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Ritual Friendship in a Converging Tribal and Caste Society

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ABSTRACT In north-west Orissa one finds an enormous variety of bonds of ritual friendship, a form of relationship in between kinship and ordinary friendship. In this article, existing types of ritual friendship and empirical cases will be introduced and analysed. Since a converging tribal and caste society has emerged in the region, the multitude of forms might be related to two different phenomena: on the one hand a segmentary structure of tribal society bridging gaps between segments; on the other hand a balance to evolving hierarchical distinctions, since ideally friends are equal and identified with each other by avoidance of individual names etc. However, the various types of friendship are ranked, and in practice the choice of ritual friends may be influenced by hierarchical considerations.

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