

Scholarship, Subtext, Submission, and Mission

Reintroducing Paul Olav Bodding

Tone Bleie

Tone Bleie (PhD) is Professor at UiT, The Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø, and the founder of the Scandinavian-Santal Heritage Initiative (SSINherit). For over 30-years, she has shifted between working as a researcher, a minority and indigenous rights advocate, aid advisor and line manager in development agencies with regional and global mandates. Bleie has published widely on minorities' rights to own cultural heritage, dignity and decent livelihood, including the monograph Tribal Peoples, Nationalism and the Human Rights Challenge (University Press Limited: Dhaka, 2005).

Abstract

The Santal Mission began as a Baptist home mission in tribal British India in the late 1860s and went through several name changes. It developed into a transatlantic, Lutheran, enlightenment-oriented, pastoral movement in the late pioneer era (1880s-1890s) with ardent supporters in India, England, Scotland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and America. Under the stewardship of most notably, the co-founders Lars Skrefsrud and Hans P. and Caroline Børresen, the Mission and a budding Santal church constituted, for a period, a dynamic religious and social mass-movement. Skrefsrud handed over vast literary responsibilities to the gifted theologian Paul Olav Bodding, while serving as a district missionary. Based on social science insights, the paper discusses the scholar-missionary Bodding's importance in this Mission, academically and for the Santals he lived amongst for more than four decades. In 1910, Bodding succeeded Skrefsrud and was tasked to modernize, democratize and streamline a largely homegrown movement into a conventional Lutheran missionary society. This article reveals some of the lesser known aspects of Bodding's turbulent life history. From a sheltered childhood to young missionary, early scholarly renown, Bodding went on to a head highly profiled missionary organization while facing unreasonable treatment, personal tragedies and unexpected conjugal fulfillment. His posthumous public reputation was divided between a deafening silence and omission in the Mission's own history books until the early 1990s and increasing public recognition in India. After Independence, his literary legacy became a source of outright public cultivation. "Bodding Sahib", as he was called in India, became gradually a cultural hero. This article attempts to analyze the underlying institutional, theological and cultural reasons for the strange silence and the eventual rediscovery of the man.

Search terms: Bodding – scholar – missionary – cultural hero – Santalmission

Norsk sammendrag

Santalmisjonen utviklet seg fra slutten av 1860-tallet under skiftende navn fra en baptist tilknyttet hjemmemisjon i et område bebodd av stammefolk til en lutheransk transatlantisk opplysningsorientert bevegelse på 1880-90 tallet. Under ledelse av grunnleggerne Lars O. Skrefsrud, Hans P. og Caroline Børresen, utviklet misjonen og den nyetablerte santalkirken seg i løpet av denne fasen til en dynamisk religiøs og sosial bevegelse. Skrefsrud valgte å gi den begavede teologen Paul Olav Bodding omfattende litterære oppgaver, mens han tjenestegjorde som distriktmisjonær. Basert på en samfunnsvitenskapelig tilnærming, drøfter denne artikkelen vitenskapsmannen og misjonæren Boddings betydning i misjonen, akademisk og for santalfolket som han levde blant i over 40-år. Som Skrefsruds etterfølger, fikk Bodding ansvar for å modernisere, demokratisere og tilpasse en uortodoks hjemmemisjonen til å bli en konvensjonell lutheransk misjon. Boddings omskiftelige og lite kjente livshistorie vil bli nøstet opp, fra en beskyttet barndom til ung misjonær som tidlig vant anerkjennelse, til lederansvar for en profilert misjon under meget krevende arbeidsforhold, nye personlige tragedier og igjen uventet ekteskaplig lykke. Han offentlige ettermæle er påfallende delt; taushetsbelagt og undervurdert i misjonens egne publikasjoner fram til tidlig på 1990-tallet. I India fikk han etter sin død økende offentlig anerkjennelse som utviklet seg til offentlig beundring og status som kulturhelt. De underliggende institusjonelle, teologiske og kulturelle årsakene til både denne tausheten og nyoppdagelsen vil bli analysert.

Introduction

The symposium *“Belief, Scholarship and Cultural Heritage: Paul Olav Bodding and the making of a Scandinavian-Santal Legacy”* was held on the university campus in Oslo in November 2015. This academic milestone event marked the first ever international effort to examine Paul Olav Bodding, the transatlantic Santal Mission’s most towering scholar-missionary, seen through the lenses of contemporary social sciences and the humanities. Around 90 participants from Europe and Asia attended papers and festivities.¹ They constituted as extraordinarily diverse group of distinguished scholars and missiologists on tribal and indigenous peoples, minority rights defenders from South Asia, Santal writers, current and former leaders and senior staff of the Santal Mission, representatives of the successor missionary organizations Normission and Danmission, as well as some of the descendants of the Mission’s pioneers.²

The symposium commemorated the 150th anniversary of Bodding’s birth. Born 1865 in Gjøvik, Bodding joined the high-profiled Santal Mission in India in the late pioneer era (1890s). Of the original founders from 1867, the Norwegian Lars Skrefsrud (1840-1910), the Dane Hans P. Børresen (1825-1901) and his Prussian spouse Caroline Børresen (1832-1914) were still the Mission’s towering figures.³ From its inception in the late 1860, the Santal Mission was a semi-Utopian pastoral enlightenment project aiming to civilize the “tribal” Santals of Northern India through Christianization and social and economic upliftment. The project entailed formidable reform and ethnographic and educational efforts. The latter included the establishment of standards of Santali grammar, a system of transliteration, new mediatory linguistic terms which sought to some degree to build on native notions in order to enable meaningful translation of the Bible, decoding and recoding of native cosmology, documentation of ancient epics, folk tales, and a diverse lifeworld that included a rich ethno-botanical knowledge tradition.

From his early years in India, Bodding came to play a lead role in this massive

generations-long diverse enlightenment effort, combining evangelization with social reform and scholarship.⁴ He became the Mission's top executive in a critical phase of the building of the institution (1910-1922). Moreover, he not only steered the Mission through an internally demanding phase complicated by the First World War, over decades of unfaltering efforts, but also left a formidable, multi-faceted legacy as a scholar and missionary. The depth of his religious and secular legacy of bible translations, grammars, and ethnographic studies was already highly visible and widely recognized by royals and distinguished societies in India and Europe during his own lifetime.⁵ It only became more significant in the period following India's Independence in 1947 and in the context of a fermenting and revitalized cultural nationalist movement among the Santals.

At the symposium, participants comprising contemporary Santal writers, academics, theologians, development workers, and leading international scholars, to engage in the critical scrutiny of Bodding's diverse and enduring legacy as scholar and missionary. Some 20 papers were presented in sessions addressing topics such as the Santal Mission in historical and contemporary context and revisiting Bodding as theologian, bible translator, hymnologist, administrator, ethnographer, linguist, and collector. A final lively session explored collaboration in the post-mission and post-colonial era. As the head of the Scandinavian-Santal Heritage Initiative (*SSInherit*) and initiative taker of the Symposium, I was pleased to accept the invitation to serve as guest editor for this issue of the *Norwegian Journal of Missiology/Norsk tidsskrift for misjonsvitenskap (NTM)*. With the journal's audience in mind, I have selected four thought-provoking symposium papers. They revisit Bodding as theologian (Timotheas Hembrom's paper), ethnographer (Ruby Hembrom's paper), and administrator (Harald Tambs-Lyche's paper). Moreover, I have included a fourth paper by Dikka Storm, which debates the domestic (*indre*) Sámi Mission to the indigenous Sámi of Northern Norway. In his paper "An Indigenous Theologian's perspective on the Bodding Era," Santal theologian and college professor Timotheas Hembrom addresses the increasingly orthodox Lutheran turn in the Bodding era, giving special attention to his influential interpretations of Santal cosmology, including demonology. Hembrom, himself an scholar of the Old Testament, is one of the Santals' most well-known indigenous Indian theologians of his generation. Originally educated at the Santal Mission's own theological seminar, he was expelled from the school and ousted from the church as punishment for use of banned native instruments and dance forms. Both as an academic writer and public academic, Hembrom has propagated a rapprochement between Protestant theology, Indigenous cosmology and religious practice. Hembrom's paper, is the first paper by him to reach out to NTM's readership.⁶

The creative Santal writer and publisher Ruby Hembrom's⁷ paper «*The Santals and the Bodding Paradox*», highlights a young author's subtle postcolonial critique focused on Bodding's famous three-volume "Santal Folk Tales" (*Santalske folkeeventyr*).⁸ Hembrom addresses what is to her a troubling paradox. This acclaimed grand series, which attests to her own peoples' rich oral narrative legacy, was, Hembrom argues, in fact mainly written for and made available to Western audiences (as indeed other ethnographic literature authored by Bodding), and less so to the native population, the Santals included. The paper draws several significant implications of the Bodding paradox, for self-perception, cultural and religious politics. In an intriguing and unexpected manner, the narratives of Timotheas and Ruby Hembrom speak to each other and us. The reason is that they are authored by a father and daughter whose lives have been molded by the Scandinavian Santal Mission and Church. This family history is part of the narrative thread in Ruby Hembrom's paper.

Prof. Tambs-Lyche is a Norwegian-French anthropologist and a noted authority on the Indian caste system and tribal India. He has co-authored a monumental study of the Santal Mission's pioneer era with Marine Carrin, a French expert on tribal India.⁹ Tambs-Lyche's paper is the first ever in-depth paper to examine Bodding's track record as the Mission's top administrator in an highly decisive period for the

Mission. Tambs-Lyche unravels the poorly understood internal circumstances Bodding worked under and assesses his major contribution to the institutionalization of the Santal Mission as a conventional missionary society. Tambs-Lyche exposes how intimately connected institutional reforms under Bodding were with changes in church politics in India and Scandinavia, and, most notably in Norway.

Dikka Storm is a curator at Tromsø Museum and a scholar on Sámi cultural history. Her contribution offers a historical reading of *"The Complex Religious Situation in the Mission District of Senja and Vesterålen in the Early Eighteenth Century"*. Storm's paper offers a comparative perspective on the operation and organization of the domestic mission to the indigenous peoples of Northern Norway, the Lapps (Sámi). The mission to the indigenous Sámi raises important questions about the nature of continuity between this older domestic (*indre*) mission (in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) and later (*ytre*) missions abroad to native peoples of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, such as the Santal Mission. One such consequential continuity is the two missions' strikingly similar attitude towards the shamanistic drumming traditions. Storm's paper unravels the organization of the mission, its shifting missiology, and complex encounters with indigenous religious practices. This paper should therefore not be understood as a stand-alone contribution, but as a firm invitation to future comparative research on underlying continuities between the early inner missions and the more recent outer missions to non-European continents, including South Asia.

My own introductory essay *"Scholarship, Subtext, Submission, and Mission"*, is intended to broaden readers' contextual understanding of the four conference papers and indeed, of the Santal Mission, once one of Scandinavia's most publicly visible outer missions in Asia. In addition, most importantly, I wish to analyze Bodding's importance in this Mission and for the peoples he came to reside among for his entire ministry as a missionary. Following a brief overview of the history of the Santal Mission, is a sketch of the main phases of Bodding's life; his transformation from a sheltered child to young missionary in the tribal heartlands of British India, early scholarly fame, but also personal tragedy. As Skrefsrud's successor, Bodding was tasked with modernizing, democratizing and streamlining the expanding Mission. This was a very difficult undertaking, for which he received much critique, often unjustified, from his superiors in the home boards and other missionaries. In his later years, his quest for personal happiness came at very high personal and professional cost. Bodding was forced to resign as the head of the Mission and became a fulltime scholar on the Mission's payroll, using his late years among the Santals and their neighbors to complete a series of ambitious linguistic, ethnographic and anthropological publications with a work ethic and scale and very few scholars can match in a lifetime. His posthumous public memory was oddly divided. In the historical accounts of the Norwegian Santal mission there was a certain odd silence around his person, at least until the early 1990s. In India, however, he had become a key figure in the struggle around the recognition of Indian tribal peoples. After Independence, a rising literary movement (which evolved into registered cultural organizations from the 1970s onward) engaged in an outright cultivation of Bodding as one of their cultural heroes. The underlying institutional, theological and cultural reasons for silence and rediscovery will be unraveled.

A contextual note on the Santal Mission

An introductory comment about the Santal Mission may be in place. The Santal Mission evolved from a home mission base in India in the earliest phase in 1867 to a transatlantic, enlightenment-oriented, pastoral movement in the late pioneer era - the 1890s. Indeed, as this special issue is published, the Santal Mission's heirs - the Norwegian, Danish and American successor Missions and Lutheran national churches in India and Bangladesh celebrate 150-years Jubilee. Under the stewardship of, most notably, the co-founders Lars Skrefsrud and the couple Hans P. and Car-

oline Børresen, it became a dynamic religious and social mass movement spanning India, England, Scotland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and America.¹⁰ It was framed and shaped by a particular instance of European colonial order, vibrant Norwegian cultural nationalism, low-church evangelism, and the Santals' collective will to resist intrusive foreigners. Following the Santal rebellion (*Hul*) against oppressive outsiders (most notably landlords and moneylenders) in 1855, which caused several thousand deaths and resulted in mass displacement of the Santals, they found themselves in a perilous economic, social, and spiritual state. It was into this situation the first Scandinavian missionaries rode in on horseback, into the newly formed non-regulation administrative district of Santal Parganas. Some, but far from all, native chiefs welcomed the missionaries in their midst, hoping the foreigners could be their advocates against an oppressive colonial authority, moneylenders and landlords. They hoped that missionaries could educate Santals by imparting literacy and other cultural skills that would help preserve their cultural legacy and strengthen their status in Indian society, where tribals remained outside the hierarchical caste system. Skrefsrud, influenced by Norwegian cultural nationalism, formulated the credo that the Santals should be saved and uplifted as a tribal people in the Indian context, where they were continually marginalized. As already underlined in my introduction, the mission became part of an ethno-nationalistic enlightenment movement seeking to advance the cause of the Santals. The pioneers preferred to designate their new mission field *Santalistan* - the land of Santals. This construct created in the minds of mission friends the alluring fiction of a geographic Santal country, inhabited by them only. The reality was different. Santal Parganas was a layered and diverse district in ethnic and religious terms. Santals were wont to form their own hamlets, but in the vicinity of other tribal groups who spoke a variety of languages (belonging to different language families) and Hinduized service castes - whom they traded with.

Following Skrefsrud's death in 1910, Boddning took over as the Mission's executive leader (secretary). Under Boddning's leadership, the movement morphed from an unorthodox home mission on Indian soil into a strictly Lutheran transatlantic missionary society. This new Lutheran orthodoxy affected baptism, marriage and evangelization, which accentuated (as highlighted in Timotheas Hembrom's paper) the fault lines between the new and ancient faiths and native and Lutheran social and moral values, yet the organization continued expanding after Boddning's momentous period as secretary (1910-22).

As Indian Independence approached in the 1940s, the Santal Mission embarked on the building of its own national Lutheran church in India.¹¹ The transatlantic missionary society nevertheless maintained considerable direct and indirect influence for decades after 1947.¹² In the latter half of the twentieth century, secularization led to the closure of the Santal Mission in India, and national mergers of the offices in the U.S., Denmark, and Norway from the 1970s onward. These changes, also driven by the Indian government's more restrictive visa policy, limited and altered the very nature of the bond between missions, national churches, and related faith-based institutions, leaving a gap in people-to-people contacts between Scandinavians and the Santal population of India and East Pakistan (later Bangladesh). The Boddning Symposium sought to address and fill at least some of this gap and lack of cooperative energy by establishing a future-oriented collaborative platform, which addresses strategies and concrete initiatives that revitalize the legacy and transcend it by way of a post-colonial mind-set and working methods. This issue of NTM lends voice to Santal and European authors and should therefore be of interest to readers in Europe, the U.S. and South Asia.

Boddning's life history from childhood to mission leader

Boddning was born in the tiny market town of Gjøvik in Eastern Norway in 1865. His

family were devoted Haugeans and among the founders of Gjøvik's first mission society. His father established and managed a bookstore and bookbindery. While on prolonged furlough in Europe in 1873-74, following a severe malaria attack, Skrefsrud visited Norway and came to stay with the Bodding family. His brief visit must have influenced the evangelically minded Mrs. Bodding greatly. Paul Olav's mother dedicated her eight-year-old son to the missionary cause. As he wrote himself: "my mother offered me to the Santal mission" (*min mor tilbød meg til Santalmissjonen*).¹³ A remarkably intelligent and bookish boy, Paul Olav prepared himself for his pre-ordained vocation and calling, something his schoolmates anticipated would be quite an adventure.

Paul Olav graduated (*artium*) from Aas and Voss Latin School in Kristiania and enrolled at the University to study theology. The active students' mission association (Studenternes Misjonsforening) became his spiritual home while studying. He was ordained priest in 1889 at Vår Frelzers Kirke and left for British India at the young age of 24. His sea voyage via London and the Suez Channel marked the beginning of his cultural enlightenment and initiation (*dannelsesreise*) to his 44 years of missionary service among the Santals and neighboring peoples in British India.

Skrefsrud placed high expectations on his friend's son's arrival in *Santalistan*. And Paul Olav impressed him by learning Santali rather quickly. Skrefsrud intended to make full use Bodding's remarkable scientific talents and asked Paul Olav to take over and complete the translation of some major Santali literary works. New assignments were also waiting. Bodding was to undertake translations of the Old and the New Testaments and a catechism-like book (*Kuk'li Puthi*) virtually at the same time. He was also asked to work on a new grammar in Santali. This sophisticated language is very demanding for Scandinavians to learn, as it belongs to the Munda family of languages, a different language family than Norwegian, which belongs to the Indo-European language family. As if these demanding literary and linguistic assignments were not enough, Bodding worked with native Santals, collecting both immaterial and material artefacts of Santal "folk culture," including the documentation and compilation of the rich Santali narrative oral legacy, tools, musical instruments, and adornments. The most monumental result of these efforts, most of which began in the 1890s is the three-volume collection of Santal Folktales (see Ruby Hembrom's article in this issue) and the Bodding Collection which remains the world's largest collection of Santal culture and is currently owned and managed by The Museum of Cultural History and the National Library of Norway in Oslo. Bodding also eventually completed the five-volume Santal Dictionary project, an extremely time consuming, ambitious project the chronically overloaded Skrefsrud had asked him to take over.

The young Bodding's formative experiences as a missionary came in one tragic circumstance to resemble those of Skrefsrud. Bodding's fiancée, Clara Braaten (1867-1892), came to India and Benagaria to marry Bodding just days before Christmas 1891. Yet, less than six months later, she succumbed to a spike of intense fever caused by pneumonia. Like Skrefsrud, Bodding became a widower early in life. Clara was buried in the sanctified burial ground between the whitewashed church and the couple's European-style bungalow. The loss left a lasting imprint on Bodding. Clara's stone-clad grave was within view of the main entrance and mezzanine floor of the Saheb bungalow. Bodding came to live in the bungalow for three of his more than four decades in India. His wife's grave was kept meticulously by the congregation under his pastoral stewardship. On all major Christian holidays, memorial prayers were said by the grave, creating an affective shared public memory between the grieving widower *Saheb* and his congregation.

Santal chiefs and commoners realized that this recent *Sahib* missionary would not become another *Karaib*, Skrefsrud's Santal name. *Kairab* used to join their feasts, sit by their campfires on hunting expeditions, and arbitrate as one of the overheadman

(*pargana*). Nevertheless, Boddling *Saheb* was like *Kairab* in his aptitude for their native tongue and consuming interest in their knowledge traditions and ceremonial life. They were impressed by his rapid mastery of Santali, enabling him to deliver sermons they could appreciate. The ongoing but demanding translation of the two testaments was warmly welcomed by the new Christians who possessed an insatiable thirst for reading the Bible and commentaries in their own tongue.

When Boddling wrote the comprehensive *Kuk'li Puthi*, a catechism which comprised 250 questions and answers, he made extensive use of Pontoppidan and other Scandinavian catechisms. The draft was written in Norwegian and later translated to Santali in collaboration with the native *guru* Biram Hasdak, Skrefsrud's most trusted language counsel over many years.¹⁴ In the mid-1890s, Skrefsrud had gone on an extended preaching and fundraising tour in America's Mid-West. When he finally returned to India and Santal Parganas, Boddling and Hasdak had managed to complete the draft of *Kuk'li Puthi* as well as a revision of Skrefsrud's translation of the New Testament. He had worked on it on and off for more than a decade. Acutely conscious of the catechism's enduring importance, Skrefsrud did not simply endorse the manuscript they submitted. He devoted time to revise the bulky manuscript before it was printed in 1899 at the Benagaria Mission's own printing press. Specific evidence of this final revision process would have been a very useful source, given the important theological issues Timotheas Hembrom's paper raises in this issue.

Kuk'li Puthi is a complex and layered text in terms of authorship. The missionaries designed it as a major part in the education of generations of priests and evangelists. With the increase of literacy among the Santals, it became a standard reference work for congregational members. Hembrom's theological argument of a critically misconstrued notion of the archangel casts up the unavoidable question: What was the relative influence of Skrefsrud, compared to Boddling's and their trusted *guru* Biram's? We know that Biram sometimes rejected Boddling's translations and suggestions for mediatory terms. But this was primarily a lofty theological question. Possibly, the trained theologian won over both his respected mentor and native *guru*. If earlier drafts can be retrieved from the archives, a methodological approach for future exegetical studies of Skrefsrud's, Boddling's and Biram's authorships and decisive influence could be done comparing drafts and final texts of the Old and New Testaments with *Kuk'li Puthi*.

Kuk'li Puthi was republished in several new editions in the twentieth century. The fact that it was the Mission's only major standard textbook in theology and ethics for several generations of pastors and evangelists, bespeaks its extraordinary importance. Only in the 1950s did Santal theologians and pastors gain enough presence and confidence to protest the dualistic eschatology that construed the chief deity Maran Buro as Satan. As T. Hembrom argues, the negative impact of this dogmatic theological interpretation, propagated since the early Boddling era, was not easily undone even at that time.

Following his first wife Clara's death, Boddling lived for couple of years alone in the spacious bungalow surrounded by a circle of dedicated native collaborators and servants. The Santals servants and community people pitied the *Sahib's* lone years without a woman. They noticed that his primary company were Santal literates and sages, his enormous stacks of books and two pet dogs. In their mind, there was something abnormal about an adult man's spouseless existence.¹⁵ The mission was located in Santal Pargana's undulating landscape of cultivated fields and pastures, intercepted by *sal* (*robusta*) forests and scrub-clad hillocks. Every month, Boddling made a four to five-hour drive by horse and cart to the Benagaria headquarters where the mission held its monthly mass meetings. The nearest train station was three hours from the new district headquarters at Dumka, from where dignitaries would come on occasional visits. Cosmopolitan Calcutta with its academic circles and societies was much further away. Boddling's personality made him shy away from the high-

brow salons of the colonial elite where Skrefsrud maintained a high publicity profile. The missionaries at Benagaria and Moholpahari kept up a massive postal correspondence via postal messengers. They safely delivered and sent post at the nearest railway station at Rampur Hat.

An 1897 issue of *Santalen* contains a short announcement of Boddings' marriage to the recently widowed Ingeborg Bahr, the Børresens' oldest daughter. This would become a decision Boddling would later regret as the marriage failed in a way that would come to mark Boddling personally and as a public figure. Ingeborg left him, in love with a Muslim who had been her horseman for a long time. The *Saheb*, as his in-laws the Børresens, chose to remain silent about Ingeborg's whereabouts in the plains of North-Bihar and her (to him) incomprehensible motives. The Santals on the other hand interpreted this within the context of a poetic tradition and social customs that recognized the all-consuming love between the sexes as a fact of life. This was far from the reaction in the Lutheran circles in India and the home countries. They thought official silence about such a moral disaster was both commendable and necessary for the sake of the greater cause. What had transpired was so unimaginable and offensive (in view of their understanding of gender morality) that it nurtured genuine anxiety. This anxiety found an outlet in rumors and occasional, confidential correspondence. Klara Flagstad of the Lillehammer Committee, one of the Santal Mission's most ardent and supporters and a confidante of Ingeborg's mother Caroline Børresen, wrote in 1907 to Hertel, the chairman of the Danish Home Board:

"There is something frightening about all this secrecy and people make themselves many of the strangest thoughts".¹⁶

Boddling buried himself in piles of literary and administrative work, which only increased, due to Skrefsrud's deteriorating health. All, himself included, assumed Boddling would succeed the great man. This happened in late 1910, but only following the unusual and complicated circumstances which Harald Tambs-Lyche's paper so insightfully exposes.

Recasting Boddling as public man

As Tambs-Lyche reveals in his contribution, Boddling's more than decade-long tenure (1910-1922) as secretary of the Santal Mission was dominated by a steered transformation of the home mission with a budding apostolic native church into



Paul Olav Boddling

a conventional foreign mission society, with a governing constitution, personnel policy, and a new multi-layered organizational structure. This complicated transnational organizational structure was not without its dysfunctional traits. Yet the top-down management structure the pioneers had so fiercely resisted and the home boards in Norway, Denmark, Sweden and America wanted, was now firmly instituted.

Tambs-Lyche's paper offers a rare insight into how Boddling as secretary responded to the demand by the home constituencies to renew and amend the original Trust Deed, the Mission's foundational legal document. He had to resort to a legal grey zone in Indian trust laws and obtain a district court's verdict before the new trustee structure could be instituted. The tumultuous legal and organizational reform process was aimed at adjusting the Mission to the Scandinavian principles of a democratic, modern mission society, without an all-powerful



Boddings in Darjeeling.

Secretary as original Trust Deed stipulated. As Tambs-Lyche highlights, Boddings' painstaking governance and legal reform efforts, placed him after 1918 in the frontline of both overt and covert critique by leading members of the power centers in the three home countries and the new India-based organ, the Missionary Conference, which was not content with its advisory status. During his last years as secretary, Boddings was literally besieged by growing direct criticism about his leadership style and dealings with the Trust from the Danes and mostly indirect from his own countrymen. Back in India, a highly articulate fraction within the Missionary Conference chose to circumvent the official lines of communication between the Secretary in India and the home countries (see Tambs-Lyche's paper). Only in 1922 were the long pending new laws approved and signed by the chairmen of the home boards. One would think the long, difficult period was over. It was not. New complications were caused by an unprecedented development in Boddings' personal life.

As secretary of a rapidly expanding missionary society, Boddings had received, tutored, and supervised over the years several missionaries from Denmark, Norway, and America. I shall below quote from Johannes Gausdal's vivid unpublished account of his early days as a novice in the field and of the strong impression Boddings made on him. One of the new arrivals in 1916 was a Danish doctor, Christine Larsen. After completing her introduction program, Boddings sent her to a mission not far from Dumka, the new Mission headquarters. The secretary devoted much of his time to sorting out the complicated trust deed matters, but he was very particular about keeping up his correspondence with missionaries just settling in at the stations across Santal country. From early on,

the tone in their correspondence is noticeably warm yet polite and formal. Boddington was 18 years Larsen's senior, and her respected leader and brother in Christ. As a priest, revered by native church members, as a renowned scholar in scientific societies in Colonial India and Europe, Boddington was an important public figure. As a private person he experienced the pain of a solitary life and marital loss intensifying as he aged.

When Boddington and Larsen announced verbally and in writing in late 1922 their engagement and asked for permission to marry, they knew painfully well their conjugal wish would not be met with jubilation within their own ranks. Criticism of Boddington's leadership style had barely subsided. The reaction to the announcement played into a set of troubled circumstances, which caused even greater official difficulties and personal pain for them than even they could possibly have foreseen. I shall below discuss some of the details of Boddington's conjugal history, The main issue, I will return to in the next section and which Tambs-Lyche observes, was the debate about different interpretations of marriage as sacrament, in contrast to prevailing secular matrimonial laws in the Scandinavian countries. At the heart of the tangled matter was the question: could their chief missionary remarry, granted he was not only a widower (from his first tragically brief first marriage) but a divorced man?¹⁷

The Norwegian Board responded by calling for Boddington's immediate resignation as secretary and by proposing a vaguely articulated alternative settlement. The tone of the Danish Board was less severe and open to dialogue about his future in the mission. However, the Danes were aware of their Norwegian brethren's more conservative theological stance, and initially promoted a compromise. Even the Americans were less rigid than the uncompromising Norwegians. Unusually heated discussions took place not only among the missionaries in the field, but between them and the home boards and between the newly engaged couple and the home leaderships. Those who for some time had wanted to see Boddington withdraw as secretary now had a convenient presenting occasion on which to base their theological and moral arguments demanding his resignation. Following months of intense wrangling, Boddington gave in to the mounting pressure and asked to be released from his executive position. A special posting as literary worker until retirement was negotiated and came into effect from early 1923. As a result, the terms of Boddington's public service and position within the Mission were radically altered. The external consequences of the marriage dispute and subsequent change of position in no way jeopardized his reputation as an eminent scholar and missionary in India and Europe. It was his reputation and standing within the mission movement that suffered, and, arguably remained impaired for a remarkably long time, as will be documented below. Several months after the wedding, Paul Olav and Christine went to Scandinavia on a badly needed holiday. Mentally exhausted by the turmoil, they asked for a private furlough in order to minimize contact with critical mission leaders. Neither interaction with leaders nor mission friends could be fully avoided. Their brisk demurs left the Boddingtons with no doubts as to where these leaders stood concerning their marriage and its special background.¹⁸ Disheartened by demonstrative moral indignation, they returned from Europe intent to dedicate themselves to their respective demanding scientific and medical projects. The following years were spent in service of the Mission's founding pastoral enlightenment ideas; offering diaconal service and upliftment of the Santal nation through literary contributions.

A great irony could be said to characterize Boddington's final decade (1923-34) of service. He could finally devote himself completely to what he was eminently suited for, being a full time scholar. But as a mission employee, the renegotiated official position came at a great cost; Boddington was not only stripped for an executive position, but of a range of pastoral duties as a missionary. Moreover, his and Larsen's newfound personal love and decision to fight for their marriage had been cynically used by some as a wedge in an embittered organizational conflict. This conflict was too painful and complex to be resolved. Instead, the home leaders handled the conflict and Boddington's matrimonial history by enforcing a collective silence. This remained entrenched as

collective repression of the mission's history of the Boddington era until Olav Hodne completed the last and third volume of the history of the Santal Mission in 1992.

Now in retrospect, we can discern that Boddington's legacy as scholar-missionary had certain contradictory consequences, which are overlooked in the third volume of Hodne's work. As Head of the Mission, Boddington spearheaded a massive organizational change which stifled the early growth of an indigenous interdenominational Santal church, instead bolstering a top-down edifice in the form of a Scandinavian-led Lutheran mission. The growth of a native church, a core institutional public pillar in an uplifted society, was at one of the core pillars of the pioneers' cultural-nationalist enlightenment vision. Not only did budding church suffer setbacks, under Boddington's leadership its tangible achievements were belittled. Boddington, as the home board leadership shifted the narrative to a rhetoric that envisioned a native church only in a distant future.¹⁹ Paradoxically, when forced to resign, and assume office as a fulltime scholar, Boddington would become the single-most important literary actor in the twentieth century in realizing the cultural pillar of his mentors' many stranded utopian cultural-nationalist vision.

Morality, Discipline, and Memory: The silence around a public man

The founders and front figures of the Santal Mission, Børresen (the Mission's Secretary) and Skrefsrud (the Mission's undisputedly most prominent public figure in colonial India, America and Europe), were often discussed in contemporary Indian and European media, i.e. – newspapers, mission newsletters, annual reports, pamphlets, literature on the Santal mission, and popularized biographies and travelogues.²⁰ Biographical interest in Skrefsrud did not wane after his demise in 1910.²¹ In Skrefsrud's case, some of the biographies attained hagiological proportions, a development he deliberately and successfully contributed to himself, although it also thrived on the popular interest in extraordinary "Askeladden," or trickster, figures. After the Second World War, a Danish and a Norwegian theologian each wrote a doctoral dissertation on respectively Børresen and Skrefsrud and the mission they founded, the Indian Home Mission to the Santals. The treatises were quickly published as a testimony to their towering importance as figures in the history of a prominent foreign mission. Knud Gjesing published his thesis for his doctoral degree in theology in Copenhagen in 1961. The Norwegian theologian and Santal Missionary Olav Hodne published his dissertation in the Egede Institute Dissertation Series only a few years after Gjesing. The body of biographical literature (comprising dissertations and popular biographies) on these two contemporary public *men*, contrasts with the scant literature about their spouses and co-missionaries Anna Onsum (1838-1870) and Caroline Børresen (1832-1914).²² The mostly public silence about these two female India missionaries might seem like a trivial point, but it is not. Caroline Børresen in particular was a formidable contributor to building up the mission. She was the driving force behind India's first boarding school for girls and a member of the Santal Mission's leadership troika with her spouse and Skrefsrud. After her husband died in 1901 and Skrefsrud's health started to deteriorate she became the *de facto* and unrivalled head of the Santal Mission. The lack of interest in Caroline Børresen as a *public woman* and the ambivalence expressed in public and private as to her personality, reveals an intriguingly gendered subtext. She arguably violated prevailing Christian gender norms because of her "domineering" personality and "intrusive" presence in the high-profile mission's executive affairs.²³

Through her disciplinary boarding school regime, Mrs. Børresen was a formidable social reformer of native gender roles. Her own conduct as a missionary challenged and violated the same hierarchical order of public men and domestic women she sought to have "her girls" internalize. Mrs. Børresen claimed more than low-key influence, but authority, a male prerogative. As Harald Tambs-Lyche's paper brings to light, the late Skrefsrud had appointed Mrs. Børresen as his successor, not Boddington,

as nearly everybody expected as Skrefsrud had said in public much earlier. Skrefsrud's decision caused moral outrage and ferocious protests. Both Mrs. Børresen's sex and personality apparently justified serious objections. So much so, that the ailing Skrefsrud had to withdraw the appointment from his sickbed and install Bodding as his successor and next secretary of the Mission.

What does this unsurprising gender bias have to do with Bodding - beyond the row about who should succeed Skrefsrud? The fact is, there is remarkably scant reference to Bodding made in the standard works on the history of the Santal Mission and biographical literature. Indeed, the contrast is stark, compared with the massive bibliographical literature on Skrefsrud. The Scandinavian public's consuming interest in Skrefsrud in fact lasted throughout Bodding's life. Another Skrefsrud biography by J. K Løth titled *L. O. Skrefsrud - misjonær blant Santalene* was actually published in 1938, the very year Bodding died in Odense, Denmark. I shall in the following section of this essay probe deeper into the above briefly discussed composite reasons for Bodding's resignation. In doing so, I shall seek to answer the question: why has there been such a "deafening" silence about Bodding within the mission movement he served for his full lifetime?²⁴ This intriguing question will be approached by first analyzing the text and sub-text of two important works, Bodding's biography and volume three of the Santal mission's history that deals with the twentieth century.²⁵

Conflicted attitudes towards Bodding: prejudice, silence and rediscovery

Restitution (or *Oppreisning* in Norwegian), the title of Bodding's biography, suggests the author thinks an injustice has been done and that his stature and reputation deserve to be restored both internally in the Mission and in the Scandinavian public at large. The book's introductory passages convey its aim to break a self-enforced oppressive silence. Stark language is employed: "a white spot" in the Santal Mission's history has been filled by this book and "history has been set free" (*historien er frigjort*).²⁶ How so? The carefully crafted forewords in the biography by the Santal Mission's then information manager, Alf Henry Rasmussen, and the author, the theologian Olav Hodne provide important clues. Both speak directly about this collectively imposed silence about Bodding's person. Rasmussen narrates how he decades earlier as a fresh employee discovered why the mission's chief chronicler, the theologian Johan Nyhagen, who had completed two massive volumes in a series, hesitated to write what was planned as volume three. It was Bodding's marital life, his divorce and remarriage. Rasmussen writes, that made it prohibitive to write about the Bodding epoch. With unusual frankness, Rasmussen notes: "The case was best served by not mentioning it" (*tiet ihjel*).²⁷

What does Rasmussen mean by his subtle general remark about Bodding's marital life? The controversies around Bodding's third marriage to Christine Larsen were closely related to the already mentioned scandal round his second marriage to Ingeborg Børresen. As explained, she eloped with her Muslim horseman. In order to marry him, she had to convert to Islam. This was a one-way exit out of the close-knit religious community within which her close family were prominent public figures. This double transgression of religious and racial borders, humiliated and defamed not only her prominent husband and natal family, but the Santal Mission at large. This scandal became a suppressed collective trauma, which was distressingly again brought into the open when Bodding and Larsen requested permission to marry. The noted theological differences between the Norwegians and Danes on conditions for remarriage, complicated the matter further. All agreed that marriage was a sacrament, but unlike the Danes, the Norwegian did not accept that a divorcee could remarry. That's why some made a big issue out of whether Ingeborg was still alive or not and accused Bodding for deliberately having lied about her death, when he and his fiancée, announced in 1922 they would marry and sought the home leaders' permission to do so. The circumstances around Bodding's verification of his second

wife's death (he was eventually divorced by court verdict) and the motives for revealing that she was alive right before the wedding, remain unclear to this day. For sure, the allegations against Bodding have never been proven. Neither can they be totally dismissed.

With these extraordinary events as a context, let us return to Rasmussen's foreword. We learn that he sensed the aging Nyhagen was reluctant to author final volume about the 20th century. Rasmussen approached another leading mission historian and missionary, Olav Hodne. Four decades earlier, Hodne had written his monumental biography of Skrefsrud. Hodne's mindset and principled approach to mission history, motivated him to start writing the overdue third volume of the History of the Santal Mission. The volume, published in 1992, highlights Bodding's extraordinary centrality as mission leader, missionary, and scholar. The author notably breaks the silence around the taboo issues of Bodding's second and third marriages, backed by stunningly elaborate evidence about them from a range of official records, personal correspondence, interviews, and published sources.²⁸ We may say in no uncertain terms that Hodne not only sat on a goldmine of valuable and sensitive information, which he already to some degree processed and analyzed in a bulky history volume. Moreover, he was persuaded that this delicate and historically important task could only be completed by him in his later years. Bodding's biography came out from the printing press in 2006, three years before Hodne passed away.

In a brief albeit revelatory foreword to the biography, Hodne writes that Bodding's fellow missionary, J.J. Ofstad, had already written a biographical manuscript shortly after Bodding's death in 1938. The heads of the Santal Mission, however, had declined to publish the manuscript. "Not scientific enough," was the official explanation. Ofstad had hoped the biography could be published in 1945, following the liberation of Norway and end of Nazi Germany's occupation, and in connection with the inauguration of a Memorial Monument of Bodding in the latter's hometown of Gjøvik. The aging Ofstad, a prolific writer and recent retiree from the missionary field, knew better than most of his contemporaries the inordinate importance of Bodding as a scientist and the weight of his legacy to the mission. He nevertheless obediently withdrew his manuscript and kept it among his private papers. Several years later, the dusty book manuscript was discovered during a loft clearing.²⁹ It appears that Hodne had read Ofstad's Bodding biography, though he chose not cite from it. One would argue, that both of these texts, with their subtexts, contain substantial evidence of willful closure and repression of the Mission's institutional memory of Bodding.

Arguably, an iron law was in force, based on the premise that Bodding's violation of a moral code of conduct was of a most serious nature. Bodding's conduct and personal life, could never be separated from his public role and position what had become a distinctly Lutheran mission. Moreover, one may discern that this moral code was highly gendered, a recognition which may help unravelling a deeper normative connection between the apparently different destinies of Caroline Børresen and Olav Bodding as "white or blank spots" in the Mission's history. In order to start unwinding the underlying gendered norms; a departure is applying classical social science insights into the eighteenth century European bourgeoisie separation of the public and private domain, based on a rigid sexual division of labor.³⁰ Based on this separation, men were public persons. Women were relegated to the domestic sphere, subjected to men's authority as breadwinners and guardians. Now binary gender distinctions in religious and political thought, may not be perfectly practiced, and so was also the case in the Santal Mission. Engagement as a missionary was often a lifelong love affair. Dedicating one's life in the service of God, implied that one's personal life was never really fully private. Choice of spouse, when and if to marry, parenting and children's upbringing, furloughs that regulated contact with family at home, nature of acceptable contact with natives, were all subjected to a highly regulated, gendered, and racialized social and moral regime, guarded by a close-knit conservative religious community.

Married women would be ordained as missionaries with their husbands. They were auxiliary missionaries and primarily relegated to the domestic sphere; expected to devote themselves to creating proper European homes and rearing children under demanding climatic and social conditions. Mrs. Børresen, whose boarding school was a prime vehicle for socializing Santal girls to become dutiful housewives, herself deviated from this ideal by exercising such unrestrained will to exercise a public leadership role. When the late Skrefsrud appointed her as his formal successor in his will, it was a blatant violation of the gender code which had to be rectified (see Tambs-Lyche's nuanced account). Notably, gender norms, legislation and practice was changing in early 20th. century Scandinavia, affecting gender relations within the conservative missions. The Santal Mission was no exception. The first generation of female missionaries did so as wives of male missionaries. In the following generation mission societies began recruiting unmarried female missionaries. Christine Larsen, who later married Boddling, was a trained medical doctor, and the fourth unmarried female missionary in the Mission's service.³¹

Understanding the cultural context for Boddling's public memory

Boddling's story has historic and legendary, nearly mythological dimensions. As part of the narrative of the Scandinavian-Santal enlightenment legacy, it is strikingly disjointed both in Boddling's lifetime and posthumously. In Scandinavia most fellow missionaries and a prejudiced home management underestimated his contributions while he still lived. As unraveled above, he was neither duly incorporated into collective memory of the Mission after his death, not sought remade into a legendary demigod of a nearly hagiological nature as was Skrefsrud in both in Scandinavia and India. The Boddling story took a very different trajectory on the soil of the Santal-inhabited northern Indian territories, compared to in Scandinavia. Decades after his demise, the Northern Santals recast Boddling into a legendary cultural hero. Now, prior to any further discussion about these different developments, let us probe the cultural and social context for memory-making of the early Scandinavian missionaries of this particular mission.

The study of sermons, speeches and writings in different religious and secular genres, of the early Santal missionaries, represents a fascinating field of inquiry, which yields insights into how they operated as faith entrepreneurs and inscribed themselves into public memory.³² Such a full inquiry is beyond the scope of this paper. I nevertheless like to touch upon one particular issue; if and how they succeeded in communicating across nearly unbridgeable cultural and social barriers to non-European audiences – most notably “heathen” converts and supporters in British India, and constituencies “at home” in Northern Europe and the Scandinavian immigrant milieus in America. I will first discuss encounters between Scandinavians and Santals in British India, and then return to the Scandinavian context.

The Scandinavian missionaries oldest mission fields was as noted in the newly formed Santal Parganas District, situated in the vast rural “tribal” belt of north-central British India. The first and second generation (the latter Boddling belonged to) chose to concentrate evangelization among the Santals. The Scandinavians encountered a people whose worldview, including eschatology, they found profoundly difficult to understand. They thought the Santals appeased malevolent *bongas* out of fear and erroneously mistook them for *trolls*, influenced by Norwegian folklore. And in some cases as the devil (see Timotheas Hembrom's paper). What escaped the missionaries was that in Santal eschatology, souls of ancestors pass through several stages before becoming benign and malevolent *bongas*. The living coexisted with the *bonga* world through rites of invocation, trance, remembrance, and appeasement. From they arrived, the missionaries discouraged ancestor and *bonga* worship as superstition; assuming the new religion would literally free the Santals from a fear-dominated and debased existence.

However, the ontology of the *bonga* world was so deeply ingrained and meaningful to the Santals that the Scandinavians' mix of evangelization, dedicated diaconal service, humanitarian aid and imposed rules of moral conduct, did not fully erase such deeply held existential convictions. The correspondence of these pioneers in fact abounds with accounts of "rice-Christians" who converted under and after mass starvations and converts whose faith was too shallow and got lost to the ancient "primitive" faith. In spite of such fundamental interpretative and communicative gaps (which impacted negatively progress in terms of saving souls), the pioneers and the resident Santal population developed over decades a remarkable mutually trusting relationship.

The pioneer generation deliberately chose to die in their new homeland and remain buried there. In fact, they were posthumously incorporated into the Santals' ancestral realm and remain an integral part of native public memory. Skrefsrud and Børresen are the prime examples in this respect. They are buried in the graveyard located within the compound of the famous Benagaria Mission. Benagaria as the Santal Mission's first headquarters, set a new standard for mission compounds in British India in terms of layout, compound-like architecture, service functions, technology and other modern infrastructure. Built and expanded between 1868-1890 by massive community participation and donations from the Santals themselves and mission friends in British India and Scandinavia, it is an important Scandinavian-Santal heritage site. Importantly, the Skrefsruds and the Børresens are buried with their head facing south, in accordance with ancient Santal ideas about directions of ancestral afterlife. These burial customs, combining Christian burials with this indigenous notion of afterlife - is a significant testimony to a degree of intercultural accommodation the first generation missionaries stood for. The second generation of theologically trained missionaries was considerably more restrictive and dismissive of leniency towards native custom.

Due to a number of circumstances, the late Bodding and his spouse Christine Larsen retired to Scandinavia and were buried in Assistens Kirkegaard in Odense, Denmark. The Santals have therefore been deprived of maintaining Bodding's final resting place as a memorial site. Bereft of a grave as memorial site, the Santals' memory making of Bodding as missionary and cultural hero remains based on an oral legacy of his deeds, actions and sayings and the wealth of religious and secular literature he either collected together with Santals or authored as an ethnographer and linguist (see Ruby Hembrom's critical and stimulating viewpoints on actual Bodding's authorship in this issue).

The post-humous memory production reflects to some degree how Bodding operated in his own lifetime as faith entrepreneur. As secretary of a high-profile missionary society and the Mission's own renowned scholar, Bodding became a public figure in India, Scandinavia, and America. With an introverted, scholastic nature, his public image was of a modest and forthright speaker, regardless the audience. Publicly he spoke more eloquently in Santali than in English or even his mother tongue Norwegian, however fluent his writings were in both languages. Skrefsrud, unlike Bodding, possessed a theatrical talent and was able to stage his performances so as to optimally engage vastly different mass audiences. His charisma combined with oratory to create a firebrand evangelist and brilliant speaker who won the acclaim of discerning elite circles in the British Empire, in London and Calcutta, and ignited a transatlantic movement. Bodding's view of the flood of semi-devotional Skrefsrud literature between the two World Wars was pragmatic; it kindled a passion for the mission. Unlike Skrefsrud, Bodding never seriously attempted to influence or more directly to craft his own public image in self-biographical or other writings. Not even when his public reputation was seriously in jeopardy in his later years as secretary of the Mission did he go public to defend himself.

Even a cursory glance at the historic evidence regarding Bodding and Skrefsrud as

public men displays how different they were as mission leaders and their ways of operating as international faith entrepreneurs. Boddling was a prolific writer in different genres of religious and secular literature, and his total production was much greater than Skrefsrud's. Boddling chose never to place himself as the centerpiece in grandiose narratives as did his respected mentor Skrefsrud. There is, nevertheless, nothing in Boddling's published and private writings that suggests he felt overlooked or offended by living in his legendary mentor's public shadow for decades after Skrefsrud's death and massively attended burial at Benagaria Mission. Boddling had no interest in 'going native' like Skrefsrud, who took on a role as traditional over-chief over several villages (*pargana*). This semi-traditional authority and legitimacy, together with his extraordinary oratory talent and multi-linguistic gifts, formed the cornerstones for Skrefsrud's brand of faith entrepreneurship. A renowned and admired public man, he mediated remarkably successfully between the indigenous lifeworld of the Santals and a range of colonially instituted and patronized institutions and public arenas in England, Scotland, America, and Scandinavia. Skrefsrud's public memory was not only maintained through the popularity of bibliographies and speeches: Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's famous poem honoring the missionary was hugely popular and the modest cottage (*Skrefsrudstuen*) he was born in, was moved to the Maihaugen outdoor museum in Lillehammer attracting scores of visitors.

Boddling operated in three continents via sea travel and maintained a regular overseas correspondence by way of telegraph, which was at the time a new, very useful invention. Nevertheless, he operated partly in different public landscapes than his famous mentor. Boddling was visible in the Mission's own international domain, which had developed into a conventional "normalized" missionary society, as illuminated by Tambs-Lyche in this issue. This domain had its own loyal hinterland of supporting circles, committees, social networks, conferences and mass media. Just as significant is Boddling as a doyen in academic the most respectable circles and academic societies of British India and Europe, mostly visible through his extensive correspondence, publications and honorary memberships and noted orders. Despite this, following Boddling's death, his public memory was deliberately silenced. In spite of the Mission leadership's top-down enforced silence, there are reliable unpublished private sources, which provide a rare, intimate portrayal of the impression Boddling's physical appearance and personality made on his younger colleagues. Johannes Gausdal was one of five young missionaries to arrive for duty in British India in late 1915, following a dangerous sea voyage during the First World War. On his early impressions of Boddling he narrates in a private memoir:

We were well received by the aging, slightly corpulent and rather mute Boddling. A pair of mild eyes behind thick glasses met us newly arrived. He had his imposing writing table stacked with books and documents near the north-eastern door in the great sitting room. Morha, the Santal housekeeper, kept the dinner table meticulously set for our meals. We were told he even decided when the Saheb's hair and beard was to be cut.³³

The newcomers had to go through a four to five-month-long introduction course in Santali with Santal teachers under Boddling's careful supervision. Gausdal writes in his memories;

His advice to us beginners was: Be seated on the women's side during church service so you can listen to their pronunciation during hymns. I sat with them and soon realized the value of Boddling's advice, their voices conveyed more distinctively the whole sound register if compared with the men.³⁴

Returning the conditions in British India for Boddling's public memory post humorously, my investigation uses interviews and ethnographic data, showing that the Santals embraced his public memory fondly.³⁵ This stands in stark contrast to his posthumous reputation in the home mission countries. Public memories of Boddling

Saheb transmuted after Independence, turning him into an elevated, revered personality in the Santals' thriving literate cultural movement. By the 1960s, Boddling had become a full-fledged cultural hero. His portrait would commonly adorn offices and his birthday would be publicly celebrated. An icon of the Santals increasingly assertive ethno-nationalist movement, they had discovered his true importance through his *magnum opus*, the five-volume encyclopedic Santal Dictionary.³⁶ The ethnographic series on *Folktales* and *Santal Medicine* was also gradually been rediscovered as they became physically assessable from Indian publishers and in copied forms (see Ruby Hembrom's paper in this issue).

Boddling's reputation reached legendary proportions among the Northern Santals, just as Skrefsrud's stature and institutionalized visibility (even in school curricula) as a prophet cum cultural hero in Norway waned. The latter was a result of massive secularization. For sure, the rather humble late Boddling could not possibly imagine that he would posthumously become the most revered cultural hero of *diku* (foreign) origin among the Northern Santals in particular in the late twentieth century. Among the Southern Santals of Odhesa (Orissa) and parts of West Bengal, his major works were acknowledged and increasingly translated and subjected to proper scrutiny. Although his reputation would be dwarfed by another culture hero, Jagnath Murmu - the inventor of the divinely revealed *olchiki* script, Boddling's Latin scripted books were influential. They sparked engaged debates about cultural politics among poets, cultural workers, academicians, community leaders and other opinion makers.

Late years in India as a scientist and retirement in Scandinavia

Following the debacle around their conjugal union and the radical shift of position from top executive and trustee to fulltime scientist, the Boddings returned to Mohulpahari. Christine worked without pay, on the assumption that her newly acquired marital status made her a dependent to be provided for. Actually, Christine worked for more than a decade (1923-1934) excessively long hours as founder, in-charge and medical doctor at first a day clinic and later also a ward with 20 beds. Her husband was working as intensely in order to complete the long-overdue massive dictionary project and to round-off and publish a number of collections and documentary ethnographical series. Completing nearly four decades of collection of museum items, donated to Ethnographic Museum at University of Oslo, known as the Boddling Collection, was another urgent priority.

Moreover, three grammars - one mostly phonetic, one morphological, and one for beginners - were published between 1922 and 1929. The three-volume Santal Folktales, the first ever compilation of the Edda-like oral epic of the Santals was published in Christiania between the 1925 and 1929. The volumes contain some 800 tales, mostly collected and written down by Sagram Murmu. In her paper, Ruby Hembrom rightly observes: Boddling was basically a series editor and co-compiler with Sagram. The ethno-botanical series on Santal medicine and connected folklore were completed more or less simultaneously. Two of the three volumes were published in Calcutta in respectively 1925 and 1927, and the last posthumously in 1940. A new edition of the whole series was republished in India in 1983.

As discussed above, Boddling's earlier work between 1890 and 1923 consisted mainly of translations of the testaments, the catechism (*Kuk'li Puthi*) discussed in Timotheas Hembrom's paper, church liturgy and hymns (some of which were his own compositions).³⁷ Other publications in Norwegian addressed missiology, the early history of the Santal Mission, and memorable evangelists, some of whom had attained popularity and sold well beyond the circles of mission supporters in Norway, Denmark, and America.³⁸ In spite of the magnitude of the scientific projects under completion, Boddling did not put the biblical revision projects on hold. A revised translation of the Bible in Santali was published in 1929 with support from the British Bible Society.

The spacious study in the bungalow housed meter upon meter of bookshelves contain meticulously recorded files of registered linguistic and ethnographic material. Some of them date back to the first collection trips undertaken by the young Skrefsrud and his Santal collaborators in the 1870 and '80s. The veranda outside the study was the permanent workspace for his indispensable in-house collaborators, a circle of eminent Santal literates, sages, and storytellers. Boddings' existence at Mohulpahari was paradoxical in certain respects. He felt the home leadership had unfairly ostracized and criticized him for being authoritarian and pathologically suspicious as secretary. The treatment Christine and he had suffered because of his checkered matrimonial history continued to cause pain, as did the prohibition of missionary and pastoral duties. When Boddings insisted on working outside the missionary conference and reporting directly home, his colleagues interpreted this as another sign of his wish to remain apart from them, not as a logical consequence of the special terms of his new position.

However semi-voluntary Boddings' retreat possibly was, it allowed him a much-cherished freedom to fully mobilize his and his dedicated collaborators' encyclopedic knowledge and vast records of linguistic and ethnographic information, and complete successively overdue projects listed above. Moreover, notably, at considerable personal and professional costs, he was finally with a loving spouse whose dedication to the greater Christian cause was no less than his own. They lived a full conjugal life, in which the personal and professional fused. In certain respects, their own daily practice was more liberal than their own Mission's normative conservative view of the husband-wife relationship.

In 1929, the first installment of the five-volume Santal Dictionary (each about 700 pages long) left the printing press in Kristiania. Following the volume's release, the Boddings could afford a much-needed furlough in Denmark and Norway. Prior to their departure from Calcutta for the sea voyage to Europe, Boddings was asked to write the Santal Mission's official greeting to Nordmanns-Forbundet (a worldwide organization for Norwegians everywhere). The occasion was the 900-year jubilee of the Christianization of Norway and the battle of Stiklestad. The fact that the Santal Mission was chosen to write the official greeting on behalf of all Norwegian societies in Asia, is testimony to the Santal Mission's recognition among missions and diaspora milieus. In "On behalf of Norwegians in Asia," Boddings wrote:

We Norwegians wherever we wander, we came to realize that what happened on Stiklestad 900 years ago, the king who gave his life for the mission he was entrusted, to which he had sworn allegiance assured of its solemn (all)importance. He gave everything for Norway. His self-sacrifice – what impact does it not still inspire? It is our hope that Norwegian men and women may all follow the Martyr King's example, and in every moment of our lives elevate our fatherland's prosperity and happiness above our own personal and dire demands. Our future depends on this. P.O. Boddings³⁹

Arguably, the text illuminates poignantly central ideas of the Santal Mission and, in an extended sense, of the whole Norwegian missionary movement abroad between the two World Wars. Boddings' words articulate an understanding of the mission's sacred duty for the Christian fatherland, whose history dated back to the historical battle at Stiklestad between Christendom and old Norse religion.

During their holidays in Scandinavia, Boddings gave several public talks. All were well attended, although not comparable to the mass attendance and religious zeal Skrefsrud's charismatic persona had inspired a generation earlier.⁴⁰ Mission leaders and supporters in Norway in particular received him somewhat coolly and reticently. This could be one of the reasons the Boddings contemplated to remain in India after their retirement, as had the pioneers. For reasons that are not stated in official correspondence and annals, they finally decided to return to Northern Europe. A pension scheme established when Boddings was secretary, made a return to Scandinavia financially feasible. In 1934, the Boddings returned for good.

They lived a withdrawn life near Oslo for two years while Boddling supervised the printing and oversaw the distribution of the last volumes. In 1936, the Boddings moved to Christine's hometown of Odense. In the missions' annals, the official reason given for their move from Norway is her wish to be close to her own family. Denmark's lower tax rate was another important factor in light of their rather modest pensions. Nevertheless, given the air of disapproval that lingered on whenever they moved in missionary circles in Norway, it was very likely another motivating factor behind their final move to Denmark. Boddling died two years later in their Odense home, shortly after an acute outdoor incident, possibly due to a mild stroke.

His funeral, which took place on a chilly October morning at Thomas Kingo's Church, brought out a mixed crowd of family, mission leaders, and friends, most of them Danes, of course, but some Norwegians also made the journey. Johannes Gausdal attended officially on behalf of the Santal Mission. Gausdal placed a Santal Bible on the flower-clad coffin as a solemn and highly meaningful token of the Santals' deep appreciation of his great work for and with them. It was a deeply meaningful duty for Gausdal, a mission priest who also cultivated intellectual interests beyond theology and fully knew the enduring and invaluable nature of Boddling's lifework and legacy. No Santals were present among the mourners for the man they for decades had increasingly considered a kindred spirit and whom they later would revere as one of their cultural heroes.⁴¹

Concluding note: The scholar-missionary and the public-private conundrums

Arguably, scholarship and primary and secondary education came to constitute a basic enlightenment pillar of the Santal Mission in "the extended Boddling era" (1890-1934). To carry forward this grandiose project, Skrefsrud had chosen the eminently suited scholar-missionary Boddling, whom his evangelization-minded mother "gifted him" to the mission when he was a little boy. Boddling and a circle of influential Santal collaborators took over some of Skrefsrud's unfinished literary project and spearheaded another generation-long enormous investment in intellectual and scholarly work and outreach (evangelization, collection work, advocacy for social reform, printing press and publications).

In order to apply Boddling's vast intellect and enormous capacity for ethnographic, linguistic, and literary work, he was offered a manageably limited regional assignment, Mohulpahari Mission. In the first decade as district missionary, he gave priority to translations of the New and Old Testaments and editing of *Kuk'li Puthi* since evangelization urgently needed strengthening. Even so, a massive collection of "saga" literature and material culture also got underway. Serving as secretary, a position that came with a formidable workload during a particularly difficult transition period, Boddling never completely shelved literary projects. When Boddling resigned from the exposed executive post under dramatic circumstances (see Tambs-Lyche's paper), he was much too valuable to be asked to leave the mission. Efforts instead were directed at recasting Boddling as public man under the most trying of circumstances. Even with his reputation tarnished within the mission, Boddling remained fiercely committed to the holy cause and showed nearly limitless loyalty. The public man's unforgivable sin was to insist on remarrying as a divorcee rather than a widower as he at one stage had reported to his superiors. Especially in the mind of the Norwegian mission board and brethren, the change in civil status amounted to nothing less than a blatant violation of marriage as a sacrament. Boddling's marital history loomed over him and Christine as a dark shadow while in India and after retiring to Scandinavia. A merciless moral judgement was applied in this particular case.

The vexed gender-based moral public and private issues involved, were too difficult and perhaps too frightening to handle with greater wisdom. Instead, they were collectively repressed, with extraordinary serious consequences for the formation of the mission's own history and the representation of the individuals involved. What

Hodne termed “a white spot” was first genuinely addressed by him in the third history volume and his Bodding bibliography, several decades after his demise. I have sought to highlight here certain rich and poignant narratives that unravel a religiously grounded morally unassailable iron “law”, which molded the private lives and public reputations Bodding and other prominent missionaries close to him.

As contemporary scholars, educators, writers and staff of faith-based institutions, we may hopefully acknowledge the importance for this issue’s re-examination of a largely forgotten and partly distorted scholar-missionary of enduring importance as a public person. This being said, Bodding’s restitution is not only the result of the efforts of few bold and fair-minded mission insiders and scholars. The end to this self-imposed and oppressive silence was made possible also by sweeping societal changes, principally Norway’s secularization and the rise of the women’s movement. The transformations altered the terms of public discourse of gender morality. Conservative Lutheran mission circles would be among the last segments of the polity to embrace this new openness toward public and private matters.

Among the mission historians of the latter half of the twentieth century Olav Hodne processed certain assets; insider knowledge of the Santal Mission, a theological open-mindedness, and profound humanism, which enabled him to begin restoring Bodding’s public memory and stature through some remarkably rich, detailed and frank publications. Naturally there are omissions and fascinating subjects that have not yet been unfolded, some of which this issue of *NTM* unravels. Hodne does not apply a longer historical timeline, which would have placed the Santals Mission in relation to precursor (*indre*) missions in Northern and Southern Norway. That makes Dikka Storm’s article here very timely and stimulating. Neither has Hodne nor any scholar from the humanistic and social sciences, examined in much depth how Bodding the theologian (compared with his mentors and Santal collaborators) influenced the translations of the New and Old Testaments and the catechism *Kuk’li Puthi*. It speaks to the theologian Timotheas Hembrom’s credit that he has raised a scholarly debate on this vexing question in this issue.

The writer and publisher Ruby Hembrom urges a similar post-colonial inspired examination of the celebrated series *The Santal Folktales*, asking penetrating questions about Bodding’s real authorship, compared to that of his native coworkers and numerous nameless storytellers who generously shared their time and stories in the first place. Ruby Hembrom exposes Eurocentric and colonial notions embedded the grand series’ foreword and elaborate footnotes. It would be naïve to expect Bodding’s scientific work and compilations not to be influenced by Lutheran theology, missiology, distinctly Eurocentric and colonial assumptions on critical conceptual issues such as Santal cosmology, demonology, witchcraft, the status of women and the Santal rebellion (*Hul*). Bodding was also influenced by Norwegian cultural nationalism, literature, museum politics and democratization process. I find distinct traces of such influences in his reform of the trust laws and the internal management structure and his recruitment of female unmarried missionaries, often completed without due credit, as Tambs-Lyche’s paper illuminates well.

Within this overarching project, there are fascinating cracks and gaps in this religious and secular literature, providing space and lending agency to a range of discordant and oppositional indigenous and Scandinavian voices. Some of these cracks in the form of tacit and subtle subtexts have been analyzed in this issue’s papers. Colleagues Marine Carrin, Peter B. Andersen and Santosh K. Soren have already published an important book, comprising translations of Santals’ own narrations.⁴² Yet we should not disregard the urgency of undertaking new archival, textual, and oral history research.⁴³ May this issue of *NJM* be a testimony to the collaborative critical research endeavor that is being spurred by the historical Bodding Symposium and the formation of the Scandinavian-Santal Heritage Initiative (*SSINherit*).

Noter

- 1 *The Bodding Symposium was a collaboration between the Universities of Oslo and Tromsø, the National Library of Norway and Goshaldanga Bishnubati Trust and Museum of Santal Culture in West Bengal, India.*
- 2 *For simplicity, the author will use the term Santal Mission (SM) and Mission (with capital first letters) in this paper. The Mission has existed under the following names since its establishment: Indian Home Mission to the Santals 1869-1911, The Santal Mission to the Northern Churches 1911-1950, then The Ebenezer Evangelical Lutheran Church 1950-1959 and later Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church from 1959 to the present.*
- 3 *The last founder, the British Baptist E.C. Johnson was no longer in the Mission, following a conflict with Skrefsrud and Børresen between 1869-1874 with the forerunner, the Baptist Mission to the Santals.*
- 4 *See this author's forthcoming monograph, The Scandinavian-Santal Pastoral Enlightenment Movement in the 20th. Century Revisited.*
- 5 *In 1901 Bodding received King Oscar's Medal in Gold and 1910 the Knight of St. Olav's Order (First Class). He was later admitted to the Asiatic Society of Bengal (Calcutta), the Royal Asiatic Society (London) and the Norwegian Academy of Science (Oslo), to mention few of his distinguished memberships.*
- 6 *Due to unavoidable circumstances, Prof. Timotheas Hembrom's could not attend the Bodding Symposium in Oslo. Nevertheless, his paper was distributed as an India Report. The fact that contributions from Santal, or for that matter other indigenous South Asian theologian, even in the early 21st century seldom reach relevant Scandinavian publication channels, should be taken as a timely reminder of the importance of including scholars like Hembrom.*
- 7 *Ruby Hembrom is the Founder and Executive Director of the Adivaani Publishing House, see <https://adivaani.org/>*
- 8 *Paul Olav Bodding Santal Folk Tales, Volumes 1-3. (Oslo: 1925-29). H. Aschehoug & Co.*
- 9 *Marine Carrin and Harald Tambs-Lyche, An Encounter of the peripheries: Santals, Missionaries, and their Changing Worlds 1857-1900. (Delhi: Manohar, 2008).*
- 10 *In the early years after the founding year 1867, Skrefsrud functioned as the official leader. It was then decided that the somewhat senior Børresen should take on the formal role as secretary. Skrefsrud remained the Mission's chief ideologist until his death. In reality, Skrefsrud, and the Børresens constituted an all-powerful troika in charge of all major affairs.*
- 11 *Carrin and Tambs-Lyche, An Encounter of the Peripheries: Santals, Missionaries and their Changing Worlds 1867-1900.*
- 12 *A huge contingent of Scandinavian missionary staff, the continued influence of the Missionary Conference (in the field) and Scandinavians occupying key positions within the new church, ensured a continued massive influence well into the 1970s, and longer in certain respects.*
- 13 *Hodne, Oppreisning, 20.*
- 14 *Hodne, Oppreisning, 112.*
- 15 *In his unpublished memoir, dated 7 December 1974, Johannes Gausdal has a note on Bodding and his two dogs: "When [Bodding] came to the service the dogs were always with him, once they had crept under the alter table and laid down the service could commence", (translation by this author).*
- 16 *Santal Posten, (Denmark, 1907) 180-181.*
- 17 *During dramatic weeks prior to Bodding and Larsen's wedding, Ingeborg's sister, who lived in South India, intervened and claimed that correspondence showed Ingeborg was alive.*
- 18 *Secretary Aage Krohn's official letter from the Danish Santal Mission (den Danske Santalmissionærers forening) dated Hillesrød, 26.04, 1923 to Secretary Rosenlund in Dumka*
- 19 *A comprehensive discussion will be found in my forthcoming monograph, The Scandinavian-Santal Enlightenment Movement in the 20th. Century Revisited.*
- 20 *In the earliest period, newspapers in England, Scotland, India and Scandinavia covered the Santal Mission extensively. The Mission Boards started their own national periodicals; Dahk-wala in 1880 and Santhal Posten in 1896, both in Denmark; Santalen in Norway in 1883; Johar in Sweden in 1888 and Santhal missjonæren in America in 1896.*
- 21 *See for example Birger Hall, Lars Skrefsrud: En Folkebog, (Kristiania: 1922); J. K. Løth, L. O. Skrefsrud – misjonær blant Santalene (Oslo: tredje utgave, 1938); N.N Rønning, Lars O. Skrefsrud, an apostle to the Santals, (Minneapolis, 1940); Einar Døhl, Lars Skrefsrud (Oslo, 1944).*
- 22 *Olav Hodne, L.O. Skrefsrud: Missionary and Social Reformer among the Santals of Santal Parganas with special reference to the period between 1867-1881. Studies of the Egede Institute, Volume 9. (Oslo: Forlaget Land og Kirke, 1966); Knud Gjesing, En Missionspioner: H. P. Børresens Liv med særlig henblik på hans misjonsvirksomhet. (Copenhagen: Gec Gads Forlag, 1961). Hodne, with his often gender sensitive gaze as*

- mission historian is a notable exception; see *I gode og onde dager*, Anna Onsum Skreftsrud 1838-1870. (Oslo: Santalmisjonens Forlag, 1950).
-
- 23 In correspondences characterizations such as “very strong willed,” “wielding a strange influence over her husband and Mr. Skreftsrud,” “intrigue-maker,” and the like, are used. See, for example, Gjesing, *En Missionspioner: H. P. Børresens Liv med særlig henblik på hans misjonsvirksomhet*, 314, 327, 353 and Hodne, L.O. *Skreftsrud: Missionary and Social Reformer among the Santals of Santal Parganas with special reference to the period between 1867-1881*, 61-63, 138.
-
- 24 Even academic circles dedicated to the study of Christian Scandinavian missions in Tribal India been more preoccupied with the charismatic Lars Skreftsrud than the reclusive Bodding.
-
- 25 Olav Hodne, *Santal Missjonens Historie, Bind 3*, (Oslo: Santalmisjonens Forlag, 1992); Olav Hodne, *Oppreisning: Misjonæren og vitenskapsmammen Paul Olav Bodding 1865-1938*. (Oslo: Luther Forlag, 2006).
-
- 26 Compared with several other European Missions in Central and North India, the Santal Mission postponed the nationalization process until the late years of the Raj and the decade following Independence in 1947.
-
- 27 Hodne, *Oppreisning*, 2006, 7.
-
- 28 Hodne, *Santalmisjonens historie, Volume 3*, 1992, 89-103.
-
- 29 Hodne, *Oppreisning*, 13.
-
- 30 Especially post-1960s literature on the public/private distinction is enormous with contributions from a range of disciplines. This author was early influenced by Richard Sennett’s influential book *The Fall of Public Man* (1977) on the tyranny of intimacy and feminist classics such as; Susan Moller Akin, *Women in Western Political Thought*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) and Nancy Hartsock, *Money, Sex and Power: Towards a Feminist Materialism*. (New York: Longman, 1983).
-
- 31 Hodne, *Santalmisjonens Historie, Bind 3*, 495-96.
-
- 32 Anthropological theory on ancestor worship was early informed by works on West African socio-religious institutions and practices. A wealth of more recent studies from East Asia and the Pacific have latter appeared. Importantly, the incorporation of the missionary pioneers into an ancestral realm did not involve appeasement through sacrifice. In devotional prayers they were invoked for blessings and benign protection.
-
- 33 Gausdal’s private memoir *Bodding Saheb*, was written for his daughter; the missionary Elisabeth Dørdal, dated 7 December 1974. Translation by this author. Access granted by Mrs. Dørdal in April 2013.
-
- 34 Johannes Gausdal, *Bodding Saheb*.
-
- 35 See my forthcoming monograph; *The Scandinavian-Santal Pastoral Enlightenment Movement in the 20th. Century Revisited*.
-
- 36 Paul Olav Bodding, *A Santal Dictionary Volumel-5*, (Oslo 1932-36).
-
- 37 Main translations (printed by the Mission’s own press at Benagaria) in Santali included *Kuk’li Puthi*, (1899), *New Testament* (editions 1911, 1928, 1929); *Old Testament* 1914; *the Bible* (in full translation) 1929, *Girjak Dhara* 1917, *Seren Puthi* (1912, 1915, and 1918, 1920, 1922).
-
- 38 Paul Olav Bodding, *Misjonens nødvendighet og velsignelse*. (Kristiania, 1904); *Utkast til Framtidsordning for Indisk Hjemmission blant santalene*, (København, 1909); *Lidt om Santalbibelens Tilblivelse*, (Kristiania, 1915). *Sona, en kristen Santalkvinnes liv og gjærning*, (København, 1919); and *Friske Skud, Santalmisjonen og Santalmenighetenes 25-års virke i Dinajpur og Malda*. (København, 1925). Bodding also contributed regularly to the journal *Pera Hor* and the monthly magazines *Santalen*, *Santalposten* and *Dakhwala*.
-
- 39 Gausdal, *Bodding Saheb* (unpublished memoires).
-
- 40 These were speech topics of the missionary scholar; the Santals’ living conditions and the role of the mission, the Santals’ religion and the role of the Christian Mission and the Santals’ language and the translation of the Bible. See Gausdal above and *Santalen* 1930.
-
- 41 Odense Assistens Kirkegaard is a large communal burial ground established in 1816. Bodding’s is mentioned on the list over the graveyard’s well-known graves.
-
- 42 Peter B. Andersen, Marine Carrin and Santosh K. Soren (Eds.) *From Fire to Rebellion: Reasserting Ethnic Identity through Narrative*. (Delhi: Manohar, 2011).
-
- 43 See this author’s forthcoming monograph, *The Scandinavian-Santal Pastoral Enlightenment Movement in the 20th. Century Revisited*.
-

