

BLOCK 1

Many are of the opinion that the tribals being away from the mainstream of life of the country, living in the mountains and dense forests, have no past or a recorded history. There may not be any written records but the oral history could be of some importance to know the origin of the tribals and the unique culture that they inherit and practice. Our whole concentration in this course will be to make an assessment of the situation of the tribes in India constituting 8.74 % of India's population. As we have said earlier the Indian government has termed these classes of people as scheduled tribes and popularly they are known as Adivasis. These groups of people have their own unique culture, customs, and way of living, myths and so on that they have inherited from their fore fathers that distinguish them from the other groups. But the recent developments and progress in the field of science and technology have created some amount of disturbance among the tribals. Although there are a number of measures taken to maintain the cultural identity of the tribals but hardly anything benefits them.

Unit 1 familiarizes us with the Historical Roots of the Tribals. Many are of the view that they do not have any past. But in this unit we will be dealing with themes like what do we understand by the term tribals, some of the historical facts about them and the sources that support these views.

Unit 2 studies the Tribal Folklore and Cultural Expressions. This unit studies the culture and the folklore of the tribals, the role that folklore plays in the life of the tribals, the various cultural expressions, the organization of the administration, the various socio-religious customs and the feasts and celebrations.

Unit 3 highlights the Impact of Scientific Culture and Globalization on the Tribals. Here we will pay attention to the policies that are introduced by the government and modern ways of development like industrialization that have had a great impact on the tribal culture. The instability of the states in different fields adversely affects the growth and development of the tribals.

Unit 4 probes into the Social Organization and Administration of the Tribals. They have different ways of administration and dislike any interference by the states. Kinship is the basis of

all the bonds that exist. The tribals have been free to exercise their customary laws regarding inheritance, marriage and other social practices.

Even though the tribals may not have a written record of the past that they have gone through, the culture and the customs that they have inherited from their ancestors reveal a lot of things. They have their own unique identity which is very much threatened by some of the wrong policies of Governments and political parties which calls for remedial measures.



BPYE-012-TRIBAL AND DALIT PHILOSOPHY (4 credits)

COURSE INTRODUCTION

A tribe looked at from the historical point of view could be those social groups that have grown outside the states or mainstream of the country. On the other hand they considered to be the original people of the land or even those settled first in the continents of Asia, Africa, Australia and even America. Some of the thinkers are of the opinion that tribes could be the intermediate stage between the band and states and others say that tribes developed only after states and we need to study them only according to their relation to the larger whole that is state. Looked at from an Indian context these very people are known as the “Adivasees” meaning the first settlers in a particular geographical region. The government of India terms these groups of people as Scheduled tribes. The Indian government is well aware of the tribal population in the country and has made a list of all the tribes and they have been guaranteed some special privileges and rights, not with the intention of making them ahead of others but in bringing them into the mainstream of life of the country.

Who then are the Dalits? They are the ones who by virtue of their caste membership were placed socially, economically, culturally and politically at the very bottom of a hierarchical society. They make up about 16 per cent of the Indian population and number about 138 million. They have been called by various names, such as ‘Untouchables’, ‘Harijans’, ‘Outcastes’, ‘Pariahs’ But the term ‘Dalit’ that is being used today is a name that the untouchables have given themselves. "Dalit" means ground down, downtrodden, oppressed, but it now is being used by the low castes in a spirit of pride and militancy. The name "dalit" is not only a rejection of the very idea of pollution or impurity or "untouchability," but also, it reveals a sense of unified class, of a movement toward equality. It speaks of a new stage in the movement of Untouchables in India.

This course, consisting of sixteen units, draws our attention to important social groups and highlights the philosophical visions implied in their traditional customs, beliefs and practices.

Block 1 focuses on the historical aspect of the tribals looking at their origin and the past, their cultural expressions, the impact of the modern development and globalization, and the way the tribals have organised themselves.

Block 2 looks at the tribals from a philosophical point of view and tries to highlight their philosophical outlook towards life, the values and the morality that they uphold and the spirituality that they practice.

Block 3 deals with the story of the dalits, one of the social sections in the Hindu society or more so Indian society, looking at the violence and the discrimination that this group of people undergoes.

Block 4 highlights the philosophical outlook towards the dalits, the way the dalits look at themselves and the others view of them, the marginalization and deconstruction and bringing them to the mainstream of life.

UNIT 1

HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE TRIBALS

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1.9 Let Us Sum Up

1.10 Key Words

1.11 Further Readings and References

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study is to get to know who the tribes are in general and to have an insight of the history of some major tribes living in the hilly terrains of the eastern regions of India. This region is full of dense forests and hill ranges and underneath in the womb of the earth there lie many rich minerals. Here in remote regions live the simple honest and unsophisticated people whom we call the primitive people, tribes or the Adivasees.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit we will focus our attention to the history of two major tribal races, first, the Kolarian race whom historians preferred to call the Munda race which comprises of the tribes like the Mundas, the Santals, Kharias, Hos, Asurs and Korwas and second, the Dravidian race in this region embracing the tribes like Oraons, Gonds and the Maltos. All these tribes live mainly in the states of Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa, Chattisgarh and the adjacent

districts of MP. These tribes are also in a very good number working in the Tea estates in Assam and settled there since 19th century.

The history of these tribes go far back in the past thousands of years ago reaching to the ancient cities of Harappa and Mohenjodaro of the Indus Valley. Besides their history other aspects of the tribal life too are quite interesting. Their languages and literature, customs and rituals, their religion and philosophy, their social and political organizations, arts and culture, dance, songs and the whole tribal ethos may as well be an engrossing study. As for now we will limit our study to the historical roots of these tribes and their struggles for survival through ages. So far the writers in the past on the tribal history and even the tribals in general thought of forts of Rohtasgarh or Ruidasgarh on the Kaimur hills in South Bihar belonging to their ancestors. But off and on some of the tribal people of this region spoke of Ajamgarh, Harappa and Mohenjodaro and the long sojourn of their ancestors through the valley of the twin rivers Ganges and Yamuna. These names do come in their folk songs.

The history of the Mundas and the Oraons caught the attention of some researchers ever since some archeological findings came to light during the last century. Archeologists, anthropologists, linguists and historians began to take keen interests in them. The academic interests grew. This study may be the continuation of this curious search about the past of the ancestors of the Mundas and the Oraons. Several questions arise as to the origin of these tribes, their possible exodus from the Indus Valley and their long journey southeast to reach the Mountain regions of Chotanagpur now called Jharkhand the name given to it by the Mughal emperors in 16th century. Before going further, we may try to understand what the connotation tribe means and what are the other names in use for them.

1.2 DEFINITION

The word “tribe” appears to have been derived etymologically from the Latin word “tribus” which means “group”. The Romans used terms like “tribus barbari” meaning the the Barbarian group or tribes with beards and shabby hair unlike the Romans. In English such people were named as primitive people (L. Primus populus - the first people). They are also called the aborigines (L. ab origine - from the origine). These people are also called the

indigenous people meaning those naturally existing in a place or country rather than arriving from another area according to Cambridge dictionary. In India these primitive people are called the “Adivasees” (H. adi vasee - first settler) one who has first come to a particular place and cleared the jungles and made it habitable. If we closely examine the definitions given by several scholars we find the following characteristics of the tribes:

(1) that it is a group of people of homogenous unit, (2) speak a common language or dialect (3) share common culture, (4) governed by customary laws of their own under a chief, (5) have common ancestry and history, (6) have their habitat in isolated geographical regions preferably in the forests and hilly terrains, (7) have a compact community life and (8) generally averse to mixing with people of other society of the plains.

People with the above characteristics are the aborigines or the Adivasees, the first settlers. The Indian government has scheduled some of these aboriginal tribes on the recommendations of the States to give them some benefits and opportunity to develop and come at par with other advanced society economically and socially. The States recommend or do not recommend an aboriginal tribe for scheduling by the Central government, all depends on the discretion of the States. It is a fact that many States have not recommended many a genuinely aboriginal tribes for scheduling. The stark example is Assam which just refuses to recommend about three million of Munda, Oraon and Santal tribes in Tea estates to be put in the scheduled tribe category. Such portion of the large group of Indian aborigines thus scheduled and not yet scheduled spread in the hilly tracts. Only those scheduled are recognized as tribes in the government records and are called the Scheduled tribes. The Indian government is somehow allergic to calling the Indian aborigines as aborigines in the International forum. It prefers to call them only as Scheduled tribes. But it is a fact that all Scheduled tribes may be aborigines but not all aborigines are Scheduled tribes. And this makes the enumeration of the aboriginal tribes lopsided and incomplete and more often misleading. The government has no Census record of the aboriginal tribes in the real sense. It has only the Census records of the Scheduled tribes.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What is your understanding of tribes?

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2. Enumerate the characteristics that differentiate them from other people.

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1.3 TRIBAL POPULATION

According to the Census report of 2001, Indian population has reached one billion. Out of that there are 80 million Scheduled tribes (ST) which comes to 8% of the total population of India. These Scheduled tribes are divided in 692 different ethnic groups. There are many million aboriginal tribes who are not included in the scheduled category. The first six major Scheduled tribes whose population is recorded more than one million as per the government Census of 1971 are (1) Bhils 5.2mn.,(2) Gonds 4.8 mn., (3) Santals 3.6 mn., (4) Oraons 1.7 mn., (5) Meenas 1.5 mn, and (6) Mundas 1.1 mn. The Mundas, the Oraons, the Santals and Gonds are found in Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, and adjacent districts of Madhya Pradesh.. The region covering these States is heavily inhabited by the tribes we are trying to study.

1.4 MUNDA RACE

When we speak of the Munda we refer here to the Munda race which embraces the Mundas, Santals, Kharias, Hos, Asurs and Korwas. These tribes are put in one category and called the Kolerian or the Munda race by the historians and others because their languages are similar to each other since they all have the austic characteristics About the origin of the Munda race there are several scholars with different views. S. C. Roy would say that the Mundas came

from the side of Aravali hills. Bongard-Levin a Russian scholar is of the view that Mundas were somewhere close to Harappa and probably they came in contact with the people of Indus civilization. Dr Diwakar Minj refers to several western scholars who hold the view that Yunnan, a place in south-east China was the original place wherefrom they moved North to central Asia and later moved southward and entered the Indus valley. A group of scholars however believed that Munda race moved from Yunnan to South and via Burma they entered the Indian soil. Historian R. C. Majumdar supporting the theory of B. S. Guha an anthropologist, writes that the Proto-Australoids came from the west and entered the Indian soil. They probably came in contact with the Negritos who had migrated from Africa in the Paleolithic age (c. 40,000 years ago). By admixture with others, specially with the Negritos who came before the Mongoloids, they gave rise to Kol or the Munda race, a Mon-khmer type in Assam, Burma and IndoChina. If this theory is true, we may assume that the Munda race inherited the dark complexion from the Negritos and the austic accent and characteristics of the Australoids in their Mundari language. We are then further led to believe that the original place of habitat of the Munda race was quite probably the Indus valley where five rivers flow according to the Munda folk. The Munda race was in this region reportedly some nine thousand years ago even before the arrival of the Dravidian here in c. 3500 B.C. The Dravidians did meet the original people who had already settled and spread in the Indus Valley. Could they be the very Munda race we are trying to trace?

Profesors Irfan Habib, a historian speaks of the people of Kot-Diji culture who were spread in the Indus Valley even reaching to the southern region of Afghanistan before the Dravidians entered the Indus Valley. Kot-Diji is the ancient name of a place. Prof. Habib does not give any name to the people of the Kot-Diji culture. Could they be the Munda race? Logically speaking two big races may not exist simultaneously spread over the same region at the same period with the same influence without any record of fights. According to some scholars the ancient names like Harappa and Mohenjodaro are not the Vedic names. Mundas still claim that these names have some meaning in their Mundari language. There are names of places like Gumla town in the Gomal ghat of Hindukush Mountain ranges in North-west, Muree, Sarai khela, Naushera, Torobogo, in Present Pakistan and Baluchistan, Ghaghar and so on. How it is that these names are also found in Jharkhand the place where Munda race is still today. It just cannot

be a chance occurrence if we consider the veracity of the theory of migration of names along with the human race.

1.5 THE ORAONS

The Kurux language is the mother tongue of the Oraon tribes which linguistically belongs to the Dravidian linguistic family. It is therefore the Oraons are put in the Dravidian race. That may be good enough to assume that the Oraons were once upon a time the residents of the Indus Valley. But let us see other reasons also to assume that the Oraons were in the Indus Valley and had some share in the building up the Indus civilization along with their distant cousins the Tamils, Telugus, Kannads, Malyalees and other races of the Dravidian stock.

Ever since the excavations have started in Mohenjodaro and Harappa in 1922, there have been about 4000 seals collected mainly from Harappa the second biggest ancient city of the Indus civilization during period 2600 B.C. – 2100 BC.. The pictograms on some of the seals have been deciphered by scholars like Prof. Asko Parpola indicate that the meanings of such inscriptions like min/ vin (star, fish,) vel (velir, beler – chief , king) mey (meysga – roof) surprisingly tally with the Kurux language spoken by almost two million Oraons in India today. Even some festive rituals in Sarhul, the Spring festival of the Oraons appear to be very similar to those probably celebrated by the people in Harappa more than 4500 years ago. Scholars are inclined to hold the view that Kurux was probably one of the spoken languages of Harappa. If that be so, the Oraons most probably had their habitat in the Indus valley during the Indus valley civilization.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit

1. What do the different scholars say about the origin of the Munda race?

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2. Why Oraons are said to have been in Harappa during the Indus civilization?

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1.6 EXODUS FROM THE INDUS VALLEY

The question is if the Mundas and the Oraons were once in the fertile valley why had they to leave this place and live in the forest and hilly tracts? The answer is simple. Stronger race drives away the weaker races. It has happened also with the Dravidian people. In c. 1750 BC the Aryan race entered the Indus Valley from West via the Gomal Ghat of the Hindukush mountain ranges destroying the small town Gumla there according to historians. Bones excavated and discovered in the ancient streets of Harappa indicate that there had been ferocious fights between the Dravidians and the invading race. Drastic destruction and savage massacres of men, women and children had happened in big cities of the Indus Valley. The Indus civilization was destroyed. No victor retains the culture of the victims. The Vedic literature gives enough evidences of the destruction of the enemies whom they called the Dasyus (the non-Aryans). The Dravidians fled to South leaving the Indus Valley and so did the Mundas and the Oraons who instead of moving towards south they fled eastward along the Gangetic valley.

1.7 FINAL SETTLEMENT OF MUNDAS AND ORAONS

The Mundas and the Oraons had a long sojourn through the Gangetic valley before they reached the Kaimur hills in south Bihar. They had hard times to flee and occasionally fight back their common enemy the Aryans chasing them. The Mundas and the Oraons had to stick together and remain united because that was their only solution to survive against the enemy. This may be the reason why despite the differences of their Mundari and Kurux languages these two tribes have one culture and one ancestral religion. They have lived together like two brothers. The Mundas and the Oraons had lived quite some time in Rohtasgarh before they left the place under the menaces of the invading Chero tribe around 600 BC and moved south and

settled down in the dense forests and hilly terrains of Khukra Desh later called Jharkhand and later again named the Chotanagpur plateau.

Upto the 15th century the Mundas and the Oraons lived in peace clearing the forests and making the land habitable with agriculture in the valleys and mountain slopes. They had the social and administrative organizations like Parha, Patti Manki systems. It was in 1616 when the first invasion of the Mughals disturbed them. The Marhatta marauders led by Bhaskar Rao Pandit, Balaji Rao and Raghuji raided Jharkhand and looted and burnt the tribal villages from 1743 to 1810. The British rule entered Jharkhand in the second half of 18th century with Colonel Dalton reaching Palamau. With the coming in of the Britishers the exploitations and oppression of the Mundas and the Oraons started as the landlords started exacting more and more heavy taxes on the tribal agriculturists. This happened because the Britishers wanted more money from land revenue and did not care for the welfare of the tribal cultivators. Moreover the Britishers promoted and protected the zamindars when the tribals vehemently protested heavy land taxes and forced labour. All this led to series of tribal agrarian revolts in Jharkhand starting from 1779. The major tribal revolts in the Jharkhand plateau were the Larka Kol Revolt (1820) in Singhbhum, Great Kol Rising (1831-32), Santal Revolt (1856-57), Sardari Larai (1862 –1890) and the last Birsa Munda Revolt 1895- 1900). The tribals fought violently against the British troops who always came to protect the land-grabbing zamindars and the exploitations. Thousands of Mundas and the Oraons were killed in these revolts they waged in order to protect their lands and survive.

1.8 PRESENT PERSPECTIVES

The reasons why the Munda and the Oraon tribes have left the fertile land of the Indus Valley with other Dravidians have been amply explained above. They were literally chased out of the Indus Valley by the Aryans some 4000 years ago. The enemies were on their heels even when these two tribes were on their long sojourn through the Gangetic valley until they reached the Kaimur hills and settled there to build the Ruidas fort (Rohtas garh) in Shahabad district of Bihar. When later attacked by the Chero tribes from north, first Mundas left Rohtasgarh and moved to Chotanagpur via the North Koel river and little later the Oraons also followed them. This happened during period c.600 B.C. – 400 B.C.

For several centuries Mundas and the Oraons had relatively undisturbed life. In 16th Century the Mughals did attack Chotanagpur but had not much impact on the people as such though Khukhra Raja Darjansal was arrested and jailed in Gwalior by the Mughals in 1616. The Oraons and Mundas of Chotanagpur suffered under the constant attacks of the Marahatta marauders led by Bhaskar Rao Pandit, Balaji and Raghuji during 1743-1810.. The real tortures, exploitations, slavery and killings of the tribes of Chotanagpur came during the British Rule durring 1765 - 1947 in the region. The British Rulers imposed heavy taxes on the petty rajas and landlords big and small who in turn levied all kinds of taxes on the tribal raiyats. Extortions and forced labour were at its height. Tribes were herded like animals to Purnea and Katihar in North Bihar to cultivate indigo and to Assam and Bengal to work in the tea gardens in thousands since 1928 onwards. Instead of giving protection to the tribes against the atrocities perpetrated by the Zamindars(landlords), the Britishers rather patronized the cruel Landlords.. The consequence was that series of tribal revolts broke out. According to one contemporary report every corner of Chotanagpur was burning. Some major revolts of the aboriginal tribes in Jharkhand during the 19th century were the Larka Kol Larai 1920, in Singbhum by the Ho tribes, the Great Kol Riisings 1831-32 by the Oraons under Budhu Bhagat in the Oraon belt of Lohardaga, Gumla and Ranchi districts, the Santal Revolt 1855-56 by Santals under Sidhu-Kanhu brothers, the Sardari Larai 1869-87 and the Birsa Revolt 1895-1900 under Birsa Munda by the Mundas in Khunti , Bundu and Tamar areas.. Unfortunately the government and its tamed historians know only the last one Birsa Munda Revolt and the hero Bhagwan Birsa Munda.They are shamefully ignorant(ignorancia elenci) and know mighty little about the series of tribal Revolts of earlier period ; some of them like Great Kol Risings of 1831-32 led by Budh Bhagat Oraon was greater and more ferocious than what we see in Birsa Revolt in Jharkhand. In the tribal revolt thousands and thousands of tribal heroes and martyrs have shed their blood for freedom and survival.

The tribes of Chotanagpur (Jharkhand) are now facing new type of dangers that threaten their very existence in their ancestral land and centuries old habitats. Jharkhand is very rich in minerals where the tribes live. Government has signed no less than 69 MoUs inviting hundreds of big and small industrial companies to tear open the lands for coal, iron ore, bauxite , mica

and uranium and set up industries of all kinds and make big dams too. The tribal lands are being acquired by fair or foul means. Lakhs of tribal people have been already displaced without any satisfactory settlement or compensation for the loss of their lands the only source of their sustenance. The ecological balance too will be destroyed. Environmental vandalism is bound to come. Besides, Naxalism in the area is becoming menacingly dangerous. Government is bent upon putting into action 75000 para-military forces to flush out the Naxalites from the jungles where the tribes live. When two elephants fight the tender blades of grass are crushed ruthlessly. It is any body's guess what is going to happen to these hapless tribes. They will be killed as Naxalite suspects, informers or supporters though they are innocent. Recent incidents in Gumla and Latehar districts of Jharkhand show that such things can happen again to create panic and serious apprehension. The aborigines will be forced to vacate their villages and seek shelter in the improvised government set up camps where they are just herded in like animals. Meanwhile they are dispossessed of their lands which will be cleared for the MoUs implementation. Such is the pathetic situation of the sons of the ancient tribes and the process of genocide goes unabated in the present day civilized society. The urgent need is the economic developments at the grassroots for the people who are living hand to mouth and not the developments for the big industrial magnates. Out of 25 million population in Jharkhand 30% are the aborigines. In the State 48% are below poverty line, of this almost 80% are the tribal people. It is paradoxical that Jharkhand is the richest in mineral resources with the poorest people in the State. During the last nine years, on the one hand the unstable governments, corruptions to the hilt and mismanagement of administration have aggravated the miseries of the common man in utter poverty and unemployment and on the other hand the same have encouraged the spread of Naxalism in the State. It is not the gun-trotting police or para-military forces required here but urgent execution of economic developmental projects suited to the needs of the people struggling for survival.

1.9 LET US SUM UP

To sum up we may say that the Munda and the Oraons have struggled from the beginning of their history for survival. Today their condition is far from satisfactory. Their social, economic and political situation is just pitiable. Their struggles continue but very poorly as compared to

their ancestors' struggles for survival. In this unit we have tried to understand who the tribes are and where do they come from. We have also seen their long sojourn and final settlement in Jharkhand. In order to save their lands, they had series of revolts against the landlords and the British rule.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit

1. Why did Mundas and Oraons leave the Indus valley?

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2. After final settlement in Jharkhand why had Mundas and Oraons series of revolts in 18th and 19th centuries?

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1.10 KEY WORDS

Homogenous people: People having the same language, culture, customs and lifestyle opposed to heterogenous people meaning different cultures, customs and so on.

Kolerian Race: People who lived from beginning in Koleria, the ancient name of India and often called the Kols.

Pictogram: Engraved picture on seals which are deciphered accordingly, like the picture of man with hands and legs read in Harappan language "Al" which in Kurukh (Oraon) language means "man".

1.11 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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1.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. A tribe is a group of people who are called aborigines, the primitive people, the indigenous people or the Adivasees.
2. The main characteristics of the tribes are that they live in remote and isolated hill tracts, speak the same language, have same customs, rituals and cultures and have one chief or leader.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. About the original place of dwellings of Mundas, many Western scholars hold the view that Munda race came to India from Yunnan a place in south east region of China. But many scholars believe that admixture of two ancient races the Negritos and the Proto-australoids gave rise to a third race called the Munda race in the Indus valley more than nine thousand years ago.

2. The Oraons belong to the Dravidian family and lived in the Indus valley in Harappa. Dravidian race whose ancestors were said to be the Mediterranean peoples who entered the Indus valley in c. 3500 BC much later than the emerging of the Munda race in the area.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

1. Mundas and Oraons left the fertile land of the Indus valley after the Aryan race invaded the Indus valley from the west and destroyed the Dravidian civilization c. 1750 BC. As a result the Mundas and Oraons fled eastward. After a long journey they crossed the gangetic plains and reached the Taimur hills. And finally they settled in Khukra desh later called Jharkhand and Chotanagpur. Outsiders – dikus – non-tribes in course of time entered here and seized the lands of the tribes.

2. Even the British rulers joined hands with the landlords in extorting heavy land taxes from the Munda and Oraon cultivators. Therefore the Mundas and Oraons revolted against them in 18th and 19th centuries to protect their lands and independence. Such were their long struggles to survive.

UNIT 2 TRIBAL FOLKLORE AND CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS

Contents

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

Culture is an integrated dynamic whole which consists of common world view or view of life, common values, goals, meaning, thinking, environment and patters of behaviour. These are acquired, embodied and transmitted through language, status and role systems, modes of behaviour, music, dance, painting, artifacts and techniques. They are transmitted through a long tradition and are capable of influencing society. Culture is also what a social group considers as the best and sum-total of its thinking, living and expressing. It is a living and dynamic reality supported and nourished by folklore. In this unit you are expected to understand:

- Tribal Folklore
- Folklore in Tribal Life
- Cultural Expression
- Village Organisation

- Socio-Religious Customs: Rites of Passage
- Annual Feasts and Festivals

2.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary this word is made up of *folk* meaning the great proportion of the members of a people that determines the group character and that tends to preserve its characteristic form of civilization and its customs, arts and crafts, legends, traditions and superstitions from generation to generation. *Lore* means something that is learned. That is, (a) knowledge gained through study and experience, (b) traditional knowledge or belief. *Folklore* thus means traditional customs, tales, or sayings preserved orally among a people. In a broad sense, it is a medium through which the soul of a people expresses itself colourfully. Culture has been variously defined. Thus, one can say that it is 'a learned behaviour and the products of that behaviour as opposed to instinctive or biologically determined behaviour'. In its *external* manifestation, it bears on tangible realities, activities and ways of conduct of social life, behaviour of people, relation to their natural environment and other persons and groups; tools and techniques, customs, forms of instruction, etc. In other words, it means social practice. In its *inner* formation, it is symbolic indicating all that transmit meaning. It is the 'way in which a group of people live, think, feel, organize themselves, celebrate and share life. In every culture, there are underlying systems of values, meanings and view of the world, which are expressed visibly in language, gestures, symbols, rituals and styles.

2.2 TRIBAL FOLKLORE

Origin Myths

A common feature of many cultures of the world is to have ancient story traditions explaining human frailty and cosmic order. There are many tribal narratives in this line highlighting human fall with a subsequent action of God. One of such narratives among the major tribal groups in the Central-Eastern region of India is as follows:

Destruction

God found the earth infested with undesirable elements. So, one day He decided to destroy mankind. He rained down fire day and night. He told the monkey to beat his drum as a sign that half the earth was thus cleansed. The monkey stationed himself on a high ebony tree. He was taken up in enjoying the ripe fruits of the tree. He forgot all about his duty until the fire scorched his hind quarters! The bark of the tree turned black. In this rain of fire a pair of a *male* and a *female* humans, a boy and a girl, hid themselves in a crab-hole of a paddy field.

Preservation

When the whole earth had thus been burnt, God did not get offerings from human beings for His own food. And He was sad. His divine beloved, seeing this, knew it was time to spring her surprise, which her own foresight had prepared. She told Him to go to the paddy field hunting. He went, taking His hawk on a golden staff accompanied by His dogs. They scented the two human beings saved by His divine beloved. The boy and the girl ran and hid themselves in a crab hole and said: “See *grandfather*, they will bite us.” And God answered: “No *grandchildren*, they will not harm you. Delightedly, He then brought them home and looked after them affectionately. He taught them to plough and cultivate. He gave them seeds for cultivation. Whenever crops failed, they approached Him for a remedy.

Tribals have a very familiar attitude to God. The image they have of Him is that of a grandfather. Their relationship with the grandfather is very cordial, familiar and spontaneous with complete faith and trust in him. This is how they understand and see God who is provident in looking after them.

Procreation

The boy and the girl, till this time, used to sleep side by side but they discreetly used to place a log/husking pole between themselves. On God’s advice they drank rice beer one night and when they were drunk God solemnly invited the boy, “If you cross the log/husking pole mankind will

multiply!" The boy did so and mankind multiplied and filled the whole earth! Thus, God imparted to the first human couple the secret of procreation.

Comment

It is common in ancient cultures to attribute human shape and characteristics to God. This anthropomorphism, as a way to speak understandably about divine mysterious realities reveals the basic personality of each people and their culture as they identify themselves in close fellowship with the godhead itself. Through this delightfully familiar symbolism, the tribal myth seeks to bring light to bear on their origins. This story communicates a profoundly optimistic view and a sense of general well-being. For tribals, life is the way it has been ordained by God.

2.3 FOLKLORE IN TRIBAL LIFE

Tribals live in a symbiotic union with nature. Hence the rural population enjoys a deep familiarity and bond with both animate and inanimate creatures. Tribal folk-tales reflect this close communion in which pride of place is always given to human beings, because they have intelligence and wisdom. This can be illustrated with one hilarious tale of a tailless jackal as follows:

A certain old man used to cross a river every day in order to go and plough his fields. His wife would dutifully carry him his rice for the noonday meal. One day a jackal met the wife and asked her: "Where are you going, old lady?" "Child I am taking rice to the old man." The jackal craftily said to her: "Mother, you are aged and the river already has much water in it. I am going to help you across." As the old lady was about to enter the water, the jackal suggested, "Mother, I shall take the rice upon my head. You just hold on to my tail." During the crossing of the river, the jackal ate half of the rice. And every day without failing he tricked the old lady, so that when the food was brought to her husband it was clear that half had already been scooped away. So one day the old man asked: "Wife, why do you bring me regularly rice, part of which has been taken away?" The old lady answered, "Husband, every day on my way here, I meet a certain jackal. It is he who

plays the cheat and eats off half of your full portion of rice.” The next day, unknown to anyone, the wife was in the field and the husband at home. In the morning when the sun was high up, the old man combed his long hair, put on a lady’s long garment, sharpened a razor, and set off with a pot of rice on his head, just as his wife usually did. Near the river he came upon the jackal: “Where do you go, old lady?” the jackal asked in mock politeness. “Child, I am taking rice to the old man,” said the husband in disguise. Pat came the invitation from the jackal, “There is much water in the river. How will you cross it? I shall carry your rice and you take hold of my tail!” So they set off. But as soon as the jackal started to eat the rice the old man took out his razor and cut his tail clean off! In great surprise the jackal turned round, saw what had happened, and only then he recognized the old man. Angry and ashamed that he had lost his tail, the jackal threatened, “Wait a bit, old man! I will cover the handle of your plough with filth!” The clever old man ordered some sharp pointed nails to be made by the village smith and then he fixed them into his plough-handle. When the unsuspecting jackal came and sat on the handle, he got his own seat damaged!

With his pride hurt again, the jackal warned: “Wait a bit, old man! You have cheated me, but I shall have your fowls for my meal!” True to his threat, soon after the jackal came with a whole pack of jackals to rob the old man of his fowls. But the farmer was ready for the attack. He had already removed the chickens from their house and he himself was there armed with a scythe. When the jackals entered the chicken house, the old man gave a touch of his weapon and they shouted: “Oh brothers, a huge cock is there! And it pecks very hard!” The tailless jackal was not afraid of any cock, so he too entered and the old man inflicted a good gash into him. The jackal ran off shouting: “You fellows! What you call a cock, is really the old man!” Again he made a threat: “Wait a bit, old man,” he said. “I shall have all of your pumpkins!” So the wise old man plucked all the pumpkins off his roof. He then covered his body with ashes, and hid himself there amid the leaves. Once more the jackal took some associates with him for a night robbery. As soon as the jackals got up upon the roof, the old man gave them each a good hard and rough push. The jackals cried: “Oh brothers, the old man’s pumpkins are butting frightfully!” Then came the tailless jackal’s turn to go to the roof for the pumpkins. Just as he came onto the roof,

the old man gave him such a sharp blow that he jumped off and ran away shouting: “You fellows, what you call the old man’s pumpkins, is really the old man himself!” So, this is the way it went: Neither could the old man kill the tailless jackal, nor could the tailless jackal rob the old man of anything.

In the end, the man and his wife held a council: “How shall we lure all those jackals together and make an end of them, once and for all?” they asked. They devised a plan and this is what it was. One day the old lady seated herself at the door of her house and cried out in lament: “My husband is dead! What shall I do?” The jackals said to her: “Old lady, you must prepare a funeral repast. And you will invite us, won’t you?” The clever woman said: “Why shouldn’t I invite you, children?” What did she do then? She collected a good quantity of dry cow dung and pebbles. After hiding away her husband, she invited all the jackals for the feast. When they had all gathered, she made the cow dung into a heap over the pebbles, and then set fire to it. Each time she would take a stone out, she would drop it into water and it hissed violently. Deceived the jackals greedily shouted: “Give it to me, granny! Give it to me granny!” The old lady replied: “Wait, Children! If you allow the cooking its time, there will be nice cakes for all! I will give you each your share!” Finally she said: “Come on children! The cooking is over!” As the impatient jackals approached, she said: “Children if you remain as you are, you will rob one another, or you will have a fight. So come, I shall tie you all down with ropes to keep peace.” And so she tied them all with ropes, and the tailless jackal she bound with a chain. Now that they were captive all, and seated in a row, she shouted. “Come quick, old man, ho! ho!” The jackals asked: “What do you say, old lady?” She replied, “Children, I was only calling out my husband’s ancestors.” With that, out of his concealment came the old man with a large wooden hammer in hand and he began to beat all those jackals one after the other up and down the row. When he came to the tailless jackal, he gave him such a thrashing that his chain snapped. At this sight, the other jackals too, vehemently pulling their ropes, broke them, and they all ran for their lives, each in a different direction and from that day they never were seen nor heard of again.

Summer evening hours are generally spent by children gathered around some old man listening to him telling them such tales in the village for hours enchanted till sleep got the better of them. Folklore is a means not only to entertain children but also to teach them values, attitudes towards life and relationships.

Riddles

They have been yet another means of entertainment and pastime that have a real community-building role among the tribals. At leisure time at night, when they come together after the day's work, both young and old revel in telling practical jokes and riddles. They enter into a lively competition to outdo one another with these mind-teasers. Such competitive superiority hurts no one – it is good fun for everyone to enjoy. Riddles also present a good glimpse into the symbolic nature of the tribal mind and a graphic feature of their language. Here are some examples:

1. As a youngster there were four feet, turned adult there were only two, and when old there were three. What is it? (A human being!)
2. A prince royal cannot bear up with the most insignificant cause of pain. What is it? (The eye!)
3. A youngster goes about sporting a crooked stick. Who is he? (A dog!)
4. Fire has broken out in one village, the smoke rises in another, while the alarm is given in a third. What do you say of this? (It is the *hookah*, a smoking device with three different parts!)
5. Flesh inside, bowels outside. What is it? (The paddy bale!)
6. A flower droops all day, but at night it blooms. What is it? (A mat!)
7. As one takes this baby in arms, it creates a din, but when one lays it down, it keeps quiet. What is it? (The drum!)
8. A girl, after raking up her sweepings, takes her station at the back of the house. Who is she? (A comb!)
9. This tiny fellow knocks down big, strappy, powerful men. Who is he? (Rice beer!)
10. A water spring coming out of dry wood. What is it? (An oil press!)
11. A broad, flat fish flounders about in a few drops of water. What is it? (The tongue!)

12. Held with the hand, it does not hold in the hand. What is it? (An umbrella!)

Proverbs

They are perhaps the best example of refined tribal sentiments. Tribals are basically people of deep emotions, they relish delicate feelings. Proverbs are the means through which they reflect their sophisticated manners and social attitudes. They are also excellent examples of tribal wisdom which is based on their concrete experience rather than on cerebral activity. Some illustrations follow:

1. With men who are perpetually hanging about their wives' petticoats have no social interaction.

Comment: For a male tribal, it is a gentle reminder that though tribal women are strong characters, husbands are not to be over-dependent on them.

2. A pig does not forget the taste of beer leftovers.

Comment: This is a symbolic language and refers both to the tendency to vice and to people who have an incorrigible taste for vice – particularly fornication and adultery.

3. When they find the bird-dirt people say, 'The birds have lodged here for the night!'

Comment: The image of bird-dirt merely insinuates an illicit relationship.

4. Danger from a tiger in the home, danger from a tiger in the jungle, whither can I run?

Comment: There are certain inescapable problems and a person simply has to face up to them. Nothing is gained by trying to escape an inescapable responsibility!

5. Shall I tie the yoke to the plough with the bullock's tail?

Comment: A tribal who is poor and without any means expresses his helplessness and brings home to listeners his wretched condition through this graphic agricultural proverb.

6. If you take only one cupful, they say, the cow charges at you; take a cupful more!

Comment: It is commonly used in drinking parties, and means that etiquette and good manners require that you accept a second helping. It is symbolic of tribal hospitality and sensitivity.

7. You will see your parents' wedding!

Comment: It is used to admonish young, mischievous boys and girls, to caution and admonish them against misadventure and danger. It would mean, "Don't court trouble, don't endanger your life, don't take undue risks!"

8. Verily, how moonlike shines your face!

Meaning: Indeed, you are too good to be true.

9. Everything else may be washed away, but the clan won't.

Meaning: It is not easy to forget one's kin.

10. If not while only a sapling, never when it is a tree.

Meaning: Evils must be remedied before it is too late.

Cosmology

Tribals often express their perception of truth and their experience of life not in conceptual language but in their own characteristically graphic, down-to-earth manner. It is the form of myths and fables which satisfy their questionings. Thus, for example, to explain lunar phases they tell the following tale:

One day the moon invited the sun to dinner and gave him a good meal of sweet potatoes cooked in butter. These were so delicious, that the sun asked what the food was and how it had been prepared, for he wanted to have the same menu again. The moon shamefacedly confessed that the food she had served were her own children. "Well," said the sun, "my children must be as good as yours!" So saying, he killed them all. Only as he began to eat them did he realize that he had been tricked. So he went in a rage to punish the moon. Seeing him coming, the moon hid behind a mango/baniam tree. The sun

saw this ruse and with his sharp sword he slashed the moon. At the same time, he cursed her saying: “Now you shall keep that cut all your life! You will try to get cured every month. But as soon as you think you are all right, the cut will reappear and go on increasing.” And so it is. From that time onwards we have the different phases of the moon. The shadow of the mango/baniam tree remains printed upon the moon’s face. From that time, also, the moon carefully remains hidden from the sun. She appears only when she knows that he has gone to sleep.

Astronomical Legends

Tribals weave beautiful legends about stars, planets and galaxies. They are also accustomed to create stories about everything and anything that make up the situation and condition of their everyday domestic life and work. These are good expressions of their rich, aesthetic grasp of reality. They show how the tribal mind revels in contemplation of the beauty and mystery of creation. They take much pride in knowing and relating these traditions. So goes the story of the heavenly constellations Orion and Pleiades:

God made the plough for the boy and girl, first ancestors of human beings. With it they were to till the earth and bring it under cultivation. It took Him seven days and seven nights to make this implement. Now, while He was making the plough, a certain tiger came to frighten and attack Him. To protect Himself He threw a handful of wooden chips upon the tiger, and sent His wild dog after it. So, the wild dog went after the tiger and ever since the wild dog has become a bitter enemy of tigers.

God again set about making the plough. He saw a dove sitting on her eggs. He aimed his hammer at the dove and threw it but it fell short. He next threw his file at it, again He missed, and the dove flew away from its nest. This dove became a star and the double eggs, double stars, and the hammer became the Pleiades, while the file became Orion.

Folk Song and Dance

The underlying current of tribal living is a sense of celebration. It is an exultation of life that finds spontaneous expression in song and dance. The jovial and celebrative character of tribal personality is best portrayed in their strong musical tradition. Song and dance are effective ways in which tribals express themselves creatively, sharing their experience of life, their emotions, their history and, above all, their irrepressible hope and joy-in-living.

Folk Song

The theme of tribal songs may be about any life-event: birth, marriage, death, ploughing, sowing, reaping, etc. These are daily life-experiences: pain and suffering, joy and sorrow, success and failure, frustration and aspiration. Tribal song is a deeply poetic expression. It may just be sung, or it may be accompanied by dramatization, movement and dance. It is never a solo performance. Song accompanied by dance is always *in* the community, *with* the community and *for* the community.

It is important to remember that tribal songs are sung according to different seasons during the year and those who sing are carried away by the rhythm of the season they are in. They witness the signs of nature and events facing them, surrounding them and affecting them. It is that experience of feeling and emotion that they give expression through songs. For example, they sing when they see clouds gathering on the distant horizon. They know that the pre-monsoon winds are building up and so one of the soothing songs they sing is as follows: *Pour down, you dark clouds!*

Shower you rains, why tarry!!

Comment: This song, thus, gives voice to their eager and joyous anticipation of the rains which bring relief and prosperity. So, as the clouds and breezes are as if ready for celebration, people's deep emotions burst forth in thankful anticipation. Experience has taught them how to read the signs of late summer days just before the incoming monsoon. With its rains there is a promise for plenty of (a) water in fields, ponds and rivers, (b) crops in the land, and (c) greenery and fruits in the forest!

Same observation as above follows in some important life-events like marriage. From their marriage tunes one gets a glimpse into the wealth of tribal poetic simplicity. One such example is as follows:

Come out and look, O mother dear!

Are they not the kin, here?

From the East do they come and enter

Are they not the kin, here?

Comment: This song is sung during the very first phase of marriage negotiations, when the mediators from the prospective bridegroom's family arrive at the house of the prospective bride. By proxy it expresses the excitement and joy felt by the latter.

Folk Dance

Folk song is accompanied with community dance. Rural tribals spend their evenings during both lean agricultural seasons and festivals in singing and dancing. "The tribe that dances does not die," states Verrier Elwin, India's famous anthropologist. In fact, song and dance are important ways in which tribals express, relive and relieve their emotions. Over the centuries they have built up a tradition, a whole cycle of song and dance corresponding to their agricultural and social customs. They have different kinds and styles of seasonal songs and dances. It is characteristic of tribal song and dance that they are performed in a variety of ways. Some songs are only sung while others are sung and danced. Some others are sung and danced accompanied by instruments. Tribal dance is rendered by groups of performers locked arm-to-arm, arm-to-shoulder or arm-to-waist, moving in beautiful, undulating waves.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. How do the tribals express their experience of truth, intelligence and wisdom?

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2.4 CULTURAL EXPRESSION

Folk culture in a tribal society is seen in the following four different forms:

Oral tradition: These include mostly verbal arts or expressive literature consisting of spoken, sung and voiced forms of traditional utterances like songs, tales, poetry. Ballads, anecdotes, rhymes, proverbs and elaborate epics.

Material Culture: These are visible aspects of folk behaviour, such as, skills, recipes and formulae as displayed in rural arts and crafts, traditional motifs, architectural design, clothes, fashions, farming, fishing and various other types of tools and machinery.

Social Folk Customs: these are areas of traditional life that emphasize the group rather than the individual skills and performances. They include large family and community observances and relate to rites of passages, such as, birth, initiation, marriage and death or annual celebrations, festivals, fairs, ritual and ceremonial gatherings, market occasions and rural meets.

Performing Arts: These consist of traditional music, masquerades, dance and drama.

Among these, the *oral tradition* and the *performing arts* appear to be the main media of communication, Storytellers, singers, minstrels and other kinds of folk entertainers have acted for centuries as sources for the transmission and dissemination of news and information through face-to-face live communication. Families, social groups and community gatherings served as the main platforms of communication and sources for feedback for the folk performers. The values, attitudes, beliefs and culture of the people are propagated, reinforced and perpetuated through these folk forms. The issues in a society are depicted in the form of satire by the folk artists for curing societal evils.

Material Culture

Every tribal group develops techniques of work that respond to the demands of the environment, to the capacity, creativity and level of living standard of the group. Hunters, fishers, farmers of different tribal cultures have markedly different techniques of hunting, fishing and tilling the soil. So, also it is from the way of playing, singing, painting, cooking and the like that it can be decided whether one tribal group is different from the other or not.

Technology and economy fall under material culture. They play an important role in shaping the mode of life of any tribal group. When the group is small, its technology is simple, resources are scarce and the problem of survival is most important. In order to survive in his material surroundings, a tribal develops techniques, invents some instruments and uses them for earning his food, making his clothes and constructing his shelter.

There is no tribal society without methods of *production, distribution* and *consumption* and some forms of exchange and some expression of value in terms of monetary or other symbols. The economy of the majority of tribals is agriculture-based economy. Land is their biggest asset and agriculture is their main occupation though forest produce is equally important in their economy. For agricultural activities they depend very much on the help of their animals, especially for manuring and ploughing their fields and threshing their crops. They have two kinds of agricultural land, (a) upland, and (b) lowland. In the former they grow crops which require less water whereas in the latter they grow paddy and wheat crops which require more water.

The economy of tribals is mainly consumption based economy. They do not bother about saving or investing for the future. If their produce is plentiful for consumption for the year, they are quite satisfied. Other necessary things for everyday life are obtained through exchange. Nowadays, money is being used more than the barter system even in remote villages.

Other occupations like weaving, basket-making, pottery, blacksmithing, tanning, etc. are best left to their low class Hindu neighbours among the tribals of Central-Eastern region of India. However, in the case of necessity they take up some of these works, too, as a part time job. They are very reluctant to take up trade as their occupation. Even those who take up this job are rarely found successful in it. They would prefer to sit in the office holding some job but would have no patience to sit in the shop! Being educated they are now going for jobs in public as well as private sectors. With mining and industries coming in their areas, even the uneducated ones among them are going to work in them as unskilled labourers.

Social Folk Customs

They consist of all the structural components of a society through which the main concerns and activities are organized, and social needs, such as, those for order, belief and reproduction are met. They constrain or determine the behaviour of specific social groups. In this context, let it be clear that today both traditional as well as modern tribal societies are undergoing far reaching transformation under the impact of rapid social changes taking place. However, their *social institutions* are still based on relatively more stable value systems as given below.

Kinship

It establishes relationships between individuals and groups on the model of biological relationships between parents and children, between siblings, and between marital partners. It thus means blood relationship. Among the tribals it includes *family* and *clan*, its extension. Relationships established by marriage forming alliances between groups of persons related by blood or consanguineous ties, are usually referred to as affinal relations. There is a special *term* for every distinct relationship, both in direct and indirect lines of descent. There is also the custom of using one and the same term called *classificatory term* in addressing the whole class of relatives. This is to show greater respect for the elders and greater affection for the younger ones. Strictly speaking, only those people have the right to call someone by name who may have been assisted by the former at the latter's birth or name giving ceremony.

Joking Relationship

A certain category of people among tribals have a fun loving relationship, for example, between (i) grandparents and grandchildren, (ii) brothers-in-law and their wives' younger brothers and sisters, (iii) sisters-in-law and their husbands' younger brothers and sisters, (iv) wife's brothers-sisters and husband's brothers-sisters. These people may enjoy greater familiarity with one another and have a lot of fun among themselves without offence. These relationships may be real or classificatory.

Reserve-Respect Relationship

In this form of relationship, there is a certain distance due to a reserve-respect attitude towards one another. Members of different families and clans enter into such relationship through affinity. The relationship may be real or classificatory, for example, between (i) one's elder

brother and one's wife, (ii) one's husband and one's elder sister. Out of deep respect for each other, there is a reciprocal *avoidance* and name *taboo* between these persons. For the same reason, there is also name taboo between a husband and his wife.

Clan

Kinship structure includes the *family* and its extension into the broader group relationships, that is, the *clan*. Each tribe is divided into a number of clans named after totems, such as, *animals, birds, fish, plants, minerals*, etc. 'Totemism' is reverence for different natural species identified as 'totems' with solidarity of particular human groups, especially groups of common ancestry. They are names standing for persons to whom one's ultimate ancestors can be traced back. They are respected. There are various legends about them of receiving some help from them in ancient times. Each clan descends from common ancestors. It is this belief which is the foundation of *marriage outside one's own clan*. It is for the same reason that sexual union between persons of the same clan is regarded as union between close family members. According to tribal creation stories, it is God Himself who divided human beings into various clans to enter into *inter-clan* marriage relationships.

Welcoming Guests

If the guest is a regular visitor, a jar of water is given to him/her to wash his/her face and feet before getting seated. Once seated comfortably, the guest and the host pick up conversation in which they exchange news about the wellbeing of each other's family members followed by rice beer and meal together.

Washing of Feet

If the guest is very dear or respectable and is visiting the family after a long time, he/she is made to sit down and then his/her feet are washed. This is a mark of great love, respect, affection, gratitude and appreciation. It is the female members who wash the feet of guests. As a token of appreciation, the guest may give some money to the person washing his/her feet but it is not obligatory.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. How does the folk culture in a tribal society get expressed?

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2. In what way does the kinship system in a tribal society help to establish relationships between individuals and groups?

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3. How does the clan system bring about social order in a tribal society?

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2.5 VILLAGE ORGANISATION

For the service of a village community, there are some officials among the tribals in the Central-Eastern region of India. They are either elected for the office or inherit it. These officials are:

- a. **Village Headman:** He is responsible for the general good of the village. When there are violations of social and moral laws and other regulations requiring settlement, it is he who calls a village meeting and informs the parties concerned with the case. He announces the judgment arrived at by the elders after their deliberation.
- b. **Village Priest:** He is the religious head of a village. He offers public sacrifices on behalf of his village community to God on some important agricultural feasts for getting good crops and rich harvest during the year. Similarly, he offers periodical sacrifices to village spirits in order to appease them so that the village community may live in peace and harmony with them.

- c. **Village Watchman:** He assists the above officials in their duties as a middleman between them and the community members.
- d. **Village Brotherhood:** In keeping with the village kinship, everyone in the village is related to one another as brother, sister, uncle, aunt, nephew, niece, etc.
- e. **Village Cooperation:** It consists of various kinds of help given to one another in the form of labour. Some of them are as follows:
- (i) **Sangat:** It is an organisation in which a person in need of labourers for some urgent work, gets them from the villagers. During the year, he pays back the village *sangat* with his own labour without any interest.
 - (ii) **Pancha:** When someone wants a number of persons to help him out to complete his work within a short time, he contacts the chief of the young men in the village and asks their help. The chief directs the young men under him to do the work promptly. It is a kind of social work through which these young men render free service to the poor and needy of the village, for example, they go to repair the roof of a poor widow or such other helpless persons in the village.
 - (iii) **Madait or Pachait:** It is getting help for a particular work in exchange of a meal and drink for the whole family.
 - (iv) **Pasri:** It is ploughing the field of a neighbour in exchange as and when need arises.
 - (v) **Sajha:** It is share-cropping in which a person cultivates the field of another person and at harvest the produce is shared fifty-fifty between the land owner and the cultivator.
 - (vi) **Dhangar:** It is employing a helper who stays with the employer like a family member, sharing in everything of the family and working for it for the whole year. At the end of the year, his parents get a fixed amount of paddy as agreed upon. The contract may be renewed every year.

f. Youth Dormitory: It is a large hall built by the young men of a village to serve at night as their dormitory. It is not only a place to rest after the day's work but also an institution to initiate the youth into various cultural aspects of their society. Here, they learn not only the songs, dances and musical instruments but also some village crafts as well. The supervision and discipline of

the dormitory is in the hand of the eldest member among them. He instructs the boys in their social and religious duties. During dances and other celebrations, it is his duty to see that they are dressed properly. He even has the right to punish anyone who does not obey him. Unmarried girls sleep in the house of a widow separate from the boys' dormitory.

The young men mentioned above have many other social duties, for example, the younger boys have to clean the hall, spread mats and light lamps. During rainy or winter season they have to light the fire. When any guest comes to their village, they have to look after him. At wedding, they have to do the cooking. If a villager needs any urgent help, he requests the leader of these boys for assistance and the latter sends the boys under him to do the work. The girls' dormitory has similar functions.

These dormitories, thus, provide privacy for the parents at home. They unite the youth together, provide an opportunity for close companionship and educate them in community living. In spite of all this, with the advance of education and process of urbanization; many of these dormitories have disappeared.

2.6 SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS: RITES OF PASSAGE

Human communities the world over have certain definite ways of ordering and regulating the life of individuals and the group. The *Rites of Passage* are the ways by which such goals are achieved by societies. These rites are socio-religious customs observed in the life of the members in relation to the community. They mark vital phases in life, namely, *birth, marriage and death*. The main point of ceremonies observed on these events of life among the major tribes of Central-Eastern India, is incorporation of a member into the community of both the living and the dead. Here they are as follows:

Birth

A new baby is, as it were, a stranger to the community and does not yet belong to it, till after the *name-giving*. In this ritual, a name for the infant is sought by rice-and-water divination. An elder takes his seat with a shallow vessel (generally a leaf cup) containing water. Another leaf cup contains a handful of paddy grains close by. He takes a grain keeping in mind the name of the

child, removes its husk with his fingernails and gently drops it to float on the still surface of water in the leaf cup. It is in the name of *God*. Similarly, he drops a second grain in the name of *elders*. Likewise, he drops a third grain in the name of the child and finally he drops the fourth grain naming at the same time one ancestor dead or alive. If the last two grains meet while floating, the child is named after this ancestor. From then on this ancestor becomes the *patron* or *guardian* of the child. The operation is repeated, each time naming different ancestor, till the third and fourth grains meet each other. After this, the child belongs to the father's *clan*, *tribe* and *ancestors*. This ceremony manifests that the child is from God and the elders are the witnesses to this mystery of life. It also reveals that the ultimate goal of this earthly life of a tribal is to attain the ancestral community at long last in which the tribe lives for ever.

Marriage

Tribals hold marriage holy for according to their various creation myths, God the Creator Himself has instituted it. They practise *adult*, *virilocal* (man's place), *monogamous* (one husband-one wife), *lifelong* marriages. However, the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia tribals practise *uxorilocal* (woman's place) marriage. Among them a tribal marries *within* his/her own *tribe* and *outside* his/her own *clan*. Members of a clan consider themselves as belonging to one and the same family. Hence, they do not get married with one another. *Widow remarriage* is allowed. Marriage between the descendants of a brother and his sister may take place only after *third generation*. Tribals do not have dowry system though they pay a token of *bride price* in cash or kind to the bride's parents. Divorce is very rare.

They go through an elaborate process of negotiation for marriage arrangement. The families of the *bride* and *bridegroom* exchange a number of visits before the marriage proper takes place. Omens, signs from nature, are carefully observed to seek *divine* approval for the proposed match. At *betrothal* rite, an opportunity is given at the courtyard of the house of the bride's parents when the bride and bridegroom may express their agreement or disagreement publicly whether in the future they would like to get married or not. In the central marriage, the bride and bridegroom apply vermilion on each other's forehead. Vermilion is the symbol of blood which is itself the symbol of life. Therefore, by exchanging it, they symbolically manifest that they have

decided to share their life and love together for ever. Tribal marriage uniting the bride and bridegroom also unites their families in venerating their ancestor spirits.

Death

According to an ancient custom among the tribals in the Central-Eastern region of the country, if a person dies before the crop seeds sprout in the fields, he/she is burnt and a few of his/her charred bones are collected in an earthen jar which is temporarily buried in the kitchen garden attached to the house of the deceased person or sometimes inside an extra hut near by. If anyone passes away when the crops are standing in the fields, he/she is buried in the burial ground. After some months a few of his/her bones are taken out and are temporarily buried in an earthen jar under a stone near the house of the deceased person. The bones preserved in these ways, are taken out at the end of the year and are deposited in the place for the bones of the dead.

(a) Bringing in the 'shade'

The tribals in general believe in the survival of *soul* after death. The tribals mentioned above, believe that the soul survives in the form of two shades, (a) *light shade*, and (b) *heavy shade*. After the burial ceremony, the light shade of the deceased person is brought back home through a special ritual and is requested to reside in one corner of the house peacefully among its old acquaintances. In this way, his/her presence continues to remain among the living members in the family.

(b) Reunion of the 'heavy shade' with Ancestors

This ceremony is held generally after 10 days of the burial of a deceased person. Meanwhile it is believed that the heavy shade is not at rest. It hovers about homeless between the old house and the burial place. Food and drink in leaf cups are provided for it at the burial place during this period. On the day of reuniting the 'heavy shade' with ancestors, relatives of the deceased person gather together at the courtyard of his/her old house. In their presence, one elder prays to God in these words: "O God, this person had been living among us. Now he/she has gone away from us. See that everything be right for him/her." After this he prays to ancestors saying: "We request you to accept this person among you. He/she is one of your children. Receive him/her as such

and have pity on us also who remain behind.” It is believed that henceforth the departed soul takes its place among the ancestors and a community meal is served in his/her name. With this ceremony the mourning period for him/her gets over and normal daily life is resumed by his/her family members.

(c) Bone Drowning

It is the crowning ceremony of the tribal death ritual. In the month of December or January when the crops have been brought in, the bones of all those who had passed away during the year, are taken from their temporary resting places. They are taken round the village halting for the last time before their old homes once and then are carried in procession with song, dance, drumming and weeping and are deposited at the place of dead persons’ bone keeping. Interestingly, the *Kurukh* (Uraon) tribe calls this ceremony ‘great marriage’. After this ceremony, it is believed that the soul of the dead person takes its place among the ancestors for ever.

2.7 ANNUAL FEASTS AND FESTIVALS

Since it is not possible to cover this topic for all the tribals in the country, the following discussion centres around the tribals of the Central-Eastern region of the country. It is hoped that it helps to understand the cultural expression of other tribal groups too in different parts of the country.

Phagua

It is celebrated on the full moon day in the lunar month of *Phagun* (February-March). It is the *new year* day for the tribals. For the celebration, a branch of the cotton tree often together with a branch of the castor plant is planted on the *phagua* field outside the village. Several bundles of thatching grass are made to lean all around the branch. After the usual consecration over a chicken, it is let loose alive by the *village priest* under the standing dry grass bundles which he next sets on fire. While the fire is ablaze, the assistant of the village priest cuts the top of the branch with a single blow of a battle axe saying: “Let all the sickness and suffering of the past year pass away like this severed branch!”

The myth behind this ceremony is that there was a wicked *vulture* in ancient times on a very tall cotton tree. It used to lift away human beings young and old to its nest to feed its young ones. Terrorised by it, the people prayed to God to save them from this vulture. God had pity on them and took the form of a dwarf hero and went down to kill the vulture. He shot the vulture with His bow and arrows made of iron. It fell to the ground in several pieces and died. He also shot down the cotton tree which had given shelter to the evil vulture. Thus, the branch of the cotton tree in the ceremony is the symbol of evil. As nature renews and bedecks itself with new, tender and beautiful leaves and flowers, the *phagua* feast ushers in the new year for the tribals and says good-bye to the past year.

Sarhul

It is celebrated in the lunar month of *Chait* (March-April) when the *saal* trees are full of flowers. Around noon on the feast day, the village priest and his assistant take a ceremonial bath at the village spring or pond or in a river close by. In some villages, the *village priest* and his *wife* are next made to sit side by side in their courtyard and the headman of the village anoints their foreheads with vermilion to signify and effect the mystical marriage and union of the earth and the sky to ensure plentiful rain and a bumper crop during the year.

A solemn procession of men now starts for the sacred grove. The village priest's assistant now clears a strip of ground with a spade and smears it with cow dung. The village priest sits cross legged in front of the clearing. His assistant takes chickens of appropriate colours, washes their legs, anoints their heads with vermilion and hands them over to the village priest. The latter beholds the victims, drops some blood on the rice heaps placed for various spirits. He prays to the spirit at the sacred grove to ensure good monsoon and rich crop during the year. He also prays to other spirits not to interfere with the mystical union between the earth and the sky so that the earth may produce plenty of good things for mankind. The sacrificed chickens are later cooked with rice and eaten as sacrificial meal in common.

God's power over the spirits is clearly maintained at the sacred grove. He is offered a white (pure) victim at a separate spot away from the place of the spirits. In the *Kurukh* tradition, the

village priest faces the east because the sun, which is the symbol of God, rises from there and prays as follows:

Here below are the *panches* (elders),
Dharmes (God) is above.

O Father, you are above, we are below.

You have eyes, we do not see.

You know all, we are totally ignorant.

Whether knowingly or by mistake we have offended the spirits, restrain them.

Overlook our mistakes.

Hariari

When seedlings get ready for transplantation, it is celebrated on a day fixed for it. The village priest prays to God to give His blessing upon green plants in the field and protect them against all dangers and help them to yield rich harvest. After this he goes to his field and plants five sheaves of seedlings. Following it other members of the village may begin to transplant in their fields too.

Karam

Its celebration begins on 11th day of the lunar month of *Bhado* (August-September) and continues till the harvest season. Although the feast is meant to ensure protection of standing crops, it is primarily the feast of unmarried girls who have been recently engaged. They pray for the blessing of healthy children in their future life in order to perpetuate the family, clan and tribe.

On the *karam* feast day, the unmarried girls who want to take part in the ceremonies keep fast. Towards the evening, young men and women of the village go in procession to a *karam* tree singing, dancing and drumming. One of the young men, cuts three branches from it. These branches are caught in mid air by the girls who carry them in dance procession to the village priest's courtyard. He and his *wife* together plant the branches in the middle of the dance ground. The girls after their light refreshment gather there and sit in a wide circle around the *karam*

branches to listen to the story narrating God's blessings upon human beings. After this, young men and women of the village proceed to dance the whole night around the *karam* branches symbolizing God the Creator.

Nawakhani

It is celebrated in the lunar month of *Kuwanr* (September-October) when the first paddy crop is ready for harvest. The *head* of each household sacrifices a chicken to the ancestor spirits in gratitude for giving the gift of life, land and livestock to their descendants. The choicest portion of the festal meal is first offered to them and ritual rice beer is poured for them and prayers are made for their blessing and protection upon the family members.

Soharai

This feast is kept on the eve of the new moon day in the lunar month of *Kartik* (October-November). It is celebrated to honour the cattle helpful in agriculture. Occasionally, a fowl is sacrificed by the *head* of the family to the spirit of cowshed. Cattle are indispensable for the tribals in agriculture. They are the tribe's most prized gift and possession given by God who had given oxen to the first human beings to plough their fields and grow crops for their livelihood. Thus, cattle are the gift of God and therefore man needs to take care of them.

Khalihani

It is celebrated in the lunar month of *Aghan* (November-December). On behalf of the village community, the village priest on this occasion prays to God in the morning of the feast day at his threshing floor for getting plenty of grain in their threshing activity.

Maghe

It is celebrated in the month of *Magh* (January-February) to honour a house servant. The housewife washes his feet, applies oil on his hair and combs it. She then offers him rice beer. After tasting it if he says, 'it tastes good, it is delightful!' then it is a sign that he wishes to continue to give his service to the family for yet another year. If he wishes to discontinue his service, he would remain silent. The willing servant is kept while the unwilling one is released after paying him duly as per agreement.

Thus, the annual feasts among the tribals centre around the good of the family, clan and tribe which is their highest good. Concretely, they are connected with the health and prosperity of their *children, cattle* and *crop* ensuring continuation and happiness of the tribe. The feasts thus manifest the common worldviews of the tribals. They also show how the tribals live their *core values* during the annual cycle of their agricultural life. Thus, they support and strengthen the socio-cultural identity of the tribals in the multi-cultural Indian society.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. Give your general evaluation of how the celebrations of annual feasts and festivals of tribals become instrumental in expressing their culture.

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2.8 LET US SUM UP

Folk means the great proportion of the members of a people that determines the group character and that tends to preserve its characteristic form of civilization and its customs, arts and crafts, legends, traditions and superstitions from generation to generation. *Lore* means something that is learned. That is, (a) knowledge gained through study and experience, (b) traditional knowledge or belief. *Folklore* thus means traditional customs, tales, or sayings preserved orally among a people. In a broad sense, it is a medium through which the soul of a people expresses itself colourfully.

2.9 KEY WORDS

Folklore: It means traditional customs, tales, or sayings preserved orally among a people. In a broad sense, it is a medium through which the soul of a people expresses itself colourfully.

Culture: It is a learned behaviour and the products of that behaviour as opposed to instinctive or biologically determined behaviour.

Riddles: They present a good glimpse into the symbolic nature of the tribal mind and a graphic feature of their language.

Proverbs: They are the means through which the tribals reflect their sophisticated manners and social attitudes. They are also excellent examples of tribal wisdom which is based on their concrete experience rather than on cerebral activity.

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2.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to Check Your Progress I

1. Tribals often express their perception of truth and experience of life not in conceptual language but in their own characteristically graphic, down-to-earth manner. It is the form of myths and fables which satisfy their questionings. They weave beautiful legends about stars, planets and galaxies. They are also accustomed to create stories about everything and anything that make up the situation and condition of their everyday domestic life and work. These are good expressions of their rich, aesthetic grasp of reality. They show how the tribal mind revels in contemplation of the beauty and mystery of creation.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. Storytellers, singers, minstrels and other kinds of folk entertainers have acted for centuries as sources for the transmission and dissemination of news and information through face-to-face live communication. Families, social groups and community gatherings served as the main platforms of communication and sources for feedback for the folk performers. The values, attitudes, beliefs and culture of the people are propagated, reinforced and perpetuated through these folk forms. The issues in a society are depicted in the form of satire by the folk artists for curing societal evils.

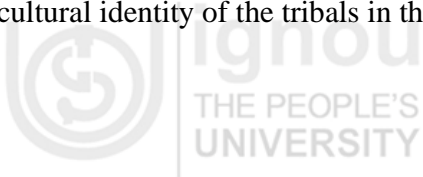
2. It establishes relationships between individuals and groups on the model of biological relationships between parents and children, between siblings, and between marital partners. It includes *family* and *clan*, its extension. Relationships established by marriage forming alliances between groups of persons related by blood or consanguineous ties, are usually referred to as affinal relations. There is a special *term* for every distinct relationship, both in direct and indirect lines of descent. There is also the custom of using one and the same term called *classificatory term* in addressing the whole class of relatives. This is to show greater respect for the elders and greater affection for the younger ones.

3. Each tribe is divided into a number of clans named after totems, such as, *animals, birds, fish, plants, minerals*, etc. with solidarity of particular human groups of common ancestry. They are names standing for persons to whom one's ultimate ancestors can be traced back. It is this which is the foundation of *marriage outside one's own clan*. It is for the same reason that sexual union between persons of the same clan is regarded as union between close family members.

Answer to Check Your Progress III

1. The annual feasts among the tribals centre around the good of the family, clan and tribe which is their highest good. Concretely, they are connected with the health and prosperity of their *children, cattle* and *crop* ensuring continuation and happiness of the tribe. The feasts thus manifest the common worldviews of the tribals. They also show how the tribals live their *core*

values during the annual cycle of their agricultural life. Thus, they support and strengthen the socio-cultural identity of the tribals in the multi-cultural Indian society.



UNIT 3 IMPACT OF SCIENTIFIC CULTURE AND GLOBALISATION ON TRIBALS

Contents

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3.2 Adivasi Situation in the Country

3.3 Industrial policy

3.4 Consequences

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3.7 Further Readings and References

3.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

3.0 OBJECTIVES

There are 67.8 million Scheduled Tribes people, constituting 8.74 % of India's population. Thus, they constitute almost two-thirds of the Muslim population and more than 3.4 and 4 times the Christian and Sikh population respectively. The Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) has identified 461 Scheduled Tribes of which about 172 are their segments or sub-groups. The ASI itself, however, admits that this is not a complete list of tribal communities in India. According to Draft National Policy On Tribals prepared by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs there are 698 Scheduled Tribes and many more unlisted groups of them spread all over the country speaking a variety of languages. In the States and Union Territories like Chandigarh, Delhi, Haryana, Pondichery and Punjab no Scheduled Tribe has been listed as per the Presidential Order. Scheduled Tribes are those which are notified as such by the President of India under Article 342 of the Constitution. In this Unit you are expected to understand:

- Adivasi situation in the country
- The impact of the industrial policy on the adivasis

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In India, tribals can be divided into two categories: (i) frontier tribes, and (ii) non-frontier tribes. The former are inhabitants of the North-East frontier states with 12.02% of India's Scheduled Tribes population at the borders of Burma, China and Bangladesh. They occupy a special position in the sphere of national politics. The rest of the 87.98% non-frontier tribes are distributed in most of the mainland states, though they are concentrated in large numbers in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. Both the tribal categories mentioned above are known as tribes, *Adivasis*, aboriginals, autochthons, etc. They have their own mother tongues, life styles, social structures, rites and rituals, values, and so on differing in many ways from those of the non-tribal social groups in the country. Many of them are today settled agriculturists but forest still forms much of their economic resource base.

Indian Tribes

The official selection of criteria to define the Scheduled Tribes is seriously mistaken for its lack of correspondence with reality and for its deep ethnocentric bias. In his report for the year 1952, the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes listed eight common features of Scheduled Tribes: (a) dwelling condition – they live in forests and hills, (b) ethnic origins – from Negritos, Australoids or Mongoloids, (c) language – tribal language, (d) religion – ‘animists’ worshipping ghosts and spirits, (e) mode of production – primitive, hunters, food gatherers, (f) carnivorous in food habits, (g) naked or semi-naked, and (h) fond of drink and dance (Sengupta 1988: 1004). This official characterisation of the tribals has remained the same to this day. Needless to say that most of the notified Scheduled Tribes population in the country today do not fit these criteria at all. The important and conscious tribal groups in the country in fact present an altogether different picture of themselves. The educated and Christianised tribals, such as, Uraons, Mundas, Kharias, Hos, Santals, Bhils, Gonds, Minas, Garos, Khasis, Mizos, Nagas, etc. are highly modernised and they would in fact consider their non-tribal neighbours in the country as primitives!

Adivasi Identity

Here, the term '*Adivasi*' deserves a special attention. This is indeed the term invented and used by the Jharkhandi tribals for their self-identity. Around 1938, the Jharkhand leaders had formed a pan-tribal organisation named *Adivasi Mahasabha*, which gave rise to the *Jharkhand Party* in

1950. The term expresses a real sense of pride as against the lowly image given by terms, such as, *forest tribe, forest and hill tribe, forest and gypsy tribe, backward tribe, primitive tribe, forest and primitive tribe, Hindu primitive tribe, backward Hindus, etc.* The Jharkhand movement perceived well the conflict between the officially sponsored image and the self-understanding of the *Adivasis*. The tribals of India, except perhaps those of the North-East states, emotionally identify themselves with the terms '*Adivasi*' and '*Adivasis*'. In this background, how can some groups of non-tribals use the derogatory term *Vanvasis* for the *Adivasis*? '*Vanavasi*' is synonymous with '*Junglee*' and '*Vanavasis*' thus means 'forest dwellers' with a pejorative sense. Nobody has ever called the well-to-do non-tribals who have their homes in jungles and hill stations as *Vanavasis*! Why then give this name to the *Adivasis* alone?

The Adivasi society however does not have caste system. It is divided into different groups and various clans. There is no high and low social hierarchy among them. There are several fundamental differences between the Hindus and the Adivasis. Even constitutionally, the Adivasis are different from the caste Hindus because the Constitution makes provision for the Scheduled Tribes. The Hindu Marriage Act and the Hindu Succession Act make it quite clear that the Acts do not apply to the Adivasis.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. The official selection of criteria to define the Scheduled Tribes has a deep ethnocentric bias. Why?

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3.2 ADIVASI SITUATION IN THE COUNTRY

Chhattisgarh an example

The purpose of looking at the Adivasi situation in Chhattisgarh is that it would sufficiently reflect the impact of scientific/industrial culture and globalisation on the Adivasis of other states

too. On 1st November, 2000, the new state of Chhattisgarh was formed with 2.07 crore population. There are 16 districts with over 18,000 villages in Chhattisgarh. The Adivasi population as large as 32.4% (1991 census) inhabits most of these villages.

In Nagarnar (Bastar) the district administration made use of falsified records in 2001 against the Adivasi land rights and claims and there was rampant police high-handedness witnessed in suppressing Adivasi protests against the above form of injustice. In Raigarh the Jindal Company is given free hand in using and misusing resources under the control and use of the Adivasis. In Tamnar the police fired in the air to disperse the Adivasis who were protesting against the above Company which was stealing the supply of their irrigation water for its own industrial use.

The serious problem of extremist violence in the state can only be ignored to one's own peril. It is in the districts in the southern part of the state bordering Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa and the north-eastern part bordering Jharkhand, that the problem of extremist violence, such as, MCC and PWG have grown alarmingly over the years. These districts are inhabited largely by Adivasi communities which are poor in terms of income and infrastructure. This is a highly sensitive problem as the Adivasi youth are getting exposed to the extreme leftist ideology which has dangerous portents for the unity, integrity and security of people. Adivasi development plans need to be based on an area approach without injuring the rich and varied heritage of the Adivasis. Rapid socio-economic development and suitable local employment to the educated youth would have to focus on agriculture development and agro-processing, processing of minor forest produce, other rural industries and handicrafts.

Forests

As much as 44% of the land area of Chhattisgarh is under forest cover. The state has thus fortunately already more forest cover than the target proposed to be attained by 2012 (33%). These forests are known for their rich biodiversity. They have a large variety of medicinal herbs and plants and Adivasi communities have the traditional knowledge of their medicinal qualities that could be learnt from them for use when needed. This could be a major programme for development and would make Chhattisgarh and other Adivasi inhabited states *Van-Aushadhi* (forest medicine) States of the country. It should be noted that by preserving such large forest

areas the states provide the nation with green lungs, and help the rest of the nation achieve a major national and social objective of preserving and protecting its ecology.

Public Sector Enterprises

Land was provided for establishment of two enterprises in the public sector, (1) Super-thermal Power Plant in Seepat, and (2) National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC) Steel Plant in Bastar. The NMDC is a public sector enterprise. Some four decades ago, it had started mining of iron ore deposits in Bailadila in the Adivasi district of Bastar, initially for export to Japan. It has by now collected huge stock of ore slack which will be used in the proposed plant taking advantage of the new technology available now.

In fact there is a strong case even otherwise for establishment of steel industry within the Bastar region rather than exporting the ore elsewhere. There were two proposals of steel plants in private sector seriously pursued in the early 1990s, (a) at Mavalibhata, and (b) at Nagarnar, inhabited by the Adivasis of the Bastar district. The proposed ventures, however, had to be abandoned in the face of strong opposition from the likely affected people. The reason was simple. The administration had failed even to present a reasonable alternative for their livelihood to the affected people. The same experience has been repeated in Jharkhand, Orissa, West Bengal, Madhyapradesh and other states where Adivasis live.

No lesson, however, appears to have been learnt even now by the Government of Chhattisgarh from the earlier experience. The new NMDC proposal has been pursued unilaterally in the same way as it was done earlier without any serious deliberations on basic issues at any level. In fact, even some of the basic changes in the Constitutional frame with regard to (a) management of natural resources, (b) acquisition of land, (c) rehabilitation of people, and (d) the structure of industrial enterprises in the Scheduled Areas, which have been effected in the intervening period have been totally ignored.

Accepted National Frame

The basic frame for establishment of an industrial enterprise in the Scheduled Areas as designed by the government itself from time to time broadly comprises the following elements:

Comprehensive Plan for Alternative Means of Livelihood

Preparation of a comprehensive plan for people directly displaced because of acquisition of land and those likely to be affected indirectly in the zone of influence of the concerned industry is a necessary first step in any proposal for establishing an industry in the Scheduled Areas. This plan, according to the guidelines issued by the government of India in this regard in 1974 as a part of the Adivasi development strategy still existing, had to be an integral part of the industrial project,

Gram Sabha at the Centre Stage

The community at the village level in the form of Gram Sabha is now a Constitutional body after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. In the Scheduled Areas, the position of Gram Sabha has become very strong as it has come to the centre stage after the enactment of the Provisions of Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (in brief Extension Act). In particular, under section 4 (d) of this Act, the Gram Sabha is competent to *manage all resources within its jurisdiction in accordance with its customs and tradition*. Moreover, consultation with the Gram Sabha before acquisition of land and preparation of rehabilitation programme for the affected of all descriptions, is now mandatory under section 4 (i) of the said Act.

Environment Clearance

Environmental clearance of any project is mandatory under the notification of Government of India dated 10-04-1997 before a project can be established.

Limitations on State in Scheduled Areas

The Supreme Court of India, in a historic judgement in the Samata case in 1997, has held that the Constitution intends that all lands in the Scheduled Areas should always remain with the Adivasi people. Therefore, as per spirit of the provisions of the Fifth Schedule even the Government cannot lease out any land to a non-tribal including juridical entities like companies.

Community Ownership over Industry

The Bhuria Committee on self-governance in the Scheduled Areas recommended way back in 1995 that “the community should have full command over the industry based on local resources. ... The community should be deemed to be the owner with 50% shares in its favour by virtue of its allowing the industry to use the local resources and getting established...”

Misadventure at Hiranar

After the decision to establish a steel plant in Bastar, a site near Geedam in Dantewara was first selected. It involved lands in the neighbouring villages of Hiranar and Ghotpal. The concerned authorities did not take any action in the identification of a zone of influence and preparation of a comprehensive rehabilitation plan. Moreover, the *so-called government land located in these villages* was straightaway allotted for the steel plant ignoring the Constitutional provision about the Gram Sabha’s competence to manage all resources. *Even the process of land acquisition was started without mandatory prior consultation with the concerned Gram Sabhas.* The concerned Gram Sabhas obviously did not agree to the proposal. All efforts to persuade the people to part with their lands even at ministerial level failed. At the end it was decided to abandon the proposal.

Nagarnar: A Case of Continuing Encounter

Local administration ignored the strong case made out by the people of Nagarnar on the earlier occasion in 1992 against location of any large industry specifically at Nagarnar. The salient features of the people's stand were:

- a. Nagarnar is one of the best agricultural tracts and one of the most densely populated areas in Bastar.
- b. The overall agricultural area in the Bastar region is limited, that is, about 30% of the total geographical area. The bulk of the remaining area comprises forest. The forest area is no longer available to the Adivasi people for agriculture, which continues to be their mainstay. Therefore, keeping in view the fact of limited agricultural area and growing pressure of population, suitable location for heavy industry should be found in other areas, including the so-called forest area. A substantial part of the forest is degraded which can be put to alternative industrial use.
- c. The establishment of a new large industry with investments of tens of thousands of crores should aim at balanced regional development.

No systematic exercise for establishing industry in Bastar has been taken up so far. The new proposals for location of plant at Hiranar and Nagarnar are facing the same opposition on the same grounds as mentioned above. From outside, it appears that the government is soft towards the the Adivasis but in reality it prefers to use its authority against them rather than going about in a rational way with informed consultation in a climate of mutual trust as envisaged in the law of the land and declared policies mentioned above.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. What is the accepted basic national frame for establishment of an industrial enterprise in the Scheduled Areas?

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3.3 INDUSTRIAL POLICY

Industrial policy is normally the presence of the “modernizing” elites of the society, formulated away from the public gaze under the assumption that it is only the financiers, industrialists and their techno-managerial advisers and hired hands who need to be “consulted” by politicians and the bureaucracy during policy formulation. There is no need for a wider democratic and public participation. This is where the combined population of Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes are provided protection through special constitutional Provisions, and in a world where the United Nations have formulated a special convention for upholding the rights and according protection to indigenous tribes, to which India is a signatory. All these are apparently of no consequence to the “modernizing” elites to whom unbridled policy is the route to super-ordinate profits. It implies, why consult other sections of the population who are of no consequence, provided they get some jobs in the factories? When an industrial policy is drafted in this manner, perhaps a correct description of the process would be, “of the industrialists, by the industrialists, for the industrialists”. Such a draft deserves both qualitative as well as quantitative critical scrutiny.

Taking for example the Chhattisgarh Industrial Policy, the main text refers to various forms of public subsidy to industrialists. The term “subsidy” may be replaced by the single term “gift”. This forms the *first core* of the policy document. The *second core* of the policy document revolves essentially around the question: Who are to be the recipients of these “gifts”? Together they form, (a) an area based subsidy criteria, (b) group based subsidy criteria, (c) size based subsidy criteria, and (d) industrial importance based subsidy criteria.

Area based subsidy criteria

Chhattisgarh is divided into two regions: (i) general, and (ii) most backward Scheduled Tribes dominant areas, that is, Bastar, Korja, Surguja and Jashpur. More subsidies are given to locations in backward areas.

Group based subsidy criteria

There are three groups of investors identified: (i) Investors from Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes (this is a group virtually with *zero* members), (ii) Non-Resident Indians (NRI) with 100% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), who will receive additional 5% incentives over and above the “directed incentives”, and (iii) General category investors.

Size based subsidy criteria

This is based on the size of investment as: (i) Small industries, (ii) Medium and large industries (upto Rs. 100 crores investment), (iii) Mega industries (between Rs. 100 crores and Rs. 1000 crores investment) and of these, the very large industries have been directly granted the maximum level of subsidy.

Industrial importance subsidy criteria

The “industrial importance” criteria simplify the identification of gift recipients into two categories: (i) General Industries, and (ii) Thrust Industries.

The *third core* of the document clearly declares the types of subsidies (gifts) to be given from the public purse to the chosen few. These are the “directed incentives” consisting of 12 subsidies: (1) Interest subsidy on term loan and working capital, (2) Capital investment subsidy, (3) Exemption from electricity duty, (4) Exemption from stamp duty both on land purchase and deeds of loans/advances, (5) Exemption from entry tax, (6) Allotment of plots in industrial area at concessional premium, (7) Exemption from land revenue for land diversion, (8) Service charge concession for land acquisition outside industrial area, (9) Interest subsidy for technology upgradation, (10) Reimbursement of project report expenses, (11) Quality certification subsidy, (12) Technology patent subsidy.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. Which process of drafting an industrial policy would be described as “of the industrialists, by the industrialists, for the industrialists”?

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2. In an industrial policy, what do the “directed incentives” mean?
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3.4 CONSEQUENCES

What are likely to be the foreseeable and predictable consequences of such an industrial policy in states where the Adivasis inhabit. As the State economy grows more and more unsustainable, all welfare and development measures in the areas of education, health, nutrition support programmes, child care programmes, irrigation development, agriculture development and many others will be curtailed and ultimately halted. The bankruptcy of State finances and inability to provide welfare services and development inputs will be as an argument for privatization of these services/sectors. Under privatization, the poor of the region will be systematically excluded. Thus, needless to say, the Adivasi population will be the worst hit and their health, nutrition, life expectancy, educational access and a number of other social indicators will show a steep downward decline.

With State bankruptcy, there will be greater pressure on the Forest Department to generate revenue, leading to unsustainable exploitation of existing forests and it will ring the death-knell of the Adivasi society in the region. As the pressure to generate revenue mounts, more mining will be undertaken to increase royalties. Obstacles like impacts on forests, biodiversity, wildlife, water falls, sacred places, tourist spots, river basin catchments and cumulative impacts of industrialization, mining, transportation and industrial infrastructure on existing/remaining forests will be considered minor and overlooked to permit the process of “development”.

The law against alienation of Adivasi lands by non-Adivasis will be neatly side-stepped by the State acquisition of Adivasi land and its resale to non-Adivasi industrialists, for a nominal

profit/premium. The State will develop a vested interest in taking away Adivasi lands for purposes of enhancing its own falling revenues.

With the simultaneous reduction of agricultural land, forest resources and welfare support available to Adivasi society, there will be sharp polarization and backlash of Adivasi society against non-Adivasi “outsiders” whose policies will be increasingly viewed as imposition upon Adivasi society, and rightly so, since nowhere have the Adivasis been consulted. All the concessions to Adivasi entrepreneurs in backward regions, are empty words because there will hardly be any Adivasi establishing industrial units.

Due to polarization between the Adivasis and non-Adivasis, there will be confrontation between the two groups in the region and thus State repression will inevitably follow in favour of fulfilment of all promises made in the Industrial Policy Document with respect to “directed incentives” (exemptions/concessions). There will be an increase in the social map of crime as a starving, illiterate, unemployed, alienated, resentful Adivasi population in the State will exact a measure of revenge on the non-Adivasi population.

It is a cruel myth for the Adivasis that due to their economically poor standard of living and lack of education for skilled jobs, in their own land they will become *khalasis*, drivers, peons, office boys, *chaprasis*, contract labourers, head loaders, coolies, watchmen, gardeners, cooks, caretakers, hotel boys, *rezas*, etc. Could there be a greater tragedy than this of development in areas where the Adivasis live?

From the above discussion, it looks inevitable that should such policy be implemented, it will lead to (a) unsustainable public debt of a long term nature, (b) the bankruptcy of State finance and (c) the rupture of both polity and a significantly Adivasi society, with a high degree of egalitarian ethos and gender equality, hitherto cohesive and ecologically sustainable, free of crime and free of many of the pathologically self destructive tendencies and poisonous hierarchies that afflict the “modern” society. Such policy in effect will privatize future public revenues as well as render more effective and efficient, the private appropriation of all other public resources, such as, land, forest, water, minerals, institutions

and people. It is a narrow money minded, money-economy based approach to social development that excludes both nature and the Adivasis.

The notion that development has to respect physical-ecological limits, is completely absent in such a policy which recognizes no limits of either nature or society in the pursuit of unbalanced and ill-conceived industrial development. There is no wisdom in the pursuit of a pattern of industrial development that destroys natural resources and social formations at one point of time, only to have to regenerate them at a future point of time, all at social cost.

The Industrial Policy of the above kind seems completely unaware of the massive worldwide scientific concern of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It appears that atmosphere is the most limited of all the resources available to humanity and will eventually set the limits on all forms of industrialization, power generation and transportation in the future that are based on fossil fuels. The combustion of fossil fuels releases carbon as carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. This carbon, stored in the earth's crust over many millions of years as coal, oil or natural gas, has been released into the atmosphere in increasing quantities over the last 150 years of industrial activity. A crude calculation is sufficient to indicate that the combustion products from the combustion of 1 million tonnes of coal per year require at least 50,000 hectares of dense natural forests to reabsorb the carbon dioxide. This is the lung capacity that is immobilized by a single large pollution source like a steel plant or a thermal power station, yet various states are multiplying steel plants, sponge iron plants, captive power plants, captive coal and dolomite/limestone mines and so on as if the atmosphere is an infinite resource. Worse still, the pattern of industrialization will further damage and reduce existing forests and grasslands senselessly while receiving public subsidy in the name of development.

Check Your Progress IV

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. What are likely to be the foreseeable and predictable impacts on Adivasis/tribals of the kind of industrial policy discussed above?

3.5 LET US SUM UP

The notion that development has to respect physical-ecological limits, is completely absent in globalised scientific culture which recognizes no limits of either nature or society in the pursuit of unbalanced and ill-conceived industrial development. There is no wisdom in the pursuit of a pattern of industrial development that destroys natural resources and social formations at one point of time, only to have to regenerate them at a future point of time, all at social cost.

3.6 KEY WORDS

Adivasis: Original inhabitants.

Directed Incentives: Types of subsidies (gifts) to be given from the public purse to the chosen few.

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3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. Most of the notified Scheduled Tribes population in the country today do not fit in the official criteria of characterising tribals at all. The important and conscious tribal groups in the country in fact present an altogether different picture of themselves. The educated and Christianised tribals are highly modernized.

The official terms used, such as, forest tribe, forest and hill tribe, forest and gypsy tribe, backward tribe, primitive tribe, forest and primitive tribe, Hindu primitive tribe, backward Hindus, etc. give a lowly image to tribal groups.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. The basic frame for establishment of an industrial enterprise in the Scheduled Areas as designed by the government itself from time to time broadly comprises the following elements:

- a. Preparation of a comprehensive plan for people directly displaced because of acquisition of land and those likely to be affected indirectly in the zone of influence of the concerned industry is a necessary first step in any proposal for establishing an industry in the Scheduled Areas.
- b. After the enactment of the Provisions of Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (in brief Extension Act), the Gram Sabha is competent to *manage all resources within its jurisdiction in accordance with its customs and tradition*. Moreover, consultation with the Gram Sabha before acquisition of land and preparation of rehabilitation programme for the affected of all descriptions, is now

- mandatory under section 4 (i) of the said Act.
- c. Environmental clearance of any project is mandatory under the notification of Government of India dated 10-04-1997 before a project can be established.
 - d. As per spirit of the provisions of the Fifth Schedule even the Government cannot lease out any land to a non-tribal including juridical entities like companies.
 - e. The community should be deemed to be the owner with 50% shares in its favour by virtue of its allowing the industry to use the local resources and getting established.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

1. Industrial policy formulated by “modernizing” elites away from the public gaze under the assumption that it is only the financiers, industrialists and their techno-managerial advisers and hired hands who need to be “consulted” by politicians and the bureaucracy during policy formulation. There is no need for a wider democratic and public participation.
2. Types of *gifts* to be given from the public purse to the chosen few. They include many more subsidies of different kinds in order to attract industrialists.

Answer to Check Your Progress IV

1. As the State economy grows more and more unsustainable, all welfare and development measures in the areas of education, health, nutrition support programmes, child care programmes, irrigation development, agriculture development and many others will be curtailed and ultimately halted. The bankruptcy of State finances and inability to provide welfare services and development inputs will be as an argument for privatization of these services/sectors. Under privatization, the poor of the region will be systematically excluded. Thus, needless to say, the Adivasi population will be the worst hit and their health, nutrition,

life expectancy, educational access and a number of other social indicators will show a steep downward decline.



UNIT 4 SOCIAL ORGANISATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE TRIBALS

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Institutions
- 4.3 Kinship System
- 4.4 Socio-Religious Rites (Rites of Passage)
- 4.5 Tribal Administration
- 4.6 Customary Law of Inheritance and Partition
- 4.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.8 Key Words
- 4.9 Further Readings and References
- 4.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In the tribal context, the entire world outside Chhotanagpur appears to be the world of the *dikus* (exploiting non-tribals) who threaten the socio-economic and cultural security of the *tribal-in-groups*. Chhotanagpur here is the cultural territory comprising Jharkhand and its adjoining districts in Chhattisgarh, Orissa and West Bengal. The image of the *dikus* in the tribal mind is generally that of “looters, trouble makers, deceivers, exploiters, cheats, unreliable, those who have a sense of superiority and inspire fear.” In this Unit you are expected to know:

- Kinship System
- Socio-Religious Rites
- Tribal Administration
- Customary Law of Inheritance and Partition

4.1. INTRODUCTION

According to the 1952 Report of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes Commission, the official selection of criteria to define the *Scheduled Tribes* is seriously mistaken for its lack of correspondence with reality and its ethnocentric bias. The traits selected in this report included: isolation, racial characteristics, use of 'tribal dialects', 'animism', primitive' economic activities, eating habits (non-vegetarian), dress ('naked or semi-naked'), nomadism, propensity to drink and to dance.

Needless to say that most of the notified Scheduled Tribes population in the country do not fit the above criteria at all. In fact, K.S. Mathur has dismissed the above classification or souls which effect consequences in society' ((Marshall, G. 1998: 671). This definition as 'a typical case of fiction-creation by Government officers.' 'Animism' defined as the 'belief that natural phenomena, animate and inanimate alike, are endowed with spirits is not of much help to us today. For material objects in which tribal divinities are often located are not venerated as material forms but as *representations* of spiritual realities.

The most important and conscious tribal groups in the country today in fact present an altogether different picture. The Christianised Uraons, Mundas, Kharias Santals, Hos, Khasis, Mizos, Nagas, etc. are highly modernised, and they would in fact consider some of their non-tribal neighbours as primitives!

4.2. INSTITUTIONS

They consist of all the structural components of a society through which the main concerns and activities are organised, and social needs (such as those for order, belief and reproduction) are met. The current concept of institution, however, comprises changing patterns of behaviour based on relatively more stable value systems. Institutions constrain or determine the behaviour of specific social groups. As a general remark, let it be understood that the discussion under the following sections is concerned with both *traditional* as well as *modern* tribal societies undergoing far reaching transformation under the impact of rapid social changes taking place.

4.3 KINSHIP SYSTEM

They establish relationships between individuals and groups on the model of biological relationships between parents and children, between siblings, and between marital partners. Kinship thus means blood relationship. Among the tribals it includes *family* and *clan* its extension. Relationships established by marriage which form alliances between groups of persons related by blood (or consanguineous ties), are usually referred to as affinal relationships.)

Kinship Terms

There is a special term for every distinct relationship, both in direct and collateral lines. In some well studied tribal groups of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Orissa origin it is quite precise, for example, *Bara-Bari* [(a) father's elder brother and his wife, (b) mother's elder sister's husband and his wife], *Kaka-Kaki* (father's younger brother and his wife), *Mosa-Musi* (mother's younger sister's husband and his wife), *Mamu-Tachi* [(a) mother's brother and his wife, (b) father's sister's husband and his wife], *etc.*

Classificatory Terms

One and the same kinship term is used to address the whole class of relatives, for example, in the father's line, *Ajjo* (grandfather), *Bara* [(a) father's elder brother, (b) husband of mother's elder sister], *Kaka* (father's younger brother), *Mamu* (mother's brother), *Mosa* (husband of mother's younger sister) – all of them are addressed as *Aba/Ba* (father). Similarly, in the mother's line, *Ajji* (grandmother) *Bari* [(a) wife of father's elder brother, (b) mother's elder sister], *Kaki* (wife of father's younger brother), *Tachi* [(a) wife of mother's brother, (b) father's sister], *Musi* (mother's younger sister) are called *Ayo/Yo* (mother). Elders use terms, *Beta* (son) and *Beti* (daughter) for their nephews and nieces. The younger members address all the elder ones as *Dada/Da* (elder brother), *Didi/Dai* (elder sister). The elder members address all the younger ones as *Babu* (little brother), *Mayia/Mayi* (little sister), *Chu*, *Buchu*, *Hiya* (dear one, little one). These are to show greater respect for the elders and greater affection for the younger ones. According to tribal custom, only those people have the right to call someone by name who may have assisted the latter at his/her birth or name giving ceremony.

Joking Relationship

A certain category of people have a fun loving relationship among themselves, for example, between (i) grandparents and grandchildren, (ii) brothers-in-law and their wives' younger brothers and sisters, (iii) sisters-in-law and their husbands' younger brothers and sisters, (iv) wife's brothers-sisters and husband's brothers-sisters. People in joking relationship may enjoy greater freedom and familiarity with one another and may have a lot of fun without offending one another. Relationship may be real or classificatory.

Reserve-Respect Relationship

In this relationship, there is a certain distance due to a reserve-respect attitude towards one another. Members of different families and clans enter into such relationship through affinity. One enters into this relationship through a special ritual. Relationship may be real or classificatory, for example, between (i) one's elder brother and one's wife, (ii) one's husband and one's elder sister. Out of deep respect for each other, there is a reciprocal *avoidance* and name *taboo* between a woman and her husband's elder brother real or classificatory. For the same reason, there is also name taboo between a husband and his wife.

Clan

Kinship structure includes the *family* and its extension into the broader group relationships, that is, the *clan*. Each tribe is divided into a number of patrilineal clans named after totems, such as, *animals, birds, fish, plants, minerals*, etc. There is a matrilineal clan system among the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia tribes. 'Totemism' is reverence for or veneration of different natural species identified as 'totems' with the solidarity of particular human groups, especially groups of common ancestry. They are eponyms (names standing for persons to whom one's ultimate ancestors can be traced back). They are respected (not venerated). There are various legends about them of receiving some help from them in ancient times. Each clan descends from common ancestors. It is this belief which is the foundation of *marriage outside one's own clan*

(clan-exogamy). It is for the same reason that sexual union between persons of the same clan is regarded as *incest* (sexual union between close family members). According to Adivasi creation stories, it is God Himself who divided human beings into various clans to enter into *inter-clan* marriage relationships.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. As a part of kinship system, how does *clan* play an important role in forming tribal social relationships?

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4.4 SOCIO-RELIGIOUS RITES

a. Birth

Pre-Natal, Natal Observances

In some traditional tribal groups, it is believed that the child in the womb is more exposed to supernatural influences. Therefore, the expectant mother should not go out when it is thundering and lightning, otherwise the child would be born deformed. She should not touch a dead body, should not associate herself with anything that signifies death. When her time to deliver the first baby has come, her father or uncle is called to the house of her husband to take part in the sacrifice offered to the ancestor spirits for the wellbeing of the mother and the child.

If the mother had lost some children soon after delivery, the baby is left in the manure pit for sometime to be picked up by some of the relatives soon after. In this case, the baby may be provisionally named as 'manure one' or 'thrown one' with the belief that even the spirits would not like to touch such an abject baby for harming it. Thus the baby would be spared from malevolent spirits and would survive.

On the day of the baby's birth or within 2-3 days of delivery, the father of the baby goes to the village priest with a red fowl, some pearl (white) rice and a copper coin. They are waved round the baby and the priest is requested to offer sacrifice for the baby. Using these objects, he offers a sacrifice to the village spirits and pours libation of rice beer to the ancestor spirits on behalf of the father. Prayer is offered to God to protect the baby from all harm and to bless it abundantly.

Name Giving

Tribals have a custom of choosing a name for a child. One of the elders takes his seat with a bowl of water and some paddy grains. He removes the husk of a grain with his finger nails and drops it gently on the still surface of the water in the bowl to float. It represents *God*. Likewise, he drops the second grain representing the *elders* of the village. Similarly, he drops the third grain in the name of the *child* and lastly he drops the fourth grain naming at the same time one *ancestor*. If the last two grains meet while floating, the child is named after the ancestor in whose name the fourth grain was dropped. From then on this ancestor becomes the *patron* or *guardian* of the child. The operation is repeated till the third and fourth grains meet. After this name-giving, the child belongs to the *community, clan, tribe* and *ancestors*. It is an initiation of the child into the clan and tribal community to grow and mature in them as a full tribal. This ceremony manifests that the child belongs to God and the elders are witnesses to this mystery of life. It also shows that the goal of this earthly life is to attain the ancestral community at long last. It is in this community that the tribe lives for ever.

b. Marriage

The tribals are *endogamous*, that is, a tribal has to marry *within his/her own tribe*. The tribe is divided into *exogamous patrilineal clans*. It means, a tribal of a particular clan has to marry an *adivasi* of his/her own ethnic group having another clan. *Adult, virilocal* (husband's place), *monogamous, life-long marriages* are the general rule. *Widow remarriage* is allowed. The tribals of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Orissa origin allow marriage to take place between the descendants of a brother and his sister *beyond three generations*. It is considered the duty of

parents to select the life partners of their children, though not without the consent of the latter. During the preliminary stages of negotiations, parents of the bride inspect the family of their prospective son-in-law to make sure that his father possesses enough land and cattle for a comfortable living of their daughter after she is given in marriage in that family. A landless tribal finds it difficult to marry his child.

Marriage Negotiations

Marriage negotiations are conducted through an intermediary or go-between. On arrival of the boy's party, the purpose of its visit is inquired by the girl's party and the answer is given in a very symbolic language as follows: (a) "Vegetable has grown in your side. Therefore, we have come to pluck it. Would you allow us pluck it please?" (b) "One of our she calves got lost. It entered this side. So, we have come to look for it. Would you allow us to take it back please?" etc. Mock acting, the girl's party would first refuse to fulfill their request before agreeing to it.

At the end of this dialogue, *omens* observed on the way are examined. Omens are signs from nature. Some omens are good while others are bad. With good omens marriage negotiation among the traditional tribals continues or else it may get terminated.

Good Omens	Bad Omens
(a) a lamp burning: it is a mark of prosperity; (b) a woman carrying water: presence of water symbolises life giving power and vitality; (c) a <i>raja</i> or royal youth: power or wealth symbol, (d) a corpse being removed: death is out of the way, opportunity for a new life, (e) seeing monkeys on the way: monkey is the nephew of God, therefore is sacred symbolising God's favour;	(a) a thorn pricking: loss of blood and, therefore, loss of life; (b) an empty pitcher: sign of lack of life giving power and vitality; (c) a woman carrying ashes or clothes in an earthen vessel for washing purposes: sign of weakness; (d) a dead animal being removed: destruction of property; (e) a snake on the path: a danger symbol; (f) a vulture overhead: it feeds on carrion

<p>(f) itching in the palm of the hand: sign that one will get money;</p> <p>(g) Jackal crossing from left to right: going away from the life centre: symbolises that death is on its way out;</p> <p>(h) seeing or hearing a pigeon or a kingcrow singing: sign of humble, patient, loving and hard-working housewife.</p>	<p>and, therefore, associated with death;</p> <p>(g) hearing an owl: its cry suggests harm and horror;</p> <p>(h) a jackal crossing the road from right to left and hearing its howling: moving to left is moving to life centre, in the present case, the jackal's direction of movement and its howling are signs of imminent death;</p> <p>(k) a tree or branch coming down suddenly on the path is a sign of impending death.</p>
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Betrothal

It is an opportunity for a boy and girl in the house of the latter's parents to see each other and express their mind of marrying each other publicly. The girl can express her agreement or disagreement on this occasion publicly. The rite takes place as follows:

The girl with her female companion side by side is brought out to stand on the open courtyard full of guests and relatives. Similarly, the boy with his male companion side by side is also brought out to stand in front of the two girls respectively face to face. Two small brass jars full of rice beer each are given to one girl each standing to hold.

One of the elders tells the young girl to take two steps forward if she is willing to accept the young boy in front of her as her future husband. If she is willing, she takes two steps forward with her companion. Similarly, the elder tells the boy to do the same and the latter with his companion does so if willing. The elder then tells the girl to pass the jar with rice beer to the boy. She with her companion does so. The boy is told to return the jar to the girl and he with his companion does so. The two jars with rice beer are then taken from the hands of the girls to be shared between the two parties as a ritual drink. The boy and girl with their companions greet

each other and go back to their respective places. With this ceremony the ritual of betrothal gets over.

Occasionally, a girl may express her disagreement publicly in the above ritual and her decision would be respected without any offence. The celebration arranged consisting of singing and dancing, rice beer, meal, etc., however, would take place and the two parties would say farewell to each other joyfully and the cordial relationship between the two families could still continue.

Bride Price

After a few exchange visits of the two families, the boy's party goes to the girl's house very early in the morning. They take their seat and start a dialogue which is quite symbolic in nature. For example, "You have a beautiful she calf, so we have come to purchase it, how much price do you fix for it?" The girl's party may ask any price, for example, a thousand, a hundred rupees, etc. just for the sake of a dialogue. Having this mock bargaining for some time, they come down to the real bride price which may be Rs. 5/- (five rupees only) among the Uraons. It is only a token gift. Some other tribes give one or two cattle heads to the bride's parents. In their absence, a cash substitute and a gift of clothes may suffice. There is no dowry system among tribals. In order to seal the contract, they exchange *duub* grass in the sense of life long contract. This is an ever green grass which never dies. Mundas use clay marbles to signify coins and leaves to symbolise a *saari* (lady's long garment).

On this occasion the girl with her female companion is made to come out from the inner room carrying a pot of rice beer each on the head. One of the elders from her side gets up and says: "Behold brothers, whether my daughter is lame or maimed. Behold well." After this the girl with her companion takes two steps forward. After this two members from the boy's side receive the pots from them and one of the guests takes the girl as their daughter-in-law. Other guests give her gifts, such as, *saari*, blouse, hair ornaments, money, etc. Meanwhile, singing, drinking and feasting continue.

Major Guest Coming

On the eve of the marriage, the girl's party consisting of men alone, goes to the boy's house in order to show special respect, honour and acceptance to the boy. On arrival their feet are washed and they are seated on the courtyard. Following it, the bridegroom with his male companion comes out of the house carrying a pair of pots with rice beer. The guests receive the rice beer and share it among themselves. One of the guests takes the boy on his lap as a sign of affection and acceptance as their son-in-law. The boy is given some gifts, especially a *turban*, some money and other gifts. He with his companion goes round greeting everybody. During this visit the elders settle how much money or clothing are to be given to the girl's party consisting in (a) money, (b) wedding garment for the mother, (c) garments for the grandfather and grandmother, (d) garments for the bride's younger brother and bride's younger sister.

Central Marriage

At the central marriage ceremony, the bride and bridegroom are brought out in the courtyard to the full view of the assembly where they mark each other's forehead with *vermilion* (a blood substitute) to express their *marriage consent* publicly. In the Santal and Munda ancient custom, a bit of blood from the small fingers of the bride and bridegroom was taken out, mixed together and applied on each other's forehead as a symbol of life.

In the Uraon tradition, the bride stands in front and the bridegroom behind on a *grinding stone* on which a *yoke* and some *thatching grass* are placed. While standing the bridegroom presses the heel of the bride's left foot between the first and second toes of his left foot. This shows that the bride belongs to him. It is the grinding stone on which the bride would work daily to prepare the family meal. Similarly, the bridegroom would go to his field taking his plough and yoke to plough in order to produce crops and support his family. Finally, both the bride and bridegroom would require a shelter, a home, symbolised by the thatching grass to bring up their family. Thus, these objects are basic economic symbols of a home and marriage is the establishing of a *new home*.

Union of Two Families

Adivasi marriage uniting the bride and bridegroom also unites the two families in venerating their *lineage spirits*. This is shown through a ceremony called *veneration of earthen clod/libation of rice beer*. Towards noon, both the fathers-in-law with the son-in-law and some other elders of the village go to the kitchen garden. From both the parties five *saal* leaves are placed on the ground and one *clod of earth* is placed on each leaf. The father-in-law introduces his son-in-law to his family spirits and advises him to remember and venerate them in times of need. Both the fathers-in-law apply oil to each other and hold each other's arms and try to pull and push each other. They jointly pour rice beer to their ancestors. These rituals form a part of the ceremony of the union of the two families. Finally, they recite a formula as follows: "Listen oh elders! We are becoming fathers-in-law. The dogs and cats of so and so (personal name) will be of the house of so and so (personal name) of such a such village (village's name) and the dogs and cats of the latter's house in this village will be of the house of the former. The thatching grass of this place will have to be taken for covering the roof of the former there and the thatching grass of that place will have to be brought for covering the roof of the latter here. Listen oh family relatives, below are the elders God is above. Binding with iron will break, binding with (living) skin (and flesh) will not break (though) stone will float, dry cow dung will sink!" It means that the union established between the bride and bridegroom will last lifelong without breaking.

Marriage Sermon

After marriage, an elderly person gives an important instruction to the couple as follows: "Look you so and so (bridegroom), this so and so (bride) has become your wife. While working or plucking vegetable, if she would fall down and her legs and hands would break or she would become blind or deaf or due to some suffering her face and form would get ugly, even then you do not abandon her. Whatever she would cook for you, eat and drink the same and be on the alert and never look at some other woman than your own wife."

Similarly, addressing the bride he says: "Look you so and so (bride), this so and so (bridegroom) is your husband. He would go to work or would go hunting into the forest or mountain and

would break his leg or hand or would become blind then you do not abandon him. Whatever eatable he would bring, cook the same and serve it to him and never look at some other man than your own husband.”

Farewell

Once all the ceremonies are over, the bride is handed over to the bridegroom and the marriage party is given farewell. The bride is given an *arrow with iron head* to take along with her to the bridegroom’s house. On arriving at the groom’s house, she inserts it in the ceiling at the entrance door. She is given the charge of the household with a ceremony called *entrusting of winnowing basket and broom* in the following words: “This is your house, look after it well.” If her father or brother or any guardian has accompanied her to the new home, he gives her the last instruction on making a happy home of peace and prudence with mutual cooperation in the following words: “Take heed, there are many to sow seeds of discord in the family but few to sow seeds of harmony. Be on your guard. When you get your food stuff in plenty and when you have it very little, eat and drink it equally by sharing. In woe and weal, be serviceable and helpful to each other in daily works.”

c. Death

Those who die before the seeds in the fields have sprouted are cremated and some of their charred bones are collected in an earthen jar which is temporarily buried in the kitchen garden attached to the house of the deceased or sometimes inside an extra hut. The bones wait here to be deposited later in a *pit of bones*, a shallow grave in a field or grove over which a stone slab is placed or a rectangular stone is erected. Those who pass away from this life while there are crops still standing in the fields are buried in the burial ground. Little bit of their bones are later taken out and are temporarily buried in an earthen pot under a stone near the house.

Bringing In The ‘Shade’

Tribals believe in the survival of *soul* in two shades, (a) *light shade* and (b) *heavy shade* and treat the dead with respect. On the day of the burial, one of the elders among the mourners builds a small hut of straw with its opening in the north close to the burial place. He sets fire to the hut after dark and calls the dead person by name shouting thrice at the top of his voice, "O so and so, come quick, come quick; your house is burning!" After giving sufficient time for the soul to return, he leads it back to his/her former home all the while striking two ploughshares or a sickle and a ploughshare, (a sort of announcing bell). The door of the house is bolted from inside and a nearest relative waits behind it with a cock in his hand to be sacrificed. As soon as the man with the ploughshares knocks at the door, it is opened to let the 'shade' in. The man inside sacrifices the cock and pours its blood in a corner of the house requesting the *light shade* to reside peacefully among its old acquaintances.

Reunion of the Heavy Shade

Now that the light shade has come to its resting place to remain peacefully among its living members, they have to take care of the *heavy shade* of the departed person. It can be helped to come into the company of its ancestors through a special ceremony. Usually, it is held after 10 days of the burial. Meanwhile the heavy shade is believed to hover about homeless between the old house and the burial place. Food in leaf cups is provided for it during this period.

On this day, the courtyard in front of the house of the deceased person is cleaned and besmeared with diluted cow dung. An elder of the clan digs a round hole in the middle with a ploughshare. The relatives of the dead person gather together, each one bringing a little rice in a leaf cup and deposit it near the hole. The man acting in the name of the elders in the village, prays directly to God in these words: "O Father, this person (the deceased one) had been living among us. Now he/she is gone. See that everything be right for him/her."

A small pig is killed and its blood is dropped in the hole by the person mentioned above. He pours all the rice brought on a mat and shuts up the hole saying: "O dear ancestors, deign to accept this person (deceased one) among you. He/she is one of your children. Receive him/her as such and have pity on us also that remain behind." This is a sacrifice offered to the *clan elder* of

the dead ancestors. The rice brought is cooked, and everyone eats of it. It is believed that henceforth the departed soul is in the company of the ancestors.

Bone Drowning/Great Marriage

It is the crowning ceremony of the tribal death ritual. In December or January when the crops have been finally brought in, the bones of all those who have died in the course of the year are taken from their temporary resting place close to the house. They are finally taken round the village halting for the last time before their old homes once and then are carried in procession with song, dance, drumming and weeping and are placed at the *clan pit* for bones. It is believed that after this ceremony, the spirits of the deceased persons who had died natural death during the year attain the *status* of ancestor spirits.

4.5 TRIBAL ADMINISTRATION

Dance Ground and Bachelors Hall

There is a large *square* in every village that serves for the dances of youths, meetings of the elders, and other feastings of the community. There used to stand near to the entrance of most of the villages 'bachelors halls', differently known as *dhumkur ia* among the Uraons, *git'i ora* among the Mundas, *ghotul* among the Gonds, *morung* among the Nagas and other tribes in the North East. These were large huts, built by the youngsters of the place, to serve at night as dormitories for boys. This is not only a place to rest after the day's work but also a cultural institution to initiate the youth into various cultural aspects of their society. Here they learn not only the art of singing, dancing and drumming musical instruments but also some village crafts as well. The supervision and control of the dormitory is in the hands of the eldest member among the boys. He is supposed to instruct the boys in their social and religious duties. During dances and other celebrations, it is his duty to see that they are dressed properly. He even has the right to punish anyone who does not obey him. Unmarried girls of a village sleep in the house of a widow and come to the square for dancing with boys.

This is an important social institution. Unfortunately, there has been some misconception about it. There are separate dormitories for boys and girls in tribal villages. In addition to receiving social education, the dormitory boys have many other social duties. For instance, the younger boys have to clean the rooms, spread mats and light lamps. During rainy or winter season they have to light the fire. When a guest comes to their village they have to look after the person. At wedding they have to do the cooking. If a villager needs any help for thatching a roof he/she may request the leader of the dormitory to send some boys to do the work. For their work they are either paid in cash or a feast is organised after the work.

The functions of the girls' dormitory are similar to that of the boys' dormitory. The supervision and control of the girls is in the hands of a senior lady of the village. Just as the boys have specific jobs to perform in the village, so do the girls. For example, when a villager requires any help in transplanting paddy, reaping and so on, he can request the leader of the girls in the village for their help. They are paid either in kind or cash. During any social function in the village, they help the boys in cooking. Bachelors dormitory thus provides privacy for the parents at home. It binds the community together, provides opportunity for close companionship and educates the village youth in community living. In spite of all this with the advance of modern education and urbanisation; many of these dormitories have disappeared.

Village Organisation

Taking the example of a few major tribal groups in central and eastern India, it is found that the descendants of the *founding fathers* of a village generally belong to the same clan and enjoy the highest status in their community, even if they form only a small section of it. Their lineages alone can furnish a village *headman* and a village *priest*. In their absence no deliberations of the village council can proceed. All tribal adult males are entitled to take an active part in the meetings of the village council and to join in the periodical sacrifices offered to the village deities at the *sacred grove* and other places of public worship.

a. Village Council

The village council once exercised generally an absolute and acknowledged authority on the village community. The most solemn oath of a tribal once used to be by “*God above and the elders below.*” Disputes about partition of family property, certain offences against marriage regulations and occasionally cases of theft and assaults are still submitted to the village council. While all adult male members of a village community are allowed to attend it, it is generally the elders who participate actively in the deliberations. In the internal administration of each village, the village head is assisted by the village elders.

On an aggrieved person's bringing his complaint to the village headman, the latter calls the village elders at a convenient meeting place which is generally the village square. The disputants are now summoned before the assembly. The headman, then, informs the defendant of the charges laid against him/her and hears out his/her defence and, when necessary, takes further evidence. They administer oaths to the witness in order to ascertain the truthfulness of the deposition. The witness is made to swear by such articles as a bit of *rice*, *cowdung* and *a clod of earth*, thus calling ruin on his *harvest*, *cattle* or *land* should he/she swear by a false statement. The headman sums up the case and pronounces the verdict of the whole gathering.

b. Patti/Parha Organisation

Over and above a village council, the tribals have larger unions made up of certain groups of villages known as the *Patti/Parha* system in central and eastern India. The most influential headman from these villages is elected as the *chief* of this village federation. The remaining village-headmen swear allegiance to this chief. However, this chief too, like the village head is looked upon as a chief among *equals*. He is a *leader* and *not* a ruler. Nor do any superior rights of property belong to him.

Each village of the above federation has its own distinctive flag or images of animals, such as, tigers, horses, or oxen, etc., which is its exclusive right to display at formal gatherings. No other village is allowed to display the emblem of the above village unless it has been ceremonially presented to it by the village owning it. All the member villages fight together against external foes, they join in hunts and meet at dance festivals.

The *Parha* federations were initially devised for mutual aid for defence and participation in combined social activities. Although their military and legislative functions have now passed over to the state, the *Parha* villages still join at dancing trysts or join in the ceremonial spring hunt, and still meet together to discuss and settle certain cases of tribal importance. Custom is the recognised law. Offences against the *Code of Custom* are punished with fines and in extreme cases with expulsion from the village community. The *Parha* council deliberates over cases of disputes over the right of games (hunt) and over village boundaries. In disputes between village and village and in cases of unusual importance of tribal interest, such as, divorce, land rights of widows and minors, inheritance, actions against crimes and nature of punishment, etc., the *Patti/Parha* council is called upon which is presided over by the *Manki/Parha* Chief. On the *Parha* still rests the task of enforcing tribal *endogamy* and clan *exogamy* and the prohibition of sexual union (a) within the prohibited degree of relationship, (b) with a member of another tribal group, and (c) with a non-tribal. Most of the violations of these rules are punished with expulsion of the accused person from his/her own community until he/she repents. He/she is then formally received back into his/her own community with a very expensive ceremony of community meal.

4.6 CUSTOMARY LAW OF INHERITANCE AND PARTITION

a. Inheritance

As a rule *males alone* inherit the family property. Women by nature being destined to marry into another clan do not inherit their father's property. It is said that in order to ensure a ready supply of offerings to the dead ancestors, the tribals would not allow their family landed property to go out of their *clans*. Land belongs to the clan. Hence, women who on their marriage go over to another clan are debarred from inheriting any property at their parental home.

A childless widow or a widow with daughters only, provided she does not remarry or quit her husband's house is entitled to the administration and exclusive usufruct (use and enjoyment) of

her husband's property until her death. Once the widow remarries and quits the house, all the property reverts to the dead man's father or the dead man's brothers.

Sons of a dead brother receive posthumously their father's share. A sonless tribal who has only daughters, takes to his house a prospective son-in-law who promises to marry one of the daughters and to work for life at his father-in-law's house. If he consents to it, he may even be adopted as a son to succeed his father-in-law. But this is rare. More commonly, a childless tribal adopts one of his close nephews as his son with the consent of the family and the village council and hands over his property to him.

b. Partition

Under the joint family system that prevails among the tribals, the father is the sole owner of the family property. As long as he lives, his unmarried daughters, his sons, their wives and children share the same mess, live under the same paternal roof, toil together in the fields and pool their cash earnings in one single reserve. Any member of a joint family may, from the date of his marriage, request for his share of property from his father or (if the father is dead) from the family. In case of refusal, he may appeal to the village council to fulfil his request which will often be granted, if based on reasonable grounds.

It is important to note that before the police and court systems were introduced, the village councils of elders and the councils of inter-village federations exercised generally an absolute and acknowledged authority on tribal communities. The tribals have been free to exercise their customary laws regarding inheritance, marriage and other social practices. The higher courts rarely questioned in the past and question today the decisions of these councils. This helps the tribals to get proper justice in their communities without losing too much time, energy and money in going to courts to get justice which is often denied to them in the present day court procedures.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. How do the tribal councils of elders maintain social control over the members of their communities?

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4.7 LET US SUM UP

Before the police and court systems were introduced, the village councils of elders and the councils of inter-village federations exercised generally an absolute and acknowledged authority on tribal communities. The tribals have been free to exercise their customary laws regarding inheritance, marriage and other social practices. The higher courts rarely questioned in the past and question today the decisions of these councils. This helps the tribals to get proper justice in their communities without losing too much time, energy and money in going to courts to get justice which is often denied to them in the present day court procedures.

4.8. KEY WORDS

Dikus: Exploiting non-tribals who threaten the socio-economic and cultural security of the *tribal-in-groups*.

Kinship System: It establishes relationships between individuals and groups on the model of biological relationships between parents and children, between siblings, and between marital partners. Kinship includes *family* and *clan* its extension.

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4.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. Kinship structure includes the *family* and its extension into the broader group relationships, that is, the *clan*. Each tribe is divided into a number of patrilineal clans named after totems, such as, *animals, birds, fish, plants, minerals*, etc. There is a matrilineal clan system among the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia tribes. 'Totemism' is reverence for or veneration of different natural species identified as 'totems' with the solidarity of particular human groups of common ancestry. It is for this reason that a tribal marries outside his/her own clan.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. The village council once exercises an absolute and acknowledged authority on the village community. The most solemn oath of a tribal once used to be by "*God above and the elders below.*" Disputes about partition of family property, certain offences against marriage regulations and occasionally cases of theft and assaults are still submitted to the village council. In the internal administration of each village, the village head is assisted by the village elders. On an aggrieved person's bringing his complaint to the village headman, the latter calls the village elders at a convenient meeting place which is generally the village square. The disputants are now summoned before the assembly. The

headman, then, informs the defendant of the charges laid against him/her and hears out his/her defence and, when necessary, takes further evidence. They administer oaths to the witness in order to ascertain the truthfulness of the deposition. The witness is made to swear by such articles as a bit of *rice*, *cowdung* and *a clod of earth*, thus calling ruin on his *harvest*, *cattle* or *land* should he/she swear by a false statement. The headman sums up the case and pronounces the verdict of the whole gathering.



BLOCK 2

If we want to understand the tribal worldview, it involves, first of all, an understanding and describing the tribal world as the tribal traditions look upon it, and then, conceptualizing and abstracting it. The tribals have a unique set of values and morals arising from the cultural set up and the tribal context as a whole. Some of the values include purity of the tribe, sexual conduct, marriage, respectful distance and so on. Tribal morality places an overwhelming emphasis on the *community* and *tribe*. The goal of life is the *good* of the community, *continuity* of the tribe, for therein lies the good of the *one* and *all*. Each of the tribes has its own way of spirituality, but the central area of all the tribal spirituality is in being harmony with the nature or creation, which they are very close to. They derive their basic necessities like food, shelter, fodder, fuel, timber, medicines etc. from nature. That is why they look at nature as their mother. Learning and writing the philosophy of the tribal/indigenous/tribal peoples of the world/India is a project to reclaim an ancient tradition. A serious look at the philosophy of the tribal/tribal peoples is necessitated not only because of the pressures they face in these times to perpetuate and preserve their identity but also because their legacy and heritage is a cultural resource that can address many a contemporary problem.

This block consists of four units which will focus on the philosophical aspect of looking at the tribals. This includes their morality, spirituality and the world view they possess.

Unit 1 studies the Tribal World-View and Philosophy of Life of the tribals. 'Worldview' is the structure of things as human beings perceive them. To understand the tribal world view we need to understand the world they live in and each tribe has a different set up that makes it different and unique from others. So we will look at some selected tribes and their world views.

Unit 2 probes into the Human Values and the Moral Sense of the Tribals. The tribal context forms the basis for our knowledge of their morality. This unit will include the human values that the tribals hold on to, the sense of good and evil and moral law regarding the purity of the tribe, marriage, respectful distance and so on.

Unit 3 highlights the Tribals' Spiritual Outlook on Nature. Being very close to nature they have a very high regard towards the nature as being spiritual. This unit deals with topics such as the Supreme Being, life and its meaning, nature and celebration of different festivities.

Unit 4 looks at Tribal Life as Original Philosophizing. The importance of the present Unit is that it sums up the rationale as well as the possible outlook on tribal philosophy with special reference to Indian context. This unit understands the cosmotheandric character of tribal philosophy and to know the reasons for transitions in the philosophy of living communities of peoples.

The philosophical outlook of the tribals has its own place in philosophy as a whole and marks its own contribution. It calls for another set of mind that understands the thinking of the tribals in order to appreciate their philosophies rooted in their life and activities.



UNIT 1

TRIBAL WORLDVIEW AND PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

Contents

1.0 Objectives

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Tribal Worldviews

1.3 Meaning Systems

1.4 Let Us Sum Up

1.5 Key Words

1.6 Further Readings and References

1.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The notion of worldview encompasses human experiences, such as, time, society, causality, nature, world, sacred and the self. It denotes “a distinct set of attitudes, beliefs and values that are held to characterize particular individuals or social group. The term often implies a relationship between the social location or situation of such individuals and group and their consequent outlook or view of reality” (O’Sullivan et al. 1996: 333). It deals with the aggregate of ideas which an individual within a group or that group have, of the universe in and around them. It attempts to define those ideas from the point of view of the individuals holding them, from inside the culture rather than outside. In this Unit you are expected to study:

- Tribal worldviews
- Meaning systems

1.1 INTRODUCTION

'Worldview' is the structure of things as human beings perceive them. It refers to the way the world looks to that people 'looking out'. It denotes the way a given people in a particular society, see themselves in relation to all else. Concepts of culture and worldview are related but carry subtle differences. On the one hand, if we try to describe the important qualities of people we can say something about those aspects, which include the mode of life, principal customs, practices, beliefs and institutions of that group. Such description amounts to the 'culture' of a people. On the other hand, the 'worldview' of a people 'is the way a people characteristically look outward upon the universe' (Redfield 1977: 84-85). It suggests how everything looks to a people. It includes, (a) the conceptions of what ought to be as well as of what is, (b) patterns of thought, (c) most comprehensive attitudes towards life, (d) dimensions of time, ideas of past and future, (e) dispositions of people to be active or contemplative (Ibid.: 86).

Within the framework of worldview, there are two types of 'views' to be distinguished: (i) 'inside' view, and (ii) 'outside' view. If we are to understand the worldview of a people, we need to begin with the 'inside' view. We need to see the meaning, understand the valuation, and feel the feeling connected with the object or act in the mind of the native. Only after this we can shift to an 'outside' view point. The 'outside' view consists in detached and abstract understanding of a view point. Thus, delineating the worldview of a given culture entails objectifying and describing the interpretation of the 'world' of that particular culture – as people in that culture see it. Initially this term came into English as a rendering of the German *Weltanschauung* which is an overall perspective on life encompassing the way a person perceives the world, evaluates and responds to it (Makkreel 1975: 346).

The cognitive view of life and the total environment which an individual holds or which is characteristic of the members of a society is frequently referred to as *Weltanschauung*, or *world view*. It carries the suggestion "of the structure of things as man is aware of them," (Redfield 1953: 86) and it is thus the life scene as people look out upon it. It is the human being's *inside view* of the way things are coloured, shaped, and arranged according to personal cultural preconceptions. The planet we live on, a world of physical objects and living things, is by no means the same world to all peoples. Indeed, a simple description of the most basic observable components of this world (the sky, the land, water, trees) by a member of one culture might

prove totally unintelligible to a member of another. Institutions, relationships, arts, and technologies vary throughout the world in manifestly observable forms, but underlying them are the existential postulates that orient a people's particular slant on life and the ways in which they organize their culture.

Etic, Emic, and Ethos

When seen from the outside and reported by an observer who is not by training and living, thoroughly enculturated with the culture observed and written of, the view is called *etic*. The inside view is labeled *emic*. Worldview, as a concept, focuses on the ways of knowing and identifying the component elements of the world – the existential and cognitive. *Ethos* expresses a people's qualitative feeling, their emotional and moral sensing of the way things are and ought to be – their ethical system (Hoebel & Frost 1979: 324).

Not all persons can by any means articulate systematically what their worldview is. Usually, it is up to the anthropologists or philosophers descriptively to analyse and formulate a people's worldview from what they learn of their thinking, feelings, and actions. Worldview and ethos are found expressed in technology, personal relations, myth, song, dance, art, and religious and magical ritual in a multitude of gross and subtle ways. They are the reflected essence of a people's inner feelings and their ways of knowing *the way things are* (Ibid.).

No worldview is a given, in spite of the numerous peoples who believe that their way of life was bestowed upon them by culture heroes or the divine revelation of prophets (such as the early Hebrews, Christians, and Muslims). Worldviews grow with cultures. Generations of anonymous human beings contribute to the unending quest to make the unknown knowable, to transform meaningless bafflement into meaningful understanding. There are individuals in every society no doubt who are thinkers and systematisers, the idealists who crystallize the myths, shape the ceremonies, express the concepts in art – symbolic creators. However, even they must work within the cultural framework.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. What does the notion of *worldview* encompass in human life?

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1.2 TRIBAL WORLDVIEWS

If we want to understand the tribal worldview, it involves, first of all an understanding and describing the tribal world as the tribal traditions look upon it, and then, conceptualizing and abstracting it (Redfield 1960: 83). Indeed, the inside view of the tribal world involves, (a) collective interpretation that is reflected in tribal language, cosmology, rituals, customs, beliefs, myths, songs and stories; (b) the way the tribal traditions interpret time-space dimensions, (c) the way tribals see their own identity and that of others, and (d) the way they interpret ethical dimensions.

In the tribal worldview space (totality of creation) is central. Everything has to be understood in the perspective of creation. Harmony with space or creation is the starting point of their spirituality and their search for liberation. An awareness of being one with the whole of creation is, therefore, the spiritual foundation of the tribal people. In this unity of creation and spirituality, there is no clear cut distinction between sacred and secular, religion and non-religion. One sees the Supreme being in space/creation and not outside of it.

Since each tribal group is unique and different from one another, it is not possible to discuss their various worldviews in this paper. However, the Mundas, Kurukhs (Uraons), Kharias, Santals and Hos, are the major tribes in the Chhotanagpur plateau, India, it is hoped that they sufficiently represent the other basic tribal worldviews as well. Their relationship with the Supreme Being and their experience of Him through generation after generation would express some of the

worldviews common among other tribal groups too. They are reflected in their various creation accounts as given below:

a. Kurukh Account

According to one of the Kurukh (Uraon) creation accounts, there was *water* everywhere in the beginning with sea creatures. *Dharmes* (God) wanted to make the *earth*. So, he sent the *kilkila* (king fisher) to the world of the earthworms beyond the sixteen seas to fetch a tiny *seed* of the earth. The bird went down the sea and brought the seed from the earthworms and gave it to *Dharmes*. He churned the sea till it got muddy and dropped the seed there. That seed multiplied and took the present form of the earth as *saat-pati-raaji* (kingdom with 7 corners).

After making the earth, *Dharmes* began to form human beings in a mould like tiles and dry them in the sun but *Hansraj* horse thought, 'If the human beings fill the whole earth, they will kill me by constantly riding on me,' and, therefore, it trampled them underfoot. This is a winged horse of *Dharmes* in the Kurukh mythology. Seeing this, *Dharmes* made male and female *dogs* of clay and put them to dry in a corner of the fireplace. That is why even today the dog likes to sleep near the fireplace. When they were dry He baked them, put blood in them and they became alive and ferocious to drive away the *Hansraj* horse.

Dharmes now began to make human beings with clay, dried and baked them, put *jiya* (life principle) and blood into them. They became alive and filled the earth. Similarly, He made other creatures of the earth and the sky. He fed them personally, lovingly and faithfully everyday till they were able to find food for themselves. Human beings multiplied in great number and filled the whole face of the earth. One day, *Dharmes* went hunting quails and partridges with the help of His *besra* (hawk). On His way, however, He could not put His feet anywhere on the earth because the human beings had dirtied its surface everywhere with their excreta! This was a great offence against *Dharmes*. He regretted to have made the human beings. Offended by their mean act, He sent *rain of fire* on them for seven days and seven nights. All the human beings perished except the *bhaiya-bahin* (brother-sister). The beloved of *Dharmes* had hidden this pair of male and female children in her bun of hair and thus saved them from perishing. Afterwards she hid

them in the hole of a *crab* covered with the *gangla* thicket (Job's tear) of the *sira-sita-naal* (*sira-sita* low paddy field) in the kingdom with seven corners.

With destruction of human beings, food supply to *Dharmes* by way of offering sacrifice to Him ceased. He was thus hungry. His beloved told Him that His happiness could return only with the finding of human beings. He asked her where to find them. She told Him to go to the *sira-sita-naal* in order to find them. So, He went there and found the *bhaiya-bahin* (literally brother-sister), male and female human couple. He brought them to His abode with great joy. He kept them with Him, fed them and looked after them lovingly with fatherly care. He called them *grand children* and they in return called Him *grand father*. There is a fond relationship between grand parents and their grand children free from fear.

When the *bhaiya-bahin* grew up, He gave them *land* to cultivate, *oxen* to plough and *seeds* to sow and reap. When their *crops* were growing, some insects and pests attacked them and thus they were getting destroyed. The *bhaiya-bahin* then went up to *Dharmes* to tell Him their problem. After listening to them, He taught them the ritual of destroying the effect of evil and receiving God's abundant blessing upon one's crop, cattle and children.

The *bhaiya-bahin* used to sleep separately by putting a log of the *simbali* (silk cotton) tree. One night they drank *hanr ia* (rice beer) which *Dharmes* Himself had taught them how to prepare and lay drunk. When they were in deep sleep, *Dharmes* and His beloved removed the log between them and they slept together as husband and wife. When the *bhaiya-bahin* reported the change of their behaviour and experience to *Dharmes* in their innocence, He said to them that it was all right. Thus, He revealed to them the secret of procreation and human beings multiplied and filled the whole world.

Dharmes divided human beings into various *gotars* (clans), such as, *Bara, Barwa, Baxla, Beck, Ekka, Kerketta, Kindo, Kispotta, Kujur, Lakr a, Minj, Panna, Tigga, Tirkey, Toppo, Xalxo, Xaxa, Xess, etc* in order to enter into marriage relationships outside one's own clan. These *totems* belong to the species of *animals, birds, fish, plants and minerals*. Thus, through marriage, the creative activity of *Dharmes* among human beings continues even to this day.

b. Santal Account

In the beginning there was only *water* and the earth was under water. *Thakur Jiu* (God) created the *crab, crocodile, alligator, raghop boarfish, sole prawn, earthworm, tortoise* and others. Then He made 2-human beings of clay. The *Sing Sadom* (day-horse) came down from above and trampled them to pieces and left the place.

Afterwards *Thakur* made *hans* and *hansil* (male-female swans) with the matter from his breast. They were beautiful. He breathed in them and they became alive and flew upwards. Since there was no place to alight, they used to alight on *Thakur's* hand. The *Sing Sadom* came down to drink water and spilt some froth of his mouth and left. It floated and foam was formed on water. The two birds alighted on the froth and moved about over the whole sea. The birds asked for food from *Thakur*. He called the *alligator* and asked it to bring up the earth. It tried to bring it on his back but the earth got dissolved in the sea. Next, *Thakur* called the *prawn* and sent it to fetch the earth. It tried to bring it between its claws but it got washed away in the water. *Thakur* then called the *raghop boarfish* for the same purpose. The fish bit the earth in its mouth and put some of it on its back, but it got dissolved in the sea. Since that time the boarfish has no scales on its body. Following it, *Thakur* called the *stone-crab* for the same work. It tried to bring the earth in his claws but it got washed away in the water. Finally, *Thakur* called the *earthworm* for the same work. It agreed to fetch the earth provided that the *tortoise* kept floating on the sea.

The tortoise agreed and *Thakur* chained its 4-legs in 4-directions. The earthworm put its tail on the back of the tortoise and with its mouth down below, swallowed the earth at the bottom of the sea and took it out on the back of the tortoise. The earth got spread out like a hard film and the present earth got formed. *Thakur* harrowed the earth when some of it got heaped up becoming mountains. The foam that was floating on the sea stuck to the earth. *Thakur* sowed seeds of all kinds of trees and plants on the foam and they sprang up and filled the earth.

The 2-birds mentioned above made a nest on a plant and laid 2-eggs. They hatched the eggs and 2-human beings were born, 1-boy and 1-girl. *Thakur* gave some cotton to the birds and told them to press the juice of whatever they ate into the cotton and put it into the mouths of the children to

suck. When the children grew up, the birds flew towards the setting sun taking the children along with them.

The names of these 2-human beings were: (1) *Haram* or *Pilchu Haram*, (2) *Ayo* or *Pilchu Burhi*. They ate the grains of grass and lived in great peace. One day *Lita* or *Maran Buru* (great mountain) came to them and asked: "Where are you *grand children*? Do brew *beer*, it has a very sweet taste." The three of them went to the forest. *Lita* showed them the roots. *Pilchu Haram* and *Pilchu Burhi* dug them and brought them along and made them into the fermenting stuff and made rice beer by putting this stuff into the boiled grains.

Fermentation was complete in 5-days. They filled 3-leaf cups with beer and poured the content of one of them on the ground in the name of *Maran Buru* and drank the remaining 2 cups and went to sleep together. *Lita* was pleased with their behaviour. They gave birth to 7-boys and 7-girls. They went to different countries. There they became like he-buffaloes and she-buffaloes. They did not respect one another.

Thakur got offended with their behaviour. He sent *Pilchu Haram* and *Pilchu Burhi* to the *Harata* mountain and sent fire-rain for 7-days and 7-nights and destroyed mankind and animals. Only the two in the *Harata* mountain cave were saved. They gave birth to 12-sons and 12-daughters and mankind descended from them. They were divided into 12 groups.

c. Munda Account

Separation of Land and Sea

The sky was empty of stars and the earth was covered with *water*. The 'Old One' (Supreme Being) had made only the creatures that live in water. He ordered the *crab* to bring some earth from under the sea to make dry land. The crab brought it between its claws but it got washed away in the sea. He then ordered the *turtle* to fetch a bit of earth. It brought it on its back but it got washed away in the sea. Finally, he tried the *earthworm* for bringing the earth from under the sea. The earthworm went down to the bottom, filled its mouth with the earth and came out and

gave it out in the hand of the 'Old One'. He multiplied it and made the dry land whereon he made all kind of herbs, plants and trees and created all kinds of animals.

Origin of Human Beings

Having made a clay figure, the 'Old One' gave a soul (principle of life) to this figure. Before life was put into the figure, a *horse* kicked it to pieces. He made another figure and the *horse* tried to kick this second figure too, but a *tiger* chased the horse away. The 'Old One' cursed the horse because it had kicked the first human figure into pieces. The curse was, (a) men would put iron into the mouth of the horse, (b) they would break wind on its back, and (c) they would scourge it at the hind quarters. Pleased with the tiger, he gave it tremendous strength and power. After making the dry land, the 'Old One' created animals on it. A large Indian stork laid two *eggs* on the land. A *boy* and a *girl* were formed in those eggs and the bird brought them up safe and sound.

Division of Time into Day and Night

Before the moon was made, the Sun was alone in the sky and it did not set. One day the 'Old One' went to see the man making fields and asked him some questions: "When did you make this field?" "Now" was the answer. "When did you make that field?" "Now." "When did you make the yonder fields?" "Just now." "When did you eat from these fresh leaves?" "Now." "When did you eat from those dry leaves?" "Now." "When do you rest and when do you work?" "I rest *now* and work *now*." The 'Old One' said: "You will not live on with such work and eating without regular times." So, the 'Old One' made the Sun to set and rise - thus *day* and *night* were made to work and to rest. He also made the moon to shine during the night.

The Rain of Fire

When the world was filled with human beings, *Singbonga* (God) rained fire and all died. Only two persons - a *brother* and a *sister* - escaped. The *Nage-era* (marsh-spirit) hid these two in the

cool water of a hollow made by a *crab*. *Singbonga* asked for those two human beings by giving an egg and turmeric to *Nage-era*. *Singbonga* made a house for them and let them live therein. But while sleeping they placed a husking-pole between themselves. One day *Singbonga* taught them how to prepare rice beer. When it was ready they drank it and went to sleep. At night *Singbonga* removed the husking-pole and the boy and girl slept together. Next morning they told *Singbonga* what had happened during the night. Listening to them He said: "You did well grandchildren."

Afterwards a child was born and *Singbonga* sent a sickness to that child. The parents told *Singbonga* about the sickness. He told them to offer a sacrifice of a *white* fowl to *Singbonga*. He also told them how everything had to be done. After the sacrifice they went home but forgot their sacrificial knife behind. Therefore, the boy returned to bring back the knife. On reaching the spot, behold, he found *Singbonga* licking off the leaf plate, that is, the remains of the sacrificial meat. The boy said: "Hello, *grandfather*, when we invited you refused and now you tried to eat the left over!" From that moment *Singbonga* disappeared and after that they never saw him again. From these two human beings, all others were born afterwards.

d. Kharia Account

In the beginning there was only *water*. A *crab* raised a pillar of clay from the bottom of the sea above the surface of the water and began to enjoy sunshine everyday lying down on top of the pillar. One day a man came from somewhere and began to play with the clay of the pillar. He is also known as *Ponomesor* (God). Seeing this the crab extended its pillar into a huge island. Thus, the earth came into existence.

The primordial man used to make 2-clay figures everyday and leave them there to dry. A *horse* used to come flying and kick the clay figures to pieces. Getting tired of this, he cut off its wings and asked his two *dogs* to guard the clay figures. Once they were dry the Man-God put them inside the hollow of a banyan tree and when the milk of the tree dripped into their mouths, they became alive. There were thus two *male* and *female* human beings created. They increased so

much that fruits and vegetables were insufficient for them. So, God made different kinds of *birds* for them to kill and eat.

Destruction of Human Beings

The human beings increased and became more and more demanding on their creator. They became proud and arrogant. All this displeased God. He sent flood to destroy them but the clever ones climbed the top of the mountain covering themselves with *gungus* (leaf-coats). Their behaviour did not change. So, he sent *rain of fire*. All died except the *brother* and *sister* whom king *Sembhu* and queen *Dakai* pulled inside the marsh and hid them.

Human Beings after the Rain-Fire

God felt very lonely and so he brought the *brother* and *sister* back to the earth. He asked them to clear the forest and make fields. He gave them the seed of a gourd and asked them to plant it. The creeper bore 3-fruits. They made an offering of the head of the fruit to God. As soon as they did this, they found the fruit full of *gondli* (millet) grains. They roasted them, made powder and ate it. They did the same with the second fruit and found *gor a* (upland paddy) grains in the fruit. They made flat rice from it and ate. They did the same with the third fruit and lo, the fruit was full of the lowland *paddy grains*. They prepared rice from them, cooked and ate. Thus, agriculture became their prime occupation.

While sleeping they kept a big wooden log between them. God taught them how to make *rice beer*. They prepared and drank it on one occasion and got drunk and the boy crossed the log and slept with the girl. Thereafter, children were born from them. They had 9-sons and 9-daughters. The sons went hunting everyday. Once they killed a deer. But they were very thirsty. So, the eldest son went to a pool of water to drink and saw a snakelike fish swimming in the pool. The second one saw a tortoise crawling in the pool. Similarly, all the brothers met one creature or the other, for example, a big flat rock, a tiger, some salt, a Kerketta bird, a Tete bird, a To'opo bird and paddy grains. Thus, they and their descendants were known by the names of those creatures that they had seen, namely, (1) *Dungdung* (eel, a snakelike fish), (2) *Kullu* (tortoise), (3) *Kerketta*

(hedge-sparrow), (4) *Tete* (bird), (5) *Kir o* (tiger), (6) *Soreng* (rock), (7) *Ba'a* (paddy), (8) *Bilung* (salt), and (9) *To'opo* (bird).

e. Ho Account

There was only *water* all around. *Singbonga* (God) wanted to make land in its place. So, he made a *tortoise* and let it into water to bring out the clay from the bottom of the sea. It brought it and placed it on the surface of the sea but the water washed it away. Then *Singbonga* made a *crab*. It entered into the water and clawed the clay from the bottom and brought it up to the surface but it was washed away as before. Next, *Singbonga* rubbed some dirt out from his thigh and made *two earthworms*, one male and the other female. They slipped into the water and began to raise and heap up mud inside the water by swallowing and disgorging it. Those two earthworms multiplied and worked together. Land rose above the water. In some places it became mountains and in other places hard *land*.

Next, *Singbonga* made '*Surmi-Durmis*' (proto-human beings). They are not seen by people. They dig ponds during the night and get a living source of water. People point to such ponds on the mountains that never dry even during the hot summer. They began to level the mountains and fill the ravines with their hands. *Singbonga* sent *tigers* and *bears*, *bisons*, *deer* and *elephants* to help them. The *Surmi-Durmis* yoked the animals and leveled the land with leveling planks. They planted *trees* and *grass* in those fields. When the land had been made and the trees and grass had grown there, it looked very beautiful. *Singbonga* became very happy and made a figure like a human being in the shape of *Surmi-Durmis*. He breathed *jibon* (life) into him. He became a *Ho* (man) and was named 'Luku' by *Singbonga*. However, Luku used to stay away from all other living beings. So, *Singbonga* put the man to sleep and took out one of his ribs and made a figure of a *woman* in the image of Luku. He gave life to that figure and placed it close to Luku. When Luku got up from his sleep, he asked *Singbonga*: "Who is this?" *Singbonga* said: "This is your companion. Her name is "Lukumi". The two of you will live together as *juri-juri tainben* (couple of companions)."

Thus, two human beings, *male* and *female*, walked around happily in the land of trees and grass. They lived on the fruits and flowers of the trees. *Singbonga* had let them eat the fruits and flowers of all the trees except the *tamarind* fruits. However, seeing that fruit daily they were overcome by the desire of that fruit. So, they ate it and immediately experienced a ticklish sensation and shame. They hid themselves behind the leafy shrubs. *Singbonga* called them out. They came to him covering themselves with leaves. He realized that his *grandchildren* had disobeyed him. So, he banished them from that place.

They provided themselves with food from the earth. There were other living beings also who increased but the human beings remained only two. They used to keep a husking pole in between them while sleeping during the night. One day *Singbonga* told them to ferment *diyang* (rice beer) and drink it. He taught them how to make it. After preparing it they drank it and crossed the husking pole and from that time they lived as husband and wife. Numerous children were born who began to walk on evil path. Seeing this, *Singbonga* was displeased and destroyed them with *rain of fire*. However, *Nage Er a* (water spirit) saved a pair of human beings and pairs of all other living beings. Through this pair of human beings, humankind increased again. Likewise, other creatures also multiplied.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. What do we need to keep in mind if we want to understand the tribal worldview?

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1.3 MEANING SYSTEMS

Cultures

Cultures are basically meaning systems, which people have evolved over centuries. We ask questions both individually and collectively about the meaning of life and death, about happiness and suffering, and about human destiny. We try to make sense of the existence of good and evil. Culture “denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life”(Geertz 1975:89). Human beings by their very nature need to interpret and make sense of the world and in that process constantly create meaning. This creation of meaning is done not only individually, but also collectively. Various cultures have sought answers to questions pertaining to human existence. But there are no simple, straightforward answers to these questions. The answers to these questions are woven into myths, epics, scriptures, stories, doctrines, symbols, rituals, folklore and beliefs. These answers and interpretation become a meaning system of people who share a common culture.

Oral Cultures

Oral culture differs very much from literate culture which is in possession of alphabets, writing, print and electronic media. In a tribal culture which is primarily an ‘oral’ culture, the knowledge needs to be organized in such a way that it is easy to recall. In a tribal culture, which is deeply embedded in an oral intellectual structure, sound, speech and memory play a fundamental role. Thus, knowledge is stored and retrieved in and through memory. Things have to be committed to memory and then recalled.

Unlike literate cultures, given the interpersonal immediacy that is required in orality, oral/tribal cultures show a remarkable tendency towards conformity to the group and adherence to tradition. In oral cultures people tend to solve problems by common consensus and in the tradition of the tribe. Oral cultures also institutionalize public pressure on individuals to ensure conformity to tribal modes of behaviour. Orality tends to encourage personality structures which manifest strong kinship patterns. Given the close-knit tribal kinship pattern, conformity to the tribe is seen as an important value.

Orality, which organizes its complete supply of knowledge around memory, speech and personal immediacy, entails certain characteristic features. Oral cultures prefer a descriptive approach in their interpretation of reality. This interpretation tends to reflect their proximity to the life-world with which they are most familiar. Further, given the interpersonal immediacy that is required in orality, oral cultures tend to have a strong 'communitarian' dimension. Instead of abstractions and analytical categories we find in oral cultures a basic orientation towards descriptive approach to reality in the form of myths, stories, and songs. Vast amount of descriptions arranged according to formulations of memory skills are possible in oral cultures. Thus, oral cultures show predominantly descriptive tendency, which is close to the life-world.

In the above context, Plato's lamentation over the disappearance of orality and the use of script is highly significant: "The discovery of alphabet will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust external written characters and not remember of themselves... You give your disciples not truth but only the semblance of truth; they will be heroes of many things, and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will gradually know nothing" (McLuhan et al. 1967: 113). Oral world of Plato is a lively world full of epics, verbal contests, debates, rhetoric, and dialogues – all spoken words. Written and printed word is inert, it is tucked away in manuscripts and books. It does not have the same dynamism of the spoken word.

Tribal myths, which embody a significant portion of tribal worldview, follow the same patterns exhibited by the predominance of oral-aural culture. The same is true of epics, which are prime examples of oral structures. Originally they were either sung or recited by specialists who did not 'memorise' verbatim, they rather assimilated the narrative in terms of themes and formula. They used striking visual symbols in their narratives. If the poets did not engage in the activity of repetition, saying things again and again, then, much of the knowledge in an oral-aural culture would disintegrate. The mystery of the universe and the wonder of the world are what speak to us through all myths and rites.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. How are cultures basically meaning systems? Explain.

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2. Why did Plato lament over the disappearance of orality and the use of script?

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1.4 LET US SUM UP

From the perspective of philosophizing, worldview functions as a window to the cultural life-world of a people. It opens up the meaning system evolved by a cultural community over a long period of time, perhaps over centuries. Eliciting the ‘inside’ view of a given culture requires a reasonably close acquaintance with that culture and the linguistic code. In tribal context communitarian aspect cannot be brushed aside which is embedded in tribal cultures. Most tribal cultures value equality and sharing and these values are reflected, among other things in their stories, folklore, rituals and dances.

Equally important is the attitude of respect for authority and tradition in an oral-aural culture. Figures such as *gurus*, village headmen, priests, teachers, and medicine men command respect as they are seen as embodiment of wisdom and knowledge. Unlike literate cultures, in oral cultures knowledge is more personal and the carriers of wisdom command respect. Orality tends to encourage personality structures, which exhibit strong kinship bonds uniting members of a given group with their religious and secular leaders. Oral cultures reflect a strong emphasis on relational, personal and existential dimension, which shape and mould the tribal worldview.

One of the important values of tribal socio-cultural life is the strong sense of community. This is characterized by sharing, a strong sense of common good and life in communion. Dignity of the human person is upheld with scrupulosity. There is basic respect for every person irrespective of his/her gender or economic status.

In a world, which is so much entrenched in consumerism and with its serious negative effect for ecology, tribal worldview has important implications. Tribal values do reflect a sense of harmony and balance in human beings' relationship to nature. It is not primarily a relationship of exploitation and domination of nature, rather tribal worldview reflects an approach to nature more in line with custodianship.

'Worldview' is the structure of things as human beings perceive them. It refers to the way the world looks to that people 'looking out'. It denotes the way a given people in a particular society, see themselves in relation to all else. Concepts of culture and worldview are related but carry subtle differences. On the one hand, if we try to describe the important qualities of people we can say something about those aspects, which include the mode of life, principal customs, practices, beliefs and institutions of that group. Such description amounts to the 'culture' of a people. On the other hand, the 'worldview' of a people 'is the way a people characteristically look outward upon the universe'

Check Your Progress IV

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. How does a worldview function as a window to the cultural life-world of a people?

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2. Is the strong community sense of tribal societies important in an individualistic and consumeristic society today? Give your reasons.

1.5 KEY WORDS

Etic: When seen from the outside and reported by an observer who is not by training and living, thoroughly enculturated with the culture observed and written of, the view is called *etic*.

Emic: The inside view is labeled *emic*.

Ethos: It expresses a people's qualitative feeling, their emotional and moral sensing of the way things are and ought to be – their ethical system.

Totems: Natural species forming different clans in a tribal society.

Orality: It organizes its complete supply of knowledge around memory, speech and personal immediacy, entails certain characteristic features.

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1.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. The notion of worldview encompasses human experiences, such as, time, society, causality, nature, world, sacred and the self. It denotes “a distinct set of attitudes, beliefs and values that are held to characterize particular individuals or social group. The term often implies a relationship between the social location or situation of such individuals and group and their consequent outlook or view of reality.” It deals with the aggregate of ideas which an individual within a group or that group have, of the universe in and around them. It attempts to define those ideas from the point of view of the individuals holding them, from inside the culture rather than outside.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. Tribal worldview, involves, first of all an understanding and describing the tribal world as the tribal traditions look upon it, and then, conceptualizing and abstracting it. Indeed, the inside view of the tribal world involves, (a) collective interpretation that is reflected in tribal language, cosmology, rituals, customs, beliefs, myths, songs and stories; (b) the way the tribal traditions interpret time-space dimensions, (c) the way tribals see their own identity and that of others, and (d) the way they interpret ethical dimensions. In the tribal worldview space (totality of creation) is central. Everything has to be understood in the perspective of creation.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

1. Cultures are basically meaning systems, which people have evolved over centuries. We try to make sense of the existence of good and evil. Culture “denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life.” Human beings by their very nature need to interpret and make sense of the world and in that process constantly create meaning. This creation of meaning is done not only individually, but also collectively.

2. The discovery of alphabet would create forgetfulness in the learners’ souls, because they would not use their memories. They would trust external written characters and not remember of themselves. Oral world of Plato is a lively world full of epics, verbal contests, debates, rhetoric, and dialogues – all spoken words. Written and printed word is inert. It is tucked away in manuscripts and books. It does not have the same dynamism of the spoken word.

Answers to Check Your Progress IV

1. It opens up the meaning system evolved by a cultural community over a long period of time, perhaps over centuries. Eliciting the ‘inside’ view of a given culture requires a reasonably close acquaintance with that culture and the linguistic code.

2. In a world, which is so much entrenched in consumerism and with its serious negative effect for ecology, tribal worldview has important implications. Tribal values do reflect a sense of harmony and balance in human beings' relationship to nature. It is not primarily a relationship of exploitation and domination of nature, rather tribal worldview reflects an approach to nature more in line with custodianship.



UNIT 2 HUMAN VALUES AND MORAL SENSE OF TRIBALS

Contents

- 2.0 Objectives
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- 2.2 Human Values of Tribals
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- 2.4 Moral Law
- 2.5 Tribal Morality
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- 2.7 Key Words
- 2.8 Further Readings and References
- 2.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0 OBJECTIVES

There are 67.8 million Scheduled Tribes people in India, constituting 8.74 % of the country's total population (Census 2001). Scheduled Tribes are those which are notified as such by the President of India under Article 342 of the Constitution. The primary factors used to determine which groups should be classified as tribes in India are basically two: (1) they do not belong to either the Hindu or the Muslim communities, and (2) they are economically poor, illiterate, technologically simple and socially marginalized people. While the first set of categorization here is fully valid, the second set cannot be accepted in this simplistic manner at present time. For some of the major tribal groups, such as, the Uraons, Mundas, Kharias, Santals, Hos, etc. of Central-Eastern India and the Mizos, Nagas, Khasis, Garos, etc. of North-East India are highly educated and socio-economically and politically much more advanced than many other Indian societies in the country today. In this Unit you will study:

- Human Values of Tribals
- Tribals' Conceptions of Good and Evil

- Their Approach Towards Moral Law
- Tribal Morality

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The tribals in India can be divided into two categories: (i) frontier tribes, and (ii) non-frontier tribes. The former are inhabitants of the North-East frontier states with 12.02% of India's Scheduled Tribes population at the borders of Burma, China and Bangladesh. They occupy a special position in the sphere of national politics. Different tribal groups together in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland form 64.22, 85.94, 94.46 and 89.15 percent of the state population respectively (Census 2001). Similarly, in Assam, Manipur and Tripura they form 12.41, 39.96 and 31.05 percent of the state population (Ibid.).

The rest of the 87.98% non-frontier tribes are distributed in most of the mainland states, though they are concentrated in large numbers in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. Their population ranges from 4.00 to 32.00 percent in these states (Census 2001). Both the tribal categories mentioned above are known as tribes, *Adivasis* (original inhabitants), aboriginals, autochthons, etc. They have their own mother tongues, life styles, social structures, rites, rituals and values, differing in many ways from those of the non-tribal social groups in the country. Many of them are today settled agriculturists but forest still forms much of their economic resource base.

The tribals in India thus constitute almost two thirds of the Muslim population and more than 3.4 and 4 times the Christian and Sikh populations respectively. Among the frontier tribes in the North-East and non-frontier tribes in the mainland, there are many tribal societies which are segmented into numerous tribes and sub-tribes speaking different languages, having distinct cultures and origin of their own. Though more and more communities have been declared as Scheduled Tribes in recent years, there are still many more who should have rightly been designated as Scheduled Tribes but have been omitted for reasons not known by the public. Thus, for example, the tribal labourers in the tea gardens of Assam have not been given

Scheduled Tribes status though they have this status in other states. Tribal societies in India today form a wide range of big and small, modern and technologically simple and linguistically quite distinct ethnic groups.

The greatest challenge for the tribals today is (a) to courageously confront the profound and inevitable changes taking place in their socio-economic and political situation and their culture-religious universe; and (b) to creatively and boldly 'reshape', 'reinvent' and 'recreate' their culture and even identity. This can only be done in an ongoing dialogue and deep collaboration with all relevant efforts, including those of various social movements, organizations and ideologies (Desrochers 2004: 5).

Tribal Context

Tribal reality is very complex because of marked differences and uniqueness of each tribal group in different parts of the country. However, almost in all tribal religious traditions *morality* bears imprints of mythical and cultic aspects. In them a state of perfection at the beginning of creation is recalled and cultic forms mark a connection between man's sinful state and creation of the universe. Generally, tribal ethical wisdom and moral sense is situated in the myth-tradition of a community. The myth confirms how God has dealt and deals with erring human beings. It also teaches what must be the standard of and rule for human actions.

Any generalization of universal validity about tribal social life and moral behaviour would require a comparative study of representative samples of tribal peoples of the world. This is clearly beyond the scope of this paper. I propose merely to touch on the religious beliefs of some major tribal groups in India and to examine whether they are related to *ethical rules*. These rules would be applicable to other tribals also in the country on some points common among them.

The Mundas, Hos, Santals, Kharias and Uraons are the major tribal groups in "Central-Eastern India. In their traditional religious myths we find that there was only *water* in the beginning with its creatures. In creating this world God took voluntary help of the *crab, turtle, tortoise, crocodile, alligator, boarfish, prawn*, etc. in different accounts in bringing a little bit of *clay* to

God the Creator from the bottom of the sea. All of them failed in their task except the *earthworm* which succeeded in supplying God with little bit of clay with which He created the *earth* with all its creatures. In addition to this, one of the Uraon accounts mentions that the *kingfisher* made by God dived into the sea till it reached its bottom where there were *earthworms* which gave a tiny *seed* of the earth to it. The bird swam back to *Dharmes* (God) holding the seed in between its finger nail. God planted this seed in the sea by churning it. It multiplied and formed into the present earth with its *seven* corners and got filled with all its creatures. In the Kharia account, a *crab* raises a pillar of clay in the sea to enjoy the sunshine on top of it. Seeing that *Ponomesor* (God) was pleased with the work of the crab, it expanded the pillar to form the present earth with all its creatures.

Having formed the earth with its creatures as described above, the Creator finally made *human beings* with clay and when they were baked in the sun He gave them life and they multiplied and filled the earth. In the Munda account, when a horse kicked and destroyed the human clay figures before they could be baked in the sun, a large *Indian stork* laid two *eggs* and on hatching them there came forth a *boy* and a *girl* and from them *Singbonga* (God) multiplied human beings and filled the earth. Similarly, the Santal account narrates that *Thakur Jiu* (God) made a pair of *swans*, male and female, who laid two *eggs*, hatched them and there came out a *boy* and a *girl* from whom the human beings multiplied and filled the earth. All of these can be called the *first* creation of God with deep *ecological* insights.

At this stage, the Munda and Ho accounts mention that human beings became very numerous and began to walk on *evil path*. It is not specified in what way it was evil. The Santal account makes it more specific by narrating that the human beings became like *he-buffaloes* and *she-buffaloes*. This statement is open for various interpretations to show the *evil ways* of human beings. However, one thing is clear that they were *not respecting* one another in their social behaviour. In the Kharia account, human beings became *greedy* for more and more food from God and also became *proud* and *arrogant* before Him and challenging Him they began to cut down fruit trees senselessly. The Uraon account narrates that God had made a beautiful world which the human beings made *dirty* with their *excreta*! Now, the human excreta is the most dirty and stinking object one could imagine. Its disgusting stench can cause vomiting. This strong

symbolic language expresses in the clearest possible way the stench of *evil* which human beings are capable of committing against their Creator. In all of these accounts God sends *rain-fire* to destroy the human beings who had turned evil in His sight. However, in everyone of these accounts it is mentioned that one pair of human beings, a *boy* and a *girl*, were saved. God made them *husband* and *wife* and from them human beings were again born to fill the earth. He divided them into different *clans* and thus established *inter-clan* marriage to take place among them. This is the *second* creation of God from which the past and present generations of human beings were born down the centuries.

From the above mythical accounts it is clear that the tribals have a strong sense of *natural law* of morality which does not permit *animal-like* and *mean way* of behaviour, *greed*, and *pride*, before God. This way of life offends Him deeply. This sense of morality has thus its origin in their religious tradition of knowing God and worshipping Him as their Creator and Master. They depend on Him totally for their life, survival and happiness in this world by walking a path which pleases Him. The tribal religious myths are, therefore, exemplary and universally valid sources which direct and control tribal social, cultural and religious behaviour. It is this point which needs to be closely paid attention to in understanding any tribal *moral rule*.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. What is the understanding of morality in tribal socio-religious traditions?

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2. Religious myths are exemplary sources of moral behaviour among the tribals. Explain.

2.2 HUMAN VALUES OF TRIBALS

Tribals are sometimes set at one end of several variously defined ahistorical *continua*: (i) the tradition-modernity paradigm (leading to G.S. Ghurye's conception [1963] of tribals as 'backward Hindus'), (ii) the tribe-caste *continuum*: (like Srinivas' [1966] Sanskritisation model leading to assimilation but change arising from it was only positional and not structural), (iii) the developmentalist traditional-modern *continuum* for administrative purpose. Hindu perspectives of tribal societies as mentioned above have to be rejected outright and new perspectives have to be adopted which would be independent from the Hindu caste model because the tribal societies do not belong to Hindu society.

In the context of the major tribal groups in general, it is to be noted that (i) the *clan* and *lineage* are important structural units, (ii) land and forest constitute their main means of livelihood, (iii) they foster communitarian living and decision making, (iv) their village communities are relatively homogeneous and unstratified – economic inequalities exist in them no doubt, but they are of a totally different order from the inequalities present in village communities in which Brahmin or Rajput or Muslim landlords reside, (v) they have been exploited in the past by the 'outside exploiters' – moneylenders, revenue farmers, landlords. The process is on even in the post independence period. Again, the tribals have few external social ties, whereas a caste is by its nature a part of a larger whole being linked by multifarious ties with other castes. Further still, each tribal group speaks its own special *mothertongue* which is different from the major Indian languages. There is no denying the fact that some tribal groups in some pockets in the country have lost their mothertongues under certain socio-political situations.

Culture is the way in which a group of people live, think, feel, organise themselves, celebrate and share life. In every culture, there are underlying systems of *values*, meanings and views of the world that are expressed visibly in languages, gestures, symbols, rituals and styles. Culture is also what a social group considers as the best and sum-total of its thinking, living and expressing. In this context, over the years tribal culture has attained a distinctiveness by fostering a balance between nature and culture. Economically, *natural resources*, which are gifts of nature, are shared in common among the tribals. Politically, *consensus* is a way of their decision-making. This manifests itself fully in their village council. All the heads of families have equal voice in this council. The head of the council is not a chief, but he is the 'first among equals', a chairman. He articulates the opinion of the members and allows them to come to a unanimous decision. A tribal swears by God and the council elders. The council in action thus fosters and promotes democratic political thinking at the grass roots level. This is important because the present day systems of administration and other institutions depend on the ruling elite and not on the people. Socio-culturally, there is no place for *caste hierarchy* among the tribals because they do not belong to any caste society. There is egalitarianism in their social structure, secular attitude in their religious outlook, and a people oriented art expressed in their seasonal and communitarian songs and dances.

Tribal Core Values

Values referred to above do not exist in their totality in the tribal society today. This society has considerably been fragmented, resources have been individualised, social stratification and competition have sharpened. The present day phenomena of growing materialism, consumerism, individualism, dishonesty, lust for power and money, use of violence, lack of concern for others, trampling ruthlessly on the rights of the poor, the weak, women and children are some of the devastating ill effects of industrialisation and modernisation that have affected the tribal societies too. However, these effects are opposed to tribal *core values*, such as, awareness of all pervasive influence of the Transcendent, respect for elders, gender equality, spirit of sociability and hospitality, solidarity and sharing, community feeling, democratic style of functioning in decision making, openness to other religions, basic honesty, hard work, creativity, contentedness and joy in simple living, love of nature, attachment to land and forest, love of freedom with

proper parental discipline, celebration of life through seasonal feasts and festivities, hope for the future. These values may be there at present or may have been there in the past. They are a kind of ideal types in terms of which the tribal societies may be evaluated or reconstructed.

Social Change

Before modern education began to influence the tribals, their belief in (a) God, (b) ancestral spirits, (c) survival of souls, etc. formed a complex religious system. Their economy was largely based on consumption and reciprocity. Their customary laws and government safeguarded by sanctions were safe without the aid of any police or jail. Not only were all these features very interconnected, but they were also in a perpetual flux of change. Due to interconnection of the institutions, when modern education began to influence them, there took place a chain of reflection, accommodation, adaptation, acceptance, rejection and integration. These social changes met their certain needs in a meaningful way. These needs were social and religious, temporal and spiritual, never one or the other alone.

These changes brought about a transformation in tribal societies. Their outlook widened and their behaviour patterns also changed. They became enlightened and stronger in their *tribal identity* and selfhood. This new identity was no more the old one and yet maintained many of its features. In this identity, the tribals crossed the social boundary of their own *collective* tribal community while becoming further a part of the larger tribal and non-tribal world. Through modern education, this identity has helped them to get adjusted to modern world confronted with fast social, economic and political changes taking place in the country and the world at large.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. What are some of the general characteristics of tribals which form their distinct identity in India?

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2. Are the tribal core values human and universal values? Explain
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2.3 GOOD AND EVIL

Good

Tribal approach to life and happiness is based on *concrete* life experience. The tribals consider rich *crop*, numerous *cattle* and healthy *children* as their most cherished possessions and abundant blessings of God upon them. They experience happiness in *good health, sufficient wealth, good crops, many cattle and children* with whom performing of ritual and offerings to *God* and the *ancestor spirits* are guaranteed. For the wellbeing of human beings depends on the good pleasure of these supernatural beings with whose favour upon the tribals, continuation of the *family, clan* and *tribe* is the greatest good desired by them. Thus, the idea of good in the final analysis is inseparably tied up with what is good for the tribals in the *physical* order of *this world*. However, the goal of life as eternal happiness rests in their belief that after this life they will join the community of their *ancestors* in the next world free from all forms of suffering and death. This is the *ultimate aim* of their life in this world. It is in the *ancestral community* that all their legitimate aspirations will be fulfilled. This community enjoys its eternal happiness under the divine care and protection of God. The *value* of the living tribal community in *communion* with its ancestors has its *root* in Him as the source of all *life, goodness and happiness*.

Evil

Evil for a tribal is again a concrete experience. It is understood as a *physical* suffering, such as, sickness, death, loss of livestock and property. At the mention of it a tribal begins to talk of the *sick child, loss of the animal, failure of crops, etc.*, and expresses his/her utter *helplessness* and

inability to handle the situation and to deal with the forces behind such happenings. This suffering is evil because it inflicts *pain*, *injury* and *harm* upon members in the community. The tribal *ethical rule*, therefore, holds works like causing suffering and pain on others as really bad and deals sternly with persons alleged to be indulging in them. Such anti-social enemies when detected may be punished very severely. Therefore, actions which *endanger* the good of individuals, family, clan and tribe are evil.

Moral Evil

An action is judged to be *right* or *wrong* in reference to the *good* of the individual and all the members of the community. The tribal *moral ideals* to be followed by all are *peacefulness*, *equality* and *kindness*. *Peace* with men/women and the supernatural beings is a *sign* of *order* and *harmony* in creation. *Equality* among all promotes, fortifies and sustains the intended order. *Kindness* to all is to be fostered in this social order. The object of public morality is the good of the tribe. Therefore, the greatest moral evil is the *failure* towards the wellbeing of and harm done to the *tribe*. Throwing into *disorder* what is religiously required is understood in terms of *violation* of tribal customs and breaking of some important taboos. In doing so *disregard* is shown for what has been determined and willed by God. Breaking of taboos is a violation of the profound reverence for the *value* protected by them.

2.4 MORAL LAW

Among the tribals, their *social custom* is regarded as having the *ultimate* power to *restrain*, *control* and *direct* an individual in their communities. Ethical understanding is shaped by aiming at the goal of life, that is, becoming a member of the community of ancestors in the next world after the life in this world. One's *moral conduct* is defined in terms of the idea of this good to be attained. The *norms* of conduct for a tribal are set in his/her *tradition* and *myth* defined in the customs of the tribe and every tribal is bound to comply with them. Taboos are put forward to safeguard the *pure* form of the customs. For example, one is forbidden to associate with non-tribals in order not to endanger the *purity* of one's tribe and its *homogeneity*. That is why strict *social control* is applied and heavy punishment is enforced upon the erring person in the above

matter. However, with changing times social customs too change for the better without remaining static and yet retain their important function of social control.

Purity of the Tribe

Tribals hold that the conduct of an individual is of interest and concern for the *whole* community. Preserving and maintaining of *order* is their *collective* responsibility. They consider certain actions good and others bad depending upon what good and bad effect they have on their communities. A tribal receives the values of his/her community from childhood that govern his/her ways of life through myths, folklore, socio-religious rites, rituals and customs. One learns to be part of one's social environment and knows what is expected of him/her. Every tribal member has thus to behave in ways which are *approved* and *accepted* by his/her community.

In a strictly traditional sense one may not associate with strangers who are non-tribals. No married tribal is allowed to dine with non-tribals because on him/her rests the responsibility and sacred duty to preserve and foster the *purity* of the tribe. It is because the tribe is understood to have taken its origin directly from God. The unmarried person may, however, not observe this restriction as he/she has not got as yet the full responsibility of the married members.

Sexual Conduct

Extra marital relations (adultery), fornication (sexual intercourse between unmarried persons) and incest (sexual relations between immediate relatives, usually between parents and children, and between brothers and sisters) destroy the ordered *family* or *clan structure* and poison the *intimate* relations within the family and lineage. Thus, if a man were to have an affair with a woman, the community would exact heavy fines from him and punish him, if need be by boycotting the culprit. Generally, strict measures are taken against the whole family of the person not keeping the social norms by not permitting the family members to have free association with the village community. They say, '*no socializing* with the family members of the culprit, *no daughter* to be given in marriage to them and *no help* to be given to them in their agricultural and

other household activities. Normal association with them may be restored only after a public dinner has been served to the elders of the community in reparation for the offence.

Failing the code of the tribe is a serious matter. Punishment for it is most severe. The offending person is expelled from the tribe temporarily or on a lifelong basis in the case of unrepentance. Not observing the tribal customs is morally an evil action which may be put right by ritual *purification, reparation* and *reconciliation* with the tribe. It is a *breaking* of the order established and maintained by the Creator for the good of the tribe and its members. Enforcement of measures against any breaking of accepted norms and misconduct rests with the village council. It has the duty to guard the tradition, to ensure the good of one and all. The *myth* is the *model* and *reference point* for their actions.

Marriage

As described above in the second creation account, marriage was divinely instituted by God. It is the sacred duty, therefore, of every adult tribal to get married in his/her own community and raise children so that the *family, clan* and *tribe* may continue. Thus, there may be members to offer sacrifices to God and the ancestors. Every family head is a sacrificer. In keeping with their inheritance law, non-tribals cannot inherit land from a tribal. Therefore, a tribal has to get married within his/her own tribe. Persons not observing this rule may be dismissed from their communities till they agree to observe the rule which they had broken. Similarly, the community members may cut themselves off from the erring members in all social relations and activities till the latter correct their wrong social behaviour. Since the *tribe* is the *highest good*, these punishments are the greatest tragedy that could befall a tribal.

The tribals marry *within* their own *tribe* and *outside* their own *clan*. They practise adult marriage of one man to one woman (monogamy). It is the most common practice among the tribals. *Widow* remarriage is allowed. *Divorce* is rare in case of (a) partners not being faithful to each other, and (b) wife not bearing children. This is an indicator that their life of sexuality is both *unitive* as well as *procreative* in a healthy balance. *Cross cousin* marriage, that is, marriage between the children of a woman and those of her brother, may take place beyond *three*

generations. Any marriage against this rule *offends* tribal feeling and fine taste for social life. Similarly, marriage within the same clan offends tribal sensibilities because the members of the same clan look at one another as brothers and sisters having *common ancestors* in the beginning in ancient times. Both of these forms of marriage therefore amount to *incestuous* relationship (marriage between mother and son, father and daughter, brother and sister).

There is a practice of giving *bride wealth* among the tribals under discussion consisting of livestock or cash. The payment of the bride wealth publicly *seals* the marriage contract, confers marital rights upon the spouses and legitimizes their children. There is no practice of *dowry* among them. A *widow* on the death of her husband, may get married with the *younger brother* of her late husband (levirate). Similarly, a *widower* on the death of her wife may get married with the *younger sister* of his late wife (sororate). These forms of marriage are permitted because the members entering the marriage have *friendly* and *fun* relationship with each other in their respective communities. These practices though not very common underline the *unity* of the family members and their relations among whom a *man* replaces his elder brother when he is dead and a *woman* replaces her elder sister when she is dead and thus the children of the deceased parents are saved from becoming *orphans* and its pain and misery.

Incest

Tribal society considers the violation of incest prohibitions a grave evil. It is thought to corrupt the social order by an undermining of morals. That is why it meets with horrified condemnation and is held to merit *exile* from the community. It provokes an emotional shock beyond description. It is held in such a horror because it *upsets* the family structure by corrupting the *intimate relations* of the family members. It destroys the very *basis* of human society, turning it into a mere disordered crowd. This natural law prohibition is, therefore, very important to preserve and maintain a tribal society.

Respectful Distance

Free association between the woman and the elder brother(s) of her husband offends modesty and is not allowed. This is to keep a respectful distance from the persons of the above mentioned categories. It is also understood as forbidden degree of association. Such a social behaviour expresses a sense of *decency* and caution against any undesirable intimacy. Such public decency is meant to protect and safeguard public and private morality.

Family

It consists of a more or less durable union, socially approved of a man, a woman, and their children. It is found in each and every type of society. The prime duty of a married tribal is to look after his/her family well, bring up children, take care of them and make them fit members of the tribe. Extra marital relations or adultery is therefore a serious failure of one's sacred duty and responsibility towards one's family. Hence, it is condemned outright. In the same understanding, pre-marital sex or fornication and any other form of illicit sexual relation are grave offences. That is why a child born out of wedlock is considered *illegitimate* and in the case of a male child of this category cannot inherit land though it is not his fault.

Inheritance

Except the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia tribals in North-East India, the other tribal groups form *patrilineal* societies. As a rule *males* alone inherit *land* in these societies. Socio-economically, a non-tribal cannot inherit land from a tribal. Hence, marriage within one's own tribe is strictly required. Possessing land and having a home is a basic right of every tribal for the upbringing of his/her children in the family. In order to ensure a ready supply of offerings to the ancestors, land is not allowed to go out of one's *clan*. Land belongs to the clan. Hence, women who on their marriage go over to another clan do not inherit it at their parental home.

A childless widow or a widow with daughters only, provided she does not remarry or quit her late husband's house is entitled to own his land until her death. *Sons* of a dead brother receive their father's share of land. A tribal without having any son, if he wishes, adopts one of his close nephews (son of his brother) of his choice to be his heir with the consent of the family members and the village council. On the other hand, if a tribal has only daughters, takes a prospective son-

in-law to his house to get married to one of his daughters and work at his house. If the young man consents to the arrangement, he may even be adopted as a son to succeed his father-in-law. However, this is rare these days.

Truthfulness

Before the British rulers came, formal judiciary and court procedures as well as prisons were clearly absent among the tribals. Instead of them there was a council in every village to look after the smooth running of social life in the village. This institution still continues among the tribals in their villages. Telling lies in the council or showing disrespect and disobedience to it is a grave offence for which the offender may be subjected to *heavy fines* or even *expelled* from the tribe. No one may have any association with that person.

Justice, Peace and Unity

Every member of the tribe has a right to possess land and a home for the upbringing of his/her family. No one may deprive the other of it by *encroaching* upon or *misappropriating* what does not belong to him/her. *Anger, envy, theft, quarrels, injury and murder* do serious harm to individuals and inflict suffering on them. They destroy peace and harmony existing among them. Practice of *witchcraft* and *sorcery* brings about *enmity, disunity and division* among the community members. Such actions are, therefore, severely condemned. The offender is made to give compensation if there is any loss of property and the usual fine is exacted from him/her by the council which has to re-establish order by healing the harm done and to restore peace and harmony between individuals, families and groups in the community.

Kindness and Hospitality

An action is judged to be right or wrong in reference to the good of the individual and of all the members of the community. The approach is based on an *egalitarian* (Seeing equality of condition, outcome, reward, and privilege as a desirable goal of social organization) outlook which determines the moral conduct of individuals. The moral ideals to be followed by all are peacefulness, equality and kindness. Peace with men/women and the supernatural is a sign of

order and harmony as intended in creation. Equality among all promotes, strengthens and sustains the intended order. Kindness, hence, is characteristic of the tribals. If one chances to enter a tribal house, it will not be long before one is made at home and no longer a stranger among the house members provided one introduces oneself to them speaking their language. They get relaxed and become friendly, happy and kind. The guest is first greeted and is requested to be seated. If he/she is very dear or respectable, the mother or sister or sister-in-law washes his/her feet with water, followed by applying mustard oil on the feet, and washing the feet again with water and drying it with a towel. This is done to the guest as a part of welcome, hospitality expressing love, affection, appreciation, friendship, respect and gratitude.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. What are the social and moral customs among tribals in order to preserve the purity of the tribe?

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2.5 TRIBAL MORALITY

It places an overwhelming emphasis on the *community* and *tribe*. The goal of life is the *good* of the community, *continuity* of the tribe, for therein lies the good of the *one* and *all*. The good is understood as a happy living protected from physical evils. From the tribe alone does life derive its meaning and orientation. It thus appears that an individual has no personal value, the person is swallowed up by the community, his personal good and wellbeing overwhelmed as it were by the *interests* of the tribe. Therefore, questions may be raised: What is the *identity* of an individual in a tribal society? Where does a person stand in relation to his/her community? Does he/she not find his/her personality and individuality sacrificed for the tribe? Yes, the person belongs to the tribe. Apart from the community he/she has no identity. This is what the *ethical* and *moral* behaviour of a tribal is based upon.

The nature of tribal existence has to be understood in this way that the tribe is created and cared for by the Creator for a *communitarian* life where there is *equality* and *harmony*. After this life in this world, a person joins the community of his/her *ancestors* in the next world provided he/she had walked on the sacred path they had shown in their lifetime in this world. *Salvation* for a tribal means *union* with ancestors and God the Creator. Thus, an individual apart from his/her community has no meaning and the healthy *tension* between this person and his/her community *dead* and *alive* continues. Tribal creation myths reveal that the individual never existed. Thus, the life and existence of every person receive true value and *meaning* in the tribe

The outlook on life and happiness is based on *equality* and *harmony* in the tribe. Establishing and maintaining happiness and wellbeing is a *collective* duty and responsibility. Everyone is responsible for the peace and prosperity of the other in the community. It is thus the community or tribe which determines tribal *moral conduct*.

It is to be pointed out, however, that the values mentioned above do not exist in their totality in the tribal societies today. They have considerably been fragmented, resources have been individualized, social stratification and competition have sharpened. In view of these, tribal values have undergone a considerable degree of change. Notwithstanding these, the values so described above are a kind of ideal types in terms of which tribal societies may be evaluated or reconstructed.

2.6 LET US SUM UP

Tribal morality places an overwhelming emphasis on the *community* and *tribe*. The goal of life is (a) the *good* of the community, and (b) *continuity* of the tribe, for therein lies the good of the *one* and *all*. The good is understood as a happy living protected from physical evils. From the tribe alone does life derive its meaning and orientation. It thus appears that an individual has no personal *value*, the person is swallowed up by the community, his personal good and wellbeing overwhelmed as it were by the *interests* of the tribe. Yes, the person belongs to the tribe. Apart from the community he/she has no identity. This is what the *ethical* and *moral* behaviour of a tribal is based upon.

The nature of tribal existence has to be understood in this way that the tribe is created and cared for by the Creator for a *communitarian* life where there is *equality* and *harmony*. After this life in this world, a person joins the community of his/her *ancestors* in the next world provided he/she had walked on the sacred path they had shown in their lifetime in this world. *Salvation* for a tribal means *union* with ancestors and God the Creator. Thus, an individual apart from his/her community has no meaning and the healthy *tension* between this person and his/her community *dead* and *alive* continues. Tribal creation myths reveal that the individual never existed. Thus, the life and existence of every person receive true *value* and *meaning* in the tribe. The outlook on life and happiness is based on *equality* and *harmony* in the tribe. Establishing and maintaining happiness and wellbeing is a *collective* duty and responsibility. Everyone is responsible for the peace and prosperity of the other in the community. It is thus the community or tribe which determines tribal *moral conduct*.

2.7 KEY WORDS

Culture: The way in which a group of people live, think, feel, organise themselves, celebrate and share life.

Good: The idea of good for a tribal is tied up with what is good for him/her in the *physical* order of *this world*.

Evil: For a tribal evil is again understood as a *physical* suffering, such as, sickness, death, loss of livestock and property.

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2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. Almost in all tribal religious traditions *morality* bears imprints of mythical and cultic aspects. In them a state of perfection at the beginning of creation is recalled and cultic forms mark a connection between man's sinful state and creation of the universe. Generally, tribal ethical wisdom and moral sense is situated in the myth-tradition of a community. The myth confirms how God has dealt and deals with erring human beings. It also teaches what must be the standard of and rule for human actions.
2. Tribal religious myths are exemplary and universally valid sources which direct and control tribal social, cultural and religious behaviour.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. *Economically*, natural resources, which are gifts of nature, are shared in common among the tribals. *Politically*, consensus is a way of their decision-making. This manifests itself fully in their village council. All the heads of families have equal voice in this council. The head of the council is not a chief, but he is the 'first among equals', a chairman. He articulates the opinion of the members and allows them to come to a unanimous decision. *Socio-culturally*, there is *no* place for caste hierarchy among the tribals because they do not belong to any caste society. There is *egalitarianism* in their social structure, *secular attitude* in their religious outlook, and a *people oriented* art expressed in their seasonal and communitarian songs and dances.
2. Awareness of all pervasive influence of the Transcendent, respect for elders, gender equality, spirit of sociability and hospitality, solidarity and sharing, community feeling, democratic style of functioning in decision making, openness to other religions, basic honesty, hard work, creativity, contentedness and joy in simple living, love of nature, attachment to land and forest, love of freedom with proper parental discipline, celebration of life through seasonal feasts and festivities, hope for the future. These values may be there at present or may have been there in the past. They are a kind of ideal types in terms of which the tribal societies may be evaluated or reconstructed. They are also human and universal values.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

1. Tribals hold that the conduct of an individual is of interest and concern for the *whole* community. Preserving and maintaining of *order* is their *collective* responsibility. They consider certain actions good and others bad depending upon what good and bad effect they have on their communities. A tribal receives the values of his/her community from childhood that govern his/her ways of life through myths, folklore, socio-religious rites, rituals and customs. One learns to be part of one's social environment and knows what is expected of him/her. Every tribal member has thus to behave in ways which are *approved* and *accepted* by his/her community.

In a strictly traditional sense one may not associate with strangers who are non-tribals. No married tribal is allowed to dine with non-tribals because on him/her rests the responsibility and sacred duty to preserve and foster the *purity* of the tribe. It is because the tribe is understood to have taken its origin directly from God. The unmarried person may, however, not observe this restriction as he/she has not got as yet the full responsibility of the married members.



UNIT 3

TRIBALS' SPIRITUAL OUTLOOK ON NATURE

Contents

3.0 Objectives

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Supreme Being

3.3 Life and its meaning

3.4 Nature and Celebration: Feasts

3.5 Let Us Sum Up

3.6 Key Words

3.7 Further Readings and References

3.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

3.0 OBJECTIVES

Tribals, conscious of the Supreme Being, try to live a good, upright, ethical and moral life which is quite a genuine spiritual life. Their natural goodness like simplicity, sincerity, honesty and hard work is certainly the reflection of their inner spiritual life. In this Unit you are expected to know:

- Tribals' way of relating to the Supreme Being
- Tribals' attitude towards life and its meaning
- Tribals' way of relating to nature and the mode of celebrations

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Spirituality can be understood at various levels. Broadly speaking it means a person's spiritual life as opposed to physical or sense life. It is the exercise or application of our spiritual faculties, intellect and will in order to enter into communion with the Divine. Strictly speaking it means (a) to express oneself in one's ethical and moral behaviour and right conduct, (b) practice of virtues and avoidance of vices, (c) acting and behaving in a way that is more human and more divine,

(d) living and practising, exercising and experiencing one's religious belief and conviction, and
 (e) a person's supernatural life lived more consciously, more fully and more intensely in relationship with the transcendent reality, God (Lakra 2006: 2-3).

Tribal Spirituality

In the tribal worldview space (totality of creation) is central. Everything has to be understood in the perspective of creation. Harmony with space or creation is the starting point of their spirituality and their search for liberation. An awareness of being one with the whole of creation is, therefore, the spiritual foundation of the tribal people. In this unity of creation and spirituality, there is no clear cut distinction between sacred and secular, religion and non-religion. One sees the Supreme being in space/creation and not outside of it (Puthenpurakal 2007: 242).

3.2 SUPREME BEING

Each tribal group is unique and, therefore, different from one another and yet there are some remarkable similarities in their worldviews. Since it is not possible to discuss the spiritual outlook of all of them, we select for our purpose the Munda, Uraon (Kurukh speaking), Kharia, Santal and Ho tribals in the Chhotanagpur cultural area running through the state of Jharkhand and the adjoining districts of Chhattisgarh, Orissa and West Bengal. The same tribal groups have also been spreading out in various parts of the country at different points of their history. Each tribal group has a very clear idea of the Supreme Being as its creator and of the universe and its creatures. He is known by different names by different tribals as given below:

Tribe	Personal Name	Relational Name	Symbolic Name (In likeness)
Munda	Haram (Old One)	Grand Father Father	Sing Bonga (Sun-Spirit) Maran Buru (Great Mountain)
Ho	Gusia (Master)	do	do

Santal	Thakur Jiu (Spirit)	do	Chando Baba (Sun-Father) Maran Buru (Great Mountain)
Kharia	Ponomesor (Unchanging One)	do	Bero Lerang (Sun-Moon)
Kurukh	Dharmes (Beneficent One)	do	Biri Belas (Sun- King)

None of the tribals mentioned above has made any *image* of their Creator in the past and present though they share in common His imagery as a benign *old man* with white long hair and flowing beard on dazzling white clouds. They have not made any *temple* for Him because they experience His presence everywhere.

Except among the Kharias there is a mention of a female counterpart of the Creator in their creation accounts. However, none of the Adivasi religious traditions in the region has any practice of worshipping any female deity at the level of the Supreme Being. Rather, the *beloved* of the Supreme Being comes across as a symbol of His own *wisdom*. She comes to His assistance whenever He needs to be wiser in creating the universe and its beings in a more perfect manner.

Creation

Before the Supreme Being made the present world, in all the accounts there is a mention of the *sea* with its *creatures* covering everywhere. In His works of creation the Supreme Being takes the help of His own creatures, especially the sea creatures, such as, *crab, prawn, fish, turtle, tortoise*, etc. separately in bringing a tiny bit of clay to Him from the bottom of the sea in order to make the present earth. However, all of them failed in their mission because the sea water washed away the clay which they had tried to carry to the Supreme Being for making this world. However, the *earthworm* finally succeeds in fetching this bit of earth to the Supreme Being in the Munda and Kurukh accounts. He takes this bit of earth and makes the present earth.

In the Ho account, the Supreme Being makes a pair of male and female earthworms which slip into the water of the sea and begin to raise and heap up mud within the water by swallowing it and disgorging it. The two earthworms multiplied and worked together and land rose above the water. In some places it became mountains and in other places hard land. In the Santal account,

the Supreme Being tied the legs of a huge tortoise in four directions to float on the surface of the sea. An earthworm then keeping its tail at the back of the tortoise swims down to the bottom of the sea and swallows the clay and evacuates it on the back of the tortoise till the present earth got formed. The tortoise changes its position sometimes and that is why the earth shakes today! Having made the earth the Supreme Being filled it with all other animate and inanimate beings.

In yet another Kurukh account, the *kingfisher* bird dives into the sea and brings a tiny seed of the earth in between its finger nail from the earthworms at the bottom of the sea and gives it to the Supreme Being. He plants this seed in the sea by churning its water till it gets muddy. It was this seed that got multiplied into the present earth with its *saat-pati-raaji* ((kingdom with 7 corners). The Supreme Being filled it with all living and non-living creatures.

In the Kharia account, a *crab* raised a pillar of clay from the bottom of the sea above the surface of water and began to enjoy sunshine everyday lying down on top of the pillar. One day a man like figure came from somewhere and was pleased to play with the clay of the pillar. He is also known as *Ponomesor* (God). Seeing this the crab extended its pillar into a huge island. Thus, the present earth with all other creatures came into existence.

In all accounts the Supreme Being first makes human figures out of clay and bakes them in the sun before putting life into them. However, except in Ho account in all other accounts there comes a *horse* (anti-life force already at the time of creation) from somewhere and kicks and destroys the human figures till the Supreme Being makes a dog(s)/tiger to chase away the destructive horse. Following it, in the Munda account, a large Indian *stork* laid two *eggs* on the land. A *boy* and a *girl* were born from these eggs. Similarly, in the Santal account, a *boy* and a *girl* were born from the *eggs* of *hans* and *hansil* (male-female swans). From the above human beings other men and women were born. In the Kurukh account the Supreme Being puts life into the many sun-baked clay *male* and *female* figures. Whereas in the Kharia account, He made two *male* and *female* human figures, dried them in the sun and put them inside the hollow of a banyan tree and when the milk of the tree dripped into their mouths, they became alive. From them other human beings were born in the world. Interestingly, the Ho account mentions that the

first woman was made from the rib of the first man whom the Supreme Being had made out of clay.

Destruction

In the creation accounts above, the Munda and Ho traditions say that human beings filled the whole earth and offended their Creator with their *evil ways* and lost His favour upon them. According to Santals the human beings *did not respect* one another by behaving like he-buffaloes and she-buffaloes. In the Kharia account they became *proud* and *arrogant* before their Creator by their destructive ways. Similarly, in the Kurukh account they with their own *excreta* polluted the earth which was a beautiful creation of their Creator. The last comment is a strong symbolic way of saying that the human beings had committed a very serious and disgusting offence against their Creator.

Offended by the evil deeds of the human beings as mentioned above, the Creator sent *rain of fire* on them for 7 days and 7 nights. All the human beings perished except the *bhaiya-bahin* (brother-sister). In the Munda and Ho accounts, *Nage* spirit hid them in the cool water of a hollow made by a crab. In the Santal account, they were saved in the cave of the *Harata* mountain. In the Kurukh account, the beloved of the Supreme Being had hidden the pair of male and female children in the hole of a *crab* covered with the *gangla* (Job's tear) thicket of the low-land. In the Kharia account, the king *Sembhu* and queen *Dakai* pulled the *brother* and *sister* inside the marsh and hid them.

With destruction of the human beings, food supply by them to the Creator by way of offering sacrifice ceased. He was thus very hungry and not happy without human beings. His beloved told Him that His happiness could return only with the finding of human beings alive. Consequently, He found the *bhaiya-bahin* (brother-sister, i.e. male-female) after many disappointments and distress. After seeking and finding them, He brought them to His abode with great joy. He kept them with Him, fed them and looked after them lovingly with His fatherly care. He called them His *grand children* and they in return called Him *grand father*. There is a fun loving relationship between grand parents and their grand children. Thus, the Creator renewed His relationship with

the surviving human beings as their *grand father* who is very fond of His *grand children*, ever loving, forgiving and accepting. In this personal relationship with Him there is no oppressive fear. It is quite liberating.

New Creation

When the *bhaiya-bahin* grew up He gave them the *land* to cultivate, *oxen* to plough and *seeds* to sow and reap. When their *crops* were growing, some insects and pests attacked them and thus they were getting destroyed. The *bhaiya-bahin* then went up to the Supreme Being to tell Him their problem. After listening to them, He taught them the ritual of *danda-katta* (ritual of destroying the effects of evil) to drive away the evil beings and their evil forces from them. The *bhaiya-bahin* used to sleep separately by putting a log of the *simbali* (silk cotton) tree in between them. In the Munda and Ho accounts there was a *husking pole* between them to separate them while sleeping at night whereas in the Kharia account it was just a *log*. One night they drank rice beer and went to sleep. The Creator Himself had taught them how to prepare this drink. The Supreme Being and His beloved removed the log between them and they slept together as husband and wife. On reporting their experience to the Supreme Being, He said that it was all right. Thus, He instituted *marriage* and introduced human beings to the secret of procreation so that they might multiply in this world. He divided them into various *gotars* (clans) in order to enter into marriage relationships outside one's own clan. Members belonging to the same clan consider themselves as brothers and sisters of one family. The tribal clans consist of *animals, birds, fish, plants, minerals*, etc. They are called *totems*. This is the *new creation* of the Supreme Being and all men and women today are the *stewards* of this creation by not destroying and polluting it. His creative activity in this world thus continues to this day through the cooperation of human beings with Him.

The tribals believe that increase of their *crop, cattle and children* is a clear sign of the Creator's abundant blessing upon them. These are His gifts to them and their whole life revolves around them. That is why they thank Him for these gifts and pray to Him to shower upon them these gifts by offering sacrifices to Him and worshipping Him. They depend on Him for their life and

existence. Since He is the Supreme Being, they pray to Him to protect them from every form of evil.

Creation of Heavenly Bodies

In the Munda and Kurukh accounts it is told that before the moon was made, the Sun was alone in the sky and it did not set. One day the Creator went out to see the man making fields and asked him some questions: "When did you make this field?" "Now" was the answer. "When did you make that field?" "Now." "When did you make the yonder fields?" "Just now." "When did you eat from these fresh leaves?" "Now." "When did you eat from those dry leaves?" "Now." "When do you rest and when do you work?" "I rest *now* and work *now*." The Creator said: "You will not live on with such work and eating without regular times." So, He made the Sun to set and rise - thus *day* and *night* were made to work and to rest. He also made the moon to shine during the night.

Together with other beautiful accounts, in the Santal account the heavenly bodies are described as human beings in their metaphorical sense. *Thakur Baba* (Supreme Being) is *Sing Chando* (the sun) and *Nida Chando* (the moon) is his wife. At first there were as many stars by day as there are by night. They were the children of the Sun and the Moon. They had divided them between the two of them. At their evil deeds *Sing Chando* blazed with fierce heat till his children and beasts died. The Moon took pity on their suffering and prayed to *Sing Chando* not to destroy them. So, *Sing Chando* saved a couple of young man and woman from whom many children were born. *Nida Chando* wanted that the human beings who belonged to her should only be there and not those belonging to *Sing Chando*. So she made a plan to trick him. She covered up all her children with a large basket and smeared her mouth and lips and going to *Sing Chando* told him that she had eaten up every one of her children and proposed that he should also do the same. Listening to her he devoured all of them. At night *Nida Chando* let out her children from under the basket. Seeing them, *Sing Chando* flew to *Nida Chando* in a passion and the children scattered in all directions. That is why the stars are now spread all over the sky. *Sing Chando* could not restrain his wrath and cut *Nida Chando* into two. That is the reason why the Moon waxes and wanes.

Approach to God

Among the tribals, there are many forms of approaching God mainly by way of offering sacrifice to Him and praying to Him in an informal but personal way. However, there is one particular ritual among the Kurukh tribals which is worth discussing here because it is full of rich symbols. It expresses protection of *Dharmes* (Supreme Being) against evil. As life is experienced in a paradoxical existence of good and evil, life and death, the twofold end of the ritual is first, to obtain blessing, viz. happiness and prosperity of life in terms of sound health and increase in progeny, cattle and abundant yield from crops and secondly to ward off evil.

The ritual is known by various names, viz. *danda-katta* (stick-splitting), *palkansna* (tooth-breaking), *bhelwan-phar i* (*bhelwan* twig splitting), *bhaakh-khandna* (destroying curse). No priest is required for the ritual. Any Kurukh male acquainted with the ritual may perform it. He recites the account of traditional creation myth, recalling (a) how *Dharmes* made the earth from a little bit of clay, (b) a universal burning of fire during which the *bhaiya-bahin* hid themselves in a crab hole, (c) how *Dharmes* found them and taught them the art of agriculture, created day and night for them, initiated them into the secret of procreation and confided to them the mysterious ritual of *danda-katta* with which to avert the attacks of beasts and pests on their crops and to destroy the effect of the *evil eye* and *evil mouth* of enemies.

The whole proceeding begins with drawing of the mystic diagram of the universe with its 7 corners in the form of 3 concentric circles and 7 arcs on the outer circle. The circles and arcs are formed in the order of *white*, *red* and *black* colours representing the *rainbow*. These colours are of rice flour, red clay powder from the hearth and black charcoal dust. A handful of pearl *rice* is placed at the centre and an *egg* is stood upright on it and the split end of a cashew (*Semecarpus anacardium*) twig rests on the egg.

The significance of these articles is explained as follows: The rainbow being the greatest bow in creation, is the most potent weapon of *Dharmes* against any evil power. The egg is a pure source of life. It is a *faceless* sacrifice to faceless God. It is broken in order to symbolise and also effect

together with the split cashew twig the bursting of the *evil eye* and the splitting of the *evil mouth* of witches and sorcerers and thus destroy the evil doings of the spirits let loose by them. It is hoped through the ritual that no harm would be caused to the *crops, cattle* and *children* of those on whose behalf the ritual is performed. The oil of the cashew nut is poisonous and a drop of it in the eyes is sure to cause permanent blindness. Hence, there is the use of the cashew twig over the sacrificial egg in order to impart its dreaded effect on the evil doers. The pearl rice is the symbol of life. This ritual is always performed with or without the full recital of the creation myth at all important events, such as, on the name giving ceremony of a child, during a wedding, after a funeral ceremony, while going for the ritual hunt, before paddy transplantation, at the beginning of threshing, while occupying a new house, etc. Belief in *Dharmes* as the source of all good and in the *evil eye* or *evil look* and *evil mouth* or *evil words* as the causes of all evil is held by the Uraons to form the most primitive tenet of their religious tradition.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. What were the root causes of destroying the first creation?

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2. Why do the tribals approach God? How do they approach Him?

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3.3 LIFE AND ITS MEANING

Birth On the *Chhati* (name giving) day of a child, one of the elders takes his seat with a pot of water and some paddy grains. He removes the husk of a grain with his finger nails and drops the grain gently on the still surface of water in the pot to float. It represents *God*. Likewise, he drops

the second grain representing the *panches* (elders). Similarly, he drops the third grain in the name of the *child* and lastly he drops the fourth grain naming at the same time one *ancestor*. If the last two grains meet while floating, the child is named after the ancestor in whose name the fourth grain was dropped. Rice grain is a symbol of life. Only after the name-giving, the child belongs to the *community, clan* and *tribe*. It is an initiation of the child into the clan and tribal community to grow and mature in them as a full tribal.

Giving the name of one of the ancestors to the child shows the faith of the tribals in the life after death. The ancestor chosen for the child becomes his/her guardian. The name thus discovered indicates that the goal of this earthly life is to attain the *ancestral community* at long last. It is in this community that the tribe lives for ever. The ceremony also indicates that the child belongs to God and the *panches* are the witnesses to this mystery of life.

Marriage

The creation accounts of the tribals testify to the fact that marriage has been divinely instituted by the Supreme Being Himself. Marriage negotiations are conducted through intermediaries. The traditional tribals observe omens or signs from nature very carefully during the negotiations. Some of the omens are as follows:

Good Omens	Bad Omens
(a) a lamp burning: it is a mark of prosperity; (b) a woman carrying water: presence of water symbolises life giving power and vitality; (c) a corpse being removed: death is out of the way, opportunity for a new life, (d) seeing monkeys on the way: monkey is	(a) a thorn pricking: loss of blood and, therefore, loss of life; (b) an empty pitcher: sign of lack of life giving power and vitality; (c) a woman carrying ashes or clothes in an earthen vessel for washing purposes: sign of weakness; (d) a dead animal being removed:

<p>the nephew of God, therefore is sacred symbolising God's favour;</p> <p>(e) itching in the palm of the hand: sign that one will get money;</p> <p>(f) a jackal crossing from left to right: going away from the life centre: symbolises that death is on its way out;</p> <p>(g) seeing or hearing a pigeon or a kingcrow singing: sign of humble, patient, loving and hard-working housewife.</p>	<p>destruction of property;</p> <p>(e) a snake on the path: a danger symbol;</p> <p>(f) a vulture overhead: it feeds on carrion and, therefore, associated with death;</p> <p>(g) a jackal crossing the road from right to left and hearing its howling: moving to left is moving to life centre, a sign of imminent death;</p> <p>(h) suddenly a tree or branch coming down on the path is a sign of impending death.</p>
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With bad omens observed on the way, marriage negotiation generally would not proceed further while with good omens observed, they would go ahead with their marriage arrangement.

Marriage gives the fullest participation of an individual in the life of the community with duties and responsibilities to shoulder for the good of the *family*, *clan* and *tribe* as a full grown up and mature adult. It marks and strengthens the ties of union between husband and wife and also of the two families and their ancestors. The use of *sindri* (vermilion) during the marriage ritual is a blood substitute and blood is a life symbol. According to their age old custom the Santal and Munda couples in this context, exchange real blood taken from the small finger of each partner and mixed together. At the central marriage ceremony in the Kurukh tradition, the *thatching grass*, *yoke*, and *grinding stone* displayed are economic symbols, stressing the fact that marriage means establishing a new home in which the husband has to work in the field, the wife has to do household works and both of them need a secure dwelling place for themselves and their children.

In keeping with their inheritance law, land belongs to the clan. Hence, women who on their marriage go over to another clan do not inherit it at their parental home. By the same rule a non-tribal cannot inherit land from a tribal. Thus, a tribal has to get married *within* his/her own tribe. He/she has to get married *outside* his/her own clan because the members of the same clan look at

one another as brothers and sisters having *common ancestors* in the beginning. There is a practice of giving *bride wealth* among the tribals consisting of livestock or cash. The payment of the bride wealth publicly *seals* the marriage contract, confers marital rights upon the spouses and legitimizes their children.

Good and Evil

Thus, the idea of *good* in the final analysis is inseparably tied up with what is good for the tribals in the *physical* order of *this world*. However, the goal of life as eternal happiness rests in their belief that after this life they will join the community of their *ancestors* in the next world free from all forms of suffering. This is the *ultimate aim* of their life in this world. It is in the *ancestral community* that all their legitimate aspirations will be fulfilled. This community enjoys its eternal happiness under the divine care and protection of God. The *value* of the living tribal community in *communion* with its ancestors has its *root* in Him as the source of all *life, goodness* and *happiness*. Value is the idea held by people about ethical behaviour or appropriate behaviour, what is right or wrong, desirable or undesirable.

Evil for a tribal is again a concrete experience. It is understood as a *physical* suffering, such as, sickness, death, loss of livestock and property. At the mention of it a tribal begins to talk of the *sick child, loss* of the animal, *failure* of crops, etc., and expresses his/her utter *helplessness* and *inability* to handle the situation and to deal with the forces behind such happenings. This suffering is evil because it inflicts *pain, injury* and *harm* upon members in the community. Therefore, actions which *endanger* the good of individuals, family, clan and tribe are evil.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. What does marriage do to an individual in his/her community?

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2. What is the ultimate aim of tribal life?

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3.4 NATURE AND CELEBRATION: FEASTS

The tribals live in close contact with nature which plays a very important role in their life. They derive their basic necessities like food, shelter, fodder, fuel, timber, medicines etc. from nature. That is why they look at nature as their mother. This gets manifested in their folktales, folk stories, seasonal songs, feasts and festivities repeatedly as follows:

The *phagua* feast is celebrated on the full moon day in the lunar month of *Phagun* (February-March). As nature renews and bedecks itself with new, tender and beautiful leaves and flowers, this feast ushers in the *new year* for the tribals. The *sarhul* feast is celebrated in the lunar month of *Chait* (March-April) when the *sal* trees (*Shorea robusta*) are full of flowers. It is the biggest annual spring festival of the tribals. The celebration centres around the *sarna* (sacred grove) deity. She is the guardian spirit of the whole village with its inhabitants, their children and cattle. This deity is believed to be very fond of children. She is responsible for good monsoon and bumper crops during the year. She shares in the joys and sorrows of the people in the village. Her abode is the *sarna* near the village. The *pahan* (village priest) offers the sacrifice of a chicken to her on a handful heap of rice in order to get her favour upon the village community. Similarly, he offers chicken sacrifices to other spirits too in order to please them so that they may not create trouble for the same community.

Transcendence of God over the spirits is clearly maintained at the *sarna*. The *pahan* offers Him the sacrifice of a *white* (sign of purity) chicken or goat at a separate spot away from the place where the sacrifices were offered to the spirits. In the Kur ukh tradition, the village priest faces the east because the sun which is the symbol of God, rises in the east and prays as follows: "Here below are the *panches* (elders), *Dharmes* (God) is above. O Father, you are above, we are below. You have eyes, we do not see. You know all, we are totally ignorant. Whether knowingly or by

mistake we have offended the spirits, restrain them. Overlook our mistakes.” (Tirkey 1991: 76). The prayer shows how the community is utterly dependent on God its Creator. It is also believed on this feast day that *marriage* between the *earth* and the *sky* takes place and due to this mystical union that nature brings forth plenty of good things for the living and sustenance of human beings.

The *karam* celebration begins on 11th day of the lunar month of *Bhado* (August-September) and continues till the end of harvest season. Although the feast is meant to ensure protection of standing crops, it is primarily the feast of unmarried girls who have been recently engaged. They pray to the *Karam Raja* (Creator) for the blessing of healthy children in their future life in order to perpetuate the *family, clan* and *tribe*. He is symbolized by the *karam* branch (*Adina cordifolia*). Through the *karam* story the feast is the reminder to the tribals that right from the time of creation, God is the ultimate source of all good things in life requiring *harmony* between God-Man-Nature.

Nawakhani is the feast of eating the first fruits of the new harvest. It is celebrated when the new paddy crop is ready in the lunar month of *Kuwanr* (September-October). The head of each household sacrifices a chicken to the *ancestors* for giving the gift of life, land and livestock to their descendants. The choicest portion of the festal meal is first offered to the ancestor spirits and a libation of rice beer is poured to them and prayers are offered to them to get their blessing and protection upon them.

The *soharai* feast begins on the eve of the new moon day in the lunar month of *Kartik* (October-November). It is celebrated to honour the cattle helpful in agriculture. The cattle are indispensable for the tribals in agriculture. They are the tribe's most prized gifts and possessions given by God. That is why they are given a royal treatment on this day. Their hoofs are washed with rice beer, horns are anointed, necks are garlanded and heads are adorned. They are fed on soaked pulse grains mixed with salt. According to a myth, God once came down to destroy a monster unseen, which used to eat up human beings. He brought along with Him a *bull* and took shelter in the hut of a kind, old and poor widow before he accomplished his mission. The dung of this bull in its shed turned into gold and the poor and needy widow became rich. Thus, the

soharai feast is celebrated in the background of this mythological account. *Maghe* feast is celebrated in the month of *Magh* (January-February) to honour the house servant who works for a family during the year.

Thus, the annual feasts of the tribals are very closely linked with the annual agricultural cycle and centre around the good health and prosperity of their children, cattle and crops as blessings of God. In them they find their joy and happiness.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. How is the tribal spiritual outlook on nature expressed in the feast of *sarhul*?

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3.5 LET US SUM UP

In the tribal worldview space (totality of creation) is central. Everything has to be understood in the perspective of creation. Harmony with space or creation is the starting point of their spirituality and their search for liberation. An awareness of being one with the whole of creation is, therefore, the spiritual foundation of the tribal people. In this unity of creation and spirituality, there is no clear cut distinction between sacred and secular, religion and non-religion. One sees the Supreme being in space/creation and not outside of it. Tribals conscious of the Supreme Being try to live a good, upright, ethical and moral life which is quite a genuine spiritual life. Their natural goodness like simplicity, sincerity, honesty and hard work is certainly the reflection of their inner spiritual life.

3.6 KEY WORDS

Spirituality: Broadly speaking it means a person's spiritual life as opposed to physical or sense life. It is the exercise or application of our spiritual faculties, intellect and will in order to enter into communion with the Divine.

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3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. In the creation accounts the Munda and Ho traditions say that human beings filled the whole earth and offended their Creator with their *evil ways* and lost His favour upon them. According to Santals the human beings *did not respect* one another by behaving like he-buffaloes and she-buffaloes. In the Kharia account they became *proud* and *arrogant* before their Creator by their destructive ways. Similarly, in the Kurukh account they with their own *excreta* polluted the earth which was a beautiful creation of their Creator. The last comment is a strong symbolic way of saying that the human beings had committed a very serious and disgusting offence against their Creator.

2. Life is experienced in a paradoxical existence of good and evil, life and death, joy and suffering etc. Tribals feel helpless in some of these situations, and, therefore, they approach God in order to restore their state of wellbeing.

Among tribals, there are many forms of approaching God mainly by way of offering sacrifices to Him and praying to Him in an informal but personal way. Through these approaches, they want to obtain blessing, viz. happiness and prosperity of life in terms of sound health and increase in *progeny, cattle* and abundant yield from *crops* and secondly to ward off evil.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. Marriage gives the fullest participation of an individual in the life of the community with duties and responsibilities to shoulder for the good of the *family, clan* and *tribe* as a full grown up and mature adult. It marks and strengthens the ties of union between husband and wife and also of the two families and their ancestors.

2. Giving the name of one of the ancestors to the child shows the faith of the tribals in the life after death. The ancestor chosen for the child becomes his/her guardian. The name thus discovered indicates that the goal of this earthly life is to attain the *ancestral community* at long last. It is in this community that the tribe lives for ever.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

1. The *sarhul* (flower festival) celebration centres around the *sarna* (sacred grove) deity. She is the guardian spirit of the whole village with its inhabitants, their children and cattle. She is responsible for good monsoon and bumper crops during the year. Her abode is the sacred grove near the village. The village priest offers the sacrifice of a chicken to her on a handful heap of rice in order to get her favour upon the village community. It is also believed on this feast day that *marriage* between the *earth* and the *sky* takes place and due to this mystical union that nature brings forth plenty of good things for the living and sustenance of human beings.

UNIT 4 TRIBAL LIFE AS ORIGINAL PHILOSOPHIZING

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Tribal Life and Philosophizing
- 4.3 Philosophy as Tribal Wisdom
- 4.4 Cosmotheandrim in Tribal Worldview
- 4.5 Tribal Philosophy in Transition
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 Key Words
- 4.8 Further Readings and References
- 4.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.0. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit—the last one with which tribal philosophy-study is concluded—is to give a sense of having delved into tribal philosophy by looking into a couple of its intricacies. Although many details of the ‘tribal worldview and philosophy’ have been considered in the earlier units, the importance of the present Unit is that it sums up the rationale as well as the possible outlook on tribal philosophy with special reference to Indian context. In this unit we shall try to trace the Contours of Tribal Life out of which or through which we access the philosophy as wisdom heritage of tribal peoples. Tribal Life in the way it manifests a worldview and wisdom compares with other peoples and therefore we shall trace the common philosophical undercurrents that links the tribal worldview with rest of humanity and end by showing how the texture and discourse of philosophy as among all peoples is under transition also among tribal peoples.

Thus by the end of this Unit you should be able:

- to have a deeper understanding of tribal philosophy;
- to relate it with wisdom heritage of all peoples;
- to understand the cosmotheandric character of tribal philosophy;
- to know the reasons for transitions in the philosophy of living communities of peoples

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Learning and writing the philosophy of the tribal/indigenous/advansi peoples of the world/India is a project to reclaim an ancient tradition. It is not merely a revisit to some ancient land, peoples or way of life. Because in its pristine purity in an uncontaminated stagnant manner it never existed nor is it presently available. However, the ongoing evolution of traditional worldviews is available wherever there are tribal/advansi communities of sizeable number preserving their way of life – customs, beliefs and practices. The reclamation process is a manner of revisiting these life-experiences and strengthening them, or allowing them to undergo the process of adjustments and adaptations to the evolving sensibilities on the one hand and preserving their resilience to withstand and outgrow the onslaught of massive interventions by the agents of progress, development, change.

In this unit in what follows an attempt shall be made to explain some aspects or ways of perceiving the worldview of tribal communities across the world and especially in India as having much to offer for modern day living. The original contribution, in the insightful ways in which the concerns of nature, the human beings and the divine realm have been understood and related with offers the scope for tribal and all other philosophies.

4.2. TRIBAL LIFE AND PHILOSOPHIZING

The geographical and numerical spread of the numerous tribes becomes a matter of significance in assessing their origin, history of movement and the present problems. The original settlers of the land, wherever they are is a credit which goes unsaid. The reasons for migration might have

been the urge to preserve their life style by seeking distance from the onslaughts they were subjected to over the millennia in different waves.

A serious look at the philosophy of the tribal/advansi peoples is necessitated not only because of the pressures they face in these times to perpetuate and preserve their identity but also because their legacy and heritage is a cultural resource that can address many a contemporary problem. This projection arises equally from the distaste towards the aggressive proliferation of a homogenizing monocultural worldview backed by science and technology and their promoters who stand to gain but also because of the potential contained in tribal/advansi worldview to address the pressing problems of the world with a viable alternative.

A deeper look into the tribal worldview is necessitated also by the numerical size and spread of the population across the country especially in its mountainous ranges. Besides along with their counterparts, the Dalit people, they form $\frac{1}{4}$ of the population of the country. Secondly these peoples have been by stroke of a pen subsumed into or coerced into an identity which has been thrust upon them. The allegiance they offer to such claims made by the dominant groups needs to be revisited.

In other words, the indigenous, advansi, tribal worldview is being reclaimed not as antidote but rather as a valuable precursor to the mainstream that awaits its integration on a dialogical egalitarian premise for the welfare and sound future of either groups. Therefore it becomes imperative for both tribal/advansi/dalit groups as well as the dominant communities to address the worldview of the tribal. Once this worldview is recognized, acknowledged and promoted its impact will begin to challenge prevailing paradigms of perception that tend towards either isolationism or assimilationism on the part of majority.

The search for the tribal/advansi worldview /philosophy is also a matter of empowering a new generation of young people who have been partly integrated or assimilated into the dominant worldview to see the continuity with the past and the possibility of creating a future that offers new possibilities or stays clear of the potential threats the contemporary world is facing economically and ecologically.

The study and elaboration of the tribal worldview across the country and continents also brings gain to the respective tribal/ adivasi groups in creating a network, link and points of mutual admiration and assimilation of values. The adivasi tribal of Chotanagpur are unique in the world in terms of coexistence without inter-tribal warfare or mutual extermination.

The north eastern tribes have shown great resilience in preserving their traditions through adaptive strategies by means of giving free education that brings access to the wider world. Similarly the earth related sustainable economies of most groups of tribal peoples become a pointer for the future of humankind. The communitarian sense of the tribe acts as a strong antidote to the evils of extravagant individualism visible in the consumer market oriented societies.

Reclaiming the philosophy of the tribal is in other words reinstating their traditional conceptions of God, relational bonds between the humans and their self-perception vis-à-vis the land and its materiality. These can be elaborated and much work has been done in this direction. This worldview is to be viewed as original rather than an imitation of some other group or people is a point to be noted in particular.

4.3. PHILOSOPHY AS TRIBAL WISDOM

Philosophy of a people manifests the collective wisdom gathered and preserved in oral or written form over a period of time and across many generations. The Tribal communities and their worldviews are inherently related to and part of their religious perceptions and practices. We shall look at the ways in which this diversity of religious manifestations have been codified and also look at the very name the carriers of this wisdom have been assigned.

The religious diversity has been variously described: personal-impersonal; great-little traditions; cosmic-metacosmic, organized-unorganized, of scripture and without scriptures, with founders and without founders, theoretical oriented and non-theoretic; orthodox /traditional and new age. There is also the delineation of the religious reality into the three broad categories of 'world

religion', 'new religious movement' and 'indigenous religions'. Along this diverse categorization process of religion and their underlying religious experiences what is attempted is to map the contours of the primordial religious experiences enshrined in practices that still continue even under the cover of metacosmic, major religious traditions of the indigenous communities wherever they are found in India or other parts of the world. The tribal communities across the world have been agents of assimilation as well as resistance to the practices whether political, social or religious of dominant communities. This phenomenon ought to be seen as part of a process of establishing their autonomy and means for claiming acknowledgement for their uniqueness is something that surfaces on closer scrutiny of different tribal communities and especially their histories.

Study of indigenous wisdom is often taken to be an overflow from the anthropological studies on 'indigenous cultures'. In describing the varieties of religions or activities known as indigenous the focus is on 'finding the common ground'. In capturing the sense of 'indigeneity,' often the labels used - 'primitive,' 'archaic' and 'pre-literate' or 'non-literate' – turn out to be misnomers. The word 'primal' though objected to because of its reference to something of the 'archaic' meaning technologically simple could nonetheless carry forward a positive meaning of being original and of the source. Any of these terms if intended to describe a people's situation to be replaced by 'western rationality' or by any 'one of the missionizing world religions' would be a problem notwithstanding the possibility of agency being granted to these communities to rework these intrusions to their advantage. How they attempt this reworking and recording the same is what contemporary research projects are engaged in.

In capturing the wisdom of the indigenous experience there is a stress and emphasis on the 'traditional religiosity.' It is 'indicative of strong links to remember past activities and intimates various interesting ways of encouraging memory, acknowledgment and observance.' It refers to the non-personal power animating all of reality, visible and invisible and approximation of that power through religious activity and its manipulation for the personal and community benefit. In this sense every 'tribe' is a nation however small and localized numerically or spatially and not to be taken in the pejorative use by the dominant forces to subdue and assimilate peoples at the

peripheries to come into the mainstream of language and religion shelving their ethnic identity and uniqueness.

In contrast, the indigenous experience is viewed within the alternative modernity scheme by scholars, be it in the studies on religion or medicinal knowledge systems and be it of Australian Aboriginals or African populations or Indian Tribals and Dalits. Some would like to link the indigenous experience as a continuation of the vitalism that Henri Bergson referred to; a promotion of the primal life force into modernity, against modernity and seeking its own modernity. In this worldview the earth is a 'magical territory perceived as the extension of the community body in relation to the ancestors'. Wisdom, in the tribal perspective, emerges out of a synchronic relationship experienced by the collective giving them legitimacy for action and existence.

Relationship to God, in African Tribal religions is a comparative case in this regard. In a number of traditions, the supreme God is not any farther nor less active than other entities: it is the mode of His presence and action, which is different. It is not human being who commands His manifestations. He has neither temple nor priests. One does not pray, one does not offer sacrifices, one only thanks Him. He gives those things which human beings need and it is offensive to ask Him 'for one does not tell the boss what he should do.' It is up to the human beings not to place any obstacles to the circulation of God's gift. It is up to him to re-establish the harmony with all creatures. He does it through a collective meal as a sign of communion with God, with spirits with ancestors, and human beings. It is not a question of mediation nor an efficacious right to placate God, but a gesture of communion to signify that human beings are disposed to receive his gifts. Love does not constitute the background of this relation and it is difficult to speak of an alliance because an alliance is tied to a cult and gives its *raison d'être*. God is not the principal object of cult in animist religions. According to Goetz "the ultimate conduct of God is to leave to human beings to decide for themselves in what concerns them... He is a gentleman more than a Lord, who, having decided to create human beings, free and responsible, plays the game till the very end. He is too great to make histories."

The traditional conception of the divinely human and humanly divine wisdom is best seen in the diverse forms of accessing the spiritual realm found in various communities. Hitchcock

comments that the phenomena of trance and possessions have a sense of ‘immediacy of everyday importance, but a part of their fascination for the observer is the knowledge of how central they have always been in human experience. The central feature a belief that we can enter into a direct and very personal communication with another world – was probably born with self-consciousness and the ability to talk.’ Accessing the multiple levels of consciousness to which special occasions and special persons were privileged lead to the derivation of the wisdom perspective.

In looking into ways in which possession has been understood two orientation can be noted: one, ‘a movement of the soul outward and upward to immerse itself in what lay beyond’; the other, ‘when what lay beyond came inward and penetrated the soul.’ Flight as a symbol of mystical experience, feather as a symbol of the flight that takes to connection with the world beyond is central to many communities. The mediators of this experience become significant persons in the community. Shamans are in control of the psychic world of the possessed as well as the community that want an interpretation of the possession. In this regard they resemble psychiatrists. Shaman is one whose personality resonates empathetically with the possessed and the family kith and kin. It is a process of curing and thus restores the harmony. The persons capable of restoring harmony thus became the ‘wise men and women’ of the community, playing the mediatory role of providing ‘enlightenment’ to the rest. This harmonious tenor of the wisdom provider needs further clarification and we shall do so in the next section.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What is your understanding of original tribal philosophy?

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2) What does it mean to say Tribal philosophy is part of an indigenous experience?

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4.4. COSMOTHEANDRISM IN TRIBAL WORLDVIEW

Cosmotheandrim is a word coined by a contemporary intercultural philosopher of repute Raimon Panikkar. However, it is an encapsulation of the philosophies underlying diverse traditions inclusive of the philosophies of the primordial peoples. A quote from his very writings conveys what the concept means and then we shall try to see how it captures the primordial/ adivasi/ tribal people’s worldview.

The cosmotheandric principle could be stated by saying that the divine, the human and the earthly – however we may prefer to call them – are the three irreducible dimensions which constitute the real, i.e., any reality inasmuch as it is real... What this intuition emphasizes is that the three dimensions of reality are neither three modes of a monolithic undifferentiated reality, nor are they three elements of a pluralistic system. There is rather one, though intrinsically threefold, relation which expresses the ultimate constitution of reality. Everything that exists, any real being, presents this triune constitution expressed in three dimensions. It is not only the fact that everything is directly or indirectly related to everything else: the radical relativity or pratyasamutpada of the Buddhist tradition, but also it is stressed that this relationship is not only constitutive of the whole, but that it flashes forth, ever new and vital, in every spark of the real.

Three assumptions lay behind Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision. The first is that reality is ultimately harmonious. It is neither a monolithic unity nor sheer diversity and multiplicity. Second, reality is radically relational and interdependent so that every reality is constitutively connected to all other realities: "every being is nothing but relatedness." There is, if you like, organic unity and dynamic process where every 'part' of the whole 'participates' in or 'mirrors' the whole. This corresponds to the ancient notion that every reality is a microcosm of the macro-universe. A contemporary version would be the *Gaia* principle. Third, reality is symbolic, both pointing to and participating in something beyond itself. We do not have a God separate from the world, a world that is purely material, nor humans that are reducible to their own thought-processes or cultural expressions. While it is important to recognise the "symbolic difference" between God and the world, as between one religion and another, for Panikkar, all cultures, religions and peoples are relationally and symbolically entwined with each other, with the world in which we live, and with an ultimate divine reality. He describes the cosmotheandric principle as an "intuition of the threefold structure of all reality, the triadic oneness existing on all levels of consciousness and reality."

The insight of Panikkar, we could say, goes back to the primordial vision of reality enshrined in tribal worldview even as it is in the Buddhist, the Christian or the Hindu worldviews. As for Tribals it is coloured by a profound reverence for life, and a deep sense of connectedness to the spiritual realities underlying all creation; further it is a view-point that human beings are a part of the natural universe, as spiritual beings are, including the human people; and that it entails a deep love for "mother" earth, for the natural landscape, for the animals and birds and fishes and skies and waters and mountains and oceans.

Tribals believe in a supreme God who is the creator of all that exists. He has created human beings and taken care of them. Some tribes speak of God creating the earth with the help of some creatures such as golden kingfisher, earthworm or tortoise. Tribals believe in benevolent and malevolent spirits. The supreme God has control over all the spirits who control as it were the cosmic elements and the spirits in turn can be maneuvered by the humans through their sacrificial ritualistic actions.

Fellowship and solidarity are the basic characteristics of a tribal society. Solidarity is expressed and experienced in giving and receiving life, being responsible for one's deeds and sharing one's possessions with other human beings. Tribals have a strong sense of community centeredness. They help each other through cooperative farming. All their celebrations end with a fellowship meal. In tribal religion, sacrificial meal concludes the ritual sacrifice. Its symbolic meaning lies in the ritual transformation of and harmony in the world through immolation of the victim. After the animal has been sacrificed the tribals cook its meat and all eat the sacred meal. It is a joyful celebration in which everybody is invited to participate and it comprises aspects of gift, communion and reconciliation.

The tribal communities interact with all living and non-living realities of the world. In fact, according to them, all the realities have life. They speak to the particles, to the stars, constellations, land, rivers, stones and rocks, hills) and mountains and every living and non-living beings during these prayer sessions. Through this sacrifice or the worship, the tribals wish to strike a cosmic balance and create an atmosphere of brotherhood and sisterhood, with the whole of cosmic realities. It is an attempt to have a cosmic fraternity. The Lepchas, an East Himalayan autochthonous tribe has for instance over the years tried to bring this cosmic balance locally and trans-locally through a principle called *NUNG-NAHAN*. Literally speaking, it would mean, the "guest first". It manifests a philosophy of life where, the guest or the other is more important than oneself. A philosophical attitude such as this can pervade every aspect of the life of a people and can influence their very existence.

While speaking about the relationship between Humans and the nature, for most tribes, it is the nature that takes precedence. It is the nature that occupies the first important place. It is the nature that deserves care and respect. It shows that there is an eco-centric approach instead of an anthropocentric one. Therefore the journey is through nature to God with the celebrations marking the gratitude to the Creator God for all that has been created.

They have an abiding sense of responsibility for restoring the ecological balance between human beings and mother earth. The tribal people revere the Earth as 'Mother', to whom they belong, the source of life, a gift from the Creator, and that humankind can never be more than a trustee of the land, with a collective responsibility to preserve it. The Earth is the core of their culture, and the origin of their identity as a people. It is the land that connects them with their past as the home of their ancestors, with the future as the legacy they hold in trust for their children and their children's children. Along with economic significance, the traditional land base holds important symbolic and emotional values for tribal people. It is the repository for ancestral remains, group origin sites and where their sacred spirits dwell.

Philosophy is a vision/worldview/a perspective. Yet it is a total vision and comprehensive perspective. It is self validatory and all encompassing. The tribal worldviews have this 'all encompassing' perspective without at the same time there being a missionising totalitarian tenor to it. Tribal worldviews do not claim totalitarian subscription by all other than those within the tribe; it does provide vision of God, world and the human realm to its members.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What is your understanding of Cosmotheandrim?

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2) How is Cosmotheandrim a part of Tribal philosophizing?

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4.5. TRIBAL PHILOSOPHY IN TRANSITION

Tribal communities across the world are experiencing the onslaught of modernity, western, Europeanized mold of progress and development eating into their land physical space and their younger generations the carriers of their ancient tradition. On the one hand no culture whether tribal or not, have remained static down the centuries. Changes of place, continent and changes effected through climatic and other factors of rivers and earthquakes and volcanoes have shifted people and their life styles have undergone transformations. However, the present ecological crisis has thrown up the opportunity before the world of recovering an attitude and approach to life that values nature and environment. In order to do so as return or reappraisal of traditional tribal worldview is a requisite. If so, it is neither a matter of civilizing the Tribal nor a matter of de-civilizing the moderns but a way of rising up to the challenge of transition imperative for survival.

The cultural transitions are bound to affect the way life is being viewed by the present and upcoming generations of tribes. This in effect is bound to bring in a change in their philosophy. The more intriguing and yet interesting aspect of a study of tribal philosophy is that every one wherever one is located, and considers himself or herself as having had it all in terms of understanding and self perception, is ultimately cocooned in a tribal world. The tribal worldview salvages such avocations because of its innocent non-claim to universality, and yet it challenges as all tribes across the past four hundred years have been, ever since the onslaught of modernity and enlightenment paradigms, to rethink ones assumptions and question ones presuppositions as to be understood by other tribes across the road, or even within ones own household. The interculturality of which there is ever growing acceptance and demand is arising out of the tribal worldviews that have prevailed down through the centuries, despite attempts to eradicate and nullify them.

There is a prevailing tendency to perceive and assess the tribal reality in a static frame. It means a normative reference is applied to the anthropological and ethnographic descriptions available of communities. On to these descriptions, besides, a value judgment is often added as to mean that the tribal is yet to be mainstreamed and developed. This assumption leads to casual and negligent approach to the disruption caused to the people and their livelihood in the name of development. Though the project is undertaken in their name yet they turn out to be the victims of development which others continue to enjoy. A development work begun in an area attracts people from else where and additional qualified workforce is brought into the location. These and other processes of alienation of the tribes from their natural habitat have lead to the transitions in their way of life and mentality affecting their very worldview.

These transitions can be observed in the following:

Environmental Changes

Societal Changes

Generational Changes

Family Changes

Personal Changes

Collective Changes

Environmental Changes: Tribal way of life and outlook intrinsically dependent as they are on nature and on it their livelihood and sustenance any climatic and environmental changes are bound to affect their lifestyle and mode of adherence to tradition with its values and customs. These may not always be radical or immediately perceivable. However environmental changes do bring about cultural changes.

Societal Changes: The composition of society changes when foreign non-tribal elements are introduced into their habitat. This has often been encouraged as a means to assimilate or even co-opt them into mainstream dominant community's practices. Sometimes these social engineering interventions have eventually wiped out the uniqueness of tribal outlook and way of life. On the other hand, occasionally, these societal interventions have also been instrumental in preserving their way of life despite odds.

Generational Changes: The impact of environmental hazards – volcanoes, drought and famine, earthquakes etc which forced them to move to other locations or developmental projects by which outsiders infiltrated into their habitat wherein the impact has been felt especially on the younger generations. The upcoming generations have as a matter of survival adapted to new circumstances and expectations. This has in general resulted in the transitions of tribal outlook and way of life.

Family level Changes: The interventions of external agents, the adaptability of families to new neighbours and work opportunities elsewhere have brought in changes at the family level which too eventually is indicative of the tribal philosophy undergoing transition. Changes in family values and ethics, morality and religion are to greater or lesser extent indicators of transitions in their philosophies.

Personal Changes: Any and all of the above transitions have a personal level implication. The subject, the individual tribal is the one who ultimately bears the brunt of the changes that the environment or society experiences or allows itself to be subjected to. On the other hand, it is the resistance of the individual, despite odds, to preserve language and culture, religion and customs that makes the tribal world to survive as a distinct entity even amidst the modern conceptualizations of life and its meaning.

Collective Changes: All of the above changes when collectively applied to a tribal community of one region then that tribe can be said to be in throes of transition and its worldview thereby undergoes minor or major modifications. This is also apparent from ethnographic descriptions.

However, the more serious thought is to be given to the fact the tribal worldview is a constant in the history of human civilizations and it does well for humankind to appropriate its values and preserve the same given the trajectory of collapse and resurgence of civilizations that the world has witnessed thanks to the ever replenishing nature.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What are the reasons for the transitions in Tribal culture/philosophy?

.....
.....
.....
.....

2) How do Tribal communities experience the Transitions in their culture?

.....
.....
.....

4.6. LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to give a summation of Tribal philosophy, by highlighting its originality as consisting in the way it links the pre-philosophical age of ancient traditions with the ever vibrant and changing concerns of post-modern societies. In keeping with the contemporary understanding we have shown the uniqueness of Tribal Life and ways of philosophizing in order to show the unique Tribal wisdom therein. We have besides made the claim that ‘Cosmotheandrim’ as understood and elaborated by Raimon Panikkar enables us to link the ancient past with the present not only of the Tribal communities but also the dominant societies. It is our conviction that the transitions being experienced by the Tribal communities, especially in India, though places them in a constraining situation of having to rework their wisdom, have much to contribute to contemporary search for new modes of wellbeing. Finally the original philosophizing contained in the ‘first philosophies’ of these diverse communities carry forward the future of humanity in these times of ecological and environmental awareness.

4.7. KEY WORDS

Original: A positional source from which arises something new and creative for the benefit of the future.

Tribal Wisdom: The unique knowledge and way of life accumulated over centuries by the Tribal communities of the world.

Cosmotheandric: A Panikkarian way of defining the perennial wisdom as consisting in the coexistence of the threefold dimensions of the 'divine', 'human' and 'cosmic' in each and every aspect of the totality of reality.

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4.9. ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check your progress I

Tribal Philosophy is the worldview which contains the meaning systems of the tribal peoples of the world. These tribal philosophies are original reflections on the relationship human beings have from primordial times experienced and have passed on. Down the centuries these peoples have innovated their understanding and preserved their traditions not only for the benefit of their own communities, but for the welfare of the human family. Assimilating their value systems, therefore, is imperative for the future sustenance of humanity upon earth. They communicate an original mode of perceiving and relating to nature by which one may attain enlightenment and succeed to preserve harmony.

The term 'indigenous' has come to mean that which is of the place than something that has been brought from outside. In recent times a debate is on as to who are people who can rightfully claim the status of indigeneity. In India, it cannot be denied that the tribals of central, south and especially north east India must be granted this status, as people who by and far the inhabitants of their habitats from ancient times. The unique relationship a people have with their environment which colours and shapes their worldview is also implied in the expression 'indigenous experience'. Transcribing that experience in a coherent universally understandable language brings about 'tribal philosophy'.

Answers to Check your progress II

Cosmotheandrim is a word that communicates the intricate connections and permanent relationships between the three dimensions of reality – World, God and Human beings. The world view of any and every people contain an explanation of the relatedness between these

three dimensions. In this sense, cosmotheandricism is part of all philosophies, marking it as the core of a perennial philosophy.

The attempt in the present study is to show that Tribal Philosophy is primarily cosmotheandric, meaning to say it highlights the relationships between nature (world/earth), human (community) beings and the transcendently or immanently divine (more than worldly and human) aspect in diverse ways in their myths and legends.

Answers to Check your progress III

Cultures whether small or big, are never static. The changes that tribal communities have experienced over the past centuries have primarily to do with their habitats – either by migration they had to leave their places, or due to ‘development’ they have had to seek out new locations for survival. Natural calamities like volcanoes, earthquakes, floods and famines too have had a toll on the tribal communities and their efforts to preserve a pristine tradition. Contemporarily, the phenomenon of Globalization too is making inroads into tribal cultures affecting their worldviews.

The challenges to Tribal philosophy come from the varied ways in which the changes occurring on many fronts have to be faced creatively by the new generations of a community. The changes they have to confront are therefore, environmental, societal, generational, family and personal levels besides the collective impact. In mutual encounter of diverse sets of people in a spirit of mutual understanding than desires to exterminate or exclude can bring about beneficial opportunities for the survival of peoples.

BLOCK 3

From the time of Puranas the society was divided into four castes, but in the course of time this division grew more rigid and violent and today this has become one of the national menace that draws the attention. Addressing the problem of Indian caste system is vital for reasons of building up an egalitarian Indian society. The word 'Dalit' in the recent past has gained so much attention that its meaning has gained international recognition. It mainly refers to the so-called untouchables of Indian caste system. It's only during the recent time it has gained its importance in the philosophical usage. The ancient Indian scriptures are the ones that initialized the whole division of the society and leading to its rigid misinterpretation. The legalizing in the Vedas and the Upanishads has given a religious character to this whole state of affairs, from which India is trying hard to liberate itself. The structural division of the society itself is violence.

This block, consisting of four units, dwell on the topic of dalits, their way of life and the discrimination that they undergo and the measures that are adopted to overcome discriminations.

Unit 1 deals with the Story of the Term 'Dalits' and the people belonging to this group. This unit clarifies about the origin of the term, the etymology, the way the class has been treated in the past and in the contemporary times, the various discriminations faced by the dalits in the time past and the status of the people in the post-independent era.

Unit 2 probes into the discrimination of the dalits in the Indian scriptures. It examines whether and where these scriptures have adopted discriminatory approaches towards certain sections of people in the society. This unit will initially define who is a Dalit and will try to locate such groups in ancient India as described in the ancient scriptures.

Unit 3 studies the various types of Structural Violence against Dalits and Constitutional Safeguards. The main objective of this Unit is to contextualize philosophy especially in setting right the social problems. The various types of structures that cause violence are religious, economic, social, political and cultural. The Government of India has identified these types of structures and has taken some measures to curb such incidents. Constitutional safeguards and legal remedies are the most effective means that are available to correct the ills of social structures.

Unit 4 intends to introduce the students to the discipline of Historiography and the different approaches to Historiography and Dalit Historiography in particular. It will help the students to see how Dalit Historiography can be a tool of empowerment for the Dalits, in its significant thrust, goals and concerns. The contributions of Ambedkar towards the methodology of an Alternative and Dalit historiography have been significant.

This block deals with one of the major social problems of our society as a whole. The initial stage of caste division had a very different approach and aim, yet over the years it has gone through a lot of negative modifications that turned out to be a national issue. The state is aware of the situation and is taking steps to remedy it.



UNIT 1 THE STORY OF THE TERM DALIT AND OF THE PEOPLE

Contents

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1.2 The Story of the Term 'Dalit'

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit titled *the story of the Term 'DALIT' and of the People* aims at:

Introducing the meaning of the term Dalit in its textual and contextual understanding by tracing the historical and the social sensibilities of the term Dalit.

Discussing the context of caste system as to situate the history of the people called Dalits.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

“Oh my unfortunate Motherland! Those whom you have insulted would drag you down to their same level. Those whom you have deprived of the rights of humanity would bring you down to their same status. By avoiding the touch of man every day, you have insulted the divinity in man..., If you avoid to embrace all and shut yourself up within the thick walls of pride, you would be simply courting Death which will level you all” are the poetic but lamenting words of Rabindranath Tagore that echoes the outrage of the practice of untouchability within the Indian social organisation called the caste system. The people who are deprived of humanity, who are insulted of the divinity in man and who suffer various forms of untouchability, according to the Indian tradition are known as the *outcastes*. The recent and broadly used term that refers to the outcaste people is generally known as Dalits.

Addressing the problem of Indian caste system is vital for reasons of building up an egalitarian Indian society. Rabindranath Tagore remarks: 'The thing we in India have got to think of is this – to remove those social customs and ideals which have generated a want of self respect and a complete dependence on those above us – a state of affairs which has been brought about entirely by the domination in India of the caste system and blind and lazy habit of relying upon the authority of traditions that are incongruous anachronisms in the present age'. The mentality and the system that generate inequality and inhumanity are but casteism and caste system respectively. Dr. Ambedkar in 1936 emphasized that a socialist revolution cannot be achieved without transforming the caste system. In the ladder of caste system, the people who suffer the heaviest burden of casteism are the Dalits. R.M. Lohia notes that the removal of poverty in India cannot be achieved unless and until we first remove both caste and gender segregations. The present chapter is divided in two inclusive parts. The first part titled 'The Story of the Term Dalit' deals with different naming of Dalits in the tradition and the social practices and the second part titled 'The Story of Dalit People' deals with the historical roots and the life history of Dalit people.

1.2 THE STORY OF THE TERM "DALIT"

The Meaning of the term Dalit

The question of the meaning of the term Dalit is the concern here. Philosophically speaking, there are two important ways by which the meaning of a/any term or a sentence may be clarified. They are the *textual* and the *contextual*. The textual meaning of a term implies both (i) Sense and (ii) reference of the term. Generally speaking, the connotative meaning of the term is said to be the sense of the term and the denotative meaning of the term is said to be reference of the term. Take for instance the term 'rose', which connotatively mean that rose is a kind of flower with some specific characters and denotatively it means the actual flower called rose. Thus the textual meaning of the term rose refers to connotative sensibility and the denotative sensibilities of it. The contextual meaning of a term refers to both (i) the historical and (ii) the social implications. Take for instance, the term, *prohita* or priest in the Hindu tradition. The term *prohita* cannot be understood completely merely by its sense and reference (textually) alone. It requires a specific

social context namely Hinduism both as a religion and a social order. Accordingly to understand the meaning of the term Dalit, it is necessary that we trace both the textual and the contextual meaning of it.

The word 'Dalit' in the recent past has gained so much attention that its meaning has gained international recognition. It mainly refers to the so-called untouchables of Indian caste system. It is used in the modern times in literature, in the realms of politics, economics, culture, sociology, anthropology, religious studies and theology. Only in the last decade the term Dalit is employed in philosophical literature.

The Numerical Strength of Dalit Population

Dalits are the people who by the Government of India under the *Presidential Order 1950* (amended in 1956 and 1990) are generally referred Scheduled Castes. K.S. Sharma in his work, *The scheduled Castes, People of India, National Series Volume II*, identifies that there are 450 Dalit communities out of 751. According to the Census 1981, these Dalits formed 15.75 per cent of India's population, and numbered 104,754,623. Presently as per the official estimate, there are 170 million Dalits in India, and the estimate excludes the number of Dalit Christians, Dalit Muslims and the Dalits residing in other countries. There are about 20 million Dalit Christians, 50 million Dalit Muslims and 20 million Dalits residing in other countries. This provides at approximately 260 million Dalits in the world. As per the survey reports, Dalits are about 17 per cent of the total Indian population. Among them 62.59 per cent are illiterates and about 50 per cent each live in below poverty line both in rural and urban areas. As per the 1991 Census Data, taken from '*Database on Scheduled Caste Literacy in India*', of the total number of Indian female population the Dalit women constitute 16.3 per cent. This means that the majority of Dalit female population live in rural areas that evidently deny the facilities of progress that are available in urban areas.

Etymology of the Term 'Dalit'

Linguistically the term Dalit has its roots both in Indian and Hebrew languages. The term *Dalit* in Sanskrit is both a noun and an adjective. As a noun, *Dalit* may be used for all three genders,

masculine, feminine and neuter. Etymologically the term is derived from the Sanskrit root word 'dal' which means to crack, open, split, and so on. When used as a noun or adjective, it means burst, split, broken or torn asunder, downtrodden, scattered, crushed, destroyed, oppressed, subjugated. Suppressed, broken. (Refer *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* by Sir Monier Monier-Williams, Delhi, 1988 (reprinted), p. 471; and also *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary* by Vaman Shivram Apte, Delhi, 1989 (reprinted), p. 493)

The Dalits called by various names

Prior to the usage of the term Dalit, the so-called untouchables or outcastes were designated by various trivial names. The Vedic literature depicts them as *Desas, Dasyas, Asuras, Antyajas, Avarnas, Nisadas, Mlechasa, Chandalas, Panchamas* etc. These name designate the Dalits in a derogative manner in the sense that the Dalits are unholy, devilish, untouchables, enemies, and outcastes. These naming depict pejorative social (upper caste) attitude towards the Dalits and ill treatment meted over to the Dalits for centuries.

The uncomplimentary and depreciative manner of naming and treating the Dalits remain to the common characteristic feature of Indian caste system. For centuries until the present day, the Dalits were treated as people devoid of human dignity and self-worth. If we ponder on the question of unifying factor of Indian society there seems to be none other than this negative character of unification that reduces the Dalits as no-people. It is not surprising to note that in every state of Indian nation the Dalits are unfortunately but purposely identified callous or heartless manner. In Tamilnadu, the Dalits are identified as *Paraihas, Pallas,* and *Chakkillyas,* which as well depict the sub-castes among the Dalits. In Andhra Pradesh they are known by the names such as *Malas* and *Madigas* that situate the Dalits as untouchables. In Kerala, a state known for its high literacy rate for many years, the Dalits are called as *Pulayas, Cherumans,* and *Ezhavas.* In Karnataka, the Dalits are known by the names such as *Holeyas* and *Idigas.* In Uttar Pradesh they are called by names such as *Charmars* and *Pasis.* In Punjab and Haryana they are branded as *Valmikis* and *Bhangis.* In Maharashtra they are categorised as *Mahars* and *Manghas.* Thus if we draw the geo-political Indian map, it will solely depict the caste-category of pigeonholing the Dalit community as untouchables. These identifications speak for themselves

the vulgarity of caste system and dire humiliation that Dalits undergo in the social history of India. They are not the names by which the Dalits called themselves, but they are the pejorative names by which the upper caste people identified the Dalits. They express strong sensibilities of contempt, hatred and inhumanity towards the Dalit community.

The British Government for reasons of identifying the different communities of Indian nation, categorised the Dalits as Scheduled Castes meaning that the Dalit community is a separate community as they were reduced to age long inhuman treatment which in turn needs special and justifiable attention and action for social progress.

Interestingly Mahatma Gandhi had his share in calling the Dalits by names. He designated the Dalits as *Harijans*. The term *Hari* means, the Divine or God (but an inferior God in comparison to the Supreme God known as Brahman) and the term *jans* means people. Thus in combination, the term *Harijans* implied that the Dalits are 'people of God'. But then this naming of Dalits as *Harijans* did not cultivate any positive attitude towards Dalits. Instead it only continued to reinstate and serve the negative attitude of the upper castes towards the Dalits. This naming as *Harijans* further implied the meaning that the Dalits are but the children who are born to *Devadasis* (*Devadasi* refer to the system of prostitution that was prevalent among the priestly communities for reasons of sexual exploitation of the selected women but unfortunately enjoyed socially approval and religious sanction). Since the period of Gandhi, the term *Harijans* gained currency to continue to identify and treat the Dalits in negative manner. The Gandhian effort to name the Dalits as children of God did not have any positive effects but it continue to reinstate the excessive caste mentality only. De facto, the so-called untouchables rejected the practice of naming them in downbeat terms. They resisted every external ways of naming them down the socio-political history of India. The forced and the externally given names only express the idea that the Dalits belong to a low grade social status and hence easily vulnerable to exploitation and dehumanization. They refused to accept the appellation and the negative implications of these very many names. They considered that naming themselves is their birth right and priority. Therefore, the term Dalit is the chosen or the preferred name by which they called themselves in the recent years. The chosen term Dalit is an expression of their historical and social identity

both as people who are oppressed in the caste system and as people who continue to struggle against or resist such forms of oppression and misidentifications.

The Meaning of the Term 'Dalit' in Contemporary Period

James Massey, a scholar in Dalit social history, in his work on '*Dalits in India*', observes that the present usage of the term *Dalit* goes back to the nineteenth century when a Marathi social reformer and revolutionary Mahatma Jotirao Phule used it to describe the outcastes and untouchables as the oppressed and broken victims of the Indian caste-ridden society. It is also believed that this usage was first coined by B.R. Ambedkar however, he employs the term Scheduled Castes or Depressed Class in most of his speeches and writings. The term Dalit gained momentum in 1970s due to the Dalit assertion to human dignity by the Dalit Panther Movement of Maharashtra. Such a usage of the term is a constant reminder of the untold sufferings and age-old oppression denoting the fact that the Dalit community for centuries is treated subhuman within the social parameters of Indian caste system. Besides its common use, the term Dalit today is specially used for those people who, on the basis of caste distinction, have been considered 'outcaste'. They were 'outcaste', because they were not according to the architects of the system fit to be included in the fourfold graded caste structure of Indian society. On the basis of this status they were made to bear extreme kinds of disabilities in the form of oppression for centuries, which made them almost lose their humanness. Thus the term Dalit for its people is not mere a title, it is both an expression of their community identity in the Indian social history, to assert their rights and to restore their identity with dignity and self worth. It as well depicts their continuous struggle for liberation. It is both a remainder of social caste oppression and a renewed identity to reassure their affirmation as a people of a nation.

1.3 THE STORY OF THE DALIT PEOPLE

The Roots of Dalit History

We need to bear in mind that the social locus and practice of caste system and the continued assertion Dalits to self dignity and identity constitutes contextual meaning of the story of the

Dalit people. Hence we shall make an attempt to trace the historical roots of the life of Dalit people here. It is a fact that we lack much of written sources about the history of Dalit people. However from the available sources we shall make an attempt make sense of the life-story of Dalits. The queries that draw our immediate concern include: what is the identity of Dalit people in the social history of India? How the Dalits are considered and treated in the Indian tradition? What is social locus in which the Dalits are situated? What are the constituting factors that construe the identity of Dalits as untouchables? And how do the Dalits view themselves or reassert their human dignity and identity? There could be number of other related issues that can be raised in the context of re-constructing the life and identity of Dalits for these are foundational and interrelated issues that go to shed light on the history of Dalits. Response to these issues is vital because they provide the basis to understand the life story of Dalits. James Massey observes: 'Though in the absence of the right material, there are some archaeological and literary sources which lead to the possible historical roots of the Dalits. Where the question of archaeological and literary sources is concerned, it seems the story of the origins of the Dalits goes far back in history. The people known as the Dalits today had definitely a beginning, similar to the beginning of other human beings on earth'. According to many scholars in history, the story of Dalits is traceable to the archaeological evidences of Mohenjodaro, Harrapa and Indus Valley civilizations whose period is approximatly fixed as 1500 B.C.

Such an observation asserts the fact that the history of Dalits as people of a nation remain to be very ancient and highly developed in its beginnings. They are the aboriginals amongst Ancient Asian civilization. However, the story of Dalits as untouchable, unseeable, and unapproachable etc are recorded in the literary sources of Vedas. This means that the life of Dalits as outcastes is of a later period, namely the period of Vedas. It is generally agreed that the Vedic literature and its world belong to the Aryan civilization. Among the famous four Vedas, the *Rigveda* contain ample evidences towards rigid adherence and practice of caste social order. This evidently implies that the prevalence of casteism came into existence right from the Vedic period whose period is roughly traceable to 1000 B.C. Thus we may infer the following:

That the people of Mohenjodaro, Harrapa and Indus Valley civilizations are the aboriginals of the then Indian continent. That the people of Mohenjodaro, Harrapa and Indus Valley

civilizations are different from the people of Vedic culture and they are generally identified as Dravidians and this in turn distinctly imply the fact that the ancient Dalits belong to the Dravidian culture.

The people of Vedic culture broadly known as the Aryans do differ from people the Dravidian culture. That between these two cultures there existed continuous conflict between these two cultures. Many of the Vedic hymns evidently imply the prevalence of a conflict between these two communities and as a result the people of Vedic community were the winners of these conflicts. To the claim that the historical roots of Dalits as touchable community is intrinsically connected with the caste world view of Aryans can be evidenced from various verses of Rig Veda. Most of the Vedic hymns or texts are addressed to Lord Indra and they narrate the rivalry between the Aryans or *Aryas* and the *Dasyas*, the excluded communities by the Aryas.

To evidence more about these two opposing groups and hostility of the Vedic People against the Dalits, few of the relevant verses from the hymns of the *Rigveda* are stated with their subsequent meaning.

vi janihayaran ye ch dasyvo... means ‘You (Indra) know well Aryas and Dasyus’
...hatavi dasyun prarya vaarnamavata ,, means..He (Indra) killed the Dasyus and protected the Aryan race (colour).

Indrapanch Kachhatinama” means Indra is the ruler of the five (races).

Tadindragni Yadus Turvasesu yad ... Druhyus Pavanusu Purusus sath.” means “O Indra-Agni, you live among (the people of) the Yadus, Turvasas, Druhyus, Anus and Purus.

par yat samudramati sur parshi paraya Turvasa Yadu svasita” means O hero (Indra)! When you came over the sea, you brought over it Turvasa and Yadu.

vadhihi dasyu dhanini.. means You (Indra) killed rich Dasyu. .

akarma dasyurabhi no amanturanya-varto amanus” means “All around us are ritual-less Dasyas who do not practice religious rituals and are alien to Vedic laws.

anaso dasyu.. means Noseless or faceless dasyus

sajatubharma chhadadadhana ojo. ... puro vimindannacharada vi dasi ... vidana vajirna dasyuve hetimasnarya...saho vadhrya sumnamindar. . dasyu hatyaya means ‘Armed with his thunderbolt,

Indra went about destroying the forts of Dasas, ... O Indra, throw your thunderbolt at the Dasyus, ... increase the power and glory of Aryas.

yo hatavahimarinata sapat sindhuna ... yo ga udajadapadha valdsaya,...yo asamanorantargina jajana... savivak sajanam Indra, means 'One who killed the Dragon and freed the Seven Rivers (*Sapatsindhu*): he who drove the cows from the Vala, One who created fire between stones, and had beaten the warriors in the battle. He, O people, is Indra.

sa vartrahendra Karsunayoni ... purandaro dasiraraiyadavi...hatavi dasyuna pura ayasinin tarita means Indra the Vartra-killer, fort-destroyer scattered the dasa, who dwelt in darkness.. he killed the Dasyus and broke the forts made of iron.

These are but few selected hymns (though there are many verses) of the *Rigveda* tell that the Dasyus were rich and wealthy and they also lived in well-fortified houses and cities, which imply the existence and the destruction of Indus valley civilization, intrusion of Aryans and consequently resulting in the birth of Dalit as outcastes. Since the Vedic period and its culture falls after the destruction of the Mohenjodaro, Harappa and Indus Valley civilizations one can evidently imply that the Aryans, namely the people of Vedic culture were responsible to the destruction of Mohenjodaro, Harappa and Indus Valley people and instruction of caste social order.

The Theory of Conflict resulting Outcaste People

Many scholars (Srivastava, Kapur Singh, Ambedkar, Smith, Basham, Chattopadhyaya, Chanda, D.D. Kosambi, and others) agree to the fact that the destruction of the Indus Valley Civilisation and contents of the hymns of the *Rigveda* are related. Both these sources point towards a war-conflict among different groups of people. This has a direct relationship with the history of Dalits, because the time of war-conflict of these opposing groups will be the beginnings of the history of the Dalits. The status of Dalits as outcastes is the direct consequence of the instruction of Vedic Social Order, the Caste System. Thus we can safely infer that the Vedic social organization is the historical context of the existence and prevalence of Dalits as outcastes or *panchamas* meaning that the Dalits fall outside the geopolitical borders of caste system. H.G. Wells, an archaeologist tells how at a point of ancient Indian history, one group (the nomad folk/The Aryan) defeated the other groups (the settled folk) and how as a result the history of

both the groups was completely changed. He wrote: 'Down pour the united nomads on the unwarlike unarmed plains; there ensues a war of conquest. Instead of carrying off the booty, the conquerors settle down on the conquered land which becomes all booty for them; the villagers and townsmen are reduced to servitude and tribute-paying, they become hewers of wood and drawers of water, and the leaders of the nomads become kings and princes, masters and aristocrats.'

Scholars like Ambedkar, Rao, Koenraad Elst, Navaratna S. Rajaram, Shrikant G. Talageri and K.D. Sethna hold the opinion that the Aryans, the people of Vedic culture and the Dravidians that include the Dalit people belong to Indian nation and therefore both these cultures are of indigenous origin.

The Theory of Invasion situating the intrusion of Aryans

Scholars namely Jyotirao Phule, Ghose, Srivastava, Chanda, Chattopadhyaya, Fuchs, Hutton, Swami Dharma Theertha, Suniti Kumar Chatterji, Jawaharlal Nehru, D.D. Kosambi, Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund and many others are of the opinion that the Aryans are not of indigenous origin and they are invaders into the Indian. According to them, Aryans are the emigrants, who originally settled in Iranian plateau, and in later periods were the invaders into Indian nation. Such a conclusion is possible due to the following factors:

A comparison between language of the Vedas and that of the Iranian Avesta proves that these languages are dialects of one and the same older language. Entire passages of Vedas may be converted into good specimens of the Avesta language by mere phonetic modifications.

The practice of religious worship of fire (*agni*) and various types of sacrifices to Gods are similar among the ancestors of the Iranians and the Vedic Aryans.

The prevalence of four fold divisions, namely the priests (*Brahmnas*), the warriors or the rulers (*Ksatriyas*), the business people (*Vaisesyas*) and the servicing labourers (*Sudras*) are common to both these groups. This is evident from the *Rigveda*, which is supposed to be the oldest literary source, the famous *Purusasukta* hymn mentions the existence of four castes: "The Brahman was his mouth, of both his arms was the Rajanya (*Ksatriya*) made, His thighs became the Vaishya, from his feet the Sudra was produced."

Thus many scholars came to believe that the Aryans are but the ancient Iranians and therefore they are not of indigenous origin which in turn meant that the Aryans were invaders in to ancient India. The Aryans during their effort to Indian settlement waged continuous war against the Dravidians.

In spite of the differences of claims amongst these theories yet there are points of commonalities namely that Dalits as untouchables did not exist during the period of Mohenjodaro, Harappa and Indus Valley civilizations; that Dalit as untouchables originated came into existence during the Vedic periods due to the Vedic social order i.e., caste system named *varnasahramadharama* in Vedic literature. Thus we can therefore be confident to assert that the roots of Dalit history is traceable to the aspect of the destruction of Mohenjodaro, Harappa and Indus Valley civilizations and the rise and settlement of Aryan race and its allied practice of caste system. The Dalits have been reduced to their present state 'by centuries of exploitation and servility' right from the establishment of the Aryan rule and its allied religious practices and taboos.

It is revealing to note that the *Upanishads* which is considered as the culmination or end portion of Vedas does have reference to the existence of outcastes as the fifth category enlisted outside the four-fold caste categories. For example, the *Chandogya Upanishad*, not only refers to the three upper castes, but also compares Chandala (outcaste) with a dog or a swine. In the tenth *khanda*, verse seven reads as follows: 'Accordingly, those who are of pleasant conduct here - the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a pleasant womb, either the womb of a Brahman, or the womb of a Ksatriya, or the womb of a Vaisya. But those who are of stinking conduct here - the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a stinking womb - either the womb of a dog, or the womb of a swine or the womb of an outcaste (*chandala*).

This means that the problem of Dalits as untouchables grew stronger during the period of Upanishads and consequently implying the idea that the birth of Dalits as untouchables is prior to Upanishads and belong to period of intrusion of Aryans and construction of Vedic hymns.

Apart from Vedas and Upanishads, the reference to Dalits as untouchable are found in other Indian traditional texts like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* (5th Century B.C), the two great epics, the *Mahabharata*, *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* that speak of undeniable faith in four-fold caste system, *Manusmriti* (the Ordinances of Manu), (possibly composed during the period A.D. 700) which segregates the people who are twice born and the people whose birth is a misnomer By the

time the *Manusmriti's* composition was complete the ill treatment of the Dalit had reached its climax.

Against the supremacy of Brahmans and the upper castes even the revolt of Mahavira (540-468 B.C.) and Gautama Buddha (563-483 B.C.) did not succeed for reasons that the attempts could not stand the supremacy and caste rigidity. Dumont notes that (a famous sociologist and a scholar on the studies Caste system) Buddhism could not survive as a force beyond the fourteenth century. The Jain strategy to deal with the problem also failed due to the fact that its opposition did not express the Dalit problem as untouchables. Jainism ultimately could not divest itself from the influence of the Hindu caste system. Buddhism faced a different kind of problem, because by the time of the *Manusmriti*, the followers of Gautama Buddha were also considered untouchables. In post-Independence India, the hundreds of thousands of Mahar Dalits of Maharashtra who became Buddhists, in 1956 and later and their progeny are known as *Bauddh*, which in Marathi has become a synonym for Mahar (untouchable).¹⁰⁴ Thus the protest of Jainism and Buddhism, against Brahmanism or the caste system could not stand the onslaught of Casteism. The later developments of Indian history may be divided into three important periods namely the Muslim period, (A.D. 700 to 1700) The British period, (A.D. 1700 to 1947) and the Post-Independence period, 1947 till date.

The Islam and the Dalit Problem

The rule of the Muslims could not address the Dalit problem for reasons that the Muslim society itself was divided into number different grades or classes like Ashrafs (honourable), Shaikhs (chiefs) and Mughals (warriors) and Pathans. The converts to Islam from untouchable communities could not find a place in any of these three categories and hence continued to be considered as untouchables.

The British Rule and the Dalit Problem

The British rule which began with the inauguration of the East India Company (London) in A.D. 1599 showed more interest in business and trade and later in successfully ruling the country with

their policies of non-interference in the internal affairs such religious and caste practices and 'divide and rule'.

Christianity and the Dalit Problem

The spread of Christianity did not attack the Caste problem and specifically the problem of untouchability of the Dalits for reasons that it showed its interests in evangelising itself; its social structure like casteism forms an hierarchy of the priestly and the lay people where in the priestly class remain upper and the later positioned lower; the fear that attack on casteism from the stand point of Dalits would limit the spread Christianity; the converts from upper-caste communities to Christianity continued to retain their upper caste mentality as well occupied high status within Indian Christianity and enjoyed privileges; The Caste Christian attitude continued to treat Dalit converts to Christianity as untouchables and socially excluded.

Reform Movements and the Dalit Problem

The efforts of most of the social reform movements such as during the British period were limited to reform rather than aimed at total change despite the fact there are individual personalities who addressed the caste and Dalit problem. The notable social reform movements include Arya samaj, Brahma samaj, Theosophical society, and Congress and Non-Brahmin Movement spearheaded by Justice party and later lead by EVR Periyar as Self Respect Movement. Arya Samaj and the Brahma Samaj's efforts to social reformation addressed the issue of retaining Hindu Identity and thus by Caste Identity; Theosophical society found its followers mostly from upper caste communities and hence the problem of Dalits was beyond the sight of it; The Pre-Independence Congress interest was political i.e., to achieve political freedom which seriously imply a transfer of political power from the British to upper-caste leaders, and not social thus deprived of the capability of addressing the Dalit issue. It is to be noted that these movements did not address the Dalit issue directly and hence the status of Dalits as untouchables and vulnerable to different forms of exploitation did persist. Most of these movements ended up with *sanskritizing* themselves, a process of self-identification as Brahmins or else belonging to the world view of Brahmanism.

Individual Personalities and the Dalit Issue

The social protest spearheaded by Jotiba Phule, Ambedkar and Gandhi is notable in the context of the Dalit traditional, historical and social identity as outcastes. The resistance to casteism (through his movement called Satyashodhak Samaj) by Jotiba Phule was greatly appreciated by Ambedkar to the extent that Ambedkar dedicated his work *Who were the Sudras* to Phule with these words: *Inscribed to the memory of Mahatma Jotiba Phule (1827-1890): The Greatest Sudra of Modern (Mahatma Jotiba Phule) India who made the lower classes among Hindus conscious of their slavery to the higher classes, and who preached the gospel that for India social democracy was more vital than independence from foreign rule.* The efforts Phule had considerable influence on Ambedkar.

The efforts of Gandhi in participating the National Congress for Independence broadly remained to be political rather than social. His social interest or dream to construct a society of the welfare of all (*Sarvodaya*) through the so-called method of non-violence however notable it may be, did not analytically decode the problem of Dalits within caste system. De facto, Gandhi like other reformers aimed at retaining the caste-system as an occupational order in the traditional language of *varnashramadharma*. To the question of social transformation the Gandhian approach was not sufficiently scientific and analytical of the Indian caste society. Gandhi had his political interests in addressing the problem of untouchability though he claimed that untouchability is sinful. Even during the period of the British, at the Round Table Conference, Gandhi strongly resisted the idea of granting separate electorate for Dalits to the extent that he went in for a fast unto death though it was supported and enhanced both by the British and Ambedkar. This means that Gandhian approach to Dalit problem lacked sufficient political will and did not reflect the stand point of Dalits themselves.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What are the reasons for the transitions in Tribal culture/philosophy?

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Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and the Dalit Question

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the pioneer in addressing the problem of Dalits as a person belonging to Dalit community particularly contributed in addressing the Dalit existential problem directly. Having born to a untouchable community (Mahars) from Maharashtra, Ambedkar understood the Dalit problem from the perspective of a Dalit. All through his life the concern for the liberation of Dalits is significant. The pain-experience of Dalit did not robe his strength to fight against casteism rather it positively contributed to understanding of it more deeply and scientifically. Ambedkar voluminous works titled as 'Writing and Speeches' (published by the Government of Maharashtra) stand witness to the fact that Ambedkar is an uncompromising person to the question of annihilating caste system. His works that chiefly aim at the Dalit issue depict the scholarship of Ambedkar in various fields such as Economics, Anthropology, Sociology, Law, Political Science, Comparative Religion, Philosophy etc. He demanded for separate electorate at the Round Table Conference though opposed by Gandhi for political reasons, found its expression as the policy of reservation or affirmative action in the constitution of India, the making of which was headed by Ambedkar himself. To question of Caste and the status of Dalits Ambedkar upheld the views that (i) it is through the practice of endogamy (marriage within the same category) that caste continue to thrive in the Indian society (ii) Caste system is diabolically political and social in nature and finds its sanction through Hindu religious practices creeds and scriptures (iii) Hinduism and Casteism are but two sides of the same coin (iv) annihilation of Caste and its allied practice of untouchability amounts to the restoration of Indian society to the status of equality and justice and the affirmation of Dalit identity in terms of human dignity.

The existential Status/Meaning of Dalits in the Post-Independent era

In the Post-Independent period, despite the constitutional guarantee to safeguard rights of Dalits, the social condition of Dalits has not substantially improved. This means that the caste-ridden

Indian society continue to resist any social transformation in terms of democracy, justice, and equality. The condition of the majority of Dalits to various forms of exploitation and thus towards social extermination remain to be a matter great concern and challenge. The following facts and figures depict the deprived social condition of Dalits: A high per cent (40 per cent) of Dalit population live in rural areas.

Nearly 20 per cent of Dalit population does not have access to safe drinking water.

The Eight Five year Plan of the Government of India, 1992-97 estimate that of the Dalit total population, 44.7 per cent are below poverty line.

The 1991 Census of India evidently records that 37.41 per cent of Dalits are illiterate.

Official reports register the fact that in 1991, 86.25 per cent of Dalit households were landless (irrespective of the land reforms policies of Indian government) and 49 per cent of Dalit population are agricultural labourers.

Dalits compose a majority of the 40 million as bonded labourers in India.

Despite the constitutional claim towards the abolition of untouchability, it continue to stay alive in various forms social prohibitions: prohibition to sit on par with dominant castes in public or private places; prohibition to inter-caste marriage; prohibition to walk with footwear in caste dominant villages; prohibition of Dalit dead bodies being carried through available paths/roads; prohibition to draw water from public village water resources; preventing exercise of franchise at elections through harassments, threats, actual murder of elected representatives from Dalit communities and forcible prevention to contest democratic elections; prohibition to demand for just wages; insult and degradation of Dalit women; The 1997-98 report of the National Sc/ST Commission reports a total number of 90925 cases of crimes and atrocities against the Dalits spread all over India. The nature of atrocities and crimes include Murder, Hurt, Rape, Kidnapping, Abduction, Dacoity, Robbery, Arson etc.

Reservation of posts for Dalits in most States of Indian nation are either not filled or delayed. As per the 1995 records, only 18.71 per cent of Dalits are in the Central Government Services.

About 70 per cent of Dalit households have no electricity and 90 per cent of have no proper sanitation facilities.

According to 1991 Census report, the female literacy rate of the Dalit population is only 23.76 per cent and the male literacy rate is about 49.91 per cent. The school drop-out rates among the Dalit communities is greater than that of the other communities.

It is alarming to note that the death rate of Dalits is higher in comparison to other communities.

The above mentioned facts are only a sample evidences that depict massive practice of social exploitation against Dalits in India. The existential situation of Dalits as people of self-worth human dignity seems to be farfetched in the contemporary periods. The Dalit right to livelihood, to gender equality, to access to land ownership, to education, to employment and reservation, to life, and to social security remain to be continued struggle amongst the Dalits. Thus the story Dalits is both a story of suffering and struggle for liberation and it is through these pain and protest state of affairs the meaning of Dalit Identity is restorable.

Check your Progress

Note: (a) Use the space provided for your answer

(b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Trace the views of Ambedkar regarding caste system and liberation of Dalits.

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1.4. LET US SUM UP

The term Dalit literally means a specific sense of oppression, exploitation within the social organization called Caste system. The etymology of the term Dalit is traceable to Hebrew and Sanskrit languages. The Dalits are the earliest settlers of India and they are indigenous population. Dalits are about 17 per cent of the total Indian population.

Dalits were called by various names such as outcastes, *Dasyas*, *Panchamas*, *harijans*, Depressed Class, Scheduled Class, etc each terms indicate the facets of social exclusion and exploitation both in tradition and in contemporary Indian society. The roots of Dalit history may be situated in the context of the factors such as the demolition of Mohenjodaro, Harrapa and Indus Valley civilizations and the emergence of Aryan race. Regarding the origin of Aryans, there are two opinions prevalent amongst the scholars: (i) they are like Dalits indigenous people (ii) they are

one of the ancient invaders to India from Iranian places. There are textual and archaeological evidences of status of conflict between Aryans and Dasyas resulting the origin of Dalits as Untouchable and vulnerable community. Despite of the presence and practice of religions such as Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Christianity that claim equality there continue to exist the practice of upper-caste domination and these religious communities are not sufficiently capable of addressing the Dalit problem squarely for reasons that casteism is both a mentality/attitude and social structure by traditional inheritance. The attempt of social reform movements in the social history of India did not address the problem of the exploitation of Dalits directly. The Gandhian approach to caste and Dalit question do lack scientific and analytical approach. However Ambedkar's approach to Dalit problem is both scholarly and socially revolutionary that really aims at the liberation of Dalits. However the facets exploitation and discrimination against Dalits continue to exist in various forms in the contemporary Post-Independent period of India. Thus the story Dalits is both a story of suffering/pain and struggle/protest assertion of Dalit Rights and Dalit liberation.

1.5 KEY WORDS

Dalit: The term indicates the sense of brokenness of the Dalits as untouchables and the struggle for liberation and self assertion.

Caste System and Casteism: Caste system refers to the hierarchical and the discriminatory sense of social organization specific to Indian tradition. Casteism is the mentality or ideology emanating from caste system.

Endogamous: the practice of marrying within once caste-fold/category.

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1.7. ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to Check Your Progress I

1. The question of the meaning of the term Dalit is the concern here. Philosophically speaking, there are two important ways by which the meaning of a/any term or a sentence may be clarified. They are the *textual* and the *contextual*. The textual meaning of a term implies both (i) Sense and (ii) reference of the term. Generally speaking, the connotative meaning of the term is said to be the sense of the term and the denotative meaning of the term is said to be reference of the term. Take for instance the term 'rose', which connotatively mean that rose is a kind of flower with some specific characters and denotatively it means the actual flower called rose. Thus the textual meaning of the term rose refers to connotative sensibility and the denotative sensibilities of it.

The contextual meaning of a term refers to both (i) the historical and (ii) the social implications. Take for instance, the term, *prohita* or priest in the Hindu tradition. The term *prohita* cannot be understood completely merely by its sense and reference (textually) alone. It requires a specific social context namely Hinduism both as a religion and a social order. Accordingly to understand the meaning of the term Dalit, it is necessary that we trace both the textual and the contextual meaning of it.

Answer to Check Your Progress II

1. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the pioneer in addressing the problem of Dalits as a person belonging to Dalit community particularly contributed in addressing the Dalit existential problem directly. Having born to a untouchable community (Mahars) from Maharashtra, Ambedkar understood the Dalit problem from the perspective of a Dalit. All through his life the concern for the liberation of Dalits is significant. The pain -experience of Dalit did not robe his strength to fight against casteism rather it positively contributed to understanding of it more deeply and scientifically. Ambedkar voluminous works titled as 'Writing and Speeches' (published by the Government of Maharashtra) stand witness to the fact that Ambedkar is an uncompromising person to the question of annihilating caste system. His works that chiefly aim at the Dalit issue depict the scholarship of Ambedkar in various fields such as Economics, Anthropology, Sociology, Law, Political Science, Comparative Religion, Philosophy etc. He demanded for separate electorate at the Round Table Conference though opposed by Gandhi for political reasons, found its expression as the policy of reservation or affirmative action in the constitution of India, the making of which was headed by Ambedkar himself. To question of Caste and the status of Dalits Ambedkar upheld the views that (i) it is through the practice of endogamy (marriage within the same category) that caste continue to thrive in the Indian society (ii) Caste system is diabolically political and social in nature and finds its sanction through Hindu religious practices creeds and scriptures (iii) Hinduism and Casteism are but two sides of the same coin (iv) annihilation of Caste and its allied practice of untouchability amounts to the restoration of Indian society to the status of equality and justice and the affirmation of Dalit identity in terms of human dignity.

UNIT 2 DALIT DISCRIMINATION IN INDIAN SCRIPTURES

Contents

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The Classification of Indian Scriptures
- 2.3 The Emergence of the Caste System
- 2.4. The Situation in the Vedas and the Upanishads
- 2.5 The Legal Works
- 2.6. The Epics
- 2.7. Let Us Sum Up
- 2.8 Key Words
- 2.9 Further Readings and References
- 2.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to provide an overview of how the ancient Indian scriptures have treated the Dalits. It will try to examine whether and where these scriptures have adopted discriminatory approaches towards certain sections of people in the society. We will see that such discriminations were more visible in the post-*Vedic* texts, which we designate as the *Smriti* texts, which include social and political treatises like the *Dharmasastras* and the epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. This unit will initially define who is a Dalit and will try to locate such groups in ancient India as described in the ancient scriptures. It will try to show that such discriminatory approaches were justified not only on the grounds of conventions and customs, but also with the aid of philosophical and metaphysical doctrines. Since the root of all such discriminations can be traced to the emergence of caste system, this unit will also begin with a discussion of caste system and will subsequently explore how the scriptures have promoted social exclusion, oppression and discrimination of a section of people in the society.

2.1. INTRODUCTION

“Dalit” is a Marathi word, which means ground, suppressed, crushed or broken to pieces and it was first used by Jyotirao Phule, who was one of the pioneers of the movement against untouchability and other caste-based and religion-based discriminations in India. Phule used the word to denote those people who were treated by upper caste Hindus as untouchables. Ambedkar also employed the word in his Marathi speeches and in 1973 the Dalit Panthers revived the term and sought to use it in order to denote all those who are oppressed in the name of caste and religion including the scheduled tribes, working people, landless and poor peasant women and all politically and economically exploited people.

The root cause of all such practices in the caste system and the discriminations based on it. Among the ancient Indian scriptures, the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* hardly contain clear references to a rigid form of caste system based on a person’s birth into a particular family or group. But the texts originated during the later period—the *Smriti* texts, the *Dharmasastras*—contain ample references to caste discriminations and they have legitimized it to a very great extent. The epics too have contributed to this.

2.2. THE CLASSIFICATION OF INDIAN SCRIPTURES

All the scriptures of ancient India do not belong to one single category, as their religious and social significance differ in important ways. For example, the *Vedas*, which are definitely the most ancient among them, were treated as more authentic and important by the orthodox *Hindu* traditions of religions and philosophies. The heterodox schools like the *Buddhism*, *Jainism* and the *Charvaka* School of materialism do not consider the *Vedas* as authority.

The *Vedas* can be dated back to 2000-1500 BC and are believed to be the documents produced by the ancient Indo-European people who came to India and settled down in the Northern parts of the sub continent by the end of 1000 BC. These people transmitted their knowledge of traditions from one generation to the next orally which constituted the *Vedic* scriptures and other various texts.

A broad division of the Indian scriptures may classify them into two groups: the *Sruti* and the *Smriti*. The *Sruti* refers exclusively to the *Vedas* which were orally transmitted from one

generation to the next. The whole of the *Vedic* literature is divided into two parts; the *karma kanda*, which refers to the various actions and rituals to be performed and the *Jnana kanda* which are constituted by the *Upanishads*, which are deeply philosophical and metaphysical. The *Upanishads* specifically deal with knowledge, particularly the highest form of philosophical knowledge about the ultimate reality. The *Vedas* were treated as *apaurusheya*, implying that they were not composed by any particular individual author and are impersonal.

The *Smriti* literature, on the other hand, was composed by individual authors. The important *Smriti* texts are comprised of the various *Dharmasūtras*, their commentaries and the epics. All of them deal with the fundamentals of Hindu *dharma*, religion and law. The ancient among them are known as the *Dharmasūtras*, comprising of the four texts written by *Āpastamba*, *Gautama*, *Baudhāyana*, and *Vasishta*. The *Dharmasastras*, which were composed afterwards, include the important law books like the *Manusmriti*, *Yajnavalkyasmriti*, *Naradasmriti*, *Vishnusmriti*, *Brihaspatismriti*, *Katyayanasmriti* etc.

These texts claim to be representing the principles expressed in the *Vedas* and have contributed in establishing what would later be known as the *Hindu dharma*. They were both law books and religious texts. Though their authority was never treated as fundamental, practically they were treated as the final authority on the questions of religion and law.

The emergence of the caste system is probably the most important development in this period. More than any other sources, these texts provided the intellectual foundation and social justification for caste system in the Indian society. This has ultimately led to the creation of another group of people who were treated as untouchables, who can be conceived as the forefathers of the present day Dalits in India.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What is the basis on which the Indian scriptures are divided into *Sruti* and the *Smriti*?

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2) What are *Dharmasutras*?

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2.3. THE EMERGENCE OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

The *Vedas* do not overtly contain any references to the caste system in the sense in which we understand it today. In the *Purushasukta*, which is the 90th *sukta* in the 10th *Mandala*, *Astaka* 8, *Adyaya* 4 of the *Rigveda*, there is a very clear reference to the classification of the society into four types of people. It says that the *Purusha* was divided into four portions, the Brahmin was his mouth, both his arms was the Rājanya, his thighs became the Vaiśya and from his feet the Śūdra was produced.

But this only says that there are four types of people and never assert that the four groups are identified on the basis of their birth into specific groups. In other words, this classification need not necessarily be interpreted as caste system, as it only classifies people into four groups and not necessarily suggest that the division is hereditary based. The Aryan people had a very peculiar form of classifying the society as well as everything in the universe. They had a mystic passion for the number three and everything in the universe was classified into three categories. Hence we have such concepts like the three *gunas* (*satva*, *rajas* and *tamas*), the three *doshas* of *Ayurveda* (*vaata*, *pitta* and *kapha*) the three *lokas*, the three great Gods—the great Indian trinity, Brahma, the God of creation, Vishnu, the God responsible for sustenance and Siva, the God of destruction.

Accordingly, the society was originally divided into three classes of people. The first group of people was known as the Brahmanas, who were responsible for the performance of the various rituals, which were integral to the lives of the *Vedic* people. The second class was the Kshatriyas or warriors, who were expected to protect the society from internal and external harm

and finally they had the Vaisyas, who were the trading people who also took care of agricultural production. Later on one more class –the Sudras—was added to the fold. The Sudras were treated as people who were expected to serve the other three classes and were known as the servant class. According to some scholars, this fourth group was added to the original classification with the integration of the indigenous people (probably *Dravidians*) by the *Aryans* who conquered them and made their settlements in the northern part of the subcontinent. Another view affirms that the Sudras were part of the Aryans, as they were sections of the Aryans employed in servile work

Since we are trying to understand the origins of caste system and also the history of social oppressions on the basis of caste, a clear understanding of this is essential. As B.R.Ambedkar observes, what has later become a caste system was essentially a class system, in which individuals, when qualified, could change their class. But the complexities of historical changes in India converted the class system into a rigid form of caste system. Ambedkar adds that at some time in the history of the Hindus, the priestly class socially detached itself from the rest of the body of people and through a closed-door policy became a caste by itself. The other classes being subject to the law of social division of labour underwent differentiation, some into large, others into very minute groups. Ambedkar is of the opinion that the occurrence of such minute sub castes would have happened from the Vaisya and the Sudra classes, as the military occupation does not very easily lend itself to very minute sub-divisions.

Such divisions and sub-divisions in India have gradually become self-enclosed and mutually excluding social units, not in the absolute sense, but relatively. Ambedkar here observes that they have thus lost the open-door character of the class system and have become self-enclosed units called castes. What is characteristic of caste as opposed to class is that in the former the power relations of domination and submission are clearly visible. In this sense all the castes are not self-enclosed units. The system has operated in such a way that, while some of them closed themselves from others, certain others were taken away all the rights to decide their boundaries. They were treated as either outcastes or lower castes and were kept away from all decision making exercises of the society. The literary tradition in India played an important role in propelling these historical changes and establishing caste differences.

The caste system is related to many other religious and philosophical doctrines like the doctrine of *karma*, the belief in rebirth, the principle of *dharma* and the concept of *moksha* or

higher spiritual emancipation. By classifying all people into four groups this system practices an internal system of hierarchy and discrimination. It is thus different from the *Varna* system which divides people on the basis of their inborn potentials and the actions they perform. The caste system classifies people on the basis of their birth and not worth. It emphasizes on parental calling. Each person's caste is therefore fixed based on one's birth. The Brahmins have the right to learn and teach the *Vedas* and they were the priests and teachers. The Kshatriyas and Vaisyas can only learn, but their learning is limited to certain specific fields of study. The Kshatriyas are expected to protect the society from internal and external harms and hence have to learn the *Dhanurveda*, or the field of warfare and the Vaisyas are tradesmen and should learn the associated skills. But the Sudras were the servants of the above three and were not expected to learn the *Vedas*. The mixing of caste, known as *Varnasamkara*, was treated as a heinous crime and one of the primary responsibilities of the King was to prevent this from happening in order to ensure purity. Hence the internal discrimination of the caste system separates the first three classes of people from the Sudras. These first three classes of people were known as *dwijas*, meaning they are born twice; first their physical birth and second their initiation to the knowledge traditions with a ritual which is known as the *Upanayana*. The Sudras have only one birth and were never initiated into knowledge.

The caste system further makes an external discrimination. It distinguishes the four groups from all those people who are not part of the system. They are the *Panchamas* or the fifth group. In the ancient scriptures we may find derogatory references to such people as *Asuras*, *Mlechas*, *Vanaras*, *Chandalas* *Rakshasas* etc. In the *Mahabharata* Bhima's son Khatolkacha, in spite of being the son of a Prince, was treated as a *Rakshasa* as his mother Hidumbi belonged to the *Rakshasa* class. All such people were widely treated as *Panchamas* (the fifth castes) and outcastes and hence were untouchables. The tribal people who are largely forest dwellers are another group of people who were treated as outcastes by the ancient caste Hindus.

The very basis of caste system can be traced to the question related to the competency and the right over knowledge traditions and systems in the society. The question is; who have the right to learn. The caste Hinduism affirmed that only those who were twice born were eligible to learn and even among them, only the *Brahmins* were eligible to teach. In this way the caste system monopolized all knowledge systems and confined it to the twice born upper castes and prevented a vast majority of people for accessing important scientific and other forms of knowledge. These

include all the eighteen interdependent disciplines which constitute the totality of the orthodox Hindu knowledge tradition. Apart from the four *Vedas*, we have the *Vedāngas* or the limbs of the *Veda* that include phonetics (*siksha*), grammar (*vyakarana*), etymology (*niruktha*), metrics (*chandas*), calendrical astronomy (*jyotisha*) and rituals (*kalpa*). Again there are the four other constituents of the *Veda*, which are called the *Upanga*; *Mimamsa*, *Nyayasastra*, *Puranas* and *Dharmasastras*. Finally there are the *Upavedas*, constituted by *Ayurveda*, *dhanurveda*, *Gandharvaveda* and *Natyaveda*. The *Sudras* and other lower caste people were never allowed to learn them.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What do the Vedic scriptures say about different castes?

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2) What is the difference between class and caste?

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2.4. THE SITUATION IN THE VEDAS AND THE UPANISHADS

As we have seen, the *Vedas* make a class division, but do not very clearly assert any hereditary hierarchy. The *Vedic* age advocated a peculiar religion which emphasized rituals and owing to this factor those who were competent to perform those rituals would have occupied a very high position of esteem in their society. This eventually would have led to the creation of the *Brahmin* class, which further would have evolved into a caste based on birth.

By the time of the composition of the *Upanishads*, the *Aryans* had established their clear supremacy in the Northern parts of the subcontinent. The *Upanishads* are texts which hardly deal with a person's social status and they are not concerned with historical and other contingent factors that determine human lives. They are texts which are dedicated to the examination of deeper metaphysical truths and raise certain very fundamental questions concerning ultimate reality and the human self.

The self in the *Upanishads* is not a social self, but is the pure transcendental reality which is identical with the ultimate reality called *Brahman*. Hence the questions whether one is a *Brahmin* or a Kshatriya or a Vaisya or a Sudra or an outcaste are fundamentally meaningless. But the *Upanishads* along with other post-*Vedic* texts do refer to different castes, without necessarily referring to differentiations on the basis of caste. We have seen that one of the important ways in which caste discriminations manifested in the society was by monopolizing and confining the learning of the knowledge traditions to the twice born castes. But we find that such rigid distinctions were not present during the early Upanishad times. For instance, in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (II chapter, 1st Brahmana) we find that a Brahmin named Gargya learning from King Ajatasatru, who was a Kshatriya. Again, King Janaka's reputation as a wise man who is an expert in *Vedanta* was a well known fact. All these show that teaching was not an exclusively Brahmin occupation.

Further, in *Chandogyopanishad* we find that a Sudra named Janasruti learning the Veda from a Brahmin named Raikwa. The *Eitareya Brahmana* (II *Panchika*, 3rd chapter) refers to a huntsman who has learned the Vedas and became a Rishi. Hence we may find that the *Upanishads*, though make references to different classes or casts of people, were not asserting a very strict and rigid system of practices which discriminates people on the basis of their class or caste. But the society at the time of the composition of many of the *Upanishads* would have already been ordered on the basis of caste and on many occasions we find references to such an order. In the *Chandogyopanishad* there is an interesting story. Satyakama the son of Jabala approached the sage Gautama with a request to teach him. Gautama asked Satyakama about his ancestry to which Satyakama replied in the following way: "I do not know, Sir, of what ancestry I am. I asked my mother about it and she replied: 'In my youth I was preoccupied with many household duties and with attending on guests when I conceived you. I do not know of what ancestry you are. I am Jabala by name and you are Satyakama.' I am therefore, Sir, Satyakama

Jabala." Gautama was impressed by Satyakama's honesty and told him that only a true *Brahmin* would thus speak out and since he has not departed from truth he would initiate Satyakama.

This above incident can be interpreted in two ways. We may conclude from this that only Brahmins were initiated during those days and caste hierarchical practices were prevalent in those days. Another way to understand this is to infer that the *Upanishadic* sages were not interested in the caste or other social conditions of the truth seeker. They were only interested to know whether the person who seeks truth possessed moral integrity.

We may conclude by observing that caste system was yet to get established during the *Vedic* age and also during the period when some of the early *Upanishads* were composed. The class differences that existed at one point of time in India cannot be equated with the caste differences. And of course, there would have been a period of transition, where we would see the elements of both. The *Upanishads* which contain references to caste differences may belong to such a transition period.

But it is a fact that by the time of the composition of the major *Smriti* texts—both the law books and the epics—caste discriminations were established in the Indian society. While the law books provided the theoretical and conceptual justification, the epics validated caste system through their repeated narratives that reached out the masses and exerted tremendous influences on their lives.

2.5. THE LEGAL WORKS

Most of these *Smriti* texts were composed after the *Vedic* age. The caste system in India was validated mainly by these post-*Vedic* texts. They not only vindicated the four-fold caste division, but also established that there were many people, groups and communities who remain outside of the four-fold caste system of the *Aryan* people. These people do not belong to the *varna* system and were known as “*avarnas*” and were treated as untouchables, as physical contact with them were considered to be contaminating. The *Smriti* texts played a very important role in creating the concept of untouchability, though many of them including the *Manusmriti*, which is the most influential among them, did not support the possibility of a fifth group. The Dalits are these people who were treated as untouchables by the caste Hindus.

Among the important law books, the *Manusmriti* is one single text whose influence is still significant. This book would have been composed during the 100–300 century AD. *Manusmriti* (10-1,2) says that people of the first three *varnas* should learn the *Vedas*, but it should be taught only by the *Brahmins*. The *Brahmins* should know about their own duties and about the duties of others as well and they should advise others on their duties. Manu thus places the *Brahmins* at a very high position, making them the complete authority of all knowledge in the society. But he affirms that there are only four castes and not a fifth one. Hence he never directly supported the concept of *avarna*, the fifth group of *Panchamas* who were outside the four-fold system. But the differentiations he made between each caste in general and among the twice-born and the Sudras have evidently supported a system of caste-discriminations which later on had given rise to untouchability and untouchables.

Underlying the idea of caste differences there is a notion of purity, a concept which has roots in the tribal heritage of the Indo-European people. Hence they regarded inter-marriage and inter-dining as polluting acts. *Manusmriti* (3.13) categorically prevents a Sudra man marrying a higher caste woman. Though Manu conditionally accepts a *Brahmin* man marrying women of the lower order. In 3.17 he says that the *Brahmin* who sleeps with a Sudra woman goes to hell. The prevention of the mixing of the *varnas* is considered as one of the main tasks of the society and the King has to ensure this. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* too insists this aspect. The intermixing or *varnasamkara* is treated as a crime by all the *Smriti* texts. They all consider that the prevention of such a mixing is essential for the preservation of social and moral order.

Almost all the texts agree when it comes to the lower status of the *Sudra* in the society. They all prevent inter-marriage and inter-dining. Though some of them conditionally permit inter-marriage, inter-dining is prevented by all.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What were Manu's views about caste system?

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2) How did the Dahrmasutra’s treat the Sudras?

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2.6. THE EPICS

There is a famous story associated with the great sage Valmiki, the author of *Ramayana*. Before composing his great work, which is hailed as the *Adikavya*, Valmiki was a *Chandala* and hence a Sudra or an outcaste. Valmiki later became a sage poet and is regarded as one of the great *Rishies* of ancient India. But paradoxically his major work *Ramayana* supports caste discriminations and asserts a concept of dharma which is rooted in the *varna* system.

Valmiki’s Rama is the *maryada purusha*, the ideal man and the embodiment of *dharma*. But the *dharma* which Rama protected includes the *varnasramadharm*, which is not different from a social order based on caste hierarchies. This hierarchical order places the *Brahmins* at the top and the twice-born are always differentiated from the Sudras. In the *Uttarakanda* of *Ramayana* (73rd *Sarga*) a *Brahmin* approaches Rama complaining about the death of his 12 years old son. Rama called all his Ministers, particularly *Brahmins* like Vasishtha and Vamadeva to discuss the matter. Among those who were present were many great sages including Narada who described the various duties of different castes. *Ramayana* here clearly affirms that the primary duty of the *Sudras* is to serve the upper castes. Narada says that the reason for the child’s untimely death is the violation of caste duties by a Sudra. Somewhere in Rama’s kingdom, a Sudra is performing penance, for which only Brahmins and other twice-born are eligible, is causing all the troubles. Rama went around and found that a Sudra named Sambuka was

performing penance and annihilated him with his sword. *Ramayana* says that Rama was praised for this act by all the *Brahmins* and Gods and the *Brahmin* boy who died came back to life.

Here we can see the author of *Ramayana* echoing the views of Manu who considers the primary duty of a King as the prevention of mixing of *varnas* and establishing order in the society on the basis of caste hierarchies.

Another epic *Mahabharata* has the episode of Ekalavya, a *Nishada* Prince and hence member of a low caste. Drona, the royal teacher refused to teach Eakalavya, as according to caste system only Brahmins and Kshatriyas were eligible to learn archery. Ekalavya makes a clay image of Drona and in its presence learned and excelled archery on his own. Hearing about this Drona demanded Eklavya to amputate his archer's thumb and give it as *Gurudakshina* (teacher's fee). The *Mahabharata* contains many such instances which testify casteism. Karna, in spite of being a great warrior was constantly humiliated by many people for being the son of a *Suta*, a charioteer who was a *Sudra*. Karna had faced many such problems throughout his life. Bhima's son, Katolkacha, who is a Rakshasa (probably an outcaste) was never given the status of a Prince in the Pandavas' family, a position which Abhimanyu, who was Arjuna's and Subhadra's son enjoyed.

In all the epics, the *Brahmins* were treated as highly respectable people and were even worshiped by the kings. This was not only the case with highly qualified and learned Brahmins, but the mere fact that one was born as a Brahmin was sufficient for him to be respected by others in the society. Killing of a Brahmin, *Brahmahatya*, is considered as an unpardonable sin, from which even kings are supposed to keep away. In another incident in *Ramayana*, finding that a Brahmin has committed a crime Rama sought the advice of his Ministers—comprising mainly of Brahmins—regarding what punishment he should award the offender. All the learned Ministers were of the opinion that a *Brahmin* should not be punished. In another incident in *Mahabharata*, four people who have committed the same crime of murder were taken to Yudhishtira for deciding the punishment. Yudhishtira made enquiries about their respective castes and found that each of them belong to different castes; one was a *Brahmin*, the second one a Kshatriya, the third one a Vaisya and the Fourth one a *Sudra*. He ordered punishments for the last three without any difficulties and made it clear that he would not take any decision in the case of the *Brahmin*, as his caste is higher than his own. All such repeated narratives asserted the supremacy of the *Brahmin* caste over the rest.

2.7. LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to give an outline about the ways in which the way lower caste people are pasteurized in ancient Indian scriptures, primarily in the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, Lawbooks, philosophical texts and the epics. We have seen that the roots of Dalit discriminations can be located in the caste system which has emerged in India during the post-Vedic age. Our analysis has shown that, except on one occasion, the Vedic scriptures do not refer to caste or class. But in later texts the references are ample. The Smriti texts occupy a unique place in this context. The texts like the *Manusmriti*, *Arthashastra* and others affirm that validity and necessity of dividing the society into four groups and all of them categorically place the Sudras outside the society of pure and twice-born people. We have also seen the ways in which the philosophical systems and schools approached the matter.

2.8. KEY WORDS

Class: this term refers to the class to which people belong on the basis of their abilities, skills, and actions.

Caste: caste is different from class in the sense that one cannot change one's caste. It is fixed on the basis of the birth of the person. One is born as a Brahmin or a Sudra and under no circumstances can one change one's caste.

Dalit: a word used by Jyotirao Phule to denote all those who are oppressed and exploited. This Marathi word literally means ground, suppressed, crushed or broken to pieces. The Dalit Panthers has revived this term during the 70s.

Smriti: refers to the Vedas. They are not written by any particular human beings and hence are transmitted from one generation to the next orally. The term *Smriti* literally means that which is heard. They are considered as *apaurusheya* or impersonal and all the orthodox philosophical and religious schools in India consider the Vedic scriptures as valid and infallible.

Smriti: literally, that which is remembered. They refer to the post-Vedic texts that mainly deal with ethical, religious, and legal issues. They are not infallible and may change from place to place and time to time.

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Web Resources

Mahabharata: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/maha/index.htm>

Works of B.R. Ambedkar: <http://www.ambedkar.org>

2.10. ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check your progress I

Ancient Indian scriptures, particularly those in the orthodox Hindu tradition are divided into *Sruti* and *Smriti*. *Sruti* is constituted of the Vedic scriptures and *Smriti* comprises of all those post-Vedic texts which include the *Dharmasutras*, their various commentaries, the epics and

other social and political treatises originated in the post-Vedic era. These texts include the the *Dharmasūtras* of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana, and Vasishta, the *Dharmasastras* which include the *Manusmriti*, *Yajnavalkyasmriti*, *Naradasmriti*, *Vishnusmriti*, *Brihaspatismriti*, *Katyayanasmriti* etc. and the epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The Vedas constitute the basis of orthodox Hindu tradition and all philosophical schools, systems and approaches of this tradition accept the unquestionable validity of the Vedas. They are treated as impersonal or *apaurusheya*, which means they are now written by man. The *Smriti* texts on the other hand, are never treated as absolutely valid and we may find the influences of time and place on them. But they played a very important role in the making of the Hindu society based on caste system.

They are important post-Vedic texts which address the problem of dharma. The concept of dharma is understood in these texts not only as an ethical notion but also as religious and legal. Hence dharma is also the law from a social and political perspective, though its validity has been established on the basis of religious and spiritual convictions. The important Dharmasastras include *Manusmriti*, *Yajnavalkyasmriti*, *Naradasmriti*, *Vishnusmriti*, *Brihaspatismriti*, *Katyayanasmriti* etc. Unlike other philosophical and spiritual texts these *Dharmasastras* are more oriented towards regulating the day to day practical social lives of people.

Check your progress II

The Vedic scriptures do not say anything explicit about caste system in society. The 10th Mandala of the *Purushasukta*, which is part of the Rig Veda affirms that, when the Purusha was divided into four, the *Brahmins* came out from his head, the *Khatriyas* from the hands, the *Vaiśyas* from the thighs and there *Sudras* from the feet. But this only says that there are four types of people and never affirm that they are four castes, determined on the basis of a person's birth. In no other place the Vedas refer to different castes. There is also a view which argues that this section of the Rig Veda, the *Purushasukta* was never a part of the original Vedic scriptures and was interpolated.

The term class refers to a classification of people on the basis of their capabilities and potentialities. Here the worth of an individual is considered in order to decide his or her class. It is not necessarily ordered hierarchically. On the other hand, caste is a division based on

hereditary belongingness. One is born into a caste by being born to parents belonging to a particular caste. This is more rigid and never permits a graduation from one to the next. It is fixed by birth. In the *Bhagavat Gita*, Lord Krishna affirms that the four classes are his creation based on the quality and actions of people. But later in India, this has become what is known as the caste system.

Check your Progress III

Manu considered the caste system as dharma. He equated the *varnasramadharma* with *dharma*. He insisted that all the four castes are different from each other and each caste has a duty or dharma to perform in the society. The Brahmins have to learn and teach, the Kshatriyas have to protect the society from harms, the Vaisyas have to engage in trading and the Sudras have to serve the other three castes. He insisted that the mixing of caste known as Varnasamkara needs to be avoided and hence intermarriage and interdining need to be avoided. Yet he recognizes inter-caste marriages but even in such occasions the order is important. The Brahmin women are not allowed to marry men from other castes and Kshatriya women not to marry men of Vaisyas and Sudras and the Vaisya women not to marry Sudra men. The opposite is conditionally permitted. He recognized the respectable position of the Brahmins in the society, but affirmed that the Sudras are the servants of all the other three. Another important feature of his views about the caste systems is that he never recognized a fifth caste which is known as panchamas, who were treated as untouchables.



UNIT 3 STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AGAINST DALITS, AND CONSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS

Contents

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Structural Violence against Dalits
- 3.3 Various Structures of Violence against Dalits
- 3.4 The Constitution of India and the Rights of the Dalits
- 3.5 Annual Report -2004
- 3.6 National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes
- 3.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.8 Key Words
- 3.9 Further Readings and References
- 3.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

3.0. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to contextualize philosophy especially in setting right the social problems. It may provide the guidelines that help us to understand analyse and respond to the social, political, economic and cultural exploitations and the means to change them by using suitable tools.

Thus by the end of this Unit the learner will be able:

- to have an awareness on social structures;
- to identify the structures of violence in the society;
- to develop action plan to reduce structural violence;
- to trust in the constitutional and legal means than illegal ways;

3.1. INTRODUCTION

An institutionalised attempt to prevent any individuals or communities from the access of available facilities and services by the dominant individuals or powerful communities through legal or illegal means and with open or hidden strategies can be called structural violence. The structural violence aims to obstruct development of dependent people or communities so that they remain backward and permanently dependent. The members of the dominant class enjoy social and economic advantages by keeping the under privileged always dependent. Structural violence is perpetuated not merely for economic or social gain but also for enjoying the subjugation of others. They also get pleasure from cultural imposition of the norms fixed by them for the members of the weak segment of the population in our society. Fulfilment of psychological satisfaction perpetuates violence.

Any systematic manipulation of knowledge, norms and information for effective control over social, political and economic domains of social life for the sake of exploitation or oppression can be identified as structural violence. Structural violence may be defined as a situation in which the social, political, economic, cultural and legal spheres function in such a way that they permit or encourage the segregation, discrimination, suppression or exploitation of the weaker sections of the community. It is a way of segregating a group of people from the social, political, economic and cultural domains of social life. The members of the Dalit communities are the most affected in India due to structural violence.

3.2. STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AGAINST DALITS

Violence against Dalits can be considered as structural because of the following reasons. Individuals practice violence not as a result of personal enmity or individual displeasure but as a result of the socio cultural learning that are imbibed by the members of upper castes. Therefore violence is not due to inherent evils of any individual or caste but because of the inherent evils of caste system itself. In other words, caste system has got immoral forms of social, political, cultural and economic structures that permit or encourage violence to go unchecked.

Violent social spheres are systematically institutionalised. Society was divided on the basis of work. Social division was stabilised through inheritance and social obligation was demanded from people as ethical norms as sanctioned by religious scriptures. In such a social system, the

social labour of the members of the upper castes was rewarded well and donation to them was accepted as a virtuous act, but members of the lower caste were not paid what were due to them.

There was no mechanism within the system that could rectify systemic problems. On the contrary there were very effective means to prevent any possible change. The members of the upper castes regard any change, however good they may be, as threat to social order, therefore should not be permitted. The attempt to change the oppressive practices by the sufferers leads to tension and conflict.

3.3.VARIOUS STRUCTURES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST DALITS

The institutionalised attempt to keep out Dalits from social order was systematically stabilized in Indian society. It started with the segregation of them from the social, political, economic and cultural domains of social life. We shall enumerate them one by one.

Cultural Structures of Violence

In earlier societies, life style of the members of a clan was regulated by customary morality. Each clan or community was self regulated. Thus it was autonomous and its norms were customary, binding on every member equally.

Caste system, the ancient social system of India, was clannish in one way and unique and different in another way. Caste norms were customary, because individual members of a particular caste could not make a moral choice against their own caste dharma. Varna dharma was binding on all the members of the particular varna equally. Each member of a clan was self motivated to act what was obligatory to that person, and the person was not rewarded for fulfilling his/her duty. As one is just fulfilling ones *varna dharma* one is not eligible to enjoy any reward but the violation of it brings punishment which one receives without the feeling of revolt or grudges.

In India, customary morality was in operation not simply within the particular caste, but also it regulated the relations among the clans (castes). Caste system cannot be considered as clannish, because castes were not autonomous. Customary norms were not the choice of any clan but it was imposed upon them. The functional relations among the castes were established and stabilised with the introduction of customary morality that regulated inter caste relations. As the

inter caste relations were bound by customary norms, even unjust norms were accepted without resistance. For example the discriminatory practices like untouchability or isolated living areas were not imposed but accepted as customary morality (*jathi dharma*).

India was a wonderful land where the inter caste relations were streamlined with very strict and well ordered norms like a customary morality. But the order was well maintained for segregating and discriminating a section of the people.

As we are brought up with caste notions and feelings, we inherit convention of customary morality than self reflective and rational moral values of modern times. Thus we are not feeling an inhuman act like untouchability as an immoral act. Sometimes, many members of upper castes feel very comfortable by segregating and not allowing persons belonging to lower caste to participate in public functions and religious festivals. They consider such acts as virtuous acts instead of seeing them as heinous crimes. Discrimination is systematically inbuilt within the caste system and strengthened by the inheritance of caste awareness and its customs.

Here we have to make a clear distinction between the customary morality of clan system and caste system. Under clan system clannish norms bind on all its members equally and they are regulated fully from within. But caste morality binds differently on different groups and punishment is imposed from above. As the caste relations are bound by inter caste norms, external monitoring on the functions of the castes was made possible.

Social structures of Violence

A lot of living traditions and cultures co-exist in India. The different traditions of the Hindu fold were brought within a well ordered and structured hierarchy through caste system. Some appreciate the caste system as an organ of social order. They claim that society is strengthened by the development and inheritance of skills through the division of labour. They argue that it built up social security by mutual support. But social division of labour led to the discrimination of people in the name of caste which in turn disintegrated society. Thus the ugliest element that we inherited from our tradition is the caste system. Ambedkar depicted it as “The most pathetic part of these traditions is an unwanted, ugly and inhuman structure called the *Caste System*. One cannot but feel ashamed of the caste system as this system continues to discriminate the human persons and stratify them into different groups.”

The traditional social system of India considered Dalits as *untouchables*. Thus they have been treated the most degraded. As the people of high caste believed that the proximity of Dalits would pollute them they considered them to be untouchable. Even today they remain downtrodden, exploited and the least educated in Indian society.

The caste hierarchy excluded a section of society from the caste system and named them *outcastes*. Their service was extracted by the members of the higher castes and treated them as untouchables. For decades, they have been barred from sharing water, food and shelter. They are forced to live in ghettos. Until today, India's caste system has compelled them to perform the most inhuman jobs like the manual scavenging, skinning animals, disposal of the dead animals, cleaning streets and the like. Most of them still live as landless labourers, bonded labourers, child labourers by performing the most inhuman tasks, such as cleaning the toilet and disposal of human waste and so on.

Indian society very efficiently segregated them from her main stream. Dalits have been socially, culturally and politically subjugated and marginalized through thousands of years. It is found very difficult to get them out of the deep seated socio cultural agony. Thus, their redemption becomes a Herculean task. The Dalits experience the effects of untouchability in their day to day social, economical and political activities. The people of high castes hesitate to tolerate them coming up in life. They fear the upliftment of the members of SC and ST as a threat to their facilities and status.

Religious Structures of Violence

Sacred texts of Hinduism upheld the divine origination of caste system. Law Books very meticulously streamlined social division of labour, restricted the upward movement of labourers and tied them to the profession attached to their caste through compulsory inheritance by birth. They made varna dharma morally bound service to society.

Religious structure happened to perpetuate violence against Dalits by deterring them from temple entry. Now a days the members of the low caste are allowed to participate in the temple worship especially in the major temples. But it is not possible for them to perform rituals as poojaries. The orthodox groups project God as the custodian of untouchability. Gods were shown as practitioners of untouchability.

The description of purity and impurity in front of God, elevated the pure and condemned the impure. The impure one who has no salvation in the other world may get a better birth in the following transmigration through his/ her dedicated service to the masters. On the contrary, the pure ones gain all the blessings from God and pleasures from the world.

Caste norms denied education to the Dalits. They were not allowed to read scriptures. Thus they did not have the knowledge of the tradition. Thus religion supported the caste system in keeping Dalts not only impure but uneducated as well. Their awareness and progress was deterred. The education on the Hindu scriptures and tradition would have opened their chance of becoming Archakas along with their entry into the temple. But that chance is very remote.

Economic Structures of Violence

The caste system is also an economic order that prevents Dalits from owning land or property. It is an exploitative economic arrangement. Caste, thus, becomes an instrument of exploitation. Traditional social order demands hard labour from the people of low caste. They are still serving as the landless farm workers, scavengers and bonded labourers. As they are underpaid, they are forced to live under inhuman conditions. They have been betrayed of rights over land or any earnable form of resources. In most part of the country Dalits are either small or marginal farmers or landless workers. The practice of social division of labour with the injunctions of varna dharma for many generations led to this situation.

Allocation of labour on the basis of caste was one of the fundamental tenets of the caste system. The rigid restriction of the movement of caste boundaries tied the members in their respective castes of their birth. The cultural conditioning of the low castes and the attitude of the upper castes are not undergoing much change.

At present, there are opportunities for those lower in the ranks to move up in the hierarchy through the capture of political power, the acquisition of land, and migration to other regions. Members of the back ward castes achieved noticeably in these regards. But Dalits being last in the hierarchy are remaining far away from the available facilities for improving their position in the social ranking. Therefore they stay socially and economically depressed.

Migration and the anonymity of the urban environment have in some cases resulted in the upward occupational mobility of some, but the majority continues to perform their traditional jobs. A lack of training and education avert them from seeking other forms of employment. Because of the fear of discrimination, many are not willing to other employment. In their native villages, the work space is limited. Neither the horizontal or vertical movement of Dalit workers is easy.

As part of village custom, Dalits are made to render free services in times of death, marriage, or any village function. The cleaning of the whole village, the digging of graves, the carrying of firewood and the disposal of dead animals are mostly done by the Dalits. A majority of the rural workforce from Dalit communities subsist on the menial wages. Those in urban areas work mostly in the unorganised sector.

It is estimated that around one million Dalits are manual scavengers. Manual scavenging is a caste-based occupation. The practice of manual scavenging continues in most of the states, though it is outlawed. The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993 prohibits the employment of scavengers or the construction of dry (non-flush) latrines with imprisonment for up to one year and/or a fine as high as Rs.2,000/-. Offenders are also liable for prosecution under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. In 1992, the government launched a national scheme that called for the identification, training and rehabilitation of safai karamcharis (cleaning workers). Government funds and other resources are available for the rehabilitation of scavengers, but no proper action has been taken towards this end. It is not the resource but the political will that comes against the rehabilitation of the scavengers.

Another group of abused Dalits are landless agricultural labourers who form the backbone of India's agrarian economy. In spite of many land reformation acts around eighty-six per cent of Dalit households are landless or near landless. Land is the prime asset in rural areas that determines an individual's standard of living and social status. Lack of access to land makes Dalits economically vulnerable. Their dependency is exploited by upper- and middle-caste landlords. Many labourers owe debts to their employers or other moneylenders.

Laws and regulations that prohibit the appropriation of Dalit lands are not properly implemented. The directions to allocate surplus government lands to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have been largely ignored or manipulated by upper castes with the help of

district administrations. In 1996, a door-to-door survey of two hundred and fifty villages in the state of Gujarat found that in almost all villages those who had title to land had no possession, and those who had possession had not had their land measured or faced illegal encroachments from upper castes. Many had no record of their holdings at all. Even those who had been offered land under agrarian reform legislation refused to accept it for fear of an upper-caste reaction.

Bonded labour is a terrible condition suffered by many Dalits. Bonded labour refers to the work in slave-like conditions in order to pay off a debt. Many financial assistance available to the members of SC/ ST communities are not availed or properly used by many. They found it easy to borrow money from their upper-caste neighbours. In most of the cases, they fail to repay and go into bondage. An estimated forty million people in India, among them fifteen million children, are bonded labourers working in slave-like conditions in order to pay off a debt. Due to the high interest rates charged and the abysmally low wages paid, the debts are seldom settled. The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 abolishes all agreements and obligations arising out of the bonded labour system. It aims to release all labourers from bondage, cancel any outstanding debt, prohibit the creation of new bondage agreements, and order the economic rehabilitation of freed labourers by the state. It also punishes attempts to compel persons into bondage with a maximum of three years in prison and a Rs.2,000/- fine. However, the extent to which bonded labourers have been identified, released, and rehabilitated in the country is negligible. A lack of political will in implementing the protective criminal legislations meaningfully sabotaged the constitutional promises.

Political Structures of Violence

The political space available for the members of SC/ ST under parliamentary system in India favoured them to represent people and hold offices. Reservation of political positions to Dalits is a compulsory component of the Constitution which is intended to empower them. It began to create tension between the earlier power holders and newly emerging Dalits in many areas of India. The orthodox and feudal minded people are not willing to accept low caste in the responsible positions. Some tolerate, some place ineffective and submissive Dalit members for the name sake and where ever it is not possible, some directly encounter with the law and the

elected representatives. Manoranjan Mohanty points out that the rising democratic consciousness among dalits, the trend of self-assertion through politics, literature and social movements invited the wrath of the upper castes against them. The empowering attempt causes severe clashes between upper castes and the Dalits mainly in the rural areas.

It is noticed that the intensity of violence against the Dalits has been increasing. One reason, as we have seen, is the political tension. It is supplemented by increasing awareness among Dalits about their rights and their assertion to achieve them. Another reason, Prof. Mohanty finds is the economic reforms under globalization, liberalization and privatization. Economic reforms have put greater power and privileges in the hands of the upper caste elites by the state. It widens the gap between upper castes and Dalits. The backward castes that were traveling in the same boat of discrimination earlier are performing better due to the political and economic changes recently. Under a favourable political climate in many parts of India, the BCs made much economic gains especially under New Economic Policy. They in turn became new masters of oppression. Prof. Mohanty observes that the one sided economic well being has nurtured the upper caste ego which leads to the suppression of demands from the lower strata.

Media plays a big role in reporting the atrocities. What all atrocities that were unnoticed earlier, are now presented especially through visual media. This gives an impression of increasing atrocity. Human rights and Dalit organisations successfully reported and documented many atrocities. Yet, many atrocities go unreported.

There are many reasons for the continuation of atrocities against Dalits. The country is too large to allow close monitoring of all atrocities. In many places the local power structure dominated by the upper castes continues to hold its sway. The caste character of the state apparatus in many cases of atrocities favours the offenders instead of standing for law. There are many instances of police itself trying to hush up cases by refusing to file FIR. The law demands the authorities to be neutral. In fact, legal system favours Dalits. But the police being either from the upper caste or dependent on the upper caste hesitate to take action against the offenders. When the upper caste commits an atrocity on Dalit, the police often do not do the legal duty to please the upper caste.

Though the state has played an important role in protecting the rights of Dalits still the complicity of local state apparatus with upper caste interests has made the laws ineffective. The revenue official or the District Collector have the same location to operate in the hierarchical society. The large number of cases pending completion of investigation is an indication of this. The judiciary, especially the lower level judiciary is also part of the same situation. We see long delays in disposal of cases, large percentage of acquittals of the accused with very few convictions.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) Why do we consider the violence against Dalits as structural violence?

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2) Increasing awareness and assertion lead to increase in conflict. How?

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3.4. THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA AND THE RIGHTS OF THE DALITS

The constitution of India guarantees equality of status and opportunity and freedom to all her citizens. It protects all individuals from discrimination on the grounds of religion caste or sex. Article 46 of the Constitution insists that the State shall promote with special care the educational and economic upliftment of the weaker sections of the people in particular of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and shall protect them from injustice and all forms of exploitation. The Indian Constitution assures the above mentioned values in the chapters on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles.

The Government of India enacted many acts, laws and rules at different intervals which uphold the values and spirit of the Constitution. The first among them was the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955(22 of 1955) with its sub section known as the Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955. The Act of 1955 was revised periodically to strengthen its efficiency. Constitutional support to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes received greater clarity and focusing with the Act enacted in 1989 known as the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

3.4.1. Provisions of the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 Relating to Untouchability

The Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 prescribes punishment for the preaching and practice of “Untouchability” and for the enforcement of any disability arising there from for matters connected therewith. In the Act “civil rights” means any right accruing to a person by reason of the abolition of “untouchability” by article 17 of the Constitution. A number of important sections are given below.

Section 3 of the Act of 1955 identifies the practices of untouchability on the ground of preventing members of the out castes

- (a) from entering any place of public worship, which is open to other persons professing the same religion , or
- (b) from worshipping or offering prayers or performing any religious services in any place of public worship, or bathing in, or using the waters of any sacred tank, well, ghat, spring, river or lake.

Section 4 of the Act– Whoever on the ground of “untouchability” enforces against any person social disabilities with regard to the following facilities, situations and conditions shall be punishable. .

- (i) accession to any shop, public restaurant, hotel or place of public entertainment.
- (ii) use of any utensils and other articles for the use of the general public.
- (iii) practice of any profession or the carrying on of any occupation, trade or business.
- (iv) use of, or access to, any river, stream, spring, well, tank, cistern, water-tap or other watering place, or any bathing ghat, burial or cremation ground, any sanitary convenience, or any road.
- (v) use of, or access to, any place used for charitable or a public purpose maintained wholly or partly out of State funds or dedicated to the use of general public.
- (vi) enjoyment of any benefit under a charitable trust created for the benefit of the general public.

- (vii) use of or accession to any public conveyance.
- (viii) construction, acquisition, or occupation of any residential premises in any locality, whatsoever.
- (ix) use of any dharmshala, sarai or musafirkhana which is open to the general public.
- (x) observance of any social or religious custom, usage or ceremony.
- (xi) use of jewellery and finery.

Section 5 : (a) if anybody refuses a person admission on the ground of ‘untouchability’ to any hospital, dispensary, educational institution or any hostel which are established or maintained for the benefit of the general public or (b) discriminates against any such person after admission shall be punishable.

Section 6: Refuses on the ground of ‘untouchability’ to sell any goods or to render any service to any person on the same terms and conditions at which such goods are sold or services are rendered to other persons in the ordinary course of business.

Section 7 (1): the other discriminatory offences which shall be punishable under the act are the following.

- (a) Prevention of any person from exercising any right accruing to him by reason of the abolition of ‘untouchability’ under Article 17 of the Constitution.
- (b) Molests, injures, annoys, obstructs or attempts to cause obstruction or boycotts any person in the exercise of any such right or any person by reason of his/her having exercised any such rights.
- (c) Incites or encourages any person or class of persons or the public to practise any form of “untouchability”.
- (d) Insults or attempts to insult a member of a Scheduled Castes on the ground of “untouchability”.

Each of the above sections are further specified and the punishments of offences are mentioned in the remaining sections. Punishments are very mild and therefore the Act of 1989 again looked into them.

Procedure

Person affected by the practice of untouchability may approach the Police Station covering the area of such incident and register FIR (First Information Report) as per provision under the Sections 3 to 7 of the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 .

3.4.2. Provisions of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989

The Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 was enacted by the Government of India to prevent the commission of offences of atrocities against the members of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. It made the provision for establishing Special Courts for the trial of such offences. It provides norms for relief and rehabilitation. The Act extends to whole of India except Jammu & Kashmir. The Act is implemented by the respective State Governments and Union Territory Administrations, which are supported by the Centrally Sponsored Scheme for effective implementation of the provisions of the Act.

The 1955 Protection of Civil Rights Act named violations against dalits and adivasis as 'crimes'. The Act of 1989 went a step further affirming that such crimes are 'atrocities' and are intolerable in a democratic society. The term "atrocities" in the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act of 1989 denotes a form of violence that society strongly condemns as inhuman and unacceptable. Thus the nomenclature *Protection of Civil Rights* was found inadequate. It directed the states to act on the issue of dalit and adivasi rights. The term 'atrocities' is further specified in terms of particular kinds of "crimes" which are considered serious under law. Some of these crimes are violent crimes such as murder, rape, abduction, arson and robbery and they are covered under the Indian Penal Code and the Indian Criminal Procedure Code.

The designers of act studied the offences that were recurring against the members of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes by the members of other castes. They found the atrocities were mostly of discriminatory type. An offence against a member of Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe intended to degrade his/her dignity by a person belonging to other castes shall be punishable.

In case a person, not being a member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe, forces a member of SC/ST

to drink or eat any inedible or obnoxious substance;

to cause injury, insult or annoyance by dumping excreta, waste matter, carcasses or any other obnoxious substance in his premises or neighbourhood;

forcibly removes clothes from the person of a member of a SC/ST or parades him/her naked or with painted face or body or commits any similar act which is derogatory to human dignity;

wrongfully occupies or cultivates any land owned by, or allotted to, or notified by any competent authority to be allotted to him transferred;

Wrongfully dispossesses a member of a SC/ST from her/his land or premises or obstructs the enjoyment of the rights over any land, premises or water;

Compels or entices a member of a SC/ST to do forced or bonded labour;

forces or intimidates not to vote or to vote a particular candidate or to vote in a manner other than that provided by law;

institutes false, malicious or vexatious suit or criminal or other legal proceedings;

gives any false or frivolous information to any public servant and thereby causes such public servant to use his lawful power to the injury or annoyance of a member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe;

intentionally insults or intimidates with intent to humiliate a member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe in any place within public view;

assaults or uses force to any woman with intent to dishonour or outrage her modesty;

being in a position to dominate the will of a woman and uses that position to exploit her sexually to which she would not have otherwise agreed;

corrupts or fouls the water of any spring, reservoir or any other source ordinarily used by members of the Scheduled Castes or a Scheduled Tribes;

denies any customary right of passage to place of public resort or obstructs such member so as to prevent him from using or having access to a place of public resort to which other members of public or any section thereof have a right to use or access to;

forces or causes to leave his house, village or other place of residence.

Such offences are punishable with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than six months but which may extend to five years and with fine.

The Act further specifies other malicious and intentional atrocities that may usually happen in the society. Such deliberate attempts to harm SC and ST members by the members of other communities are tackled with severe punishment.

Whoever gives or fabricates false evidence against a member of SC/ST intending to be convicted of an offence which is capital by the law shall be punished with imprisonment for life and with fine.

If an innocent member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe be convicted and executed in consequence of such false or fabricated evidence, the person who gives or fabricates such false evidence, shall be punished with death.

Whoever gives or fabricates false evidence intending thereby to cause any member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe to be convicted of an offence which is punishable with

imprisonment for a term of seven years or upwards, shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than six months but which may extend to seven years or upwards and with fine.

Whoever commits mischief by fire or any explosive substance intending to cause damage to any property belonging to a member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe, shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than six months but which may extend to seven years and with fine.

Whoever commits mischief by fire or any explosive substance intending to cause destruction of a place of worship or a place for human dwelling or a place for custody of the property owned or used by a member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe, shall be punishable with imprisonment for life and with fine.

Whoever commits any offence under the Indian Penal Code against a person of Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe shall be punishable with imprisonment for life and with fine. The same offence against a non dalit receives only a lesser punishment.

Procedure

The affected person may file FIR (First Information Report) in the Police Station of the area as per provision under Section 3 of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

Powers and Functions of the State Government

For the purpose of providing for speedy trial, the State Government shall, with the concurrence of the Chief Justice of the High Court, specify for each district a Court of Session to be a Special Court to try the offences under this Act.

For every Special Court, the State Government shall specify a Public Prosecutor or appoint an advocate as a Special Public Prosecutor.

The state government is empowered to impose and realise collective fine from the offenders.

Responsible judicial or police authorities can declare a disturbed area to be an area prone to atrocities and take necessary action for keeping the peace and maintenance of public order and may take preventive action.

The State Government should take such measures as may be necessary for the effective implementation of this Act as:

the provision for adequate facilities, including legal aid to the persons subjected to atrocities to enable them to avail themselves of justice.

the provision for travelling and maintenance expenses to witnesses, including the victims of atrocities, during investigation and trial,

the provision for the economic and social rehabilitation of the victims of the atrocities.

the appointment of officers for initiating or exercising supervision over prosecutions.

the identification of the areas to atrocities and adoption of such measures so as to ensure safety for such members.

The Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules, 1995

In the exercise of powers conferred by the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, the Central Government made a few rules and regulations for the effective function of the Act. The uniqueness of the 1995 Rules is that they very firmly direct State Governments to take necessary precautionary and preventive measures to prevent any possible violence against the members of SC/ST.

Rules suggest due importance to the protective measures like identification of the areas prone to atrocities and direct verification of places by higher officials. There should be control over licensed and illegal weapons in such places. The rules permit the authorities in the volatile areas, if needs, to equip the members of the SC and ST with arms.

The rules of 1995 encourage public participation for creating harmony. NGO's are encouraged to conduct awareness programmes.

It directs the State to constitute high power committees at different level to assist the government in implementation of the provisions of the Act. Similarly, vigilance and monitoring

committees can be set up to suggest effective means to implement the provisions of the Act. Periodical reviewing of functions and situation is insisted.

3.5. ANNUAL REPORT -2004

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, prepares annual reports on the functioning and progress of implementation of 1955 Act and 1989 Act. As a model, 2004 report on the Act of 1989 is given below. This is chosen, though recent reports have come, because this presents data of two years in comparison.

Annual Report on the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, for the Year 2004 has compiled the number of cases registered by the State Governments and Union Territory Administrations. A total of 23,629 cases were registered in 2004 and 22,603 in 2003. It appears that total number of offence of atrocities registered under the Act have slightly been increased during 2004 as compared to 2003.

Cases under the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 (state wise)

S. No.	State/Union Territory	Number of Cases reported during the year	
		2004	2003
1	2	3	4
1.	Rajasthan	5391	5241
2.	Madhya Pradesh	4135	5087
3.	Uttar Pradesh	2863	1778
4.	Andhra Pradesh	2236	2328
5.	Bihar	1785	1185
6.	Orissa	1407	1222
7.	Karnataka	1232	1293
8.	Gujarat	1070	1025
9.	Maharashtra	922	870

10.	Tamil Nadu	891	974
11.	Chhatisgarh	769	815
12.	Kerala	374	335
13.	Jharkhand	232	168
14.	Uttaranchal	133	120

Only the top 14 states which figure above 100 cases are given here. The annual report contains all the states and union territories except Jammu & Kashmir. From the data the following implications can be derived. Large number of cases indicates the presence of atrocities even after the implementation of acts and rules for the protection of Dalits. It should be taken as a good sign as well, because the number shows the increasing intervention of police and judiciary in favour of the down trodden. Above all, it also indicates the strength of Dalit and other social organizations and activists in raising the problems of the weak. But the data given in the following tables from the 2004 annual report are not so encouraging.

Investigation of Cases by Police 2004

A total of number of 32,324 cases was brought forwarded in 2004. After investigation 15,646 cases were charge sheeted.

Number of Cases

S.No.	Item	Number	Percentage of total
1	Total Number of cases (including brought forward)	32,324	-
2	Number of cases charge sheeted in courts	15,646	48.40%
3	Number of cases closed after investigation	6,912	21.38%
4	Number of cases pending with the police at the end of the year	9,766	30.22%

From the above, it appears that more than 48.40% of the cases were charge sheeted during the year and 21.38% cases were closed after investigation.

Disposal of Cases by Courts

Number of Cases

S.No.	Item	Number	Percentage of Total
1	Total Number of cases (including brought forward)	1,41,881	-
2	Number of cases disposed of by Courts	20,750	14.62%
a	Number of cases ending in conviction	3,259	15.71%
b	Number of cases ending in acquittal	17,491	84.29%
3	Number of cases pending with Courts	1,21,131	85.38%

The disposal of cases by the courts makes us to think about the reluctant role of the courts in promoting a just society. As the table concerned the disposal of cases shows that trial was taken place only in 14.62 per cent of the cases. Out of them, above 84 per cent did not favour the victims. It confirms such claims as the charge sheets were not well framed or the prosecutors were not properly representing the clients. In some cases the witnesses might have changed their sides. It is also observed that the victims many times make out of court settlement and allow the offender to escape from punishment.

3.6. NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCHEDULED CASTES AND SCHEDULED TRIBES

The commissioner for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes had been functioning as a constitutional authority under Article 338 since 1950. The Government of India, keeping in view of the magnitude of the problems of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, decided to set up a broad based multi- member body as a constitutional authority in place of a single person to make it more representative and strong. Accordingly a bill was passed by the parliament after the amendment of Article 338 of the Constitution of India by the Constitution (Sixty-fifth Amendment) Act, 1990. The National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes came into existence as a Constitutional body on March 12, 1992.

The following are the duties of the Commission:-

(a) It has to investigate and monitor all matters relating to the safeguards provided for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled and to evaluate the working of such safeguards.

(b) The commission has to inquire into specific complaints with respect to the deprivation of rights and safeguards of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

(c) It should participate and advise on the planning process of socio-economic development of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and to evaluate the progress of their development under the Union and State governments.

(d) It has to present (annual) reports upon the working of those safeguards to the President.

(e) It can make in such reports recommendations as to the measures that should be taken by the Union or any State for the effective implementation of those safeguards and other measures for the protection, welfare and socio-economic development of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

(f) It has to discharge such other functions in relation to the protection, welfare and development and advancement of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as the President may specify.

The Commission shall, while investigating any matter relating to the safeguards or specific complaints with respect to the deprivation of rights and safeguards have all the powers of a civil court trying a suit and in particular in respect of the following matters, namely:-

- (a) summoning and enforcing the attendance of any person from any part of India and examining him on oath;
- (b) requiring the discovery and production of any document;
- (c) receiving evidence on affidavits;
- (d) requisitioning any public record or copy thereof from any court or office;
- (e) issuing commissions for the examination of witnesses and documents;
- (f) any other matter which the President may, by rule, determine.

The Union and every State Government shall consult the Commission on all major policy matters affecting Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Apart from the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, National Human Rights Commission and other institutions are in place to implement and monitor the Constitutional guarantees. Parliament and State legislatures not only review annual records but also constantly take up issues of violation of rights. Judiciary plays a key role in enforcing the laws and regulations.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with the note above in the unit.

1. Write a note on the provisions of the law against 'untouchability.'

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3.7. LET US SUM UP

The goal of social structures is to construct a harmonious society. But violence has been institutionalised through social and cultural practices of caste system over the years. The legal measures are not that effective to counter the vices in the name of caste. The deep rooted and violent socio cultural and economic traditions of India are continued to exist even under the liberal economic and political conditions. Cultural conditioning stays behind and its influence is stronger than rational and humanist views.

The purpose of the Acts and the Commissions is to prevent atrocities and help in social inclusion of Dalits. Though the efforts have not been fully successful, they vibrated the movements working for the liberation of Dalits into the main stream.

It is not the severity of punishment that we need but certainty of punishment. Large number of offenders is not convicted not because of the absence of law or loopholes in law but because of the slackness in implementing the spirit of the law. It shows that the problem lies in the implementation process. It is in the hands of police, judiciary and bureaucracy. The functions of these important authorities are to be made simple, transparent and accountable.

Constitutional safeguards and legal remedies are the most effective means that are available to correct the ills of social structures. Civil liberty groups and social movements including Dalit groups have to collectively intervene in the processes of implementation. In the recent years, the media have emerged as the watchdog for human rights. Social organizations and the media have to monitor the functioning of the Governmental machinery in protecting Dalits by preventing atrocities against them.

3.8 KEY WORDS

Structural Violence - An institutionalised attempt to prevent any individuals or communities from the accession of available facilities and services by the dominant individuals or powerful communities through legal or illegal means and with open or hidden strategies can be called structural violence.

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1.10. ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1) Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. Violence against Dalits can be considered as structural because of the following reasons. Individuals practice violence not as a result of personal enmity or individual displeasure but as a result of the socio cultural learning that are imbibed by the members of upper castes. Therefore violence is not due to inherent evils of any individual or caste but because of the inherent evils of caste system itself. In other words, caste system has got immoral forms of social, political, cultural and economic structures that permit or encourage violence to go unchecked.

Violent social spheres are systematically institutionalised. Society was divided on the basis of work. Social division was stabilised through inheritance and social obligation was demanded from people as ethical norms as sanctioned by religious scriptures. In such a social system, the

social labour of the members of the upper castes was rewarded well and donation to them was accepted as a virtuous act, but members of the lower caste were not paid what were due to them.

There was no mechanism within the system that could rectify systemic problems. On the contrary there were very effective means to prevent any possible change. The members of the upper castes regard any change, however good they may be, as threat to social order, therefore should not be permitted. The attempt to change the oppressive practices by the sufferers leads to tension and conflict.

2. The rising democratic consciousness among dalits, the trend of self-assertion through politics, literature and social movements invited the wrath of the upper castes against them. The empowering attempt causes severe clashes between upper castes and the Dalits mainly in the rural areas. It is noticed that the intensity of violence against the Dalits has been increasing. One reason is the political tension. It is supplemented by increasing awareness among Dalits about their rights and their assertion to achieve them.

Answer to Check Your Progress II

1 The Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 prescribes punishment for the preaching and practice of “Untouchability” and for the enforcement of any disability arising there from for matters connected therewith. In the Act “civil rights” means any right accruing to a person by reason of the abolition of “untouchability” by article 17 of the Constitution. A number of important sections are given below.

Section 3 of the Act of 1955 identifies the practices of untouchability on the ground of preventing members of the out castes

(a) from entering any place of public worship, which is open to other persons professing the same religion , or

(b) from worshipping or offering prayers or performing any religious services in any place of public worship, or bathing in, or using the waters of any sacred tank, well, ghat, spring, river or lake.

Section 4 of the Act– Whoever on the ground of “untouchability” enforces against any person social disabilities with regard to the following facilities, situations and conditions shall be punishable. .

- (i) accession to any shop, public restaurant, hotel or place of public entertainment.
- (ii) use of any utensils and other articles for the use of the general public.
- (iii) practice of any profession or the carrying on of any occupation, trade or business.
- (iv) use of, or access to, any river, stream, spring, well, tank, cistern, water-tap or other watering place, or any bathing ghat, burial or cremation ground, any sanitary convenience, or any road.
- (v) use of, or access to, any place used for charitable or a public purpose maintained wholly or partly out of State funds or dedicated to the use of general public.
- (vi) enjoyment of any benefit under a charitable trust created for the benefit of the general public.
- (vii) use of or accession to any public conveyance.
- (viii) construction, acquisition, or occupation of any residential premises in any locality, whatsoever.
- (ix) use of any dharmshala, sarai or musafirkhana which is open to the general public.
- (x) observance of any social or religious custom, usage or ceremony.
- (xi) use of jewellery and finery.

Section 5 : (a) if anybody refuses a person admission on the ground of ‘untouchability’ to any hospital, dispensary, educational institution or any hostel which are established or maintained for the benefit of the general public or (b) discriminates against any such person after admission shall be punishable.

Section 6: Refuses on the ground of ‘untouchability’ to sell any goods or to render any service to any person on the same terms and conditions at which such goods are sold or services are rendered to other persons in the ordinary course of business.

Section 7 (1): the other discriminatory offences which shall be punishable under the act are the following.

(a) Prevention of any person from exercising any right accruing to him by reason of the abolition of 'untouchability' under Article 17 of the Constitution.

(b) Molests, injures, annoys, obstructs or attempts to cause obstruction or boycotts any person in the exercise of any such right or any person by reason of his/her having exercised any such rights.

(c) Incites or encourages any person or class of persons or the public to practise any form "untouchability".

(d) Insults or attempts to insult a member of a Scheduled Castes on the ground of "untouchability".

Each of the above sections are further specified and the punishments of offences are mentioned in the remaining sections. Punishments are very mild and therefore the Act of 1989 again looked into them.



UNIT 4

DALIT HISTORIOGRAPHY

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Definition and Scope of Historiography
- 4.3 Subaltern Historiography
- 4.4 Emergence of Alternative Historiographies
- 4.5 Contributions of Dr B. Ambedkar to an Alternative Dalit Historiography
- 4.6 Rationality, Moral and Community as Principles of Dalit Historiography
- 4.7 Historiographical Relevance of Caste and Religion
- 4.8 Major Thrusts of Dalit Alternative Historiography
- 4.9 Foucault's Deployment of Nietzschean Genealogy as a Tool
- 4.10 Pregnant Time and Pregnant Space as Symbols of History of the Dalits
- 4.11 Historiography as Re-Membering the Lack
- 4.12 Remembering Identity and Agency
- 4.13 Celebrating the Dalit Agency in the Choice of Alternative Religiosities
- 4.14 Overcoming the Eclipse of the Subaltern Contribution to Political Economy
- 4.15 Let us sum up
- 4.16 Key Words
- 4.17 Further Readings and References
- 4.18 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This section intends:

- to introduce the students to the discipline of Historiography and the different approaches to Historiography.
- to present an overview of the Historiographies, which have been embraced by different Schools of History in approaching the history of our nation.

- to help the students to see how Dalit Historiography can be tool of empowerment for the Dalits, in its significant thrust, goals and concerns.
- to understand how and why history and historiography, have of late, become sites of contestation of power.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Among the many functions the study of the past performs, its ability to create a consciousness of the common cultural and political heritage, and thus to create the ability to imagine that the nation is very important. Among the many factors that enable the imagination, history has a central role. During the last few decades, history, as a discipline among the social sciences, has gone through a phase of intense soul-searching and self-critique. This process of self-engagement was triggered off by the hermeneutical turn of the sciences and facilitated by the new epistemological frameworks, created by the forces of Post-colonialism and Post-Modernism. Historiography is one of the most contested sites, in terms of equations of power-relationships and identity-politics. Consequently, various historiographies are in emergence. History, which had hitherto been playing the role of a ‘fact-finding’ mistress, sees itself instrumentalized, constructed and de-constructed by the various dominant and subaltern communities. It is imperative that the students come to know the importance of historiography and its role in the reimagination and the reinvention of the Nation, whether it is in the guise of rewriting of the textbooks of history, the demand for smaller states or attempts at homogenization of pluralistic and multicultural identities, through the tool of cultural nationalism.

4.2 DEFINITION AND SCOPE OF HISTORIOGRAPHY

Historiography is the history of history, the aspect of history and of semiotics that considers how knowledge of the past, either recent or distant, is obtained and transmitted. Formally, historiography examines the writing of history, the use of historical methods, drawing upon authorship, sources, interpretation, style, bias, and the reader. Moreover, historiography also denotes a body of historical work. Scholars discuss historiography topically, i.e. the “historiography of Catholicism”, the “historiography of China”, etc., and the approaches and

genres include oral history and social history. Beginning in the nineteenth century, at the ascent of academic history, a corpus of historiography literature developed, including *What is History?* (1961), by E. H. Carr, and *Metahistory* (1973), by Hayden White.

Historiography is predicated on the assumption that important questions arise concerning the reliability of the knowledge of the past produced by historian and whether history is a science or an art. It is concerned with the study of the writing of history with particular reference to the style of historical writing, the methods of interpretation and the tools of investigation employed. It can also refer to a specific a body of historical writing (for example, 'medieval historiography during the 1960s' meaning 'medieval history written during the 1960s'). Historical method comprises the techniques and guidelines by which historians use primary sources and other evidences to research and then to write history. Historiography takes into account of the processes by which, history as a mere archival record grows into history as conscious cultivation and construction of his/her/their stories, and a simultaneous critique of this very process of constructing histories. Issues engaged by critical historiography include:

What constitutes a historical "event"? In what modes does a historian write and produce statements of 'truth' and 'fact'? How does the medium (novel, textbook, film, theatre, comic) through which historical information is conveyed influence its meaning? What inherent epistemological problems does archive-based history possess? How do historians establish their own objectivity or come to terms with their own subjectivity? What is the relationship between historical theory and historical practice? What is the "goal" of history? What does history teach us?

4.3 SUBALTERN HISTORIOGRAPHY

The subaltern history was conceived as an alternative to all existing historiographies. Dismissing all of them as elitist in character, the subaltern history set out to recover the voice of the subaltern, a social group identified as representing the 'demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those who are described as the elite'. The people's history – the history of the oppressed and the exploited – was nothing new in Indian historiography; the concern of the Marxist historians has been precisely that. What could have distinguished the subaltern

history from the earlier genres of people's history was a qualitative change in its methodology by ushering in a history from below. This however was not to be, as most of the essays collected in the series failed to recover the voice of the marginalised by using unconventional sources drawn from Indian languages. In fact, two major marginalised groups in Indian society, the Dalits and women, hardly appeared in these studies. Moreover, despite the obvious inspiration from the writings of Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist theoretician, the entire project lacked theoretical coherence and conceptual precision. It is therefore not surprising that the project soon took a linguistic turn, and lost much of its radical rhetoric.

4.4 EMERGENCE OF ALTERNATIVE HISTORIOGRAPHIES

Today, we stand particularly before the challenge of re-defining both nationalism and historiography in relation to the marginal peoples and groups. The question they raise is: *Whose nation? Whose history?* To be able to come to terms with these questions, we need to migrate to another level of experience in historiography, which has great potential for enduring unity and peace.

A positive trend in Indian historiography is the emergence of Dalit and women's history. The former contests the social power of the upper castes and the latter the patriarchal authority of the male. The Indian historiography, whichever genre it belonged to, have been silent, either consciously or unconsciously, about the history of these groups. Ranajit Guha, in his introduction to the Subaltern studies has stated that the 'history of Indian nationalism has been written up as a sort of spiritual biography of the Indian elite'. In fact the entire history of India has been written as the saga of the upper castes and the male heroes. The history of the Indian Renaissance, for instance, has been encapsulated in the socio-religious efforts of upper caste leaders from Rammohan to Dayanand. For a long time, people like Jyotibha Phule, Narayana Guru, Ayyankali or Ramaswamy Naicker did not figure at all. Pandita Ramabhai or Tarabhai Shinde are still not included. This is true of the national movements as well. Ambedkar has only begun to be noticed, thanks to the attempts to recover the role of the Dalits in order to gain their rightful place in the national life.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What is the relevance of Alternative Historiography?

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4.5 CONTRIBUTIONS OF DR B. AMBEDKAR TO AN ALTERNATIVE DALIT HISTORIOGRAPHY

Ambedkar's contributions are not only significant in writing Indian history but in evolving a method which is more relevant even for contemporary historians of different schools. Ambedkar came to forefront in Indian academics from the decade of nineties with the intensified struggles of Dalits. The struggles of the ordinary people forced the centers of power and knowledge to consider the importance of Ambedkar and his ideas in social reconstruction of the nation. With Ambedkar as the source of inspiration, Dalits are struggling to write their own history by interrogating the dominant Brahminical traditions. The relevance of Ambedkar has to be read with the fifty years developments of Post-Ambedkar of post independent India. His approach to Indian society and its history are crucial in understanding contemporary India and the struggles of the oppressed.

4.6 RATIONALITY, MORAL AND COMMUNITY AS PRINCIPLES OF DALIT HISTORIOGRAPHY

Ambedkar's notion of history is identified with 'moral community' imbued with the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity. His historical method borrows tools from Marxism in understanding the ancient history. Rather than mechanically applying Marxism, he had creatively

used it in keeping the specific context of Indian society. He approached Indian society from the point of religion and finds the religion as source for the different ideological position. For instance, Buddhism is considered as revolutionary and Hinduism as counter revolutionary. 'Rationality' is the guiding principle in evaluating the principles and practices of religion. For the claims of religion he applied rationalistic principle. He brings the religion as a focal point in reference to caste system. To construct the Indian history in proper perspective, he availed of all the convincing ideas of his times, from liberal to Marxist. This may go in tune of pragmatism, especially John Dewey

The pragmatism of Ambedkar differs from the context of Western societies. The pragmatic method of Ambedkar came out of his social responsibility and in presenting the history from the victim's point of view. In essence he made a serious attempt in constructing the Indian history in which one finds dignified place for 'Sudras' and 'untouchable communities'. Ambedkar is a source of inspiration for contemporary Dalit movement and so for constructing history from Dalit point of view. Dalit historiography establishes its own method by challenging the Colonial, Nationalist, Marxists and Subaltern approaches of Indian historiography.

4.7 HISTORIOGRAPHICAL RELEVANCE OF CASTE AND RELIGION

Ambedkar appears very much aware of the role of historian's social affinity, especially the caste, in dealing the material in relation to the problems of social history. In an introduction to '*Who are the Shudras?*' he made this point more clear. Ambedkar is the first thinker who systematized the conception of caste in analytical way. All the human activities are determined by the caste. Caste has social, political and economical implications. In truth, caste is the primary institution of Indian society and other institutions like family, state, nation, school are directly or indirectly related to/influenced by it.

Ambedkar had more focus on philosophy of religion in understanding the socio-historical phenomenon and the moral basis of Indian society, than exclusively depending on either religion or philosophy. He developed it as a method. It seems in evolving this method; he got influenced by John Dewey. He felt that Hindu religion need to undergo a reform. Caste is a natural outcome of certain religious beliefs which have the sanction of *shastras*. To abolish the sanctity and sacredness of caste, one has to destroy the authority of the *shastras* and *Vedas*. Ambedkar not

only proposed the religion that should stand for reason, but also tries to link it up with the governing principle of politics. In simple terms, he thought reason and critical analysis as a method used for the study of religion.

For Ambedkar, religion had become important category in constructing/interpreting Indian history. Further he proceeds by understanding religion in historical dialectical way. He borrowed the tools of Marxism in understanding Indian history in this fashion. Buddhism had been considered as revolutionary strand against Brahminism and against the triumph of Brahminism. Moreover, he made a systematic attempt to bring in view the history of victims of Indian society, where one finds no trace of any historical evidence in official records or narratives of dominant Brahminical class.

He is critical about the Brahminical past and at the same time he valorizes the democratic past of the oppressed sections of India. Altogether he gave different meaning for nationalism of oppressed. Although Ambedkar was lenient towards Marxism, he is against mere economic reductionistic approach of it. He forcefully argues that other factors like culture and religion too influence the world view of people. He throws a challenge to Marxists on understanding the issue of caste. Ambedkar's method had potential to counter religious nationalism of Hindutva kind and in place of it proposes democratic nationalism of the oppressed. Ambedkar's idea of history came out of the struggles of the oppressed communities and had the imagination of better future by owning the reasoned/democratic past.

4.8 MAJOR THRUSTS OF DALIT ALTERNATIVE HISTORIOGRAPHY

In the present intellectual and cultural climate in India, a major desideratum is the historiography of resistance, both the articulate and hidden forms of resistance. The implicit and silent forms of resistance have not attracted the same scholarly treatment. This is to a large measure, due to the relatively underdeveloped state of cultural history, as silent resistance generally manifests itself in the domain of culture. Recovering the meaning of silence, along with the articulate, and contextualizing it in relation to the social forces should therefore form the agenda of new alternative historiographies, especially of the Dalit Historiography, as distinct from the textual analyses that currently crowd the cultural studies. The following sections deal with the main philosophical and hermeneutical thrusts and signposts, which would make of the Dalit Alternative Historiography, grounded, contextualized and related to the flesh and blood concerns of the marginalized of the society.

4.9. FOUCAULT'S DEPLOYMENT OF NIETZSCHEAN GENEALOGY AS A TOOL OF DALIT HISTORIOGRAPHY

For Michael Foucault, Genealogy is a tool of investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are thinking and doing. It is contrasted with the Historical Schools of the Dominant Historiography. Genealogy looks at history from below, from the bottom to top and not from top to bottom. Foucauldian genealogy is indeed a Dalit historiographical tool for recording the histories of Dalit everydayness. Genealogical method helps to overcoming the privileging of time as a metaphor of history and progress, to privileging space. This, in turn, helps us to overcome the gap between history and memory, especially in the context of the everydayness of the Subalterns.

4.10 PREGNANT TIME AND PREGNANT SPACE AS SYMBOLS OF HISTORY OF THE DALITS

In the context of our discussion on the Dalit historiography, we have to think not only with the metaphor of time but also with space. In the spirit of Foucauldian genealogy, the shift from Time

to Space as a metaphor for history has also to do with rethinking history, in the context of coping with contingencies, especially in the Dalit context. Foucault too as indicated by his genealogical approach, has also been a major voice in drawing our attention to the challenge of contingencies in the study of society and history. He interrogates Kant's construction of a harmonious rapport between the three domains of knowledge--scientific, political and religious. He posits contingency in the dynamics and work of these three bodies of knowledge. This responsibility of the historian has to be a creative historiographical engagement with and for the Dalits.

4.11 HISTORIOGRAPHY AS RE-MEMBERING THE LACK

As we consider the role of memory, relation to history and its role in a history and historiography of the Dalits, we may take up certain specific examples that show how history was understood as a 'lack', especially the lack of history. . This notion of history, interpreted in relation to a 'lack' becomes the major argument of the theorization of slavery. The historiographical problematic is to encounter how in the context of social movements in modernity, the slave experience was recalled, and made on par with authentic histories, that contest the textual representation of slavery, as academic histories. This is achieved by fictionalizing the history of slave experience or by erasing the difference between fiction and history. By ritual rendering of the slave experience, it enters the consciousness of the people, making them aware of the horrors of slavery that existed historically.

It is through this process of selective appropriation/erasure and reinscription that particular versions of the past have been created, and circulated. This has gone too much into the making of an identity for the people who have not experienced slavery in their lived experience. It is significant to note that there is a tension involved in the memories of individuals, where the personal life history does not validate slave experience, while the collective memory that pertains to the historical past recreates images of slavery. In other words, the situatedness of individuals in contemporary cultural milieu, which is far removed from slavery as a social experience challenges the historians to analyse how these visual images of slavery are created through some kind of 'ritual rememory'. The concept of rememory is used in other contexts to analyse slave experience'. "Rememory is something which possesses (or haunts) one, rather than something

which one possess.” It is absolutely necessary to ask what happens to history in this context. ‘History’ is imaginatively recreated, through various strategies. It has been observed in other contexts that, if individuals and collectivities have been produced in discourses, it is possible to imagine discourses that will produce ‘new selves’. The experience recounted produces new selves by providing a different version of their history, in which slavery assumes centrality.

4.12 REMEMBERING IDENTITY AND AGENCY

The narratives of everyday lives of slaves are nothing but a history of oppression, and the notion of suffering body, which is unclean, that requires to be salvaged. More intense stories are being made out that underpin the ravages caused by the cruelties of slavery. Landlords forced women to work in the fields even before they completed postnatal care. They were forced to work for hours together transplanting and weeding paddy fields for longer hours without respite, even in torrential rain or scorching sun. They were not even permitted to feed their newborns, who were usually kept in the cradle hanging from the branches of the nearby trees. In one such instance, when the mother came back after hours of work, what awaited her were the ant-eaten mortal remains of her tender one.

The staggering problem here is to analyze the real functions of the histories of oppression. It is equally significant to ask, to what extent is it history and non-history. It is history even to a conventional historiographer as they are well documented and repeated in several histories of Kerala. But in our context of the Dalits and the re-membling of their slavery, it does perform an extra function, in that it helps achieve subjectivity and agency for people who recall this collective memory. In fact, such rationalized critical theorization definitely helps transgress the ‘social lacks’ to which we are referring.

4.13 CELEBRATING THE DALIT AGENCY IN THE CHOICE OF ALTERNATIVE RELIGIOSITIES

Another area where the Subaltern historiographies can inhabit as their space is the Subaltern agency expressed by the Dalits and other Subalterns, in their opting for alternative religiosities. Very often, an alternative soteriological idiom has been at work in these passages to alternative

religiosities. But the Subaltern agency at play there has been instrumentalized, or eclipsed by dominant historiographical constructs. Subaltern historiographies have to re-deem and celebrate this agency. As the Madigas of Konaseema, who opted for the alternative religiosity of Catholicism, expressing their agency, remarked:

We are proud to say that ours is the very first Madiga enclave in Konaseema to have received Catholicism. When we went over to Bhimavaram as migrant harvesters, we met Fr. Pagano and invited him to our village. Mr. Jonnada Paul was our leader. He was the most educated among us. Later, he along with Mr. Marri Ganapathi, a military man, who was a Mala, went over to Gunadala during the Gunadala *Matha* Feast. Mr John had contact with Christianity in the military. At Gunadala, they impressed upon Fr. Pagano once more on the need of coming to Konaseema and almost fixed a date on which he could come over to our village. Protestants were here but we did not join them because their doctrine and approach to life seemed to uproot us from our tradition. They used to frighten us by saying “No bangles, no *bindi/bottu* and no ornaments.” But Fr. Pagano's words were “You can have and wear everything. *Atme alankaram*. God looks at the heart. Adore God with happiness and joy.

The above passage gives us an inkling into the circumstances of the option by the Dalit Madigas for Catholicism and its entry into Konaseema, at their express invitation around 1942. What Kooiman noted about the nineteenth century Christian converts from among the Shanars and Pariahs of South Travancore can be extended to the situation of the Madigas of Konaseema of mid-twentieth century. “One of the main characteristics of the nineteenth century mass movements was precisely that material, political and spiritual motives were blended together in one complex whole, making it next to impossible to isolate one single factor.”

4.14 OVERCOMING THE ECLIPSE OF THE SUBALTERN CONTRIBUTION TO POLITICAL ECONOMY

In one of the many plays performed by the Madigabhighamvallu (the wandering group of Madiga performers and ritual prostitutes of the Madigas), Veerabahudu, a Madiga is on his way to the market, to buy none other than *Harischandra*, who has run into penury, and is selling himself.

On the way, the Madiga is singing himself away to glory and the lyric of his song, can be roughly translated as follows:

Please give some way, make some space for me. I am from an *esteemed* family.

If I don't tell you the truth, you will tell me to get out of sight

If I deliberately refuse to tell you the truth, even then you will cast me away.

If I cross you without asking, you will blame me, "Don't Pollute"

If I ask your leave and then go, even then you will question me

I am going to buy somebody, who is on sale, on the road - it seems he is good

I am going to buy him, since my wife has told me so.

Though these lines are taken from a wandering troupe's enactment of an oft-enacted common scene, it is pregnant with self-assertion and protest against an existing oppressive order of things. It is an artist's signature on his creation, especially, the first line "*Please give me some way, make some space for me. I am from an esteemed family.*" In words couched in irony and protest, he is expressing his resistance to the existing order, in the context of the enactment, removed from the real life situation, but very much reflecting it.

Like the folk-drama, *Harischandra*, *Kulapuranas* are identity markers of any caste. They are inherited oral texts, not a piece of recitation, but as cultural metaphor, an interactive text, which explicitly relates members of a social group to its own self and to the other social groups. Jambavadu is the focal identity symbol of the Madiga caste, and the central figure of their caste. In the performance of their *Kulapurana*, he becomes a symbol of protest, of their being denied their due share in the political economy of the land, and the de-valorization of their traditional skills.

Historiographies of/for the Dalits will be fulfilling their task, if they become sites where the performative and the oral protests of the Dalits, vis-à-vis their eclipse from the political economy are highlighted, as survival is the primordial subaltern posture.

Check Your Progress 4

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What is Genealogy according to Michael Foucault ?

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2). What is meant by historicizing the 'lacks' by the Dalits?

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4.15 LET US SUM UP

As we outlined in the Objectives and Introduction, our task in this section had been to bring out the salient features of a Dalit Historiography, which would empower them, both as communities and identities. Reaching up to the task, we have critically defined historiography and its scope. We have brought into relief, the unique features of the Dalit historiography, against the background of the other historiographies, which have been vogue in India. The contributions of Ambedkar towards the methodology of an Alternative and Dalit historiography have been placed as a link between the earlier mainline historiographies and the forward thrust of Dalit Historiography. In the process, we have also brought out the relevance of the Dalit Historiography, as an Alternative historiography of protest, identity assertion and culture of silence, aimed at the empowerment of Dalits. In the final section, we have delineated the major philosophical and hermeneutical thrusts of the Dalit historiography in prospect.

4.16 KEY WORDS

Historiography - is the history of history, the aspect of history and of semiotics that considers how knowledge of the past, either recent or distant, is obtained and transmitted. Formally, historiography examines the writing of history, the use of historical methods, drawing upon authorship, sources, interpretation, style, bias, and the reader.

Subaltern Historiography - is an alternative to all existing historiographies. Dismissing all of them as elitist in character, the subaltern history is set out to recover the voice of the subaltern, a social group identified as representing the 'demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those who are described as the elite'.

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4.18 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1) The Alternative Historiographies give voice to the silent protest of the sections of society, which has been hitherto eclipsed and not heard. A positive trend in Indian historiography is the emergence of Alternative Historiographies like those of the Dalits and Women. The former contests the social power of the upper castes and the latter the patriarchal authority of the male. The Indian historiography, whichever genre it belonged to, have been silent, either consciously or unconsciously, about the history of these groups. Ranajit Guha, in his introduction to the Subaltern studies has stated that the 'history of Indian nationalism has been written up as a sort

of spiritual biography of the Indian elite'. In fact the entire history of India has been written as the saga of the upper castes and the male heroes. The history of the Indian Renaissance, for instance, has been encapsulated in the socio-religious efforts of upper caste leaders from Rammohan to Dayanand. For a long time, people like Jyotibha Phule, Narayana Guru, Ayyankali or Ramaswamy Naicker did not figure at all. Pandita Ramabhai or Tarabhai Shinde are still not included. This is true of the national movements as well. Ambedkar has only begun to be noticed, thanks to the attempts to recover the role of the Dalits in order to gain their rightful place in the national life. The Alternative Historiographies take into account of the culture of silent protest.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. For Michael Foucault, Genealogy is a tool of investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are thinking and doing. It is contrasted with the Historical Schools of the Dominant Historiography. Genealogy looks at history from below, from the bottom to top and not from top to bottom. Foucauldian genealogy is indeed a Dalit historiographical tool for recording the histories of Dalit everydayness. Genealogical method helps to overcoming the privileging of time as a metaphor of history and progress, to privileging space. This, in turn, helps us to overcome the gap between history and memory, especially in the context of the everydayness of the Subalterns. He also helps us to understand how space can be understood as a tool in analyzing structures of power/knowledge along with time, which was the privileged category of Modernity in analyzing power/knowledge relationships.

2). As we consider the role of memory, relation to history and its role in a history and historiography of the Dalits, we may take up certain specific examples that show how history was understood as a 'lack', especially the lack of history. . This notion of history, interpreted in relation to a 'lack' becomes the major tool of the theorization of slavery and the sufferings of the Dalits. The historiographical problematic is to encounter how in the context of social movements in modernity, the slave experience was recalled, and made on par with authentic histories, that contest the textual representation of slavery, as academic histories. This is

achieved by fictionalizing the history of slave experience or by erasing the difference between fiction and history. By ritual rendering of the slave experience, it enters the consciousness of the people, making them aware of the horrors of slavery that existed historically. In this process, the historicizing the 'lacks', whether it be the absence of history or other structures which prevented their well-being can be appropriated and made tools of a reversal of roles. This helps in the assertion of Dalit identities and contesting hierarchy.



BLOCK 4

The dalits are also part of the Indian social system and as such they too have a different approach and outlook to reality and the world they encounter. India, being a pluralistic country, needs a study of this class of people. Dalits, who are at the bottom of Indian society, have their own culture, philosophy and political aspirations, and studying such a group of people will tell us about the complexity of the Indian sub-continent. The dalits have always been discriminated. Although the occupational division of the society initializes itself from the sacred scriptures itself, those very scriptures discriminate and put down this group of people. They are reduced to be the 'untouchables' by the mainstream of the Indian caste system. Indian society, for not less than the past three millennia, has been under the grip of the system of social hierarchy of casteism. This has been perceived by the leaders of the country and the state has guaranteed some privileges and rights that can emancipate them.

Unit 1 studies the dalits' Outlook on Life and the World. The origin of the caste system and the division of the Indian society into four castes dates back to the ancient scriptures itself. This unit deals with the clarification of the term dalits, their place in the Hindu hierarchy, their origin, outlook towards life, and world and the dalit movement that has taken momentum.

Unit 2 highlights the Marginalization of Dalits and the various steps taken to deconstruct it. It brings out the reality of the Indian society. They are reduced to be the 'untouchables' by the mainstream of the Indian caste system and are marginalized. This needs to be deconstructed and they need to be brought to the main stream of life and the civil society has a role to play in this direction.

Unit 3 looks at Dalits in the Light of Gramsci's Thought. This unit includes the philosophical standpoint of Antonio Gramsci, a general comparison between Gramsci and Ambedkar, the concept of civil and caste society, Hegemony and Deconstruction in Dalit Politics and the limits of applicability of Gramscian concepts.

Unit 4 highlights the meaning of the Philosophy of Liberation in general and then applies it with Special Reference to Dalits. It clarifies the underlying principles which are embedded in the

philosophy of domination in the Indian soil and then goes on to question the principles in the caste system and move towards a liberative philosophy.

The richness of the Indian social system lies in its diversity and variety. But this has given rise to a lot of complexities and divisions. All these need our attention and the right attitude to eliminate these evils. It calls for a review of the whole social organization and a movement towards a new India, a truly free India.



UNIT 1 DALIT'S OUTLOOK ON LIFE AND WORLD

Contents

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Origin of Caste and Untouchability
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- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7 Key Words
- 1.8 Further Readings and References
- 1.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to understand Dalit's Outlook on Life and World. This study will help the student of philosophy to realize the pluralistic nature of Indian philosophy and culture. The identity of India is under great discussion. While many philosophers and social thinkers consider India mainly from Brahmanic Hindu perspectives, the study on Dalit's outlook on life and world will expose the students of philosophy to view India in all its complexity. Dalits who are at the bottom of Indian society have their own culture, philosophy and political aspirations. This Unit aims to expose the world of Dalits to the students of philosophy. Thus by the end of this Unit you should be able:

- to have a basic understanding of who are Untouchables;
- to differentiate the aspirations of Untouchables with that of caste Hindus;
- to relate Dalits with their struggles for human dignity;
- to expose the philosophy students with prominent Dalit Social Thinkers
- to know the importance of Dalit philosophy today

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Hindu society is divided into groups, known as castes, with varying degrees of respectability. The lowest rung in the caste hierarchy is that of the untouchables. They have been called by this name because the very touch of them would pollute the caste people above them. They have been kept at a distance due to the above consideration. Their person, shadow, food, vessels were to be avoided. They were made to live separately and often could not share such common village amenities as the well. The stigma of "untouchability" was also related to the type of occupation these castes did such as clearing the dead chattels, cleaning the public places and removing the night soil. This stigma could be traced back to centuries old Manu, the Hindu law-giver.

Who then were the Dalits? They were the ones who by virtue of their *jati* (caste) membership were placed socially, economically, culturally and politically at the very bottom of a hierarchical society (Webster, 1994:32). They make up about 16 per cent of the Indian population and number about 138 million. They have been called by various names, such as 'Untouchables', 'Harijans', (a glorified term, coined by Narasimha Mehta and adopted and popularised by Mahatma Gandhi), 'Exterior Castes' (used by J.H. Hutton), 'Depressed Classes' (by British officials), 'Outcastes', 'Pariahs' (commonly, but undoubtedly derived from the Tamil word *para* or *parai*, the drum (Deliege,1997)). In more ancient times the terms 'Mlechha' 'Chandala' (used by Manu), also Panchama (the fifth class), Avarna (i.e. outside the four varnas), Nishada, Paulkasa, Antyaja, Atishudra, etc., were used (see Michael 1999: 12). But the term 'Dalit' that is being used today is a name that the untouchables have given themselves. "Dalit" means ground down, downtrodden, oppressed, but it now is being used by the low castes in a spirit of pride and militancy. The name "dalit" is not only a rejection of the very idea of pollution or impurity or "untouchability," it reveals a sense of unified class, of a movement toward equality. It speaks of a new stage in the movement of Untouchables in India (Zelliot, 1996:1).

1.2 ORIGIN OF CASTE AND UNTOUCHABILITY

The origins of caste and of untouchability lie deep in India's ancient past and the evidence of those origins provided by the archaeological and literary sources now available is, at best, circumstantial. Consequently, scholars have been forced to engage in considerable speculation in their efforts to reconstruct the past history of untouchability. What we now have are not

hard and clear facts but a variety of competing theories, all of which have proved difficult to substantiate in a convincing manner.

The dominant view traces the origins of caste and Untouchability to the Aryans themselves and to their ways of relating to the peoples of India with whom they came into contact. The Aryans, a set of related and highly self-conscious tribes sharing a common language and religion, began their invasions of India from the northwest around 1500 B.C. For centuries they remained in seemingly constant conflict with the indigenous peoples, whom they looked down upon as culturally inferior and shunned as ritually unclean. Once conquered by superior military technology, some of these peoples withdrew into regions as yet unoccupied by the Aryans, while others were incorporated as separate and inferior castes within Aryan-dominated society. In post Rig-Vedic literature there are more frequent references to primitive forest-dwellers who were kept on the fringes of Aryan society in the conquered regions. Among these were the Candala. Although the Candala were severely stigmatised in the later Vedic age, it was only in the period between 600 B.C. and 200 A.D. that untouchability appears as such (Webster, 1994:2). In the Dharmasutras and in Kautilya's Arthashastra the Candala are treated as untouchable and the "mixed caste theory" of the origins of untouchability is enunciated. However, it is in the Manusmriti that this theory, as well as the varna theory and the classification of castes in a hierarchy based on occupation and degree of pollution, receives its classic statement.

According to Manu, the ancient Indian law-giver, untouchability is the punishment for miscegenation, between a member of a high caste and that of a low caste or an outcaste. The children of such an unequal pair become untouchables, and the greater the social gap between the two parents, the lower the status of their children. The consequences are also more severe if the mother is of the superior caste. Thus the offspring of a Brahmin father and a Shudra mother is called Nishada; the child becomes a fisherman. The offspring of a Shudra father and a Brahmin mother is called Chandala; he is the most degraded of all mortals. To Manu a degraded occupation is not the cause of untouchability, rather untouchability condemns a person to a low and impure occupation. In later times racial mixture was added as a factor of impurity. In the period after Manu increasing numbers of

the members of the lower castes belonged to different races and cultures. The practice of untouchability was intensified and applied to more groups in the years following 200 A.D., while Candala became a label not simply for a tribe but for all whom the Aryans considered to be at the very bottom of society.

What has been described thus far relates to North India. The literature from South India suggests that the people whom the Aryans conquered were Dravidians, who subsequently moved south subjugating the indigenous people. It was only later, when Aryan influences spread to the South, that the *varna* system and untouchability came into being there.

J.H. Hutton, eminent anthropologist and author of the best book on caste, *Caste in India*, locates the origins of caste in the taboos and divisions of labour in the pre-Aryan tribes of India as well as in their efforts at self-preservation in the face of invasion (1963). In his opinion untouchability is the consequence of ritual impurity. He says: "The origin of the position of the exterior castes is partly racial, partly religious, and partly a matter of social custom. There can be little doubt but the idea of untouchability originates in taboo."

Von Fuerer-Haimendorf, another eminent anthropologist believes that untouchability is an urban development and is the result of an unclean and ritually impure occupation (see the Foreword in *Children of Hari*, Fuchs 1950). Once untouchability had developed in urban or semi-urban settlements its gradual spread to the villages was inevitable, for it is everywhere the towns which set the standard.

Dr. Ambedkar's thesis on the origin of untouchability, as expounded in his book *The Untouchables* (1948) is an altogether novel one. The distinction between the Hindus and the untouchables in its original form, before the advent of untouchability proper, was the distinction between Tribesmen and Broken Men from alien tribes. It is the Broken Man who subsequently came to be treated as untouchable. There are two roots from which untouchability has sprung: a) Contempt and hatred for the Broken Man, as far Buddhism by the Brahmins. b) Continuation of beef-eating by the Broken Man after it had been given up by the others.

Dr. Ambedkar tries to explain what he means by Broken Men. He proposes an ingenious hypothesis: When primitive society began to settle down and to cultivate, certain tribes remained nomadic and warlike. They began to attack the settled tribes as the latter were wealthier. In addition they had grain which the nomads wanted but did not possess. The settled men

needed defenders as they had lost their warlike spirit. They employed 'broken men' - defeated nomads, and stray individuals who needed protection and shelter. These became mercenaries of the settlers, but were not allowed to stay within the settlement. They were kept at a distance, as they belonged to a different tribe. They were treated with disrespect, as 'broken men' and as mercenaries.

Dr. Ambedkar provided supporting evidence for such a process from Ireland and Wales. The difference was that in those countries the outsiders were after nine generations absorbed into the settled community. This did not happen in India, for the Hindus had contempt for the broken men who were Buddhists and beef-eaters.

At first sight this theory may seem rather far-fetched. However, agreeing with the views of Dr. Ambedkar, Dr. Stephen Fuchs says: "It is a well-known fact that the nomadic animal breeders of Inner Asia, for example, enjoyed nothing more than raiding and fighting. When a tribe was defeated and routed, the survivors often used to be sold into slavery by their conquerors. Those who managed to escape had to seek the protection of another tribe. Being powerless they had often to content themselves with menial jobs, tending horses and cattle, making and repairing saddles and other leather-work, such as tongs and bridles, making and cleaning weapons, etc. As these animal breeding nomads generally despised menial and manual work, this contempt was also extended to those who had to perform it" (Fuchs, 1981:13). There was thus a deep social cleavage between the masters and their servant class. Dr. Ambedkar believes that the root cause of untouchability lies in a pronounced cultural or racial difference coupled with a close economic dependence of the inferior society on the superior one.

Dr. Stephen Fuchs proposes a new theory regarding the Origin of Untouchability (1981: 15ff.). According to him the above proposed theories as well as various others presented by a number of Indologists seem to suffer from one great defect: they do not penetrate deeply enough into the past of the dominant Indian peoples. They restrict themselves unduly to happenings in India. It is true that the caste system and untouchability developed after the arrival of the Aryans and, most probably, of the Dravidians in India, that caste system, as it has grown in India, is unique and not found elsewhere in the world, and that nowhere in the world are untouchables found in such vast numbers - 138 millions! Yet, the roots must be sought in an age when both population groups lived on the steppes of Inner Asia. Here the

animal breeding societies developed a pronounced hierarchical structure. These animal breeders gave up cultivation completely and regarded manual work of any kind as unworthy of a shepherd and a warrior. They also developed a social structure of their own: an extended joint family system with a patriarch at its head in whom all power was vested. According to Dr. Stephen Fuchs, there is sufficient evidence to prove that the Aryans as well as the Dravidians on their arrival in India still belonged to such an animal breeding culture. They must have brought along also their aversion to manual work and to foreign people. The Aryans, on their slow advance through northern India, and the Dravidians wandering down along the west coast into South India, encountered on their way a multitude of earlier settlers who either submitted passively to their conquest or were defeated in fierce battles. As conquerors they managed to impose many of their cultural values and prejudices on the subject peoples of India. Adding to their inherited attitude to manual work and racial purity a new dimension, namely that of ritual purity, they gradually developed this unique Hindu caste system which is intimately connected ideologically with the concept of untouchability.

None of the above explanations for the origin of untouchability are conclusively proved facts. As so often happens with human institutions, no single cause can explain untouchability. It is deeply rooted in Indian history, in the agrarian social order that dominated the Indian economy until the advent of the British, and which remains today India's largest economic sector. Though the relation of India's rural Untouchables to this social order has shifted in subtle ways in the past two centuries, there remain pervasive continuities, especially of meaning and of cultural construction, with this deeply rooted past.

1.3. UNTOUCHABILITY TO DALIT MOVEMENT

Perhaps the first modern Dalit voice was that of Jotiba Phule, a powerful advocate of social and gender equality based in Maharashtra. Another Dalit deeply influenced by liberal values was the Ezhava leader of Kerala, Narayana Guru, who attacked the institution of caste in a regional society where Adi Shankara had argued, long centuries ago, of the essential oneness of things in his metaphysical formulation of *advaita* (non-dualism) as the true basis of reality. There was a fair sprinkling of Dalit leaders elsewhere holding out identical messages. Their principal

argument was loud and clear. Humankind was made up of a vast community of individuals all of whom, in principle, were entitled to the same social status and economic and cultural dignity.

Though the Dalit voice expressed itself eloquently from the outset, it was left to B.R. Ambedkar, a second-generation Dalit leader, to articulate the abject condition of his community in the idiom of modern politics. Ambedkar also spelt out why Hindu discourse offered no route to liberation for the oppressed classes located within the Hindu social matrix. The Dalit communities, Ambedkar argued, were not the stratified constituents of an associational social order. Instead, they constituted the nethermost stratum of an organically integrated social body held together somewhat tightly by the world-view of Brahminical Hinduism. The only way to liberation for the Dalits, therefore, was to opt out of the Hindu fold.

In the course of empowering his Dalit caste fellows, Ambedkar was drawn into an epic conflict with Gandhi on the critical question of the Dalit location within the Hindu social order. Ambedkar felt that once India got freedom, his people, the Untouchables, would once again be subjected to the hegemony of caste-Hindus and be forced to scavenge and sweep for them. To safeguard their interests, he proposed that there should be a number of special seats in Parliament for the depressed classes which would be filled through elections from special constituencies. While drafting a new Constitution for India in the 1930s, the British extended to the Dalit communities the privilege of voting as a separate electoral constituency. Gandhi opposed this constitutional provision with all the strength at his command, since (so he believed) a separate Harijan electorate would damage Hindu society beyond repair. Instead, he offered the Dalits reserved seats in the central and provincial legislature(s) on a scale more generous than promised by the British. The so-called Poona Pact of 1932 was a triumph for the Mahatma because it ensured the social cohesion of Hindu society.

According to Gandhi, "the most effective, quickest and the most unobtrusive way to destroy caste is for reformers to begin the practice with themselves ... The reform will not come by reviling the orthodox. The so-called higher classes will have to descend from their pedestal before they can make impression upon the so-called lower classes". Ambedkar on the other hand believed that India requires a cultural revolution to destroy the caste system and his call to his followers was: "educate, organise and agitate".

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In addition to providing leadership, Ambedkar engendered among the Depressed Classes the vital element of self-respect without which the untouchables movement probably could not have arisen. Under his leadership they realised that it was possible for them to organise resistance and challenge the injustice they were suffering under.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What is your general understanding of Dalits?

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2) What is the difference between the term “Untouchables” and Dalits?

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1.4. UNTOUCHABLES OUTLOOK ON LIFE AND WORLD

As Exploited

The word “Dalit” in Sanskrit means “broken”, and “downtrodden”. Dr. Babasaheb Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar often described the “untouchables” as broken people. The Dalits are socially weak, economically needy and politically powerless, despite the protective policies followed by the government under provisions of the Constitution (guaranteeing them educational

concessions and scholarships, employment and political reservations and socio-economic welfare benefits). The term 'Dalit' thus describes a condition of being underprivileged and deprived of basic rights and refers to people who are suppressed on the ground of their lowly birth. The word 'Dalit' is a descriptive word evocative of bondage and agony, the anguish and frustrated aspirations of a vast victimised section of the Indian population right down the ages. The word 'Dalit' as such was first used as far back as 1931 in journalistic writings. Following this, the Dalit Panther Movement of Maharashtra in the early 70s gave currency to the concept and word "Dalit" to highlight the sufferings and struggles of the untouchables to begin with, but later extending it to include all the oppressed groups, namely the Scheduled Castes, the tribes, the workers, landless labourers, small farmers and other poor, and also the neo-Buddhist converts. However, more recently, the Scheduled Castes (earlier called Depressed Classes under the British and Harijans by Gandhiji) prefer calling themselves "Dalits" or "the oppressed", while the tribals prefer to call themselves "soshits" or the exploited. Both the words are evocative of the anguish and frustrated aspirations of these victims of social injustice for several thousand years. The word "Dalit" particularly emphasises the dehumanising "caste oppression" that makes them out-castes and untouchables (a degradation not shared by the tribals or sohits), within the context of the Hindu caste system with its religio-social organising principle of "purity and pollution" (see Zelliott, 1992; Prabhakar, 1990: 24-25; Massey, 1990: 40-41; Irudayaraj, 1990).

As Impure

Dalits experience that they are treated as impure people. Many high caste Hindus have certain ideas in mind about people belonging to the lower orders: ideas that they are dirty, lazy, quarrelsome, not reliable, they have no morals.

The foundations of untouchability were laid in ancient times. The immigrant Aryans were very different from the non-Aryan dark people whom they found living in India. Aryans considered themselves superior and were proud of their race, language and religion. They considered non-Aryans to be non-humans or *amanushya* (Rigveda 1981:X.22.9). The non-Aryans were described as *Krishna varna* (Rig Veda 1981: IX.41.1) or dark-skinned, *anasa* or without nose (snub-nosed). Thus the Aryans maintained a distance from the earlier settlers or Dasas. These Dasa were declared to have been created as the 'lowest of all' (Rig Veda 1981:II.12.4). They were also called the *Chandala*.

The Chandala has been declared the lowest of all men. He has been assigned the work of removing unclaimed bodies. Chandalas are called *nirvasita*, or exiled, and they were segregated and made to live on the outskirts of villages. It is recorded that under the rule of the Marathas and the Peshwas, the Mahars and Mangs were not allowed within the gates of Poona after 3 p.m. and before 9 a.m. because before nine and after three their bodies cast too long a shadow, which falling on a member of the higher castes - especially Brahmin - defiles him (see Ghurye, 1969:11). The impure castes, and particularly the untouchables, could not enter even the outer portions of a temple. The schools maintained at public cost, were practically closed to untouchables. The toddy-tappers of Malabar and the east coast, the Shanars, were not allowed to carry umbrellas, to wear shoes or golden ornaments, to milk cows. Members of all castes, except the Brahmins, were expressly forbidden to cover the upper part of their body above the waist. In the case of women also, until 1865, if they belonged to the untouchable castes, they were obliged by law to go with the upper part of their bodies quite bare (for more details of the discrimination of the untouchables, (see Ghurye, 1969:10-15).

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) How do the Untouchables experience their world as exploited people?

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2) Illustrate the sense of impurity in Caste society and how it affects the Untouchables?

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1.5. DALITS' OUTLOOK ON LIFE AND WORLD

From the above background of exploitation and impurity, today Dalits have developed a militant and revolutionary outlook towards life and world. It is important to understand that Dalits are not a homogenous and unified group. There are regional, ethnic and religious variations among different previously known untouchable castes of India. All the same, there is some common experience among them.

Impact of Social Philosophers on Dalit Outlook on Life and World

The militant Dalit outlook on life and the world has been developed mainly by some eminent social philosophers like Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, E.V. Ramaswamy Periyar and Babasaheb Ambedkar, with many others throughout India (Narayanswami Guru in Kerala, Achhutanand in U.P. and Mangoo Ram in Punjab). They attacked the system of exploitation at all levels, cultural, economical and political. They developed their vision of Indian society as an alternative to the upper caste understanding of life and the world.

Jotirao Phule gave Dalits a proud out of life by unearthing the Indian history by arguing that the low castes were the original inhabitants of the country, enslaved and exploited by conquering Aryans who had formulated a caste-based Hinduism as a means of deceiving the teeming masses and legitimizing their own power. It was the confirmed and sincere view of Jotirao that the ancient history of India was nothing but the struggle between Brahmins and non-Brahmins (Keer, 1964:120). Hence, Phule consciously sought to bring together the major peasant castes (these were, besides the Kunbis or cultivators, the Malis or 'garden' cultivators and Dhangars or shepherds) along with the large untouchable castes of Mahars and Mangs in a common 'front' against Brahman domination.

Jotirao's attack on Brahmanism was uncompromising. He realised that the seeds of the Brahmins' power, supremacy and privileges lay in their scriptures and puranas; and these works and the caste system were created to exploit the lower classes. Phule also reinterpreted sacred religious literature. To give an example; by reading the nine avatars of Vishnu as stages of the Aryan conquest and using King Bali as a counter symbol to the elite's use of Ram, Ganapathi or Kali,. Thus, Jotirao attacked the brahmanical scriptures and puranas, revolted against priestcraft and the caste system and set on foot a social movement for the liberation of the Shudras, Atishudras (untouchables) and women.

Another important social philosopher who influence the outlook of Dalits today is E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker Periyar (1879-1973). Periyar became convinced that casteism and Hinduism were one and the same. He wanted Hinduism, as he saw it, to go altogether. Periyar realised that the important feature of all new ideologies of the elite was the “Aryan view of race”. The “Aryan view” was adopted enthusiastically by the Indian elite as a new model for understanding caste. That is, Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas were held almost as a matter of definition to be the descendants of invading Aryans, while Shudras and untouchables were those of the native conquered inhabitants. In this new language of caste and race, to claim “Aryan” descent was equivalent to claiming “twice-born” status, to say “Dravidian” or “non-Aryan” almost equivalent to saying “Shudra”.

The high caste elite of India began to take Aryan and Sanskritic culture as the basis of “Indian nationality”, but in so doing they were in fact taking a part - the culture of the upper castes and roughly more northern groups - for the whole.

Periyar’s social philosophy sought to defend the rights of the Dravidians against Aryan domination. He saw in the Brahmins the representatives of Hindu arrogance and the stronghold of social injustice (see Devanandan, 1960). Naicker publicly ridiculed the Puranas as fairy tales, not only imaginary and irrational, but grossly immoral as well. Naicker attacked the Hindu religion as the tool of Brahmin domination.

It is indeed impossible to understand the contemporary Dalit outlook to life and world without understanding the ideas of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956). For a growing number of young Dalits across India, many born after his death in 1956, he has become a symbol of a vision that can be achieved, a vision of freedom from social and economic injustice. Ambedkar attacked two central features of the Indian order: culturally enforced inequality and economic inequality.

Throughout his writings and actions there is one common thread, i.e. that socio-economic transformation in India requires a cultural revolution, one that will not only destroy the culture of the past but also build something of value in its place.

Ambedkar was inspired and guided by the noble example set by Mahatma Jotiba Phule. Phule was no longer there to guide Ambedkar. Nevertheless, his example had an indelible imprint on Ambedkar’s mind. He was determined to complete the work started by Jotiba and it is

not surprising that it became his life's mission (Rajasekhariah, 1971:18-19; also see Keer 1974: vii).

Ambedkar was a revolutionary. He led the fight against Untouchability, Hinduism, and the Brahman caste. He was convinced that the caste system was not only unjust but also immoral. He established a new dispensation, a new religion ((Neo-Buddhism) whose foundation is its unequivocal rejection of Hinduism.

Ambedkar criticised the caste system vehemently. For him, the fight against casteism and untouchability was central, at the heart of his agenda. Hence, he was very critical of the two contemporary approaches to reform of the caste system, namely Dayananda Sarasvati's and Gandhi's (see Baxi, 1994). According to him neither could bring about a real solution to casteism. He held that society should be based on the three fundamental principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.

If caste was to be destroyed, he said, then its religious foundation in the Vedas and Shastras must also be destroyed. Faith in these scriptures was nothing more than a legalised class ethic favouring the Brahmins. "If you wish to bring about a breach in the system, then you have got to apply the dynamite to the Vedas and the Shastras, which deny any part to reason, to the Vedas and Shastras, which deny any part to morality. You must destroy the Religion of the Smritis" (Ambedkar 1945:70).

Ambedkar also rejected the position of Gandhi with regard to caste and its reform. Gandhi felt that the ancient Hindus had already achieved an ideal social system with varna vyavastha. According to Gandhi, "The law of varna means that everyone will follow as a matter of dharma-duty the hereditary calling of his forefathers.... he will earn his livelihood by following that calling" (Zelliot, 1992: 154). In contrast, Ambedkar believed that an ideal society had yet to be achieved in India. For him, the priority was not making "Hinduism" or Hindu society "shine forth" but building a new, equal, free, open, non-hierarchical, modern India.

According to Ambedkar: "It is wrong to say that the problem of the Untouchables is a social problem....the problem of the Untouchables is fundamentally a political problem (of minority versus majority groups)" (Ambedkar, 1945 a:190). Hence, Ambedkar launched his revolutionary movement for the liberation and advancement of the Dalits. On July 20, 1942, he declared at Nagpur: "With justice on our side, I do not see how we can lose our battle. The battle to me is a matter of full joy. The battle is in the fullest sense spiritual. There is nothing material

or sordid in it. For our struggle is our freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of human respectability which has been suppressed and mutilated by the Hindu social system and will continue to be suppressed and mutilated if in the political struggle the Hindus win and we lose. My final word of advice to you is, 'educate, organise and agitate'; have faith in yourselves and never lose hope". (see Das and Massey, 1995: viii). Thus Ambedkar was able to put the untouchability issue on the centre stage of Indian politics (see Shashi, 1992).

Ambedkar painfully realised that within Hinduism the untouchables would never be able to get equal status and receive just treatment. He was also convinced that individual and group mobility was difficult for the untouchables within the Hindu social system. In this context, he saw two possibilities for social emancipation: the political unity of untouchables and an en masse conversion. Hence, in 1936 he talked of conversion to another religion: "Though I have been born a Hindu, I shall not die as a Hindu" (1936-31st May, Bombay). He had already made a first mention of conversion in the Yeola Conference of 1935.

The conversion call of Ambedkar disturbed the Hindu leadership very much. Several leaders tried to persuade him not to go ahead. Ambedkar expressed surprise that the caste Hindus, who had never shown any fellow-feeling for the untouchables were suddenly beseeching them to stay within Hinduism. Since Untouchables had been for centuries ill-treated and humiliated by caste Hindus, why did they now suddenly take such an interest in keeping them within the Hindu fold?

On the 14th October, 1956, after long deliberation and a conscious choice in favour of Buddhism, Ambedkar took his diksha at Nagpur at 9.30 a.m. Assembled were about five lakh Mahars, who all converted to Buddhism on that day. Ambedkar's embracing of Buddhism was a strong protest against all that the Hindus had failed to do. For him swaraj did not mean anything if it did not also put an end to the slavery of the untouchables (Gore, 1933 :144).

Ambedkar's view that the problem of the Untouchable is economic, social, and political, as well as religious, is widely held in India.

The above Phule - Ambedkar - Periyar tradition represents the effort to construct an alternative identity of the people, based on non-Aryan and low-caste perspectives, that was critical not only of the oppressiveness of the dominant Hindu caste society but also of its claims to antiquity and to being the dominant Indian tradition (see Omvedt, 1994, 1996).

Politics of Number in Dalit Outlook of the World

With the growth of democratic institutions and the “politics of number” in contemporary India, the Dalits began to assume some importance in national politics. The Dalit leaders, in order to take advantage of the situation and bring about their liberation, began to mobilise forces.

To fight untouchability, which was spread throughout the country and was deeply rooted in the minds of the people, was not a simple task. Firstly, the Dalit leaders had to lift their brothers and sisters from their ignorance; to teach them to agitate against injustice and to organise them into a pulsating force. The response was at first weak, clumsy and slow, but later it became positive and healthy. Secondly, the leaders had to face and stand up against the reactionary caste Hindus. Every step towards the liberation of the Dalits was followed by sharp reaction from the caste Hindus in the form of boycotts, atrocities, arson and other crimes. In all such critical situations, the Dalit leaders had to stand by their poor brethren, raise their morale and help them wage a peaceful and legal battle against the forces of reactionaries. Thirdly, the Dalit leadership had to convince the government to accept their demands of human rights.

Today’s political scene in India cannot be understood without understanding the phenomenon of the upsurge of Dalit-OBC self-consciousness that has spread from the South and the West to the North. The backward castes hold immense political potential, if they could be united into a powerful force. They would bring about a true social revolution for equality and justice.

There is growing awareness that weak, relatively passive official policies of affirmative action and reservation have produced poor results. In 1981, some 126 million of 156 million S.Cs and S.Ts were illiterate, the proportion of rural female illiterates being as high as 91.5 and 93.2 per cent. The Government admitted in Parliament on April 22, 1994 that there were 62,113 cases of atrocities against Dalits and tribals between 1991 and 1993. The annual report of the ministry of welfare for 1995-96 shows that the number of cases of crimes against SCs and STs committed by members of non-scheduled castes and non-scheduled tribes has shown a continuous increase with the number of cases going up from 25,352 in 1992 to 38,926 in 1994. The increase in crimes against SCs and STs in 1994, as compared with crimes in the preceding year, was as high as 36 and 27.4 per cent respectively (Godbole, 1997:14). In Class I and II of

the Central services (leave alone State government jobs) Dalit representation is as low as 6.9 and 10.4 per cent. The persistence of caste injustice remains a shameful blot on this society.

Today, the Dalits have decided that they will fight their battles directly, in their own way, independently, without mediation by brokers and upper caste sympathisers. They want to represent themselves, not be represented by others. They have decided that they will not call themselves “Harijans” - simply because it is a paternalistic expression. There are numerous small and large organisations of Dalits all over the country such as the Dalit Sangharsh Samiti in Karnataka, Indian Dalit Federation in Kerala, Dalit Maha Sabha in Andhra Pradesh, Bahujan Samaj in U.P. and Bihar etc. The Dalits are trying to get organised into a well coordinated political movement with an all-India organisation and all-India leadership that can challenge the established socio-political order. This aim is inspired by their resentment against the existing social system which expresses itself through various forms of agitation and struggle and is bound to acquire the momentum of a national movement in the years to come (Ayrookushiel, 1990: 14-23).

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. What is the Dalit outlook on life and world?

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2) What are the philosophical thought of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar? How it influenced the Dalit outlook to life and world?

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To understand the Dalit outlook on life and world, we need to understand their social position in the Hindu hierarchical society. As untouchables, their outlook to life was very different from the present self perception as Dalits. The pioneers who worked for the liberation of the Dalits like Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar have played a tremendous role in changing the perception of Dalits. Today, Dalits believe in the idea of the need for a cultural revolution or a total transformation of Indian society. There is, however, much discussion and dispute on the means of attaining these ideals. This problem is worsened by the multiple divisions existing in the Dalit ranks; for example, the Dalits are divided among themselves along sub-caste lines and like the proverbial crabs keep clawing at each other, pulling down those who move up, so that all of them remain in their lowly position. They are also hindered by the present political climate where the upper castes are trying to establish a unified Hindu cultural nationalism. What is needed is good and able leadership.

1.6. LET US SUM UP

The Untouchables are the victim of Hindu caste system. They are placed at the bottom of Hindu society. For centuries, the untouchables internalized their status as divinely ordained. But, with the dawn of modern era, through the universalization of education and by the impact of Christianity, Buddhism and other equalitarian religious ideologies, the situation began to change. Prominent social thinkers like Jotirao Phule, Ramaswamy Periyar, B.R. Ambedkar and others developed a radical social philosophy for the emancipation of Untouchables. Today, the Untouchables of India reject their traditional term “Untouchables” or “Harijans”. They are proud to call themselves as “Broken” (“Dalit”) people. With the dawn of parliament elections, the Dalits use their strength as a political pressure group to attain their social emancipation. They have developed their own philosophy of emancipation.

1.7. KEY WORDS

Untouchables: Certain sections of Indian population who are placed at the bottom of caste hierarchy due to the Hindu belief in “impurity”. They have been traditionally discriminated in social, cultural and political participation in the main Hindu society.

Dalits: The word 'Dalit' is a descriptive word evocative of bondage and agony, the anguish and frustrated aspirations of a vast victimised section of the Indian population right down the ages. Following this, the Dalit Panther Movement of Maharashtra in the early 70s gave currency to the concept and word "Dalit" to highlight the sufferings and struggles of the untouchables.

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1.9. ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

Hindu society is divided into groups, known as castes, with varying degrees of respectability. The lowest rung in the caste hierarchy is that of the untouchables. They have been called by this name because the very touch of them would pollute the caste people above them. They have been kept at a distance due to the above consideration. They were made to live separately and often could not share such common village amenities as the well. The stigma of "untouchability" was also related to the type of occupation these castes did such as clearing the dead chattels, cleaning the public places and removing the night soil. They have been called by various names, such as 'Untouchables', 'Harijans', 'Exterior Castes' ; 'Depressed Classes' ; 'Pariahs'; 'Mlechha'; 'Chandala'; Panchama; Avarna; Nishada; Paulkasa; Antyaja; Atishudra. But the term 'Dalit' that is being used today is a name that the untouchables have given themselves. "Dalit" means ground down, downtrodden, oppressed, but it now is being used by the low castes in a spirit of pride and militancy. The name "dalit" is not only a rejection of the very idea of pollution or impurity or "untouchability," it reveals a sense of unified class, of a movement toward equality. It speaks of a new stage in the movement of Untouchables in India.

The origins of caste and of untouchability lie deep in India's ancient past. What we now have are not hard and clear facts but a variety of competing theories, all of which have proved

difficult to substantiate in a convincing manner. The dominant view traces the origins of caste and Untouchability to the Aryans themselves and to their ways of relating to the peoples of India with whom they came into contact. The Aryans, a set of related and highly self-conscious tribes sharing a common language and religion, began their invasions of India from the northwest around 1500 B.C. For centuries they remained in seemingly constant conflict with the indigenous peoples, whom they looked down upon as culturally inferior and shunned as ritually unclean. Once conquered by superior military technology, some of these peoples withdrew into regions as yet unoccupied by the Aryans, while others were incorporated as separate and inferior castes within Aryan-dominated society.

Answers to Check your progress II

Many social thinkers have developed the emancipator philosophy of Dalit movement of today. Perhaps the first modern Dalit voice was that of Jotiba Phule, a powerful advocate of social and gender equality. Another Dalit deeply influenced by liberal values was the Ezhava leader of Kerala, Narayana Guru, who attacked the institution of caste

Though the Dalit voice expressed itself eloquently from the outset, it was left to B.R. Ambedkar, a second-generation Dalit leader, to articulate the abject condition of his community in the idiom of modern politics. Ambedkar also spelt out why Hindu discourse offered no route to liberation for the oppressed classes located within the Hindu social matrix. The Dalit communities, Ambedkar argued, were not the stratified constituents of an associational social order. Instead, they constituted the nethermost stratum of an organically integrated social body held together somewhat tightly by the world-view of Brahminical Hinduism. The only way to liberation for the Dalits, therefore, was to opt out of the Hindu fold.

Answers to Check your progress III

The word “Dalit” in Sanskrit means “broken”, and “downtrodden”. Dr. Babasaheb Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar often described the “untouchables” as broken people. The Dalits are socially weak, economically needy and politically powerless, despite the protective policies

followed by the government under provisions of the Constitution (guaranteeing them educational concessions and scholarships, employment and political reservations and socio-economic welfare benefits). The term 'Dalit' thus describes a condition of being underprivileged and deprived of basic rights

Dalits experience that they are treated as impure people. Many high caste Hindus have certain ideas in mind about people belonging to the lower orders: ideas that they are dirty, lazy, quarrelsome, not reliable, they have no morals.

From the above background of exploitation and impurity, today Dalits have developed a militant and revolutionary outlook towards life and world. It is important to understand that Dalits are not a homogenous and unified group. There are regional, ethnic and religious variations among different previously known untouchable castes of India. All the same, there is some common experience among them.

The militant Dalit outlook on life and the world has been developed mainly by some eminent social philosophers like Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, E.V. Ramaswamy Periyar and Babasaheb Ambedkar, with many others throughout India (Narayanswami Guru in Kerala, Acchutanand in U.P. and Mangoo Ram in Punjab). They attacked the system of exploitation at all levels, cultural, economical and political. They developed their vision of Indian society as an alternative to the upper caste understanding of life and the world.

Ambedkar's view that the problem of the Untouchable is economic, social, and political, as well as religious, is widely held in India.

With the growth of democratic institutions and the "politics of number" in contemporary India, the Dalits began to assume some importance in national politics. The Dalit leaders, in order to take advantage of the situation and bring about their liberation, began to mobilise forces.

To fight untouchability, which was spread throughout the country and was deeply rooted in the minds of the people, was not a simple task. Firstly, the Dalit leaders had to lift their brothers and sisters from their ignorance; to teach them to agitate against injustice and to organise them into a pulsating force. The response was at first weak, clumsy and slow, but later it became positive and healthy. Secondly, the leaders had to face and stand up against the

reactionary caste Hindus. Every step towards the liberation of the Dalits was followed by sharp reaction from the caste Hindus in the form of boycotts, atrocities, arson and other crimes. In all such critical situations, the Dalit leaders had to stand by their poor brethren, raise their morale and help them wage a peaceful and legal battle against the forces of reactionaries. Thirdly, the Dalit leadership had to convince the government to accept their demands of human rights.

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UNIT 2 MARGINALIZATION OF DALITS AND ITS DECONSTRUCTION

Contents

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Dalits
- 2.3 Marginalization
- 2.4 Deconstruction of Marginalization
- 2.5 Struggle for Emancipation
- 2.6 Role of Civil Society
- 2.7 To Sum Up
- 2.8 Key Words
- 2.9 Further Readings and References
- 2.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to give an overall understanding of the reality of the 'Dalits'- the oppressed people of the Indian society. They are reduced to be the 'untouchables' by the mainstream of the Indian caste system. This Unit does not claim to be an exhaustive portrayal of the details of the 'how' they are systematically subjected to slavery in practice. But it dwells on the ways in which the 'Dalits' encounter the suffering imposed on them while seeking to build a new humanity founded on egalitarian way of living together with others as co-humans. Grappling with the implications of the meaning behind the term 'Dalit', we shall further reflect on the multiple ways through which the oppressed people of Indian social context look forward to deconstruct marginalization. Emancipation from the clutches of oppression can never be presented to any one. Rather it has to be achieved by people as the subjects of their own history and destiny. Dalit studies are not merely the academic pursuit, but a way of life to promote egalitarian values both within oneself and the society at large. By the end of this Unit one should be able:

- to have a basic understanding of Dalits;
- to take stock of their aspirations and struggles;
- to have glimpses into how they grapple with their suffering;
- to explore into the possibilities of accompanying them to become co-humans with others;
- to know the importance of philosophy of Dalit struggle to attain integral human liberation.

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Indian society, for not less than the past three millennia, has been under the grip of the system of social hierarchy of casteism. It is founded upon the iniquitous mind-set of ‘permanent’ purity and pollution legitimized in the name of ‘the divine’ conveniently interpreted by the traditional culture of domination. And accordingly, ‘the sacred’ or ‘the impure’ is attributed to one’s birth or origin, and any upward or downward mobility is neither permissible nor made possible. Being projected as the harmonious one, this atrocious caste system is further claimed by the minority of the dominant and the privileged as the natural, moral, and even the divine order. This very abominable system as such is drilled into the collective consciousness of the majority of the people systematically disempowered by this systemic evil. The caste system reducing a large number of people as untouchables (about 250 millions out of 1000 millions) refuses to treat them as co-humans with the so-called caste people. One has to be acutely aware of the social location of those who offer such titles gratuitously to them in every situation. But the same very untouchables are demanded, with meagre pittance and scanty respect, to be involved in the productive labour for the welfare of the community at large. The untouchables are needed for the labour, but not as dignified co-humans with others.

2.2. DALITS

The term “Dalit” is derived from the Sanskrit root, which means burst, split, broken or torn asunder, downtrodden, scattered, crushed, destroyed. But although the term has ancient roots, its contemporary usage to specify a section of the people of India who have suffered oppression throughout history under the prevailing religious and social norms goes back only a few decades. As such *Dalit* has become part and parcel of the vocabulary of all the Indian languages. For

example, the well-known Hindi dictionary *Bhasa-Sabad Kosh* describes *Dalit* as an undeveloped or backward section of people, such as among the Hindu untouchables (*achut*) or serving caste (*shudra*). In Punjabi, the *Mahan Kosh* defines *Dalit* as one who belongs to the lowest caste (*hini jati*) and has been trampled down by or broken under the feet of the upper caste (*uchi jati*). The seeds of this understanding of *Dalit* could be traced to two great Indian personalities: the 19th century reformer and revolutionary Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, and the 20th century intellectual and revolutionary B.R. Ambedkar. Mahatma Phule used the terminology *shudra* for the so-called “touchable backward castes” and *atishudra* for the so-called “untouchable backward castes”. In order to enslave the *shudras* and *atishudras*, Mahatma Phule said, the priestly caste conspired to divide them into these two classes. Ambedkar wrote in detail about *shudras* and untouchables in the following two well-known works: *Who were the Shudras?* (1947) and *The Untouchables* (1948). In his writings, he used the English term “untouchable” (*achuta*) for “Dalits”.

The term *Pariah* in those days was generally deployed by the foreigners and social observers as an umbrella concept incorporating all the landless labourers divested of social dignity and ownership of land making their livelihood with their manual labour irrespective of one’s caste affiliation. Only in the 20th century we observe the gradual sophistication of the nomenclature of the intricate layers of caste hierarchy. Today *Pariah* refers to one of the subgroups among the so-called untouchables, who by and large, assertively claim the self-designation as Dalits.

The recent use of the term “Dalit” has been developed in the Manifesto of the Dalit Panthers Movement of the Indian state of Maharashtra, published in Bombay in 1973. Accordingly the Dalits are the “members of scheduled castes and tribes, neo-Buddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion”. In other words, the Dalits, on the basis of the graded four-fold caste structure of Indian society, are cast out as “outcastes”. On the basis of this attributed status they have been made to bear extreme forms of humiliating oppression and continuous assault on their humanity of being reduced to a state of being “lesser humans” and “no-people”.

A variety of other names have been used in both English and Indian languages to designate these people who are outside the social structure because of the contempt and hatred shown by others. Besides the terms “scheduled castes” and “untouchables”, the terms “exterior

castes". "Depressed classes" and *harijan* have become well known and will be used at several points in the historical account in this book. What is most important to emphasize at this point is that "Dalit" is the term these downtrodden people have given to themselves. This helps to account for the popularity of the term among Dalit people of different protest movements in India. "Dalit" is thus not a mere descriptive name or title, but an expression of hope for the recovery of their past identity. The struggle of these "outcastes" has given the term *Dalit* a positive meaning. The very realization of themselves as Dalits, the very acceptance of the state of "Dalitness", is the first step on the way towards their transformation into full and liberated human beings.

The practice of untouchability is the most violent form of exploitation on the face of earth, which survives the ever-changing forms of the power structure. Legal measures like abolition of untouchability in the Indian Constitution and the Atrocities Act-1989 have not succeeded in breaking the evil of untouchability and casteism. Moral discourses from the political platforms and religious pulpits have not made any dent into the structural violence of the caste system. Even the fast-growing process of migration due to the pressures of urbanization and globalization has not adequately tackled the habitual rut of endogamy in-built in the practice of casteism.

2.3. MARGINALISATION

The names like *chandals*, *bhangis*, *chamars*, *churhars*, *malas*, *madhikas*, *mushikars*, *pulayas*, *parayas*, *pallas*, *chakkiliyas* are attributed to Dalits in various regions. The Gandhian title for them as *Harijans* (children of God) does not find favour with them for its apparent condescending attitude. The legal and the bureaucratic title *Scheduled Castes* does not connote the humiliation they are subjected to or their legitimate spirit of self-assertion.

The marginalisation of the Dalits could be perceived through the following patterns of practices:

segregation of the living locations and burial grounds

step motherly treatment meted out to them regarding their dignified participation in public events, social activities, community worship, or governing institutions

denial of equal rights in marriage or burial ceremonies and car procession of festivals

indifference and even opposition towards promotion of vocations to dignified services at the civil level and sacred premises of the worshipping places

continuing the tradition of endogamy perpetuating the caste systems

By and large, these regular patterns of elbowing out Dalits from the mainline society is taken for granted as the habitual cultural praxis by the caste-minded people with their socio-economic powers operative in their respective locations.

As the victims of the shameful practice of untouchability, the Dalits are subjected to lots of suffering as indicated below;

The damage of human dignity with arbitrary attribution of permanent pollution as untouchables due to the practice of caste hierarchy.

The contradiction between being wanted as menial executives and unwanted as people with equal footing.

The inner conflicts between the personal desire for equal placement with others and the impersonal duty of being reduced to be lesser humans in the socio-political ladders.

Conflicting expressions of the explicit consciousness (immediate agenda of survival) and the implicit consciousness (sustaining passion for collective human identity).

When the achieved status is ridiculed and camouflaged by attributed inferior status.

When multiple forms of day-to-day socio-psychological and politico-physiological violences are trivialized by routinization, naturalization or even legitimization by the media, bureaucracy or judiciary.

The vicious cycle of behaviour due to depression or self-hatred resulting in fear of alienation and punishment.

Ever carrying the heavy burden of initiating the painful process of reconciliation, at least for the short-term political alliances, with the anti-Dalit forces which are just above in the social pyramid of caste hierarchy.

When Dalit ethical sensibilities are thrown overboard as eccentric claims for any regional, national or international discourse.

While scanning through all these sources, we realize that these sufferings are not inflicted by the Dalits upon themselves. And hence the classical ways of approaching the problem of evil (suffering) cannot be adequate while dealing with Dalit suffering.

Without entering into dialogue with this Dalit world, there seems to be a general sense of fear psychosis operative in the minds of the people when they come across Dalits. This fear may be fabricated due to the arbitrary imagination of the following possibilities: (1) Direct pollution, (2) Proximity with the hated object, (3) Possible role exchange in which the oppressed might eat into the present privileges of the oppressors, (4) Pre-empting the possible uprising of the oppressed with disproportionately vehement offensive, (5) Prevailing endogamy might give in to exogamy and thus a possible dismantling of the so-called orderly society. And consequently the Dalits are socially discriminated, religiously neglected, politically ignored, and economically pauperized.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What is your general understanding of the term 'Dalit'?

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2) Explain how the Dalits are marginalised in Indian society

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2.4. DECONSTRUCTION OF MARGINALISATION

The Dalit agenda for integral liberation does not merely attempt at mobilization for acquisition of resources and power. Along with the above, it predominantly addresses the question of basic identity as dignified co-humans with others both as individuals and a people. And hence, any Dalit discourse, mild or articulate, in the last analysis, seeks to project an inclusive ideology. In

their on-going struggle for annihilating caste-system and gaining their human dignity, the Dalits are relentlessly optimistic in building a new human family in which there will be no trace of any discriminatory hierarchical consciousness.

The rebellion against caste system is as old as the caste system itself. But the power structures- legislature, judiciary, and executive- right from the ancient era up to the present neo-colonial era of market globalization are deployed as the handmaids serving the needs of the oppressive caste minded people. As part of the self-assertion of the victims of untouchability against the derogatory treatment imposed by the caste people, they have chosen the self-designation as Dalits to empower themselves by annihilating the caste system.

Right from the inception of the practices of casteism and untouchability, the victims have been revolting against them. The following list has to be seen as the multiple forms of protest against the hegemony of those practicing casteism and untouchability down the centuries in the Indian soil: Buddhism and Jainism (B.C.E.), Bhakti Movements and Protest Movements (Siddhars, Sufism, itinerant mendicants) from the subaltern cultural soil (A.C.E.), the Mass Conversion Movements towards Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism, and the Counter-Cultural Movements initiated by Mahatma Phule, Iyothethaasa Pandithar, Ambedkar, Periyar, Vaikundasamy, Ayyankali, Narayanaguru (18-20 centuries A.C.E.).

Bhakti Movements opposed caste system as early as 12th century. Unlike Vedantic speculations, these movements believed that salvation is accessible to one and all through simple devotion to the divine irrespective of one's creed or colour, and cult or caste. Instead of mantras through which the caste elite controlled worship they introduced simple songs, music, dancing and waving of lights and preferred local languages for prayers instead of Sanskrit. Among all the saints of Bhakti cult Ramananda, Vallabacharya, Kabir, Tukaram, Meerabai and Chaitanya were prominent. Many Dalits who then were considered as 'untouchable' saints like Ravidas, Chokamela, Kanaka, Nandnar and others were attracted to Bhakti Movements. However these Bhakthi cults could create a philosophical equality but not effectively achieve social equality.

There were Dalit Reform Movements like Ramdeo Panth founded by Guru Ramdas in Rajasthan, Satnami Panth founded by Ghasidas in Madhya Pradesh, Kabir Panth founded by Kabir in Khasi, and Nasriah Sect founded by Nasraiah in Andhra Pradesh. The most important among social movements during this time that envisaged social equality is that of the vision of Jyotirao Phule in Maharashtra. Phule was not a Dalit but belonged to the 'Mali' (gardener) caste,

which is classed with the Kunbi-Maratha caste, a 'sudra' community in Maharashtra. He began as a social reformer establishing schools for both girls and untouchable boys, and founded 'Satyasodaka Samaj' in 1875. Phule's Movement can be best understood at three levels: (1) dissent against the Brahminic orthodoxy, (2) Rational analysis of the oppression of the peasants and (3) creative integration of theistic roots and egalitarian fruits. Such attempts tried to bring about social transformation through religious faith. They promoted principles like boycotting temples of 'caste Hindus', discarding Brahmin priest for any ceremony, and to maintain unity among Dalits.

During Muslim and British period, many of the Dalits joined the martial services to escape from the caste system. It was estimated that in 1856 the Mahars (Dalits) from Maharashtra comprised one-third of the British Army Quarters in Bombay. Through some initial level of educational opportunities and exposure to the outside world, they grew up in self-confidence. At the same time, Zamindari system and Ryotwari system encouraged and supported by the British created a new class of landlords to safeguard British interests of collection of revenue. Now the land has been recognized as private property and became a commodity which can be mortgaged, leased, or sold. This new system of land ownership further deprived Dalits of their land as it gave rise to money lending and exploitation. Landlessness became the fertile ground for the birth of various People's Movements struggling even with arms and weapons. Dalits as landless agricultural laborers and poor peasants joined these Movements in large numbers.

In India atrocities against the Dalits continued unabated even after independence and they got aggravated during 1960s. This gave rise to Movement called 'Dalit Panthers' in 1972 in Bombay. They were inspired by the Movement of the 'Black Panthers' of America with the asserting spirit of assertion against the oppression especially from the dominant system of discriminatory caste hierarchy.

Along with Dalit religious and social movements, it is important to know about Dalit political struggle. E.V. Ramaswamy, known as Periyar, has quit congress as early as in 1925 and attacked it as a tool of Brahmin domination. He organized the 'Self- Respect Movement' in Tamil Nadu and protested against the Aryan domination. On the eve of independence, he called upon the Dravidian people of South India 'to guard against the transfer of power from the British to the Aryans'. Dalit politics got streamlined through the active political involvement of Ambedkar. Unlike the political leaders like Mohandas Gandhi and Lokmanya Tilak who

thought that political democracy will solve all problems in India, Ambedkar argued that unless there is social revolution (moving towards annihilation of caste system) political democracy will not result in social justice. He believed that there cannot be political equality without social equality. Therefore he developed a protest ideology where he encouraged people to revolt by saying that Dalits cannot gain their rights by begging but only through political struggle. He is instrumental in establishing three political parties and their manifestos, namely, the Swatantra Mazur Paksha, the Scheduled Castes Federation and the Republican Party of India.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) Name some of the leaders and Bhakti Movements leading the religious protests against the practice of casteism.

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2) Spell out some of the political struggles against caste system

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2.5. STRUGGLE FOR EMANCIPATION

Dalits are struggling to do away with the existing sad states of affairs in constructing a new world order ensuring personal dignity to be celebrated with all other humans as sisters and brothers. Their mind-set, both articulate and inarticulate, could be portrayed as indicated below:

FROM

TOWARDS

<p>Imposed disempowerment</p> <p>Experience of dishonour and shame</p> <p>Being excluded in human relationship with equal footing yet imposed with menial labour</p> <p>Acceptance and internalization of the discriminatory hierarchy</p> <p>Denial of participation in decision-making everywhere</p> <p>Being looked down upon as demerited beneficiaries of reservation</p> <p>Deprived of land and other means required for decent life</p> <p>Exclusion and humiliation as lesser humans with denial of human dignity and legitimate share of opportunities</p> <p>Violent placement under the permanently stratified caste hierarchy with no possibility of upward or downward mobility</p> <p>Mythological legitimation of the arbitrarily attributed status of the pure and the impure for the perpetuation of the privileges of the socio-cultural elite</p>	<p>Self-empowerment</p> <p>Experience of honour and dignity</p> <p>Being included in human relationship with personal choices of work with creativity</p> <p>Eradication and annihilation of every form of discriminatory hierarchy</p> <p>Appropriation of participatory roles in every realm</p> <p>Equal opportunities in every realm</p> <p>Availability of the means needed for dignified life</p> <p>Dignified inclusion as co-humans with due share of power and opportunities</p> <p>Demolition of every trace of discriminatory hierarchy for ushering in an egalitarian ethos</p> <p>Rational legitimation of the ethically achieved status by enabling the victims of casteism to humanise themselves even amidst conflicts</p>
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By and large the existing Dalit discourses, ideologies, philosophies, theologies, strategies and programmes, by and large, seem to articulate the aspects of their deprivation (Dalits as Victims), or/and also of their affirmation (Dalits as Subjects). Besides the labour from the Dalit manual power contributing to the welfare of the society, the passion for creating a casteless humanity is the unique Dalit agenda in building up the community. Hence the Dalits, through their very

struggles are the community-building community. And the existing Dalit discourses have to deepen their commitment and broaden the scope of their strategies to accomplish the desired result of integral Dalit emancipation. In other words, the Dalits themselves are challenged to extend their hands out of this Dalit-centredness to reach out to a broad-based Dalit discourse while deepening their commitment to their emancipation. What could be the role of Dalit solidarity with other communities of victims around them and across the globe? What are the practical implications of the role of Dalits as the community of community-builders?

Exploration into the new spaces for dialogue between Dalits and others (both at the intra and inter levels) is the need of the hour while constructing Dalit Theologies.

Dalit Women & Dalit Men

Less Privileged among Dalits & More Privileged from Dalits

One subgroup of Dalits & Other subgroups of Dalits

Christian Dalits & Other Dalits

Dalits & Untouchables like Burakumin

Dalits & Adivasis

Dalits & Tribals

Dalits & Nomadic Peoples (Koravan Korathi, Boom-boom Maattukkaarars & Others)

Dalits & Immediate Bahujans (MBC, BC, OBC)

Dalits & Blacks (Africans & Afro-Americans)

Dalits & Victims of Global Economy (Minjung & Others)

Dalits & Indigenous Peoples (Maori & Others)

For anyone, who chooses to accompany the Dalits, cannot have the luxury of supporting them from outside. Their own pre-understanding has to be organically tempered by the ever-struggling and ever-exploratory preunderstanding of Dalits. It is with this deep sense of genuine solidarity with them, they are constantly challenged to play the role of compassionate midwife to Dalits who are undergoing the ongoing labor pain of delivering dreams of Dalit empowerment.

2.6. ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Some dimensions that need to find a place in the educative formation of the children, youth, and the people at large, both in the formal and non-formal education process could be spelt out as follows:

Basic and advanced familiarity with Indian Constitution

Basic Legal and Human Rights Education

In-depth probe into native resources like Dhamma Pada, Grant Sahib, Ambedkar, Ramabai, Periyar, Ayyankali, Kabir Das, Ayodhidas Pandithar, Mahatma Phule, Savitribai Phule, Narayana Guru, Meenakshi Moon and others

Dalit women's concerns and challenges and Dalit movements.

Skill and capacity building training to handle conflict situation and to face the challenges of life and livelihood.

A genuine sense of Dalit solidarity seeks to work for unity and cooperation for the wellbeing, prosperity and the empowerment of Dalits. This could be done by the following 2 steps:

(1) Bringing together all the Dalits by building a shared consciousness of their identity, culture and history as well as to conscientize them to the future possibilities. (2) Gathering all the likeminded people who include all the people of good will other than the Dalits who recognize the plight of Dalits throughout history. People could never value feeling one with Dalits if they do not realize that the total emancipation of the whole of the humanity cannot be achieved without actualizing the total emancipation of the Dalits.

It has been drilled into the minds and hearts of the Dalits that they were born only to serve their oppressors who designed caste system and draw the benefit out of it. Being made disempowered by grabbing away their land they are also deprived of education. Hence the attempt at creating Dalit Solidarity seeks to bring about unity not only among the Dalits who are kept divided but also unity between the Dalits and others. This process involves struggles to restore Dalits with their land and to work for their self-governance by affirming their power, freedom and dignity. The following strategies could affirm the gradual growth of the envisioned Dalit Solidarity:

Conscientizing Dalits and others about the rich Dalit heritage (Dalit identity, Dalit history and Dalit culture)

Building and furthering Dalit movements for struggle for emancipation

Developing Dalit leadership

Internationalizing Dalit issue

The unity of the Dalits cannot be achieved without underlining their common cause of emancipation from the oppression of the caste system. On the other hand, Dalit unity has to be worked out on the basis of affirming their common Dalit identity in relation to their history and culture.

Developing Dalit leadership is essential requirement to build Dalit solidarity. One of the reasons for lack of concerted efforts on part of the Dalits to build a casteless society is lack of credible leaders who could lead them to liberation and freedom. By and large, they are reduced to be the sheep without a shepherd. Not to say that there are no leaders among Dalits in history but mostly they are unsung heroes. In general, leadership is defined from the dominant perspectives in history. Leadership is associated with the qualities like domination, power, control, intellect, riches or success. But from Dalit perspectives, leadership has to be constructed through one's contribution for the protection and welfare of the society at large. This is possible only by placing oneself with the people suffering humiliation and asserting themselves for achieving the human dignity. It enables the leader to genuinely to journey with his people with a sense of belonging. What matters here is not the power to dominate but to have the credible solidarity with the people whom s/he seeks to accompany in their journey towards emancipation for all.

Even the modern educational systems could not effectively tackle the evil system of casteism. Ambedkar realized the need to open up Indian society to external influences if at all caste system has to be annihilated. Apart from encouraging religious conversions he also presented the problem of caste at different international circles to gain their solidarity. He raised the issue before the British Round Table Conference from 1930 to 1947 during the struggle for Independence. Even today the caste system was not being recognized by United Nations as a social evil on par with racism. In the third World Conference Against Racism, Racial discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in 2001 at Durban, South Africa, the Human Rights activists raised their voice as follows: "Dalit Rights are Human Rights." This has resulted in international recognition of the plight of Dalits as well as in gaining solidarity of the world community, which eloquently communicated to India to effectively eradicate caste system.

'Casteism is Sin' and 'Untouchability is a Crime against Humanity'. Without concrete historical realization of the emancipation of the Dalits and the Tribals, India can never become a genuine land of freedom. Into the haven of freedom let my country awake!

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) Comment on Dalit Solidarity.

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2) What are the ways of empowering Dalits?

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2.7. LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to offer some glimpses into the world Dalit deconstruction of their marginalisation. Dwelling on the nuances of the Dalit experience of marginalisation, we have entered the discussion on the meaning of the term 'Dalit' leading to the possibility of creating Dalit Solidarity to create a new order of humanity built on the foundation of egalitarian values.

Every brand of discriminatory exclusion and inequitable hierarchy is sought to be demolished by Dalit sensibilities. To empower the Dalits to continue with their struggle towards their emancipation, all people of good will have to join hands with them in rightly identifying their human identity, their history of struggles for deconstructing every type of marginalisation. One has to realise that the Dalits Rights are the Human Rights. India can become an exemplary nation, when she has determined to demolish the dehumanising practice of casteism and untouchability.

2.8. KEY WORDS

Dalits: People reduced to be untouchables by the practice of caste system yet assertively struggling against to bring about a new order of humanity without any discriminatory hierarchy.

Marginalisation: Systematic ways of excluding the so-called 'untouchables' to be 'lesser humans' as socially discriminated, religiously neglected, politically ignored, and economically pauperized.

Deconstruction of Marginalisation: Movement towards annihilation of caste system through the gradual empowerment of the Dalits awakened to their human dignity in deep solidarity with co-Dalits and other co-humans.

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2.10. ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check your progress I

1) The term “Dalit” is derived from the Sanskrit root, which means burst, split, broken or torn asunder, downtrodden, scattered, crushed, destroyed. What is most important to emphasize at this point is that “Dalit” is the term these downtrodden people have given to themselves. This helps to account for the popularity of the term among Dalit people of different protest movements in India. “Dalit” is thus not a mere descriptive name or title, but an expression of hope for the recovery of their past identity. The struggle of these “outcastes” has given the term *Dalit* a positive meaning. The very realization of themselves as Dalits, the very acceptance of the state of “Dalitness”, is the first step on the way towards their transformation into full and liberated human beings.

2) The marginalisation undergone by the Dalits could be briefly spelt as follows:

segregation of the living locations and burial grounds

step motherly treatment meted out to them regarding their dignified participation in public events, social activities, community worship, or governing institutions

denial of equal rights in marriage or burial ceremonies and car procession of festivals

indifference and even opposition towards promotion of vocations to dignified services at the civil level and sacred premises of the worshipping places

continuing the tradition of endogamy perpetuating the caste systems

Answers to Check your progress II

1) Religious upheavals like Buddhism, Jainism, and Bhakti Movements were the Protest Movements against casteism. The Movements of mass conversion towards Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism were also the response towards casteism. Similarly the counter-cultural Movements initiated by Mahatma Phule, Iyothethaasa Pandithar, Ambedkar, Periyar, Vaikundasamy, Ayyankali, Narayanaguru, Ramananda, Vallabacharya, Kabir, Tukaram, Meerabai and Chaitanya were prominent. Many Dalits who then were considered as ‘untouchable’ saints like Ravidas, Chokamela, Kanaka, Nandnar and others were attracted to Bhakti Movements. However these Bhakthi cults could create a philosophical equality but not effectively achieve social equality. There were Dalit Reform Movements like Ramdeo Panth founded by Guru Ramdas in Rajasthan, Satnami Panth founded by Ghasidas in Madya Pradesh,

Kabir Panth founded by Kabir in Khasi, and Nasriah Sect founded by Nasraiah in Andhra Pradesh. The most important among social movements during this time that envisaged social equality is that of the vision of Jyotirao Phule in Maharashtra.

2) During Muslim and British period, large number of Dalits joined the martial services of the rulers. When lands were handed over to the land lords and Zamindars, the Dalits as landless agricultural laborers and poor peasants joined various People's Movements in large numbers. In the face of unabated atrocities against the Dalits even after Independence, there appeared a Movement called 'Dalit Panthers' in 1972. It was inspired by the Movement of the 'Black Panthers' of America with the asserting spirit of assertion against the oppression especially from the dominant system of discriminatory caste hierarchy. E.V. Ramaswamy Periyar organized the 'Self-Respect Movement' in Tamil Nadu and protested against the Aryan domination. Dalit politics got streamlined through the active political involvement of Ambedkar. Unlike the political leaders like Mohandas Gandhi and Lokmanya Tilak who thought that political democracy will solve all problems in India, Ambedkar argued that unless there is social revolution (moving towards annihilation of caste system) political democracy will not result in social justice. Therefore he developed a protest ideology through establishing three political parties and their manifestos, namely, the Swatantra Mazur Paksha, the Scheduled Castes Federation and the Republican Party of India.

Answers to Check your progress III

1) A genuine sense of Dalit solidarity seeks to work for unity and cooperation for the wellbeing, prosperity and the empowerment of Dalits. This could be done by the following 2 steps:

Bringing together all the Dalits by building a shared consciousness of their identity, culture and history as well as to conscientize them to the future possibilities.

Gathering all the likeminded people who include all the people of good will other than the Dalits who recognize the plight of Dalits throughout history.

The unity of the Dalits has to be achieved by focusing on the common cause of emancipation from the oppression of the caste system. Attempts at creating Dalit Solidarity seeks to bring about unity not only among the Dalits who are kept divided but also unity between the Dalits and

others. This process involves struggles to restore Dalits with their land and to work for their self-governance by affirming their power, freedom and dignity.

2) The following strategies could be adapted for achieving the envisioned Dalit empowerment:

Conscientizing Dalits and others about the rich Dalit heritage (Dalit identity, Dalit history and Dalit culture)

Building and furthering Dalit movements for struggle for emancipation

Developing Dalit leadership

Internationalizing Dalit issue

Common Dalit identity in relation to their history and culture has to be underlined. Developing credible Dalit leadership is essential requirement to build Dalit solidarity for creating a casteless society. What matters here is not the leadership to dominate but to have the credible solidarity with the people whom s/he seeks to accompany in their journey towards emancipation for all. International solidarity has to be strengthened to tackle the evils of casteism and untouchability. “Dalit Rights are Human Rights.” “Casteism is a Sin”. and “Untouchability is a Crime against Humanity”. Without concrete historical realization of the emancipation of the Dalits and the Tribals, India can never become a genuine land of freedom.

UNIT 3 DALITS IN THE LIGHT OF GRAMSCI'S THOUGHT

Contents

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Life of Antonio Gramsci
- 3.3 The Philosophical Standpoint of Gramsci
- 3.4 The Concepts of Antonio Gramsci
- 3.5 Gramsci and Ambedkar: A General Comparison
- 3.6 The Concept of Civil Society and the Caste System
- 3.7 Hegemony and Deconstruction in Dalit Politics
- 3.8 Limits of Applicability of Gramscian Concepts
- 3.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.10 Key Words
- 3.11 Further Readings and References
- 3.12 Answers to Check Your Progress

3.0. OBJECTIVES

In the beginning of the present Unit, you will get a brief sketch of the difficult life of Antonio Gramsci under conditions of Fascism in Italy and his prison life. Then we would go for explaining Gramsci's reading of Marxism and his own concepts as addition to the Marxism already existing. Once we become clear about the conceptual world of Gramsci, then we would try to apply the Gramscian ideas to the Indian reality, particularly to the understanding of caste system. We may find certain remarkable similarities between the Dalit politics and the political path proposed by Gramsci for his own country. The similarities referred here do not mean any mechanical application of Gramsci to India. On the other hand we are interested to find the limits of any application of Gramscian ideas too. Thus, our objectives are:

Understanding the Gramscian concepts

Knowing the applicability of Gramscian ideas to Dalit politics

Identifying certain limits in applying the Gramscian ideas to the Indian scenario

3. 1. INTRODUCTION

Marxism has proved itself as the most influential thought in the 20th century. Apart from its direct political articulations, it has its academic variations too. While Marxism has met with certain definite political failures, it has withstood the test of time and academic achievements. Marxism has shown itself as a successful social analytical theory particularly from the point of view of subaltern masses struggling for their emancipation. Marx, Engels, Roza Luxemburg, Lenin, Trotsky, Mao, Che Gue Vera etc are the leaders of the Marxist political movement all over the world. George Lukacs, Herbert Marcuse, Adorno, Louis Althusser and others are the academicians who contributed considerably to the making of 20th century Marxism. Thus, Marxism has undergone basic transformations in 20th century and early 21st century. Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist, is one among those who have been very much instrumental to changes and developments in present day Marxism. Gramsci has created waves of interest in re-reading and reinterpreting Marxism particularly in conditions of traditional societies with immense population of peasants. To us, it is pertinent that the recent developments in Marxism have changed the character of Marxism as an European theory and have come to contribute much to the understanding of Third World realities such as Indian society.

The present Unit is dedicated to the thought of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1936), his basic philosophical standpoint and his concepts as well as to the applicability of Gramsci's ideas to the Dalit Question in India.

3.2. LIFE OF ANTONIO GRAMSCI

The British Historian Eric Hobsbaum says that Antonio Gramsci is the greatest original Marxist thinker of 20th century. Antonio Gramsci was born on 1891 in a middle class family in the Sardinia region of Italy. Italy in the early 20th century was a country of various segregated regions of uneven development without adequate unity and a country of rich tradition of Christianity, having the cities of Vatican and Rome at its midst. Gramsci hailed from the Southern region of Italy with its densely inhabited peasant population. Gramsci had a failing health during his adulthood and he could not pursue his education in philosophy systematically.

As a youth, Gramsci joined to work in the Socialist Party of Italy and the October Revolution of 1917 in Russia inspired him to become a Marxist. He imagined that the creation of Workers' Councils in Italy in the pattern of Russian Soviets would lead his country to Revolution. In 1921, along with some other people he became instrumental to the founding of the Italian Communist Party. However, making use of the nationalist ideology and underdevelopment of Italy, the Fascists captured power in Italy by 1922. Feeling the danger of arrest in Italy, Gramsci soon got out of his country and preferred to live in exile for a year in Moscow and then in Vienna. While in Vienna, Gramsci was elected to the Italian Parliament and he dared to enter into Italy as a member of Parliament. It happened so that he was anyhow arrested by the Fascist forces and was put into prison for a long term of 20 years. Within the prisons, Gramsci understood that with his failing health, all his enthusiasm would be destroyed under the prison conditions and he decided to resist his conditions by reading, thinking and writing secretly on the theme of Italian way to revolution. He wrote extensively on Italian history, philosophy and Marxism. Gramsci died in the prison in 1936. He was only 45 years old then. It was found that Gramsci had left written 33 notes full of his creative thinking about his country and Marxist theory. The notes of Gramsci found printing after the second world war with the title "Prison Notebooks".

3.3. THE PHILOSOPHICAL STANDPOINT OF GRAMSCI

Gramsci refuses to take up Marxism as a pure economic theory. Neither he understands Marxism as a theory that stands upon any economic determinism. On the other hand, his philosophical standpoint is that the strong point of Marxism is its dialectics. Dialectics is a philosophical trend that advocates flexible transformations between rigid standpoints. Dialectics as such is against any fixed unchangeable severity. It is a philosophy of change, interrelations and interconnectedness, mutual influences and elastic transformations. Gramsci revived the core status of dialectics in Marxist philosophy. He rejuvenated the dialectics of economic politics and cultural politics, the dialectics of objectivity and subjectivity and the dialectics of political society and civil society in Marxism. Gramsci refocused on the dialectics of spontaneity and consciousness in mass mobilizations for social change. He advocated the combination of the class politics and nationalist politics. He invigorated the blending of coercive methods and consensus ways in political organization so that it assumes an overwhelming moral content.

Gramsci called the Marxists of 20th century to learn from the experiences of religions during the medieval period and from the nationalist ideologies of the modern period. Religions and nationalism could assume the role of “national collective will” and popular hegemony through their subtle ways of psychological persuasions of ordinary masses. Religions and nationalism had an army of traditional intellectuals on their side and the traditional intellectuals always mediate the masses to the rulers. Gramsci suggested that the Marxist movements must achieve a national collective consensus in favor of social change and accomplish an alliance of workers, peasants and intellectuals. That would be the path of revolution in traditional societies with uneven development.

3.4. THE CONCEPTS OF ANTONIO GRAMSCI

Civil Society: If economy forms the base structure of any society, there are two superstructures upon the economic base of society. They are the political society and the civil society. The political society comprises of the State Apparatus, State Institutions such as Law, Courts, the Departments of Police and other wings of Administration, Political Parties and modes of Election. Marxists including Marx, Engels and Lenin paid special attention to the political society and advocated the communists to achieve political power to realize social changes towards Socialism. But Gramsci says that it is high time that the revolutionaries must pay special attention to achieve hegemony in Civil Society. By Civil Society, Gramsci understands the social institutions such as education, ideology, family and religion that fundamentally influence the psyche and minds of the people and thus the private world of the people. According to Gramsci, the Civil Society is more powerful and proficient than the Political Society in terms of practical efficacy. In the Civil Society, not merely the objective structure of economy is active but also the subjective moments of belief, ideology and consent of the people prevail. In the Civil Society, the economic relations objectively and the consciousness (including the false consciousness) subjectively are operative. Without victory over the civil institutions, Marxism cannot achieve the national collective support and without which even the political victory would not be enduring.

Hegemony: The term “hegemony” was popularly used by Lenin during the October Revolution to indicate the strategy of achieving the political leadership of Working Class upon its allies in the Revolution. Thus the concept was conceived by Lenin to denote the necessary political influence, even dominance, the working class must have upon its less proletarian working masses including the peasants. In such a scheme of things, the peasants were perceived as the petty-bourgeois who depending upon the historical circumstances may stand one with the workers for a revolution. Gramsci made use of the term hegemony but with a revised meaning. For Gramsci, hegemony is not a tactical alliance but a real alliance of social groups mediated by the progressive intellectuals to make it almost equivalent to a national collective will for a social revolution. Hegemony is less political and more ideological in Gramsci. The hegemony should act as a moral force of justice, even as the spirit of the national. Hegemony, thus, means for Gramsci the moral and intellectual triumph of Marxism as a national consciousness. When the hegemony is reached, a historical bloc comes into existence transcending the spontaneous economic interests of particular classes and an ideological cementing occurs among the toiling masses on the one hand and between the subalterns and intellectuals on the other hand.

Subalterns: Gramsci’s writings contain the impressions of his prison life that he could not use the Marxist terms openly and he prominently used the term “subalterns” in place of working class or working masses. However, in Gramscian Studies now, the term “subaltern” has gained more meaning than denoting merely the working class. It has come to denote the economically exploited, socially oppressed and denigrated, having the impression of spontaneity and passivity in all through history. Gramsci’s discussions lead to the idea that during the historical development towards the revolution, the subalterns get out of their spontaneity, indifference, passivity and superstitions, and rise to become the most active and collective national consciousness. The subalterns turn into the active and conscious hegemonic force. The common sense, religiosity and folklore of the subalterns are overcome and a conscious and practical phase is reached.

The Role of Intellectuals: Gramsci paid a special attention to the role of intellectuals in constructing the hegemonic consciousness towards revolution. He called the Marxist scholars to spot out the role played by the traditional scholars in constructing the religious ideology and the

state ideology of nationalism in history. This fact informs us the tremendous importance of modern organic intellectuals in building the historical bloc and its hegemony. Gramsci represented the dialectical relationship between the elites and the masses towards ensuring the ideological hegemony of the oppressed. The intellectuals are to become the mosaic and take up the role of cementing the coherence among the subaltern masses. The intellectuals must play the most active role in transforming the spontaneous subalterns into the conscious social classes of praxis. Even a class intellectual is only spontaneous in his/her ideology. The need for revolution is the intellectual of the hegemonic praxis who makes it into a national task.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. Brief the philosophical position of Antonio Gramsci

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2. Explain the Gramscian concept of Civil Society

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3. Explain the Gramscian concept of Hegemony

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3.5. GRAMSCI AND AMBEDKAR: A GENERAL COMPARISON

Gramsci is generally considered as the founder of Eurocommunism whereas the European path of revolution is seen as different from the Russian way to socialism. The decisive moment of the European path is said to be giving predominance to democracy. In other words, the Russian path

is considered to be aggressively political whereas the European path is celebrated as a more civilian one. The “civilian” here means more of a path through social and moral consensus, and through constructing a national collective will. Philosophically, the conscious moment occupies a predominant place in comparison to the materialistic economic moment. In this way of interpreting Antonio Gramsci, he is often characterized as a Hegelian and social democrat.

There is a remarkably similar evaluation about Ambedkar, the leader of Dalit politics, in Indian writings. Ambedkar too is considered as an ideologue who pays primary attention to the democratic revolution in India. Some leftist writers are inclined to see Ambedkar as a caste reformer and social democrat. Ambedkar’s denouncement of violence in the Marxist concept of social revolution and his conversion to Buddhism as a peaceful moral path and finally, the legal means of safe-guarding the rights of the Dalits are seen by some of the scholars as evidencing the democratic spirit of Ambedkar.

A careful scrutiny of both Gramsci and Ambedkar would reveal that they cannot be characterized merely as advocates of democracy and peaceful transition. On the other hand, the analyses of Gramsci and Ambedkar stand tremendously nearer to the Italian and Indian realities that refuse to sit monolithically within the class essentialism of classical Marxism. The involvement and commitment of Gramsci and Ambedkar to their respective societies made them understand that the classical Marxist concepts were inadequate to comprehend their societies in all their concreteness. It is this latter realization that compelled Gramsci and Ambedkar to move intimately into the inner layers of society that contributed to the introduction of fresh concepts about their societies. Gramsci and Ambedkar cannot be labeled just as social democrats but they realized that only through a democratic strategy of unifying the multifarious forces of the subaltern realm, the path for a socialist transformation can be moulded. According to them, a revolution should start from the specific conditions of the country. The specificity of Indian society is that it is a traditional one and the caste system occupies the most prominent place in its structure. Hence, a democratic intervention and mobilization addressed to the traditional structures of the society would be the starting point for any revolutionary change in India. In this regard, Ambedkar and Gramsci do not support the concept of stages of revolution but organically united the democratic and socialist stages of Indian revolution.

3.6. THE CONCEPT OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE CASTE SYSTEM

We refer back to the Gramscian dialectics of Political and Civil Societies here. Gramsci is not satisfied with the task of achieving the proletarian political power and he postulates that there is a civil society wielding real power upon the people and conditioning their every day life activities. This is not merely a political tactics but behind the idea of Gramsci stands the fact that there is a real structure of civil society exerting tremendous influence upon the people in practical terms. Ambedkar argued with Indian Marxists that there is a caste system in Indian society that was not taken note by the Marxists. In a sense, the caste system makes the private psychology of the Indians. Gramsci too maintains that the civil society makes the private life of its citizens. Ambedkar maintains that the independence of the country from the British colonial rule does not at all automatically mean a social revolution in India. According to him, the problem with India lies well deep into the history of Indian society. It has a caste system not merely in terms of economic relations but as a social order cultivated and safe-guarded by Hindu religion and its ethics all through its history that should be addressed primarily. Any talk on social change or revolution must address the problem of caste system that makes the faith, psyche, behavior and praxis of all Indians. It appears that Ambedkar had a concept of Civil Society well before Antonio Gramsci conceived it in Italian context.

Did Ambedkar have a concept of Civil Society? Yes. Ambedkar did have it. Dividing the Indian society into political and social (Read it as Civil) levels started actually well ahead in the late 19th century when Indians entered into modernity under colonial conditions. In late 19th century, the newly emergent Indian elites, did not speak politics openly against the British rulers, but actually created a space for cultural politics in difference to that of either Christianity or Western values. Even we can assert that cultural politics preceded direct politics under colonial conditions in late 19th century. Organizations such as Brahma Samaj in Bengal, Arya Samaj in Gujarat, Theosophical Society in Chennai, Singh Sabha Movement in Punjab, the Justice Party in Tamilnadu etc introduced the discourses of cultural politics in India in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in various parts of India. It is within these discourses of the cultural politics of India

under colonial conditions that the caste question too appeared to be discussed. This is also the context in which the Dalit politics too came into existence.

As such the nationalist politics is a late comer in comparison to the politics of civil society in India. The nationalist movement brought to focus the question of Swaraj and national independence. From the beginning of 20th century, the nationalist politics of political independence and the cultural politics of civil society competed among themselves exhibiting two varying approaches to the question of Indian society and its development. Often the nationalist school of thought vulgarized the adherents of civil politics as anti-nationalists and pro-British. But actually the problem lies elsewhere. The problem as such was not at all whether one was national or anti-national. The problem was that India in its specific historical conditions exhibited two types of politics: one is the politics of civil society and another is the nationalist politics. In other words, well before Gramsci came to the concept of civil society within the Marxist frame, Indian society showed itself exposed to the politics of civil society as a specific case to discuss the caste system and its ideological ramifications. The Dalit politics in India anchored itself in the realm of civil society and the nationalists limited themselves in the realm of political society. India reached the concept of Civil society not in the Marxist frame but under the specific conditions of colonialism. Indian nationalism speaking only about the independence of the country from the British is a careful avoidance of the real problems of the Indian society, particularly its caste problem. It is also uncharacteristic of nationalism as a political discourse. Nowhere in Europe or elsewhere, the nationalism avoided its social questions. But Indian nationalism did it just to escape from its social responsibilities. Nationalism averting the caste question is merely seeking political power to the traditional caste elites.

The Dalit politics of civil society really was rich in its content to delve deep into the layers of Indian society. The Dalit politics actually flexibly moves into the realms of economy, politics, religion, ideology and culture. It is a dialectical process. The Dalit approach does not take anything deterministic and it is not in search of any determinant at all. On the other hand, it starts from the civil phenomenon of caste practices, elastically moves into its Hindu religious realm, further deals the political proportions of the caste system and finally explores the economic ramifications of the caste system. The Dalit approach, thus, is comprehensive and beyond

determinism, and it seeks the rectification of the problem too in a comprehensive manner. Ambedkar is the classical exponent of this approach. It is here Gramsci is relevant to the Dalits.

Ambedkar reiterates that the caste society can practice tyranny and oppression against an individual in a far greater degree than a Government can. The means and scope that are open to civil society are far more extensive than those that are open to the political society, also they are far more effective. Neither Ambedkar had any illusion about the laws of the State. He maintains that rights are protected not by law but by the social and moral conscience of society. If the fundamental rights are opposed by the community, no law, no parliament, no judiciary can guarantee them in the real sense of the term. Ambedkar very flexibly moves from economic to social, from social to moral, from moral to political and vice versa. This is the dialectics of civil society and political society in operation. Without the knowledge of Gramscian Marxism, the Dalit movements had the genius to comprehensively unite the political and civil tasks of Indian society.

3.7. HEGEMONY AND DECONSTRUCTION IN DALIT POLITICS

Ambedkar is one among the first to understand the hegemonic role of ideology, specifically the Hindu ideology, in founding and maintaining the caste system. Ambedkar has entered into the evaluation of Hinduism when many European orientalists were reverting to Hinduism and its brahmanic core as the original and pure Aryan spirituality. All through the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century, the orientalists of Europe tend to celebrate Hindu religiosity as the best alive form of religious wisdom for all times. Some of the Indian scholars too were happy about the appreciation of Hinduism by the European scholarly world and they made use of the European admiration for their own conservative nationalist purposes. It is in such difficult circumstances that Ambedkar set himself to deconstruct Hinduism fundamentally.

Ambedkar widely uses the term “Hindu Social Order”. The term is almost equivalent to Hindu social formation or Hindu mode of Production. It means that Hinduism is basically a sociological religion. Its ultimate aim is to construct a particular type of society and to defend it. In Hindu religion, the social question occupies a predominant role and the theme of social order is crucial

in Hindu religion. The segregation of castes has been programmed in the Hindu endogamic marriage pattern too. In Ambedkar's view, Hinduism came into existence establishing the caste system and continues to protect the caste order. Ambedkar does not hesitate to say that the caste system in the Hindus has the foundation of religion. Hindus can not destroy their castes without destroying their religion. Hinduism has programmed graded inequality into the entire social fabric of the Hindus. Hinduism infuses hatred and suspicion among its members. Hinduism serves the interests of one particular class, the Brahmins, and the Brahmanic hegemony has been ramified upon all the non-brahmins. Ambedkar speaks about the Brahmin-Kshatriya alliance that had successfully worked all along Indian history. The Brahmin-Kshatriya alliance is the alliance of the civility with the politics of the traditional society. Ambedkar ultimately informs that Hinduism is basically immoral. This is the crux of Ambedkar's critique of Hinduism that a sociological approach develops into a moralistic one. Ambedkar very fundamentally challenges the Hindu ideological hegemony. This has been done on the basis of the understanding of the Hindu religious hegemony operative all along in the history of India. Ambedkar sets himself to deconstruct fundamentally the Hindu ideological hegemony. Ambedkar scrutinizes the basic Hindu religious texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavat Gita, Manu Dharma and Puranas, and shows that the caste system is intact substantiated by all the Hindu scriptures.

Ambedkar builds an alternative hegemony too for the modern period. For this purpose he revives the oldest conflict of Indian history namely the contradiction between Brahmanism and Buddhism. Both Brahmanism and Buddhism are philosophies as well as sociologies that they came to compete one against the other from the most ancient days of Indian history. While Brahmanism desired a hierarchical social set up, Buddhism advocated an egalitarian and ethical order. In history, it might have happened that Brahmanism succeeded and Buddhism got defeated. But Ambedkar wants the old fight to be replayed now. This is a strategy of deconstruction to challenge the hegemony of the Hindu view. Ambedkar dares to problematize the moral justification of Brahmanism and Hinduism. He proves that Hinduism does not possess a spiritual foundation not even an ethical foundation. In a sense, he asserts that Buddhism might have got defeated in the barbarian conditions of ancient India but let it be measured now in terms of the most modern yardsticks. Buddhism today, for Ambedkar, should achieve its modern hegemony against Hinduism. Marxism or the democratic ideals of French revolution would stand

in support of Buddhism today. Ambedkar imagines an ideological leadership for Buddhism in terms of its egalitarian economy and sociology, ethical input, benevolent politics and humanist appeal. Buddhism must lead the new collective consciousness of the Indian people.

The Dalit politics of 20th century has a wonderful understanding of the role of intellectuals in constructing the hegemonic ideology. The Dalit intellectuals have come to capture the debates in religious themes, in literature, in history and in sociology. The debate invoked by Ayotheedasa Pandithar in the South and Ambedkar in the North between Buddhism and Hinduism is an unending one. Dalit intellectuals have been successful to enter into very challenging constructions of history from the most ancient days till date. Dalit writers are unbeaten in creative literature and literary criticism. The Dalits are in academia, administration, media, art and literature. The Dalit intellectual activities are hegemonic and deconstructive.

The Dalits politics desires to go beyond the spontaneity of Dalit caste consciousness and places the annihilation of caste as its agenda. The Dalit attempts to access education, jobs, literary creativity, political praxis, media, reconstruction of history and religion evidence that the Dalit program is well beyond mere construction of caste identities. Gramsci aspired that the subalterns should transcend their economic spontaneity, common sense and folklore and reach out to the hegemonic phase consciously placing the program of social transformation. It has to be asserted that the Dalit praxis is very much similar to the program aspired by Antonio Gramsci.

3.8. LIMITS OF APPLICABILITY OF GRAMSCIAN CONCEPTS

At this level of discussion one has to ponder upon the limits of the applicability of the Gramscian concepts to the Dalit politics. Gramsci's usage of the terms of civil society, war of position, hegemony etc are said to be characteristic of western society where, according to some of analysts, the civil consciousness is developed. According to the same scholars, the civil society is sounder than the political society in the western countries. The civil realm in the western society accommodates rational ways of discussion, human rights, media activism, a sense of justice, peaceful ways of mediation, consent and consensus etc that Gramsci decided to address the civil

society. In Gramscian terms, the political society is aggressive and coercive whereas the civil society is based on psychological persuasion and consent.

It is at this point, one has to differ in the applicability of the Gramscian concept to Indian conditions. Although Ambedkar speaks about a civil society that is more efficient and practical than the political society, he did not mean that the Indian civil society is less coercive in terms of practicing the caste rules. On the other hand, it has to be specially noted that the caste practice at the civil societal level in India is more aggressive and coercive than it is at the political level. The Indian civil society is thoroughly permeated by aggressive caste practices. Reason, logic, discussions, media activism, social ideals, religiosity etc miserably fail in front of the caste practices of Indian civil society. Here the civil society is not consent-based as it was conceived by Antonio Gramsci.

Check Your Progress II

Note a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) Apply the concept of Civil Society to Dalit situation in India

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2) Apply the concept of Hegemony to Dalit Politics in India

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3.9. LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to get introduced to the life and activities of the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci had a difficult life, however he dedicated his prison years to

introduce new categories of thought pertinent to the social reality of his own country. During the course, we have got introduced to the major concepts of Antonio Gramsci namely civil society, hegemony, subalterns etc. The role of intellectuals to mediate the working class and the subaltern masses to construct a collective consciousness too was elucidated in the unit.

A comparison of Gramsci and Ambedkar was undertaken in the unit to identify the applicability of Gramscian concepts to Indian reality. Concepts of civil society, hegemony and subalterns were studied from the perspective of Dalit situation in India and Dalit politics. The unit shows that the Gramscian concepts exhibit dialectical flexibility and come near to Ambedkarian approach to the study and understanding of Indian society. Towards the end of the unit certain limits in the applicability of Gramscian concepts are indicated.

3.10. KEY WORDS

Dialectics: Dialectics is a philosophical trend that advocates flexible transformations between rigid standpoints. Dialectics as such is against any fixed unchangeable severity. It is a philosophy of change, interrelations and interconnectedness, mutual influences and elastic transformations.

Civil Society: By Civil Society, Gramsci understands the social institutions such as education, ideology, family and religion that fundamentally influence the psyche and minds of the people and thus the private world of the people. According to Gramsci, the Civil Society is more powerful and proficient than the Political Society in terms of practical efficacy. In the Civil Society, not merely the objective structure of economy is active but also the subjective moments of belief, ideology and consent of the people prevail. In the Civil Society, the economic relations objectively and the consciousness (including the false consciousness) subjectively are operative.

Hegemony: For Gramsci, hegemony is not a tactical alliance but a real alliance of social groups mediated by the progressive intellectuals to make it almost equivalent to a national collective will for a social revolution. Hegemony is less political and more ideological in Gramsci. The hegemony should act as a moral force of justice, even as the spirit of the national.

3.11. FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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3.12. ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

Gramsci refuses to take up Marxism as a pure economic theory. Neither he understands Marxism as a theory that stands upon any economic determinism. On the other hand, his philosophical standpoint is that the strong point of Marxism is its dialectics. Gramsci revived the core status of dialectics in Marxist philosophy. He rejuvenated the dialectics of economic politics and cultural politics, the dialectics of objectivity and subjectivity and the dialectics of political society and civil society in Marxism.

2) By Civil Society, Gramsci understands the social institutions such as education, ideology, family and religion that fundamentally influence the psyche and minds of the people and thus the private world of the people. According to Gramsci, the Civil Society is more powerful and proficient than the Political Society in terms of practical efficacy. In the Civil Society, not merely the objective structure of economy is active but also the subjective moments of belief, ideology and consent of the people prevail. In the Civil Society, the economic relations objectively and the consciousness (including the false consciousness) subjectively are operative.

3) For Gramsci, hegemony is not a tactical alliance but a real alliance of social groups mediated by the progressive intellectuals to make it almost equivalent to a national collective will for a social revolution. Hegemony is less political and more ideological in Gramsci. The hegemony should act as a moral force of justice, even as the spirit of the national.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1) The Dalit politics in India actually flexibly moves into the realms of economy, politics, religion, ideology and culture. It is a dialectical process. The Dalit approach does not take anything deterministic and it is not in search of any determinant at all. On the other hand, it starts from the civil phenomenon of caste practices, elastically moves into its Hindu religious realm, further deals the political proportions of the caste system and finally explores the economic ramifications of the caste system. The Dalit approach, thus, is comprehensive and devoid of determinism, and it seeks the rectification of the problem too in a comprehensive manner. Ambedkar is the classical exponent of this approach. It is here Gramsci is relevant to the Dalits.

2) Ambedkar is one among the first to understand the hegemonic role of ideology, specifically the Hindu ideology, in founding and maintaining the caste system. Ambedkar has entered into the evaluation of Hinduism when many European orientalist were reverting to Hinduism and its brahmanic core as the original and pure Aryan spirituality. As well as Ambedkar builds an alternative hegemony too for the modern period. For this purpose he revives the oldest conflict of Indian history namely the contradiction between Brahmanism and Buddhism. The Dalit politics of 20th century has a wonderful understanding of the role of intellectuals in constructing the hegemonic ideology. The Dalit intellectuals have come to capture the debates in religious themes, in literature, in history and in sociology.

UNIT 4 PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERATION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO DALITS

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Notional Clarifications
- 4.3 Philosophy of Caste-Domination
- 4.4 Philosophy of Liberation
- 4.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.6 Key Words
- 4.7 Further Readings and References
- 4.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.0. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to introduce to the students, first, the meaning of philosophy of liberation in general, then, make them understand the underlying principles which are embedded in the philosophy of domination in the Indian soil. After analyzing the principles of the philosophy of Domination, the principles in Caste-domination can be counter questioned and the principles needed for the philosophy of liberation with special reference to Dalits can be arrived at. So, at the end of this unit, the students will be able:

- To understand in general what the philosophy of liberation is.
- To recognize the principles underlying the philosophy of domination of dalits.
- To arrive at the philosophy of liberation in favour of Dalits
- To discover the truth of Indian society and be motivated for liberative action.

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Philosophy of liberation is a recent discourse. Nevertheless, its antecedents are older than modern European philosophy. It can be said that it was implicit even in 16th century when the Europeans were dominating the peripheral worlds. Then in the 18th Century the philosophical justifications were born. Only in the 20th Century, especially in Latin America, Liberation Philosophy was first articulated. The intricacies of Latin American Liberation philosophy is not the main concern. It is mentioned here in order to show that in the

past there was no systematized philosophy of liberation established that got the approval of the scholars of philosophy.

In fact, the philosophy of liberation cannot be understood from only one angle. Neither can it be understood in vacuum because liberation of any group of people takes place in a context. Unless we become aware of the context, it is difficult to understand the meaning of philosophy of liberation. Now the impending task before us is to formulate the philosophy of liberation from the point of view of the most oppressed, the dalits, in India.

4.2. NOTIONAL CLARIFICATIONS

Is it possible to philosophize authentically and systematically in a dependent and dominated culture? The reason for this doubt is that the facts of underdevelopment and then of dependence and the fact of philosophy appears to be mutually exclusive or inclusive only with difficulty. Yes, we can philosophize from the dominated culture, the dalits culture. Only thing is that it will be different from the view point of the dominators' culture. The hypothesis of the philosophy of liberation from the oppressed point of view cannot have any allegiance to the philosophy of centre. This discourse must have a point of departure and must come to distinctive conclusions by a different method. Its point of departure is an ethical-political option in favour of the oppressed of the periphery. It is respect for the exteriority of the Other; geopolitically and socially speaking, listening to the word of the Other, the dalits.

Dalits

Since we are interested in analyzing the philosophy of liberation with special reference to Dalits, it is appropriate to ponder over "Who are dalits?" There are many opinions aired throughout our country regarding the category called 'Dalits'. Though there are certain disputable names like 'harijans', 'untouchables', 'outcastes', 'the last born', 'depressed class', 'SCs and STs' and so on to designate the lower caste people, the most oppressed people of India, the category called 'Dalit' was accepted by the majority of the dalits in spite of some scholars opposing it. It was first advocated by Dalit Panthers and its major ideologue was Baburao Bagul.

Prof. Gopal Guru, in his edited book *Intervention* says, "It is a revolutionary one for its hermeneutic ability to recover the meaning of the historical past of the dalits. Also, it is not a mere linguistic construction but based on the materialistic epistemology. Its strength is that it has an ontological ability to define itself the other lower castes like tribals, toiling classes and women... it is interesting to note that the category Dalit

was used no less than a person than Dr. Ambedkar himself in his fortnightly publication *Bahishkrut Bharat*. It was not a mere a linguistic expression. The term Dalit was defined by him in a comprehensive way. He says, ‘Dalithood is a kind of life condition that characterizes the exploitation, suppression and marginalization of Dalit people by the social, economic, cultural and political domination of the upper castes’ Brahminical ideology”

4.3. PHILOSOPHY OF CASTE-DOMINATION

Having clarified the main concepts like ‘philosophy of liberation’, ‘the possibility of philosophizing for the oppressed people’, and ‘who are dalits?’ the principles embedded in the philosophy of domination of the upper caste people can be studied. That study is needed to construct the philosophy of liberation through counter arguments. So, the task ahead of us is first to expose the principles that construed a philosophy of caste domination. Then, we have to engage into a discourse of a philosophy of liberation by counter arguing the principles of caste domination.

Main principles embedded in the practice of discrimination

One-dimensional Concern: Subject-Object Relation

In India, in the social and religious structures Caste ideology is deeply rooted. The very existence of dalits is viewed from the unitary concern of caste-dominated society where ‘caste’ alone matters. The being of a dalit is treated like an object. She/he is considered as ‘It’, an object that can be used, misused, manipulated, and exploited. The relation between the caste-ridden persons and the dalits remains to be Subject and Object relationship. A value dualism is created with the help of many binary opposites between Caste-Self (Pure-self, Twice born) and Dalits (Impure non-self, the last born), where the caste-selves occupy a higher status than the dalits (no-caste people). It is a denial of values against the affirmation of one’s essence and existence, as a human person in relation to other humans.

The philosophical mind-set, that leads to treating dalits as ‘It,’ needs to be clarified here. In the ‘I-It’ relation, caste-self understands himself/herself as a closed ‘I’. S/he is a closed totality. And there is no possibility of recognizing the dalits as the Other. Instead, they are commodified and manipulated as ‘It’. Since the very logical construct of the caste pattern is ‘I-It’ relation, Casteism can only regulate a relation of hierarchy (Four Varnas and Avarnas), hegemony and subordination, and cannot exercise a genuine just-relation with the dalits. There exists a gradation of lower caste persons in the Caste hierarchy, each occupying a territory of its own in antagonism with lower castes. In India, the total weight of casteism falls heavily on the shoulders of

the dalits as they are in the lowest rung of the society. This discriminatory practice is systematized, legitimized, institutionalized and religiously sanctioned, especially by Hindu religion, for further consolidation and extended exploitation.

Colonization of the Life-World of Dalits

In the philosophical frame of Casteism, the concept of 'self' is uncritically defined and accepted as a unified self, (shelved self) as one substance and one complete being. Martin Buber, the Jewish philosopher, sociologist and theologian (1878-1965) in his writings expresses his recurrent interest in ethical problems and their relationship to everyday existence, as framed by the encounter between self and the Other. Emmanuel Levinas, a postmodern thinker, observes that the subject-object dualism is not restricted to the obscure 6th century BC; rather, it can be found throughout the length and breadth of Western Philosophy. Such a perception of reality is predominant in the history of philosophy, from Plato's theory of forms to Spinoza's monistic 'substance' and more recently Husserl's attempt to ground an ontology in the concept of 'Being'. Levinas is highly critical about the Western philosophical trends concerning the concept of being as one, indivisible and unified substance. One may even be aware of the fact that this kind of philosophy would pathologically be concerned only about the unity and totality of the substance to the extent of neglecting the Other. This will, in turn, pave the way for the development of an objective knowledge of this totality of 'self'.

Johnson Puthenpurackal, while writing about Philosophizing from Dalit perspective says in the book titled, *Subaltern Perspectives, Philosophizing in Context*, "(according to Jacques Derrida, the proponent of 'Deconstructionism')...Western thinking – and Eastern thinking no different – has been based on a hierarchical system of binary opposites of the center and the periphery. The center has been taken as that which guarantees meaning and truth, and what is at the periphery has meaning only in reference to the center. Philosophy, morality, social structure etc., have been built exclusively on and for the centre, and the periphery is totally excluded. It is true in Indian society where the so-called High Caste always occupy the top of the social ladder and the dalits are pushed to the periphery to be in dismay and dismal. Thus the ideology and the structure of casteism colonize the life-world of the dalits. The everyday life of the Other (dalits) is fragmented and programmed as per the norms of the caste-dominated religious and social structures.

Discrimination and Alienation

The acceptance of unitary concern of the caste-self will not only colonize the life world of the dalits but will also discriminate them. Martin Buber throws more light on this subject. He recasts the subject-object duality as a relation between 'I' and 'It'. The relation 'I-It' denotes a situation where the self confronts an external object-world and proceeds to give this world shape, meaning and a pragmatic 'use-value'. Here, self is accepted as an indivisible substance that exists in itself. The concept of completeness is embedded in the substance itself. It does not need the Other for its completion. Here one can be reminded of the marriages conducted in India within one's own castes. If married outside, the purity is considered to be at stake. This kind of absolutization of 'I', the self, will meditate upon its accepted perfections (presuppositions) of the self. Absolutization of the caste-self and alienation of the dalit-self will lead to a practice of domination supported in any caste society. There are greater dangers involved here. The subject begins to contemplate passively without giving any room for relation with the Other. It also provides the foundations for objective knowledge and formulates the norms (Manu Dharma). Those norms will be the ideal and absolute norms. They will be the points of reference for all and the certitude of the objective knowledge is unquestionable.

The Being of the caste-person and its power to know, to conceptualize, to manipulate and interpret the reality of the Other is made identical. To be a caste-self is to possess the knowledge of the power to dominate. Knowledge and the totalized self are made identical. Consciousness is believed to be the characteristic of the caste-self whereas materiality, is the characteristic of the dalits. The conscious self (High caste are intellectuals), therefore, is deemed superior and the so-called unconscious, the dalits (the lower castes are uneducated and uncivilized) is doomed to be inferior in the order. Such a solipsistic megalomania is a source of violence and domination, because it conceals the reality that the self is heterogeneous, a product of its alterity with the Other.

Unitary Utility Approach

The self (Caste-self) would relate with the Other (dalits) only in terms of the pragmatic or use-value. Utility becomes the criterion for relationship. The nearness of the Other is calculated in terms of domination. In this subject-object relationship, genuine dialogue has no value. The proximity of the Other is not respected and the intimacy of the Other is not recognized. "The I-It relation is one of detachment and mastery and is regulated by a purely technical interest in manipulation and control or what Adorno and Horkheimer have identified as 'instrumental rationality'." Thus, dalits are reduced to mere instruments that are of utility value in any caste society. They are not allowed to recognize their nature as human beings. In Indian society when

other caste persons may sometimes be disliked, the dalits are always despised. The caste perspective of reality redefines their nature. Any claim that is made in and through this conceptual frame is bound to be lopsided, and therefore, liberation of dalits within a caste pattern is not possible.

Casteism has crowned itself as the absolute norm. Looking at the problem of dalits from the perspective of the totalitarian caste (Indian) world-view, the problem of the liberation of dalits can only be partially addressed, because the very foundation negates dalits. If addressed so, it could only bring non-sustainable solutions. Genuine liberation of the dalits lies outside the fallacious casteistic perspective. When the perspective itself is wrong, whatever may be the way in which reality is looked at, will also be wrong. Therefore, there is a need for a radical shift in our perspective. The alternative perspective should necessarily be freed from the faulty thought pattern of the caste ideology, that is, there should prevail a genuine relation between the self and the Other, between the so-called high castes and the dalits.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) How do you understand notional clarification?

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4.4. PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERATION

Humans are not isolated individuals. To be human is to be related to the Other in a society. Social institutions are the ground where social relations are realized. The 'I' has its existence only in relation to the Other. No individual can claim that s/he leads a genuine life isolated from the Other. Michael Gardiner says that "Human life is best grasped in lived experience, in the expressions of these experiences, and in the understanding of these expressions." They cannot be kept in isolation and studied because, "the entire

universe is thoroughly *interrelated and organic*; what one is and what one makes of oneself takes place through dependence on others, through relationships and connectedness”, says Albert Einstein.

We are social beings, but not in the sense that we would be incarcerated to one particular society without having any proximity or nearness or interaction with any other society. On the other hand, we are supposed to have relation not only with the individuals in our own religious or cultural societies but also with the individuals of any other human societies. We are social in the global sense and hence we are interchangeably social. Whatever may our society be at present, we belong to the whole human society in a wholistic sense. Our ‘I’s are dependant not only to humans but also to the non-human world, the world of nature. We depend on the entire universe, each entity interacting with the Other. Thus the foundation of our very being is characterized by dependency, mutuality, community and relationship.

When such mutuality or community is historically, culturally and religiously caste-strained, it is imperative that it must be restored again. The process of restoration of the genuine human relations would also then be alternatively historical, cultural, religious and ideological. Any such process has to begin with the analysis of the particular context of the problem, without losing sight of the holistic communitarian concept. Since the practice of caste-discrimination affects the Indian community as a whole, it should be responded primarily in the way that the dalits are affirmed. It means that, the denied identity of dalits has to be restored by means of an alternative process of thought and action. It is both a process of reflection of an alternative philosophy and a social action for liberation.

‘I-Thou’ Relation as against Subject – Object Relation

As against the principles of colonization by the caste-self, the freedom of dalits needs to be affirmed. To counter the principle of ‘I-It’ relation found in the caste pattern, the ‘I-Thou’ relation has to be fostered, as an alternative principle. To promote the ‘I-Thou’ relation at the global level, a proper thought pattern needs to be employed. The understanding of self matters a lot here. The insights of Emmanuel Levinas, the Lituianian-French thinker is worth-mentioning here. He conceives the concept of *self* from a different angle. Levinas may be located more firmly within the phenomenological existentialism of Husserl and Heidegger, although, at the same time he is sharply critical of the aspects of this tradition. He attacks the idea that the self is a unified subject. It means that he rejects the way the concept of self has been understood by the Western thought. “This is what he refers to as the ‘Parmenidean’ or Eleatic view of the subject, whereas Heraclitus maintained that ‘all is flux’. Parmenides sided with such Eleatic philosophers as Zeno and argued that reality

was monolithically stable and everlasting because, it was composed of a single, indivisible substance. It followed that Being was itself equally homogeneous and indivisible, 'that which is', and hence did not contain any hint of its negation, or 'not-Being'."

Levinas's position is that "reality itself is not 'all of a piece'. Rather, reality is complex and internally divided, a fractured mosaic of positive and negative forces that partakes of otherness as well as sameness. It follows that the subject itself is not a unified entity – of the sort that Parmenides compared to the 'mass of a well-rounded sphere – but radically *pluralistic*, in as much as it is generated out of the alterity between the self and the Other."

Such a conception helps us understand the need for relationship with each other. When we understand 'I' as pluralistic and not as a unified and substantiated entity, we allow space *in* the self and advocate interaction with the Other. The responsibility to interact with the Other is not something added to the self, but is understood as an inherent characteristic of the self. The self has to respect the proximity of the Other, and extend its 'self' necessarily to the space of the other 'selves'. Levinas' understanding of the self is that it is "radically *pluralistic* in as much as it is generated out of the alterity between the self and the Other. An understanding of this alterity requires that we cultivate a sense of 'exteriority', and develop an awareness, of our *relationality* to the world and other selves. The self is no more understood as *one* by Levinas but as plural, allowing space to be social, in the sense of having relation with the other selves. Thus, the notion of Eleatic school regarding being is overcome, and the possibility of having 'I-Thou' relation is realized.

The Interrelated 'I' as against Colonization of Life

In the I-Thou relation "the 'I' appears as a person and becomes conscious of itself as subjectivity. The I-Thou is one of 'natural association'. It is a qualitatively different type of relation, since it establishes a new type of entity – a 'we' – that cannot possibly emerge from the I-It, which is only a concatenation of isolated egos, and hence not a genuine relation at all." In any caste-perspective frame, caste-selves are 'I's, the isolated egos in an exploitative relation with dalits. A world which has denied the personhood of dalits can have only the isolated 'I's, in solitude, isolation and individualization. It cannot respect the other selves, not only dalits but also the other caste persons other than their own.

Only 'I-Thou' relation can instill 'life' in the relationship. When there is... "I-Thou relation, the self comes to the realization that it cannot be self-consistent, autonomous ego, but part of the category 'in between' or

what Buber sometimes calls the ‘ontology of the interhuman’.” In any ‘I-Thou’ relation, the individual self (caste-self) has to lose its ego, the indivisible oneness, superiority and the centre. No individual self can exist, without having relation with other selves. All selves will have to recognize that there is a deeply felt need for being social and communitarian. The ‘ontology of the interhuman’ has to be made aware of. The realization of self as communitarian, the interrelated I, prepares the ground for relation with others.

Relation is Imperative as against Discrimination and Alienation

Now, it is clear that the caste-self can no more be closed up within its own view-point. We ought to accept mutuality, compatibility, reciprocity, and adaptability. In this alone lies real security of human existence. Thus the ‘I-Thou’ relation paves the way for ‘We’, a real unity, and a genuine community because the basic nature of the self is communitarian. When the self comes out of the delusion that it is one, complete and perfect, there emerges the spontaneity of being social and being global. The self becomes aware of the fact that the relation with the Other is a genuine ‘living intercourse’ and is a ‘natural association’. It is inevitable and obligatory. There is no need to have any immediate or eschatological purpose for the manifestation of one to the Other. The relation is neither instrumental nor a means to attain an end. In this interaction, the presence of oneself to the Other, itself is the end. It is the process of attaining the wholeness of the parts, and in turn, the wholeness of the Whole.

Inherent Responsibility and Affirmation of the Other as against Unitary Utility Approach

In the unitary concern the meaning of existence is fragmented in itself. As such it cannot become the source of existential meaning. The fundamental and foundational truth is that the subject is not a thing but a relation. In the wholistic concern, which we have taken as the prime principle of our paradigm-shift, each one values the responsibility for the Other. Nearness of the Other is the way in which the communitarian nature of self is maintained and balanced. The alterity between the self and the Other should be recognized, and exteriority of the Other has to be taken note of for the sake of proper interaction. Michael Gardiner opines that “The Other is ... always-already *in* the self, and any viable ethics must take this into account... The relation between self and other cannot be thematized; it cannot be translated into rational, conceptual thought, for this would destroy the unmotivated and spontaneous character of the encounter. It simply *is*. It is a relation of pure immediacy, an ‘epiphany’. So it is only ‘beyond’ cognition... One cannot remain a neutral bystander, indifferent to the presence of the Other.”

The inherent responsibility of the self to the Other is not merely derived from the wholistic concern, but it is an in-built component of human nature. It already exists in the consciousness of the self. The interaction between 'I' and 'Thou' is not rationally supported, for rationality is always purpose-oriented. Any purpose-oriented relation, does constrain human relations. Ethically, relationship cannot be a purposeful activity. It is a genuine flux of reality. It is a spontaneous aesthetic flowering of the self into the Other self. Self has to relate and be related with others mainly to maintain the wholeness, the equilibrium of the world.

In order to attain the wholeness of the Whole, the individuals need to relate with the others in their society. In this relation, the individuality is not eliminated or fused but maintained as it is. The relation with the Other is towards the wholeness of the society. It pervades, permeates and transcends any social fringes or boundaries. Therefore, the 'I' is plural, communitarian, relational and interrelatedly social. When 'I-Thou' relation is maintained in the interrelated-social level, then, the wholeness of the whole, the equilibrium of the Whole will be restored and the identity of the Other is affirmed.

4.5. LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we are introduced to the general understanding of philosophy of liberation. As a responsible citizen of our country, it is imperative that we understand the Indian context and its deep rooted casteism. It is not enough that we understand that there is a problem. It is our bounden duty to alleviate the problem. Since there has been no systematic way of presenting the philosophy of liberation with a special reference to dalits, an attempt has been made to first bring out the principles embedded in the philosophy of domination in the caste society. As we have analyzed it is the one-dimensional mind-set which understands his or her self as a closed self and the Other as 'It', an object to be exploited. This leads to colonize the life world of the Other and discriminate them by alienating them from genuine relationship. Therefore, there exists only a unitary utility approach towards others. Then, a search is geared up to arrive at the philosophy of liberation by counter questioning the principles of domination. In the process, we become clear that we are interrelatedly social as our self is not a closed self but communitarian having an in-built relationship with the Other and so our relation with others is imperative and our responsibility to each other is inherent. If justice is denied for one group of people, then it is an ethical necessity to restore justice that is denied. It is social justice. It is an affirmative action for the liberation of the Other, the dalits. It is a process of struggle and suffering. It is commiseration. It is a suffering with the discriminated, the captives (*anawim*) against injustice. It is a cross towards resurrection.

It is a protest against and protest for. It is a process of going against the caste pattern as well a process of liberation. It eliminates the different forms of alienation of dalits in any caste society. By doing so, we could pave way for the real liberation of dalits. The Patterned way of thinking, the 'closed' life-style of caste-selves, as solitary and isolated egos, has to be thrown overboard, and a dynamic Process of Liberation has to be ignited and initiated so that there can exist the relation of 'I-Thou' encircling the whole world.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What do you mean by principle of discrimination?

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2) Philosophy should be non-philosophical. Substantiate the statement.

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4.6. KEY WORDS

Alterity: Relationship with the Other is referred here. That relation is understood as in-built in human nature.

Exteriority: The space of one's self which is in others is referred here. The self is not individualistic as it is commonly accepted, but it is to be understood as communitarian which means the space of my 'self' is in other selves. That space has to be reached by others in relation and so, the human relation is imperative.

Proximity: The nearness of a person in terms of relation is referred here.

4.7. FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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4.8. ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to Check Your Progress I

1. Though there have been many attempts to formulate strategies to fight against the discrimination against dalits, there has not been a systematic way of presenting a philosophy of liberation with special reference to dalits. Therefore, at the end of this unit the students should have the clarity of thought that are required to enter into the search for philosophy of liberation. Certain notions would have been clarified in other units related to this subject. Ideas like philosophizing from the point of view of dalits, who are dalits are clarified in this unit.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

In this unit, the main principles that were the major causes for the discriminatory mind-set of the dominators are culled out. The students should get familiarized with the concepts such as ‘closed self’, ‘unitary concern’, colonizing the life-world, discrimination, alienation and unitary utility approach. The High caste people

mind-set is closed to other castes, because they do not come of their closed shell (self). Therefore, their concern towards others will not take into account of others, but only themselves. It is called unitary concern. This will not allow other castes to enjoy their freedom and lead a dignified equal status in the society. Instead, their life is fragmented and colonized and thrown into the periphery. Thus they are alienated from the main stream of life and are exploited in all walks of life to suit the needs of the 'high caste' people.

For analyzing the philosophy of liberation with special reference to dalits, the students should feel one with the suffering of the dalits. Otherwise all the exercises will only be academic. It will be merely an armchair philosophy. Philosophy should be non-philosophical; it should enter into the ground realities to change it. It is necessary for the students, therefore, to identify that the self is not a unified one, but communitarian, interrelated I. the interrelation does not stop with only humans, but extends to other creatures and to the whole world. When we are able to understand that we are interrelatedly social, and social in the global sense, then, we begin to realize that our relationship with others is obligatory and our responsibility towards others is inherent. If so, there starts a genuine relationship without discrimination and alienation.

