DRAMATIC GESTURES:  
THE FIJI INDIAN PANCAYAT AS THERAPEUTIC DISCOURSE 

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1. Introduction 

Central to the ethnographic study of discourse is an interest in the relationships between participants in speech events and the communicative forms characteristic of those events. In this paper I explore one particular aspect of the role of participants. I am concerned with the local theories in terms of which speakers and hearers not only make sense of speech events but also shape their experience of those events, i.e., how they are taken to "feel." My discussion is informed by relatively recent explorations of the active role of audiences in discourse (Duranti and Brenneis 1985); if, as Duranti (1986: 243) argues, "every act of speaking is directed to and must be ratified by an audience," the premises on which such ratifications are based must be examined. Such premises are unlikely to be solely interpretive, i.e., concerned with issues of meaning in the strict sense. They also draw upon participants' aesthetic notions, on local theories of coherence, beauty and effectiveness. The following discussion presents an account of one particular variety of speech event in a particular speech community. The underlying question is one of the effectiveness of speech; how is communicative form related not so much to speakers' intentions as to the understandings which listeners bring to different varieties of discourse?

This paper analyzes the pancayat, a public event for the mediation of disputes in Bhatgaon, a Fiji Indian community. Although pancayats are held quite infrequently, they are regarded by Bhatgaon villagers as the definitive Indian occasion for the amicable settlement of conflict.¹ The pancayat, 'council of five,' has a long history in India as both a conflict-managing and decision-making institution but has assumed a very different form in Fiji, as will be evident below.² How the pancayat "works" in Bhatgaon depends in large part, I will argue, on several Indian aesthetic and psychological notions introduced to and reinterpreted in the Fijian context. These underlying notions differentiate the construction and implications of pancayat from, on the one hand, Western notions of therapeutic events and, on the other, from some of the traditional theories of emotions and therapy suggested for the Pacific by Lutz (1983), Ito (1985) and White (1979, n.d.).

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Gibbs' article, "The Kpelle Moot" (1963), is important here in two respects. First, it is a locus classicus for the description and interpretation of moots and other public mediation occasions, of considerable importance in the development of legal anthropology. Second, it provides a clear if general statement of an important Western theory of therapeutic events. Drawing upon Parsons' (1951) characterization, Gibbs cites four elements of Western psychotherapy: support, permissiveness, denial of reciprocity and manipulation of rewards (1963: 284). Gibbs argues that these four elements are also present in the Kpelle moot or house palaver, a public discussion and resolution of conflict primarily within households or between neighbors. The moot is supportive; it is culturally defined as a valued and beneficial event. One can discuss a wide range of events and issues within the moot and be very emotionally expressive without fear of revenge or anger in response. Finally, the audience for the moot provides not only a sympathetic hearing but very real rewards as well; reaching accord is a warrant of full participation in the life of the local community.

Perhaps central to a consideration of the theory of therapeutic talk implicit in Gibbs' model are his second and third elements, the permissiveness or "anything goes" quality of moot discourse and the safety from angry response which makes it possible. "Permissiveness in the therapeutic setting (and in the moot)," he argues (1963: 285), "results in catharsis, in a high degree of stimulation of feelings in the participants, and an equally high tendency to verbalize those feelings." Apart from those etiological insights which the session might afford, how those insights are reached, i.e., in apparently unrestrained expression, is central to the therapeutic experience. As Labov and Fanshel (1977) note, "It had been observed many times that the (therapeutic) interview is simultaneously a diagnostic device and the method of therapy." While empirical studies of both therapeutic conversation and mediation sessions demonstrate that this freewheeling quality is often more appearance than fact—that successful events involve careful if indirect guidance—the underlying notion that catharsis, a purging or cleansing of troubling emotions through their identification and expression, is a critical element remains central in many Western theories.

The term catharsis is at present primarily used in psychological contexts, but its first major use, apart from the literal meaning of cleansing or purification, is by Aristotle in the Poetics. Although it is unclear exactly what Aristotle meant by the term, he argues that catharsis is a critical aesthetic element in tragedy. As literature professors rather than classicists generally understand the term,
"Aristotle appears to wish to put the emotions of fear and pity into his audience, to 'cleanse.' A real emotional transformation, a real experience is intended" (Gerow 1974: 133). Drama works through the catalyzing and purging of strong emotions in the individual spectator. Therapy, by analogy, works in part through the similar processes of expression and cleansing, although the emotions are located in oneself rather than in a play. Aesthetic and therapeutic models are closely intertwined.

Whether Gibbs' discussion accurately reflects what the Kpelle themselves saw in the moot, his article remains a fair characterization of a Western model of therapy. It also reflects a usually unspoken premise shared by many anthropologists. This is the notion that a wide range of conflict management events—from the Eskimo song duel to an American's "day in court"—are effective in large part because they afford individuals positively sanctioned opportunities for emotional expression and release. What is striking about the pancayat is that, in regard to emotional expression, it is very unlike the Kpelle moot. The pancayat seems concerned not with emotion but with questions of fact and is highly decorous, restrained and subject to very narrow relevance rules. The pancayat, however, considered by Fiji Indians to be a very powerful occasion for social mending, for repairing damaged interpersonal relations and restoring amity. The central questions addressed in this paper are, first, what the salient features of pancayat as communicative events are and how they are related to conditions of Indian life in Fiji; and, second, how the pancayat "works," how it effects the therapeutic results claimed for it.

My answer to the first question, that of the relationship between social and communicative forms, is methodologically rather straightforward, although fairly complicated in its details. The discussion is rooted firmly in the ethnography of speaking tradition and follows directly my earlier considerations of other discourse genres in Bhatgaon (see, for example, Brenneis 1978, 1984; Myers and Brenneis 1984).

The second question is much more problematic, as it raises a range of theoretical and methodological issues. One problem is a definitional one: how is therapy to be defined, and for whom or what is it intended? As will become evident in the discussion below, the problem to be remedied is located neither in an individual nor in the relationship between conflicting parties alone. The pancayat must affect a broader village public as well as those immediately involved; disputants and audience alike must be satisfied. A practical
resolution alone is insufficient. As one man declared during the pancayat described below, "The political work is finished; religious work is remaining." In this "religious work" are entwined ethics, aesthetics and ethnopsychology.

As an ethnopsychological enterprise, the pancayat stands in marked contrast to those characteristic features suggested by Gibbs. In fact, the pancayat's effects on individuals do not figure greatly in villagers' discussions. However they may actually perceive their world, Bhatgaon villagers rarely talk about it in terms of a personal self. The pancayat is said to lead not to the stimulation and release of individual feelings but to a shared experience of some sort. These local theories rest upon an ultimately dramatic model, one drawn from Sanskritic poetics rather than those of Aristotle.

To claim that villagers share these ideas is not to imply that their theories are clearly or systematically articulated. They are, rather, what I would call "partial theories," drawing upon orally transmitted beliefs, the semantic resources and constraints of Fiji Hindi, and local interpretations of classical Hindu notions introduced to Fiji in published religious texts. Further, they are most fully expressed not in ordinary discourse but in ethnographic interviews, a kind of event often leading to greater clarity and coherence than observations of everyday village life might suggest. This paper draws upon field notes, interview data, and my own interpretations, tested and refined through continuing discussions with my village colleagues. The final product, however, remains my responsibility.

After a brief discussion of the historic and contemporary situation of Bhatgaon, I describe in detail one pancayat and the events leading to it in "The Case of the Purported Profanities." I then examine salient social and communicative features of Bhatgaon as a community and move to the characteristics of the pancayat as a speech event. In the final section I explore Fiji Indian emotional notions and their implications for an understanding of how the pancayat works.

2. Bhatgaon: A Fiji Indian Community

Bhatgaon is a rural village of 671 Hindi-speaking Fiji Indians located on the northern side of Vanua Levu, the second largest island in the Dominion of Fiji. The villagers are the descendents of north Indians who came to Fiji between 1879 and 1919 as indentured plantation workers. Bhatgaon was established in the early 1900's and now includes 90 households. There has been little migration to or from
the village for the past twenty years. Most families lease rice land
from the Government of Fiji, and, although they may work as seasonal
cane cutters or in other outside jobs, most men consider themselves
rice farmers. Rice and vegetables are raised primarily for family
use, although surplus produce may be sold to middlemen. Leaseholds
are generally small, and rice farming does not afford Bhatgaon
villagers the same opportunities for wealth available in sugar cane
raising areas.

The following account, "The Case of the Purported Profanities,"
both exemplifies panchayat procedures and gives some of the flavor of
troubled social relations in Bhatgaon.

The Case of the Purported Profanities

Amka and his married son Arun lease nine acres of land in a
relatively new subdivision. Amka had applied for two acres adjacent
to this fields and had begun to clear the area in March, 1972, before
his lease was approved. In mid-March the government surveyors came
and laid out boundaries for the new leases; the two acres Amka had
cleared were to be rented to Satish and Jeshwan, two other farmers.

One day soon after the surveyors' visit Amka was walking to his
nine-acre plot when he encountered the wives of Jeshwan and his
younger brother working in Jeshwan's new field. He told them to stop
working there, as he had not yet accepted the surveyors' decision.
Jeshwan's wife subsequently claimed that he had sworn at them as well;
she and Amka had a longstanding dispute from the days when they had
lived in adjacent households and had quarreled about Amka's dogs,
which frequently entered her compound. A few days later Amka also
stopped the wife of Surend, Satish's son, from working in the new
field. The rumor that Amka had sworn at her as well spread rapidly.

Allegations of Amka's insults became widespread. Such charges
are taken seriously, as profanity to women is viewed as in Bhatgaon as
an adharmik offense, that is, one "against religion" (Brenneis 1980).
Such behavior also raises more practical concerns; Fiji Indian
communities are village-exogamous, and few parents would want their
daughters to marry into a community where women were not safe from
such verbal assaults. Although the three women were the targets of
Amka's alleged oaths, from a local perspective the injured parties
were their male affines—husbands or fathers-in-law—as men are
considered responsible for protecting female relatives from attack,
whether physical or verbal.
Satish, as the senior and most widely respected male related to any of the women and the one closest to Amka in age, was seen as the primary injured party. As Amka and Satish were both samajis and respected men, several leaders of the reform Hindu association became concerned. After individual discussions with Amka, Satish and Surend, they called a panchayat which met several days later on the edge of Satish's new field.

Satish, his son Surend and Birendra, a friend of Surend, were waiting when Amka and seven other association members joined them. Surend and Birendra were both in their late thirties and shared a reputation for hot-headedness; the panchayat committee was particularly concerned that they not be aroused. Everyone walked through the disputed field and agreed that Amka had put considerable effort into clearing the land. Then they sat together on a hillside overlooking the land. Satish began by speaking of his own difficulties with the government, which had given him this acre but had given some of his older fields to two other villagers. Then Satish said that the panchayat had not been called to deal with the land issue, as the surveyors' decision was final.

Amka then stood and agreed with Satish that, "The political work is finished; religious work is remaining." The panchayat members then began to discuss the alleged profanities. They had arranged that Jeshwan's brother's wife, Rina Devi, would be waiting at Satish's house to serve as a witness. They avoided notifying Jeshwan's wife as all knew of her antipathy towards Amka and doubted she would be willing to alter her story. It would have been impossible to construct a satisfactory account of the incident had she persisted; the panchayat does not provide the opportunity to judge between competing accounts. Rina Devi was called. She stood fifteen feet away from the men with her young son as she swore to tell the truth. When Prakash, a panchayat member, asked her about the incident, she responded that Amka had said that it was not yet their land, but that he had not insulted them. Amka agreed with her testimony when questioned, admitting that he might have been somewhat short-tempered. At this point Surend's friend Birendra unexpectedly entered the discussion by claiming that three years earlier Amka had sworn at him for tying his bullocks in Amka's field, where they ate some rice. The other men were dumbfounded at this accusation, as they had heard nothing about it in the past three years. When no one responded to his complaint, Birendra walked away angrily. As Rina Devi had been called as a test witness, everyone seemed satisfied that Amka had probably not sworn at Jeshwan's wife either. At this point Amka's son Arun jokingly commented that when he had seen the witness arrive
he had thought that the **pancayat** members had intended to embarrass his father. Amka had known beforehand of the witness and had agreed to her testifying, as he knew it would exonerate him, but he had not told Arun. Satish was angered by Arun's comment and claimed to have known nothing of the witness. Surend then spoke for the first time and was furious, displaying the temper for which he was well known. He shouted that there was no conspiracy against Amka, but that Arun could have it that way if he so desired. Surend then called his wife, Amka's third alleged victim, from the house. She also testified on oath that, although Amka had said that the land was not theirs, he had not sworn at her. She returned to the house, and Surend sat down apart from the others. His father, Satish, made a brief speech, quoting a Fiji Indian political leader on the virtues of reasoned discussion of disputes. One of the **pancayat** members then assured Surend that Arun had only been joking, and Arun apologized for his comment. Surend and Arun then shook hands, and the **pancayat** ended without further comment.

3. The Politics of Equality in Bhatgaon

Among Bhatgaon males an overt egalitarian ideology prevails. Although ancestral caste appears to influence marriage choice to some extent (Brenneis 1974: 25), it has few daily consequences. As one villager said, "Gaon me sab barabba hein, 'In the village all are equal.'" This public ideology is manifest in such practices as sitting together on the floor during religious events and equal opportunity to speak. The roots of this egalitarian outlook lie in the conditions of immigration and indenture and are reinforced by the relative similarity in wealth throughout Bhatgaon (for a detailed discussion of the development of egalitarian ideology in Fiji see Brenneis 1979).

Such egalitarianism, however, is problematic in several important respects. First, not every villager is a potential equal. Gender is a crucial dimension, for men do not consider women their equals. Men and women are both politically active in Bhatgaon, but they take part in very different ways and in different settings. Men are the performers in such public political events as religious speechmaking and insult singing (Brenneis 1978; Brenneis and Padarath 1975). As the case above demonstrated, the conflicts engendering **pancayat** are defined as being between men, even if women are the immediately affected parties. Women may speak in **pancayat** as witnesses, but men organize and run the events. Women's political participation generally occurs in less public settings, as does much male politicking through **talanoa**, 'gossip.'
Age also makes a difference. Adolescent boys are accorded less respect than older, married men. As there are no formal criteria or ceremonies to mark the transition from adolescence to social adulthood, disagreements about how one should be treated are common and often lead to serious conflicts between males of different ages. Even after adolescence, age remains an important factor. Thus, Amka and Satish, not Amka and Surend, were treated as the principal parties in the case above.

A second problematic aspect of Bhatgaon egalitarianism is the delicate balance between people who should be equals. One of the hallmarks of such an egalitarian community is that individual autonomy is highly prized. Equals are those who mutually respect each other's freedom of action. Attempting too overtly to influence the opinions or action of another is a violation of this equality. Further, individual reputation is central to one's actual social standing. A man's name ('name' or 'reputation') is subject to constant renegotiation through his own words and deeds and through those of others. Reputation management is a constant concern in disputes, for conflict often arises from apparent insult, as that to Satish implied by Amka's alleged profanities. The remedy lies in the public rebalancing of one's reputation with that of one's opponent.

A number of men are recognized as bada admi, 'big men,' because of their past participation in village affairs, religious leadership, education, or other personal accomplishment. Both Amka and Satish were considered bada admi. They also gain respect through the successful management of the disputes of others. This status is always under stress, however, as intrusive attempts to assert authority or to intervene in others' problems abuse the autonomy of other men. Successful big men do not exercise their informal power ostentatiously. Continued effectiveness as a respected advisor depends upon an overt reluctance to assume leadership. Even when requested to intervene in a dispute, big men are often unwilling because they fear both being identified with one party's interests and being considered too eager to display power. The willing exercise of authority leads rapidly to its decline.

There is a police station three miles away, but there are no formal social control agencies within Bhatgaon itself. The village has a representative on the district advisory council. He is not, however, empowered to regulate affairs within Bhatgaon. With the decline of caste as an organizational feature of Fiji Indian life, such bodies as caste councils are not available for conflict management. Conflict in Bhatgaon remains largely dyadic, the concern
of the contending parties alone, yet as long as the disputes are dyadic, the chances of a settlement are slim. The face-to-face negotiation of a serious dispute is usually impossible, as open accusation or criticism of another is taken as a grievous insult. The offending party might well express his displeasure through clandestine mischief. While such vandalism would not be praised, other villagers would interpret it as the natural result of direct confrontation and would not intervene. Only a kara admi, a 'hard man,' would risk such revenge through direct discussion. Most villagers resort to more indirect strategies. It is difficult to enlist third parties in the management of a conflict, but such triadic participation is crucial. The recruitment of others, not as partisans but as intermediaries and mediators, is a central goal of disputants. Compelling their interest and involvement is therefore a major end in dispute discourse. Not surprisingly, avoidance remains the most common means of managing conflict.

Central to an understanding of conflict discourse in Bhatgaon is a consideration of the sociology of knowledge in the community. As in any society, both what people talk about and how they talk about it are to some extent informed by what they know, what they expect others to know and what they and others should know. However, just as local organization and social values were transformed during immigration, indenture, and post-plantation life, expectations concerning the social distribution of knowledge were also dramatically altered from those characteristic of north Indian villages.

The radical levelling of Indian immigrant society in Fiji had obvious implications for the allocation of knowledge in Bhatgaon. While in north India the differential distribution of knowledge had both reflected and sustained a system of ranked but interdependent caste groups, in Fiji the groups were at best ill-defined, and the division of labor in part responsible for the division of knowledge no longer existed. Secular knowledge became, in effect, open to all.

In Bhatgaon there was a corresponding democratization of sacred knowledge as well. The reformist aryā samāj sect has a central tenet the notion of sikṣā, 'instruction.' Members are expected to educate both themselves and others in religious practice and understanding. The stated purpose of most type of public communication, from hymn singing to the pancayat, is mental and spiritual improvement. Although reform Hindus are a minority in Bhatgaon, their stress on instruction has had a considerable effect on orthodox Hindu villagers.
The generally egalitarian nature of social life in Bhatgaon has a counterpart in the relatively equal opportunity of all villagers to pursue knowledge, both sacred and secular. The sacred has become shared knowledge, in most cases no longer the property of a particular group. It is important to note, however, that where egalitarian ideals are stressed, continuing symbols of one's membership in a community of peers are necessary. One must not only feel membership but be able publicly to display it. Apparent exclusion from that community is taken very seriously, and knowledge continues to define one's social identity, albeit in ways quite different from those characteristic of India.

A crucial way of demonstrating one's membership is through sharing in what is "common knowledge" in the community—what "everyone" knows. Although sacred and technical knowledge can be included in this, they are relatively unchanging. The real action lies in the dynamics of everyday life, for which familiarity with local events and personalities is necessary. No one, however, knows everything, and some villagers are considerably better informed than are others. This differential participation in common knowledge lies at the root of political talk in Bhatgaon.

4. Talk in Bhatgaon

A consideration of the panchayat—or of any other particular type of verbal event—requires a brief consideration of the larger speech economy of the village. The general features of male speaking in Bhatgaon derive in large part from its character as an acephalous, egalitarian community in which individuals are concerned both with their own reputations and freedom of action and with maintaining those of others, particularly of men with whom they are on good terms. One's enemies present a more complex situation. Their reputations are tempting targets, but too overt or successful an attack might lead to immediate revenge or preclude future reconciliation, as the insult would be too grievous to remedy.

These broad features of life in Bhatgaon underlie a speech economy the salient feature of which is indirection. One rarely says exactly what one means. Instead, in a variety of public and private performance genres, speakers must resort to metaphor, irony, double entendre and other subtle devices to signal that they mean more than they have said. Such indirection is particularly marked in situations where overt criticism or comment would be improvident or improper. In Bhatgaon public occasions recurrently pose the same dilemma: one must both act and avoid the appearance of such action. The perils of
direct confrontation and of direct leadership in the village have fostered oblique and highly allusive speech. Understanding political discourse in Bhatgaon therefore requires both the interpretation of texts in themselves and the unravelling of well-veiled intentions. In such genres as parbcan, 'religious speeches,' such oblique reference is particularly marked. Parbcan are oratorical performances with ostensibly religious content given at weekly services. Their contents are not ambiguous in themselves. Thus, it is easy for the Hindi-speaking outsider familiar with Hinduism to follow a discussion of, for example, the fidelity of Sita, the wife of the epic hero Ram. The relationship between such a text and its intended function, however, remains quite opaque. The audience knows that some speakers have no hidden agenda while others are using parbcan for political ends. Such indirection both precludes revenge and pricks the curiosity of others who feel they should understand what is really going on. A successful parbcan compels the interest and involvement of potential third parties.

A second important feature of men's talk in Bhatgaon is that the culturally ascribed purpose of most genres of public, generally accessible performance is sikca, 'instruction.' Whatever intentions individual speakers might have, their texts must focus on such topics as moral and spiritual improvement and their apparent motives must be didactic. Such genres as parbcan work politically by joining sacred teaching with covert secular interests. The political implications of panchayats are most overt. They provide authoritative and licit public explanations—though not evaluations—of particular incidents. Villagers can refer to these authoritative accounts in later discussions without fear of revenge.

Private conversation, whether gossip or not, is not limited by this concern for instruction. Topics of conversation may range from national politics to the weather, the selection of topic depending upon participants and their shared interests rather than on generic requirements. Most conversation is neutrally evaluated and seen as not offering the same scope for instruction as speechmaking. Gossip, however, is negatively evaluated as worthless. The activities discussed in gossip are themselves considered worthless or wasteful. What could one possibly learn from such talk, especially given its potential dangers? Despite these negative associations, gossip is a popular activity from which villagers take considerable pleasure.

Talk is evaluated not solely in terms of topic, however. Artfulness, fluency, and wit are highly praised along dimensions specific to each genre. Speechmakers, for example, should display a
good knowledge of standard Fiji Hindi, a large Sanskritic vocabulary, and a knack for apposite parables. While gossip is thought to be worthless in itself, men who excel in it are much appreciated.

Finally, genres of verbal activity in Bhatgaon are linked together not only in terms of the expressive repertoire of the village but in an inferential web as well. Given the indirect nature of most public communication, a crucial question is how one learns the background information in terms of which these oblique references can be interpreted. The pancayat plays a critical role in village background information.

5. The Pancayat: Constructing Public Knowledge

A pancayat is usually convened by the elected officers of a religious association after considerable, albeit indirect, prodding from disputing members of the group. Pancayats involve quite direct talk about specific events and personalities. Allegations which in most contexts would lead to revenge are discussed at length and without repercussions. Given the nature of political life in Bhatgaon, the pancayat poses interesting questions: What makes such direct performances possible? What are their implications for the future relationships of the contending parties? And why do participants claim to find them satisfying experiences? These questions can partially be answered by outlining the process by which pancayats are arranged, their participants, the formal organization of the session as a communicative event, the contents of testimony, and the effects of the sessions. The pancayat must then be located within the broader context of local theories of "therapy."

Pancayat sessions are planned and convened by elected officers of the disputants' religious association. These officers meet as the antarang samiti ('confidential committee') and very deliberately discuss the case, choose appropriate witnesses to summon and otherwise prepare for the session. Often committee members will interview witnesses clandestinely before the session is held. While they are concerned that factual evidence will be presented, they also want to manage the presentation of the evidence in such a way that neither party will be completely vanquished. Reinstating the good reputations of both disputants is a central goal. In the above case, only Jeshwan's wife, the original accuser who was not called as a witness, was not vindicated; from the male point of view, women's reputations are more expendable. Committee members are also concerned with the public evaluation of their own behavior. They must not appear to be
too eager or to dominate the proceedings. The successful management of others' conflicts requires at least the appearance of reluctance; the committee remains as far backstage as possible.

The pancayat itself is held on neutral ground. Both parties attend along with their supporters, the witnesses, and the committee members. The session is often the first public occasion since the beginning of the dispute to be attended by both disputants. Such joint participation is important in itself.

The pancayat audience presents a complex picture. Discourse in the pancayat chiefly takes the form of testimony under oath, and various deities comprise an important secondary audience insuring the truthfulness of eyewitnesses' accounts. The committee members also play an important role in asking questions and maintaining fairly close control over the issues which witnesses can pursue. The primary audience for the event, however, is not present. This audience includes coreligionists and the village as a whole, and it is from this audience that the pancayat derives a great deal of its effectiveness. Before the session is held, an individual villager's knowledge of the case comes through private and frequently factional lines. Such knowledge is unauthorized; it can be discussed with close and trusted friends but cannot be drawn upon in public talk. Through pancayat testimony an official and definitive account of events crucial to the development of a dispute is publicly constructed. It becomes the basis for later discussion and a new baseline against which the subsequent behavior of the disputants can be measured. It also lets everyone know what happened between the parties and answers those critical questions raised obliquely in parbakan (religious speeches).

The interrogative form of pancayat proceedings is another factor in their success. Members of the committee interview a series of witnesses, each of whom has sworn to give truthful testimony. Such oaths are taken quite seriously, although personal animosity can at times interfere, as was feared in the case discussed above. In marked contrast to American courtrooms, there is no adversarial questioning. Only the committee can ask questions, and they ask only those questions to which they already know the answers. Women, who rarely figure in other public events, are called as frequently as men, although the disputes are construed as being between men, even if through their female kin.
The question-answer format has two features of critical importance for the sessions' success. First, panchayat questions compel answers (Cf. Goody 1978). An unanswered question is an interactional vacuum, and, especially in these public contexts, response is necessary. It is likely, furthermore, that the style and degree of directness of an answer are patterned on the same qualities of the question (see Conley et al., 1978 for some suggestive findings in this area). The direct questions put by committee members draw forth terse but equally direct answers.

A second important feature of the question-answer format is suggested by the work of Keenan, Schieffelin and Platt (1978). In interpreting its extensive use by mothers in speaking with very young children, they suggest that the question-answer pair be considered a single propositional unit. By answering the question—whether verbally or nonverbally—the infant completes the idea begun by its mother. If this notion is applied to the panchayat, the committee member's question and the witness's answer comprise a single proposition. Thus, no one is solely responsible for any claims. Such evasion of personal accountability and the concomitant shared resolution of contention fit well in the acephalous and egalitarian context of Bhatgaon. The public narrative is constructed through the propositions collaboratively stated by questioner and witness. The committee is not presenting an account of its own but is contributing to its composition.

The orchestration of panchayats as events is a delicate job. The appropriate witnesses must be located and their accounts compared and checked. The planning involved, however, cannot be evident to the disputants or the neutrality of the committee might be challenged. Witnesses and audience alike must be carefully controlled. The perils posed by extraneous issues are clear in the case above. In contrast to the Kpelle moot, the panchayat by no means involves a full airing of grievances, since potential hostile responses are not denied but carefully avoided. Panchayat testimony is confined to a particular incident from which the dispute is considered to stem. The committee has a clear prospective interest in future relationships between the disputants, but a constrained, apparently unemotional and retrospective focus is the most effective way of insuring a successful outcome.

A final crucial feature of panchayats is the manner in which they end. After the last witness there is no summing up, no discussion, and no decision by the committee. The disputants are not embarrassed by any directly suggested solution, and the committee members do not overstep their roles. Testimony establishes a single and
noncontradictory account of crucial events. These publicly accomplished facts are seen to stand on their own. The disputants usually shake hands without much conversation, serving as both a public statement of the resumption of amicable relations between them and a signal that the session is over. The participants may linger, but they talk about other subjects. It is important to understand that no consensus is reached or even attempted, and no decision is made. A cooperative and binding account of a contested incident is accomplished, and interested villagers are left to draw their own conclusions and interpretations. Everyone's autonomy is maintained.

6. Dramatic Gestures

In the preceding section I explored the pancayat as a shared social occasion, an event in which communicative form, political flexibility, and concern for the values of individual autonomy and reputation are closely interwoven. In this section my focus remains on the pancayat as communicative event, but I am more concerned with questions raised by the striking contrasts between its features and those suggested by Gibbs for therapeutic talk. The pancayat is clearly a supportive context, one in which the reward of respectful treatment as a worthy social equal is critical. It is not, however, an event in which just any kind of talk is permitted, in terms of either content or style. Further, there is no denial of reciprocity in that speakers are still accountable for the conduct of their talk and not sheltered from anger or revenge should they go beyond acceptable limits. These two elements are critical for the cathartic quality of much therapeutic talk. In their absence, how does the pancayat work as a psychologically satisfying event for those involved?

Any valid measure of "psychological satisfaction" was beyond both my intent and my ability when I went to the field. It was clear, however, that many villagers valued the pancayat for reasons quite apart from its role in developing a public narrative. One reason was clearly its association with archaic Hindu institutions, a very important quality for aryasamajis in particular. Further, the pancayat was often discussed in aesthetic terms: how well staged was a particular pancayat, how well did it hang together, how well spoken were its participants? In short, the pancayat as a whole fits Bauman's definition of verbal performance (1977: 11), "involv(ing) on the part of the performer(s) an assumption of responsibility to an audience for the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content." A pancayat is more than its topic, for aesthetic pleasure, or pleasure expressed in aesthetic terms, is
central to it. In the preceding section I discussed in detail some of the nonreferential features of the panchayat, especially the basic organizational fact that it is co-performance, an event relying upon cooperation and the coordination of numerous people's efforts. In this section I will concentrate on some aspects of local aesthetic theory and its confluence with notions of personal experience and emotion. While these ideas are not elaborated or associated in very systematic ways with each other, they provide a missing link between social action and individual satisfaction in the panchayat.

There are two salient features in Bhatgaon villagers' discussion of emotion and expressiveness. First, the word in local Hindi for emotion or feelings—bhaw—is the same as that for gesture or display. Second, none of the feelings glossed by bhaw seem to be individually experienced ones, at least as people spoke of them. Bhaw, 'feelings,' are not viewed as internal states.

There is an odd juxtaposition of psychological and aesthetic theory here. Why should such apparently disparate ideas as gesture and feeling be joined together in the same word? While our tradition reveals somewhat analogous phenomena—for example, the initially metaphorical extension of the dramaturgic notion of catharsis to psychological theory—the Fiji Indian case is quite different. The Hindi word bhaw derives etymologically from the Sanskrit bhava. Bhava is linked with a second Sanskrit term, rasa, in the central theory of classical Hindu poetics, usually known as rasa-bhava theory. Rasa refers to moods, or, among more poetic translators, flavors, impersonal, universal sentiments. Bhava is usually translated as feelings, individualized, experienced, situationally specific. The role of drama, and of artistic endeavor more broadly, is to provide the opportunity for audiences to share in the experience of the nonindividualized, universal moods.

"In a play, what the actor acts is not the central mood of love or grief. He acts out the conditions that excite that mood and the responses that follow from it...The Indian theorists spell this out in great detail, prescribing for each of the rasas the correlative consequences, the kinds of dramatis personae, the gestures and scenery and kinds of diction, thus analyzing content into forms. The feelings of an individual are based on personal, accidental, incomunicable experience. Only when they are ordered, depersonalized and rendered communicable by prescriptions do they participate in rasa...Rasa is a depersonalized condition of the self, an imaginary system of relations" (Ramanujan 1974: 128).
In contrast to usual Western notions of the locus of emotion being in the individual and to those regionally Pacific ideas of "emotion words...as statements about the relationship between a person and an event" (Lutz 1982: 113), rasa-bhava theory seems to locate mood in events themselves. The nonindividualized mood—rasa—is more highly valued than the personal and inexpressible feeling associated with it. Performers are not "expressing" themselves in any way; they are rather helping construct a shared emotional experience for the audience.

Specific rasas are integrally linked with specific kinds of interpersonal arrangements, often redundantly encoded through costume, makeup, gesture, and setting as well. The example of Hindi films might be helpful here. They are full of what most Westerners see as stock characters and a predictable range of stock scenes, more like a series of tableaux than a drama in the Western sense. These elements, however, are seen by Indian audiences as conventionally engendering particular responses shared by the audience as a whole.

While the term rasa is not heard in Bhatgaon, it is clear that bhaw is related in more than etymological ways to the dramaturgic and psychological notion of bhava. Bhaw is used most frequently in compound constructions in religious discourse, as in prembhaw ('love' + bhaw), which carries the multidimensional meaning of a situation of interpersonal amity, the display of the mutually respectful and amiable demeanor which embodies this amity, and the experience of that state. Prembhaw is definitively associated with the weekly meetings of religious associations and linked through that event with such performance genres as parbacan and hymn singing. Moral didacticism—the willingness to teach and be taught—is a critical component of prembhaw. Clearly defined turns, a focus on moral or spiritual improvement—on the "message"—and the willingness to attend to what an individual is saying are among other features encoding prembhaw and enabling its experience.

The pancayat both instances and allows for the experience of prembhaw. Although organized differently from the religious meeting, the pancayat similarly demands cooperative co-performance. Strict turn alternation, mutually respectful demeanor, and its clearly marked status as an event are social and individual gestures of amity. Strong emotion need not, indeed must not, be expressed in such a context. Central to its success is the participation of all present in a depersonalized, and hence less dangerous experience of shared good will. Therefore such eruptions as those of participants not fully primed for their parts—as in Birendra's outburst over an alleged
oath three years earlier—can be especially threatening. The accounts developed in the panchayat, and the means by which those narratives are participants cooperatively constructed, allows participants to join in an "imaginative system of relations" (Ramanujan 1974: 128), one in which a shared sense of social stability and common purpose in a frequently tumultuous social world is possible.

My analysis here clearly relies on attention to very localized and particularistic materials. If Gibbs possibly erred in using Western theories to explicate the effectiveness of the Kpelle house palaver, does this paper go too far in the other direction, eschewing any cross-cultural applicability for the sake of providing a culturally rooted account? I would suggest that ethnographically rooted analyses can indeed have broader heuristic and substantive implications.

First, studies make it increasingly clear that the "political" and the "psychological" do not comprise easily definable, let alone clearly separate domains. Rather, sociopolitical features of life in particular communities interpenetrate cultural theories of personhood and experience. The Fiji Indian situation is a striking example of how closely entwined the two strands can be and of how rapidly they can change. Bhatgaon villagers are engaged in an ongoing process of interpreting and redefining cultural notions and applying them to new problems and situations. Their theories are "partial" because they are emergent, responding to a social world already dramatically transformed and still changing.

Second, Fiji Indian theories concerning conflict and its resolution proceed from somewhat different premises than those shared by many Western analysts. Scholarly treatments often, in effect, "psychologize" conflict, making social process—at least in its more disruptive aspects—sometimes seem to represent individual processes writ large. In such treatments, frustrations unexpressed lead to aggression, and individual aggressiveness leads to broader conflict. Gibbs' arguments, and those of many other legal anthropologists as well, fall firmly within this tradition of psychodynamic analysis. Gibbs argues that the individual catharsis and release afforded by the moot help reduce the likelihood of future conflict, and that personal therapy serves social ends as well.

In Bhatgaon, on the other hand, what we might consider psychological is made social. The internal self so critical to Gibbs' model is peripheral to the panchayat. Instead, "persons" are political actors, embodied in large part in their reputations, what others think
and say of them. As political solution the *pancayat* allows the public restoration of good names. The possibilities of shared sentiment critical to satisfaction with the event, however, are socially based and can only be socially experienced.

In his recent theoretical outline of pragmatics Verschueren includes two factors particularly relevant to this study, the "psychologies" of speaker and hearer (1987: 66, 68). Their individual intentions, predispositions, and idiosyncracies are often assumed to be critical determinants of linguistic form. This paper suggests that "psychological" concerns are indeed important in understanding the effectiveness of *pancayat* discourse. However, I was not guided by the imputed qualities and motives of particular individuals; rather, local ethnopsychological theories - shared notions of emotion, expressiveness and experience - shaped my interpretations. It is in terms of such notions that audiences ratify the message of the *pancayat* and find it effective and satisfying.
I. During my thirteen months of fieldwork in 1971-72 I attended three pancayat and heard of only four others taking place during that time. An exhaustive survey of pancayat was impossible, but I am certain that I learned about almost all the more or less successful ones after they had taken place. Subsequent fieldwork in 1975, 1980 and 1984 indicates that pancayat have become even less common events. I was welcome at the three pancayat I attended but was asked not to bring the tape recorder in case something went wrong; only successful pancayat were to go on the record.

2. With Indian independence in 1947 village pancayat were reorganized or, in some cases, created from scratch by the national government for local-level development or as alternatives to formal courts. The most thorough and revealing study of a contemporary traditional pancayat in India has been Robert Hayden's work with the Nandiwallas of Maharashtra (1981). In a recent explicit comparison with the Fiji Indian pancayat, Hayden (1987) argues that the Indian pancayat is primarily concerned with questions of evaluation and response, in contrast to the "fact finding" central to the Fiji Indian event. The style and organization of the two kinds of pancayat as communicative events are strikingly different, the Nandiwalla version being exceptionally raucous and full of conversational overlap. These differences in part reflect the considerably more authoritative position of the Nandiwalla pancayat; its role is taken for granted, while the occurrence, let alone the effectiveness of its Fiji Indian counterpart, relies on delicate negotiation.
3. Since Gibbs' article was published in 1963 a wide range of therapies not premised upon the idea of catharsis have become increasingly salient in the United States. This paper is concerned solely with contrasts between Fiji Indian practice and that model of therapy Gibbs presents.

4. The minimal role of the "self" in Fiji Indian ethnopsychology has a counterpart in the more general Hindu notion of "open" personhood (Marriott n.d.). The highly "concrete-relational," contextually specific person descriptions found by Shweder and Bourne (1984: 172) in Orissa contrast strongly with the more abstract descriptions given by Americans and illustrates an apparent Oriya reluctance to think of the "self" as a consistent, rigidly bounded unit. See also Surya (1969) for a discussion of related difficulties he had in applying Western notions of "ego" in psychotherapeutic work with north Indians.

5. There is a more direct link between Indian rural culture in Fiji and the literate Hindu great tradition than there might be for most mainland Indian villages as Hindu missionaries, both orthodox and reform, have been very active in Fiji, drawing upon and using a wide variety of textual materials which have subsequently been adopted by villagers. The reform (Arya Samaj) missionaries particularly took classical Hindu notions such as bhava as rhetorical focuses for their work.

6. One of the clearest discussions of the "psychologization" of conflict in Western scholarship is in Koch's (1974: 5-7) concise essay on anthropological theories of warfare.
REFERENCES


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