ROCZNIK ORIENTALISTYCZNY, T. XLII, Z. 1, 1981

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Reward and Punishment in Indian Folk-tales

Many recent publications have shown how closely interrelated are the three major sub-structures functioning within the framework of the traditional Indian culture (the elite, the folk and the tribal traditions)[1]. Their authors concentrated mainly on the process of sanskritization of the lower social strata and — to a lesser extent — on the penetration of folk and tribal elements into the Sanskritic culture of the elite. In these studies similarity (or continuity) of certain core cultural traits and culture concepts shared by the three sub-structures was viewed as resulting from such processes. Consequently, it was brought in relationship with the dynamics of interchange of ritual, mythological and social themes through the channels of oral tradition and cultural performances, including some nonlinguistic media of expression, and through the networks of marriage trade, religious pilgrimages and festivals[2].

These findings are undoubtedly of great value for the study of Indian culture as a whole. It should be pointed out, however, that the validity of theories and hypotheses based on them was not in general assessed against sufficient ethnographic and textual information. The fact that the researchers showed special concern for the study of unifying elements, *loci communes* of Indian culture, using the concept

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[1] A systematic presentation of this theoretical structure is given by T. K. N. Unnithan, *Indra Deva and Yogendra Singh* in: *Towards a Sociology of Culture in India*, in: *Towards a Sociology of Culture in India: Essays in Honour of Professor D. P. Mukerji*, New Delhi 1965, pp. 1–35. See also: M. N. Srinivas, *Social change in modern India*, N. Delhi 1972 (Indian edition); Y. Singh, *Modernization of Indian Tradition. A systemic study of social changes*, Delhi 1973; S. C. Malik, *Understanding Indian Civilization: A Framework of Enquiry*, Simla 1975; and classical comparative study of folk traditions: *Village India. Studies in the little community*, McKim Marriot, ed., Chicago 1955.

[2] See especially M. Singer, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes. An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization*, New York 1972, pp. 39–80, where such networks are described.

of *sanskritization* to stress the binding force of the elite tradition, while glossing over deep cultural cleavages within their respective fields of study, be it a village or a small town, might have in many cases hidden ideological roots. Another factor contributing to this situation might be found in an easy availability of research materials and highly articulate informants from among those who represent the traditional elite culture or those who are, within their folk groups, acting as the agents of sanskritization.

Although there appeared excellent sociological and anthropological field studies and monographs on the village or town menial classes[3], these were concerned especially with power structures, caste mobility, familial and caste interactions, social function of religion and rituals[4]. Not much has been done after India's independence to bring out systematic collections representing folklore and oral tradition of these groups. An examination of a whole series of recently published PhD dissertations on folk literature in the Hindi linguistic area reveals the fact that the oral tradition of untouchable menials has been given in them only marginal attention. Such material, when collected, should serve, in addition to interviews and direct observation, not only as empirical data for theory building, but also for a closer examination of sociological and anthropological insights regarding the folk culture. Its marked lack prevents testing the prevalent hypotheses about that culture: its complementarity or its being a "diluted" transformation of the elite culture, its Pan-Indic or regional character, its relative uniformity or heterogeneity (i.e. inclusion of several sub-units, according to the major caste divisions).

The significance of oral tradition for sociology of culture in India can be emphasised in the best way by enumerating its functions which, if we put aside its purely recreational role, include: realistic representation of everyday life, preserving the accepted behaviour patterns, strengthening systems of belief and representation of social system[5]. Within the array of the traditional Indian folk media nearly every genre can fulfil these functions. Although it is thought that the so called moral stories, moral songs, myths and epic lays, presumably because of their manifest "moral" content, are closer to devices of social control than the other genres[6], the

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[3] Among others: S. Fuchs, *The Children of Hari. A Study of the Nimar Balahis Madhya in Pradesh, India*, Vienna 1966; B. S. Cohn, *The Changing Status of a Depressed Caste*, in: McKim Marriot, ed., op. cit., pp. 53–77; see also F. G. Bailey, *Caste and the Economic Frontier*, Manchester 1957, pp. 211–227, and A. Chakravarti, *Contradiction and Change: Emerging Patterns of Authority in a Rajasthan Village*, Delhi 1975.

[4] Meena Kaushik studied recently religion and social structure of the untouchables (Doms) in Benares; the results of her fieldwork are presented in her highly interesting paper *The Symbolic Representation of Death*, "Contributions to Indian Sociology", Vol. 10, No 2, 1976, pp. 265–292.

[5] Cf. S. L. Srivastava, *Folk Culture and Oral Tradition. (A Comparative Study of Regions in Rajasthan and Eastern U.P.)*, N. Delhi 1974, pp. 3–4.

[6] S. L. Srivastava, op. cit., p. 278.

data related to the use of positive and negative forms of social sanctions and of other instruments of social control are specifically present in the folk-tales with a distinct outcome[7].

It is the working presupposition of the present paper that such data encoded in folk-tales reflect (as in rituals and more envolved children games) certain aspects of enculturation process during which an individual learns through conflicts what attitudes to assume towards his social and natural environment, what are — also the less definable — values of his group's culture, where in the social structure are located its forbidden territories and marginal lines, what are the dangers arising from culturally ill-defined situations, and how to cope with them. Folk-tales function then as the pool of cultural memory which, in A. Wierciński's definition consists of "steadfastily registered information in symbolical connotations including the knowledge about world and a set of behavioral instructions which are transmitted by education from generation to generation"[8].

In folk-tales the diversification of fates of the main and the secondary heroes serves as a device correlating rewards and punishments with what is conceived in a given culture as *right* or *improper*, *moral* or *immoral*, *normal* or *abnormal*, *collective* or *personal*, *implicit* or *explicit*, *informal* or *formal*, *functional* or *dysfunctional*, *general* or *situational*. The discernment of these categories is achieved on the metaphor level, i.e. by the use of contrasting metaphors pertaining to alternative life strategies, problem solving procedures, child training themes, social roles, etc.[9]

Thus within the folk-tale reference frame the desired objects and the instruments of punishment represent metaphorically alternative inventories of the culture's values and anti-values. The routes devised by the main and the secondary heroes (in the formal structure of the text the main plot and the sub-plots) to reach the reward may be considered as metaphorical representations of life strategies and/or problem solving procedures. Certain single actions which bring upon the acting characters of a tale either reward or a punishment, i.e. further participation in goal-seeking activities or transfer into the category of secondary actors, may represent alternative patterns of behaviour corresponding to the culture's main child training themes. The relative value of these patterns is defined from the point of view of their expediency in particular and more often than not ill-defined situations. It may be argued that these riddle-like situations are themselves metaphorical expressions of a series of alternative conceptualizations of the social and the natural order. To

[7] Cf. J. M. Roberts, B. Sutton-Smith and A. Kendon, *Strategy in Games and Folk Tales*, in: P. Maranda ed., *Mythology. Selected Readings*, Penguin Books 1972, p. 195: "Some folk tales resemble games in that they display outcomes with winners and losers, but other folk tales resemble amusements in lacking such outcomes".

[8] *The meaning and Scope of Anthropology*, "Coll. Antrop." 2, 1978, Zagreb, pp. 10–16 and especially p. 14.

[9] Several child-training themes have been related to folk tales with strategic outcome by John M. Roberts et al. ibid.

solve such a situation, then, means to subscribe to this one of them which reveals, besides the obvious, also the implicit dimensions of the social structure, its organizing principles and, especially, hidden features of power distribution within and outside it.

As far as I am aware no attempts have been made till now to correlate the contents of Indian folk-tales with their social backgroud. A comparative study of the elite and the low-class Indian folk-tales, if performed from this point of view, should help in establishing new facts regarding the elite and the low-class world outlooks. It should also throw light on certain aspects of the cultural selection process as operating within the context of Indian oral tradition.

The aims of this inquiry are of limited character. At the present moment any attempt to build a detailed model of rewards and punishments on the basis of the folk-tales of the untouchables will be seriously hampered by the lack of their systematic collections. Instead, I propose to demonstrate on a small sample of such tales how the untouchables from the North-Western part of Uttar Pradesh conceive risks, dangers and the means to escape them, and, also, to what extent their folk-tales reflect the concept of inequality inherent in the model of social relations prevalent in the village India. For this reason I have decided for including into the sample three tales with the low and three with the high status hero. Five of these tales fall clearly into the folk-tale category, while one can be described as a potential folk item[10]. All of them are connected by one of the most widespread motives found in Indian narratives — the motif of *a hero breaking, splitting, openning ... touching an unknown* (or seemingly known) *object, animated or unanimated*[11]. Before proceeding to the presentation of the tales it is necessary first to discuss this motif and its functioning as a plot unit in Indian narratives.

The word "motif" was used here in its colloquial sense. However, I am not concerned in this inquiry with motives as "floating intercultural narrative elements"[12],

[10] The tales belong to the repertoir of Mr. Zahur A h m a d (alias M u n s h i R a m), a Chishtiya and Jogi, and a professional singer and story-teller from the Roorkee District, Uttar Pradesh. Knowing the kind of audiences he works for (especially sweepers of the Bhangi caste, among whom he lives during his yearly tours covering all the main places connected with worship of their hero Guga Pir in Uttarpradesh and Rajasthan), one can suspect that his stories ans songs mirror values rather consistent with the low caste world-outlook. Such are generally his less defined stories, folk items in statu nascendi, which he insists are true events, but does not take too seriously, using them as a yarn to while his time away. One of such narratives (b_1) has been included into the sample.

[11] This motif may be compared to *vidveṣaṇa*, one of the six basic action categories systematized in popular magic texts of the *Indrajal* type. Cf. S. S a n t r ā m, *Aslī barā indrajāl* (*The true great Indra's net*), Delhi, Hind Pustak Bhandar (without date), pp. 15–16.

[12] E. K. M a r a n d a and P. M a r a n d a, *Structural Models in Folklore and Transformational Essays*, The Hague 1971, p. 22, where also discussion of analytic units used in folklore studies, i.e. type (Arne, 1910), function (Propp, 1928), motif (Thompson, 1932), mytheme (Lévi-Strauss, 1955), motifeme (Dundes, 1962).

but rather, in accordance with Propp's definition, with "acts of dramatis personae, defined from the point of view of a tale as a whole"[13]. The motif of "the striking hero" comprises in fact at least two analytic units definable as Propp's "functions", and these are always stated explicitly. The action of the hero, as a stimulus, is followed by a response. These two units, represented by a sequence of activities of the actors in the text, are sufficient to form a nuclear tale. They may be also accompanied by other sequences and, together with them, form only a small segment of longer narrative material[14].

Though in some texts the sequence is used — as in *kāvya* — as a purely aesthetic device, an embellishment[15], and has no dramatic function, it performs such function in classical and folk narratives, regardless of the genre of the story in which it appears (myth, Puranic story, legend, fairy-tale, primitive tale, animal tale, etc.). Its dramatic magnitude, however, may differ to some extent. That would depend on the kind of logical operations and transformations the sequence undergoes in the hands of a story maker, for example — substitution of terms accompanying the transition from one story to another within one narrative genre, or the transition from one genre to another.

Till now I have analysed sixty Indian classical and folk narratives possesing the sequence. In all of them the appearance of its initial part, "*the hero approaches and breaks ... touches the object*" signalizes without exception an impending turn in the tale's plot and in the hero's fate. The counteraction of the initial action's object, "*the object is broken ... opened; some power appears and interacts with the hero*", brings always upon the hero either loss of the tale values and thus reconfirms his initial situation (lack, loss, hunger, anxiety, danger) or — fulfilment of his wishes, contradicting his negative initial state. The sequence belongs, then, to the same plot category as tests. Although tests are specifically present in the fairy-tale type of plots, the alternation of losses and gains (centered around a limited set of plot units) is common to all the narrative forms, including that of the fairy-tale[16].

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[13] W. Propp, *Morfologia bajki*, Warszawa 1976, p. 59.

[14] Cf. Robert P. Armstrong's discussion of "units based upon the substance of the text" in his *Content Analysis in Folkloristics*, pp. 175–181, (in: P. Maranda, ed., op. cit., pp. 173–193).

[15] Cf. J. Brough, *Poems from the Sanskrit*, Penguin Classics, 1968: "Among such conceits, which were taken for granted by the Sanskrit poets and their audience, we may cite the fancies that the Ashoka-tree comes into full blossom only after it has been kicked by a beautiful girl...", p. 35. In his third Appendix to the Tawney's translation of *Kathasaritsagara* (C. H. Tawney, *The Ocean of Story*, Vol. I., Delhi 1968, Indian Reprint, pp. 221–228) N. M. Penzer connects interestingly the motif with *dohada* or craving of the pregnant woman, one of the embellishments of the Indian fiction.

[16] Cf. E. Meletinsky, S. Nekludov, E. Novik and D. Segal, *Problems of the Structural Analysis of Fairytales*, in: P. Maranda ed., *Soviet Structural Folkloristics*, The Hague 1974, pp. 73–139: "The tests are a specific category of the tale but the alternation of losses and gains is common to fairytales, myths, and other forms of narrative folklore" p. 73.

The sequence can be compared to the fairy-tale type of tests (more precisely the preliminary and the additional tests) also in that that in some cases it provides its heroes with helpers or with magic objects. But, if in the European folk-tales the difference between the main and the secondary positive characters (the hero and his "retinue") performing tests seems to rest in general on the opposition of their action aims (*reflexive* vs. *transitive*), this does not always hold true for the Indian folk-tales containing the sequence[17]. Although in some of these tales the helpers do act on behalf of the hero, the hero often remains passive even during the main conflict and may gain less than his helper(s) in the final distribution of rewards. Such helpers act *transitively-reflexively*. In other tales of this type the helpers act *transitively*. It is argued that the outcomes of the tales (or the episodes within more developed narratives) containing the sequence depend closely on: a) lack or presence of the helper (*irreversible loss* vs. *reversible loss* or *gain*), b) transitive-reflexive or transitive actions of the helper (*reversible loss* vs. *gain*). This division has been used for the presentation of the six tales summarized below.

a_1. *The Jackal and the trap*. (The active, low status hero. Helper not present. Irreversible loss).

Once a hungry Jackal who has been wandering in the jungle in search of food watched a fight between a Hunter and a Boar. He saw how the mortally wounded Boar killed the Hunter. However, he did not notice that the Hunter had set a trap some time before his fight with the Boar. Seeing the bodies of the Hunter and the Boar, and a chunk of meat lying nearby, the Jackal — out of modesty — decided to take the smallest thing. On biting the meat he released an arrow hidden under it. The arrow killed him on the spot[18].

a_2. *The Farmer and the Black Dog*. (The active, high status hero. Helper not present. Irreversible loss).

Once a rich Fa1mer gave a feast to his friends. The friends were throwing bones to some familiar dogs milling around. The Farmer noticed a strange Black Dog who stood apart and, not daring to come near enough, could not get hold of any bone. Out of compassion the Farmer threw him a bone. It hit the Black Dog in the eye. The wounded Black Dog ran away terribly howling. The feast was over by then and the Farmer, though it was shortly after the nightfall, went to the fields. The Black Dog met him at the cross-roads and bit him. As there was nobody who could help him, the Farmer died there[19].

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[17] In E. Meletinsky's words: "The basis of the formal structure (of the narrative) is the opposition of the preliminary test, in which the hero acquires the magical agent (object or person), to the main test, in which the hero attains his principal goal with the help of this very agent. This opposition is either not found in myths and folktales of primeval societies or, if found, irrelevant". *Marriage: Its Function and Position in Folktales*, in: P. Maranda, ed., op. cit., p. 67.

[18] The tale about the greedy Jackal appears in *Pañcatantra* (IInd Book, 3 Kathā), ed. by Kale, Delhi 1969; *Hitopadeśa* (Ist Book, 6 Kathā) and in Somadeva's *Kathāsaritsāgara* (Xth Book, 5 Taraṅga, ślokas 101–104), ed. Kāśīnāth Pāṇḍuraṅg Parab, Bombay 1904, Sec. Ed.

[19] This story is only locally known. In some parts of Uttar Pradesh it is told to illustrate a proverb prohibiting touching or beating black dogs, especially stray ones. Cf. Bhairon's dogs as receptacles of blood lost by demons in their fight with

b_1. *The Boy and the Tree.* (The active-passive, low status hero. Helper present. Helper acting transitively-reflexively. Reversible loss).

Once a poor Boy was sent to the town to bring some sweets for his family gathering. On his way back the Boy took a shortcut way through the forest. It was the high noon time. The Boy, being tired, stopped to take some rest under a tree. The Boy touched the tree and in this very moment lost his mind. He was found later wandering aimlessly in the forest and brought home. Some relatives fetched an Exorcist (*bhagat*), who, after he had demanded quite high payment, extracted the spirit from the Boy's body (*jhāṛ phūṅk*) and transferred it into a clay pot. The pot was then sealed and buried under the refuse-heap outside the garden. All throughout the treatment the Boy was passive or violently contradicted the Exorcist's efforts[20].

b_2. *The Foolish Brahman.* (The active-passive, high status hero. Helper present. Helper acting transitively-reflexively. Reversible loss).

Once a poor Brahman decided to leave his family and to try to earn some money in the city. But the way to the city led through the forest and, as soon as he had entered it, the Brahman lost his way. After some time he saw a cage and a Tiger inside it. The Tiger requested the Brahman to open the cage and let him out. The Brahman opened the cage. The Tiger jumped out and immediately demanded the Brahman's flesh, claiming his rights to it. The Brahman could not agree with the Tiger's reasoning. Two judges, a Tree and an old Ox, whom the Brahman called hoping that they would decide the argument in his favour, refused to help him. The third judge, the Fox, who used to scrounge for some food near human habitations, pretended not to understand the issue and — asking stupid questions and behaving idiotically — cleverly brought the Tiger back into the cage. The cage was then closed. All who witnessed it praised the Fox, but laughed at Brahman's foolishness. All throughout the second part of the tale the Brahman was passive or contradicted his helper's efforts[21].

c_1. *Nuna Chamarin.* (The active-passive, low status heroine. Helper present. Helper acting transitively. Total gain).

Once Nuna who was a poor but beautiful girl of the Chamar caste went to the river to wash some clothes. Working there she smelled cooked meat. As she was very hungry, she looked around and noticed a clay pot floating in the middle of the river. She waded to the pot and lifted the lid. On finding food there she brought the pot ashore, took the meat out of it and ate it up. From this time some magic powers were aiding her. She had only to mutter some spells (*mantar*) and even such wearisome tasks as rice planting were performed magically for her in no time[22].

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the Goddess. Cf. W. Crooke, *Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, Delhi, S. Chand and Co. (without date, Indian reprint of 1928 R. E. Enthoven's Edition), pp. 96, 360.

[20] This is not a folk-tale but a potential folk-item, too realistic in its description of reversal ritual to be discarded as a "neighbourly yarn" without meaning.

[21] This well-known tale has — as far as I am aware — no classical variants. Cf. Shankar, *Treasury of Indian Tales*, N. Delhi 1972, Book II, pp. 43–52. A variant with a different outcome (irreversible loss) is given in *Skazki narodov Indii*, Moskva 1964, pp. 92–94.

[22] The meat eaten by Nuna Chamarin was, according to several local traditions (cf. Crooke, op. cit., p. 437, where she is ultimately discovered to be a witch and banished from her native village; cf. also G. W. Briggs, *The Chamars*, Indian Reprint, Delhi 1975, p. 185, and R. C. Temple, *The Legends of the Panjab*, Vol. I, Patiala 1962, pp. 491–506, where the cooking of the meat is described) the flesh of Dhanatthar the Leech, cooked by his disciples or sons on his orders.

c_2. *Ramji and the Charmed Stone.* (The active, high status hero. Helper present. Helper acting transitively. Total gain).

When Ramji wandered through the forests in search of Sita he once heard a request for help coming from a nearby stone. He kicked the stone. The stone split and a woman appeared from within it. Thanking Ramji for his deed she told him where to look for Sita. Her advice was excellent. The woman was Ahalya transformed into stone by her husband's curee[23].

All the six stories form one thematic-narrative scheme and present simple variants of one syntagmatic chain (multiform), which in case of b_1 and b_2 is doubled. Each variant consists of eleven easily identifiable units grouped in turn into three plot segments:

I. General activity of the hero initiated to overcome his negative state (exemplified in a_1 and c_1 by hunger, in b_2 by poverty, in c_2 by loss of wife; b_1 is not clear — hunger?). In a_2 the hero's activity is aimed at strengthening his already positive state. The activity itself takes form of wandering and/or search, as in a_1, b_1, b_2, c_1, c_2, or giving a feast — in a_2. It takes place on own (a_1, a_2) or foreign territory (forest in b_1, b_2, c_2, river in c_1).

II. Specific disturbing action directed towards an unknown (but not unfamiliar) object which appears on the scene as if to answer the hero's wishes. The hero either approaches the object (a_1, b_1, b_2, c_2) or is approached by it (a_2, c_1). This involves simple chance (b_1, b_2, c_1, c_2) or selection process (a_1, a_2). The object has appearance of a container (b_2, c_1) or a solid, whole thing (a_1, a_2, b_1, c_2). Time element is given in a_2 and b_1 (twilight, high noon).

III. The counteraction of harming or helping powers (killing arrow in a_1, wounding fangs in a_2, debilitating spirit in b_1, devouring tiger in b_2; aiding meat in c_1, aiding woman in c_2) hidden in the object directed towards the hero).

The last two plot segments (the "sequence") of the tales present a pair of model subject-action-object sentences with stable functions and interchangeable terms. In their ideal, matricial form they can be written down in the following way:

— the hero disturbs an object —

— a harming/helping power emerges from the object and harms/helps the hero.

The sequence, then, describes two kinds of mediation, unsuccesful (the heroes of a_1, a_2, b_1, b_2 are the "failing mediators") and succesful (the heroes of c_1, c_2, and the helpers in b_1, b_2; these helpers carry the story through a sort of a loop, bringing it again to its beginning but apportioning to themselves some of the tale's values at the cost of the hero or his family — "mediation with the permutation of the initial impact"; the helpers in c_1, c_2 while acting on behalf of the heroes perform the "nullification of the initial impact" mediations)[24]. It should be noted here that the fact that the heroes in c_1, c_2, and the helpers in b_1, b_2, perform similar, if not

[23] Ahalya's legend is told in V ā l m ī k i's *Rāmāyana* (Ist Book, 48 sarga 15–34, 49 sarga 1–23); Ed. by Kāśīnāth Pāṇḍuraṅg Parab, Bombay 1902, Sec. Edition.

[24] The terminology pertaining to different types of mediation comes from E. K. M a r a n d a and P. M a r a n d a (*Structural Models*...).

identical tasks, namely releasing others from dangers arising from unsuccesful attempts at mediation, indicates that it is possible to consider these tales not only as the variants of one multiform, but also as different episodes of one, more structurally developed plot. Within such a plot the heroes of a_1, a_2 and b_1, b_2, might be classified as secondary acting characters, failing competitors; also the helpers in c_1 and c_2 would fall into the category of secondary actors, but in their proper function.

The final positive outcome of the tales (gain, reward) is determined solely by the hero's ability to concentrate in his person a specific set of distinctive characteristics which would make him ambiguous enough to first neutralize and then to transcend the pairs of opposites existing in the tale[25]. Even on the level of the manifest content the sample reveals a whole series of them: active/passive, poor/rich, wise/foolish, own/foreign, manifest/hidden, open/closed, moving/non-moving, helping/harming, container/contained, disturber/disturbed, helper/helped etc. Inclusion of such ambiguous traits should be assumed for the heroes in c_1, c_2, and the helpers in b_1, b_2 (winning competitors), and — for the disturbed objects in a_1, a_2, b_1, b_2 (could they be interpreted as testers?). In other words — Nuna Chamarin and Ramji have the necessary mediating power to use even potentially harming powers hidden in the disturbed objects for their own needs. In possession of such power are also the Exorcist and the Fox, but not their clients — the Mad Boy and the Foolish Brahman; these, as was the case with the Jackal and the Rich Farmer were easily mediated upon by the objects they had disturbed, the objects which had more ambiguous traits than they. The mediating power of the objects in the first four tales is exemplified most dramatically by the trap in a_1 and the cage in b_2; the trap consisting of a piece of meat covering an arrow placed on the tense bow-string, and the cage enclosing a hungry tiger. The ambiguity of the tree in b_1 and the Black Dog in a_2, less evident for a European, is quite clear to Indians[26]. One may add here that objects of this kind resemble in their internal tension certain unstable systems ready to explode in the face of anybody who would disturb their precarious balance without knowing how to handle them (we have already seen how the arrow, the fangs, the spirit and the Tiger "attached" themselves to the failing heroes' bodies, and how the helpers in b_1 and b_2 "detached" them and — without falling prey to them — "attached" them again to their proper envelopes; we have also seen that the heroes in c_1 and c_2 were able to "detach" the charmed meat and the charmed woman from their envelopes and use them as helpers, without "attaching" them back to any object).

The tale b_1 provides the necessary key to our understanding the meaning of the sequence. It describes explicitly an exorcism and the rites necessary to perform it: the extraction of the spirit from the patient's body, its "pacification" and its transfer to a spot outside the human habitations. The fact that the differentiation of the hero's and the helper's roles in b_2 has its exact counterpart in b_1 indicates that it

[25] Ibid., pp. 66–83.
[26] W. Crooke, op. cit., pp. 400–418 and 361.

is possible to treat both the tales as two variant descriptions of a similar ritual. The ritual context of b_2 is further corroborated by the "nonsensical" behaviour of the Fox during his treatment of the Brahman: in order to cure possesion the curer has to work himself into frenzy far greater than his patient's. Again, the heroes of c_1 and c_2 may be seen as releasing others from snake-bite and curse. In c_1 Nuna Chamarin's actions (eating meat found floating in a pot) resemble strongly certain rites which, it is believed, may be performed even on the patients dead from snake-bite. Such patients were usually not cremated but placed on a raft made of banana stumps, or on a bundle of reeds, and sent down the river in hope that some powerful sorcerer would find them and, after sucking the poison out, bring them back to life[27]. Similarly, the surprising action of Ramji in c_2 (who kicked the stone after it had requested help from him) can be understood properly only if seen in its ritual context. It is argued that this action is related to the practice of beating the patients, often resorted to by exorcists during certain types of exorcisms[28]. It is noteworthy that this tale equates thus curse with possession (and these sicknesses whose aetiology is believed to be connected with spirit- possession[29]). The common element of the tales a_1 and b_2 can be discovered in their original competitive situation. Two powerful competitors are involved in it, fighting for dominance over the jungle: the Hunter, present in a_1, and the Tiger, present in b_2. As the heroes of the tales (the Jackal and the Brahman) do not recognize the traps as means used by the Hunter to win the competition, by disturbing them they unleash powers far beyond their control. In the competitive situations of this kind witchcraft forces are attributed to close competitors[30]; the traps may play role of such forces. In b_2 the Tiger by coming into contact with the cage becomes dangerous to those who would try to help him as a witchcraft (or pollution?) carrier.

Using the symbolism of dangerous foreign moving towards non-moving own, and of own moving towards non-moving foreign, of danger inhering in the foreign, not yet acculturated territory (the forest), of harming powers found in containerlike foreign although familiar objects, all the six tales describe anomalous events. When faced with such events their heroes display three types of possible behaviour related to the three outcomes of the tales. Thus irreversible loss is connected with aggresive

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[27] Ibid. p. 390; G. W. Briggs, op. cit., p. 179. There are some interesting parallels to this story existing in Bengal folklore (Behula tale).

[28] I have heard about such practices from my informants of the Bhangi caste.

[29] Given by S. L. Srivastava, op. cit., as: half-headache, stomach ache, backache, leucorrhea, typhoid, cholera, snake-bite, scorpion-bite, dog-bite, evil eye, pp. 254–271.

[30] M. Douglas (*Purity and Danger. An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Pelican Books, 1966, pp. 124–126) pointed out that the close competitors' resentments may find their expression in their use of witchcraft (involuntary). An interesting question could be posed here as to whether in certain Indian settings it would be rather pollution and not witchcraft which would be attributed to close competitors.

behaviour: the hero is at first active, then "over-passive" (i.e. dead). The peculiar active-passive behaviour of the heroes of b_1, b_2 and reversible loss seem to represent entry into the sick-role. Total gain is obtained through "over-active", abnormal behaviour.

We can thus infere that the tales caution against an aggressive involvement in anomalous (unknown? not mastered?) activities or events, labelling them outrightly as dangerous: it may be recalled at this point that the heroes of a_1 and a_2 consciously selected the objects of their actions. Chance or involuntary involvement in such activities, as in b_1 and b_2, should be according to the tales followed by an immediate acknowledgement of one's guilt, i.e. by entry into the sick-role. Only in this way irreversible punishment may be avoided. [In an absence of confessional rites possession serves as a factor permitting the discharge of pent-up, socially unacceptable affects.] Only those persons who are able to display abnormal "over-activity" may confront any anomaly without incurring unnecessary risks. The fact that the values of the tales are allotted exclusively to them confirms the supposition that they fulfil important social functions as innovators, mediators, ritual specialists and curers. Finally, the tales inform implicitly that in order to avoid dangerous situations and risks connected with them one should not get involved in any activities except those performed in the carefully controlled, acculturated environment (*village* vs. *forest*), even at the cost of suffering.

The tales of the sample exhibit only a small amount of fantastic element (speaking animals) and no traces of conventional poetic imagination; they are rather crude and realistic in their treatment of the subject-matter. It is argued that they have not as yet lost their ties with the archaic patterns of magico-religious beliefs and prescriptions, and behavioural norms of the society in which they were not only preserved, but also recreated again and again. Their ethnographic concreteness can be confirmed by direct observation of the village untouchables' everyday life.

When the heroes of the tales approach the sequence, they are not tested for the knowledge of the fairy-tale code of abstract moral and social norms, but for the knowledge of those magical beliefs and prescriptions, and, as well, for personal ability to withstand their unconscious or conscious breach. The situations in which they get entangled only distantly resemble the preliminary tests of the European fairy-tales. The preliminary test checks on the hero's preparedness to perform his role, verifying his "awareness of elementary norms of behaviour", his "kindness, modesty, intelligence, politeness, and most often, the knowledge of the particular rules of the game"[31], if successfully performed it leads the hero to the benefactors — magic helpers and magic donors. The sample shows that in three cases the heroes who show kindness (the Farmer, the Brahman) and modesty (the Jackal) are not awarded any gain, but automatically punished. Neither the Mad Boy nor Nuna Chamarin are given any moral characteristics — they simply "get what was coming to them", in terms of loss or gain. The only exception in this sample is Ramji whose

[31] Meletinsky et al., op. cit., p. 79.

reward may have some connection with his answering a request ("kindness and politeness"); the source of his success lies in his earlier exploits which form parts of the Ramayana cycle and are well known to any audience in India. The tales negate thus the concepts of conventional morality in the European sense of the word. Expressing their notions of good and bad, sin and merit, they use, like the Hindu religious code, the idiom of liminal states, of impurity[32].

The terms of the sequence form a vocabulary of this idiom. They reveal to the listener the inner deep meaning of the tales, providing him simultaneously with inventories of meaningful actualizations of the culture values (non-hunger, prosperity, friendship, integrated family, prestige, active body), antivalues (hunger, poverty, loneliness, disintegrated family, lack of prestige, body disability), liminal states (sickness, possession, death, "over-activity") and liminal persons (sick, possessed, corpse; curer, exorcist, king-culture hero).

The sample does not show any correlation between the status of the hero and the distribution of rewards and punishments which is ascribed mainly to the agencies of "immanent justice". However, the fact that I have been not able to obtain from my informant even one folk-tale withe the b type of outcome (low status hero — reversible loss) might be significant in indicating difficulties that the poor might have insecuring services of the traditional mediators. The sample shows that some situations bring irreversible losses and punishments, independently of the hero's moral qualifications. It is postulated that the tales containing the "striking hero" motif stress the necessity of mediation or reconcilliation of opposites, but do not propagate solution of dangerous (anomalous) situations through open conflict. As manipulative behaviour directed towards foreign (anomalous) objects may bring punishment, it should be left in the hands of ritual specialists. It may be inferred that the tales world outlook values conservatism and uninquisitiveness, which are not specially rewarded, but also not punished.

Some more extensive studies, based on much broader corpus of texts (including the caste Puranas or cosmogonical-genealogical myths) would be needed to possibly connect the "shamanistic" world-outlook of the untouchables with their punitive and rewarding systems.

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[32] For realization that "those who have been led into believing that the notion of impurity encompasses the notion of sin, have perhaps confused the idiom with the content" I am very grateful to Veena Das (*The Uses of Liminality: Society and Cosmos in Hinduism*, "Contributions to Indian Sociology", Vol. 10, No. 2, 1976, pp. 245–263, but particularly 258–261).