

# ADIVASI

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# Scheduled Tribe and Forgotten Kings Ethnohistory of the Joria Paraja in the erstwhile Nandapur-Jeypore Kingdom

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The Paraja group is considered as one of the many Scheduled Tribe residing in the Koraput District of Southern Orissa. Its relative regional fame is partly due to the novel Paraja, published in Oriya in 1945 by Gopinath Mohanty and translated into English in 1987. Administratively speaking, the Joria<sup>2</sup> are included in the larger group of the Paraja. Two years ago, we planned to study the Joria Paraja from different for a better understanding of the historical process, we follow generally the geographical and chronological order, crossing ancient administrative divisions viewpoints. In order to reach a more comprehensive view of this group, it seemed necessary to proceed our study with a preliminary historical and general enquiry. The analysis of the successive descriptions of this group has been a way to understand the present Joria Paraja identity. This clarification helped us to reconstructed their situation in the former local context. This article present this enquiry, from a presentation of the various descriptions of the Joria Paraja, to a reconstruction of their place in the former local kingdom of Jeypore-Nandapur.

## 1. The Joria Paraja category in the ancient ethnographic reports :

1) the Central Provinces and Bengal Presidency, 2) the Madras presidency (former Vizagapatam district).

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Different persons helped us in various ways in the field. First of all, Professor P.K.Nayak helped one of us considerably during his first steps in Orissa. In the field, the precious friendship of Shri Bhijoy Kumar Padhi facilitated considerably our enquiries, and staying, in Nandapur. In Jeypore, we owe to Sri Pandit Biswambhara Nanda a lot of informations. In the Joria village of Hadaput, we thank our numerous friends among which Raju Khora, Pujari Madan Amtal, naiko, and the two gurumai Kamala Khora and Moti Amtal. We owe most of our informations on the Benek Paraja's legend to Vishnu Sisa, Rama Sisa, and Lakhan Sisa from Sarbati and Darengba. Thanks to all of them.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding the spelling of the different groups, we write "Joria" following the common pronunciation. Other variants ("Jodia", "Jhoria") will be given in the first part according to the spelling of the authors quoted. More generally, the names of tribes are used in an invariable form.

### 1) Joria and Paraja in the former Central Provinces and Bengal Presidency :

The first report mentioning "Joria" people is in the notes of the Reverend Stephen Hislop, about the tribes of Bastar<sup>3</sup>. For him, Joria is a synonym for Maria, a section particularly savage of the Gond. He is the first to suggest the etymology from "Jhodi"; "brook", "stream".

In 1906, Grierson defines a "Parji" language spoken by the Parja tribe of Bastar<sup>4</sup>. According to him, the Parji is a dialect of gondi, but some forms are more close to the Bhatri, itself a mixture between Chhattisgarhi Hindi and Oriya.

For E.A. de Brett, a group called "Jharias" is one of the three, Kewat, Khatik, Khond, Kirar, Kumhar, Kunbi, Kurni, Mahar, Mali, Nai, Sunar, Teli and Turi<sup>5</sup>. After such a list, it seems difficult to identify precisely our Joria Paraja among others! On the other hand, Russell and Hira Lal give us a precious indication regarding the actual meaning of the "Joria" appellation.

Referring exclusively to the Bastar region, both Grierson<sup>6</sup> and Elwin (1947) mention the Joria as a subdivision of the Muria gond living in the North-Central Plains around Chota Dongar (at the feet of the Abhujmar hills). According to those authors, the Joria consider themselves as former Hill Maria who settled in the plains. Elwin precises at this occasion that "Joria" refers to "lowlanders" in contrast with their "Hill Maria" neighbours and relatives.

<sup>3</sup> Paper relating to the Aboriginal Tribes of the Central Provinces. R. temple ed, with notes and preface, Nagpur 1866.

<sup>4</sup> G.Grierson, Linguistic Survey of India, vol. IV, VI, 1906; Vol.IV, p.554.

Classes of Rawat, but he count also "Jharian" among gond on Antagarh<sup>5</sup>. The Parja are, here, totally districts from any Joria, and equated with Dhurwa, themselves divided in Tagara, Peng, and Mundra, the latter two living in Jeypore area. For the same area, Cobden-Ramsay precises an information about certain Jhora or Joria mentioned briefly by Dalton<sup>5</sup>. According to him, this group (from alleged Gond origin) was living not only in Chhattisgarh but also in the petty states around Chota Nagpur (Bonai, Bamra, Gngpur, Pal Lahara), from gold-washing, boating, and fishing on the Brahmani river.

En 1916, Russell and Hira Lal give a much more complex account of the situation in the Central Provinces. For "Jharia", their glossary refers to "Jhadi", where we find the following statement :

"Jhadi, Jhade, Jharia, Jharkua, (Jungly) – A name often applied to the oldest residents of a caste in any locality of the Central Provinces. In Berar it is used to designate the Wainganga Valley and adjacent hill ranges. A subcaste of Ahir, Barai, Barhai, Chamar, Dhangar, Dhanwar, Dhobi, Gadaria, Gurao, Kapewar, Kasar, Katia<sup>5</sup> Russell and Hira Lal. The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India, London, Vol. I and III, 1916; vol. I, p.369.

<sup>6</sup> Grigson Wilfrid V., The Maria Gonds of Bastar, Oxford 1938.

## 2) Joria and Paraja in the Former Madras Presidency :

In 1869, Carmichael calls the "Prajās" "the common laboring class of Jeypore"<sup>7</sup>, and compare this name to the Sanskrit term "Prajā", "ryot". Among this class, the "Jodiya", along with ten other "castes" of Jeypore, are said to be born from a deformed king from Hindustan, Nishadas, who became Lord of the Hill tracts<sup>8</sup>. In the list given, the "Jodiya" stand between the "gonda" and the "Pangu". Later in his manual, Carmichael (and more exactly the Ltnt. J. Mac Donald Smith for the information regarding Jeypore) give another list, without special comment :

"Malsowra, Burrojorecapurja, Barungjorea, Sanjorea, Penjoopurja, Gadaba, Parengagadaba, Nangpur Purja or naked ryot."<sup>9</sup>

In this list of eight groups, we can see different "jorea" and "purja" subdivisions. We will find them again more precisely later on.

For Francis, following the Madras census report 1871, the Poroja group is composed of seven different tribes. Those tribes speak now Oriya, but keep sometimes their original language. They can be differentiated as follows : the Barang Jodia Poroja are beef-eater, like the Pengu Poroja, but the latter speak a language close to the Kui. The Kondi Poroja are beef-eater, like the Pengu Poroja, but the latter speak a language close to the Kui. The Kondi Poroja are a Khond section, while the Parengi Poroja are a Gadaba section, and the Tagara Poroja (or Thakura) are a Koya section. The Bonda Poroja (or Nanga, or Langla) bear such a name because their women are almost naked, and the Dur Poroja (or Didayi), lastly, are an Oriya section. According to the author, the Barang Joria, or simply Joria, women were characterized by their white cloth, with red hem, and their numerous bracelets on the left arm<sup>10</sup>. In his Gazetteer of 1945, Bell repeat most of the informations given by Francis.

In the Castes & Tribes of Southern India, Thurston and Rangachari quote Carmichael about the origin of the name, and consider that "Paraja" designate "a conglomerate" of cultivators living in the hill tracts of Vizagapatnam and Ganjam districts<sup>11</sup>. They give the now classical seven subdivisions among which we find the "Jhodia". In the second volume of their Castes & Tribes, however, we find a "Joria" group who has nothing in common with the first one : a subdivision of the Goudo, a pastoral caste living mostly in Ganjam and former Vizagapatam districts.

<sup>7</sup> Carmichael 1869, p.16

<sup>8</sup> Carmichael 1869, p.75. the Nishada's myth, largely known in India, can be found in the Atharvaveda VIII, and the Vishnu Purana 1.

<sup>9</sup> Carmichael 1869, p.103. Malsowra stands for the "Hill (mal) Saora".

<sup>10</sup> Francis 1907, p. 86, and footnote 2.

<sup>11</sup> E. Thurston and K.Rangachari, Castes and tribes of Southern India, Madras, Vol. II, VI, 1909 ; Vol. VI, p.207-222.

In 1931, G. Ramadas combines together the various information, and speaks about a divided tribe whose "lost language" was certainly Dravidian. He indicates twelve subtribes, but insists on the stronger distinction between Bodo (or Sodia) and Sano (and Joria, and Perang) Paraja, on the basis of beef-eating. According to him, even if those people wear various sorts of cloths, "the white cloth with red hems is the one peculiar to all the classes of the Parajas"<sup>12</sup>.

In the years preceding Independence, G.Mohanty offers us a groups within the framework of the Jeypore kingdom.

More recently, in two studies about the Dhurwa / Porja of Bastar and the Pengo Paraja of Koraput, K.N. Thusu recalls the Dravidian origin of the Parji and Pengo languages (respectively more close to the Gondi, and, to the Kui languages, according to the works of Burrow and Bhattacharya<sup>13</sup>). In a latter work about the Ollar politically committed image of the Paraja. As a writer, Mohanty was deeply influenced by Gandhi and the Russian author Tolstoi, and at that time involved in the social & Hiralal according to whom the term means something like "jungly", and is a common appellation for the oldest sub-castes and tribes of the area. More accurately than "jungly" however, the translation could be rendered by the term "lowlander" (Elwin), or even more by "people of the valley"<sup>14</sup>. The origin of our Joria seems to be local, but we know by different traditions and legends, that some groups connected with the king (like the Rona) accompanied him during the shift of his capital. More close to the Joria, the Pengo Paraja are said to have followed a raja from their original abode in the Warangal area (present Andhra Pradesh) to Bastar, before to reach the Jeypore and Kalahandi regions by themselves<sup>15</sup>.

### 3) The Parji and Desia languages :

The Parji has been identified as the language spoken originally by the "Paraja tribe", but was defined differently by Grierson or Burrow and Bhattacharya. If we follow the former, the Parji is an Aryan dialect close to the Bhatri, mixing Oriya and eastern forms of Hindi (Halbi, Chhattisgarhi). If we follow the latter it's a Dravidian language more close to the Ollari than to the common gondi. It seems to us that the Parji doesn't refer to one language, but to different ones practiced by different groups of Paraja. Secondly, one same group is frequently at least bilingual (as G. Pfeffer insisted upon, since long time). Thirdly, the present language of the Joria Paraja of Koraput is the Desia dialect of Oriya.

<sup>12</sup> G.Ramadas, "Porojas", Man in India, Vol.XI, no 3-4, 1931, p.243-258 : p.246.

<sup>13</sup> T. Burrow and S.Bhattacharya, The Parji Language - A Dravidian Language of Bastar, 1953: The Pengo Language, Oxford University press 1970.

<sup>14</sup> According to a remark of R.Hardenberg, Joria, indeed, evokes an association with a stream.

<sup>15</sup> This opinion is reported by different authors who quote the Pengo themselves or their neighbours : Brett 1909, p.46; Thusu 1977, p.12; Elwin 1947. According to Thusu, the king concerned is said to be a "Chalkiban".

The Desia dialect is generally described as a lingua franca spoken in the low "plateau" from Koraput to Bastar. This dialect is mostly a form of Oriya, but show also some elements from Eastern Hindi and some elements from Dravidian languages. As Bell said, fifty years ago, it should be seen less as a corrupt language, than as in ancient and local form of Oriya.

"A number of words are current, which in the old Orissa Division of Bengal had passed out of polite usage years ago. Such words are 'gnoita' for husband, 'randi' for a widow, 'andira' for man, 'maikina' for woman or wife, and 'paiti' for work. The explanation seems to be that the Oriya now spoken in Gunjam and Koraput is the form of the language which was generally spoken in Orissa a century ago. The Oriya of Cuttack has been influenced by literary experiments and so has tended to discard words which had humble associations or were considered to be characteristic of the lower classes. Koraput has long been isolated from the influence of modern Oriya literature and has thus retained the old form of the language unchanged<sup>16</sup>."

According to Thusu, the Desia was named the "Joria bhasha" in the eastern part of jeypore kingdom. We can therefore suppose that the present Desia language and culture is the result of the interactions between the various local communities in the ancient royal society. The periodical migrations of Hindi merchants (Bohipari, Banjari) through the kingdom contributed without doubt to the generalization of the dialect<sup>17</sup>.

According to our clarifications, "Joria Paraja" appears to mean something like the "peasant citizens of the valleys". The Joria constitute an independent group since long time, sharing numerous characteristics with other local Dravidian groups. Among those latter, the Ollar Gadaba stand apparently closer to the Joria of Nandapur area, with respect to their kinship systems<sup>18</sup>, and linguistic expressions. On the other hand, in different areas of Koraput district, the Joria share some traits with others neighbouring groups like especially the Pengo Paraja (also Dravidian). Unfortunately, we can not say much more on their origins, due to the lack of historical sources. It is time for us to exploit the possible historical sources with a local focus.

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<sup>16</sup> Bell 1945, p. 57.

<sup>17</sup> All the historical account of the Nandapur – Jeypore kingdom mention the intervention of Brinjari (also Banjari, Bohipari or Lambadi) itinerant carriers and merchants in the settling of the first Suryavamsi king. See Singh Deo 1939 and Schnepel 1992 and 2002.

<sup>18</sup> They favored, for example, the cross-cousin marriage and have close kinship terminology. In Nandapur area, the names of their clans (bonso or vamsa) are the same than those of other groups of the area : Khora (sun), Amtal (Snake), Khilo (tiger), Pangi (Vulture), sometimes Petia (pig). The status titles (kuda) are also naik (nayak), sisa, barik, and salan or chalan. We can also find muduli, majhi, kirsani, bhoi denoting originally village functions but now often considered as lineage names.

## II. Ethno-historical reconstruction of the Paraja and Joria categories

To attempt an ethno-historical analysis, we need to adopt a "local point of view"<sup>19</sup> by concentrating the study in a specific area, and combining fieldwork investigations and available information on local history. In our case, we confine our inquiry to the area around Nandapur, the former capital of the Jeypore kingdom. This kingdom, it is well known, was nearly coextensive with the present Koraput district. This location permits to get few historical insights and to glance at the links between the different Jati and the local king. We may thus attain a more comprehensive view of the Paraja and Joria categories.

### 1) The Paraja as "peasant-citizen" class :

In the area surrounding Nandapur, the Paraja in general hold a relatively low rank in the hierarchy, though not at all the lowest. They are supposed to be among the most ancient inhabitant of the area, the rural "dominant" group or "earthmen" (matya) in the Pfeffer's words following the local term<sup>20</sup>. The Madras Census Report of 1871 pleaded also for their ancient presence, in view of their knowledge on the regional land rights<sup>21</sup>. For this reason they are considered as "senior" (bodo). On this topic, we can quote a widespread myth in Central India according to which the tribes were originally related to the Raja. The ancestors of both were brothers, but the younger (sano) succeeded in riding a horse and became the first king while the older failed and remained peasant<sup>22</sup>. This legend is a way, through kinship terminology and antiquity in the area, to reverse the hierarchy in favour of the tribal "subjects".

We have to examine now the distinctions made within the Paraja category itself. At a first level, most of the informants recognized the classical distinction between Bodo (elder) Paraja, comprising mostly Sodja and Sano (younger) including Joria and Pengo<sup>23</sup>. We can precise that the Sodja and Joria are Desia speakers, while the Pengo are still Dravidian languages speakers (related with the Kui Khond). To this basic structure, they add locally the Parenga (related with the

<sup>19</sup> One of us (rousseau 2003) tried to show that the "local point of view" was generally the Dumont's perspective on the "tribal question" in India, and that this perspective is still fruitful though other aspects are more open to criticisms.

<sup>20</sup> Pfeffer 1983, p.90-91.

<sup>21</sup> " Their ancient rights to these lands are acknowledged by colonists from among the Aryans, and when a dispute arises about the boundaries of a field possessed by recent arrivals a Parja is usually called in to point out the ancient landmarks. Gadabas are also represented as indigenous from the long lapse of years that they have been in the country, but they are by no means of the patriarchal type that characterizes the Parjas", Madras Census Report 1871, quoted in Russell and Hira Lal 1916, p.371.

<sup>22</sup> We can find close versions, among others, in Elwin 1954, p.xxxiii, and Russell and Hira Lal 1916.

<sup>23</sup> In the north-western part of Koraput, around Nowrangpur, the Joria are classified with the Sodja among the Bodo Paraja, by the Pengo informants of K.N. Thusu : Thusu 1977, p.3.

Gadaba), some Kond, the Bondo and the Gadaba<sup>24</sup>. We face, thus, subgroups from different origins whose common denominator is to have been more closely connected with the king and his capital-city than other related lineages. It seems then that the Paraja hierarchy follows the spatial dispersion too: the closer you are to Nandapur and Jeypore, the higher you are considered.

From the Paraja's point of view now, to be acknowledged citizen of the king constituted a form of "social distinction". At the lineage or individual level, secondly, the same process was going on, through the use of the titles (kula). Most of the present local "tribal" titles indeed, as the Oriya ones, come from royal offices considered as hereditary. Obviously, it doesn't imply that there was no "tribal" chief or priest before the local kingdom, but their original functions have been influenced by the wider royal structure. On this topic, we can attempt a more general remark. One finds a widespread tendency among the local "tribes" to introduce themselves only by their title instead of their clan name. This fact takes place once more in the common strategy of distinction. The emphasis on the title permits to separate them from their local origins (at least in the words), as well as to "functionalize" their lineage in a more prestigious way. More generally, this process, combined with claims of respecting rules of purity (especially regarding cow), has been a powerful factor in creating new endogamous communities<sup>25</sup>. The famous "Kshatriyaization" can be considered like a particular extension of this kind of phenomenon<sup>26</sup>. But, beyond the tribes, the same strategy is in fact employed since long time by the castes. Beyond the Bayley's continuum from tribe to caste, this observation supports the Hocartian hypothesis of a progressive subordination of the kinship principle to a status one in a royal context.

Together with different Desia Scheduled Castes, the groups living in this area form therefore a "local system" which, more generally, constitutes what G. Pfeffer called the "Koraput complex" or what P. Berger, following the local people, call the Desia society. Beyond caste hierarchy, the very existence of such organization centred on Nandapur turns our attention towards the ancient kingdom frame. It may be time for us to learn from the historians what could be the Paraja category in the ancient royal context. If we follow, for example, the general indications of Ronald Inden, *praja* appears to mean "subject", or a certain "kind of citizenship" whose members were "supposed to be loyal to their king". More appropriately still according to Inden, *praja* stands as synonym for *janapada*: the "residents of the countryside", mostly engaged in agriculture in contrast with the *paura* or "residents of the city" (merchants, and castes involved in more "urban" activities)<sup>27</sup>. But that's not all, and Inden specifies that the whole rural world

<sup>24</sup> On those distinctions, see Francis previously quoted. We can also stress the conventional aspect of the Paraja list, often composed of seven groups even if the names change. Seven is a common number for the founders of a tribe, or the puranic world levels, etc.

<sup>25</sup> K.N. Thusu reports the case of a Pengo group living near Jeypore whose members call themselves Sodabesia, respect pollution rites for the cows and buffaloes dead in their house, and refuse intermarriage with the other Paraja whom they nickname the Petia, "pigs"! Thusu 1977, p.9. The term *sodia* may come from *sud*: "purete".

<sup>26</sup> Hermann Kulke proposed a rather similar scenario of "ritual democratization" in his article: "Kshatriyaization and social change. A study in Orissa setting", in *Aspects on changing India. Studies in honour of Prof. G.S. Ghurye*, Devadas Pillai ed., Bombay 1976.

<sup>27</sup> Inden 1990, p.218-220.



“consisted of overlapping territorial societies”<sup>28</sup>. What Inden defines here, from his historical data, reflects quite exactly what we faced actually on the field. The Paraja of Nandapur area constitute a peasant society overlapping the more urban and mercantile one which can be divided in lower (the local Domb and Ghasi) and higher castes (here mostly the Rona, the Mali, the Gouda, the Kamar blacksmiths and the Kumhar potters)<sup>29</sup>. The Paraja society is divided in its turn, as we have seen, according to different criteria among which the most important one was formerly the proximity with the royal palace and the temple.

## 2) The *Joria* or the "peasant citizens of the valley" compare to the "peasant warriors of the hills":

In this context, as "peasants of the valleys"<sup>30</sup>, the *Joria* were considered as somehow inferior to the *Sodia* living around Jeypore and closer to the palace life. According to the *Joria* themselves, they accept food and water from Brahmin and *Khandayat* (scribes) obviously, but also from *Rona* (ancient warriors of the royal militia), *Gouda* (herdsmen), *Mali* (gardeners), *Parenga* and *Gadaba*. They accept only fruits from *Dombo*, *Teli* (*Vaicya*), and *Bondo*, but nothing from the *Ghasi*. *Dombo* and *Ghasi* are their common "client" castes<sup>31</sup>. A close version of this situation is given by another legendary account of the origin of the *Joria*, reported by *Elwin*:

"the first *Joria* was the child of a *Mali* woman, and was born in a stream. He was adopted by a *Gadaba*. and when people asked him his tribe, he could say nothing but '*Joria*, *Joria*. stream, stream'.<sup>32</sup>"

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<sup>28</sup> Inden 1990, p.224

<sup>29</sup> Those "overlapping societies" can be equated, in our view, with what Peter Berger described recently as the three levels of the *Desia* society (Berger 2002. thank you to him to have given this article). Our *Paraja* in particular stand in Berger's middle level.

<sup>30</sup> We must remark that some "Laudiya-Jhadia-Jana" are actually mentioned in the royal title of *Viswambhara Deo I*, one of the most famous king of Jeypore who ruled the kingdom between 1672 and 1676. according to *K.B.Singh Deo*, 'Laudiya-Jhadia-Jana, stands for the tribes of 'Loriyas' and 'Jhadas' that are found in the *Chhattisgarh* and *Sambalpur Agencies*' (Singh Deo 1939, p.58-59). We don't know why the writer refer to *Chhattisgarhi Joria* instead of mentioning the *Koraputi* ones. It can refer to two groups : the *Joria* and the *Lorya* (subcaste of *Gouda*), or, to a single group : the *Lorya Jodia*, a subcaste of *Gouda* described by *Thurston* as 'a small class of hill cultivators in the *Vizagapatam district*' (*Thurston & Rangachari* 1909, Vol. IV, p.291) *Russell & Hira Lal* 1916 mention a *Lohara Jhadia* subcaste of *Oriya* blacksmiths, as well as a *Lodhia Jharia* subgroup of *Rajasthani* landholders, living in *Mandia (Chhattisgarh)*. It may be to the latter that *Singh Deo* think about. As we can see the identification of this group is difficult, but the rest of the tittle seems to indicate that this group was relatively important, and may be rebel at a time. *Viswambhara Deo I* is known to have encouraged the peasants to settle in the plains.

<sup>31</sup> on the "client" category, see *Dumont* 1980, and *Pfeffer* 1997 for an application of the concept in a "tribal" context.

<sup>32</sup> *Elwin* 1954, p.xxxvii

This myth places in fact very well the Joria in the local scale, between the higher Mali gardeners and the lower Gadaba<sup>33</sup>. Other local legends of the same kind explain for example the proximity but not withstanding relative inferiority of the Bondo (or even the Parenga) presented as wilder than them. Though rather low, the Joria Paraja were, indeed, considered as loyal, more quiet and "civilised" than the Bonda (Paraja nonetheless), and more over than proud and aggressive highlanders like the Dongria Kond or the Lanjia Saora.

Compare to the people of the valleys, those two "hill tribes" were seen as wilder, but, on the other hand, were appreciated for their martial capacities by the king. This distinctive trait helps us to understand the very special status of the Saora and Kond in the kingdom. Some of them, indeed, were considered as Paraja (the Kond living around Nandapur for example, and the Desia Kond in general, are proud to belong to this category). But we know, thanks to Prof. P.K. Nayak, that the Dongria Kond of the Niamgiris Hills accept only with indignation to be called "subjects" of an Oriya king. The same could be said about the Mal Saora. This claim of autonomy was not totally fulfilled since, still according to P.K. Nayak, the same Dongria Kond recognized among themselves the Nishika clan as "*bodo Paraja*", or eldest of all the Dongria clans representing all the Dongria Kondhs<sup>34</sup>. As a matter of fact, the so-called "Bodo Paraja" were relatively autonomous concerning their own feuds and the administration of "their" hills. They were nonetheless tributary to the local king, as we can see through their participation of the different Dasara festivals. At this occasion, they had some martial privileges close to those of the local Paika castes (or Rona).

An important occasion to see the kingdom's organization at work was offered indeed by the Dasara festival. For Jeypore, this royal ceremony has been largely commented by B. Schnepel (quoting himself L.H. Sahu) as both the expression and the maintenance of the kingdom unity and divisions<sup>35</sup>. The hierarchy was legitimized indeed through the participation of each group in the general procession. According to some informants, the Gouda (milkmen) were bringing water and other things, the Dombo were drum beatters, the Ghasi had to watch the horses while the Gadaba had to watch the elephants (and to bear palanquin), etc. Unfortunately, no one has been able to tell us what was the function specially allotted to the Joria. But people told us something else that we didn't suspect. Formerly, the festival of Jeypore didn't be girl before the warlike arrival of the Nandapur delegation bringing there their own flags (*jhanda*) at the extremity of long poles. Most of those flags were coming from certain villages<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> We recognized here the classical Indian way of explaining the creation and relative situation of a caste through a blend (*varnasamkara*, generally a marriage) of earlier Jati. The theme of adoption keep, in any case, untouched the Joria blood and dignity.

<sup>34</sup> Nayak 1989, p.184 et p. 123. They were under the *Thatraja* of Bissamcuttack (himself dependent of the Jeypore raja), but recognized mostly their legendary king of the hills : *Niamraja*

<sup>35</sup> Schnepel 2002

<sup>36</sup> The *jhanda* recall in mind the *satarbond*. or clanic insignia of the Dongria Kond, which were brought to Bissamcuttack for Dasara. Nayak 1989. It seems that most of the *jhanda* brought to Jeypore were from important villages like headquarters of *mutha* (group of villages), or martial villages (like some Kond ones)

Among the few representatives of this area who accompanied the insignia, one Paraja enjoyed some privileges: the representatives of the "Benek Porja". After enquiry<sup>37</sup>, we discovered that this small group resides in three close villages in the high-plateau above Nandapur. The members of this group claim to be few higher than the Joria and are then equated with the *Bodo Paraja*. Actually, their intermarriages as well as their funerary customs show that they are a branch of the Joria belonging to the *Khilo* (Tiger) clan, and bearing the *Sisa* (generally "priest") title. Their slight superiority comes from the fact that they are still considered the descendants of the tribal couple who, according to the local origin myth of the Jeypore dynasty, adopted the first Nandapur king : Benek Raja. We will try now to identify this king as well as the different agents of this ancient history.

### III. The citizens of Vinayak Deo : a reconstruction of Nandapur ancient history

#### 1) From *Benek Raja* to *Vinayak Deo* :

The strange name *Benek Raja* barely hides the more prestigious *Vinayak Deo*, founder of the *Suryavamsi* dynasty, who ruled Nandapur between 1443 and 1476. Following the Nandapur legend, the Benek Paraja were granted some lands and few privileges like to set fire on the Holpuda (Holi) pyre in Nandapur, or to perform the first ritual sowing of the paddy of all the kingdom (during Chaitra month) for the care their ancestors gave to the royal child. From the rice grown by them in the hill close to Nandapur, some is given to the royal family of Jeypore, as well as some water from the Rani Duduma falls (in the same area). This royal distinction, which is recognized by all the population of the Nandapur area and beyond, speaks for an unexpected role played by the Joria Paraja at the founding of the kingdom.

Let us come back to the legend, in its version mentioned by Bell:

"A tradition in the Agency, current among others besides the Dombs, has it that the Panos of Ghumsur in Ganjam district, proved themselves so obnoxious to the people by their criminal habits that the Raja issued an order that any Pano should be killed wherever he should be found. In fear of this edict the men of the tribe scattered and some of them sought refuge in the hills of Jeypore. Soon after their arrival one of their number succeeded by a trick in inducing the Kondhs of the locality to accept him as their king. Observing that the Kondhs were in the habit of worshipping a certain *bija* tree, this man concealed himself in the tree and suddenly leapt from it when the Kondhs were performing their devotions, announcing that he had been sent to them to be their king. Simultaneously he summoned some of his fellow-refugees who had been concealed themselves nearby and declared that they were his retinue. The Kondhs believed that a king had been given to them by the tree as a reward for their devotion and accepted the ruler thus sent to them. They built forts' for him at a number of places, of which the remains of one near Sembliguda are still clearly visible

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<sup>37</sup> They are mentioned in Das 1999, p.5. This book helped us to locate them-

and are known locally as the 'Domb fort'. A period of terror and anarchy followed during which the Raja and his followers came to be called 'Dumbas' or 'devils', which name was latter changed to 'Domb'

The tradition further narrates that the reign of the Domb kings was ended by a boy, who was found in a forest guarded by a cobra and a peacock and fed by a goat, and was brought up by the foster-parents who discovered him. After overthrowing the Dombs he established a kingdom at Narayanapatnam, which was later moved to Nandapur. One of the successors of this Raja had no male issue and at the bidding of the god Sarveswara, who appeared to him in a dream, married his daughter to a certain youth who had come to his kingdom, also at the direction of the gods, and from this union sprang the present family of the Rajas of Jeypore.<sup>38</sup>

A nearly similar legend is famous in all the Nandapur area. The supposed 'Domb fort' (*Domo gada*) is actually situated in the close vicinity of Nandapur (on the way to Semiliguda) but no such precision is given about the origins of the local Dombs. In any case, it is doubtful that the name, Domb come from *Duma*, as Domb is a widespread word, far from Orissa and from the area where *duma* is employed. The story of a Domb king may be an invention or not, in any case, the remains of a fort is not a proof for such allegation. We will see, nevertheless, that some informations are still interesting in this myth.

This version of the story is particularly valuable because it clearly distinguishes three successive events. The first describes the Domb kingdom, ended by the second event: the conquest of the young warrior. The last episode is the establishment of the Suryavamsi dynasty with Jeypore as next capital. Of all the story, only the last episode is mentioned in the official dynastic legend of Jeypore (*Jayapura Raja Vasmyavali*<sup>39</sup>). Recently, B. Schnepel showed that the founder of the Suryavamsi dynasty, Vinayak Deo, might be originally a warrior-merchant Banjari, or was, at least, an ally of them. The Banjari, or more accurately "Bohipari" as they are called locally, crossed indeed the Koraput plateau to exchange various goods from Bastar and Chhattisgarh against salt of the Oriya and Telugu costal areas. More over, it is well known that the Jeypore kings ended their signature with a wavy line representing the whip of the Banjari. We can add to the Schnepel demonstration that a special celebration was held in honour of the Bohipari in Jeypore. In September, people were celebrating the *Kundi Balada Puja* to increase their welfare (puja to Laxchmi and Ganesh) but also in honour of the Bohipari and their cattle<sup>40</sup>. The festival, indeed, consisted mostly of small clay cart procession in the main street of Jeypore. This festival involved also a reception of some Bohipari who were gifted some presents by the king.

Still according to the dynastic legend, Vinayak Deo was helped by the Bohipari against a rebellion of the local peoples around Nandapur. Schnepel

<sup>38</sup> Bell 1945, p.80

<sup>39</sup> Sarma 1938. We thank the son of the author, Viswambhara Nanda, who showed us his copy of this precious book.

<sup>40</sup> Carmichael mentioned also a Kunde Aumas or festival of the patron god of the Brinjaris and traders 1869, p.99) We owe most of those informations to Sri Suryanarayan Beborta of nandapur, confirmed by Sri Pandit V. Nanda of Jeypore.

supposes that this rebellion was fomented by the previous king, of the *Silavamsi* dynasty ("stone dynasty"). We don't know much about the kings of this dynasty. The last Silavamsi king is said to have married his daughter to Vinayak Deo, following a dream sent by Shiva Sarveswara, before to let the throne to his son-in-law. As Schnepel argue, the story can be read in a different way, as a conquest of the throne by Vinayak, legitimized afterwards by an alliance between the two lineages. The rebellion can be easily understood in this case, as a revolt of the local subjects, faithful to their ancient king, against the new ruler. It should be said that the so-called *sati packana* ("sati stone" worshipped by the neighbours), situated in the ancient Nandapur fort, seems to belong to the rani of Vinayaka Deo, as the very corrupted scripture still show it <sup>41</sup>. The carvings show a king facing his wife and together, seated by crossing their legs, are raising their hand as a sign of mutual vow. A second woman, certainly second wife, is standing and raising her arm on the left side of the stone. If our interpretation is true, the king represented on the stone is Vinayak himself, and he got two wives, as the custom prevailed for the kings of this time. To add to our hypothesis, it can be said that the style of this image remind us of sati stones as we can see in Bastar <sup>42</sup>.

## 2) The lineage "born from the rock":

Let us carry on our comparisons between myth and historical evidences. Previous to the Vinayak's arrival, the legend mention a miraculous boy, guarded by a cobra and a peacock, which are royal animals *par excellence*. He was adopted by foster-parents, won against the bad Domb king, and then founded a kingdom at Narayanpatna before to settle in Nandapur. This last idea should be reversed, as Narayanpatna became capital only after Nandapur. At this point, the versions of the legend collected orally in Nandapur become more accurates. According to it, the boy was born on the *batisimhasana* ("thirty-two steps throne") hillock in the centre of present Nandapur. Different people even say that his umbilical cord was kept in an hidden spring within the same hillock. The foster-parents who discovered him were an old barren couple (called sometimes *Benek raja* and *Benek rani* themselves), the ancestors of the so-called *Benek Paraja*, who were collecting roots in the forest. Some years after, the boy followed secretly his father to the royal Dasara and met the Domb king (called here Sundarbani). Unknowningly, he made *Namaskar* with his feet, gesture which was highly disrespectful, so the king wanted to arrest him. The boy ran away to his native jungle and made bamboo sword and shield. With those weapons, he won against the whole Domb army and reigned over Nandapur.

As, according to the legend quoted by Bell, Vinayak Deo succeeded to a descendant of this boy, we can suppose that this latter is the founder of the

<sup>41</sup> We have been able to decipher, on the second line, successive Sanskrit or ancient Hindi letters which can be read as ViNaYa(?) DeVa

<sup>42</sup> See S. Settar & G.D.Sontheimer (ed), Memorial stones. A study of their origin, significance and variety, Dharwad. Heidelberg, Manipal Power Press – South Asia Institute, New-Delhi 1982. at least four sati stones can be seen in Nandapur, even if their name is different. One has numerous women represented. The practice of sati was common for the Jeypore rani, as we can see also in Rayagada and Narayanpatna.

*Silavamsi* dynasty. The scarce historical informations about the kings of this family only tell us that they ruled Nandapur up to 1443 (the last king being Pratap Gangaraju), and that they are known by some inscriptions since 1353 (the first known king being called Gangaraju)<sup>43</sup>. Our identification is confirmed by two elements: the name of the dynasty: the "dynasty of the stone", and, the detail of the umbilical cord kept in the stony hillock. It refers, indeed, to a myth according to which the founder was born out of the rock<sup>44</sup>. In this case, the *Benek Paraja*, alias a Joria branch, can be considered as the foster-parents of the ancient royal dynasty.

Moreover, they may have been the "real" parents of the king. Some arguments point in this direction. Firstly, some *Benek Paraja*, though proud to play a role in the former royal celebrations, claim to have been in war with the Jeypore raja during some times. They say also that Bhairava (whose damaged temple is still honoured in the "old Nandapur" area) was their own divinity in the past, and that the Jeypore raja stole it to them. Last but not least, some of them say that the *batisimhasana* is forbidden for the male members of their lineage, because it is the *bomilikal* of their family, which means the "stone of the umbilical cord"... With those elements, we can maintain that the actual *Benek Paraja* are directly related to the more ancient royal dynasty historically documented in Nandapur. And if they were not direct relatives, at least they supported his reign, considering it as rightful as an offspring of the soil akin to them."

To conclude, we will come back to the legend opposing the raja riding a horse and the *Paraja* cultivating the soil (cf. II, I). K.N. Thusu give a more complete view on these myth by precisating that, though the junior brother became raja, the peasant *Paraja* stayed senior (*bodo*) and "priest" (*jani*). He continue by telling that the *Pengo Paraja* believe that one *Paraja* called *Narangi Jani*, who might live in Kondmal close to Jeypore or in the "Bomli Kutra" in Nandapur, was previously essential to the coronation of the Jeypore king<sup>45</sup>. He enjoyed the privilege, indeed, of *Singhasan Mati* ("soil of the throne"). Still according to the *Pengo*, this *Narangi Jani* was also previously essential during the *Dasara*.1 procession, and for the first rice seeds consecrations. All those functions were actually performed by the main member of the *Benek Paraja* lineage, who are also called the *Sisa* (here "priest"<sup>46</sup>) family". The priest mentioned by the *Pengo* can be easily identified with this *Sisa*. The relation mentioned by the local tribes between the Raja and his older brother the *Paraja* priest was actually not only mythical but somehow real. The *Benek* in particular, and the Joria and *Paraja* in general, were the true senior "earthmen" (*matia*) who were still dominant in the area (and maybe formerly even rulers) and with whom the king had to deal. Moreover, the fertility

<sup>43</sup> Bell 1945, p.22.

<sup>44</sup> This legend recalls the origin myth of the ancient Sailodbhava dynasty of the Chilika area (7<sup>th</sup> century). It is interesting to find the same idea among the *Pengo*, according to which the Jeypore raja was born out of a stone which broke into peaces; Thusu 1977, p.13

<sup>45</sup> Thusu 1977, p.13-14.

<sup>46</sup> This title is not always clear, as it refers to the "sacrificer" as well as to the "pujari" of the village shrine (*jani*). In other village around Nandapur, it can be also employed for the "cook" generally called *Randari*. The same ambiguity can be seen in the *Gadaba* case : Berger 2002.

of the kingdom was still insured by the performance of the spring rituals by those original "masters of the earth". The association of the tribal priest with a Hindu king, lastly, widespread in Orissa, evokes both the senior-religious / junior-secular distinction of the Middle Indian "tribes", and, the more classical one between Brahman and raja. Actually, both priests were necessary, and while the Brahman provided a textual authority to the royal decisions, the local *Sisa* could give a customary legitimation<sup>47</sup>.

### Conclusion :

Beginning with the first scientific reports on the Joria Paraja, this article tried firstly to define the name of this group, by situating it progressively in its local context. This process lead us to examine the ancient little kingdom organization. We saw then that the Joria Paraja were closely connected with a group called the Benek Paraja, itself directly involved in the kingdom ancient history and royal rituals. Today a *Scheduled Tribe*, the Joria Paraja of Nandapur area were undoubtedly a dominant local group in the far past, and the Benek Paraja might have been even forgotten kings.

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<sup>47</sup> Galey 1984.

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