



CENTRE FOR ASIAN AND
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INSTITUTE OF
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COLLOQUIUM SERIES OF THE INSTITUTE OF ANTHROPOLOGY
Public Lectures

Subaltern Sovereigns

Rituals of Rule and Regeneration in Highland Odisha, India

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The vast and ancient topic of kingship in India has mostly been studied from the perspectives of rulers and other elites. But what constitutes sovereignty viewed from "below"? This lecture presents some parts of a new book in which this question is discussed in detail with regard to indigenous communities inhabiting the mountain range called Eastern Ghats in Central India. Starting point of the investigation is a local proverb that connects the ritual of the king (Dasara) with various festivals performed by his "tribal" subjects. On the one hand, this aphorism thus identifies signature rituals, associating one community with a particular ritual. On the other hand, the proverb is about the relationship between ruler and ruled.

In the lecture, one of the festivals is discussed and analyzed, which is performed by the Joria community. Two main themes of the festival become immediately apparent; it is about rice and about rule. Paddy is conspicuously present throughout the performance. With regard to rule, it is noticeable that for the duration of ten days a royal polity is enacted. Among other things, the festival features animal sacrifices, dancing paddy-monkeys with long phalluses, stilt-dances, and royal soldiers fighting against low-caste stable grooms. Clearly, from the local perspective, rule and regeneration go hand in hand. This also means that the subalterns consider themselves sovereigns as well.

TUESDAY, JUNE 6

17:00 c.t. – 19:00

LOCATION: South Asia Institute, Lecture Hall (010.01.05), 1st Floor