

**“Acting In”: A Tactical Performance Enables Survival
and Religious Piety for Marginalized Christians in
Odisha, India.**

Dissertation

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Abstract

This dissertation examines "acting in" as a subaltern tactic through which marginalized Christians from local Oriya villages leverage an ideological and cultural space for practicing and sharing a Christian piety in modern Odisha, India – a region that has experienced significant anti-Christian violence in the past two decades. This research examines the cultural and political work accomplished through two modes of "acting in" performances through which specific kinds of performances enable specific kinds of relationships.

The first mode of "acting in" occurs in the openness of village streets and incorporates highly stylized epic narrative presentations of Christian scriptures realized through song, dance and drama. This "acting in" draws on local performance conventions in order to affect a resonance between the audience's experience with similar performances of Hindu epics and the "acting in" performances of Christian narratives presented here. This resonance, a domain of experience that Dwight Conquergood calls an "embodied epistemology," enables the dramatic presentation of Christian stories – and even the Christians themselves – to be received by villagers as if emanating from a shared past.

The political notion of "acting in" becomes evident as I demonstrate how the tactics of this first "acting in" mode include a jettisoning of practices deemed foreign. This combination of carefully crafted performance and the absence of foreign cultural markers enables Maranatha Ministries Christians to become accepted in the village – and undifferentiated from their Hindu neighbors. This lack of differentiation produces a functional invisibility to the state and unofficial means of surveillance that might otherwise find it expedient to govern Christians as a distinct social entity. In this way "acting in" enables peaceable relations between Maranatha Ministries Christians, their village neighbors, village elders and regional and state authorities. Ironically, invisibility to the state is achieved through performance of what state officials call "oral tradition" – a practice first employed by the state itself for tourist purposes.

The second mode of "acting in" occurs in the seclusion of a house church and incorporates verbatim scripture recitation rather than epic stylized scriptural narrative. While some church leaders claim verbatim recitation as a local practice, I investigate a plurality of claims and interpretations of verbatim scripture among local church pastors, executive leaders and sponsoring agencies in the West to reveal a highly complex stance on the part of Maranatha Ministries in which verbatim scripture is and is not local, is and is not Western, and is and is not required to maintain a relationship through which resources at times flow into an impoverished village locale.

Contradictions abound in the precarity of Odisha's modern political society, as Maranatha Ministries Christians navigate an unstable environment where their enemy is

and is not the state, their enemy is and is not Hinduism, their enemy is and is not Hindutva. What unfolds is a marvelously complex stance that requires considerably agility and poise on the part of the marginalized Christians. “Acting in” is the performative expression of this stance that enables both piety and agency in the political uncertainties of modern Odisha.

This document is dedicated to the brave, devoted and innovative
men and women of Maranatha Ministries in Odisha, India.

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Transcription and Orthographic Conventions

When presenting dialogue throughout this dissertation I will use a double forward slash // to indicate omissions in quoted conversation. I will use ellipses . . . to represent pauses as they occurred in the live context. These markings are intended to increase a sense of ethnographic presence for the reader. I will use brackets [] during long quotations to insert my own clarifying remarks; whereas parentheses, () will represent the speaker's own parenthetical constructions.

The official name of the country in which this ethnography occurred was changed from Orissa to Odisha on November 04, 2011. This change reflects a growing desire by various Indian State governments to reclaim pre-colonial names and pronunciations. Similar name changes include the following cities and states: Bombay to Mumbai, 1996; Madras to Chennai, 1996; Calcutta to Kolkata, 2001; and Pondicherry to Puducherry, 2006. In the course of this writing I will refer to the State by its proper name of Odisha although the former name, Orissa, will appear in the quotations of my interlocutors and even the State Secretary of Culture, demonstrating its continued use during the years of this study, 2011 to 2015.

“Oriya” is the most common language in the State of Odisha and is also the term used by my interlocutors when referencing Odisha’s native people. My interlocutors argued that the terms “Orissan” and “Odishan” more accurately signify ideas of State citizenship, whereas “Oriya” is the term used to reference those who are native to Odisha. I will use “Oriya” when referring to the inhabitants of Odisha.

The names of my interlocutors, performance sites, village Christians, and Odisha-based Christian ministries have all been changed in order to attenuate any risk such exposure could bring.

After its introduction, I will abbreviate Maranatha Ministries as “MM” when it is used to qualify a noun such as “MM leaders,” but I will continue to spell out the term throughout this dissertation when it is used as a proper noun.

Introduction

From violence an “acting in” tactic emerges

“When it is acted in the drama it will become real for them.”

BBC News, October 16, 2008: Across Kandhamal tens of thousands of Christians are now living in fear. Many have moved into camps set up by the government, with armed guards at the gate. Others are living in the shadows, spending the nights hidden in the forest before venturing back to deserted villages during the day.

In one such village, littered with empty, burnt-out houses, we were speaking to a nervous elderly woman, when the sound of a conch shell being blown echoed through the trees.

"They're coming," she cried. "You must leave now."

She pushed us away, picked up the folds of her dirty blue *sari*, and ran for her life.

For others, returning to their village is still too dangerous. I met a young priest named Manoj, now in temporary exile, who related the story of his father.

"They came to our house and held an axe to his neck. 'If you stay Christian', he was told, 'you will be killed.' He was taken to a local temple and forced to convert."

"To live in this world today," Manoj's father relates in a letter smuggled out of his village, "we have to live as Hindus."¹

¹ Chris Morris, “Fear and fundamentalism in India,” October 16, 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/7672228.stm, accessed 08.01.14.

An unexpected response

Soon after the 2008 Kandhamal uprisings, anti-Christian violence spread through neighboring districts. Even during my fieldwork from 2011 to 2014, television, radio and newspapers reported new incidents of Christian persecution with some regularity. Yet, today certain Oriya Christians openly perform Christian scripture stories on village streets to the delight of their Hindu neighbors. In spite of the risks of physical violence, the Christians of Maranatha Ministries, an evangelical ministry founded and registered by Odisha native Dr. Abhinav Satpathy, perform their way, or “act in” to local villages. “Acting in” becomes a way to negotiate a new way of being Oriya – a way to be Christian and yet still “live as Hindus.”²

An intriguing proclamation

In February of 2012, Dr. Abhinav Satpathy hosted his first Christian Oral Arts Festival in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. The city was scarred from the burning alive of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two young sons in 1998 and still tense from the 2008 Kandhamal riots.³ The two-day arts festival showcased the use of Oriya performance traditions for purposes of public Christian evangelism. The practices, styles, and costumes varied greatly according to background and many of the performing troupes demonstrated considerable skill in engaging a live audience. It was at this festival, hosted in risk-laden, violence-inflected Bhubaneswar that Satpathy made the following proclamation:

² Maranatha Ministries was founded in 2006 by Dr. Abhinav Satpathy, a native of Odisha, India.

³ “Thousands mourn missionary’s death,” Monday January 25, 1999, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/261391.stm, accessed September 18, 2014.

“Yesu Masih-ki!” [Praise the Lord!] shouts Dr. Abhinav Satpathy. “Hallelujah!” the crowd shouts back. “Yesu Masih-ki!” “Hallelujah!” they reply. “Yeeeshuuu Masiiah-kiii!” “Hallelujah!” roars the enthusiastic audience. Satpathy continues, “When the people see the stories of the Bible presented through the music and drama and dance of their own culture how can they say that the gospel comes from the West?” [cheers] ”How can they say that Christianity is from the West? Christianity is from Orissa! The gospel is from Orissa!” [more cheers].

An inquiry begins

“Who can say that Christianity is from the West? Christianity is from Orissa! The gospel is from Orissa!” Satpathy’s intriguing declaration became the launching point for this dissertation project. After hearing this assertion, I eagerly embarked on the pursuit of answers to an ever-expanding list of questions: What does Satpathy intend by such a fascinating statement? He seems fully aware of the paradoxical nature of his claim for Oriya origins for the Christian gospel. He seems keenly aware also of the volatile political environment in which he is making this declaration; so what claim is he really making here? Satpathy’s ideological framework begins to emerge later in the festival as he asserts, “We are 100% Oriya and 100% believer in Jesus Christ!” Satpathy seems to contend that by means of the performance practices portrayed at the Oral Arts Festival, the processes and tropes through which authenticity is determined for both Oriya society and evangelical Christianity have been fully met. What knowledge could my investigation of these processes produce about the conventions by which performances and performers are deemed to be Oriya? Or, conversely in Satpathy’s terms, Western? How do local understandings of religious practice – Hindu, Christian or otherwise – contribute to these Christian performances and to Satpathy’s declarations? What can be

learned of local aesthetic practices of music and drama that appear to be the basis for such a claim? And finally, how do I take advantage of my unique relationship here as a scholar, a Christian pastor and a volunteer member of an evangelical Christian NGO (Non-Government Organization) currently working with Satpathy's Maranatha Ministries, to gain investigative access while still maintaining critical distance in both my research and writing?⁴

An “acting in” tactic enables relationships

This chapter initiates the discussion of “acting in” as a subaltern tactic employed by Maranatha Ministries (MM) Christians in modern Odisha, India. Through this tactic certain kinds of performances by MM Christians enable certain kinds of relationships with local villagers, various governing bodies and sponsoring agencies in the West.⁵ “Acting in” performances draw on local performance genres and conventions specifically chosen with the hopes of effecting a sense of resonance between the audience's lived history with performances of Hindu epics and “acting in” presentations of Christian narratives. Such historical resonance enables relationships between MM Christian

⁴ In January of 2010 I began working as an ethnomusicologist with Freedom to Lead, International (FTL). The FTL team was (and as of this writing, still is) working with a network of eighteen different Christian ministries in India to develop and implement a structured curriculum for leadership development that is designed for non-literate, or as FTL prefers to call them, “storycentric” leaders in the Christian community. It was through my work with FTL that I became aware of the tactics and performances practiced by MM leaders that are the focus of this dissertation research.

⁵ I employ the terms “tactic” and “strategy” after Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1984), xix. De Certeau distinguishes between the terms “tactic” and “strategy” through differentiations of power and place, with “strategy” as an action by one which assumes a circumscribed exteriority of place and space, and “tactic” as an action by one who is subsumed within another's space. Thus, strategies are actions by those with the privilege of power and place whereas “tactics” are opportunistic actions by those with neither power nor place.

performers and their Hindu village neighbors that are characterized by my interlocutors as “natural” and “accepted.” Failure to achieve “natural” or “accepted” status invites the risk of Christians and their stories being labeled “foreign” or “Western,” categories identified by my interlocutors as inviting anti-Christian violence such as that described in the BBC article above.

This project examines two types of “acting in” performances. It explores the ways these performances enable specific kinds of relationships between MM Christians and local villagers and between MM Christians and the official and unofficial entities that attempt to govern them. While these two types of performance have different and seemingly contradictory goals, they each employ similar tactical performance practices. I should note here that there are many Christian denominations and ministries in Odisha other than Maranatha Ministries that do not repeat, aspire to, or even agree with the tactics of “acting in” performances that are the focus of this dissertation research. Each Christian organization has adopted its own methods and tactics to enable survival in the precarious political environment of modern Odisha.

The first type of “acting in” performance takes place in the openness of village streets. Here, Biblical stories are performed as highly stylized epic narratives using what Odisha’s Secretary of Culture calls the “oral traditions” of Oriya dance, drama and song.⁶ Through these street performances, both the performances and the performers themselves “become real” in the village. “Becoming real,” a phrase articulated by my translator,

⁶ Chitta Ranjan Mallia, Secretary, Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi. Personal interview with the author in the Secretaries’ Bhubaneswar office, February 19, 2014.

Santanu Subudhi, is a process by which MM Christian performances resonate with the embodied domains of a villager's past experience with "oral tradition" performances. This resonance, examined in more detail later in this chapter, is an embodied epistemology, a way-of-knowing that is described variously by my interlocutors as "accepted," "remembered," and "understood." "Acting in" performances on village streets enable relationships with Hindu villagers that were not previously possible. They also enable processes through which the Christian gospel emerges in village dialogue, in the words of my translator, Santanu, as "natural."

My analysis also considers the political work accomplished through this same type of "acting in" performance. "Acting in" performances on village streets do not simply enable a new relationship to Hindu villagers, these performances also enable a new relationship to various apparatuses of state and local governance. The process of "acting in" encompasses not just the performances themselves, but also includes a jettisoning of practices perceived as "foreign" or "Western." Together, this combination enables a relationship with governing bodies such as the state, in which Oriya Christians are no longer seen, or identified, as an entity separate from that of their Oriya Hindu village neighbors. The end result is that Christians appear undifferentiated from Hindu village society and thus become both "natural" to local villagers and achieve a degree of invisibility to various means of surveillance and governance – particularly that governance which could find it expedient to treat Christians as a separate category from that of their Hindu neighbors.

The second type of “acting in” performance takes place within the seclusion of a village house church, a Christian worship gathering that meets in individual homes or ante-rooms rather than in structures publically identifiable as Christian churches. I investigate the ways this isolated “acting in” performance facilitates not only individual and corporate expressions of religious piety and devotion, but also enables relationships with sponsoring Christian agencies in the West and subsequently a broader evangelical community. The performance of verbatim scripture in the house church, equated by some, but not all of my interlocutors with “foreign” practices, seems paradoxical in light of the risks that accompany “foreign” associations in modern Odisha. The appearance of verbatim scripture performance in this research demonstrates a different mode of “acting in,” one that does not draw on local conventions of Hindu epic narrative performances. The ideological roots from which verbatim recitation is taken is a matter of debate; however, the attention that I draw to this apparent disagreement reveals a highly contextual and contingent determination of meaning. The pragmatic fluidity that emerges both informs and enables tactical maneuverability for MM Christians.⁷

“Acting In”

I am proposing the term “acting in” to refer to the tactics by which individuals and groups perform their way out of an identity that is contrary to social norms and subject to persecution, and into an identity that is local and accepted and which discourages attention from potentially persecuting groups. Conceptually, my use of “acting in” is

⁷ The use of “verbatim” to qualify this type of scripture recitation is necessary in order to differentiate this practice from other genres of scriptural performance identified by my interlocutors as “storied scriptures” or “chanted scriptures” or by myself as “stylized epic scriptural narrative.” Each of these terms will emerge in the ethnographic accounts that follow.

grounded in Judith Butler's use of "acting out" in her well-known treatise on performance and performativity, "Critically Queer."⁸ In "Critically Queer" Butler proposes a tactical implementation of the term "queer" as applied to the performance of gendered drag. She uses the term "acting out" to indicate this "hyperbolic display" of drag that shatters an "epistemic blindness to an increasingly graphic and public homosexuality."⁹ Butler grounds "acting out" in psychoanalytic terms related to gender melancholia. "Acting in," as I propose it here, does not reference an attempt to shatter an "epistemic blindness" but rather, to create one. In the Bagharpalli street performance discussed in chapters two and three, the representation of an authenticated "oral tradition" enables Oriya Christian villagers to become "accepted" and also undifferentiated from their Oriya Hindu neighbors – a process described as "becoming real." Through this performative identification, Oriya Christians enter village life as "understood" and "natural" and accomplish a degree of invisibility to various means of governance.

An uncertain politics

Christianity is a lawfully permitted religion in the eastern Indian state of Odisha, and government agents are quick to reinforce its official acceptance. "We receive [new religions], we don't reject, and by that we are rich," claims one such official.¹⁰ However, the lived reality for Oriya Christians is much more tenuous.

⁸ Judith Butler, "Critically Queer" in *Literary Theories*, (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 578.

¹⁰ Chitta Ranjan Mallia, Secretary, Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi. Interview by the author in the Secretaries' Bhubaneswar office, February 19, 2014.

The Freedom of Religion Act of 1967 was created to ensure integrity in religious conversion, a chief tenant of evangelical Christianity, but this legislation has since been contested and many anti-Christian groups claim that religious conversion is illegal in all cases. Controversy surrounding the legalities of conversion is just one example of the relational uncertainties between Oriya Christians and the State of Odisha, uncertainties that are heavily influenced by changes in political climate.

State government officials in charge of tourism downplay the 1998, 2008 and more recent anti-Christian violence, attempting to characterize it as atypical for this “peaceful Oriya society.” The State Secretary of Culture claims violence arises from “limited groups,” and “miscreants”; he implies that violence comes from outside the region, “but not the cities inside, [not] from all of society.”¹¹ However, many Christians and Muslims, both minorities in Odisha, deny such claims and openly accuse local and state governments of collusion with the local perpetrators of violence. “The attacks were not isolated or sporadic incidents but were part of a well-orchestrated conspiracy, which had full support of the State Government,” claims Housing and Land Rights Network (HRLN), a global watchdog group that focuses on social justice and habitation rights.¹² Criticism of government response is often verbalized through public media outlets, “The state of justice delivery system as such is abysmal,” claims one Muslim leader to a news

¹¹ Chitta Ranjan Mallia, Secretary, Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi. Interview by the author in the Secretaries’ Bhubaneswar office, February 19, 2014.

¹² “Genocide in Kandhamal: Ethnic Cleansing of Christians by Hindutva Rightwing Forces in Orissa,” Human Rights Law Network, http://idsn.org/uploads/media/Orissa_report_-_Human_Rights_Law_Network.pdf, accessed April 2, 2014. HRLN is global in its focus of human rights but is headquartered in India.

reporter, “the communalized state apparatus blocks the justice at various levels.”¹³ This unequal political terrain means that the protective capacities of the state are applied unevenly to its Christian and Muslim citizens.

The lived inequities experienced by Odisha’s religious minorities are characteristic of an environment Partha Chatterjee terms a “modern political society.” Chatterjee proposes the term “political society” to define systems of governance wherein “inhabitants . . . are only tenuously, and even then ambiguously and contextually, rights bearing citizens in the sense imagined by the constitution.”¹⁴ Officially, laws protect the rights of all Odisha’s citizens from religious persecution, be they Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Jain or other,¹⁵ as such religious persecution is prohibited by the laws of Odisha’s civil society. Unofficially, however, such religious persecution may be enabled or even encouraged by various means of governance. I will employ Chatterjee’s concept of “political society” as a lens through which “acting in” emerges as a tactic that enables new relational possibilities for Christians while minimizing the risk of religious persecution resulting from specifically “Christian” identities.

An acting in tactic requires a stance

In contrast to Muslim and Christian groups who claim that persecution of religious minorities stems from collusion between government agencies and local Hindu activists,

¹³ Ram Puniyani, “Kandhamal Carnage: Aftermath,” August 16, 2013, http://twocircles.net/2013aug16/kandhmal_carnage_aftermath.html#.U2okzl64nII, accessed May 07, 2014.

¹⁴ Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

¹⁵ These are the categorical choices given on India’s 2001 census, http://censusindia.gov.in/Census_And_You/religion.aspx, accessed August 12, 2014.

the leaders of Maranatha Ministries affirm the government's innocence in such matters. MM President, Dr. Abhinav Satpathy, remains adamant that "the persecutors are brought in from the outside, not from within the community." I contend that this position by Satpathy and Maranatha Ministries represents what Harris Berger calls a "stance-on-power" that is critical for the tactical success of acting in.¹⁶ Harris Berger proposes the idea of stance in his phenomenological approach to theorizing expressive culture, particularly as it relates to meaning-making in the course of performance.

Berger's concept of stance is grounded in Samuel Todes' insistence on the embodied nature of human experience, arguing that physical bodies first exist "in a world of physical objects, and our existence is oriented toward dealing with them."¹⁷ Berger contends that "dealing with" the surrounding world becomes a matter of relationship, and that furthermore, this "relationship of subject and world is not an impediment to the subject's agency, but its condition."¹⁸ Stance-on-power becomes, then, the subject's awareness of the "sedimented structures of domination and subordination" around him as well as a conscious action to achieve and maintain a desired relationship, a "balance and poise" with each identified object and force in their world.¹⁹

It is the relational aspect of Berger's stance-on-power that proves most valuable for this project. In the uneven political scene, the "political society" of modern Odisha, the

¹⁶ Harris Berger, *Stance: Ideas About Emotion, Style, and Meaning For The Study Of Expressive Culture* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2010).

¹⁷ Samuel Todes, *Body and World* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2001), as cited in Harris Berger, *Stance*, 113.

¹⁸ Harris Berger, *Stance*, 114.

¹⁹ Samuel Todes relates "balance" to "forces" and "poise" to "objects" as presented in, Berger, *Stance*, 114.

Christians of Maranatha Ministries must continuously adapt to maintain “balance” in relation to villagers, elders and various forms of surveillance and governance. For Oriya Christians, a rigid identity could leave them unable to adjust to shifting political winds; therefore, in order to maintain agency Oriya Christian identity must remain fluid, even ambiguous at times. The acting in performances of Maranatha Ministries are a primary phenomenological means of accomplishing this critical task.

It will become evident in the ethnographic accounts that follow that both Satpathy and the Secretary of Culture carefully incorporate the concept of “outside” to reference an ideological rather than a strictly geographical space, this allows room for careful dialogic maneuver in Odisha’s uncertain political environment. MM leaders wholeheartedly agree with Satpathy’s stance and permit no room for accusations of conspiracy, collusion or even selective indifference on the part of government agencies. These same MM leaders deny that animosities are fundamentally religious in nature, claiming instead that overtly “Western” cultural practices incite negative response. “When oral people see these thing[s] [western pants or shirt], it is easy to conclude that we have connections to western countries. // And that is why they [the unnamed, outside perpetrators] violently persecuted us.”²⁰

The term “West,” or more accurately “western culture” emerges as a flashpoint for eruptions of violence against Oriya Christians in relation to local villagers and to the ambiguous and unofficial means of governance. Western clothing, church architecture, pews, organs, hymns, and preaching all invite categorization by villagers as foreign or

²⁰ Pradeep Kumar, *Man of Peace: The Storytellers of Odisha*, Scriptures in Use, 2013 DVD.

more specifically as Western, an identity that elevates the risk of anti-Christian violence. On this basis, MM leaders have adopted a stance-on-power that declares foreign culture rather than religious difference to be a point of contention, thereby permitting themselves the freedom to practice and share a Christianity that has been purged of foreign cultural practices such as those mentioned above. This stance by MM leaders also identifies the perpetrators of violence as outside the local society – at least ideologically – and denies that local governing agencies are in any way complicit in, or negligent in providing protection from occurrences of anti-Christian violence. This stance is at odds with those of numerous other Christian ministries, a point that will become evident in the ethnographic accounts that follow. This stance is also at odds also with a prevailing statist discourse that is careful not to identify a Western influence as problematic. Maranatha Ministries’ stance leverages the ideological space needed to practice and share a Christian piety in this Hindu context by its avoidance of both “foreign” practices and anti-government critique – a critique that would make MM Christians visible to what Pastor Pradeep calls “the government [that] sees.”²¹ Such public criticism of government would amount to “acting out”, as it were.

This tactical position that claims “outsider” origins for persecution and animosities aroused by foreign (and not religious) practices represents not only a carefully nuanced relationship to Hindutva, a nationalist reform movement, and the state, but also demonstrates a degree of self-awareness by which MM leaders conceive of this stance in

²¹ Pradeep Kumar, one of my interlocutors and translators, makes this declaration in discussions with Abhinash, myself and Santanu in his hotel room after a *keertan* performance in the village of Kundhamal, February 23, 2014.

relationship to themselves.²² This self-awareness is, in Berger's terms, a "stance that one has on one's stance" or a "meta-stance".²³ I mention "meta-stance" here to presage the awareness that I believe MM leaders have of such tactical positioning even if they themselves deny its intentionality.

Acting in as both "existential project" and "ethical project"

Acting in is an endeavor through which the Oriya Christians of Maranatha Ministries establish agency amidst a political and social climate that seeks to restrict Christian activities or eliminate Christian presence altogether; in this environment, acting in becomes what Ryan Skinner deems an "existential project."²⁴ In his forthcoming monograph on Malian music, Skinner follows Simone de Beauvoir's understanding of human projects when he states, "projects are the means by which people act to consciously (re)produce the human artifice; they are vital acts of 'natality.'" "Existential projects," he continues, "are inherently intersubjective and are, thus, contingent on the intentional interests and actions of others."²⁵ Such actions necessarily include acting upon other humans, or as de Beauvoir states, "To make being 'be' is to communicate with others by means of being."²⁶ Finally, Skinner posits that "ethical projects" are those that do not "refuse the right of others to act on the world."²⁷ This dissertation depicts the tactic of "acting in": first, as only one of a variety of options available to MM Christians;

²² Hindutva organizations include Rashtirya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS),²² Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)²² and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)²² among others. A more thorough discussion of Hindutva ideologies will follow in chapter three.

²³ Harris Berger, *Stance*, 32.

²⁴ Ryan Thomas Skinner, "Chapter One," in *An Afropolitan Muse*, forthcoming, 11.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1948), 113.

²⁷ Skinner, *An Afropolitan Muse*, 12.

second, as one in which responses to “acting in” performances remain otherwise undetermined; and third, as a tactic that maintains the agency and autonomy of other residents and citizens. Audience members attend “acting in” performances of their own volition and under no obligation or compunction to stay. This combination of tactical choices, undetermined outcomes, and the protection of an other’s agency is what qualifies this particular existential endeavor in Skinner’s terms, as an “ethical project,” or as de Beauvoir states, one that does not generate action “against men.”²⁸

An ever-present risk

Undetermined outcomes – in this case, risks of violent reprisal – maintain a constant yet elusive presence for Oriya Christians throughout this ethical project. Indeed, the risk of anti-Christian violence motivates acting in – although this point is contested by some of the MM leaders, themselves. MM leader’s denial that acting in is a direct response to violence is, I contend, an attempt to avoid being identified as an agent in the political arena, choosing instead a path of relative invisibility. The ethical project of acting in enables Oriya Christians to practice their religion and peacefully coexist with their Hindu neighbors amidst the uncertain political terrain that comprises the Odisha of this study. The tactics that inform this negotiative effort, elaborated and enacted by my interlocutors, are examples of the pragmatic eclecticism required to maintain agency in the modern political society of Odisha, India; tactics that enable Christians villagers to escape categorization as societal Other. The historical nature of this eclecticism will become evident in chapter two.

²⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 126.

The presence of a Christian Other carries with it perceptions of threat to the political, economic, and cultural norms of the Hindu majority culture. This threat then becomes an impetus for protective action by the threatened, thereby placing those in the category of “other” (Christians) at risk of violent expulsion by a dominant social group (Hindus). Edward Said grounds the conception of societal Other in his seminal monograph, *Orientalism*.²⁹ In it, he demonstrates various ways Oriental exoticism produced a sense of Western coherence, reason, and superiority through the representation of Muslim and Arab identities as “exotic others.” “In essence such a category is not so much a way of receiving new information as it is a method of controlling what seems to be a threat to some established order of things.”³⁰ Said follows Foucault in linking regimes of knowledge with regimes of power and extends this interconnectivity to an imperial world.³¹ Said’s work highlights systems of (post-)colonial knowledge produced by the West that serve to reify unequal relations of status and power between the scientific, superior, occidental West and the exotic, inferior, Oriental east. In the Odisha of this study, it is the occidental West that is represented as “other” in order to produce a particular Oriya Hindu coherence; Christian practices deemed “Western” are widely regarded a threat to the established order of things for the Hindu majority that is the dominant religious power.

²⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

³¹ For a discussion of the connection between knowledge and power see Michel Foucault’s, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982) and *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, Colin Gordon, ed. (Toronto: The Harvester Press, Limited, 1980).

A local lexicon of performative authenticity

Any ethnography of the local necessarily includes the identification of terms and phrases that, if examined, yield fruitful understandings of people's way of being in their own world. My efforts to clarify the terms through which present-day performances resonate with a historic past proved challenging not only in Bagharpalli, but in numerous other village performances I observed throughout Odisha as well. I continually altered the terms of my inquiries with both audience and performers, with the hopes of identifying local terms or phrases that seemed to reverberate with some experiential weight. In Hindi and Kosli³² terms such as *protha* ("accepted by the culture") and *sampurna nijara* ("completely from your culture") emerged occasionally but gained no clarifying traction. Markers of aesthetic authenticity tended toward phrases translated variously as "like the festival" and "as in the festivals" but also included *khub bhala* ("done well, excellent"), *bahuta bhala* (very good), *bololo tilaki* ("good," "liked," "enjoyed"), *kalagila* ("better") and *tig nahi* (not good).³³

The lack of a distinctive village discourse on performative authenticity was disappointing as my expectations had been conditioned by the engaging work of scholars such as Jonathan Holt Shannon.³⁴ Shannon's work in modern Syria depicts a vigorous

³² Kosli is the local language of the Bagharpalli region.

³³ The transliterations are depicted here as verbalized and carefully spelled by my interlocutors. These transliterations roughly follow a Romanized spelling absent of diacritical markers. These terms exhibit a degree of eclectic borrowing from among Hindi, Mathli, Kosli and Sambalpurī languages. For example, *protha* (accepted by the culture) is similar to *pratha* (practice) in Hindi; *sampurna* (completely) is also found in Mathli language as *sampurna* (complete); *tig nahi* (not good) in Kosli is normally transliterated *Thīk nahī* (not good) in Hindi; *khub* (excellent) listed here is also *khub* (plenty) in Hindi.

³⁴ Jonathan Holt Shannon, *Among the Jasmine Trees: Music and Modernity in Contemporary Syria* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2006).

public discourse among Syrian social elites concerning issues of authenticity and musical performance. It is within this privileged, public discourse that Shannon recognizes a “turn to heritage” in the construction of an authentic Syrian modernity. In the rural Oriya villages of my study, I identified no such robust authenticity debate, but rather a series of implicit connections between a process of “becoming real” and a resonance with the sedimentary layers of a historical past. This resonance is expressed primarily through the embodied interactions and responses shared between performer and audience, and only occasionally appears in dialogue via the binary constructs presented below.

“Natural”

The terms that emerge most tellingly in this project are English words and phrases employed by my Oriya translators and in the broken English of other interlocutors. At one point, after tiring of my repeated inquiries as to local terms for authenticity, my primary translator, Santanu Subudhi blurted out in frustration, “But that is not clear to the people, actually, when you are asking ‘authentic’ – or it is ‘good’ and ‘not good!’” he exclaimed. “So, normally when they do it with . . . with makeups and with the costume and all, naturally that becomes good and people like it. [But] without any dress, without any music, if you do something – they won’t like it. So that is a *natural* thing!” (emphasis his). Santanu argues against a detailed and specific lexical construction of local authenticity and in favor of a broad conception of accepted performance practice – a conception formed not through public debate as much as through public practice.

“Habituated”

Echoes of Santanu’s concept of “natural” can also be heard in Satpathy’s responses to my inquires about the presence and influence of Hindu religious factors in local performance aesthetics. In his response, Abhinav distinguishes between practices that are fundamentally religious, or in this case Hindu, and those that are, in his words, “habituated.” “It’s not the Hindu festival thing that makes them good,” he said, “but it is the rhythm, the costume, the action, the dances – they [the villagers] have been *habituated*. So not necessarily that they [the villagers] are Hindu but they had no other chances to see anything else but that [Hindu festival performance]” [emphasis his].³⁵ “Natural” and “habituated” gain significance throughout this project as terms and ideas that guide and inform Christian performance strategies, terms whose initial descriptive fuzziness is gradually eclipsed by their formative influence on local performers and their performances.

“Accepted,” “remembered,” “understood” and “paying attention”

In addition to the words “natural” and “habituated” above, my interlocutors also make use of the English terms “accepted,” “remembered,” “understood” and “paying attention.” Some of these terms emerge dialogically as relatively clear binaries, such as “accepted” vs. “rejected;” others are less obvious, such as “natural” vs. “not good.” (“Natural” would seem to invite “unnatural” but this never occurred in dialogue; instead, “natural” was consistently used in opposition to “not good.”) One of the more curious

³⁵ Abhinav Satpathy, personal interview with the author in Nagpur, Maharashtra, India, February 10, 2013.

pairings is “paying attention” and “very tired,” this couplet emerges in a conversation in which Abhinash, a church planter (one who begins new churches) and trainer, claims that people disengage from preaching as if they are very tired or sleepy, while they conversely engage with acting in performances by “paying attention.” This exchange appears in the ethnographic account of chapter two.

The majority of these pairings can be situated under the binary headings of “Oriya” vs. “foreign” and they appear as such below. I present this lexical rubric here not to suggest a reductive simplicity but rather to lay a foundation for highly contingent processes of meaning. These meaning-making processes require considerable skill for effective social maneuver in the quest for agency in modern Odisha. (Note: The nuanced terms “Hindu” and “habituated,” discussed previously, do not fit under a rubric of “Oriya” and “foreign” but rather both belong in the same category of “Oriya” below.)

Lexicon of Oriya/Local vs. Foreign/“West”

Oriya/Local	Foreign/“West”
Natural/Good	Not good
Accepted	Rejected
Remembered	Forgotten
Understood	Not understood
Paying attention	Very tired (bored, disconnected)
Becomes real (in drama)	Hearing only (in song)
Oral	Literate, Western

Illustration 1: Lexicon of Oriya/Local vs. Foreign/“West”

These pairs are similar to the multiple discursive binaries identified by Shannon in the modern Syria of his study. Shannon’s binaries begin with ideas of *hadatha* (heritage,

tradition) and *asala* (modernity) and move into realms of political and ethical sensibilities that connect ideas of “beautiful” and “authentic” with virtuous behavior while “ugly” or “inauthentic” come to indicate “dangerous or morally suspect” behaviors.³⁶ This combination of the ethical and the aesthetic is also manifest in this Oriya project in ways that demonstrate continuous negotiation. For example, in Odisha, “Western” is variously attached to “suspect,” “risky,” “bad” or “foreign” and as a binary opposite of “trusted,” “safe,” “good” and “local.” “Literate” or “literacy” also emerge as contested terms in modern Odisha that range in meaning from “bad” to “good” to “upper caste” in the course of this study.

“Becomes real”

Finally, the Oriya performances of this study draw on bodies of local aesthetic practices in ways that enable Oriya Christians and their Biblical stories to “become real” to local villagers. The idea of “becoming real” emerged during an interview with my interlocutor Abhinash. The discussion concerned what I perceived to be a limited emotional response to the songs in comparison to the audience’s heightened emotional engagement with the drama that followed. “First you performed the song about the prodigal son,” I begin, “then you performed the drama of the prodigal son, right?” “Yes,” he confirmed. “How important is it to connect those two?” I asked. Santanu translated Abhinash’s answer: “Song means only they are listening, but when it is acted in the drama *it will become real for them.*” Abhinash spoke these last words in unison with Santanu for emphasis.

³⁶ Jonathan Holt Shannon, *Among the Jasmine Trees: Music and Modernity in Contemporary Syria* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), xix.

Aaron Fox's idea of "relating" is useful here for understanding the experiential process whereby stories "become real" to the Bagharpalli audience. In his study of working class Lockart, Texas, Fox employs the term "relating" to represent the action of connecting verbal performance, mediated through radio, recordings or live performances, with embodied domains of experience that include spoken dialogue.³⁷ Fox describes relating as an additive process whereby what is heard in speech or song, on stage or on the jukebox, is attached to one's own story in part, through repeated vocalizations that include both reported speech and the citation of song lyrics. This process can involve a glossing of the story, or stories, in question, allowing for the connection of both factual and fictional events to create a meaningful and affective memory.³⁸ In Bagharpalli, Biblical stories take root in, or are added to, the personal, lived experiences of local villagers through acting in performances. I contend that newly-introduced Christian stories resonate with normative Hindu performances to the degree that these new stories are "accepted" as historical. In this way, these stories are added to an existing, historical archive in a process similar to Fox's additive concept of "relating" discussed above.

Through the ethnographic account of a Bagharpalli street performance in chapter two, I claim that what is fundamentally "relating" or "becoming real" in Bagharpalli is not simply the "natural" or "habituated" music and drama performances, but is also the Christian stories and the Christians themselves. Additionally, I claim that musical performance alone is insufficient to achieve this authentication. "Song means only they

³⁷ Aaron Fox, *Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

are listening, but when it is acted in the drama *it will become real for them*” [emphasis added].³⁹ Abhinash is saying that the addition of drama to music produces the “real.” His statement implicates local aesthetic practices of performance and reception as well as his own critical and strategic awareness of these processes. A careful look at the Bagharpalli performance of chapter two reveals an additive process of authentication that begins with music, “becomes real” in drama, and takes root through the dialogue of question and answer between performer and audience.

“Orality”

“Orality,” “oral strategy,” “literacy” and “literate” emerge in my interlocutors’ dialogue not just as meaningful terms but also as strategic and tactical approaches by both Maranatha Ministries and state leaders. These ideas are critical for a proper understanding of “acting in.” At first I ignored these terms because they did not follow typical usage in the academy, which I will summarize later in this chapter. Even as these terms began to appear more frequently I still found myself substituting Western terms such as “authenticity,” “indigenous” or “cultural practices” because I didn’t want to confuse my Western academic reader. I was nearly finished with my fieldwork when I realized how important these terms were not only to my interlocutors, but also for the integrity of the entire project. I subsequently revisited the mountains of audio and video recordings, transcripts and fieldnotes amassed from 2011 through 2014, to ascertain just how these terms are defined, in what contexts they are used and what kind of work they accomplish.

³⁹ Statement by Gunagy Bagh in discussions with Santanu and myself after the first *keertan* performance in Bagharpalli July of 2013.

“Orality:” Maranatha Ministries

For Satpathy, Santanu and Pradeep, “orality” has become a term that represents a highly contextualized, enculturated ministry approach that resonates within village contexts.

Satpathy: “Orality for us comes as a package that includes using the right language for our people, understanding their culture, bringing the culture into the gospel, telling stories and dramas in a way that they would understand. The whole thing as a package has become orality for us.”⁴⁰

For Satpathy, “orality” or “oral strategy” engages the person at an unconscious level. He believes the embodied experiences of a person’s youth resonate more strongly than does their accumulated objective knowledge. In terms of acting in performances, this means the timbres, rhythms, melodies and bodily motions drawn from historical performance practices reverberate as “natural” in ways that supersede any perceptual dissonance arising from an unfamiliarity with the performer or with the religious ideologies of Christianity. In the following remarks, made in response to a performance at the 2012 Oral Arts Festival, Satpathy conceptualizes an embodied epistemology, a way of knowing and being that surpasses a conscious objective assent and relies more heavily upon an embodied resonance with the past.

Satpathy: These [the performers who just finished] were the guys and the girls from Kalahandi. I just stood up and went and I thought I would play these drums. Seventeen years back I used to play these drums very well. So, when they were playing, the blood in me was just being drawn to culture. Something was happening within me, I just wanted to grab it! It doesn’t matter how great

⁴⁰ Abhinav Satpathy, personal interview with the author in Nagpur, Maharashtra, India, February 10, 2013.

graduate or doctorate you are, your culture within you will make
you restless when you sit //

Whenever I see oral culture, I will tell you something happens
within me. . . I had been circling [living in] Delhi for almost
seventeen years and yet the Oriya culture attracts me, how much
more it will not be true for my brothers and sisters who are part of
it from day to day life.

You can be 100% Oriya and 100% believer in Jesus Christ.⁴¹

This embodied resonance, described by Satpathy as “blood being drawn toward culture,” evokes a sense of shared historical experiences that enables Christian performers and their performances to become rooted into village life. Villagers move impulsively with the music, clapping, nodding, swaying; they respond spontaneously to drama, eyes wide, mouths agape, bodies tensed with expectation as they abandon themselves, if only momentarily, to an engaged experience with performance. This embodied resonance creates the conditions for a mode of being that is “100% Oriya and 100% believer in Jesus Christ.” Acting in performances bring into play the sedimented layers of life experience in ways that allow much of what is connected to these performances to sound and appear as “natural.” Michel Foucault describes such embodied ways of knowing as “subjugated knowledges,” non-textual means that are often rendered illegitimate within the academy because of their lack of textuality and the supposed certainty that text

⁴¹ Abhinav Satpathy as emcee at the Oral Arts Festival in Bhubaneswar, February 2012. Note: “Oriya,” “Oriya,” and “Orissan,” are at times used by other scholars to indicate the people of Odisha. “Oriya” is generally connected to those who speak the Oriya language and share its culture, while “Orissan” could be used to indicate a resident or citizen of the State of Odisha. My interlocutors were adamant that Oriya was the proper term to represent themselves and their people, therefore I have chosen to use Oriya throughout this dissertation.

provides.⁴² Dwight Conquergood contends such embodied epistemologies are “tacit, intoned, gestured, improvised, coexperienced, covert and all the more meaningful because of [their] refusal to be spelled out.”⁴³ It could even be that this deep resonance with a local, experienced past allows these Christians and their stories to emerge not only as entities that could have been part of their youth, but possibly as events that reverberate in ways that indicate that they were indeed part of a shared past. In the Bagharpalli performance presented in chapter two, audience interviews indicate that the Biblical story of the prodigal son from Luke 15, carefully crafted according to Bagharpalli conventions of performance, appears to elicit the same physicality of attraction, bodily movement and familiarity as did similar presentations of Hindu epics in villagers’ previous experience. This historical and embodied resonance enables such performances to be “accepted” as if a historical past were shared between Christian and Hindu practices. This phenomenological process creates the conditions by which the Christian gospel emerges in subsequent village dialogue as local, and allows the distinctiveness of MM Christianity to gain clarity while its origins appear culturally undifferentiated from the local Hindu practice.⁴⁴

The concept of “orality” as a ministry tactic permeates all of the performative activities presented in this project. While some of the leaders may not be particularly

⁴² Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, Colin Gordon, ed. Trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper. (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 81-84.

⁴³ Dwight Conquergood, “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research” in *The Drama Review* 46, 2 (T174) Summer 2002, (New York: New York University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002) 145-156, 146. Conquergood’s concept of embodied epistemologies will be taken up again in relation to the ethnography of the Bagharpalli street performance presented in chapter three.

⁴⁴ The differentiation between the phenomenological and the cognitive with regards to historical resonance will be examined in greater detail in chapter three.

adept at articulating this approach, Satpathy himself is evangelistic in his fervor. The Oral Arts Festival in February 2012 became a platform for promoting his orality tactic to other local ministry leaders who were personally invited by Satpathy to attend. Below are a few quotations gleaned from Satpathy's banter as emcee during the two-day event.

Satpathy: This was the recitation of a Psalm. 'Bless the Lord O my soul.' // The whole Psalm can be recited in such a way and you can attract a crowd. . . . That's because the *oral art*, cultural art *excites everybody*. [emphasis added]⁴⁵

Satpathy's first comments follow a performance of chanted scripture in the local style of the Kondh, accompanied by the intricate rhythms of *dashkatia* (hardwood sticks).⁴⁶ Satpathy capitalizes on this opportunity to celebrate local artistic practices as useful for gospel presentation.

After a forty-five minute performance by a group of men from Cuttack, Satpathy exclaims, "What a powerful tool this is for the gospel!" And following a women's ensemble performance of song and dance, "Many of you are catching the vision and taking up the challenge to go back to your people, taking the *oral arts* as the vehicle to get the gospel there." [emphasis added] An extended scripture chanting performance known as *Satya Purano Patho* in a local style elicits this response: "So when these men are praying the gospel in such a form, who is there to say, "The Bible is a foreign gospel?" Here, once again, each performance is followed by a declaration by Satpathy as to its value for identifying their Christian message as Oriya.

⁴⁵ The scripture cited here is from Psalm 103.

⁴⁶ The Kondh, also known as Kui, are the largest tribal group in Odisha. The Kondh musicians translated *daskathia* to me as meaning, literally, "ten fingers (*das*) with a stick (*katia*)."

One performance at the festival depicts the story from John 2:1-11 of Jesus turning the water into wine at a wedding in the village of Cana. The music and drama of this performance includes all the traditions and costumes of a village wedding of tribal Kona. In celebration of this Biblical story being embedded into local practices, Satpathy declares, “This is *our culture* because in our birthday parties, after the marriages and other functions that you have at home you want to do such things because they are *our culture*.” [emphasis his]

For Satpathy, “orality” is not just for the illiterate. On day two of the Oral Arts Festival, a woman performer is interviewed on the stage, she is recently retired from a high-ranking state position in education.

Satpathy [speaking to the woman]: You are highly educated. You have worked in the top levels of education. But what you did now is contrary to your work and education. Oral arts in you still inspires lots of people. So orality is not only for the *illiterate* ones, even the *literate* ones, highly educated people, want to start dancing.⁴⁷ [emphasis his]

At one point, Satpathy even appeals to Jesus Christ, himself, as endorsing orality:

“What we have brought to you, orality, is not a man-made thing but *Jesus himself* has modeled it. And when we do the work of Jesus the way He did, I believe we will be able to win the whole area. Now God gives me a bigger picture – we will see sixty-two tribes sitting together – one million Oriyas sitting together, bring their culture, bring their language, bringing their everything together to worship Him.” [emphasis added]⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Abhinav Satpathy, as emcee of the Oral Arts Festival in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India, February, 2012.

⁴⁸ There are sixty-two different tribal groups in Odisha. See Abhaya Narayan Nayak, “Primitive Tribal Groups of Orissa: An Evaluation of Census Data” *Orissa Review (Census Special)* December, 2010, 202-05, <http://orissa.gov.in/e-magazine/Orissareview/2010/December/engpdf/203-206.pdf>, accessed February 07, 2015.

Satpathy's summary at the end of the interview portrays "orality" as a tactic not only for the illiterate, but one that resonates with educated people as well.

While other MM leaders do not communicate these ideas as succinctly as Dr. Abhinav Satpathy does, from our many discussions it becomes clear that they embrace Satpathy's concept of "orality" as a ministry tactic. In the following exchange Abhinash, a church planter and pastor in the Angul region, employs the phrase "illiterate type of work" instead of "orality," but otherwise his claim exemplifies the use of "orality" as a tactic designed for the illiterate as Satpathy did earlier.

Doug: Have you done any other drama in this village [Bagharpalli] since we were here last?

Abhinash: Yes, yes. The drama and skits. That *illiterate type of work we* are doing and using in that place. Storytelling and drama - some skits and some story telling and other methods - we are using in that place. [emphasis added]

"Orality" vs "acting in"

While the terms "acting in" and "orality" overlap considerably, they differ significantly as well. "Orality," as used by Satpathy and Maranatha Ministries, has reception as its primary focus. "Orality" describes the enculturation of Christians stories and a Christian gospel in ways that resonate locally as "accepted," "remembered," "understood," "natural," and "become real" in the village. As Satpathy said, "Using the right language for the people, understanding their culture, bringing the culture into the

gospel, telling stories and dramas in a way that they would *understand*.”⁴⁹ [emphasis added] The primary focus of “orality” here is on village reception of a particular message.

My proposed term, “acting in” encompasses all of the local “orality” practices above, but has as its primary objective the enabling of specific kinds of relationships, (with villagers, elders, forms of governance) through specific kinds of performances (including both stylized scriptural narrative and verbatim narrative). These performances situate Christian stories and the Christians themselves in ways that enable relationships to local Hindu society as “accepted,” “remembered,” “understood,” “natural,” and “becoming real” in the village; relationships to various means of surveillance and governance as “undifferentiated” and “invisible;” and relationships to sponsoring Christian agencies in the West as “accepted” by evangelical standards, or, as I suggest, “orthodox.” I should add that the jettisoning of Western practices is also common to both “orality” and “acting in,” but once again the main focus of “orality” is village reception, while the audiences for acting in include surveilling bodies and Western agencies. These differences, both nuanced and overt, will gain clarity through the ethnographic accounts that ground this dissertation.

“Oral tradition:” a precedent of the State

Government-sponsored cultural presentations for tourism established the use of group-specific costume, dance, instruments, rhythms tunes as markers of Oriya

⁴⁹ Abhinav Satpathy, personal interview with the author in Nagpur, Maharashtra, India, February 10, 2013.

“oral tradition.” This practice has become a precedent that enables or even empowers Maranatha Ministries to “act in” to the local villages through their own stagings of “oral tradition.” Acting in exhibitions by MM Christians make possible a locally-embedded gospel and a Christian church that becomes undifferentiated from the surrounding culture; a church which therefore becomes functionally invisible to the surveillance of both official and unofficial governing bodies. Kelly Askew’s work in Tanzania recognizes a similar state role in the promotion of what she calls “cultural production” as a tourist destination.⁵⁰ Askew’s identification of state efforts to both encourage and control cultural production for nationalist purposes helped me to recognize and evaluate similar processes in the Odisha of my study. My project, however, focuses less on the power and action of the state and more on the agential tactics of Oriya MM Christians and their acting in performances, activities that enable particular kinds of relationships to the state, to the village and to the West.

The parallel between the strategies of the state and that of Maranatha Ministries also extends to the use of the term “oral” as a signifier of the local. During an interview with the Secretary of Culture for the State of Odisha, Mr. Chitta Ranjan Mallia, I attempt to delineate the measurements and markers used by the state to determine authenticity.

⁵⁰ Kelly M. Askew, *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

Doug: How do you determine what is authentic when you go to Kalahandi? [we are discussing a particular performance scheduled for later that week]

Secretary of Culture: We don't have any fixed descriptive or literate evidence to that effect – it is an oral tradition. *Our culture is in effect an oral tradition.* Since generations and generations pass, in that way there may be some changes in between, but it passes through the generations – it is tradition. That has to be recognized. And of course we have developed some sort of mechanism to keep it intact, but *ultimately it is the tradition which chooses.*⁵¹ People are there to retain it. To sustain with this. So that is very recognized.⁵² [emphasis added]

Secretary Mallia's differentiation between the absence of "fixed descriptive or literate evidence" in response to my authenticity inquiry, and his subsequent explanation that "ultimately it is the tradition which chooses," indicates a strategic use of the term "oral tradition." His argument carves out for "oral tradition" a space of tradition and tradition-making that precludes external analysis or critique. "Literate" ideals of authenticity are out-of-bounds in this space that declares simply that "oral tradition" is what oral people do and is therefore authentic (and now authenticated) according to the state. Any challenges from outsiders – be they Western, academic or otherwise – regarding the historicity of certain instruments, song forms and costumes become moot in Secretary Mallia's construct of "oral tradition."

⁵¹ Secretary's declaration here that "it is the tradition which chooses," is reminiscent of a statement by Tanzanian Director of Arts and National Language in the Ministry of Education and Culture, Mr. Godwin Kaduma: "Tanzanian national culture is whatever Tanzanians want it to be." Quoted by Kelly Askew in *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 269.

⁵² Chitta Ranjan Mallia, Secretary, Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi. Personal interview by the author in the Secretary's Bhubaneswar office, February 19, 2014.

The state's strategic implementation of "orality" is notably similar to the "rule of colonial difference" which Partha Chatterjee defines as a tactic employed by colonial India against the British.⁵³ Chatterjee identifies a politics in which the colonized were able to separate certain domains as "inner practices" of Indian culture and therefore beyond the disciplinary power of British rule. Such inner cultural practices initially included music, dance and art; they grew to encompass language, religion, education and any domain that could be attributed to personal or family life. Chatterjee claims that this "rule of colonial difference" was employed to such great effect that under the dominion of the Raj "the nation is already sovereign even though the state is in the hands of colonial power."⁵⁴

Chatterjee's "rule of colonial difference" represents a subaltern tactic employed against state interference in the colonial sub-continent. In the present study, by contrast, the modern state of Odisha implements "orality" as a government strategy to guard the integrity of cultural performances against external critiques of authenticity – whether from the West or the (literate) academy in general, including the academy in India. The MM tactic of "orality," while described by its practitioners predominantly in terms of evangelistic effectiveness, also includes a process by which it "carves out" certain domains as exempt from external critique. Paradoxically, the domains claimed by MM are not primarily concerned with "literate" or Western intrusion, but rather with the

⁵³ Chatterjee employs the term "strategy" throughout his own writing in depicting his "rule of colonial difference;" I have chosen, instead, to use the term "tactic" here, after Michel de Certeau as a reference to this subaltern endeavor and to maintain consistency throughout this dissertation.

⁵⁴ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 6.

intrusion of the state. So while the state employs “oral tradition” as a strategy against outside interference, Maranatha Ministries employs a similar subaltern tactic of “orality” against the intrusion of this same state.

Scholarly Perspectives on “Orality”

In the Western academy, the terms “orality” and “orality studies” reference a wide body of research that includes 1) the impact of literacy on cognition, oral memory and transmission; 2) the embodied nature of memory, cognition and communication; and 3) the impact of literacy on the production of meaning.⁵⁵ Walter Ong’s focus on psychodynamics in oral and literate societies identifies the primacy of narrative for storing information in oral cultures. Ong’s work provides a productive lens through which to appreciate the celebration of narrative repetition found in the ethnographies in this project, particularly in chapters two and three.⁵⁶ Dwight Conquergood’s concept of embodied epistemologies is foundational throughout this project for identifying responses informed primarily by a resonance with an audience member’s embodied domains of

⁵⁵ The production of meaning itself is the focus of Wilhelm von Humboldt & Benjamin Worf who claim that meaning resides in language, for Franz Boas (1911), who claims that meaning resides in mental images, for Christiane Nord (1997) who demonstrates that translation limits the transference of contextual and embodied information, and Benjamin K. Bergen (2012) who contends the production of meaning through imagination or visualization, while initiated by the mind, extends to the body.

⁵⁶ See Walter Ong’s monograph *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 1982, 2002). Contributions by others to the impact of literacy on cognition, oral memory and transmission include a structuralist analysis of oral communication by Maranda and Maranda (1971) as well as comparative projects that contrast cognition in oral and written communication such as those of Jack Goody (1968, 1987), Rosalind Thomas (1989), and Maria Tymoczko (2007). Milman Parry’s work with the Iliad and the Odyssey is also foundational in its contrasting of literate and oral practices; others in this vein include Albert Lord (1960), Erick Havelock, Marshall McLuhan (1962), Walter Ong (1982) and Jean-Francois Vallee (2009).

historical experience.⁵⁷ Finally, Udo Will's work with Central Australian Aboriginal Music identifies a productive link between the necessity of particular information for survival and verbal memory recall. Will's work provides a basis for the intensive memorization of stories and their critical necessity for religious permanence among MM Christians, particularly as it relates to verbatim recall and the survival of the Christian church in Odisha.⁵⁸

Literacy

Finally, the term "literacy," discussed earlier in the chapter in association with the concept "Western," is a contested domain in this project. The variety of ideas attached to "literacy" become even more wide-ranging than those attached to "orality" presented earlier. "Literacy" is defined variously by agents in my research as meaning "bad, Western and foreign," or "good and a social lift for the poor," or even "upper caste and urban." "Literacy" appears most tellingly in the at-times-animated discussions of my interlocutors, who argue about the role of verbatim text and its connection to "literacy" and "preaching" in chapter two. Textual meaning is thus fluid, contingent and contextual in the uneven political terrain of modern Odisha.

⁵⁷ See Dwight Conquergood, "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research," in *The Drama Review* 46, 2 (T174) Summer 2002, (New York: New York University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002). Other scholars who study the embodied nature of communication include Howard Gardner (1983) who introduced the idea of "multiple intelligences," D. Kimura (1993), Jose Esteban Munuz (1999) and Moya Lloyd (1999). Zoila S. Mendoza (2000) examines the pivotal role of dance in establishing identities and David Howes (2003) examines the connection between sensory perception and cultural expression.

⁵⁸ See Udo Will's "Oral Memory in Australian Aboriginal Song Performance and the Parry-Kirk debate: a cognitive ethnomusicological perspective," in: E. Hickmann/R. Eichmann eds., *Music-Archaeological Sources: Finds, Oral Transmission, Written Evidence. Studien zur Musikarchäologie IV, Orient-Archäologie* 15, 2004. 161-179. Other contributions to memory and transmission include those of Marilee Sprenger (1999), a classroom teacher turned scholar, D. C. Rubin (1995) a cognitive psychologist and Leo Treitler (1981) a historical musicologist.

An arrival story and methodological approach

I first arrived in Odisha in July of 2011, less than three years after the Kandhamal riots. My initial work was centered in the ancient and storied regions of Cuttack and Bhubaneswar and later a fishing village on the Bay of Bengal; this NGO project allowed me to develop relationships with several who would become my interlocutors for this research. Although I had been in India several times before, this was my first time in Odisha. This was also my first experience with audio and video recording as part of my volunteer labor with a North Carolina based NGO, Freedom to Lead, International, with whom I was a partner in a curriculum development project for illiterate, or what FTL calls “storycentric” learners. FTL, Scriptures in Use (SIU) and several other outside agencies provide training for Maranatha Ministries and seventeen other similar organizations on the subcontinent.⁵⁹ These eighteen ministries gather regularly to share ideas and participate in training; together they claim over eight thousand house churches throughout north India and Nepal.

It was in February of 2012 at the Christian Oral Arts Festival sponsored by Maranatha Ministries, that I was first exposed to what I am calling acting in performances. These performances by accomplished MM Christian troupes demonstrated

⁵⁹ The term “storycentric” is a neologism created by Freedom to Lead in response to the multiplicity of vernacular and academic meanings attached to “oral” and “orality.” The term “storycentric” is intended to be inclusive of both those with no literacy and those who are literate yet whose preferred method of learning is not through literate means. The term “storycentric” in this usage is not hyphenated.

various ways that the performing arts, and particularly local genres and styles referred to by MM leaders as “oral arts,” were being used to present stories from Christian scriptures in the streets of Oriya Hindu villages. As I explained above, the Oral Arts Festival was the event through which my focus for this research began to take shape. This was also the first time that I detected the residual tension from the region’s recent religious violence. This underlying but tangible tension informed many of the logistical decisions that determined the public-ness or seclusion of the festival venue.⁶⁰

The partnership between Freedom to Lead, International (FTL) and Maranatha Ministries (MM) provided me access to observe these and similar performances in the streets of Hindu villages and well as performances in the seclusion of house churches. At the same time, my credentials as an academic scholar enabled me to arrange formal interviews with various government leaders and state officials. My strategy was threefold: first, to observe acting in performances in Oriya villages and interview those in attendance; second, to spend time with MM Christian performers and leaders in order to evaluate the strategic processes they employed; and third, to interview various community and government leaders and draw out their perceptions regarding both the roots of religious conflict and the role of cultural performance in mediating cultural and religious dialogue.

⁶⁰ The Oral Arts Festival was originally scheduled for an outdoor venue but this was changed because of the presence of westerners, such as myself, as well as protection from the elements for the benefit of an American film crew. I discuss these risks in greater depth in the concluding chapter.

Satpathy seemed the obvious choice as the point person for my research needs in Odisha because of both his enthusiasm for academic research and his strong administrative and linguistic skills. Satpathy was more than gracious in facilitating my work. He personally took care of booking the necessary train travel as well as granting access and providing critical introductions to various key leaders. Santanu and Pradeep, who work under Satpathy's leadership, arranged my lodging and auto transportation in addition to coordinating village performances to align with my travel schedule. Santanu became my primary translator with Pradeep assisting. I developed a great admiration and respect for these two men who opened their homes and lives to me and gave significant time away to assist with my research; all this when they already spend considerable time away from their families.

Santanu and Pradeep's role within Maranatha Ministries is that of providing care, leadership, and training to village pastors and church planters. The two travel together throughout Odisha to direct group training events in which they teach strategies for beginning new churches and for communicating the Christian gospel using story and local genres of music, dance, and drama. Throughout their travels, these two men meet with individual pastors to encourage and guide them. It was not at all uncommon for a local pastor to meet us at a train station. The pastor might travel over an hour just to visit with these two leaders during our twenty-minute layover.

Research Methods

My preferred method of gathering data was through video and audio recordings which I would later transcribe word for word. In my situation the presence of a recording

device was less restrictive to the flow of communication and interaction than written note-taking would have been. That said, I always had a pad and pen at the ready for recording names and contact information and for gathering signed forms to satisfy the demands of responsible research practices. My primary recording device for interviews was a Zoom Q3 video recorder. This little Q3 unit, about the size of an ice cream sandwich, can be quickly switched from shooting video to functioning solely as a digital audio recorder; it can also slip comfortably into a pocket or be fastened to the corner of a bamboo roof frame or chair with the addition of a flexible tripod. The recorder's large built-in microphone is unusually responsive for a video device and allows for quality recordings of both personal interviews and the high sound pressure levels of percussion instruments. For stationary music performances I first used a Zoom H4n and later the much improved H6n digital recording unit. In addition to the excellent internal stereo microphones of these recorders I employed external Shure SM 57 and SM 58 microphones for various vocal and instrumental needs. These dynamic microphones, while not as responsive as condenser mics, provide solid frequency response at high sound pressure levels and are relatively bulletproof. Their durability in the field offsets their additional weight – a nuisance for travel.

As in any fieldwork endeavor, making the time for transcription was important for framing the next day's line of inquiry. However, numerous performances were compacted into only a few days to accommodate our traveling schedules; this intensity meant that some performances and interviews could not be transcribed until a later date.

For this reason I am grateful for Skype calling and email, which enabled me to contact my key interlocutors occasionally even after returning to the United States.

My visits to the villages were brief, often lasting only four or five hours on each occasion. Nevertheless, I was able to observe performances in each village in at least two different seasons. In two of the villages I became reacquainted with musicians I had previously recorded in the course of my work with Freedom to Lead, International. It was enjoyable to visit with them in their homes, to meet their children and extended families, to share a cup of *chai* (tea), and to witness their performances in the streets of their own and nearby villages. During my time in these local communities, my roles as scholar, NGO volunteer and Christian pastor overlapped, and it seemed that through my presence and attention, I was able to express my gratitude and esteem to these performers in the presence of family and neighbors.

Freedom to Lead, International

My volunteer work with Freedom to Lead, International (FTL) provided many valuable field contacts for this doctoral research. FTL is an NGO based in North Carolina whose stated mission is “Cultivating Christ-centered leaders through story, symbol and song to unleash the whole Gospel in local communities.”⁶¹ The organization was founded in 2009 by Richard Sessoms and has been working with Christian ministries throughout northern India and Nepal since 2010 to develop a structured leadership curriculum for what they call “storycentric” learners; these are people who may or may not be literate

⁶¹ Freedom to Lead, International website homepage, <http://www.freedomtolead.net>, accessed January 20, 2015.

but who learn primarily through non-literate methods. In Odisha, storycentric people and methods are most often referred to by MM leaders as “oral.” As discussed above, the term oral here is akin to the term “indigenous” but does not carry with it any claim to indigeneity; rather, oral people are the quintessence of the local and oral methods are simply the methods of oral people. Oral methods can therefore, incorporate non-traditional instruments or modern processes while still remaining valid as “the way oral people do things.”⁶²

I began volunteer work with FTL in January of 2010 and it was through my FTL travels in north India and Nepal that I came into contact with Dr. Abhinav Satpathy and Maranatha Ministries. I was able to coordinate the timing of my research trips to take advantage of air travel between the US and India funded by and for FTL, significantly reducing the costs of fieldwork research. The vast majority of my research and writing was accomplished as a full-time Christian pastor and graduate student in Ohio; however, during the last few months of my dissertation writing, I have begun serving as a full time international worker with Freedom to Lead, International.⁶³

The final Western agency in this project is the Arizona-based NGO, Scriptures in Use. SIU’s residual presence in this project is significant for having initiated the focus on oral arts and communication through storytelling with Maranatha Ministries and numerous other similar ministries in India. SIU was founded in 1986 by retired Arizona

⁶² This concept of the term “oral” was articulated most clearly by Dr. Abhinav Satpathy of Maranatha Ministries and Chatta Ranjan Mallia, secretary, Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi.

⁶³ I resigned my pastoral position as of December 31, 2014 and began as paid staff with Freedom to Lead, International as of January 01, 2015. As with all FTL staff, I am responsible for raising my own financial support.

residents, Jim and Carla Bowman; it is an independent Christian mission established to “guide and mentor each church planter to develop a grass roots church planting ministry through Bible storytelling, dialog and other traditional oral communication methods.”⁶⁴

The Bowmans’ focus on communicating through story was heavily influenced by their use of *The Jesus Film* throughout Mexico and Central America in the late 1980s.⁶⁵ By the early 1990s their focus had expanded to training local storytellers (1992), developing a curriculum for training storytellers (1994), and establishing a broader strategy entitled “Communication Bridges to Oral Cultures” (1996).⁶⁶ SIU, which is now also known outside the US as the “Bridges Training Network,” expanded to oral and semi-literate peoples of Ghana in 1997, India in 1998, Spain in 1999, and the West African countries of Togo and Benin in 2000.

Funding sources for SIU travel and training outside the U.S. have gradually shifted from monies donated by friends and family to those awarded through foundation grants. The U.S. staff added throughout SIU’s twenty-five years of expansion are not funded by the organization, however: each is required to raise support locally for his or her own living expenses. I mention funding sources here because, as the ethnography that follows will show, flows of money exert an influence that must be taken into account when evaluating acting in performances as efforts by Oriya Christians to maintain an eclectic, if

⁶⁴ SIU website home page, <http://www.siutraining.org/>, accessed March 13, 2013.

⁶⁵ Jim Bowman, interview with the author, February 2012. *The Jesus Film* is an evangelistic film based on the stories of Jesus from the Gospel of Luke, it was first produced in 1979 and has now been dubbed in more than 1,200 languages, <http://www.jesusfilm.org>, accessed September 20, 2014.

⁶⁶ All dates are from September, 2007 edition of SIU’s “Scriptures in Use” newsletter, “A Twentieth Anniversary edition” which presents a historical timeline from 1986 to 2007.

not contradictory, sets of relationships. This topic will be taken up in more detail in chapter four.

Chapter Review

Chapter one of this dissertation traces flows of people and ideologies throughout Odisha and the sub-continent over the past three thousand years.⁶⁷ This selective historical account establishes an extensive record of religious eclecticism, partly as a tactic of social survival, and highlights connections between historical socio-religious struggles and the modern Odisha of this study. One such connection is with Partha Chatterjee's "rule of colonial difference," discussed above as an anti-colonial strategy employed to label ever-increasing areas of sub-continent life as "culture" and thus off-limits to direct British rule.

Chapters two and three of this dissertation examine one acting in performance in relation to local village life as well as to state and local means of governance. Chapter two examines the cultural work accomplished through this acting in performance in the village of Bagharpalli, and demonstrates how acting in enables relations between Christians and local villagers through which Christian stories and the Christians themselves appear as "natural," a process which occurs through co-present dialogue in the village. Chapter two examines a performance designed to root Christian stories and the Christians themselves into local village life as "accepted," "remembered,"

⁶⁷ Longue durée, or "long history" is after Marc Bloch and the French Annales School of historical writing that seeks to identify persistent historical structures rather than chronicle short-term events. See Bloch's *French Rural History: An Essay on Its Basic Characteristics*, originally published 1931, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970).

“understood,” “natural” and “becoming real,” where each of these terms is defined against their opposites, opposites attributed to “foreign” if not “Western” ideologies.

Chapter three subsequently draws out the political work accomplished through the Bagharpalli acting in performance in relations between Oriya MM Christians and the official and unofficial forces that seek to govern them. It details how this same acting in performance includes a jettisoning of foreign practices. This jettisoning is a critical tactic that enables Oriya MM Christians to become functionally invisible to official and unofficial means of governance. In chapter three we see that acting in enables relations between Christians and various forms of governance to be based on an authenticated performance of “oral tradition” rather than religious practice. This tactic does not enable an escape from governance altogether, but rather enables Christians to avoid being governed as a separate entity from their social group of origin. Bagharpalli Christians are thus governed not as an identifiable social group known as “Christians,” but rather simply as “Bagharpalli residents.”

Chapter four examines a different kind of acting in performance, one that does not minimize a Western Christian identity but rather maximizes it in specific ways. This acting in performance takes place in the seclusion of a local house church rather than in the openness of village streets; it employs verbatim scripture recitation rather than the epic, dramatized scripture stories utilized in the streets of Bagharpalli. This acting in performance facilitates expressions of personal piety and religious devotion, but it also enables relations between local Christian churches and sponsoring Christian agencies in the West order to maintain an evangelical Christian fellowship and to maintain the

potential flows of resources they represent. Access to resources is a matter of no small influence in such impoverished communities.

Finally, the concluding chapter summarizes acting in, through which Oriya MM Christians practice a Christianity that borrows from both Oriya Hinduism and Western Christian evangelicalism to inform and enable meaningful Christian piety and devotional expression while facilitating survivability within the precarity of the modern “political society” that is the Odisha of this study. This conclusion re-presents a discussion of the risks of anti-Christian violence, an ever-present condition that continually influences the lives and tactical choices of Oriya Christians today and permeates this entire project.

Chapter 1

The Soil of Odisha and her people

A history

Acting in performances and audience responses to them do not occur in a vacuum; rather the social positions and attitudes that come into play are historically inflected and informed. This chapter traces the historical threads impacting present-day social, religious and political practices to reveal a history of both dogmatic and violent religious conflict as well as a chronicle of peaceable and eclectic religious borrowing. This eclecticism, or “promiscuous borrowing” from various religious ideologies, is a conscious process of selection according to religion scholar Brian Hatcher. Hatcher posits that eclectic borrowing differs from syncretism in that it is a creative appropriation of ideological practices rather than a harmonized merger of the same.⁶⁸

Of primary interest in this chapter are the historical intersections between various systems of governance, religious practice and the strictures of caste. These social constructs have historically been troubled by religious conversion and this chapter examines social conditions in which acting in performances seek to skillfully navigate potential sites of conflict without incident. Acting in performances and the Oriya Christians who perform them draw upon select historical threads in their attempt to

⁶⁸ Brian Hatcher, *Eclecticism and Modern Hindu Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11.

weave a new portrait of what it means to be Oriya, an image that includes both Christian identity and constructive religious dialogue. This chapter endeavors to identify these select threads throughout Odisha's chronology.

I begin with a discussion of geography, language, and socio-cultural ordering by caste in terms of Oriya history, present-day realities and politics. The village locale is then introduced as the residence of the vast majority of Odisha's (and India's) population, as well as the location of specific performances that are the primary sites of this research. Historical flows of people across the subcontinent are shown to influence both religion and government in Odisha, which is a pilgrimage destination for Hindus and Buddhists alike. The accounts presented here belie concrete categorization and demonstrate a capacity for religious and social differentiations to become rigid at certain times and conflated at others. The advent of British rule and Christian missionary presence are shown to upend prior sociological categories and to require continual renegotiation by all parties involved.



Map 1: Odisha location map

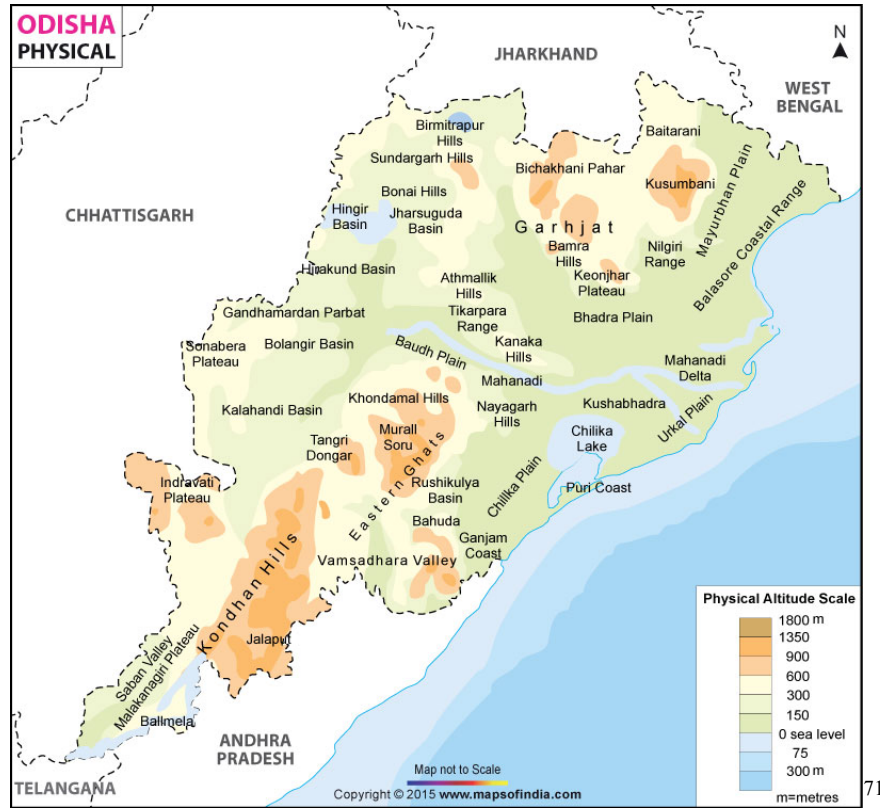
Geography

The Christians of Maranatha Ministries live scattered among their fellow Oriya throughout the State of Odisha, India, with the Indian Ocean at their eastern border and the State of Chattisgarh to the West.⁷⁰ The states of West Bengal and Jharkhand form the

⁶⁹ Odisha location map, www.mapsofindia.com, used with permission.

⁷⁰ While some scholars have used the term “Oriyan” to refer to the people of Odisha, my interlocutors are adamant that the proper term is “Oriya”: therefore this is the term I will use throughout.

state's northern border while its narrow southern boundary is shared with Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.



Map 2: Odisha physical map

Odisha's elongated shape encloses just over 60,000 square miles, comparable in size to the US state of Georgia, and it lies northeast to southwest along the Bay of Bengal. A forested hilly region runs through the middle of Odisha parallel to the coast where elevations range from three hundred to thirteen hundred meters. This hilly range begins in

⁷¹ Odisha physical map, www.mapsofindia.com, used with permission.

the south with the Kondhan Hills, northward are the Eastern Ghats and then the Khondamal Hills before being broken by the Baudh. The Mahanadi River flows eastward from the interior highlands through the Baudh plain, past the industrial city of Angul and on to the Bay of Bengal near the ancient capital city of Bhubaneswar. The Bamra Hills of the mountainous Garhjat region extend from this central river plain the final quarter distance to the northern border. The eight hour SUV ride from the train station in the central plain city of Angul to my fieldwork sites in Bolangir crosses the grand Mahanadi River and winds through the Khondamal Hills, “the jungle,” as Santanu, my translator, calls it. We were entertained at times by wandering hordes of monkeys and warned by posted signs of dangerous elephant herds and jungle cats, of which we saw none.



Map 3: Odisha district map

The entire state of Odisha lies within the tropical climate zone. The plains to the west and coastal lowlands to the east are largely cultivated for rice; secondary crops include sugar cane, wheat, groundnut (peanut), maize, and potato. These crops sustain a people whose diets range from strictly vegetarian to those including a mixture of vegetables and meats. According to my interlocutors, a vegetarian diet implies a heightened degree of spiritual devotion. The hill country provides timber and other forest products for local commerce, and the harvesting of forest resources has come under strict government controls in recent years. The hills also provide coal, iron ore, aluminum, mica, and chromium, which provide the raw materials for transnational industrial projects

such as the steel works near the industrial center of Rourkela in the far north and the aluminum plants in the central Baudh Plain city of Angul, one of the sites of this dissertation's fieldwork studies.

Language

The Oriya language, also known as Odia, is an Aryan derivation similar to Assamese, Bengali, and Maithili and is the state's official language. Other languages or variations in the region include Balesware, Bhatari, Laria, Medinipuri, Ganjami, Chhatisharhi and Sambalpuri.⁷² Most Oriyas with whom I worked understood some Hindi but spoke predominantly Oriya and often at least one regional language. My unseasoned Hindi skills proved to be of limited use for conversational participation in most rural areas.

Family Structures

Oriya family structures are largely patrilineal and parents arrange the vast majority of marriages. Other marriage arrangements include marriage by capture (a form of elopement), exchange, or force.⁷³ Love marriages, those determined by the couple themselves, are rare in villages and, according to my interlocutors, generally occur

⁷² www.orissatourism.org/languages-of-orissa.html. Accessed November 08, 2014.

⁷³ Marriage by capture involves the male, accompanied by a band of male friends, entering his intended's compound and carrying her off by force. Numerous ceremonies include a sham battle that is enacted between the bride's family/village and the groom. A dowry is set and terms agreed upon. Marriage by exchange includes the exchange of money or goods for the bride; in some cases girls were literally sold by their families at auction to the highest bidder. Marriage by force is when one party forcibly moves into the home of their love regardless of the families' desires. See Augustine Kanjamal's discussion of Oriya family structures at length in "Marriage, Family and Population Control," in *Religion and Modernization of India: A Case Study of Northern Orissa* (Indore, India: Sat Prachar Press 1980), 108-150.

mostly in urban cosmopolitan settings.⁷⁴ Indeed, every leader with whom I worked was married through parental arrangement. Multiple patrilineal family structures are organized under the centralized rule of a village eldership and include both nuclear and extended forms of patrilineage, clans and family.⁷⁵ These structures can vary from village to village and are adapted to meet changing sociological conditions, including the immigration of new family units. Marriages, climate conditions such as drought or flood, or social and political unrest such as family squabbles or religious conflict are the main reasons people move from village to village.

Social order by caste

The social strata of Oriya society are ordered primarily through the ancient Hindu system of *varna* or caste, although some scholars argue that caste is secondary to other sociocultural systems among Odisha's highland tribes.⁷⁶ Since the advent of British rule caste has been considered a primary means of social organization throughout the entire Indian subcontinent as well as a persistent outward sign of India's identity as exotic and Other. The historical development of caste is a topic of considerable scholarly debate, which I selectively recount below.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Nkilakantha Panigrahi, "Development of Eco-Tourism in Tribal Regions of Orissa: Its Potential and Prospects" *Research Paper No. 11, The Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies*, Dr. R. James Feguson, ed. (Queensland, Australia: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Bond University, February 2005), 9.

⁷⁶ Georg Pfeffer argues for the primacy of tribal delineations over caste categories for Odisha's highland tribes in the northern regions of his study. See "'In the Remote Area:' Recent German Research in Tribal Orissa," in *Voices from the Periphery: Subalternity and Empowerment in India*, Marine Carrin and Lidia Guzy, editors. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 75-102.

Regardless of its origins, caste is a government-sanctioned and enforced means of ordering society in the modern Odisha of this study. *Varna*, or caste as it is structured today, is composed of four main categories: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Shudra, with the Brahmin as the priestly or “twice-born” ruling class. Beneath these four categories are those known as “untouchables.” In 1950, India’s government abolished “untouchability” and instead created further categories for those outside this four-part caste system: these groups are classified as Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) or Other Backward Caste (OBC).⁷⁷ The Oriya people I encountered in the villages of this study, both Christians and Hindus alike, were primarily Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe according to government categorization. Their principle means of sustenance, be it menial labor or agriculture, is largely predetermined by their SC, or ST status.⁷⁸ The Indian government provides assistance for Scheduled Caste people in the form of hiring quotas that reserve a certain number of government jobs (reservations) for Scheduled Caste persons. Nevertheless, the Indian government refuses to officially recognize any person who is not Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist as Scheduled Caste; this is a source of struggle for many Indian Muslims and Christians alike. The issue at hand is access to

⁷⁷ For a thorough discussion of the history and politics of caste see Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁷⁸ Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste are official government classifications as evidenced by the following statement: “The statutory lists of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, in pursuance of Articles 341 and 342 of the Indian Constitution, were notified for the first time under the Constitution (Schedule Castes) Order, 1950 and the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950. These lists have been modified/amended/supplemented from time to time. On the reorganisation of the States, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes List (Modification) Order came into force from 29th October, 1956. Thereafter, a few other orders in respect of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes list in some individual States also came into force.” National Portal of India, <http://www.archive.india.gov.in/howdo/howdoi.php?service=4>. Accessed January 21, 2015.

resources, if one is a low caste Christian or Muslim, he or she is excluded from many government programs intended to assist the state's poorest residents.

Recent scholarship has viewed caste across the subcontinent as a product, a consequence, even an “invented tradition” of British authoritative presence. This perception at times has been blinding. The social and cultural historian Frank Conlon relates an anecdote wherein a visiting colleague reacted strongly to Conlon's raising the topic of caste, exclaiming, “Caste? I thought that was all an invention of the British!”⁷⁹ The answer is not that simple. A careful look at historical accounts along with the historical interrogation accomplished by Nicholas Dirks reveals a social stratification that predates British presence yet was significantly altered by it.⁸⁰

Most scholars agree that the ancient origins of the caste system emanate from an indigenous understanding of *varnasrama-dharma*, (*varna*), the religious and social responsibilities of each class and stage of life.⁸¹ What is less clear is the extent to which local manifestations of caste were varied, and what other local means of social ordering existed prior to the British governance. Nicholas Dirks challenges the colonialist conception of caste as the all-encompassing and primary means of social order because of its relative absence, or at least limited importance in the documents of indigenous courts, western merchants and travelers.

⁷⁹ Frank Conlon, “Speaking of Caste? Colonial and Indigenous Interpretations of Caste and Community in Nineteenth-century Bombay,” in *Ancient to Modern: Religion, Power, and Community in India*, Ishaita Banerjee-Dube and Saurabh Dube editors, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 292.

⁸⁰ Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

Early accounts, such as those of 16th century traveler Duarte Barbosa; French merchant Jean Baptiste Tavernier in the mid-17th century; and the 18th century writings of Colin McKenzie and Francis Buchanan each depict social stratification as regionally specific.⁸² Some indicate that caste delineations were not necessarily the primary ordering system of the region.⁸³ For example, the arrangement of marriages was contained within fixed caste delineations in some communities but was based on occupational traditions in others.⁸⁴ Some communities strictly limited occupational practice and social status to heredity and lineage, while others allowed for increasing social rank based on personal achievement.⁸⁵ One trait that seems to be consistent involves issues of purity and pollution: these inform prohibitions against contact between the upper, priestly classes and those who handled dead or diseased animals, human corpses, dung, feces, or even animals skins (such as those on drums) or any other items deemed pollutants by a predominantly Hindu society.⁸⁶

According to Dirks, in the British quest to understand indigenous structures they placed inordinate trust in an English translation of *The Laws of Manu (Manu Dharma*

⁸² Barbosa and Tavernier are both discussed in Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind* . . . 19. McKenzie and Buchanan appear in Thomas Metcalf, *The New Cambridge History of India: Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 115-6.

⁸³ McKenzie and Buchanan traveled and wrote extensively but neither indicated caste as a primary means of social ordering but rather attested to stratification by royal lineage. See Metcalf, *The New Cambridge History of India*, 1995, 19.

⁸⁴ See Cynthia Talbot, *Precolonial India in Practice: Society, Region, and Identity in Medieval Andhra* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 66, for a discussion of social practices in precolonial Andhra Pradesh.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ See Nicholas B. Dirks, “The Original Caste: Social Identity in the Old Regime” in *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 63-80.

Sastras) as a representation of social stratification for all of India.⁸⁷ Brahmin scholars composed the Manu texts that presented Hindu caste as a four-part structure with the Brahmins as the dominant group. Dirks qualifies his claim for caste as a product of the colonial project, claiming that caste did exist prior to colonialism, but that “colonialism made caste what it is today.” That is, caste became “the sign of India’s fundamental religiosity, a marker of India’s essential difference from the West and modernity at large.”⁸⁸

Some Christians in this study, church leaders in particular, as a result of their conversion to Christianity and ascent to leadership within church structures, enjoy a lifestyle that would normally not be available to those from Scheduled Tribe, Scheduled Caste or Other Backward Castes backgrounds. Dr. Abhinav Satpathy is one such leader from a Scheduled Tribe background. Satpathy grew up in a village with no electricity, and thanks to his father’s constant urging, he was the first in his family to complete local schooling. Satpathy was chosen at a young age for the Hindu priesthood and was in training when he converted to Christianity. It was his religious conversion that enabled the connections through which he was able to attend college and graduate school in the capital city of New Delhi. Satpathy speaks evocatively of his intense struggles as a young man to adapt to the modern urban setting. Yet, in spite of these difficulties, he excelled

⁸⁷ Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 122.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

academically and eventually completed one undergraduate and three graduate degrees before becoming a professor and finally the dean of the school.⁸⁹

The Village

As in Satpathy's childhood, the vast majority of Oriya live in, work near, and socialize around the structure of the village. Villages, communities of less than 5,000 people, represent the primary investigative sites for this research project. As of the 2011 census, 82.32% of Odisha's residents live in villages, making Odisha it the fourth most rural state in India.⁹⁰ The percentage of village residents across the nation is very high as well with a national average of 68.84%.⁹¹ The village in India is "the essence of Indian civilization as it is considered a repository of traditional mores and folkways," according to sociologist Vandana Madan.⁹² Each village has its own unique social, political and economic relationships that guide and form the basis of interactions among its residents.⁹³

Villages are not normally the habitations of the wealthy, but rather of those who struggle to sustain their families through subsistence agriculture, cottage business or hourly labor in nearby towns. There is little access to medical care, and in villages where I was introduced to local Christians as both an ethnographer and a Christian minister, my visits ended with lines of people, mostly women, requesting prayer for healing of feverish children, healing of skin diseases, fertility for barren couples, the blessing of homes and

⁸⁹ Satpathy attended Eastern Theological College in New Delhi, India.

⁹⁰ 2001 India census data via IndiaFacts, <http://indiafacts.in/india-census-2011/urban-rural-population-o-india>. Accessed January 7, 2014.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Vandana Madan, editor, *The Village in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1.

⁹³ For an example of such structural analysis, see social anthropologist, F. G. Baily's "Two Villages in Orissa," in *The Village in India*, Vandana Madan, ed. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press 2002), 80-99.

the blessing of many bottles filled with water. Even those who were not Christian came seeking prayers for healing or blessing; the urgency of their need seeming to outweigh religious distinctions.

The Oriya villagers of this study live in homes made of mud bricks. In some homes the bricks are exposed, others have been plastered over with mud or cement and painted. Roofs vary from bamboo and thatch, to clay tile or corrugated metal. Homes are often built in clusters according to family relations and children run freely throughout their family neighborhood if not the entire village. House churches usually begin meeting within the home of the first Christian converts and then move to larger homes/porticos if needed. In cases where church numbers exceed the capacity of an individual home, a bamboo and thatch structure is built and maintained in someone's courtyard solely for the purpose of the church gathering.

The villages of this study are comprised of numerous familial clans that relate to one another under the leadership of village elders. Eldership tends to be based on accumulated respect rather than democratic election and is generally considered to extend for the remainder of the elder's life. Village elders were present at each of the village performances I observed and respect was shown to these elders through special recognition and formal greetings prior to performances. Elders were also given preferred seating for the performances, usually one of only a few plastic resin chairs available in the neighborhood. As part of a demonstration of respect, I, as a visitor, Western scholar and Christian pastor, was carefully introduced early in the event's proceedings. It is significant to note that my identity as Christian pastor was included in these introductions

only when there were significant numbers of Christians already living in the village. In one village my presence required a brief ceremony of sorts, which involved the village elder draping a gift of fabric across my shoulders. I discovered later that the materials for such acts of hospitality, be they woven fabric or specific flowers, were provided by the host family in the village so that the elder would incur no financial burden or even worse, shame, at his unpreparedness or inability to provide the obligatory welcome.

Expectations for such reciprocal demonstrations of respect are not fixed but rather can require continual negotiation. During my most recent visit to the village of Bagharpalli, the older sisters-in-law of Kanti Senapatti, our host for the performance, arrived to acknowledge my return. In the course of their welcome they asked if I had also bought a gift for the village on this return visit. This was unexpected. I cast a quick glance at my translators for help and was surprised to receive none. I hurriedly considered all of the items in my backpack and on my person, none of which I had confidence would be suitable; some of which I feared could be offensive – including cash. With no opportunity to confer with my translators or hosts, I replied, “I regret that I have come unprepared to bless the village with a gift, but I assure you that my heart is filled with gratitude for your generosity towards me on these visits. I would be most pleased upon my next visit to bring a suitable gift as thanks for your warm and repeated hospitality.” At this response the group of women retreated; several did not return for the day’s performance.

At the end of the day it was agreed that we should not attempt to make peace by giving a gift on that day but rather hold to my promise to bring a suitable gift at my next

return. It was suggested that a possible reason for the request was that older family members may have been somewhat jealous of the attention received by the young Kanti Senapatti and her husband from this visiting foreign researcher. I was told the young couple would confer with their siblings after our departure and achieve a peaceable resolution, hopefully one that would result in greater trust than before.

Performances

Village performances are the primary sites of this fieldwork. In Odisha, village performances of song, dance and drama are often connected to specific Hindu festivals; most months contain at least one local religious festival for which there will be performances of music, dance and/or drama as part of ritual observances. Becoming less common in recent years are traveling performance troupes with genres that are not strictly religious in nature, as well as those which incorporate religious themes but which are not connected to Hindu festivals. Acting in performances draw upon a wide variety of genres and events, both ritual and entertainment, and are often enthusiastically received in part because they draw on a nostalgia for traveling street performance troupes still remembered by village adults.

Tourist performances generally occur in cities and larger towns. These performances include a variety of competitions and exhibitions often organized or sponsored by Odisha's Ministry of Tourism or Ministry of Culture. The state views tourism as a valuable endeavor for generating sustainable jobs and to help preserve cultural and historical sites and artifacts, as tourism contributes over \$290 million USD per year to

Odisha's economy.⁹⁴ Odisha's rich archeological sites are stunning in both their variety and intricacy. Once such site is Dhauli, the site of both the Kalinga War of 261 BCE and of King Ashoka's subsequent conversion to Buddhism. Other sites include enormous Jain caves from the first century BC, fabulously preserved Buddhist *stupas* (mound-like structures), Kalinga-era temples as well as those of countless other Hindu deities, some of which have been worshipped through a variety of religious traditions since before the time of Christ. The city of Bhubaneswar is touted as the "Temple City of India" in state tourist publications and the immediate region is said to have once contained over 7,000 temples.⁹⁵ One online source still lists 145 temples as present-day tourist attractions.⁹⁶ The temples, many dating from the 6th to the 12th century, are truly magnificent to behold.

Religion

Jagannath, which today has the exalted title of "Lord of the World" or "Lord of the Universe, has been a central deity of the Oriya people continuously throughout eras of dominance by Buddhist, Jain, Muslim and now Hindu practices. The persistence of Jagannath worship regardless of majority religious practice is one example of the eclecticism that characterizes the religious practices of the region and which troubles attempts to create rigid religious categories. Statues of Jagannath have the unique distinction among major Hindu deities of being made of wood rather than metal or stone. Originally a wooden "post god" from aboriginal times, the physical manifestation of

⁹⁴ Department of Tourism: Government of Odisha, *Annual Activities Report 2012-13 item 3.1*. The economics of tourism will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four.

⁹⁵ From an Odisha government tourism brochure entitled, "Orissa . . . Imaginations engraved on stone" (no date given), listing as a web address www.orissatourism.gov.in.

⁹⁶ "Tourism in Odisha," *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tourism_in_Odisha. Accessed January 16, 2015.

Jagannath has transformed over the years to become a limbless yet anthropomorphic wooden deity with arm stumps and large eyes.⁹⁷ The dating of Jagannath's origins is unclear but scholars claim that by the 10th century the Jagannath cult deity was already widely revered as a pilgrimage destination.⁹⁸ From the early 13th century to the present, the triad of deities worshipped at the famous Puri temple of Jagannath have included Balabhadra, Subhadra and Lord Jagannath.⁹⁹ The temple at Puri has attracted pilgrims from across the subcontinent for more than a millennium, so great was its fame that 18th century missionaries likened it as the "Mekka or Jerusalem of the Hindus."¹⁰⁰

Odisha has experienced a wide variety of religious practices over several millennia in accordance with the flows of people throughout the Indian subcontinent. The last millennium BCE saw the emergence of śramanic (Buddhism, Jainism, Ajivikas) philosophies after Magadha, Mahavira, and Gautama Buddha c. 466-486 BCE and their subsequent rise to prominence with the conversion of King Ashoka to Buddhism in 260 BC.¹⁰¹ Śramanic religions are non-Vedic, meaning they do not adhere to the doctrinal authority of the Vedas scriptures, but rely instead on the philosophical teachings of individual leaders such as Gautama Buddha mentioned above. Śramanic teachings

⁹⁷ For a thorough historical account of the Jagannath deity see *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, Anncharlott Eschmann, Hermann Kulke and Gaya Charan Tripathi editors (Delhi: South Asia Interdisciplinary Regional Research Programme of Heidelberg University, 1978).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, xvi.

⁹⁹ For the development of this triad see "The formation of the Jagannatha Triad" in *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, Anncharlott Eschmann, Hermann Kulke and Gaya Charan Tripathi, editors (Delhi: South Asia Interdisciplinary Regional Research Programme of Heidelberg University, 1978), 169-96.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 357

¹⁰¹ Frank J. Korom expands on this era of India's religious history in "Holy Cow! The Apotheosis of Zebu, or Why the Cow Is Sacred in Hinduism," in *Asian Folklore Studies* 59, No. 2 (2000), 189-203.

eventually spread as far as Sri Lanka, which today is one of the centers of modern Buddhism. It is important to note that the emergence of new religious ideologies here was not solely or even primarily the result of military conquest, though this was certainly a factor, but also was influenced by religious and philosophical discourse and the socio-economic conditions among the inhabitants of this shared geographic space. Ideological exchange was sufficient to inspire King Ashoka, the third emperor of the Mauryan dynasty (321 BCE to 232 BCE) to convert from Vedic Hinduism to Buddhism at the site of his military conquest of the Kalinga at Dhauli, Odisha.¹⁰² The story is commonly told that Ashoka was remorseful at the extreme numbers killed in this battle and subsequently pursued a more peaceful religion.¹⁰³ By the time of King Ashoka's death, the Mauryan Empire, and Ashoka's Buddhist influence, covered almost the entirety of what is modern India today. The expansiveness of the Mauryan empire would not be equaled again until the British Raj ("Raj" means "rule" in Hindi).¹⁰⁴ I mention Ashoka's story here to demonstrate the deep historical precedent for religious conversion in Odisha in light of the intense controversy surrounding modern conversion practices taken up in this study.

After the downfall of King Ashoka, Buddhist practices continued in Odisha along with those of Jainism, the religion of Ashoka's Mauryan predecessor, Emperor

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ This is the common story in scholastic accounts, such as that found in Burjor Avari's *India: The Ancient Past: A history of the sub-continent from c. 7000 BC to AD 1200* (London: Routledge, 2007), 110-111, as well as that told in Odisha State tourist publications such as "Buddhist Heritage: Legacy of Orissa, Pride of India" (Orissa: Department of Tourism, no date given), 1-3.

¹⁰⁴ Burjor Avari, *India: The Ancient Past: A history of the sub-continent from c. 7000 BC to AD 1200* (London: Routledge, 2007), 113.

Chandragupta.¹⁰⁵ Even as late as 641 CE, Chinese traveler and Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang visited Odisha and described a great and flourishing Buddhist practice there.¹⁰⁶ Today Odisha's Ministry of Tourism promotes Buddhist pilgrimage tours of the many stunning ancient temples and ruins found throughout the state in hopes of attracting the attention and disposable income of wealthy Asian Buddhists.¹⁰⁷

Buddhism continued to grow and flourish in Odisha, reaching its peak in the 10th century. Throughout the remainder of the subcontinent, what have become known as "Hindu" faiths (a term I will take up momentarily) experienced a resurgence in the 8th to 10th centuries CE with Buddhist ideologies remaining dominant in Odisha, Sri Lanka and northwest of the Himalayas. After the 10th century Buddhism in Odisha began a gradual decline and Vedic Hinduism began to increase in prominence.¹⁰⁸

The origins of the term "Hindu" were initially geographic in nature, referring in the third century BCE to the people of the Indus river basin in the north central region of the subcontinent. As a result, the various religious practices and ideologies of that region were subject to classification under the singular marker "Hindu" (people of the Indus

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 107.

¹⁰⁶ This visit is depicted in many accounts with numerous name variants, including Hsuan Tsang, Hiuen Tsiang and Xuan Cang, just to cite a few.

¹⁰⁷ At the time of my fieldwork, Odisha's Ministry of Tourism tagline was "Orissa: The Soul of Incredible India." Included in each brochure was a section on Buddhist pilgrimage sites. Other Ministry of Tourism publications included "Discover the hidden face of Buddhism" as well as "Buddhist Heritage." These full-color brochures were made available to me through the tourist booth at the Bhubaneswar airport as well as by way of the generosity of the Director of Tourism and Joint Secretary, Shri M. R. Pattnaik I.A.S. and his staff.

¹⁰⁸ For an overview of religious practice in Odisha, see H. V. Stietencron "The Advent of Visnuism in Orissa: An Outline of Its History According to Archaeological and Epigraphical Sources from the Gupta Period up to 1135 AD," in *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, Eschmann, Kulke and Tripathi, editors (New Delhi: South Asia Institute New Dehi Branch Heidelberg University, 1986), 1-30.

valley) by subsequent large-scale arrivals of people most notably by the Turko-Afghan Muslims who entered the Indus plain through northern conquest in the 8th century.¹⁰⁹

The stark contrast between Islam and the variety of previously established religions enable the broad label of Hindu to be applied to Vedic Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists alike.¹¹⁰

When addressing the modern Odisha presented ethnographically in the following chapters, I will also use of the term Hindu as a broad marker of majority religious practice in the region, be it Vedic Hinduism, Śramana religions (Buddhism, Jainism, Ajivikas) or combinations of any of these with traditional tribal religious practices. This broad usage is in keeping with the dominant categories of the public discourse in which my interlocutors struggle to achieve agency. I should note here that the modern Indian Constitution still classifies all Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists as Hindu.¹¹¹

Flows of people into the subcontinent from the North resulted in Islam's increasing prominence in the northern cultural and political scene and the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in 1206; this was followed by steadily expanding Muslim rule in the north of

¹⁰⁹ Burjor Avari, *India: The Ancient Past: A history of the sub-continent from c. 7000 BC to AD 1200*, (London: Routledge, 2007), 227.

¹¹⁰ For more on the interaction of Muslim and Hindu ideologies see Partha Chatterjee's, "Histories and Nations" in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 95-115. See also Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East,'* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 98.

¹¹¹ Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and The Mystic East* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 108. See also: India Constitution, [http://lawmin.nic.in/olwing/coi/coi-english/Const.Pock%20Pg.Rom8Fsss\(6\).pdf](http://lawmin.nic.in/olwing/coi/coi-english/Const.Pock%20Pg.Rom8Fsss(6).pdf), accessed March 18, 2015, which states "Explanation II.—In sub-clause (b) of clause (2), the reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jaina or Buddhist religion, and the reference to Hindu religious institutions shall be construed accordingly."

India. By 1526 the majority of northern India was unified under Muslim rule, this period is referred to by ethnomusicologist, Udo Will as “the 16th century divide” and marks the beginning of the Mughal Empire.¹¹² Odisha’s geographical position allowed for a degree of isolation from political developments across the subcontinent, this remoteness enabled Odisha to avoid Islamic dominance until 1568.¹¹³

The movements of people that produced these religious contacts were not without conflict or violence, although the nature, extent and origins of violence remain contested in the Odisha of this project. Contradictory claims regarding the frequency and extent of military force and violence have resulted in the coexistence of competing narratives, the tensions of which resonate into the contemporary era of present day Odisha.¹¹⁴ Hindu historians such as Mrityunjay Vidylankar (ca. 1762-1819), claimed divine will as a justification for Hindu rule and accused Muslims of violent aggression, while at the same time downplaying any evidence of violence between competing Hindu groups.¹¹⁵ Conversely, Muslim historians such as Abdul Karim (1863-1943) presented the Muslim conquest of northern India as beneficial to Indian people for dispelling a superstitious Hinduism, introducing a just Islamic religion and producing a benevolent Sultanate

¹¹² Will identified the “16th century divide” as such in his lecture “Music Cultures in Asia and the Middle East,” MU787.02, The Ohio State University, 01.07.2009.

¹¹³ “Introduction” in *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, Eschmann, Kulke and Tripathi, editors (Delhi: South Asia Interdisciplinary Regional Research Programme of Heidelberg University, 1978).

¹¹⁴ For a more detailed account of India’s history from the time of the Mughals forward, see *A Concise History of Modern India*, by Barbara D Metcalf and Thomas Metcalf (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). See also Rashid Abdurra’s *Islam in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent* (Lahore: National Book Foundation, 1977).

¹¹⁵ Partha Chatterjee, “The Nation and Its Pasts” in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 76-94.

rule.¹¹⁶ In addition to establishing a history of violence categorized by the pseudo-religious markers “Hindu” and “Muslim,” a deeper look into each of these historical narratives reveals a privileging of gross distinctions (between “Hindu” and “Muslim”) over more subtle religious, political and ethnic identities. Both Abdul Karim and Vidylankar present highly generalized identity formations that ignore the presence of or adherence to a religious text as a possible indicator of religious identity. In this way both classify all Vedic and non-Vedic inhabitants under the singular label of “Hindu.”¹¹⁷

In addition to standardizing a broad category of “Hindu,” the text-inflected ideologies introduced by the British also influenced religious leadership. The colonizers’ criteria for validating religious leaders encompassed only those literate, learned male priests who enforced adherence to sacred texts; these were the Brahmins.¹¹⁸ Absent from consideration were leaders of Śramana religious groups such as Jains, Buddhists, and Ajivikas because of their independence from sacred texts. Religious appointments by the British disregarded local determinations of religious acceptance and thus upended local systems of religious authority.¹¹⁹

In spite of the militaristic interventions discussed above, religious practices throughout the subcontinent were characterized by both a free exchange of ideas and a

¹¹⁶ Partha Chatterjee presents Abdul Karim’s narratives in juxtaposition to previous Hindu accounts such as those of Mrityunjay Vidylankar’s in the chapter, “Histories and Nations,” in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 95-115.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 109.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 10.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

degree of eclecticism.¹²⁰ Instances of eclectic practices include: Gupta rulers performing both Vedic Hindu sacrifices and expressions of Buddhist devotion; the divergent ideological and religious roots of the sacred Puranas; the public presentation of Indian Hinduism by the 19th century Swami Vivekananda; and more recently, the inclusionary statements of Mahatma Gandhi, who proclaimed, “While we adhere to our faith, we have every right to adopt acceptable features from any other faith.”¹²¹ Such borrowing belies Western modernist concepts of orthodoxy. Religious eclecticism is a thread that appears at various times in this dissertation; it appears in ways that trouble static depictions of religious ideologies and yet create possibilities for new ways of being Oriya in today’s Odisha.

The performance of verbatim sacred texts versus that of highly stylized religious text becomes a point of contention and inquiry for this study. In the modern Odisha of my research MM Christians perform Biblical stories as highly stylized epic narratives for Hindu audiences on village streets, and yet these same Christians recite scriptures in verbatim form for a Christian audience in the secluded house church setting. The memorization and public recitation of verbatim scripture practiced in house churches is strongly encouraged by Arizona based NGO, Scriptures in Use (SIU). SIU provides ongoing support by funding regional and national training for leaders in Maranatha

¹²⁰ Burjor Avari, *India: The Ancient Past: A History of the Indian sub-continent from c. 7000 BC to AD 1200*, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 132.

¹²¹ Vincent A. Smith describes in some detail the eclectic practices of Gupta rulers in *The early history of India from 600 B.C. to the Muhammadan conquest : including the invasion of Alexander the Great* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), 288. Also see Brian Hatcher, “What’s the Connection? India’s Eclectic Heritage” in *Eclecticism and Modern Hindu Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 71-94. Mahatma Gandhi as quoted by Brian Hatcher in *Eclecticism and Modern Hindu Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1999, 61.

Ministries and other similar organizations throughout northern India. Because of the connection of verbatim scripture with a continuing influence by a Christian agency in the West, I found myself questioning whether or not these practices represent a residual colonialist influence. Is the practice of verbatim scripture a value introduced and even enforced by the western sponsoring agency, Scriptures in Use? Is the use of stylized narrative performance a form of resistance or subversion on the part of Maranatha Ministries? If so, I hypothesized, such subversive behavior could be akin to Partha Chatterjee's "rule of colonial difference" discussed first in the introduction and again in the later part of this chapter and in chapter four.

The date of Christianity's arrival in Odisha varies according to the source. The Odisha Catholic Bishops Council traces the roots of Roman Catholic presence in Odisha to 1498 with the arrival of Portuguese believers.¹²² The historical narrative presented on the Bishop's Council website also claims a Jesuit presence arriving from Rome in 1541 joined later by Vincentian missionaries arriving from Spain.¹²³ The Bishop's Council account depicts a relatively small group of churches that maintained a persistent presence through more than five centuries. The work of Catholic scholar Augustine Kanjamala claims instead that Christianity first arrived in Odisha in 1854 with the arrival of four Evangelical Lutheran missionaries in Chota Nagpur and a small group of Jesuit missionaries soon after in 1859.¹²⁴ According to Kanjamala's account, the Lutherans saw

¹²² Odisha Catholic Bishops Council website.
<http://www.catholicorissa.org/orissachruchhistory.html>. Accessed April 26, 2014.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Augustine Kanjamala, *Religion and Modernization of India: A Case Study of Northern Orissa* (Indore, India: Sat Prachar Press, 1980), 62.

31,253 converts by the year 1880 and the Jesuits saw an additional 50,351 converts from 1885 to 1888; in Kanjamala's words, a "mass conversion."¹²⁵

It is my estimation that the discrepancies between these two accounts are most likely an issue of categorically different interests rather than a dispute of factual basis.

Kanjamala's scholarship focuses on Christianity's impact on modernization in Odisha; he recognizes only that Christian presence which is capable of exerting a measurable influence on local social practices. It may be for this reason that he traces the origins of Christian influence to the Lutheran arrival in 1854. The 15th and 16th century arrivals cited by the Catholic Bishops' website, on the other hand, were most likely churches established to facilitate the worship needs of expatriate Christians living in the coastal cities rather than missionary endeavors aimed at converting local populations. They would have had little impact on the surrounding social order, hence their exclusion from Kanjamala's research.

Colonial period

Odisha was conquered by the British military in 1803 and the entire subcontinent came under British colonial control in 1818.¹²⁶ The relationship between colonial and Christian agencies varied from one of hand-in-glove cooperation to that of apparent opposition on some issues. This uneven and variable political terrain between Christian Church and governing agencies continues into the Odisha of this project. Early British

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Hermann Kulke, "'Juggernaut' Under British Supremacy and the Resurgence of the Khurda Rajas as 'Rajas of Puri,'" in *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, Eschmann, Kulke and Tripathi, editors (New Delhi: South Asia Institute New Delhi Branch Heidelberg University, 1986), 345-57, 349.

governance in Odisha established an official policy of secular rule. Yet, the British military provided strong support of the Jagannath temple at Puri, protecting temple leadership with the hopes of encouraging (and taxing) pilgrimages and securing the cooperation of temple leaders.¹²⁷ Some British Christians opposed such policies as a “state sanction of idolatry.”¹²⁸ British officials, however, reaffirmed their strategy toward the people of the subcontinent that protected “the undisturbed exercise of their religious rites and ceremonies and to preserve their places of worship inviolate.”¹²⁹ The British believed the support and control of the Jagannath temple at Puri in Odisha to be of politically “incalculable” value.¹³⁰

Despite the official British policy of secular rule, during the colonial era Christian ministries experienced considerable freedom and support from both local and British governments. While Christian missionaries were officially permitted to enter India only after the Renewed Charter Act of 1813, medical missionary work was already established in numerous places before this prohibition on missionary activity was lifted.¹³¹ At the lifting of the ban, William Carey immediately launched numerous educational projects,

¹²⁷ The “Pilgrim Tax” was instituted by the British in Puri from the seventeenth century until 1840 with a brief suspension from 1803, after the conquering of Odisha, until 1806. For more on the Pilgrim Tax see Manorama Tripathy’s, “A Brief History of the Pilgrim Tax in Puri,” in *Odisha Review*, Jan 2014. <http://orissa.gov.in/e-magazine/Orissareview/2014/Jan/engpdf/62-69.pdf>. Accessed January 19, 2015.

¹²⁸ Governor-General Mr. Richardson, Member of the Board of Revenue on deputation to Cuttack in a letter to the Secretary to the Governor as cited by Kulke in “Juggernaut,” in *The Cult of Jagannath*, 355.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ John Melville to Shawe (Private Secretary to Lord Wellesley the Governor General), November 7, 1805, Wellesley Paper, Add. Ms., 13611 as cited by Kulke, “Juggernaut,” in *The Cult of Jagannath*, 347.

¹³¹ Binu John, “Christian Contribution to Healthcare in India,” in *Christian Contribution to Nation Building*, Bishop Dr. Ezra Sargunam, ed. (Chennai: Mission Educational Books, 2006), 254.

beginning with the Serampore College just north of Odisha in West Bengal in 1818. Others quickly followed, with no less than fourteen colleges established in the next few decades.¹³² The British, identifying education as a key to transformation, created a Grants-in-Aid program as part of the Woods Dispatch of 1854. Although these grants were intended for indigenous educational entities, missionary organizations were able to qualify for this funding and establish programs that satisfied both government and mission goals. Such endeavors dovetailed neatly with the British government's civilizing strategies for the region to the degree that in 1876 Sir Philip Edmond Wodehouse, appointed Governor of Bombay, claimed, "The missions have done more for India's welfare than all other agencies combined."¹³³

Colonialist Idealism

Early British governance across the subcontinent was heavily influenced by a liberalist universalist ideology that drew upon concepts of evolutionary progress. British leaders assumed that the inhabitants of the subcontinent were simply farther behind in the evolutionary process and could "catch up" if given the proper environment and stimulus.¹³⁴ With this evolutionary basis British leaders reasoned that if all men shared equal capacity, then it was only logical that all men, given the proper education, would respond in like fashion to similar systems of government and law. Thus, if these

¹³² Siga Arles, "Christian Contribution to Education in India," in *Christian Contribution to Nation Building*, 228.

¹³³ Sir Philip Edmund Wodehouse, as quoted by Loius D'Silva in *The Christian Community and the National Mainstream* (Pune, Maharashtra: Spicer College Press, 1985), 49.

¹³⁴ Thomas Metcalf explores the ideologies of universalist liberalism in depth in *The New Cambridge History of India: Ideologies of the Raj* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). His insights into these changing colonial ideologies inform my work here in significant ways.

inhabitants, known to the British as *Gentoo*s, were fully educated in the rule of law, they would eventually respond (or more accurately, “submit”) to it as did Great Britain’s upstanding citizenry and would thus become respectable subjects of the crown – and Christian subjects at that.¹³⁵ Proper education would create not simply “a class of Indians educated in the English language . . . but one ‘English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.’”¹³⁶ Energized by such ideals, the British introduced reforms in education, governance, welfare, and law with evangelistic fervor throughout the region in hopes of realizing what Thomas Metcalf characterized as a “civilizing regime.”¹³⁷

The term evangelistic is especially apt here, as Christian evangelicalism not only followed British governmental presence but became intermixed with it to the degree that Nicholas Dirks characterizes the whole endeavor as “an unholy alliance of parliamentary pragmatists and imperial crusaders.”¹³⁸ The belief in the moral superiority of British Christian faith is evidenced by Sir William Jones’s declaration condemning Hindu beliefs as “a system of priestcraft, built upon the most enormous and tormenting superstition that

¹³⁵ The etymology of the term “Gentoo” is uncertain, but it is most commonly related to “Gentile” as in non-believing (non-Christian) inhabitant. The term was commonly used by the British in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as evidenced by the titles: *A Code of Gentoo Laws* by N. B. Halhed, 1776 and *Religious Tenents of the Gentoos* by J. Z. Holwell, 1767. Both publications incorporate “Gentoo” as an established term.

¹³⁶ Lord Thomas Macaulay as quoted by Thomas Metcalf in *The New Cambridge History of India*, 34.

¹³⁷ Thomas Metcalf uses the term “civilizing regime” in *The New Cambridge History of India*, 39. The term “civilizing mission” has been employed to refer to European colonial rule as a whole. See Alice Conklin’s *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), and also Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹³⁸ Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 133.

ever harassed and degraded any portion of mankind.”¹³⁹ Despite such dismissive judgments, liberalist universalist ideologies gained traction during the colonial era and both church and colonial state became deeply invested in the possibility of individual and societal transformation. This significant overlap in values and mission between government and church, although arising from somewhat differing motives, quickly formed a comfortable and mutually beneficial alliance throughout Odisha and British colonial India.

Literacy was a priority for both colonial and missionary leadership and remains a value of the Christian organizations presented in this ethnography. In 1837 however, British leaders in Odisha sought to eliminate the Oriya language as the official language of Odisha, preferring the more widely known Hindustani.¹⁴⁰ Christian missionary groups opposed British anti-Oriya efforts and defended the local vernacular in public newspapers and before government authorities. Missionary influence proved effective in numerous legal court proceedings and Oriya was reinstated as the official language of Odisha in 1868.¹⁴¹ Missionary advocacy extended to publishing as well. Mission agencies supported higher education efforts and cultural study by translating western scholarship into local languages as well as translating classic Indian texts, such as the *Ramanyana* and *Mahabharata* epics, as well as the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Hitopadesa* into English.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Sir William Jones as quoted by Thomas Metcalf, *History of India*, 1995, 30.

¹⁴⁰ Babu K. Verghese in “Christian Contribution to Indian Languages, Literature and Culture: A Brief Overview,” in *Christian Contribution to Nation Building*, 193.

¹⁴¹ Historian, Sisar Kumar Das identifies American missionaries Dr. Miles Bronson, Dr. Nathan Brown along with an Assamese associate Nidhi Levi Farwell as launching the paper *Arundoay* (The Sunrise) in 1844. *History of Indian Literature* (New Delhi: Sahitya Skademi, 1964), 104,

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 216.

The celebration of local vernacular in terms of language, customs, dance, costume and music is of utmost significance for acting in performances and a primary focus of this ethnographic study.

1857

“The Great Revolt,” “The Uprising,” “The Mutiny,” “The Indian Rebellion of 1857,” by whatever name, the events of May 10, 1857 marked a significant shift in ideologies of the British Raj. The uprising was sudden, violent, and unanticipated by the British, who in their shock reacted with fierce and deadly military retribution that further galvanized the mounting discontent of the indigenous population.¹⁴³ The uprising was not unexpected for the local inhabitants however, as offenses caused by insensitive British rule had been accumulating for some time. As a result of this violent break in relations between the British and their colonial subjects, the heady colonial idealism of liberalist universalist ideologies reluctantly gave way to philosophies emphasizing a fundamental difference between British colonizers and Indian subjects.¹⁴⁴ This ideological shift became a racializing move that declared the indigenous population unalterably different from natural-born British citizens. Previous colonialist hopes of nurturing a self-governing state “guided” indirectly by the British gave way to a heavy-handed direct rule through which the British declared their superiority over, and their disdain for, the local populace. The British grand civilizing mission, with all of its noble educational endeavors, transformed into a project focused on efficiency of rule and governance, having abandoned hopes of raising inhabitants up to equal standing as British citizens. In

¹⁴³ Metcalf, *History of India*, 43.

¹⁴⁴ See Metcalf, *History of India*, for a substantive account of universalist ideologies of the Raj.

Odisha, these social tensions were soon exacerbated by the Famine of 1866. This famine was reported to have claimed the lives of nearly one million Oriyas, or fully a third of the population. That the famine was caused by “administrative inefficiencies” merely fueled anti-British and Oriya-nationalist sentiments all the more.¹⁴⁵

Rule of colonial difference

The emerging ideological rift between the colonizers and the colonized provides the conceptual terrain from which emerged what Partha Chatterjee calls a “rule of colonial difference,” a tactic of Indian resistance.¹⁴⁶ In Chatterjee’s construction, accentuated ideologies of difference led to a British abandonment of their civilizing mission and subsequently allowed for an increasing British tolerance of local religion and social customs. Chatterjee claims this process established an essential independence for Indians while still remaining “under” colonial rule. “The nation is already sovereign,” he states, “even when the state is in the hands of colonial power.”¹⁴⁷ In this notion, Chatterjee takes exception to Benedict Anderson’s concept that such imagined communities arise solely from shared language and literature to produce a shared (“imagined”) idea of community.¹⁴⁸ Rather, Chatterjee argues that a sense of national community can also emerge from a shared domain of “culture” understood to be separate and distinct from the institutions of British rule. In this process, Chatterjee identifies a subaltern tactic in India that first moves to separate the domains of spiritual, inner and essential from those of

¹⁴⁵ G.N. Dash, “Jagannatha and Oriya Nationalism,” in *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, Eschmann, Kulke and Tripathi, editors (New Delhi: South Asia Institute New Delhi Branch Heidelberg University, 1986), 359-74, 364.

¹⁴⁶ Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, 18.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁴⁸ See Benedict Anderson’s, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

material, outer and nonessential. Following the separation of these domains, the colonized uncouple language, education, religion, and family from colonial rule. Such “cultural” distance from statist rule continues to inflect the politics of culture in postcolonial India and the modern state of Odisha. Chatterjee proposes that in like manner, India’s postcolonial nationalism developed from nationalist identities based on difference from Western colonial powers.

Conversion

Conversion became a highly contested domain in Odisha and much of India at least partly because of its perceived capacity to circumvent the social norms of caste. Many claim that conversion enables an evasion of caste; this evasion is claimed as a reason why religious conversion is most common among the lowest caste, known variously as *Dalits*, *Adivasis*, outcastes, untouchables, or scheduled classes.¹⁴⁹ Some, however, dispute the effectiveness of *Dalit* conversion for social emancipation, claiming that *Dalits* continue to face subjugation even after conversion. Others go so far as to claim that converted *Dalits*, such as *Dalit* Christians, are “twice-discriminated” against; for not only do they fail to escape the strictures of caste but they come to experience another level of social discrimination within the Christian church itself.¹⁵⁰

The modern Catholic scholar Augustine Kanjamala attributes the Oriya “mass conversion” of the late 19th century to missionary advocacy for locals during a time of

¹⁴⁹ Prakash Louis, “Caste Based Discrimination of Dalit Christians and the Demand for Reservation,” in *Dalit and Minority Empowerment*, Abhinava Bharatiya, ed. (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan Pvt. Ltd, 2008), 368.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

social oppression. During this era, local *Adivasi*¹⁵¹ were being taken advantage of by *zamindar* (aristocratic landowners) landlords, resulting in impoverishment for many tenant farmers. Under the leadership of Jesuit Constant Lievens, missionaries acquired the legal training necessary to guide the *Adivasi* farmers through proper judicial channels to defend themselves against the strong-armed tactics of the *zamindars*. This advocacy resulted in many people seeking legal aid from Christian missionaries. According to Kanjamala's account, in response to the increasing cries for assistance Father Lievens established a policy that "he would help only the Christians or those who wished to become Christians."¹⁵² Entire villages chose to become Christians as a result and the outcome was, in Kanjamala's words, a "social revolution." According to Kanjamala, this social movement ushered in a modernity in which local people came to the new understanding that through the state government they possessed legal rights and privileges despite their low caste.¹⁵³

Large-scale conversions to Christianity, such as those discussed above, threatened to destabilize social structures. The effect of these changes and the ethical questions surrounding coercive material enticements, such as the promise of legal counsel in the case of Father Constant Lievens, were the source of continual debate and in the 20th century finally resulted in Odisha's Freedom of Religion Act of 1967. This legislation

¹⁵¹ *Adivasi* is a term that refers collectively to indigenous tribal peoples throughout India. In Hindi, 'adi' means of earliest times and "vasi" means inhabitant. This term does not refer to any one tribal or ethnic group but rather to a category of resident peoples.

¹⁵² Augustine Kanjamala, *Religion and Modernization of India: A case study of Northern Orissa* (Indore: Instiuti Missilogici Societatis Verbi Divini, 1981), 64.

¹⁵³ See Augustine Kanjamala, "Mass Conversion to Christianity and Social Changes Before 1947," in *Religion and Modernization of India: A case study of Northern Orissa* (Indore: Instiuti Missilogici Societatis Verbi Divini, 1981), 55-107.

was an effort to control proselytization by forbidding that anyone “convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religious faith to another by the use of force or by inducement or by any fraudulent means.”¹⁵⁴ Enacted as an attempt to quell religious unrest, this new law prompted a prolonged and continuing public and legal debate as to what constitutes force, inducement, or fraudulent means. Today, many Hindus refer to the legislation as the “Anti-Conversion Act,” a telling example of the continuing battle for interpretation and meaning.¹⁵⁵

Religious violence

Despite government efforts to establish peaceful inter-faith relations through the Freedom of Religion Act, religious violence has erupted in Odisha in recent years. In 1999 the prominent burning alive of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two young sons shocked many Oriyas and revealed a widening social rift defined in religious terms in public discourse.¹⁵⁶ Less than a decade later, in August of 2008, rioters burned Christian churches and homes, trapping people inside. Thirty-eight were killed in the initial attack, 132 were counted dead before year’s end, and thousands fled to relief camps to await a stabilization that would enable their return.¹⁵⁷

In the aftermath of the 2008 riots, Hindu leaders claimed that offensive and fraudulent conversion practices by Christians provoked this violence. The religion

¹⁵⁴ *Orissa Freedom of Religion Act 1967*,

<http://www.lawsofindia.org/pdf/orissa/1968/1968OR2.pdf>. Accessed March 12, 2013.

¹⁵⁵ I heard the term “Anti-Conversion Act” used numerous times in casual discussions of current events.

¹⁵⁶ “Thousands mourn missionary’s death.” Monday, January 25, 1999.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/261391.stm. Accessed September 18, 2014.

¹⁵⁷ Rajat Kumar Kujut, “Naxal Conflict in 2008: An Assessment, in *IPCS Issue Brief* 93, February 2009 (New Delhi: The Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies), 1.

scholar, Chad Bauman's investigation into the incident cites that "many Hindus" believe the claim by Sangh leader Ram Madav that "90 per cent of conversions [in] India are through fraud means [sic] or allurements."¹⁵⁸ While other Hindu leaders, such as R.P. Tripathy, increase the rhetoric even more, claiming that "poor tribal villagers are being converted at gunpoint."¹⁵⁹ Regardless of the reality, the discourse surrounding this most recent violence specifically identifies conversion as a point of religious contention.

A pragmatic eclecticism

Despite such moments of dogmatic and vitriolic religious opposition, examples of a pragmatic religious eclecticism emerged repeatedly throughout Oriya and Indian history. According to religious scholar Brian Hatcher, such eclecticism emanates from ancient roots in the Vedic religions of the region. Hatcher examines religious discourse in India through the ages, but especially since the Hindu Renaissance.¹⁶⁰ He describes this discourse as a pastiche of ideas involving "promiscuous borrowing" from the world's religious and philosophical traditions right up through the modern era. Hatcher provides numerous examples of noted Hindu leaders, historians, and writers engaging in eclectic borrowings and uprooting previously foundational concepts; these include the work of Keshub Sunder Sen, Swami Vivekananda, Achehananda Bharati, Mahatma Gandhi, and Salman Rushdie, among others. His work traces this eclecticism throughout recorded

¹⁵⁸ Chad Bauman, "Identity, Conversion and Violence: Dalits, Adivasis and the 2007-08 Riots in Orissa," in *Margins of Faith: Dalit and Tribal Christianity in India*, Rowena Robinson and Joseph Marianus Kujur, editors (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010), 263-90, 281.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. For more discussion of anti-Christian sentiment see also Chad Bauman's, "Postcolonial Anxiety and Anti-Conversion Sentiment in the Report of the Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry Committee," in *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 12.2 (2008): 181-213.

¹⁶⁰ Brian A. Hatcher defines the Hindu Renaissance as extending from the early nineteenth century through Indian independence in 1947 in *Eclecticism and Modern Hindu Discourse*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 13.

history and points out significant variations in Hindu beliefs throughout the ages. Hatcher borrows from Claude Levi-Strauss the term *bricoleur* as a suitable image for the assembling of mythopoetic beliefs throughout Hindu history.¹⁶¹ Levi-Struss's use of the term "mythopoetic" focuses on the degree to which "myth-making involves the continual recombination of the diverse repertoire of mythemes that circulates [sic] within a culture."¹⁶² My project borrows from Hatcher's work to demonstrate historical precedent for a pragmatic eclecticism that extends beyond Hindu practice and provides Oriya MM Christians room for ideological maneuver in the volatile socio-political terrain of their modern scene.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 92

¹⁶² Ibid.

Chapter 2

A Performance. A tactic. A stance.

“Who can say the gospel is from the West? The gospel is from Orissa!”

A Dialogue

“So . . . in terms of performance, what are we going to see today?” I ask as we bounce over potholes, our hired vehicle veering and dodging to avoid pedestrians, bicycles, motorbikes, oxcarts, farm tractors, heavy trucks and the ever-present, meandering cows. “*Keertan*,” Santanu replies. “It is performed in a big circle.” “Is it a local form?” I ask. “Yes, this is folk music. The song [tune] is the same, only the words are different,” he replies. “Did you grow up with this, all of you – are you from this area?” I ask. The passengers respond in various ways in the affirmative. “Yes, from their childhood they have seen it,” interprets Santanu. Abhinash Bagh seems to be the key leader for this particular performance, so I turn to him next. “Did you grow up in a village?” “Yah,” he smiles and nods. “And you did *keertan* in the village?” “Yah, yah,” he interjects before I am finished. “From a child then?” “Yeeees,” comes the lyrical, laughing reply as if this fact is redundantly obvious to all. “Same instruments? *Dholak* and . . .” I pause, not able to remember the name for the cymbals. “*Dholak* and *ginni*.” says Abhinash, completing my sentence.

Keertan is a genre of *Bakhti* devotional song that originated in West Bengal as an epic song-drama in the mid-to-late fifteenth century and flourished as the preferred song genre for the Vaishnav poets in the century that followed. *Keertan* (literally “to sing the deeds”) has spread throughout much of North India, and according to my interlocutors, it is a local favorite in many parts of Odisha.¹⁶³ Today’s *keertan* performance includes

¹⁶³ *Keertan* is described variously by scholars as a song form, a song-dance form, a song-drama form, a performance context, or a mixture of song, preaching and storytelling. The spelling most

song, teaching and drama. *Keertan* that demonstrates acting in as an authenticating process whereby Christians and their stories “become real” in the village, an approach to understanding the local and authentic that is performative and, as we shall see in the next chapter, necessarily political.

“Will there be costumes?” I ask. “Yes,” Santanu answers, “this is important in the village.” His phrase ‘Important in the village’ gives me pause. I turn to address the four additional performers we have picked up during our morning trek. “For my research,” I explain loudly over the road noise, “my questions focus on what makes these performances ‘authentic’; what makes them ‘indigenous’; what makes them ‘from the village?’ So . . . how do you as performers define these things and how do the people in the village define these things?” Santanu translates my lengthy question. An extended discussion ensues that includes some singing and drumming, apparently meant as illustration. After some time, Santanu finally translates into English: “So, when someone preaches, it happens that people are very tired and so they do not listen. But when they sing songs and do this *keertan*, people will say . . . that ‘this culture is from our past’.” I am confused. Why are people falling asleep? What does boredom or fatigue have to do with my questions about local practices? Eventually, I realize that what he means is that *keertan* itself is, to use a term that Santanu will later introduce, “natural,” while Christian preaching is not; therefore, people will engage with *keertan* but disengage from preaching.

commonly found in other scholarship is *kirtan*, the spelling I employ here, *keertan*, is that given by my interlocutors in this region. I will use *keertan* when referring to this ethnographic context and *kirtan* when referring to other’s scholarship. The closely related *hari-kirtan* is listed in neighboring regions as highly repetitive hymn genre as well. I have found no scholarly references to *kirtan* as a circle dance, but this is clearly the classification used here by Santanu and Abhinash and later echoed by Satpathy. For various *kirtan* and *hari-kirtan* descriptions, see Edward O. Henry and Scott L. Marcus, “Uttar Pradesh;” Gordon Thompson, “Gujarat;” Karunamay Gosami, “West Bengal and Bangladesh;” and Ashake Ranade, “Orissa,” in *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Vol 5 South Asia* Allison Arnold, editor. (New York: Garland, 2000) various pages. As well as *The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*, Edited by Ananda Lal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Published online: 2011.

Abhinash's comparison here between *keertan* and Christian preaching is especially apt as today's performance represents an innovation in how Christianity is being performed and enacted in Odisha. Previous Christian practices among MM churches were heavily inflected by foreign expressions of Christianity, the manifestations of which included New England or Colonial style church buildings, business suits, pants, dresses, music and instruments, and communication forms such as preaching that were modeled after Western academic lectures. Associations with the West have become problematic, even dangerous, in an Odisha that seeks to erase markers of foreign influence and domination. (One such erasure was the 2011 name change from Orissa to the pre-colonial Odisha.¹⁶⁴) The potential for physical danger is evidenced by the 2008 accounts of violence between Christians and Hindus that open the first chapter of this dissertation. Today's performance in the village of Bagharpalli will demonstrate a marked turn from "foreign" to "natural" practices as part of a tactic that I am calling "acting in." Through acting in, Oriya MM Christians perform their way into Hindu communities as a means of rooting themselves and their stories into the village, in hopes that their Christian gospel will emerge in village dialogue as not as "Western" or "foreign" but rather as something described variously by my interlocutors as "accepted," "remembered," "understood," "natural," and "becoming real" in the village.

¹⁶⁴ Odisha's name was officially changed from Orissa to Odisha on November 4, 2011.

Both the uncertainty of success in the acting in endeavor and the agency it generates invite its classification as what Ryan Skinner terms an “existential project.”¹⁶⁵ Such “projects” initiate interaction between peoples of various subjectivities, the outcomes of which remain ambiguous. Acting in performances emerge in this ethnography not just as projects, but as specifically “ethical” projects, that is projects that do not “refuse the right of others to act on the world.”¹⁶⁶ I mention ambiguity here to remind the reader of both the uncertainties accompanying acting in tactics and the subjectivities of the various agents and agencies involved in light of the real and physical dangers that persist if Christians forego such agential “projects.”

A stance

Today’s acting in performance begins with song and dance, takes root through the dialogue of question and answer and “becomes real” with the addition of drama. I contend that the success of this acting in presentation is predicated on the achievement of an embodied resonance between the MM Christian acting in performance experienced today and the memory of Hindu performances experienced in a villager’s past. This embodied resonance is accomplished through the careful implementation of performance conventions to which villagers have become, in Satpathy’s words from chapter one, “habituated.” Satpathy’s use of “habituated” can best be understood through Harris

¹⁶⁵ In “Chapter One,” in *An Afropolitan Muse*, forthcoming, 11, Skinner follows Simone de Beauvoir’s existentialist ideas of ethics and ambiguity in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1948), 113.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Berger's concept of a "stance-on-power."¹⁶⁷ As part of this "stance-on-power" Satpathy separates the domains of culture and religion in order to draw from culture without inviting acts of retributive force by agents of a dominant Hindu religion. This stance-on-power enables Christians to borrow from local cultural practices that might otherwise be called "Hindu," while maintaining claims to an orthodox evangelicalism. As Satpathy says, "We are 100% Oriya and 100% believer in Jesus Christ."

Harris Berger conceives of stance as value-laden and relational, as such this theoretical lens of stance is useful for viewing the tenuous and potentially perilous existence of Maranatha Ministries. Berger's concept of stance is not static, but rather a relationship between various fluid entities. Stance becomes a continually negotiated locus, informed by values, and which seeks to maintain a relational position through a performative agency. While Berger's conception of stance can be applied to either side of unequal relations of power, I employ it here as a subaltern tactic after de Certeau, a tactical process that is performative.¹⁶⁸ This tactical process is dependent on an intuitive response of acceptance by the audience, an acceptance based on a resonance with what Aaron Fox calls "embodied domains of experience": historically-informed experience that accepts the performances and stories of my interlocutors, and indeed, the performers

¹⁶⁷ Berger proposes a phenomenological approach to analyzing expressive culture that takes into account the complex intersubjectivities and historicized cultural practices of performer/audience relationships. Harris Berger's term "compositional stance," could also be effectively applied in this instance. However, I have chosen to narrow my application to Berger's "stance-on-power" as it represents the meta-narrative of the "acting in" endeavor. See Harris Berger *Stance: Ideas About Emotion, Style, and Meaning For Thy Study Of Expressive Culture* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2010).

¹⁶⁸ Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1984), xix.

themselves, as “natural” and “understood.”¹⁶⁹ The idea of stance takes into account the embodied nature of how humans come to create knowledge about our world as well as the conditions of force that frame all human experience. Such forces range from the physiological realities of gravity to the sociological realities of unequal power relationships.¹⁷⁰

This historically-informed resonance that I am claiming for acting in performances exceeds the experiential conditions of force in which Berger grounds human experience. For this historical resonance I turn to a way of knowing identified by Dwight Conquergood as an “embodied epistemology.” To illustrate his theory Conquergood explores Frederick Douglass’s nineteenth-century examination of American slave performances of communal songs and field hollers through which deeply affective meaning is conveyed to the listener. Conquergood argues that for Douglass, a former slave, the grief, sorrow and deep yearnings of the oppressed resonate knowingly within the listener in ways that exceed the possibilities of propositional knowledge. I contend that the creation of a similar type of resonance with historical, embodied epistemologies is critical for the success of acting in performances in Odisha. Satpathy articulates this resonance in chapter one as “blood being drawn toward culture.” Such resonance is necessary for Christian stories and the Christians themselves to be “accepted” in the village and for the Christian gospel to emerge in village dialogue as “natural.” Such

¹⁶⁹ Aaron Fox discusses embodied domains of experience in “‘Feeling’ and ‘Relating:’ Speech, Song, Story and Emotion” in *Real Country: Music and Language in Working Class Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 152-92.

¹⁷⁰ Harris Berger, *Stance*, 115

historically-informed resonance enables Satpathy's audacious declaration: "The gospel is from Orissa!"

The processes of historical resonance that I am identifying here are phenomenological as opposed to cognitive in nature. As such, the performance event, and the structuring of the *keertan* performance itself, become the stimulus by which historical resonance is activated. This resonance pertains to the embodied domains of performative experience rather than the cognitive processes whereby ideological differences are identified and negotiated; however, this phenomenological historical resonance subsequently creates the conditions for peaceable ideological dialogue. I should note that cognitive researchers have identified connections between various individual's present experience with musical pulse when listening to a performance that "transforms the subjective experience of pulse into a shared one." They identify this phenomenon as possibly "one of the most significant inter-personal effects of the temporal regularity in music."¹⁷¹ The cognitive process identified in their research, however, do not apply to past (historical) experiences.

Moving toward a performance

Today's performance in the village of Bagharpalli is one of several such performance events that were coordinated to accommodate my travel schedule in August 2013 and February and October 2014. Today's performers, repertoire and performance sites were chosen by MM leaders. I am told that because this is the rainy season,

¹⁷¹ Udo Will, M. Clayton, I. Wertheim, L. Leante and E. Berg, "Pulse and Entrainment to Non-Isochronous Auditory Stimuli: The Case of North Indian Alap," PLoS ONE 10(4): e0123247. Doi 10.1371/journal.pone/0123247, accessed April 17, 2015.

attendance at today's performance will be lower than during the dry season, as many villagers will be working in the fields and not within hearing distance.

I first became aware of today's *keertan* performance and other Christian performances like it at the Oral Arts Festival sponsored by Maranatha Ministries in Bhubaneswar in February 2012. At this festival Dr. Abhinav Satpathy made a declaration that prompted this entire research project: "When the people see the stories of the Bible presented through the music and drama and dance of their own culture how can they say that the Gospel comes from the West? How can they say that Christianity is from the West? Christianity is from Orissa! The Gospel is from Orissa!" It was obvious to me that several of the ensembles had performed these stories many times before, quite possibly, as Satpathy claimed, in Hindu village streets as evangelistic efforts. I subsequently approached Satpathy with my proposed research idea and was given approval to observe performances in local villages similar to those presented at the Oral Arts Festival. Satpathy also granted permission to interview any of those attending the village performance, whether audience, village leader or performer.

The local

"And only local language," Abhinash exclaims over the road noise in English, abruptly re-convening the previous discussion of local performance practices. "Sambalpuri? Kosli?" I say, offering my best guesses. "Sambalpuri only," says the ever-smiling Abhinash. "Kosli, also," interjects another – I'm not sure who. A debate ensues, apparently clarifying today's geographical context. "Sambalpuri only," declares Abhinash with some finality, still with a smile.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Most of my interlocutors, Satpathy included, contend that Sambalpuri and Kosli are two different names for the same language.

It is evident from these discussions of local aesthetic practices in terms of genre, song, instrumentation, dress and language, that the leaders and performers in this rented car share a conscious, informed awareness of what constitutes the local. The musicians here seem confident their Christian performance will resonate as “natural” (a term introduced below by Santanu) to the Hindu Bagharpalli villagers. The designation of “natural” is more than a hope: it is a critical necessity for acting in success. Today’s performance seeks to begin a process of rooting the Christian church and its leaders not just into the lives of area Christians, but into the cultural fabric and public dialogue of the Hindu villagers as well. Success means that villagers will consider today’s performance as if it were from their own past and embrace the performance, the stories, and the performers alike. But success is not assured and the stakes are high. If these performances are perceived in Satpathy’s terms as “foreign,” these Christians, and the Christian gospel in general, could be perceived as “foreign” as well. A designation of “foreign” or “unnatural” could thwart the entire acting in tactic, leaving Christians, the Christian church, and their Christian gospel continually at risk as a societal Other.¹⁷³

Jonathan Holt Shannon posits a similar binary aesthetic construct pitting the local or “authentic” (Arabic, Syrian, safe, beautiful) against “foreign” (Western, suspect, dangerous, ugly) in his study of modern Syria, *Among the Jasmine Trees: Music and Modernity in Contemporary Syria*.¹⁷⁴ Anti-western sentiment reverberates through the

¹⁷³ I use “other” after Edward Said in *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

¹⁷⁴ Jonathan Holt Shannon, *Among the Jasmine Trees: Music and Modernity in Contemporary Syria* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2006).

modern Syria of Shannon's study and signifies a historical shift away from a prior desirability of Western connections exemplified in 1950's Syria by the phrase, "Everything from the West is Best."¹⁷⁵ Shifting ideologies, however, mean that western culture has now become an object of disdain in Shannon's Syria – and today's Odisha. The Syria of Shannon's work differs strongly from the Odisha of this study because of its public presence of vigorous intellectual debate on the topics of authenticity and modernity; I identified no such open public discourse in the Oriya villages of my study.

The ethnographic account presented in this chapter will demonstrate my struggle to identify an ongoing authenticity debate within the village of Bagharpalli. My expectations were informed by two assumptions formulated during the 2012 Oral Arts Festival in Bhubaneswar. First, I had assumed that in order for Satpathy's "oral strategy" to be effective, it must meet or exceed village markers of authenticity for similar Hindu performances in Bagharpalli. The binary construct upon which Satpathy framed his celebration of "orality" at the Oral Arts Festival consisted of "foreign" (or "Western") versus "oral" (or "local"); from this binary I concluded that for Christian performances to be embraced in Odisha, they must move from a category of "foreign" ("Western") to a category of "oral" ("local"), and this categorical move must necessarily involve a loss of "foreign" cultural markers and the addition of "oral" markers. This assumption proved correct. My second assumption was that I would readily identify an ongoing verbal discourse among both performers and audience through which designations of "foreign" or "oral" were dialogically framed and actively contested. This assumption proved

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 77.

incorrect. I recognized few discursive practices, but discovered instead veiled references to patterns of embodied response that revealed performative indicators of local aesthetic frameworks and determinations of authenticity.

I incorporate the terms authentic and authenticity reflexively throughout this ethnography. By this I mean that these terms initially functioned as discursive place markers in my early fieldwork with the expectation that local terms and processes would gradually emerge to replace them. When these terms appear in earlier chapters without nuance or ethnographic clarity it is because they are representing my earliest conceptions in this research. My intention is that where their use is unqualified the reader will recognize the reflexive nature of such representations and appreciate all the more the nuanced ideas and processes that are defined and refined as this ethnography unfolds.

A dialogue continues

The paved road gives way to dirt, and the dirt road to a muddy path. The path is wide enough for a four-wheeled vehicle but worn mostly on one side by pedestrians and bicycles and the occasional motorcycle. Our driver stops occasionally to determine if our four-wheel drive vehicle is capable of traversing the next challenging terrain – here a mud hole of considerable size. Sometimes these decisions require participation from passengers, interrupting our ongoing discussions. Our driver skillfully wallows through another rainy season quagmire.

“What about instruments?” I ask. “If you use different instruments would the people say, ‘that is not right’?” I am struggling to find a better translation or paraphrase for the term “authentic.” “Actually,” Abhinash begins, “in the song *keertan*, we [should] use the *mrudanga* [a double-headed clay drum] and *ginni* [small cymbals], but we are using *dholak*, which in the Sambalpur language is “*nal*.” I immediately recognize the *dholak* as a ubiquitous and accepted drum substitution, similar to the accepted

substitution of the *djembe* for some regionally specific drums in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁷⁶ “So,” I push on, “if you were to use an instrument not from this area, what would happen?” “They would not accept,” comes the unison reply from both men as we continue to bounce along the rutted path. “People would say this is some other things – not *keertan*,” explains Abhinash.¹⁷⁷

“Will Gyan play the *dholak* today?” I inquire. Gyan is an excellent drummer, singer and composer with whom I have recorded twice before in my song development work with Freedom to Lead, International. “No – Jagamoha.” replies Santanu, indicating one of the other musicians in the car whose name I had forgotten. “You must be very good!” I say to Jagamoha Mohanta with a smile. “Yes.” “Yah.” “He is very good!” affirm the others. “That’s why they brought you, right?” I state with an encouraging laugh, hoping not to have weakened his credibility through a comparison to Gyan. “But what if the *dholak* player is not good?” I continue. “Would it still be *keertan*? Would people accept it? Would they like it?” I’m still searching for some kind of aesthetic standard. “Yes, yes,” says Abhinash confidently. “What if a child is playing? Is that a problem?” “No, no, it is still ok,” answers Abhinash quickly, still smiling.

¹⁷⁶ Allyn Miner refers to the *dholak* as “the epitome of a folk sound.” She credits Indian film and pop music industries as sharing this valuation in “Musical Instruments: Northern Area,” in *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Vol 5 South Asia*, Allison Arnold, editor. (New York: Garland, 2000): (331-349), 332. I should also note here that one of the advantages of the wooden *dholak* is its durability for a traveling musician when compared to that of the clay, and therefore fragile, *mrudanga*. Eric Charry writes of the ubiquity of the *jembe* (*djembe*) throughout West Africa and even across the continent in numerous publications including *Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalizing World*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) 2012, 307.

¹⁷⁷ The instruments described by my interlocutors here are similar to those mentioned for *keertan* performance in other scholarship. While I have not found the names *nal* or *ginni* mentioned by other scholars, it appears that most areas consistently employ a double-headed drum and small cymbals as the culturally accepted instruments for the *kirtan* or *hari-kirtan*. Ashok Ranade’s *Garland Encyclopedia* entry for Orissa mentions only the combination of *khol* (double-headed clay drum) and the *kartal* (cymbals) for instrumental accompaniment for the *kirtan*; but in Bengal, instrument names for *kirtan* and *hari-kirtan* include the *khol* and *kartal* (cymbals). Sikh musicians in Punjab employ the *dholak*, *tabla*, and *cinta* (metal tongs with jingles), while a combination of *dholak* and *jhanjh* (cymbals) are listed for Banjares. See Ashok D. Ranade, “Orissa;” Allyn Miner, “Musical Instruments: North India;” Joyce Middlebrook, “Punjab,” in *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Vol 5 South Asia*, Allison Arnold, (New York: Garland, 2000) various; as well as Steven M. Slawek, “Popular Kirtan in Baneres: Some ‘Great’ Aspects of a Little Tradition” in *Ethnomusicology Vol 32. No 2* (Spring – Summer 1988) 7-92, 80.

Here, I was attempting to identify aesthetic factors such as performer proficiency or even age that might reveal boundaries delineating acceptable and unacceptable performances. While this particular inquiry seemed ineffective, later responses did indicate a necessity of intense preparation in order to achieve the desirable practiced coordination. All the while, however, my interlocutors simultaneously claimed that the performances were “natural”.

“What else would cause them to say that ‘this is not *keertan*’?” Some discussion ensues. “If you wear these pants,” declares Santanu, pointing to the dress slacks the musicians are wearing. “So, if you don’t wear the costume, it is not good?” I offer, hoping to clarify. “Yah,” agrees Santanu, “the *dhoti* should be there.” [*Dhoti* is a traditional male garment in this region consisting of a large cloth that is wrapped around the waist, knotted, and pulled up in the middle, giving the appearance of a type of pant.] Santanu pulls out a *dhoti* fabric from a plastic bag for my benefit. “Without this,” Abhinash says, nodding towards the fabric, “no *keertan*.” Both Abhinash and Santanu complete this sentence in unison for emphasis. Gyan agrees, “People who wear pants, that is not *keertan*.”

Authenticity

My efforts to clarify the salient terms through which ideas of authenticity are negotiated in the local village proved challenging not only in Bagharpalli but in numerous other Christian performances I observed throughout Odisha as well. I continually altered the terms of my inquiries with both audience and performers, hoping to identify local terms or phrases that evidenced some historical weight or resonance. In Sambalpuri, the local language of Bagharpalli, terms such as *protha* (“accepted by the culture”) and *sampurna nijara* (“completely from your culture”) emerged occasionally

but gained no clarifying traction. Markers of aesthetic approval tended toward phrases translated variously as “like the festival” and “as in the festivals” but also included *khub bhala*, (“done well, excellent”), *bahuta bhala* (very good), *bololo tilaki* (“good,” “liked,” “enjoyed”), *kalagila* (“better”) and *tig nahi* (not good).¹⁷⁸ These terms and phrases, while initially promising, lacked coherence in identifying local processes of acceptance. This ethnographic account will demonstrate a turn from my repeated attempts (and there were many) to delineate established conventions of local authenticity, to an understanding of the local as performative and a place where authenticity is rendered as a process of “becoming real.”¹⁷⁹ Three terms emerge that mark this turn from seeking codified structures to recognizing active processes; these are English terms employed by my Oriya interlocutor/performers. The first is “natural.”

At one point, after growing tired of my repeated inquiries as to local terms for authenticity, a frustrated Santanu blurted out:

“But that is not clear to the people, actually, when you are asking ‘authentic’ – or it is ‘good’ and ‘not good!’” he exclaimed. “So, normally when they do it with . . . with makeups and with the costume and all, *naturally* that becomes good and people like it. [But] without any dress, without any music, if you do something – they won’t like it. *So that is a natural thing!*” [emphasis added].

¹⁷⁸ These references to festivals indicate the performances that accompany the many Hindu religious festivals that occur throughout each calendar year. These religious performances are for many their primary or even sole means of performance entertainment.

¹⁷⁹ I use the term “performative” here in the sense put forth by Judith Butler, who claims “the performative is one domain in which power acts as discourse.” (572) I also include her idea that “resignification” can be used as an act of agency of political contestation. (584) See Judith Butler, “Critically Queer, in *Literary Theories: A Reader and Guide*, Julian Wolfreys, ed. (New York: New York University Press), 1999.

Santanu argued against a detailed and specific construction of village authenticity and in favor of a broad conception of accepted performance practice – a conception formed not through public debate as much as through public practice. Echoes of Santanu’s concept of “natural” can also be heard in Pastor Satpathy’s remarks about the presence and influence of Hindu religious factors in local performance aesthetic constructs.

“It’s not the Hindu festival thing that makes them good,” he said during an interview the week following this performance, “but it is the rhythm, the costume, the action, the dances – they [the villagers] have been *habituated*. So not necessarily that they [the villagers] are Hindu but they had no other chances to see anything else but that [Hindu festival performance]” [emphasis added].¹⁸⁰

Both the first term “natural” and this second term “habituated” gain significance throughout this project as terms and ideas that guide and inform Christian performance strategies, terms whose initial descriptive fuzziness is gradually eclipsed by their formative influence on local performers and their performances.

The third term, “becoming real”, emerged while interviewing Abhinash about what I perceived to be a lack of emotional response to *keertan* songs when compared to the heightened emotional engagement with the drama that followed.

“First you performed the song about the prodigal son,” I began, “then you performed the drama of the prodigal son – right?” “Yes,” he confirmed. “How important is it to connect those two?” I asked. Santanu translated Abhinash’s answer: “*Song means only they are listening, but when it is acted in the drama it will become real for them.*”

¹⁸⁰ Abhinav Satpathy, personal interview with the author in Nagpur, Maharashtra, India, February 10, 2013.

Abhinash spoke these last words in unison with Santanu for emphasis. The Oriya performances of this study draw on local aesthetic practices in ways that enable Christians and their stories to “become real” to local villagers.

Through the ethnographic account that follows, I claim that what is fundamentally “becoming real” in Bagharpalli is not simply the “natural” or “habituated” music and drama performances, but is also the Christians themselves and the stories they are telling. The goal for these leaders is not simply an acceptable performance, but rather a means of entry into village society – a process of rooting the Christians and their stories in the fabric of village life and dialogue. Additionally, I claim that musical performance by itself is insufficient to achieve this authentication: “Song means only they are listening, but when it is acted in the drama it will become real for them.” Authenticity is rendered here as a process of “becoming real.” Abhinash’s statement indicates a conception of local aesthetics that differentiates between an initial stage that he describes as “only listening” and a subsequent phase realized in the drama, described as “becoming real.” The notion of “taking root” is one that arises from my observations of these performances and the interactions surrounding them. A careful look at this Bagharpalli performance reveals an authentication process that begins with music, takes root through the dialogue of question and answer, and “becomes real” in drama.

The rice fields along the roads are flooded and those working in the fields straighten from their labors in knee-deep water to watch our hefty, gleaming SUV pass. Abhinash normally travels to this village by bicycle, but today we have several musicians with instruments and myself to transport, requiring the hiring of this vehicle and driver. Today’s performance is one of several that have

been arranged for the benefit of my research. I am especially eager to witness this performance as there are only two people in this village who are Christians and this will be the first time this group, or possibly any Christian group, has ever performed there. Will this performance – and these performers – be accepted or rejected? On what basis? Will villagers walk away? Will they become engaged? Will they allow me to ask them questions about their opinions of the performance? Does it appear local? Foreign? Trustworthy? Why or why not? Will it change their perceptions of the performers – and of Christians and Christianity in general? After ninety minutes of skillful maneuvering, the driver stops in the village of Bagharpalli.

An Entrance

Santanu, dressed in clean, pressed denim pants and a patterned, long-sleeved, button-down shirt leads us along a well-worn path through the village. The musicians, wearing long-sleeved white *kurta* (shirts) and dark slacks follow along. Lithe, energetic children, some barefoot and some flip-flopped, appear suddenly at our sides with shouts, giggles and lots of questions, and then disappear just as quickly. We duck repeatedly to avoid the overhanging tile roofs. A small, wide-eyed boy carrying a goat nearly half his size quietly follows.

We enter an opening in the street where preparations are in process. A young woman is covering a *charpai*, a wooden frame with woven platform for sitting or sleeping, with a large royal blue cloth in anticipation of our arrival. Several children scatter leaving one quiet, inquisitive five-year-old girl in green alone on a white tarp. I surmise that the children have already announced our arrival in the village more effectively than a cellular phone call could have. The woman, dressed in a shimmering *sari* of gold and navy, disappears into a home and then emerges with a brass pitcher; bowing, she pours water across the path at our feet. “This is our culture,” Santanu announces proudly. Now kneeling before us, she places her hands flat on the ground and elegantly genuflects until her forehead touches the back of her hands. The woman rises with a warm and welcoming smile and returns to her preparations. “So, in the other village they do it differently, ya? The culture is different.” Santanu declares. I immediately recognize that Santanu is calling to mind our village welcome in another region only two days earlier in which water was poured directly onto our shoes and sandals and then wiped clean. The young Bagharpalli woman who

poured the water is Kanti Senapatti; she is the only Christian living in the village and one of only four Christians in the area. She and her Hindu husband welcome Abhinash into their home each week for worship and Bible stories; today they are the hosts for this *keertan* performance. Santanu directs me to sit on the cloth-covered frame.

I realize that there are no fewer than eight active children now assembled on the white tarp. The tarp is a pragmatic assemblage of woven, industrial bags sewn together, the red “ACC cement” logo repeating across a white background. The energetic children quickly become the focus of attention for the musicians, who have been noodling on the red, double-headed *dholak* drum, *dara* (tambourines) and *khanjani* (stick tambourines). The musicians transition into a song, inviting the children and others to join in, lining out the words between phrases.

As the children clap along with the music, I realize that the sound of the instruments and singing is serving to attract a crowd in the heat of this August work day. Adults appear intermittently, laying down their shouldered loads and heavily-laden bicycles. Some first peer cautiously around corners of brick or concrete before venturing closer. I notice that the musicians have discreetly changed into their costumes – most have added off-white *dhoti* (pants) with colorful sashes to coordinate with their white *kurta* (shirts). Their costume change brings to mind Abhinash’s cautionary warning, “Without this [*dhoti*] – no *keertan*.” Everything, including the *natokiyo beso bhusa* (“dress for the drama”) seems to be in order.

The sporadic playing and song was all prelude - a means of drawing a crowd. And it worked. A gathering of a dozen or so women in colorful *saris* are sitting on the orange clay of earthen shelves or stoops that front some of the homes. The group of children on the white tarp continues to increase; too active now to be counted. These are joined by younger men taking a break from their labors, most standing or leaning beneath overhanging tile roofs. One white-haired man is seated on a red resin chair – a place of honor. I sense that it is time for the *keertan* performance.

A Performance begins with music

The sharp, deliberate quarter-notes of the *ginni* (small cymbals) split the coolness of the late morning air and are joined by the

melodic pulse of the *dholak* in eighth, sixteenth and quarter notes. The six encircled male musicians, now dressed according to local custom, begin synchronized, counterclockwise movement in time with the music. A smiling Abhinash chants a simple vocal line of even quarter and eighth note rhythm and minimal ambitus which is then echoed by the others. “*Bolo anande premanande prabhu Jishu bolo,*” which translated is, “Sing the name of the Lord Jesus in gladness and in love to Him.” I am surprised by the overt mention of Jesus’ name here in this environment fraught with risk, but as one pastor’s wife later said, “My family worshipped thirty-six gods, what difference was one more going to make?”¹⁸¹ Most of the crowd watch quietly – a few children attempt to sing along. After four cycles, the *ginni* signal a switch to a triple eighth-note pulse. Immediately the ensemble’s intensity increases in both volume and rhythmic subdivision. The tempo increases slightly as well. The men’s energetic movements accent the duple and triple rhythms. Smiles light the performers’ faces. Smiles begin to dot the audience as well.

A rhythmic flourish signals an abrupt ending. Without delay a new pattern begins, the melody of this one is a heavy, deliberate triple rhythm. The circle’s motion becomes more fluid; upper body movement and hand gestures provide visual emphasis to the triplet pattern. Only the *dholak* and a single *ginni* play, freeing the other four musicians to emphasize the lilting dance with their arms and hands. At the *ginni*’s signal, the intensity and tempo increase once again, the dancers resume playing their instruments, and the village streets are again dominated by the dynamic energy of *keertan* dance and song.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Pramila Sah in dinner conversation with the author, July 2013, Patna, Bihar.

¹⁸² This repetitive, cyclic form, increasing in both intensity and tempo, resembles scholarly accounts given for *kirtan* in other regions. Stephen Slawek describes the *nam-kirtan* of the Banares region of his work in nearly identical fashion, noting that the initial melody was commonly sung four times followed by the second line of melody, also sung four times, after which, “the whole procedure would start over once again, but at an increased tempo.” See Slawek, 80. Anna Schultz’s description of the musical elements of *Marathi kirtan* begins similarly, with repetitive call-and-response, increasing tempo and rhythmic density before the highly-politicized *Marathi kirtan* transitions ingeniously into another genre of praise song. See Anna Schultz, “The Collision of Genres and the Collusion of Participants: Marathi “Rastriya Kirtan” and the Communication of Hindu Nationalism.” In *Ethnomusicology Vol. 52 No.1* (Winter, 2008): 31-51.

Keertan Song 1

tune: "Bagharpalli"

♩ = 96
Keertandholia (leader)

♩ = 144
Keertandholia (leader)

Ensemble (echo) Repeat 4x total

1, 2, 3 | 4.

Translation:
Sambalpuri: Bolo anande premanande prabhu Jishu bolo
English: Sing the name of the Lord Jesus in gladness and in love to Him

Transcription 1: Keertan song 1

Keertan song 2

♩ = 48
♩ = 80
A Keertandholia call

Ginni slow tempo

Ginni fast tempo

7 Ensemble response

14 Keertandholia call

21 Ensemble response

28 Ensemble response

34 Ensemble response

Lyrics:
 thi - le ja - ne dha - ni lo - ko he thi - le ja - ne dha - ni lo - ka ra du e ti pu - a - ba - pan -
 ka - a - ti - pri - ya thi - le ja - ne dha - ni lo - ko he thi - le ja - ne dha - ni lo - ka ra du - e - ti pu -
 ba - nan ka - a - ti - pri - ya di - ne - sa - na pu - a - a - shi ka - hi - la ba pan - ku ha - si sam - pa - ti - ra bha - ga - di - ya he sam - pa - ti - ra
 an - ta - pa sa - ri - se - be ka - hi - la ba pan - ku ha - si sam - pa - ti - ra bha - ga - di - ya he sam - pa - ti - ra
 phe - ri - la pu - an - ko ba - se
 bha - ga - di - ya he ji - bi - bi - de - sha ban - du - man - ka - sa ha sam - pa - ti - ra
 bha - ga - di - ya he sam - pa - ti - ra bha - ga - di - ya he ji - bi - bi - de - sha ban - du - man - ka - sa ha sam - pa - ti - ra

Song order: Slow - A A A B B A₂
 Fast - A A B B B A₂ A₂ B B A B B A₂ A₂ A₂ A₂

Transcription 2: Keertan song 2

<p>Keertan song 2 translation Sambalpuri:</p> <p>thile jane dhani loko he thile jane dhani loka ra dueti pua bapanka ati priya</p> <p>dine sane pua ashi kahila bapanku asi sapatira bhaga diya, he campatir bhaga diya, he jibi bidesha bandhu mananka saha</p> <p>kahile bapa bujhayi kichi se bujhila nahi kahile bapa bujhayi kichi se bujhila nahi sapatira bhaga nei sapatira bhaga nei bidesho gola apa baya kapila</p> <p>anutapa kari sese pherila pitanko pase khyama kari apardha khyama kari apardha diya sarana padekali jana</p>	<p>English:</p> <p>There was a rich man who had two sons And they were beloved to his father.</p> <p>The younger son came and he asked the father for his share of the wealth He wanted to go to a far away country with his friends.</p> <p>The father tried to make him understand but he did not listen to him. Then he took his share and he went away and wasted all his money.</p> <p>At last he repented and he came to his father again. He asked for forgiveness and asked for shelter in his father's house.</p>
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Illustration 2: *Keertan* song 2 translation

A Performance takes root in question and answer

After yet another vigorous rhythmic climax from the encircled musicians, Abhinash calls out to the crowd: “*Bolo Davda Santana Jishunkara jai!*” (Hail Jesus, the Son of David!) To which comes the collective response “*Jai!*” (*Hooray!*).¹⁸³ The lyrics of the first *keertan* song and this statement are the only overtly Christian references in a performance that otherwise minimizes difference between itself and a Hindu *keertan* performance. After two more repetitions of this shouted exchange, Abhinash is center stage before the now-attentive villagers. Smiling and mopping his brow, he questions those gathered about the story song just completed. The children answer in a chaotic chorus and Abhinash affirms their correct answer by immediately singing a phrase of the song. The other musicians join as if on cue. Abhinash addresses his next question to a young, attentive woman seated in a doorway. She answers enthusiastically, but with slight embarrassment at being

¹⁸³ At the time I was not aware that this call and response invoked the name of Jesus.

singled out. Instantly the musicians resume another portion of the song.

Abhinash is teaching the story of the song now, skillfully drawing more villagers – particularly more adults – into the conversation. His warm, smiling demeanor is disarming and most in the audience are eagerly engaged in the encounter – more so than with the song performance itself. Villagers discuss amongst themselves the answers to the questions he asks and willingly follow his leadership. It seems to me from Abhinash’s bubbly demeanor that all the answers are correct; it is only later that I came to discover that incorrect answers were greeted with equal enthusiasm after which the musicians repeated the appropriate song portion, allowing the listener to adjust his or her answer. The ever-enthusiastic and bearded Gyan joins in the fray, role-playing an exaggerated question and answer exchange with Abhinash and spontaneously acting out scenes from the song story, all to the crowd’s delight.

Abhinash’s function here is that of *keertandholia*, the “leader of the *keertan*.” His is the respected role of telling engaging stories and expertly leading songs that both teach and inspire the audience to greater religious devotion.¹⁸⁴ These relational interactions, led by Abhinash, engender audience participation and engagement and have been steadily increasing in both directness and intensity since our arrival: first through our ritual welcome, then to the playful interaction with the children, and finally to the responsorial song now being explained in entertaining fashion. This dialogue works to structure and even control the ways that today’s performance and these performers take root in the

¹⁸⁴ Abhinash’s role here is similar to that of the *kirtankar* of Gordon Thompson’s study in Gujarat. The *kirtankar* is “generally a highly-literate man,” who tells stories and Hindu epics and expertly leads from one song genre to the next – all in praise of Hindu deities but without strict adherence to any particular tradition or temple. The *kirtankar* of the Marathi *rastriya kirtan*, works the crowd into a frenzied state using contagious rhythmic grooves and familiar devotional songs, segueing seamlessly between songs of religious devotion and songs of Hindu nationalism so as to translate Hindu religious passion into Hindu Nationalist fervor. In each of these contexts, the *kitankar* is a respected individual expected to entertain, teach and possibly, as in the *rastriya kirtan*, challenge cultural assumptions by cleverly connecting accepted devotional practices with new ideas.

village. Today's performance is an important step in the acting in process in which performers carefully construct a "natural" performance that "becomes real" to villagers and which serves to authenticate the stories and the performers themselves. The specifically political nature of this process, and the significance of the *keertandholia*'s role will be addressed in chapter three.

A Performance "becomes real" in drama

Abhinash segues fluently into the announcement: "And now the story of the prodigal son!" With this introduction, the *keertan* performance moves from circle dance to drama.

The tall, dignified, Salman Dutta enters the scene. He has changed back into button down dress shirt and slacks during Abhinash's question and answer time. He sports a woven scarf draped stylishly around his neck and shoulders as he plays the part of the wealthy, cosmopolitan farmer and father. The audience watches intently. First the obedient son appears, dressed in the traditional clothes of a laborer and carrying a *pavda* (field spade) on his shoulder; he discusses the day's work with his father and departs for the fields. The second son appears with no tools, looking every bit the slacker, rebellious, partying type. It is obvious to me that the Biblical narrative is greatly expanded here, incorporating humorous scenes and taking liberties with plot details to heighten interest. The second son exits to intrigued laughter – the villagers glancing at each other as if to say, "Uh oh, this fellow is about to do something very bad!" They are riveted to the performance. Other characters enter, each dressed for his role, as the story of the prodigal son "becomes real" on the packed orange clay of Bagharpalli streets. The onlookers comment amongst themselves with each character entrance and plot development; the adult women often covering their mouths with sari sashes to politely hide their smiles and laughter. The performers smoothly adapt to their audience, adding dramatic pauses, quickening the pace, or stretching humorous moments until villagers are completely absorbed in the performance.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ This local performance of *keertan* more closely resembles the multifaceted character of Anna Schultz's *Marathi "ratriya kirtan"* and Steven Slawek's *kirtan* in Uttar Pradesh than it does the Oriya song form described by Ranade in his *Garland* entry for Orissa in which Ranade describes *kirtan* simply as an "important song genre" with special sessions known as *asht prahar*

The climactic reunion of the prodigal son and the persistent father elicits visible surprise and relief from the audience. At the drama's conclusion, children and adults eagerly clap and sing a song led by the musicians, some standing to celebrate the restoration of relationship between the son, his father, his family and his community. It should come as no surprise that in a land where cows are sacred and protected, the "killing of the fatted calf" was prudently omitted from this Biblical narrative – an example of the editorial aspect of acting in that carefully crafts Biblical narrative to avoid transgressing against local conceptions of purity and the sacred.

During the drama, villagers enter into the narrative through modes of reception and engagement that exceed mere listening and become for them lived experience. The extent of villagers' engagement both individually and collectively is evidenced by their embodied responses, an individual body shaking with laughter, wide-eyed with surprise, tensing in moments of anxious anticipation; gathered bodies whispering to confirm approval or intrigue, lightly touching in moments of suspense, making eye contact in affirmation of a shared experience. The noticeable and collective sigh of relief at the story's conclusion is further evidence of the embodied nature of engagement with the

that "last twenty-four hours without interruption."¹⁸⁵ An Odisha tourist website describes *kirtan* in similar fashion as "basically an ecstatic meditation in which the participant/singer celebrate[s] the qualities of existence by chanting the Lord[s] name."¹⁸⁵ In contrast to the singularity of genre found in these Oriya examples, Schultz's and Slawek's *kirtan* forms include a variety of responsorial and non-responsorial songs, drama, as well as social, religious, and in Schultz's case, political commentary.

narrative. These villagers have not just heard about the story, they have – on some level – lived it.

It is through the embodied nature of audience experience that the story of the prodigal son “becomes real” in the village through drama in ways that are not possible through song alone. When the villagers hear the story in song, they are merely “listening,” which, according to Abhinash’s comparative statement, is markedly less than the “real” experienced through drama. Abhinash’s conception of engagement with song infers a mere transference of information, whereas his notion of engagement with drama implies a visceral, embodied experience that exceeds the capacity of song alone.

The comparative structure in Abhinash’s comparison between mere “listening” and “becoming real” is similar to one used by Dwight Conquergood to differentiate between the distanced empiricism of academic knowledge – a “knowing that” or a “knowing about” – and that of the intimate, local, lived experience of embodied knowledge – a “knowing how” and a “knowing who.”¹⁸⁶ Conquergood’s notion of embodied epistemology as an intimate, local, and lived “knowing” provides a useful theoretical lens through which to view Abhinash’s conception of “becoming real” in the village.¹⁸⁷ It is through this embodied engagement with drama that villagers come to “know” the

¹⁸⁶ Dwight Conquergood, “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research” in *The Drama Review* 46, 2 (T174), Summer 2002. (New York University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) 2002, 146.

¹⁸⁷ To clarify: Conquergood’s notion of academic knowledge would exclude Abhinash’s conception that “song means only they are listening”; his definition would claim this conception as “local” and “embodied.” I employ Conquergood’s lens here on the basis that his construct is based on difference – the difference between cognitive, intellectual knowing and embodied knowing. I contend that Abhinash’s construction mirrors Conquergood’s binary; although the categories differ the comparison remains valid.

characters and to “know” or experience the events. It is through this embodied engagement with drama that the story “becomes real” in the village.

An Inquiry

Suddenly it is my turn to interview and question those in attendance. I choose to address the crowd first, hoping to interview individuals as villagers disperse. Nervously I ask, “So, did you enjoy this performance?” Not an auspicious start, but a start nonetheless. Santanu translates to the crowd. A variety of overtly positive and enthusiastic responses erupt from all corners; my translator, Santanu simply nods to affirm the obvious. Well, at least all are paying attention. “What made it enjoyable?” I continued. “Drama.” “Drama.” “Drama,” come the replies in English. “What about the music?” I ask, hoping for some rich ethnomusicological nuggets. “Huh! Huh!” (Yes! Yes!) “Yes, they like the music, too” he says. OK, not exactly what I was looking for. “Would you call the music ‘traditional?’” I continued. Several respond at once. “Huh!” “Huh!” “Yes, it is from the village,” Santanu interprets. “What makes it ‘from the village?’” I ask eagerly – I’m looking for markers of authenticity here. The answers seem vague. Santanu addresses me quietly, “They are saying, ‘in the community they have all the same instruments’ . . .” He turns his head and comments as a quiet aside that the villagers don’t seem to be able to go beyond this point conceptually.

Frustrated, I try another approach, “Have you seen other performances like this one in the village?” “Yes.” “How often?” “During the festival times,” comes the response. “Do they use costumes and drama and instruments like this one?” “Huh. Huh.” (Yes. Yes.) come scattered replies. I’m surprised and pleased to see that most of the villagers are staying for this discussion, but I’m still struggling to identify a public discourse on authenticity. “Does this message feel like it comes from your people?” “Yes.” “Huh.” “Yah.” But none wish to elaborate. “Does this performance change what you think of Christians?” I’m taking a risk here as I have no clear idea of what was or was not presented in the performances today. (At this point I am not aware that the name of Jesus has been invoked by Abhinash in both the first *keertan* song and in his call and response.) Santanu translates the question, so I must be OK. I hear, “Huh.” (Yes) “How?” I ask before I realize that the answer came from a young man named Dit, one of only four Christians in this region. “He says ‘God loves us and if we

return to Him, He will accept us and forgive whatever things we have done against Him.” He is basically giving the Christian gospel message by retelling the story – but I want to know what is thought by those who aren’t Christians – and that would be nearly everyone else present. More frustration. I decide to proceed one-on-one.

Before I can move to individual interviews others in the crowd ask to speak. At times I am omitted from these conversations as my interpreter becomes engaged in the dialogue. Santanu later explains, “often the people were saying the same things that had already been said so I didn’t bother to translate everything.” A village woman holding a young child on her lap addresses an ongoing discussion among those seated on or in front of the earthen stoop; as she talks the others turn to listen. Santanu translates to me as she speaks, “That boy [the prodigal son in the story] realized that he has done a mistake and . . . “ Santanu’s translation is lost in the noise of the crowd’s enthusiastic applause and cheers for the woman’s synopsis. The significance of her retelling the story is lost on me at this time.

My efforts to clarify the terms by which processes of acceptance were negotiated proved challenging in numerous Oriya villages. I entered the field conditioned by scholars whose published descriptions of such discursive practices produced engaging and enlightening insights into local performance conventions. This scholarship included Jonathan Holt Shannon’s depiction of heritage and modernity in Syrian music,¹⁸⁸ Aaron Fox’s look at what constitutes the “real” in the country music of Lockhart, Texas,¹⁸⁹ Janaki Bakhle’s historical depiction of nationalistic constructions of Indian classical music¹⁹⁰ and Louise Meintjes’ study of the production of Zulu-ness in a South African

¹⁸⁸ Jonathan Holt Shannon, *Among the Jasmine Trees: Music and Modernity in Contemporary Syria* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press), 2006.

¹⁸⁹ Aaron Fox, *Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press), 2004.

¹⁹⁰ Janaki Bakhle, *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2005.

recording studio.¹⁹¹ My stubborn pursuit of established, static authenticity tropes during my fieldwork, particularly during audience interviews, kept me from recognizing significant means through which local process of acceptance were being negotiated and expressed. It was only after repeatedly reviewing my notes and recordings that I began to see individual terms and patterns emerge as salient. One such pattern is indicated in the two accounts above, and that is the significance of re-telling the story: The young mother's re-telling, which began, "That boy realized that he has done a mistake . . ." elicited strong affirmation from those gathered. For these villagers, retelling the story demonstrated not only their own attentive prowess, but the degree to which the story had "become real" to them.

I approach the white-haired man who had been given a seat of honor. We exchange pleasantries and I repeat some of my previous questions hoping for a different or more elaborate response. "Did you enjoy the drama and the dancing?" I begin. "Huh," (yes) he smiled. "Is drama like you remember as a child?" I'm trying to find a way around 'traditional' (translated *protha*, "accepted by society") now. "Huh," he sighed convincingly with a smile, "it is like I remember as a child." "If they did the dance without costumes would it still be 'like when you were a child'" "Yes, still good." I'm somewhat confused now. "If they did the drama in pants?" I ask, pointing to Salman's non-*dhoti* dress pants. "Costume is better," he replied. "Would it still be 'traditional' (*protha*)?" I asked, venturing a return to my previous terms. "No," he said.

The old man's differentiation between a performance practice that was accepted and "like when he was a child," (my words) and one that was accepted and *protha*, ("culturally approved") is a nuanced distinction that indicates a plurality of local possibilities for

¹⁹¹ Loiuise Meintjes, *Sound of Africa! Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio* (Durham: Duke University Press), 2003.

acceptance. Factors beyond those that were *protha* (“accepted by society”) were in play. Thus non-*protha* (not “accepted by society”) factors do not trump recognized and shared social standards nor are they simply added to them. Rather, fluid processes of authentication are operating in this village, practices that are rendered here as “becoming real.”

“Have you ever seen performances that were not done well?” I ask, returning to the old man again, hoping to uncover an aesthetic discourse in the negative. “Yes,” interrupts an older woman seated nearby. “If they don’t organize it and do it . . . alike . . . it won’t be good.” The gathered villagers applaud her answer. I am a little uncertain. “You mean if they don’t play well together?” I ask. “Yes,” clarifies Santanu without translating my question, “the coordination must be there.” “Have they seen performances that weren’t good?” “Yes, they have seen.” Santanu answers, again without returning to the woman. I am encouraged to discover that local aesthetic valuations of performance include a consideration of technical proficiency, but it is unclear to me if there has been a breach of etiquette by this woman. It seems to me that I should move on. I return to address the older man hoping to preserve any jeopardized dignity. Our continuing exchange is pleasant but not helpful to my quest.

The woman’s identification of a negative performance aesthetic seemed encouraging at the time. I followed up later with Santanu to clarify. “So when the coordination is not good,” He said, “simply they come and do it [without practice], naturally that won’t be good. But when they are performing outside, definitely they will prepare all these things and they will go and do that [outdoor performance]” [emphasis his]. Santanu’s use of “natural” gains clarity here as we consider that without practice, a performance “naturally won’t be good;” while at the same time, as he stated earlier, “with makeups and with the costume and all, naturally that becomes good and people like it.” The idea of being

“natural” here does not preclude strategic planning and rehearsal and in fact may require it, even though Santanu and others have stated elsewhere that the expertise of the performer, such as the *dholak* player discussed during the car ride to the village, is not critical for acceptance. “Natural,” then becomes a marker of approval rather than an indication of origin. A performance is accepted as “natural” or “naturally good” on the basis of reception, or, if I may once again invoke the broad place markers with which I began this study, “natural” is a marker of an “authenticated” performance rather than an “authentic” one. Satpathy noted in a separate conversation that ensembles performing in the major Hindu festivals practice for several months ahead of time, as did those who performed in his own Oral Arts Festival in February of 2012. The significance for this project lies in the variety of performances that can be accepted in the village, from those that are poorly prepared to those that are professional. The point here is not simply to identify an increasing variety of static markers but to recognize the processes through which village acceptance is negotiated and produced, and the possibilities that emerge. These “natural” performances don’t come naturally – they take work.

I then turn to Abhinash. “First you performed the song about the prodigal son, then you performed the drama of the prodigal son, right?” “Yes,” he confirms. “How important is it to connect those two?” “Song means only they are listening,” Abhinash answers through Santanu, “*but when it is acted in the drama it will become real for them.*” Abhinash speaks this last phrase in unison with Santanu for emphasis. “That’s when they laugh and engage?” I ask. “Yes, yes,” both agree. [emphasis added]

A new awareness

That the drama would make the performance “become real for them” was not a possibility that I had previously considered. In fact, I had unknowingly limited my inquiries and filtered all initial responses through lenses that tended to obscure all but music. The idea that the villagers would be more engaged with the drama than the music was at first a disappointment to me – no teary, moving tales here; no cross-legged cerebral ecstasy as is common in some Indian classical traditions. And then it became a conundrum. Why was this happening, and how would I theorize it? I had begun to doubt the acceptability of these performances. After all, if they were so “natural,” why wasn’t anybody ecstatically moved? But when I recalled Santanu’s statement, “Song means only they are listening, but when it is acted in the drama it will become real for them,” I realized I had overlooked something significant. This memorable phrase mirrored the progression of audience engagement I observed in the village *keertan* performance. Santanu’s statement indicates that for him and Abhinash, the progression of audience responses, from one of attentive listening (to musical performance) to active engagement (with drama performance) is somehow normative. From today’s *keertan* example, it seems apparent that this progression of audience response and engagement has become the basis for acting in as a performative tactic.

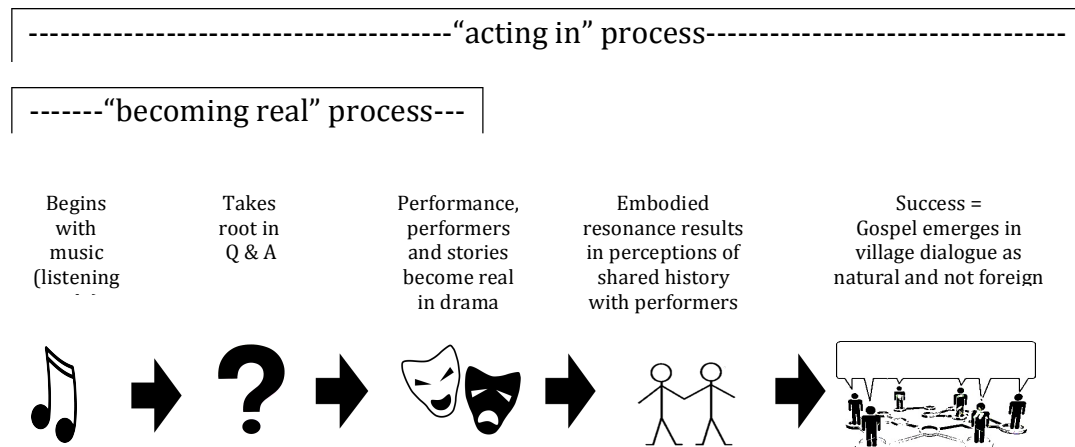


Illustration 3: Acting in process vs. becoming real process

I continue my questioning of Santanu: “You have question and answer afterwards,” I begin, “so tell me what happens there.” “First he (Abhinash) is asking questions, but they were not answering,” explains Santanu, “so again he is starting with the song.” Abhinash interrupts: “We repeat and repeat and they are asking [being asked] the questions – and by the songs we are answering them [our questions]. That’s when we find out if they are listening or not listening. They are *understood* or *not understood.*” [emphasis added]

Here the political nature of the dialogic practices accompanying this *keertan* performance is foregrounded.¹⁹² This question and answer time is not simply a

¹⁹² My use of “dialogic” here follows after Mikhail Bakhtin in the sense that communication always draws from other bodies of knowledge, or for Bakhtin, other voices, more often spoken than written down. In Bagharpalli the works upon which communication draws include the performances just presented in addition to all previous performances experienced by villagers. I have intentionally avoided the term “dialectical” here as it infers a dissonance between ideologies or paradigms in which one conception becomes preeminent. At this stage of the “acting in” process the tactic and goal intentionally pursues the relativistic and malleable characteristics of the dialogic process. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* by M. M.

performance practice that heightens audience enjoyment; rather, through these question and answer sessions salient ideas and subjects are formed, clarified, and defined in and for village dialogue. Abhinash, in the role of *keertandholia*, directs this process, carefully framing, even controlling the terms that take root in the village's vocabulary. Here in the village, through the dialogic practice of performance, Oriya Christians become real, they take root in the community and its dialogic practices as natural participants. Thus, through this acting in performance, Oriya Christians gain entrance into the discursive terrain of the village as accepted, natural and real participants. Through acting in, Oriya Christians escape the discourse that Othered them in regions such as the district of Kandhamal discussed in the first chapter, a discourse that framed both themselves and their connections to the West as a threat and put them in physical danger.

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated acting in as seen through a Bagharpalli *keertan* performance in order to determine what social conditions and processes are put in play to enable Satpathy's claim, "The Gospel is from Orissa!" Christian performances emerge here as embodied, dialogic, and performative events, strategically drawn from local ideas and processes expressed by my interlocutors as "natural" and "habituated" and rendered as a process of "becoming real." Villagers' historical experiences inform and enable a resonance with embodied epistemologies throughout all stages of acting in performances that begin with music, take root through the *keertandholia*'s dialogue of question and answer, and finally "become real" with the addition of drama.

Bakhtin, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press), 1981.

In chapter three I will discuss the distinctly political nature of acting in as a response to the risks of physical danger experienced in this modern political society. I will demonstrate the political work accomplished through “acting in” in relation to Odisha’s systems of governance, particularly how acting in minimizes difference between Oriya Christians and their Oriya Hindu neighbors. This attenuation of difference renders Christians functionally invisible to various means of governance that would seek to govern them as a separate “Christian” population. Following Kelly Askew’s work that demonstrates the Tanzanian government’s use of “cultural production” as a statist project, I will demonstrate the connection between the Odisha government’s own practice of determining Oriya identity through authenticated performance and the acting in tactic of Maranatha Ministries. The subversive overtones of this “political” action will be qualified and tempered somewhat by viewing acting in through the lens of Ryan Skinner’s “ethical project.” Once again, the acting in tactic is shown to accomplish significant cultural work while protecting the agency of others.

Chapter 3

Invisibility, Orality and the Politics of Acting In

“We are not hiding from them – just not exposing
before them [how] we enter the village.”

Doug: Are these performances something that you wouldn't want authorities to know about – or are you ok with it? In other words, is it a risk if the government officials knew that you were doing this – these performances – as a way to spread the gospel in the villages?

Santanu: It is not necessary to tell them, actually, about all this.¹⁹³

Doug: Right, you don't have to tell them – but do you want to keep it from them?

Santanu: Not necessarily. *The government sees* - they can do that - but there is no need of telling them something we are doing in the village.

Pradeep: [confidently] *We are not hiding from them – just not exposing before them [how] we enter the village.* [emphasis added]¹⁹⁴

This chapter examines acting in as it relates to a MM Christian stance of “not hiding but not exposing” themselves to state and local bodies of governance “that see.” In particular, this chapter outlines the means by which the Oriya Christians of Maranatha Ministries become functionally invisible to the surveillance, and by extension, the

¹⁹³ Note: the names of my interlocutors, the names of Christian organizations, the names of Christians in the villages and the names of the villages themselves have been changed in order to reduce any risk that such exposure could bring now or in the future.

¹⁹⁴ This exchange occurred in a Bolangir hotel room in February, 2013.

enforcement of governing entities be they official village, district, or state agencies, or unofficial entities such as various Hindutva groups. As such, acting in manifests as a decidedly political act.¹⁹⁵ This degree of invisibility is accomplished through a combination of both cultural performances and the jettisoning of all practices marked by Oriya people as foreign. This combination of accepted cultural performance and the removal of foreign cultural markers comprise the tactic called “orality” by MM leaders. Paradoxically, this “orality” tactic through which the MM Christians become invisible to, and thereby escape, government surveillance is predicated on the state’s own practice of defining local identity by means of authenticated cultural performances, or “oral tradition,” for the purposes of tourism and cultural affirmation.

My investigation of the state’s role in establishing performance as a marker of “oral tradition” draws on Kelly Askew’s application of performance and performativity of identity and power in her investigation of Swahili music in Tanzania. Askew’s thick description of *ngoma* performances, a traditional initiation rite, brings to the fore not only a personal politics of local performance, but also the national politics of government-sponsored tourism performances she calls “cultural production.” Askew highlights a performance of governmental power in the field of cultural production that transforms a *ngoma* initiation rite into a means of competition. Through this statist intervention, the performances themselves, rather than the initiates, become both “relics of excavation and

¹⁹⁵ Hindutva groups include, but are not limited to, Rashtirya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP).

modern expressions of the nation.”¹⁹⁶ It is this process by which societal membership is validated through a government-sponsored performance that I wish to borrow here. For this project, having previously identified the unevenness of Odisha’s political society, I wish to highlight the agential personal politics exercised by individuals and groups in creatively appropriating that which was enacted first as a national politics, that is, “oral tradition.” In the Odisha of this study, Christian tactics mirror state strategies by which cultural performances of “oral tradition” determine societal membership.

The previous chapter examines the Christian performances in the village of Bagharpalli in terms of the cultural work being accomplished through direct dialogue and interaction with local villagers. The performative co-presence of the Bagharpalli scene allows both the Christian stories and the performers themselves to become rooted in the local community in ways that are accepted, remembered, understood, and natural. Through these acting in performances, the stories and practices of MM Christianity are perceived by villagers as undifferentiated from local Hindu stories and practices. Additionally, these Christian performances effect a resonance with embodied domains of villager experience and, I suggest, even imply perceptions of historical co-presence between Hindu villagers and Christian acting in performances.

This chapter, on the other hand, will examine the political work being accomplished through Christian performances such as the one in Bagharpalli and its impact on relationships to official and unofficial means of governance, be they local, regional or

¹⁹⁶ Kelly Askew, *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 215.

state law enforcement, military or elected officials, or various unofficial groups such as Hindutva, a nationalist reform movement. The decided lack of co-presence between Maranatha Ministries and official state agencies precludes direct dialogue, even more so between Maranatha Ministries and unofficial modes of governance. In this uneven political environment both the dialogue and the players themselves become foggy spectral entities, often speaking past each other through various forms of published media – a condition that works against meaningful dialogue and stable relations. The acting in tactic of Maranatha Ministries takes advantage of these nebulous political relationships and lack of dialogic co-presence in ways that enable MM Christians to become undifferentiated and thus functionally invisible to such governing bodies. The ethnography of this chapter attempts to represent this indirect and complex dialogue through a variety of voices, some specific and singular, such as those of my interlocutors or the State Secretary of Culture; others more nebulous and ephemeral, such as local, regional, national or international news agencies and human rights watchdog organizations that monitor government action and inaction. No single article reprinted here encapsulates the whole reality, but each represents its own perspective as it reports “the news.” Each account below attempts a resonance with a shared social and political agenda and seeks to safeguard the agency of one particular social group.

The political and cultural work of acting in is accomplished without limiting the privileges, rights or agency of the Hindu villagers, religious leaders or the Christians themselves, thereby classifying acting in as an ethical project. This classification brings critical clarity to understanding what is and is not being accomplished politically and

culturally through “acting in.” Ryan Skinner argues that ethical projects necessarily invoke “value-inflected concerns about personal initiative, responsibility, and influence in social space” – an ethics.¹⁹⁷ In his forthcoming monograph on practices of Malian music-making, such ethics emerge through practices in which a specifically Malian morality and ethics inform all facets of music-making from conception to production to consumption. Skinner’s work follows De Beauvoir, who proposes a space for social action that remains undetermined in both its options and its outcomes and which furthermore establishes agency (“existence”) for one individual or group while at the same time avoiding the paradox in which “no action can be generated for man without its being immediately generated against man.”¹⁹⁸ De Beauvoir proposes the possibility of “living” or “ethical” endeavors in which man willfully acts to establish his own agency or “freedom” without “seeking it against (other men) at that same time,” thus creating a conflict of wills.¹⁹⁹ “The ‘ethics of ambiguity,’” as Skinner summarizes, “is, thus, the ability to meaningfully act upon social space – to solve a problem – without denying the intentional agency of others or one’s own intentionality.”²⁰⁰ In modern Odisha, “ethical projects” are the means by which MM Christians establish an agential freedom to practice and share a Christian religious piety.

¹⁹⁷ Ryan Thomas Skinner, “Chapter One,” in *An Afropolitan Muse*, forthcoming, 7.

¹⁹⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948, 1976; Lexington, KY: Zaubooks.com, 2010), 126.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

²⁰⁰ Ryan Thomas Skinner, in “Chapter One” in *An Afropolitan Muse*, forthcoming, 12.

“Who can say the gospel is from *the West*?”²⁰¹

The words “who” and “the West” of Satpathy’s declaration above become the framing devices through which the remainder of this chapter investigates the political work accomplished through acting in street presentations such as the Bagharpalli performance first presented in chapter two. My claim is that acting in performances enable particular kinds of relationships between MM Christians and other entities; to official and unofficial governing bodies, that relationship is one of functional invisibility. Acting in success depends on this degree of invisibility, which is dependent in turn, on those particular social entities represented by the collective “who”, in Satpathy’s quotation above not identifying Christian practices as from “the West”.

Satpathy’s statement in the heading above implicates a carefully crafted stance in relation to various entities; entities which can and do exert influence on the lives and religious practices of MM Christians. Dr. Satpathy’s stance includes the claim that violence is the work of “outsiders” as well as the assertion that the root of conflict lies in a corrupting foreign culture rather than religious difference. His position is what Harris Berger calls a “stance-on-power.” Berger’s conception of a “stance-on-power” dovetails nicely with Skinner’s ethical projects in that both posit agential action while not limiting other’s agency. Berger claims, “The stance qualities of stance-on-power are not “domination” or “subordination,” but the affective and stylistic relationships to one’s own actions within a particular situation and at a particular social position in a world of

²⁰¹ This is a quote by Dr. Abhinav Satpathy at the Oral Arts Festival in Bhubaneswar, Odisha February, 2012

sedimented structures of domination and subordination.”²⁰² Acting in thus becomes a “stance-on-power,” a specifically performative stance whereby Satpathy and Maranatha Ministries gain room for maneuver in relationship between Christians, community and government, a condition that creates possibilities for peaceable relationships in a setting that knows violence only too well.

Saturday, 23 February 2013 BHUBANESWAR, India (IANS):
“Kandhamal, about 200km from Bhubaneswar, witnessed widespread violence after the murder of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati and four of his aides at his ashram [religious retreat center] in Jalespata village on August 23, 2008.

At least 38 people were killed and more than 25,000 Christians were forced to flee their homes in 2008 after their houses were attacked by mobs, who accused Christians for killing Saraswati, although police had blamed the Maoists for the ashram killings.”²⁰³

“Who”: unofficial governing bodies

Maranatha Ministry leaders claim that the Hindu/Christian violence of 2008 was neither an action of local leaders nor of the state, but rather was an expression of vigilante force enacted by external parties. Despite evidence to the contrary, Satpathy contends the violent acts are solely the work of gangs from “outside” the community even while he admits that processes of surveillance are local. (Note: the brackets below [], indicate my own clarifications.)

Satpathy: The persecutors are brought in from outside – not from within the community. When the local community people are

²⁰³ “Kandhamal riots could have been prevented” IANS Bhubaneswar. Accessed April 17, 2014,
²⁰³ “Kandhamal riots could have been prevented” IANS Bhubaneswar. Accessed April 17, 2014,
<http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-kandhamal-riots-could-have-been-prevented-1803609>.

involved in the persecution then you cannot help. [There is nothing you can do.] We are able to be in healthy relationship with the local community people and therefore people from the outside [persecutors] are not invited in.

Some of the evidence contradicting Satpathy's statement above includes testimony presented before an enthusiastic audience at Satpathy's own 2012 Oral Arts Festival. Bharat and Pastor Jagadeesh alternate in telling the personal story which is translated by Satpathy himself. Their testimony belies claims that violent acts are limited to outsiders, portraying instead acts of violence from within an extended family clan, a familial unit which can encompass an entire village or villages. The young man telling the story is Bharat, who since his conversion to Christianity has become a leader in the church and a key actor and musician in acting in performances in this region of Odisha. The following is Satpathy's translation:

Satpathy: When he [Bharat] had accepted the Lord he was kicked out of the village. He was in a meeting of 200 people getting fellowship with Pastor Jagadeesh and those villagers came and snatched him from their hands and beat him very bad – black and blue. Those people who had come to persecute him were his own uncles. And they confronted us and said, “Because of these people [Christians] you entered into our village so we will straighten them out - straighten them out so that you will never be able to come again to our village.” So Pastor Jagadeesh said, “We stopped the Gospel [preaching] and started to enact the drama.” And then his own uncles started to take part in the drama! (audience applause)²⁰⁴

In this biographical narrative we see once again how the addition of drama transforms a combative situation into one of productive interaction. Pastor Jagadeesh's cursory

²⁰⁴ Abhinav Satpathy, translating the story of Jagadeesh Pradhani and Arul at the Oral Arts Festival, Bhubanswar, Odisha, February, 2012.

retelling exemplifies his understanding and celebration of drama's critical role in the process by which MM Christians "become real" to their Oriya neighbors.

Odisha's Secretary of Culture denies that such violent acts are characteristic of local citizens. Like Satpathy, he claims the 2008 violence was the work of a limited few, not those "inside." In the following interview he struggles to find words that distance these acts, and the ideologies that support them, from the larger Oriya population. (The ellipses below indicate a conversational pause.)

Doug: You mentioned religion. I remember reading about some violence that happened here six or seven years ago.

Secretary of Culture: What kind of violence?

D: Some Christians were persecuted.

Sec: In the Kandhamal district?

D: Yes.

Sec: That is a different [from] religion. You cannot relate it to religion. Because . . . Yes, ultimately, it comes to religion. But, the way things happened, some people . . . some limited people . . . some limited groups . . . not the whole masses. So we cannot take it as a great issue for the whole state of Orissa. It has happened. It has happened for a purpose for some . . . miscreants . . . some . . . limited people . . . by some limited people, but not the cities inside, not from all of society.²⁰⁵

In the public press, numerous parties, including many Christian and Muslim groups, claim "Hindutva" as the culprit for Odisha's violent eruptions.

"Hindutva" is a Hindu nationalist movement currently championed by

²⁰⁵ Chitta Ranjan Mallia, Secretary, Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi. Personal interview with the author in the Secretaries' Bhubaneswar office, February 19, 2014.

organizations such as Rashtirya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS),²⁰⁶ Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)²⁰⁷ and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)²⁰⁸ among others. The website of BJP claims “Hindutva is a nationalist, and not a religious or theocratic concept.”²⁰⁹ The VHP website makes similar claims to purely nationalist motivations and yet their reference to the Hindu deity *Ram* in their mission statement belies their claims of secular founding: “its motto was Service, Security and Sanskar together // until the cause of Ram is fulfilled.” As such, the ideas that constitute nationalism and religion in this discourse are often conflated.

Muslims and Christians are religious minorities in India and when interviewed by media outlets many portray Hindutva as an extremist, militant religious movement. The media excerpts below present claims that Hindutva seeks to move the national government away from its current secular stance to one that legislates Hindu practice as the social norm. In one newspaper article a Communist Party official expresses fear of greater trouble yet to come.

“Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and its affiliates have been saying that Orissa will be their next Hindutva laboratory after Gujarat,” said a concerned Sitaram Yechury, senior Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader here on Friday. “It has implications for the whole country.”²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ See <http://rss.org/default.aspx>.

²⁰⁷ See <http://bjp.org>.

²⁰⁸ See <http://vhp.org/vhp-glance/youth/dim1-bajrang-dal> accessed May 23, 2014. It was the murder of VFP leader Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati and four of his aides on August 23, 2008 that is said to have incited the December 2008 riots against Christians.

²⁰⁹ “BJP Philosophy: Hindutva (Cultural Nationalism).” Accessed 5.23.14, <http://www.bjp.org/about-the-party/philosophy/?u=hindutva>.

²¹⁰ “Kandhamal violence premeditated” author listed as “Special Correspondent” The Hindu. Accessed April 17, 2014, <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/kandhamal-violence-premeditated/article1172936.ece>.

Oriya Christians share similar concerns that Odisha will become a testing ground for Hindutva's nationalist endeavors.

The perception of the Hindutva movement as religious vigilantism is also shared and reinforced by numerous agencies that monitor religious persecution in India and around the globe, such as India-based Human Rights Law Network (HRLN). In the report that follows, HRLN attempts to ideologically separate a radical Hindutva from a normative, peaceable Hinduism.

December 17, 2008 NEW DELHI, India HRLN: There is a clear distinction between Hindutva and Hinduism. Hinduism is a diverse, inclusive and tolerant faith, which embraces 'Ahimsa,' the principle of non-violence, which extends to a preference for vegetarianism. Hindutva incites violence, uses hate speech and instigates bandhs [strikes], rallies and riots as means of imposing their views of Hindu supremacy.²¹¹

The Indian Muslim news outlet, TwoCircles, claims Hindutva organizations were behind the 2008 violence in Kandhamal and cites arrest reports as evidence. In August of 2013 this article lists a large numbers of Hindutva arrests in the attacks: "85 people from the RSS, 321 members of the VHP and 118 Bajrang Dal members." Yet the article also decries the fact that less than five years later only 27 remain in custody. The article makes the bleak pronouncement: "The state of

²¹¹ "Ethnic Cleansing of Christians by Hindutva Rightwing Forces in Orissa," Human Rights Law Network. Accessed April 17, 2014, http://hrln.org/beta/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=346:even-judges-wont-go-to-court-to-file-child-sexual-abuse-case&catid=123:news&Itemid=136.

justice delivery system as such is abysmal. The communalized state apparatus blocks the justice at various levels.”²¹²

The dilemma remains, however, how to account for the nebulous origins of hostilities. The evidence presented above suggests that arguments for both local and outside origins for violence each have their own validity without being mutually exclusive. All the while, leaders such as Satpathy and Secretary Chitta Ranjan Mallia continue to claim only “outside” origins for such attacks and deny the presence of an identifiable, local oppositional faction. But what mechanisms are activated to initiate such violence? How is it that no structured organization of Hindutva can be identified on the local scene?

Anthropologist Deepa Reddy’s research may shed some light here on the origins of Odisha’s anti-Christian outbursts. Reddy foregoes attempts to define Hindutva as structure, choosing instead to describe the movement in terms of praxis because of its elusive combination of undetermined structure and momentary uprisings.

Dhooleka Raj has written of Punjabi Londoners that “there is no Hindu Punjabi ‘community’,” only “*moments when community occurs*, when people gather as a whole, because of a certain criterion of religious identification” (2003, p. 93 emphasis added). Much the same could indeed be said of Hindutva: that it does not always-already exist in pre-determined form, but occurs most powerfully at moments when the interests and identifications of

²¹² Ram Puniyani, “Kandhamal Carnage: Aftermath,” August 16, 2013. Accessed 05.07.14, http://twocircles.net/2013aug16/kandhamal_carnage_aftermath.html#.U2okz164nII.

disperse groups come most closely into alignment.²¹³

Reddy's idea that Hindutva opposition could materialize at any time resonates with the communication practices observed in my interlocutors as we moved from village to village. MM leaders were cautious in their communications in less familiar surroundings. Santanu and other musicians demonstrated a careful deliberateness in dialogue with village elders in newer venues while their verbal exchanges with elders in more familiar villages were quite fluid. This could be dismissed as a rather obvious and pedestrian observation but for certain telling exchanges such as this one: In a village near the town of Bimbarhar, I asked our host Christian couple if the same performance we had just experienced could have been enacted in another part of Bimbarhar village where no Christians live. "It would be too dangerous," they replied.²¹⁴ Acting in performances have their limits and the risk of anti-Christian violence continues to pervade every aspect of Christians' lives and religious practices.

In spite of such evidence to the contrary, MM leaders claim that no localized threat exists, only outside "persecutors" who can be summoned should local individuals, uncertain and unnamed, take offense. Reddy's work suggests that the "community" of Hindutva in Odisha may not exist in an identifiable, organized fashion but may instead materialize at moments of when the "interests and identifications" of various dispersed groups become aligned.²¹⁵ MM leaders recognize that these high-risk moments include

²¹³ Deepa Reddy, "Hindutva as Praxis," *Religion Compass* 5/8 (2011): 412-426.

²¹⁴ Unnamed Christian couple, personal conversation with the author. July 29, 2013.

²¹⁵ Deepa Reddy, "Hindutva as Praxis," *Religion Compass* 5/8 (2011): 412-426.

occasions when Christians or Christianity are perceived as a threat to societal norms, such as when foreign practices (such as those previously described by MM leaders) are evident. According to the host couple interviewed above, these threatening moments can also include acting in performances.

The Hindutva movement appears to have already accomplished the kind of functional invisibility I am claiming from acting in performances. According to Reddy, Hindutva exists not in definite terms but only in moments of praxis. Conversely, for MM Christians, acting in becomes a moment of praxis when recognition as a separate entity is minimized rather than exaggerated. The distinct lack of co-presence between MM Christianity and Hindutva is exacerbated by functional invisibilities that further limit the possibilities for meaningful dialogue. As such, the relationship between Christians and unofficial modes of governance such as Hindutva remains apprehensive at best.

“Who”: Official governing bodies

In relation to the official governing bodies of the state, however, Christians within Maranatha Ministries have adopted a clear stance of affirmation and obeisance.²¹⁶ In all of my conversations with MM leaders no indication is ever given of a tactic of clandestine behavior toward government agencies. Direct inquires produce confident replies. Even the ambiguity of Pradeep’s statement quoted under this chapter’s title is declared directly: “We are not hiding from them – just not exposing before them [how] we enter the village.”

²¹⁶ For a discussion of stance, see Harris Berger’s *Stance: Ideas About Emotion, Style, and Meaning For The Study Of Expressive Culture* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2010).

While MM leaders have adopted a stance that is supportive of the state's position, there is no shortage of organizations accusing the government – the “government that sees” – of collusion in the 2008 hostilities. Various groups claim government “inaction,” “indifference,” or even a “well-orchestrated conspiracy that had the full support of the state,” when speaking of the 2008 riots.²¹⁷ However, none of the MM Christian leaders with whom I worked admitted to or gave evidence of holding this or any similar position against the state. In fact, these leaders remain adamant that cultural insensitivity on the part of Christians is the primary cause of anti-Christian sentiment, regardless of data or claims to the contrary.

Officially, India's national government is secular and endorses religious pluralism. Officially, Odisha's state government is the same. The Odisha Secretary of Culture claims the relationship between the state and Christians is historically supportive, even benevolent. He credits the state with creating an environment of religious plurality and freedom. He also credits the state's promotion of “oral tradition”, (what Askew terms “cultural production”) as a strong unifying influence in this relationship.²¹⁸ It is precisely this representation of “oral tradition” by the state that Maranatha Ministries calls upon in their acting in tactic – a performative approach that calls to mind the Tanzanian state's role as described by Askew.

²¹⁷ “Ethnic Cleansing of Christians by Hindutva Rightwing Forces in Orissa” published by Human Rights Law Network. Accessed April 17, 2014, http://hrln.org/beta/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=346:even-judges-wont-go-to-court-to-file-child-sexual-abuse-case&catid=123:news&Itemid=136.

²¹⁸ Kelly Askew, *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 160.

It is important to note that while many sources quoted in this chapter seem to represent the state as an autocratic power, the numerous tasks of governing a populace require considerable negotiative skill. The state must not only define citizenship but also deliver services, including protection, to a public that includes both citizens and non-citizens. It precisely this differentiation between defining citizenship and providing public services that prompts Chatterjee's notion of "political society."²¹⁹ The complexities of delivering services while governing various social movements results in the irregular distribution of the rights and privileges within the populace. This uneven environment is, in Chatterjee's terms, a modern "political society." One can see from the interviews with Odisha's Secretary of Culture that his office does not operate from a position of autocratic power but rather as one struggling through the difficult task of negotiating positive social and economic outcomes through the celebration and performance of "oral tradition." Askew identifies such performance as "a startlingly common recourse" on the part of state strategists whose task becomes "how to smooth over the inconsistencies and present an unified national front that blankets dissension and masks diversity."²²⁰ In this regard, the state, Maranatha Ministries, and indeed all of the entities represented here, including Hindutva, share a common challenge of accomplishing their various missions while simultaneously negotiating the territory of public opinion.

²¹⁹ See Partha Chaterjee's *Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

²²⁰ Askew, *Performing the Nation*, 2002, 6.

The carefully crafted stances of both Maranatha Ministries and government leaders described above stand in stark contrast to numerous claims of government complicity regarding the December 2008 violence, claims repeated by human rights groups such as the South Asian non-profit, Human Rights Law Network:

December 17, 2008 NEW DELHI, HRLN: The catalogue of incidents that took place in December 2007 then the further attacks from August 2008, indicate that the attacks were not isolated or sporadic incidents but were part of a well-orchestrated conspiracy, which had full support of the State Government. The inaction of the State with regard to the relief, rehabilitation and protection to the victims and the indifference of the police indicate that all this took place with their tacit approval, or worse, their active co-operation.

Police personnel were present during many of the attacks but on not a single occasion did the Police conduct a lathi [military baton] charge or fire at the assailants. The only incident of firing was on the 27 August 2008 at Bamanigaon when the Police opened fire and killed one of the victims of the assault. It appears that a decision was taken at the highest level to allow the assaults to continue as even when they were informed of the attacks they took no action.

Instead the State has attempted to criminalize and victimize the victims themselves, threatening to file false cases against them in order to deter them filing criminal complaints. In two cases victims of violent assaults were themselves arrested under the Forestry Act for timber found on their premises.²²¹

Because Maranatha Ministries has chosen a tactic to achieve a functional invisibility to the above modes of official and unofficial Odisha governance, the possibility of

²²¹ “Genocide in Kandhamal: Ethnic Cleansing of Christians by Hindutva Rightwing Forces in Orissa,” Human Rights Law Network. Accessed 04.27.2014, http://idsn.org/uploads/media/Orissa_report_-_Human_Rights_Law_Network.pdf.

participating in public activism similar to that of HRLN as a subaltern tactic is precluded. A public activist position would result in unwanted attention and a clear differentiation of these MM Christians from their Hindu neighbors – an “acting out” as it were.

In Odisha, Christians must navigate a local and regional politics, often played out in the public press, in which their enemy is and is not the State; their enemy is and is not Hinduism; their enemy is and is not Hindutva. In this ambiguous environment, the MM leaders have adopted a stance toward incidents of Hindu/Christian violence that names Christians as the guilty party and insensitive cultural practices as the offending actions. Maranatha Ministries’ orality tactic, elaborated and explained below, addresses these purported cultural offenses while maintaining fully respectful relations with the state. Among MM leaders, no room is permitted for either an overt critique of state action or a nuanced critique of state inaction. Acting in and orality become ethical projects that allow Oriya MM Christians to practice and promote their faith without arousing the attention or ire of various agents of surveillance. MM leaders employ a tactic of “acting in” in hopes that “the government that sees” will no longer recognize cultural difference between Oriya MM Christians and Oriya Hindus.

“The West”?

At times Satpathy and other MM leaders cite “the West” as a polluting influence that produces conflict in Odisha, demonstrating a propensity to conflate “the West” and “foreign.” A deeper inspection of MM dialogic practices reveals two qualifications to this claim. First, the flash point for violence is not caused so much by connections to the West as it is by the polluting influence of a Western culture that threatens to dominate “oral

traditions.” In the examples that follow, MM leaders claim that Western culture threatens to dominate “oral traditions,” potentially destroying the very practices that mark each local group as unique, practices celebrated by Odisha’s Ministry of Culture. Second, it is not so much a specifically *Western* culture that is at fault but rather any *foreign* practice that stirs animosity among Odisha’s governing entities, official or otherwise. For this reason, the abandonment of foreign cultural practices is essential for the achievement of MM Christian invisibility.

My argument here is not that MM Christians embrace a specifically Western Christianity. Part of what this ethnography seeks to make clear is that for Maranatha Ministries, Oriya Christianity remains locally informed and deeply meaningful as a pious practice regardless of its ideological roots. What I am arguing, however, is that prior to the 2008 riots, expressions of Christian faith and practice were heavily inflected by foreign practices, the continuation of which would place Oriya MM Christians at risk of violent opposition. Because of these risks, the practices of Oriya MM Christianity are changing. In the examples that follow, MM leaders continually conflate West, Western and foreign. These quotations are from a documentary film produced by Scriptures in Use, entitled *Man of Peace: The Storytellers of Odisha*.²²²

²²² *Man of Peace: The Storytellers of Odisha*, Scriptures in Use, 2013 DVD. This film’s production was sponsored by Scriptures in Use to communicate through story the transformation of ideology and methodology that has enabled the gospel message and the Christian church to take root in local Oriya villages. This film crew was in Odisha shooting footage for this video in February 2012 and were filming at the Oral Arts Festival when Satpathy declared, “Who can say the gospel is from the West? The gospel is from Orissa!” These were the words that inspired this dissertation project. It is rather ironic that both this dissertation and the post-production work of this film occurred simultaneously. I must admit to my jealousy that *Man of Peace* was published nearly two years before this dissertation. But now it is a useful research document.

Satpathy: “Sometimes a woman becomes a Christian and stops applying vermilion on her forehead or wearing bangles on her wrists and ankles because the missionaries told her these were a sign that she was still Hindu. But for the local people, the absence of vermilion or bangles is actually a sign that she is a widow. This is very confusing locally and is seen as an offense to the local culture. We don’t approve everything in culture - every culture has some things that are in conflict with Christianity, but there are many things that bridge the gap.”²²³

Pastor Jeet: The people of Kandhamal are very simple people, but they cannot tolerate outsiders or foreigners. They think that Christianity is a foreign religion, that this religion doesn’t belong here. To them, “Christians” are the lovers of Western things and Christians should go live in the West, they have no place in Kandhamal. In Kandhamal, if a man wears a full pant or shirt, they figure he got them from foreigners.”²²⁴

Pradeep: When the oral people see all these things, it’s easy to conclude that we have connections to Western countries, and that is why we are different in our clothing and culture. And that is why they [the Kandhamals] violently persecuted us.”²²⁵

Scriptures in Use (SUI) founder, Jim Bowman, also shares this view that a specifically Western culture is the central point of contention in Odisha’s Hindu/Christian violence. He, too, claims cultural methodologies, not religious beliefs, are the flashpoint for such violence.

Jim Bowman: What was being said all the time was “the Gospel is separating us from our people”; this was the complaint of local leaders. And of course Christians, Western missionaries, look at it and say, “Yeah, this is the gospel that is separating us.” [meaning nothing could be done to change the situation]. But it was not the gospel – it was our method and the way the message was being

²²³ Abhinav Satpathy, personal interview with the author in Nagpur, Maharashtra, India, February 10, 2013.

²²⁴ Pastor Jeet, *Man of Peace: The Storytellers of Odisha*, Scriptures in Use, 2013 DVD.

²²⁵ Pradeep Kumar, *Man of Peace . . . 2013*.

presented to them. And so a simple adjustment in the way we presented the gospel changed everything.²²⁶

Odisha's Secretary of Culture, Chitta Ranjan Mallia, however, is careful not to pit Western influences in opposition to the celebration of local culture in the interview presented earlier in this chapter. His response to my question about the roots of local violence cautiously celebrates a history of religious pluralism that includes "Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Saktism, Brahmanism, and so many religions."²²⁷ While he never names "the West," the Secretary does recognize "constructive" cultural influences coming from outside, "So [these are] not destructive, also constructive." He appears uncomfortable, however, when addressing this particular topic of inquiry and is careful not to say anything that could potentially disrupt relations between Odisha and the United States – relations that I represent as an American scholar.

Regardless of the Secretary's careful avoidance of any critique of the West, MM leaders are adamant in their avoidance of what they call Western practices and products, particularly the means by which their Christian gospel is presented and reinforced. The Bagharpalli ethnography of chapter two provides examples of such tactics. The excerpts from this ethnography repeated below exemplify a conscious approach to what Askew calls, "cultural production." When employed by the state, "cultural production" is a statist strategy, but when employed by the Oriya Christians of Maranatha Ministries, it becomes instead a subaltern tactic and an ethical project.

²²⁶ Jim Bowman, personal interview with the author September 18, 2013, St. Louis, MO.

²²⁷ Chitta Ranjan Mallia, Secretary, Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi. Interview by the author in the Secretary's Bhubaneswar office, February 19, 2014.

“Story is remembered, preaching is not,” is one of the phrases from the Bagharpalli ethnography of chapter two that marks a turn not just toward the local but away from foreign. Preaching is characterized by my interlocutors as an unproductive and even contentious foreign practice. Preaching is not remembered, preaching is not accepted, preaching is not understood, preaching does not cause people to pay attention, preaching is not natural, and preaching certainly does not “become real” in the village. Rather, according to most (but not all) of my interlocutors, preaching represents a distinctly foreign practice.

The idea that costume is “important in the village” also appears in the musician interviews found in chapter two. Having a proper costume is not simply connected to the appropriation of the local, as in Abhinash’s statement, “Without this [*dhoti*]- no *keertan*,” but includes the subtraction of that which is not local as well; as Gyan stated, “People who wear pants, that is not *keertan*.” The combination of putting off the foreign and the putting on the local, however, becomes “natural” to Santanu, who says, “with makeups and costume and all, naturally that becomes good and people like it.”

The jettisoning of foreign cultural practices is a key component of a Maranatha Ministries orality tactic in which Christians and Christian churches become undifferentiated from what the Secretary of Culture defines as Oriya oral tradition. Gone are the Colonial and New England style church buildings along with their accompanying organs, pianos and rows of pews; replacing them are worship meetings in mud homes or thatch and bamboo rooms with worshippers sitting cross-legged on the floor using local *dholak*, *khanjani* and *ginni* instruments. Gone are imported hymnals, song tunes and

lecture-style sermons; replacing them are Oriya melodies and poetic forms and the repetition of Bible stories. Gone also are business suits, neckties and women's dresses; replacing them are the local colors and varieties of *kurta*, *dhoti* and *sari*.

This process of taking off the foreign and putting on the local is expressed poignantly in the documentary film, *Man of Peace*, produced by SIU.²²⁸ The film portrays the shift from foreign ministry forms and styles to local processes and practices. The film defines these differences primarily in terms of “oral” versus “literate” methodologies; with “oral” referring to the rural village context and “literate” referring to practices formed under tutelage of Western academic and religious traditions. A pivotal scene in *Man of Peace* shows Satpathy in a bedroom removing his business suit, necktie, and dress shoes and replacing them with the flowing white *kurta* and *dhoti* of an Oriya *guru* [teacher], complete with *gamucha* (head sash) and sandals. This scene visually marks the transformation from the use of foreign forms and practices to those that are thoroughly Oriya. This transformation is reminiscent of the erasure of colonial markers such as the state's official name change from Orissa to Odisha. Throughout the film MM oral tactics emerge as successful in villages where “literate” approaches fall woefully short.

In spite of such efforts to achieve a functional invisibility by avoiding foreign practices, two continuing practices of MM Christians that threaten to make themselves stand out to “the government that sees”; these are conversion and caste upheaval.

²²⁸ *Man of Peace: The Storytellers of Odisha*, Scriptures in Use, 2013 DVD.

Conversion

Controversies agitated by conversion ripple through the various functions of government from legislation, to interpretation, to enforcement. Conversion, particularly Christian conversion, has become strongly identified as a culturally corrupting practice. Yet, for Maranatha Ministries, conversion remains a central tenet marking the transference of allegiance from a Hindu to a Christian faith practice. As such, this is one practice of Maranatha Ministries that threatens to expose Oriya MM Christians, differentiating them from local Hindus and thus thwarting efforts to attenuate a visibility that exposes them to anti-Christian violence.

A law was passed in 1967 to guard against forced, fraudulent or coerced conversion.

Provision number three of “The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967” states:

No person shall convert or attempt to convert, wither directly or otherwise, any person from one religious faith to another by the use of force or by inducement or by any fraudulent means nor shall any person abet any such conversion.²²⁹

While this legal document is entitled “The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967,” it is most commonly referred to as the “anti-conversion law.” The battle over meaning and language rages in both the courts and the public press over the proper interpretation of this law, with many pro-Hindu or Hindutva voices claiming all conversion to be unlawful.

²²⁹ “The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967” as published in Act 2 of 1968, p364. Retrieved via PRS Legislative Research (PRS). Accessed May 15, 2014.

In the following media excerpts, Christian conversion surfaces as a point of contention in the dialogue surrounding incidents of religious violence. Each author's bias becomes evident in the reports.

January 08, 2008 ReDiff India Abroad: However, if there is any one aspect that is pan-Indian in all the incidents related to Hindu-Christian clashes it is religious conversions. Even in Kandhamal district, one of the major factors fuelling tensions is the conversion campaign of the evangelical groups. It is noteworthy that in a state like Orissa which enacted anti-conversion laws as back as in 1967, the Christian population in Kandhamal district alone has grown from 6 per cent in 1970 to 27 percent in 2001.²³⁰

In the above article by Hindutva BJP vice president Ram Madhav, Madhav opposes conversion and blames “evangelical groups” for the resulting tensions. The next two accounts on the other hand, are from Christian media outlets; these criticize government attempts to limit conversions, characterizing such attempts as a “violation of human rights.”

November 09, 2012 Christianity Today: “Restrictions on religious conversion have "become a human rights problem of great concern," according to the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.

Speaking to the UN General Assembly last week, Heiner Bielefeldt said those violations need to stop. He urged states to "consistently respect, protect and promote the human right to freedom of religion or belief in the area of conversion." In 2011, CT noted the arrests of 12 people in India for converting to Christianity without notifying government officials first.²³¹

²³⁰ Ram Madhav “Local factors led to Kandhamal violence” January 08, 2008. Accessed April 17, 2014, <http://www.rediff.com/news/2008/jan/08guest.htm?zcc=rl>.

²³¹ “The Most Troubling Violation of Human Rights? Conversion,” Melissa Steffan, 11/9/2012 06:40AM. Accessed May 09, 2014, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2012/november/most-troubling-violation-of-human->

June 14, 2010 BHUBANESWAR, India (AsiaNews) - Even if peace is slowly returning to the District of Kandhamal, the State of Orissa continues to be the scene of anti-Christian violence. A young Christian was recently beaten, tortured and dragged into the middle of his village, where his tormentors forced him to undergo a ceremony of reconversion to Hinduism // During their rampage, the hooligans took away four Bibles. Before dragging the young man out, they also tortured him. On their way to the local Hindu temple, they beat him. Inside the building, amid kicks, slaps and insults, they "re-converted" him to Hinduism. Local police moved in the day after. Superintendent Bibek Rath arrested five of the six assailants, Siba Prasad Jha (22), Bijoy Punji (20), Samita Patra (23), Girish Panda (23) and Jasobanta Ada (20), and charged them. Then, he let them go. Sajan K George, national president of the Global Council of Indian Christians, told AsiaNews that the kind of violence is not random. "There are hidden interests behind the threats and violence against the Christian community in Orissa. Just as the community was slowly learning to live a normal life again after the 2008 pogroms, we get this kind of violence."²³²

It is clear from the articles above that conversion remains a highly-contested practice in public discourse and those who practice conversion risk both verbal and physical retribution.

Despite risks of public exposure, MM churches continue to promote and practice conversion as well as water baptisms that signify conversion. The timing and public-ness of baptisms are conditioned by the rootedness of the Christianity in the local community. In general "giving baptism in public is a risky thing now," according to Santanu, in some

[rights-conversion-says.html](#).

²³² Nirmala Carvalho, "Orissa, India: More Anti-Christian Persecution. Hindu Extremists Torture Christians." Accessed May 07, 2014,

<http://www.catholic.org/news/international/asia/story.php?id=36942>.

situations it can be done but that “depends on the individual’s decision.”²³³ Baptism and conversion remain controversial in the public domain and Christians avoid using the term conversion, because, according to Santanu, “non-believers will generally not support it.”²³⁴

Caste upheaval

In addition to conversion, caste upheaval is a second point of contention that stirs fears of cultural erosion. The breakdown of caste is viewed by some as a threat to accepted ways of being in Oriya society, a threat often attributed to modernization and issues of foreign corruption. Caste issues become intertwined with conversion in regions where large numbers of Scheduled Tribes (ST) or Scheduled Caste (SC)²³⁵ people have become Christians. In these places, conversion to Christianity can enable a path to employment that circumvents the local restrictions of caste, allowing lower caste people access to jobs that were previously unavailable to them. In the first example below, Scheduled Tribe (ST) Christians demand Scheduled Caste (SC) status in spite of recent legislation that clearly states, “no person professing a religion different from the Hinduism or Sikhism or Buddhism can be deemed to be a member of Scheduled

²³³ Santanu Subudhi, email communication with the author, July 30, 2014.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Scheduled Caste (SC) as a governmental classification is defined on the website for the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes as follows: “The framers of the Constitution took note of the fact that certain communities in the country were suffering from extreme social, educational and economic backwardness arising out of age-old practice of untouchability and certain others on account of this primitive agricultural practices, lack of infrastructure facilities and geographical isolation, and who need special consideration for safeguarding their interests and for their accelerated socio-economic development. These communities were notified as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as per provisions contained in Clause 1 of Articles 341 and 342 of the Constitution respectively.” Accessed June 09, 2014, <http://ncst.nic.in/index.asp?langid=1>.

Castes.²³⁶ Financial resources are at stake. As stated in chapter one, the Indian government provides assistance for Scheduled Caste people in the form of reservations (hiring quotas) for government posts. These quotas guarantee a certain number of secure government positions for Scheduled Caste persons, positions that are often passed down to a family member when someone retires. In this way, a prized government job can financially sustain one family for generations. However, the dilemma remains that the Indian government refuses to officially recognize any non-Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist person as Scheduled Caste. As such, even the politics among the lowest castes are unequal.

MM leaders classify the real life effects of caste as demeaning and discriminatory.

Pastor Jagadeesh [speaking of the Hadi, a Scheduled Caste]: In their society, although they are human beings, they are the most hated of all creatures. They are untouchables, and are not even allowed to eat their meals inside the village.²³⁷

Satpathy: [speaking of the Hadi]: They cannot put on a slipper or a flip-flop and work in the village, because that is considered to be the thing that the upper class people do. Hadi people are mostly used for cleaning the toilets and the sewer lines.²³⁸

MM pastors glow with pride when speaking of the newfound self-worth experienced by Scheduled Caste people who follow Jesus Christ. The prospect of a SC person gaining a new identity in Christ invigorates these leaders, many of whom come from SC

²³⁶ “Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.” Accessed 07.31.14, http://persmin.gov.in/DOPT/Brochure_Reservation_SCSTBackward/Ch-08_2014.pdf.

²³⁷ Pastor Jagadeesh, *Man of Peace: The Storytellers of Odisha*, Scriptures in Use, 2013 DVD. I will be returning to a discussion of this film later in this chapter.

²³⁸ Abhinav Satpathy, *Man of Peace: The Storytellers of Odisha*, Scriptures in Use, 2013 DVD.

backgrounds themselves. Pastor Arul, a young musical leader of an acting in troupe, likens his previous Hadi identity to that of being a leper and speaks with great enthusiasm of how Jesus was not afraid to touch lepers or even heal them. Thus, despite the risks to a strategy of invisibility, MM leaders celebrate the “cultural lift” made possible by conversion to Christianity.

Those opposing conversion claim such a breakdown in the social order will leave no one to accomplish tasks that exceed the purity regulations for upper caste residents. MM leaders recognize the perception that conversion is a perceived threat to the social order of caste but disregard it as overstatement. Satpathy describes the social transformations made possible by conversion, employing hyperbole below when he describes the Pana as “no longer available to be used and abused.”

Satpathy: There are a large percentage of Pana in this region and conversion has upended the social system; people are no longer available to be used and abused as the outcastes. Once they become Christians they are able to find better jobs because of their new connections and relationships. Now the Pana are no longer available to serve in these tasks that no one else wants to do.²³⁹

Satpathy later tempered this exaggeration of the cultural impact of conversion by affirming that there remain sufficient numbers of unconverted Pana to support the traditional social order. Nonetheless, his statement validates the nature of the articulated concern even if it questions the social import.

²³⁹ Abhinav Satpathy, personal interview with the author in Nagpur, Maharashtra, India, February 10, 2013.

Modern day Odisha as a “political society”

From the previous discussion, it becomes clear that the Christians of today’s Odisha find themselves in a social context in which the rights, privileges and responsibilities officially attributed to Odisha’s populace are realized unequally, even though Oriya Christians remain within the rubric of “citizen.” The inequities of this ever-changing political environment demand continual adaptation for Christian survival and practice. Partha Chatterjee’s concept of “political society” is certainly apt in depicting the modern State of Odisha in which citizenship does not guarantee an equitable share in privileges or government services.²⁴⁰ Chatterjee describes the modern Indian political society as one in which “most of the inhabitants of India are only tenuously, and even then ambiguously and contextually, rights-bearing citizens in the sense imagined by the constitution.”²⁴¹ The tactics of both acting in and orality are made necessary by the risks inherent in minority status in Odisha. Acting in performances thus become part of the “tenuous logic of tactical politics in political society.”²⁴² For these Oriya MM Christians, this tactical politics includes acting in through authenticated performances of oral tradition, as well as the removal of anything that could signify a corrupting foreign influence to their Oriya neighbors. Additionally, the tenuous logic of these politics includes a carefully crafted stance in which MM leaders claim their orality tactic is not related to Hindu/Christian unrest.

²⁴⁰ Partha Chatterjee, *Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 3.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 17.

Political society necessitates a stance that denies the causality of risk

At this point I have unpacked a highly complex tactical approach to being “100% Oriya and 100% believer in Jesus Christ” in modern Odisha, a stance-on-power that includes a denial that Hindu/Christian violence arises from the general populace, and the claim that such violence arises not so much from religious conflict as from the threat of corrupting foreign cultural practices. The MM tactics of both orality and acting in serve to minimize this risk. At the same time, MM Christians continue to practice both Christian conversion and baptism, each of which increases risk. The discussion that follows gives greater nuance to the various facets of this stance.

As part of their stance-on-power my MM interlocutors continually denied a direct cause and effect relationship between their orality tactic and the riots of 2008. Leaders claim instead that their tactics are simply a matter of effectiveness in communicating the gospel and not a means of limiting risk. However, I claim this as another example of the elusive nature of risk in this project – and another facet of the Maranatha Ministries stance-on-power. In what follows I offer some dialogic examples that elucidate risk and implicate a tactical response on behalf of Maranatha Ministries.

In this first exchange, Santanu attempts to diminish perceptions that acting in performances comprise a tactical response to 2008 riots. He claims instead that subsequent to 2008, orality was developed simply as an effective evangelism strategy. I cite his response here to indicate the year 2008 as a temporal marker dividing before and after.

Doug: Is this cultural performance a change as a result of the persecution that happened in 2008? Or is this something that is new?

Santanu: No, not necessarily. Before that [2008 persecution] we didn't know about this. So in 2008 only we came to know about all of these things. It's not that because of persecution we are using cultural program, but it came during that time.

Nevertheless, in the following exchange Santanu not only recognizes the 2008 violence as a temporal marker for a change in mission tactics, but also makes clear that it is not just successful evangelism, but survival that is at stake:

Doug: "Do you ever do big drama in the middle of town?"

Santanu: "Yeah, it was happening before, but *after the outbreak of this persecution* that [drama performances in the middle of town] is not there." [emphasis added]

Pastor Jagadeesh and Pastor Raja also demonstrate a temporal reference to 2008 as well as an overt connection between orality tactics and decreased persecution.

Pastor Jagadeesh: Because we do relevant things, people are attracted to us. The people are *no longer* provoked by us, and *now* there is no persecution [of] our churches.²⁴³ [emphasis added]

Pastor Raja: *Previously* people were extremely hostile towards Christianity, but *now* that's changing. More and more people are coming to [the] faith every day."²⁴⁴ [emphasis added]

This denial by MM leaders of overt connections between their present orality tactics and Hindu/Christian violence is, I believe, yet one more example of the tactical politics

²⁴³ Pastor Jagadeesh, *Man of Peace* DVD.

²⁴⁴ Pastor Raja, *Man of Peace* DVD.

required for successful navigation of the inequities of political society in contemporary Odisha. What is yet another instance of a stance-on-power that denies not only the co-presence of those who perpetrate anti-Christian violence, but also denies the historical import of the riots themselves and their influence on acting in tactics.

Political society necessitates tactical discursive practices

Through “acting in”, MM performers gradually release information in order to control the terms of dialogue, allowing new ideas to emerge in the village context as accepted, natural and understood. When questioned about the reasoning for controlling the release of information, Satpathy speaks of “not pouring water into a closed mouth”: by this he means not giving information until the person has become open to receive it. Satpathy then presented his orality strategy as illustration:

Stone-clearing

Don't include [mention] Jesus right away - not in any songs initially. You are getting people on board with what you do with your entertainment, your music and dances, first. So in stone clearing phase your songs and your arts would focus only on the truth without controversies [no mention of Jesus, God or Christianity]

Sowing

In sowing stage you give the Word of God [Bible stories], because the nature of the people changes from an antagonistic nature to an inquiring nature. In the second level, in sowing stage, inquiry comes, questions come, but they are not repulsive questions, they are something of a seeker. The questions will be different with them. Like: “Why do you do this what you do?” “There is a big difference in you and other parties that have come to our village – you keep smiling, you are very happy - what is the reason for it?”

Watering

In the first phase, in stone clearing stage, you talk about all the truth, but not about God. In the sowing phase, starting the

performances but [still] not mentioning God, but other things like creation, like fall. In watering phase, talk about God but not about Jesus.

Harvesting

Then comes harvesting. The people say, “You have been talking about ‘God’ and ‘God’ – which God are you talking about?” All the songs from the gospel comes in right here: starting from the virgin birth of Jesus, getting into the miracles and baptisms. The death of Jesus and resurrection.²⁴⁵

The gradual release of information that Satpathy has just outlined is a discursive practice meant to control the terms of village dialogue. This tactical control of discursive practice is also demonstrated in the following exchange between Santanu, Abhinash and myself. The conversation below connects acting in performances to diminished opposition and also incorporates temporal markers, such as “then,” “before,” and “now” throughout. In addition, this dialogue also contrasts oral strategies such as story, songs and drama with the literate tactic of preaching.

Santanu: So he says this story telling and singing then drama – this is effective in the villages. Yeah.

Abhinash: And the Hindu people are not opposing, also. We are doing drama and songs and skits and they are not opposing. If we are coming to that place and directly speak the Bible [preaching], then they are opposing

Doug: You are telling the stories now?

Abhinash: *Then* [before] they [Christian pastors] are directly telling [preaching].

²⁴⁵ Abhinav Satpathy, personal interview with the author in Nagpur, Maharashtra, India, February 10, 2013. The portions of the conversation presented here are a small but representative portion of a more extensive discussion.

Santanu: But *they* [Hindu villagers] *don't not know the stories are from the Bible*. Simply they [Christian performers] are telling story and explaining about God *but the time will come* when they [Christian performers] will say [openly], 'all these stories are from the Bible.'”

Abhinash: “And *they* [Christians] *don't have any Bible or anything in their hand right now – so people will not identify them* [as Christians].” So it takes time.

Doug: Do you think these performances help to break down the tension between Christian and Hindu, do they make it seem like Christians are more a part of your culture?

Abhinash translated by Santanu: “It does reduce that tension.”

Santanu: I realized this was the best way to reach our people with the gospel of Jesus. So I thought, “Why shouldn't we take this strategy back to Orissa?” I shared this with brother Abhinav and he agreed this strategy was right for Orissa. *That's how we started the oral strategy in Orissa.*²⁴⁶ [emphasis added throughout]

What becomes clear through these discussions is that the “orality strategy” employed by MM leaders to produce an enculturated Oriya gospel is not, itself from Odisha but is instead a borrowed tactic.

Acting in as an ethical project

Despite the degree of political work being accomplished, acting in was birthed in this marginalized Christian citizenry not from ideas of subjugation or domination of other social groups, but rather as one of numerous possible tactics for Christian survival.

Neither the tactical choices nor their outcomes are predetermined amidst the political uncertainties experienced by Christians. Attendance at acting in performances is purely

²⁴⁶ Santanu Subudhi, personal interview with the author in his hotel room after a *keertan* performance in the village of Kandhamal, February 23, 2014.

voluntary and partially dependent on prior relationships. In addition, audience members are always free to leave or to verbalize disagreement during the question and answer sessions.

Viewing acting in as an ethical project helps to clarify it as a tactic of social survival formed not against the State, nor against Hindus, nor against Hindutva, but rather formed for the benefit of Oriya Christians and, at least in the minds of MM Christians, for the benefit of local villagers who have yet to hear the Christian gospel. In Skinner's terms, MM Christians are thus able to establish their own agency without refusing "the right of others to act on the world."²⁴⁷ The insistence by MM leaders that cultural insensitivity by Christians is the catalyst for outbreaks of violence maps squarely onto the negotiated framework of Skinner's "ethical project" concept, as does their refusal to fix any blame on the state for either an action of collusion or the inaction of delayed police response.

Other Christian ministries in the region have adopted stances that vary considerably from this one, with some actively calling for government reform and others passively calling for prayer. The multiplicity of tactical possibilities characterize this project as ambiguous in that both the definitive means and the consequences are undetermined. The ambiguity of tactical options available to MM leaders is made evident through published statements from a variety of Christian ministries whose tactics differ significantly from those of Maranatha Ministries.

²⁴⁷ Ryan Thomas Skinner, *Bamako Sounds: The Afropolitan Ethics of Malian Music*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 09.

The Catholic Church in particular has remained outspoken towards governments, both state and local, for not controlling “radical Hindu extremists.” Statements by Catholic officials regularly call attention to the plight of Oriya Christians in terms of citizenship and rights, stating that “The Christians of Kandhamal have lost faith in the state government, and they feel that their fundamental right to live has been totally taken away by the constitutionally elected government.”²⁴⁸ Catholic leaders directly accuse Odisha’s governing bodies of abdicating responsibility and withholding protection, justice, and services to the point of collusion with the extremist parties.²⁴⁹

Public responses from Baptist organizations vary from overt accusations of persecution describing the “atrocities of August 2008” as a “bloodbath” enacted by “angry Hindu mobs,”²⁵⁰ to the local Gajapati Baptist Church in Odisha, which identifies themselves as a persecuted church while at the same time adopting a tactic of blessing and prayer towards their aggressors.²⁵¹ The Southern Baptist Convention in the US created an Ethics and Civil Liberties Commission (ELRC) that attempts to mobilize international political machinery to address injustices that it identifies around the world. The ERLC claims their impact “stretches from homes across the nation to Capitol

²⁴⁸ “More homes burned in Orissa. Statement by the bishops,” Nirmala Carvalho. Accessed May 07 2014, <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=13526&theme=8&size=A>.

²⁴⁹ See “Life a nightmare again for Orissa Christians says Indian churches’ leader,” Peter Kenny Friday, May 09, 2014. Accessed May 09, 2014, <http://www.ecumenicalnews.com/article/life-a-nightmare-again-for-orissa-christians-says-indian-churches-leader-24735>. See as well, “Orissa: government forbids rebuilding of destroyed churches.” Catholic World News., Accessed May 09, 2014, <https://www.catholicculture.org/news/headlines/index.cfm?storyid=11466>.

²⁵⁰ Caroline Anderson, “Baptists help persecuted Christians rebuild lives,” Baptist Press, October 28, 2010. Accessed May 09, 2014, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/religion/2616668/posts>.

²⁵¹ This local church quotes from Romans 12 to establish themselves as a persecuted church that chooses to pray for those who persecute them. Baptist Gajapati, Orissa. Accessed May 09, 2014, <http://odiasammilani.hubpages.com/hub/Utkal-Baptist-Mandali-Sammilani-Gajapati-Orissa>,

Hill.”²⁵² After the 2008 Kandhamal violence the ERLC claims to have exerted pressure on the U.S. President George Bush and congressional leaders to respond in defense of Oriya Christians.²⁵³

Lutheran agencies vary in their published responses. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) calls on its members to, “pray for all victims of religious persecution, both Christians and non-Christians, and for their oppressors,” without ever actually identifying an oppressor group in the world.²⁵⁴ The language of the ELCA appears to be carefully avoiding inflammatory labels when compared to publications of the Lutheran Church of Canada that mention murdered VFP leader Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati by name as an organizer of “Hindu extremists” they accused of attacking Christians.²⁵⁵

There are several India-based agencies committed to raising awareness of religious persecution, these include persecution.in,²⁵⁶ persecution.org,²⁵⁷ The National Human Rights Commission,²⁵⁸ and the Human Rights Law Network.²⁵⁹ Each of these organizations regularly issues statements and advocates for those whom they identify as victims of human rights violations (religious and otherwise) throughout Asia.

²⁵² See <http://erlc.com/erlc/about/>. Accessed May 09, 2014.

²⁵³ See <http://erlc.com/article/erlc-urges-us-action-on-orissa-violence>. Accessed May 09, 2014.

²⁵⁴ “Persecution of Christian SPR99
<http://download.elca.org/ELCA> Resource
accessed May 09, 2014.

²⁵⁵ “India’s cycle of anti-Christian violence continues,” THE CANADIAN LUTHERAN, March 2009. Accessed May 09, 2014, <http://www.lutheranchurch.ca/canluth/nn0309.pdf>.

²⁵⁶ See <http://persecution.in>. Accessed May 07, 2014.

²⁵⁷ See www.persecution.org/about-us/. Accessed May 09, 2014.

²⁵⁸ <http://www.nhrc.nic.in>. Accessed May 07, 2014.

²⁵⁹ <http://www.hrln.org>. Accessed May 07, 2014.

In contrast to various tactical approaches of outrage and condemnation towards the state discussed above, Maranatha Ministries chooses instead to affirm the protective role of local and state governments and to maintain a stance that claims violent offenders are brought in from outside the region. As stated previously, a public activist position would result in unwanted attention and a clear differentiation of these Christians from their Hindu neighbors, or what I would call an “acting out.”

Government precedent for this ethical project

Acting as an ethical project builds on the premise that Oriya identity can be determined through the performance of oral tradition. Paradoxically, Odisha’s government itself has established this practice through the sponsorship of cultural performances of oral tradition for the purposes of both tourism and the affirmation of local cultural groups.

The Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Tourism sponsor many oral tradition performances and competitions throughout Odisha as an official project of the state. The State of Odisha annually invests 6586.07 lakh Indian Rupees (roughly \$10.5 million USD) for the promotion of tourism in the state. The tourism department serves primarily to “increase tourist traffic to the State, extend their duration of stay, promote and position Odisha as one of the preferred destinations both in the domestic & international

markets.”²⁶⁰ The departments of Tourism and Culture have been officially under one umbrella since 1973.

Eco-tourism is a form of tourism that focuses on environmental, financial and human sustainability and has become a major focus in developing countries since the UN declared an International Year of Eco-Tourism in 2002. The maintenance of tourism sites as pristine environments is vital, as are fiscal processes that enable tourism revenues to provide for the operation and preservation of tourist sites as well providing employment in under-resourced regions of the globe.²⁶¹ According to government statistics, in 2012-13 Odisha tourism generated 3,711,825 visitors from outside the state, visitors who spent 1815.47 crore India Rupees (roughly \$290 million USD) during their stay,²⁶² as such eco-tourism is a big business.

The Secretary of Culture, Chitta Ranjan Mallia, claims the celebration of local culture is integral to the goals of government tourism endeavors:

Secretary Mallia: Arts ... but culture is such a subject, it gives boost to tourism. Tourism has to depend on the culture. Because culture you see – what you call the tangible and the intangible – that comes under this. You have this monument – that comes under culture. You have this temple – that comes under culture. You have the dams – that comes under culture. You have this music, the

²⁶⁰ “Annual Activities Report 2012-13,” Department of Tourism: Government of Odisha, item 3.1. Note the use of Orissa here in official documents subsequent to the 2010 name change.

²⁶¹ Bhagyalaxmi Mahaptra, *Ethnic Dances and Music of Western Orissa: An Anthropological Study Towards Promoting Eco-Tourism* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company Pvt. LTD, 2011), 120.

²⁶² “Performance Budget 2012-13,” Department of Tourism: Government of Odisha item 7.3.

folk songs, so many things – that comes under culture. If tourism is to be strength – then that has to be promoted – the culture.²⁶³

The presentation or performance of “culture” thus becomes a primary means of promoting the State of Odisha for tourism purposes. In so doing, the state defines what it means to be Oriya by means of these same performances and material culture.

The State of Odisha also promotes Buddhist pilgrimage tourism with the hopes of attracting wealthy Asians to visit many of the world’s oldest Buddhist temples many of which are beautifully preserved in modern Odisha.²⁶⁴ The resulting influx of wealthy Buddhists will most certainly affect the values placed on Buddhist practice and may produce a subsequent rise in economic and social status for Buddhist religious leaders – a development that could further complicate the inter-faith relations and cooperation that are central to this dissertation research.

Review

In this chapter, the tactics of acting in are investigated as decidedly political actions. It is through acting in performances, and the jettisoning of foreign practices, that MM Christians become functionally invisible to various means of surveillance – including that of the state itself. These are not, however, political actions against state or local governments, nor are they political actions against other social groups be they political or religious. The tactics of acting in are, rather, ethical projects through which the Oriya

²⁶³ Chitta Ranjan Mallia, Secretary, Odisha Snageet Natak Akademi. Personal interview with the author in the Secretaries’ Bhubaneswar office, February 19, 2014.

²⁶⁴ Lisa Tsering, “Orissa, Andhra Pradesh Promote Buddhist Tourism,” in *India-West* (San Leandro, CA), March 26, 2010, B20.

Christians of Maranatha Ministries establish and perform their own agency while preserving the agency and rights of other citizens and even the state itself.

The ethical tactics of acting in enable MM Christian individuals and MM Christian churches to carve out a social space in which it is possible to be fully Indian, fully Oriya, fully Bagharpalli while still being fully Christian. As Satpathy exclaimed, “We are 100% Oriya and 100% believer in Jesus Christ.”²⁶⁵ Satpathy’s claim requires a carefully nuanced relational position, a performative stance-on-power that takes into account MM Christians, the State of Odisha, Oriya village culture, an evangelical church in the West and sponsoring Western agencies such as Scriptures in Use and Freedom to Lead, International. Acting in thus creates a new way of being in the Oriya world, and a new way of being Oriya in the world - one that includes a practice of Christian piety.

Acting in not only establishes Christian agency but minimizes risk caused by the uneven experiences of citizenship in the modern political society of present-day Odisha. The presence of risk further necessitates a stance by MM leaders of “not hiding but not exposing” their tactics to the “government that sees.” Ironically, invisibility to the state is achieved through performance of oral tradition, – a practice first employed by the state itself.

The following chapter examines a different mode of acting in performance. Rather than creating distance from the West, this acting in performance seeks to generate the good graces of sponsoring Western agencies. Chapter four places the private performance

²⁶⁵ Satpathy made this claim on several occasions both public and private during my four years of interaction with him.

of verbatim scriptures in the house church in direct contrast to the public performance of highly-stylized, epic versions of Christian scriptures. These performances will be viewed through Harris Berger's stance-on-power to reveal an orientation towards multiple communities, representing multiplicity of relationships requiring continuous management.

When viewed together, the two different acting in performances – the Bagharpalli street performance of chapter two and the verbatim house church performance of chapter four – will demonstrate a careful, tenuous, multi-faceted stance-on-power in the unpredictable political terrain of modern Odisha. This stance enables both a deepening embeddedness in the village and a functional invisibility to agents of surveillance without foregoing the financial, moral and spiritual support available through vital relationships to sponsoring Western agencies. This stance diminishes risk on one side and paradoxically increases risk on the other.

Chapter 4

Acting in to beneficial relationships with the West.

“I think we haven’t discussed those things”²⁶⁶

The previous two chapters of this dissertation examined acting in as a performative tactic and ethical project that enables relations between MM Christians and local villagers and between MM Christians and various forms of governance. Chapter two examined the cultural work accomplished through village acting in performances that enable Christians and their stories to become accepted, remembered, understood, natural and become real in the village. Chapter three, on the other hand, drew out the political work accomplished through acting in performances in relations between Oriya MM Christians and the forces that might find it politically expedient to govern Christians as a separate entity. It detailed how acting in, along with a jettisoning of foreign practices, enables Oriya MM Christians to become functionally invisible to various means of governance. Collectively, these chapters exemplify a performative stance-on-power that facilitates and attempts to stabilize a plurality of relationships.

This chapter examines a different kind of acting in, one that does not minimize a Western Christian identity but rather maximizes it in specific ways. This acting in takes place not in the in the openness of village streets, but rather in the seclusion of a house

²⁶⁶ Sanatu Subudhi, spoken in the context of a group interview following a village performance on July 29, 2013.

church. This performance employs verbatim scripture recitation instead of epic, dramatized scripture stories. It is through this very different mode of acting in that the fluid nature of Oriya Christianity emerges most dramatically. Oriya MM Christians practice a Christianity that borrows from both Oriya Hinduism and Western Christian evangelicalism to inform and enable meaningful Christian piety and devotional expression.

Through the ethnographic accounts and interviews below I tease out a series of ideological and practical tensions resulting from the various practices of scripture presentation by MM Christians, particularly the frictions surrounding the verbatim scripture recitation in the Kusasinga house church. These tensions appear dialogically as points of conflict and matters of contention in which speakers at times disagree with their own previous statements or practices. Through these dialogues, this chapter demonstrates the contingent and contextual nature of meaning articulated by MM leaders who negotiate and maintain an increasingly complex plurality of relationships.

The network of relationships in this ethnography depicts a different kind of stance from that of chapters two and three. This chapter's stance is a multi-faceted one that creates resonance with Oriya (in this case Hadi) historical scripture practices thus enabling verbatim scripture recitation to "become a pious thing" within this village house church.²⁶⁷ This chapter's mode of acting in also creates resonance between MM house church practices and the evangelical orthodoxy of sponsoring agencies in the West so that

²⁶⁷ "Becomes a pious thing" is a quote from Abhinav Satpathy, personal interview with the author in Nagpur, Maharashtra, India, February 10, 2013. Longer portions of this interview appear throughout this chapter.

verbatim scripture recitation, in a sense, “becomes an orthodox thing”.²⁶⁸ The resulting relationship between MM churches and their sponsoring evangelical agencies in the West not only facilitates a Christian fellowship but also makes possible the continued flow of resources that this fellowship represents. This different kind of acting in depicts an alternate kind of spatial practice, one that accomplishes a functional invisibility to means of surveillance through the physical seclusion of the house church while maintaining a functional visibility to sponsoring agencies in the West.

A different kind of acting in

The clearest signs of modernization in this region of Odisha are the aluminum factories themselves, with gleaming concrete buildings rising more than ten stories and smoke stacks reaching hundreds of feet into the sky. The scene is reminiscent of the steel mills of Pittsburgh in the 1970s but without the soot. The electric lights of the factories glimmer to excess while the world around is a dusty, dimly-lit, single-story existence in which shop owners sleep on woven mats only feet from their counters. Enormous, overloaded trucks plow the streets like large ships in busy channels as smaller vehicles make way and then jostle again for position in the wake of their passing. Across the street from carefully guarded factory entrances are neatly fenced corrals filled with thousands of bicycles, proudly proclaiming their owners’ entrance into a new and growing middle class – a class expansion from which the worshippers we are about to meet are excluded.

We exit our SUV in the dusty outskirts of Hularisingha in the industrial region of Angul. The Hadi people who live and worship here are a Scheduled Caste (SC) and not permitted to live in the towns or villages proper. “The Hadi are the lowest of the low caste,” Santanu explained, “there is no one beneath them.” I follow Santanu and Pastor Jagadeesh as we wend our way along litter-strewn paths between houses and structures of mud, brick and wood and skirt numerous empty lots. In a small clearing we are greeted warmly by several men and a rather dignified, confident

²⁶⁸ “Becomes an orthodox thing” is not a quote from any of my interlocutors, but rather a phrase that I have created to stand in for a parallelism between the two different modes of “acting in” presented in this dissertation.

women who is introduced as Kalindee Badnayak, the pastor of this little house church. Santanu and Pastor Jagadeesh join the group's discussion in the local Sambalpuri language. Once again, my Hindi is of little use in following their discussion.

A young man, apparently appointed to be my host, enthusiastically waves me into a small bamboo structure with woven bamboo walls and a roof of thatch and leaves. I remove my sandals, duck through the entrance and sit as directed on one of several red resin chairs that have been brought in for "special guests" in the cool shade of this twenty by twenty foot room. A grey vinyl tarpaulin covers the red clay earth. Sunlight streams through gaps in the walls and roof, glistening off the many-colored foil streamers decorating the peaked ceiling. A shiny white ceiling fan mounted in the center of the peaked roof indicates the small congregation is well established and prioritizes resources for worship. By local standards the temperature is cool, so the fan remains still. The young man reappears with unopened bottles of water, one for each anticipated guest – a welcome sight for this fatigued foreigner. I smile and nod my thanks although I cannot discern his face in the brilliant glare of the doorway behind.

Six women dressed in *saris* of magenta, turquoise and amber sit cross-legged on the gray tarpaulin with their children to my right. Other women and children gradually enter to join them. The men gather to my left, one with a *dholak* (a double-headed drum), several with *chimta jhand* (jingle sticks) or *khanjani* (tambourines) – most are wearing well-worn pants, clean t-shirts or button-down shirts – clothing typical of that donated from American relief agencies. I smile and nod whenever eye contact occurs, respond with a handshake to those who come forward, and rise to bow respectfully with palms pressed together before shaking hands with those who are brought to me for a formal introduction.

I was told the service would begin at ten o'clock, but it is now ten thirty and people are still milling about. The room is slowly filling with women and children to my right and men to my left. The men who first greeted me continue their energetic discussion just beyond the doorway, occasionally dispatching an individual for some task, hurriedly completing preparations for the service.

In my efforts to arrange attendance at this Hadi worship service, I sought to make it clear that I desired to observe a "normal" house church service – no special

accommodations for a foreign guest, no preaching or songs from me, no special musical presentations or additional musicians from them – just a service as it would normally happen on a weekend, in this case Sunday morning. But as the service unfolds I have no idea what is about to happen.

My interpreter, Santanu, and Pastor Jagadeesh join me on the red resin chairs. The young Pastor Arul, now standing among the male musicians, invites the twenty-five people gathered to join him as he leads out in song. He is dressed in a long-sleeved, button-down dress shirt, pumpkin in color and gray pinstriped slacks with black belt and shoes. When Arul concentrates his face is serious – even stern, but when he sings his smile can light up a room. I enjoy this opportunity to watch his ebullient performance again today.

Arul is a key church leader and musician in this region of Odisha. He and I have worked together in our roles with the North Carolina-based NGO, Freedom to Lead, International (FTL). Arul was part of a music team composing songs in local genres to accompany a leadership development curriculum designed for what FTL calls “storycentric” learners. My task as an FTL team member was to guide the song development process and to record songs that were composed for the FTL curriculum. Once again my roles as scholar, Christian pastor, and NGO worker are conflated at the site of my fieldwork.

The *dholak*, *khanjani*, and *chimta jhand* skillfully support the singing; the people clap along also, making clear their understanding of musical time for this song. The energy increases steadily as the congregation progresses from song to song. Arul is now sweating, now singing, now shouting between the sung lines; now jumping, now dancing to the rhythmic strains. Many stand to clap and sing. Arul’s wide eyes and upturned face exude a passionate fervor for his God and for this music as those around him surrender space for his embodied zeal. The men to my left

vigorously engage both their voices and instruments. Most women sing with smiling, upturned faces but a few keep their gaze downward as if shy. Three young girls take care of small children while several babies are nursed by seated mothers. The children are rarely still and become quite energetic during the most intense singing.

Twenty-three minutes and three songs later, the youthful Pastor Arul prays with great fervor and emotion, his words punctuated by congregational utterances, some of which I recognize as “Amens.” After prayer the people are seated.

I have not included musical transcriptions of these worship songs here because my purpose in this chapter is to demonstrate the difference between the use of verbatim scripture reading in this Hadi house church as opposed to the epic stylized scriptural narrative presented on Bagharpalli village streets for a Hindu audience. The scriptures in Bagharpalli were performed through songs, drama, and dance, but here among these Hadi Christians the scriptures are performed as verbatim recitation. The scriptures will be presented in italics below.

Other words of direction from Pastor Kalindee follow before we honored guests are introduced. Each of us rises in turn from our resin chairs to give words of greeting and offer thanks for the warm hospitality. I am grateful to have avoided a preaching role here (on other occasions I have been asked to preach) but I do wonder if I were neither a pastor nor a member of FTL if I would have been permitted to simply set up my recording equipment and take up a less-conspicuous position in the rear.

The pastor announces that Kalapriya Badnayaak will be presenting a special song that she has composed. The people’s eyes light up with expectation; whispers abound particularly among the women and children in expressions of eager anticipation. Kalapriya, a tall woman with a larger frame than most, carries herself with modest humility as she slowly picks her way through the seated worshippers to stand next to Pastor Kalindee. The pastor announces that tithes and offerings will be collected as Kalapriya

sings – a yellow plastic bag serves as the offering repository. The funds will be used for cement and wood to maintain this building, and for rice and vegetables to accommodate those who come to teach and train the small congregation and their leaders.

Neither the poverty of the Hadi people nor the resources of training and encouragement from outside agencies precludes their participation in such offerings.

While this chapter exposes financial and ideological incentives for this particular mode of acting in, it also recognizes the house church members' undiminished capacity for expressing gratitude and generosity through such financial offerings. The offering is for them a pious practice, as is the scripture recitation below.

Kalapriya's song today is not her typical story song recounting Biblical narrative, but rather a song of praise to God. The people sit cross-legged and fully engaged from the waist up. They hang on each lyrical phrase and melodic tension as the song unfolds before them, their upper bodies swaying as if being gently drawn by the tension of each musical sentence. The women in particular seem supportive of the soloist, smiling and affirming Kalapriya with their eyes as she carefully, even cautiously, sings her narrative. I later learned that Kalapriya is not literate and creates songs with the collective help of several other women here who also memorize the stories from which the song lyrics are created. Today's song is one of praise and thanksgiving to God for the many ways He has intervened in Kalapriya's life and the life of this Christian community. This is their collective faith story. The people nod, and smile their approval as she humbly sings her many verses. The little congregation, now approaching thirty-five in number and somewhat crowded in this little room, affirm the performer with applause, smiles and nods of appreciation as she carefully steps over and around the other women's bodies and finds her previous place on the floor.

I have included the account of this vocal solo to indicate the various types of embodied engagement that occur in the Hadi house church setting. Throughout the

worship songs the audience is engaged in practices of singing, playing instruments, rhythmic clapping, and non-choreographed movement. By comparison, during Kalapriya's song the audience is seated, intently focused on the performer. They exhibit upper body movement affected by the melodic and textual phrasing of the vocalist rather than by the rhythmic patterns of *dholak*, *khanjani*, and *chimta jhand*. A third type of engagement occurs through a process of question and answer, an event which follows the recitation and memorization of verbatim scriptures below.

Pastor Kalindee and her husband Induhasar say they are privileged to live in housing provided by Induhasar's employer. Their housing includes the land on which this bamboo structure stands, for which they are most grateful. Most of the women gathered here work as maids, cleaning homes and washing clothes for a meager living. Santanu says that many formerly "worked in the hotels," a softened reference for prostitution. The men do "folk work," menial labor that includes cleaning roads, sewer lines, toilets and other such tasks that are beneath the purity standards of middle or upper caste people. Santosh later explains that alcoholism is rampant among Hadi men who "need the alcohol to enable them to do the filthy work that they have to do."²⁶⁹

Pastor Kalindee stands to speak. Her quiet confidence adds stature to her diminutive frame (Having met her before the service and sat nearby as she taught, I was surprised to later discover that she is barely five feet tall – shorter than many of the other adults.) She is attractively dressed in an ivory *sari* of a deep coral floral pattern and with coordinating colored bangles on her wrists. She addresses the people with warmth and assurance and begins a story from the Christian scriptures. It is the story of the persistent widow and the unmerciful judge from the Gospel of Luke 18:1-8. Her delivery is engaging but not animated and she maintains confident eye contact throughout.

This particular Bible story seems to be a favorite among lower caste and tribal people who are denied the full privileges of citizenship in this political society. I have seen this Biblical

²⁶⁹ Abhinav Satpathy, personal interview with the author, August 28, 2014.

account performed as a highly stylized epic narrative on several occasions during my fieldwork excursions. The scripture recitation begins:

*Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'"*²⁷⁰

The house church audience identifies intensely with the hopelessness of this scenario.

First, as marginalized members of this political society, their only hope for any measure of justice in the courts is a judge with an exceptionally generous view of citizenship that would include the Hadi among those who were granted rights and protection. Second, widows here have no inheritance rights to their husband's property and are often abandoned and left destitute by their own children. This is contributing factor to *sati*, or widow immolation, a practice in which a widow climbs onto the funeral pyre alongside her husband's body to be burned alive rather than face a life without privilege or agency. *Sati* was outlawed throughout India in 1920 but several recent publicized occurrences in neighboring West Bengal have reignited a public dialogue about widows' rights.²⁷¹

All eyes are on the pastor as this desperate narrative unfolds.

*For some time the judge refused.*²⁷²

²⁷⁰ Luke 18:1-3 The entire Biblical story is contained in Luke 18:1-8. I am presenting the English here from the New International Version (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

²⁷¹ For a discussion of *sati* as an act of subaltern women's agency, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994). Nicholas B. Dirks also writes about the practice of *sati* in *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 20, 151-2.

²⁷² Luke 18:4a

Pastor Kalindee learned this story earlier in the week. Each Thursday or Friday she and her husband, Induhasar, welcome Scriptures in Use trainer Sayan Badnayak to their home to teach Kalindee a new Bible story. Sayan tells and retells the story and has Kalindee repeat it back to him until he is satisfied that she can repeat it “word-for-word,” according to Santanu. After ensuring successful transmission, Sayan questions Kalindee about the story both as a means of testing her comprehension and for equipping her with questions for her own congregation. Sayan makes certain this oral pastor can repeat the story verbatim, understand the meanings, and reproduce it well.²⁷³

This telling and retelling, this repetitive training of illiterate pastors to recite verbatim scriptures, is a strategy of the Arizona-based NGO, Scriptures in Use. SIU subsidizes regional trainers like Sayan, who travel to the various villages and instruct local house-church pastors. This subsidized investment in local church pastors is an economic incentive for churches such as this one to maintain relationship with sponsoring agencies in the West. The pastors being tutored can usually neither read nor write and are wholly dependent on SIU trainers for access to the Biblical stories that inform and energize this local expression of Christianity. Later in this chapter it will become clear that SIU places a high value on the recitation of scripture “exactly as it was written.”²⁷⁴

But finally he [the judge] said to himself, “Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!”²⁷⁵

²⁷³ The pastors being tutored can usually neither read nor write – hence the SIU moniker “oral pastors.”

²⁷⁴ “Exactly as it was written” is a quote by SIU founder, Jim Bowman, personal interview with the author, September 18, 2013, St. Louis.

²⁷⁵ Luke 18:4b-5.

For pastors like Kalindee Badnayak, persistence is a virtue whose reward is a growing congregation. Years of consistent memorization and recitation of the scriptures in this house church setting have produced dozens of conversions and baptisms and a congregation of thirty-five who gather here each week. Kalindee estimates that she knows and can recite between seventy and eighty scripture stories “word-for-word.” While I am not able to validate her impressive claim of verbatim recall, I mention it here as an example of the value placed on verbatim memorization and recitation by this house church pastor.

And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”²⁷⁶

Having finished, Pastor Kalindee asks the people to repeat the story back to her. Several take turns at retelling during which Pastor Kalindee corrects and clarifies at various points of each attempt. No one takes offense at her corrections and all seem at ease with this teaching process. I am struck by the amount of time patiently invested here by congregation and leader alike. The pastor affirms each repetition of the story; she seems keenly aware of their collective engagement, their body language and utterances indicating agreement or disagreement with the words of each individual retelling or explanation.

During this telling and retelling, I am reminded of the importance placed on the retelling of the story by the villagers of Bagharpalli. During the question and answer time after chapter two’s *keertan* performance, the villagers retold the story as if to demonstrate

²⁷⁶ Luke 18:6-8

their own prowess for either memory or retelling or both. When the older Bagharpalli woman was asked, “Does this performance change what you think of Christians?” She simply retold the story, beginning; “The boy realizes that he has done a mistake . . . “ Later, a young man and a boy in Bagharpalli did the same, repeating the story and receiving affirmation from the other villagers. Verbal recall is a prized skill in these villages, and narrative is a treasured verbal form.

Primacy of narrative

Walter Ong recognizes narrative as “paramount among all verbal art forms” for storing knowledge and history.²⁷⁷ In his celebrated 1982 summation of the emerging field of orality studies, Ong affirms the primacy of story’s role in social organization, describing narrative as “the roomiest repository of an oral culture’s lore.”²⁷⁸ Here in the village of Kusasinga, the Biblical account becomes the framework through which knowledge is stored. In the parable of the persistent widow, these Scheduled Caste Hadi meet a figure with whom they share a common bond. Not only do they identify with the widow’s lack of agency, but they also identify with her diminutive relation to a monumental and systemic injustice. Through this Biblical narrative Hadi Christians learn and store new knowledge and new ways of being in their Oriya world. These include a subaltern tactic for achieving agency in relation to an unjust ruler and a new spiritual way-of-being in relation to a deity who hears and who brings justice without delay.

²⁷⁷ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 1982, 2002), 137.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Once the narrative account is firmly and accurately rooted in memory, Pastor Kalindee questions the people about the meaning of the story. What did they learn from the story? How do they relate to the widow in the story who does not receive either attention or justice except by her persistence? Do they understand that God hears the cries of His people? Is not God more just than this judge who only acts because he is worn out by the widow's repeated pleas? At each question, the people affirm their understanding of the Biblical story and their trust in a God who hears them and brings justice to those who have no social standing.

This process of question and answer in the Kusasinga house church parallels a similar process in the Bagharpalli performance. In Bagharpalli, the performance of the *keertan* songs and dance was followed by a time of question and answer, while in this house church the question and answer follows the scripture recitation. This parallelism gains strength when one remembers Abhinash's statement, "song means only they are listening." In other words, in both venues the conception of *keertan* song and scripture recitation are informational, a presentation of narrative. The information then takes root in the minds and memories (and even affections) of the listeners through a dialogic process of question and answer. This interactive verbalization not only produces clarity, but also facilitates memorization. Thus the dialogic process of taking root is common to both modes of acting in.

A new line of questioning

To some, the account of this performance may seem rather mundane; after all, what is so unusual about a Christian worship service that includes songs, prayer, scripture reading, offering and a message? But it is the performance here of verbatim scripture rather than a stylized, epic scriptural narrative that warrants closer inspection. In chapter

two, the Biblical story of the prodigal son was performed on the Bagharpalli streets through the performance genre of *keertan*. The *keertan* performance was carefully crafted, rehearsed, costumed, and presented so as to resonate with historical village practice in ways that were accepted, remembered, understood, natural and became real in the village. Yet, in the privacy of the this house church setting, the epic, stylized narrative is abandoned and instead the scriptural story is presented, rehearsed, and repeated through verbatim recitation with accompanying explanation and discussion.

I emerge from the Kusasinga house church service puzzled. During my numerous fieldwork trips I have observed quite a few acting in street performances that presented highly stylized Biblical narratives in ways that enabled the scriptural stories to “become real” to the Hindu villagers. Why is it that to “become real” to Hindu villagers requires a forty-five minute dramatic enactment and yet to “become a pious thing” for Hadi Christians (a phrase uttered by Satpathy), requires only a five minute verbatim recitation accompanied by memorization along with question and answer discussion? How does one account for these two variant scriptural performances? Does verbatim recitation draw on local Oriya practice or is it exogenously mandated by sponsoring Western agencies?

At the 2012 Oral Arts Festival my fellow American evangelicals expressed great admiration for the word-for-word accuracy of memorized scripture recitation. Their acclaim reminds me of the value my own religious tradition places on the scriptures as the exact, inerrant, eternal Word of God. If the stylized scriptural narrative performed in the streets is so carefully crafted for the cultural setting, is the verbatim performance instead an indicator of prescriptive foreign influence? Does SIU require this verbatim

performance to demonstrate an American evangelical authenticity, an “orthodoxy”? Would access to resources be cut off without it? If so, could it be that the seemingly incongruous practice of both types of scriptural performance by MM Christians indicates a local tactic akin to Partha Chatterjee’s “rule of colonial difference”? In Chatterjee’s conception the colonized sub-continent carved out the domains of language, education, religion and family as spiritual, inner, and essential domains beyond the purview of British rule while at the same time appearing to cooperate harmoniously within the mandates of the British Raj.²⁷⁹ In this modern Oriya case, the presence of verbatim recitation could simply be a perfunctory satisfaction of American sponsor demands while the stylized epic narrative represents a locally accepted and understood expression of Oriya Christianity. If verbatim scripture is only practiced as long as resources flow from sponsoring agencies, this study could have far-reaching implications for sponsoring Christian agencies.

Verbatim recitation: foreign or local? An executive leader’s perspective

I begin with the question proffered above: is verbatim scriptural performance a signifier of local Oriya or of foreign practices? There is no doubt that verbatim scripture is a strong value within the Arizona based NGO, Scriptures in Use (SIU). Jim Bowman, the founding president of SIU esteems the presence of verbatim scripture and cautions

²⁷⁹ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 18.

those who would do otherwise. However, Bowman also claims verbatim recitation is highly valued among all the world's textual religions and not simply a Western agenda.

Doug: So, talk to me more about the story-telling scripture and the verbatim scripture. The street presentations are a very "epic" narrative – a *Ramanyana*-ish epic narrative. Do you have a policy or a philosophy for the use of verbatim scripture? If so, what does it indicate? Is it absolutely necessary? How do you view these things?

Jim: Yeah, we think that the traditions, the oral traditions, the *Bhagavad Gita*, or in Islam, the Koranic traditions, and all oral scripture has been presented all over the world in every tradition *verbatim*. Only in Christianity will we allow for a summarization of the story, or a story of the story. We [at SIU] just really objected to that because we worked in so many traditions – whether a Hindu tradition or Islamic tradition – where print has always been used as an aid to memorization. So you look at the print before, and you internalize it so well that you are able then to retell it *exactly the way it was written* but still use the printed page as an aid to memorization. If you look at the traditions that way – whether the Jewish traditions or Islamic or whatever, you are going to find that that is highly valued by all cultures. [emphasis his]²⁸⁰

Initially, Bowman denied that continued access to resources was connected to the performance of verbatim scripture in local house churches, claiming instead that SIU's emphasis on verbatim scripture is simply a shared value among their partner ministries. He explained that the emphasis on verbatim scripture on SIU's website is intended for potential donors in America who may be comparing SIU to other mission agencies. However, when asked directly if he would end relations with an organization that refused to use verbatim scripture, his first words were, "We would."

²⁸⁰ Jim Bowman, personal interview with the author September 18, 2013, St. Louis, MO.

Doug: How important is the presence of verbatim scripture in terms of the foundations that fund SIU and your relation to these Indian churches? In other words, if one of those Indian organizations said, ‘Well, we are just going to use scripture story, we are not going to use verbatim scripture at all.’ Would you end your relationship with them?

Jim: We would. You know, none of them have said that to us. And as far as verbatim scripture, we have never heard one person come to us and say, “We don’t want to do verbatim scripture.”

For Jim Bowman, the use of scripture “exactly as it was written” is a matter of an evangelical Christian orthodoxy, a value he assumes is shared by the Christian organizations with whom he partners. Later in the same conversation, he adds, “They [South Asian partners] hold themselves accountable to the accuracy of the scriptures because they hold it dear as *the right thing to do*. I think that is where most of them come from.” [emphasis his] Bowman seems surprised by this line of inquiry at our first interview and particularly puzzled at the thought that any of his South Asian partners might not share his valuation of verbatim scripture.

Look, the Bible is the Bible; it is the Word of God and there are severe warnings about those who change the Word of God. So it is our policy that we want the scriptures to be told *exactly as they are written*, whether we always get it that way we are not sure – because the movement has gotten too big. But I would just say, that generally we work hard to try to keep the scriptures verbatim. [emphasis added]

SIU’s Odisha partner, Dr. Abhinav Satpathy, shares this high esteem for verbatim recitation and, like Bowman, draws upon world religious traditions, in this case Hindu, to defend the performance of verbatim scripture as “a common thing” and “accepted” and

one which “becomes a pious thing” for the people. In the following dialogue Satpathy responds to my questions about the use of verbatim scripture and scripture chanting in house churches. His references to John Wycliffe and John Purvey flow effortlessly and demonstrate his knowledge of 14th century pre-reformation Western church history.²⁸¹

Satpathy: But it has been a culture for our people to listen to a written religious book. For example, in Hinduism, a lot of people don’t read and they are not expected to read the Hindu books. It is the priest who reads and they have to listen carefully and recite after it. So reading scripture in the midst of the congregation, even if they don’t know how to read themselves, is the common thing given them by the Hindus in our cultures because the Hindu books remains always with the priests and not with the people. That was the case with Christianity when Catholicism came in, before John Purvey and [John] Wycliffe and others translated the Bible.

Doug: And with ancient Israel too, the public reading of scripture.

Satpathy: Yes, exactly. They say public reading has been there for many, many centuries. Even in the time of Ezra, you know, the people requested of Ezra, the priest to bring the Book. And when the Book was brought, the Book was read, and they stood up and revered and respected it.²⁸² So it is the same thing in India and Orissa, so scripture reading *becomes a pious thing* for people. So when people say they want to read the scripture I say, “Ok,” because that doesn’t make a big difference in the culture. [it is similar to common cultural forms] That is *accepted*. But for life application and for instruction and for teaching it is always the story that goes well with these people. [emphasis added]²⁸³

²⁸¹ John Wycliffe (c. 1320 – 1384) is famous for being martyred for his attempts to translate the Latin Vulgate into local vernaculars. John Purvey (c. 1354 – 1414) is less well-known for translation work and his inclusion here is an indication of how knowledgeable Satpathy is regarding western church history.

²⁸² Satpathy is referring to the story of Ezra, an Israelite reformer whose story is recounted in the Old Testament book of Ezra.

²⁸³ Abhinav Satpathy, personal interview with the author in Nagpur, Maharashtra, India, February 10, 2013.

My point here is not that these two leaders espouse verbatim scripture to the exclusion of storied scripture accounts; far from it. Both are heavily invested in the street performances of highly stylized, epic scripture narrative. As we have seen throughout the previous chapters, Satpathy championed his orality approach to ministry, particularly throughout the 2012 Oral Arts Festival. And while Jim Bowman maintained a low public profile at the festival, SIU featured the occasion prominently in its spring newsletter and provided additional funding to make the festival possible. SIU's website champions both types of scripture presentations. The article places a primacy on the use of scriptures "exactly as they are written in the Bible," and also lays out a sequential process in which verbatim scriptures appear first while culturally adapted stories follow after. Note that this temporal ordering is opposite that observed in the Bagharpalli acting in event presented in chapter two.

Scriptures In Use, Spring Newsletter 2012: One of SIU's partners in Orissa, India, Maranatha Ministries, hosted the First Bridges Oral Arts Festival in February in Bhubaneswar. SIU's training curriculum features integration of the Local Oral Arts into Scripture Storytelling. In the photos above and to the left, Old and New Testament stories are told *exactly as they are written* in the Bible and *then*, according to the local culture, the story is performed in drama, song and dance. Scriptures In Use places a long-held, strong value on complete accuracy of the Scripture narrative, but we also believe the story must be reinforced in the traditional ways that impact oral learners and help them best understand the Word of God. This celebration of Scripture use through storytelling, drama and music had participation from Oral Bible churches all over Orissa, where church planting multiplication is very extensive. [emphasis added]²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴ Scriptures In Use Spring Newsletter 2012. Scriptures in Use 101 South La Cañada Ste 49D; Green Valley, AZ 85614 520-648-6400 www.siutraining.org

One could argue that Bowman's emphasis on the necessity of verbatim scripture is driven by his American evangelical roots rather than by local non-Christian cultural practices. The same argument could be made for Satpathy, who although an Oriya native, has been conditioned by years of higher education that includes a Master of Arts in English Literature, a Master of Divinity, and a PhD in Discipleship Studies at Eastern Theological College in New Delhi. Eastern Theological College may be located in India's capital city, but as Satpathy says, "it is modeled after Western theological education."²⁸⁵ Conversely, one could also argue that the claims for verbatim recitation as a staple practice among world religions as well as those for verbatim recitation as an Oriya practice are also valid.

The ideological tension surrounding these assertions by Bowman and Satpathy demonstrate a stance that enables verbatim recitation to be validated by both Oriya and Western evangelical standards. This validity is situated and contextual. The fluidity of this stance enables the "just as it was written" demands of an evangelical orthodoxy to be satisfied on one hand while scripture "becomes a pious thing" in the Oriya house church on the other. However, I am curious to see if the stance demonstrated here is enacted throughout the MM organization with the same consistency as that of the stance-on-power Maranatha Ministries demonstrated in their approach to conflict, described in chapter three.

²⁸⁵ Dr. Abhinav Satpathy, personal interview with the author, August 29, 2015, Cary, NC.

Verbatim recitation: foreign or local? A perspective “on the ground”

For local MM church planters, epic, stylized narrative and verbatim recitation are each necessary for sharing and practicing an Oriya Christian piety. However, the dialogue below seems to trouble the claims by Satpathy and Bowman above that verbatim scripture is a “common thing” and “accepted” in the village. Through the accounts below, I will place the “exactly as it is written” ideals of Jim Bowman and “pious” practice claimed by Satpathy in contrast to the working ideologies of village pastors and church planters “on the ground” in Odisha.

The discussion below finds Santanu, Pradeep, Abhinash, Gyan, myself and several others seated around a noisy swamp cooler in the dim light of a village home, enjoying biscuits, *chai* (tea) and good conversation. The team has completed performances in two villages today, the last in this village of Loisinga, and all are weary from the day’s events. After a generous time of pleasant small talk, I initiate a line of inquiry into the use of verbatim scripture versus stylized epic narrative.

As a result of my inquiry, a debate ensues as to when and how each practice is best employed. The underlying ideology that is at stake in this conversation is one of which I gradually became aware in the course of my fieldwork. This idea is that epic, stylized narrative – that is, story – is best used for evangelism and church planting while verbatim recitation – that is, scripture – is a sign of spiritual maturity and a goal toward which every church should be moving. The conversation below is my first opportunity to initiate a group discussion on the topic with local church planters from various backgrounds that include Lutheran, Baptist, Evangelical Charismatic, and Church of North India. As we

pick up the conversation transcribed below, the epic stylized narrative presented in street performances has become “story”; verbatim recitation, on the other hand, is being called “scripture.”

Doug: In your worship services when you use scripture, is it word-for-word scripture or is it told like these stories?

Gyan: No, it is word-for-word message, it is *Puji* [recited] not acted out

Abhinash: This morning in Bagharpalli – only story in that place. Singing and story is enough!

Gyan: No, no. Actually [using] story means a newly established church, new place, new believers. But after two or three years of church services they don’t like story-telling any more.

Doug: So, after two to three years you shift in the services to using only scriptures?

Abhinash: Yes, definitely.

Doug: Why is it that you switch?

Santanu [interjecting his own opinion in disagreement]: Even story also can be used for the older [more mature] believers!

An active discussion ensues in mixed languages in response to Santanu’s statement.

Finally, Santanu summarizes for my benefit. (Note the substitution of “preaching” below in place of the phrase, “word-for-word scripture” in my original question.)

Santanu: They are discussing about where to use stories and where to use preaching. They are telling that when the church grows, *then* they have to start preaching, not story. So I am telling when stories can be used for such believers also, but it depends on *how* you are using it. That is what I am telling. [emphasis his]

What becomes even more interesting is that as the dialogue continues, “scripture,” or verbatim recitation, becomes synonymous with “preaching,” a decidedly foreign practice according to the ethnographic accounts of chapters two and three. This correlation of verbatim scripture with the foreign practice of preaching exposes a point of ideological difference among my interlocutors. At this local “feet on the ground” level of leadership, verbatim scripture, such as that observed in the Kusasinga house church, is not categorized as a local practice which is accepted, remembered, understood, natural and becomes real in the village, but rather as a foreign event in the village equated with the foreign practice of preaching. I have added emphasis to key words and phrases throughout the discussion below to highlight these telling moments.

Doug: Is there any expectation that a mature church is using the scriptures word-for-word?

Santanu: Yes, that is the tradition that they follow.

Doug: For more mature churches?

Santanu: Yes.

Doug [addressing the whole group]: Would you say that word-for-word scripture is a sign of authentic Christianity – a more mature Christianity in the churches?

Santanu: I don’t agree with that. Even story can make mature believers. Even more than powerful *preaching*. Because, when you tell a story that remains in the hearts of the people, but whatever *preaching* you hear, next time when you hear you will just *forget*, the next moment you will *forget*. [here again, “preaching” is directly substituted for “word-for-word scripture”]

Abhinash: But the story you will *remember* but what you will speak [preach] they will not *remember*.

According to this dialogue, epic scripture story is remembered but preaching (and word-for-word scripture) is forgotten. This brings to mind the lexical binary construction presented in the introductory chapter, a binary that situates that which is remembered (story) as Oriya and local and that which is forgotten (preaching and word-for-word scripture) as foreign.²⁸⁶ This ideological construction does not line up with Bowman's and Satpathy's claims for the Oriya and Hindu origins of verbatim recitation.

As the discussion around the swamp cooler continues, Santanu explains his understanding that "story" is primarily geared to non-literate villagers while "word-for-word scripture" (and the requisite, accompanying preaching) are more appropriate for a literate audience. He also claims that story can be adapted for "the literate mass."

Doug: Is there any expectation from sponsoring partners like SIU, that you will use word-for-word scripture? [I have the previous interview with Jim Bowman in mind here]

Santanu: No, story is fine. But they say that when you are going to [the] literate mass[es], then maybe you can use some other method than story telling. But still, story is still appropriate for the literate mass also. It depends on how you interpret it, and how you use it. So the way you tell story to the village people is different. They way you use story to the literate mass, that will be different. And that we need to do it in a different way.

After the awkwardness and disagreement of this conversation, I attempt to bring closure to this interaction and ensure peace among my interlocutors.

Doug: Is the discussion between verbatim and story telling an active discussion in terms of tactics or is this just my question?

²⁸⁶ See the lexicon in chapter one page 19.

Santanu: (with a knowing smile) I think we haven't discussed those things.

What this at-times-animated discussion makes clear is that at the “on the ground” level of church ministry and training, verbatim scripture is and is not geared to “older [more mature] believers” and a “literate mass;” and verbatim recitation is and is not equated with “foreign” practices that include “preaching.” So, while executive leaders Jim Bowman and Abhinav Satpathy claim verbatim recitation as “a common thing given them by the Hindus,” and one that “becomes a pious thing” in the village; for these leaders “on the ground,” verbatim scripture is at time equated with “preaching” that “you will just forget.” However, just as Bowman and Satpathy’s claims for verbatim recitation as a local practice are made more complex (or even suspect) by their ideological roots in an orthodox evangelicalism, so also the verbalized claims of Santanu, Abhinash, Gyan and Jagadeesh must be interpreted in light of their practiced implementation of verbatim recitation in house churches. These local church planters are partially responsible for the verbatim recitation demonstrated in the Kusasinga house church above.

It is evident from the various dialogues above that the particular stance that emerges from this chapter’s ethnography is not as consistently articulated among MM leaders as is the stance-on-power in chapter three. However, the stance that emerges here does bear some strong similarities to that one. The performative nature of each stance is one such similarity.²⁸⁷ In the same way that a local Oriya authenticity is performatively rendered in

²⁸⁷ My use of performative here is not intended to invoke Berger’s concept of a “performer’s relationship with any entity known as a preexisting condition” but rather references the agential capacity of words and speech acts to define identity as employed by Judith Butler. Harris

Bagharpalli as a process of “becoming real,” the standards by which verbatim recitation is deemed Oriya in the Hadi house church is performatively rendered as a process of “becoming a pious thing” without being an exclusive sign of such piety. Second, the stance-on-power that emerges in chapters two and three involves a jettisoning of the tangible artifacts of clothing, architecture, instruments, music or other practices that could be deemed foreign; likewise the stance supporting verbatim scripture jettisons (or chooses to ignore) any foreign ideological roots for the practice in village house churches. The ideological tension among these leaders that I have drawn out here demonstrates a pragmatic religious eclecticism for both SIU and MM leaders that holds in suspension the ideals of 1) an evangelical “orthodoxy,” 2) a local practice of listening to scripture that “becomes a pious thing” and 3) the desire for a scriptural presentation that “becomes real” in the village.

Regardless of the assorted political and economic dynamics that are variously satisfied or unsettled by verbatim performance in the house church, the practice is, for these Kusasinga Christians, an expression of religious piety and spiritual devotion. Scripture has indeed “become a pious thing” for them. I contend that verbatim scripture recitation, while insufficient for “becoming real” in the village, still generates an embodied resonance with the cultural tradition of telling and retelling scriptural narratives among these Hadi Christians.

Berger’s concept of performative stance is defined in *Stance: Ideas About Emotion, Style, and Meaning For The Study Of Expressive Culture* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2010), 8. Judith Butler’s concept of performativity can be found in her final chapter, “Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions,” in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge, 1989.

Verbatim recitation

Listening to scripture readings and especially the rhythmic chanting of scripture, or *Satya Purana*, is indeed a pious practice within this Oriya Hindu society. According to my interlocutors, it is the tradition of many Oriya Hindu people to sit and listen for hours on end whenever they come across a holy man sitting under a tree, chanting scriptures.

One of the numerous acting in performances I attended was a presentation of *Satya Purana* using Christian scriptures in the village of Burobhadi. The performance begins:

A group of twenty-five or so villagers is crowded onto a portico to escape the steady rain in the village of Burobhadi which has emerged at a simple crossing of two rural roads.²⁸⁸ A gray haired man in his 50s and a black haired and bearded man in his 30s alternate periods of chanting Biblical scriptures in *Satya Purana* style. The older man uses slow and simple rhythmic structures that allow for breaks of several seconds between phrases. His melodic phrasings cover a limited ambitus and alternate between two tonal centers a perfect fifth apart. Melismatic embellishments occur on the last note of each phrase. The younger bearded man chants with a more rapid and continuous rhythmic pattern that at times is joined by soft hand clapping from the audience. His melodic pattern centers around only one tonal center and but his melismas occur at both the middle and end points of his chanted phrases. The musicians occasionally join this reader on *dholak*, *ginni*, and *khanjani*, but I was told later that there would normally be no instruments accompanying such chanting.

Both men read their chanted texts from a book in which Biblical scriptures have been rewritten specifically to enable such rhythmic incantation. Each is dressed in button down shirt and gray slacks. The older man's shirt is gray and tucked into his pants, the younger man's shirt is a light blue and remains untucked with a straight hem.

The villagers engage passively with the chanted scriptures. Most sit quietly while some softly exchange short bits of conversation. The smallest children continue to climb on and around adults,

²⁸⁸ This performance occurred in the village of Burobhadi in February 2013.

occasionally contributing their own vocalizations to the scene. Some eyes are on the performers while the gaze of others moves from one object to another. The embodied nature of the villager's response indicates a respect for the genre and the performers themselves, but aside from occasional clapping to support the younger man's chanting, there are few signs of active physical engagement besides their relaxed seated presence here.

I present the account of this performance to once again demonstrate the varying levels of embodied engagement with acting in presentations. The local practice of *Satya Purana* style scripture chanting elicits a level of audience engagement that indicates familiarity, acceptance and respect, all of which could be interpreted as indicators of pious practice.

When the performance shifts, however, from the chanting of *Satya Purana* to a drama depicting the Biblical story of a shepherd who left his flock of ninety-nine to look for one lost sheep, the villager's laughter, heightened attention, and looks of surprise and delight indicated that the story had "become real" for them.²⁸⁹ Salman Dutta portrays the poor *mesharakshaka* (shepherd) wearing plain, unpatterned fabric *gamucha* wrap on his head, unbound *dhoti* around his waist and carrying a stick. All eyes are on Salman as he calls for his lost sheep; audience members take pleasure in offering their own bleating to mimic the sounds of a gathered flock. The villagers' impulsive smiles and shared glances affirm their pleasure as individual and as a collective.

Next, the performance genre – and audience interaction – shifts below, with the addition of drama:

Salman stretches out this narrative, taking time to ask questions of the villagers, old and young alike, occasionally breaking into a song typical of a solitary shepherd. The search for the missing sheep builds in intensity as the shepherd repeatedly calls the sheep by name. When suddenly a bleating response is heard from inside the house, the cry is obviously that of a small child and the crowd

²⁸⁹ The parable of the lost sheep is found in Luke 15:1-7.

erupts with surprised laughter and spontaneously applauds the arrival of the little girl as the lost sheep, now safely in the shepherd's arms. For the audience crowded on this porch in Burobadi, the story has "become real."

This addition of drama elicits a level of embodied engagement in performance that indicates a heightened intensity – and pleasure. The story has "become real" for this audience.

In the interviews following the performance, Magarmuhan villagers describe *Satya Purana* as "understood," a marker of the local. "Does this performance feel like it is coming from your community or from outside your community?" I ask. "It is like from our community," comes one man's reply; many nod in agreement. "We could understand it," voices an older woman. But for churches that seek to maintain fellowship with the evangelical community represented by SIU, the performance genre of *Satya Purana* is insufficient to satisfy an orthodoxy that demands that scripture be "recited exactly as it was written." My interpreter, Pradeep, claims the Biblical scriptures "were not written to be chanted," and then explains that *Satya Purana* performances require a rewriting of the sacred text to enable a rhythmically chanted delivery.²⁹⁰ In harmony with Pradeep's claim, neither my translator/interlocutors nor the villagers themselves seem to classify *Satya Purana* as "scripture." Throughout our discussions, my interlocutors consistently categorize *Satya Purana* as "story" (stylized epic narrative such as *keertan*) instead of "scripture" (verbatim) because it remains an adaptation of the Bible. In the village of Magarmuhan I attempt to force a clear differentiation by asking, "Is *Satya Purana*

²⁹⁰ Pradeep Kumar *keertan*, comments after a performance of *Satya Purana* in the village of Magarmuhan in the Balangir District of Orissa. July, 2013.

performance better accepted than listening to verbatim scripture from the Bible?” To which one of the women replies, “This will be easier than preaching.” So, once again we find not only a determination that the rhythmic scripture chanting of *Satya Purana* is not equated with Biblical scripture, but we also find that preaching is not equated with verbatim scripture either. Additionally, neither preaching nor verbatim scripture are classified as understood, at least not within this Burobhadi village setting.

Despite these comparisons between *Satya Purana* and verbatim scripture, in this chapter’s house church service Hadi villagers in Kusasinga seemed fully engaged in the telling and retelling of verbatim scriptures. Theirs did not appear to be a tedious or perfunctory practice, but rather one that invited participation and a subsequent opportunity to perform the scriptures for those in the congregation. For illiterate Kusasinga villagers, the practice of listening to scripture, whether verbatim or in *Satya Purana* style, is indeed an act of religious devotion and piety. In the house church, Christians listen intently, even deeply, to sacred texts and subsequently memorize them as an act of spiritual discipline. In the house church, the Hadi subject their own conceptions of the world and ways of being in their world to rigorous inquiry through question and answer sessions during which the scriptures speak to and take root in their own lives, in similar fashion to the way in which Bagharpalli street performances take root among Hindu villagers through question and answer. The combination of memorization, verbalization, and veneration of Biblical scriptures constitute a

disciplining of the self within a discourse of personal and corporate piety in the Kusasinga house church.²⁹¹

So while *Satya Purana* is fully “understood” in the village, it still falls short of a “just as it was written” standard of orthodoxy expected by Western sponsor SIU. Likewise, verbatim scripture is fully “orthodox” but at times falls short of being fully “understood” in village streets. Once again, a pragmatic and tactical eclecticism emerges through seemingly incongruous expressions of pious practice in Odisha. In this case, Oriya Christian eclecticism enables both continual fellowship with an orthodox evangelicalism represented by and through SIU as well as continual access to the potential flows of resources such foreign relationships represent to this marginalized and impoverished people.

An additional parallel aspect to the two performances is found between the process of “becoming real” in the village and that of “becoming a pious thing” in the house church. This affective turn is dependent on the performance’s ability to achieve a degree of historical resonance. In the Bagharpalli account this resonance requires that performers possess a keen awareness of which costume, instruments, genres and styles constitute the local, and conversely, which practices are perceived as local and which are foreign. The careful orchestration of such practices creates the potential for the creation of an embodied resonance, this is an affective turn that draws on sedimentary layers of the audience’s experience. Whereas the Bagharpalli performance described in chapter two

²⁹¹ “Disciplining the self” is a term from Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Alan Sheridan, trans. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

details a presentation that begins with music, takes root in question and answer and “becomes real” in the village with the addition of drama, the Kusasinga house church performance presented in this chapter details a presentation in which word-for-word scripture begins with story, takes root in question and answer, and, in Satpathy’s words, “becomes a pious thing” in the house church through repetition.

Verbatim recitation enables access to resources

The question remains, however, if verbatim scripture performance is at times conflated with foreign practices by local church planters, what benefits could warrant its continued use when foreign practices increase the risk of anti-Christian violence? It would be simplistic to assume that the sole reason for verbatim scripture performance in the house church is continued access to the resources of sponsoring agencies in the West – although clearly one cannot ignore such benefits in this impoverished society. It would be too simplistic also, to attribute the presence of verbatim scripture performance in house churches solely to a desire for an evangelical orthodoxy, although this too, plays a part. However, connections to the sponsoring agencies in the West have historically meant both infusions of operating capital and access to training programs for church planting, fund raising, leadership training and community development. It is this flow of resources and the contingencies that condition it that I examine now.

The combination of Oriya poverty and a monetary exchange rate that strongly favors the US dollar means that relatively small amounts of American capital can enable significant ministry ventures in local villages. Christian training programs are almost always accompanied by capital for housing, transportation, meals, and meeting space.

Many of these programs provide training not just for executive leaders but for key personnel throughout the ministry as well. This flow of resources from the agencies in the West is significant and remains a carefully guarded and nurtured connection for Maranatha Ministries and other local partner organizations.²⁹²

Connections to foreign agencies can enable infusions of resources other than cash as well. Both the video *Man of Peace: The Storytellers of Odisha*²⁹³ and the 2012 Oral Arts Festival were supported by Arizona-based SIU. Jim Bowman, SIU founder and President, says that the *Man of Peace* video cost “about \$40,000 USD” to produce. When I asked if the video resulted in increased contributions sufficient to offset production costs, Jim replied, “It hasn’t opened doors to new funding sources as much as it has helped to establish ministry partnerships with like-minded nationals.”²⁹⁴ Bowman went on to explain that because of the complexity of the orality ministry approach, it was difficult to succinctly communicate their orality strategy prior to the production of this video.

Sponsoring agencies in the West must procure funding for themselves as well. Just as Oriya ministries lack the local resources to fully fund their work, so do Scriptures in Use (SIU), Freedom to Lead (FTL), and several other cooperating agencies that I have chosen not to list here in order to limit any potential risks of being named here. Each of

²⁹² Maranatha Ministries is one of eighteen different ministry organizations that together claim a total of eight thousand house churches throughout north India and Nepal. These eighteen ministries gather regularly to share ideas and receive training from outside agencies such as SIU, FTL and others.

²⁹³ *Man of Peace: The Storytellers of Odisha*, Scriptures in Use, 2013 DVD.

²⁹⁴ Jim Bowman, personal interview with the author September 18, 2013, St. Louis.

these organizations must also raise capital to support their international projects. These funds come from a combination of private donors and large charitable foundations.

Large foundations such as The Maclellan Foundation,²⁹⁵ The Harry Lloyd Trust,²⁹⁶ First Fruit,²⁹⁷ The Cornerstone Foundation²⁹⁸ and Rivendell Stewards Trust²⁹⁹ were established years ago with large donations by a single or a very few wealthy philanthropists. These funds are managed so as to protect principal assets and channel investment proceeds into Christian ministries that align with the fund's vision. Organizations must submit carefully crafted proposals complete with detailed budgets in hopes of being awarded grants with which to accomplish their proposed projects.

What makes this funding process interesting for this study is that most of these sponsoring Western agencies and even a few of the Oriya ministries receive direct funding from some of the same foundations. These large foundations employ their own personnel to monitor the impact of each funded project and the degree to which various organizations such as SIU, FTL, and others coordinate their efforts on the ground.³⁰⁰ So, while Maranatha Ministries makes use of acting in performances in ways that minimize the appearance of foreign influence on one hand and paradoxically, maximize foreign relations and flows of resources on the other; so, too, do each of these foreign agencies

²⁹⁵ See www.maclellan.net for more information on The Maclellan Family Foundations.

²⁹⁶ See www.hjltrst.com for more information on the Harry J. Lloyd Charitable Trust.

²⁹⁷ See www.firstfruit.org for more information on First Fruit.

²⁹⁸ See www.cstonefoundation.org for more information on The Cornerstone Foundation.

²⁹⁹ See www.rstrust.org for more information on Rivendell Stewards' Trust.

³⁰⁰ The Maclellan Foundation was founded in 1945 and, according to their website has "a heart to invest in evangelical faith-based solutions around the world and to encourage wise giving among Kingdom Investors." Maclellan's assets exceed \$300 million USD.

have to satisfy the demands of an ever-changing realm of requirements and relationships in order to maintain access to the resources necessary for their own survival and success.

The economic downturns of 1988, the Enron scandal, post 9/11 realities, and recent banking debacles have hit managed funds hard, with many funds drawing on principal to cover financial commitments made during better financial times. I have been told by reliable sources that one major foundation will cease operations in the next few years while others face decreasing revenue streams.³⁰¹ According to FTL President Richard Sessoms, “local sustainability” has become a new emphasis for foundations who, as a result of market downturns, are now experiencing declining principal assets and have adapted to operating with an end date in mind as opposed to a previous era in which investments were viewed as a continually renewable source of revenue that would exceed the lifetimes of those currently managing them.”³⁰² According to Sessoms, the push for sustainability is both quantitative, as a strategy to stretch declining resources, as well as qualitative, as a maneuver to encourage the development of ministry tactics that are more deeply embedded in local cultural practices.

What local sustainability means on the ground in Odisha is that recipients are expected to contribute an increasing percentage of project resources. Additionally, projects must be designed so that replication of training within an organization requires little or no outside support, hence the term “sustainability.” This means Maranatha Ministries must cover some expenses for initial leadership training, significant expenses

³⁰¹ I am not at liberty to divulge the name of this particular foundation.

³⁰² Richard Sessoms, phone interview with the author, November 08, 2013.

for the first round of replication events and all expenses for additional training. Staff salaries are now rarely included in grants for new projects.

A second reason for declining funds comes as a result of government anti-terrorism measures. In its efforts to safeguard against the growth of terrorist cells that are increasingly common in the post-9/11 world, India's government, along with many other nations, now requires significant documentation and receipting for funds entering their country through NGOs. These controls are meant to ensure that funds are not funneled into fanatical or money-laundering activities.³⁰³ Previously, agencies in the West could send monies for a project or event and allow the beneficiary to use the capital however they saw fit. Now all assets must be fully documented and receipted to verify that monies are in fact used solely for their designated purpose. While newer ministries such as FTL have never known any other mode of operation, older ministries and their South Asian beneficiaries are having to adjust their methods and expectations. Such adjustments require considerable tact in order to affirm continuing relationships while adapting to decreased material benefits from these same relationships.

Drawing conclusions from this acting in performance

The acting in performance examined in this chapter does not minimize foreign connections but rather maximizes them in ways that enable certain kinds of relationships. These include relationships that engender expressions of personal religious piety and

³⁰³ These and similar anti-terrorism measures are spelled out in The Prevention of Terrorism Act, (POTA) 2002. <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/document/actandordinances/POTA.htm>, accessed August 18, 2014.

devotion as well as relationships through which diminishing resources may still flow to the local house church. This chapter's examination of acting in focuses on the contingent and contextual meanings associated with the use of verbatim scripture recitation. According to my interlocutors, verbatim scripture recitation is and is not foreign. Verbatim scripture recitation is and is not local. Verbatim scripture is and is not a sign of spiritual maturity. Verbatim scripture is and is not remembered. Verbatim scripture is and is not forgotten. Verbatim scripture is and is not equated with the foreign practice of preaching. Verbatim scripture is and is not necessary for continued relationship with sponsoring evangelical agencies. Verbatim scripture is and is not a sign of accommodation to NGO ideologies in the West.

The acting in performance of verbatim scripture in this chapter exemplifies the fluid and eclectic nature of a modern Oriya Christianity. The region's history of religious eclecticism reverberates through the present socio-political challenges of religious practice – particularly a minority Christian religious practice in the region – as Christianity is continually being made and remade to function in a changing environment. This historical eclecticism contributes to a multi-faceted stance, a stance-on-power that performatively maintains an agential space for MM Christians between the “just as it was written” orthodoxy of a sponsoring Arizona agency and the pious Oriya practice of *Satya Purana* that informs the embodied histories and practices of the Kusasinga villagers.

My inclusion of this verbatim house church performance in this dissertation is important because it demands a scholarly approach sufficient to accommodate the complexities of Odisha's modern pluralistic society. This chapter's house church

performance nuances the tactics that emerge from the Bagharpalli *keertan* performance in several ways: First, foreign practices are jettisoned in some relationships and embraced in others. Second, performances that represent an accepted Christianity to the village are rendered insufficient to represent an evangelical orthodoxy to sponsoring agencies in the West. Third, practices that are rejected as unacceptable in the village streets are accepted in village houses where verbatim scripture recitation becomes a pious thing.

My earlier consideration that acting in may represent a tactic similar to Chatterjee's "rule of colonial difference" is troubled by the ideological and financial support given to both scripture (verbatim) and story (stylized, epic narrative) performances by sponsoring agencies in the West such as SIU. Such financial support indicates that SIU is not cut out of internal "essential" domains, but rather is invited to participate in these expressive practices. On the other hand, spatial practices emerge in this chapter that do indeed support a separation of domains such as Chatterjee describes. In Bagharpalli, acting in achieves a functional invisibility through a minimization of difference and a performance of cultural inclusion, all of which is accomplished in the openness of village streets. In this Kusasinga account, acting in achieves a functional invisibility to "the government that sees" through the physical seclusion of the house church setting, all of which is accomplished while maintaining a prominent visibility to the welcomed surveillance of evangelical agencies in the West.

However, while I believe that labeling acting in a "rule of colonial difference" is too reductive, I contend that acting in remains a highly complex subaltern tactic through which the marginalized and endangered Oriya MM Christian community leverages a

degree of functional agency in relation to state and local governments, local villages and to foreign religious agencies.

Conclusion

Risk: articulating the unseen, representing the inaccessible.

“This is Christian and you shall not come and do like this!”³⁰⁴

Doug: Is this a typical response – that Christian and Hindu performances are the same?

Santanu: Not everywhere actually

Abhinash [interpreted by Santanu]: In other village they will immediately say, “*This is Christian and you shall not come and do like this!*” This is the first [performance] here [in this village] and they had no idea about it [that it was Christian] but next time there may be new persons here and there and their minds may change. [emphasis his]³⁰⁵

Risk is not represented explicitly in this dissertation, but rather as a constant yet elusive presence that forms the invisible axis around which the many tactics, performances and dialogues of Oriya MM Christians move. The 1998 and 2008 riots lurk ominously in video and print and emerge tellingly at times in the dialogue of this dissertation’s ethnography. Despite attempts by both MM leaders and government leaders to situate agents of violence as coming from outside the mainstream of Oriya society, the risk of Hindu/Christian violence in today’s Odisha remains the *raison d’être* for acting in as an ethical project in this modern political society where some Christians still struggle

³⁰⁴ Abinash Bagh, spoken during a group interview with the author traveling in a car after a performance in the village of Kundumal, February 21, 2014.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

to recover from the loss of homes, villages, churches, cottage businesses, farms or even family members as real physical consequences of the 2008 riots.

Risk caused a change in venue for the 2012 Oral Arts Festival in Bhubaneswar, which was moved from an outdoor facility to an enclosed one because of the presence of foreigners including myself, other FTL and SIU personnel and an American crew shooting footage for the Man of Peace film. Risk limited possible locations for acting in performances that were arranged in several villages. “Do you ever do big drama in the middle of town?” I asked. “Yeah, it was happening before,” Santanu replied, “but after the outbreak of this persecution that is not there.” And when I asked if the drama could have been performed in the part of one village where no Christians lived, our host couple said, “It would be too dangerous.”³⁰⁶ Risk also limited my access to village leaders for the same reason as the previous example. Only those village elders in immediate relationship to the neighborhood of acting in performances and/or who attended the performances themselves were considered safely available for interview.

Risk was a consideration in my interviews with state officials. It was from a desire to minimize risk that I took care to arrange my interviews with Odisha state officials as an OSU scholar and not as someone connected to Maranatha Ministries or any of the other Christian NGOs with whom I have worked in Odisha. However, I did discuss my attendance at Christian performances with these officials in order to initiate lines of inquiry about authenticity, religion and the outbreaks of violence in 1998 and 2008. Still, I remained concerned that our conversations could ultimately cause difficulties for my

³⁰⁶ Unnamed Christian couple, personal conversation with the author. July 29, 2013.

interlocutors. Whether or not this last concern was valid I cannot say, but I mention it here to emphasize the perceptions of risk that permeated this entire project.

I should note that in the course of my research I never felt physically threatened or in immediate peril. After many years of overseas travel I have learned to trust the instincts and judgment of my interlocutors. That said, the accounts above constitute indications of risk that were identified or measured by the words and safeguarding actions on the part of MM leaders.

Lastly, risk remains a factor in the publication of this dissertation document. Even as I write this paragraph I am considering the necessity of making certain that I have carefully deidentified every interlocutor, performing artist, Christian villager, Indian Christian organization and even the names of certain villages as well. The publication of these names could potentially put the lives of my interlocutors and their families in jeopardy, subject churches and organizations to governmental scrutiny, or even invite retribution by vigilante groups at some time in the future. The intensity of such risks ebbs and flows with the prevailing political winds and to ignore them could undermine the accomplishments of acting in tactics and the trust instilled in me by my interlocutors.

As I stated earlier, in the modern Odisha of this study, Christians must navigate a local and regional politics, often played out in the public press, in which their enemy is and is not the State; their enemy is and is not Hinduism; their enemy is and is not Hindutva. In this ambiguous environment, the leaders of Maranatha Ministries have

developed an innovative tactical approach to enable them to become “100% Oriya and 100% believer in Jesus Christ.”

Acting in

I have proposed the term “acting in” to refer to a subaltern tactic through which the marginalized and endangered Oriya MM Christian community leverages a degree of functional agency in relation to state and local governments, local villages, and to non-governmental Christian agencies in the West. Acting in is the performative means by which MM Christians negotiate a plurality of somewhat paradoxical relationships and attempt to satisfy the various conflicting means by which one is rendered a natural or accepted member of each social group.

In this project I have examined two different modes of acting in performances and have explored the ways these performances enable specific kinds of relationships between MM Christians and local villagers, between MM Christians and the agencies that seek to govern them, and between MM Christians and sponsoring Christian agencies in the West.

The Bagharpalli *keertan* performance presented in chapter two enables relationships between MM Christians and local villagers. Through an examination of both dialogue and performance I argue for a conception of local authenticity that, while relatively absent from public debate, is performatively rendered as a process of becoming real. I claim that what is fundamentally becoming real in Bagharpalli is not simply the natural or habituated music and drama performances, but is also the Christian stories and even the

MM Christians themselves. Additionally, I claim that musical performance alone is insufficient to achieve this authentication. As Abhinash stated, “Song means only they are listening, but when it is acted in the drama it will become real for them.”

The transition from “listening only” to “becoming real” is an affective turn that I contend is dependent upon an embodied resonance with the audience’s historical past. This historical resonance represents an embodied epistemology, a way of knowing that is based on a physicality of experience rather than a mere acceptance of verbalized information. Dwight Conquergood posits such an epistemology as an experiential “knowing how” and “knowing who” rather than an informational “knowing that” or “knowing about.” It is this embodied epistemology that enables these performers and their stories to be subsumed within a category of “known” for the Hindu Bagharpalli villagers.

Through the Bagharpalli ethnographic account, the observed physicality and embodiment of audience engagement ethnographically grounds the acting in tactic. The resonance achieved with the audience’s historical past enables the performances of Christian songs, stories and dramas, and indeed even the Christians themselves to become real to villagers. This process begins with song, takes root through a dialogic process of question and answer and becomes real with the addition of drama. This historical resonance provides the basis for Satpathy’s audacious declaration, “The gospel is from Orissa!”

In chapter three I considered the political work being accomplished through this same Bagharpalli performance. I found that the jettisoning of foreign cultural practices combined with the performance of what the government calls “oral tradition” results in a functional invisibility to various means of surveillance. These are surveilling agents, official and otherwise, that may find it politically expedient to govern Oriya MM Christians as a separate entity from their Oriya Hindu neighbors.

The tactical maneuver from one category of governance to another is necessarily political in nature and unique in several ways. First, this political action is accomplished in the context of an ethical project. Such ethical projects are, according to Ryan Skinner, agential acts by one entity that “do not refuse the right of others to act on the world.”³⁰⁷ In the case of the Bagharpalli street performance, the Hindu neighbors are in attendance of their own accord, their attendance is not coerced and there is no compunction for them to stay except for their willful choice to observe the performance and voluntarily engage in the question and answer process.

Second, the incorporation of what Odisha’s Secretary of Culture calls performances of “oral tradition” mirrors a strategy of the state by which similar performances are organized and promoted for state purposes of tourism. Through these tourist performances of “oral tradition,” the state declares the performers to be an authentic representation of the local. The state also declares such “oral tradition” to be beyond the critical purview of outside agents, be they foreign or academic. As such, “oral tradition”

³⁰⁷ Ryan Thomas Skinner, *Bamako Sounds: The Afropolitan Ethics of Malian Music*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 09.

is simply the way that “oral people” do things. It is ironic that the tactic by which MM Christians perform “oral tradition” to achieve a functional invisibility to state and other surveillance is based on a precedent of authenticated performance established by the same state.

The ethnography of chapter three exposes an MM stance of “not hiding but not exposing” themselves to state and local bodies of governance. The complexity of Maranatha Ministries’ stance emerges throughout chapter three as MM leaders affirm state declarations that persecutors of Christians come from outside the community. MM leaders are also careful to avoid any accusation of government complicity in occasions of anti-Christian violence. This tactical position requires MM leaders to ignore evidence to the contrary (and there is considerable evidence to the contrary) and embrace a stance towards state and local government that is cooperative and affirming rather than antagonistic. I point out that functional invisibility to the state would be lost were MM leaders to openly protest; such an action would amount to an “acting out” as it were.

A third unique characteristic of the political work accomplished through acting in is that MM leaders appeared genuinely surprised by my identification of this political notion. While MM leaders work diligently to maintain a working and respectful relationship to various entities from village neighbors, to village elders, to government leaders, they seemed genuinely unaware that such tactical maneuvers could be classified as political action. This was a possibility they had not considered. Upon hearing of my investigation into the political ramifications of acting in performances, MM leaders were concerned that they not be viewed as subversive to government agencies. I share this

concern by and for my interlocutors, a concern that influenced my decision to examine acting in through the scholarly lens of Skinner's ethical project. For this reason I have endeavored to clarify the various processes by which the cultural and political work of acting in is accomplished without domination, subjugation or limitation of others' agency.

The acting in ethnography presented in chapter four demonstrates an even greater complexity within the stance that supports the cultural and political work of the Bagharpalli account. Whereas the Bagharpalli street performance employs epic, stylized Biblical narrative, the Kusasinga house church account instead presents a different mode of acting in that utilizes verbatim scripture recitation. Rather than a performative tactic that seeks to minimize a Western Christian identity, this performance seeks to maximize Western connections in specific ways. Rather than a functional invisibility to official and unofficial means of governance achieved through performances that minimize difference, among Hadi Christians functional invisibility is achieved instead by means of the physical seclusion of a village structure or house. Rather than a jettisoning of foreign practices, this acting in embraces a practice of verbatim scripture recitation that lays claim to both local Oriya and broader religious practices.

An ongoing and uneasy public discourse

As I write these final paragraphs I have been made aware of the following BBC news item. In the account below, Hindutva leader Mohan Bhagwat draws upon public opposition to conversion as a basis for undermining the credibility and social value of Mother Teresa's well know charitable work in Kolkata and beyond.

BBC News, February 24, 2015: *There has been outrage in India over a Hindu leader's comment that Mother Teresa's charity work had one objective - to convert the poor to Christianity.*

Mohan Bhagwat is the powerful head of Hindu nationalist organisation RSS, which is close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP government.//

The prime minister's comments followed a string of attacks on churches in Delhi.//

"Mother Teresa's service would have been good. But it used to have one objective, to convert the person, who was being served, into a Christian," Mr. Bhagwat said while speaking at a function in Rajasthan on Monday.//

The comment sparked a howl of protest from Christian leaders, opposition politicians and ordinary Indians.³⁰⁸

This latest accusation is evidence of the instability of the politics of religion in modern Odisha and across the subcontinent. Here, historical Christian contributions that have here to fore seemed beyond reproach, such as the lifelong charity of Mother Teresa, are at risk of being transformed into anti-Christian fodder for Hindu nationalist purposes. Here, Christians must remain agile in their tactics in order to survive.

³⁰⁸ "India outrage after Hindu leader attacks Mother Teresa motive," February 24, 2015, accessed 02.23.15, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-31598834>

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