outstanding role of the virginal, sexually unripe girl, the plant bearing the fresh seed, the woman and mother with her offspring, support the analytic view that the rituals originated in older, pre-Hindu agrarian cults. A notable feature is the inclusion of various wild plants and forest trees which indicates a close link between forms of soil cultivation and the parallel use of jungle products, involving the spiritual approach of the slash-burn peasantry with accompanying hunting and gathering activities. In the spiritual culture of the slash-burn perasant the buffalo, Durga's demonic opponent, and the animal blood sacrifices too,have a causal motivation. The ritual slaughter of buffaloes and other animals has an outstanding significance in all the magic fertility rites for the protection of society and nature practised by tribal communities from the north-eash of India to the Chittagong uplands in Bangladesh. They are mostly immaculate male animals.

The Durga festival with its various rites invoking fertility and the cosmic order is linked in Hindu tradition with the end of the agrarian year. The blessing of a plentiful harvest is regarded as the powerful life-giving gift of the "great mother". Her powers are ritually renewed and invoked for the future by the grateful worshippers for the basic securing and continuation of the human community with its natural sources of existence. The philosophy of a settled and developed peasant population emerges here.

In the public urban festivals this aspect is now submerged mostly by over-emphasis of the artistic presentation of the demon-slaying Durga and her companions. Dominant in the public eye and as a tourist attraction is the increasingly close rivalry between the various urban districts and local communities in producing the most handsome and artistically satisfying images as well as magnificent provisional temple edifices made of bamboo and fabric which call for considerable expenditure. In this way a new affluence based on changed economic factors and greared to industrial conditions is demonstrated.

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The Siddi and the Cult of Bava Gor in Gujarat[1]

HELENE BASU
Institute of Ethnology, Free University of Berlin

Abstract : The Siddi, descendants of former slaves from East Africa, have been commonly depicted more or less as isolated groups living in various pockets of Western India. The close interdependence of the group's social organisation, which combines caste - like features with a Muslim - fakir - brotherhood has by and large escaped scholarly attention. The paper demonstrates that the Siddi are neither isolated exotics, nor have they merely imitated their neighbouring communities. Ideas and practices related to Bava Gor rather indicate a lively interplay of given conditions and creative interpretations by the Siddi.

In the coastal state of Gujarat members of a small group of African diaspora are known for various ritual and musical performances in the arena of Muslim saint worship. The Siddi, as the descendants of former slaves from East Africa call themselves, have been commonly pictured as more or less isolated groups or tribes living in various pockets of Gujarat (Bhattacharya 1970, N. Basu 1982, Chakraborty & Nandi 1984). Depending on the perspective of the author, the Siddi have either been classified as servants or as fakirs (Bhattacharya 1970; N. Basu 1982, Chakraborty & Nandi 1984, Titus 1930). The close interdependence of the group's social organisation which combines caste-like features with a Muslim-fakir-brotherhood has escaped scholarly attention. The distribution of Siddi settlements over a wide geographical area is matched by a network of shrines maintained by religious specialists (fakirs) who organise the cult for other Siddi as well as for independent followers. The shrine in South Gujarat which is named after the Siddi saint Bava Gor functions as the centre of a regional cult structuring heterogenous social relations of Hindus, Muslims and others (Parsi, Bhil). Bava Gor figures as head of an assembly of male and female saints conceived as brothers and sisters. The cult of Bava Gor is, as will be shown, deeply embedded in the cultural symbolism of South Asia.

People speaking about Bava Gor and other Siddi saints often employ the categories of 'hot' and 'cold'. In the context of South Asian culture, Hindus and Muslims share a cosmological logic based on a thermodynamic theory of hot and cold forces (Kurin 1982; 1983). While heat is essential to life and fertility when taken alone, it can be extremely dangerous and it has to be ritually balanced by cooling substances as Beck and others have shown (Beck 1969; Werbner 1986). An extreme example of the power of controlled sexual heat is provided by Hindu ascetics whose creative qualities are based on the retention of semen in ascetic practices (*tapas*) (cf. Cantlie 1977). Food is classified according to temperature as either hot or cold implying moral qualities which - according to Cantlie - "affect the mind and disposition of the eater such that certain categories of food cool the blood and dispose to virtuous thoughts while others inflame the passions and brutalize the character" (1981: 42). Young and old age and sexual immaturity are supposed to be cool conditions while youth is associated with passion, sexuality and heat. Similarly, temperament and physical states are expressed through the idiom of hot and cold. Bodily substances and fluids such as blood, uterine flows and semen are equated with heat and carry strong connotations of impurity. The notion of heat associated with impurity is also relevant in relation to concepts of spirit possession. In Gujarat, Muslims refer to hot spirits as *maili* [illegible]*asti* (dirty people) who cause the possessed to develop fits of hot temper, act on sexual impulses [illegible]nd crave for hot foods like meat. Hot and cool ways of life are associated with higher and lower [illegible]ocial status by Hindus and Muslims alike; Brahmins and Sayyid both strive towards cool [illegible]onditions (Cantlie 1977, Kurin 1984). The Siddi, on the other hand, value heat in its various [illegible]orms. Siddi saints are categorized as hot or cold which define [illegible]

As a group, the Siddi are said to favour a hot way of life, because they are thought to possess hot blood as swell as hot tempers. Therefore, hot food such as meat is considered to be particularly suitable for Siddi people.

Anthropologists have repeatedly stressed that Muslim forms of social organisation in India resemble those of the surrounding caste society (cf.I, Ahmad 1978; P. Werbner 1991). Recently Gaborieau (1986) has drawn attention to a close correspondence between the ranking of distinct Muslim groups and the hierarchy of Sufi ordrers. Both are distinguished by reference to the distinction between the honourable Ashraf and the non-Ashraf groups (without honour). The latter category encompasses groups of inferior position who are supposed to be descended from Hindu converts, which explains the continued application of Hindu criteria. In the context of non-Ashraf groups Gaborieau therefore speaks of castes. Moreover, the same distinction divides so-called orthodox (Chishtia, Naqshabandia, /Qadiria, Suhrawardia) and non-orthodox Sufi orders (Madari, Qalandaria, Siddi). Although the Siddi are not Hindu converts but 'foreigners' like Sayyid and other nobleborn Ashraf, they occupy a very low position amongst other Muslims in terms of social honour, wealth and political power. As a group conspicuous by their physical appearance (black skin), the Siddi consider themselves as bound together in an ideally endogamous caste termed *jamat*. The same term is used when people refer to a brotherhood of fakirs which is distinguished by spiritual kinship ties (Basu 1995). Fakirs are not subject to celibacy vows but live in households. They differ from other people by the specialised work they perform in relation to the upkeep of shrines and the organisation of the cult of Bava Gor. As in many parts of the world, Africans of western India are recognized as excellent musicians and dancers. In the context of caste society in Gujarat, this talent has become part of the Siddis' caste image. In their case, dancing is associated with a black skin and clowning. In the past, the former seems to have predetermined them to act as jesters at noble courts, aside from their work as domestic servants. Many Siddi fakirs (men and women), on the other hand, are known as *mastfaquir* or 'mad fakirs'. The term mast as used by them refers to a positively evaluated form of madness which arises from a close relationship to one of the saints believed to guide the actions of his/her adept. Madness and heat appear as an inversion of the values maintained by high status Muslims. The Siddi call themselves jokingly *badsha loko* or 'royal people' whose headman, the *gadivaras* i.e. 'the one who sits on the throne' is a *mastfakir*, a madman, a fool without reason (*aql*), a person with a hot mind whose behaviour is unpredictable and not assessable by norms valid for honourable people. The role of Siddi fakirs is defined in opposition to the religious discipline of Sayyid *pirs* at the top of the hierarchy and reflects principles governing relations between superior and subordinate in the political sphere as well as in the worship of Sufi saints[2].

In the following, I shall confine myself to an exploration of relationship between what is known about the history of African slaves in India on the one hand, and the ideas the Siddi maintain in regard to their immigration. First a short account of the slave trade is given. Instead of seeking a historical explanation of present day practices, I would rather like to draw attention to an interesting continuity of ideas defining the role of Africans in Gujarat, which have been shifted from a historical-political to a symbolic context provided by saint worship. From court jesters the Siddi became ritual clowns endowed with charismatic gifts. Their role as religious specialists and fakirs is based on their bond to the shrine of Bava Gor which I will describe in the second part. The third part of the paper deals with the annual celebration of death anniversary (*urs*) at the shrine of Bava Gor.

The original Arabic meaning of the term is "marriage" or "nuptials" (Platts 1960:720) which carries important connotations referring to the perceptions of such death celebrations. In the case of saints, death does not mark the termination of life but a new stage of saintly existence. The relationship between saint and God is often expressed in the idiom of a bride longing for her lover and during an *urs* festival devotees celebrate the union of the saint with the divine or his spiritual marriage to God. While these concepts are generally associated with Muslim saint cults, the manner is which they are articulated differ according to various versions of locally practised forms of Islam. The *urs* celebrations at the shrine of Bava Gor play on the categories of hot and cold mentioned above contain messages about the relation between Siddi and saints and their role as ritual clowns expressed in marriage, symbols. In marriage, themes of fertility, sexual heat and the need to control these forces constitute essential elements during rituals transforming the status of the bride. This process has been analyzed by Pnina Werbner based on the opposing types of virgin and clown figuring in Punjabi marriage rituals (Werbner 1986). Here, the widespread cultural image of the female as wild, disorderly and governed by uncontrolled heat is symbolized by the wedding clown who appears during the ritual sequences when the bride is at her coldest state undergoing the application of *mhendi* consisting of a cold substance, henna. The clown impersonating dangerous heat by expressing obscene and vulgar sex is then "juxtaposed with the (...) bride's 'cold', safe condition" (Werbner 1986: 238). During the death anniversary, Bava Gor and the other saints undergo a period of transition marked by rites which are modeled upon marriage ceremonies. The saint is involved like a bride in a dialectic of cold and hot states which provides a ritual frame allowing for the enactment of Siddi core symbols.

Slaves

The presence of African slaves on the Indian subcontinent is closely connected with centuries-old sea trade and is recorded from the first century A.D. African slaves are first mentioned in Konkan, on the south-western coast in Maharashtra[3]. Slaves gained in importance with the onset of Muslim rule in North India. The system of slavery prevalent in the Islamic world brought slave-soldiers and slave-courtiers (including Africans) to the Sultanate of Delhi as well as to later empires and regional states (Pipes 1981; Brunschving 1961). Since in the Islamic world Ethiopian slaves were considered to be superior, African slaves were generally called Habshi (from Arabic *habash*, Abyssinia). Historians use the term Habshi when referring to African slaves in India, though the name includes people from different parts of East Africa, from the Horn of Africa to Mozambique (Burton-Page 1971).

The Islamic concept of slavery was based on the legal status of bondage concerning three categories, domestic, labouring and military slaves (cf. Brunschving 1961). Slave status did not necessarily imply poverty, low social status or political subjugation (Pipes 1981). This is particularly true of military slaves, who unlike domestic and labouring slaves, were not privately owned but were in the service of rulers and governments. After conquering an area, military slaves often achieved power themselves as in, for example, the first slave dynasty of Islamic rulers of Turkish origin in the Sultanate of Delhi. Habshi soldiers came to India in the retinue of conquering Muslim armies joining the foreign Muslim aristocracy. During the 15th and 16th centuries they gained considerable political power in some areas, such as in Bengal, the Deccan and Gujarat. In the 16th century about 5,000 Habshi soldiers were stationed in the town of Ahmedabad in Gujarat, some of whom took leading positions in the army and in government institutions (Burton-Page 1971:16). During this period the Siddi saint Bava Gor is first mentioned A 16th century Muslim historian, ad-Dabir, reported the visit of Sultan Ahmed to the grave of the "Abyssinian saint Bava Gor" in southern Gujarat (Lokhandwala 1970:4). The same historian was reported to be under the patronage of a Habshi aristocrat in Ahmedabad (Burton-Page

1971:16). During the rule of the Mughals, a Habshi navy was based at the Western seaport in Surat, the most important harbour in Gujarat at the time. The post of admiral in Surat was in the hands of a "seafaring Habshi clan" called Siddi from the Konkan coast who performed various naval functions like accompanying pilgrims by sea to Mecca in order to protect their ships from pirates. After the British arrived on the scene as a result of conflicts over the control of Surat, the Siddi in turn became pirates and lost their position to the British (cf. Das Gupta 1979).

Whereas in local historical discourses a host of references to the aristocratic Habshi can be found, much less is known about ordinary black slavers who continued to be imported to India until the end of the 19th century. Black slaves found their way mainly to the provinces of the western coast of India, from Karnataka in the south to Sind and Baluchistan in the west. They mainly employed as mercenary soldiers by local rules (Hindu and Muslim) or as domestic servants (Palakshappa 1976; Rahman 1976). Burton reported in the 1840s that in Baluchistan, 600-700 "Zangibari, Bambasi, Habshi and other blacks were imported" yearly (Burton 1973: 253). Beachey notes for the same period: "In Baluchistan, no family of any consideration was without male and female slaves" (Beachey 1976:50). As late as the second half of the 19th century, slave traders could obtain high prices on the Saurashtra (Kathiawad) peninsula in Gujarat: "A slave purchased at Zanzibar for five to ten dollars could be sold at Muscat for 25 dollars; at Bushire or Basra for 40 dollars; and at Kathiawar for as much as 100 dollars" (Beachey 1976: 54). In this period the slave trade was controlled by Omani Arabs from Zanzibar but European and Gujarati traders also participated. In Zanzibar and Pemba local traders of Indian origin (mostly Gujarati Bania) owned about 6,000 African slaves of both sexes (Beachey 1976: 56), and both Gujarati and Arab traders brought Siddi slaves to India. According to the Census of India, the largest Siddi settlement in Gujarat is Junagadh in Kathiawad was founded by a Gujarati merchant who imported Africans as domestic servants (Census of India 1961, Ethnographic Series, Vol. V:2). Black servants were popular not only at the courts of regional rulers, but also in the houses of well-to-do government servants, landowners, merchants and traders. The possession of black servants conferred prestige on the owner and was a means to express high status. The Siddi were, however, no ordinary servants: they frequently appeared as court jesters (Rahman 1976). As slaves they were without roots, without status and their negroid appearance set them visibly apart from their social environment; this seems to have predetermined a role as a kind of natural clowns, as people living permanently "betwixt and between" the boundaries of social space. In the role of jesters or clowns Siddi dancers enjoyed freedom of expression against superiors, which shows itself especially in the context of the *goma* dance. The word *goma* is derived from the Swahili word for dance, *ngoma*, which in the East African cultural context is applied to a wide variety of different dances. Siddi servants used to perform *goma* dances with drums, rattles and shells on special occasions (births, weddings) at noble courts. During the dance, norms of respectability were violated, men and women danced together, moving their limbs obscenely and making fun of the audience. Today, *goma* dancing is considered to be a gift which the Siddi have received from the saints defining essential activities of Siddi fakirs. This is manifested especially at the saint's day (*urs*) of Bava Gor when large numbers of Siddi are collectively possessed by the saints. In this context, the dance is called *masti goma or masti dammal* (from *dam*, breath).

From the beginning of the 19th century the rising British colonial power tried to end the slave trade in the Indian Ocean. In 1840, the British signed a treaty with the Omani ruler which made the sale of slaves to India punishable crime (Beachey 1976: 51-53). From then on the British navy regularly sent out patrols to check on Arab shipping. Slaves who were discovered on board were transported to Bombay or Surat. There they were freed and left to themselves. While the

British colonial regime employed some of the former slaves in the military or police, most of them served the native elite as domestic servants. The Gazetteer of 1899 reports the arrival of a small group of Siddi in Surat who were later employed as servants by "Christian, Muslim, Hindu or Parsi masters". Some of the older Siddi living today in Gujarat are only second generation immigrants and still remember stories of their parents' captivity. At least in the 19th century the shrine of Bava Gor with a group of Siddi fakirs affiliated to it seems to have served as a medium to assimilate new arrivals from Africa. Old people generally remember the arrival of former slaves as it is told by a man from Surat:

"My father was still a boy. One day he was playing with his younger sister on the beach in Zanzibar. Suddenly they were seized by a man and taken to a ship. Many Siddi were already there and they were all kept for many months. Then they arrived in Bombay. My father's sister died shortly after their arrival, but my father came to a sheth (master), a trader from Daman. Here he worked for some years but then he had a fight with his sheth and he ran away. He heard the name of Bava Gor and found his way to his shrine. Here he met my nana (MF) and later married my mother".

The Siddi's assimilation into Gujarati society turned them from homeless slaves of no status into the marginal role of fakirs. Slaves without caste affiliation, ancestry, or family were integrated into a caste of black people by the mediation of fakirs. Fictive kinship ties provided such single individuals with a social identity necessary for establishing marital relations (cf. Basu 1995).

The shrine of Bava Gor

The shrine of Bava Gor is situated in the territory of the former Rajpipla State some eighty miles between the two industrial cities of Surat and Bharuch in South Gujarat on a range of low hills surrounded by bushes and trees. In the last century the shrine has been the only Muslim place of worship in an area predominantly inhabited by Bhils. The first reports of Siddi fakirs at the shrine of Bava Gor were made by British colonial officers who were exploring the area geologically. The village at the foot of the hill had been long known as a place of carnelian mines. After travelling through the area, Lieutenant Fulljames reported in 1832, "on the summit (of a high hill) there is a peer's tomb. The only people residing there are a few Siddis or negroes who say that they were born and bred on the spot, wither their fathers came from Broach". Siddi living near the shrine of Bava Gor today, however, claim that their ancestors came to Bava Gor seven hundred years ago. According to the legend they narrate, Bava Gor was an Abyssinian military commander who was sent to Hindustan by Prophet Mohammad. From Mecca a light could be seen coming from a distant place in Hindustan which people regarded as the sign of Makhan Devi, a destructive demoness under whose power all life withered away. She was known to eat men and children and controlled demons and ghosts. Bava Gor obeyed the order of the Prophet and assembled a large army of Habshi soldiers. They passed through different lands. When Bava Gor and his army reached Gujarat they rested in may places. Each time a few Siddi from his army stayed behind. They are venerated today as saints in local shrines neighbouring Siddi settlements. After Bava Gor and his army arrived at the hill in southern Gujarat where Makhan Devi was waiting, he realized that he could not fight against the demonees, because she was a woman. The adherence to the Muslim code of conduct (*adat*) prevented him from taking physical actions. So instead they played chess for a long time but neither of them won. While they played, the younger brother Bava Habash arrived on the scene. His mind became heated when he saw his elder brother playing with the demoness and being cheated by her. But he was prevented from killing her by Bava Gor and the game continued. Finally the sister, Mai Mishra, arrived in a ship accompanied by other Siddi women to the rescue of her brothers. Only she could destroy the

power of the demoness. She was a female hersrelf and could therefore fight with her. Using her wooden sandal Mai Mishra eventually killed the demoness by forcing her into the ground. The place was taken over by Bava Gor and his brother and sister as well as by subordinate Siddi like Lalam Shah, the vizir of Bava Gor, and Pir Kisti, the captain of the ship carrying the women, the female saints, who are often referred to collectively as Mai Saheb.

Taken as a subjective account of Siddi history the legend contains references to all the major themes mentioned before. The names of Bava Habash and Mai Mishra refer to geographical regions in Africa connected with the slave trade and slavery, like Habash (Abyssinia) and Misher in Egypt respectively. Following the pattern of other Sufi hagiographies, Bava Gor and his Siddi army came as conquerors to the lands of the infidel. In a way, the legend can be seen as a kind of social memory preserving the former social standing of Africans as aristocrats in a society which no longer exists. On a synchronic level three aspects are particularly relevant in regard to the workings of the cult: Firstly, the conflict between the saints and the demoness provides an ideological frame for the shrine being a local centre for the healing of spirit possession. Bava Gor is referred to as *jinnat ka sarkar* or "lord of the spirits". Secondly, the female saint Mai Mishra represents a prominent feature of the cult consisting of two complementary ritual spheres (male and female). The veneration of male saints is parallelled by that of female saints whose shrines are cared for by Siddi women. At the shrine of Bava Gor, women are not prevented from entering the inner sanctuary where the tomb is situated, but they may not tresspass the wall separating the interior, most sacred part of a male saint's grave; men on the other hand are not allowed to enter the interior of Mai Mishra's tomb who is thought to rest in *parda* (seclusion). Therefore, Siddi women perform ritual tasks specifically related to a female domain of the cult. Thirdly, the attitudes of the saints towards the demoness are taken as a model of hot and cold temperament respectively. Bava Gor is thought to possess a cool mind (*thanda magaj*) characterised as benevolent, indulgent, generally lenient and respecting the barriers of the moral code of conduct (*adab*) between the sexes. Bava Habash on the other hand exhibits a hot temper (*garam magaj*), he is intolerant, irate and capable of violating sexual barriers, feared as wild and likely to punish people. Mai Mishra finally unites both aspects in her character; she may be hot–when killing the demoness–or cool, when helping her brother in his mission[4]. On the whole, the temperaments of the saints are taken as models by which the specific berhaviour of Siddi fakirs are explained.

Nowadays the place is known as *jungli dargah* or the shrine in the wilderness. The power emanating from the graves of the saints is held by the regional population to be especially effective against spirit possession, male impotence and female infertility. Bava Gor is believed to possess the additional power of revealing the truth by an ordeal in cases of social conflicts (theft, black magic, adultery). Until about thirty years ago the shrine was hardly more than a local place of pilgrimage and the cult center of Siddi fakirs. Since then the shrine has rapidly grown attracting an increasing number of visitors from towns and villages all over Gujarat. During the time of fieldwork Bava Gor was listed as one of the destinations of commercial shrine tours or those organized by urban kinship and neighbourhood groups who hire a bus in order to visit several regional shrines. In spite of this recent trend the cult of Bava Gor has retained much of its characteristic face-to-face relationships. Most of 100-150 people visiting the shrine on Thursdays (*jumme rat*) are known to the Siddi maintaining the shrine and mediating the power of the saints as well as to each other as *bavagorvale*, as believers of Bava Gor. Men and women maintain personal networks of clients. Many of those who visit the shrine regularly are former patients of spirit possession or had other personal problems solved by the saints. Often the relationship was initiated by somebody who had 'seen' Bava Gor or his brother or sister in a dream calling him to the shrine. According to the Siddi, devotees are guests of the saints having

been 'called' or 'invited' by them. Although the cult is dominated by the poor, it is stressed that the saints well come everybody: the rich and the poor independent of their respective religious affiliations. Facing the saints, social and religious differences of Muslim, Hindu and Parsi devotees recede into the background. Living in a world of increasing communal tensions, most of the *bavagorvale* emphasize the insignificance of social distinctions rejecting Muslim reformist as well as Hindu revivalist agitations. However, multiple meanings are attached to the saints reflecting different socio-religious contexts. Low caste Hindus place greatest emphasis on their power against evil spirits and most of them visit the shrine only in cases of affliction on the part of family members. Parsi devotees see the saints as part of their own tradition. Muslims perceive Bava Gor, Bava Habash and Mai Mishra as those saints whom they follow specially but who connect them additionally to a wider network of saints representing different Sufi orders (Chishtia, Qadiria, *Rifa'i*).

The distribution of Siddi shrines corresponds with the dispersal of the jamat over the geographical area extending from the peninsula of Saurashtra in the West to Bombay in Maharashtra. Among them the shrine of Bava Gor, Mai Mishra and Bava Habash occupies a central position[5]. Though the Siddi population is small (about 6,000), a few households are found in most towns where both men and women are often employed as domestic servants. Independent of its location, each Siddi neighbourhood is marked by a small shrine of one or several saints. With the exception of the village near the shrine of Bava Gor (20 Siddi households), most Siddi neighbourhoods lie at the outskirts of towns, in growing slum areas or in traditional urban quarters of service castes. In Southern Gujarat there are often only 3-5 Siddi households in the towns while in Jamnagar and Junagadh they have more than 100. All Siddi neighbourhoods form, at the same time, a network of interrelated shrines conceived of as the spiritual territory (*wilaya*) of Bava Gor. Shrines are distinguished in dargah as the original tomb of a Siddi saint and *chilla* as symbolic representation of a tomb at a spot touched by Bava Gor. In correspondence with the ultimate victory of Mai Mishra, the spiritual territory is also represented by shrines or seats of female saints. In several of the numerous songs sung during cult rituals (*jikkar*), reference is made to Mai Saheb in her various forms. There is for example one song which lists many towns in Gujarat including Bombay where Siddi live. Each Siddi neighbourhood is named as the place where the swing representing the seat of Mai Saheb is to be found (Census 1961: 27). Such local Siddi shrines are frequented by people living in the neighbourhood. Their cult clienteles usually represent a sample of the heterogeneous population of such settlements. Followers of Siddi saints belong to the Adivasi (Bhil) or to lower Hindu or Muslim castes. They are artisans, small traders, workers or labourers. Often people seek help in personal or family crises such as possession. At a local neighbourhood shrine, early diagnoses are made and minor treatments given. In persistent cases, several visits to the cult center are advised. Many of the people who visit the shrine of Bava Gor on a weekly basis (*jumme rat*) have been sent from such local neighbourhood shrines.

Urs

The most important event at the shrine of Bava Gor is thre annual celebration of *urs*. It is the main occasion for a meeting of the widely dispersed Siddi caste. On the last day a *mela* attracts thousands of people from surrounding towns and villages. The ritual period stretches over six days and culminates on the 11th day of the Muslim month *rajjab*. During the first few days Siddi from other parts of Gujarat, Bombay and even Pakistan arrive in succeeding waves till the area of the shrine is swarming with black people. The prospect of several nights of dancing *dammal* is considered by many to be the most exciting event of the celebrati...

The rituals carried out during the liminal time follow a fixed schedule though the way in which they are performed may vary (Turner 1969). Rituals proceed in phases highlighting different messages. The rituals are organized by Siddi fakirs affiliated with the shrine of Bava Gor. The main responsibility for the correct organisation of the performances is vested in those who have special roles at the shrine. All rituals and the procession are preceded by the *gadivaras*, the ritual head of the shrine and the *jamat* (caste). The *gadivaras* is supposed to be *mast* or mad because he occupies a hot position, the throne of Bava Gor. According to the Siddi, the cool saint Bava Gor puts those who are tied to him by special bonds such as the *gadivaras* and other fakirs into hot states of mind (*hal*). *Hal* implies that one of the saints, either Bava Gor or Bava Habash in the case of men or Mai Mishra in the case of women has entered the body of a person through whom he or she speaks. *Hal* as a positive form of possession is juxtaposed with negative *hajri*, the trance produced by evil spirit possession. The singing, drumming and dancing sessions (*dammal*) are led by the *nagarchi* ('head drummer') who controls *dammal* congregations which produce the heat sending dancers into a state of divine possession (*hal*). The Siddi are thought to be guests of the saints who are invited as if for a marriage feast. A few weeks before the *urs*, the *nissandar* ('carrier of the flag') travels through Gujarat from one Siddi shrine to the next announcing the approaching *urs* and inviting his *jamatvala*-s (caste fellows). During the days of *urs*, a series of common meals are offered to members of the Siddi *jamat*. In this way their status as guests of the saints is cared for, because ordinarily the *dargah* of Bava Gor maintains no *langar* (communal kitchen) as do other shrines of the high tradition. The *kotval* ('gendarm') supervises the cooking operations during the *urs*. Women are also involved in carrying out *urs* rituals though there are no specialized roles except female *mujavari* (shrine service) at the tomb of Mai Mishra. Moreover, other fakirs help in organisational work during the *urs* celebration out of personal inclinations.

The beginning of the liminal time is marked by the ritual washing of the tombs of Bava Gor, Bava Habash and Mai Mishra (*ghusl*). The term *ghusl* is also used for the performance of ablutions when a dead body is rendered pure (*pak*) by removing remnants of internal hot substances (blood etc.)[6]. In the context of *urs*, concepts of death and marriage merge in the idea of the saint's spiritual marriage to God as is shown by this ritual. The tombs representing the saints are separated from the eyes of the public by a curtain (*parda*) like a bride who is secluded for the ritual marking the beginning of the ceremonial marriage cycle. Analogous to the seclusion, shaving and oil treatment (*thel bethana*) of the bride the tombs are cleansed, newly decorated with colourful cloths and scented with *atar* (scent).

After sunset, before the actual washing takes place, Siddi and a few close cult adepts from neighbouring places gather at the shrine and share a common mean consisting of rice and lentils cooked by the family of the *kotval*. Afterwards, singing of *jikkar* aimed at the invocation of the saints begins[7]. Next to *gadivaras*, *nagarchi*, *nissandar* and *kotval* other respected elders of the *jamat* form a circle in the middle of which is placed burning incence and a bundle wrapped in green cloths called *poshak*. *Poshak* contains new *chaddar* (covering sheets for the graves) and the utensils used for washing. The men wear green turbans and a piece of green cloth around the lower part of the body. Since green is held to be a cool colour, head and genitals are covered with green cloths in order to counter the heat evoked by the following rituals. *Jikkar* singing is controlled by the *nagarchi*, the precentor. While men are playing drums (*dholak*), women beat the rythm with a rattle which is called after the female saint Mai Mishra. The first two lines are sung by the *nagarchi* who determines the beat and speed of rythm which is repeated by the others. While the speed of the drums is accelerating, the *gadivaras* experiences trance-like state (*hal*), his body starts shaking and he laughs and cries at the same time. The *gadivaras* is a privileged person in relation to the saints. Because he represents them on a throne (*gadi*), he is the first who is seized by Bava

Gor. Later other men and women show similar symtoms of *hal* as a beginning mild trance. This is taken as a sign that the saints have accepted their invocation and are ready to unite with them during *urs*. As the ritual proceeds, white and black *kavo* are served in cups to everyone present. White *kavo* consists of sweet milk and is supposed to be cool, while black *kavo* is a hot drink made from ginger, pepper and other spices. White *kavo* refers to the cool milk ties given by the mother, black *kavo* signifies the hot blood ties given by the father. Both drinks are served in one cup from which everybody takes sips confirming the close ties between the Siddi as 'children of the saints with hot blood'. At this point the washing procedure of the tombs begins. The bundle containing *poshak* is carried to the tombs in a procession by *dammal* dancers. Each grave is covered with white curtains referring to death and the presently extremely cold condition of the saints. The ritual cleansing of the tomb of Mai Mishra is carried out by women, the male saint's tombs are washed by men. Meanwhile, others are listening to Quawwali performed by the *nagarchi* and other Siddi. At early morning the white curtains are removed and the tombs are displayed in bright new *chadda*, a green one for the cool saint Bava Gor a red one for the hot saint Bava Habash and another red one for Mai Mishra made of the special kind of cloth which is worn by a Gujarati bride. The saints are greeted by another round of *dammal*. Finally, water which had been used for cleaning the tombs is distributed which people carry home because it is supposed to possess strong healing powers.

During the following nights *dammal* is danced. The peak of the *urs* celebrations occurs at *sandalnirat*. It takes place five days later, on the 10th of *rajjab*, i.e. the night preceding the actual *urs*. It is the time when sandalpaste is put on the tombs which corresponds to the mhendi rite in marriage. The ritual starts in the late afternoon with a procession (*julus*) from the village to the shrine. The procession is led by *gadivaras* and *nissandar* who carries the flag of Bava Gor and other Siddi elders each carrying on his head a large *tali* (plate) with pieces of sandalwood, flowers, new *chaddar* again and offerings of *malido*, a sweet dish made from wheat. The *kotval* carries vessels containing *sharbat*, a drink made from fermented grains which is classified as hot. The *nagarchi* leads the drummers who accompany the procession. Shortly before they reach the shrine, the *kotval* shows signs of *hal* caused by the hot *sharbat* contained in the vessels placed on his head. After having entered a room adjacent to the shrine, seven Siddi men grind the sandalwood and prepare a paste from it. During the next few hours, sandalpaste is put on each grave in turn while the *gadivaras* is in *hal*. At the end, *malido* is distributed as a gift from the saints (*niaz*) transmitting their blessings. Later at night *dammal* is danced in front of the tomb of Bava Gor. Like the nights before, *jikkar* are sung to invokde the presence of the saints. The Siddi are seated in a circle, in the middle are placed burning incence (*loban*) and the *nagarchi* leads the performance. After the singing, hot *sharbat* is distributed and consumed. Only then does the dancing performance becomes more violent than the nights before, because of the effects of hot *sharbat*. Instruments are rearranged, big drums (*muggarman*) being put up and played by men in a standing position juxtaposed to smaller drums and metal vessels played in a sitting position by men and women alike. In addition, dancers form a circle playing on a *dholak* or Mai Msihra rattle while others are crowd around, singing and playing the drums or simply watching. On this night, the saints take possession of men and women almost immediately. There is always a group of people, men and women, who are seized by either of the saints. This kind of saintly possession does not depend on any specific ritual role but is subject to individual disposition. Those who are experiencing *hal*, dance in the middle of the circle while they are surrounded by other dancers drumming and singing. There are no formal rules as to how to dance: men and women, old and young join the circle of the dancers for as long as they like, step out of it for some time and join again. Sometimes people gather around a person housing a saint and ask him or her about personal problems

because they speak with the tongue of a saint. After several hours dominated by such dancing it slowly takes on another character. Those who are possessed decrease in number and finally retreat while others begin to entertain the audience by clowning and with acrobatic stunts. Onlookers throw money into the circle which is picked up in mockfights or by someone dancing on his hands. At this stage, single dancers jump into the middle of the circle performing their own art which is often turned into obscene and vulgar gesturing intended to make people laugh. The atmosphere changes while spectators enjoy clowning performances. Late at night dancing finally takes yet another form. The scene is lastly left to young boys and girls, most of them still unmarried who dance together. This, then, is the only occasion when adolescents are allowed to have contact with the opposite sex temporarily and in a relatively uncontrolled way. The ritual sequences at *sandalnirat* emphasise a close interaction of saints and Siddi. At first Bava Gor, Bava Habash and Mai Mishra undergo a process of transformation from a cold to a hot state which parallels the *mhendi* sequence during marriage rituals when henna is applied to the bride's hands and feet. Sandal paste is used like henna as a ritual transformer (cf. Werbner 1986: 238-39), rendering the tombs first cool, then heating or cooking them thereby changing them from cold to hot. The hot state of the saints is matched by the hot drink consumed by their dependents followed by heated ritual dancing.

The three phases of dancing are embedded within a liminal period of time characterized by a temporary breakdown of status-bound social rules ordinarily governing social action allowing thus an experience of normative communities in the sense of Victor Turner (1969). Within this context, themes of heat associated with sexuality are elaborated upon and articulated in the idioms of possession and gender relations. While the symptoms of saintly possession evoke on a phenomenological level similar associations of srexual agitation like the negative type of spirit possession (*hajri*), they are interpreted as a positive form of possession demonstrating the Siddi ideal of *mast*. This is closely connected with a pivotal element characteristic of the *mastfakir* expressed by dancing while clowning. While the wedding clown as representative of dangerous, uncontolled aspects of sexuality is finally overcome, "sex (being) incorporated, but in a transformed, safe form" during the wedding ceremony (Werbner 1986: 238), the role of the clown is permanently attached to the self-image of the Siddi.

Clowning fakirs are characterised by uncontrolled heat which is essential to their charismatic abilities. As if the heat and disorder released during the preceding night is perceived as basically feminine, it is Mai Mishra who is the centre of attention on the last day. Mai Mishra is characterized by ideals of wifely devotion and motherhood. She is supposed to have been engaged to a saint called Sultanji Pir whose shrine is about twenty kilometres away. According to the story both partners died before the marriage could be consummated and Mai Mishra remained a virgin. The enactment of Mai Mishra's engagement ceremony (*sagai*) concludes the ritual cycle of the *urs* celebration. On the last day the caretakers of Sultanji Pir act as people on the grooms' side, as bridetakers who carry the gifts which are given to a prospective bride in the social milieu of poor Gujarati Muslims at the engagement ceremony: sugar, lime, a new head scarf, *kajal* and glass bangles. Lime and sugar are processed into a cool *sharbat* which is distributed to the guests of the bridegivers. This cooling ritual concludes the liminal phase and terminates the *urs* celebrations. The ritual *urs* sequences at the shrine of Bava Gor are thus emphasised by an inversion of life-cycle-rituals: the beginning of the spiritual marriage of the saints is marked by rituals performed at the last life-cycle ritual a human being is subjected to when his life has been terminated by death. The end is marked by the opposite: by a ritual using

the symbolism of marriage which signifies the beginning of adult life for a women. This inversion, it may be argued, points to the fundamental difference between human and saintly existence.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

My aim in this paper was to demonstrate that the Siddi are neithber isolated exotics nor have they merely imitated neighbouring communities as it is often proposed. Ideas and practices related to the cult of Bava Gor rather point to a lively interplay of given conditions and creative interpretations by the Siddi The way Indian society offers for the integration of foreigners carrying the stigma of black skin are manipulated and turned into its oposite, into a positively evaluated ideal of heat, clowning and madness implying a rejection of the ascription of social inferiority. This is achieved by infusing culturally predefined categories with parochial meanings. As a result the Siddi have created their own social universe which is, however, deeply embedded in the society of Gujarat where they live.

NOTES

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5 Nagarchi Pir in Junagadh is characterized by similar functions like the shrine of Bava Gor, of. Chakraborty & Nandi 1984.

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A Critique on Theories of Ethnicity

AJIT K. DANDA
North Bengal University, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Pin 734 430

Abstract: During the last two decades and a half, ethnicity has emerged as a major area of research in social and sociobiological sciences the world over. Naturally discussions on the methodology of studying ethnicity as well as the framework of analysis received a fair degree of attention. The present essay reviews five important approaches to the study of ethnicity namely : (i) sociobiology approach; (ii) primordialist approach; (iii) assimilationist approach; (iv) world system approach; and (v) historical materialists approach and highlights how because of over-emphasis on the fixed system of categorization and attachment with the boundary maintenance mechanism of nation-states, the approaches, despite brilliance, fell short of explaining the contemporary socio-political processes. The critique explains how the operative model developed by the present author is in a position to interpret the ethnic phenomena within and between the bounds of nation-states.

I

Ethnicity, mostly because of its ubiquitous nature, has of late, particularly during the last two decades and a half, emerged as the major area of research and been drawing attention both at nation-specific as well as international levels. Despite such importance as a social science concept, nevertheless, it is yet to acquire a fully agreed upon definition. In different socio-cultural and political contexts, ethnicity as a phenomenon has often been and still is being attributed with non-identical connotations. This is perhaps not necessarily as much due to any casual approach to the exercise or apathy by the concerned scholars dealing with the concept as it is for the very nature and scope of the subject-matter as such. To be somewhat extra-specific, among its several characteristics, simultaneous existence of both subjective as well as objective elements seems rather too conspicuous in the very perception of ethnicity. They, therefore, impinge upon the mental construct or theorization of the topic. In spite of such apparent claims as if being in the era of post-modernism, scholars even in the West are still found by and large occupied in interpreting structuralism of various shades and examples are extremely rare where research pursuits have followed an absolutely value-free strategy. But most of the researches being repetitive in nature, they have been responsible for setting the dominating trend. As a result, this has become a major source of impediment toward initiating even a perceptible breakthrough in this respect.

Perhaps the problem is even more deep-rooted than what it appears to be,since it is hardly possible to attain a position beyond the realm of influence of structure, being virtually tied up with the pattern of the same. In other words, total detachment with a culture or society, being once reared up according to its prescribed values, even hypothetically seems a remote possibility. Thus apparent bound lessness or directionlessness, as manifest expressions of post-modern strategy, seems to poject rather a comparative situation where the nature of comparison by and

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