Remaking Tradition:

The State Government and Martial Arts Competition in Orissa, India*

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I Introduction

This paper deals with a martial arts competition held in Orissa, India in 1992, which I had a chance to observe during my fieldwork in the region. The competition has been held sporadically since 1979, sponsored and organised by the Directorate of Sports and Youth Affairs, the State Government of Orissa. In this paper I would like to analyse the way in which several different identities and interests—caste, party-political, regional, national etc.—appear and interact in this state organised performative ritual. It was much more than a mere sports competition, and as I hope to show in this paper, the complex politico-cultural significance of this event is very much relevant to the understanding of present day Indian society and politics.

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II The Problems and Theoretical Perspectives

a) Ritual Representation of Authority

Since the publication of The Invention of Tradition,\(^1\) the study of rituals in modern settings acquired new significance for historians and anthropologists. It has led scholars to pay more attention to the historically dynamic aspects of so-called "traditional" phenomena. In particular, B.S. Cohn's seminal paper in the volume, dealing with imperial rituals in Victorian India, stimulated a number of South Asianists, especially those inclined to "ethnohistorical" approaches, to take up imperial ceremonies in colonial India as their objects of study. This has resulted in recent publications of a number of papers on the subject.\(^2\) These works contribute to investigation on the significance of imperial rituals in colonial India, and, moreover, has important implications for understanding of India today; suggesting that idioms found in imperial rituals may be seen to have continued even after Independence, when the Indian people rejoiced in their victory over imperialism.

Those who took up the subject of imperial rituals, however, tended to confine their perspectives mainly on the political intentions of those who took part in designing the ceremonies, and on the cultural meanings and ideological models which lay behind such ritual manipulation.\(^3\) In order to fully understand the significance of rituals, however, it is necessary, to be more sensitive to the problems of the co-existence of different and even contradictory ideas which are generated and contested in a ritual setting, particularly as both the ritual form and its socio-political context has been under dynamic change. Due attention must be paid to different meanings attached to the event by various participants, and also to the unexpected repercussions and other contingent elements that evaded designers' manipulation.

b) "The Public" in Modern India

Concomitant with the recent discussion on the politico-cultural significance of rituals in colonial South Asia, increasing attention is paid to the role of "the public" in shaping modern India. These two trends share concerns over certain spheres of activities which hitherto has been neglected or little discussed. They are both interested in the nature of publicly held activities in cities and towns, which, despite being full of

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2) Michael H. Fisher 1985; as well as the collection of papers by Michael H. Fisher, Edward Haynes, Douglas Haynes and Charles W. Nuckolls which were featured in Modern Asian Studies Vol. 24 No. 3 1990.
3) Douglas Haynes takes up similar points in his studies on the British imperial ceremonies and seeks to find out "the meanings Indians attached to their ceremonial involvement." (1990, p. 494; the emphasis is mine.) Haynes is certainly in the right direction but it is further necessary to look into the diverse workings and complexity of different points of view even among the Indians or the non-organising participants and observers.
politico-cultural significance, have evaded attention of scholars who tended to concentrate on either state-level “real politics” or cultural meanings of village festivals. One of the reasons behind the recent growth of interest on rituals in modern India is the increasing awareness among scholars that rituals and other public performances have assumed a central place in the formation of Indian politico-cultural environments to this day. Public ritual provides both occasion and arena for performance based on various political and cultural ideas and ideologies, in which identities and authorities are shaped, confirmed, and contested. Discussion regarding the notion of the “public”, I would argue, may be usefully combined with that concerning the notion of the “invention of tradition” for the purpose of analysing the political and cultural significance of “public” rituals “invented” in the modern period.

This notion of the “public”, however, is difficult to define; as rather than having its characteristics drawn out in a straightforward fashion, it seems to have been employed primarily to be distinguished from the sphere of the state and that of the “private”. It has been useful in delineating a sphere belonging neither to the activities of state governance per se nor to the realm of apolitical, domestic privacy. The development of the notion “the public” has been prompted particularly by Jurgen Habermas’s analysis of the emergence of a bourgeois public sphere in Europe (Habermas 1989). Particular attention has been paid to his argument that “in its early phases ‘the public sphere’ functions as an intermediary realm between ‘the state’ and ‘the people’, in which informed public opinion exercises independent judgement in its surveillance over the state”, and that the “creation, in turn, of a ‘public sphere’ based on that public opinion depended on the increasing distinction between public and private” (S.B. Freitag 1991).

To apply to South Asia such a slippery notion, developed primarily through studies of Western Europe and having no clear definition, obviously one must be very sensitive to indigenous socio-cultural and historical contexts. However, such a shorthand term as “the public” proves most useful in indexing, if not defining, the problematics. In the Indian context, the notion of “the public” proves an apt way of talking about the emergence of collective politico-cultural activities that challenged the authority and legitimacy of the colonial government.

c) The Inherent Paradox of Colonial Modernity and Its Continuity

Recent studies on public activities in colonial India have been very fruitful and brought about various stimulating findings, albeit primary. S.B. Freitag (1991a), in her introduction to the collection of papers on this subject, writes that most notably a tension has been identified between two distinct arenas of public performances. One such arena is constituted by political discourse “represented, for instance, by the nationalist rhetoric”; and another by cultural discourse that belongs to “a realm of localised, familial and fictive kin-based activities” (Freitag 1991a, p. 3). The latter includes such aspects as religion, caste, etc., which are highly politicised in modern In-
dia; and hence the term "cultural" should not be treated as being the same as "the private" that indicates an apolitical nuance. The political nature of the cultural realm is particularly important, since in colonial India cultural or local/domestic idioms were consciously or unconsciously employed by the newly emerging Indian "public" as a way to explore and express their new identity as well as their socio-political relations. Its profound impact may still be traced, not only in the activities of various contestatory movements against the government by several ethnic or caste communities as pointed out by Freitag, but also in present government’s attempts to establish authority on such "cultural" grounds.

Related to this tension between cultural and political realms, are other dichotomic notions which I propose to use in the following analysis; namely general/particular and modern/traditional. When the public sought to establish their legitimacy and authority, it was necessary that they claimed to represent the general interest. At the same time, however, they depended on activities based on particular local and personal ties they created and represented. In a similar vein, although they were inspired by such modern ideals as democracy and freedom of individuals, they also sought to ground their politico-cultural identities on the so-called traditional past, since they were in the midst of the fight against their colonial present.

It should be noted that these paradoxical tensions existed not only in public activities but also in imperial rituals. Similar point is made by B.S. Cohn, that imperial proclamation "encompasses two divergent or even contradictory theories of rule: one which sought to maintain India as a feudal order, and the other looking towards changes which would inevitably lead to the destruction of this feudal order." Here we can see that colonial rule, too, bore problems regarding general-versus-particular and modern-versus-traditional. Such paradoxes, it seems, were inherent in India from the birth of the colonial-state to the emergence of the present post-colonial nation-state, and have posed deep-rooted existential problems for modern India.

d) The Martial Arts Competition and Postcolonial India

The framework of analysis and historical implications of the studies on imperial ceremonies and public activities in colonial India can be utilised for looking at a state-organised ritual, the martial competition that took place in Orissa in 1992. It is important to note that today’s government-organised ritual inherits idioms of both imperial ceremony and public ritual, due to the historically unique position of the government after Independence in relation to the former colonial government and "the public". Postcolonial independent governments have, on the one hand, undeniably taken on power roles from their imperial predecessors; but on the other hand, they are also righteous heirs of the Independence movement supported by the anti-imperial "public".

In organising the martial arts competition, the government of Orissa tried to highlight Indian nationalist and Oria nationalist elements of the martial arts by
manipulating ritual forms and historical discourses. At this level, the competition may be said to illustrate a typical example of an "invention of tradition", and indeed, one aim of this paper is to examine the way in which the government tries to reconstruct "authentic" and "traditional" martial arts, re-formulating history related to it in order to invent and stage a symbol of nationalism.

The problem, however, does not end here, since actual performances in, and discourses surrounding the competition-ritual inevitably involved hidden motives and different interpretations of the various participants, as well as contingency and indeterminacy that were beyond the intention and conscious manipulation of the organisers. The competition-ritual contained themes deeply associated with socio-historical identity of the Oriya people and produced complex multi-layered responses and effects. Another aim of this paper is to describe such nuanced complexity of the event and the reflexivity of the past and present it involves. Attention will be paid, in particular, to the paradoxical nature of actions and discourses surrounding the ritual, concerning the notions of modern/traditional and general/particular, which characterize the post-colonial condition of modern India.

III The Background History of the Area

Orissa has developed its distinct regional language and culture through its history as a natural geographical unit with a fertile alluvial belt along its coast by the Bay of Bengal, surrounded by a semi-circle of rugged tracts of jungles, hills and valleys. The first medieval kingdom of the region was established in the 11th century by the Somavamsa dynasty. This short-lived polity was followed in the early 12th century by the imperial Gangas which ruled over Orissa in glory for more than 300 years. The formation of Orissa as a cultural and political unit seems to have been consolidated during this medieval period.

After the collapse of the Hindu Orissan empire in 1568 due to the Muslim conquest, however, the Oriya speaking areas were split up under different administrative jurisdictions. The north-east area along the coast-line was dominated by the Mughals while the rest was divided into a number of small Hindu kingdoms. During this period from 1568 till the British conquest, the Khurda kingdom, though small in size, functioned as the central locus for the cultural identity of Oriya people. The Khurda kings assumed the succession to the glorious Orissan empire and continued its politico-religious tradition as they retained the traditional title of Gajapati as rulers of Orissa and representatives of the state god Jagannath on earth.

Muslim Orissa was conquered by the British in 1803, and the Khurda kingdom followed the same fate in the following year. The king of Khurda was deprived of his political authority but was appointed as the superintendent of the Jagannath temple and was allowed to pursue his religio-ritual duties. His residence was confined to Puri, the seat of Jagannath, and his designation was changed from the king of Khurda
to the king of Puri. King of Puri has remained a symbol of Orissa’s cultural unity to this day, despite being devoid of political power.

Under the first phase of British administration, feelings of discontent grew in Orissa due to ever worsening economic and social conditions. In 1817, an anti-British revolt known as the “paika rebellion” broke out under the leadership of Buxi Jagabandhu, who was the commander-in-chief and relative of the king of Khurda. Buxi Jagabandhu with his paikas (soldiers) marched to Puri and tried to persuade the king of Puri to return to Khurda to assume the throne again. This rebellion, though it proved unsuccessful in the end, came to take on a very important place in historical notions of Oriya people, especially for the nationalist cause in later periods.

Orissa had long been denied of its independent existence under British India. Only in 1936, did it become an independent province. The state of Orissa finally came to take its present form as late as in 1949 integrating the remaining Oriya speaking areas, then Feudatory states. Due to the long struggle to amalgamate Oriya speaking areas, which lasted even after independence, the Indian nationalist movement and Oriya nationalism have complex cross currents noticeable even today, for example, in the state organised ritual dealt with here.

IV Paika Akhada—The Context of the Martial Arts Competition

The tradition of martial arts in Orissa, called paika akhada or foot-soldier’s play, has been passed down by the male members of warrior-peasant castes living in rural parts of Orissa. People still perform the martial arts to the sound of drums on such occasions as village festivals. It was, however, becoming a dying tradition and the Orissan government is now making an effort to revive the heritage and to reformulate it as a traditional symbol of Indian nationalism and Oriya nationalism.

Paika, in its original sense, just meant “foot soldiers” in king’s time. The name paika came to imply nationalism and heroism after the Paika a Rebellion of 1817. The rebellious paikas were led by Buxi Jagabandhu, the ex-commander-in-chief of Khurda kingdom, who became an Oriya hero. Stories recounting the heroic deeds performed by him and the paikas are repeatedly reproduced in plays, novels and people’s discourses. One finds related stories also in school text books. The government is now said to have plans for subsidising films about Buxi Jagabandhu.

These stories/histories of Paika Rebellion have become so popular that they form one of the important cores of Oriya identity, especially that of the people of Khurda. Whenever I introduced myself as a researcher interested in the culture and history of Khurda, people would always want to think that I was studying about Buxi Jagabandhu and his paikas, although this actually formed but a small part of my research plan. So much so that I was introduced in several Oriya newspapers as a Japanese researcher who came to study the paikas. This must have confirmed Oriya people’s conviction about the “international” importance of Oriya paikas and their
history.

The word *paika* is sometimes used also as a prestigious self-referential term, and almost has become a caste term. The king’s foot soldiers were mostly peasant-militias who were engaged in agriculture during times of peace but fought at times of war. They belonged to different gaitis, the most prestigious among them being *Khandayats*. While *Khandayats* claim that they are the only real and genuine *paikas*, it seems that peasants who belonged to other gaitis, such as *Chasas* and *Mahanayakas*, preferred the more prestigious designation of *paikas* or *Khandayats* and gradually adopted those references for themselves. So an anthropologist today would find most non-*Khandayat* peasants claiming themselves to be either *Khandayats* or *paikas* rather than calling themselves by other older names which they consider to be degrading. I personally experienced much of this when I was interviewing people. Their “traditional” caste can be known only from old records of rights from the British period on which the right holder’s caste name is inscribed. 4) Peasants who do not belong to *Khandayat* caste according to such records nevertheless claim to be *Khandayats* to outsiders. In front of the “real” *Khandayats*, however, they dare not call themselves *Khandayats* but resort to the term *paika*. It seems as if the whole peasant population, which are divided into a number of jatis, are becoming one caste in name, as all try to claim their share in the heroic heritage of *paikas*.

This trend can be traced back to the past in the census records, where one finds a disproportionate increase in percentage of the population who claim to be *Khandayats*. One census report mentions “the desire of the Chasas to improve their social status by converting themselves into Khandayaits” (Lacey 1987 [1931]). In Puri district, which includes the sub-division of Khurda3) that was the main stage of the Paik rebellion, the increase in number and percentage of *Khandayats* is phenomenal. In 1891, the number of *Khandayats* in Puri district was only 8,193 (0.87% out of total population of 944,998) and that of *Chasa* 273,715 (28.96%) (Census of Puri district 1891). By 1931, the number of *Khandayats* increased by more than ten times to 112,571 (10.87% out of total population of 1035,154) while the number of *Chasas* decreased to 231,021 (22.32%). As far as my experience goes, there was virtually nobody who willingly claimed oneself to be a *Chasa* in Khurda area in 1992. All agricultural caste people claimed to be either *Khandayats* or paikas.

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4) This can be added to the list of examples of objectification and fixation of the “tradition” of India by the British colonial government. See B.S. Cohn 1987 for the objectification process which census operation had for the social structure of India.

5) Khurda sub-division acquired the status of Khurda district in 1993 encompassing the nearby areas of other sub-divisions. It is noteworthy that though it includes the Orissa’s capital city of Bhubaneswar and head quarter of the district is placed there, the government of Orissa opted for the name Khurda district. There was a complex political process behind such a decision, but it can be conjectured such choice of the name is made, at least partially, because of the historical importance people attach to the name Khurda.
The government of Orissa, in its effort to make the martial arts a symbol of both Indian and Oriya nationalism that appeals to all Oriya people, tries to stress the general significance of *paika akhada*. They claim that its importance is not confined to a particular caste, i.e. *Khandayat*, against the common belief that the *Khandayats* are the community which has handed down the tradition. They use two steps of logic for this claim.

Firstly they argue that recruitment of *paikas* or soldiers were not along caste lines and by no means confined to *Khandayats*. In an interview with the Director of Sports and Youth Affairs, who is the main organiser of the competition, I was told “*Paikas were not only Khandayats*. Most Oriya people did agricultural work in peace and fought in war. Everybody, irrespective of caste, creed or religion, sacrificed himself for the cause of his country, and this is very important. Please don’t misunderstand.” It does seem true that *paikas* were not confined to the *Khandayat* caste. People often told me that only those who worship swords during the festival of *Dasahara*, the day on which the tools of profession are taken up for worship, are the real *paikas*. According to this criteria, some of the non-*Khandayat* peasants and cowherds qualify as *paikas*. Moreover, in the region around a fort village in Khurda area where I conducted my fieldwork, some of the non-*Khandayat* caste people such as *Chasas*, *Mahanayakas*, and *Gaudas* (cowherds) held non-tax residential land (*minaha*) given in king’s time for their *paika* work, and some of them even held such titles as *Dalai* which denotes special rank and position in the traditional military system. Such evidence suggests that while it is true that *paikas* are not confined to *Khandayats*, they are still confined to certain castes of peasants and cowherds.

The government uses a second logic to overcome such particularities posing limits to the general significance of *paika akhada*, by stressing that the *Paika* Rebellion, whose image is very much associated with *paika akhada*, was in fact a general uprising in which participation was not confined to *paikas*. Some historians indeed portray the rebellion as a popular uprising, stating that it was not merely a “*paika*” rebellion (e.g. P.K. Mishra 1983, P.K. Pattanaik 1979). A local historian, in a personal communication with me, took a list of the names of those punished for taking part in the Paik rebellion as a proof in point. One can see on the list names belonging to different jatis probably those of Brahmins, barbers, untouchables and tribal people beside those of *Khandayats* among others.6 It should be pointed out though that while it seems true that people from different jatis participated in the revolt, their roles were still based on caste divisions. The major part of the fighting was left to the *paikas*.

All considered, it seems undeniable that the tradition of *paika akhada*, the heritage of the fighting technique itself, belongs to a certain section of society, those who are of

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6) The list can be found in S.C. De (eds.) 1961 published from the State Archives of Orissa. It is suggestive that such an effort to reconstruct “national” independent movement is a part of the government’s activity.
peasant and cowherd castes. Moreover, the prestige of the tradition is primarily associated with the Khandayat caste who claim and is recognised to be the descendants of "the real" paikas. This is confirmed from the fact that the participants in the competition were mostly Khandayats with a few exceptions of Muslims.

It is interesting that the Orissa state government relies on a symbol, such as paika akhada, which is associated with a particular section of Orissan society, for representation and performance of nationalist ideology concerning people of Orissa in general. The term "paika", in Orissa, is an idiom carrying complex ideas and memories that reflects the politico-cultural problematics surrounding notions of the general and the particular. However, it is in its local and particularistic character that lies the strength of the idiom's appeal, which the government tries to extend to the general. This may have to do with the ability developed during India's independence movement by then newly emerging "public", to put forward, by performance of collective activities, themes of general significance through more particular idioms persuasive in a locality (cf. Freitag 1991b esp. p. 83).

Some people suggested that the government is really well aware and conscious of the fact that the martial arts have special appeal to the Khandayat caste. According to such people, the government has hidden political motives in promoting paika akhada. By glorifying the paikas' past and granting subsidies for related movements, the government is trying to win the favour of the Khandayat caste people who are influential in rural areas of Orissa and would form an important vote bank for the government. One cannot know for certain whether or not such a hidden motive existed, but it is interesting that questions of caste politics were brought up when the official aim of the competition was to bring about unity in the country. Here, the paradoxical nature of modern politics can be clearly seen. While the majority is supposed to represent the general interest, that majority, in its actuality, is always formed by being based on particular social ties, such as caste, kinship or patron-client relationships. Here again one can find the resonances of the tension between the general and the particular.

The first state-level martial arts competition in Orissa was held in Bhubaneshwar, the state capital, in 1979. On that occasion, a seminar was organised on the martial tradition of Orissa, which was attended by politicians, bureaucrats, professors, journalists and leading figures in the locality. The competition took place for the second time in 1990, this time at the ruins of old Khurda fort. The competition in 1992, which is dealt with here, was also held at the same place. Although it was in fact the third martial arts competition held in Orissa, it was referred to as the "2nd state-level martial arts competition" in local newspapers (Sambad, 12 April 1992; Samaj, 15 April 1992), probably taking into account the fact that it was the second time the competition took place in Khurda and the government seemed to have plans to hold this competition at Khurda fort on a regular basis. The counting and numbering of the competition show that this occasion is expected to become a fairly estab-
lished affair. This numbering suggests that the competition is expected to be held on a regular basis, and moreover adds a sense of establishment and a touch of authority.

The ruins of the old Khurda fort, where the competition was held, was the palace cum military centre of the Khurda kings from the late 16th century to 1804, when it was attacked and conquered by the British. Oriya nationalist historians often stress that this fort was the last one in India to have held up against the British colonial forces before losing its independence. There is a big signboard on the highway near the fort which reads “India’s Last Fort of Independence” in Oriya, Hindi and English. Considering the historical background, it seems natural that the government chose the ruins of the fort for the competition, as the place certainly has the effect of arousing memories and sentiments surrounding the infused glorious past.

The government’s official intention was to turn the competition into an occasion to propagate national and regional identities and the spirit of independence. In the words of the Minister of Cultural Affairs, Orissa, “The Objective of … State Level competition of Paika Akhada is to focus the attention on the past glories of the invincible people for whom no sacrifice was impossible. I feel that this occasion provides an opportunity to re-live the historic moments and re-kindle the spark of heroic virtues to illumine the spirit of nationalism …” (1979 “Souvenir”) Actions and discourses surrounding the competition, however, proved to be much more complex and nuanced than the government’s official intention, as there was a dynamic interplay of various identities and interests on the scene.

V The Process of Competition-Ritual and Interpretation

The competition-ritual took place for three days from 10th to 12th April, 1992. Mid-April is around the hottest time of the year and the heat makes any outdoor activity impossible during mid-day. Besides, the timing overlapped with the important religious ritual of Pona Sankranti for which some of the competitors were on fast. The Minister of Culture, in his speech at the inauguration ceremony, gave a historical reason for choosing this particular period; but, as I shall show later, there were some slight discrepancies between the dates of the competition and historical facts. One newspaper criticised the government for choosing such a time for the competition (Samaj, 11 April 1992).

The martial arts competition began with an opening ceremony. It began in a village 20 kilometers away from Khurda fort. This village was, in fact, where I spent most of my time in fieldwork. In pre-colonial time, it was a fort village dominated by a chief under the Khurda king. The fort village today is famous for its history of providing shelter for successive Khurda kings at times of danger and having a tutelary goddess of regional importance. The participants from this village were to begin by worshipping the goddess and taking the sacred fire from the ritual of worship to the Khurda fort.
I was told beforehand that the main worshipper would be the chief of the fort as he is the traditional representative of the paikas of the area. However, as it turned out, he was late for the ritual, and even worse, he had eaten in the morning, which the main worshipper should never do. When the government official pressed the villagers to begin the worship as time was running late, the local Member of the Legislative Assembly (M.L.A.) sat down to take up the role of main worshipper, as though it were a matter of course. The chief arrived late and was called to sit next to the M.L.A. He then also assumed the role of the main worshipper beside the M.L.A. This was an unusual scene in a Hindu worship to have a double main worshipper. It was symbolic to have the two representatives, traditional and modern side by side. Although the chief did represent the traditional past, glorification of his role as the chief would have clashed with the modern idea of democracy on which, after all, the government of Orissa is based; while the local M.L.A., though a democratic representative of the area, did not possess the traditional quality befitting the theme of the competition which was to glorify the heroic past. The basic problem seems to have stemmed from the inherent paradox of the question of legitimate representation centering around the notions of tradition and modernity. Their roles as double main worshippers, rather than symbolically complimenting each other, made apparent the inherent contradiction between the heroic past and the democratic present.

In actual fact, the event seems to have involved further complexity, regarding party-political interests at the village level. There were two factions in the village. One being a group supporting Janata Dal (People’s party) and communist party, then ruling at the state level; and the other being supporters of the Congress party. The former faction then had strong connections with the state government. In fact, in 1990 when the previous competition was held, the two factions refused to cooperate entirely and only the supporters of the ruling party participated in the competition. At that time, the local M.L.A. played the part of the main worshipper. It was only just before the competition was held in 1992 that the two factions made a compromise, allowing members of both factions to participate in the event. The chief of the fort supported the non-ruling Congress party and this was the first time he was to play the role of the main worshipper in this ritual. A leader of the ruling faction told me, “The chief might as well play the part of the main worshipper this year as next time he may not be able to participate at all.” The fact that the chief was invited to play the role of the worshipper, but was somehow misinformed so that he was late and had eaten when he should have fasted, illustrates the political complexity in the village. The chief told me later “I was to play the role of worshipper but I was told that morning that the M.L.A. had already taken the seat of the worshipper so I ate and went to the hill of the goddess.” I can only conjecture that, on the one hand, the members of the ruling faction did not want there to be an open conflict by refusing the chief to be the worshipper as a compromise had been achieved to the credit of the local M.L.A. who belonged to the ruling party, but on the other hand, they did not want the chief’s position to be
honoured, and probably misinformed him, because glorification of his position through ritual representation would go against their interests.

This incident shows us the paradoxical nature of "democratic representation" in the Indian context. While the M.L.A., in principle, is supposed to represent the general interest of Oriya people, he is also expected to represent the interests of the people of his constituency. Moreover, as actual electoral politics goes, he is linked with a certain section of the population who in most cases form a faction in the locality. This faction is usually founded on particular locally based relationships centering around caste, kinship and/or patron-client relationships. In this way, democratic representation is forced to recognise and is also dependent on the effectiveness of the particular, and herein lies the potential for existence of the notorious so-called "party-politics". It should be pointed out, on the other hand, however, that it is the effectiveness of the particular that gives people chance to participate in actual political processes. Public rituals such as this one with cameramen and journalists present on the scene was an important political arena for expression of power relations in the locality.

The worship was performed with arms placed in front of the goddess as to receive her blessings and power, as was always done, so people say, before traditional warfare in kings' time. People told me that British colonial conquerors often engaged in unrighteous warfare by attacking while arms were kept for worship. After the worship, the sacred fire taken from the fire sacrifice (homa) was lit on the torch and taken in a relay running to Khurda town. It is unusual to keep the fire from the homa ritual where the extinguishing or cooling down of the fire constitutes an important part of the ritual. This was, then, a new manipulation of the Vedic ritual to suit the form of modern sport ritual where sacred fire is used as in the Olympics. The last runner handed the sacred fire over to a Minister who is also the local M.L.A. from Khurda in front of the town hall, where a "martyrs' park" is located, complete with a statue of a paika and a canon. This park was opened in 1991 to commemorate the heroic deeds of martyrs who sacrificed themselves for the cause of the country during struggles against the colonial power. The M.L.A. brought the fire into the martyr's park and placed it front of the paika statue, followed by the chief holding the sword and other Khandayats.

The statue of the paika in the park was modelled after a pictorial image of the paika (Figure 1) which first appeared in a book called Paika Kheda (S. Rathasarmma, 1953). This image of the paika became fairly popular and prevalent, reproduced in several places such as in a history book on Khurda (P.K. Pattanaik 1979), the pamphlet of the martial arts competition of 1990 etc. It was made into a statue in 1991 in a government park as to become, so to say, an officially recognised image of the paika. This image of the paika, however, I suspect, may not be an accurate depiction of the paikas as existed in history.

Paika Kheda was the first substantial publication on the topic of the martial arts in Orissa. It includes a detailed description of the costume of the paika, with an illustra-
tion of the *paika* as in Figure 1. The description goes, "Paika ... should hold a sword in one hand and a shield in the other. Under the waist he should wear a piece of tiger skin tied with a rope made of wool ... Above the waist he should wear an armour which will cover the body from the naval up to the chest. Under the armour there should be a dagger on the left and a curved knife on the right ... A small shield (should be tied) on the belt made of bell (around the waist) ... An arrow holder should hang across his body ..." (S. Rathasarma, 1953, pp. 13-14. Translated from Oriya by Tanabe referring to notes for translation prepared by S.N. Rajaguru.) S. Rathasarma states that information in the book was taken from old palm leaf scripts, the existence of which, however, is not ascertained by anybody else. Moreover, the language and the style used has made many researchers suspicious of the authenticity of the palm leaf scripts. In the opinion of a well known Oriya epigrapher Satya Narayana Rajaguru, "... it may be a later compilation or probably forged by some intelligent man of the modern age" (from the notes for translation.)

Regarding the costumes of the *paikas*, there is another description by a British officer, A. Stirling, which is also well known among the educated Oriyas but not popular probably due to its derogatory tone. It says, "The war dress of the *Paiks* consists, or did consist of a cap and vest made of the skin of the tiger or leopard; a sort of chain armour for the body and thighs; and a girdle formed of the tail of some wild animal. Besides the terror inspired by these unusual habiliments, they further heightened the ferocity of their appearance by staining their limbs with yellow clay, and their countenances with vermillion, ..." (A. Stirling, 1904) This book was originally published in 1822, 18 years after colonisation and only after five years after the *Paik* rebellion. The author seems to have some first-hand empirical knowledge of Orissa, though to what extent cannot be ascertained. Despite the differences in the tone, there are some factual coincidences between *Paika Kheda* and Stirling’s book, such as the use of tiger skin and armour, which suggest their factual accuracy. *Paika Kheda* also mentions use of turmeric ("yellow clay", according to Stirling) and vermillion. These features, for the absence of other evidence, may be temporarily ac-
cepted as facts. Regarding other costumes and ornaments, about who wore what kind, other historical evidences are necessary before we can say anything more about them.

In any case, it would not be unreasonable to doubt the typicality of the image in Figure 1. The *paika* in the picture is dressed with almost all the known ornaments. Although this gives a good illustration, it seems unlikely that a *paika* would wear all these ornaments at a time. Existence of metal (?) helmets as shown in the illustration is not known for the Oriya *paikas* and the tiger skin in the style of short trousers looks rather too modern. Also it is unimaginable that *paikas* wore boots in those days. It would not seem too far off the mark to consider it as an idealised image of the *paika* reconstructed in later times. It is interesting how such an image, once created and matching the needs of the age, can be quickly reproduced and become a powerful representation shaping people's imagination about the past.

Let us return to the scene of the competition. Participants from different regions of Orissa gathered in front of the town hall and started a procession to Khurda fort about 2 kilometres away. There were 36 teams from districts of Koraput, Sundargarh, Dhenkanal, Ganjam, Puri and Cuttack (*Samaj*, 15th April, 1992). Participant teams represented 6 districts out of the total 13 districts in Orissa. The participants were given accommodation in class rooms of a school near Khurda town and were provided meals during the competition. The participants in the procession wore various colourful costumes, supposedly like those worn by *paikas* in the past, but were actually more like ones wore in theatrical plays. Many of them carried various armours—swords, shields, sticks etc., probably inherited from their ancestors. These armours are often displayed in the houses of *Khandayats* today and are worshipped on the ritual day of *Dasahara* in the month of Aswin (September–October). The *Khandayat* people are very proud of possessing these armours. The participants seemed to be very much keen and concerned to represent and reproduce the image of the "traditional" and "authentic" *paikas*. Some of the participants even made up their faces and put on big moustaches.

The procession of *paikas* from the town hall to Khurda fort was led by one of the *Khandayats* from the fort village holding the sacred fire. The participants performed various martial arts on the way. It was revealing that the martial arts were performed most energetically at the beginning of the procession near the town hall and at the end near Khurda fort where more spectators were present. In the middle of the procession where there were hardly any by-watchers, they simply walked—except when cameras approached. The *paika akhada* here was clearly not physical exercise, sports nor a set of ritual movements to be performed in religious festivals. It was clear that they intended their performances to be seen. It was to be a spectacle.

After arriving at the ruins of Khurda fort, the participants stood in line and the sacred fire was handed over to two ministers who together lit the main fire place. Then students of the local music school, Barunai Sangeet School, which was named
after the tutelary goddess of Khurda fort, presented invocation songs. Speeches by ministers, a bureaucrat, the secretary of the Khurda Fort Memorial Society and a professor of history followed. Politicians tried to dramatise the history to arouse nationalist sentiments, whereas the history professor presented a background history of the region, setting an academic tone, which must have increased the sense of authenticity of holding such a competition.

Local newspapers reported on the speeches in the ceremony: “Addressing the ‘Paika’ representatives from all over the state and the huge gathering, culture minister ... said, ‘today is an important day for all of us.’ Continuing he said when Khurda was brought under British rule in 1804 the ‘Paikas’ never accepted it. The ‘Paikas’ of Khurda under the leadership of legendary Buxi Jagabandhu exhibited their valour to the Britishers by wresting Puri from their clutches (in 1817).” The same year on April 12 the ‘Paikas’ fought their last battle with the British force at Puri. In memory of the great sons of the soil this date is celebrated with vigour. To pay tribute to the valiant, ‘Paikas’ this function has been celebrated at Khurda and not at Bhubaneswar, ... (the minister) said. The minister further said that the future is meaningless without past. A race can’t build its future ignoring its past. Paika culture is the culture of entire Orissa.” The minister is reported to have also said, “the state government is seriously contemplating to set up a martial art academy at Khurda to revive the ‘Paika’ culture in the state.” “Prof(essor). ... said that not only Orissa but the whole nation owes a lot to those great sons of the state who laid down their lives for the country’s independence. Prof Behera ... suggested the government should set up a museum at Khurda in memory of ‘Paikas’.” (Sun Times, 12 April 1992.) Another minister “said ‘the Oriya people were so indomitable that the British murdered Jayi Rajaguru not by hanging but by tying his legs to trunks of two trees and then splitting him in half. In the history of India and Britain, there is no other case of such punishment. He questioned where the valour of the Oriya people has gone today.” (Sambad, 12 April 1992; the translation is mine.)

The speeches by politicians certainly made effective use of the “history” of the independent struggles against the British, leaving strong impressions in the minds of the people. I later heard similar stories being repeated in tea stalls and homes in the town and villages. It should be pointed out, however, that the politicians’ speeches included some factual mistakes and that some were rather representations of popular “pseudo-history” than historical facts. The Minister of Culture stressed that the last fighting against the British in Puri in 1817 took place on 12th April, corresponding with the last day of the competition, and a newspaper, either intentionally or by coincidence, published an article regarding the speech on 12th April, when in fact Buxi Jagabandhu reached and captured Puri on 14th April, 1817, and fighting in Puri

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7) The words in the brackets are added by Tanabe. The minister referred the year 1817 in his speech, but the newspaper did not mention this.
lasted till 18th April when the rebels fled and the king was captured. So, the particular dates of the competition cannot be said to coincide with history. Also, although another minister’s story of the brutal murder of Jayi Rajaguru, another Oriya historical hero, is indeed interesting and popularly told, this fact is not historically ascertained and history books simply tell us that he was hanged (e.g. P.K. Mishra 1983; P.K. Pattanaik 1979). Obviously, politicians who gave speeches were interested in the political and theatrical effects of recounting “history” and not in giving sound and precise historical facts.

The announcement by the Minister of Culture that the government is planning to set up a martial arts academy in Khurda provided a topic for popular discussion. Many newspapers reported on the plan under big headlines (e.g. Sambad, 12 April 1992; Sun Times, 13 April 1992). The plan seemed to be welcomed especially by the people of Khurda, not only due to cultural sentiments but perhaps also due to the potential job opportunities and other economic benefits involved.

After the speeches, the actual competition of the martial arts began. Each team was given 3 minutes to perform a particular art, such as sword fighting, stick fighting, ox-cart wheel lifting, acrobatics etc. Each performance was evaluated on points to determine the winners. It is interesting to note that the performance of the martial arts have undergone change due to the conditions set by the competition. When people perform the martial arts on their own accord in their villages, they would firstly put a hand on the ground and then to their forehead three times to worship the mother earth, the guru or preceptor and the god; and then they would do some war dance steps to sound of drums to build up the atmosphere and inner concentration perhaps letting out some war cries; only then would they start performing the main martial arts. In the circumstances of the competition, however, there was no time for them to do either the worship or the building up process of war dance and cries. They are demanded from the start to perform the best climax part of the martial arts. Here one can see the transformation of the forms of martial arts as they were decontextualised from life of warrior-peasants with their religion and aesthetics, to a sport which can be performed and evaluated in a competition.

The competition-ritual took place over three days. On the second and the third day, there were speeches and competition in the morning and then in the evening. I will give the list of the speakers below.

10th April 1992
President: Minister of Pension and Grievances (Also M.L.A. from Khurda)
Inaugurator: Minister of Sports, Culture, Youth Affairs, Information and Public Relations
Chief Speaker: Minister of Revenue and Excise
Guest of Honour: Secretary of Khurda Fort Memorial Society
Guest of Honour: I.A.S. Collector, Puri
Speaker of Honour: Professor, Utkal University (historian)

11th April morning
President: Member of Parliament
Chief Guest: Minister of Commerce and Transport
Chief Speaker: Professor, Utkal University (historian)
Guest of Honour: M.L.A. from Jatni (neighbour town, called Khurda Road)

11th April evening
President: I.A.S. Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Department of Sports, Culture, Youth Affairs, information and Human relations
Chief Guest: Minister of Food & Civil Supplies
Chief Speaker: M.L.A. from Begunia (Constituency including the fort village from which the sacred fire was taken. He played the role of the main worshipper for the goddess.)
Guest of Honour: Sub-Collector, Khurda
Guest of Honour: Advocate

12th April morning
President: M.L.A. from Saitila
Chief Speaker: Minister of Forest
Chief Guest: Gajapati Maharaja, Puri
Guest of Honour: M.L.A. from Ranpur

12th April evening
Chief Guest: Chief Minister of Orissa
Chief Speaker: Minister of Pension and Grievances
President: Minister for Sports, Culture, Youth Affairs, Information and Public Relations
(Translated and cited from the pamphlet of "All Orissa Martial Arts Competition" (1992). All personal names are omitted. The pamphlet was prepared by Director of Sports and Youth Affairs, whose name is given at the bottom of the programme. I.A.S. stands for Indian Administrative Service. The words in the brackets are added by Tanabe.)

During the competition, a small temporary museum was opened in a corner of the grounds to display the pictures of Buxi Jagabandhu, the leader of the paika rebellion, and other regional heroes with historical depictions. Next to such historical figures were the photographs of participants in the previous martial competitions. The message is obvious enough: Oriya people are descendants of the great historical heroes; and as Oriyas keep the tradition of the martial arts, so also the spirit of independence and self-sacrifice should be learned and kept as part of their history. Also, audiences were advised in the intervals of the competition to take a look around the ruins of the Khurda fort. After all the talks by politicians and a historian on the glorious history of the Khurda kingdom and the brutal attack and conquest by the Britishers, the tours must have been "educational" in revising such history with vividly visual images.

In the morning of the last day of the competition, the king of Puri was invited as the main guest. The people were very excited at the news of the arrival of the king and many rushed to the entrance of the fort to see the king. There were cries of "Puri Maharaja jay" (Victory to the great king of Puri) among the people and the women sounded hula-huli, that is, auspicious hi-pitch cries made with the tongue sticking out and trembling from side to side. The king stepped out of the Indian made car and on to the new white cloth which led to the entrance of the fort. This cloth was prepared by the local residents to honour the king. The king entered the fort and took his seat. A little later when he was invited to give a speech, he took off his sandals and
chanted a hymn before starting to speak. He said, "I did not come here on account of being the main guest. I did not come here as a guest. Because this is my own palace and my own land. I came here to greet my paika brothers." The Khurda fort certainly belonged to the king's ancestors. It may have been a little inconsiderate of the government to invite the king as the main guest to the ruins of his own palace whose belongingness may be open to question. There was a huge applause from the audience which seemed never to end until the king intervened. He ended his speech by saying "I thank you for giving me the opportunity to visit my own palace" and then again chanted a hymn. At the last moment he cried "Jagannath Mahapru" (the great god Jagannath), to which the whole audience responded with the cry of "Jay" (victory). The audience seemed to be very much moved and excited.

The presence of the king certainly had the effect of arousing people's sentiments related to their reflected past, and this may have indeed contributed to the glorification of history. It is doubtful, however, whether this resulted in the arousal of nationalist feelings approving the present so-called democratic style of government. It may well have been that the idealisation of the past led to critical views towards the present, especially among those such as the king and his ex-soldiers, the Khandayats, who enjoyed prestigious positions in pre-colonial days but are suffering in the present day politico-economical circumstances. As the king aroused the sentiments of the good old days now lost, people were made more aware of the unsatisfactory present. Also it became more apparent to the people that the present government lacked the quality of religious and cultural fervour, the kind possessed by the king, providing an almost ecstatic feeling of loyalty and pride to be subjects under the king.

In the evening of the last day of the competition, the Chief Minister of Orissa arrived on the scene. He wore a kind of hat traditionally allowed only to royalty, thus adopting idioms of royal rituals which may have strong appeal in the locality. It is interesting to note that there were also elements of imperial idioms on the scene, as the Chief Minister sat in the very front of the stage, surrounded by police forces, with other ministers and M.L.A.s behind him. In this way, it may be said that they, consciously or unconsciously, adopted the imperial manner in which authority is displayed in terms of rank and power. In sum, the manner in which the government's authority was represented in the competition was a hybrid mimesis of royal and imperial ritual elements, backed by the ideational legitimacy of being democratically elected.

I remember the words of an M.L.A. who explained to me in a private conversation that "the chief minister is the elected maharaja (great king) of present Orissa. I am the elected raja (king) of my constituency." This may have been an facile eulogy for an ignorant outsider. However, these words capture the basic paradox born by the present government of Orissa regarding its legitimization of authority. The government is certainly elected on the principle of modern democracy and draws a part of its authority from this fact. However, this is not enough. As pointed out before,
modern India inherently possesses two distinct arenas for representation of authority —that of political discourse, as exemplified here by modern democracy, and that of cultural discourse of such elements as caste, kinship and kingship. As government after Independence was founded on the negation of the colonial past, it had to seek for foundation of authority in a local, cultural model of the pre-colonial past, that is to say, the royal model, in order to win popular support. Moreover, ironically, the present government seems to maintain the imperial ritual elements derived from their colonial past, the very thing India had fought to overcome and dissociate itself from. In order to represent their authority, though being, in ideal principle, the government of and by their own people, the government seems to have adopted imperial ritual elements from colonial times. Thus, one finds, in the existence of the Chief Minister and his government, a strange hybrid of elements derived from imperial and royal ritual idioms as well as ideas of modern democracy.

The competition ended after the Chief Minister handed over prizes to the winning individuals and teams. It was already late at night. I, together with the fellow villagers, hurried back home. Other participants from distant places must have stayed another night in the nearby school class room and left the following morning.

Back in the village, I was told by the participant-villagers who failed to get any prize from the competition that they performed the martial arts according to the tradition in the right manner but the referees failed to appreciate it. They complained that they were not given enough time to show their best and criticised the government for not organising the competition properly and using it for their political motives. They went on talking of the ways to preserve the martial arts in a good traditional manner; of the ideal teaching methods which should be adopted by the planned martial arts academy, of getting more government subsidies for training children; of getting a good researcher to work on the topic of martial arts etc. The competition had certainly aroused the people’s sense of need to do something about their tradition.

VI Conclusion

The “tradition” of the martial arts staged in the competition was obviously not mere repetition of the past, it was consciously designed and manipulated to match present needs. Although the whole competition-ritual was represented and maybe experienced as “traditional”, its character was in fact hybrid of the old and the new and its form transformed. The inherent paradoxical nature of the postcolonial predicament in today’s India—as seen in the tension between the arenas of tradition and modern, general and particular etc.—can be observed in collective activities held in public, which have played and still do play important politico-cultural role in the country’s modern history. This paradoxical nature, that comes to the observable surface in such collective activities, has been depicted through the analysis of the martial arts competition here dealt with in many aspects and need not be repeated here.
It is important to note that the actual performance and its experience had over-reaching effects beyond the organisers' intentions. Although the organisers had intended to instill a feeling of unity in this modern age by reminding people of their glorious past and showing them that they are part of a patriotic and nationalistic tradition, what they in fact did seem to have been to stimulate the process of detaching "tradition" from "modern" circumstances. That is to say, the hybrid of the old and the new which had hitherto been lived and repeated pretty much unconsciously and automatically in everyday life as an unconscious habitus was made an object for reflection; and in this reflective process, "tradition" came to be reified and separated from what is "modern". It is interesting to note that what was singled out as "traditional" seems to be a product of the modern reflective process and itself a hybrid of the old and the new.

Reflection on the past necessarily involves the reflection of the present, two of which would be contrasted and compared. This reflexivity and interrelation of the past and the present, when consciously made object for interpretation, lead to the historical awareness in the modern sense. The staging of the tradition of the martial arts certainly had the effect of making history, their past and the present, objects for discussion and contemplation. People are gradually coming to think that "tradition" is not something to be ignored, that they must either preserve it or discard it. The actions and discourses surrounding the paika akhada competition-ritual show that the people have started to engage in reflective and creative processes of pursuing a "tradition" better suited to their present sentiments and conditions.

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8) See Bourdieu 1982.


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