Kali’s Tongue: Cultural Psychology and the Power of Shame in Orissa, India

Usha Menon and Richard A. Shweder

This chapter is about an Oriya Hindu facial expression (biting the tongue) and the Oriya emotion that it conveys (lajja or lajju), and about the narrated meanings of a core Oriya cultural symbol, a particular iconic representation of the Great Mother Goddess of Hinduism (see Figure 1). The Great Goddess, who is variously referred to in local South Asian discourse as Devi, Ma, Parvati, Durga, Kali, Chandi, and numerous other appellations, is depicted in this icon in her manifestation as Kali,
with eyes bulging and tongue out, fully equipped with weapons in ten arms, garlanded with skulls, wearing a girdle of severed arms and heads, grasping a bloody decapitated head, and poised with her right foot on the chest of her husband, the god Siva, who is lying supine on the ground beneath her (Siva is the reigning deity of the temple town of Bhubaneswar where our research in Orissa [India] was conducted).

The icon is a normative collective representation or core cultural symbol that is all about *lajya* and the meaning of the emotionally expressive act of biting the tongue. For the moment, we hazardously and inadequately translate *lajya* as shame (for a detailed discussion of the difficulties in translating *lajya* with any single term, such as *shame, embarrassment, modesty,* or *shyness*, from the English emotion lexicon, see Shweder, 1992; see also Parish, 1991). In the Oriya language, the linguistic expression “to bite your tongue” is an idiom signifying *lajya*. In towns and villages in India where Oriya is spoken, it is a good and powerful thing for a woman to be full of “shame” (*lajya*). The icon of the Great Goddess, in her manifestation as Kali, is the key to understanding why.

*Shame, happiness,* and *anger* are three words for emotions in the English language. Were one to ask bilingual (Oriya–English) speakers for equivalent words in the Oriya language, they would most likely generate *lajya* (for shame), *sukha* (for happiness), and *raga* (for anger). When Anglo-American college students are asked to evaluate similarities and differences among shame, happiness, and anger using a triads test format (Which of the three emotions is most different from the other two?), they typically respond in one of two ways. A majority say that happiness is most different. Many say that shame is most different. Almost no one says that anger is most different.

Those who say that happiness is most different have in mind some kind of hedonic component of comparison. They judge that it feels pleasant to be happy, but unpleasant to feel either shame or anger. Those who say that shame is most different have in mind that to experience happiness or anger is to feel expansive and full of one’s self, whereas to experience shame is to experience a diminishment of the ego.

On the other hand, Oriyas frequently say that anger ( *raga*) is most different from the other two. They say that anger is destructive of social
relationships and of everything of value. They say that shame (lajya) and happiness (sukha) are the glue of social relationships. Armed with an appreciation of the cultural psychology of Kali’s tongue in Oriya culture, it is to be hoped that the reader will understand why Oriyas typically judge the emotion of anger (and not happiness or shame) to be the most different from the other two, and why Oriyas in the temple town of Bhubaneswar believe that shame (lajya) is a feminine virtue that is both powerful and good.

The Cultural Psychology of Emotions

The aim of this chapter is to increase our knowledge of emotional functioning in a different cultural tradition by examining the stories told about a core cultural symbol. In recent years, a new interdisciplinary field of research known as cultural psychology has emerged on the interface of anthropology, psychology, linguistics, and philosophy, promoting theory and research on domains of psychological functioning, including the cultural psychology of the self, the cultural psychology of cognition, the cultural psychology of emotions, and so forth (see Bruner, 1990; Cole, 1990; D’Andrade, 1990; Jahoda, 1992; Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1992; Miller, Potts, Fung, Hoogstra, & Mintz, 1990; Much, 1992; Shweder, 1990, 1992; Shweder & Sullivan, 1990, 1993; Stigler, Shweder & Herdt, 1990; Wertsch, 1992). Cultural psychology is the study of how culture and psyche make each other up (see Wiggins, 1991, for a philosophical discussion of psychological states and their objects as equal and reciprocal partners and of the necessity of softening received distinctions between inside and outside points of view). The aim of cultural psychology is to document and explain divergences in the way in which the psyche functions across different ethnic and cultural groups. Among the many questions definitive of the research agenda of the cultural psychology of emotions, we focus on the following: What particular emotional meanings (e.g., Oriya lajya) are constructed or brought “on-line” in different ethnic groups and in different temporal–spatial regions of the world? How are these emotional meanings brought “on-line,” socialized, or otherwise acquired? More specifically, what is the role of core cultural symbols (e.g., the icon of the Great Goddess and the storytelling norms associated with its interpre-
Narratives, Numbers, and Norms

We address the issues of narratives, numbers, and norms by examining the extent to which the various narrated meanings associated with the icon of the Great Goddess (see Figure 1) are organized into culturally sanctioned and enforced norms of correct meanings definitive of cultural competence or expertise in storytelling.

In this study, we infer the existence of a culturally sanctioned and enforced norm for generating correct meanings by relying on the logic of metric scaling, in particular Guttman scaling (Ghiselli, Campbell, & Zedeck, 1981; Gordon, 1977; Weller & Romney, 1990). If a local norm for generating culturally correct meanings exists, it is to be expected that it will exercise an influence not only on the likelihood of certain meanings being activated at all (e.g., that a protruding tongue bitten between the lips means “I am ashamed”) but also on the distribution and pattern of sharing of those meanings across members of a single cultural community. We discovered that the distribution of meanings associated with the icon of Kali suggests the existence of a unidimensional scale or a cumulative hierarchy of normative meanings, which constrains the telling of a culturally correct story about the Goddess, organizes the order in which meanings unfold, and establishes a standard for differentiating levels of local cultural competence or expertise. Clearly, the very existence of such hierarchical levels of competence presupposes the reality and existence of a cultural norm that members of a community share in common even though they have mastered it to different degrees.

The Canonical Story of Kali’s Tongue

The following is the canonical story about Kali’s tongue as told in the temple town of Bhubaneswar. The expert narrator here is a 74-year-old
FIGURE 1. Icon of the Goddess Kali used in the study.
Brahman man, the father of three sons and two daughters. A retired hotelkeeper, he spends his time these days keeping an eye on his grandchildren and going regularly to the Lingaraj Temple.

Q. Do you recognize this picture?
A. Kali.

Q. Can you describe the incident that is portrayed in this picture?
A. This is about the time when Mahisasura became so powerful that he tortured everyone on earth and heaven.... He had obtained a boon from the gods according to which no male could kill him. All the gods then went to Narayana and they pondered on ways to destroy Mahisasura ... each contributed the strength and energy of his consciousness—his bindu—and from that Durga was created. But when Durga was told that she had to kill Mahisasura, she said that she needed weapons to do so and so all the gods gave her their weapons. Armed thus, Durga went into battle. She fought bravely, but she found it impossible to kill the demon ... he was too strong and clever. You see, the gods had forgotten to tell her that the boon Mahisasura had obtained from Brahma was that he would only die at the hands of a naked woman. Durga finally became desperate and she appealed to Mangala to suggest some way to kill Mahisasura. Mangala told her that the only way was to take off her clothes, that the demon would only lose strength when confronted by a naked woman. So Durga did as she was advised to; she stripped, and within seconds of seeing her, Mahisasura's strength waned and he died under her sword. After killing him, a terrible rage entered Durga's mind, and she asked herself, "What kinds of gods are these that give to demons such boons, and apart from that, what kind of gods are these that they do not have the honesty to tell me the truth before sending me into battle?" She decided that such a world with such gods did not deserve to survive, so she took on the form of Kali and went on a mad rampage, devouring every living creature that came in her way. Now, the gods were in a terrible quandary. They had given her all their weapons. They were helpless without any weapons, while she had a weapon in each of her 10 arms. How could Kali be checked and who would check her in her mad dance of destruction? Again, the gods all gathered and Narayana decided that
only Mahadev (Siva) could check Kali, and so he advised the gods to appeal to him. Now, Siva is an ascetic, a yogi who has no interest in what happens in this world; but when all the gods begged him to intervene, he agreed to do his best. He went and lay in her path. Kali, absorbed in her dance of destruction, was unaware that Siva lay in her path, so she stepped on him all unknowing. When she put her foot on Siva’s chest, she bit her tongue, saying, “Oh! My husband!” There is in Mahadev a tejas, a special quality of his body that penetrated hers, that made her look down, that made her see reason . . . she had been so angry that she had gone beyond reason, but once she recognized him, she became still and calm. This is the story about that time.

Q. How would you describe the expression on her face?
A. She had been extremely angry, but when her foot fell on Mahadev’s chest—after all, he is her own husband—she bit her tongue and became still; gradually, her anger went down.

Q. So is there still any anger in her expression?
A. Oh yes, in her eyes you can still see the light of anger shining.

Q. And her tongue? What is she feeling when she bites it?
A. What else but shame (lajya)? Shame . . . because she did something unforgivable, she is feeling shame (lajya).

What follows is our analysis of this story of Kali’s tongue: a Guttman scaling of the distribution of narrated meanings across 92 informants and a discussion of the normative meaning of shame in Orissa, India.

The Icon of Kali: The Study

The study was conducted in the Old Town section of Bhubaneswar, Orissa, India in the neighborhood surrounding the Lingaraj Temple. Lingaraj is one of the many names of the Hindu god Siva (also spelled Shiva). The temple dates back to at least the 11th-12th century. It is an important pilgrimage site for Hindu wanderers (for a more detailed description of the community, see Mahapatra, 1981; Seymour, 1983; Shweder, 1991; Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1990; Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, in press).
The Narrators

A total of 92 informants participated in the study: Seventy-three were Brahmans, and the remaining 19 were members of what are referred to locally as clean castes. Women outnumbered men: There were 66 women to 26 men in the sample interviewed. The narrators spanned an age range from 18 to 86 years: The average age of the male narrators was 58.8 years, and that for the female narrators was 42.1 years. Except for the two oldest men, who were widowers, and the two youngest, who were bachelors, all the men were married. Of the 66 women, 53 were married, 6 were still unmarried, 5 were widows, and 2 were separated from their husbands and had chosen to return to their fathers’ homes. The mean length of education for the men was 9.6 years, whereas it was 6.5 for the women. Fifteen women had no schooling at all, although no woman was completely illiterate. With one exception, all the men in the sample were literate: 15 had more than 10 years of schooling and 5 were particularly learned in Sanskrit. With the exception of the unmarried and separated women, all of the women maintained traditional female roles in their households or joint families as wife, daughter-in-law, mother-in-law, or widowed matriarch. Most of the men were civil servants, schoolteachers, shopkeepers, hotel owners, and small-time politicians. In spite of this involvement in nontraditional activities, their status in the community continued to be defined by their roles or by that of a family member’s in the ritual activities of the temple.

The Storytelling Task

All interviews were conducted in Oriya by Usha Menon, coauthor of this chapter, at the homes of the narrators during the months of June through September, 1991. The interviews began with the interviewer showing to the informant the icon of the Great Goddess in her manifestation as Kali (see Figure 1) and consisted of a short series of probes.

The probes for the study had been designed so as to encourage every narrator to spontaneously generate his or her story about the icon. The first two probes were as follows: “Do you recognize this picture” and “Can you tell me the story that is associated with this picture.”
After the narrator had told his or her story, there were additional follow-up probes, such as, “In this picture, how would you describe Kali’s feelings?” “Have you seen this expression in everyday life?” If yes, “Who and under what circumstances?” “Is Kali merely stepping on Siva or is she dancing on him?” “Why do you think Siva is on the ground?” “Do you think that Siva is on the ground to subdue Kali?” “Whom do you see as dominant in this picture: Kali or Siva?” Additional probes or paraphrased variations of the probes were occasionally introduced in an effort to determine what the narrator knew about the icon, and whether the narrator had anything further to say.

The pragmatic context in which the narrators told their stories to Usha Menon is one in which we wanted to learn what they knew about their own cultural symbols, but the task was not constructed or presented as a test of knowledge. We imagine that the experience is much like asking a Christian to explain, to a seriously interested and persistent visitor, the meaning of the iconography of the Crucifixion scene. We do not know whether or in what ways the stories told by our narrators would be different if told within a different context or to a different interviewer.

We also cannot be certain about the cognitive status of absent meanings. Absent meanings are meanings that a particular narrator failed to produce in our interview context and in our follow-up probes. We do not know whether our informants would have incorporated those absent meanings into their narratives had we primed those meanings by making them readily available in the form of a true/false or recognition task.

Later in the chapter, we briefly survey several types of interpretations of the cognitive status of those meanings that a narrator does not mention while telling the story of the Great Goddess. Given the evidence at hand, we cannot know for certain whether an absent meaning is an indication of a lack of sufficient knowledge of normative meanings to support the verbal production of a story, or an indication of the repression of certain normative meanings (perhaps because they are too emotionally “hot” to handle consciously), or perhaps even an indication of a deliberate unwillingness to narrate particular normative meanings in the context of our storytelling task. For reasons that we shall discuss later in the chapter, we favor the lack of knowledge interpretation of the cognitive status of
absent meanings, although further research is needed to settle this important issue and to sort out possible interpretations of the psychological significance of absent meanings.

What we do know with some confidence from our study is that the meanings that are narrated (or left out) in any particular narration are narrated (or left out) in a very systematic way, which is suggestive of the existence of a cultural norm for ascribing meanings to the icon of the Goddess in her manifestation as Kali.

Within the pragmatic context of our storytelling task, some of the older married women, though eager to chat and entertain, exhibited a certain reluctance to be interviewed. They would disclaim having any knowledge about the icon and would suggest that their husbands would make better informants. There is certainly a cultural aspect to this behavior pattern, in that women in the community are encouraged to be modest and self-effacing in such contexts, and such self-effacing behavior may even be an aspect of lujya. As we shall see, it is also possible that the task was especially problematic for some of those older married women because of their relatively limited mastery of available storytelling norms.

The interviews rarely lasted longer than half an hour. All were tape-recorded and later transcribed and translated into English. What follows is an interview with one of the more expert of our narrators. As can be seen, she adheres closely to the canonical story as it is told in the Old Town. This narrator (Narrator 78) was a married Brahman woman of 50, the mother of a grown-up son and daughter, who, although she had had no formal education, could read and write Oriya fluently. Two sections from her extensive narrative are given here.

Q. Do you recognize this picture?
A. Yes, of course. This is Kali.
Q. Can you tell me what is happening in this picture?
A. She has put her foot on Siva.
Q. Why has she done that? Has she done it deliberately?
A. No, Ma hasn't done it deliberately. When she came after killing Ma-hisasura, she was in a terrible rage, filled with the desire to destroy, and she was powerful—every god and goddess having given her their
particular strengths, their particular weapons. Then, she took on the form of Ugra Chandi, the most destructive of Ma's forms and it is like this that she stepped on Siva. She didn't know what she was doing, and when she did, she asked herself, "What have I done? Have I stepped on my husband?" And she bit her tongue. When we have made mistakes and realize that we have made them, don't we too bite our tongues? Don't we ask ourselves, "Eh, Ma, what have I done?" It is the same kind of ma shakti (mother power). Here, she is shown destructive and wild, but she has a peaceful form too, which she shows to the true believer. What we should do is close our eyes and pray to her without any fear or anxiety. She will then appear not as she is in this picture but otherwise. If I focus on you and pray to Ma, I will see her in you and if you focus on me and pray to Ma, you will see her in me. But we will neither of us see her as she is in this picture, fierce and bloodthirsty. What does this picture teach us? That none of us is free of her. She devours each one of us so that she can create more. Also, by standing with her foot on her husband, she shows that she doesn't pay heed to anyone. She is supreme. No one can question her.

Q. How would you describe Kali's expression here?
A. Kali here is frightening. She strikes terror. She is killing demons and so naturally she would look fierce. But once she recognized her husband lying under her foot, she bit her tongue and felt shame. She became calm and her anger began to go down.

Q. So there is both shame and anger in her face?
A. Yes, there is shame in her face. But can you look at her face alone? You can't. You look at everything else, the weapons she is carrying, the garland of skulls, her girdle of heads and arms, the way she is standing. And when you look at all that she doesn't look as though she is feeling shame. That is all part of her Ugra Chandi form.

Q. And her eyes? What do they show?
A. They too show how angry she has been.

Q. Is there a name or a way of describing this expression?
A. This is the way Kali is worshipped. She is a warning to all sinners. In this kali yuga (the fourth and final stage in the cycle of time)—I call it korla yuga (the age in which one has to work), one has to struggle
to do one's dharma (duties of station). In other yugas, doing one's dharma came easily, but not in this yuga. And this way of portraying Kali is useful since it shows us which way we should not go.

Q. Have you ever seen this expression in everyday life?
A. I've told you already. All women, Ma included, bite their tongues when they feel they have not behaved properly. So to that extent, there is some similarity. But that is all. Kali is the mother of the world, and we may resemble her a little, but we are only weak shadows. Ma can take our forms, look like us if she wishes to because she likes to play with us, but we can never look like her.

Q. Who do you see as more dominant in this picture, Ma or Siva?
A. Here? Ma's strength is definitely greater. Why? Listen to me. What do the gods do? They give boons. They give boons to demons, but when it is necessary to destroy the demons they pray to Ma. And what sort of boons do they give these demons? That only when they see a naked yoni (female genitals) will they die. Like Ravana, he only became vulnerable to death because he desired Sita [the reference is to the Hindu epic, Ramayana]; and the Kauravas, would they have died but for the fact that they tried to strip Draupadi in public [the reference is to events in the Hindu epic, Mahabharata]? They are all instances of Ma Shakti (the power of the mother goddess). Similarly, here Ma took the form of Durga so as to kill Mahisasura, but her humiliation at the hands of the demon lead to the death of many more. All this can be found in the Chandi Purana.

The Analysis of Normative Meaning

Initially, the interviews were analyzed into 60 elements of meaning (e.g., “This is Kali,” “There was a demon named Mahisasura,” “Mahisasura was given a boon by the gods that he could only be killed by a naked woman”) that were mentioned at least once by any one of the 92 narrators. Of those 60 elements of meaning, 25 were mentioned by fewer (typically far fewer) than 15 narrators and were not included in our subsequent analyses (e.g., that “it was a voice from the sky who advised Kali that she had to strip,” that “Kali was full of remorse”). We also decided to eliminate from
the analysis all elements of meaning that were not narrations about the story of the icon per se but were propositions about side topics or the broader context of social life and morality in Orissa. Thus, some of the elements of meaning elicited by the probes ("Have you seen this expression in everyday life?" “Who and under what circumstances?”) were not included in the Guttman scaling analyses (e.g., “that when a person is ashamed, he or she looks like Kali”; “that women rather than men feel shame”; “that a woman feels shame when she uncovers her face in front of an elder”; “that only those who are conscious of their duties—dharma—experience shame”). Such elements of meaning are, of course, relevant to any characterization of the nature of Oriya lajya, and we make use of them in the interpretation of our results.

We ultimately settled on 25 elements of meaning that were thematically relevant to telling stories about the icon per se and were mentioned by at least 15 of the narrators. These 25 elements of meaning are listed in Table 1, where they are presented as three packages or modules of meanings.

The first module (Kali’s lajya as the antidote to her anger) involves 11 elements of meaning in which the narrator talks about Kali and Siva, their marital relationship, and the received hierarchy of domestic status relationships in which the husband is the social superior of the wife, while mentioning that Kali felt angry and accidentally stepped on Siva, but then experienced acute shame (lajya) at having been so outrageously immodest and disrespectful, thereby restraining herself and cooling out her anger.

The second module (the destructive nature of female anger) involves nine elements of meaning in which the narrator elaborates on the magnitude and destructive nature of the Goddess’s anger, mentions that the Goddess is a tremendously powerful force created by the male gods to kill demons, in particular a demon named Mahisasura (buffalo demon), but that after her battle with the demon, she was so enraged that she turned into Kali and lost awareness of her surroundings and her ability to discriminate right from wrong, which had disastrous implications for the very survival of the world. This required the male gods to enlist Siva to hatch a plan to bring the Great Mother Goddess back to her normal protective and nurturing sensibilities, which Siva carried out by deliber-
ately positioning himself in Kali’s path so that she might step on his chest and experience *lajnya*.

The third module (men humiliate women and are the cause of their anger) involves five elements of meaning in which the narrator explains the source of Kali’s anger. These elements of meaning link Kali’s rage to a boon given by the male gods to the demon Mahisasura and to the

**TABLE 1**

25 Elements of Meaning (Listed as Three Modules)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module 1. Kali’s <em>lajya</em> (shame) as the antidote to her anger.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. This is the Goddess Kali.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. All goddesses are incarnations of the Great Goddess.</td>
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<td>3. That is the God Siva.</td>
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<td>4. Siva is Kali’s husband.</td>
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<td>5. Kali stepped on Siva accidentally.</td>
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<td>6. Males are superior to women in social status.</td>
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<td>7. Kali is more dominant and powerful than Siva.</td>
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<td>8. Kali’s expression is one of anger.</td>
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<td>9. Kali’s expression is one of shame.</td>
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<td>11. To “bite the tongue” is an expression of Kali’s shame.</td>
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</table>

**Module 2. The destructive nature of female anger.**

| 12. There once was a demon, called Mahisasura. |
| 13. Durga was created by the male gods to help them fight the demon. |
| 14. In her rage, the Great Goddess transformed herself into Kali. |
| 15. Rage is a loss in the capacity to discriminate, a loss of awareness of one’s surroundings. |
| 16. As Kali, the Great Goddess threatened the survival of the world. |
| 17. Kali destroys the world with her dance. |
| 18. Siva lay in Kali’s path at the request of the male gods or of mortal men. |
| 19. Siva lay in Kali’s path deliberately. |
| 20. When she stepped on Siva, Kali became calm/still/statuesque. |

**Module 3. Men humiliate women and are the cause of their anger.**

| 21. A boon was given by the male gods to the demon that he could never be killed except by a naked woman. |
| 22. When the male gods were challenged by the demon, they were helpless to defend themselves. |
| 23. Durga was helpless against the demon until she stripped naked. |
| 24. Durga was humiliated at having to strip naked. |
| 25. Durga’s humiliation was followed by uncontrollable rage. |
ultimate humiliation experienced by the Goddess when she had to take off her clothes and stand naked before the demon to rescue the male gods from the demonic powers that they themselves had bestowed on him.

Captured in these three modules of meanings is a certain narrative logic for generating stories about the icon of the Great Goddess. The various meanings in Module 3 (the explanation of the Goddess's destructive rage and rampage by reference to the nakedness of the Goddess and the humiliating boon given to a demon by the male gods) seem to presuppose and build upon the various meanings in Module 2 (the elaboration of the nature and destructive implications of Kali's anger), just as the various meanings in Module 2 seem to presuppose and build upon the various meanings in Module 1 (the reality of Kali and Siva as divine characters, their social relationship, and Kali's basic moral and emotional attitudes).

As we shall see, the 25 elements of meanings in Table 1, analyzed either as 25 individual elements of meaning or as three modules or meta-meanings, form a transitive hierarchy of meanings suggestive of a unidimensional Guttman Scale. The stories told by different narrators unfold their meanings in a relatively fixed order so that the particular meanings narrated can be predicted by the number of meanings narrated, and the least frequently mentioned or distinctive meanings are narrated by precisely those informants who seem to know the most about how to ascribe meaning to the icon of Kali. The Guttman Scale seems to measure the degree to which a narrator exhibits competence or expertise in the norms for telling culturally correct stories about the Great Goddess.

In Table 2, the 25-item scale was also used to order the 92 informants in terms of their relative expertise or competence in producing a culturally correct narration about the meaning of the icon of the Great Goddess. A Guttman Scale score (ranging from 0 to 25) for each of the narrators is listed in Table 2. Based on their pattern of narrated meanings, this scale score is the best estimation of where each narrator would be located along a perfect cumulative 25-item unidimensional scale.

The 25 elements of meaning in Table 2 can also be aggregated into three modules of meaning. Module 1 consists of the 11 elements of mean-
### TABLE 2
Distribution of 25 Elements of Meaning Across 92 Narrators

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Distribution of 25 Elements of Meaning Across 92 Narrators

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**Note.** 1 = Presence of meaning; EL = education level (years); GSS1 = Guttman Scale Score 1; GSS2 = Guttman Scale Score 2.

There are two types of justification that may be offered for aggregating the 25 meanings into three distinct modules of meaning. The first justification appeals to narrative coherence; the second appeals to empirical coherence.

We have already discussed the narrative coherence of the three modules and have presented evidence that the 11 meanings in Module 1 have less extreme Guttman Scale positions than the 9 meanings in Module 2, which in turn have less extreme positions than the 5 meanings in Module 3. Narrators who tended to know the meanings in Module 3 tended to know the meanings in Module 2 and Module 1. Narrators who tended to know the meanings in Module 2 tended to know the meanings in Module 1, but not vice versa.
Convergent evidence can be provided by analyzing the three modules of meanings (Module 1 = the proposition that \( lajya \) is a divinely sanctioned antidote to female anger; Module 2 = the elaboration on the destructive nature and on the implications of female anger; Module 3 = the explanation of how men humiliate women and are the cause of their anger) as three meta-meanings definitive of four stages of expertise in the narrative forms of the community. From that perspective, the most expert narrators in the temple town community might be designated Stage 3 narrators. Stage 3 narrators told stories about the Goddess by using meanings from Module 1 + Module 2 + Module 3. Stage 2 narrators used meanings from Module 1 + Module 2. Stage 1 narrators used meanings from Module 1. In contrast, Stage 0 narrators lacked even a minimum level of competence for attributing culturally correct meanings to this core cultural symbol of their community.

In our sample of 92 narrators, there was not a single narrator whose story violates the four-stage pattern (Stage 0 = precompetent; Stage 1 = competent in meanings from Module 1; Stage 2 = competent in meanings from Module 1 + Module 2; Stage 3 = competent in meanings from Module 1 + Module 2 + Module 3). There was no narrator in the sample who mentioned 50% of the elements of meaning in Module 3 but not 50% of the elements in Module 2, or who mentioned 50% of the elements of meaning in Module 2 but not 50% of the elements of meaning in Module 1. A second Guttman Scale score (ranging from 0 to 3) for each narrator is listed in Table 2. Based on the pattern of narrated meanings, this score is the best estimation of where each narrator would be located along a perfect cumulative three-module unidimensional scale.

Table 2 displays the Guttman Scale ordering of the 25 elements of meaning (which, as seen, may be also interpreted as three transitively ordered clusters or modules of meanings). The table also lists two sets of Guttman Scale scores (one ranging from 25 to 0; the other, from 3 to 0) for the 92 narrators and visually designates (the bold lines) subsets of narrators in terms of their approximate stage of competence.

The 92 narrators arrange themselves in a descending order or cline that reflects the degree of their narrative involvement with the 25 elements of meaning, viewed as a transitive unidimensional scale. The first 21
narrators (23%), those in the top rows, told their stories using elements of meaning from Modules 1, 2, and 3 (Stage 3). Moving down the rows, we come to 12 narrators (13%) who told their stories using elements of meaning from Modules 1 and 2 (Stage 2). Farther down are 38 narrators (40%) who used elements of meaning from Module 1 only (Stage 1). Finally, at the bottom of Table 2 are 21 narrators (23%) who might be characterized as cultural "duds." They adduced very few of the meanings available in the local culture for telling "culturally correct" stories about the Great Goddess. Their stories did not convey even the most basic meta-meaning of the icon for members of the temple town community. In some instances, they explicitly professed ignorance of what the icon is all about. However, no narrator knew absolutely nothing about the icon. The alternative ordering of narrators based on their scale scores (3-0) from the second Guttman Scale analysis reveals the following distribution of competence: Stage 3 (23%), Stage 2 (13%), Stage 1 (43%), Stage 0 (20%).

There is one final empirical justification for arranging and designating the 25 elements of meaning in Table 2 as three meta-meanings or modules of meanings. The elements in each module tended to be narrated as packages of meanings. If they were mentioned at all, there was a tendency for them to be told together as clusters of meanings. This may be seen in Table 3, which presents the results of a hierarchical cluster analysis of the 25 elements of meaning and indicates the degree of correlation of each pair of meanings as they were narrated across all 92 informants. The measure of relationship used in the cluster analysis and presented in Table 3 is G, recognized as a form of the correlation coefficient ($r$; Driver & Kroeber, 1932, p. 219; Kelley, 1923, p. 190).¹

$G$ is the geometric mean of two proportion scores, the first being the number of narrators ($c$) who mentioned both elements of meaning divided by the number of narrators ($a$) who mentioned only the first element of meaning, and the second being the number of narrators ($c$) who mentioned both elements of meaning divided by the number of narrators ($b$) who mentioned the second element of meaning. $G$ may be computed as $c + \sqrt{a \times b}$.

¹We are grateful to Roy D'Andrade for drawing our attention to this measure.
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**Note.** Shown are two decimal digits.
One advantage of this type of correlational measure—the geometrical mean of the two proportion scores—is that it does not assume that the two proportion scores must be identical. A second advantage is that the degree of correlation between two elements of meaning is determined entirely by the narrators who actually mentioned one or the other or both of the relevant elements of meaning. In other words, in those instances in which a narrator mentioned neither of the elements of meaning (perhaps because of ignorance of the meaning of the icon) that failure to narrate either of those two absent meanings is not treated as an indication of the high degree of relationship between them. Two meanings are not considered interrelated merely because a narrator did not know either of them.

The coefficient of relationship $G$ used in Table 3 helps to answer the following question: Considering all possible pairs of comparisons among the 25 meanings in Table 3, which pairs of meaning were more likely to be mentioned together, if one takes into account only those narrators who mentioned at least one of the meanings of the relevant pair? The hierarchical cluster analysis, using the maximum distance algorithm of the Anthropac 3.25 software program (Borgatti, 1990), revealed that the most fundamental partition of the 25 elements of meaning is between the first 11, Module 1 meanings and all the rest. The high level of intercorrelation $G$ among these 11 elements can be seen in Table 3. A boundary has been drawn in Table 3 separating the first 11 elements of meaning from the rest.

We have also drawn a second boundary between the last 5 elements of meaning (Module 3 meanings) in Table 3 and the rest. On correlational ground alone, there is probably more than one way to divide reasonably the remaining 14 (non-Module 1) elements of meaning in Table 3 into two clusters. There are two reasons for drawing the second boundary as we did between the 9 elements of meaning in Module 2 and the 5 elements of meaning in Module 3.

The first reason is that this particular partitioning is not only consistent with the ordering of elements of meaning in the hierarchical cluster analysis but is also sensitive to the evidence in Table 3 of extremely high intercorrelations among the five elements of meaning in Module 3, all of
which tended to be told together, if and when they were told at all. It 
also appears that this particular partitioning of the elements of meaning 
is sensitive to the special narrative character of the meanings in Module 
3, all of which have to do with the cause and consequences of the na-
kedness and humiliation of the Goddess.

The Four Stages of Cultural Competence

On narrative and empirical grounds, we feel justified in characterizing 
the local normative meaning of the icon of Kali in terms of three modules 
of meaning and in characterizing local cultural competence in terms of 
four stages or levels of expertise.

The lowest level of expertise includes those who have not even 
progressed to the first stage of competence. The Old Town community 
of high caste narrators is a relatively well-defined community, yet even 
in our sample, approximately 21 narrators (23% of the sample) seemed 
to be either ignorant of the normative meanings associated with this core 
cultural symbol or else (in the case of two Tantric narrators, to be dis-
cussed later) narrated their stories under the influence of story telling 
standards that are not normative in the local Bhubaneswar community 
(see Appendix). Most of these 21 narrators may well be members of a 
subculture of (real or feigned) "ignorance": These narrators might be 
referred to as cultural duds. They are either unaware of or unwilling to 
reveal their knowledge of the storytelling norms of the community.

Correlates of Expertise

Diversity in the production of a culturally competent story about the 
meaning of the icon of Kali clearly exists in our sample. The question 
that arises is, Does this cognitive diversity relate in any obvious way to 
the dynamics of the cultural system?

One aspect of our sample of narrators is that, at first blush, variations 
in degrees of cultural competence appear to be patterned according to 
differences in gender, with men more likely to exhibit a higher level of 
narrative expertise. Thus, if we divide the 92 narrators into two groups, 
the 33 Stage 2 or Stage 3 narrators (Guttman Scale score of 15 or greater)
versus the 59 Stage 0 or Stage 1 narrators (Guttman Scale score of less than 15), as in Table 2, gender is a significant correlate of expertise \( \chi^2(1) = 5.06, p < .05 \). However, upon closer examination, it turns out that this gender effect is significant when comparing relatively educated men (with 12 years of education or more) with relatively educated women, \( \chi^2(1) = 12.45, p < .001 \), yet, it disappears entirely when comparing less educated men (with less than 12 years of education) with less educated women. It is not gender per se that is a correlate of expertise in our sample, as we shall see.

A second aspect of our sample of narrators is that, for the men, cultural competence is patterned according to number of years of formal schooling. The educated men (with 12 years of education or more) were far more likely to be Stage 2 or Stage 3 narrators than their less educated male counterparts, \( \chi^2(1) = 10.84, p < .001 \). This was not the case for the women in the sample. The relatively more competent female narrators (Stage 2 or Stage 3, scale score of 15 or greater) were not more educated than the relatively less competent female narrators. In fact, the mean number of years of schooling among more competent female narrators was marginally lower than the mean number of years of schooling among the less competent women. The educated men may have been more competent than the less educated men in their ascriptions of culturally correct meanings to the icon, but this did not appear to be the case for the women.

Age seems to play no part in the distribution of cultural competence for either men or women. Those who were 50 years of age or older did not exhibit higher levels of cultural expertise (Stage 2 or 3) than those who were younger. There was no evidence of an age effect on narrative expertise.

In sum, neither age, nor education, nor gender per se was a correlate of cultural competence in ascribing meanings to the icon of the Great Goddess. However, there was an interaction effect between schooling and gender such that education was associated with the enhancement of the narrative expertise of men but not of women. Thus, although there were female experts, it was the educated men in Bhubaneswar for whom a high level of cultural competence in ascribing meaning to the icon of Kali...
was most commonplace. Indeed, 85% of the men with 12 years or more of formal education were Stage 2 or Stage 3 experts, whereas this was true of only 23% of women with 12 years or more of education. Less educated men had no such advantage over their female counterparts; 23% of the men with less than 12 years of formal schooling were Stage 2 or Stage 3 experts, whereas this was true of 32% of the less educated women. Nevertheless, the intuition of some female informants that they knew less than their men folk about the icon may be justified, especially if they were married to an educated narrator.

Given the high levels of narrative expertise among educated men but not among educated women, it appears likely that the intracultural variation in cultural competence observed in the sample reflects more than just individual variability in native intelligence, although precisely what it reflects remains to be documented.

At best, our findings are merely invitations to further research on the sources of cognitive diversity in the production of a culturally correct story about the Great Goddess. Differences in social contexts of learning and in social identities (Boster, 1986) may account for some of the cognitive diversity, but the range of plausible accounts is vast. We have favored the view that the diversity in our sample regarding the culturally competent ascription of meanings to Kali is an index of differential mastery of local narrative norms. We would expect mastery of those narrative norms to be related to differential exposure effects that, in turn, we would expect to be related to the pragmatic contexts of storytelling in everyday life (e.g., the importance of both education and knowledge of the Gods for the social standing and prestige of high caste Hindu men, the socially sanctioned narration of the story of Kali on public ritual occasions run by educated male religious specialists, and the differential use of the story of Kali in familial contexts as an exhortation about feminine virtues).

Yet, given the limited evidence available, other views cannot be ruled out totally. It is conceivable that in Bhubaneswar everyone is well-exposed to the narrative norms of the community and that the diversity in our sample is an index of differential (conscious or unconscious) resistance to certain of the meanings of the icon. Psychoanalytically inclined theorists will have little difficulty generating hypotheses of this kind, for ex-
ample, by postulating male identification and oedipal fascination with a
demon whose fate is to be decapitated at the hands of a naked, tongue-
wagging Mother Goddess, or female defensiveness against the recognition
of one’s own rage and potential to do harm.

It is even conceivable, given a slight stretch of the imagination, that
everyone in the community really is a Stage 3 expert in the local narrative
norms, but that in the context of our storytelling task, only certain
informants were motivated or willing to reveal all that they knew. Some
of the educated men might have wanted to show off their knowledge to
an educated female interviewer. Some of the females might have been so
devoted to the Goddess and afraid to talk about her that they decided to
feign ignorance. However, on the basis of our experience in the com-
community and with the narrators, these hypotheses feel a bit ad hoc and
somewhat contrived. Yet, personal testimony is no substitute for more
systematic evidence on cognitive diversity in the ascription of meanings
to the Goddess and, at the moment, we cannot rule out absolutely any
of the hypotheses.

Our various analyses were designed only to determine whether the
pattern of sharing of ascribed meanings across informants in the temple
town suggests the influence of a culturally defined standard of correctness
for telling stories about the icon of Kali. We believe that they do. But
precisely how the local cultural norm exercises its influence (e.g., via
selective flow of symbols, differential rates of face to face interaction,
hegemonic control over or differential access to education institutions,
defensive identification with authority figures, etc.), we are not in a po-
sition to access.

There are other limitations to the study. It is perhaps worth reiter-
ating that our study relied on evidence from a story production task not
from a story recognition task. The failure by an informant to narrate
(produce) certain meanings associated with the icon of Kali is not an
index of his or her failure to acknowledge those meanings as culturally
correct. It seems likely that some of our Stage 0 and Stage 1 narrators
would have recognized and endorsed many of the meanings in Modules
2 and 3 had those meanings been made cognitively available to them by
means of a true/false test.
Because our sample of narrators oversampled the female population of the temple town, we can only guess what the distribution of narrative expertise would have looked like for a sample more evenly balanced by gender. It seems likely that the proportion of expert Stage 3 storytellers would have been higher than 23%. Nevertheless, it seems clear that whatever the sample selected for study in Bhubaneswar, the normative meanings associated with Module 1 are going to be the most widely distributed meanings across the community. In our study, those meanings were narrated by 80% of the members of our sample.

Perhaps the most relevant finding of the study for a discussion of the cultural psychology of the emotions was that the meaning of *lajya* as a divinely sanctioned antidote to destructive anger expressed by biting the tongue (Module 1) was widely distributed across the community. We feel confident about making the following claim: that in the temple town of Bhubaneswar, a conception of *lajya* (shame) as a highly valued mental state is the local cultural norm.

**Is There a Canonical Scriptural Version of the Story?**

When asked about the icon of the Great Goddess in her manifestation as Kali, members of the Bhubaneswar temple community produced stories that suggested that the icon was a representation of events or scenes that could be found in the traditional corpus of medieval scriptural narratives, the *Puranas*, in particular the *Devi Mahatmya* and the *Devi Bhagvata Purana*, two texts that reflect on the nature of the Great Goddess and try to establish that ultimate reality is feminine in nature. Thinking that it might be instructive to compare the local contemporary versions of the story to a canonical version in the scriptures, we turned to the scriptural literature to locate an original, or at least an early official version, of the key events (the boon to the demon Mahisasura that he could be killed only by a naked woman, the striptease by the Goddess, the foot on Siva's chest) leading up to the moment of Kali's shame (expressed by her protruding tongue) as portrayed in the icon as told by Oriya narrators.

To our surprise, the most popular meaning of the icon (that the Goddess is full of shame and that her protruding tongue expresses this shame) cannot be found in the traditional scriptural narratives, neither
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Sanskritic nor Oriya. There are many classical Puranic variations of the stories about the Great Goddess, but none that matches precisely the version that is currently the local cultural norm for ascribed meanings to the icon of the Goddess in the temple town of Bhubaneswar. One can find variations in which the male gods beg the Goddess to become a celestial nymph and to seduce, weaken, and kill Mahisasura, although no boon is mentioned (O'Flaherty, 1975, p. 241). One can find variations in which the demon receives a boon that he will be released from all his sins by dying at the hands of the Goddess, although no mention is made of nakedness or shame (O'Flaherty, 1975, p. 242). One can find Puranic stories in which the Goddess behaves recklessly and indiscriminately and is overcome by shame, for example, when she curses her own son in a fit of anger (O'Flaherty, 1975, p. 260), but these do not occur in the context of a battle with demons or with a foot on Siva's chest.

In Tulsi Das's Adhkhuta Ramayana, Sita as Kali does step on Siva, but there is no boon, no stripping, no humiliation, and no rage. A fifteenth-century Oriya text, the Chandi Purana, is the only one that provides a story that comes tantalizingly close to the structure of meanings that is normative in the vicinity of the Lingaraj Temple in Orissa, India, but, in the end, it too fails because it makes no mention of the Goddess stepping on Siva or her sense of shame (lajya). We are now entertaining the alternative hypothesis that there is no single canonical scriptural version of the story of Kali's shame as told in the temple town, and that the events and psychological attitudes narrated by our informants are imaginative synthetic constructions of the local folk mind, which is well-deserving of note and comment.

Shards of Meaning Reworked by the Local Oriya Imagination

The Oriya story of the Goddess as Kali does not match any of the canonical stories in the Devi Mahatmya or the Devi Bhagvata Purana. If the icon of the Great Goddess, which is today a core symbol in the temple town of Bhubaneswar and in other locations in Eastern India, does not have its source in the orthodox Puranic scriptural literature, where does it come from? If it is not a Puranic image, could it have its source in the more heterodox Tantric way of depicting the Great Goddess?
In Eastern India (and in nearby Nepal; see Levy, 1990), Tantra has long been the subaltern, heterodox voice of Hinduism, existing on the edges of mainstream Brahmanical culture, an exotic cult of dark fortnight sacrificial rites and magical powers. Tantrics are ideologically committed to the inversion of traditional orthodox values and conceptions. In Tantric rituals, menstrual blood is not polluting, it is sanctifying; in Tantric metaphysics, the world is run by women, not men. Men are passive and inert; it is female power, especially the erotic power of naked young women, that makes the world go round.

One particular Tantric text, The Mahanirvana Tantra (4.34), describes the Great Goddess as black skinned because she encompasses everything in the universe, "just as all colors disappear in black, so all names and forms disappear in her"; as naked because she is beyond all illusions; as having a red, lolling tongue because that represents the passion and creativity of nature; and as standing on the lifeless corpse of Siva, awakening him, because she is the giver of life and its destroyer. In his monumental study of Hinduism and Tantra in the Newar city of Bhaktapur in nearby Nepal, Robert Levy (1990) noted that, in Tantric imagery, Siva is represented as a corpse, and he mentioned a Newar representation of the Great Goddess in her manifestation as Mahakali in which her vehicle or mount is not the lion described in the Puranic scriptures but "an anthropomorphic male form, at or under her foot" (pp. 212, 251).

Jeffrey Kripal (1993), in his work on the nineteenth century Bengali saint Ramakrishna, discussed the Tantric meanings attached to Kali's tongue and described it as a "consumer of blood sacrifice, a provoker of horror." He also saw it as indicating the "goddess's erotic arousal": Her tongue is extended in passion, as she stands on her husband, Siva, engaged in "aggressive intercourse" (p. 12).

Curiously enough, though Tantrism is a rather exotic cult of the night and of nighttime fantasy, peripheral to local Brahmanical culture in the temple town of Bhubaneswar, it would appear that it is a Tantric icon that has become a core symbolic representation in the local community. Most informants had no difficulty in recognizing the icon as Kali because, in Bhubaneswar, it is a typical way of depicting the Great Goddess. Although it is impossible to offer a definitive explanation for the popularity
of Kali’s image, some insight into the core of the symbol may be gained by juxtaposing this icon against its social context.

In the patriarchal social world of Oriya Hindus, hardly anyone questions the superior position of the male. And yet in Eastern India (in Bengal, Orissa, and the Eastern border districts of Madhya Pradesh), there is a strong tradition of goddess worship as well as of Tantric belief that the power and energy of the universe is female. This particular combination of beliefs and practices makes the maintenance of the patriarchal social order more problematic than it would have been if the superiority of the male had been unabashedly acknowledged and celebrated.

It is in this context of conflicting cultural beliefs about superior male social status and supreme female divine power that the icon of the Great Goddess gathers its significance because it symbolizes, for Oriya Hindus, the essentially unresolvable nature of male-female relationships. The local narrators of the story of the Great Goddess, especially those who are most expert in the storytelling norms of the community, articulate these ambiguous and often contradictory themes as they interpret the icon.

By and large, the local narrators ignore the pure Tantric view that consistently subordinates men to female power. Instead, they prefer to integrate certain highly edited incidents from the second story in the *Devi Bhagvata Purana* about a battle between a demon named Mahisasura and the Great Goddess (which contains no mention of the Goddess as Kali or of the Goddess’s nakedness) with the provocative imagery of the *Chandi Purana* story and certain key elements that have social significance locally to create a new and compelling narrative. This synthesis has produced the canonical story of the icon as it is told in the temple town of Bhubaneswar.

Apparently, one of the more striking features that the narrators felt the need to explain is the Goddess’s nakedness in the iconic representation. In their search for a plausible explanation, they went back to the *Chandi Purana*, a fifteenth-century Oriya extrapolation of classical Puranic literature, in which Śārañā Dāsa, the author, modifies the boon, making the conditions for the demon’s death even more stringent than any condition to be found in the Puranas themselves. In his imagination, Mahisasura may be killed only by a naked woman. Thus, the Goddess’s
nakedness becomes part of the logic of the story and is used to make sense of the sequence of the narrated events.

It is fascinating that such an explanation tends to strengthen the Tantric view of the power of female sexuality. After all, none of the weapons provided by the male gods suffices to kill the demon. Ultimately, the only weapon that the demon cannot withstand is that which is intrinsically the Goddess's own: her gendered anatomy, her female genitals.

An equally plausible non-Tantric explanation for the demon's death could be that he is undone by his own uncontrolled lust. Such an explanation shifts the emphasis from Tantric notions regarding the power of women to the more common Puranic view that desire, in and of itself, is evil and can have only disastrous consequences.

The Oriya narrators do not explicitly articulate one or the other interpretation, leaving it to the listener to sift through the ambiguous meanings of the demon's death. Unlike the Tantrics who see in the Goddess's creativity and in her absolute destructiveness the ultimate meaning of life, the narrators with the broadest narrative reach (Stage 3) offer a moral justification for the devastation caused by her. They believe that having been, in a sense, set up by the gods in her battle with Mahisasura, she is not entirely unjustified or irrational when she goes berserk with rage. Finally, with great finesse and in clear contradiction to Tantric descriptions, the experts point to Kali's protruding tongue as the mark of her shame (lajya) at having stepped on her husband. They fashion an explanation that harmonizes perfectly with notions of male superiority inherent in the patriarchal social order.

Thus, it seems plausible to suggest that this contemporary way of telling the story of the Great Goddess in the temple town of Bhubaneswar represents a local Brahmanical synthesis of a Tantric icon with the moral requirements of a patriarchal social world. In trying to integrate the images of female power invoked by the Tantric icon with the idea that lajya (self-control, shyness, modesty, and a sense of shame) is an essential attribute of female virtue, the local folk imagination has invented a new and different story that has only the most tenuous associations with the canonical Puranic versions of the Goddess narratives.

We have no way to assess the creative historical role played by local experts in synthesizing or transforming local narrative norms. D'Andrade
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(1990) has suggested that not only do cultural experts know a great deal about their own particular domains, but more important, that they are adept at integrating more esoteric knowledge with meanings and understandings that are shared more commonly. It is also possible that the social recognition of the “expertise” of experts gives them a special authority to introduce new elements of meaning into their narratives and generate fresh interpretations of cultural symbols, which then become normative. We do not know whether this is the historical process that produced a distinctive local Oriya version of the story of the Great Goddess. We do know that a reworked and reconstructed story that has no direct parallel in either the Puranic or the Tantric scriptures is today culturally correct in the wards of the old temple town of Bhubaneswar and lends definition to what it means to be an expert in that small, close-knit community of orthodox, Saivite (Siva worshipping) Brahmans.

Beyond the Narrative Norm: A Tantric Story

Given all these ambivalent and conflict-laden themes about male–female relationships and the attempt by Oriya narrators in the temple town to reconcile them within a single narrative framework, it is instructive to examine what happens to the two pure Tantric narrators in our analysis of local Oriya norms. They end up looking like the cultural duds. However, unlike the cultural duds who seem ignorant of any storytelling norms, the problem for the Tantric narrators in the sample is that they narrated the meanings of the icon under the influence of a canon that is not normative in the Bhubaneswar community. They possessed heterodox specialized knowledge that is so esoteric and counterhegemonic that it was not shared by most local informants. Thus, pure Tantric stories about the (admittedly Tantric) icon of Kali have so little in common with the stories that are generally shared in the temple town that Tantric informants are identified as ignorant and grouped with those who know nearly nothing about the icon. In the context of local cultural norms, their stories are exotic and from out of the underground, making no concessions to commonly held notions about traditional hierarchy and social relations.

In the example of the Tantric narration presented below, the narrator (No. 21) is a 70-year-old Brahman man, married with two sons and two daughters. All his adult life, he has been a priest at the Lingaraj Temple.
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During the interview, he admitted having attended some Tantric ceremonies, although he claimed that he was not a true worshiper of the Goddess.

Q. Do you recognize this picture?
A. This is the Tantric depiction of Kali. Kali here is naked, she has thrown Siva to the ground and is standing on him. She displays here absolute, overwhelming strength. She is in a terrible rage, wearing her garland of skulls and in each arm a weapon of destruction. Look, in this hand, the trisul; in this, the chakra (the disc); in this, the sword; in this, the sickle; in this, the bow and arrow. This is how Kali is shown in Tantric pujas where the devotee is praying to the goddess for perfect knowledge and awareness. All this kind of worship goes on in the Rama-krishna Mission. The monks there are all Tantrics and they know all about it. Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, both great sages, knew about such sakti pujas and Tantric rites.

Q. Can you tell me the story that is associated with this picture?
A. In all these Tantric pujas, the goal is to acquire perfect knowledge and ultimate power. The naked devotee worships Mother on a dark, moonless night in a cremation ground. The offerings are meat and alcohol. Ordinary people cannot participate in such worship; if they were even to witness it, they would go mad. I have attended such worship once, but I am not a true worshiper, and I have no special knowledge of Tantric worship.

Q. How would you describe Kali's expression here?
A. She is the image of fury.
Q. You mean she is angry? She is in a rage?
A. Yes . . . yes. You must understand that this is how she appears to her devotee. He has to have the strength of mind to withstand her fierceness. She is not mild or tender, but cruel and demanding and frightening.

Q. Do you think that she has put out her tongue in anger?
A. Yes, she has put out her tongue in anger. Kali is always angry, she is always creating and, at the same time, destroying life. Here you see her standing with her foot placed squarely on Siva's chest. When the time comes for the universe to be destroyed entirely, no one will be
spared, not even the gods—whether Visnu or Siva—everyone will be destroyed.

Q. Some people say that she is feeling deeply ashamed at having stepped on her husband and that is why she has bitten her tongue. You don’t agree?

A. People have different views. People believe whatever makes them feel comfortable and if they like to think that Kali is ashamed, then let them. What I have told you is what the special devotees of Kali believe. They believe that Mother is supreme. Even Brahma, Visnu, and Siva are her servants.

Q. Have you seen this expression, that is, Kali’s here, in daily life?

A. No, if one was to see this expression on an ordinary human being’s face, he would have to be mad, to have lost all his senses. Kali, in fact, is mad with rage, but her rage has nothing that is remotely human about it, it is a divine rage that only a human being who has completely lost his mind can duplicate.

Q. Can you tell me why Siva is lying on the ground?

A. Kali has thrown him to the ground and she puts her foot on him to make clear that she is supreme.

Q. So you don’t think that he is lying on the ground to subdue Kali?

A. No, that is beyond Siva’s capacity. If Kali becomes calm, it is because she wishes to, not because she is persuaded to be so. Even to her most faithful devotee, Kali’s actions sometimes don’t make sense, but life itself often doesn’t make sense, so what can one say?

Q. Who would you say is dominant in this picture: Is it Kali or Siva?

A. Obviously, Kali. But it is also important to realize that while Sakti is absolutely necessary for the creation and evolution of the universe, by itself even Sakti cannot achieve anything. Sakti has to combine with consciousness for the process of creation to take place and so consciousness, as symbolized by Siva, has a unique position. Just as it is only through the union of a man and a woman that a child can be conceived, so too, only when Sakti and Cit (consciousness) come together does creation occur.

In many ways, this is an impressive informant, especially if one is not interested in the representation of local narrative norms. He is helpful
and self-reflective and his narration is "juicy." His narration might even be informative for an investigation of Tantric meanings. Yet, he cannot be viewed as a local cultural expert, and it would have been a disaster for an anthropologist to rely on him as a key informant for the reconstruction of the meaning of this core cultural symbol in the temple town. From the perspective of the approach to the study of cultural norms developed in this essay, an expert or competent informant is not just a helpful member of another culture or even a helpful and highly self-reflective and imaginative member. An expert is a community member whose imaginative reflections are helpful in identifying locally sanctioned and culturally defined truths or canons of correctness. The Kali of Tantric lore is the antithesis of the model of domestic female restraint idealized in Bhubaneswar. The meanings of Tantra are in tension with the local narrative norm.

The Moral of the Story: The Two Castes of Orissa (Male and Female)

Interestingly, the Oriya norms for telling culturally correct stories about the icon of the Goddess explicitly affirm the view that all the goddesses, Kali, Durga, Parvati, and so forth, are but different manifestations of the Great Goddess Devi (see Kurtz, 1992, on the theme that all the goddesses are one). More than half the narrators insist that all the goddesses are lower embodied forms of the transcendental Goddess, merging, separating, and taking on different identities depending on the circumstances and on the particular action that has to be undertaken. They do not portray, as might Western psychoanalytic narrators, a splitting of the divine Mother, with Kali epitomizing the Bad Mother, whose identity is distinct from that of the Good Mother. Rather, for these indigenous storytellers, Kali is represented as one side or aspect of the Divine Mother who, just like any human mother, has her cruel as well as her tender aspects. As one of the women narrators said, "How can a mother be one and not the other? If she genuinely desires the best for her child now and in the future, she has to be both harsh and demanding as well as indulgent and forgiving, only then will her child come to know what the real world is like."
Also, unlike certain Western psychoanalytic narrators, our local Oriya narrators do not portray the female as an incomplete male. Tantric stories about the Great Goddess portray her as self-creating, autonomous, and capable of reproduction through her own emanations. She is parthenogenic. Even in those Puranic portrayals, where the Goddess is the creation of the male gods, she has the combined powers of the male gods and is greater than any one of them. In the stories of the local narrators, Devi's awesome potential for self-sufficiency is recognized even as she is called upon to renounce it and to acknowledge her cosmic interdependency with and social subordination to her husband for the sake of the social good. Unlike narrators in the West who are under the influence of psychoanalytic norms for storytelling, Oriyas do not construct a story about the female as a castrated male. The idea of the female as an incomplete male (a castrated male; an emanation from the rib of Adam) seems to be more characteristic of storytelling norms in the Judeo-Christian traditions, of which contemporary psychoanalytic storytelling may be a local variant.

Whereas the first Oriya module of meanings (Module 1) seems to be saying that the world is truly energized when women regulate, control, and rein in their power, the other two modules of meanings (Modules 2 and 3) offer somewhat ambivalent views regarding female power. At one level, there appears to be the notion that female power is, in and of itself, essentially dangerous because it is always in imminent danger of slipping out of control. At another level, there is the sense that men are often so treacherous, untrustworthy, and exploitative that women would be justified in destroying the world. Taken together, the different interpretations seem to reveal a deep set of ambivalences in the culture regarding the power and potency of the female.

One reason for the popularity of this particular iconic representation of the Great Goddess (as Kali with her tongue out and foot planted on a supine Siva) may well be because of the value that members of the community place on the meta-commentary that it provides on the problem of organizing and understanding a key existential issue or universal social existence theme: the issue of what is male and of what is female and the nature of male–female relations (Shweder, 1982, 1993). That the infor-
mants are aware of this interpretive function of the icon is made abundantly clear by the way in which they make pragmatic use of the icon and its narrative. When discussing the disastrous consequences of uncontrolled rage, or proper wifely conduct, or the kind of restraint and modesty valued in a daughter-in-law, the icon is used time and time again to prove points and support arguments. The story of Kali articulates the concerns of a patriarchal society that seeks to establish its own legitimacy.

At the same time, in a place like India where “the preferred medium of instruction and transmission of psychological, metaphysical and social thought continues to be the story” (Kakar, 1989, p. 1), the story of the Great Goddess does not merely reflect a preexisting sensibility but also creates and maintains such a sensibility in a positive manner. In most discussions about the icon, there is an effortless moving back and forth between the world of gods and that of humans, divine action being explained in terms of human needs and failings and standing as an ideal for mortal beings. Every time an informant discusses or interprets the icon, the story told generates and regenerates the very subjectivity that it seems to display.

The significance and popularity of this icon appears to lie in the way in which it crystallizes several themes important to the culture: female power and female shame, anger as socially disruptive and destructive, the disjunction between a male dominated hierarchical social order and the potential power of women, and self-control and self-discipline as the only effective means of regulating destructive power. The stories about the Great Goddess in her manifestation as Kali give order to these themes within an encompassing narrative structure and represent them in such a way as to throw into relief a particular view of their essential nature.

As one female narrator put it: There are only two castes in the world, male and female. All other caste barriers can be breached, but the one that divides men and women is so fundamental that it can never be transcended. Therefore, men and women are different and unequal, an inequality that is context sensitive (Ramanujan, 1989), moving in either way in favor of or against women depending on the circumstances. Thus, men, being more sattvika (pure), rank higher than women in ritual status, whereas women partake of the Great Goddess’s power to create and destroy, and to nurture and deconstruct simply by virtue of being female.
and of having female bodies. As the Great Goddess creates and destroys the universe, so does every woman contain within herself the power to sustain or destroy her family.

Durga's ability to kill Mahisasura—the mere sight of her naked genitals (yoni) sufficing to destroy the demon—epitomizes the potency of female sexuality. Yet, as the icon displays so dramatically, uncontrolled power may have disastrous consequences. Kali's foot on Siva's chest symbolizes the most shocking reversal of traditional hierarchy. As the story goes, Kali's power, when unchecked, leads not only to death and devastation, but more important, to a complete collapse of family values. She forgets the respect that she owes her husband as his servant, she forgets her wifely duties, and she forgets her dharma.

In other words, the story articulates the fear that anger, when unchecked, could destroy the social order, and the belief that uncontrolled power is immoral. Therefore, power, although a natural consequence of being female, has to be controlled. Because the most effective and the most moral way to control one's power is through means that originate within oneself, Oriyas work to cultivate the emotion of *lajya*, imperfectly translated as shame, to achieve precisely such control.

**Bite Your Tongue: The Meaning of Lajya**

Everyday, Oriya Hindu morality requires self-regulation through sensitivity to the emotion of *lajya*. To have a sense of *lajya* is to be civilized; to know one's rightful place in society; to conduct oneself in a becoming manner; to be conscious of one's duties and responsibilities; to persevere in the performance of social role obligations; to be shy, modest, and deferential and not encroach on the prerogatives of others; and to remain silent or lower ones eyes in the presence of social superiors. *Lajya* is something that one shows or puts on display, just as one might show gratitude or loyalty through various forms of public presentation. Like gratitude or loyalty, *lajya*, which is a way of displaying one's continuing commitment to the maintenance of social harmony, is judged in Bhubaneswar to be a very good thing.

Because everyone concedes that women rather than men have natural power, it is primarily women who need to exercise control over it, and it is they who have to develop their capacity to experience shame.
Lujyu is analogized to a gorgeous ornament worn by women. Lujyu is the linguistic stem for a local plant (a touch-me-not) that is so coy that it closes its petals and withdraws into itself at the slightest contact. Every time a woman covers her face or ducks out of a room to avoid affiliation with an “avoidance relative” (e.g., her father-in-law or husband’s elder brother), she is displaying lujyu, giving evidence of her civility and intimating that she has within herself the power to do otherwise and to wreck the entire social show. In Orissa, there is not only virtue in lujya; there is also terrifying power in it as well.

It is noteworthy that when narrators comment on the manner in which Kali is recalled to a sense of her wifely duties, nearly two thirds of them insist that it happens by her reining in her own power and not through any external control that Siva might exercise. They point to Siva’s passivity and argue that Kali could have, if she had wished, trampled on him and gone on. That she chose to recognize him is a measure of her self-control and of her sensitivity to lujya. (For more on lujya, see Parish, 1991; Shweder, 1992.)

The ultimate message of the icon is to display the cultural truth that it is women who uphold the social order. The more competent narrators, both men and women, articulated this view. They described wives and mothers as the centripetal forces that hold families together. They contrasted those roles with those of husbands and fathers who contribute only financially to the welfare of the family, a contribution that most informants did not view as terribly significant to the family’s well-being. Curiously enough, this view of women coincides with the Tantric one that also sees women as the power that upholds the universe. The difference is that although the Tantric view sees women as achieving this position through the unchecked exercise of power, the narrators in the sample saw it as being attained through the moral self-control of such power.

Conclusion

Our analysis demonstrates that expert knowledge about the icon of Kali is hierarchically structured, consisting of four different levels or stages of competence. The Stage 0 level is one of apparent or real ignorance of local narrative norms. The Stage 1 level of normative knowledge adduces
female shame as an antidote to female anger. The Stage 2 level of normative knowledge encompasses that first stage of understanding and elaborates on the destructive nature of female anger. The Stage 3 level of normative knowledge offers, in addition to everything else, an explanation for the anger, a critique of male authority, and an appeal to women to control their awesome powers for the sake of social reproduction.

The set of meanings that is most frequently narrated across the community (Module 1 meanings) appears to postulate the view that women keep the world going by reining in their power and by regulating it through sensitivity to the emotion *lajya*. This message is within the competence of anyone with at least a Stage 1 level of expertise. Perhaps it is the most important message that the icon conveys in the sense that the greatest number of people mention it. They accept Kali as the embodiment of power but see in her expression and in the biting of her tongue in particular, the mark of her shame at not controlling her damming force.

For Oriyas, female *lajya* is an antidote to anger. The icon of the Great Goddess freezes and commemorates a particular divine moment in which the Goddess realized her potential for destructiveness and chose to recognize the necessity for reining herself in. By biting her tongue, she gave expression to her sense of deep shame at having forgotten herself in the first place. The facial expression has become a culturally standardized expression of shame, one that is lexicalized in the Oriya idiom “to bite your tongue,” which forms part of everyday discourse.

At the beginning of this essay we asked which emotion was most different from the other two: *sukha* (happiness), *lajya* (shame), or *raga* (anger). Perhaps the reader will no longer be surprised that for residents of the temple town of Bhubaneswar, it is *lajya* (shame) and *sukha* (happiness) that go together and *raga* (anger) that is judged most different from the other two. In Orissa, India, *lajya* is both powerful and good, and the icon of the Great Goddess in her manifestation as Kali is the key to understanding why.

References


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Appendix: Interview With Cultural “Dud”

(Narrator is a 70-year-old Brahman widow.)

Q. Do you recognize this picture?
A. ... an image of Durga?
Q. Kali.
A. Yes, Kali of course.
Q. You do recognize her, don't you? ... Can you tell me who is lying on the ground?
A. ... I can't tell you ...
Q. You can't tell me who is lying on the ground? ... Can you see clearly?
A. Oh, I can see all right ... but I can't tell you ...
Q. You can't tell me who is lying on the ground? ... So, you don't know the story associated with this picture?
A. ...
Q. All right. Can you see Kali's face clearly? ... You can, can't you?
A. She is Kali.
Q. Yes. Can you describe her expression here?
A. I can't see properly.
Q. Tell me what you see in her face: Is she angry? Is she sad? Is she happy? Tell me what you see in her face.
A. I can't tell you these things.
Q. But surely you can say what she looks like here.
A. She is not angry here.
Q. She is not angry ... then, what is she?
A. She is peaceful here.
Q. What about her tongue? Why has she put that out?
A. Kali always puts out her tongue ... that is Kali ... she always has her tongue out.
Q. But she has not put out her tongue in anger?
A. Why should she be angry?
Q. When I ask others these questions, many people tell me that Kali has bitten her tongue in shame: She has stepped on her husband and when she realizes that, in shame, she bites her tongue. What do you think? Are they right in saying that?
A. ... I don't know all these things ... I can't tell you.
Q. Have you ever seen this expression—Kali's expression here—in everyday life?
A. . . . I don't know what you are asking . . . I don't go out anywhere, how will I see anything?
Q. Who do you see as dominant in this picture: Kali or Siva?
A. . . . I don't know all these things. . . .
Q. It's not a matter of knowing or not knowing . . . when you look at this picture, what do you think? Do you think Kali is stronger than Siva or that Siva is stronger?
A. Siva.
Q. Why do you think that?
A. Can a woman ever be stronger than a man? Is it possible? How can Kali be stronger than Siva?
Q. But Kali here has weapons in each of her 10 arms and Siva has nothing. She is also standing on his chest. You don't think that she is stronger than he in this picture?
A. After Siva, Kali is the most powerful . . . but you know best . . . maybe she is stronger; maybe the two are equally strong. . . . I don't know.