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From Ancestor Rituals to Tourist Entertainment:
Changing Music of the Sora People in Eastern India
Ideas for a Revisitation Project

ROLF KILLIUS, London
1 November 2012

(With 36 illustrations on plates LXXVII–LXXXIV)

“Sora culture is largely preoccupied with dead but it is not morbid. My subjective impression is of happy people [...] the Sora employ extremely effective means for facing personal unhappiness by bringing it into the open, acknowledging its destructive power and eventually drawing its sting.”¹

It has to be added, the reason that the Sora² people from eastern India are happy has definitely something to do with the fact that every important activity is accompanied by music making, singing and dancing. The Sora are an Indian indigenous community who mainly live in small hamlets on the hilly slopes and in the valleys of the *Eastern Ghats* in the Indian states *Odisha* and *Andhra Pradesh* (see illustrations 27–30 on plate LXXXIII).

In this article I provide an overview about the various forms of music making, compare *traditional* and *modern* music styles, and consider the fast and fundamental socio-economic changes forced upon the Sora people. Following MERRIAM we study the musics of the Sora in a changing culture.³ Special attention is given to the Sora worldview, which is closely related to their musical expressions. Music, dance and ritualistic context are at the centre of Sora life and identity.

This is a collection of ideas to be used as a base for a revisitation project with the focus on traditional music and dance considered in its socio-religious context.

The terms *traditional* and *modern* are only used as an analytical tool to show the changes in the musical forms of the Sora. *Traditional* stands for various styles closely related to the ancestor ritual; *modern* forms have been created more recently and in most cases not related to the Sora ritual practices. Anyhow, there has never been such a thing as a *pure* Sora style; Sora music has always been influenced by neighbouring indigenous

¹ VITEBSKY 1982, p. 25f.

² Also called Soara, Sawara, Savara, Saura or Saora.

³ See MERRIAM 1964.

and Hindu communities and in a process of permanent change. Rather than showing differences between *traditional* and *modern* styles I want to outline, how traditional styles are changing caused by alternations within the socio-economic base. Still, present changes are so radical that they seem to destroy the very fundamentals of the Sora music system.

In the 1920s the German physical anthropologist *Egon von Eickstedt* researched for two months within the Sora habitats. His extensive collection contains ethnological objects, his diaries and over 500 black-and-white photographs, which are preserved at the *GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde* in Leipzig and Dresden in Germany. Though *Eickstedt* followed and partly developed the *Rassentheorie*—theory of races (for a critical analysis see: HOSSFELD 2005, KAUPEN-HAAS und SALLER 1999, and LÜDDECKE 2000) the unpublished photographs, depicting people, musical instrument playing, dance, and natural environment, provide an invaluable pool for a new research project.

The author of this article has visited the Sora habitats in *Odisha* and *Andhra Pradesh* in 1997, 2002, 2003, 2006 and 2008. This research was part of the *Traditional Music in India* (TMI) project jointly set up by the *British Library Sound Archive* and ROLF KILLIUS. The project intended to record (audio and video), document and research folk, devotional and ritual musics of India. Part of the project became the collection and documentation of musical instruments for the *Horniman Museum* in London.⁴ The tight timeframe of this project did not allow a detailed analysis of the music styles and social changes.

As there has never been a comprehensive account of the Sora musical culture a re-visitation project based on the *Eickstedt* collection could provide new insights on the music, dance and socio-religious practices of the Soras. In this article I juxtapose selected photographs (black & white) taken by *Egon von Eickstedt* to my images (colour) from the years 2002–2008, that is around 80 years later. Despite major socio-economic changes for the Sora and other Indian communities it is interesting to observe the striking resemblance of their musical culture as depicted in these photographs (*see illustrations 31, 32 on plate LXXXIV*).

In my investigation method I loosely follow the framework developed by STEVEN FELD⁵ created to compare music of different cultures in their social context (structured in categories such as environment, competence, performance, form, value and equality). He explains that the framework is “...intended as an approach to integrating the microscopic, ethnographically detailed analyses of musical lives, with an arena of comparable, general, relevant issues that will help us compare socio-musical realities and practices.”⁶ As FELD’s system is based on his fieldwork in relatively isolated and egalitarian societies

⁴ In 2008 the London *Horniman Museum* opened a temporary exhibition mainly dedicated to rural musical traditions rarely seen outside India. The exhibition, *Utsavam—Music from India* (*Utsavam* means celebration or festival in Sanskrit) showed more than 300 musical instruments and around 40 short films; most of the material was collected in extensive fieldwork trips over the past five years. The exhibition was jointly curated by Margaret Birley, the museum’s Keeper of Musical Instruments and Rolf Killius.

⁵ FELD 1984.

⁶ FELD 1984, p. 388.

it seems justified to use this framework. Anyhow, it is not my intention to judge whether this system is useful to compare completely different societies. For my purpose it seems justified to use his concept as it provides a suitable framework to compare changing styles within the same culture over time. Each chapter has about the same structure, that is 1) information related to the traditional social and musical system, 2) information related to the present, fast-changing social and musical system, and 3) a comparison of both. Before comparing *traditional* and *modern* styles I shall provide a brief anthropological account with special consideration to the religious system of the Sora. I term their ideas about death, life, animated and non-animated nature and their worldview as “Sora religion” or “Sora worldview”. The details outlining the Sora worldview are mainly taken from VITEBSKY⁷ and my personal observations during my fieldwork.

The Sora People in Western India

The Sora, an Indian Adivasi community numbering around 452,000,⁸ are one of the oldest communities known in India and their main habitats are situated in the hilly border area of the East Indian states *Odisha* and *Andhra Pradesh*. The term Adivasi is commonly used for indigenous people in central and eastern India. Though the terms “tribal” and “tribe” can be derogatory they are used by the non-Adivasi population, by some groups of Adivasi themselves, and denote an important administrative and constitutional term in India (see *illustrations 23–26 on plate LXXXII*).

The language of the Sora belongs to the *Munda* branch of the *Austro-Asiatic* language group. The small Sora speaking area is surrounded by *Oriya* speakers (a north Indian language) in the north and by *Telugu* speakers (a south Indian language) in the south.

Traditionally the Sora live on the hill slopes, just below the remaining forests and in the valleys relatively isolated from the surrounding communities. Economically they depend on the terraced paddy and lentil cultivation and, to a very small degree, on the *slash-and-burn* agricultural system. They gather minor products from the forests and rear domestic animals like chickens and goats, which they sell at the local markets. The Sora live in small hamlets with adjoining houses. An exogamous kin group (*birinda*), defined by an ancient male ancestor, lives in one part of the village. The marriage system is *virilocal* (son stays; wife comes) and *polygyny* is possible. In comparison to the neighbouring communities the Sora society is relatively equalitarian in respect to gender and class (see *illustrations 35, 36 on plate LXXXIV*).

Sora Religious Concept

Christianity, especially in the form of *Baptism* (initially brought in by North American missionaries) made a big impact on Sora villages in *Odisha*. As most of the Soras have

⁷ VITEBSKY PhD thesis 1982.

⁸ VITEBSKY 1993, p. 24.

become Christians a minority regard their traditional belief system as being part of Hinduism. Although the liberal Hinduism incorporates many aspects of the Sora traditional belief system, its theory and practices and social customs differ fundamentally from the Sora religion.

As the Sora belief system is very refined and developed it seems justified to use the terms “Sora religion” or “Sora belief system”. I shall describe the main features of it following PIERS VITEBSKY’s analysis and include some of my own observations.⁹ The key term is the *sonum*. The person who dies becomes a *sonum*; which could be described as an ancestor who turned into a “spirit” or a god-like creature. The *sonum* has two aspects, positive and negative; while the former protects and supports the living, the latter causes illness and death. In order to find out about the cause of an ancestor’s death or to cure illness the living contact the *sonum* by using a medium, the Sora shaman.

A medium needs to reach a transcendental state (trance or *tedung*) to contact and communicate with the *sonum*. Before the medium falls in trance certain *mantras* have to be recited. The medium is a spiritual expert “...who goes into trance in order to act as a medium for the dead...”¹⁰ The most important spiritual experts are *kuran*; women are called *idai-boi* while men are *idai-mar*. Apart from their ordinary life in the villages these media have families in the underworld (*kinorai*, the abode of the ancestors); this supports their role and authority.

During the ritual the relatives of a deceased person sit in close proximity to the medium to question the *sonum* through the medium and listen to the respective advises or answers. The main ritual types are the post-mortem ancestor rituals (*sanatung*) and the healing session (*tedung*). As the latter is an individual affair mainly between the healer and the patient the former is an elaborated celebration attended by the whole village.

“All trances are thus divinations leading to a verdict: the *tedung* kurans allow people to seek the cause of a patient’s illness or, where a cure (*pirpir*) requires a trance, the knowledge that a sacrifice has been successful, while the *sanatung* kuran allows a quest for knowledge about the cause of a ‘patient’s’ death.”¹¹

All ancestor rituals are closely related to life-cycle and annual cycle events.¹² For instance the *karja* festival is both an annual harvest festival and addresses those who have died in the previous three years. An important feature of all ancestor rituals is the sacrifice of buffalos, goats or chickens. The animal is a “substitute’ (*spanadu*) for a person and in particular that its soul is a substitute for the person’s soul.”¹³ The sacrifice separates the living from the dead, it “serves both to acknowledge this separation and to reinforce it.”¹⁴

⁹ VITEBSKY 1982.

¹⁰ VITEBSKY 1982, p. 28.

¹¹ VITEBSKY 1982, p. 25.

¹² “Just as stages in the Sora life-cycle, such as those of puberty and marriage, are not marked in a decisive way, so the process of death and birth require several years for completion and their course is subject to many reversals.” (VITEBSKY 1982, p. 95.)

¹³ VITEBSKY 1982, p. 132.

¹⁴ VITEBSKY 1982, p. 132.

For all parts of a festival or smaller ritualistic events musical forms are prescribed. In the villages where we recorded music the people emphasised that the dance group *kading-pane* is indispensable for all festivals and that certain *mantras* must be recited prior to any trance ceremony. We could sum up the function of the big ritualistic festivals, expressing the dichotomy of annual-cycle event and ancestor ritual, as a collective bereavement process for the deceased AND a gay village event to celebrate a successful harvest or sowing activity (see illustrations 17, 18 on plate LXXXI).

To compare *traditional* and *modern* styles of music making I use FELD's "broad areas of inquiry into music as a total social fact,"¹⁵ which are 1) changing environment, 2) competence and performance, 3) musical forms, and 4) changing values.

Changing Environment

Over the last 20 years the socio-economic structures in India have undergone a rapid change. Although the changes affected the life of all communities the impact on indigenous communities are far more concerning. The low social and economic position of the Adivasi within the traditional social system in India makes them especially vulnerable and these rapid changes are a threat to their traditional way of life. The "superfast highway of modernisation" in India has so far produced little benefit to the majority of rural and Adivasi people. The consequences of modernisation in the cultural field have put many of the traditional music styles and dances on the "endangered genres" list. For instance my own observations in 1997 and 2002 at a tribal market in *Andhra Pradesh* show the brisk cultural changes. Within only five years the buying and selling Sora completely replaced their traditional way of clothing with the styles worn by the non-tribal villagers in the area (see illustrations 19, 20 on plate LXXXXI).¹⁶

Many Sora still live on the slopes of the hills, gather minor forest products, and occasionally hunt a small animal. Their diminishing communal land is encroached by non-tribal land-owners and government agencies¹⁷, who want to use forests and paddy fields for economic exploitation. Extensive deforestation is another problem for the tribal and non-tribal population. In order to buy cooking oil, spices or kerosene the Sora sell their agricultural products on the local markets, where they are rigorously exploited by local businessmen (see illustrations 33, 34 on plate LXXIV).

One result of these changes is that Sora people are forced to work for the big land-owners or in minor industries in the next towns for the lowest salaries. Many Adivasi are unemployed, formally uneducated, extremely poor and are completely dependent on their tiny piece of land and few domestic animals. The lack of land, no access to the communal forests and changing employment patterns affect the way they construct

¹⁵ FELD 1984, p. 388.

¹⁶ The author visited the tribal market in Sitambeta (northern *Andhra Pradesh*) in 1997 and 2002.

¹⁷ Government agencies in Odisha and Andhra deal with specific problems of the tribal communities.

houses, dress code and wear jewellery, the family life, the use of the Sora language and other traditional customs.

These major socio-economic changes have a direct impact on the Sora religious practices, some are: the new concrete houses¹⁸ provide no space for ritualistic corners; traditional sacred places in the forests and outside the villages are desecrated by non-Sora; with deforestation the abodes of the ancestors disappear; buffalo and goat sacrifices have become unaffordable. VITEBSKY (1998) also argues that through deforestation the base of the Sora belief system, the ancestor worship vanishes as well.

Although government agencies, NGO's (non-governmental organisations), government schools, and Christian missions try to improve the social and economic conditions of the Sora, they generally disapprove or are even hostile towards their traditional belief system.

The (dominant) Hindu communities in *Andhra Pradesh* and *Odisha* regard Sora generally as being at the lower end of the Hindus caste hierarchy. For some, especially young people, a conversion to Christianity, readily offered by *Baptist* missions, is an attractive escape route. Hindu and Christian communities alike criticize the Soras for their traditional customs such as smoking home-grown tobacco, drinking of palmwine or *mahua* brandy, social contact, the way of dressing, or the diet regime.

Hinduism has not done such damage to the culture of the Sora as some of the more fundamentalist Christian doctrines. Like in many other parts of India Hinduism is rather a generic term for various ancient religious forms and the Sora have been living for centuries alongside and influenced by Hindu communities. Since the independence of India (1947) there have been some attempts to streamline, reform, or to "clean up" Hinduism from its 'low caste' influences. Some Hindu reform groups¹⁹ presently active in the Sora area try to change Sora customs (for instance they introduced the worship on shrines for the higher Hindu gods *Vishnu* or *Shiva*).

The introduction of new forms of worship goes along with new forms of music, like singing of *bhajans*, the Hindu devotional songs. Traditional styles have changed or been replaced by new styles. As the musical expressions of the Soras are directly linked to their traditional belief system it is obvious that the socio-economic changes influence the way Sora music is performed and maintained. The most radical changes can be observed in the area where the *Baptist* Missions hold sway. Their policy is to replace the collective memory and practice of the Sora belief system with dogmatic Protestantism and "modern" (Western) values. In many villages of the Sora main habitats a whole generation has already grown up without any knowledge of its own ancient culture. Some results are: many songs and mantras to be sung at various rituals have completely disappeared; dance, once the main attraction of the people, is not at all or only performed in a subdued way; festivals with elaborate sacrifices, rituals and related musical activities have either changed or disappeared completely.

¹⁸ These houses, sometimes provided by government agencies, are unpractical (extremely cold in winter and warm in summer) and unhealthy (asbestos roof, smoke cannot escape).

¹⁹ Such as the *Vigyana Parchar Ashram*, whose founder, SP Mangei, introduced a Sora script.

An important change within the Sora habitats is the appearance of missionaries from fundamentalist Hindu organisations. They, in adopting practises of the early Christian missionaries, deny the existence of traditional Adivasi culture and the believe system, attack Christianity and Islam, and try to convert tribal people to their intolerant form of Hinduism.²⁰

Apart from the two main religions the tribal societies have come in contact with the economic powerful and popular *Hindi* and *Telugu* film music distributed on cassettes and shown on television. Some results are: The Sora music has been slowly replaced by film songs, songs are modified in a way that the melodic lines are simplified (i. e. without the Sora “echo style”), or the singing voice imitates the high-pitched sound typical for the Indian film music playback singers.

Competence in Music Making and Performance

Traditional music making within the Sora community can be done by anybody, who takes interest. In the remote villages the researchers were never introduced to an *expert musician*. Music making is regarded as a collective property, where everyone is allowed to play, sing and dance. Music and dance is never *performed*, people play music, dance and sing for their own pleasure. Though nearly all festivals are dedicated to the ancestors, it is always a merry affair actively involving all villagers, children and adults. Apart from the simple Sora dress no special party or performance costumes are required. However the playing of musical instruments is the domain of men and *mantras* have to be recited by the male or female ritual expert (see *illustrations 21, 22 on plate LXXXI*).

Visiting a village with an existing folk group was a different story altogether: Often the village headman received and introduced the recordist to the *bandleader*. At a fixed time a performance was arranged *for the guests*. All musicians were regarded as *experts* on a specific instrument or as singers. Often the small dance group constituted of very young and *beautiful* girls and the men were playing a multitude of tribal and non-tribal instruments. The group started playing when cued by the bandleader or the village headman. Other villagers, especially elderly men and women, were not allowed to join in the dancing and music making. Band members mentioned proudly how they used to perform at folk music evenings in one of the state capitals, where they were dressed in costumes specially designed by non-Sora. *Sora folk bands* have started performing short tourist animation programmes in hotels of the cities in proxy to the Sora habitats.

The Musical Forms

The traditional forms described here are only the result of listening to the author’s own recordings; whether the musicians would distinguish their styles in the same way has to be investigated further. The Sora themselves only distinguish between song (*king*

²⁰ See, for instance <http://dir.groups.yahoo.com/group/saldwr/message/315>.

king), dance (*tong sing*) and music (*kading pane*). *Kading* is the frame drum and *pane* the double-reed oboe; both instruments are essential to accompany any dance party.

As in most Indian music styles, the voice is the preferred melodic “instrument”, often accompanied by cymbals and drums. Unlike the Indian *Hindustani* and *Karnatic* music systems, where strict *raga* rules apply, in these genres the melodic structure should express the meaning of the lyrics or support specific religious or community functions. Generally the voices are rich in overtones, especially as the musicians usually do not perform over an amplification system. Vocal music is mainly sung unaccompanied and the majority of performers are women. The musical side of the performance is extremely interesting: While the lead-singer starts the chorus the second singer follows only seconds later, what produces an exciting *echo-effect*.²¹ To produce the required sound at least two performers are necessary. A similar style is used in the south Indian *Karnatic music*, where the violin player follows the voice. This singing style seems unique to the Sora and the recordist observed that the younger singers have started to sing in unison. Especially the older women sing in a guttural raspy voice and use slight melismatic effects.

Sometimes singers are accompanied by the fiddle *gogoray*²², the flute *tiriduy* or the stick-zither *jenjurungrai*. The only instrument which is performed unaccompanied is the flute though its repertoire is also derived from the vocal styles. This end-blown bamboo flute with internal duct has a playing hole and four fingerholes. Cellophane above the mouth of the flute helps to direct air to the lip. The *gogoray* spike fiddle is played with a bow (*gorokkod*) and consists of two wire strings (one used as a drone), two pegs, a bridge, and a tin or coconut shell resonator. The *jenjurungrai* is a two-stringed stick zither with five frets. The lower of the two equally tuned strings is used to play the melody, the upper is the drone. The zither is plucked by the right index finger, while the small finger, carrying a brass ring with little bells, continuously strikes towards the instrument body to keep the beat. The notes of the songs are replicated on the instrument by plucking and stopping the string, using mostly three of the five frets (*see illustrations 1–6 on plates LXXVII–LXXVIII*).

All observed ancestor rituals require certain lengthy *mantras* to be performed before the medium falls in trance; for every part of the ritual a particular *mantra* is prescribed. It is because of the religious/spiritual context that the *mantras* are not recited by everyone, but by the ritual experts, the *kuran*. The recorded *mantra* recitations have a striking similarity to the prevailing *sāmaveda* chanting styles in India.²³

At the heart of Sora traditional culture is the dance music ensemble *kading-pane*, which is essential for any of the ancestor ritualistic celebration or festival. Although the repertoire is certainly derived from vocal music the dance music naturally emphasises more on the rhythm and the rhythm instruments. The band can therefore be appended with additional drums and idiophones.

²¹ See the author’s CD *Voices for Humans, Ancestors and Gods—A musical Journey through India’s interior*.

²² All the instruments mentioned here were exhibited at the *Utsavam—Music from India* exhibition at the *Horniman Museum*, London in 2008.

²³ For *Sāmaveda* see for instance HOWARD 1977.

The *kading-pane* ensemble requires at least a pair of *pane* (oboe) players, the mono-facial frame drum *kading* and the big vessel drum *tudum*. Both drums are played with two drum sticks. While the *kading* sticks (*dep-ding-dang*) are made of wood the *tudum* sticks (*teruddum*) consist of rubber. Furthermore the instruments *nening*, *dragestan* and *suura koma* can be added. The *nening* is a resting bell played with a hammer. The small kettledrum *dagedu* is beaten using a pair of sticks (*dagododadi*). The wooden scraper *dragestan* is an idiophone made of a clapper bell for a goat and played with a stick. An important musical instrument within the extended *kading-pane* group is the C-shaped trumpet *suura koma*, a lip-vibrated aerophone with a conical bore. The Sora believe that this instrument is necessary to call the ancestors to dance and celebrate with the living. Therefore the *kading-pane* band is only employed for the ancestor ritual festivals, but not for the wedding parties.²⁴ During the TMI research project villagers once offered the author to buy the last two remaining *suura koma* in the village.²⁵ Their point was that they do not need these instruments any more, as they have become Christians (*Baptists*) (see illustrations 7–16 on plates LXXVIII–LXXX).

In dance the dancers form a row of two or three and interlock their arms. Apart from basic dance steps and dance formations the dancers improvise, depending on their talents, the available space and mood. Especially the old women dance on their own and occasionally fall into trance. Some of these dancers expressed their view that by dancing on their own they dance with the ancestors. Many dancers wear the brass anklets *dagara* or *andorakka* and brass bell chains fixed to their upper bodies to create an amazing jingling sound. Even dance music is based on vocal music, so when music is played to accompany dancers, some dancers sing the beginning of a song in order to cue the musicians, which piece should be played next. Only then the oboe players start playing the requested dance tune. Therefore it is assumed that all instrumental music of the Sora are based on the lyrics and melody of the vocal styles.

In Sora villages situated in valleys the author recorded male village minstrels, who accompanied themselves on the *gogoray* fiddle and the *jenjurungrai* zither. As the musical style and performance context are very different, it cannot be included in any form described above. The performance context and style is closer to the one of the non-Adivasi itinerant minstrels of *Andhra Pradesh* and *Odisha*, although the singers tell stories of an old Sora kingdom. The long established relationship between Sora and non-Sora is reflected in this *Sora-minstrel-style*.

All traditional music genres are more or less related to the Sora religious rituals as performed individually or at festivals. As the old religious practices have been successively abandoned it becomes more difficult to find the related musical forms. Modern folk bands try to de-spiritualise the music, for instance lyrics are restricted to the themes of the annual and life-cycle events, such as marriages or harvests. This also distinguishes the repertoire of the traditional groups from the modern folk bands. In addition there are other differences: folk bands play for an audience on a stage, dance is restricted to

²⁴ Information gathered in various villages at the TMI project in 2002.

²⁵ Whether my refusal to buy these instruments helped the village to preserve their traditional culture cannot be proved (RK).

few (mostly) young dancers, to increase the volume more instruments (Sora and non-Sora) are used, the singing style is less raspy and melismatic, some singers imitate the style used in Indian film music, and the Sora typical *echo-style* as described above is abandoned.

The Sora Christians have also developed their own musical system. It consists of very few traditional melodies, where all ancestor related lyrics are replaced by Christian texts. The songs, performed in a restrained way are remote of the joyful mood once experienced with communal dancing, music making and drinking.

Hindu *bhajans* are sung in addition to the traditional Sora songs. In both cases Sora instruments tend to be replaced by the bulging barrel drums common in *Odisha* and *Andhra Pradesh* such as *mrdanga* and the tiny *tala* brass cymbals. It is interesting, that while for the *bhajans* the north Indian languages *Hindi* or *Oriya* is preferred, the Christian songs are sung in Sora language.

Changing Value System

To what degree the values have changed shows a brief look at the school system in the tribal areas, where Sora children are (nearly) exclusively taught by non-Sora teachers. Government servants, school teachers, and even NGO activists describe the Sora culture and their traditional way of life as “primitive”, “simple”, “backward”, or “uncivilized”. The intricate religious system and its practises are generally termed as “superstitious”, and in order to change that the “simple people have to be uplifted and educated”.²⁶

By describing the musical forms I have shown how they are inextricably linked to the Sora rituals and therefore the process of music making is essential in everyday-life events and festivals. None of the ancestor festivals could be celebrated without reciting the *mantras*, a *kading-pane* dance party and the singing of ancestor songs. The inclusive and collective way of singing, instrument playing and dancing reflects the relative equalitarian social system of the Soras.

The value system of the music represented by the *Sora folk bands* is quite different: The criteria of appreciation is not whether they are able to support ritualistic activities or if people like it. Whether the music is valued “high” or “low” is exclusively rated by outsiders (especially the event organiser). Many groups are only constituted to perform for a radio session or at a cultural event in the next town. There is no link to the ancestor ritual (although the musicians might also play for rituals). Usually the village headman or a senior male musician is the leader of the band. The only female members in the band are young girls necessary for the dance part. The hierarchy and the gender relationship mirror the social set-up of the mainstream Indian society.

Therefore music making in a *traditional* in comparison to a *modern* environment is very different: As in a *traditional* environment music is essential for the people’s well-

²⁶ Personal discussion with teachers and government servants in Sitambeta, *Andhra Pradesh* during the TMI project.

being and practised by everyone, in a *modern* environment its practise is not essential; it is carried out by *cultural experts* (preferable male) and performed for an audience.

Is there a Future for Sora Music?

Having described the socio-economic and religious changes and their reflections in the Sora musical system the main questions remain: How can their music survive or is there any future at all?

While *Hindustani* and to a lesser degree *Karnatik* music—are appreciated in many musical circles in India, and *Bollywood* film music has an even wider global audience, the music of the majority of rural India, including the Adivasi communities remains relatively unknown. Even in the big Indian cities only few people know about the abundance of music styles in rural India, and the numerous musician communities. One must consider that till today the majority of Indian people live in villages. Therefore I consider the rural forms of music (including the tribal music!) as a major, not a minor stream, in Indian music. As described by the author (KILLIUS 2003 and 2006) there has been some confusion about how to categorise the many Indian music systems. The widely used great-little traditions dichotomy (great for “classical” and little for local or “folk” systems) or—their Indian variation—*margi-desi sangit*²⁷—seems unsuitable to be forced upon Indian musics.²⁸ Many criteria for the “great traditions”, like professional status and training of the musicians, could be applied to many rural or tribal musical genres. Rural musics—like Indian musics in general—consist of complex and interrelated traditions, established on a secular-sacred, and canonised-less canonised continuum, performed by professional, semi-professional and/or amateur musicians.²⁹

In India the general perception about tribal and rural people is based on the social fabric of the former British colonial system, merged with the Indian caste system, and perpetuated into the present-day rigid class system. The judgement is simple: “primitive or simple people cannot produce sophisticated music.”

Quite often rural and Adivasi musics are closely linked to their religious systems, which is either a complex rural version of Hinduism or a developed system of ancestor religion and ritual practices. Competing fundamentalist Christians and Hindus have outreached to tribal areas and by targeting indigenous religions they destroy a striving musical instrument, singing and dance culture.

Researchers, enthusiasts, and music promoters should therefore highlight the varied rural and Adivasi music styles still prevalent all over India. Not so much in a nostalgic or “authentic culture” sense, but emphasise on the aesthetic beauty of these musics and dances. Also, these oral traditions should be considered as intangible historical, socio-re-

²⁷ See for instance BABIRACKI 1991.

²⁸ GROESBECK (1999, pp 87–89) argues in a similar way.

²⁹ See KILLIUS, 2006, p. 6.

ligious, and musicological document belonging to the world's cultural heritage as books and manuscripts kept in libraries.³⁰

By describing the changes of the socio-economic situation and how these changes affect the Sora religion one could conclude that within the near future the traditional way of life will vanish altogether. As music is the key to the ritual religious practices and the way how this traditional belief system is threatened by Christianity and modern Hindu reform movements one could assume that the music styles of the Sora will disappear with the religious practices. As described above there have been radical changes already, but music and dance are still practiced. Although music making depends on socio-economic conditions, it does not copy them, but expresses aesthetic feelings, dreams and hopes of the people. Musical change is "constant in human experience... But culture is also stable...."³¹

There is hope in the preservation of traditional music, but as in all cultures music and dance evolve and change perpetually. Whenever the culture changes there is loss and gain. Instrumental and dance music is likely to thrive and adapt new instruments and tunes, whereas the ancient *mantras* could be lost with the diminishing numbers of ritual experts and decreasing demand for ancestor festivals. The use of new instruments and new-formed folk groups could even enrich and develop the Sora musical culture.

An interesting way to preserve and develop ancient musical styles is to support Sora musicians to perform on art stages in the Indian villages and towns rather than degrading them as animators in tourist hotels or entertainers for visiting government officials. An example for preservation and innovation could be the work with musicians and dancers of the Muslim *Siddi Goma* community in *Gujarat*, western India.³²

Systematic research of the Sora religion and ritual music must be carried out urgently for preservation and deeper understanding of the meaning of the ritual. Such research might have a positive impact on the opinion leaders of the Sora and encourage schools and communities to teach the Sora belief system actively, and to train the younger generation to sing, play and make instruments. Long-term research in different Sora areas should be carried out, to analyse the numerous ritual practices and map them to the musical expressions, and to record, translate and explain the lengthy *mantras* as still performed by the few remaining ritual experts.

Sora Revisitation Project with the Focus on Music and Dance

Based on some ideas assembled in this article and the comparison between *Eickstedt's* and newer photographs I suggest to organise a Sora revisitation project under the guidance of the *GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde* in Leipzig, Germany. Nearly 50 years after

³⁰ See KILLIUS 2008, p. 170.

³¹ MERRIAM 1964, p. 303.

³² See, for instance <https://sites.google.com/site/musicoftheindianocean/reading-units/sidis-and-their-music-african-culture-in-india/summary-review-of-from-sufi-shrines-to-the-world-stage> or http://www.esplanade.com/whats_on/programme_info/the_wandering_fakirs/sidi_interview.pdf

Eickstedt's death one should do research on the objects, diaries and especially the photographs as kept in Leipzig and Dresden. *Egon von Eickstedt* and the *GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde* did not do any ethnological research after his return. This might have been due to his primary interest in physical anthropology and the changing political environment in Germany towards the end of the 1920s. The new project should include a historical-critical approach to *Eickstedt's* ideas about races and should be designed in a participatory way, that is Adivasi organisations in *Odisha* and *Andhra Pradesh* should be consulted prior to the research and included into the project.

It seems justified to focus the research on music and dance as these cultural forms are still alive and with the remaining ancestor worship practises this could shed light on the Sora cultural life and the changes.

“Let the ancestral spirits of North Malabar come out of their obscure village shrines and perform on the world stage. May the tribes of the ancient Velan (folk dancers) and Panan (folk musician) prosper, multiply and increase.”³³

The *Velan* and *Panan*, traditional communities from *North Malabar* in South India, practice an ancestor religion similar to the one of the Sora. In a foreword to a study about the *teyyam*³⁴ ritual the former head of the history department at *Kozhikode University* in *Kerala*, Dr KKN Kurup, expressed his wish that these ancient religious expressions could be preserved and developed. This book was published in 1973, and today, nearly 40 years later, *teyyam* is still performed as a ritual and a cultural art form. In respect to the Sora Adivasi community this gives us hope that some ancestor ceremonies and forms of traditional music continue to exist.

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³³ See NARAYANAN 1973.

³⁴ Ancestor ritual, dance and music of northern Malabar in Kerala, India.

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Sora Photograph Gallery—A Comparison

Black & White Photographs by EGON VON EICKSTEDT (1920s)

Colour Photographs by ROLF KILLIUS (2001–2008)



ill. 1: Gogoray fiddle player



ill. 2: The blind gogoray fiddle player Sunna Soara



ill. 3: Dagedu (small vessel drum) and tiriduy



ill. 4: Tiriduy players



ill. 5: Jenjurungrai stick zither player



ill. 6: The Jenjurungrai player Mr India



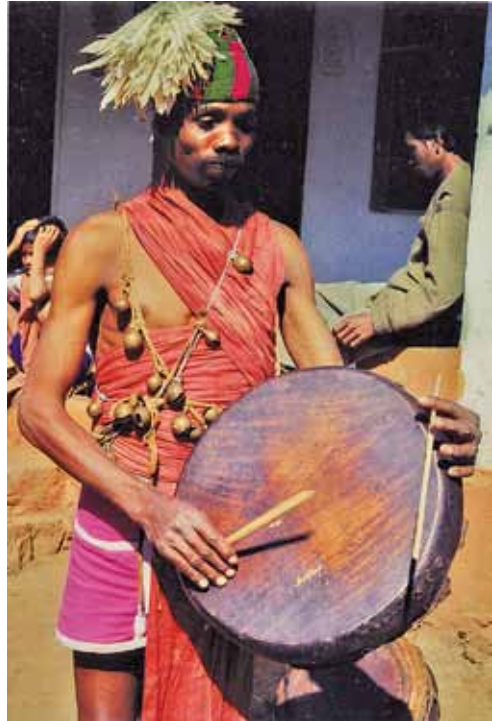
ill. 7: Pane (oboe) player



ill. 8: Pane players



ill. 9: Kading frame drum player



ill. 10: Kading player



ill. 11: Kading frame drum (left) and tudum players



ill. 12: Kading and tudum drum players with modern instruments



ill. 13: Nening (resting bell) players



ill. 14: Nening player



ill. 15: Dagedu player (small vessel drum)



ill. 16: Dagedu player



ill. 17: The full band (kading, tudum, suura koma, tiriduy and dagedu)



ill. 18: Suura koma players



ill. 19: Dancers



ill. 20: Female dancers



ill. 21: Dancers and kading frame drum player



ill. 22: Dancers



ill. 23 Sora men with child



ill. 24: Sora men with children



ill. 25: Sora woman



ill. 26: Sora women



ill. 27: Mothers and children



ill. 28: Mothers and children



ill. 29: The village head (Gomanko) with Axe



ill. 30: The village elder, Mr India



ill. 31: Sora hills



ill. 32: Sora hills



ill. 33: Paddy cultivation



ill. 34: Terraced paddy cultivation



ill. 35: Sora hamlet



ill. 36: Sora hamlet