

OCCASIONAL PUBLICATION 27

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The Marginal Jotter:
Scribe Chaube and
the Making of the
Great Linguistic Survey of India
c. 1890-1920

by
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The Marginal Jotter: Scribe Chaube and the Making of the Great Linguistic Survey of India c. 1890-1920

I propose to tell a small story about a colonial *dobhashi*, literally a speaker of two languages, as it intersects with that of colonial India's two civil servant-scholars, ethnographer William Crooke and linguist George Abraham Grierson. Ram Gharib Chaube, the protagonist of my story, was a two-way speaker-scribe: he was special assistant and Pandit to the ethnographer William Crooke, and functioned for several years as the chief clerk and translator for Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India* (12 volumes, 1892-1920s). Ram Gharib also mentored the future Hindi scholar Ram Chandra Shukl in Mirzapur in the early 1900s, and took him on field trips to the adjacent tribal areas. It was said that in all of Mirzapur, it was Chaube who could read the English paper, *The Pioneer* in which Kipling worked, the best!

I tell this story not as a *dastango*, though my documentation is somewhat unorthodox—card-carrying historians may even take exception to it and dub it unreliable. But history-writing is not what we remember as journeymen from a master's workshop; it is how we write and with what evidence, so as to gain the readers' assent to our non-fictional stories now.

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* Lecture delivered at the IIC, on February 22, 2011 by Professor Shahid Amin

Chaube's is an insistent presence in the leading ethnographic journal, *North Indian Notes and Queries (NINQ)*, which William Crooke edited from 1890 to 1896 with his assistance. Here I am less concerned to analyze the 200 odd ethnographic notices that Chaube published in this and other leading orientalist journals of the time. I am more interested in the marginal comments that Chaube made for his masters, either as personalized pendants in response to a long-distance enquiry, or quite literally in the margins of the manuscripts he was charged to prepare for publication. Very little is known about Chaube's life—indeed very little of what Chaube wrote in his firm hand in the margins of the official transcriptions of the various language specimens from north and central India made it to the printed pages of the *Linguistic Survey of India (LSI)*. These marginal comments by a knowledgeable native which failed to get the sahib's nod, would be illustrative, I hope, of newer ways of tackling the issue of native agency in the production of official knowledge about colonial India.

'You have the power to make me rich by your writing'. So wrote Ram Gharib Chaube from his village in Gorakhpur to William Crooke in retirement in England in December 1900. The letter, written on different-sized paper, is indeed a 'pathetic' letter, asking Crooke to speak to someone in the north Indian bureaucracy and get Chaube an assignment, befitting his linguistic and ethnographic talents. Chaube goes on to remind Crooke of the many kindnesses the master had shown him, and how this was atypical of other sahibs in their dealings with native subordinates. At one place he seeks to evoke Crooke's pity by recounting a journey on elephant-back, the same elephant-back as Crooke, when the sahib very kindly let Chaube share a blanket: which other Englishman would have allowed such familiarity to breach the natural colonial distance between the sahib and native informants?

But while Crooke—from the same I.C.S. batch as R.C. Dutt—was to launch into a prolific career after early retirement, writing learned capsules on folklore and popular religion for several Encyclopaedia, Chaube was left high and dry after his stint (1898-1900) at the *LSI*, Shimla. So in the December 1900 letter, Chaube requests for an appointment with the District Collectors of neighbouring Ballia and Basti districts. Grovelling for some economic support—'I pray ... to my Crooke family... to send morsel of bread from their table', Chaube reminds his old master, William Crooke of the many ways in which he has been paying obeisance to Crooke and Grierson after their departure from India in 1896 and 1899 respectively. He has named a masonry

well in his village Gopalpur after Mrs. Grierson, and he has taken to advertising the name of Crooke by signing all notices written by him to the Journal of the Bombay Anthropological Society as 'Late Pandit to William Crooke'.

Lest our discomfort at the mendicancy of Chaube's prose exhaust our post-colonial cringe, let me add that the letter in question contains a detailed *expose* on 'Cloth and Clothes of the Natives of United Provinces' written by Chaube, in response to a detailed enquiry by William Crooke, now in retirement in England. And we have reason to believe that Chaube must have paid for its postage to England as well. In this Note on Cloth, we have all the tell-tale features of Chaube's published ethnographic notices: attention to detail, over-description, and a pronounced attempt to distance himself—the *dobhashi* native insider—from subalterns and the new nationalist elites alike. (This is 1900).

Here is Chaube's account of *char-khana* cloth:

Cloth of coloured square lines, price range between 2 ½ to 6 annas a yard, woven by native weavers of east-UP weaving centres, [Mau, Tanda and Fyzabad], but best made in Ludhiana in Punjab, and much in demand. One of the sectors of this large demand for this *indigenous* cloth is the pretentious political desire of some educated natives to serve the country by wearing home-made cloth (and not the better, machine-made cloth):

It is much in demand. Some men, who have received English education and sympathize with that fast-disappearing class of man, known among the officials as professional agitators, make their coats, pants, etc. of char-khana, believing perhaps that they are serving the interests of their country...

Or take the extended digression by Chaube on the beastly-affinity of low-class women who wear *ek-ranga*, or monochromatic saris. I summarize: that this sort of cloth is used principally by women for saris for ritual bathing, for the *bhitaulis* or *dulais*, winter *angas* for the grown ups and for the *angas* of children. Fast of colour, and wide of width, it costs 3 to 3 ½ annas a yard. With

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his keen ethnographic eye, Ram Gharib Chaube underlines the festive and ritual aspects of *ek-ranga* sari-wearing: going to *nahaan* or to a mela or when the married women transits 'from [natal home to the in-laws]—*naihar* to *susral* or vice versa'; amidst a good deal of weeping and lamenting, he could have added. At this point, Chaube forces a chance comment made by Crooke into his description that prise open the space for gratuitous comment (gratuitous for an ethnographer), but whose justifications seems to arise from a joke shared with Crooke at a railway station a couple of years ago:

Women make saris (6 yards) to go bathing in sacred streams or to melas. But the women who use *ek-ranga* saris are low caste. In going from *naihar* to *susral* or vice versa they use these saris also. At Chunar station in Mirzapur, your worship saw a woman of this class and jokesely [jokingly] pointed her out to a gentleman with the remark: 'How far above cattle are this class of native women'.

Trying to build upon an affinity, Chaube seeks to make Crooke's aside ethnographically rich:

There was opportunity enough here for Chaube to distance himself from the behaviour of his countrymen, high and low, but his published ethnographic entries are less pontifactory

'Their hair pasted together with an objectionable seasumum [sic] paste, their forehead up to the nose painted like an elephant, the hands, the feet with silver handcuff and chains on, their nose pierced and clumsily adorned with a heavy nose-ring, their necks weighed down by heavy silver weights, their face covered with a long, hanging veil, these daughters of India really excite laughter – than pity in the hearts of all thinking men'.

Would Chaube have pasted such a digression onto a notice on 'monochromatic cloth', had he meant it for publication in *NINQ* or contributed it for discussion and subsequent publication in the Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay? I doubt it. My evidence is the cache of over 200 notices that Ram Gharib contributed on sundry topics—agricultural ceremonies, the rituals of well-digging (a perilous enterprise), charms for curing snake bite, or indeed infertility. There was opportunity enough here for Chaube to distance himself from the behaviour of his countrymen, high and low, but his published ethnographic entries are less pontifactory. And that seems to be because William Crooke (and before him Richard Temple) as editors

of 'Notes and Queries' by throwing open its columns (beyond the missionary, the planter and the collector) to the local native informant, were trying to encourage a distinct type of ethnographic description: one bleached of all disdain about the ways of the 'other' [---] native, low caste or Musalman for that matter. To have published notices, largely from high caste, Hindu native informants, that contained the marks of derogation and denigration across caste, class and creed—which a hierarchical society like India breeds—would have been to undercut the foundations of a 'new' ethnological enterprise, where sahib and natives were joining hands to record authentic customs that were bound to disappear soon under the influence of the west-induced cultural change. The *NINQ* was after all—as its sub-title proclaimed—a 'monthly periodical devoted to the systematic collection of authentic notes and scraps of information regarding the country and its people'. Reportage in its pages required a prior suspension of disbelief and; as one of the star native informants of *NINQ*, Chaube had learnt the rudiments of such an ethnographic trade.

Opinionated digressions Chaube seems to have reserved for his private, manuscript notes, meant for the consumption of the sahib—Crooke or Grierson. Here Chaube tended to exceed the ethnographic brief. In the case of a manuscript on *Native Customs and Ceremonies*, his marginal remarks were meant to show up the incompleteness of the original writer's text that he was translating for Grierson, and if this could be done by inserting himself as illustration and informant, so much the better.

Thus while conveying the belief, prevalent among east-U.P. Hindu women, 'that all infant girls represent the seven sisters of the goddess Bhavani', Ram Gharib pauses to invoke the blessings of the new Bhavani, Queen Victoria:

These names differ in different localities. I have given the names I have heard from my grand-mother who is, as it were, a living dictionary of all the popular beliefs and superstitions. My former Master's 'Introduction to the Popular Religion and Folk-lore of Northern India' owes a good deal to that old mother. With her perhaps will die away I, my family, all the superstitions: for the younger women have become so intelligent through the grace of learning imparted to us in the schools and colleges set up all over the country by the beneficent English rule that even the women who come in our contact do not escape the enlightenment we have received through the blessings placed in our reach by *Queen Victoria*.

At other places in this manuscript, Chaube attempted to improve upon the original text by adding something on his own (as in the case of the *sindur*-giving ceremony) or proffering additional material, notably songs (from his own family), if Grierson so desired. Both these moves were an effort by a native subordinate to please the master by indulging in what old history primers called 'performance beyond the call of duty'.

Sucked into 'translating' the U.P. linguo-cultural for the sahibs as a vocation, this accomplished *dobhashi* had no other avenue to turn to in his old age. During his extended sojourn in Mirzapur, Chaube could not make a niche in the newly emerging Hindi world: his *métier* was cultural and linguistic crossings for which a colonial connection was a prerequisite as well as an end. Herein lies the tragedy, I suggest, of Ram Gharib Chaube. 'You have the power to make me rich by your writing', this demeaning and ungainly sentence of Chaube sums up, in a sense, the inequality that was inherent in the condition of a native colonial ethnographer.

Crooke and Grierson were not expressly concerned with our history: their real interest lay in India's timeless past

Crooke and Grierson were Collector-ethnologist and Collector-linguist par excellence of the Ganga valley, and Chaube's 'academic life' is best illustrated in conjunction with the careers of these two civil servants. It was not just that their two *Glossaries of Peasant Life* that were so similar: between them, they had annexed large portions of the intellectual and spiritual worlds of the peasants of North India as their field of specialization. Both were graduates of Trinity College, Dublin, and had joined the Indian Civil Service in 1871. Crooke and Grierson were not expressly concerned with our history: their real interest lay in India's timeless past. Crooke's forte was ethnographic enquiries, and he produced valuable work on the tribes and castes of U.P. and the popular religion of north India. Grierson concentrated on the popular literature and languages of eastern U.P. and Bihar, and went on to conduct the monumental *Linguistic Survey of India*.

Ram Gharib Chaube joined the *LSI* as a clerk on 24 September 1898 at a rather high salary of Rs. 45 per month, which went up to Rs. 50 per month from November 1899, when Chaube began to be called 'clerk and translator' in *LSI*, Shimla. The *LSI* was very much Grierson's brainchild. A resolution adopted at the third Oriental Congress in Vienna at his behest, had urged upon the Government of India in 1886 to undertake

'a deliberate systematic survey of the languages of India'. It was to be primarily a collection of specimens, 'a standard passage was to be selected for purposes of comparison'. The 'foundation of the Survey' was three specimens for every language: the standard translation, the passage collected locally for the full idiomatic range and a list of words and sentences originally devised by the Bengal Asiatic Society way back in 1866. The template passage, the first specimen, was to be 'a version of the *Parable of the Prodigal Son*, with slight verbal alterations to avoid Indian prejudices'. The reasons, Grierson coyly remarked in a footnote, was that 'it contains the three personal pronouns, most of the cases found in the declension of nouns, and the present, past, and future tenses of the verb'.

Chaube's actual employment lasted from 24 September 1898 to 27 August 1900. On that day Chaube 'acknowledge'[ed] with a certain *babu* pomposity 'to have received every farthing from the Linguistic Survey up to date'. He had signed this ringing receipt with a flourish on a 1 anna stamped paper, taking care to describe himself as 'late clerk, Linguistic Survey Office, Shimla' and resting his pen only after appending suitable diacritical marks to his name. The addition of diacritics at four places had rendered his usual signature technically false, but this along with the self-designation 'late clerk' which literally marked the time that he ceased to be with the LSI, were flourishes typical of Chaube: forever over-describing, over-reaching himself in his intellectual dealings with the sahibs, in whose short employ he found all the gainful employment he ever did in his adult life.

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Ram Gharib—a curious name—was a prominent figure in the small establishment of the LSI in Shimla. Till mid-1897, it consisted of two clerks, Moti Lal Mukherjee and Syed Altaf Husain employed at relatively low Rs. 25 and Rs. 20 per month, for transcription from Bangla/Hindi and Urdu scripts, with the usual Bengali, one Sudhir Kumar Lahiri, acting as the Head Babu at Rs. 24, 8 annas and 3 pice a month after deduction of income tax. George Grierson after tax and deduction for pension received Rs. 1895, 11 annas and 5 pice as Officer on Special Duty. There was a turnaround in the clerical staff, with the induction of Chaube at a high Rs. 45 per month, with Balwant Ranade and Bolai Chand Ghosh as two additional clerks hired at a salary lower than Chaube. Chaube's monthly emoluments went up to Rs. 50 per month from

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June 1899. Ram Gharib was not only the highest paid native, he was an important presence, working after office hours, taking down notes from books in the camp office library for his own scholarly pursuits, procuring sundry things that the office or the two chaprasis needed. A Bill records the payment to Chaube for expenses incurred for 'Telegram, Ink bottle, jharan [duster], gum, twine, matches and a book costing Rs. 4-4'.

The Chaprasis, decked in regulation *chapkan*, *chapras*, *kamarband* and *pajamas* purchased from Supt. Army Clothing in Shimla, often received their salary through Chaube, especially if it involved additional payment for work done in addition to normal duty. Tulsī Ram *chaprasī* received Rs. seven as pay in early 1899, together with one rupee 'as my pay for lighting the *angethi* [a brazier] and keeping the library and office clean. Received through Ram Gharib Chaube'. The requisite accent on '*angethi*, in keeping with the orthographic style-sheet of *LSI*, appears to be very much Chaube's handiwork. Chaube, who worked after office hours compiling notes for his own scholarly pursuits, had clearly taken charge of keeping the office and the library warm in the freezing cold months in Shimla—and in his own fashion. He had decided, without the written permission of the Office Superintendent, to substitute the softer charcoal for the cheaper hard coal (appropriately called *patthar ka koyla*, in Hindi). And when he was asked to get the necessary authorisation, Chaube was quick to get Grierson himself to make a noting that twenty rupees worth of 'Charcoal was bought under my orders', the officer taking care of any possible audit objection by adding: 'It is absolutely necessary'.

The Shimla records show Chaube as a noticeable presence: so that if three days' salary for November 1899 is docked for 'leave without pay', Chaube receives a substantial reward of Rs. 25 two months later for Ormuri or Bargista Grammar. Now Ormuri or Bargista, called Baraki by its 20 tribal speakers (!) of the Logar valley and in the heart of Waziristan who returned it in the 1911 Census, was an 'Eranian language' bearing only a distant relationship to Pushto which hemmed it from all sides. Grierson in the published *LSI* extracted an 1830s learned paper on this, 'a veritable fly in the amber' language which hinted at a hoary role played by the Barakis in the spoliation of India in the early eleventh century.

The Barakis, according to this 1838 paper by R. Leech, accompanied Mahmud of Ghazni in his invasion of India, 'and were pre-eminently instrumental in the abstraction of the gates of Somnath' from that famous temple on India's western coast, 'and its dispatch to Ghazni'. For this momentous unhinging, the Barakis, the paper maintained, were recompensed with a 'perpetual grant [in] any part of the country they chose; they fixed upon the district of Kaniguram in the country of the Wazirs, where they settled...', and had been reduced by the 1911 Census (unless some of them chose not to respond) to the grand total of 20 persons! Official British lore wrongly claimed they were fitted into the mausoleum of that Sultan. In any case their triumphal journey, unhinged by the victorious British in 1840s from the tomb of that notorious eleventh-century despoiler of north India was cut short embarrassingly for the Governor-General Lord Ellenborough, when the spuriousness of this colonial claim of bringing a prize back from the land of the Muslim marauders inhabiting the north of the Indus was finally admitted. By then, the triumphal procession of these Gates had gone past Delhi en route to the ruined temple on the western coast. Specimens of Afghan carpentry, the gates were allowed quietly to rest in peace in the fort built by Emperor Akbar in Agra.

As a part of the *LSI*, his 1913 note on Ormuri language, Grierson reproduced this bit of nineteenth century colonial mumbo-jumbo without querying it, or mentioning the *fin-de-siecle* work of Chaube on this grammar, which must have been of some substance for a special award of Rs. 25 from the budget of the *LSI*. Was his role that of translating Ghulam Muhammad Khan's *Qawaid-e-Bargista*, written by the District Inspector of Schools, Dera Ismail Khan 'at the request of Major Macaulay, the Political Agent with the force that invaded Waziristan in 1881'? This seems most likely, as Chaube was well-versed in Urdu, and Grierson not entirely comfortable with the Arabo-Persian script: in one instance he expressly ordered all applications in Hindustani to be written in the Devnagari script.

A telling illustration of the impress that Chaube had left on Grierson is provided by an incidental mention that the linguist makes in an official letter written from England in 1917, seventeen years after his departure from India. And thereby

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hangs an interesting tale. As soon as the initial volumes of the *LSI* began rolling off the press, Grierson had been busy lobbying the governments in India to have specimens of local dialects recorded. This would serve as authentic specimens of variation in speech and dialect for the record and for pedagogy. The First World War intervened, and it was 1920 before the gramophone records, totaling 284 in number could be cut for the various languages and dialects of imperial India.

In a letter of January 1917, Grierson suggested a standard format, by which the first record, followed by one or two local fables or songs, was to be cut: each record should commence with the title of the composition in English, best dictated by the recordist himself—one hears such a high pitched English voice in all the records cut at Allahabad on 20 May 1920. Grierson went on to add, ‘The title may be something such as ‘Parable of the Prodigal Son in Bhojpuri’ dictated at Gorakhpur by Ram Prasad Chaube on such and such a date, and so mutates mutandis for the others’. By all available local accounts, Chaube had died four years before; an aging Grierson, for his part, could still recollect his prize assistant’s name (more or less correctly) as representative of native agency in the compilation of his *Linguistic Survey India*.

To stay with the gramophone records for a little longer, Grierson was very particular about their pedagogic function as training discs for I.C.S. students in the dedicated Universities in UK; he even suggested that the gramophone company produce some records at a slower speed to help such language training, a suggestion that could not be implemented in 1920. These 78 ½ rpm discs were to be authentic specimens of native speech. This meant that not only did he decline to speak himself into the recording machine, he insisted that H.M. Sherani, a scholar on early Hindi, then resident at London’s Finsbury Park, should be identified as a ‘Musalman of north India speaking in Hindi’ on the record that he was invited to cut in London.

The two dozen records on the several dialects of North India, all recorded at Allahabad in mid-1920 that I first heard at the British Library in 2004 were really enthralling, and not because of the inflections of the ‘fatted calf’ story that they provide! It is the second and third specimens: a folk song, a north Indian light

classical *thumri* or *dadra* sung by an east U.P. landholder or a courtesan, brought all the way (on Government expense) to the city of Allahabad; or the stylized story telling by Mir Baqar Ali, the celebrated *dastango* of Delhi, that offer us fantastic auditory and performative insights into ways of speaking and singing. (All these records have now been put on the web and are fully accessible, in some cases with translations: I am working on a complete set of transcripts for all gramophone records. (See <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/lsi/>; <http://www.openthemagazine.com/article/arts-letters/voices-from-colonial-india> and now audio clips at <http://www.theworld.org/2011/04/documenting-indian-languages/>)

I wish to carry on with this digression on the recordings a little bit longer, and then return to the labours of Chaube in the cosy office of the LSI in Shimla. Grierson was very particular that native specimens of Sanskrit from the holy city of Banaras be also recorded. And that the records of the Sanskrit accents of both the local Pandits of the city and the migrant Maharashtrian Brahman be secured. The problem, as Grierson put it was that:

Some of the records taken will illustrate the most sacred Hindu scriptures as uttered by Indian Pandits. These men are prohibited by their religion from uttering these holy passages in the presence of a European.

Grierson broached the idea of the Gramophone Co. 'arranging for a Brahman Expert to secure records' of such passages, but that was not possible. A compromise was worked out. In the words of the Manager, Gramophone Company:

We are not sure just to what extent these Pandits would carry their objections—how literally they would read this prohibition—but in view of the value of these records to you in your work we would do all we possibly can towards satisfying their religious scruples. A Brahman recorder we can not provide; but we would arrange for two rooms to be engaged to record in; in one would be our recording expert and his Apparatus—In the other the Pandits; such Assistants as we would employ to guide them would all be orthodox Brahmans and no one but a Brahman would be permitted in the room. They need not see the recorder, nor need he see them....

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... The recording horn [could] protrud[e] into the room where the performance is to take place... the whole arrangement could be worked by electric light flashes, as when to start and when to stop. The operator cannot then overhear the performer.

It was through such a Rushdie-like arrangement—remember Dr. Salim Sinai seeing his future wife through the several holes in the sheet that he was allowed to peep through diagnostically—that the five records of Sanskrit and one of Vedic Sanskrit as spoken in Banaras got recorded for the *LSI*.

And now back to Shimla, the summer capital of the Raj, where Chaube toiled over the manuscript specimens of the draft *LSI*.

Grierson's departure for England in 1899 had put even greater responsibility on the shoulders of his prize-clerk at the Shimla office of the *LSI*. The collection of local

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specimens of the different *bolis*, all formatted to the standard *Prodigal Son Parable* (with a local fable or conversation as additional specimen), were got collected by District Officers in their respective districts and forwarded to the Shimla Office of the *LSI*, where Chaube led the team of native transcribers who rendered the Devnagari text into English with interlinear literal translation of each and every word. The specimens had to be paid for: the Detailed Contingency Bill lists Rs. 11-8 annas as 'expenses incurred in obtaining specimens of dialects', paid to Dy. Commr. Muzaffarnagar. The Dy. Commr. of Lohardga (south-west Jharkhand) was paid a very substantial sum of Rs. 1600 'for specimens' in the same month.

Eight years ago I began to go through the specimens collected for the *LSI* for Chattisgarhi and Bagheli which have a family resemblance to Bhojpuri with which I have a certain affinity. To my joy I realized that hundreds of pages had been transcribed in roman, and the interlinear literal translations done in the firm italic hand of Ram Gharib Chaube! As I turned the leaves, Chaube the ethnographer, the maker of marginal comments, started making his appearance, suggesting linguistic nuances, ethnographic reflections as he toiled over the several versions of the *Prodigal Son* tale for his living. A full 99 per cent of these marginal comments were turned down by Grierson, and so failed to make it to the printed pages of volume VI of the *LSI*. It would be tedious to give more

than a couple of examples: Grierson's project was largely classificatory: a formal comparison of collections of language specimen. Chaube, as he slogged over the dialects, tried to bring all of his ten years' experience in the tribal belt of central India to comment on the finer points of the language: Grierson was not interested, and chose to ignore the vast majority of the comments Chaube appended in the margins of his translations.

In the *Prodigal Tale* in Chattisgarhi, '*gajab din nahin bhai ke* occurs fairly early in the tale as the younger son departs and falls into evil ways. Chaube translates '*gajab*' as many, and appends the comment: 'This Persian word has the meaning of '*great*' or '*many*' in almost all the aboriginal languages of North India I have hitherto come across'. This was a personal note, ignored by the editor. In the specimen of Bagheli, the situation is: the father welcoming back the wayward son: '*apne gare maan lagaay-lihis aur puchkaris*': A Note: '*Puchkaris*' is a word used chiefly in the case of young calves. For instance when a calf runs about and does not let itself be tied down to a post they say: '*puchkaari ke pakari-la*'. Here it has been used for a human being. So I have translated it caressed'. Note ignored:

Another instance occurs in the specimen of Laria Dialect from Chattisgarh: The situation is where someone asks the wayward son to look after his swineherd. The difficult word was '*keseji*' which Chaube wrote as 'He', queried it with a question mark, and then in a marginal note held forth on its significance as a marker of third person:

This is simply the third person in as much as it denotes 'which person', i.e. the person unknown. In the childhood of the world, people could not determine a word for a man absent and they, therefore, in my humble opinion, called the man absent about whom they had to say something— the person unknown. This fact may be noted in a footnote because it is very interesting from an ethnographic point of view... Better remove the interrogations. *I have now fully thought about it*'. Chaube took care to sign in the margin, dt. 30.6.1900.

The question marks which Chaube queried after some deliberation were allowed to remain by Grierson; they still pockmark the printed text (*LSI*, vi, p. 238). Or take another dialect, the Sadri Korwa dialect, again from the Chattisgarhi group of languages. It is the very beginning of the story: when the younger son demands a division of the wealth between the two brothers. The operative phrase is '*sab dhaan-paan-dangar-*

garu. Chaube insists in his usual marginal note that the word '*paan*' need not be taken as an empty rhyming word to go with '*dhaan*', paddy. 'Paan must be literally translated to show to the foreigner that Indian wealth has a sign to set it off, viz. the chewing of betel. The Brahmans bless us sometimes '*Baithal Paaan chabha*'. Grierson chose to ignore, and perhaps rightly, this ethnographic over-reach of Chaube exuberance and so '*dhaan-paan*' stands translated as 'paddy etc' in the printed text (*LSI*, vi, p. 225)

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There are other examples where Chaube suggested a connotative for a word, and Grierson opted for a meaningless literal meaning, but these need not detain us. Eg: '*Mor kotwali bhuiyan mor pas hawwe; te-la jot-bo-ke apan pet bharthan*': 'I am in possession of some kotwali land, and we fill our bellies with its produce' (VI, p., 201) Chaube had rightly suggested in the margin that kotwali is the same as *gorait* land, i.e. rent-free allotment granted to village watchmen. Even left untranslated 'kotwali land', i.e. police station land in the printed volume seems meaningless!

The last example I wish to give is perhaps the most poignant. Unable to think up a proper equivalent for the Hindi '*bera*', a barge, Chaube for once burst into his mother tongue, and penned a note in Hindi for Grierson sahib, explaining that it was to convey products across the river, ending with the sentence: '*Hamen Angrezi ka shabd smaran nahin aata* (I can't recollect the English word for it)!

Soon after I discovered a remarkable popular folk song, a *dadra*, that Chaube had got transcribed in 1890 on the legendary Rani of Jhansi. The Rani Jhansi song we all remember is a lament with the refrain '*khub lari mardani wo to jhansi wali Rani thi*': how wonderfully did she fight, that manly Rani of Jhansi. It has that stirring beginning:

*Singhasan hil uthe, rajvanshon ne bhrikuti taani thi;
Burhe bharat mein aai phir se nai javani thi,
Dur firengi ko karne ki sab ne man mein thani thi*

This appears to be a case of Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, as with other nationalists, celebrating a young nation's age and antiquity (shades of *Young India?*): the song maintains that when the nation stirs, it is an old Bharat which feels rejuvenated in 1857. By contrast the popular song recorded by Chaube in a village in

Etawa district in central U.P. was not marked by any such biographical view of India. Rather the emphasis here was on the Rani's valour and sacrifice, and her concern for her soldiers:

The refrain was much the same, but everything else was different:

Khub lari mardani, are Jhansi wali Rani.

Burjan-burjan topaen lagae dee, gola chalaye aasmanai, are jhansi...

Sagre sipahiyan ke pera-jalebi apne khae gur-dhani, are jhansi...

Chor morcha lashkar ko bhagi, dhunde naahi miley pani, are jhansi...

A fuller English translation of this popular song I found in the most unexpected of academic books: I.H. Qureshi's *Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent, 610-1947* (Hague, 1962). This testifies, indirectly, to its wide provenance in northern India, independent of the text-book Jhansi Rani anthem. Qureshi says that he heard this song sung in his childhood, and still remembered the words to give this very full translation:

'You fought very bravely, you brave Rani of Jhansi;

You bore all the hardships, but your troops were well looked after;

You ate coarse food, but your troops were well fed.

You fought well. If you lost what does it matter?

You fought for your rights, of which you were

so cruelly deprived by the Firangis.

You fought so well. If you lost your life, it does not matter.

You earned immortality for your name'.

When Mrinal Pande, then editor of the Hindi newspaper *Hindustan*, agreed to publish an article by me on 1857, she had no idea that her sub-editor would edit out the words altogether! Almost immediately I received a postcard from Banaras: 'As Ram Gharib Chaube had lived in our family for many years nearly 100 years ago, I would very much like to read that song collected by Chaube'. I knew that Chaube had lived in Mirzapur, but this was really unexpected. I replied with an enthusiastic note, and appending all that I had known or written about Chaube.

In early August 2004 I received a long handwritten letter from Kusum Chaturvedi, the 72 years old grand-daughter of Ram Chandra Shukl. It contained a detailed account of Chaube's stay in the family of Chandrabali Shukl, and how he mentored the young

The letter was a long story of how Chaube had not been given his due by Crooke, how his name is missing as the co-author of the *Tribes and Castes of NWP and Oudh*, and how because of this perfidy Crooke came to be called 'Crooked sahib in the Shukla family'

Ram Chandra Shukl, taking him on his journeys into the hill tribes' habitat, about whose languages he advised Grierson from the margins of his transcriptions. The letter was a long story of how Chaube had not been given his due by Crooke, how his name is missing as the co-author of the *Tribes and Castes of NWP and Oudh*, and how because of this perfidy Crooke came to be called 'Crooked sahib in the Shukla family'; how he was again cheated of his scholarship by, this time an Indian savant, Gauri Shankar Ojha, who worked on a translation of the *History of Rajasthan*, and how he returned broken and demented from Rajasthan to the haven of the Shukla household in Mirzapur:

His friend tried to get him treated, but those days there were no mental hospitals. For a few months he kept babbling "Tribes... Crooke.. Rajasthan... Ojha" in a disjointed manner, [By this time he was a gone case]. One night he simply disappeared.... He was brought back from a station just beyond Kanpur, and a cousin took him home. He died a lunatic in 1914.

The penultimate paragraph of this long letter had a poignancy to it, far removed from the 'interaction of European and Indian mental frames' that is being advocated for writing about the likes of Ram Gharib: 'Your response to the post card that I sent you has opened new vistas for understanding Ram Gharib Chaube... I have heard the story of Ramgharib from the mouth of Ram Chandra Shukl, my grandfather... What drew you so to Chaube? Are you also from the same area (*jawaar*)? As far as I know, he did not have a family. It is well possible that he would have had a child-marriage, as was the custom those days, and for some reason, or because of her death, there was separation. If you have been to his village, you would know'.

'What do I say about myself and my family? I was born and educated in Banaras – and for some time in a small town Majhauri in Deoria District. I have one son... who is a Professor of Sociology in BHU. I have a daughter who is a novelist; four books she has

to her credit. You asked me all about myself, and my relation to Ram Gharib Chaube, but did not say anything about your self [and your family]?

Convey my *sneh* to every one at home.

Yours only,

Kusum Chaturvedi

I am still trying to respond to this letter about Ram Gharib Chaube.

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