Abstract

Survey of fieldwork and region of research: The book is based on long-term research between 2005 and 2019. In participant observation fieldwork was done in Kolhan, a terrain in Central Eastern India transgressing the borders of the states of Odisha and Jharkhand and part of Middle India’s tribal belt. This constitutes one of India’s four tribal zones inhabited by altogether more than 100 million people administratively catalogued as Scheduled Tribes.

The study focusses on the Ho, a tribal community of approximately one million people. With members of other aboriginal (adivasi) communities and artisan nontribal categories they have shared cultural norms and the space of the hilly region and plateaux of the Chota Nagpur Plateau within an ordered multi-ethnic assemblage “for ages”. Recognized in the region of research as first settlers and landowners Ho command high status as they cultivate the land cleared by their forefathers and given to them as a gift by their creator god Sinbonga. Land is honoured by the Ho as Mother Earth.

Outline of the argument: The book explores the structured tapestry of Ho people’s relations and interrelatedness within their culture-specific sociocosmic universe ensuring their social reproduction in the present and affording them the means for and the awareness of living in a world of plenty. This world of abundance – with the Ho (“a man; a Ho”) as its conceptual centre – includes the Ho’s dead, their spirit world and supreme deity, and their tribal and nontribal fellow humans.

The core of the book is an arrangement of chapters studying how social cohesion of specific Ho social categories and ordered coexistence of notionally distinct categories across tribal boundaries manifest themselves in the region of research in manifold ways: socially, ritually, economically, and linguistically.

Of course, the representation of the Ho’s universe in the book is my representation as it has been filtered through my perception, my interpretation, and my understanding of it. Among other factors, this was certainly impacted by the ritual friendship relation saki that has accompanied me over the years almost since the very beginning of fieldwork. It has hence lent itself to being analysed as a resourceful focal point contributing to relatedness and social cohesion across tribal boundaries in its own right.

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Glimpses from Ho Country II