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## Village Politics and Women: Towards a Gendered Analysis of "Faction" in Rural Orissa

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### Introduction

This paper attempts at a gendered analysis of political activities in contemporary village India.<sup>1)</sup> It deals with the process of reproduction and change in political groupings — known in previous literature as "factions" — that involve both men and women each playing particular roles which have hitherto been ignored due to the nature of analysis in previous studies on factional politics in rural India.

Although Indian women's participation in institutional politics in the public sphere has been pointed out particularly in the context of the nationalist struggle for independence [Jayawardena 1986; Visweswaran 1990] and recently with regards religious nationalism and Hindu fundamentalism [Basu 1993; Hansen 1995; Mazumdar 1995; Sarkar 1991, 1993], observations have been restricted mainly to activities of middle class women. When they have dealt with

rural women, analyses have been mainly in terms of focus on actions of particular individuals [Wadley 1992], resistance involving peasant women in particular movements in history [Kannabiran and Lalita 1990], or women's empowerment [Calman 1992]. Moreover, there has been a tendency to restrict the meaning of women's political participation to such factors as electoral behaviour and political activism and awareness [Jharta 1996]. There has been little discussion over the relationship between politics and women's everyday activities at the village level.

This, I would argue, is due in part to the focus on the separation of social space along gender lines and the view that, in Indian society, there is a clear-cut distinction between the domestic sphere of women and the public sphere of men's activities [Fruzzetti 1989]. According to such perception, factional politics in rural India fell under the realm of public action carried out by male agents. Thus political participation by women in many previous studies were defined in terms of how women left the confines of the domestic sphere to enter the public sphere, and there has been little discussion about the political function of women's everyday activities at the village level. Previous studies on factional politics, then, have based themselves on male-centred presuppositions and have concentrated on defining the role of factions in Indian public politics and delineating the social relationships that constituted them.

There are some major problems with the gender blind and essentialist orientation of previous studies on factional politics. First, previous studies on political factions at the village level tended to see factions as a group with determinate members and attempted to discover the organising principle or its "essence". However, it is doubtful whether recruitment into a political faction can ever be said to be determined, as village people are continually interacting within and across factions, constantly gauging each other's stance to reproduce and transform relationships. From such a view, the existence of a "faction" itself may be said to be indeterminate. In this way, it is not that there is a political faction and people belong

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to it, but a faction may be seen as a label used by people to describe their relationships with one another at one particular point in time. Moreover, the idioms employed by people to explain "factional" relationships, such as kinship, brotherhood, community or party politics, may be regarded as representing people's discursive and interpretative frameworks rather than the "essence" of faction. We should get away from the idea that there is a static pre-established structure such as a political faction, and instead describe the processes through which a political faction is said by the people to exist.

Second, as I have already implied, the process of reproduction and change involving factional politics are participated not only by men but also by women, in important though differing ways. There is undoubtedly a significant distinction in social action along gender lines; and in fact, I would like to focus precisely on that distinction in order to investigate the different ways in which men and women exercise their agency in factional politics within a framework based on gendered division of social space. I would argue that whereas men's actions in the public "outer" domain have a more determinate and symbolic character, women's actions in the "inner" domain — that is women's sphere of activity at "home" and the "back" which may be larger than what the term "domestic" space would suggest — leave room for indeterminacy and manoeuvrings that lead to the flexible reproduction and change in social relations regarding the constitution of factional groupings.<sup>2)</sup>

Third, it would be a mistake to assume a static and ahistorical "cosmological" type of gender division of space and activity. Such categorisations mislead us into giving ahistorical basis to the gender division of labour, when we really need to pay attention to the transformations in the meanings of gender and social space in history. In particular, it is important to take note of how the framework of gender difference has acquired new significance in post-colonial times when people have had to adopt to "modern"

(*ādhunika*) changes and at the same time retain their "traditional" (*paramparā*) identity. To put it in rather simplified terms, men are required to take up the challenge of new opportunities in the "modern" times, which included participation in factional politics in the "outer" sphere for self-interest. By contrast, women are expected to maintain the enduring aspects of culture and identity, or what is referred to as "tradition", newly invented or otherwise, in the "inner" sphere, and they talk about their actions in such terms.

It is important, however, to note that the outcome of social action deemed "traditional" do not constitute static and determinate social relations defined by "norms", but a dynamic reproduction and change in social relations which shape factional membership. It is precisely through women's activities and discourse regarding ideal community relations that factional activities can be dynamic and at the same time retain what the villagers see as community ties which form the basis of their "traditional" identities.

In the sections that follow, I will first discuss the "factional" contexts in Garh Manitri where I conducted my fieldwork. I will then go on to consider the semantics of gender before analysing the place of gender in factional politics in the village, giving examples from actual incidents that occurred during my stay in a village in Orissa.

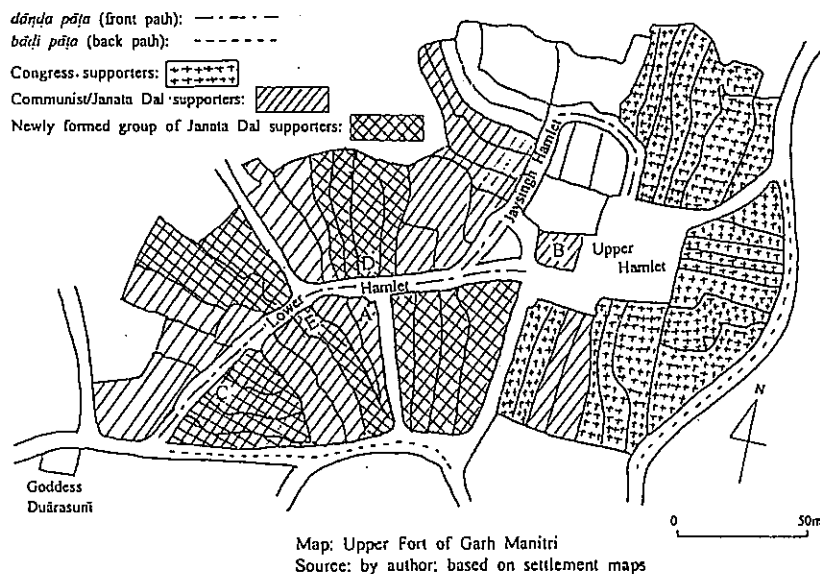
### Faction in Garh Manitri

Garh Manitri is a fairly large multi-caste village with a population of around 2,500. It consists of 480 households, out of which, just under half (228 households) are of Peasant-Militia caste (*Khaṇḍāyāt*) which may be called the dominant caste, having the greatest politico-social influence in the village and the surrounding region (see Table). The *Khaṇḍāyāt*s play an active part in the political affairs in and around the village and are the main players of factional politics in the village.

Garh Manitri is divided largely into Upper Fort (*uṣara gaḍa*)

Table. Castes in Garh Manitri

Caste Name	"Traditional" Occupation	Household
Khaṇḍāyat	Peasant-militia	228
Brāhmaṇa	Priest	22
Karaṇa	Scribe	6
Mohānti	Peasant	5
Gauda	Cowherd	23
Jyotiśa	Astrologer	1
Baḍheri	Carpenter	20
Kamāra	Black smith	7
Guḍiā	Sweets maker / seller	34
Khumbāra	Potter	10
Teli	Oil presser/merchant	27
Māli	Gardener	6
Bhaṇḍāri	Barber	10
Dhobā	Washerman	11
Bāuri	Rock cutter	12
Hāḍi	Sweeper / drummer	28
Khond	Horticulture	2
Saora	Horticulture	28



where mainly Khaṇḍāyāts with some Scribes (Karaṇa) and Barber (Bhaṇḍāri) castes reside and Lower Fort (*tala gaḍa*) some distance away where other castes, such as Brahmans, Carpenters (Baḍhei), Oil Presser (Teli) etc., live. These two Fort areas are further divided into eight hamlets (*sāhi*) which together are considered to constitute the village proper. At the fringes of these two Fort areas, there are hamlets inhabited by Washermen (Dhobā), Sweeper-Drummers (Hāḍi) and Rock Cutters (Bāuri) belonging to Scheduled Caste categories and Saoras who belong to Scheduled Tribe category.

I employ the term "faction" in this paper to refer to the group called *daḷa* at the village level in Orissa.<sup>3)</sup> Although the constitution of a *daḷa* differs depending on the caste composition in the village, it is primarily a group formed amongst the dominant caste headed by several oligarchic leaders (*netā*) who form a fairly stable core.<sup>4)</sup> In Garh Manitri, the term *daḷa* is used specifically to refer to the "political cliques" within Khaṇḍāyāts. According to people's discursive representation, the Khaṇḍāyāts of Garh Manitri were divided into two *daḷas*, namely the "*kānguresa daḷa*" (Congress faction) and the "*kamyunisut daḷa*" (Communist faction).

In the period 1991-92 when I was a resident in the village, the Upper Fort area was the centre of political and factional activities. Of the three hamlets making up the Upper Fort, namely Upper Hamlet (*upara sāhi*), Lower Hamlet (*tala sāhi*) and Jaysingh Hamlet (see Map), the Congress faction was more or less concentrated in the Upper Hamlet, whereas the Communist faction was predominant in the other two hamlets. The Khaṇḍāyāts living in the Paik Hamlet in the Lower Fort were divided in their support of either of the two factions.

It should be noted here that the geographical or kinship units such as hamlet, lineage or household are not determining factors of factional membership, though they are related and influential. There were factional divisions in Upper Hamlet and Paik Hamlet when we arrived, and Lower Hamlet also went through factional

division later. This was despite the fact that in people's discourse, people living in a hamlet are called "hamlet brothers" (*sāhi bhāi*) and are supposed to live in harmony. Also it was not uncommon to see families of the same lineage belonging to different factions. Sometimes family members living in the same household supported different factions, though this was considered unusual and was a constant source of bitterness and lamentation. There were three such cases in Garh Manitri.

We should also note the ways in which discourses regarding brotherhood among hamlet members and kinship obligations play an important part in factional politics, not as an organising principle of factions, but as a frame of reference for criticising others and for lamenting of the present state village disunity. Such frame of reference sometimes works as a framework for action and interpretation that lend dynamism to political processes in the village. The way in which this is accomplished in the context of factional politics in Garh Manitri and how it gives a semantic twist to the role of women in the process will be discussed during the course of the paper.

Non-Khaṇḍāyāts in Garh Manitri were not very politically active, and most of them seemed to keep, on the surface at least, neutral stances as regards factional politics. This meant that the non-dominant caste people neither formed a particular group supporting a political party outside nor supported a particular faction inside the village. Jajmani relationships were not binding forces for political support. Brahmans often presumed an air of aloofness from secular, political matters, while the other service and artisan castes, though taking a subservient attitude to the dominant patron caste, were almost never committed to one particular *daḷa*. This was also a matter of pragmatics, since for those who served the dominant-caste families belonging to different factions, it was necessary to maintain good relationships with all of them. If a service caste made a commitment to a particular *daḷa*, there was danger of ostracism from families belonging to another *daḷa* and thus of los-

ing jobs. There was in fact such a case in Garh Manitri where the Washerman caste showed commitment towards the Congress *daḷa*, and as a result they lost their patrons in the Communist *daḷa* who decided to employ other Washermen from a nearby village. In contrast, merchant castes such as the Teli who have businesses independent of community relations, or the tribal Saoras, who nowadays earn most of their wages by working outside the village as labourers cutting stones used for construction work, have little fear of losing their patrons and can thus afford to express their support for a particular *daḷa* rather more openly. Although they are never considered *daḷa* members per se, the Telis and the Saoras were considered to be sympathetic to the Congress *daḷa*, whose votes could be counted upon.

Each non-Khaṇḍāyāt caste usually act as one unit in electoral support towards a *daḷa*. At each election, they secretly pledge support for one *daḷa* in return for promises of some benefits. The support, however, never seems to be constant and changes according to the political situations inside and above the village level, as well as the personal relationships between *daḷa* leaders and the caste leaders.

When I say that most non-dominant caste people were not politically active in Garh Manitri, I am only referring here to the politics of *daḷas* and I do not mean to suggest that non-dominant castes never engage in "political" activities in a wider sense. It goes without saying that there are power games within families and castes amongst them. These, however, are never referred to as "factional" (*daḷa*) or "political" (*rājanīti*). More importantly, non-dominant castes who have so-called jajmani relationships with the dominant caste, previously formed caste associations, negotiating against the dominant patron caste for better deals in jajmani exchanges. Such activities, in spite of their importance, are distinct from factional (*daḷa*) politics, and need to be considered separately in another paper.

People living in smaller villages surrounding Garh Manitri

tended to stick together in their support for a particular *daḷa*. They were careful not to make commitments to a particular *daḷa*, probably in fear of changes in the power situation that would result in discrimination against them if the opposition *daḷa* came to power. At the time of election, they would carefully negotiate with the leaders of both factions, and secretly promise electoral support to one *daḷa* after minute discussions over what their village would gain in return for their support. Small villages consisting of less than 100 households usually acted as one political unit, but in the last five years or so, there has been an increasing tendency for these smaller villages to also be divided into factions of their own. In such cases, the *daḷa* of Garh Manitri and *daḷas* of surrounding villages supporting the same party often formed fairly stable ties, though even then they were not considered as one *daḷa*.

Some of the main functions of *daḷa* are related to the control of distribution of resources that flow from top to bottom through politico-administrative channels and to the organisation of electoral support from bottom to top, to higher political leaders whose participation in the ruling government ensure a flow of resources to the *daḷas*. Members of the *daḷa* whose supporting party is in power at the state government level can expect to win priority in distribution of politico-administrative benefits, gaining government posts, official contracts, pensions, police support, etc. And for this reason, the *daḷa* functions as the main supporting body of political parties at the time of elections at the village level. This does not mean, however, that there is any structural and permanent connection, not to mention ideological, between political parties and village factions. The connections are more often than not contingent and perhaps due to some personal relationships between village leaders and higher leaders on a temporary basis. The village *daḷa* leaders are very vigilant about political situations at the higher level, and are quick to form new personal ties with key politico-administrative figures when considered necessary for the benefits of their *daḷa*.

The leaders of the village *daḷas* play pivotal roles in connecting village *daḷa* members with higher political leaders — mainly with Members of Legislative Assembly (MLA) — and with key offices outside the village — local administrative offices, police and court — as the need arises. The *daḷa* leaders in Garh Manitri often visit Khurda, the sub-divisional headquarters, and Bhubaneswar, the state capital, to meet and discuss various matters with such key persons. The leaders are usually comparatively educated and are capable of helping *daḷa* members with various kinds of office work. They arrange for *daḷa* members, for example, to apply for various government benefits and loans, register land purchases and sales, contact police and negotiate court cases. *Daḷa* members and other villagers depend largely on the leaders for these matters. The leaders also work to link their *daḷas* with other villagers not belonging to a particular *daḷa* and with the population of surrounding smaller villages. They act as political manipulators at times of elections and go about in and around the village trying to convince these people to vote for the candidates they support. They can usually count on *daḷa* members of the same caste for votes, but must convince others such as the members of different caste in the same village or other village members to support their cause.

### Gender in Village Orissa

#### "Home" and "Outside" in the Village Context

Having dealt with the factional context in the village, I consider here the place of gender in factional politics, but before doing so it is necessary to explain the semantic framework of gender with regards the different kinds of activities.

According to the general impression concerning politics and division of labour along gender lines in village India, politics belongs to the public sphere in which adult males participate, and women and children whose activities are confined to the private field do not take part in politics. It is true that in Indian villages, space and contents of activities are strictly defined according to gender and

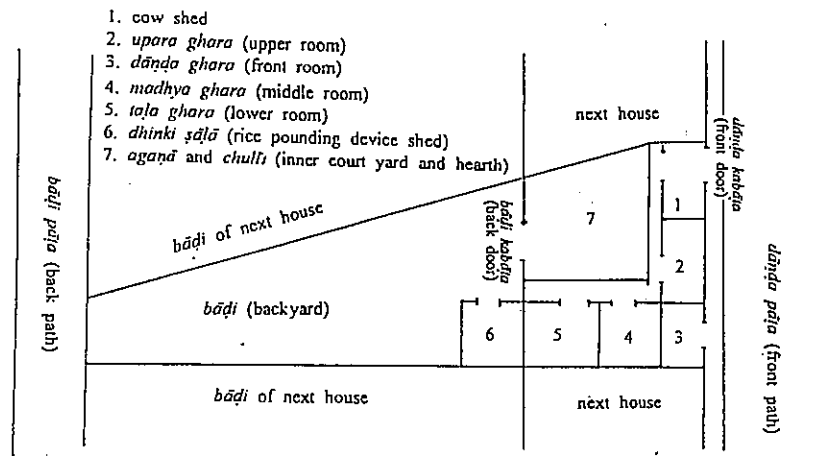


Figure: An example of an Oriya Khaṇḍāyat house

life stage of persons. For instance, one cannot imagine women attending faction meetings in the village.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to apply the public / private distinction uncritically and consider politics as being limited to the so-called public sphere.<sup>6</sup>

I would suggest that the distinction on which spheres of activities are defined in village Orissa where I conducted fieldwork can be characterised not so much in terms of private/public, but in terms of the division between the “home” and “outside” and the more general distinction between the “inner” and “outer”. In Orissa, “home” is referred to as *ghara* and “outside” as *bāhāra*. *Ghara* refers to house, room or indoors and is considered primarily space occupied by women and children which is often put in opposition to *bāhāra*. *Bāhāra* may refer to outside of the house, or of the village (*gaā*) depending on the context, where kinship and community ties are gradually diluted, where public meetings take place and where men often break restrictions — as regards food and sex — that are posed in the village or in the house.

There is another related distinction between the “back” and the “front”, referred to as *bāḍi* and *dāṇḍa* respectively in local terminology (see Figure). *Bāḍi* means typically the backyard or the area

behind the house and *dāṇḍa* the area in front of the house. *Bāḍi pāṭa* (back path) is the foot path linking houses or leading to a nearby pond through the back way, whereas *dāṇḍa pāṭa* (front path) is the main street in front of the houses. Visitors who are not relatives and are from outside the village (and are hence considered as *bāhāra loka* or outsiders) are first seated on mats on the terrace facing *dāṇḍa*, so in this sense *dāṇḍa* is associated with “outside”. In my terminology, *ghara*, *bāḍi* and *gaā* (village community) depending on the context belong to the “inner” sphere, and *bāhāra* and *dāṇḍa* to the “outer”. “Inner” and “outer” are not simply spacial distinctions. They constitute parts of discursive frameworks which are often contrasted with each other, the former expressing community ties, morality among kinsmen and hamlet or village members and aspects of “tradition”, while the latter refers to matters of self-interest in terms of wealth and prestige that are said to be part and parcel of “modernity”.

Certain kinds of information gets passed on through women’s conversations across fences in the backyard. Feasts cooked in the house on occasions including ancestor worship (*śrāddha*), annual festivals (*parba*), marriage functions and fasts (*osā*, *brāta*) are distributed to neighbours and relatives, and it is women and children who play major roles in such interactions. In this sense, the “back” and “house” are not a private domain, but rather an important site of social interaction centred around women. As I will go on to show later, this interaction by women has importance beyond social and ritual meaning and play subtle but pivotal role in the processes of factional politics in the village:

#### Women’s Duties and Everyday Activities

Most studies on factionalism have regarded political action in terms of control of power in public space. Nicholas, for example, defines political activity as “organised conflict over public power” [1968: 244]. Indeed women and children hardly feature in the accounts given by previous scholars.

According to my observation, practices and actions concerning faction groupings may be divided into two kinds, namely those involving men as agents in the "outer" domain and those involving women in the "inner" domain. The "outer" domain, where men exercise their agency, has been dealt with by previous works on political factionalism in village India<sup>7)</sup> and include such activities from drinking tea together<sup>8)</sup> to village meetings and elections. However, I would like to include in my account practises in the "inner" domain, that is to say, actions which take place in the space of the "home" and the "back" where women exercise their agency.

Among the Khandayats, as is the case with other upper castes, married women whose husbands are alive (*ahya*) seldom go out via the "front" of the house in their husbands' village and their activities remain inside the house or in the backyard, that is to say, in the "home" (*ghara*). *Ghara kāma* literally means "house work" and much of women's time is taken up by cooking, cleaning, looking after cows, as well as performance of votive rituals (*osā*, *brāta*) at certain times of the year in which women pray for the health and well-being of their husbands and children. A married woman's primary duty is to maintain her husband's family by bearing children, especially sons who continue the family line, and by feeding members of the family, which is extended to her feeding her husband's ancestors. An ideal wife here is the auspicious supporter and protector of the husband's family line, the enduring aspect of life that is called "tradition" (*paramparā*, also meaning "line").

A newly married woman's movements are particularly restricted for up to about eight years in her husband's house until she gives birth to a few children, after which she is allowed to fetch water from a well in the front street, covering her face with sari. By that time her position in the household has become more secure, especially if she has borne sons. Her sisters-in-law and her mother-in-law in particular give her a hard time initially, but the power relationship becomes more subtle when the woman begins to establish herself in her husband's house and commands respect from

other household members.

If a woman is the wife of the eldest son, she will have more power and responsibility than the wives of the younger brothers while her husband is alive. She will have more say in the engagement of everyday household tasks, the organisation of fasts and festivals among women and will represent the household on important ritual occasions, such as certain parts of marriage rituals. Gifts of food to be sent to family and neighbours on special occasions are prepared under her and her mother-in-law's instructions. Such gifts are often sent via the back of homesteads so it is women who receive them. The exchange relations thus organised by women play an important part in village political processes.

Elderly women and young girls who have not yet reached puberty sometimes help men and boys with tasks which require going outside the household compounds, such as grazing cows, collecting firewood or keeping watch over cashewnut fields. Elderly widows are relatively free to move about the village and often play an important part in transmitting information between households. Children and young girls are often sent on errands by their parents to other households. These activities together with the inter-household exchanges carried out by women, I would argue, play a crucial part in the reproduction of factional groupings.

In the following section, I shall first give a background history of factions in the village before going on to discuss the significance of the incidents that occurred during my stay. I consider the actions and discourses regarding the process of reproduction and change of factional relationships. Special attention will be paid to the ways in which women's activities create the on-going dynamics of inter-household relations and at the same time are referred to in terms of kinship and brotherhood of "traditional" community.

## Processes of Reproduction and Change in Factional Membership

### Background of the Conflicts

The beginning of the great divide in the Upper Fort is said to have begun during the late 1970s when there were conflicts over money and positions concerning the newly built high school in the village. The villagers say that before that "the village was one" (*gaā eka thilā*), though they admit that there had been a rivalry between the Khaṇḍāyāts of the Upper Fort and those of the Lower Fort. According to the "Communists", the "Congress people" cheated over the finances of the high school and manipulated matters to give jobs to their followers, and it was since then that the conflict started. In 1979, there was a major incident when the member of the Congress faction threw a bomb in a car in which a communist MP and a left-wing journalist rode in their visit to the village. A large-scale feud followed between the Congress faction and the Communist faction in which many were injured and a large number arrested.

Court cases concerning the bomb incident and the feuds that followed are still carrying on, and the villagers must attend to them at their own expense. Since the incident, the Congress faction and the Communist faction have been in hostile relations. As the Janata Dal supported by the Communist party was in power at the Orissa state level since the 1991 election, the members of the latter faction were on the state government's side enjoying various benefits. They have gradually re-identified themselves as Communist / Janata Dal faction. A major transformation in the constitution of factions in the village took place after some people in the Communist / Janata Dal faction attempted to take leadership in their hands.

#### Incident 1: Rumours

There were three main leaders of the Communist / Janata Dal faction, namely Mr. A who was serving as a low-rank government official,<sup>9)</sup> Mr. B who was a school teacher in a nearby town, and Mr. C who had owned a weaving factory but then had closed it down and was living off his land in the village (see Map). They

were all in their forties, comparatively well-educated and their incomes were above the average by village standards.

Now, Mr. D who owned a grocery shop in the village and Mr. E who was a cultivator were young active members of the faction in their mid-thirties and wanted to be nominated as candidates for the ward member. Mr. A, however, questioned their capability as ward members in public. Also, when Mr. D and Mr. E wanted to be given the government contracts for improving the village road, Mr. A gave the job to somebody else in the hamlet close to himself. It was then rumoured that the person who got the contract made more than 1500 Rupees (about 9000 yen then) by gaining a margin.

It was then that rumours spread in the village that Mr. A who had recently organised a *pālā*, that is, a folk theatre performance offered to Krishna, through donations in the Lower Hamlet, fiddled the accounts and pocketed the excess amount. Obviously, somebody wanted to dishonour Mr. A's reputation. Mr. A did not have any direct evidence as to who exactly was spreading the rumour, but he suspected Mr. D and Mr. E in particular.

The route by which rumours spread is worth noting here, since it provides insight into the significance of gender in the political processes in the village. It is common for men to gossip at tea shops in the village, and each tea shop is attended only by the members of the same faction. It is the place where men exchange information. However, when the matters concern sensitive issues within a faction, it is not possible to talk about the matter there in public. The place for exchanging information then becomes restricted to the backyard (*bāḍī*) or inside the house (*ghara*) where women play a pivotal role.

One way in which information gets passed from the men's side to the women's is via children or elderly women who happen to hear the men talking in the bus stand, tea shop, front street or other public places. Another way in which there is communication between the men's area and that of women is through the HyB<sup>10)</sup>

(*diara*) and the eBW (*bhāuja*) between whom there is a joking relationship which is further extended to those in the same caste in classificatory kinship relations. Hence there is no problem for men to talk with their classificatory eBWs in the back part of homesteads. It is very common to see them (more than two) sitting together near the kitchen gossiping.

Rumours then spread among women via the backyards of households which are separated only by low walls or hedges. Information thus spread among women may again go back to men through classificatory HyBs.<sup>11</sup> In this way, women and their space, that is to say kitchens and backyards, are important media through which sensitive village communication, informal but nevertheless influential, takes place.

The content of the rumours regarding faction and money considered degrading for the persons concerned is very typical and illuminates the framework of discourse and thoughts about factional politics and community. People often lament that in this degenerating age of kali yuga (*kali juga*; the iron age), people have become egoistic and greedy. According to such discourse, factions are talked about as typical phenomena of kali yuga which disrupt the harmony of the community. When people gossip about how people cheated or used faction connections to get money, they are implying that those people are not complying with the "traditional" community relations which are supposed to be based on brotherhood and have instead succumbed to corrupt "modern" influences which are inherently self-seeking.

Relationships between classificatory HyB and eBW are based on an extension of kin relations to the caste community. Women are considered to be the subjects of the "home" and their space of activities, such as the kitchen and backyard, the sphere where "traditional" kind of identities and social relationships are to be maintained. The kind of cut-throat politics involved in factional groupings and cheating amongst village "brothers" are considered to be the results of corrupting influence of the "modern", in contrast to

the idealised community relationships.

#### Incident 2: Separate Meetings

Since the time the rumours began to spread, Mr. D and Mr. E tried with other dissidents to hold a hamlet meeting on their own initiative without attending the official meeting called by Mr. A, but their meeting did not take place as Mr. A and his followers refused to attend.

The hamlet meeting held by men is a place where factional membership is visibly constructed and represented in public. The fact that Mr. D and Mr. E did not attend the meeting called by Mr. A and attempted to hold a meeting on their initiative made it a public indication that the relationship between Mr. A and Mr. D and Mr. E had deteriorated beyond containment in the inner sphere. Obviously, it was Mr. D's and Mr. E's intention to make question of Mr. A's leadership a public issue.

The action of men in the "outer" or public (*dānda*) regarding factional politics have a symbolic and determinate effect. Once things are made public, they cannot be taken back and hence the incident was an omen for further escalation of trouble.

#### Incident 3: A Feud and Its Aftermath

Periodic quarrels began to occur between the family members and supporters of Mr. A and those of Mr. D and Mr. E, until one night a large-scale feud erupted which resulted in one of Mr. A's young friends and Mr. A's FFyBS becoming hospitalised and another of Mr. A's FFyBS having a minor head injury. Mr. D, his FyB and Mr. E had hit the two men on the head with rocks. They were arrested next morning to be detained for a week at the local police station.

Another quarrel broke out when Mr. A's FFyBSM threw a stone at Mr. D's house. This was in the front street and in full view of men. The woman protested that a member of Mr. D's household had injured her sons when their sister's daughter had married

into that household. She admonished Mr. D's household for injuring their own *bandhu* (relative by marriage).<sup>12)</sup> Mr. A's FFyBSM was an elderly widow with a reputation of speaking her mind in front of everyone (and also of being a bit mad after she had a stroke). Many Khaṇḍāyāt women take pride in their readiness to be vocal. Older women, especially widows, can afford to do so since they can go about the village fairly freely to seek or spread information without fear of husbands or older relatives. Mr. A's mother, another elderly widow also with a reputation of being outspoken tried at first to drag her embarrassing relative away, and up till this point, people watching in the front street remained silent and some even seemed amused.

However, then Mr. D's FyBW commented sarcastically across the street that Mr. A's family acted as if the whole hamlet were their domain. At this, Mr. A's mother became very angry and started shouting at Mr. D's FyBW. Mr. A, who had been sitting quietly until then outside his front door pretending to ignore the unseemly behaviour of the old women, intervened to tell Mr. D's FyBW to take back her comment. The woman refused and a full-scale quarrel erupted with men and women shouting at each other across the street.

The feud was a culmination of hostilities which had been brewing up. We notice here that there are two distinct discursive frameworks employed, namely the "inner" one referring to kinship and community ties and the "outer" one on which factional politics is based. It is significant that the injured men's mother protested to Mr. D's family members in a discursive framework that put emphasis on the closeness of their kin relation as *bandhu*. As a woman, she did not mention the political side of the matter, but rather rebuked them for their improper behaviour as kin. In my terms, she stuck to the "inner" discursive framework of kinship and community, rather than intruding into the "outer" framework of factional politics. Men ignored the woman until Mr. D's FyBW commented in retaliation that Mr. A's family acted as if the whole

hamlet were their domain, thus shifting the discursive framework to that of "outer" factional politics. It was precisely then that Mr. A interfered and told the woman to take back her words. It is considered improper for women to criticise men's political behaviour which is thought to belong exclusively to men's sphere, at least at the village-level. It is notable here that there is a strict gender segregation in terms of discursive framework rather than in the actual topic of discourse.

#### Incident 4: Temporary Peace

In spite of there being heated discussions of revenge among the classificatory HyBs and eBW's in the back of homesteads, Mr. D and Mr. E were forgiven for the time being as they apologised for their mistakes. As a result, when the injured men returned to the village from hospital, there was a big celebration to welcome them and offerings were made to the tutelary goddess of the hamlet located at the entrance of the hamlet (*Duārasunī*), vowing to her that the hamlet would live in harmony. The remains of the offerings (*bhoga*) were later distributed among the hamlet members.

We notice here that those in the Communist / Janata Dal faction in the Lower Hamlet temporarily chose to remain united. "Inner" idioms of community were invoked to represent such unity, rather than the logic of factional politics, that is to say a pledge of allegiance to a *daḷa* or to a certain party. The congregational worship of the tutelary goddess and sharing of the remainder of the offerings are typical actions symbolising the solidarity of "traditional" community. Here we note that the members of the Communist/Janata Dal in the Upper Hamlet were absent from the scene. Although they were part of the same faction in political terms, they belonged to a different hamlet in terms of community.

#### Incident 5: Village-level Unification

Some days later, however, rumours spread among members of Mr. A's and Mr. B's group that Mr. D and Mr. E had pledged to

join forces with the Congress faction in the Upper Hamlet. Mr. C seemed sympathetic to Mr. D and Mr. E. They and their supporters began to work towards ameliorating the relationship between the Congress faction and the Communist/Janata Dal faction. A local MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly) elected from the region was contacted to take part in the negotiations, since the village was notorious for its factionalism and violence and any peace-making procedures would be a credit for higher officials.

From the villagers' point of view, they could authorise the process of unification with the presence of the MLA and also do him a favour by giving him the credit. From the MLA's point of view he could gain both credit and expectation of support from the unified village members. Eventually after a large-scale village meeting on the hill of the village goddess, an agreement was drawn up between the Congress faction and the Communist / Janata Dal faction. That evening a procession was organised to celebrate peace making after twelve years of division in the village. This procession was led by the leaders of the Congress faction as well as Mr. C, Mr. D and Mr. E, but Mr. A, Mr. B and their followers did not participate.

This was a public ritual enacting village unification after twelve years of enmity. It is notable that again the idiom of religio-community harmony was employed by invoking this time the village goddess. According to the "official" history that village people would explain to the outsiders, "Although there had been two factions (*daḷa*) in the village, the village became one (*eka heiḷāichhi*) after the meeting." This kind of simplified story, however, belongs to the representational level of the reality. It gives a clear-cut and positivistic picture of the situation readily available for a speaker who wants to avoid making any committed discourse on the matter. Moreover, the discursive framework belongs typically to the "inner" logic of community ties where factional logic and pursuit of self-gain are denied and unity is emphasised. It is a safe and sound discourse that no one can deny or argue against in public.

There was mixed response to this among women. Mr. A's mother told me that now her family can go back to exchanging new rice at harvest with the chiefly family in the Upper Hamlet just as they used to do before the factional split twelve years ago. She employed the discourse of community relations to say that the relationship between her family and the chiefly family in the Upper Fort was returning to how it was in the past, as that between "village brothers". Her daughter-in-law, that is, Mr. A's wife, showed more scepticism. She almost sneered as she saw the menfolk parading in the front street to celebrate the village unification. She was no doubt aware of the absence of her husband and the members of his and Mr. B's group in the parade, and was wary perhaps of the complexities under the show of unity.

#### Incident 6 : Movement towards Reconciliation between Households

With the hamlet now supposedly committed to peace and unity, people began to test each other's intentions and to engage in subtle manoeuvres of inter-household exchanges. It was at such a time when one of the girls in Mr. E's family (Mr. E's eBD) had her first menstruation. This occasion calls for gifts of food to be sent for the girl to eat while she is secluded in a room for three days and three nights. I suggested to Mr. A's wife that I send some fried snacks for the girl. Mr. A's wife thought for a moment and bought some herself. As I was going to the girl's house with the gift, Mr. A's wife gave me a plate of savouries and told me to make sure to tell them that this plate was from her house giving a gift independently of me.

Mr. A's wife's sending a gift to Mr. E's family should be seen in the context of village practices regarding exchanges. The villagers express good relations between households in terms of existence of "*diā niā*" (giving and taking), "*jibā āsibā*" (going and coming), "*kathābārttā karibā*" (having conversation) and "*sāhājya karibā*" (helping out). Such actions involve women and children to a great

extent. Children come and go between houses when they play and are sent on errands. Women, elder ones in particular, also come and go between houses as they go and ask their neighbours for small favours such as borrowing some salt or chilli, taking embers from the neighbour's hearth when their own has become extinguished, and using their neighbour's rice pounding device (*dhinki*) when their own is out of order. In return for such favours, women may send small items of food as gestures of appreciation. They are also responsible for preparing food given to other houses.

Whenever there is a special occasion, such as ancestor worship (*śrāddha*), annual festivals (*parba*), marriage functions, fasts (*osā*, *brāta*) and indeed the occasion of a girl's first menstruation, food and sometimes other gifts are exchanged between neighbours and relatives. Offerings made to deities are also distributed as gestures of good will. Also when visitors come, it is usual for them to bring vegetables, fruits, snacks or sweets and a little of what is given is often kept aside for neighbours and relatives living nearby. Thus, food and other items are exchanged between households having "good relations" (*bhala samparka*).

Relationships between households are judged by the quality and quantity of these actions between people of the respective households, and women and children play a vital role in constructing relationships between households. Inter-household exchanges undertaken by women thus constitute important political actions at the village level and a means whereby women exercise their agency. Since factional membership is fluid, mutual understanding and behavioural representations of which households in good relations are crucially important from the point of view of village politics. Thus, who gives what to whom and when as well as who receives what from whom and when are subject to subtle political manoeuvrings and in this incident, when Mr. A's wife, apparently of her own accord, decided to send snacks to Mr. E's family through me via the back path, she was performing a significant "political" act.

Women's activities take place in the "home" and the "back", that is to say, the "inner" domain where traditional community relations are supposed to be maintained. As a matter of fact, discourse of household exchanges initiated by women are based on language of kinship and locality which are the basis of community relations in the village. When I asked village women who they exchange gifts with, the answer was always framed in a stereotypical normative discourse, namely that exchanges take place between family of the same lineage (*kuṭumba*) and neighbours (*paḍoṣi*). It goes without saying that in practice, factional divisions make matters more complicated; nevertheless, it is important to note here that the explanation for such deviation is not put in terms of political conflicts but in terms of failure to comply with the traditional norms due to morally wrong behaviour on the part of other households. This kind of "inner" discursive framework employed in women's politics that unfolds in the back part of houses confers a particular significance to women's activities and their influence in factional relationships.

Although the exchange of food takes place in the back part of homesteads and is considered a "social" or "domestic" matter falling into the semantic framework of the "inner", people are also aware that it influences inter-household relations a great deal in factional terms. However, in terms of discursive and interpretative framework, the two — "inner" community relationship and "outer" factional relationship — are carefully distinguished, as we have already seen in the case of Incident 3 when Mr. D's FyBW was chided by Mr. A for intervening in men's affairs. As such, while on the one hand, the domestic interactions by women play an important role in construction of inter-household relationships and hence in village political processes, on the other hand, they are talked about in the language of "traditional" community relations.

This gives an interesting twist to the semantics of inter-household interactions among women. They are often employed to test and transform inter-household relationships without having to di-

rectly refer to the factional situation, since they are a matter of community and kinship relations in their discursive framework. However, as I repeatedly emphasise, they do in fact have pivotal importance in village politics. The move by Mr. A's wife to send the snacks through me was a strategy to reconcile the relationship with Mr. E's family. By using me, instead of going herself, she could maintain her dignity, and also made it easy for them to accept the gift. The exchanges at the back carried out by women are thus important in enabling people to test and transform inter-household relationships.

#### Incident 7: Interactions of Dissemination between Households

Mr. C who was in close relations with Mr. D and Mr. E became a Samiti member. Mr. A's relation with him had been deteriorating since around the time of the big feud. Though there was a wedding of Mr. C's son, Mr. A refused to attend. The new bride had brought gifts of sweets from her father's house to be distributed in the hamlet. Few days later, a small boy from the house came to Mr. A's house carrying a tray with small quantities of the gift. Mr. A's wife and Mr. A's yBW decided not to accept the gift. They told the small boy that they are not allowed to accept anything without their mother-in-law's consent and as she was out at the moment they could not accept. Mr. A's mother returned and said that they should have accepted. Mr. A's wife argued, however, that she did the right thing since, the quantity of the gift was very small and Mr. C's house was very late in giving the gift which should be distributed on the actual wedding day when the bride comes to the groom's house. They all agreed on this.

Thus, the move by Mr. C's household to see the reaction of Mr. A's household by sending gifts through a boy was turned down. It was convenient that a small boy was sent with the gift since the two women of Mr. A's household did not have to explain very much and the giver could also go away with the minimum embarrassment. It is interesting to see how women find fault with the house-

hold sending gifts.<sup>13</sup>) They do not mention factional confrontation as the reasons for not accepting gifts but point out instead that the gift was late and small, thus not befitting the proper behaviour towards a fellow hamlet household. Here again although the women's actions are obviously influenced by factional logic, their way of interpreting and discussing the matter falls strictly in the "inner" community logic.

Relations formed in the "back" between households influence the larger political relationships and usually get consolidated with actions in public by men. The decision by the two women of Mr. A's household to turn down the gift from Mr. C's household was probably communicated to men in the respective households in some way or another, since it was an important move as far as factional politics was concerned, and the men no doubt took note of it. The rejection by the women of Mr. A's household of the gifts sent by the women of Mr. C's household pointed to a failure in re-establishment of exchange relations between the two households and this may have been instrumental for Mr. C to go ahead with consolidating ties with Mr. D and Mr. E, and also with the Congress faction members.

In the following Sarapanch elections, the followers of Mr. C, Mr. D and Mr. E apparently supported a Congress candidate. Rumour spread that Mr. C had come to a deal with the Congress group to support their candidate provided they would support him in his bid to become the block chairman. Mr. C went on to become the block chairman in the next election, supported by the Janata Dal group as a whole and with tacit support from the Congress members from Garh Manitri. Mr. A tried to support another candidate but could not because it was decided at a block-level Janata Dal meeting that Mr. C should stand. The action by the women of Mr. A's household to discard the reconciliation move by the women of Mr. C's household had in effect contributed to isolating Mr. A from the then mainstream of village politics.

### Incident 8: Politics in Married Women's Ritual

It was around this time, just when the hamlet people were getting anxious about their inter-household relationships, that an important time for observances of fasting rituals (*osā*) among married women approached. Performing *osās* is an important part of women's housework (*ghara kāma*), vital for continuity and maintenance of the family line conceptualised as *parampara*, namely "tradition".

Budhei *Osā* takes place every Wednesday in the month of *Bhādra* (August–September) and women from different households in the hamlet observing the fast for their husbands and children gather around a place of worship to listen to one woman read the story (*kathā*) about the goddess. Worship takes place in certain houses in the neighbourhood and Mr. A's house was one of them.

Three of Mr. D's family women had always attended the worship of Budhei *Osā* at Mr. A's house in spite of the fact that one of their family had started up a new worshipping place after quarrel with Mr. A's FFyBS's family some years ago. Mr. A's mother announced that she would go and call the three women from Mr. D's family to do Budhei *Osā* at her house as they have always done but Mr. A's yB and his FFyBS told her not to call them in case they don't want to and they might say no.

Another woman doing the *Osā* at Mr. A's house living next to Mr. E's household reported that the eldest of the three women had already done the worship by herself. Mr. A's wife then decided not to wait anymore and started the worship. Just as she did so, a small girl from Mr. D's household came with two plates of offerings from the other two women. Mr. A's mother said she will call the three women for the evening worship. In the evening, three sets of offerings were sent from Mr. D's household via an older girl and the small girl who came in the morning. They stayed on throughout the reading.

The following Wednesday, the old woman who had done the worship by herself the week before came with a plate of offerings,

bowed down in front of the deity, exchanged a few words with Mr. A's mother and other women and left. After the worship was over, Mr. A's mother sent the offerings back to her house via a small boy.

There was thus a reconciliation in the "back" among the women of Mr. A's household and Mr. D's. The announcement made by Mr. A's mother that she would call the women of Mr. D's household had a considerable impact, since though stopped by the male members of her family, the fact that she had made such move probably reached Mr. D's household somehow or other. Move by the women of Mr. D's household's to send a little girl with offerings was a test to see the reaction of Mr. A's household. Since the reaction was favourable, one woman attended the ritual in person and even had a brief chat, hence reinstating a talking relationship (*kathābārttā*) among the women at least.

In the subsequent development of village politics, the Communist / Janata Dal dissidents began to lose ground. The Congress group became more prominent as the Communist / Janata Dal group's solidarity had weakened. Seeing this, the Communist / Janata Dal dissidents tried to make up with Mr. A and his followers. The dissidents proposed to Mr. A to form a unified faction again. Mr. A answered, however, that since the village had become one already there was no longer any question of unifying factions. This answer, while turning down the dissidents' proposal in effect, was consistent with the discursive framework of community harmony and with the ritual relations they had established.

Later on, Mr. A and Mr. B's group and the Congress group gradually began to cooperate, holding power and influence over village politics. The dissidents, in the end, apologised to Mr. A for splitting off from his group and asked for reestablishment of good relations. We might say that such a move by men was made easier because the women had already established a talking relationship between Mr. A's household and Mr. D's since Budhei *Osā*. Women's activities thus can be said to play an influential part in

the process of transformation of inter-household relationships and hence of processes of factional politics.

### Concluding Remarks

The above account of incidents illustrates that it is not always clear whether a particular person or household belongs to a particular faction since people are always uncertain about whether they can trust one another for support, especially in a situation when there is a new dynamism in the village politics. In such a situation, relationships between persons and those between households are speculative by nature and are not taken for granted because they always contain the possibility of change. Here, the politics by women at the backyard is especially important since it is easier to negotiate things at the "back" side and to see the opponent's reactions before committing to anything. Thus, in cases where women and children exercise immediate visible agency, it is possible to employ tactics or strategies which enables gauging the reactions of the other party in informal, fluid ways. In other words, whereas political action by men in public places (for instance, participation in a meeting of a particular political faction) leads to fixing of intentions, affiliation and membership, actions by women and children involve subtle, processual undertakings which may be interpreted in manifold ways and enable reinterpretation of actions and relationships between households and hence may be said to contribute substantially to the everyday dynamics of political factionalism in the village.

It is *not* my intention here to argue that faction is a modern political phenomenon which is talked about in the traditional language of community ties among women in India. Factionalism as seen today is based on pre-existing social ties and is also a product of village people's practical response to a new social environment in which they are able to seek benefits through belonging to a political group. From this point of view, then, there is little point in discussing whether or not it is a traditional or modern phenom-

enon.<sup>14)</sup>

What I have tried to look at is the way in which factional politics in the village involves both "outer" and "inner" domains of activities. As far as inter-household relations are concerned, men and women play complimentary roles in actions involved in the reproduction of factions each in their own domain of activities. This makes it possible for the villagers to talk about and orient their action towards the same "factional" relationships both in the "outer" framework of self seeking politics and in the "inner" framework of community and brotherhood. By thus employing these kinds of dual behavioural and discursive frameworks for inter-personal and inter-household relations, people are able, on the one hand, to introduce dynamism to factional membership, and, on the other hand, to talk about and place themselves in the framework of "traditional" community ties without making cut-throat politics the norm of the day. In this way, village people are able to affirm their "tradition" on which their identities are based and at the same time pursue factional strategies, keeping in mind the political situation outside the village.

Here, as I have tried to show, women are not merely passive bearers of tradition. As far as factional politics are concerned, women employ the framework of community and tradition to criticise the "outer" realm of self-seeking politics and to reconstitute the "inner" value and identity, and at the same time, participate in the reproduction and transformation of factional relationships in their own ways. A gendered perspective thus provides scope for understanding the subtle semantics and processes of factional politics in village India today.

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#### Notes

- 1) Fieldwork was conducted between April 1991 and October 1992 in Garh Manitri, Khurda District, Orissa. I would like to thank the people of Garh Manitri for their kindness and hospitality. Special thanks are due to Mr. Laxmidhar Sundaray and his family. Fieldwork was carried out with my husband, Akio Tanabe, to whom I am indebted for some of the information collected for this paper. This paper is part of a research project conducted with the aid of a Japanese Ministry of Education research grant for science (effective from April 1st 1995 to March 31st 1996) and the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science Research Fellowship for Young Scientists (effective from April 1st 1995 to March 31st 1997), for which I am very grateful.
- 2) Chatterjee [1989, 1993] has dealt extensively with the discourse of anticolonial nationalism which divided the world of social institutions and practices into two domains, the "outer" and "inner". Whereas the West was considered superior in the "outer" material domain, of economy and statecraft, etc., the "inner" spiritual domain was the core of Indian cultural identity. Chatterjee goes on to say that this inner/outer distinction was mapped on to the concrete separation of living space of *ghar* and *bahir*, (the Bengali equivalents to the Oriya terms *ghara* / *bāhāra*) translated as the "home" and the "world". The home / world distinction was applied to the gender division of social roles, as the world came to be considered the domain of men, while the home, with women as its representative, was to remain unaffected by the material world and to retain its inner spiritual culture. Contemporary significance of this gendered distinction has been pointed out by Ram in her study of South Indian fishing community [Ram 1992].
- 3) Nicholas refers to faction as "dal" [Nicholas 1965: 43], Bailey as "dolo" [Bailey 1969: 47] and Lewis as "dhar" [Lewis 1958: 114].
- 4) Nicholas gives an account of dominant caste and political cleavage [Nicholas 1968: 273] and Bailey of divisions among warrior caste groups [Bailey 1957: 194].
- 5) Seats for ward membership have been reserved for women since 1992, and elected women have begun to attend gram panchayat meetings. These meetings, however, are distinct from faction meetings, and are considered simply to be of nominal value compared to faction meetings where important decisions are often made.
- 6) The public / private distinction is a product of specific socio-historical conditions in the modern West. The public sphere is "the space of political participation, debate, and opinion formation" [Fraser 1987: 41] as opposed to the private sphere or the "modern nuclear family" [ibid.]. There have been attempts made by certain groups of elites to apply the distinction to Indian society for the establishment of liberal politics and civil society [Chakrabarty 1994], but in village India today, it does not

exist in its original sense.

- 7) For reviews of previous works on factions, see Hardiman 1982, Nagasaki 1986 and Fukunaga 1993.
- 8) In a similar vein, Lewis mentions "hookah smoking groups" that "serve as social centres where there is daily face-to-face contact" [Lewis 1958: 115]
- 9) My husband and I were staying at Mr. A's house during our fieldwork. Though we tried our best not to be caught up in the factional matters in the village, we sometimes found ourselves being a part of the process, since we were considered Mr. A's "home people" (*ghara loka*) and any "social" action would have political implication in terms of inter-household relationship in the village. The following description thus contains mostly the information that are gathered "inside" Mr. A's household besides those talked about openly in public. It should be kept in mind that *no one* can have complete information about village politics and the following is an example of people acting with inevitably limited information, trying to get the best out of uncertain and indeterminate situations.
- 10) In the following, I use conventional abbreviations to indicate kinship relations in which "H" stands for husband, "y" for younger, etc.
- 11) It is difficult to know how much information is exchanged between husbands and wives, since if they communicate at all it is often behind closed doors in their bedrooms. A wife may inform her husband about matters concerning her activities with her neighbours and relatives if she feels he ought to know, but we can never be sure about what exactly is said.
- 12) Strictly speaking, Mr. A's two FFyBS injured on the head are Mr. D's *bandhu's bandhu*. However, it is common to refer to all relatives by marriages as *bandhu*.
- 13) Village women have great memory when it comes to remembering who gave how much to whom and when. They often have lengthy discussions about this, criticising or praising households which have given too little or a lot.
- 14) Fukunaga also makes this point though in a different context [Fukunaga 1993: 15-16].