

Indira Gandhi National Open University

MPYE – 012

School of Interdisciplinary and

Trans-disciplinary Studies

Tribal Philosophy

Block 1

HISTORICO-SOCIAL BASIS OF TRIBAL PHILOSOPHY

UNIT 1

Historical Roots of The Tribals

UNIT 2

Tribal Folklore and Cultural Expressions

UNIT 3

Social Organization of Tribals

UNIT 4

Impact of Scientific Culture and Globalization on the Tribals

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Tribal culture is seen as a system of social control, wherein people shape their standards and behaviour. The cultural values form the founding principles of one's life. They influence one's principles and philosophies of life. Indian tribal fashion can be zeroed down on the two primary aspects of costumes and jewellery. Commercialisation and modernisation has paved way for tribesmen to move out into the wide world for gaining popularity. The immensely formulated manner in which such tribal performing arts work is done is one that fetches inspiration for cosmopolitan cities also. Be it while singing, while dancing, while enacting a theatrical performance or beating of united drums, tribals in India try to make a point every time. Indian tribal art is always delineated upon positive themes and ideas like birth, life, harvest, journey, jubilation or marriage. The Indian tribal art includes paintings, which are the integral part of the tribal tradition. It is a tribal art form where life and ingenuity are fused.

Unit 1 introduces the general notion of tribal, their meaning, significance and geographical location. It elaborates also the origin of races in India, the peopling of India and the historical roots of tribals. *Adivasi* is an umbrella term for a heterogeneous set of ethnic and tribal groups claimed to be the aboriginal population of India. There is a study of the origin and rootedness of the tribals.

Unit 2 dwells on the Tribal folklore and culture. Folklore consists of legends, music, oral history, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, fairy tales and customs that are the traditions of a culture, subculture, or group. It is also the set of practices through which those expressive genres are shared.. Folklore may be divided into four areas of study: artefact, describable and transmissible entity (oral tradition), culture, and behaviour (dance or rituals). These areas do not stand alone, however, as often a particular item or element may fit into more than one of these areas.

Unit 3 discusses the social conditions and their organisation. The basic unit of the Tribal communal system was the village. Social authority in the village is exercised by the headman but always in consultation with the *mone hor* (five people council: *manjhi* (headman), *paranik* (assistant headman), *jog manjhi* overseer of morals), *godet* (announcer), *naeke* (priest) and *kudam naeke* (assistant priest). All the villagers are members of the village council. Village council is the institution that settles all the disputes of the villages. There are no written laws and patterns of behaviour codes. Ethical principles have guided social behaviour for centuries. There are many traditions and customs that have come down through oral tradition and they are strictly followed. There are several taboos and prohibitions which regulate and control behaviour. Back in history, the Adivasis were in effect self-governing 'first nations'.

Unit 4 deals with the impact of science and culture, first talks of ethnobotany, an emerging branch of science, where tribal life style has significant contribution to make. Then we talk about the impact that globalisation, together with science, has on the Indian tribal society. It analyzes impact of earlier domination and current globalisation on the culture and economy of tribals.

COURSE INTRODUCTION

Who are the tribals? With distinctive culture, language and religion tribal communities have kept up their own identity. Certain characteristic features of adivasis are Geographical isolation (they live in cloistered, exclusive, remote and inhospitable areas such as hills and forests), 'Economic' Backwardness (their livelihood is based on primitive agriculture, a low-value closed economy with a low level of technology that leads to their poverty. They have low levels of literacy and health, distinctive culture, language and religion, shyness of contact (they have a marginal degree of contact with other cultures and people, though the situation is changing fast today), etc. Indian tribals primarily reside in various ecological and geo-climatical conditions ranging from plains, forests, hills and inaccessible areas, that perhaps lies dotted in the panoramic Indian terrain. Indian tribal people amount to an 8.14 percent of the total population of the country, numbering 84.51 million, according to the 2001 census. These tribal people reside in approximately 15 percent of the country's area.

Block 1 traces out the historical and social basis for developing tribal philosophy. *Adivasi* is an umbrella term for a heterogeneous set of ethnic and tribal groups that are the aboriginal population of India. They comprise a substantial indigenous population of India. This background enables the students to familiarise with the socio-economic and historical situations and conditions of the tribals in India.

Block 2 exposes the students to some of the values of tribal societies, emphasising that philosophy is not mere speculated ideology but a lived in world view and outlook. In modern life, the absence of tribal values and vision causes a hunger we all feel, one that can't be fulfilled by those palliatives of modern life--more activity, more or other individual relationships, more gadgets to entertain us, more or higher goals achieved. Along with losing our tribal vocabulary - us, we, our, offer, share, open, collective, creation, receptive, receiving, patience - we have lost much more; we have lost our connection to each other, to humanity, and to the planet. We are alone, isolated from the eternal flow of life. Without tribal values or vision, we see our own, singular accomplishments as the be-all and end-all of our lives.

Block 3 on political and economic philosophy of the tribes in India elaborates the ground realities of their life with the agrarian and pastoral life style, the social phenomena of displacement and migration due to various factors. The second part of the block pictures the tribal resistance to foreign powers and influences which leads to the crucial problem of tribal identity crisis. Discussions together with critical analysis pave way for not only just upholding the socio-economic philosophy but also tries to offer a solution to the concrete problems faced by tribal population in India.

Block 4 illustrates the religious philosophy of the tribals. It begins with the portrayal of tribal religious structures with their belief systems and ritual customs. Besides speaking of the present day religious practices and beliefs, there is a tribal eschatological discourse presented elaborately. The block not only speaks of the past and present interaction and influences of non-tribal religions with the tribal communities, but also speaks of the specific identity of the tribal religion in the future.

UNIT 1 HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE TRIBALS

Contents

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 *Adivasis*: Meaning and Significance
- 1.3 Geographical Overview
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- 1.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.9 Key Words
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1.0 OBJECTIVES

- To study the origin and rootedness of the tribals.
- To appreciate the claim that the tribals are the original inhabitants of India.
- To study briefly the diversity and development of tribal cultures.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Adivasi is an umbrella term for a heterogeneous set of ethnic and tribal groups claimed to be the aboriginal population of India. They comprise a substantial indigenous minority of the population of India. Officially recognized by the Indian government as “Scheduled Tribes” in the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India, they are often grouped together with scheduled castes in the category “Scheduled Castes and Tribes”, which is eligible for certain affirmative action measures in India. In this unit we want to familiarise ourselves with the origin, meaning and significance of Tribals in India.

1.2 ADIVASIS: MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE

In this section we deal with the meaning and significance of the word “*Adivasis*,” with view to appreciating their culture and life on the whole. Connotations of the word ‘*Adivasi*’: Although terms such as *atavika* (Sanskrit for forest dwellers), *vanvasi* or *girijan* (hill people) were used for the tribes of India, *adivasi* carries the specific meaning of being the original and autochthonous inhabitants of a given region, and was specifically coined for that purpose in the 1930s. Over a period of time, unlike the terms “aborigines” or “tribes”, the word “*adivasi*” has also developed a connotation of past autonomy which was disrupted during the British colonial period in India and has not been restored. Today tribals or *adivasis* have succeeded partially to claim their original rights are dignity and the primordial inhabitants of the land (Adivasi 2011).

Scheduled tribes: The Constitution of India, Article 366 (25) defines Scheduled Tribes as “such tribes or tribal communities or part of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are

deemed under Article 342 to the Scheduled Tribes (STs) for the purposes of this Constitution”. In Article 342, the procedure to be followed for specification of a scheduled tribe is prescribed. However, it does not contain the criterion for the specification of any community as scheduled tribe. An often used criterion to define adivasi is based on attributes such as:

- Geographical isolation - they live in cloistered, exclusive, remote and inhospitable areas such as hills and forests.
- Backwardness - their livelihood is based on primitive agriculture, a low-value closed economy with a low level of technology that leads to their poverty. They have low levels of literacy and health.
- Distinctive culture, language and religion - communities have developed their own distinctive culture, language and religion.
- Shyness of contact – they have a marginal degree of contact with other cultures and people, though the situation is changing fast today (Johar 2010).

Primitive tribes: The Scheduled Tribe groups who were identified as more backward communities among the tribal population groups have been categorised as ‘Primitive Tribal Groups’ by the Government at the Centre in 1975. So far seventy-five tribal communities have been identified as ‘primitive tribal groups’ in different States of India. These hunting, food-gathering, and some agricultural communities, who have been identified as more backward communities among the tribal population groups need special programmes for their sustainable development. Today the primitive tribes are awakening and demanding their rights for special reservation quota (Adivasi 2011)

1.3 GEOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW

There is a substantial list of Scheduled Tribes in India recognised as tribal under the Constitution of India. Tribal peoples constitute 8.2% of the nation’s total population, over 84 million people according to the 2001 census. One concentration lives in a belt along the Himalayas stretching through Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand in the west, to Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur, and Nagaland in the northeast. In the northeastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland, more than 90% of the population is tribal. However, in the remaining northeast states of Assam, Manipur, Sikkim, and Tripura, tribal peoples form between 20 and 30% of the population.

Another concentration lives in the hilly areas of central India (Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and, to a lesser extent, Andhra Pradesh); in this belt, which is bounded by the Narmada River to the north and the Godavari River to the southeast, tribal peoples occupy the slopes of the region’s mountains. Other tribals, including the Santals, live in Jharkhand and West Bengal. Central Indian states have the country’s largest tribes, and, taken as a whole, roughly 75% of the total tribal population live there, although the tribal population there accounts for only around 10% of the region’s total population.

There are smaller numbers of tribal people in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala in south India; in western India in Gujarat and Rajasthan, and in the union territories of Lakshadweep and the Andaman Islands and Nicobar Islands. About one percentage of the populations of Kerala and

Tamil Nadu are tribal, whereas about six percentage in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka are members of tribes (Adivasi 2011).

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What are some of the criteria used to define an adivasi?

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2) Are there tribals in South India? Give an approximate estimate?

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1.4 THE ORIGIN OF RACES IN INDIA

To trace the origin of tribals, it will be helpful to find out the races in India. According to reliable evidence, the species known as Ramapithecus, one of our pre-human ancestors 12-14 million years ago, was found in the Siwalik foothills of the Northwestern Himalayas (ORI 2011). Further Researches have found that a species resembling the Australopithecus (who are very close to present human beings) lived in India some 2 million years ago. Scientists have so far not been able to account for an evolutionary gap of as much as 12 million years since the appearance of Ramapithecus.

The people of India belong to different anthropological stocks and main ethnic group which define Adivasis especially Santhals, Munda, Kol and Ho are as follows. According to noted anthropologist and the first Director of the Anthropological Survey of India, B. S. Guha, the population of India is derived from six main ethnic groups:

(1) **Negritos:** The Negritos or the brachycephalic (broad headed) from Africa were the earliest people to inhabit India. They are survived in their original habitat in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The Jarewas, Onges, Sentelene and Great Andamanis tribes are the examples. Studies have indicated that the Onges tribes have been living in the Andamans for the last 60,000 years. Some hill tribes like Irulas, Kodars, Paniyans and Kurumbas are found only in patches among the hills of south India on the mainland.

(2) **Pro-Australoids** or **Austrics**: This group was the next to come to India after the Negritos. They represent a race of people, with wavy hair plentifully distributed over their brown bodies, long heads with low foreheads and prominent eye ridges, noses with low and broad roots, thick jaws, large palates and teeth and small chins. Austrics tribes, which are spread over the whole of India, Myanmar and the islands of South East Asia, are said to “form the bedrock of the people”. The Austrics were the main builders of the Indus Valley Civilisation. They cultivated rice and vegetables and made sugar from sugarcane. Their language has survived in the Kol or Munda (Mundari) in Eastern and Central India.

(3) **Mongoloids**: These people have features that are common to those of the people of Mongolia, China and Tibet. These tribal groups are located in the Northeastern part of India in states like Assam, Nagaland and Meghalaya and also in Ladakh and Sikkim. Generally, they are people of yellow complexion, oblique eyes, high cheekbones, sparse hair and medium height.

(4) **Mediterranean** or **Dravidian**: This group came to India from the Southwest Asia and appear to be people of the same stock as the peoples of Asia Minor and Crete and the pre-Hellenic Aegeans of Greece. They are reputed to have built up the city civilization of the Indus Valley, whose remains have been found at Mohenjodaro and Harappa and other Indus cities. The Dravidians must have spread to the whole of India, supplanting Austrics and Negritos alike. Dravidians comprise all the three sub-types, Paleo-Mediterranean, the true Mediterranean and Oriental Mediterranean. This group constitutes the bulk of the scheduled castes in the North India. This group has a sub-type called Oriental group (ORI 2011).

(5) **Western Brachycephals**: These include the Alpinoids, Dinarics and Armenoids. The Coorgis and Parsis fall into this category.

(6) **Nordics**: Nordics or Indo-Aryans are the last immigrants into India. Nordic Aryans were a branch of Indo-Iranians, who had originally left their homes in Central Asia, some 5000 years ago, and had settled in Mesopotamia for some centuries. The Aryans must have come into India between 2000 and 1500 B.C. Their first home in India was western and northern Punjab, from where they spread to the Valley of the Ganga and beyond. These tribes are now mainly found in the Northwest and the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP). Many of these tribes belong to the “upper castes” (ORI 2011).

1.5 INDIAN TRIBES: HISTORICAL ROOTS

Indian tribes with their characteristic lifestyle and unblemished tradition, take us earlier to the history of India. In fact the term “Indian tribes” which hold in an astounding number of tribal populations in the country, meticulously assimilating each characteristic specialty. As noted in the previous section, the first traces of tribes in India can be traced to the species known as ‘Ramapithecus’, discovered in the Siwalik foothills of the north-western Himalayas. This species, held to be the first in line of hominids, lived approximately 14 million years ago. Researches have established that a species corresponding to the Australopithecus romped about in India roughly 2 million years ago. The people of India belong to different anthropological bloodlines (Indianet 2009).

Indian tribal people amount to an 8.14 percent of the total population of the country, numbering 84.51 million, according to the 2001 census. These tribal people reside in approximately 15 percent of the country's area. Indian tribals primarily reside in various ecological and geo-climatical conditions ranging from plains, forests, hills and inaccessible areas, that perhaps lies dotted in the panoramic Indian terrain. According to Article 342 of the Indian Constitution, at present, there exist 697 tribes notified by the Central Government. These Indian tribal groups of people have been notified to reside in more than one State. More than half of the Indian tribal population is concentrated in the States of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Jharkhand and Gujarat. On the other hand, in other states of India like in Chandigarh, Delhi, Puducherry, Punjab and Haryana there is no particular tribal group that is reckoned as a specific tribal group.

As already shown above, research scientists opine that the population of India, including Indian tribes, is derived from six primary ethnic groups namely Negritos, Pro-Australoids or Austrics, Mongoloids, Mediterranean or Dravidian, Western Brachycephals and Nordics. The Negritos or the brachycephalic (broad-headed) men from Africa were the earliest tribesmen to populate India. They presently survive in their original home-ground in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The Jarewas, Onges, Sentinelese tribes and Great Andamani tribes are good examples. Studies have indicated that the Onges tribes have been living in the Andamans for the last 60,000 years. Some hill tribes like Irulas, Kodars, Paniyans and Kurumbas are found only in patches among the hills of south India on the mainland.

This group of Pro-Australoids or Austrics was the subsequent bunch to arrive in India after the Negritos. They symbolise a race of people, with wavy hair. The people of his community were distinguished for their prominent eye ridges, low foreheads and long heads. The other physical features of the people of this tribal community include thick jaws, low and broad based nose, small chins and large teeth. Austrics tribe, dispersed over the whole of India, Myanmar and the islands of South East Asia, are believed to 'form the bedrock of the people'. The Austrics are proudly known to be the main founders of the Indus Valley Civilisation. These people were of agrarian culture and they lived on cultivating vegetables and rice. Some of them were also engaged in making sugar from sugarcane. In Eastern and Central India, the language of this tribal community existed among the Munda or Kol tribes (Indianet 2009).

Mongoloids bear features that are common to people of Mongolia, China and Tibet. These tribal groups are located in the North-eastern portion of India in states like Assam, Nagaland and Meghalaya and also in Ladakh and Sikkim. Generally, these people are of yellow complexion, oblique eyes, high cheekbones, thinning hairline and medium height.

Mediterranean or Dravidian group of tribesmen arrived in India from South-west Asia and appears to be people of the same bloodline as the people of Asia Minor and Crete and the pre-Hellenic Aegeans of Greece. They are presumed to have constructed up the city civilisation of the Indus Valley, whose remains have been discovered at Mohenjodaro and Harappa and other Indus cities. The Dravidians are believed to have circulised in the entire part of India, replacing Negritos and Austrics equally. Dravidians incorporate the three sub-types namely the aleo-Mediterranean, the true Mediterranean and Oriental Mediterranean. This group makes up the

bulk of the scheduled castes in North India. This group also has a sub-type called Oriental group (Indianet 2009).

The bunch of Western Brachycephals includes the Alpinoids, Dinarics and Armenoids. The Coorgis and Parsis of Indian tribal origin fall into this category. Nordics or Indo-Aryans are the last immigrants into India. Nordic Aryans were a division of Indo-Iranians, who had originally left their homes in Central Asia, approximately 5000 years ago and had settled in Mesopotamia for some centuries. The Aryans must have arrived into India within 2000 and 1500 B.C. Their first home in India was western and northern Punjab, from where they scattered to the Valley of the Ganges and beyond. These tribes are now mainly witnessed in the Northwest and the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP). Many of these Indian tribes however belong to the `upper castes`.

One has to comprehend the inimitability of tribal culture, in order to admire them, to experience their warm hospitality and simple ways of living. Such can be described as the subtle and innocent qualities of Indian tribal people, who at times take recourse to perceptive and sincere judgment of opinions to determine their birth-right and destiny (Indianet 2009).

A positive and blissful note on Indian tribal people is that such endangered men folk are at various stages of social, economical and educational development. Access to sophisticated communication and modern-day transport is yet one of the umpteen domains in which Indian tribal people needs to look towards the future. Yet, the fact that underlines Indian history is not rather surprising, because Indian tribal groups of people perhaps have existed since the birth of history of ancient India. The interesting and novel mode of lifestyle that such Indian tribal people lead, accounts for a vast section of Indian travelogue. Be it in the sphere of much-retold Indian tribes or yet-to-be-known tribes, various styles of eating, drinking, working, singing, dancing, clothing, accessorising, or religious customs, Indian tribal people lead a life of their own. This distinctness is as if encased and enveloped within a protective covering, that at times receives massive public coverage. The distinction in the variety of the tribal people in India enriches the Indian culture and art.

With such bulky and hefty Indian tribal classification, the present Indian tribal scenario has somewhat transformed into an indigenous class, divided into the basic directions of east, west, north and south Indian tribal society and culture. This four cardinal tribal faction in India is then sub-divided into North-East Indian tribes, North Indian tribes, East Indian tribes, South Indian tribes and West Indian tribes and Central tribes. Leaving these spectacular bunches of Indian tribes; the tribes divided into the sections of Union Territories are listed under ethnicity and administrative marvel (Indianet 2009).

[Please note that the student is not expected the names of the different tribes by heart. A general acquaintance only is presupposed.]

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How are the Negritos connected to India?

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2) Give a brief demographic distribution of tribals in India according to 2001 census?

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1.6 THE PEOPLING OF INDIA

The concept of ‘original inhabitant’ is directly related to the initial peopling of India, which, due to the debate on topics such as the Indo-Aryan migration hypothesis, has been a contentious area of research and discourse. Some anthropologists hypothesize that the region was settled by multiple human migrations over tens of millennia, which makes it even harder to select certain groups as being truly aboriginal. One narrative, largely based on genetic research, describes Negritos, similar to the Andamanese adivasis of today, as the first humans to colonize India, likely 30-65 thousand years before present (kybp). 60% of all Indians share the mtDNA haplogroup M, which is universal among Andamanese islander adivasis and might be a genetic legacy of the postulated first Indians.

Some anthropologists theorize that these settlers were displaced by invading Austro-Asiatic-speaking Australoid people (who largely shared skin pigmentation and physiognomy with the Negritos, but had straight rather than kinky hair), and adivasi tribes such as the Irulas trace their origins to that displacement. The Oraon adivasi tribe of eastern India and the Korcu tribe of western India are considered to be examples of groups of Australoid origin. Subsequent to the Australoids, some anthropologists and geneticists theorize that Caucasoids (including both Dravidians and Indo-Aryans) and Mongoloids (Sino-Tibetans) immigrated into India: the Dravidians possibly from Iran, the Indo-Aryans possibly from the Central Asian steppes and the Tibeto-Burmans possibly from the Himalayan and north-eastern borders of the subcontinent. None of these hypotheses is free from debate and disagreement (Adivasi 2011).

Ethnic origins and linguistic affiliations in India match only inexactly, however: while the Oraon adivasis are classified as an Australoid group, their language, called Kurukh, is Dravidian. Khasis and Nicobarese are considered to be Mongoloid groups and the Munda and Santals are Australoid groups, but all four speak Austro-Asiatic languages. The Bhils and Gonds are frequently classified as Australoid groups, yet Bhil languages are Indo-European and the Gondi language is Dravidian. Also, in post-colonial India, tribal languages suffered huge setbacks with the formation of linguistic states after 1956 under the States Reorganisation Act. For example

the Santals are “gradually adopting languages of the areas inhabited, like Oriya in Orissa, Hindi in Bihar and Bengali in West Bengal” (Adivasi 2011).

Disruptions during Mughal and Colonial Periods

Although considered uncivilized and primitive, adivasis were usually not held to be intrinsically impure by surrounding (usually, caucasoid - Dravidian or Aryan) caste Hindu populations, unlike Dalits, who were. Thus, the adivasi origins of Maharishi Valmiki, who composed the Ramayana Hindu religious epic, were acknowledged, as were the origins of adivasi tribes such as the Grasia and Bhilala, which descended from mixed Rajput and Bhil marriages. Unlike the subjugation of the dalits, the adivasis often enjoyed autonomy and, depending on region, evolved mixed hunter-gatherer and farming economies, controlling their lands as a joint patrimony of the tribe. In some areas, securing adivasi approval and support was considered crucial by local rulers, and larger adivasi groups were able to sustain their own kingdoms in central India. The Gond Rajas of Garha-Mandla and Chanda are examples of an adivasi aristocracy that ruled in this region, and were “not only the hereditary leaders of their Gond subjects, but also held sway over substantial communities of non-tribals who recognized them as their feudal lords.”

The British Period

This relative autonomy and collective ownership of adivasi land by adivasis was severely disrupted by the advent of the Mughals in the early 16th century. Similarly, the British, beginning in the 18th century added to the consolidation of feudalism in India, first under the jagirdari system and then under the zamindari system. Beginning with the Permanent Settlement imposed by the British in Bengal and Bihar, which later became the template for a deepening of feudalism throughout India, the older social and economic system in the country began to alter radically. Land, both forest areas belonging to adivasis and settled farmland belonging to non-adivasi peasants, was rapidly made the legal property of British-designated zamindars (landlords), who in turn moved to extract the maximum economic benefit possible from their newfound property and subjects without regard to historical tenure or ownership. Adivasi lands sometimes experienced an influx of non-local settlers, often brought from far away (as in the case of Muslims and Sikhs brought to Kol territory) by the zamindars to better exploit local land, forest and labor. Deprived of the forests and resources they traditionally depended on and sometimes coerced to pay taxes, many adivasis were forced to borrow at usurious rates from moneylenders, often the zamindars themselves. When they were unable to pay, that forced them to become bonded laborers for the zamindars. Often, far from paying off the principal of their debt, they were unable even to offset the compounding interest, and this was made the justification for their children working for the zamindar after the death of the initial borrower. In the case of the Andamanese adivasis, long isolated from the outside world in autonomous societies, mere contact with outsiders was often sufficient to set off deadly epidemics in tribal populations, and it is alleged that some sections of the British government directly attempted to destroy some tribes (Adivasi 2011).

Land dispossession and subjugation by British and zamindar interests resulted in a number of adivasi revolts in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, such as the Santal hul (or Santal revolt) of 1855-56. Although these were suppressed ruthlessly by the governing British

authority (the East India Company prior to 1858, and the British government after 1858), partial restoration of privileges to adivasi elites (e.g. to Mankis, the leaders of Munda tribes) and some leniency in tax burdens resulted in relative calm, despite continuing and widespread dispossession, from the late nineteenth century onwards. The economic deprivation, in some cases, triggered internal adivasi migrations within India that would continue for another century, including as labor for the emerging tea plantations in Assam. (Adivasi 2011).

1.7 TRIBAL SITUATION TODAY

The Indian aboriginal tribes constitute roughly 8 percent of the nation's total population, according to the 1991 census. The native tribes were much less in number during the primitive times, however, with the passing decades, the Indian aboriginal tribes considerably grew in number. Some of the native tribes found concentrated in the belt along the Himalayas stretching through Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh in the west, to Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur, and Nagaland in the northeast (Indianet 2009).

Another aboriginal tribal group lives in the hilly areas of central India and in this belt, which is surrounded by the Narmada River to the north and the Godavari River to the southeast, tribal people live along the slopes of this region. Other Indian aboriginal tribes are the Santhals, live in Bihar and West Bengal. There are some native tribes in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala, in western India in Gujarat and Rajasthan, and in the union territories of Lakshadweep and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The extent of the tribal population varies considerably from state to state. In the Northeastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland, almost 90 percent of the population is tribal. The Gondi tribe is one of the aboriginal tribes of the central India. The Gondi, or Gond people live across the states of Madhya Pradesh, eastern Maharashtra (Vidarbha), Chhattisgarh, northern Andhra Pradesh, and western Orissa. More than four million people, they make up the largest tribe in Central India.

The Kol is a generic name for the Munda, Ho, and Oraon tribes who are the aboriginal groups of India. These tribes live in the states of Jharkhand, Orissa, and West Bengal, and spread over into parts of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Tripura, Bangladesh, and Nepal. The Munda tribe is an aboriginal tribe of Austro-Asiatic physical type and in 1901 they inhabited the Chota Nagpur Division, numbering to almost 438,000. The majority of the Kol people thought themselves to be Hindus with a syncretic admixture of innovative animistic beliefs; some of them also practice Christianity. The village community in its ancient structure still exists among the Mundas (Indianet 2009).

Bhils are the native tribes of Central India who speak Bhil languages, a group of Indic languages. Bhils are scheduled tribes and are found in the states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan in western and central India, as well as in Tripura in far-eastern India, on the border with Bangladesh. Bhils also dwell in Tharparkar district of Sindh in Pakistan. The Ghoomar dance is one of the oldest and most popular aspects of Bhil culture. In feudal and colonial times, the ruling Rajputs in various areas of work employed many Bhil tribal

groups. Most of times, the Bhils worked as the hunters because of their knowledge of the topography and some had even become warriors in armies.

The Kota tribe, also called Kotas is a community of indigenous peoples who inhabit areas on the slopes of the Nilgiri hills in Tamil Nadu in South India. The Kotas are the experts at the occupation of traditional artisans and arts of pottery and terracotta baking in the Nilgiris and their associated community, the Todas, are the agriculturists of the Nilgiris.

The Santal Tribes are the largest tribal community in India, found mainly in the states of West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam, and Orissa. There is also a significant Santal minority in neighboring Bangladesh.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How did some of the tribals become bonded labourers?

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2) Briefly describe the Kols.

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1.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have introduced ourselves to the general notion of tribal, their meaning, significance and geographical location. We also saw the origin of races in India, the peopling of India and the historical roots of tribals. In general, it is no exaggeration to say that the aboriginal tribes of India are the oldest groups (Indianetzone) and the first population of the country.

1.9 KEY WORDS

Australopithecus: A genus of near-men in the subfamily *Australopithecinae* representing a side branch of human.

Autochthonous: aboriginal; indigenous (opposed to *heterochthonous*)

Jagirdar system: Form of land tenancy introduced in India by the early sultans of Delhi in the early 13th century. Under the system, land, its revenues, and the power to govern it was assigned to an official of the state. The land reverted to the government on the official's death, but heirs could renew the land assignment by paying a fee. Feudalistic in character, the *jagirdar* system tended to enfeeble the central government by setting up quasi-independent baronies. Periodically abolished, it was always renewed. After Indian independence, measures were taken to abolish absentee landownership.

Negritos: A member of a black people of short stature native to the Austronesian region.

Ramapithecus: *Ramapithecus* (meaning "Rama's apes") an extinct group of arboreal (tree-living) primates that lived from about 12 to 14 million years ago, for a time regarded as a possible ancestor of Australopithecus.

Zamindar: A landholder in British colonial India responsible for collecting and paying to the government the taxes on the land under his jurisdiction.

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UNIT 2 TRIBAL FOLKLORE AND CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS

Contents

- 2.0 Objectives
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- 2.2 Tribal Art
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- 2.4 Indian Tribal Performing Arts
- 2.5 Tribal Costumes And Jewellery
- 2.6 The Importance Of Tribal Culture
- 2.7 Adivasi Contributions To Indian Civilization
- 2.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.9 Key Words
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2.0 OBJECTIVES

- To understand some of the rich tribal folklores and cultural expressions.
- To appreciate some of the cultural heritages of the tribals in India.
- To acknowledge the tribal contribution to Indian culture.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Culture is a living expression of a group of people. The culture provides a group its identity, self-worth and meaning. In any society, culture refers to the lifestyle of that society. Historically, handed down through oral tradition, it demonstrates the "old ways" over novelty and relates to a sense of community. Folklore consists of legends, music, oral history, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, fairy tales and customs that are the traditions of a culture, subculture, or group. It is also the set of practices through which those expressive genres are shared. The term 'folklore' was first used by the English antiquarian William Thoms 1846. Folklore may be divided into four areas of study: artifact, describable and transmissible entity (oral tradition), culture, and behaviour (dance or rituals). These areas do not stand alone, however, as often a particular item or element may fit into more than one of these areas. Folk culture is quite often imbued with a sense of place. If elements of a folk culture are copied by, or moved to, a foreign locale, they will still carry strong connotations of their original place of creation. folklore can also serve to validate a culture. In this unit, we look into the folklore of the tribals from general perspectives and how it contributes to their culture. We look into their art, music, costumes, etc. Then we see their contribution to the Indian culture. For the first part of this unit, I depend heavily on Indianetzone, "the largest free encyclopedia on India" (Indianet 2010).

2.2 TRIBAL ART

Folk and tribal art forms a part of Indian art as a whole. It has undergone transformation since a long time. They have evolved along with classical art. Tribal and folk art belong to the section of

people who belong to different social groups and it has a native flavour. These are visual arts for example paintings that depict their lifestyle, tradition and culture. They are the ones close to nature and this thing is regional. They have a set of belief system that allows them to interpret things in their own native ways and this influence them in their art even. Puranic gods and legends are often changed into contemporary manner (Smith 2006).

Tribal and folk art is related to fairs, festivals, local deities, fantasy in their representation. Indian art cannot do away with this section that has a regional and a mystic aura in it. Nomadic way of life is also an integral part of the tribal and folk art. Pithora paintings of the tribes of Rathwa, Bhilals and Nayka of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, are another fine example of Indian tribal art. These paintings convey the joy and celebration of the community. Tribal paintings from Orissa, earlier done as house-hold decoration, but now a commercial art-form done on raw silk fabric have themes of everyday life. Madhubani paintings depict bright, lively deities, most popularly Krishna and his beloved Radha, and various stories associated with their legend. They are named after the village of their origin. Others like Phad, Warli, Pithora, Choittora also fall in this category of Indian art (Indianet 2010 & Das 1979).

Indian Tribal Art provides valuable insights into elementary human nature and lifestyle among the Indian tribes. The Indian tribals pay due veneration and reverence to Mother Earth and its crucial elements. Indian tribal art is always described by positive themes and ideas like birth, life, harvest, journey, jubilation or marriage. The Indian tribal art includes paintings which are the integral part of the tribal tradition. It is a tribal art form where life and ingenuity are fused. Tribal paintings and sculptures are of exceedingly high quality and are documents of their cultural heritage. Tribals have made their own place in the contemporary world of art. The art gives the tribals a power and responsibility to control and guide them through it. The symbols portray the imaginations of men and these imaginations are the representative emotions of the people of a particular period and society (Indianet 2010 & Staab 2009).

It has not been more than half a century since the discovery of tribal paintings has revolutionized the discipline of the fine arts. Tribal art is a term covering the art products and performances of tribals. Indian tribals have definite artistic express. Geographical, sociological, historical and traditional factors determine the degree of primitiveness among tribals (Smith 2006).

In fact, tribal art is an art where life and creativity are inseparable. The tribal arts have a unique sensitivity. Their art is a manifestation of their life and holds their passion and mystery. The tribal art is one of the most fascinating parts of the tribal culture in India. The treasure of tribal arts is immense and has an astounding range, diversity and beauty (Staab 2009). Traditional Indian tribal art tries to wholly recreate the immortal charisma of Indian tribal life. One can easily come across exquisite pieces of Indian tribal art in different parts of India. "The Indian tribal art is rich in expression and is a living form very much with the times." It has become an intrinsic part of the country's cultural identity (Indianet 2010).

Traditional Indian tribal art tries to wholly recreate the immortal charisma and creativity of Indian tribal life. Through solemn efforts, the Indian tribes try to keep alive a culture that is thousands years old, comprising music, traditions, rituals and art. They live in complete harmony with nature by preserving their resources and blending with the environment. Tribal paintings

usually belong from the remote tribal regions, in forests or high up in the mountains. Indian tribal paintings bearing illustrious backgrounds include Saura paintings, Gond paintings, Bondi paintings, Pithora paintings, Warli paintings, Thanka, Patta Chitra, Kurumba paintings, Khovar paintings, Pichhvai painting and, miniatures etc. (Indianet 2010).

The Indian tribal art is influenced by the contemporary art and its narrative approach. At the same time the tribal art has also shaped contemporary art. Now we move to the next section where we see the varieties of tribal music. As such the melody of music and rhythm of dance reverberate in the life of every tribal (Archer 1974).

2.3 TRIBAL MUSIC

Indian tribal music possesses numerous modulations that have been inimitable in its traditions. Truly, Indian tribal music is considered to be a version of house music. The music is mostly accompanied by drum-beats, with no presence of specific melody. During an ongoing performance, there exists no prolonged synth sound in such music. Due to the Indian variation being of much rugged origin, the instruments utilised are not as refined as the ones used in classical music. Tribal musical instruments are generally manufactured by the musicians themselves, making use of materials like coconut shells, animal skin, etc.

The musical beats are based on sophisticated and synchronised drum patterns, establishing a rhythm. Into a wholesome Indian tribal musical session, there can be a mixture of drum sounds in a particular track. Other instruments utilised include horse hair violin, duduk, bamboo flutes, santoor, sitar etc. (Bhattacharya 1999).

The strict definition of tribal music in India is pretty formless, since tracks are acknowledged as ruggedly tribal because of their booming sound. However, present times witness much of lyrical chanting and traditional sounds, comprising contemporary musical variations. The aboriginal, ethnic tribal music is reproduced live with drums, in accompaniment with other musical instruments (Indianet 2010).

Tribal music in India is not taught the same way as classical music is. There are no finishing schools that instruct tribal music. It has a hereditary process of learning. The music is passed down from generations to generations. However, as times and tastes have changed, variations in the current form are foreseeable. Included in the present-day tribal variation, tribal house music is the end-product of digitalised instrumentation.

Indian tribal music with its closed-group form of ethnicity, is remarkable in the sense that it can never be studied in isolation from the social and ritual contexts of the people concerned. Tribal music possesses a well-built community basis. The fact can be comprehended in the domains of musical-socialisation, kinds of ownership, levels of participation and nature of specialisation. Learning music in a typical tribal society forms a cardinal part of the entire process of association of its members. It is learnt together with the umpteen customs and practices conforming to the standards reckoned apt by the society. Any given tribal community as a whole initiated its children in learning music, i.e., singing, drumming or dancing, from an early age. Children from the Santhal tribal society are initially supplied with the katic murli (small sized

flutes) of five to six inches in length with three to four envoys to blow and the drums of smaller size to beat (Indianet 2010 & Knight 1993).

As with any other tribal society, Indian tribal music scenario also possesses its aboriginal restrictions as well. Music amongst tribals are not conceived as exclusive property of its individual members, but of the community as a whole. For this very reason, tribal music even if framed by individual composers remain anonymous. For instance, none of the Santhal songs can be seen to contain the names of individual Santhal composers. Modernisation has however completely overhauled this tradition. Individualism is keenly looked after (Indianet 2010).

Closely related to the music is the tribal dance. Rhythmic movement and dance steps flows through the very blood of the tribals and is part of the tribal folklore and will be taken up in the next section, as part of the tribal performing arts (Bhavnani 1965).

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is a folklore?

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2) How are Indian tribal art connected to normal events of life?

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2.4 INDIAN TRIBAL PERFORMING ARTS

Indian tribal performing arts is amazingly divergent in its content, with ethnicity speaking from each angle. Tribal performing arts in India is not an area that needs further novelty and expression to elucidate its profound charm. Tribal existence in the country is known to have been since thousands of years, even before the advent of Aryans. Hence, it becomes pretty obvious that their indigenous culture has been rooted with passionate culture and tradition. Performing arts may not be the term which such men and women might use, but that was what they had imbibed themselves with as an essential past-time.

Historically, it can be explained that tribal life in India was much unhurried and relaxed moments making up each day. Something new and novel comprising dancing, dramatics, singing, imbibing of musical instruments, art of chiselling out refreshing artefacts, was perhaps the order of the day. Tribal women in India were foremost and leading in such business in performing arts,

including sometimes painting or sketching. The tribal society in India is a very close-knit one, with unity surviving in diversity (Indianet 2010).

Through common motives and aims of establishing an orchestrated society, performing arts in Indian tribal groups were done in a common platform in a clearing. This tradition is however still followed amongst some tribes, lurking within the depth of woods.

Commercialisation and modernisation has paved way for tribesmen to move out into the wide world for gaining popularity. The immensely formulated manner in which such tribal performing arts work is done is one that fetches inspiration for cosmopolitan cities also. Be it while singing, while dancing, while enacting a theatrical performance or beating of united drums, tribals in India try to make a point every time.

The exceedingly enriched and indigenous performing arts culture amongst Indian tribals is manifest by their yet successfully surviving tradition, battling against all odd of modernism. The positive point that can be mentioned here is that whatever has happened or occurred in tribal lives, Indian tribal performing arts has moved ahead in unison to capture million of hearts today (Indianet 2010).

2.5 TRIBAL COSTUMES AND JEWELLERY

Indian tribals have an innate sense of beauty that is simple and close to nature. Among them fashion has existed since the primordial existence of tribals who had first laid their footsteps in the subcontinent. With time, several instances and excavations by historians and archaeologists have exhibited the unusual yet exceptional qualities in making beautiful things during times when man had just started to grasp the meaning of `progression of humanity`. Today, however tribal fashion in India has taken on a fresh meaning, looking towards the Western culture, with much broader and pan-Indian aspects to be proud about. People of the Indian metropolitans, with imposing shops established in every corner of streets, house tribal jewellery or tribal attires, making the rather archaic communities going great guns. Whatever is the stance of cities today, the fact remains as it is, that Indian tribal fashion has descended from the tribal ancestors, who still maintain a progeny. The hinterlands in which they perhaps reside, stay witness to umpteen innovative tribal fashion, successfully blending the ancient and the modern (Indianet 2010).

Indian tribal fashion can be zeroed down on the two primary aspects of costumes and jewellery. Indian history bears evidence that the primeval tribal jewelleries were sometimes chiselled out from animal bones, carved into extraordinary angles. These jewelleries possessed a sharp and jagged edge, which were almost always worn everyday, with specialties reserved for occasions. With time and advancement of civilisation, Indian tribal fashion took on a fresh turn, with the surging advent of gold jewellery. Depending on one`s capacity to afford the expensive metal, throughout the ages gold has been utilised in every kind of jewellery, from necklace, armlet, headgear, wristlet, ornament for the waist, or even anklets. Gold ornaments were also and still is at times utilised in appeasing the Almighty in ceremonial occasions. Emerging in almost every hue and brightness, gold jewellery in Indian tribal fashion can be witnessed from the east to west and north to south (Indianet 2010).

Flowering one's body, empowered with rich patterns of fragrant flowers amongst many tribes of North-East India are in vogue, however with certain restrictions. Indian tribal fashion also finds proud passage in the diversified class of costumes and attires from the states and union territories that the country is dotted with. For example, men in Arunachal Pradesh, believe in keeping it simple, hence they wear *lungis* woven in red and black yarn, a jacket and a turban. Women from Arunachal deck themselves in a piece of cloth that wraps the body from the shoulders to the knees. This is then done again with a full-sleeved coat and a striking sash, called *muhkak*, tied around the waist. A Khasi man from Meghalaya is known by his dhoti (an unstitched garment for the lower part of the body), jacket and a turban. Khasi women from Meghalaya deck them with a two-piece cloth pinned on each shoulder and a shawl, called *jainsem* and *tapmoh* locally. A Garo tribes woman dons a blouse and tie and a long unstitched cloth called *dakmanda*, round the waist. The cloth is hand-woven, with a 6-10 inch borderline, bearing floral motifs. A Jaintia tribes woman from Meghalaya deck up in a similar manner as Garo women, with the blouse, a striped sarong (A garment consisting of a long piece of cloth worn wrapped around the body and tucked at the waist or under the armpits), called *thoh khyrwang* (Indianet 2010).

Indian tribal fashion is also reflected exceedingly well in the costumes of tribes in Mizoram. Men folk from Mizoram deck them with a piece of cloth, early 7 feet in length, wrapped round the body. In winter, men adorn them with a long white coat, fastened at the throat and going down up to thighs. The coats are ornately patterned near the sleeves with bands of red and white. The tribes men also wear a particular kind of headgear, wrapping a cloth around the head, paying attention that the ends fall over the ears. Women from Mizoram don a single cloth wrapped around the waist and descending to the knees. A short white jacket with hand-woven patterns on top completes the look of the attire. Tribal fashion in Manipur consists of women donning a blouse and a three-piece hand woven *phanek* (the traditional women's wear of Manipuri women), closely resembling a wrap-around skirt. Men generally wear a single piece of cloth, resembling a lungi. Turbans are a must attire for Manipuri men.

Indian tribal fashion finds a pride position in Nagaland, with sixteen tribes donning different costumes. Within the men, attires primarily comprise a short wrap-around skirt and a feathered headgear. Women from Nagaland possess various fashions of donning a skirt, named mekhla, varying according to tribes. Whatever, is the form amongst the tribes, wearing of mekhla follows the basic of less is more. Tribal fashion in Tripura consists of men wearing a narrow piece of cloth as a garment for the lower section of the body, without a shirt. The headdress is a turban, with the Tripura women donning two separate pieces of cloth, draped round the body both for lower and upper section of the body. The most astonishing feature of the attire is the upper part of the garment, embroidered with ornate designs (Indianet 2010).

Indian tribal fashion amongst the Bhil community in Rajasthan consists of the men getting comfortable in a loincloth, embroidered waistcoats, turbans and traditional Rajasthani shoes. The Bhil tribeswomen don a single cloth, tucked round the waist, while the rest is used to cover the head. Diversified jewellery, ranging from beaded chokers, colourful bangles, nose-rings and an ornament hanging from the hair to the forehead, is a requisite for Bhil women. The Warli tribe from Western Ghats, rather popular as *ghatis*, don minimal clothing, with men wearing short dhotis and embroidered waistcoats. Warli women wear saris, short in length, with a half-sleeved

embellished choli that is tied in a knot in the front. The Toda tribe from Nilgiri Hills have men wearing long, loose-flowing garment, covering the whole body. The colours are normally red, white and blue borders. Toda women also wear the same woven garment, except in the fashion of a sari. The jewellery is limited to silver, beads and shells.

Indian tribal fashion exists to quite a massive height in West Bengal, Bihar and parts of Orissa, with the presence of the Santhal tribe. Santhal attire basically redefines minimalism, with men donning lungi and women donning short sari without a blouse, however worn to fit their body neatly, without even going loose at any trying circumstances (Indianet 2010).

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How did commercialisation affect tribal art positively?

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2) Give the role of Jewellery in tribal culture?

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2.6 THE IMPORTANCE OF TRIBAL CULTURE

These folklore and other expressions indicate the dynamic and creative nature of the tribal culture. Culture refers to the pattern of human activity and the symbols, which give significance to this activity. Culture is represented through the art, literature, costumes, customs and traditions of a community. Different cultures exist in different parts of the world. The natural environment greatly affects the lifestyle of the people of that region, thus shaping their culture. The diversity in the cultures around the world is also a result of the mind-sets of people inhabiting different regions of the world

The cultural values of a community give it an identity of its own. A community gains a character and a personality of its own, because of the culture of its people. Culture is shared by the members of a community. It is learned and passed from the older generations to the newer ones. For an effective transfer of culture from one generation to another, it has to be translated into symbols. Language, art, religion and folklore serve as the symbolic means of transfer of cultural values between generations (Edward 2007).

Culture is a bond that ties the people of a region or community together. It is that one common bond, which brings the people of a community together. The customs and traditions that the

people of a community follow, the festivals they celebrate, the kind of clothing they wear, the food they eat, and most importantly, the cultural values they adhere to, bind them together.

Culture is seen as a system of social control, wherein people shape their standards and behavior. The cultural values form the founding principles of one's life. They influence one's principles and philosophies of life. They influence one's way of living and thus impact social life. The importance of culture lies in the fact that it is a link between people and their value systems (Oak 2010). In fact tribal culture has something very profound to share with others: simplicity, closeness to nature, democratic values, community spirit, etc.

2.7 ADIVASI CONTRIBUTIONS TO INDIAN CIVILIZATION

Adivasi traditions and practices pervade all aspects of Indian culture and civilization, yet this awareness is often lacking in popular consciousness, and the extent and import of Adivasi contributions to Indian philosophy, language and custom have often gone unrecognized, or been underrated by historians and social scientists (Payat 2002).

Although popular myths about Buddhism have obscured the original source and inspiration for its humanist doctrine, it is to India's ancient tribal (or Adivasi) societies that Gautam Buddha looked for a model for the kind of society he wished to advocate. Repulsed by how greed for private property was instrumental in causing poverty, social exploitation and unending warfare - he saw hope for human society in the tribal republics that had not yet come under the sway of authoritarian rule and caste discrimination. The early Buddhist *Sanghas* were modelled on the tribal pattern of social interaction that stressed gender equality, and respect for all members. Members of the *Sanghas* sought to emulate their egalitarian outlook and democratic functioning

At that time, the tribal republics retained many aspects of social equality that can still be found in some Adivasi societies that have somehow escaped the ill-effects of commercial plunder and exploitation. Adivasi society was built on a foundation of equality with respect for all life forms including plants and trees. There was a deep recognition of mutual dependence in nature and human society. People were given respect and status according to their contribution to social needs but only while they were performing that particular function. A priest could be treated with great respect during a religious ceremony or a doctor revered during a medical consultation, but once such duties had been performed, the priest or doctor became equal to everyone else. The possession of highly valued skills or knowledge did not lead to a permanent rise in status. This meant that no individual or small group could possess exclusive authority any kind, or enjoy hereditary rights (Payat 2002).

Such a value-system was sustainable as long as the Adivasi community was non-acquisitive and all the products of society were shared. Although division of labor did take place, the work of society was performed on a cooperative and co-equal basis - without prejudice or disrespect for any form of work (Kumar 2003).

In fact, it is said that the simplicity, the love of nature, the absence of coveting the goods and wealth of others, and the social harmony of tribal society attracted Gautam Buddha, and had a profound impact on the ethical core of his teachings.

Nevertheless, tribal societies were under constant pressure as the money economy grew and made traditional forms of barter less difficult to sustain. In matters of trade, the *Adivasis* followed a highly evolved system of honour. All agreements that they entered into were honoured, often the entire tribe chipping in to honour an agreement made by an individual member of the tribe. Individual dishonesty or deceit were punished severely by the tribe. An individual who acted in a manner that violated the honour of the tribe faced potential banishment and family members lost the right to participate in community events during the period of *punishment*. But often, tribal integrity was undermined because the non-tribals who traded with the *Adivasis* reneged on their promises and took advantage of the sincerity and honesty of most members of the tribe (Payat 2002).

Tribal societies came under stress due to several factors. The extension of commerce, military incursions on tribal land, and the resettling of Brahmins amidst tribal populations had an impact, as did ideological coercion or persuasion to attract key members of the tribe into "mainstream" Hindu society. This led to many tribal communities becoming integrated into Hindu society as *jatis* (or castes) while others who resisted were pushed into the hilly or forested areas, or remote tracks that had not yet been settled. In the worst case, defeated *Adivasi* tribes were pushed to the margins of settled society and became discriminated as outcastes and "untouchables".

But spontaneous differentiation within tribal societies also took place over time, which propelled these now unequal tribal communities into integrating into Hindu society without external violence or coercion. In Central India, ruling dynasties emerged from within the ranks of tribal society.

In any case, the end result was that throughout India, tribal deities and customs, creation myths and a variety of religious rites and ceremonies came to be absorbed into the broad stream of "Hindu" society. In the *Adivasi* traditions, ancestor worship, worship of fertility gods and goddesses (as well as male and female fertility symbols), totemic worship - all played a role. And they all found their way into the practice of what is now considered Hinduism. The widespread Indian practice of keeping '*vratas*', i.e. fasting for wish-fulfillment or moral cleansing also has *Adivasi* origins (Payat 2002).

Renowned Bengali writer Mahashweta Devi has shown that both Shiva and Kali have tribal origins as do Krishna and Ganesh. In the 8th century, the tribal forest goddess or harvest goddess was absorbed and adapted as Siva's wife. Ganesh owes its origins to a powerful tribe of elephant trainers whose incorporation into Hindu society was achieved through the deification of their elephant totem. In his study of Brahmin lineages in Maharashtra, *Kosambi* points to how many Brahmin *gotras* (such as *Kashyapa*) arose from tribal totems such as *Kachhapa* (tortoise). In Rajasthan, Rajput rulers recognised the *Adivasi Bhil* chiefs as allies and *Bhils* acquired a central role in some Rajput coronation ceremonies.

India's regional languages such as Oriya, Marathi or Bengali developed as a result of the fusion of tribal languages with Sanskrit or Pali and virtually all the Indian languages have incorporated words from the vocabulary of *Adivasi* languages.

Adivasis who developed an intimate knowledge of various plants and their medicinal uses played an invaluable role in the development of Ayurvedic medicines. In a recent study, the All India Coordinated Research Project credits *Adivasi* communities with the knowledge of 9000 plant species - 7500 used for human healing and veterinary health care. Dental care products like *datun*, roots and condiments like *turmeric* used in cooking and ointments are also *Adivasi* discoveries, as are many fruit trees and vines (Payat 2002). Ayurvedic cures for *arthritis* and night blindness owe their origin to *Adivasi* knowledge.

Adivasis also played an important role in the development of agricultural practices - such as rotational cropping, fertility maintenance through alternating the cultivation of grains with leaving land fallow or using it for pasture. *Adivasis* of Orissa were instrumental in developing a variety of strains of rice.

Adivasi musical instruments such as the *bansuri* (flute) and *dhol* (drum), folk-tales, dances and seasonal celebrations also found their way into Indian traditions as did their art and metallurgical skills.

In India's central belt, *Adivasi* communities rose to considerable prominence and developed their own ruling clans. The earliest Gond kingdom appears to date from the 10th C and the Gond Rajas were able to maintain a relatively independent existence until the 18th C., although they were compelled to offer nominal allegiance to the Mughal empire. The Garha-Mandla kingdom in the north extended control over most of the upper Narmada valley and the adjacent forest areas. The Deogarh-Nagpur kingdom dominated much of the upper Wainganga valley, while Chanda-Sirpur in the south consisted of territory around Wardha and the confluences of the Wainganga with the Penganga.

Jabalpur was one of the major centers of the Garha-Mandla kingdom and like other major dynastic capitals had a large fort and palace. Temples and palaces with extremely fine carvings and erotic sculptures came up throughout the Gond kingdoms. The Gond ruling clans enjoyed close ties with the Chandella ruling clans and both dynasties attempted to maintain their independence from Mughal rule through tactical alliances. Rani Durgavati of Jabalpur (of Chandella-Gond heritage) acquired a reputation of legendary proportions when she died in battle defending against Mughal incursions. In fact, the city of Nagpur was founded by a Gond Raja in the early 18th century (Payat 2002).

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How important is culture in tribal societies?

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2) Was Buddha attracted by tribals?

2.8 LET US SUM UP

After having look into the various aspects of folklore among the tribals, we have also studied their significant contribution to the Indian culture. In spite of their simplicity and serenity, there is a profound and lived wisdom in their culture, which are expressed through their folklores and other expressions.

2.9 KEY WORDS

Folklore: The traditional beliefs, practices, customs, stories, jokes, songs (etc.) of a community, handed down orally or behaviorally from individual to individual.

Performing arts: The performing arts are those forms of art which differ from the plastic arts insofar as the former uses the artist's own body, face, and presence as a medium, and the latter uses materials such as clay, metal or paint which can be molded or transformed to create some physical art object.

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UNIT 3 SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF TRIBALS

Contents

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 The Social Structure Of Santals
- 3.3 The Village Set-Up
- 3.4 The Council Of Five People (*Mone Hor*)
- 3.5 The People's Assembly (*Disom Hor*)
- 3.6 The Code Of Behaviour and Taboos
- 3.7 Social Evils: Magic and Witchcraft
- 3.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.9 Key Words
- 3.10 Further Readings and References

3.0 OBJECTIVES

- To study the social organization of tribals in general and Santals in particular.
- To see some of the unique and sustainable social set up of the tribals.
- To note the democratic and participative nature of tribal social organization, which has made them successful.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The tribals have an organic and well-organised social structure that is both function and self-sustaining. Since the social organisation vary immensely depending on the particular tribe, in this unit, we study the social organisation of the Santals, the largest Indian tribe, which could act as a sample for the other tribes also. Many of the general features are true, with few exceptions, for other tribes.

3.2 THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF SANTALS

Traditionally, the Santals possess a well structured social organisation to ensure discipline in the whole community and harmony among themselves. The people based governance is more than an idea; it is also a concept that needs to be practised at different levels. The tribal world view of democracy is a broad concept that includes the symbolic triad of human beings, animals and forest. The functioning of a vibrant democracy demands not only a proper ecological balance but also due respect for one another. A holistic view of the tribal lifestyle, customs and culture underscores the critical role played by natural resources in establishing a thriving democracy which begins at the village level.

In a village the head person is called *manjhi* (headman). A number of villages form part of one local administrative unit, administered locally by a *Parganait*. He is the custodian of all social functions of these villages. Kinship is the tie that binds human beings together. A society is

organised in such a way in order to perform functions necessary for the well-being and maintenance of the society. Santal social organisation is characterised by a lack of the caste cleavages so prominent in Hindu society, a patrilineal kinship system, and a relatively low level of political integration. The basic family unit is the extended patrilocal (relating to residence with a husband's kin group or clan) family. Each village is usually composed of a number of lineages as the ancestors are very important for the family and village (Singh 2003).

It is important to note that the concept of family in the tribal community goes beyond the circle of one's own household and encompasses the entire village. Further the surrounding forest, water, land, animals, river and so on constitute an inseparable part of the village community. Although the term "democracy" is not part of tribal vocabulary, they very much practice the spirit of democracy. Unfortunately over the years, this relationship has considerably weakened due to external influences (Kumar 2002).

3.3 THE VILLAGE SET-UP

The basic unit of the Santal communal system was the village. For the efficient running of the village administration they elected a village headman and his assistants from among the leading members of the group. A full-fledged village council consisted of seven village officials, namely *manjhi* (village headman), *paranik* (assistant headman), *naeke* (village priest), *kudam naeke* (the priest worshipping local spirits), *jog manjhi* (guardian of morals), *jog paranik* (assistant of the *paranik*), and *godet* (messenger of the village). Succession to these posts was hereditary. However any official could be removed for incompetency by the people of the village (Kumar 2002).

Ordinarily the social authority in the villages is exercised by the headman, *manjhi*, with the help of the above-mentioned village officials. He conducts meetings in the village and makes decisions. Problems are brought to the meetings and at times a fine may be imposed depending on the case and the *manjhi* has to give the final decision on the case. *jog manjhi* has an interesting office. He is responsible for arranging feasts and acts as a censor of village morals. He has to instruct the people sometimes. *Godet* is actually to help the *manjhi* to announce to the villagers the forth-coming events (Mukherjee 1980). Although these functionaries have distinct responsibilities, decisions could be taken only through the collective consensus of the community in a *kulhi durup* or village meeting in which all the adult members of the village participate. Most decisions on social, cultural and political issues are taken at the village level (Choudhury 1999).

The social authority in the villages is exercised ordinarily by the headman, *manjhi*, with a batch of village officials to assist him. He collects rents from the people (to be paid to the government). All abandoned holdings and waste land are in his charge. He is the custodian of the village property – the communal wells, streets and grazing grounds. He has to maintain the *manjhithan* (founder's shrine) and the *jaherthan* (sacred grove). He has to also see to it that the yearly festivals are duly held and every householder contributes for the feasts. He requests all the people of the village to participate in the ceremonies of birth, marriage and death. If a sickness breaks out in the village, he must summon a meeting and arrange for special sacrifices. His position is that of a disciplinarian and a communal custodian. Because of his role in the village, he commands respect. The Santals regard him as the father of the village (Archer 1985).

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Who is the headman in Santal village and what is his role?

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2) How does a village function in a tribal setup?

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3.4 THE COUNCIL OF FIVE PEOPLE (*MONE HOR*)

Social authority in the village is exercised by the headman but always in consultation with the *mone hor* (five people council: *manjhi* (headman), *paranik* (assistant headman), *jog manjhi* (overseer of morals), *godet* (announcer), *naeke* (priest) and *kudam naeke* (assistant priest)). Though there are six people or at times seven people it is called *mone hor* because five people are important. All the villagers are members of the village council. Village council is the institution that settles all the disputes of the villages. Santal community as a whole maintains certain uniform customs and laws with relation to marriage, divorce, birth etc. *Manjhi* presides over the village council meetings when they are held to discuss matters related to village. In the event of disputes with other villages he acts as the representative of the village. *Paranik* is the principal assistant to *manjhi* and representative of *manjhi*. If *manjhi* dies without any male issues or brothers, then *paranik* will get the office. No public sacrifice, no festival, no ceremony such as marriage can be done without *manjhi* taking initiative. *Jog manjhi* serves as the supernatant of the youth of the village and he is the link between younger generations and older generations. Equally important is the religious headman called *naeke* and his assistant *kudam naeke* (Choudhury 1999).

3.5 THE PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY (*DISOM HOR*)

The highest authority in Santal society is known as *Disom Hor* or assembly of the people of the region. Even the *pargana* or *parganait* and the assembly do not exercise final authority. This is vested in the people of a number of villages. The final authority is exercised once every year through the medium of the *lo bir* or hunt council. If there is an inter-village dispute, the matter is taken up with the *parganait* and not the *manjhi*. He is expected to settle the problem. In case he fails to come to a decision, the matter is taken up by the hunt council (*lo bir*). In such a case the head of the group is the hunt priest (*dihri*). In this case usually the people themselves make the decision and the hunt priest and other officials are only to assist in making the decision. Punishment for serious breaches of discipline may be as serious as *bitlaha* (excommunication)

which may be decided by the hunt council. It is the administration of the people, conducted by the people, for the benefit of the people. There is no appeal against this judgement.

The assembly meets during the annual hunt (*lo bir sindra*). In the *lo bir* all Santals, with or without an official position, have equal status. Any matter may be raised by anyone and is fully discussed. As the highest court of appeal, the decisions of the *lo bir* are binding to all. The decision about excommunicating (*bitlaha*) a person from Santal society can be taken and executed only by *lo bir*. *Bitlaha* or social ostracism is the most severe form of punishment known to the Santal and is imposed for a violation of the rules of sib exogamy (Santals having the same surname/clan cannot get married) and tribal endogamy (marriage is not allowed outside the Santal tribe). Social ostracism has two forms, temporary and permanent. Temporary *bitlaha*, because of the violation of the rule of sib exogamy, can be lifted by the performance of *jamjati*, which is an expensive ceremony (because of the expenses to be paid for it is more than an ordinary Santal can afford). Permanent *bitlaha*, deals with grave cases like serious break down of morals and beliefs, murder and so on. Such punishment is also given to a woman who indulges in sexual relation to any *diku* (non tribal) or accepts herself to be a concubine. It consists in formally expelling him or her from the tribe for good (Datta-Majumdar 1956).

[The student is not expected to learn the technical terms by heart. Only the important notions are to be remembered. What is expected is a general acquaintance.]

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How is social authority exercised in the village?

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2) Who exercises the highest authority in a village?

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3.6 THE CODE OF BEHAVIOUR AND TABOOS

There are no written laws and patterns of behaviour codes. Ethical principles have guided social behaviour for centuries. There are many traditions and customs that have come down through oral tradition and they are strictly followed. There are several taboos and prohibitions which regulate and control behaviour.

Santal code of behaviour is rooted in early tradition, based in their religion. The Santals have respect for their elders. They are generally a very hospitable people. Though the parents

generally do not punish the children, they are expected to follow the norms and practices of daily life. Children are told not to steal, quarrel and mix with *dikus* (non-tribal). The idea of personal sin as understood in Christianity does not exist. But the idea of sin does exist and so does the idea of punishment. When a person commits a sin the whole community is affected and the Supreme Being may punish the whole community. That is to say that any breach of discipline is against the community and against God. Disobedience to God's law can lead to punishment as it had happened in the primordial punishment of the rain fire.

All Santals are expected to observe certain restrictions in daily life. These restrictions are to preserve the society in good stead as they believe. Through these taboos the spirits remain pleased. The *manjhithan* (founder's shrine) and *jaherthan* (sacred grove) are considered sacred. Therefore all should respect these places. No one should plough this area or cut the trees from here. Women must never climb the trees in this area nor cut their branches. The village street (*kulhi*) is also considered sacred as it is the abode of the *manjhithan* and meetings are held on the street. No one should plough this area. It is also the place where village meetings are held. The priest has to abstain from sexual relation on the eve of offering sacrifices to the spirits (Troisi 1978).

Santal women must avoid a number of actions which men are permitted or even expected to do. Women are barred from ploughing the field; it is even inauspicious for a Santal woman to touch a plough. They are not supposed to thatch the roof of a house, strike with an axe, shoot an arrow, play a flute or even to wear male clothes. They are not expected to go for the hunt. A pregnant woman must not sit on the narrow ledge surrounding the house with her legs dangling or her hair loose or any portion of her clothing hanging loosely from her body. She may not look upon a dead body. She must not weep when a death occurs. If there is an eclipse of the moon she should remain inside the house; she should not look at it. Such breaches would be regarded as symbolic perversions by the *bongas* (spirits) and at the same time safeguard the mother so that the child is born well.

It is taboo to marry outside the tribe or inside one's own clan. Having sexual relations with them is also taboo. Adultery and homosexuality are also prohibited. Such breaches are believed to incur the wrath of the spirits and to bring immediate punishment. The relation between a Santal and his younger brother's wife is marked by taboo. They are not supposed to have any physical contact; they cannot be alone in the same room or in a courtyard; they must never sit near each other. They are also expected not to mention the names of these persons. When they have to be referred to, they are referred to in terms of their children.

We can say that taboos are pragmatic moral principles. They derive their validity from their efficacy. They are observed because they work, because they yield solutions and provide results. They disappear or are transformed when no longer useful. If it's taboo, maybe we shouldn't discuss it. But we find the world over, each culture having its own particular version of taboos. Although some taboos can be traced to evident risks to health and safety, there is no generally accepted explanation of most others. I may say that they tend to relate to objects and actions that are significant for the maintenance of social order (Vadappuram 2009).

Bitlaha (Ostracism)

As already mentioned *bitlaha* is imposed on someone in a very grave situation. Clan and kin incest, intercourse with *diku* (non-tribal), eating with forbidden relatives, are some of the reasons for being ostracised. The village *bongas* (spirits) are deemed to be polluted and in many cases the offenders are liable to full and immediate out casting followed by the ceremony known as *bitlaha*. On rare occasions an offence may be punished with a fine; that is when the crime is not as serious as incest (Archer 1946).

The first step for holding a *bitlaha* is to obtain regional approval. The village headman must first inform the local *pargana*. He has to tell him of the village decision and ask him to consult the headmen from the nearby villages. These village headmen should approve of the case and confirm the village decision. Once they have confirmed a date is fixed for the *bitlaha*.

If the *bitlaha* is declared it is announced in the market place a few days before the actual date of the event. On the day of *bitlaha*, the male members from the nearby villages including the village of the culprit, with flutes and drums, bows and arrows meet in the street where the culprit lives. Drumming is kept high so that it can be heard from a long distance. When most of the people have reached the village, they tie a short charred bit of firewood, a worn out broom and some used leaf plates on a bamboo pole and fix at the entrance of the courtyard. Then the room of the culprit is desecrated by throwing away the things from the house. He or she is not allowed to take food with the others and they cannot give or take children in marriage within the Santal community. Thus he or she is cast away from the village and Santal society (Biswas 1956).

***Jamjati* (Re-admittance)**

By performing *jamjati*, an out-casted Santal is accepted back into the society. It is done in the following manner. However if the crime is serious as mentioned above there is no re-admittance possible. When both the parties are ready to pay the necessary amount of money for the performance of the ceremony they inform the headman. The headman in turn has to inform the *parganait* and the neighbouring villages as it had been done earlier in the case of *bitlaha*. Then they fix a day to perform the ceremony. The person who is to be re-admitted has to prepare a big feast. On that day the out-casted man and woman go to the village street with twisted cloth around their necks and water in a small pot. Before the headman and his assistants, the offenders acknowledge their offence and agree to pay the fine for it. Then they wash their faces with water from the pot and give the water to the leading men who will repeat the same. After this ceremony, the feet of the headman and other leaders are washed by the female culprit. Once this is over they all sit down to eat and on the plate of the *parganait* some money is kept. The other headmen also receive some money though not a big amount.

Significance and Problems of *Bitlaha*

Usually when an incident of *bitlaha* takes place a huge crowd gathers. If the number of people is very small then the effect of *bitlaha* is also less significant; the Santals say like wise. That is the reason why so many nearby villages are informed to show the seriousness and enormity of the problem. A *bitlaha* is considered like a hunt in which the offenders are like the prey. 'They must be tracked and hunted down'. For this reason the men carry the sticks of hunters and a hunt-master presides. They dance, beat drums and play flutes, all similar to the annual hunt (Archer 1946).

A *bitlaha* demonstrates the beast like behaviour of the culprits. The headman says on this occasion, “We have made them like cattle. They have acted like the early ancestors whose conduct ruined the world. They have rutted like buffaloes.” For this reason also the songs dwell constantly on bestiality. It conveys the meaning that such behaviour is not becoming of the tribe.

In the mocking song here we see how abominable such behaviour of the culprit is.

Across the river, Barsa, you are always at a sheep.

I shall tell your father, but my father goes to girls.

Bitlaha is considered as an “*ato bapla*” (wedding of the village). The crowd is a wedding party. But they say that the family did not marry them but the individuals did. The village puts the two offenders together, exposes their secret relationship and broadcasts it over the area. Another song that shows the crime,

The Street is filling, with men from the country

What a wrong you did me, but you flirted, Sonodi (name of a girl)

You flirted with me, and we are both to blame.

Bitlaha is a tribal (Santal) punishment. In a Santal society the sole wish of individuals is to remain anonymous to lead their lives quietly, not to attract the attention of others. *Bitlaha* reverses all this and makes the offender public which he/she most dislikes. It pulls him out of the obscure settings and dangles him before the whole region. This is to create shame for the deed. It also reveals the tribe’s sense of defilement. Even the use of the worn out broom implies the degradation of the act and the burnt piece of wood suggests the sexual ruin which the wilful breach of rule has caused (Vadappuram 2009).

What is unacceptable today during *bitlaha* is some of these cases land in courts and then there are unending problems not only for one family but several of them. At times the Santals are so infuriated that they commit *bitlaha* on non-Santals. But Santal customary law suggests that the non-Santals are beyond their jurisdiction. However when they are passionately angry nothing can control their anger. The problem comes later because the others may go to court and file petitions against the Santals. Such cases are prevalent today (Mukherjee 1980).

In the next section we take up a social evil that is prevalent in the Santal culture, against which we need to work.

3.7 SOCIAL EVILS: MAGIC AND WITCHCRAFT

Witchcraft as sorcery has existed since humans first banded together in groups. Prehistoric art depicts magical rites to ensure successful hunting. Western beliefs about witchcraft such as sorcery grew out of the mythologies and folklore of ancient peoples, especially the Greeks and Romans. Roman law made distinctions between good magic and harmful magic, and harmful magic was punishable by law. When Christianity began to spread, the distinctions vanished. Witchcraft came to be linked with worship of Devil. Today, most historians agree that all the victims of witchcraft were falsely accused. In many tribal societies the practice of witchcraft is

very prevalent. Magical practices and witchcraft are very prevalent among the Santals. It has been considered as a cultural/religious practice (Orans 1965).

The Witch-Finder

The Santal village is organised to secure the greatest possible degree of co-operation not only in temporal affairs but also in dealing with the spirit world. A good relationship is established between Santal society and the spirit world. A representative called *naeke* (village priest) maintains the right relationship with the tribal spirits. He is a man apart and is conscious of his separation from his people. He is not appointed by the fellow villagers but by the *bonga*, the spirits that are worshipped. Investing of a new priest occurs after the death of his predecessor. The spirits take possession of the individual and so establish the identity of the priest. The process takes place in the following manner (Culshaw 1949).

“The marks of possession, the result of the process known to the Santals as *rum*, are quiet familiar. *Rum* is the regular method by which the spirits reveal their wishes, convey comfort or warning, and assure the living of their fellowship with the spirits of the tribe and with their ancestors. The behaviour of a person possessed is similar to that of one who has suffered a sudden onslaught of insanity, and he speaks in the character of the spirit who has for the time being taken possession of his personality.”

For practical reasons it is normal that the eldest son of the *naeke* assumes office after his death. Failing him they may appoint a brother of the deceased. The son is expected to know the activities, rules and regulations of the *naeke*. Secondly when the distribution of land was made, the first *naeke* received a portion of the land by his profession. This land is not expected to pass out of the possession of the particular clan (Vadappuram 2009).

Santals believe that apart from the various benevolent spirits there are also malevolent spirits which have to be scared away through exorcism or magic. The Santals have to cope with a number of inexplicable supra-natural phenomena. For this reason there are also magicians (*ojhas* or medicine men) as they are known, to protect Santal society. Many of these *ojhas* are non-Santals. There are also Santals now among them. *Ojhas* are needed because diseases are seen as something unnatural, ascribing to the agency of evil spirits, witches and evil eye. Natural medicines are used by people or medicines given by *ojhas* are also used; but when they fail they need to call upon a *Jan Guru* or witch finder.

Once the witch is found out she is severely beaten, the household may be fined for keeping a witch, and she may be ostracised or even killed. Unfortunately the woman is not consulted or interrogated; she is simply judged. She has no opportunity to speak of her innocence (Vadappuram 2009).

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How are ethical laws maintained in the village?

.....

2) Briefly mention witchcraft in Santal village?

3.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have studied the social structure and organisation of the Santal tribals, with its self-sustaining village set up and well-managed organisational setup for the smooth functioning of the village set up. We also saw the prevalence of tabu and witchcraft in the villages.

3.9 KEY WORDS

Bitlaha: A tribal concept used as a social punishment for violating the norms of exogamy and endogamy.

Dhiku: An outsider or non-tribal.

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UNIT 4 IMPACT OF SCIENTIFIC CULTURE AND GLOBALIZATION ON THE TRIBALS

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Ethnobotany
- 4.3 Economic And Cultural Situation Of Tribals Today
- 4.4 Alienation Of Adivasi Territories
- 4.5 Hope For Tomorrow
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 Key Words
- 4.8 Further Readings and References

4.0 OBJECTIVES

- To conclude the course of metaphysics with a deeper understanding of Being.
- To identify the notion of Absolute with that of God cautiously.
- To become aware of the tragic situation of tribals, especially due to globalization.
- To draw hope for *adivasi* by ongoing dialogue and democratic process.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit, that deals with the impact of science and culture, first talks of ethnobotany, an emerging branch of science, where tribal life style has significant contribution to make. Then we talk about the impact that globalisation, together with science, has on the Indian tribal society.

4.2 ETHNOBOTANY

Since the beginning of civilization, people have used plants as medicine. Perhaps as early as Neanderthal man, plants were believed to have healing powers. A discussion of human life on this planet would not be complete without a look at the role of plants. A complete record of the many thousands of plant species used for human functioning would fill volumes, yet historians have often tended "to dismiss plants as less than fundamental in history." In recent years, however, there has been a reawakened scientific interest in the fundamental role plants play in many cultures, including medicinal purposes. That is the story of today's ethnobotany. Ethnobotany is the study of how people of a particular tribe and region make use of indigenous plants. Ethnobotanists explore how plants are used for such things as food, shelter, medicine, clothing, hunting, and religious ceremonies.

The Task of Ethnobotany

Ethnobotany has its roots in botany, the study of plants. Botany, in turn, originated in part from an interest in finding plants to help fight illness, especially from tribal dominated areas. In fact, medicine and botany have always had close ties. Many of today's drugs have been derived from

plant sources. Pharmacognosy is the study of medicinal and toxic products from natural plant sources. At one time, pharmacologists researching drugs were required to understand the natural plant world, and physicians were schooled in plant-derived remedies. However, as modern medicine and drug research advanced, chemically-synthesized drugs replaced plants as the source of most medicinal agents in industrialized countries. Although research in plant sources continued and plants were still used as the basis for some drug development, the dominant interest (and resulting research funding) shifted to the laboratory.

The 1990's has seen a growing shift in interest once more; plants are re-emerging as a significant source of new pharmaceuticals. Industries are now interested in exploring parts of the world where plant medicine remains the predominant form of dealing with illness. The tribal areas, for example, has an extraordinary diversity of plant species and has been regarded as a treasure grove of medicinal plants. The tropical jungles contain an incredibly diverse number of plant species, many still unexplored, many unique and potentially useful as medicinal sources. Scientists have also realized the study of the tribal cultures which inhabit these regions can provide enormously valuable clues in the search for improved health. To uncover the secrets of the rain forest with the help of tribal medical practitioners, is the challenge of ethnobotanists. And ethnobotany as a field is on the rise, which can hopefully provide better health system based on our traditional and tribal practices.

Folk Medicine

Coming to the Indian science, it is reported that India hopes to popularise the “folk medicine” of tribals. The Government of India has decided to “document, validate and popularise folk medicine practices of tribals across the country and even start institutes for their study to save these traditions from extinction.” “Folk medicine is different from ayurveda, homeopathy or unani. These are local medicinal procedures practised by tribals across India. We are trying to document, digitise and scientifically validate them,” said Verghese Samuel, joint secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. “Due to modern systems of medicine, this health heritage is losing its popularity. We are trying to save these good practices through the initiative,” he added. The department of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Sidha and Homeopathy) of the Government of India is also involved in this project. Its director Sanjeev K. Chadha added: “Because of folk medicine practices, tribals in India have a very good immune system. If they are getting benefits out of these practices then there must be something good about these practices. These age-old traditions should not be lost in the wilderness. We will do research on these practices and record them. All the good practices would also be considered from patenting” (Lakra 2008).

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is Ethnobotany?

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2) How is folk medicine related to ayurveda?

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4.3 ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL SITUATION OF TRIBALS TODAY

The Constitution of India, which came into existence on 26 January 1950, prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 15) and it provides the right to equality (Article 14), to freedom of religion (Articles 25-28) and to culture and education (Articles 29-30). STs are specially affirmed and protected. Despite this, and after the largest "modern democracy" of the world has existed for more than half a century, the struggles for survival of Adivasis - for livelihood and existence as peoples - have today intensified and spread as never before in history. In this section, I base myself exclusively on the well-documented article of social scientist C.R Bijoy (2003) to focus on the problems faced by and possibilities offered by globalisation. We first begin with a historical analysis of the colonial and pre-colonial times.

Dominated by the British

Over centuries, the Adivasis have evolved an intricate convivial-custodial mode of living. Adivasis belong to their territories, which are the essence of their existence; the abode of the spirits and their dead and the source of their science, technology, way of life, their religion and culture (Bijoy 2003).

Back in history, the Adivasis were in effect self-governing 'first nations'. In general and in most parts of the pre-colonial period, they were notionally part of the 'unknown frontier' of the respective states where the rule of the reign in fact did not extend, and the Adivasis governed themselves outside of the influence of the particular ruler.

The introduction of the alien concept of private property began with the Permanent Settlement of the British in 1793 and the establishment of the "Zamindari" system that conferred control over vast territories, including Adivasi territories, to designated feudal lords for the purpose of revenue collection by the British. This drastically commenced the forced restructuring of the relationship of Adivasis to their territories as well as the power relationship between Adivasis and 'others'. The predominant external caste-based religion sanctioned and practiced a rigid and highly discriminatory hierarchical ordering with a strong cultural mooring (Bijoy 2003).

This became the natural basis for the altered perception of Adivasis as the 'others' in determining the social, and hence, the economic and political space in the emerging larger society that is the

Indian diaspora. Relegating the Adivasis to the lowest rung in the social ladder was but natural and formed the basis of social and political decision making by the largely upper caste controlled mainstream. The ancient Indian scriptures, scripted by the upper castes, also further provided legitimacy to this.

It is sad that the significant role played by the adivasis in fighting the British is not recognised by the larger India. "In the early years of colonization, no other community in India offered such heroic resistance to British rule or faced such tragic consequences as did the numerous Adivasi communities of now Jharkhand, Chhatisgarh, Orissa and Bengal." (Lakra 2008)

Subjugated by Religions

The subjugated peoples have been relegated to low status and isolated, instead of being absorbed by the majority communities. Introduction of capitalism, private property and the creation of a countrywide market broke the traditional tribal and village economy based on use value and hereditary professions. All tribal communities are not alike. They are products of different historical and social conditions. They belong to four different language families, and several different racial stocks and religious moulds. They have kept themselves apart from feudal states and brahminical hierarchies for thousands of years.

In the Indian epics such as Ramayana, Mahabharata and Puranas there are many references to interactions and wars between the forest or hill tribes and the Hindus. Eminent historians who have done detailed research on the epic Ramayana (200 B.C to 500 B.C) have concluded that 'Lanka', the kingdom of the demonic King Ravana and 'Kishkinda', the homeland of the Vanaras (depicted as monkeys) were places situated south of Chitrakuta hill and north of Narmada river in middle India. Accordingly, Ravana and his demons were an aboriginal tribe, most probably the Gond, and the Vanaras, like Hanuman in the epic, belonged to the Savara and Korcu tribes whose descendants still inhabit the central Indian forest belt. Even today, the Gond holds Ravana, the villain of Ramayana, in high esteem as a chief. Rama, the hero of Ramayana, is also known for slaughtering the Rakshasas (demons) in the forests (Bijoy 2003)

The epic of Mahabharata refers to the death of Krishna at the hands of a Bhil Jaratha. In the ancient scriptures, considered to be sacred by the upper castes, various terms are used depicting Adivasis as almost non-humans. The epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata, the Puranas, Samhitas and other so-called 'sacred books' refer to Adivasis as *Rakshasa* (demons), *Vanara* (monkeys), *Jambuvan* (boar men), *Naga* (serpents), *Bhusundi Kaka* (crow), *Garuda* (King of Eagles) etc. In medieval India, they were called derogatorily as *Kolla*, *Villa*, *Kirata*, *Nishada*, and those who surrendered or were subjugated were termed as *Dasa* (slave) and those who refused to accept the bondage of slavery were termed as *Dasyu* (a hostile robber).

Ekalavya, one of the tribal archers was so skillful that the hero of the Aryans, Arjuna, could not stand before him. But they assaulted him, cutting his thumb and destroying his ability to fight - and then fashioned a story in which he accepted Drona as his Guru and surrendered his thumb as an offering to the master! The renowned writer Maheshwata Devi points out that Adivasis predated Hinduism and Aryanism, that Siva was not an Aryan god and that in the 8th century,

the tribal forest goddess or harvest goddess was absorbed and adapted as Siva's wife. Goddess Kali, the goddess of hunters, had definitely a tribal origin, claims Bijoy (2003).

Pushed into the Periphery

Little is known about the relationship between the Adivasis and non-Adivasi communities during the Hindu and Muslim rules. There are stray references to wars and alliances between the Rajput kings and tribal chieftains in middle India and in the North-East between the Ahom Kings of Brahmaputra valley and the hill Nagas. They are considered to be *ati-sudra* meaning lower than the untouchable castes. Even today, the upper caste people refer to these peoples as *jangli*, a derogatory term meaning "those who are like wild animals" - uncivilised or sub-humans (Bijoy 2003).

The Adivasis have few food taboos, rather fluid cultural practices and minimal occupational specialization, while on the other hand, the mainstream population of the plains have extensive food taboos, more rigid cultural practices and considerable caste-based occupational specialisation. In the Hindu caste system, the Adivasis have no place. The mainstream society of India has evolved as an agglomeration of thousands of small-scale social groups whose identities within the larger society are preserved by not allowing them to marry outside their social groups.

The subjugated groups became castes forced to perform less desirable menial jobs like sweeping, cleaning of excreta, removal of dead bodies, leather works etc - the untouchables. Some of the earliest small-scale societies dependent on hunting and gathering, and traditional agriculture seem to have remained outside this process of agglomeration. These are the Adivasis of present day. Their autonomous existence outside the mainstream led to the preservation of their socio-religious and cultural practices, most of them retaining also their distinctive languages. Widow burning, enslavement, occupational differentiation, hierarchical social ordering etc., are generally not there. Though there were trade between the Adivasis and the mainstream society, any form of social intercourse was discouraged. Caste India did not consciously attempt to draw them into the orbit of caste society.

But in the process of economic, cultural and ecological change, Adivasis have attached themselves to caste groups in a peripheral manner, and the process of de-tribalisation is continuously taking place. Many of the Hindu communities have absorbed the cultural practices of the Adivasis. Although Hinduism could be seen as one unifying thread running through the country as a whole, it is not homogenous but in reality a conglomeration of centuries old traditions and shaped by several religious and social traditions which are more cultural in their essence (and including few elements of Adivasi socio-religious culture).

Adivasis are not, as a general rule, regarded as unclean by caste Hindus in the same way as Dalits are. But they continue to face prejudice (as lesser humans), they are socially distanced and often face violence from society. They are at the lowest point in every socioeconomic indicator. Today the majority of the population regards them as primitive and aims at decimating them as peoples or at best integrating them with the mainstream at the lowest rung in the ladder. This is especially so with the rise of the fascist Hindutva forces (Bijoy 2003).

Ignored by the Mainstream

Scientific culture and education made available to some tribals have improved their economic situation. Some of the new technologies like radios, mobiles and TVs also have changed their life-style. Such facilities along with the constitutional privileges and welfare measures benefit only a small minority of the Adivasis. These privileges and welfare measures are denied to the majority of the Adivasis and they are appropriated by more powerful groups in the caste order. The steep increase of STs in Maharashtra in real terms by 148% in the two decades since 1971 is mainly due to questionable inclusion, for political gains, of a number of economically advanced groups among the backwards in the list of STs.

The increase in number of STs, while it distorts the demographic picture, has more disastrous effects. The real tribes are irretrievably pushed down in the 'access or claim ladder' with these new entrants cornering the lion's share of both resources and opportunities for education, social and economic advancement. Despite the Bonded Labour Abolition Act of 1976, Adivasis still form a substantial percentage of bonded labour in the country (Bijoy 2003).

Despite positive political, institutional and financial commitment to tribal development, there is presently a large scale displacement and biological decline of Adivasi communities, a growing loss of genetic and cultural diversity and destruction of a rich resource base leading to rising trends of shrinking forests, crumbling fisheries, increasing unemployment, hunger and conflicts. The Adivasis have preserved 90% of the country's bio-cultural diversity protecting the polyvalent, precolonial, biodiversity friendly Indian identity from bio-cultural pathogens. Excessive and indiscriminate demands of the urban market have reduced Adivasis to raw material collectors and providers.

It is a cruel joke that people who can produce some of India's most exquisite handicrafts, who can distinguish hundreds of species of plants and animals, who can survive off the forests, the lands and the streams sustainably with no need to go to the market to buy food, are labeled as 'unskilled'. Equally critical are the paths of resistance that many Adivasi areas are displaying: Koel Karo, Bodh Ghat, Inchampalli, Bhopalpatnam, Rathong Chu ... big dams that were proposed by the enlightened planners and which were halted by the mass movements.

Such a situation has risen because of the discriminatory and predatory approach of the mainstream society on Adivasis and their territories. The moral legitimacy for the process of internal colonisation of Adivasi territories and the deliberate disregard and violations of constitutional protection of STs has its basis in the culturally ingrained hierarchical caste social order and consciousness that pervades the entire politico-administrative and judicial system. This pervasive mind set is also a historical construct that got reinforced during colonial and post-colonial India (Bijoy 2003).

The term 'Criminal Tribe' was concocted by the British rulers and entered into the public vocabulary through the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 under which a list of some 150 communities including Adivasis, were mischievously declared as (naturally) 'criminal'. Though this shameful act itself was repealed in 1952, the spectre of the so-called 'criminal tribes' continue to haunt these 'denotified tribes' - the Sansi, Pardhi, Kanjar, Gujjar, Bawaria, Banjara and others. They are

considered as the first natural suspects of all petty and sundry crimes except that they are now hauled up under the Habitual Offenders Act that replaced the British Act! Stereotyping of numerous communities has reinforced past discriminatory attitudes of the dominant mainstream in an institutionalised form (Bijoy 2003).

There is a whole history of legislation, both during the pre-independence as well as post-independence period, which was supposed to protect the rights of the Adivasis. As early as 1879, the "Bombay Province Land Revenue Code" prohibited transfer of land from a tribal to a non-tribal without the permission of the authorities. The 1908 "Chotanagpur Tenancy Act" in Bihar, the 1949 "Santhal Pargana Tenancy (Supplementary) Act", the 1969 "Bihar Scheduled Areas Regulations", the 1955 "Rajasthan Tenancy Act" as amended in 1956, the 1959 "MPLP Code of Madhya Pradesh", the 1959 "Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Areas Land Transfer Regulation" and amendment of 1970, the 1960 "Tripura Land Revenue Regulation Act", the 1970 "Assam Land and Revenue Act", the 1975 "Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction of Transfer of Lands and Restoration of Alienated Lands) Act" etc. are state legislations to protect Adivasi land rights.

In Andhra for example, enquiries on land transfer violations were made in 57,150 cases involving 245,581 acres of land, but only about 28% of lands were restored despite persistent militant struggles. While in the case of Kerala, out of a total claim for 9909.4522 hectares made by 8754 applicants, only 5.5% of the claims have been restored. And this is happening in spite of favourable judicial orders - orders which the state governments are circumventing by attempting to dismantle the very protective legislation itself.

The callous and casual manner with which mainstream India approaches the fulfillment of the constitutional obligations with reference to the tribes, and the persistent attempts by the politico-administrative system to subvert the constitution by deliberate acts of omission and commission, and the enormous judicial tolerance towards this speak volumes on the discriminatory approach that permeates the society with regard to the legal rights of the Adivasis.

Fragmented by Race, Religion and Language

The absence of neat classifications of Adivasis as a homogenous social-cultural category and the intensely fluid nature of non-Adivasis are evident in the insuperable difficulty in arriving at a clear anthropological definition of a tribal in India, be it in terms of ethnicity, race, language, social forms or modes of livelihood. The major waves of entry into India divide the tribal communities into Veddis, similar to the Australian aborigines, and the Paleamongoloid Austro-Asiatic from the north-east. The third were the Greco-Indians who spread across Gujarat, Rajasthan and Pakistan from Central Asia. The fourth is the Negrito group of the Andaman Islands - the Great Andamanese, the Onge, the Jarawa and the Sentinelese who flourished in these parts for some 20,000 years but who could well become extinct soon. The Great Andamanese have been wiped out as a viable community with about only 30 persons alive as are the Onges who are less than a 100 (Bijoy 2003).

In the mid-Indian region, the Gond who number over 5 million, are the descendants of the dark skinned Kolarian or Dravidian tribes and speak dialects of Austric language family as are the Santhal who number 4 million. The Negrito and Austroloid people belong to the Mundari family

of Munda, Santhal, Ho, Ashur, Kharia, Paniya, Saora etc. The Dravidian groups include the Gond, Oraon, Khond, Malto, Bhil, Mina, Garasia, Pradhan etc. and speak Austric or Dravidian family of languages. The Gujjar and Bakarwal descend from the Greco Indians and are interrelated with the Gujjar of Gujarat and the tribes settled around Gujranwala in Pakistan.

There are some 200 indigenous peoples in the north-east. The Boro, Khasi, Jantia, Naga, Garo and Tripiri belong to the Mongoloid stock like the Naga, Mikir, Apatani, Boro, Khasi, Garo, Kuki, Karbi etc. and speak languages of the Tibeto-Burman language groups and the Mon Khmer. The Adi, Aka, Apatani, Dafla, Gallong, Khamti, Monpa, Nocte, Sherdukpen, Singpho, Tangsa, Wancho etc of Arunachal Pradesh and the Garo of Meghalaya are of Tibeto-Burman stock while the Khasi of Meghalaya belong to the Mon Khmer group. In the southern region, the Malayali, Irula, Paniya, Adiya, Sholaga, Kurumba, etc., belong to the proto-Australoid racial stock speaking dialects of the Dravidian family.

The Census of India 1991 records 63 different denominations as "other" of over 5.7 million people of which most are Adivasi religions. Though the Constitution recognises them as a distinct cultural group, yet when it comes to religion those who do not identify as Christians, Muslims or Buddhists are compelled to register themselves as Hindus. Hindus and Christians have interacted with Adivasis to civilize them, which has been defined as sanscritisation and westernisation. However, as reflected during the 1981 census it is significant that about 5% of the Adivasis registered their religion by the names of their respective tribes or the names adopted by them. In 1991 the corresponding figure rose to about 10% indicating the rising consciousness and assertion of identity!

Though Article 350A of the Constitution requires primary education to be imparted in mother tongue, in general this has not been imparted except in areas where the Adivasis have been assertive. NCERT, the state owned premier education research centre has not shown any interest. With the neglect of Adivasi languages, the State and the dominant social order aspire to culturally and socially emasculate the Adivasis subdued by the dominant cultures. The Anthropological Survey of India reported a loss of more than two-thirds of the spoken languages, most of them tribal (Bijoy 2003).

Some of the ST peoples of Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, W. Bengal, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram have their counterparts across the border in China (including Tibet), Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh. The political aspirations of these trans-border tribes who find themselves living in different countries as a result of artificial demarcation of boundaries by erstwhile colonial rulers continue to be ignored despite the spread and proliferation of militancy, especially in the north east, making it into a conflict zone.

The Adivasi territories have been divided amongst the states formed on the basis of primarily the languages of the mainstream caste society, ignoring the validity of applying the same principle of language for the Adivasis in the formation of states. Jharkhand has been divided amongst Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa though the Bihar part of Jharkhand has now become a separate state after decades of struggle. The Gond region has been divided amongst Orissa, Andhra, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Similarly the Bhil region has been divided amongst Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan (Bijoy 2003).

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Who were the self-governing “first nations”?

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2) How is the adivasi territory fragmented by language?

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4.4 ALIENATION OF ADIVASI TERRITORIES

Today land alienation marginalization of tribals is the main problem of adivasis. The total forest cover in India is reported to be 765.21 thousand sq. kms. of which 71% are Adivasi areas. Of these 416.52 and 223.30 thousand sq. kms. are categorised as reserved and protected forests respectively. About 23% of these are further declared as Wild Life Sanctuaries and National Parks which alone has displaced some half a million Adivasis. By the process of colonisation of the forests that began formally with the Forest Act of 1864 and finally the Indian Forest Act of 1927, the rights of Adivasis were reduced to mere privileges conferred by the state (Bijoy 2003).

Tribal Dependence on Land

This was in acknowledgement of the tribal dependence on the forests for survival and it was politically forced upon the rulers by the glorious struggles that the Adivasis waged persistently against the British. The Forest Policy of 1952, the Wild Life Protection Act of 1972 and the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 downgraded these privileges of the peoples to concessions of the state in the post-colonial period (Bijoy 2003).

With globalisation, there are now further attempts to change these paternalistic concessions to being excluded as indicated by the draft "Conservation of Forests and Natural Ecosystems Act" that is to replace the forest act and the amendments proposed to the Land Acquisition Act and Schedule V of the constitution. In 1991, 23.03% of STs were literate as against 42.83% among the general population. The Government's Eighth Plan document mentions that nearly 52% of STs live below the poverty line as against 30% of the general population (Bijoy 2003).

In a study on Kerala, a state considered to be unique for having developed a more egalitarian society with a high quality of life index comparable to that of only the 'developed' countries, paradoxically shows that for STs the below poverty line population was 64.5% while for

Scheduled Castes it was 47% and others 41%. About 95% of Adivasis live in rural areas, less than 10% are itinerant hunter-gatherers but more than half depend upon forest produce. Very commonly, police, forest guards and officials bully and intimidate Adivasis and large numbers are routinely arrested and jailed, often for petty offences (Bijoy 2003).

Only a few Adivasi communities which are forest dwellers have not been displaced and continue to live in forests, away from the mainstream development activities, such as in parts of Bastar in Madhya Pradesh, Koraput, Phulbani and Mayurbanj in Orissa and of Andaman Islands. It is tragic that thousands of Korku children below the age of six died in the 1990s due to malnutrition and starvation in the Melghat Tiger Reserve of Maharashtra due to the denial of access to their life sustaining resource base. Adivasis of Kalahandi-Bolangir in Orissa and of Palamu in south Bihar have reported severe food shortage. According to the Central Planning Committee of the Government of India, nearly 41 districts with significant Adivasi populations are prone to deaths due to starvation, which are not normally reported as such.

Invasion of Adivasi Territories

The "Land Acquisition Act" of 1894 concretised the supremacy of the sovereign to allow for total colonisation of any territory in the name of 'public interest' which in most cases are not community notions of common good. This is so especially for the Adivasis. The colonial juristic concept of *res nullius* (that which has not been conferred by the sovereign belongs to the sovereign) and *terra nullius* (land that belongs to none) bulldozed traditional political and social entities beginning the wanton destruction of traditional forms of self-governance (Bijoy 2003).

The invasion of Adivasi territories, which for the most part commenced during the colonial period, intensified in the post-colonial period. Most of the Adivasi territories were claimed by the state. Over 10 million Adivasis have been displaced to make way for development projects such as dams, mining, industries, roads, protected areas etc. Though most of the dams (over 3000) are located in Adivasi areas, only 19.9% (1980-81) of Adivasi land holdings are irrigated as compared to 45.9% of all holdings of the general population. India produces as many as 52 principal, 3 fuel, 11 metallic, 38 non-metallic and a number of minor minerals.

Of these 45 major minerals (coal, iron ore, magnetite, manganese, bauxite, graphite, limestone, dolomite, uranium etc) are found in Adivasi areas contributing some 56% of the national total mineral earnings in terms of value. Of the 4,175 working mines reported by the Indian Bureau of Mines in 1991-92, approximately 3500 could be assumed to be in Adivasi areas. Income to the government from forests rose from Rs.5.6 million in 1869-70 to more than Rs.13 billions in the 1970s. The bulk of the nation's productive wealth lay in the Adivasi territories. Yet the Adivasi has been driven out, marginalised and robbed of dignity by the very process of 'national development'.

The systematic opening up of Adivasi territories, the development projects and the 'tribal development projects' make them conducive for waves of immigrants. In the rich mineral belt of Jharkhand, the Adivasi population has dropped from around 60% in 1911 to 27.67% in 1991. These developments have in turn driven out vast numbers of Adivasis to eke out a living in the urban areas and in far-flung places in slums. According to a rough estimate, there are more than

40,000 tribal domestic working women in Delhi alone! In some places, development induced migration of Adivasis to other Adivasi areas has also led to fierce conflicts as between the Santhali and the Bodo in Assam (Bijoy 2003).

4.5 HOPE FOR TOMORROW

The struggle for the future, the conceptual vocabulary used to understand the place of Adivasis in the modern world has been constructed on the feudal, colonial and imperialistic notions which combines traditional and historical constructs with the modern construct based on notions of linear scientific and technological progress (Bijoy 2003).

Historically the Adivasis, unfortunately, are at best perceived as sub-humans to be kept in isolation, or as 'primitives' living in remote and backward regions who should be "civilized". None of them have a rational basis. Consequently, the official and popular perception of Adivasis is merely that of isolation in forest, tribal dialect, animism, primitive occupation, carnivorous diet, naked or semi-naked, nomadic habits, love, drink and dance. Contrast this with the self-perception of Adivasis as casteless, classless and egalitarian in nature, community-based economic systems, symbiotic with nature, democratic according to the demands of the times, accommodative history and people-oriented art and literature.

The significance of their sustainable subsistence economy in the midst of a profit oriented economy is not recognised in the political discourse, and the negative stereotyping of the sustainable subsistence economy of Adivasi societies is based on the wrong premise that the production of surplus is more progressive than the process of social reproduction in co-existence with nature. Bijoy concludes the article by asserting that for the adivasis, "with globalisation, the hitherto expropriation of rights as an outcome of development has developed into expropriation of rights as a precondition for development" (Bijoy 2003).

But some of the hopeful signs emerging from contemporary globalised and scientific culture. Some of them are:

English Education

The role of English education popularised by Lord Macaulay (1800-1859) has significantly contributed to the education of Indians in general and tribals in particular. English education was introduced by the British with the twin purpose of impressing upon the natives the value of western thought and of preparing them for taking up jobs to assist in the administration of the country. Today's Indian economy and culture of today is significantly influenced by the English and it is hoped that English will further contribution to the development of tribal, since it acts as a means of getting out of their subjugation, both cultural and economic.

Emergence of Democratic Spirit

One of the positive significant features of globalisation is the spread of democratic ideas, not merely in the running of the state, but also in daily activities. Truly, democracy concerns collective decision making, by which decisions that are made for groups and that are binding on all the members of the group, just as it happened in the tribal societies earlier. The power of

number that tribals and other marginalised sections of the society has liberating potential for them.

Scientific Temper

Our worldview and culture promotes scientific spirit and temper. The basic tenets of scientific culture are as follows: the world is understandable, scientific ideas are subject to change, scientific knowledge is durable and incomplete, science demands evidence, science is a blend of logic and imagination, science is not authoritarian, science is a complex social activity, generally accepted ethical principles. Coming to the tribal situation, we can hope that scientific culture and temper enables one to respect humans as humans, irrespective of their origin and culture. In this sense, scientific temper has led to humanistic ideals, which does not allow any human being to be exploited on account of their status.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is the main problem of the *adivasis* in India?

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2) How does scientific temper empower the tribals?

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4.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we saw the impact of earlier domination and current globalisation on the culture and economy of tribals. We also saw some of the hopeful signs that emerge out of globalisation and scientific culture of today. [The student is not expected to learn by heart the technical names and the data given in this unit. General familiarity with the content and situation is enough.]

4.7 KEY WORDS

Ekalavya: In the Hindu epic Mahabharata, Ekalavya is a young prince of the Nishadha tribes, and a member of a low caste, who nevertheless aspires to study archery in the gurukul of Dronacharya. After being rejected by Drona, Ekalavya embarks upon a program of self-study in the presence of a clay image of Drona. He achieves a level of skill far superior to that of Arjuna, Drona's favorite and most accomplished pupil. Drona eventually comes to know this and demands that Ekalavya turn over his right thumb as a teacher's fee. The loyal Ekalavya cripples himself, thereby ruining his prospects as an archer.

Ethnobotany: The scientific study of the traditional knowledge and customs of a people (especially tribals) concerning plants and their medical, religious, and other uses

4.8 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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Indira Gandhi National Open University

MPYE – 012

School of Interdisciplinary and

Trans-disciplinary Studies

Tribal Philosophy

Block 2

PHILOSOPHY AS WORLD-VIEW AND OUTLOOK

UNIT 1

Tribal World-View and Philosophy of Life

UNIT 2

Human Values and Moral Outlook of the Tribals

UNIT 3

Tribal Aesthetic Outlook

UNIT 4

Tribal Cosmogonies and Cosmologies

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Our worldview and culture promotes scientific spirit and temper. The basic tenets of scientific culture are as follows: the world is understandable, scientific ideas are subject to change, scientific knowledge is durable and incomplete, science demands evidence, science is a blend of logic and imagination, science is not authoritarian, science is a complex social activity, generally accepted ethical principles. Coming to the tribal situation, we can hope that scientific culture and temper enables one to respect humans as humans, irrespective of their origin and culture. The simplicity, the love of nature, the absence of coveting the goods and wealth of others, and the social harmony of tribal society had a profound impact on the the tribal world view and tribal philosophy. A recent Supreme Court Judgement affirms: "... the tribals of India have generally (though not invariably) retained a higher level of ethics than the non-tribals in our country. They normally do not cheat, tell lies, and do other misdeeds which many non-tribals do. They are generally superior in character to the non-tribals." Tribal philosophy argues for a fact that our very survival we need to rediscover these tribal values and a need for re-tribalisation for contemporary people.

Unit 1 introduces the general aspects of the tribal world-view, focusing on the interconnectedness of tribal philosophy. The tribal population in India forms a huge chunk of the population. The members of a tribe possess a consciousness of mutual unity. The members of a tribe speak a common language. The tribes believe in ties of blood relationship between its members. Tribes follow their own political organization which maintains harmony. Religion is of great importance in the tribe. The tribal political and social organization is based on religion because they are granted religious sanctity and recognition.

Unit 2 enumerates the modern hunger to appropriate tribal values for our very survival. The values of Tribals such as Respect for elders, Gender equality, Solidarity and sharing, Basic honesty, Hard work, Creativity, Love of nature , Love of freedom with proper parental discipline, Celebration of life through feasts and festivities, Hope for the future. For the tribals living together is natural. In short, what the modern world longs for is a tribal way of life, with its values and morality.

Unit 3 familiarizes the students about the rich cultural heritage of aesthetics among the Tribals of India. Tribal Aesthetics is unique because it is predominantly dependent on and adapted to the culture of a tribe (life, society, religion). What is accepted as aesthetics in a culture need not necessarily be so in other cultures. However, aesthetics can be generally applied to all the tribals of the world. Since they belong to the 'primitive groups', their aesthetic sense soars higher than the so-called 'the cultured groups'. The Tribal Worldview consists of all that a member is, viz., life, death, religion, afterlife. Beauty and art become integral to tribal life. In every culture there is beauty and art. The tribal ethos however has preserved its beauty and art in its life and environment. What is beauty and art in the eyes of tribals is to be exploited for 'human development and scientific progress.'

The **unit 4** take the students to the world of tribals in their conception about the origin of the universe. The tribal conception of the universe and its origin is harmonious and nature oriented. That human beings are part of the cosmos is what comes out very strongly in tribal cosmologies and cosmogonies.

UNIT 1 TRIBAL WORLD-VIEW AND PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

Contents

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Characteristics of Indian Tribes
- 1.3 World-View of the Tribal Population in India
- 1.4 Interconnectedness and Tribal Philosophy
- 1.5 Connected to Nature
- 1.6 Connected to One Another
- 1.7 Connected to the Common Destiny (God)
- 1.8 Time to Undo 'Historical Injustice' to Tribals in India: Supreme Court
- 1.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.10 Key Words
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1.0 OBJECTIVES

- To learn the general aspects of the tribal world-view.
- To focus on the interconnectedness of tribal philosophy.
- To call to attention the need to undo the “historical injustice” done to adivasis.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The tribal population in India forms a huge chunk of the population. A part of the tribal population has joined the mainstream life and they cannot be considered to be tribals in the about 27% of India's population which includes 8% tribals and the rest as other castes. The tribal population in India is second only to Africa in the World. The actual number of tribals in India is 77 million (8% of India's population). Most of these people are from the North East - 12%; Southern states - 7%, Central zone - 81%. In this unit, we first deal with the characteristic of Indian tribes and then go on to see some aspects of their world view. Then we shall see interconnectedness as their basic philosophy. Finally we talk of the need to undo the injustice meted out to them.

1.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN TRIBES

The tribe inhabits and remains within definite and common topography. The members of a tribe possess a consciousness of mutual unity. The members of a tribe speak a common language. The members generally marry into their own group but now due to increased contact with outsiders there are instances of tribal marring outside as well. The tribes believe in ties of blood relationship between its members. They have faith in their having descended from a common, real or mythical, ancestor and hence believe in blood relationships with other members.

Tribes follow their own political organization which maintains harmony. Religion is of great importance in the tribe. The tribal political and social organization is based on religion because they are granted religious sanctity and recognition (SG 2011).

D.N Majumdar defines tribe as a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous with no specialization of functions ruled by tribal officers hereditary or otherwise, united in language or dialect recognizing social distance with other tribes or castes. According to Ralph Linton tribe is a group of bands occupying a contiguous territory or territories and having a feeling of unity deriving from numerous similarities in a culture, frequent contacts and a certain community of interests.

L.M Lewis believes that tribal societies are small in scale are restricted in the spatial and temporal range of their social, legal and political relations and possess a morality, a religion and world view of corresponding dimensions. Characteristically too tribal languages are unwritten and hence the extent of communication both in time and space is inevitably narrow. At the same time tribal societies exhibit a remarkable economy of design and have a compactness and self-sufficiency lacking in modern society (SG 2011).

T.B Naik has given the following features of tribes in Indian context:-

- A tribe should have least functional interdependence within the community.
- It should be economically backward (i.e. primitive means of exploiting natural resources, tribal economy should be at an underdeveloped stage and it should have multifarious economic pursuits).
- There should be a comparative geographical isolation of its people.
- They should have a common dialect.
- Tribes should be politically organized and community panchayat should be influential.
- A tribe should have customary laws.

Another sociologist, David G. Mandelbaum mentions the following characteristics of Indian tribes (SG 2011):

- Kinship as an instrument of social bonds.
- A lack of hierarchy among men and groups.
- Absence of strong, complex, formal organization.
- Communitarian basis of land holding.
- Segmentary character.
- Little value on surplus accumulation on the use of capital and on market trading
- Lack of distinction between form and substance of religion
- A distinct psychological bent for enjoying life.

1.3 WORLD-VIEW OF THE TRIBAL POPULATION IN INDIA

After seeing the general characteristics of tribal life, we are in a position to understand their world-view. Some salient features of the world-view of Tribals could be given as follows:

- 1) Close attachment to ancestral territory: All the tribal people have a very close attachment to the territory that they have been living in. In fact there are some tribes that have not been civilized yet and they are fierce and may even kill at times when they are disturbed and are made to go away from their ancestral land (Kumar 2010).
- 2) Close to natural resources: Most of the tribal population in the forests of India lives in areas that are rich in natural resources. These resources include those like iron ore, manganese and even precious and semi precious stones. These make it a hot spot for all the mining companies who try to make many mines in these areas, but the tribals and their support groups are against this.
- 3) Self-identification and identification by others as member of distinct cultural group: This is true because many of the tribals have their own language and they have their own culture that is very different and unique from that of the other groups of the population.
- 4) Indigenous language: Another unique characteristic of the tribals is that they have their own language. Each of the tribal groups has its own language and this also makes them to be very unique when compared to other large groups of populations. In fact there are some tribal groups where there may be only a few hundred people, but they have their own language.
- 5) Presence of customary, social and political institutions: In spite of the various problems, they do have their own social and political institutions and live a life that is full of rituals and other traditions.
- 6) Vulnerability to severe dislocation, disruption and exploitation: The tribal population is very vulnerable to all the problems mentioned above because of the caste system in India and also because of the isolation they face so that they will give up their land to the mining companies (Kumar 2010).

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What are some of features of tribal life?

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2) How “closeness to natural resources” affect tribal life today?

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1.4 INTERCONNECTEDNESS AND TRIBAL PHILOSOPHY

Chief Seattle (1786-1866) of the Duwamish tribe, also known as Chief Seattle was a prominent figure among the American Indian people. The city of Seattle, Washington had been named in memory of him. Chief Seattle is remembered for the famous speech he gave at a large outdoor gathering in Seattle on March 11th, 1854 concerning the concession of native lands to the settlers. He is an apt representative of tribal world-view. We just want to focus on three aspects of connectedness that is intrinsic to the tribal way of life, i.e., connectedness to nature, to one another and to the common destiny (God). Below are given extracts from the talk of the chief of Seattle that highlights this tribal connectedness to nature, to fellow human beings – including animals - and to the Divine – or our common Destiny (SCS 2009).

1.5 CONNECTED TO NATURE

“If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water how can you buy them? Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every meadow, every humming insect – all are holy in the memory and experience of my people.” “We know the sap that courses through the trees as we know the blood that courses through our veins. We’re part of the earth and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters. The bear, the deer, the great eagle, these are our brothers.” “The rocky crests, the juices and the meadow, the body heat of the pony, and men all belong to the same family. The shiny water that moves through the streams and rivers is not just water but the blood of our ancestors. If we sell you our land you must remember that it is sacred. Each ghostly reflection in the clear water of the lakes tells of events and memories in the life of my people. The water’s murmur is the voice of my father’s father.” “The rivers are our brothers. They quench our thirst. They carry our canoes and feed our children. So you must give to the rivers the kindness you would give any brother.”

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Who is chief Seattle and how is he connected to tribals?

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2) How do the adivasis view the rivers?

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1.6 CONNECTED TO ONE ANOTHER

“Our ways are different than your ways. The sight of your cities pains the eyes of the red man. There is no quiet place in the white man's cities. No place to hear the unfurling of leaves in spring or the rustle of the insect's wings. The clatter only seems to insult the ears. And what is there to life if a man cannot hear the lonely cry of the whippoorwill or the arguments of the frogs around the pond at night? I am a red man and do not understand. The Indian prefers the soft sound of the wind darting over the face of a pond and the smell of the wind itself, cleaned by a midday rain.

“The air is precious to the red man for all things share the same breath, the beast, the tree, the man, they all share the same breath. The white man does not seem to notice the air he breathes. Like a man dying for many days he is numb to the stench. But if we sell you our land, you must remember that the air is precious to us, that the air shares its spirit with all the life it supports.”

“The wind that gave our grandfather his first breath also receives his last sigh. And if we sell you our land, you must keep it apart and sacred as a place where even the white man can go to taste the wind that is sweetened by the meadow's flowers.”

“What is man without the beasts? If all the beasts were gone, man would die from a great loneliness of the spirit. For whatever happens to the beasts, soon happens to man. All things are connected.”

“You must teach your children that the ground beneath their feet is the ashes of our grandfathers. So that they will respect the land, tell your children that the earth is rich with the lives of our kin. Teach your children that we have taught our children that the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of earth. If men spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves.”

“This we know; the earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected.”

1.7 CONNECTED TO THE COMMON DESTINY (GOD)

“Even the white man, whose God walks and talks with him as friend to friend, cannot be exempt from the common destiny. We may be brothers after all. We shall see. One thing we know which the white man may one day discover; our God is the same God.”

“You may think now that you own Him as you wish to own our land; but you cannot. He is the God of man, and His compassion is equal for the red man and the white. The earth is precious to Him, and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its creator. The whites too shall pass; perhaps sooner than all other tribes. Contaminate your bed and you will one night suffocate in your own waste.”

“But in your perishing you will shine brightly fired by the strength of the God who brought you to this land and for some special purpose gave you dominion over this land and over the red man.”

1.8 TIME TO UNDO 'HISTORICAL INJUSTICE' TO TRIBALS IN INDIA: SUPREME COURT

In general the virtues of tribal world-view and life-style could be summed up as: Simplicity, Sincerity and Spontaneity. Precisely because of these, the tribals have been physically and emotionally exploited, robbed of their land and looted of their possession. A recent Supreme Court Judgement noted that "Despite this horrible oppression on them, the tribals of India have generally (though not invariably) retained a higher level of ethics than the non-tribals in our country. They normally do not cheat, tell lies, and do other misdeeds which many non-tribals do. They are generally superior in character to the non-tribals." Unfortunately great harm has been done to them. So the Supreme Court notes that it is time now to undo the historical injustice to them (Supreme Court 2011).

Woefully noting the sad state of adivasis, whom the Court described as "original inhabitants of India", the Supreme Court in its decision pronounced in January 2011 (Kailas & Others v. State of Maharashtra) declared that it is "time now to undo the historical injustice to them". The Court cited the example of Dronacharya and his disciple Eklavya (from Mahabharata) to hold that the tribals have been victims in India for long. The Court noted the ancient history of India to hold that the historical theory that the Dravidians were the original inhabitants of India was also not correct and actually the pre-Dravidian tribals were the original inhabitants of this country.

The Supreme Court held that 92% people living in India today are descendants of immigrants and that it "it is absolutely essential if we wish to keep our country united to have tolerance and equal respect for all communities and sects. It was due to the wisdom of our founding fathers that we have a Constitution which is secular in character, and which caters to the tremendous diversity in our country."

Below are given extracts from the judgement (Supreme Court 2011):

The Bench *inter alia* observed as under;

4. This appeal furnishes a typical instance of how many of our people in India have been treating the tribal people (Scheduled Tribes or Adivasis), who are probably the descendants of the original inhabitants of India, but now constitute only about 8% of our total population, and as a group are one of the most marginalized and vulnerable communities in India characterized by high level of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, disease, and landlessness.

17. The Bhils are probably the descendants of some of the original inhabitants of India living in various parts of the country particularly southern Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh etc. They are mostly tribal people and have managed to preserve many of their tribal customs despite of many oppressions and atrocities from other communities.

18. It is stated in the Article 'World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples – India: Adivasis', that in Maharashtra Bhils were mercilessly persecuted in the 17th century. If a criminal was caught and found to be a Bhil, he or she was often killed on the spot. Historical accounts tell us of entire Bhil communities being killed and wiped out. Hence, Bhils retreated to the strongholds of the hills and forests.

19. Thus Bhils are probably the descendants of some of the original inhabitants of India known as the 'aborigines' or Scheduled Tribes (Adivasis), who presently comprise of only about 8% of the population of India. The rest 92 % of the population of India consists of descendants of immigrants. Thus India is broadly a country of immigrants like North America. We may consider this in some detail. India is broadly a country of immigrants

20. While North America (USA and Canada) is a country of new immigrants, who came mainly from Europe over the last four or five centuries, India is a country of old immigrants in which people have been coming in over the last ten thousand years or so. Probably about 92% people living in India today are descendants of immigrants, who came mainly from the North-West, and to a lesser extent from the North-East. Since this is a point of great importance for the understanding of our country, it is necessary to go into it in some detail.

21. People migrate from uncomfortable areas to comfortable areas. This is natural because everyone wants to live in comfort. Before the coming of modern industry there were agricultural societies everywhere, and India was a paradise for these because agriculture requires level land, fertile soil, plenty of water for irrigation etc. which was in abundance in India. Why should anybody living in India migrate to, say, Afghanistan which has a harsh terrain, rocky and mountainous and covered with snow for several months in a year when one cannot grow any crop? Hence, almost all immigrations and invasions came from outside into India (except those Indians who were sent out during British rule as indentured labour, and the recent migration of a few million Indians to the developed countries for job opportunities). There is perhaps not a single instance of an invasion from India to outside India.

22. India was a veritable paradise for pastoral and agricultural societies because it has level and fertile land, hundreds of rivers, forests etc. and is rich in natural resources. Hence for thousands of years people kept pouring into India because they found a comfortable life here in a country which was gifted by nature.

23. As the great Urdu poet Firaq Gorakhpuri wrote: "*Sar Zamin-e—hind par aqwaam-e-alam ke firaq Kafila guzarte gae Hindustan banta gaya*" Which means – "In the land of Hind, the Caravans of the peoples of The world kept coming in and India kept getting formed".

24. Who were the original inhabitants of India? At one time it was believed that the Dravidians were the original inhabitants. However, this view has been considerably modified subsequently, and now the generally accepted belief is that the original inhabitants of India were the pre-Dravidian aborigines i.e. the ancestors of the present tribals or advasis (Scheduled Tribes). In this connection it is stated in The Cambridge History of India (Vol-I), Ancient India as follows:

"It must be remembered, however, that, when the term 'Dravidian' is thus used ethnographically, it is nothing more than a convenient label. It must not be assumed that the speakers of the Dravidian languages are aborigines. In Southern India, as in the North, the same general distinction exists between the more primitive tribes of the hills and jungles and the civilized inhabitants of the fertile tracts; and some ethnologists hold that the difference is racial and not merely the result of culture. Mr. Thurston, for instance, says:

"It is the Pre-Dravidian aborigines, and not the later and more cultured Dravidians, who must be regarded as the primitive existing race..... These Pre-Dravidians are differentiated from

the Dravidian classes by their short stature and broad (platyrrhine) noses. There is strong ground for the belief that the Pre-Dravidians are ethnically related to the Vedas of Ceylon, the Talas of the Celebes, the Batin of Sumatra, and possibly the Australians. (The Madras Presidency, pp. 124-5.)”

It would seem probable, then, that the original speakers of the Dravidian languages were outsiders, and that the ethnographical Dravidians are a mixed race. In the more habitable regions the two elements have fused, while representatives of the aborigines are still in the fastnesses (in hills and forests) to which they retired before the encroachments of the newcomers. If this view be correct, we must suppose that these aborigines have, in the course of long ages, lost their ancient languages and adopted those of their conquerors. The process of linguistic transformation, which may still be observed in other parts of India, would seem to have been carried out more completely in the South than elsewhere.

The theory that the Dravidian element is the most ancient which we can discover in the population of Northern India, must also be modified by what we now know of the Munda languages, the Indian representatives of the Austric family of speech, and the mixed languages in which their influence has been traced (p.43). Here, according to the evidence now available, it would seem that the Austric element is the oldest, and that it has been overlaid in different regions by successive waves of Dravidian and Indo-European on the one hand, and by Tibeto-Chinese on the other. Most ethnologists hold that there is no difference in physical type between the present speakers of Munda and Dravidian languages. This statement has been called in question; but, if it is true, it shows that racial conditions have become so complicated that it is no longer possible to analyse their constituents. Language alone has preserved a record which would otherwise have been lost.

At the same time, there can be little doubt that Dravidian languages were actually flourishing in the western regions of Northern India at the period when languages of the Indo-European type were introduced by the Aryan invasions from the north-west. Dravidian characteristics have been traced alike in Vedic and Classical Sanskrit, in the Prakrits, or early popular dialects, and in the modern vernaculars derived from them. The linguistic strata would thus appear to be arranged in the order- Austric, Dravidian, Indo-European.

There is good ground, then, for supposing that, before the coming of the Indo-Aryans speakers the Dravidian languages predominated both in Northern and in Southern India; but, as we have seen, older elements are discoverable in the populations of both regions, and therefore the assumption that the Dravidians are aboriginal is no longer tenable. Is there any evidence to show whence they came into India?

No theory of their origin can be maintained which does not account for the existence of Brahui, the large island of Dravidian speech in the mountainous regions of distant Baluchistan which lie near the western routes into India. Is Brahui a surviving trace of the immigration of Dravidian-speaking peoples into India from the west? Or does it mark the limits of an overflow from India into Baluchistan? Both theories have been held; but as all the great movements of peoples have been into India and not out of India, and as a remote mountainous district may be expected to retain the survivals of ancient races while it is not likely to have been colonized, the former view would a priori seem to be by far the more probable.” (See ‘Brahui’ on Google).

25. In Google 'The original inhabitants of India', it is mentioned : "A number of earlier anthropologists held the view that the Dravidian peoples together were a distinct race. However, comprehensive genetic studies have proven that this is not the case. The original inhabitants of India may be identified with the speakers of the Munda languages, which are unrelated to either Indo-Aryan or Dravidian languages"

26. Thus the generally accepted view now is that the original inhabitants of India were not the Dravidians but the pre-Dravidians Munda aborigines whose descendants presently live in parts of Chotanagpur (Jharkhand), Chattisgarh, Orissa, West Bengal, etc., the Todas of the Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu, the tribals in the Andaman Islands, the Adivasis in various parts of India (especially in the forests and hills) e.g. Gonds, Santhals, Bhils, etc.

27. It is not necessary for us to go into further details into this issue, but the facts mentioned above certainly lends support to the view that about 92% people living in India are descendants of immigrants (though more research is required).

28. It is for this reason that there is such tremendous diversity in India. This diversity is a significant feature of our country, and the only way to explain it is to accept that India is largely a country of immigrants.

29. There are a large number of religions, castes, languages, ethnic groups, cultures etc. in our country, which is due to the fact that India is a country of immigrants. Somebody is tall, somebody is short, some are dark, some are fair complexioned, with all kinds of shades in between, someone has Caucasian features, someone has Mongoloid features, someone has Negroid features, etc. There are differences in dress, food habits and various other matters.

30. We may compare India with China which is larger both in population and in land area than India. China has a population of about 1.3 billion whereas our population is roughly 1.1 billion. Also, China has more than twice our land area. However, all Chinese have Mongoloid features; they have a common written script (Mandarin Chinese) and 95% of them belong to one ethnic group, called the Han Chinese. Hence there is a broad (though not absolute) homogeneity in China.

31. On the other hand, as stated above, India has tremendous diversity and this is due to the large scale migrations and invasions into India over thousands of years. The various immigrants/invaders who came into India brought with them their different cultures, languages, religions, etc. which accounts for the tremendous diversity in India.

32. Since India is a country of great diversity, it is absolutely essential if we wish to keep our country united to have tolerance and equal respect for all communities and sects. It was due to the wisdom of our founding fathers that we have a Constitution which is secular in character, and which caters to the tremendous diversity in our country.

33. Thus it is the Constitution of India which is keeping us together despite all our tremendous diversity, because the Constitution gives equal respect to all communities, sects, lingual and ethnic groups, etc. in the country. The Constitution guarantees to all citizens freedom of speech (Article 19), freedom of religion (Article 25), equality (Articles 14 to 17), liberty (Article 21), etc.

34. However, giving formal equality to all groups or communities in India would not result in genuine equality. The historically disadvantaged groups must be given special protection and help so that they can be uplifted from their poverty and low social status. It is for this reason that special provisions have been made in our Constitution in Articles 15(4), 15(5), 16(4), 16(4A), 46, etc. for the upliftment of these groups. Among these disadvantaged groups, the most disadvantaged and marginalized in India are the Adivasis (STs), who, as already mentioned, are the descendants of the original inhabitants of India, and are the most marginalized and living in terrible poverty with high rates of illiteracy, disease, early mortality etc. Their plight has been described by this Court in *Samatha vs. State of Andhra Pradesh* and Ors. AIR 1997 SC 3297 (vide paragraphs 12 to 15). Hence, it is the duty of all people who love our country to see that no harm is done to the Scheduled Tribes and that they are given all help to bring them up in their economic and social status, since they have been victimized for thousands of years by terrible oppression and atrocities. The mentality of our countrymen towards these tribals must change, and they must be given the respect they deserve as the original inhabitants of India.

35. The bravery of the Bhils was accepted by that great Indian warrior Rana Pratap, who held a high opinion of Bhils as part of his army.

36. The injustice done to the tribal people of India is a shameful chapter in our country's history. The tribals were called '*rakshas*' (demons), '*asuras*', and what not. They were slaughtered in large numbers, and the survivors and their descendants were degraded, humiliated, and all kinds of atrocities inflicted on them for centuries. They were deprived of their lands, and pushed into forests and hills where they eke out a miserable existence of poverty, illiteracy, disease, etc. And now efforts are being made by some people to deprive them even of their forest and hill land where they are living, and the forest produce on which they survive.

37. The well-known example of the injustice to the tribals is the story of Eklavya in the Adiparva of the Mahabharat. Eklavya wanted to learn archery, but Dronacharya refused to teach him, regarding him as low born. Eklavya then built a statue of Dronacharya and practiced archery before the statue. He would have perhaps become a better archer than Arjun, but since Arjun was Dronacharya's favourite pupil Dronacharya told Eklavya to cut off his right thumb and give it to him as '*guru dakshina*' (gift to the teacher given traditionally by the student after his study is complete). In his simplicity Eklavya did what he was told.

38. This was a shameful act on the part of Dronacharya. He had not even taught Eklavya, so what right had he to demand '*guru dakshina*', and that too of the right thumb of Eklavya so that the latter may not become a better archer than his favourite pupil Arjun?

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) According to the Supreme Court how many percentage of Indians are descendants of immigrants?

.....

.....

2) How were the tribals persecuted, according to the Supreme Court?

1.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have briefly dealt with the characteristics and world-view of the tribals. Then we focussed on the need to undo the injustice to them, as noted by the Supreme Court of India.

1.10 KEY WORDS

Chief Seattle's Speech: Chief Seattle's Speech of 1854 is a powerful statement on the environment, culture, and the future of humanity. There is a great deal of controversy surrounding Chief Seattle's speech of 1854. Chief Seattle is remembered for the famous speech he gave at a large outdoor gathering in Seattle on March 11th, 1854 concerning the concession of native lands to the settlers. There are many sources of information, various versions of the speech, and debates over its very existence.

Supreme Court: The Supreme Court of India is the highest court of the land as established by Chapter IV of the Constitution of India. Articles 124 to 147 of the constitution of India lay down the constitution and jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of India. Primarily, it is an appellate court which takes up appeals against judgments of the provincial High Courts. But, it takes writ petitions in cases of serious human rights violations or if it involves any serious issue that needs immediate resolution. Supreme Court of India had its inaugural sitting on January 28, 1950 and since then has delivered more than 24,000 reported judgments

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UNIT 2 HUMAN VALUES AND MORAL OUTLOOK OF THE TRIBALS

Contents

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Characteristics of Indian Tribes
- 2.3 Tribal Values and Moral Outlook
- 2.4 A Tribal Story
- 2.5 Modern Hunger for Tribal Values
- 2.6 Rediscovering the Sacred Space
- 2.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.8 Key Words
- 2.9 Further Readings and References

2.0 OBJECTIVES

- To expose the students to some of the values of tribal societies.
- To emphasize the sustainability of tribal culture and values.
- To rediscover our collective human longing for re-tribalisation.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Oxford Dictionary "A tribe is a group of people in a primitive or barbarous stage of development acknowledging the authority of a chief and usually regarding them as having a common ancestor."

On the other hand Munda tribe in Jharkhand has a short story which value gender equality, respect for nature and equality of all trades. This Munda fable is particularly illustrative: There was a king who lost a war with Munda tribals. He sent a messenger to the king of Mundas. The messenger looked around but could not find the king or his palace. He asked one farmer as to where to find the king. The farmer replied, "He was here a while ago, let me see (he looks around)...Oh there he is (pointing to a man ploughing his fields with his bullocks)... He is working there."

The value and moral out look of the tribals are being appreciated by the contemporary society, though they had been denigrated by the earlier one. In this unit we first begin with the characteristic of Indian tribals and then go to see some of their value. Then we look at the modern hunger to appropriate tribal values for our very survival.

2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN TRIBES

The renowned Indian anthropologist D.N Majumdar defines tribe "as a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous with no specialization of functions ruled by tribal officers hereditary or otherwise, united in language or dialect recognizing social distance with other

tribes or castes.” According to American anthropologist, Ralph Linton, “tribe is a group of bands occupying a contiguous territory or territories and having a feeling of unity deriving from numerous similarities in a culture, frequent contacts and a certain community of interests.”

In a similar vein, *Social Anthropologist*, L.M Lewis, believes that tribal societies are small in scale are restricted in the spatial and temporal range of their social, legal and political relations and possess a morality, a religion and world view of corresponding dimensions. Characteristically too tribal languages are unwritten and hence the extent of communication both in time and space is inevitably narrow. At the same time tribal societies exhibit a remarkable economy of design and have a compactness and self-sufficiency lacking in modern society.

In the background of our above reflections, we may sum up our understanding of tribe by following the insight of another famous Indian anthropologist T.B Naik. According to him:

- A tribe should have least functional interdependence within the community.
- It should be economically backward (i.e. primitive means of exploiting natural resources, tribal economy should be at an underdeveloped stage and it should have multifarious economic pursuits).
- There should be a comparative geographical isolation of its people.
- They should have a common dialect.
- Tribes should be politically organized and community panchayat should be influential.
- A tribe should have customary laws.

Naik argues that for a community to be a tribe it should possess all the above mentioned characteristics and a very high level of acculturation with outside society debars it from being a tribe. Thus term usually denotes a social group bound together by kin and duty and associated with a particular territory.-

2.3 TRIBAL VALUES AND MORAL OUTLOOK

After seeing the general characteristics of Indian tribes, we shall try to understand their values. Agapit Turkey (2004), an acknowledged Tribal anthropologist, lists the following core values of the adivasis are:

- Awareness of all pervasive influence of the Transcended
- 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
- Contentness and joy in simple living

- Love of nature
- Attachment to land and forest,
- Love of freedom with proper parental discipline,
- Celebration of life through feasts and festivities
- Hope for the future.

For the tribals living together is natural. Taking care of the elders is normal. Relating to the plants is part of their daily routine. In short what the modern world longs for is a tribal way of life, with its values and morality.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Mention some core values of adivasis?

.....

.....

.....

2) How does Majumdar define a tribe?

.....

.....

.....

2.4 A TRIBAL STORY

In a time when many tribals are trying to preserve and reincorporate traditional core values into all aspects of life, the contemporary situation presents a unique opportunity for integrating this thinking into daily community life (Gold and Kammen 2011). The following story is from Thailand and has universal applications for all tribals.

At daybreak, the first women awoke, tended their fires and began preparing food. A baby cried and a mother strapped him on her back. Another woman brought her baby to her breast. Meanwhile, the morning washing began. Women washed the youngest children, and older children helped. Men gathered their tools to go out to work in the fields. Young boys of the tribe stood at the village gate looking on. Their adolescent brothers, meanwhile, helped the men to gather their tools, and then went with them out into the fields. Later that afternoon, we sat with several small children, watching as a girl of about fourteen wove magnificent strands of cotton--magenta, fuchsia, yellow, and turquoise--for the garment she would wear at her wedding. In the course of the day stories were told, simple rituals performed, children were scolded or disciplined, and occasionally tempers flared. Choices were made and people laughed at jokes. The young helped with various tribal tasks and paid respect to the elders. Older children mentored and taught younger ones.

We listened to tribal laughter as families gathered at dusk to share the evening meal. And when the dinner was done, we joined the entire village, sitting in a circle to tell stories, in a room lit with a single kerosene lamp. As the evening came to a close, the women danced their ancestral dance, one that had been danced for hundreds of years, a dance telling the story of the tribe and its lineage. The dances let them know that their lives were woven into a much larger fabric, a continuum stretching far beyond what they could immediately see or even fully imagine. Clearly, there is something we all share with these ancient villagers who live on the mountain in Thailand. It is a sense of personal linkage and community--tribal connection--that so many of us are seeking in our families, corporations, in the privacy of our own struggles.

Some of the lessons we learn from such a tribal set up are:

Collective Decision Making

Since tribal communities had their ancient practice of community problem-solving this was dialogical and democratic. Since such a healthy practice has been disrupted, decision-making often occurred outside of the tribal community. It is generally felt that this process yielded poor, if not destructive results (Gold and Kammen 2011).

Today, tribes and their leaders have the opportunity to reclaim decision-making and community problem-solving processes. Care needs to be taken to ensure that harmful, imposed policies are not replicated in our own decision-making. Modern educational training can influence traditionally tribal thinking and core values. When our traditional thinking and knowledge gets replaced as the foundation for our decision-making and problem-solving, we take a turn on another path. We need to change this pattern by identifying modern influences that have had a negative effect on the tribal people and work to undo the harmful effects of these influences.

This is not to say that everything developed in the non-tribal communities, should be excluded from consideration when developing policies for our People. There are many nontribal processes, tools, and models that can be used to help us achieve successful outcomes that will not be in conflict with or compromise the traditional core values of the People. However, by simply including traditional core values when implementing a modern approach or policy does no more than give such policies a tribal appeal, satisfying a superficial need to “incorporate” tradition into non-traditional processes (Gold and Kammen 2011).

While there may be general reluctance to incorporate tribal values beyond the ceremonial realm, each community will have to make a decision as to what can or should be disclosed, in written or oral form, in order to protect that knowledge. There are, however, concepts that can be applied in a non-ceremonial environment, such as the values of respect, sacrifice, sharing, humility, relationships, family and community relations, etc. These types of values come from our ceremonial life and can be implemented into everyday life without violating ceremonial practices. Of primary importance is the fact that our tribal communities are our homes, and our tribal institutions, including our judicial system, schools, and governmental operations should offer a reflection of our People’s own values at a very deep and fundamental level.

Sharing and Collaboration as Natural

As the above story makes it clear, there is a life of caring, sharing and collaboration. As a community they are dependent on each other. They abandon themselves to the tribal collectivity

for their common good and so collaboration comes naturally to them. In fact their very survival hinged on tribal solidarity.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is the characteristic feature of tribal societies with regard to decision making?

.....

2) How does sharing and collaboration become natural for adivasis?

.....

2.5 MODERN HUNGER FOR TRIBAL VALUES

In modern life, the absence of tribal values and vision causes a hunger we all feel, one that can't be fulfilled by those palliatives of modern life--more activity, more or other individual relationships, more gadgets to entertain us, more or higher goals achieved. Along with losing our tribal vocabulary - us, we, our, offer, share, open, collective, creation, receptive, receiving, patience - we have lost much more; we have lost our connection to each other, to humanity, and to the planet. We cling to the vision that life is about me and mine, about here and now. We are alone, isolated from the eternal flow of life (Gold and Kammen 2011).

Tribe offers us a very different perspective on our relationship to the present, the past, and the future. When we can see ourselves part of a larger whole, one that extends beyond our own lifespans into the infinite continuum of the cosmos, our singular lives take on meanings that connect us to that continuum that spiritual teachers urge us to seek--our relationship to the life force itself (Pandikattu 2002).

Without tribal values or vision, we see our own, singular accomplishments as the be-all and end-all of our lives. But tribe allows us to see our part in the eternal flow more clearly, to be awed and inspired by it, to be shown how our lives have meaning far beyond the reach of our own years. In the context of tribal learning, we find ourselves part of something larger than ourselves, not just a part of God, which is so difficult for us to imagine, but part of a work in progress that mirrors the evolution of human consciousness. We make assumptions about what it means to know our neighbors. In modern life, to know someone is to know their name, to recognize their face when we meet them on the street, and perhaps to know their work or profession. But tribal experiences of knowing teach us that it's much more than that (Pandikattu 2002).

Who is my neighbour: A Tribal Story

There is a wonderful story about a tribe in the Kalahari Desert of South Africa who was visited by a reporter (Gold and Kammen 2011). The reporter intended to live among them, and get to know their ways and customs. One day he asked one of the tribe members, "Do you like your neighbor?" The village man replied, "Do I like my neighbor?" And left it at that. Many days went by, until at last the tribesman gestured to the reporter, "Come with me." And with that he took the reporter across the dirt path to his neighbor's hut. There he sat for the better part of the day, talking, laughing, sharpening his weapons. Day after day, the tribesman would take the reporter and they'd visit the neighbor. Some days they would hunt, some days they'd stay in the village. This went on for many months, until finally, the tribesman sat down with the reporter and said, "You asked me if I liked my neighbour ... there, that is how I feel about my neighbor".

What a wonderful story this is! Where we might expect a short answer - yes, I do, or no, I don't-- we were instead invited in to experience the actual beauty of that friendship. I don't know my neighbors. I have met them, we are friendly, I like them. But I do not know them. The boundaries of our homes are clearly delineated by our walls and shrubs and property lines. I have never cooked with the woman next door. Never watched her discipline her children or comfort them when they cry. And since I do not know my neighbors, I have no access to who and what they truly are. We can't learn from one another, pool our resources or our wisdom. It is not only property lines and walls that break down our bonds with one another. For example, millions of children growing up in the cities and suburbs have no concept of how the food they eat is grown, or how it gets to the market. In the fast-food world in which we live, many people don't even know how food is prepared and cooked (Gold and Kammen 2011).

The Tribal Consciousness

Ask a Kalahari tribesman (made famous through the movie, "The Gods Must Be Crazy") where his food comes from and he may probably take you out on a hunt with him, or suggest that you spend the next few days gathering wild melons, herbs and native root crops with the women. In the process, you'd learn about the terrain, when things were ready to pick, when they were not, how to harvest what you needed without damaging the plant or surrounding environs. Mostly, you'd learn about the close relationship between hunter, gatherer and the Earth. You'd touch the sacred each time you harvested a vegetable or fruit, or tracked, killed and dressed out a game bird or other animal. That is, in fact, the emergence of tribal consciousness. (Tirkey 2004)

There is plenty of evidence that tribal consciousness is universal, that it endures in the human soul regardless of its diminished external expressions. Regardless of how we might view the politics behind such events, we see it manifest in different ways. We find it in increasing numbers of mother's groups, in support groups that help us through difficult life passages, addressing issues as far ranging as addiction and poverty alleviation programmes (Gold and Kammen 2011).

Clearly, many people feel this instinctual attraction for the tribal way of life. Our contemporary society bereft of warmth, hospitality, love and a sense of belongingness need it. So we need to ask, what is the common solvent, the needs and values that all of these groups share? As a society we are desperate for something we cannot even name. But we must name it. Our very survival depends on it. Western culture has come to a major turning point. We know this both as individuals and as a society. Our values are changing. Something is going on deep within our collective consciousness. We are entering a new phase of our being. Like all creatures in

transition, we must let go, surrender to the incoming phase of our being. The time is here to invent a new model of tribe.

Need for Re-Tribalisation

Our sacred re-tribalization for the new millennium doesn't require us to go back in time to simpler, more elemental ways. But it does demand a willingness to meet life head on, to take our places in society as contributing members, to be responsible for the impact of our choices on those around us, and on our planet. It means getting to know the sacred values that are at the heart of all existence. It means traveling a path toward greater receptiveness and a new definition of power. Above all, the tribal consciousness evolving out of the mist rouses us from our innocence and asks us to open up to the mysteries of life. It starts with making new kinds of decisions, not ones based only on what's most convenient, profitable or efficient in the short run but on how the actions we take will serve the continuum, the flow of life that extends even beyond our own lifespans (Pandikattu 2002).

We know that tribal consciousness can be created in every aspect of our lives--in our marriages, in the work place, in our families, and in the larger communities to which we belong. What we create in our individual lives can extend out into tribal connections that embrace our entire planet and that, in turn, embrace us individually. What we're describing here is a shift in perception, with a new focus on the sacred (Tirkey 2004).

Sacred values are those which link us to the deeper meanings of our lives. They connect us to the mystery of the life force itself. The sacred is the magic, the alchemical ingredient that uplifts and elevates us, inspiring us to move beyond the limitations of our ordinary lives. Throughout the ages, in myths, folk stories, and spiritual teachings, we have been linked with the sacred through a tribal process that extends back to time immemorial, weaving the magic of sacred values (Gold and Kammen 2011).

The sacred is our link with the mystery, with the original intention of a power greater than us. Without this link with the sacred, we invent values and goals that take us further and further from our source and we find ourselves wandering alone in the universe. The sacred is our opening to a life lived with the qualities of the awakened heart... compassion, innate harmony and balance, having direct access to the healing presence of unconditional love. The sacred provides us with a map to the universe, to God, one that existed long before we came into this life, and will exist long after we are gone. Tribal life, and the connections it gives us with the continuum that stretches way beyond our own lifespans, teaches us that human life is one of the expressions of the sacred mysteries, and human beings enacting sacred tribal values is the thread that leads us back home to God.

We can explore ways to renew this sense of awe, this reverence for the mystery, not by returning to a more primitive lifestyle, or necessarily by living communally, but through finding in ourselves the spirit of devotion and communion with life, remembering that living is not a problem to be solved but an unfolding mystery to be experienced. Modern society offers an endless array of goals--the house in the suburbs, the "happy" marriage, the perfect job or profession, the dream of living without having to experience the discomforts of anxiety, grief, conflict or doubt. If we just stay on track and do it right, or do it enough, we will be rewarded with the gold ring at the end of the game (Gold and Kammen 2011).

We imagine there is a payoff that will make all our sacrifices, all the miseries we've endured up to that point, worth all the effort. One day, at last, we tell ourselves, we'll have enough love, enough money, enough self-esteem and enough achievements. But will we quell our longing for the sacred that tugs at our hearts as this century comes to a close? When the values of the sacred tribe are missing, and the sacred values are either neglected or unknown to us, our lives easily become meaningless, a string of individual acts, with no link to a deeper guiding force. A wonderful question to ask yourself is, "At the end of my life, looking back at all that I've experienced, what is it that I have valued the most?" The very question itself rings us into the realm of the sacred. What is the unseen force that connects and gives meaning to all of life's actions? The sacred is the magic, the alchemical ingredient that lifts and heightens us, inspires us to move beyond the limitations of our ordinary lives. Sacred values are the values that link us to deeper meaning, beyond the temporal boundaries of our physical existence, connecting us with the great mysteries.

2.6 REDISCOVERING THE SACRED SPACE

We long to have our lives count, to feel that we matter. While we have never met a person who hasn't experienced this yearning at sometime in their life, we have met people who long ago stopped believing it possible. Some people forget this feeling or deny it to themselves, thinking that it is something that only "special" people enjoy. But inevitably, with only a little nudge, even those who are loudest in their denial, reconnect with their desire for this sacred intent (Gold and Kammen 2011). Sometimes all it takes is a question: "How am I participating in my life? What am I creating, bringing in, and contributing?" Our yearning for the sacred in daily life is the connective tissue that holds our lives together. We know that the sacred exists everywhere in daily life, even though we may not see it or experience it. This is the invisible reality that forms the very foundation of all existence. This is the essence of tribal consciousness.

Tribe is not the creation of an association of like minds but an exploration of our diversity and the universal bonds that exist beyond that diversity. Slowly, through this process of acknowledging our need for tribe, we get our humanity back. We begin to see how we are all parts in the circle of life. We heal the sense of separation and alienation that has created our longing. We remember that we are connected to everything that exists, the eternal flow of past, present, and future. We take our places in life, reclaiming the promise of full, rich, livingness now...within ourselves, shared with others (Gold and Kammen 2011).

In our undefined hunger for the tribal connection we know that life has some invisible, connective tissue. We instinctively know that there is more to life than we can see and measure in external events, goals, and accomplishments. From the feelings that are raised as we think about tribe comes a very essential question: "Why bother to do my life at all if it doesn't serve a larger cause, if it doesn't make a contribution, if it doesn't add something that can make life for all of our planet a little better? Why bother if in my life I feel increasingly separate from my soul, my family, my community, and from the earth itself?"

What is tribe if not that wondrous container that mirrors back to us all the sacred parts of ourselves? Tribe helps us to remember our love and our important place in life. It helps us know and understand and live in harmony with life, with what life calls us to do, with the fact that there is a greater purpose than ourselves. We can each begin to take steps to humanize our lives

and restore tribal consciousness as part of all of our lives--embracing the realization that this is our rich inheritance of being. Through our humanness we build what the ancient teachers called the "unseen" or "invisible"--the powers of the emotional and spiritual realms that none of us can escape from, and which are the deep well from which each of us can draw for the nourishment of all life (Gold and Kammen 2011).

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What does re-tribalisation require?

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2) How is tribal consciousness related to the sacred?

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2.7 LET US SUM UP

A recent Supreme Court Judgement affirms: "Despite this horrible oppression on them, the tribals of India have generally (though not invariably) retained a higher level of ethics than the non-tribals in our country. They normally do not cheat, tell lies, and do other misdeeds which many non-tribals do. They are generally superior in character to the non-tribals." (Supreme Court 2011). In this unit we have tried to show that for our very survival we need to rediscover these tribal values. So the need for re-tribalisation for contemporary people.

2.8 KEY WORDS

Re-tribalisation: the act of returning to a tribal way of life in terms of its values and vision. It can be also done in our modern society, without physically returning to the tribal surroundings.

Tribal Consciousness: An awareness of and pride in one's identity as a member of a tribe and share in its general values, world-view and outlook.

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UNIT 3 TRIBAL AESTHETIC OUTLOOK

Contents

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Characteristics and Functions of Tribal Aesthetics
- 3.3 Beauty and Art (a philosophical outlook)
- 3.4 Tribal Art Forms
- 3.5 Music and Song
- 3.6 Festivals
- 3.7 Embroidery, Painting and Drawing
- 3.8 Let us Sum up
- 3.9 Key Words
- 3.10 Further Readings and References

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to familiarize a student about the rich cultural heritage of aesthetics among the Tribals of India and in particular among the Chotanagpur Tribals (who are mainly agriculturists and partly hunters) who are also scattered in other parts of India as well, viz., West Bengal, Orissa, North East India and Andaman-Nicobar Islands. The principal goal of this outlook will be to discover something more about the tribal aesthetics which form part and parcel of their daily life, nay their world view. Not much has been down in this area of the tribals. It will also serve as an impetus and challenge to others to undertake more scholarly research into this important theme of aesthetics among the tribals especially of Chotanagpur.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As per Census India 1991, out of a total population of 843,930,861, as many as 61,628,683 belonged to the category of scheduled tribes. In other words, they constitute 7.76% of the population of India, divided into over 600 communities (*Manorama Year Book* 1991, 411). Tribals in general have a rich heritage of aesthetics based mainly on oral traditions. Our main interest will be to delve deeper into the aesthetics of the Chotanagpur tribals (who are also called *adivasis*) who live presently in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, West Bengal, NE India (especially in Assam) and Andaman-Nicobar Islands. Aesthetics of the tribals takes concrete forms in beauty and art, art forms, storytelling (folktales, riddles, proverbs, myths), music and song (types, functions), musical instruments, dance, embroidery, painting and drawing, tattooing, and tribal feasts. Making deeper reflections into each of the above aspects truly brings out the prominence of the so-called 'backward, primitive or uncultured tribals'.

One can firmly opine that the concept of aesthetics is never an absolute term rather is a relative one. What is accepted as aesthetics in a culture need not necessarily be so in other cultures. However, aesthetics can be generally applied to all the tribals of the world. And interestingly, among the Chotanagpur Tribals the sense of aesthetics is very high. Since they belong to the 'primitive groups', their aesthetic sense soars higher than the so-called 'the cultured groups'. The

reason is not far to seek. These tribals, predominantly agriculturists, are one with nature. We may even say that their aesthetics is 'eco-aesthetics' which the present world is waking up to now only.

3.2 CHARACTERISTICS AND FUNCTIONS OF TRIBAL AESTHETICS

Tribal Aesthetics is unique because it is predominantly dependent on and adapted to the culture of a tribe (life, society, religion). The main characteristics are the following:

- i) handing down is done mostly by oral tradition with practically no written documents,
- ii) they reflect the social structure and local reality,
- iii) their author or origin is unknown,
- iv) they are uncomplicated or devoid of any complexity; their music, songs and language are simple and so they are learnt easily by the younger members,
- v) there is a face to face, live contact with the audience with plenty of scope for feedback,
- vi) they are very flexible and easily filter down to grassroots,
- vii) being rooted in the folk culture they easily appeal to the masses,
- viii) they are economically very feasible and viable,
- ix) in decision-making, democratic process like *panchayat* (tribal village council) are followed,
- x) they give importance to relationships,
- xi) community feeling is promoted through mutual sharing at every level of life,
- xii) they communicate and strengthen spirit of solidarity and equality through group participation in dances and festivals.

The functions of tribal aesthetics are the following:

- i) to mirror familiar details of a culture and incorporate a common situation of everyday life, ii) to validate culture, justify rituals and institutions,
- iii) to educate especially in non-literate societies where oral tradition is prevalent,
- iv) to maintain conformity to accepted patterns of behaviour,
- v) to entertain, and
- vi) to have a cathartic function.

3.3 BEAUTY AND ART (A PHILOSOPHICAL OUTLOOK)

The Tribal Worldview consists of all that a member is, viz., life, death, religion, afterlife. Thus Beauty and art become integral to tribal life. One major issue in aesthetics is whether it should concern itself with beauty or with art. Hegel was reluctant to accept aesthetics as the science of beauty, because he was interested not in beauty in general, but in 'fine art' and the philosophy of art. In this Heidegger follows him: he says he is concerned only with art, and that too with great art. Kant instead was interested in that particular and peculiar response which is evoked in us which we call 'aesthetic'. Whether this response is evoked by real flowers or by a painting of flowers, whether by nature or by art, is secondary for Kant. Thus Kant would not, like Hegel, equate aesthetics with the philosophy of art.

Given that historically human beings have reflected on both beauty and art, they are both issues for aesthetics. So we ask: What is beauty? What is art? We could also ask about the relationship between beauty and art. Is all art beautiful? Should all art be beautiful? What if it is not? Is there some other dimension to art? There is one of the most frequent questions in aesthetics, viz., 'Does beauty lie in the eye of the beholder?' and, indeed, even by the average 'educated' person on the street. It is a question that is raised and answered most notably by Hume and Kant. How is art/aesthetic experience related to the rest of life? What place, function, and status does it have? And what explains the enormous amount of time, energy, resources and passion dedicated to the making and interpreting of works of art? And why are we moved by the beauties of nature? Many philosophers are interested not so much, or not only, in beauty or art itself, as in its relation to the rest of life, or in its place in the overall scheme of things.

Thus Hegel asks about the relation of art to religion and to philosophy; its relation to truth; its place within the culture of peoples. Kant asks what the aesthetic experience reveals about the nature of human beings and their place in the universe. Schiller tries to show that the function of 'aesthetic play' is to harmonize the cognitive and sensual aspects of our existence that are normally in conflict. Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) who restated and developed the main theme of the Indian aesthetic tradition, argues that aesthetic pleasure is indicative of the religious sense of a universe that is a beautiful whole. Dewey shows the continuity between art and life. Heidegger proposes that the identity of a people is partly forged by its great works of art. Others like Plato, Mo Tzu and Tolstoy, on the other hand, downplay the importance given to art. They feel it is either a distraction from the chief and important purposes of life, or else downright unhelpful, evil or corrupting.

Art can be defined as the '*idealization* of the purely experiential pattern'. It is selective, rather than merely autobiographical or confessional. Therefore it is truer, leaner, meaner, more effective, more to the point (Lonergan, *Topics in Education* CWL 10:218). Art is abstraction of a form, but the form is not conceptual. In fact, it cannot be conceptualized. It depends on certain material conditions; it cannot be freed from these, as for example, a scientific hypothesis can be freed from determinate material conditions (Lonergan, *Topics in Education* CWL 10:218-9). Representative art: when there is isomorphism not only between what is produced and the idealization of the experiential pattern, but also between the product and something else, e.g. a house (Lonergan, *Topics in Education* CWL 10:219).

Objectification of a purely experiential pattern can be concretized through the following:

i) Music: sound, ii) Song: sound and linguistic meaning, iii) Sculpture: mainly the human body, iv) Dance: the human body in movement, v) Painting: colour, vi) Drawing and Embroidery: shapes and forms, vii) Literature: language and oral tradition, viii) Drama: human life situations, ix) Architecture: space of homes and village, x) Food: types, colours, tastes, smells, forms.

From the point of view of the senses, one can surmise the following:

i) Seeing: drawing, painting, embroidery, weaving, architecture, dance; ii) Hearing: music, song, poetry, folklores, iii) Seeing and hearing: drama, iv) Tasting: food ceremonies, treatment of guests, v) Smelling: use of the correct and appropriate housing and worshipping materials, clothing, vi) Seeing, tasting, smelling: food, vii) Touching: all of the above applies to this.

In every culture there is beauty and art. Unfortunately, what is old, traditional and rural or even rustic is often uncritically discarded as outdated and even irrational. On the other hand, what is new, scientific, logical, modern or western is just as uncritically absorbed as 'true' beauty and art. When we look around, modernity seems to be dominant ideology in any society. This attitude has changed not only the bulk of the urban elite consciousness, but also permeated all levels of society, the rich as well as the poor, the rulers and the ruled masses, planners and pawns of development, the urban as well as the rural population. The tribal ethos however has preserved its beauty and art in its life and environment. This has caused tension between the governments and the tribals. What is beauty and art in the eyes of tribals is to be exploited for 'human development and scientific progress'.

3.4 TRIBAL ART FORMS

In the world of aesthetics of the Chotanagpurians, one discovers that they have a rich sense of aesthetics which may not come up to the 'world standards' but in their own culture, they are masters of it. Unfortunately, today's postmodernity is gradually swallowing up such great sense of aesthetics among them. Oral Tradition occupies the first rung of the ladder of tribal art forms. It is part of the folk culture or folklore (traditional beliefs, legends and customs current among tribals) which cannot be dissociated from one another. The term 'folklore' was coined by the English Antiquarian William Thorns in 1846 which substituted the older term 'popular antiquities' (*New Catholic Encyclopedia* 1967, V, 989). Oral tradition refers to things handed down from antiquity of a group to the younger generation. This tradition consists of ballads, folk songs, stories, traditions, beliefs, games, dances, music and musical instruments, social customs and popular arts and crafts. It is the transmission from one to another, or from one generation to another, of statements, beliefs, rules, customs, practices, etc., by word of mouth or by practice without writing.

One may find also the other types of art:

i) plastic arts seen in drawing, painting, sculpture, ii) cloth weaving and embroidery, iii) oral literature, including drama and poetry, iv) music, v) dance, vi) architecture, vii) decorations with flowers, cloth, materials taken from nature.

Another interesting art form among the tribals is the whole ceremony of food-taking which is considered not simply a physiological act but above all a religious one. Lonergan says that humans don't just eat but make an art of eating. This is applicable to the tribals in every sense of

the word. Every element in food is taken care of: not only taste, but also its presentation, colour, form, amount, etc.

Storytelling

Storytelling is old as humanity itself and invariably forms part of aesthetics. All primitive societies made use of this as an indispensable means of education in tribal values and for entertainment. It includes narration of folktales, myths, proverbs, riddles, etc. A folktale can be described as 'a prose poetry, traditional in content, transmitted orally through many generations' (*New Encyclopedia Britannica* 1986, IV, 861). Folktales contain elements of myth, often devoid of religious meanings as in fairy tales, household tales, local traditions and legends, animal tales, trickster stories, tales of heroes, jests or merry tales and etiological tales (used to explain how a natural phenomenon, animal feature or institution of a society came to be).

Among the Chotanagpur tribals such storytelling was transmitted in the common youth dormitories (boys and girls separately - *gitiora*) and around the warm hearths of the people. These consisted of *Kaji-kahani* (orally narrations in prose form), and *durang ka-ani* (through singing interspersed during the narration of the above). Riddle has been defined as 'a question or a statement intentionally worded in a dark or puzzling manner, and propounded in order that it may be guessed or answered' (*The Oxford English Dictionary* 1989, XIII, 898). Tribal riddles occupy a prominent place in storytelling and indispensable in the life and work among the tribals.

Proverbs are 'short, pithy saying in common and recognized use; a concise sentence, often metaphorical or alliterative in form, which is held to express some truth ascertained by experience or observation and familiar to all' (*The Oxford English Dictionary* 1989, XII, 712). Proverbs are closely associated to folk wisdom, although they often have a literary origin unknown to the speaker. They are vivid and easily remembered since they are easily spoken than written. They are connected to folk life and comment on matters of daily life such as weather, medicine, religion, law and family. Myth is 'a narrative that portrays an event' (*New Catholic Encyclopedia* 1967, X, 185). The Chotanagpur tribals have numerous myths but the chief ones deal with creation, fall and punishment, and restoration or redemption. Interestingly, such myths are in similar to the great myths of the Middle East and other tribes.

3.5 MUSIC AND SONG

Tribal music and song is learned through hearing. It is disseminated within families and restricted social networks such as the clan and the tribe and are performed primarily by and for the members of that tribe alone. It is characterized by collectivity in performance, recreation in oral transmission and in performance, emotional content, and association with a particular geographic area. On the other hand, it is also characterized by its close association with dance and its functional quality and its lack of direct interaction with art music. In order to survive, a folk music or song must be accepted by the community and in some way reflect that community's values and tastes. The composers are usually anonymous but anyone is free to vary and embellish or simplify the original models as they are handed down from generation to the next. Most traditional folk melodies are monophonic (having one part) and strophic (having repeated stanzas, often with four lines). Rhythm in folk music and songs often depend on the

local language and its patterns of emphasis. Music and song often embody aspects of a tribe's characteristics. Individual tunes, song lyrics, drum patterns and musical styles of each tribe are unique as are the steps and styles of their dances.

Tribal songs are characterized by their appropriateness to each of the different seasons and activities carried out during those seasons. These different classes of songs are distinguished from one another mainly by their differences in interval, rhythm and modulation of the voice, and also by the peculiar vociferation with which a song or part of the song is begun or ended. The songs can be divided into two general categories: dance songs (for various festivals) and function songs (for the rites of passage). The dance songs are primarily performed in accompaniment to their dances either for the various festivals during the year (as per seasons) and on occasions like birth, puberty, adulthood, marriage, death. No tribal song is devoid of any meaning for they bring out the poetic patrimony of the tribe, sentiments and emotions, dreams, hopes and aspirations in life. Their function can be the following: i) amusement and recreation, ii) sanctioning tribal customs, and iii) emphasis on standards of conduct and assertion of values.

Musical Instruments

Tribals in general use numerous musical instruments as accompaniment to their songs and dances. The rhythm, beating or blowing of them depends on the tribal ethos of each group and that add richness to their aesthetics. We have the following Chotanagpur tribal instruments (Marie C. Babiracki, *Musical and Cultural Interaction in Tribal India: the Karam Repertory of the Mundas of Chotanagpur* 1991):

i) *Banam* is a single-string fiddle, without frets and with a skin-covered soundbox, played with an arched bow and horse string.

ii) *Rutu* is a transverse reed or bamboo flute, with mouthhole and finger-holes. It is a side blown bamboo flute normally played by men to accompany song and dance. At times it ranges from roughly 30cm to 51cm long, although smaller flutes are preferred. It is played while walking or tending herds, or to accompany the otherwise unaccompanied marriage songs. It is also played in the larger instrumental ensemble which accompanies seated small group-singing and community singing and dancing in the *akhra* (village dancing/meeting ground).

iii) *Bher* is a long straight trumpet with integral mouthpiece made of copper or tin in several sections,

iv) *Damua* is a large kettledrum with a bowl-shaped iron body and single laced buffalo-hide head. It is one of the most important drums to signal gatherings, including the hunt and as an essential percussion accompaniment for community dances,

v) *Dhak* is a large wooden drum ranging from 65cm to 95cm long with two equal heads, stretched over bamboo hoops and placed to the body. It hangs from the player's left shoulder and is held at his left side with its goat skin or calfskin playing-head facing forward. The drummer beats the head with thin reed sticks, one in each hand, or with a thick wooden stick in his right hand and a bamboo stick in his left. The drum's rear head is of ox-hide, with a temporary paste of resin and/or burnt oil residue applied in a circular patch at the centre. The *dhak* has traditionally been associated with hunting and warfare (also used for community dances, on occasions of marriage and sword dances).

vi) *Dhapla* is a wooden tambourine-like frame drum covered with goatskin and in the early decades of the 20th century was used by the tribals as part of the percussion ensembles accompanying community songs and dances.

vii) *Dholki* is generally barrel-shaped, with one head about 28cm in diameter and the other, usually played with the right hand, about 25cm in diameter. The smaller head is made of goatskin and the larger, deeper in pitch, of unspoiled calfskin. A paste of iron filings or tree resin (sometimes a paste of cooked flour or incense and oil) is often applied to the centre of the outer surface of the left head. The player holds the drum horizontally before him, slung from his neck by a leather or cloth strap. The right head is played directly with the hand and the left is beaten with a stick, slightly wider at its playing end and sometimes wrapped in hide. *Dholki* is not only a supporting drum in the percussion ensemble but often assumes the lead role.

viii) *Ektara* has a bamboo stick fingerboard about 86cm long and 3.5cm thick. The stick passes through one side of a bowl-shaped bottle gourd, roughly 15cm by 21cm, and projects a few inches out of the opposite side. A piece of goat or lizardskin (scaly side out) is attached with metal tacks or with wooden pegs and string over a mouth about 11cm in diameter cut in the face of the gourd. One or two brass playing strings pass over a wooden bridge and are secured at the gourd's lower end to a peg or to the bamboo stick's projection. At the upper end, the strings are fastened to pegs about 25cm from the bridge. The player holds his instrument upright, gripping the neck just above the resonator and plucking the playing string or strings with the index finger of the same hand. *Ektara* is played by men as a drone accompaniment of definite or indefinite pitch accompaniment.

ix) *Gugucu* is a small pyramid-shaped or conical hollow earthen aerophone. The narrow end of the instrument, which stood 15cm to 23.5cm high, was covered with a spider's web and the instrument was blown through an opening in the opposite end.

x) *Karah* applies to the double-head drums such as the *tapar*, *rabaga* and *dholki*. A drum functions as *karah* when only the larger of its heads is played with two small sticks to provide a rapid and regular pulse for other drummers. In a traditional ensemble of *karah*, *dholki* and cymbals, the *karah* drummer's fast, even strokes, four or eight per beat, alternating with rapid rolls, also fill in the more complicated syncopated patterns of the other drummers.

xi) *Kendra* is a plucked or bowed chordophone of the tribals. It may include lute *kendra*, *gopiyantara kendra*, stick-zither *kendra*, fiddle *kendra* and *majhi kendra*.

xii) *Mandar (dumang)* is a double-headed drum, 50cm to 66cm, with baked clay body and laced skin heads. It is used as the most important drum in the percussion ensemble in singing and dances.

xiii) *Murali* is an end-blown notched flute of thick bamboo about 20cm to 30cm long, with five to seven finger-holes and an optional thumb-hole.

xiv) *Nagara* is a large single-headed kettledrum, ranging in size from small, with a head diameter of 45cm and height of about 40cm, to extremely large, with a head diameter of about 114cm and a height of about 110cm. It is played with a pair of sticks, each about 30cm to 40cm long and slightly curved at the playing end. When used in the percussion ensemble which accompanies community dancing the drum is slung from the player's neck by a leather or cloth

strap. Often the drummer dances as he plays. Sometimes the nagara accompanies small group singing, in which case it is placed on the ground in front of the seated drummer. The nagara is primarily associated with outdoor community dancing and processions. Because of its thunderous sound it is also used to call the people to such gatherings as the hunt.

xv) *Narsiga* is a S-shaped metal trumpet, often made of brass, copper or silver and measuring about 115cm in length.

xvi) *Perened* is a double-reed aerophone with six finger-holes. It has two parts: a wood or bamboo tube about 15cm long and an engraved conical bell of brass or bell-metal about 10cm long.

xvii) *Rabaga* is a double-headed drum with truncated-conical wooden body and laced skin heads. It is played by a man, who hangs it from a neck strap at his left side, with the larger head facing forward. He plays only the large head with two thin bamboo sticks, one in each hand. Although, traditionally *rabaga* was associated with the *akhra* and *gitiora*, it is also used in the percussion ensemble. The player also plays the *karah*, a series of fast, equal strokes, normally four to eight to a beat, alternating with fast rolls. Thus he helps keep the beat and fill in the more complicated patterns of the other drummers.

xviii) *Kunj* is a heavy, cylindrical drum, about 34cm long and 22cm in diameter. At times it is a double-headed drum with a waisted clay body and laced skin heads. Both heads are of goatskin and played with curved wooden sticks.

xix) *Soekho* is a ring-rattle idiophone, composed of a pair of large iron rings, each about 23cm in diameter and placed one on top of the other, soldered together at one end and remaining slightly parted at the other. Around each ring there are a number of loose-fitting smaller rings, each about 2cm in diameter. The player holds a pair of the rings by their soldered ends in each hand and shakes them back and forth. It is part of the percussion ensemble which accompanies community dances, particularly the *karam* dances.

xx) *Thecka* are wooden clappers, set in wire frame. In the double-clapper variety a movable oblong wooden plate is fitted on an arched wire frame whose two ends, each with a wooden disc attached, run through holes in either end of the plate. The player holds the top of the frame with one hand and claps the plate against the discs with the other. It is part of the percussion ensemble accompanying community dance and song.

xxi) *Tuila* is a single-string fretless plucked stick zither. It is normally played to accompany group marriage songs or the player's own singing. The *tuila* repertoire includes songs for common dance but the instrument itself is not played with drumming or dancing.

Dance

Dance is one of the commonest phenomena of folk or tribal life. It is part and parcel of their daily life, nay integral to the adivasi culture in Chotanagpur. It is not merely a source of amusement but the very breath of their life which includes beliefs and rituals. It is said that a tribe that dances that cannot die (LP Vidyarthi, *Cultural Contours of Tribal Bihar* 1964, 163). It is described variously as traditional dance as it evolves from daily activities (following various seasons of cultivation and occasional hunting), as native dance possessing magical or economic

functions, or as dance performed non-professionally. Rural folk dance often manifests ancient ritual roots and serves recreational functions, whereas their urban equivalents may be more recent and fulfil other secular aims. However both celebrate original festivals, like those based on local calendars for agricultural ecology. In almost all cases the older, experienced men and women serve as leaders in dances, with the children following as novices, though normally the individual of any age or sex is submerged in the larger society and is required to fit harmoniously in the dance party. Cultivation alternates with the change of seasons. Following this agricultural work-pattern their dances too go on changing. Thus each season has its own dance and as there are many months and seasons there are many types of dances.

i) *Hario Dance* is performed in the months of *Magh* (Jan-Feb) by boys, girls, young men and women in the *jatras* (dancing meets). Normally the dancers arrange themselves in columns but sometimes spread out in line, each dancer placing his/her hands on the neck of the next dancer on either side. The steps are martial, the movements quick and at times the dancers seem running. Sometimes they stand erect in a row, holding hands and dancing round in circles. Male drummers beat the *mandar* drums (K. Chattopadhyay, *Tribalism in India* 1978, 276-77).

ii) *Faggu Dance* is held in the lunar month of *Falgun* (Feb), marking the end of the old year and the commencement of the new year. After the feast, the men go for hunting called '*faggu-sendra*' (February hunting). During this season, they sing the *faggu* melody. It is often accompanied by vigorous dance like the *khaddi* dance.

iii) *Kinbhar Dance* is held from *Phalgun* to *Baisakh* (Feb to May) which is known as *angan* or courtyard dances. In the season of transplantation of seedling while the *ropa* (plantation) melody is sung in the fields, the *angnai* is sung and danced in the courtyard by way of relaxation to fight away the fatigue of the heavy day's work.

iv) *Khaddi Dance* is performed weeks before and on the day of the *Sarhul* festival in *Chait* (March). This dance is very virile. The dancers jump up and down with heavy steps, sometimes in a simple style, other times in a more intricate manner. In the evening of the *khaddi* feast (*sarhul*) itself *khaddi-tunta* dance is performed with *tunta* melody.

v) *Jadur and Gena dances* begin when the *mage* feast ends with the *jarga* dance in December to welcome the beginning of *sarhul* or *baporob* festival in *Chait* (March-April; SC Roy, *The Mundas and their Country* 1995, 307)). Either women alone or men and women dance together clasping one another's arms. They advance and recede with measured steps in a low stooping posture. The feet of the dancers alternately go up and down in unison, the drummers, in the opposite row, also do the same; and while one row recedes, the other row also does the same. But when there is only one row of dancers, then as the dancers advance the drummers recede, and vice versa.

vi) *Halka Dance* belongs properly to the *Kharia* tribe of *Chotanagpur*. Men and women dance together in an orderly fashion. It is accompanied by songs but without musical instruments.

vii) *Dhuria dance* is performed when the monsoon is delayed so as to bring down rains on the newly sown paddy in the dry land and make it germinate and grow without much delay. This continues till the start of the rainy season (J. Lakra, *Sevartham* 8, 1983, 70).

viii) *Asari Dance* is performed to welcome the rain-laden clouds with the melody of the rain season: *asari*, which is also named *tunta* when danced as *khaddi*. *Asari* songs often speak of the cloud, rain and other events and activities of the rainy season.

ix) *Karam dance* is performed during *karam* festival, one of the most important festivals of the adivasis. It is celebrated on the 11th of the lunar month of *Bhado* (August) when the fields are already green with growing paddy plants. These dances commence soon after the *ropa* (transplantation in the lunar month of *sawan-bhado*/July-Aug) and reach the climax on the day of the *karam*. The boys and girls cut three *karam* branches, plant them in the *akhra* (dancing ground), venerate them, take them from house to house for family veneration and finally immerse them in a nearby tank – all this amidst singing and dancing. The *karam* season has the greatest variety of dances, like the *chali*, *lahsua*, *tharia*, *lujhki*, *thapri rinja*, *brinjhia*, *rasika*, *arjho*, *jugia*, *dhenguria kram* dances, each having their own variety of actions, steps and movements (SC Roy, *The Mundas and their Country* 1970, 307). These dances go right up to the feast of *sohrai* in *kartik* (Oct-Nov).

x) *Kudhing or Jatra dances* are performed in the season of *Kuar* or *Aswin* (Sept-Oct). In the month of *kartik* (oct-nov), the *indrail* dance is performed by young men and women, and the *halka* dance by old men and women. In the *tharia*, *lahsua* and *doyor* dances, dancers sometimes carry sticks in their hands or over their shoulders.

xi) *Tusgo dances* come soon after the *karam* festival. This is to celebrate the eating of the new rice. It resembles the *karam* dances so closely that they are almost an appendix to the *karam* dances. Soon after the *tusgo* dancing season, in some areas *matha* dance is held.

xii) *Mage or jarga dances* begin after the *sohrai* festival in *kartik* (Oct-Nov) and continue till the *kolom sing bonga* (threshing floor feast) and the *mage* festivals in *aghan* or *pus* (Dec).

xiii) *Marriage dances* have combinations of joy and sorrow. One is to highlight the sorrow at the separation of the daughter from her family and village and the other is joy for the groom. There are two instances of the marriage when dancers are performed: the first being a blessing dance. Women carrying the *kanrsa bhanda* (marriage pot) perform the *benja-lesna* dance accompanied by the biggest kind of drum called *dhak*. This is a silent, ceremonial dance without songs. The second is the *painki* dance which is performed when the groom's party enters the girl's village. The bride's party also welcomes them with the same *painki* dance. Men dancers wield swords in their hands and dance singly to the accompaniment of the *dhak*. This is a type of silent, war dance without songs.

xiv) *Domkach dance* does not follow a seasonal pattern because it seems to be borrowed from the Hindu neighbours. Its melody is lighter but the dance steps are often very intricate. While dancing the *domkach* the drum used for accompaniment is *dholak*.

The functions of tribal dances are the following:

i) **Magico-Religious:** From the earliest times the functions of most tribal dances in almost every part of the world was to control and propitiate the spirit world. It was performed for the preservation of the individual and the tribe as a whole (as the *karam* dance is used as a mark of respect and veneration to the *Karam Raja*, a deity worshipped during the *Karam* feast). Later on, among the peasants of Asia, Europe and the Americas, dances continued to be used as magico-

religious rituals to ensure good hunting, fertility, victory in war, and smooth passages through the major crises of life. In the eastern countries, with all its all-inclusive, all-pervasive, folk dance to this day retains much of its ritual function. Nevertheless, dances were performed to celebrate the commencement of spring, mid-summer, harvest, weddings and funerals and gradually lost the specific ritual significance of the movements and danced mainly for amusements (Gertrude P. Kurath, *Encyclopedia Americana* 1977, XI, 498d).

ii) **Strengthening of solidarity:** Many of the traditional dances are stylised versions of movements derived from various forms of work. Originally they possessed a kind of ritualistic function as they elicited enthusiasm for the work at hand. However, the onset of industrialization has brought doom to manual labour, cooperative work sessions and agricultural celebrations, the concurrent dances have been gradually forgotten or have become simply a source of entertainment. The Chotanagpur dances are meant for all, men and women, boys and girls, young and old and without much paraphernalia. The experienced dancers lead the dance, followed by others, while join the rear trying to learn the art and aesthetics of dancing from their elders. Such collective dancing and singing become channels through which cultural traditions are expressed and confirmed. Community solidarity and tribal confidence is inspired on such occasions (Manoharlal, *The Munda Elite* 1983, 89).

iii) **Entertainment functions:** Together with the above functions mentioned, many of the tribal dances provide also pleasure through patterned movements in groups. They often give opportunities for courtship. When derived from fertility rites, courtship dances stressed with varying degrees of mime, the interplay between men and women. During *sarhul* and *karam*, main dances are performed but even weeks prior to the feasts, people start dancing in the evenings. After the day's hard toil in the fields, dancing is often the only means of relaxation and amusement to them.

In sum, tribal songs and dances are not just means of entertaining the members and enlivening their seasonal feasts and ceremonies but they bring out the great aesthetic sense that the tribals possess.

3.6 FESTIVALS

Celebration of feasts has been a common feature among peoples of all times, places, religions and cultures. Feasts are 'periodically recurring occasions for the expression of religious joy. Generally they occur annually, but weekly, monthly and other celebrations are also common' (GW Mac Rae, *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 1967, V, 867). The Chotanagpur festivals are seasonal and coincide with events in the agricultural cycle. Some of these festivals are the following:

i) *Phagua* is celebrated in the lunar month of *Falgun Purnima* (Feb-Mar). It corresponds to the Hindu festival of *holi*. It signals the end of the old year and the dawn of the new one. Only after the *phagua puja* jungle produce may be gathered and game killed for food. Ploughing and manuring of the fields may not be done before this.

ii) *Sarhul* or *khaththi* is celebrated in the month of *chait* (March) one month after the *phagua* when the sal trees are in full blossom. It is the principal religious spring festival of the Chotanagpur tribals. It introduces the agricultural cycle. In fact, due to the abundance of *sal*

flowers, the Mundas call it *baporob* (flower feast). This feast is celebrated in order to obtain more rain the current year and for the fecundity of the soil.

iii) *Hariyari and kadleta* are associated with crops. *Hariyari* (greening) is observed when the tender paddy seedlings are ready for transplantation; while *kadleta* (making the field muddy for transplantation) is celebrated when the early upland crops and millet are ready for harvest and is generally observed on the eve of the *karam* festival. During these two feasts prayers are offered for protection of the crops and for a good yield.

iv) *Karam* is very important for the Chotanagpurians. It is a critical period for the standing crops in the fields. They are at the mercy of invading insects and animals. The feast is celebrated to ward off attacks of the enemy and to secure protection of the green crops as well as to obtain the gift of happy and healthy children. *Karam* is predominantly a feast of the unmarried but recently also of the engaged girls.

v) *Nawakhani* (new eating) is the feast of eating the first-fruits of the land and is observed when the crops are harvested and collected. It generally occurs in the month of Bhado (Sept). a large rice cake is offered to the ancestors. Rice beer is poured in libation to them and their blessing protection is invoked on the descendants, cattle and crops.

vi) *Sohrai* is solemnized by the Chotanagpurians on the new moon day in *kartik* (Oct-Nov) to honour the animals who toil in the various cultivations. On this day the cattle are treated royally: they are bathed, their hoofs are washed with rice beer, their horns anointed with oil and their heads adorned with flowers. In some places a fowl is sacrificed to the spirit presiding over the shed. Being indispensable for agriculture, cattle are very precious to the tribals.

vii) *Khalihani* is last but one of the agricultural feasts. It is the 'threshing floor' feast which is celebrated in the month of *aghan* (Nov) to signal the beginning of harvest and threshing season. During this feast, the tribal god and the ancestors are thanked for being propitious and protective. Just as they were invoked in the beginning, they are remembered at this close of the cultivation season.

viii) *Maghe* feast closes the agricultural feasts. It is observed to honour the house servants. The housewife washes the feet of the servant, oils his hair and combs it. Next she offers him rice beer. If the servant wants to continue serving in the same house, he says that the drink is good. If he wants to leave, he just keeps quiet and is released from service after due remunerations. This feast brings in two main ideas: servants are useful and helpful in the domestic chores; with their service they contribute to the well-being of the family, clan and tribe.

The importance of festivals in the life of a tribal cannot be downplayed. From the remotest times, in nearly all primitive societies, festivals have had a religious significance. To some extent, they continue to be so even today. They also manifest natural human desire to rejoice in the blessings of life and to periodically evade the vexations of daily life. Moreover, they express man's turning towards the gods, the givers of life and nature, in an effort to unite with the realm of the divine. The much diffused tradition of honour the dead ancestors shows clearly the role of the festivals in linking with the world beyond. Similarly, the ritual, symbolism, and mythology of the festivals enable the celebrants to participate in the world of mythical origins seen as an eternal present.

3.7 EMBROIDERY, PAINTING AND DRAWING

Another important aspect of aesthetics is seen in the tribal embroidery, paintings and drawings. Each tribe had its own 'coat of arms' to identify itself from the others. This is seen in their weaving and embroidery, primitive paintings and drawings. The cloths of cotton and silk (shawls, scarves, clothing) are woven and embroidered with their 'trademarks'. In the earlier times, the shields together with the weapons of war bore the clan-protectors or the clan-symbols. The weapons of war (bow, arrow, axe, spear, swords, iron-bound stick, pincers) would be identified by the motifs they bore. The tribal architecture (homes, common youth dormitories, village ground, etc) too were beautified with the clan-drawings and motifs. At times, skulls of prized animals were displayed at the front of such architecture. Some clans had also some sort of drawings on rocks or erected monoliths (in the cemeteries or at the village gates) to keep the memory of their ancestors or a war victory. The tribal motifs were also embossed in the jewellerys and ornaments that the men and women wore, viz., ear rings, finger rings, rings for the toes, nose rings, brass bracelets-armlets-necklets-anklets, wooden hair-combs, etc.

It was customary among the Chotanagpur tribal-clans to take their surnames (Totems: *tuti, mundu, soe, horo/kachua, nag, sandi, hemrom, barla*, etc) from nature (trees, animals, birds) or environment and they would display that symbol in their life and activities. This would be displayed in their weapons of war and agricultural tools as well. Household utensils and furniture, musical instruments and other implements too had this.

Tattooing

There was a time when the civilized world looked down upon the tribals because of their tattooing. Because it appeared to be 'ugly' or 'dirty'. Today even the postmodern world is crazy about it; of course the method of tattooing differs. The Chotanagpurians held tattooing as a sign of honour and status, beauty and ornamentation, respect and remembrance; of reaching the age of puberty and adulthood. Both boys and girls at young age (8 or 9 years) were tattooed. The parts of the body to be tattooed are pricked over with a needle and then a kind of black vegetable-dye is injected into them and left to dry. No washing is to be done till it is dry and strong. The body-parts for tattooing are the following: forehead, temples, chin, back, chest, arms, hands, feet. Another interesting or painful way of tattooing (for boys only) was to have the flesh of a portion of their arms scalded with a red-hot iron-rod into a circular mark which was regarded as a sign of decoration, honour and prestige; above all, it was a sign of manhood or adulthood.

3.8 LET US SUM UP

We have undertaken this tribal aesthetic outlook journey and it has not been in vain. One discovers that a rich cultural and aesthetic heritage lies among the Chotanagpur tribals. In the mainstream of the Indian society, they are looked down upon. But one finds that in aesthetics they are no less than any postmodern usage and understanding.

3.9 KEY WORDS

Adivasis: aboriginal, first dwellers of the land.

Eco-aesthetics: aesthetics which takes into account whatever is found in nature.

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UNIT 4 TRIBAL COSMOGONIES AND COSMOLOGIES

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
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4.0 OBJECTIVES

The unit takes the students to the world of tribals in their conception about the origin of the universe.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1975), the first meaning of *cosmogony* is the creation or origin of the world or universe. The second meaning is a theory of the origin of the universe. Taking the first meaning, cosmogony of some major tribal groups in Central and Eastern India is given in this unit. The same dictionary gives the meaning of *cosmology* as (1) a branch of metaphysics that deals with the universe as an orderly system, (2) a branch of astronomy that deals with the origin, structure, and space-time relationships of the universe. Tribal mind explains cosmology in its own unique way, not in the way modern science explains. Tribal way of looking at the universe is a symbolic way.

4.2 CREATION ACCOUNTS OF CENTRAL AND EAST INDIAN TRIBALS

Source for the following accounts: (Pereira 2007: 433-439, 555-562, 564-567, 568-571)

(Mundu 2003: 26-62)

Munda

Earth was covered with *water*. *Haram* (Old One, Personal name of the Supreme Being, the Wise One.) had made only the *creatures in water*. He told the *crab* to fetch some *soil* from under water to make the dry land - Soil was washed away. He told the *turtle* to bring the soil and the same thing happened. Finally, he told the *earthworm* to go down the sea and bring the soil. It filled its mouth with soil and came back and gave it out on the Old One's hand. He multiplied it and made the *dry land* and made all kinds of *herbs*, *plants* and *trees* and *animals* to grow. He made a *clay figure* of a *human being*. A *horse* kicked it. The second time a tiger chased it away. The horse was cursed and the tiger was praised. A large *Indian stork* laid 2-eggs. While hatching them a *boy* and a *girl* were formed. The Old One made the first *plough* for the boy (man) from a single,

large tree, taking a long time. His wife sent a mosquito to disturb him in his work but he continued in fashioning the plough. So, she sent a tiger to frighten him. He threw a chip on the tiger and it became a wild dog and chased away the tiger. He brought the plough but his wife did not appreciate it. She told him to throw it on the ground and it broke into pieces! She made another plough with different parts which did not break when thrown to the ground. Therefore, he freed her and the women from the hard work of making the plough, they are not even to touch it. The Old One visited the boy (man) making fields and asked him questions: "When did you do this work?" He answered: "Now." The Old One asked again: "When did you do that work?" The boy answered: "Now." The Old One asked the boy yet another time: "When will you do that work?" The boy answered: "Now." So, the Old One arranged the sun-set and sun-rise. He made the sun for the day and the moon for the night. He told the boy to work by day and rest by night.

When the world was filled with human beings, and they began to walk the evil path, *Singbonga* (Symbolic name for the Supreme Being meaning that He is *like the sun*. *Sing* means the sun and *bonga* means the spirit. However, the Mundas never mean that the Supreme Being is the sun spirit.) rained *fire* and all died. Only 2-persons: *one brother* and *one sister* escaped. A *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* when it asked for them. *Singbonga* made a home for them and let them live therein. While *sleeping* they placed a *husking-pole* between themselves. *Singbonga* taught them how to prepare *rice beer*. They drank it and went to sleep. At night *Singbonga* removed the husking pole and the boy and girl behaved like a husband and wife. Next morning they told *Singbonga* what had happened during the night to which he said: "All is well with you *grandchildren*. You did well!" From these two all human beings were born afterwards

Santal

There was only *water*. *Thakur Jiu* (Supreme Being) created the creatures in water: the *crab*, *crocodile*, *alligator*, *boarfish*, *prawn*, *earthworm*, *tortoise*. He made 2-clay figures of *human beings*. The *sing sadom* (day-horse) trampled them into pieces. He made *hans-hansil* (male goose and female goose). He breathed in them and they became alive and flew up. They alighted on *Thakur's* hands. The day-horse came down to drink water and spilt some froth of his mouth and left. Foam was formed on water. The birds alighted on the foam and moved about all over the sea. They requested *Thakur* to give them food. He called the *alligator* and asked him to bring up the earth from the bottom of the sea. He tried to bring the earth on his back but the earth got dissolved in the sea. *Thakur* then sent the *prawn* to bring the earth. He tried to bring it with his claws but it got dissolved in the sea. *Thakur* this time sent the *raghop boarfish* to fetch the earth. The fish bit the earth in his mouth and put some of it on his back but the earth got dissolved in the sea. Again *Thakur* sent the *stone crab* to bring the earth. The crab tried to bring it between his claws and it got dissolved in the sea. Finally, he sent the *earthworm* to bring the earth which he agreed to do provided the *tortoise* floated on the surface of the sea. The latter was called and he floated on the surface of the sea. *Thakur* chained his 4-legs in 4-directions. The *earthworm* put his tail on the back of the tortoise and with his mouth down below swallowed the earth and brought it out on the back of the tortoise.

The *earth* was spread out like a hard film and the present earth was formed. *Thakur* harrowed the earth. Some of it got heaped up and became mountains. The foam that was floating on water stuck to the earth and *Thakur* sowed *sirom* seed on it, followed by *dhubi* grass, *karam* tree,

sarjom, *labar atnak* (*Kahua* or *Arjun*), *matkom* (*Mahua*). After this he made all kinds of plants. The 2-birds made a nest on the *srom* plants and laid 2-eggs and hatched them. There were 2-human beings born: one *boy* and one *girl*. *Thakur Jiu* gave the 2-birds some cotton telling them to press the juice of whatever they ate into the cotton and to put it into the children's mouths to suck. The children grew up and began to walk. The 2-birds took those children and flew towards the setting sun into *Hihiri-Pipri*. The 2-human beings were *Haram* and *Ayo*. Some call them *Pilchu Haram* and *Pilchu Burhi*. They grew up eating the grain of the *sumtu bukue* grass and ears of the *sama* grass. *Lita* (*Maran Buru* - Great mountain, symbolic name of the Supreme Being.) main *bonga* (spirit) of the Santals, came to them, calling them *grandchildren*. He taught them how to brew *rice beer* and they *drank* it and *slept* together. They got 7-boys and 7-girls. They went to *Khoj Kaman* (different countries). There they became like he-buffaloes and she-buffaloes. They did not respect one another. *Thakur* became very angry. He sent *Pilchu Haram* and *Pilchu Burhi* to the cave in the *Harata* mountain. *Thakur* sent *fire-rain* (sky-rain) for 7-days and 7-nights and destroyed mankind and animals. Only the two persons in the *Harata* mountain cave were saved. From these two human beings 12-sons and 12-daughters were born and from them the rest of mankind multiplied. They were divided into 12-groups according to the *food* their ancestors chose at a feast.

Ho

There was only *water* all around. *Singbonga* wanted to make land in its place. So, he made a *tortoise* and let it go into water to bring out *mud*. It brought the mud with its mouth and hands and placed it on the surface. The water washed it away. Then *Singbonga* made a *crab*. It entered into the water and clawed out mud and brought it up to the surface but it was washed away as before. *Singbonga* then rubbed some dirt out from his thigh and made *two earthworms*: one male and one female. They slipped into the water and began to raise and heap up mud within the water by eating 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 it became hard *land*. Then *Singbonga* made '*Surmi-Durmis*' (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.) with hands and feet. They began to level the mountains and fill the ravines with their hands. *Singbonga* sent *tigers* and *bears*, *bisons* and *deer*, and *elephants* to help them. The *Surmi-Durmis* yoked the animals and leveled the land with leveling planks. They leveled even the mountains. Later, in those fields they planted *trees* and *grass*. When the land had been made and the trees and grass had sprouted and grown, 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*. But 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". You two will live together as *juri-juri tainben* (companions)." Thus, *Singbonga* made 2-human beings, male and female. They 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 too. They multiplied. However, the human beings remained only two. They used to keep a husking pole in between them without crossing it 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 but they began to walk on evil path. Seeing this, *Singbonga* was displeased and destroyed them with *rain of fire*. However, *Nage Era* (water spirit) saved a pair of human beings and a pair of every other living beings. Through this pair of human beings, humankind increased again.

Kharia

There was only *water* in the beginning. A *crab* raised a pillar of clay on the surface of the water to enjoy sunshine. A *man* (figure representing the Supreme Being) began to play with the pillar. Seeing this, the crab extended its pillar into a huge island, the *earth*. The *man* used to make 2-clay figures everyday and leave them to dry there. A *horse* came flying and kicked those figures to pieces everyday. Man-God cut off the wings of the horse. He asked his 2-dogs to guard the clay figures. The dogs hid themselves under an *akwan* shrub to bark at the horse. The clay figures were thus saved from the horse. Man-God put the dry clay figures inside the *hollow* of a *banian tree*. The milk of the tree dripped into their mouths and they became alive - one *male* and one *female*. Human beings increased and fruits and vegetables were not enough. They prayed to God for more food. God caused a big whirlwind with dry leaves flying. They became birds. Human beings began to kill and eat them. Still food was not enough. Human beings became proud and arrogant and began to cut down fruit trees senselessly. God became angry and sent *flood* first to destroy the human beings. Some clever ones climbed the top of the mountains covering themselves with *gungu* (leaf cover). Flood subsided and human beings came down from the mountain but behaved the same way as before. God sent *rain of fire* to wipe out all human beings. Only a *brother* and a *sister* were saved who ran away towards the marshy land where king *Shembhu* and queen *Dakai* pulled them inside the marsh and hid them. After the Rain of Fire, God felt lonely. He appointed the *kingcrow* as *sardar* (Leader), *koel* as *kotwar* (Assistant), *crow* as *bhandari* (grain store keeper), *lipi* as *susras* (Care taker) and sent them to different directions in search of human beings. With hard work, birds grew thinner but the crow grew stouter. It had discovered human beings and was having food from their left-overs. God sent the birds to fetch them but queen *Dakai* refused to let them go. God Himself went to fetch them and made an agreement with *Dakai* that 7-parts of the human beings would belong to her and only 1-part to Him. God asked them to clear forests for fields. He gave them a seed of gourd to plant. The creeper bore 3-fruits. They offered the head of one of the fruits to God. They found the gourd full of *gundli* (millet). They roasted and powdered it and ate it. From the second fruit they discovered *gora* (coarse paddy) and made flat rice. Similarly, they found the third fruit full of low land paddy grains. They boiled, dried, husked, cooked and ate them. They kept a big *wooden log* between them while *sleeping*. God taught them how to make *rice beer*. They drank it and the boy crossed the log the other side. Thus, children were born: 9-sons and 9-daughters. The sons used to go hunting. One day they killed a big deer. They were thirsty and began to look for water from trees. They managed to locate one water pool. The eldest brother went and saw a snakelike fish. The second one saw a big tortoise....all of them thus met one thing or the other. Taking the equal share of deer meat, they departed. Opening the bundle at home, each one of

them found what he had seen on the way to the pool of water. Accordingly, each one of them was called, *Dungdung* (Eel), *Kullu* (Tortoise), *Kerketta* (Hedge sparrow), *Tete* (a bird), *Kiro* (tiger), *Soreng* (rock), *Ba'a* (paddy), *Bilung* (Salt), *To'opo* (one kind of bird).

Kurukh (Uraon)

There was *water* everywhere and water creatures were living there. *Dharmes* (Supreme Being, Beneficent One) was interested in making the earth. Therefore, he sent the *crab* below the water to fetch the clay in order to make the earth. The crab went down swimming to fetch the clay. It dug up the clay and holding it in its claws returned. However, during its return journey, the clay got washed away. *Dharmes* asked the crab: "Where is the clay you have brought?" The crab replied: "While I was swimming back the clay in my claws got washed away *Dharme*." *Dharmes* cursed the crab. From that day the crab walks in a crooked way and looks at others from the corner of its eyes! *Dharmes* now sent the tortoise to fetch the clay. It immediately dived into the water and collected the clay on its back and came up to *Dharmes*. However, while swimming back all the clay was washed away. *Dharmes* now asked: "Where is the clay?" Feeling shy the tortoise hid its head, mouth and eyes. From that day on if it sees anyone, it hides its head. *Dharmes* now sent the *earthworm* to fetch the clay. It slipped down to the bottom of the sea and filled its belly with clay and came up to the surface of the sea and began to throw out the clay on the palm of *Dharmes* and it kept spreading out and drying up to become the present earth. *Dharmes* made all the *creatures* of the earth and the *birds* of the air. He made a pair of *male* and *female* human beings out of clay and kept them out to dry. After they were dry he would bake them in fire and put life into them. However, the *pankha-hansa* (winged horse) trampled the human beings of clay into dust. *Dharmes* made human beings of clay a couple of times more and kept them out to dry. The horse came to destroy them again. So he made a *dog* to chase away the horse. Seeing the behaviour of the horse he put life into the human beings of clay that were not baked. That is why the human beings have to die in this world. In the beginning the human beings were a couple like a pair of eggs of a dove. From this couple, the earth was filled with human beings afterwards.

2nd account

Dharmes made the *kilkila* (kingfisher) bird to bring the *seed* of the earth. It brought the seed from *earthworms* under the sea. *Dharmes* now churned the sea and put the seed there and the 7-seas turned into the *saat-pati-raji* (7-cornered earth). *Dharmes* had a *flying horse* and an *ordinary horse*. He formed human beings of clay and put them in the open to dry. The winged horse used to come down and destroy the clay figures. He made dogs to frighten the horse. Thus human beings filled the earth. He made other creatures too. He gave them food. The human beings *dirtied* the earth with their excreta! *Dharmes* was deeply offended by this evil act. He sent *rain-fire* on them for 7-days and 7-nights and destroyed them and cleaned up the dirt on the earth. All perished except the *bhaiya-bahin* (brother-sister). The beloved of *Dharmes* hid them in the hole of a *crab* in the *Sira-Sita Naal* (deeper paddy fields). After destroying the human beings, *Dharmes* felt very lonely without them. In order to teach *Dharmes* a lesson, his beloved told him to go out and find the human beings wherever they might be. After many trials he succeeded in finding the *bhaiya-bahin*. After bringing them home he kept them with him in his abode. When they grew up, he gave them *field* to cultivate, *oxen* to plough and *seeds* to sow and reap. He also taught them how to prepare *hanria* (rice beer). They used to sleep at night on either side of a log of the silk-cotton tree. One night when they were sleeping after drinking the rice beer, *Dharmes*

and his beloved removed the log between them and human beings were born and multiplied. *Dharmes* divided them into various *gotras* (clans). Thus, people enter into marriage relationships with different clans outside their own.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Which were the causes of destruction of the first creation of the Supreme Being in the creation accounts of different tribal traditions?

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2) What lesson can the present day world faced with ecological disaster learn from the above creation accounts?

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4.3 CREATION ACCOUNTS OF NORTH-EAST INDIAN TRIBALS

Source: (Panthanmackel 2009: 324-330)

Naga

The Nagas consist of a number of groups, each with its own identity and language. The Nagas believe that in the beginning a vast sheet of *water*, towered over by a hill where lived God *Sabrai*, covered the earth. One night a giant *bat* who was a god, having found no spot to land, flew to God *Sabrai* and told him that he came from another overpopulated world to look for a new world to land. Then *Sabrai* created land, trees, grass and the wind to blow. Crows made rivers flow through the land. Then birds, animals and humans were created to be placed on the land. Each species had its own king. In the beginning, all humans were one, and only later they broke themselves up into many. It took place in the following manner: A king had a daughter called *Sitoyle* who was exceptionally fleet-footed and she enjoyed wandering in the jungles. One day she was missing. The search party came across a python with a bloated stomach. Men attacked it with *dao* (Sharp sword). As they attacked it, their physical appearance began to

change resulting in different kinds of language and groups. Concerning earthquake, once when a king died, he went to the home of gods and married Sabrai's daughter. Then he tried to set himself as a rival to *Sabrai*. In order to resolve the issue, a wrestling contest was held. When the result seemed to hang in balance, the king's wife in sympathy with her father managed to tie up her husband's legs with her hair holding him to the ground. The agreement was that the vanquished would be confined to the middle of the earth. That is why whenever the king struggles to free himself from his confines, the earth suffers a big quake. If the quake occurs early in the morning or late in the evening, it is considered unlucky; if it occurs later in the day, it signifies good omen.

Ao

The Ao Nagas form an important branch of the Naga group of tribals. The district of Mokokchung in Nagaland is the traditional home of the Aos. The Aos believe in a supreme God whom they call *Lichaba*. He is the creator of the earth and all in it, the Lord of the earth and its vegetation. He has the greatest influence upon the earth and is responsible for natural calamities. He bestows both blessings and punishments on human beings. He remains under the earth holding it between his two hands and is conscious of all events. In the beginning *Lichaba* took his time to mould the plains of Assam. He started to mould the Naga Hills thereafter. Then a sea beetle came shouting, 'Enemies, enemies! Hurry! Hurry! Enemies are approaching to destroy the earth,' and he disappeared. So *Lichaba* had to mould the Naga Hills in haste in order to defend the earth from the attack of the enemies. That is why Assam is plain while Nagaland is mountainous. The Aos infer from the story that there was an evil force in the beginning in order to distract and bring confusion. So, a human being has both a 'good will' and 'bad will' simultaneously. In another similar story, in the beginning, the human being, tiger, birds and an angel lived in a place in the East. As their mother grew older and thin, each tended her in turn. As days went by, the human being suspected the tiger of having an eye to eat the mother at her death. So, the human being and the angel sent the tiger to the field on the day the mother died. On his return the tiger did not see his mother since they had already buried her. After the mother's death they dispersed in different directions, and the human being decided to work in an open field. The tiger went into the jungle and the angel into the dark. In yet another story, the first human beings were created by God and thereafter destroyed by a flood due to sin and wickedness. The present humans are the descendants of a couple that survived because of their virtuous life.

Khasi

The Khasis inhabit the Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya. Many hold the view that they are an offshoot of the Monkhmer branch of the Austro-Asiatic stock. They hold the view that the earth had 5 children when God created heaven. The children of the earth are the sun, moon, water, air and fire. All the constellations have their origin in the sun and the moon. All things that cover the earth have their origin in water, air and fire. The mother earth asked God for a ruler of the beautiful world. God selected and sent seven tribes to the earth. The Khasis claim themselves as the people of the seven huts and seven nests. God made an agreement that He would be in touch with the Khasis as long as they led good lives. The symbol of this truth was a tree. An evil spirit from the sea plotted the downfall of the human beings. It convinced the people that the symbolic tree would menace them by filling the entire earth if it were not cut down. So the people cut down the tree at the suggestion of the evil spirit. As it fell down it shook

the entire earth; and wherever its sap fell it turned the sand into coal. In this way, humans brought disaster upon themselves, losing God and turning life into ashes. But God took pity on the humans again and came down to help them start afresh their life when the *cock* interceded for humans. Because of the concern of the cock for the fallen humans, God gave the cock the gift of heralding each day by crowing. It is considered as a mediator between God and the humans. It lays down its neck for the humans. This is often interpreted as substituting human sacrifices by offering the cock which God accepted through a covenant. God also taught the humans how to till the land and produce food, and the rites and ceremonies that go with the daily tasks. God would not talk to humans face to face, but only through signs and symbols used in rituals. God also promised humans that He would make His will known through the entrails of the cock and in the shells of the hen's egg.

Adi

The Adis are a hill people constituting 20% of the total population of Arunachal Pradesh. In the past they were known as Abors. The curiosity of the Adis to know the creator and controller of the universe, led them to invent a number of myths concerning the origin of the universe. They are embodied in the ballads called *abangs* from which we know that all beings of the universe have been created by a supernatural power called *Sedi*. He is the creator of gods and goddesses who in turn gave birth to numerous spirits that control the various spheres of the universe. The entire universe is the physical embodiment of *Sedi* who manifests Himself in and through the earth. The earth, in fact, is His physical image with dual name *Sedi-Melo* (*Sedi*=the earth and *Melo*=the sky). *Sedi* has also a pair searching eyes with which He keeps vigil on the humanity. The two eyes are *Donyi* (the Sun) and *Seeching* (the earth) as creators. After the creation, *Donyi* and *Polo* (moon) went to the sky and in course of time they became gods. *Donyi Polo* (the Sun-Moon god) comes next to *Sedi* or *Jimi*, the Creator who remains hidden after creation, and so no sacrifice is offered to His name. Hence, the Adis give popular divine dignity to *Donyi Polo*, who is regarded as protector and saviour. *Donyi Polo* physically and spiritually remains with the Adis. Some believe that it is a single god with a double personality, with functions of the sun and the moon. Some others believe that they are two, *Donyi* being the husband of *Polo*.

Bodo

The Bodos in Assam believe that originally God, *Aham Guru*, created two birds: one male and the other female. When the female bird laid three eggs, there was a voice from *Aham Guru* that after a period of time 3 different lives would be born from the eggs. The female bird sat on the eggs but there was no sign of life even after thousands of years. Then she broke one of the eggs out of curiosity and found nothing in it. Suddenly there came a voice from heaven asking her not to break the other two eggs lest there could be the destruction of the world. As she spread the broken pieces of the egg at the command of *Aham Guru*, evil spirits, ghosts, various insects, plants and trees were born. But these newly born creatures roamed about helplessly without finding any food for them. Then the *Aham Guru* created the earth with a small quantity of soil. That is why the area of land is smaller than the area of water. After many years, humans were born from the other two eggs. There are also other myths among the Bodos which explain the origin of gods and humans.

Mizo

The Mizos are in Mizoram which is with the exception of a small portion of plains, full of hill ranges. Etymologically, the word 'Mizo' means Hillman. The Mizos believe in the existence of one Supreme Being or Spirit who is the Creator of everything, gracious and merciful. The Supreme Spirit is called *Pathian* (God). There are also numerous other good spirits that belong to the family of *Pathian*. They are: *Pu Vana*, *Khua Nu*, *Van Chung Nula*, *Khuavang*, *Vanhrika*, *Sakhua*, and *Lasi*. *Pu Vana* means 'grand-father-heaven.' He is probably the grand-father of *Pathian's* family. He is believed to be the God of nature with power over thunder and lightening. *Kua Nu* is the wife of *Pathian*, considered as a goddess. *Nu* signifies the feminine character and *pa* refers to masculine form. Hence, as *Pathian* stands for God it is natural to conceive *Kua Nu* as goddess. She always blesses humankind as a mother does. *Van Chung Nula*, the daughter of *Pathian* is the damsel in the family of *Pathian* and is the goddess of rain and water. *Kuavang* is a good spirit inferior to *Pathian*, a spirit concerned with the affairs of humans. In marriage, when the bride reaches the groom's house the priest chants a prayer, addressed to *Khuavang*, wishing the couple long life and many children. He is the creator of all humanity, the spirit of kindness and greatness. *Vanhrika* is a good spirit concerned with science and learning. *Sakhua* is concerned with the destiny of a clan to its ancestors. As there are many clans of Mizos, so there are many *Sakhua* spirits too. *Lasi* is the spirit governing wild animals and hunting. It is a good spirit, a female spirit, invoked for success in hunting. Apart from the good spirits, the Mizos also believe in the existence of numerous evil spirits that cause misery and suffering to humans.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) In the Khasi creation account, what was the tree symbolizing? Why did the people cut it down? What was its consequence? Has it got any message for the modern world?

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2) How do the Nagas explain the phenomenon of earthquake? How does the Ao creation account illustrate that a human being has both a good will and a bad will?

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4.4 CREATION OF HEAVENLY BODIES

The names tribals give to the stars are those of animals, birds and household implements, such as, dove, deer, cot, fire-pot, etc. When they saw the stars, they detected with a sense of humour similarities with objects and situations they were familiar with. What Hoffmann has observed about the Mundas equally applies to the Uraons too. The names of the stars have not been chosen to honour any deified ancestor, any hero or any eminent person of historical importance. They do not represent any mythical being or any particular idea. They are more projections, so to say, on the starry realm, of the main features of the tribal daily life, and especially of their work as farmers. The Mundas looking up dreamily, have discovered in the grouping of certain stars as likeness to episodes of their own life and have on this ground imagined the same episodes as occurring in the lives of the stars which they regard as living beings (Hoffmann 1950: 1917-1925). There are altogether 8-stars which are known to the Uraons according to their tradition as given below:

Panrki Bi (Dove's eggs): *Dharmes* began to make the plough and yoke for the boy and girl, the first ancestors of human beings. With them they were to till the earth and bring it under cultivation. It took Him 7-days and 7-nights to make this implement. His beloved got impatient with this delay. Therefore, she sent a tiger to frighten Him so that He might be reminded of her and come back home soon. To protect Himself He threw a handful of wooden chips upon the tiger, and sent His *Barwa* (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.

Dharmes set about making the plough again. He saw a dove sitting on her eggs in the nest. He aimed his hammer at the dove and threw it on the dove but it missed the dove which flew away from the nest. He next threw his file (agricultural tool) at it but again He missed it. This dove became the *Sirius* (a bright star) and the double eggs, *Double Stars* (Campion 1980: 4).

Mora Mugra (Club to make a grain store bail): This consists of a group of seven stars which together look like a club. As mentioned above the club was thrown by *Dharmes* at the dove to hit it but missed it and became the *Pleiades* (*Ibid.*). The number of stars is less on the side of the grip but there are more stars on the opposite side.

Har Juwat (Plough and yoke stars): In the account above, *Dharmes* threw His file (steel tool) on the dove and missed it. This file became the *Orion* (Tirkey 1989: 57). These are three stars of Orion's belt. The *Har Juwat* denotes three shining stars which appear in one line, another two stars astride one end of the line as to give the appearance that the plough and yoke are tied together for the farmer to take them to the field or carry back home. It is still a common practice among the above mentioned tribal farmers and their other peasant neighbours.

Khati Pawa (Legs of a cot): The four stars forming a great quadrilateral space, suggesting the frame of a big bed. Literally, this suggests a group of 4-stars which resemble the 4-legs of a cot (*khatia* = cot, *pawa* = legs). According to *Kurukh* (Uraon) tribal tradition, this cot was used by *Dharmes* while working hard in the field (Kujur 1989: 225).

Bursi Binko (Fire prepared to warm up): In the middle of the above mentioned quadrilateral space, there are two small stars, that is, *Upsilon* and *Tau*. This is a group of 2-small stars with feeble light (*Ibid.*). *Bursi* means a fire pot which is generally used in winter to warm up the room and the bed. According to *Kurukh* (Uraon) tribal tradition, these two stars were used to heat up the cot of *Dharmes*. They are seen in the middle of *khati-pawa* (Great Bear). All these stars have always been a great inspiration and strength to the Uraon and other tribals sitting during long winter nights round the fire in their fields and threshing floor watching their crops and paddy and meditating and talking over the wonders of the works of God on the earth and in the sky. By the position of the *Har Juwat* in the sky, they usually determine the hours of the night.

Mak Binko (Deer star): It is the bright star which can be seen just after sunset. The *kurukh* (Uraon) tribals say that this star gives light to the deer for grazing in the evening. As this star disappears they return to their hideouts. Most probably the above tribals named this brilliant star thus because it helped them to hunt deer in the evening.

Gai Chhaur (Cows path): It is the path which was used by the cattle of *Dharmes*, when he took them out to the fields.

Bhurka or Bij Binko (Star at dawn): This star is anxiously awaited in the morning about 3 o'clock when it is still dark and men and women get ready for their different daily activities.

The Sun, Moon and Stars

a. Munda and Kurukh Account

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 (Van Exem 1982: 35-36).

b. Santal Account

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 the evil deeds of his children *Sing Chando* blazed with fierce heat till they and beasts died. The *Nida Chando* 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* feared that *Sing Chando* would again get angry with the new human beings and destroy them. Therefore, she made a plan to trick him. She covered up all her children with a large basket and smeared her mouth and lips with red and going to *Sing Chando* told him that she had eaten up every one of her children and proposed that he should now eat up his children. At first *Sing Chando* declined to believe her but she pointed to her lips and said that they were red with the blood of her

children. So, *Sing Chando* was convinced and agreed to eat up his children except two that were saved to become the Morning and Evening Stars. At night *Nida Chando* let out her children from under the basket. Seeing them alive, *Sing Chando* flew to *Nida Chando* in anger and the children at the sight of him scattered in all directions. That is why the stars are now spread all over the sky. Although the stars escaped, *Sing Chando* could not restrain his anger and cut *Nida Chando* into two. That is the reason why the Moon waxes and wanes. Before this she was always full like the Sun (Pereira 2007: 558-559).

c. *Kurukh (Uraon) Account*

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/banyan 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 (Tirkey 1989: 56). From that time onwards we have the different phases of the moon. The shadow of the mango/banyan 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.

4.5 DETERMINING TIME

For *Kurukhs* (Uraons) the time and hours of a day are governed by the rising and setting of the sun. Thus morning begins with *cock crowing* and evening begins with *cattle coming home*. Before noon time is called *lazy man's noon*. Noon time is known as *lunch time*. The time before sunset is called *parrots time* probably because that time parrots are seen flying in small and big group formations. The time just before this is called *time for putting rice cooking pots* on the oven. Night time begins with *supper*.

For tribals a month is determined according to the waxing and waning of the moon. The time between the crescent and full moon is a fortnight, and from full moon to its disappearance is another fortnight. One fortnight is called *one moon*. The sun, moon and stars are a kind living beings, but they are not considered as gods. The stars are the children of the moon. The sun has no children because he ate them up. Tribals know that epileptic patients are affected by the full moon. However, they understand it as a natural effect.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is the tribal characteristic of giving names to stars?

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2) Explain the phenomenon of different phases of the Moon?

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4.6 LET US SUM UP

The tribal conception of the universe and its origin is harmonious and nature oriented. That human beings are part of the cosmos is what comes out very strongly in tribal cosmologies and cosmogonies.

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School of Interdisciplinary and

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Block 3

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PHILOSOPHY

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Agrarian/Pastoral life of Tribals

UNIT 2

Displacement and Migration of Tribals

UNIT 3

Resistance and Revolutions against Foreign Powers

UNIT 4

Identity Crisis and Solutions

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Tribe is a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous with no specialization of functions ruled by tribal officers hereditary or otherwise, united in language or dialect recognizing social distance with other tribes or castes. Some of the core values of the Tribal communities are the following: 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 and basic honesty. Most of the tribal population in the forests of India lives in areas that are rich in natural resources. The rivers are our brothers. They quench our thirst. They carry our canoes and feed our children. So they give to the rivers the kindness they would give any brother. Collective decision making is their characteristic feature. Since tribal communities had their ancient practice of community problem-solving disrupted, decision-making often occurred outside of the tribal community. Our sacred re-tribalization for the new millennium doesn't require us to go back in time to simpler, more elemental ways. Our yearning for the sacred in daily life is the connective tissue that holds our lives together. This is the essence of tribal consciousness.

Today land alienation, marginalization of tribals is the main problem of adivasis. The tribals were called '*rakshas*' (demons), '*asuras*', and what not. They were slaughtered in large numbers, and the survivors and their descendants were degraded, humiliated, and all kinds of atrocities inflicted on them for centuries. They were deprived of their lands, and pushed into forests and hills where they eke out a miserable existence of poverty, illiteracy, disease, etc. And now efforts are being made by some people to deprive them even of their forest and hill land where they are living, and the forest produce on which they survive. Deprived of the forests and resources they traditionally depended on and sometimes coerced to pay taxes, many *adivasis* were forced to borrow at usurious rates from moneylenders, often the *zamindars* themselves. When they were unable to pay, that forced them to become bonded laborers for the *zamindars*. Taking into account such a situation, the block analyzes the political and economic aspects of tribal philosophy.

Unit 1 tries to describe the human and tribal evolution from historical perspective. This leads to the discussion on the agrarian and pastoral aspects of tribal life that discloses the tribal life and worldview in close association with nature, land and cattle.

Unit 2 discusses elaborately on two major sociological phenomena, displacement and migration of the tribals. Displacement is more than physical dislocation. It is being uprooted and dismemberment of the socio-economic webs of life with traumatic experiences. It results into a spiral of impoverishment. Displacement threatens the existence and identity of people. There is a process of dispossession in displacement. There is an inter-relation between displacement and migration. Migration is not a new phenomenon and it is not going to end in the near future.

Units 3 and 4 captures the historical account of tribal resistance and revolutions against the non-tribal foreign powers, that leads to a discussion on tribal identity crisis. The case of tribals of Chotanagpur and Santals are taken as a concrete expressions of such resistance and revolutions against such powers. It would be applied to other tribals in their own concrete specific situations. Encounter of tribal societies with outside incoming non-tribals resulted in organizational changes along with socio-economic and cultural disruptions. This specifically has a great impact on the tribal identity.

UNIT 1 AGRARIAN AND PASTORAL LIFE OF TRIBALS

Contents

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Historical Evolutions
- 1.3 Agrarian and Pastoral Settlements
- 1.4 Agricultural Settlements
- 1.5 Philosophical and theological Implications
- 1.6 Pastoral Tribal Communities
- 1.7 Socio-economic Conditions of the Pastoralists
- 1.8 Pastoralist confound Progressivism
- 1.9 Socio-political and Ideological Underpinnings
- 1.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.11 Key Words
- 1.12 Further Readings and References

1.0 OBJECTIVES

- To know the human and tribal evolution from historical perspective
- To familiarize with agrarian and pastoral aspects of tribal life
- After having known the agrarian and pastoral aspects of tribal life, to see the tribal life and worldview in close association with nature, land and cattle.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The present day understanding about agrarian and pastoral life of tribals has not come out of a blue moon. It has been a gradual process of growth and development over the years. It is also a known fact that many of the traditional communities still hold on to the traditional ways of sustenance and agricultural practices. Many agrarian and pastoral communities live in modern India practicing a very ancient form of pastoral and agrarian ways. Thus tradition and modernity walk hand in hand as far as the agrarian and pastoral life of tribal communities are concerned.

Historical Evolutions

History is always a fusion of tradition and modernity (contemporary). In history one always finds a connection between the past and present. Therefore the study of tribal agrarian and pastoral life in present will invariably lead us to the historical developments of human and tribal life on earth.

Burton Stein in his 'History of India' states, human communities are thought to have inhabited the Indian subcontinent for 500,000 years, according to stone age sites found scattered between the far south of Kerala and Tamil Nadu and the Soan and Beas river valleys in northern Punjab, and from one coast to the other; estimates of dates for some of these range between 400,000 to 150,000 years ago. So - called 'middle Stone Age' societies appeared between 40,000 and 10,000 years ago, followed by those using microlithic tools, first found around 15,000 years ago. Some microlithic communities overlap the first neolithic communities by around 7000 BCE, and

both types of cultures continue to be found in most parts of the subcontinent along with hunting - gathering and nomadic pastoral economies; often their activities have been caught in rock art, such as the examples found at Bhimbetka, in Madhya Pradesh, a middle stone age as well as a microlithic site, and occupied in later times as well. Other late Stone Age sites have also been identified, half of them scattered around the continental portions of the subcontinent and the rest found in various parts of the peninsula, or southern extension.

Around 7,000 BCE neolithic communities began to be founded in the valleys draining the mountains which separated the Indian subcontinent from Afghanistan and continental Asia. Before 4000 BCE, hunter - gatherers had merged into more complex and advanced communities of farmers and artisanal specialists in settlements of circular mud - covered bamboo huts. The earliest known of these are found in Baluchistan, with similar communities appearing shortly after in the Gangetic plain and on the Deccan plateau. There, archaeologists have discovered neolithic assemblages: domesticated cattle, sheep, goats and plants, including rice. These Stone Age cultures merged into Iron Age communities by 1000 BCE, again divided between northern and southern India.

1.2 AGRARIAN AND PASTORAL SETTLEMENTS

Between 1000 and 500 BCE iron tools and weapons provided the technological foundations for the expansion of agricultural communities over the entire basin of the Ganges. One important consequence of the replacement of copper and bronze implements by stronger iron weapons and tools was the greater ease in removing the forest cover from the banks of the Ganges, so that these fertile lands could be planted. Much of the tree cover was also removed by burning.

The supersession of bronze by iron and pastoralism by sedentary agriculture laid the foundation for a new period of political consolidation beginning around 1000 BCE. Numerous small cities in the Gangetic valley reflect the twin processes of agricultural development and state formation.

The opening of the vast, fertile Gangetic plain to agrarian exploitation can be glimpsed in the post-Harappan archaeological record, to which has been added the rich documentation of human existence. From both come details of settlements by horsemen with iron weapons imposing their rule over other peoples, first in the Punjab and the western Gangetic plain and later over the whole of the plain to the Gangetic delta in Bengal. It has been a gradual change rather than the cataclysm implied by the oft-used term 'Aryan invasion'. Archaeology and the Vedic documents permit two simultaneous changes to be traced, one to a fully settled agrarian economy and the other from clans with a lineage - based society to the more complex social and political forms that have marked all subsequent developments in India and made it distinctive.

1.3 AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENTS

Later on came agriculture and human beings settled down along rivers to grow crops. An agrarian way of life is more congenial for individual ownership of wealth than in this context was land and cattle. And once the qualities of individual greed and self-seeking were born there was

no going back for them. In an agricultural society man's wealth grew phenomenally, as compared to what it was earlier, and along with the growth of settled agriculture were developed professions like plough-making, pottery, chariot-building, etc.

A significant and far-reaching shift in human subsistence and lifestyle was to be brought about in areas where crop farming and cultivation were first developed: the previous reliance on an essentially nomadic hunter-gatherer subsistence technique or pastoral transhumance was at first supplemented, and then increasingly replaced by, a reliance upon the foods produced from cultivated lands. These developments are also believed to have greatly encouraged the growth of settlements, since it may be supposed that the increased need to spend more time and labor in tending crop fields required more localized dwellings. This trend would continue into the Bronze Age, eventually giving rise to towns, and later cities and states whose larger populations could be sustained by the increased productivity from cultivated lands. One potential benefit of the development and increasing sophistication of farming technology was the possibility of producing surplus crop yields, in other words, food supplies in excess of the immediate needs of the community. Surpluses could be stored for later use, or possibly traded for other necessities or luxuries. Agricultural life afforded securities that pastoral life could not, and sedentary farming populations grew faster than nomadic communities.

However, early farmers were also adversely affected in times of famine, such as may be caused by drought or pests. In instances where agriculture had become the predominant way of life, the sensitivity to these shortages could be particularly acute; affecting agrarian populations to an extent that otherwise may not have been routinely experienced by prior hunter-gatherer communities. Nevertheless, agrarian communities generally proved successful, and their growth and the expansion of territory under cultivation continued.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is historical evolution of human communities in Indian subcontinent?

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2) How did the agrarian and pastoral communities evolved?

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1.4 PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Agricultural cycles, crops, celebrations and human life coincide with the nature and cycle of the seasons. The Tribals of Central India especially the Gonds, Santals, Hos, Uraons, Mundas, Kharias have similar type of socio-cultural practice that coincides with the agricultural and natural cycle. These feasts and festivals are the results of their long experience of relating with the land, water, forest and supernatural forces.

The agrarian tribal communities identified their existence in relation to land, forest and ecological ambience, for their meaningful living. They saw their life cycle coinciding with the agricultural cycle throughout the year. Thus they intuned their life, celebrations, meaning system and philosophy of life based on the natural phenomena.

Socio-cultural celebrations (Feasts and Festivals) of Adivasis in the agrarian communities

Feasts and celebrations in the tribal world are beautiful fusion of tribal work, worship and celebration. They involve the whole village community. These feasts are seasonal celebrations which are closely linked to agricultural operations and as such they reflect the harmony that exists between the tribe, nature and their religion. Celebration of these feasts help them to make a smooth transition at every stage in the annual cycle of its simple economic pursuits, such as food gathering, hunting, cattle tending and agriculture. These feasts are celebrated to share in life and prosperity in the perspective of the harmoniously ordered cosmological whole, with the cosmic elements and God. The main feasts celebrated chiefly by the *adivasis* of Chotanagpur tribal regions are-

(1) Phaggu/Phagua:- *Phagua* feast is celebrated on the full Moon day of *Phalgun* (February-March). *Phaggu* is related with hunting and food gathering. It is the New Year Day for the Uraons and a few other tribal communities in central India. '*Sikar Candi*' (a deity for hunting) is propitiated for a good hunt. *Phaggu* is symbolic celebration of end of evil and the beginning of a new life. The heap of the thatched grass is set on fire and the *Pahan* cuts the branch, saying, "Let all sickness and suffering of the past year pass away like this severed branch." Only after celebrating *Phaggu* the *adivasis* of Chotanagpur can start gathering new leaves, flowers, fruits, roots and start ploughing and manuring their fields.

(2) Sarhul/Xaddi:- On the Full Moon day of *Cait* (March-April) *Sarhul* is Celebrated by the entire tribal groups of Chotanagpur (CNP) with the aim of securing good rain, good harvest and general well being of all. It is the greatest annual feast for the Uraons, Mundas, Kharias and Hos. It is also New Year Day for the Kharias, Hos and Santals. On this day all the spirits are propitiated at the *Sarna* (sacred grove). Another purpose of celebrating *Sarhul* is to secure favours from the spirits, malevolent or benevolent. *Sarhul* is the most important feast of the Chotanagpur tribals. This feast is celebrated when the *Sal/sarjom* (*sorea robusta*) tree is in full blossom. The *Sarhul* offering is made at *Sarna* which is considered as the dwelling place of *Chala Paccho* or *Sarna Budhia*. On this day special honour is given to the spirit *Chala Paccho* because according to some myth this spirit is the spirit of a widow at whose house *Dharmes* himself stayed when he came to destroy the *Asurs* (evil doers) in the form of a sore-filled boy. This feast is also observed as a marriage

between the sky and the earth. Only after marriage the earth is supposed to grow new vegetation. On this occasion special prayer is offered to the Supreme Being (Dharmes, Singbonga, Ponomosor, Chando Baba, Marang Buru) as the following, "Here below are the punches, Dharmes 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 unknowingly we have offended the spirits, restrain them. Overlook our mistakes."

(3) Dhanbuni (first sowing of the seeds): It is the symbolic inauguration of the sowing of the seeds when the people pray to their ancestors and Creator God to get abundant blessings on their forthcoming crops in the year. **(4) Hariari (Bangari/Batauli):-** In the month of *Asar Pahan/Naigas/Kalo/Naeke* prays to the Creator God for blessings over green plants and for their protection from all harm. **(5) Kadleta/Kadlota-** On the 10th day of the Lunar Month of *Bhado* (Aug.-Sept), this feast is celebrated to ensure the protection of the crops not only from birds, beasts and insects but also from the 'evil mouth and evil eyes' of the wicked people. During this feast the village deities and Supreme Being are offered sacrifices in order that they may protect the standing crop from all harms. *Dandakatta* sacrifice is offered to the Creator God and His blessings are invoked upon the crops with the following prayer - "May the crops ripe and come out well; and may we reap a full harvest and may nothing untoward happen." **(6) Karam:-** Karam is celebrated on the 11th day of the Lunar Month of *Bhado* (Aug-Sept).- *Karam* is celebrated to ensure the protection of the standing crops in the fields, for the welfare of the offspring and for the young maidens who are preparing themselves for marriage in near future. This feast is very symbolic celebration of the young tribal maidens who grow to a marriageable age and are ready to bear children as the crop is ready to sprout. This feast shows another beautiful correlation between nature and human beings. Symbolizing productivity and fecundity the young maidens themselves stand for the good of the tribe as they always did in the past. **(7) Nayakhani/Tusgo/Jom Nawa/Neodem:-** The celebration of *Nayakhani* starts from the New Moon Day onwards in the Lunar Month of *Kunwar* (September-October). On this day tribals take the first fruits of the year. They also venerate the ancestors for giving the gift of life, land and art of cultivation. This feast shows the living inter communion between the living members and the community of ancestors. **(8) Sohrai/Sohrae:-** Sohrai is celebrated on the eve of the New Moon day in *Katik* (October-November). This feast is celebrated to show special respect and gratitude to the cattle. Cattle is a great help for ploughing and for many other agricultural activities. Thus cattle, crop and children are highly given priority in tribal life and world. *Gorea* spirit (cowshed spirit) is propitiated on this day. **(9) Khalihani:-** (Lunar month of *Aghan*, Nov.-Dec). It is the last agricultural feast of the *adivasis*. Prayers and sacrifices are offered in thanksgiving to *Dharmes/Singbonga*, and the threshing of the crops begins. The village spirits are offered sacrifices for being favourable during the agricultural operations. Blood sacrifice is offered to the spirits and to the Supreme Being. **(10) Maghe:-** Maghe is celebrated on the 4th day in the lunar month of *Magh* (January-February). This feast is celebrated to give honour to the house-servants who help the tribals in all sorts of agricultural operations throughout the year.

All these annual feasts of tribals are intimately linked with the annual agricultural cycle and are centered around 'the good of family, the good of the clan and the good of the tribe which is their highest good.' The details of celebrations and number of feasts may differ from community to community but the meaning system behind all the celebration is the same. Tribals commonly share

the same type of worldview with regard to Supreme Being, spirits, agricultural cycle, ancestors, human and nature.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What are the different feasts the agrarian tribal community celebrates round the year?

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2) What is the relationship between tribals, land, nature and celebrations?

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1.5 PASTORAL TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

Pastoral tribal communities trace back their historical link to the days of Mehrgarh in Afghanistan. The human communities as they moved towards the Indian subcontinent, they bifurcated principally into two communities, one agrarian and another pastoral. However most of the anthropologists are of the opinion that human societies are most often organized according to their primary means of subsistence. They have identified hunter-gatherer societies, nomadic pastoral societies, horticulturalist or simple farming societies, and intensive agricultural societies. These are also called as civilizations.

Pastoralism is a slightly more efficient form of subsistence than the hunter-gatherer societies. Rather than searching for food on a daily basis, members of a pastoral society rely on domesticated herd animals to meet their food. Pastoralists live a nomadic life, moving their herds from one pasture to another. Because their food supply is far more reliable, pastoral societies can support larger populations. Since there are food surpluses, fewer people are needed to produce food.

Definition of Pastoralism

Pastoralism is a form of subsistence. In the pastoralism the 'Pastoral societies are' defined as 'those that have a disproportionate subsistence emphasis on herding domesticated livestock.' It is like many other forms of subsistence like- horticulture, agrarian or industrial. The most important defining criterion of pastoralism perhaps is the organization of community life around the needs of the herds. Typical herding societies are "nomadic." People live in portable tents or

temporary structures and move considerable distances from pasture to pasture according to the dictates of ecological circumstances and the needs of the beasts.

Pastoral societies are theoretically important because they exhibit non-progressive evolution. At the same time this society is capable of teaching other human communities how to adjust their life style according to the changing ecological circumstances. Pastoral societies played an important role during the agrarian era and illustrate some important ecological/evolutionary processes. Evolutionists of the progressivist (orthogenetic) type, who believe that evolution has some inevitable tendency in the direction of more complex and probably morally superior societies, are inclined to downplay pastoral societies because they tend to contradict with the inevitability of progress and change.

In India the pastoralists can be identified in the most arid parts of the Thar Desert on the Indo-Pakistan border and the sub-alpine and alpine zones above 3200 meters in the Himalayas, which can only be utilized seasonally by means of pastoral strategies. But in most parts of India, pastoral and agrarian land use strategies are spatially integrated and interdependent activities pursued within the same landscape. Besides breeding their own livestock, pastoralists also take care of the animals of other communities, fulfilling the role of village cowherd.

Geographically, nomadic pastoralism is most prevalent in the drylands of western India (Thar Desert) and on the Deccan Plateau, as well as in the mountainous regions of North India (Himalayas). Types of livestock kept in mobile pastoral systems include buffaloes, sheep, goats, camels, cattle, donkeys, yaks and even ducks are raised under transhumant conditions. But there are also more sedentary forms of pastoralism, represented, for instance, by the buffalo breeding of Todas in the Ghat region of Southern India.

Pastoralist communities in India

There are various types of pastoralist communities across India with a vast difference at times. The Himalayan pastoralists are different from their counterparts in the Southern and Western part of the country. Some of the main pastoralist communities in India are- Ahirs, Bhutia, Gujjar, Ghosi, Ranghar of North India, Baghelmainly, Muslim Gaddi, Gaderiain in UP and MP, Bakarwal found in Jammu and Kashmir, Bharwad, Maldhari, Charan, Rabari, Raika in Gujarat and Rajasthan, Bodla, Chisti, Wattu found in Pakistan and Punjab, Dhangar found in Maharashtra and MP, Gaddi, Kinnauras of Himachal Pradesh, Gvala in Bangladesh, Kuruba, Kurma, Todas found in South India, Sherpas in Nepal etc. The majority of them are connected with particular livestock species by their myth of origin, tracing their descent to an ancestor who was created by God for the purpose of taking care of these animals. For instance, the Raika/Rebari are linked to the camel, the Charan in Gujarat are associated with cattle, and the Bharvad keep mostly small stock. Based on this heritage, these pastoralists are endowed with a special sense of responsibility for the welfare of their livestock. Among the pastoral communities many communities fall under the Hindu caste structure.

Socio-economic Conditions of the Pastoralists

Pastoralists are viewed as poor people in the Indian context. In government records, publications and documents, pastoralists are regarded as marginalized, backward and poor populations. The dispersed population, remote habitations, cultural uniqueness, low literacy rates and migratory

lifestyles have contributed to this perception of the state. In the Himalayas, they are a low priority group and there has been no conscious attempt by the state or any other institution to assess their poverty status. There could be the following reasons for low priority-

- The socio-economic status of pastoralists in Himalayas is seriously under-documented.
- Their mobility and ownership of unconventional property assets, i.e. animals have made it difficult to assess their poverty status with the help of existing poverty indicators.
- The only method to assess poverty status of Himalayan pastoralists would be through physically culling out from the district census data and compare it with the existing poverty indicators.

In the Western dry lands the pastoralists are placed in a respectable position in comparison with the lower caste groups in the region. Thus they rank far above the untouchable castes. However, they are commonly believed to represent the most backward and conservative social group in the region.

1.6 PASTORALIST CONFOUND PROGRESSIVISM

In social evolutionary thinking, the nomadic lifestyle has traditionally been treated as less civilized, less productive and more degrading than a settled lifestyle. This cultural bias is clearly manifested in many of the colonial, historical and governmental documents and seems to have many policy level implications for the Himalayan pastoralists. Pastoralists continue to be treated as a problem for administrators in terms of collecting taxes or controlling the population or even to plan any developmental programmes. Due to the problem of their cultural stereotyping, small population and migratory lifestyle, the Himalayan pastoralists are ignored in the various policy-level decisions. Non-participation and ignorance of their due rights and status in the Indian state have seriously marginalized these communities. Their political marginalization is also visible across all the Himalayan states where most of the pastoral groups are not vocal about their concerns. Besides the above mentioned problems other major threats to livelihood faced by the pastoralist groups in Himalayas are- (a) reduced pastures and (b) disturbed migration routes.

In the Western Region too the pastoralists are facing serious threat to their livelihood. The pastures have considerably decreased and the forests are declared prohibited area from grazing. Thus shrinking of grazing area is the most serious threatening problem in the Western region. The pastoralists become the victim of agriculturally centered development strategies of the government. The expansion of irrigated agriculture, expansion of cultivation into former wastelands, land reservation for military base, Wild Life Sanctuaries, expansion of urbanization and industrialization are making the pastoral way of life more difficult. However, the secluded and nomadic society has something important to teach to the rest of the human community.

Environmentally specialized societies

Pastoralism was for a long time a very successful adaptation to grassland and desert. The existence of extensive tracts of temperate grassland, subtropical desert, or tropical savanna, combined with the technology of animal husbandry, lead to the development of pastoral societies that compete and very effectively with more “advanced” agrarian societies for these open country environments, despite being considerably more “primitive” in terms of complexity of social and political organization.

Pastoralists have shown themselves very resilient, they have intact social structures and mechanism for mutual sharing of resources and their livestock also represents an encashable asset. Although odds seem stacked against them there is some hope that with increasing international emphasis on the conservation of biodiversity, pastoralists might be able to benefit from recognition of their role in conserving livestock genetic diversity, valuable indigenous breeds and indigenous knowledge about coping mechanisms for environmental stresses like drought and floods. However based on their thorough understanding of their traditional production systems, indigenous knowledge, traditional strategies and practices, the concerned agencies could empower the pastoralists and maintain their capacity to produce food on marginal lands.

Technological Adaptations

The technology of pastoralism is largely just the animal husbandry component of the prevailing horticultural and agrarian technology, more or less thoroughly shorn of its plant cultivation component. On the level of subsistence, pastoralists are merely farmers who specialize in herding animals like sheep, goats, cattle, horses, llamas, yaks, and so forth. Normally, this specialization includes a good deal of specialized knowledge about animal husbandry, pasture, and land transportation technology, exceeding that of their farming neighbors, but not dramatically. Contrariwise, although many pastoralists also farm, they are generally not the experts as their neighbors are.

Few pastoral people subsist entirely on animal products. Most probably they derive half or more of their calories from plant products. These may derive from growing crops, from trade in animal products with settled agricultural foreigners, by extending services such as caravan operation for pay, by having agricultural slaves or clients, and by raid or threat of raids. The human diet is greatly enriched by eating relatively small amounts of meat and animal fats. Leather, horn, wool, and animals for traction are also valuable. Thus animal specialists are often motivated to trade much of their valuable animal production for grains, crafts and manufactures, luxuries and so forth. Settled peoples often pay tribute to pastoralists to avoid raids, or pay some pastoralists to protect them from other pastoralists. The role of pastoralists as traders best developed in those places and periods when caravan routes were important.

1.7 SOCIO-POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS

The Pastoral societies possess a close economic symbiosis with state level polities. Pastoralists though, are politically not very important but their contributions to the day today human needs are inevitable. The nomadic nature of pastoralism was made use of for transportation of goods and services to other parts of the country. Thus trade and commerce flourished in the remote and difficult places through the free movement of the pastoralists. In the past trade through the pastoralists became an avenue for ideas, and religions like Islam and Christianity to spread across the regions.

Though pastoralism is considered very traditional and outdated means of livelihood in today's competitive world, it has a lasting value and philosophy of life. There are threats of perceptions where pastoralism is considered as a non-sustainable economic process and a greater productive efficiency is assumed for capital and technology-intensive world. Such tendencies can

discourage pastoralists way of sustenance and nomadic pastoralism. In the Himalayan regions resources are scanty and pastoralism is seen as traditional and viable means of sustenance in the absence of any other alternative.

The new perspective on pastoral development looks at the relevance and effectiveness of western concepts which have been applied in developing countries. There is now an increased appreciation for the complexity and ecological economic efficacy of traditional pastoral systems. It provides hope that the vast indigenous knowledge herders possess will be better understood and used in designing new interventions. Greater awareness of the need to understand existing pastoral systems should also help ensure that the goals and needs of pastoralists are incorporated into new programmes and the local herders become active participants in the development process.

1.8 LET US SUM UP

Pastoralism is in crisis globally, both as a result of human-made and natural constraints, and internal and external influences. The existence and problems of pastoralists in India have barely filtered into the consciousness of the general public and policy makers. If there is any awareness at all, then pastoralism is regarded as a way of life that is backward and doomed. It is this attitude that requires change. Pastoralism needs to be given recognition and promoted as a land use strategy that is ecologically and economically appropriate in certain marginal areas and basically has the same value in some areas as cultivation and wildlife conservation in others, besides providing positive reinforcements to them.

Moreover, pastoralists make an important contribution to the conservation of biodiversity through their sustainable use of indigenous livestock germplasm. Making planners, policy makers and advisors recognize this situation would mean that a major part of the battle was won. This calls for a change in perspective of the people. The geographical and occupational differences keep them away from the ordinary hustle and bustle of city and people. The pastoralists essentially occupy different spheres that are very far apart and not at all interconnected. An attempt to reduce the gap and foster a systematic interaction with pastoralist community can create better atmosphere and human interaction where no one is deprived of the social, human and national development. Like the pastoralist community the agrarian states are typically very conservative compared to the modern technologically advanced states. But as far as sustainability and stability, ecological sensitivity and interdependence between human and nature is concerned the agrarian and the pastoralist communities have a lot to teach the rest of the human communities.

Agrarian and Pastoral life of tribal communities have a very long history to hold on. The origin and evolution of such communities can be traced back to the days of human civilizations of pre-Harrappan and Mohen-e-Jodaro era in and around Baluchistan and Mediterranean civilizations. The historical evidences prove that agrarian and pastoral tribal communities have gradually moved towards Indian sub continent of which they became the original inhabitants. Both the agrarian and Pastoralist communities have developed a life style and meaning system most suited to their daily needs and simple understanding. In the course of their symbiotic living with nature

the agrarian and pastoralist tribal communities followed the course of nature through land, forest, waters and ecological surroundings. They also saw the Creator and Supreme Being in relation to their experiences of the natural and supernatural forces. Thus both the communities have developed a more sustainable, stable and ecologically more sensitive human living which is based on interdependence between humans, nature and supernatural beings.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What are the positive contributions the pastoralist community can make?

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2) How politics is connected with the agrarian and pastoral communities?

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3) Why is the study of agrarian and tribal communities important?

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1.9 KEY WORDS

Sarna: *Sarna* means the sacred grove, usually a cluster of *saal* (*sorea robusta*) trees popularly found in the Chotanagpur regions. In every village there is supposed to be a *sarna*, a sacred grove where most of the village deities reside. *Sarna* is actually the dwelling place of the spirit "*Chala Pacchho/Sarna Budhia*"/or just *Chala*. Once a year, during "*Sarhul*" celebration, all the spirits are propitiated at *Sarna*, many fowls are offered to different spirits and God the Dharmes is also offered a sacrifice of egg in a separate place. There is a popular belief among the people and according to Van Exem and others that when the tribals were first clearing the forests for

cultivation the spirits already residing there were not allowing people to clear the forests. Many people were dying in the mysterious enmity between the spirits and tribals. When they left a cluster of trees in each region the spirits did not trouble people. And they thought this sacred grove is like a safe residing place for the spirits. Thus the idea of *sarna* evolved in each village. Now *Sarna* has become a religious symbol for the tribals of these regions who are traditional worshippers according to their religio-cultural practice. They had no name for their religion and so now they have named their traditional way of worship as *sarna*. And thus the word *Sarna* is now also the name of their religion.

Dandakatta- *Dandakatta* sacrifice or ceremony is the central ritual of the Uraons. It is called by different names like- *Palkansan*, *Bhakh katna*, *Bhelwan Phari*, *Danda Rengtana* etc. The word's meanings slightly differ but the applied meaning is the same i.e. to cut the effects of malicious words and evil eyes caused either by spirits or by human beings. The seven corners or petals are made in a diagrammatic form with three layers of colours: white, grey and black. An egg is placed between a split branch of a poisonous wild cashew nut tree. Some unparched rice is also placed at the centre of the diagram. This diagram is also called the bow of Dharmes the Supreme Being with which he destroyed evil (nly. Sonu Gidh and the silk cotton tree).

Symbiotic/symbiosis:- It is an interdependent and interrelatedness between different bodies. Here it is meant interdependent and mutual drawing of life form each other between human beings, nature and the Supernatural Beings, where one is meaningless without the other.

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UNIT 2 DISPLACEMENT AND MIGRATION

Contents

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Displacement
- 2.3 Consequences of Displacement
- 2.4 Migration
- 2.5 Patterns of Migration
- 2.6 Causes and Consequences of Migration
- 2.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.8 Key Words
- 2.9 Further Readings and References

2.0 OBJECTIVES

Displacement and migration are two major sociological phenomena. By the end of the chapter you are supposed to have an understanding of:

- displacement and its implications, primarily for the marginalized communities, who completely depend on their land for livelihood;
- the need of a comprehensive rehabilitation policy in the country;
- migration and its kinds; and
- relationship between displacement and migration.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Displacement is more than physical dislocation. It is being uprooted and dismemberment of the socio-economic webs of life with traumatic experiences. It results into a spiral of impoverishment. Displacement threatens the existence and identity of people. There is a process of dispossession in displacement. It is estimated that in the last 65 years after independence of India there are more than 60-70 million displaced persons in the country. According to a study, it

is also estimated that only about 24 per cent of the displaced are rehabilitated and more than 75 per cent are left in the lurch. There is an inter-relation between displacement and migration.

Migration is not a new phenomenon and it is not going to end in the near future. Ever since the existence of humanity, human beings have been and are still migrating. Existing anthropological and archaeological literature indicates that the early human beings migrated from one place to another for security, sustenance and stability. In various periods in the history of mankind, ranging from the Vedic period through the colonial period to the contemporary times, migrations in varying degrees has been taking place. In the contemporary world the phenomenon of migration has been quite common.

2.2. DISPLACEMENT

The history of Indian economic and industrial development is a never ending story of displacement of people. A few years ago, available reports indicated that more than 21 million people were internally displaced due to development projects in India. Although they only make up eight percent of the total population, more than 50 per cent of the displaced were tribal peoples (HRW, January 2006). Until 1990, about 85.39 lakhs tribals had reportedly been displaced due to industrialization and development projects like dams, power projects, nature conservation, etc., but their rehabilitation and resettlement always remained a neglected subject. For example, tribals constituted 8.2 per cent of the total population of India, according to the 2001 Census. But they also constituted 55.1 per cent of the total displaced persons as a result of so-called development projects (*ACHR Weekly Review*, December 2006). These figures must have gone much higher now which need to be updated.

“Development” according to the Constitution is “that process of governance which, while respecting human rights of all persons, secures to all Indians freedom from material impoverishment” (Baxi 1997:164). Baxi believes that in the planning process in India the spirit of the constitution has been betrayed – people are no partners in the process of decision making regarding the construction of dams, size, areas of submergence, environment impact, cost-benefit analysis, allocation of resources, designs including safety designing, epidemiological impact analysis, contracts for construction, flow of benefits to certain classes/sectors, displacement, rehabilitation, etc. All these are considered to be the domain of the administration. Development should have a more ‘representative’ character. There should be a people-orientate development (*Ibid.*, 164-67). Involuntary relocation of sites of community existence is always problematic as the consequent dislocation of human beings is much too high. Land Acquisition Act 1894 talks of “public purposes” and “compensation” for acquisition of land. “But when whole villages are submerged, people who have no land are also displaced” (*Ibid.*, 169). Money compensation is one component but not necessarily the most decisive one of “rehabilitation”.

The Affected People

It is important to ask ‘what’ and ‘how’ of displacement, but more important is the question ‘why’ and ‘whose’. Displacement is a process where poorer sections are ‘pushed’ out of their own habitat. It is a situation where the marginalized people have no other choice but move from their own village or place of origin to another place. The local inhabitants lose their command over the resources. Given the number of displacements, types of displacement and the plight suffered

by the displaced, many are now asking: whose nation is it? Whose good is being served? Is it for the planners, administrators, implementing agencies or upper middle class or marginalized sections of the society? (Fernandes 1997) Planners and administrators invariably capitalize on and manipulate the relatively weaker socio-economic and political position of the Displaced Persons (DPs). Their numbers are underestimated. They are treated indifferently and only minimal cash compensation, if at all, is paid to them. They are rarely granted security of tenure or alternative developed land. Often after a painful and traumatic period of establishing a new lifestyle, they are again informed, they must move again to make way for yet another project. Apart from the immediate economic loss, displacement also brings about social, cultural and psychological dislocation. The physical displacement of the people leads to their uprooting from their socio-cultural base which is no less pathetic than the dispossession of land. They lose their traditional mechanism of social control, and as a result social tensions increase among them (Fernandes, 1997).

The history of the tribals has been one of displacement without rehabilitation. If the history of Jharkhand is traced in the Muslim, British and post-colonial periods one is amazed as to how involuntary displacements have taken place down the centuries with no rehabilitation or without adequate rehabilitation. One of the excuses by various governments is that there is no policy on rehabilitation. Nevertheless, what is a matter of grave concern is the attitude of partisanship to a few haves at the cost of the have-nots. It is precisely this approach that is discriminatory against the weaker sections, especially the tribals.

The alienation of land was one of the main reasons of the many tribal uprisings all over the country. In 1793 the British passed the Permanent Settlement Act to get as much revenue from land as possible. This Act, common in Bengal, Awadh and Madras presidencies, gave zamindars absolute proprietary right on land. There were middlemen created to collect revenue from their respective areas. Therefore, water, land and forests, hitherto considered being community owned natural resources, became private property of individual owners. The new landed class was naturally happy with these new arrangements, since it enabled them to establish recorded rights over land (NCAS 2002:3). So far there was no ownership of the land but only the right of revenue collection “since, land ownership was considered to be private, the state could collect revenue from these lands but it could not take over the land as and when it desired” (*Ibid.*). On the other hand, there was an increasing need for land for railways, roads, other government projects, for forest produce to support British industries. It was to establish rights over the ownership of land that the British created the Land Acquisition Act 1894. This Act facilitated the British control by destroying local people’s rights over the country’s natural resources (*Ibid.* 4). The draconian Act of 1894 continued till as recently as 1984 when few amendments were made.

Land is sacred to the tribals because that is the only resource they have for their sustenance. About 70 per cent of India’s population, most of whom are tribals, primarily depends on land-related work and agricultural production. Thus, land for them is a means of livelihood and the basis of socio-economic relationship. Alienation from land and displacement have threatened the livelihood of millions. People are displaced without any consultation or participation in the development process. Furthermore, they are denied their rightful share in the gains of the development project that displaces them. A very large number of the displaced belong to the

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and women are the worst sufferers. Moreover, rehabilitation is still not an integral part of any displacement plan (*Ibid.:v*).

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is your understanding of displacement and migration?

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2) Why are the victims of displacement and forced migration often the marginalized sections of the society?

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2.3 DISPLACEMENT AND LIVELIHOOD

Victims of displacement are deprived of compensation for the loss of their land because they do not possess any documents to claim that the land indeed belongs to them. Moreover, even if the lost land does not belong to them, tribals' dependence on forests, land, river and other natural resources, sustain them. If they are expropriated their support system is also eroded. Hence, there is an adverse impact of displacement on tribals.

Negative impacts of globalization and industrialization through the corporate are affecting the tribal and other deprived communities across the country, especially those located in tribal areas. These communities are being threatened with massive mining, industrialization, hydro projects leading to large-scale displacement. These regions are also a homeland of large number of tribal and the so-called Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs). The survival rights of these groups related to food and livelihood, and customary practices reflecting the community's identity, goes beyond the state administrative boundary. The recent development interventions have led to major setback for the existence of all these people threatening their very survival.

Displacement as a Norm

There is no national comprehensive rehabilitation and resettlement policy. It is still in the draft form and by the time this unit is printed, the new policy may or may not see the light of the day. Whatever be the case, the most disturbing part of the Rehabilitation Policy is its concept of displacement as a norm and not as an exception or the last resort. The Policy is meant only for the Project Affected Families (PAFs) and not for the affected without the project in question. The “Resettlement zone” for one group of people in fact is the “displacement zone” for another. The land required could be for any company, a body corporate, an institution, or any other organization for whom land is to be acquired either for its own use or “in public interest”.

The administrator’s responsibility is the acquisition of “adequate land” for the project and also for settling the PAFs. It implies that more and more land has to be acquired irrespective of the consequences. The Policy fails to address the problem of culture, religion, social organization and community life.

One of the important issues around Rehabilitation and Resettlement is the ‘development paradigm’ (Fernandes 1997: 22). Displacement is considered inevitable for development. Displacement is not taken as the last resort. Even in the cases where displacement is the last resort, rehabilitation is only secondary. This is basically a denial of people’s ownership to land and their right to live in dignity. Land is the only possession of the tribals. If that is taken away from them there is nothing left. The principle of terra nullius, viz. nobody’s land hence that of the State, is applied. Even the private property of the individual can be acquired any time by the State. This principle of ‘eminent domain’ is the guiding principle of land transactions (*Ibid.* 23). The policy does not seem to recognize the historical, customary and cultural rights of the tribal community in practice though it does mention them in letter. According to Fernandes any policy should recognize the historically established rights of the people over their livelihood, including land, natural resources and knowledge, etc. This entails recognition of their rights to land, livelihood and survival. Fernandes opines that the lands should be treated as a community resource. It implies therefore, that if the government or a company acquires such lands it must pay full compensation to the traditional residents, and rehabilitate them totally (*Ibid.*).

The policy is insensitive to the multiple displacements. There is no assurance that the PAFs from earlier projects will not be displaced again. The policy is insensitive to the disruption of traditional culture and ecological and environmental degradation. There is no assurance that the DPs persons from other projects in the region will be resettled and rehabilitated first before the newly displaced are rehabilitated. The Policy is not gender sensitive. It does not take into account the trouble the women go through in such situations without the rehabilitation first.

Inner Contradiction

The notion of ‘development’ by dispossessing tribals of their land is contradictory in terms. The Government is aware of the “traumatic psychological and socio-cultural consequences” besides deprivation and displacement of their lands, livelihoods and resource-base. The stress, however, seems to be on “compulsory acquisition of land for public purpose” and the inevitability of displacement. The policy talks of minimizing large scale displacement “to the extent possible” but does not say anything about efforts to ‘prevent’ displacement altogether. Though the Policy seeks to handle the issue of displacement with “utmost care” the text that follows hardly reflects any

desire to stop displacement. The Policy also acknowledges that “cash compensation” does not really enable the victims to obtain cultivable land, homestead and other resources which they “had to surrender to the State”. It is also aware that the landless agricultural workers, forest dwellers, tenants and artisans, etc., those dependent of the “acquired assets”, though severely affected, are not eligible for cash compensation, but offers mighty little for them.

No participation in the decision-making

At present people have no consent in the setting up of the project. The affected people are not even involved by the government in the discussion concerning the policy. Till now no project has recognized this right. Fernandes says, “Displacement is taken for granted. The assumption is that the people, most of them poor and powerless, should adjust themselves to the situation once a decision to displace them is taken” (1997: 24). This is the right of the displaced, potential victims and those who might accommodate them subsequently. They have the right to information in the regional and local languages regarding the project.

As per the ‘cost-benefit analysis’, due to displacement there is destruction of the livelihood of the poor. This happens because of the non-participatory decision-making. Though lots have been said about the socio-cultural aspects in the rehabilitation policy, it appears as if only the marketable commodities of the economy are taken into consideration. Fernandes (1997) suggests that while calculating/assessing the economic value of assets lost, for the purpose of compensation, the concept of “replacement value” of all quantifiable assets should be used in the place of “present depreciated value” of assets carrying ownership titles alone. He further says that the policy should recognize the social and psychological trauma caused by dislocation and displacement, and focus on mechanisms to compensate and relieve the distress thus caused. Efforts have to be made to prepare the oustees for a new life, economically, socially and psychologically. The policy should also include a mechanism for making the host population appreciate the problems of the oustees, and to accept them.

The policy does not say anything about a proportionate pre-determined share in its ownership as well as benefits with the DPs. The policy for rehabilitation does not give such participation in the benefits on a long term basis. No benefits come either in terms of long term jobs, share in the product, stock ownership, literacy programme, capacity building, etc. The policy does not look beyond compensation though it tries to give impression of being holistic. Fernandes (1997: 26) points out that displacement in the name of national development has become a mode of transferring CPRs from the communities to whom they are a life support system to the corporate sector to whom they are a source of profit or raw material to produce consumer goods for the middle class. “Thus a clear distinction exists between the class that gets the benefits and those who pay the price of “national development”, particularly the tribals and Dalits. This is a process of impoverishment of the CPR dependent and landless communities.

The Maharashtra experience of displacement and rehabilitation, according to Dhagamwar (1997:172-73), has been the non-participation of the victims who are mostly the poor, uneducated or even illiterate, and very frequently tribals. There is no information about the project, leave alone any consultation. They are not even informed about their displacement and resettlement in any satisfactory manner. The government does not exert itself to gather adequate

information on the population to be displaced. Inadequate compensation is paid tardily and grudgingly. Those paid are only a small class who own land. Others are not compensated for the loss of livelihood but only for the loss of houses. They are the landless labourers, artisans, women and other users of CPR, e.g. cowherds and nomads. Wherever alternate land is offered, the price is higher than the compensation paid. The oustees have to pay the difference between the two amounts. No compensation is given for CPR. The resettlement is at worst non-existent and at best unsatisfactory, unimaginative and unsympathetic. The oustees are not welcomed in the new places by the original population. No attention is paid to the emotional trauma caused by the upheaval. No efforts are made to give the people a life which is similar to the one from which they have been uprooted. The definition of displacement is narrowly restricted to actual physical transfer. Dhagamwar argues for a policy and institutional change regarding the attitude to displacement and rehabilitation.

Lack of Database

The absence of a database is one of the reasons for poor rehabilitation. The project needs accurate data on their number and type if it is to resettle them properly. Besides, the performance of the displacing agency that is put in charge of rehabilitation is judged not by its extent or quality but by the speed and economic efficiency with which it implements the project. Since most DPs are voiceless, they ignore their rehabilitation. Moreover, most of them are Common Property Resource (CPR) dependants or sustain themselves by rendering services to the village as a community (Dhagamwar 1989:172-173) but the *Land Acquisition Act, 1894* (LAQ) has an individual *patta* as the basis of compensation. Exceptionally the CPR dependants may be compensated but not the landless who depend on the village as a community. Even individual owners are given only monetary compensation. Often intermediaries appropriate it (Viegas 1992). The issue of compensation is contentious in the Fifth and Sixth Schedule areas where the customary law is given constitutional recognition. Their essence is community ownership.

Moreover, even if the financial aspect is attended to, the psychological consequences such as alienation from one's culture and community and insertion into a new work culture are ignored. As a result, many of those forced into a new work culture and economy, often outside their region, fall into bondage or become victims of absenteeism and alcoholism (Mankodi & Gangopadhyay 1983:81). However, most decision-makers view the project in isolation and make no long-term plan for the region. It often results in multiple displacements as it happened to the Rihand dam DPs of Madhya Pradesh (Ganguly Thukral 1989: 47-48), the Soliga tribals of Mysore (Cheria 1996) and the DPs of Orissa villages (Fernandes and Raj 1992: 25).

Problems around the Rehabilitation Policy

There is absence of an adequately comprehensive Rehabilitation Policy in India although a rehabilitation policy was promulgated in February 2004, and a second one on October 31, 2007. The Government of India is now working on a Rehabilitation Bill, but it is not sure as to when it will take the form of the law.

Until now, only Maharashtra has a rehabilitation law for all DPs, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka have laws, MP and Rajasthan have policies for irrigation, Orissa has a comprehensive policy and Coal India and the National Thermal Power Corporation have their own policies. No North-eastern State has a rehabilitation policy. In Asom fewer than 10 projects rehabilitated their DPs 1947-2000 (Fernandes and Bharali 2006). Jharkhand does not have a Rehabilitation policy either despite rampant displacement taking place all over the state. The proposed study is meant to be a contribution to the formulation of a new policy not only for Jharkhand but also for the whole country.

Need of an Alternative Policy

The New Tribal policy is being revised and most changes it suggests are acceptable. Based on Art. 21 that recognizes the right of every Indian to a life with dignity, it considers rehabilitation a right of the DPs/PAPs and a duty of the requiring agency to rehabilitate them. It also accepts some other principles enunciated by the civil society during the process around the policy in the 1990s. One of them is prior informed consent and the other is that the lifestyle of the DPs/PAPs should improve after the project because they pay its price. It has provisions to ensure gender justice and has a focus on the tribals. It deals with many past shortcomings such as compensation, land for land, the definition of the DP/PAP and jobs. It suggests that it should apply to the DPs of ten years before its promulgation. Ways have to be found of identifying them.

The failure to evolve a just rehabilitation law or policy reinforces the view that the decision-makers ignore the DPs/PAPs because most of them belong to powerless groups. Besides, in the absence of a law, even those who understand the consequences of displacement without rehabilitation are unable to take many steps in favour of the DPs. Therefore, before undertaking any project, an extensive study has to be conducted on its viability taking into account its entire social, environmental and economic cost.

Cost-benefit Analysis

Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) estimates and totals up the equivalent value—financial, social, cultural, religious, environmental, psychological, and so on—of the costs and benefits of projects to establish whether they are worthwhile. These projects may be development projects, such as dams, highways, infrastructure, mining, industries, defence, and wild-life, or can be capacity building training programs, education programme, health care systems, employment schemes, and so on. The idea is to assess whether the amount allocated and spent on a project is worth the cost in terms of benefit to the groups or persons it is meant for. There are systematic methods for measuring such costs and benefits.

Collaboration is needed at the level of respect and dignity. Choice of the individual has to be respected. Communities have to enter into relationship of collaboration with one another and not of domination. Hence, there should rather be a demand of a 'Displacement Policy', viz. one which

asks for alternate ways of project planning that would minimize displacement or avoid it altogether. The new Policy, however, looks like a clear design for land acquisition and nothing else. A policy is policy all the same. Unless it is converted into a law there is no binding on the part of the government or of the enforcing authorities. Every community has the right to develop and grow – using the framework to enter into discovery, develop itself by making use of what is available.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is the relationship between displacement and livelihood?

.....

2) What are the problems of displacement and rehabilitation?

.....

2.4 DEFINING MIGRATION

According to M. S. Rao, Migration is a shift in the place of residence for some length of time. While it excludes short visits and tours, it includes different types of both voluntary and involuntary movements. Examples of involuntary movements are migration under such crisis as war, transfer of population, riots, floods, droughts and earthquakes. It also includes marriage migration, virilocal, uxorial or neolocal and transfer migration. There are other situations of migration where movement is part of people's earning a livelihood. These are nomads, shifting cultivators, itinerant traders and salesman, artisans and labourers. Transhumance is a special type of migration between two sets of settlements in different seasons (Rao, 1986: 19-20).

Internal migration is related to the international migration either overseas or overland. The latter creates imbalances in certain region in labour supply and internal migration comes as an answer. For instance, in Punjab continuous waves of overseas migration to England, United States, Canada, and now to Gulf countries have created shortage of labour and this gap is filled by migrants from Jharkhand, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Migrants from Jharkhand include significant

percentage of tribals. However, international migration needs to be studied in its own right. There are immigrants from Tibet who have been rehabilitated in different parts of India. There are also migrants from Nepal and Bangladesh - both legal and illegal, and they need to be studied from the point of view of adjustments. Another aspect of international migration is the question of return migration and repatriation of Indian overseas migrants. For instance, there were about 80,000 Tamil repatriates in Tamilnadu in 1986 (Rao 1986:25).

International migration is a part of global social system of 'flows' of communications, capital, resources, goods and services which have development consequences for both sending and receiving countries including social and economic conditions, population stocks and population flow (Van Arsdol, 1989: 391).

Rao observes that there are two aspects of migration. First, what happens to the migrants in the place of destination, how they adjust themselves and the kind of social consequences that follow? Second, what are the feedback effects of migration in the place of origin of the migrants? The continuing interaction process between the place of origin and place of destination is an essential aspect of migration study. In the view of Rao, a cultural interpretation is important in gaining deeper understanding of the process of migration. Of all the social scientists interested in migration, economists have been the foremost in advancing theories to explain migration flows. Migration is considered to be a function of labour reallocation in response to market demand so that the demand and supply of labour are always in equilibrium. Migration is also considered as an investment in human capital involving cost-benefit analysis at different levels. At the individual level, it is argued that migration is based on careful calculation involving money and non-money (psychological cost). While some economists do consider the importance of non-economic factors in explaining migration, others assume that the individual is a rational economic man interested in maximization of profit or utility. And it is the poor who move out attracted by higher wages. The limitation of this theory is that it does not explain why, among people placed in the same economic circumstances, some migrate and others do not. Secondly, it does not explain why people who are economically sound also move to other cities. So economic consideration does not wholly explain why people migrate. They provide only the necessary conditions for people to migrate, the sufficient conditions are provided by non-economic factors which explain how migrations occur (Rao, 1986: 29-30).

2.5 PATTERNS OF MIGRATION

The pattern of migration in India can be divided into various analytical categories on the basis of causal factors, which force migration, census figures and duration of migration. In this regard, Rao (1986: 20) has divided the pattern of migration into three categories:

(1) Involuntary migration: migration under crisis such as war, transfer of population, riots, floods, droughts, earthquakes, construction of the hydel projects. It also includes marriage migration, virilocal, uxolocal or neolocal and transfer migration.

(2) Voluntary migration: means people move out in search of livelihood. It includes nomads, shifting cultivators, traders and salesman, artisans and labourers.

(3) Transhumance migration: it is a special type of migration between two sets of settlements in different seasons.

Rao has constructed the category of migration on the basis of the causal factors, while Malavika Karlekar (Schenk-Sanbergen 1995:24) has constructed four migration streams on the basis of census figures, namely: (1) rural to rural, (2) rural to urban, (3) urban to rural, and (4) urban to urban. In turn, these four streams signify the direction of the flow of the people.

Irrespective of the direction of the flow of the people, Malavika Karlekar has categorized migration into four sections on the basis of time spent by the migrants outside their place of residence (Schenk- Sanbergen, Loes, 1995:25-26):

(1) Permanent migration: migrants move from the area of birth for a lifetime though some contact with the place of origin is maintained through visits on the occasion of marriage, death and other ritual occasions within the kin group. Some of them might send the remittances to the dependent family members.

(2) Temporary migration: migrants who remain out of their home for few months in a year come under this category.

(3) Seasonal or Circular migration: It relates to short term stay, normally under a year, outside the place of residence by those at the subsistence level and it is likely to be repeated in the coming years as well.

(4) Return migration or relay migration: Different members of the same family migrate in turn outside their place of residence to earn some money for the family. This feature is common among the Mexican peasant families.

Migration from the tribal areas

In the light of the above various categories of migration, the migration of tribals from the central and eastern India has been divided into three categories: (1) Seasonal migration (circular migration) to the nearby towns; (2) Yearly or permanent migration to large cities; and (3) Relay migration - family members going out in turns to earn the livelihood.

The migration of tribals from their regions or place of origins is not voluntary in India. In fact, they are forced out due to ecological degradation, landlessness and land alienation, unemployment and poverty. However, the propelling factor in such migrations is to ensure survival for himself/herself and the family.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What are the patterns of migration?

.....

.....

.....

2) What is specific about migration of tribals?

.....

.....

.....

2.6 CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF MIGRATION

Everett S. Lee has emphasized the role of pull factors or incentives associated with the destination areas, push factors or those associated with the areas of origin, intervening obstacles such as ethnic barriers, distance, cost and the personal factors to explain the migration of people from one area to another. The pull factor includes employment opportunities in the cities and the push factor includes labour surplus with low productivity in the rural areas, disguised unemployment and the exploitative relationships that exist in the villages. This theory has been utilized to explain the rural-urban migration in India (Premi, 1980: 10). But it has been criticized for over simplification of the migration analysis as push factor can also operate in the urban areas. So, a migrant looks at both, the positive and negative factors at the place of origin as well as the place of destination before finally decided to migrate.

Labour equilibration model by W.A. Lewis (1954) and J.C.H. Fei and G. Janis (1964) has also tried to provide an explanation for migration; the model works on the assumption of a dual economy that of labour attempting to move out from subsistence, low or zero productivity economy to the fast growth capitalist, urban sector with higher wages. However, the critics suggest that labour productivity is not zero in the rural areas; moreover, it is the structural factors relating to the mode of production, which lead to low production rather than little work in the villages (ISI, 1993: 14).

Harris and Todaro considered migration to be a function of labour allocation in response to the market demands, so that the demand and supply of labour are always in equilibrium. According to this theory, labour mobility occurs in direct response to the expected wage differential between rural and urban areas. The theory further elaborates that if wage differential between the rural and urban sectors is in excess of equilibrium, the inter-sectoral transfer will continue until there is equality. The theory goes on to say that given higher wages in the urban areas, people would be attracted from low-income underdeveloped regions in numbers much larger than the available employment opportunities on the chance of getting a job (Rao, 1997: 30). The assumption of this theory is that the individual is a rational economic person interested in the maximization of profit or utility and it is basically poor who migrate as attracted by the higher wages. The premise of this theory is on the economic factor while the non-economic factors have not been given adequate attention. This theory would fail to explain why, among the people placed in the same economic circumstances, some migrate and the others do not. In addition, there is a question as to why people who are well off also migrate to the cities.

Samuel A. Stouffer has developed the hypothesis of migration and intervening opportunities. He argued that degree of migration would be inversely related to the distance between the two places as also the extent of intervening opportunities but directly related to the opportunities in two places (Premi, 1980: 10). Premi has thus argued that source and the destination areas are both likely to have attractive and the repulsive elements, that these will be weighed differently by different individuals.

J. Clyde Mitchell has theorized the idea in a more comprehensive way. He has stated that a single factor explanation of migration is totally inadequate and that listing all possible motivations is also not very useful. He has seen the need to link together and has related the multiple causes in a logical framework and suggested a classification whose major headings are “the nexus of a centrifugal tendencies” and “the nexus of the centripetal tendencies” sub divided by social, psychological and economic factors (as cited in Premi, 1980: 11).

Premi has identified employment, income and rapid population growth, as the three key variables, which determine the extent and pattern of the migration flows. Migrants flow from areas where employment opportunities are stagnant, income is low and rate of population growth is high. Conversely, they are attracted to the areas of new industrial development, regions of higher per capita income and the areas where the disparity between birth and death rate is low (*Ibid.*).

Rao (1986: 31) has also pointed out that isolated variables cannot adequately explain the reason for migration. Hence, he has taken the multi-dimensional approach for the analysis of migration. In this way, Rao has identified the following key factors in the multi-dimensional approach: historical development of the region; wider economic and political conditions, which regulate and condition the nature of employment opportunities; economic and social conditions in the place of origin; at individual level: level of skills, family circumstances, process of socialization and the personality factors; and presence of the resource network such as social network, which acts as the most effective channel of communication that favours decision making in migration.

Consequences of Migration

The consequence of migration is no less important. The consequences of migration may be analyzed in the framework of changes at the place of destination and changes at the place of origin (Rao, 1986: 29). The impact of migration (Malavika Karlekar in Schenk-Sanbergen 1995: 51-64) on the people at the place of destination can be analyzed in the following dimensions, namely: (1) Wage discrimination and exploitation; (2) Sexual harassment; (3) Vulnerable migrant child: girls in particular; and (4) Destruction of culture, kin networks and social relations.

Croll (1986), while analyzing the migration of rural women to the urban centers in China, has argued that domestic workers are necessary as it releases the urban women from their domestic responsibilities to gain access to paid employment outside the home. Furthermore, domestic workers are required in China to allow other women to increase their contribution to production and the modernization programmes in the country. However, a study by Neeta Lodha (2003: 371) shows that tribal women who migrate to the urban centers for employment in the lean season face several problems. The tribal women mainly work on the construction sites on the basis of daily wages. Lodha's study has demonstrated that minimum wages for the tribal men and women are not uniform and tribal women are both sexually and economically exploited. Moreover, presence of infant children obstructs to the tribal women's economic participation.

As a result of shift to the urban areas, tribal women suffer from 'Cultural' as well as 'Knowledge' and are unable to adjust to the individualist life pattern in such areas. It may be added here that women enjoy relatively high social status in the tribal societies. The research by Lodha reveals that women are the main decision makers in the household work and partial decision makers in the activities related to the agriculture and livestock/poultry. However, the shift to the urban areas for employment reduces the status of women in the families as they lack awareness of the new working environment, credit facilities, market and savings (Lodha, 365-372). The illiteracy of the tribal women along with lack of any technical knowledge has completely removed women from the decision making process in the family and made them completely dependent on the men-folk. Women in such circumstances suffer from being uprooted from their traditional locale and milieu and face a sense of socio-psychological insecurity.

The impact of migration on the people at the place of origin can be analyzed on the following dimensions, namely (1) Effect of male migration: improvement in the socio-economic condition of the family, but increased burden on the women; and (2) Effect of female migration: improvement in the socio-economic condition of the family, position of women in the family and in the community.

Rao and Kumar (1997), while highlighting the impact of migration on the women folk, pointed out that male migration actually enhances both physical and financial burdens on the women in terms of overwork leading to poor health and indebtedness. In the absence of male, women have the sole responsibility to looking after the children, cattle and doing the household chores. Further, the cash remittances from the male members are irregular and the need to run the

household on a daily basis till such time as cash remittances arrive puts additional burden on women. As a result, women have to look for jobs as the wage labour in the surrounding villages, which puts her at the risk of physical and economic exploitation of the outsiders.

2.7 LET US SUM UP

This unit has attempted to highlight the characteristic features of displacement and migration and their inter-relationship. These are sociological phenomena, although some of them are voluntary and others involuntary. This unit highlights lacunae of the Government policies regarding rehabilitation and resettlement. There are inner contradictions in those policies. The victims do not have any participation in the decision making process. There is a close relationship between displacement and migration which can be derived from the unit. Displacement is one of the many factors responsible for forced migration. There are many patterns of migration, which has been dealt with briefly in the unit. Apart from the causes of migration the consequences of migration are also analyzed. These consequences have social, cultural, economic, social and psychological implications.

2.8 KEY WORDS

- Globalization** : Increasing unification of the world's economic order through reduction of barriers to international trade, such as tariffs and export fees.
- Industrialization** : The process of socio-economic transformation of a human group from an agrarian society to an industrial one.
- Rehabilitation** : The process of restoration of the earlier state of displaced/affected persons/families in a new habitation.

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UNIT 3 RESISTANCE AND REVOLUTIONS AGAINST FOREIGN POWERS

Contents

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Pacification of the Paharias
- 3.3 Santal Revolt (1781-84)
- 3.4 Kol Insurrection
- 3.5 British Rule (1834 Onwards) and Tribals
- 3.6 Tribal Movements
- 3.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.8 Further Readings and References

3.0 OBEJCTIVES

The unit tries to capture the historical account of tribal resistance and revolutions against the non-tribal foreign powers. The case of tribals of Chotanagpur and Santals are taken as a concrete expressions of such resistance and revolutions against such powers. It would be applied to other tribals in their own concrete specific situations.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The tribals of Chotanagpur and Santal Pargana in Jharkhand today have a long history of resistance and revolt against the British administration and its non-tribal collaborators, such as, jagirdars (service tenure holders), thikadars (permanent or temporary land lease holders), zamindars (persons recognized as possessing proprietary rights over land under the British Law), etc. This history of pre-Independence India (1947) is well documented and probably represents by far the best tribal resistance and revolutions against foreign powers that have taken place in different parts of the country in the past. Although Chotanagpur was ceded to the British East India Company (EIC) in 1765, the first entry of the British rulers into this region took place in 1772 when Dripnath Shahi was the ruler of the region. He was in the subordinate position under the EIC and consequently handed over the region into its hands in the same year. He agreed to pay the EIC an annual tribute of 12,000 rupees. For some years the administration of this territory was left in his hands but in 1817 it was handed over to a British magistrate at Ramgarh in the district of Hazaribag.

The British Rule in general and the introduction of the *zamindari* (landlordism) system in particular marked the beginning of tribal conflict and struggle in the above region. Rebellions of various tribal groups of the region against their rulers date from this point. They revolted against the social and administrative arrangements introduced by the foreign rulers. The rebellions were the last resort of the tribals driven to despair by the encroachment of non-tribal outsiders on the former's land, forest and other economic resources. Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, a British

anthropologist specializing in India's tribes had the following observation to make: "Anyone with first hand experience of conditions in areas where aboriginals are subjected to exploitation by more advanced populations must be surprised not by the occurrence of risings, but rather by the infrequency of violent action on the part of the aboriginals deprived of their ancestral lands and the freedom they enjoyed before their contact with populations superior in economic and political power" (Singh 1966: ix-x). In this light, following are some of the well known and important tribal resistance movements and revolutions against foreign powers:

3.2 PACIFICATION OF THE PAHARIAS

The *Maale* or *Sauria Paharias*, are a tribal group in the Rajmahal Hills of Santal Pargana. They had maintained a virtual independence before the British Rule came to India. The early history of this Rule in the Rajmahal area is mainly a record of the British attempt to pacify the *Paharias* (Hillmen). They grew very meagre crops of maize and lentils and had to supplement their diet by hunting. Consequently, in the days gone by they were notorious raiders of the plains and cattle lifters. Their raids rose to their highest during the famine of 1770 which proved very severe on the plains between the Ganges and the Rajmahal Hills. So widespread was the terror these raids occasioned that the plains around the Rajmahal Hills were soon deserted by their non-tribal cultivators. No boat dared to moor on the southern bank of the Ganges after dusk for fear of being plundered and even the Government mail-runners on the roads skirting the hills were often robbed and murdered.

Warren Hastings, realizing the need of putting an end to these raids and acting on the suggestion of General Baker, his military adviser, raised a special corps of about 800 strong in 1772 and placed it under the command of Captain Brooke. His orders were to subdue the *Paharias* and induce them to settle as peaceful cultivators. His kind treatment of the prisoners and their women and children won for Brooke the confidence of the *Paharias* and he was able to induce them to come down and settle on the arable land below the hills. Captain Browne was the next to be put in charge of the Rajmahal Hills from 1774 till 1778. He continued his predecessor's work. He is best remembered for the preparation of a scheme for the pacification and future administration of the *Paharias*, which was later elaborated and implemented by Augustus Cleveland, his successor.

Augustus Cleveland, Collector of the District of Bhagalpur and Rajmahal, appears to have been impressed with the simplicity and truthfulness of the *Paharias*. He accepted their claim of always having been independent of the lowland *rajās*. Thanks to his understanding approach, they showed themselves ready to submit to the Government and to renounce for good all unlawful practices of robbery, murder and pillage, if the government could provide them with some means of subsistence, the lack of which had hitherto driven them to marauding habits. He drafted a plan for enlisting the *Paharias* into a corps of archers under the command of their own leaders, all in the service and pay of the Government. Warren Hastings sanctioned the proposed scheme of Cleveland in 1782, agreeing on an allowance of Rs.10 a month to all the *Sardars* (leaders) and Rs.5 to their *Naibs* (deputies).

The enrolment of a corps of archers reached the strength of 1,300 men armed with bows and arrows. They were under the command of a certain Jaurah who had once been a notorious and dreaded bandit. He remained throughout life a bold, active and faithful servant of the EIC in

different enterprises against outlaws both in the Ramgarh hills and his own mountains. Sanction was also obtained to drill the corps and to arm like regular sepoy and to withdraw the offences of the hill people from the jurisdiction of ordinary courts and to have them tried by tribunal of chiefs presided over by Cleveland.

3.3 SANTAL REVOLT (1781-84)

There was a revolt against the British in Santal Pargana under the leadership of Tilka Majhi. He is said to have been a person of extraordinary physical and spiritual powers. Most of the time he moved in the hills around Sultanganj like a Robin Hood. Time to time he came down from the hills and attacked the boats of the East India Company moving along the Ganges, robbed and murdered *dak*-runners passing by the Teliagarhi pass and looted the British treasury. However, he shared the spoils with the poor. He organized guerilla warfare in which the Santal women also participated. Several encounters took place inside the jungles at many places in the *Jungle Tarai* region between Tilka Majhi and his followers with bows and arrows and the British soldiers with guns. In 1784, Tilka and his followers attacked Bhagalpur and it is said that Tilka shot an arrow which passed through the chest of Cleveland and he fell down from his horse and died on the spot on 13th January, 1784. The main reason for the revolt of the Santals under Tilka was the policy of exploitation, extortion, atrocities and harassment of tax collectors, police officers and the agents of the landlords of the British, Hindus and foreign rulers. The above all reason for the revolt was the suppression of the Santal's freedom by the non-tribal outsiders mentioned above.

Tamar Revolt (1798)

The leader of the Tamar revolt was Bholanath Singh of Tamar. This rebellion was very much due to the faulty and alien system of the Government that was thrust upon the freedom loving people of Tamar and its adjoining territories. In this struggle against the British, the discontented rich land owners were the leaders of the revolt. They were aided by the Munda tribals and their chiefs. The revolt was put down by an expedition led by Lt. Cooper.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What was the observation of Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, a British anthropologist specializing in India's tribes?

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2) How did the British authorities manage to win the confidence of the rebelling *Paharia* tribals.

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3) What was the main reason of the Santal Revolt in the leadership of Tilka Majhi?

Suppression of Ramgarh Collectorship (1800)

The collectorship of Ramgarh was abolished in 1800 and the collector of Bihar became the collector of what was formerly the Ramgarh Hill Tract. The offices of a judge and a magistrate of Ramgarh still continued. To secure better administration, a system of civil justice was introduced, police stations were established and maintained at government expense. In the year 1806, the *Maharaja* and *zamindars* too were encouraged to establish police stations and appoint police officers. This was a very serious mistake, for to have policemen under the control of those who were the enemies of the tribals, could not but lead to unfair treatment of the tribals. From this time the fight between the Hindus and tribals of Chotanagpur took another form, that of calling in the aid of the Police and Court of Law, an arena in which the Hindus soon became the masters of the field. The police were chiefly men of Bihar, the same province from where the *zamindars* originally had come.

The tribals had no title deeds to their land and so could not prove their ownership in the British Court of Law. The court language was Hindi and the tribals did not know how to speak that language and the court officials did not know the languages of the tribals. Hence, when any suit was brought against the tribals, the court officials had to take help of the interpreters who tried to translate the ideas of the tribals into Hindi. The preconceived notions and prejudices of the interpreters against the tribals made it very complicated to get justice from the cases of the tribals presented before the courts. Hopelessly misstated, the cases of the tribals came before the British officers and they found it impossible to rectify anything in this mass of conception and misunderstanding. In keeping with the British legal system, they required documents to prove ownership of land that the tribals did not have. This is the way the British officials favoured those foreigners who had some sort of documents like the ones the *jagirdars* and *thikadars* had. The tribals thus invariably lost their cases in court.

Worse than this oppression perhaps was the effect which the court cases had on judges and tribals. The judges who were all non-tribals, came to believe that the tribals were rascals trying to avoid paying their lawful dues. Their claims to their land were regarded as false and fictitious. Seeing that to tell the truth in court did not pay, tribals took to lying thus destroying their native honesty and truthfulness. In this context, Sir William Hunter had aptly observed, "In the void left

by ignorance, prejudice has taken up its seat and the calamity of the non-Aryan races is not merely that they are not understood, but that they are misrepresented. We have gathered our notions concerning them from their immemorial enemies. In this way, extravagant calumnies attained the dignity of State papers, and are copied from one report into another. Thus ignorance begets misrepresentation, and misrepresentation brings forth bitter political fruits” (1868: 2-6).

3.4 KOL INSURRECTION

The First Kol Insurrection under Rugdeo and Konta Mundas (1820)

The grievances of the Munda and Uraon tribals were directly concerned with the new class of alien landlords called *thikadars*. The Hindu, Muhammedan and Sikh merchants and adventurers from north Bihar and northern India were introduced by the *raja* as *thikadars* (lessees) over the heads of tribal village land owners. The *thikadars* obtained from the *Maharaja* temporary leases of the villages as payment for their goods. They took away land from the tribals and levied rents and other services from them. One of the services taken from the tribals was the *beth begari* or forced labour. In 1820, the ferment of unrest that had been so long seething all over the country burst forth in open revolt. It originated again from Tamar. The leaders of this revolt were Rugdeo Munda and Konta Munda. A war against the alien *thikadars* and *jagirdars* was proclaimed. Destruction of all these alien intruders was the avowed aim of the revolt which spread far and wide, and military operations of an extensive scale had to be resorted to for several months by Major Roughsedge with the Ramgarh Battalion in order to counter it.

The Ho Rebellion in Singhbhum (1820-21)

In Singhbhum, the Ho tribals carried out their tactics of irregular warfare and rose in rebellion several times to protect their freedom and check the exploitation by the British and the local *zamindars*. As these were splendid fighting people popularly known as *Larka Kols*, the local *rajahs* made full use of them as tools in the game of power-politics in their quarrels with each other. On 1st February, 1820, Ghanshyam Singh, *raja* of Porahat, made an agreement with the British by accepting the protection of the EIC government. The main aims of the *raja* were: (i) to be recognised as lord over the chiefs of Kharsawan and Saraikela, (ii) to regain the family idol in possession of the Saraikela chief, (iii) to reduce the Hos to submission with the aid of the British.

This agreement had far reaching consequences for the Hos. The Company now launched an offensive against the Hos in collaboration with the *raja* of Porahat and the *zamindars* of Singhbhum on the pretext that the Hos were entirely destructive and had to be suppressed. Major Roughsedge marched into Singhbhum and camped at Chaibasa. The Hos attacked the British with bows and arrows. Forty or fifty of their men were killed in the encounter. Sometime in March 1820, the whole of the northern *pirs* (generally a *pir* comprised 12 villages) submitted to the British. Then the Major marched into the southern *pirs* and defeated the Hos there. The freedom loving Hos did not give up. They made a major attack and defeated the British at Pokeree and Chainpur. After this a strong British military expedition was sent against the Hos. By the end of May 1821, the Hos surrendered themselves to the British under the threat of total annihilation.

The Great Kol Insurrection (1831-32)

The horrors of the 1820 uprising were still fresh in the memory of the authorities when towards the end of the year 1831, another outbreak vastly more formidable in its magnitude shook the entire length and breadth of the county. Tribals' deep discontent manifested itself once again in the Kol Insurrection (1831-32). The *thikadars* or the lease holders had obtained from the young *Maharaja* temporary leases of villages as payment for their goods sold to him. They took away the land of the tribals and levied rents and other services from them. They demanded *beth begari* or forced labour from the tribals. The Munda and Uraon tribals were chiefly driven to desperation. Arrows of war were sent along all the countryside by them calling upon their neighbours to join the revolt. With the breaking out of the revolt, various tribal groups and their local non-tribal neighbours of Chotanagpur, such as, (a) the Mundas, Uraons, Hos, (b) the Bhogta and Ghasi of Tori, (c) the Chero, Kharwar and Poliar of Palamu; had all self-consciously joined the revolt in solidarity. Bindrai Manki, Kol leader, explained quite aptly why his people had taken to arms in 1832 as follows:

“The Pathans had taken our *hoormut* (honour) and the *Sing* our sisters and the *Koour* (scion), Harnath Sah had forcibly deprived us of our estates of twelve villages which he had given to the *Sing*. Our lives we considered of no value, and being of one caste and brethren, it was agreed upon that we should commence to cut, murder and eat....It is with this resolution that we have been murdering and plundering those who have deprived us of both honour and homes....”(Guha 1986: 282-83).

The selective violence of the rebellion measured up to the bitterness and anger of the above words. In villages where the tribal people and *dikus* (outside non-tribal exploiters) lived together, it was on the latter that the attack was concentrated. In many cases they were killed while their houses were burnt to the ground. The British authorities were entirely unprepared for an outbreak of such a magnitude. It was not till March 1832 that Captain Thomas Wilkinson with the collective help of all available forces, succeeded in bringing back order in the country. All the risings mentioned above were against the *dikus* who were the new class of middlemen, *zamindars*, moneylenders, government officials and the British colonists at large.

Budhu Bhagat and his Revolt (1832)

Budhu Bhagat of Silligaon was a famous religious leader among the Uraon tribals in the Churia region. He led the insurrection of 1832 in that area. Budhu's whole family and closest disciples fought with bows and arrows against the British. The old leader perished with all his sons and relatives and about a hundred and fifty of his disciples. They preferred to die rather than to submit to a life of subjection.

Ganga Narain Revolt in Manbhum and Singhbhum (1832-33)

While the Government had scarcely recovered from the Kol insurrection, the Bhumij Kols of Manbhum (Barabhum, Patkum, etc.), Singhbhum (Dhalbhum) also broke out in open arms under the leadership of Ganga Narain Singh, a scion of Barabhum raj family. Bindrai Manki, leader of the Kol Rebellion, also became a leader of this revolt. This revolt was against the British administration and for deliverance from rapacious landlords. The British suppressed this rebellion by sending a strong military force. Ganga Narain fled to Singhbhum where he sought the help of the Hos who were against the *Thakur* of Kharsawan, an ally of the British, against whom Ganga Narain waged war and fell fighting in February 1833.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Which were the negative consequences on the tribals with new administrative changes introduced by the British rulers?

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2) How did Bindrai Manki, Kol leader, explain why his people had taken to arms in 1832?

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3.5 BRITISH RULE (1834 ONWARDS) AND TRIBALS

The Kol Insurrection (1831-32) brought far reaching changes in the administrative machinery of this region by Regulation XIII of 1833. It was decided in 1834 to put an end to the indirect administration by the EIC in Chotanagpur and to introduce a new system of administration. Chotanagpur became a part of the South West Frontier Agency with headquarters at Kishunpur (Ranchi). This was done because the Government at last found the necessity of a closer administrative and more effective control of the country by the British officers on the spot. Chotanagpur thus came under the management of the Agent to the Governor General. Capt. Wilkinson was appointed the first Agent to the Governor General for Chotanagpur. He was assisted by other British officials who were called Principal Assistants. The Principal Assistants to the Agents came to be called Principal Assistant Commissioners from 1855.

After the Kol Rebellion, the ordinary *Regulations* which had hitherto been in force in the area were withdrawn from it. *Regulations* meant laws and judicial rules passed by the Government between 1793-1834. Chotanagpur and some of the surrounding territories were separated from the Ramgarh Hill Tract and formed into a *Non-Regulation Province*. Regulation XIII of 1833 exempted these areas from the regulations and placed them under special and new rules for the administration of civil and criminal justice and for the superintendence of police, land revenue, etc. The reason for the change was to provide the backward areas a more flexible form

of administration. The district of Lohardaga was constituted as a centre for dispensing justice over 12,500 square miles. At the same time, the new districts of Manbhum and Hazaribag were created. Similarly, the district of Singhbhum was created in 1837 and Kolhan was formed as a Government Estate.

Kolhan, the land of the *Larka* Hos, has the unique distinction of being the last area to come under the subjugation of the British imperialism. This area has the glorious past of remaining independent and isolated throughout history prior to the coming of the British. The comparatively late conquest of this area was due to the stubborn resistance of the *Lakra* Hos to any attempt by aliens to infiltrate into their territory and also due to the difficult terrain of their country. The British knew that it was against their interest to allow the Hos to remain independent for long. Capt. Wilkinson, therefore, sent an invitation to the chiefs of the *Larka* Hos to meet him at Chaibasa or Gumra. The chiefs responded to the invitation readily. They entered into solemn agreements to obey the orders of the British government and not of the *rajās* and other non-tribal chiefs to whom they had previously been required to submit.

Capt. Wilkinson gave his Assistant in Kohan certain simple and practical instructions for the administration of this area. The main features of the administrative set up proposed by Wilkinson were (a) preservation of the indigenous form of government, (b) direct contact between the Assistant and the people without the intervention of subordinate officials, (c) settlement of all disputes as far as possible through village *panchayats* (councils) on the spot, and (d) exclusion of *dikus* (foreigners) from the area. The general principles which were laid down by Capt. Wilkinson in his letter were subsequently embodied in a set of statutory rules which came to be known as 'Wilkinson Rules'. The administration of civil justice in the Kolhan area is still carried on under these rules.

Telanga Kharia and his Movement (1850-60)

Telanga Kharia hailed from the Murhu village of Sisai Police Station, Gumla District. He was a revolutionary and a fearless leader. His movement was against the exploitation of tribals by *zamindars* (landlords) and *mahajans* (moneylenders) during the British Rule. As middlemen for collecting revenue from the tribals to the British authorities, the *zamindars* captured the land of the tribals and made it their own when the latter refused to pay revenue to them. The *mahajans* also captured the land of the tribals when they were not able to pay back the loan taken from the former. To make things worse the British rulers gave their protection and support to the above mentioned exploiters. Due to this the tribals hated the British, *zamindars* and *mahajans* and were determined to fight against them in the leadership of Telanga Kharia.

Telanga's main occupation was agriculture but he was well known for giving training in the skills of archery and sword wielding to young people who visited him from all sides for their training at Sisai *maidan* (ground). It is said that one time he had 900-1500 men at his command to fight against the British and their agents. Oppression and exploitation of the tribals were at their peak during the year 1849-50. Telanga went about from village to village to make people aware of their exploitation and to unite and organise them to fight against their oppressors. In order to carry out his plan, he started to form major village federations which increased to 13 in number. In his leadership the tribals fought against the British, their native police force and their other agents during 1850-60.

When the British authorities came to know about Telanga's movement, they arrested him at the village of Kumhari in Basia and sent him to jail in Calcutta. He was released from there almost after 16 years and on 23 April 1880, second day of his return to his village, he was shot dead early in the morning by one of his non-tribal traitors. However, his inspiration continued among his followers and in their movement.

Establishment of Chotanagpur Division (1854)

As a result of Mr. Rickett's report (1854), the form of administration was changed by the Act XX of 1854. The South West Frontier Agency was replaced by a Commissionship for the Chutia Nagpur (Chotanagpur) Division, under the jurisdiction of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal as a Non-Regulation Province. It consisted of the districts of Lohardaga, Hazaribag, Manbhum and Singhbhum with the Tributary States of Jashpur, Udaipur, Surguja, Koreya, Chang-Bhakar, Gangpur and Banai, under the jurisdiction of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal. Regular civil, criminal and revenue courts were established.

The Movement of Morgo Majhi and Bir Singh Majhi in Santal Pargana (1854)

During the middle of 19th century, the Santals began to settle in Santal Pargana. They came from Purulia, Bankura and Midnapur. Slowly, their exploiters – the Bengali *Mahajans* – also came among them. Because of the oppression and merciless exploitation by the money lenders, landlords and merchants, the Santals became desperate. A Santal by the name of Morgo Majhi unsuccessfully attempted to organise the Santals of the southern area into a separate kingdom. In the beginning of 1854, Bir Singh Majhi proclaimed that in a vision he had of *Chando bonga* (Supreme Being), he had received magical charms by means of which the Santals' exploiters would be punished. He had an enthusiastic following. They committed many robberies in the houses of the *dikus*.

The Great Santal Insurrection (Hul) (1855-57)

This rebellion was the outcome of a long course of oppression silently and patiently submitted to by the Santal tribals. There were four grievances which were chiefly responsible for the rebellion: (a) mean and greedy spirit of the money lenders in their transaction with the Santals, (b) increasing misery caused by their unjust system of allowing personal and hereditary bondage for debt, (c) unparalleled corruption and extortion by the police in aiding and supporting the *Mahajans*, (d) impossibility of obtaining redress from courts by the Santals.

The small traders could make good profits by buying rice or oilseeds from the Santals and selling them in plains. The Santals got their money for paying rent or for personal purposes like wedding from the money-lenders who kept false accounts and used false measures and weights. The rate of interest charged was sometimes to the extent of five hundred percent per year. As a result, many Santals ran deep into debt so much so that they became bonded labourers for life which was made hereditary. This was broadly the social setting in which the *Hul* or Santal Rebellion (1855-56) started in the Santal Pargana and later embraced the rural population across an extensive area inhabited by them.

The Santal peasants had become dependent on merchants for loans in kind or cash at high interest rates. Almost their entire harvest went to pay debts. The Santal peasant worked the creditor's land without pay and did not have time to cultivate his own. The system of loans

finally forced the Santals to pay their debts with the very lands they had opened to cultivation. These lands gradually passed into the *diku* hands. From the beginning of 1855, the Santal peasants sent petitions to the Collector, Commissioner and Government demanding that usury be stopped and all the *dikus* expelled from the Santal lands. These petitions remained unanswered or were considered too late when the Santals had already taken to armed struggle.

Four Santal brothers from the village of Bhagnadih were selected as leaders. Two of the brothers, Sidhu and Kanhu, emerged as the actual leaders of the movement. They had become landless peasants after their father had lost his lands to the *dikus*. The main goal of the movement was the elimination of merchants, moneylenders, colonial officials and alien landlords. The final objectives were to achieve Santal independence, land restoration and establishment of a Santal government.

On 30th June 1855, more than 30,000 Santals assembled at Bhagnadih. They were armed with bows and arrows to march to Calcutta and place their petition of grievances before the Governor General. A police inspector, instigated by some Hindu and Muslim money lenders tried to arrest the leaders but this enraged the mob so much that they hacked him and nine others to pieces. The cry *hul!hul!!* was now raised everywhere and the rebellion broke out in its full fury. The above march led on 7th July, 1855, to an open armed struggle. It was the last resort to obtain redress. After intermittent battles lasting over a year, the movement became openly anti-British. Consequently, the colonial power ruthlessly suppressed the rebellion. The Santal insurgents suffered heavy losses and the ring leaders were rounded up, summarily tried and hanged.

Creation of Santal Pargana (1855)

After the suppression of the Santal rebellion, an inquiry was made into the grievances of the Santals by Ashley Aden. Its outcome was the Act XXXVII of December 22, 1855 for forming the territory into a separate non-regulation district called Santal Pargana and placed it under the control of the Commissioner of Bhagalpur. A special system of administration was also introduced through which an attempt was made to use the Santal village organisation in administering the area.

Santal Revolt in Hazaribag (1855-56)

There was a fierce rising of the Santals in Hazaribag. Their leaders were Lubia Majhi and Bairu Majhi. The rising was widely spread in the Hazaribag district in April 1856. The jail at Hazaribag was stormed and set on fire. The rebellion was due to the same pattern of reasons which had led to the Santal *Hul* in Santal Pargana. Cruel measures were taken to put down the Santals.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Which were the main features of administrative set up in the 'Wilkinson Rule'?

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2) What were the grievances of Great Santal Insurrection (Hul) (1855-57)?

Government attempts a Record of Rights (1858)

In 1858, the Mundas rioted once more against the landlords but were put down by the British. Now the Government seriously discussed the question of registering the land tenures (rights over land) of Chotanagpur. Accordingly, on 15th April, 1858, the Government appointed Lal Loknath Sahi, a local landlord and sub-assistant commissioner, to prepare a register of all *bhuinari* lands belonging to original settlers of a village. The officer worked from August 1860 till his death in August 1862 without accomplishing much. The operations he had carried out extended only over 572 villages in the pargana of Lodhma, Khukhra, Udaipur, Sonapur, Doensa, Korambe and Basia. With his death, the investigations were discontinued.

The Chotanagpur Tenures Act (Act II of 1869) Bhuinhari Survey and Settlement

The Chotanagpur Tenures Act (Act II of 1869) was passed to ensure the settlement of the title to *bhuinari* (privileged) lands. Rakhal Das Haldar, a special Commissioner, was appointed to survey and demarcate the *bhuinari* lands of the tenants and the *majhihas* lands of the landlords. The Act is also called the *Bhuinari* Survey and Settlement or simply the *Bhuinari* Settlement. Unfortunately, the Act did not define the term *Bhuinari* land which was related to the *Bhuinars* or original settlers in a village of Chotanagpur. It was a term used in court language. The *Bhuinari* Settlement reveals the full extent of the appalling ruin brought on the tribals' economic and social sphere. It was found in 1869 that in the 35 *parganas* alone, to which the above Settlement extended, 2,482 villages had lost all their rights, privileges and the social and moral safeguards that the community had laid down in the immemorial customs regulating the life of the village community. Only a few scraps of land were left to them as ancestral property. The survey operations lasted till 1880. The Settlement of 1902 found that there were only 152 villages in the whole of the *Maharaja's* estate of Chotanagpur that still preserved the greater part of the ancient rights. This area was hardly more than one per cent of the *Maharaja's* estate.

High hopes entertained at the introduction of the Settlement Act (1869) were far from being fulfilled. The operations failed to restore confidence of the tribals in the Government. Neither did it succeed in its main aims to protect the people against the future attacks on their ancestral lands and to give back lands to those who had been wrongfully dispossessed during the previous 20 years. The reasons for this failure is not far to seek. First of all, the Act came too late. Secondly, the tribals had no more confidence in the Government. Only a few of the *bhuinari* relied on the good intentions of the Government and understood the purpose of the Act. A great many of them

looked with suspicion on the proceedings of the surveyors and the Special Commissioners. The landlords started a rumour that the officials intended to find out the exact number and size of *bhuinari* fields in order to charge a new and heavier tax for each plot. As a result of the suspicion of the people, helped on by the trickery of the landlords, several of the tribals declared no fields at all as their own and many more declared less than they really possessed. Their lands then were appropriated by the landlords.

3.6 TRIBAL MOVEMENTS

Bhagirath Majhi and Sapha Hor Movement among the Santals (1871)

The period following the Santal Insurrection (*Hul*) of 1855 was not entirely peaceful. The oppression by the *Mahajans* still continued in Santal Pargana. A spirit of resentment swept throughout the district brining the Santals once again to the point of mass upsurge. They felt that no good could be achieved unless a revitalization of their society was brought out. This realization was the beginning of a new consciousness which manifested itself in another social movement called the Kharwar movement. It was motivated by the desire to return to the Golden age of tribal independence and glory that is celebrated in the Santal myths.

The movement achieved prominence in 1871 when a charismatic leader called Bhagirath Majhi proclaimed himself the king of the Santals and representative of God. He announced that he would restore the golden age to the Santals if they returned to the worship of one God and cleanse themselves of their sins. His movement tried to raise the status of the Santals by emulating the Hindu socio-religious practices. When the movement began to turn political, the government arrested Bhagirath and imprisoned him. This movement spread also to Hazaribag where Dubia Gossain and his men preached on the lines of Bhagirath and they resisted the first census operation among the Santals in 1881. This movement too was suppressed but not before they convinced the people that their uplift lay in purifying themselves and regenerating themselves as *Sapha Hors* or pure men.

Sardar Movement (1858-95)

The term *sardar* meant leader. It was applied to the organisers of the movement in Chotanagpur. It was largely the struggle of the Christian tribals against the landlords. They were educated in the Lutheran mission which had come to Ranchi in 1845 and had opened schools in the surrounding areas. The movement was called the *Sardar Larai* or *Mulki Larai* (1858-95). It gained momentum after the failure of the Chotanagpur Tenures Act (1869) and the operations following it. The *sardars* had sent a petition to the Commissioner of Chotanagpur early in 1867 complaining against the oppression of the landlords.

Among the forms of oppression especially mentioned were the attempts of the landlords to eject the tenants from their land by taking it away from them and destroying their crops, houses, etc. They also complained about the collection of tax which was collected several times over, as the landlords refused to give receipts for the tax paid. A further complaint was that the landlords exacted more tax than they were entitled to receive. The petitioners asked the Commissioner for two remedies in order to stop these forms of oppression, (i) to take measures to mark out definitely and clearly the boundaries of the tax-free lands, (ii) the people be allowed to pay their taxes directly to the government. The Commissioner rejected their petition. The *sardars* then

appealed to the Lieutenant Governor in a petition dated September 21, 1867 but he too refused to listen to their requests. Following it, the *sardars* sent a petition again to the Chotanagpur Commissioner in Ranchi on 25th March, 1879, with the above requests but he too rejected their petition.

The memorialists then appealed to London. In addition to the claims which they had made to the Commissioner, they asked that they be allowed to form themselves into village communities directly under the government. They wished to be freed from the landlords. The Secretary of State for India, Lord Hartington, rejected the petition. The request of the Mundas to be directly under the Government was found to be extravagant and unreasonable. Besides, London agreed with the officials in Ranchi that the *Bhuinari* Survey mentioned above was the most that the Government could do for the people.

The *Sardar* Movement was characterised by a tone of forceful but reasonable argument with the government. The *sardars* said, 'We do not like to see the *Rajah* and *zemindars* reigning in *our country*. Our forefathers came into this country and cleared the jungle. Now the Hindus rob us of *our fields*....Every nation has its own Government, only we *Mundas* and *Uraons* have not' (Thapar & Siddiqi 1979: 49-50). The *sardars* were representing the tribals of Chotanagpur and their hopes and aspirations. They were expressing their resentment against the petty *rajahs* who had established their political power base under the Chotanagpur *maharaja* and were lording over them.

Birsa Movement (1895-1900)

The *sardars* were in need of a leader who could lead the people to their liberation from bondage. This leader who emerged was young Birsa Munda of the village Chalkad in the Ranchi district. In the early monsoon of 1895, he presented himself as a new prophet to liberate his fellow tribesmen from the foreign dominion. He claimed to possess miraculous powers. In his youth educated by Christian missionaries and a *Vaishnava* monk, he instituted a new religion and forbade the veneration of deities and spirits. At the same time, he encouraged his disciples to defy the Government and disobey its officials. He soon found a large following and pilgrimages were started to him who had called himself the *Dharti Abba* (father of the earth). He prophesied a terrible catastrophe, a deluge, in which all his opponents would be drowned and his followers would survive.

Birsa's movement gradually began to assume a political character. He informed the people that the *raj* of the *Maharani* (Empress Victoria) was over and the Munda *raj* had begun. He passed an order that the *raiya*s (cultivators) were to pay no rents in the future. They were to hold their lands rent-free. Several times he planned an armed rising. In 1897, he was arrested on the eve of the rising and jailed. Pardoned in the jubilee year of the Queen Victoria, he planned another rising. The day fixed for the outbreak was Christmas of 1899. A large number of attacks occurred in various places in the police *thanas* (stations) at Khunti, Tamar, Basia and Ranchi. The Deputy Commissioner of Ranchi rushed with troops to the spot of rioting. On the Dumbari hill he encountered the main body of the Munda forces. In the encounter, many Mundas were killed. Birsa himself escaped for the moment but was captured later on 3rd February, 1900, in Singhbhum. He died of cholera on 9th June, 1900 in the Ranchi jail.

The Birsa movement was a manifestation of the socio-economic and religious unrest among the Mundas. They saw in him a prophet and saviour who would redeem them from the oppression of the *dikus* – the hated foreigners whether British or Indian and would establish for them a Munda *raj*. The movement was agrarian in its root, violent in its means and political in its end. Birsa in his speeches emphasised the agrarian factors and sought a political solution of the problems facing his people, that is, the establishment of the *Birsaité Raj* under the new king (himself) (Singh 1966: 191). The movement had such a tremendous impact that the foundation of the British rule in Chotanagpur was shaken for sometime.

Survey and Settlement Operations (1902-1910)

An immediate result of Birsa's uprising was the authorities' awareness of the urgency of preparing a record of rights for the lands of discontented Mundas. The earlier *Bhuinari* Settlement (1869) did not extend over the Munda areas of Khunti, Tamar, Bundu and Sonahatu police stations. It was precisely in these areas that Birsa's movement centred. The new settlement operations began in these police stations. All praedial services (relating to land and its products) were changed to cash payments throughout the district. The praedial conditions (*abwabs* and *rakumats*) were also changed to cash payments. The *abwabs* were various kinds of taxes exacted by landlords and public officers from the cultivators while the *rakumats* were payments in kind. Both the *abwabs* and *rakumats* were the secondary cause of dispute in the region.

Passing of Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (1908)

This Act was of capital importance. It came into force in November 1908. Through the Act, the *khuntkattidar* and *Mundari khuntkattidar* tenancies were legally defined. The Settlement Operations of the Revenue Department restored to some Mundas their *khunkatti* and *bhuinari* rights as original clearers of the land. The Act safeguarded a number of points which the Mundas had claimed as a central part of their social system. According to this system, the land within the boundaries of the village is the common property of the village family. The members of this village family are the direct descendants of the original founder of the village. No individual can sell or divert his land. The Deputy Commissioner is empowered to eject forcibly any alien who may have acquired lands in a *khuntkattdar* village. There are restrictions on the sale and transfer of a Munda's lands. However, so far as the safeguard of *khuntkatti rights* was concerned, the Act came late because more than nine-tenths of the Mundas had meanwhile lost their *khuntkatti rights*.

Tana Bhagat Movement (1914-20)

This movement was initiated in 1914 by a young man named Jatra Uraon. He was about 25 years old, a resident of the Chingri village in the Gumla district. The movement was known as the *Tana Bhagat* movement. Jatra declared that *Dharmes* (Supreme Being) had told him in a dream to give up (a) ghost findings and exorcism and belief in spirits, (b) all animal sacrifices, animal food and liquor, (c) ploughing their fields which entailed cruelty to cows and oxen but failed to save the tribe from famine and poverty, and (d) working as coolies or labourers under men of other castes and tribes. He proclaimed that the Uraon *raj* was about to begin and that he would be its first king.

The Uraon *bhagats* (prophets) promised their followers safety and relief from the oppressive and unjust revenue system and exploitation by landlords, usurers and Government officials. In the leadership of young Jatra, his followers were determined to put an end to the system of *beth begari* or forced labour extracted from them by the *diku oppressors* without any payment. Jatra told his followers to (a) stop paying tax for lands which were theirs, (b) pray to one true God, and (c) throw out all spirits from their rituals and beliefs. Because of their refusal to work for the *zamindars* and Government, Jatra and his disciples were arrested and put in jail. However, other *bhagats* like Sibhu Bhagat of Mandar in the Ranchi district; Balram Bhagat and the woman bhagat Deomania of the Batkuri village in the Gumla district took over from Jatra and continued the movement.

The Kisan Movement (1917)

The *Maharaja* of Surguja exacted excessive *beth begari* from the people. The oppression of the money lenders in the area was unbearable. The cattle of the *Ahirs* (cowherds) were wildly destroying crops. All these roused the Kisans (Nagesia tribals) to rise in revolt under the leadership of Labur Kisan. He was an ardent Tana Bhagat. The Uraon Tana Bhagats of the Palamu district partially backed him and his movement. Labur boasted that he could fly at will to Germany and back to Surguja in a secret flying machine. He also showed his followers a secret machine (a long and large glass tube) for the purpose of destroying his enemies at long range. Once the foreigners had been destroyed, Labur would be the king of the Kisans on the Jamira plateau in Surguja.

The Kisans revolted against their *Maharaja*. In the police station of Kusmi, they killed one of the *Maharaja's* native magistrates, some Hindu money lenders and the *Ahirs*. They stopped one of the Hindu collectors from coming to them. An armed police force was rushed in from the British territory to the troubled area. Similarly, a detachment of soldiers from the Central Provinces with the British Political Agent at their head marched to the area to suppress the rebels. Labur Kisan was caught, tried and hanged at Ambikapur, capital of the Surguja native state. His skeleton was displayed to the public view as a warning to other would be rebel leaders of Surguja.

3.7 LET US SUM UP

Encounter of tribal societies with outside incoming non-tribals resulted in acute institutional changes which gave rise to radical disruption of tribal organizational structures. This led to various tribal resistance movements and revolutions against foreign powers. It was mainly the revolutionary change in the land tenure system that brought about the disruption of the traditional way of life of the agricultural tribal societies. Freehold of lands and their crops formed not only the basis of their livelihood, but also of their status system, as well as of their administrative and economic organizations. After these institutional changes had taken place, the tribals rose in repeated armed rebellions but they were put down by the British arms. Next they tried a legal defence of their agrarian rights with the help of European education which had entered among them already towards the end of the first half of the 19th century. However, the existing legal system which was introduced by the British could not protect the agrarian rights of the tribals because the non-tribals had been cultivating their lands for a very long time. Thus, their ancestral lands had now passed into the hands of the non-tribals for ever. In this desperate situation, leaders like Bhagirath Majhi, Birsa Munda, Jatra Uraon, etc. attracting large number of their

followers rose against the prevailing foreign powers. Their resistance movements against these powers succeeded to some extent in drawing the British rulers' attention to their legitimate grievances and their solutions. Following this, the age old agrarian unrest among the tribals in central and eastern India has not surfaced in a wide spread manner during the 20th century. However, what they are fighting against now are the persistent forces of land grab by the corporate companies that are much worse than the anti-tribal forces working against them during the 18th and 19th centuries discussed above.

Check Your Progress IV

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Which were the orders of Birsa Munda to his disciples? Highlight the main characteristics of his movement.

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2) How did Jatra Uraon and his disciples try to bring about liberation of their oppressed people through the Tana Bhagat Movement (1914 - 20)?

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3) Why was the passing of the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (1908) of capital importance for the tribals?

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4) In the light of the past tribal resistance movements and revolutions, give your comments why the present day corporate model of development is highly disturbing among the tribals in India.

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UNIT 4 TRIBAL IDENTITY CRISIS AND SOLUTION

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Definition of Identity
- 4.3 Who are the Tribals?
- 4.4 Factors that constitute Tribal Identity
- 4.5 Crisis of Identity
- 4.6 Solution
- 4.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.8 Key Words
- 4.9 Further Readings and References

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit attempts to define identity as a concept and also look at some of the characteristic features of identity in the context of tribals in India. At the end of the lesson the students are expected to have:

- a basic understanding of the what identity is about;
- an understanding of the constituent elements of tribal identity;
- some knowledge of the problems/threats to their identity; and
- recommendations for solution to their problem of identity crisis.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of identity is perhaps the most misused concepts in the contemporary times. There has been a complex trajectory of the identity studies from psychology to anthropology, from individual to collective, and from self to communal. In common parlance and everyday life the term 'identity' is conveniently used without often being aware of its nuances and implications. Reflecting on the concept of identity Karina V. Korostelina agrees with the argument of Brubaker and Cooper's that the term identity "tends to mean too much (then understood in a strong sense), too little (then understood in a weak sense), or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity)". Our concern here is 'social identity', which is one of the most popular and controversial concepts in social sciences (Korostelina, 2007:15).

There are three important elements that need to be kept in mind in the identity discourse: formation of identity, agency of identity articulation, and dynamics of identity assertion. First, identity is relational. Identity is always organised around relationships. Identity is a question of perception as to how one group perceives itself and others in relation to oneself and others. It is through interactions between people that identity formation takes place. These are at the personal and social levels. The social aspects of identity include the social structures around which our identities are organized. Thus, there is a role of social structures, values and meaning systems in shaping of our identities.

Second, Woodward (2000:1) is of the opinion that “identity necessarily involves an interrelationship between the personal and the social which can also be expressed as a tension between structure and agency”. The structural changes take place in terms of socio-economic organization, religious organization, scientific and technological advancement, through migration, ethnic diversity, organization of domestic and gender roles. These structures shape, construct and reconstruct their own identities. The construction of identities is also in terms of influencing social structures and using them to create collective identities. Third, identities are fluid in many ways. In today’s changing times when the process of globalisation is impacting different spheres of life of different individuals and groups, nation-states are faced with diverse cultures, religions, and different forms of identities. Thus, diversity is created by the fluidity of the changing identities. With the coming of globalisation and breaking down of national, cultural and social barriers there is a danger of homogenisation and therefore, in the present scenario identity has become important.

4.2 DEFINITION OF IDENTITY

According to the Oxford Dictionary of English, the word “identity” originated in the late sixteenth century from the Latin word “idem” which means “same.” The term states the “fact of being who or what a person or thing is,” and it also stands for “a close similarity or affinity” (Sriratana, 2008).

Identity is a collective aspect of a set of characteristics that define a person or a thing. It is a term which is both inclusive and exclusive because on the basis of ones identity one can get included or excluded in a group. No one can have a singular identity because one gains various identities on the basis of ones nationality, gender, region, ethnicity, language, caste, class, etc. One can be identified on the basis of his political, social, economic and ideological beliefs, too. A person can have multiple identities depending on his association or affiliation with various groups.

Identity is changeable and fluid. One can project a particular identity of his at one time and another one at another time or a collective of identities depending on the factor(s) that might motivate one to do so or put him in advantageous position as compared to the others. Identity is a process, as Robbins said, that “have to do with those aspects of culture that directly relate to the formation and maintenance of identities” (Robbins, 1973: 1208).

Social Identity

Korostelina defines social identity as “a feeling of belonging to a social group, as a strong connection with social category, and as an important part of our mind that affects our social perceptions and behavior” (2007: 15). Korostelina views social identity as a space for protection of individuals from ‘solitude’, which it does by creating “boundaries and a sense of a common space within a group.” She views identity as a tool of social analysis with all its limitations and is aware of the findings of the researches which show social identity as “socially constructed and influenced by the processes of existing social structures” rather than being “primordially intrinsic and inherent” (*Ibid.*).

Korostelina is of the opinion that despite their changing nature “social identities can be characterized as relatively stable and fixed” (*ibid.*). This argument seems to be more convincing than that of those who do not recognize the attempts of boundary creation, preservation and

maintenance. These are the daily human actions and no mere imagination. It is a different matter whether we call these boundaries a mental construct or something else. Social identity, as Korostelina says, serves as “a link between an individual’s psychology and the structures and processes of large social groups” (*Ibid.*: 17).

The concept of identity is multi-disciplinary. Korostelina tries to show how various disciplines have their specific focus on the question of identity. The psychoanalytic studies, for instance, focus on the role of social identity in ethnic conflicts and cycles of violence as in Volkan (1997, 2004). Anthropological research shows the manifestation of social identity in culture, its meaning, and impact on group boundaries as in Barth (1969) and Cohen (1986). Social psychologists analyze social identity in terms of intergroup relations, prejudice, and group conflicts as in Tajfel and Turner (1986) and Turner *et al.* (1987). Moreover, sociologists evaluate identity to analyze the interrelations between personality and society as in Giddens (1991) and Jenkins (1996). Moreover, political scientists explore the role of identity in domestic and international conflicts as in Brubaker (1996), Fisher (1997), Gellner (1994), and Gurr (1970). These approaches analyze social identity as ‘a dynamic construct’ determining interrelations between individual behavior and social reality (as in Korostelina, 2007: 17-18).

Korostelina (2007:18-19) observes that identification is a process, which is determined by culture and social reality with two components—emotional and cognitive. The emotional component develops as a result of positive feelings. The cognitive component develops on emotional connections that lead to an acceptance of values, beliefs, attitudes and worldviews. She claims that there are two main functions of identification—first, a realization of the need of the individual’s belonging to a group for protection and confidence; and second, a person’s inclusion into a system of social relationships. She identifies some of the types of groups which serve as objects of identification as—primary groups (family, friends); primordial groups (ethnic, religious); socially constructed groups (nation, political, party); contact groups (colleagues, mates, associates); and symbolic groups (generation).

Korostelina (2007: 61) defines identity as “a system that involves core identities, short-term identities, and situational identities”. Core identities, she argues, are fairly stable and dominant and they exist for a relatively long time and change only in situations of considerable social shifting. She holds that some core identities remain through an individual’s entire lifetime. Short-term identities, she claims, are not constant and reflect temporary in-group and intergroup relations. Further, situational identities, she says, are connected with, and depend on, concrete situations.

Korostelina (2007: 75-76) is of the view that social identity contains the following components:

- (1) In-group traditions and values (culture): This component is a reflection of the specificity of interrelations within in-groups, cultural characteristics, values and beliefs, holidays and customs, ways of life, and worldviews.
- (2) In-group language: It connects the native language(s) of in-group, other common spoken languages, and the influence of worldview and perception on individuals and groups through specific grammatical orders and linguistic structures.

- (3) Characteristics of in-group members: This component includes in-group prototypes as well as stereotypes, valued individual features, and characteristics of the most prominent in-group members.
- (4) In-group history: This element contains historical events, names and situations that are important in-groups and that assist in defining their development, such as fairy tales, legends and heroes.
- (5) In-group ideology: This component reflects the main ideas, goals, aspirations and aims of an in-group.
- (6) Interrelations with out-groups: This element contains the norms and traditions of interconnections between in-groups and out-groups, such as the history of relationships, gains and losses resulting from the interrelations.
- (7) Reverberated identity: This refers to an in-group's identity resulting from comparisons with out-groups. It includes all in-group characteristics that develop in opposition to out-group characteristics.
- (8) Out-group image: This component reflects stereotypes, attitudes toward out-groups, and the perceived characteristics, culture, and history of out-groups that help define intergroup borders and stress differences between in-group and out-group.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is your understanding of identity?

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2) Why do you understand by social identity?

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4.3 WHO ARE THE TRIBALS?

The term 'Tribe' in Anthropology as defined by Wikipedia is a notional form of human social organization based on a set of smaller groups, having temporary or permanent political integration, and is defined by traditions of common descent, language, culture, and ideology. In different countries they are known by different names. In India the tribals are known as the *Adivasis*. The term *Adivasi* literally means 'original inhabitants'. It is an umbrella term for a

heterogeneous set of ethnic and tribal groups believed to be the aboriginal inhabitants of India, although terms such as *atavika* (a Sanskrit word for forest dwellers), *vanvasi* or *giriyan* (hill people) are also used for the tribes of India. The term *adivasi* carries the specific meaning of being the original and autochthonous inhabitants of a given region, and was specifically coined for that purpose in the 1930s. The ILO convention 107 describes the tribals as those people “who are at a less advanced stage of development than those reached by the other sections of national community and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs and traditions” (Xaxa, 2008: 223-240).

Over a period of time, unlike the terms ‘aborigines’, ‘indigenous peoples’ or ‘tribes’, the word *adivasi* has also developed a connotation of past autonomy which was disrupted during the British colonial period in India and has not been restored ever since. Opposition to the usage of this term is varied, and it has been argued that the original inhabitant contention is based on dubious claims and that the adivasi-non adivasi divide that is created, is artificial (Xaxa, 2008: 223-240).

The adivasis comprise a substantial indigenous minority of the population of India. They are present in Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Mizoram and other north-eastern states, Paschim Banga, Andhra Pradesh, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. They are officially recognized by the Government of India as “Scheduled Tribes” in the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India. There is a list of Scheduled Tribes recognized as tribal under the Constitution of India. Tribal people constitute 8.2 percent of the nation's total population, over 84 million people according to the 2001 census (Xaxa, 2008: 223-240). In India there are more than 400 officially recognized tribes in India (Xaxa, 2008: 223-240). Among the tribals:

‘All tribal communities are not alike, that they are products of different historical and social conditions and that they belong to four different language families and several different racial stocks and animistic moulds. Some of them belong to the primitive stock with a continuous cultural history, others have been pushed out of the mainstream and have been "drop-outs" of our main history, yet others are created by various legal and economic interventions in society.’(Xaxa, 2008: 223-240).

Thus, each tribe is distinct from the other and can be identified on the basis of their practices, myths, culture, language, and so on.

In India, tribals are one of the most backward people. Even after decades of Independence and several government aids, the condition of the tribals has not changed much. As compared to them, the other backward groups have progressed, and to a certain extent, have overcome their backwardness. This is a daunting question as to why the tribals have remained where they were decades ago. The tribals have been exploited and subjugated ever since. Jaganath Pathy says that the tribals have been victims of conquest and colonization. As a result of which they lost control over customary territorial resources, faced cultural annihilation and turned powerless (Xaxa, 2008: 223-240). Virginius Xaxa says that the tribals in India faced *double colonization* (by ‘double colonization’ is meant that the tribals were colonized both by the Britishers and the dominant Indians). He further elaborates: “The colonialism in the context of tribes was external

(British) as well as internal (dominant Indian population). There was control by the colonial state as well as by the dominant Indian population. The dominant Indian population in collusion with the state embarked on alienating tribal people from their control over land, forest and other resources. In the course of this process there was also settler colonization of the regions inhabited by the tribal people. Colonization of tribal regions has gone on unabated in post-independent India” (Xaxa, 2008: 223-240).

Tribals faced suppression and oppression from various groups at various times in history. The extent and degree of colonization has been different for different regions and it has continued even after the independence of the country. In other words, the domination and the subjugation of the tribal people have resulted in the increased marginalization and pauperization of the tribal people (Xaxa, 2008: 223-240).

Owing to their primitiveness, they are seen as opposed to modernity and change. Such aversion to change or modernity is accounted for the pitiable state of the tribals perpetrated by others. The life-style and culture of the tribals demands the preservation of their surroundings as it is without affecting it. The tribals share a symbiotic life with forest, land and water. Take any one of it away from them and there will be a death knell for them. They do not depend on forest, land and water just to sustain themselves but their life revolves around them. Their life is intertwined with nature. Thus, a lot of their cultural activities are dependent on nature. If we separate them from nature, they will not die but their culture and the tradition revolving around the nature will die. Thus, their identities are intrinsically and symbiotically related to nature. All these constitute the identity of a tribal.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What do you understand by tribals?

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2) What are the issues of tribals?

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4.4 FACTORS THAT CONSTITUTE TRIBAL IDENTITY

There are various factors that constitute one’s identity; for example nationality, origin, gender, religion, culture, caste, class, and so on. These factors define the various categories that one can fall into. Among others, some tribal anthropologists and thinkers like Ram Dayal Munda, John Lakra, Agapit Tirkey, Boniface Tirkey, Virginius Xaxa, to name a few, have defined the identity

of Adivasis in different facts of their life. Here, we present a synthesis of those ideas and factors that define tribal identity:

First, geographical territory: this refers to the territorial and physical aspect of the tribal identity, which in common parlance is known in the slogan of *Jal-Jungle-Zamin* (water-forest-land) symbiosis. *Jal*, *Jungle* and *Zamin* are central to tribal identity. They are important factors in ascertaining and defining their identity. They are more than mere natural resources to them. Their whole existence and livelihood is centred on it. All the three are in one. One cannot be separated from the other. Of all the three 'land' is the most important because their whole life is centred on it. Their rituals and cultural practices are related to season, crops, plantation, trees and activities related to farming. Forest and water, too, are sources of livelihood for them. They do not see them as mere sources of sustenance but share a unique bond with it. In other terms, what sea is to a fisherman, land is to a tribal.

Second, social organization: the tribal social organization in general is characterized by egalitarianism. In the villages tribals are still governed by the *sahiyaro* and *madait* concept. These concepts mean 'friends' and 'help'. The villagers are friends of one another. They are in solidarity with one another and with the entire village in their joys and sorrows. In moments of need of one another, each family shows its solidarity with the other in terms of ploughing the fields, sowing seeds, transplanting and harvesting. There are many other economic and social activities in which they help out each other free of cost. This is an important aspect of tribal identity. Adivasis have a strong sense of community. Community is the centre of their life and activities. This sense of collectivity helps them rise above the narrow walls of individualism and have respect for diversity, in order to counter divisive tendencies, hatred and conflict. Community life is the foundation of their democratic system. According to S.M. Michael, "The tribal society is not organized along the hierarchical line of class. It is not based on the basis of occupation by birth. The tribal society is organized on kinship basis." (Michael, 1992: 23)

Third, economic organization: there is a tremendous collectivity in the economic organisation of the tribals which is not found in other communities. Rather than having individualistic approach in their economic enterprises, tribals have a sense of social responsibility and co-operation. Their orientation is towards mutual sharing rather than hoarding.

Fourth, collective history: the history of tribals is characterised by hospitality and accommodation even of outsiders. The identity of the tribals is incomplete without taking into account their collective memories, which are necessarily inclusive of their origin, struggles, happiness and glorious past. Their oral tales, songs, folk tales, idioms, rituals are the medium through which their collective history is stored. The collective history gives them a sense of belonging and be a part of their ancestral glory.

Fifth, political structure: Tribals have their own system of governance, which is characterised by self-rule and decentralisation of power. In this type of governance decision is taken by consensus and not by election or majority-minority votes. For instance, among the Oraons of Jharkhand, there is the system of traditional village Panchayat, which is responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the village. It takes care of the disputes taking place in the village. The system of *Parha* (confederation of villages) comes into the picture when the nature of dispute is inter-

village. When there are disputes there are also socio-cultural mechanisms to resolve them. Often reconciliation takes place over a leaf-cup of rice beer. This is the traditional identity of the tribal community.

Sixth, religious organisation: tribal religion is characterised by harmony with nature. There is a symbiotic relationship of the tribals with nature, which is reflected in all their agricultural activities, hunting expeditions and rites and rituals. The Tribals have their own religion and follow their own religious practices. For example, the Oraons who are the indigenous people of Jharkhand have their own *pahan* (religious priest) and God addressed as *Dharmes*. Each tribe has their own God and has distinct practices which identifies or distinguishes them from other tribes. As a result of coming into contact with other cultural groups and due to the processes of Sanskritization and Hinduisation, the tribals have incorporated or adopted some of the practices of other cultural groups. Consequently, they are viewed by some as 'Hindus' which is wrong. Mere adoption of some of the alien cultural practices does not make them Hindus.

Seventh, Adivasi worldview: like any other cultural and religious groups tribals too, have their own philosophy of life which is distinct from those of the others. Their way of life, values and ethos are different. They have their own worldview about the origin of cosmos and human beings. They have their own notion about the present life and the life after death. They have their own view about the Supreme Being and other beings existent in this world. They have their own myth and other legends which form the basis of their faith system and worldview.

Eighth, art and literature: life for tribals is a celebration even if the things do not go the way they would have liked it to go. Literature, art and music are people's artistic expression of life which are characterised by collectivity, cooperation and participation. Their art is for arts sake which cannot be commodified. It is a different matter that things are now changing due to the processes of change. Literature and art also enforces ones identity because it not only showcases their artistic genius but also projects their culture.

Ninth, linguistic identity: language is one of the main identity markers. It clearly distinguishes one from the other because language is not just a means of communication but an important aspect of culture and identity. Through language and words stories of human values, practices, songs, idioms are stored or conveyed. Tribals are of the oral tradition unlike other cultural groups who follow the written tradition. So, language becomes very important for the tribals because it is the only means through which they pass on their traditional knowledge from one generation to another generation. If their language gets lost, it is not a mere loss of language but a loss of ones history, traditional thought-pattern, oral literature and rich indigenous knowledge which has been collected over the centuries. Loss of language can be a death knell for a community.

Tenth, Constitutional recognition: the constitutional recognition for the tribals as 'Scheduled tribes' under Article 342 of the Constitution, has a special significance. Before the independence of India they were identified or constructed during the colonial regime as 'tribes', but now they are given a Constitutional and legal status, which makes them eligible to benefit from certain provisions meant for their educational and economic empowerment. In absence of this status, the tribals would have no identity as a Scheduled Tribe, even if they considered themselves to be so. There are more than 600 Scheduled Tribes in India but only certain tribes have been included in

the Scheduled Tribes list in the Constitution of India. And the main criteria for including them in the scheduled tribes' list as given by Verma (1990:11) are: "Traditional occupation of a definite geographical area, (ii) distinctive culture which includes whole spectrum of tribal way of life, i.e., language, customs, traditional, religious beliefs, arts and crafts, etc., (iii) primitive traits depicting occupational pattern, economy, etc., and (iv) lack of educational and techno-economic development." Jaipal Singh Munda, in the Constituent Assembly debates, had preferred the use of the term Adivasi instead of Scheduled Tribe. It was, however, not acceptable to Ambedkar, Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution, who explained that "the word Adivasi is really a general term which has no specific legal *de jure* connotation". On the other hand, the term "Scheduled tribe" has a fixed meaning because it "enumerates the tribes". He further said that "in the event of the matter being taken to a court of law, there should be a precise definition as to who these Adivasis are." It was under these conditions that the adivasis are presently called "Scheduled Tribes" of India. (Verma, 1990:11).

The above points have tried to list and elaborate on some of the factors that constitute and define tribal identity.

4.5 CRISIS OF IDENTITY

A crisis in identity takes place when the projected identity fails to get one identified by the other or when multiple identities creates confusion and fails to project a coherent picture of a person. The expression 'identity struggles' was used by Wallace to state the tension created by those interactions which led to a discrepancy between an individual's claimed identity and the identity attributed to him by the others. The term "Identity diffusion" introduced by Eric Erikson is used to denote a splitting of the self into multiple images which leads to a loss of centre, or a dispersion of identity. Identity diffusion connotes a psychopathic state in which the individual suffers from a lack of identity confirmation and alienation. Both states are the processes of facilitating identity formation or change.

These definitions of identity crisis fit in very well in the context of the tribals. From the colonial times onwards we discover that rather than identifying tribes by their ethnic names, they have been given some other names. Thus, identity from outside has been imposed upon them. In this process they have gone through crisis. The imposed identity was quite different from what they thought themselves to be or derived from within.

The following are some of the factors that have threatened and are still threatening tribal identity:

1. A total breakdown of tribal social institutions during colonial period:

With the coming of the British, new and alien systems of governance and jurisprudence were introduced. Major structural changes took place. The *Khuntkatti/Bhuinhari* lands, which were sacred to the tribals and which could not be bought or sold, were introduced to the notion of private ownership. All this damaged the psyche of the tribal societies.

2. Developmental processes:

With globalisation and economic liberalisation came various changes in the economic policies of the country. To meet the needs of the nation and the need to increase the economic resources of the country, natural resources were and are still being tapped and exploited. Since, most of the mineral and natural resources are concentrated in the tribal areas. Their lands have been taken away for various developmental purposes because of which they have lost all their means of livelihood and the traditional way of living. The Constitution of India provides measures to protect the tribal rights, land and culture. Their areas have been designated as Fifth Scheduled Areas which enjoy certain special rights to protect the tribals from invasion of their land, culture and way of life. Unfortunately, those very rights are being violated and manipulated for economic gains by various forces.

3. Loss of cultural practices/ritual:

There is loss of tribal cultural practices. With the loss of land and its natural surroundings, there has been a breakdown in their traditional form of living and practices. As a result of which, some of their cultural practices are gradually getting lost; for example *jani shikar* (hunting by women), which is a cultural practice/ritual whereby the women folk dress up like men and go hunting in the forest. This is done by women once every twelve years in remembrance of Oraon woman, who along with other women fought with the Turks and chased them away from Rohtasgarh. These practices cannot be performed these days because most of the forest areas are restricted for public use and is no longer accessible to them. As a consequence, they are not able to perform those practices and hence, they are losing them gradually but speedily.

4. Breakdown of community and traditional form of governance in contemporary times:

There has been a breakdown of the traditional form of organisation of the tribal villages because their land has been taken away from them which were their main source of livelihood. As a result of which the villages are disintegrating as people are either moving out of the villages for better opportunities and survival purposes. The ones who are rehabilitated by the government, too, cannot setup the old system of community because the new surrounding may not have the same natural surrounding which is essential for organising and conducting it. Hence, there is a breakdown of the traditional community and organisation. Their traditional practices are thus getting lost and hence, rendering them as people with no culture (not cultureless or uncultured).

5. Impoverishment and unemployment:

Most of the developmental activities are taking place in the tribal areas but unfortunately the tribals have remained backward as compared to the other communities of India. Owing to the loss of lands, inaccessibility to forest and poor status of agriculture, and lack of access to modern technology of farming due to lack of financial assistance, they have been forced to work as bonded labourers or migrants in the mega cities of India. This condition of tribals is not a state of poverty; this is impoverishment because the once land-rich tribals have now become migrant labourers and rickshaw pullers due to the wrong model of development. Life is thus a constant struggle for survival.

6. Distortion of identity:

Tribals are a distinct category of people. They have their own ethnic identity. Still, some right wing people claim that Tribals are Hindus which is a distortion of their identity. It should be noted that tribes do not fall within the framework of the caste system of the Hindus. Tribals are sometimes equated with Dalits, which is also not correct, because Dalit is a caste category whereas Tribal is an ethnic category. The tribal converting to other religions is wrongly alleged to have lost his/her identity, but the fact of the matter is that in a religious conversion one adopts another religion and not another ethnic identity. Again, while they came to terms with the term 'tribe', which is basically a colonial construct, some forces in India tried to label them as 'Hindus'. This was another point of crisis in history.

7. No constitutional recognition for some tribes:

There are some tribes that have not been listed in the Scheduled Tribes' list notified by the President of India; for instance the Denotified tribes, also known as criminal tribes. Similarly, the tribals who have moved away from their states of origin to other states for economic reasons are considered as non-tribals. For instance, some tribes who have migrated more than 150 years ago to the Assam tea gardens or to the Andaman islands, are not recognised by the State as Scheduled Tribes. The same is the case with those tribals who have migrated to cities like Delhi for better prospects. In their new destinations they are not recognised as Scheduled Tribes as a result of which they lose all the benefits and facilities that to which a Scheduled Tribe is entitled. Hence, some of the protective measures adopted by the government to uplift the Scheduled Tribes are failing because of this crisis.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What are the constituent elements of tribal identity?

.....

2) What have you learnt about the crisis of tribal identity?

.....

The solution to Tribal identity crisis lies in the understanding of the worldview of the tribals and respecting their cultural difference. Since, land is central to their identity steps should be taken so that their land remains with them and the scheduled area laws and other tribal rights laws are seriously implemented. Care should be taken so that their languages are promoted and measures be adopted to create opportunities for them.

One of the ways in which development and empowerment of the tribal areas and scheduled areas can take place is to give leadership of development in the hands of the tribals themselves. In fact, as Nirmal Minz (2007) says, “The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, No. 40 of 1996 (24th Dec. 1996), makes space for tribals’ participation in governance. This Act which is also known as PESA 1996, provides for the extension of the provisions of part IX of the constitution relating to the Panchayats to the Scheduled Areas”. Further, No. 4 Exceptions and modification to part IX of the Constitution is the main body of this Act that provides Gram Sabha as key place. (a) Every village shall have a Gram Sabha consisting of persons whose names are included in the electoral rolls of the Panchayat at the village level. (b) Every Gram Sabha shall be empowered to safeguard and preserve the traditions and customs of the people, their cultural identity, community resources and customary laws of dispute resolution. (c) Gives the detailed power and functions of the Gram Sabha. It is hoped that self-rule alone will preserve and promote their identities through Gram Sabha, a constitutional instrument in future. The Adivasi identity across the country will be preserved in future. For Minz, this is the ray of hope for the Adivasis.

Tribal communities are going through a process of crisis due to various economic and historical processes. However, due to the indiscreet and rampant exploitation of resources not only the tribals but the entire universe is in danger of extinction. Hence, tribals have some important lesson for the world. Minz (1994) portrays this very well in his paper. He observes that industries and mining are necessary, but they cannot go on for 24 hours a day without any rest for this earth. Balance in industry and mining is necessary if humans are to live on this earth. The greed of the modern industrialists and miners will ultimately bring self destruction of the earth and all that is in it, including the human beings.

Minz further observes that this earth, the environment and eco-system have been misunderstood as a machine, which functions by itself. That Man could manoeuvre it as he liked. He claims that now we have accepted the Organismic view of the earth and the nature. That, there is a living organic relationship between human beings, trees, animals, insects, water, air, sun shine and the soil of this earth. The Adivasi have been holding these views from time immemorial and they have understood human beings as an integral part of this macro-organism. It is precisely this value of the tribals that is pro-life and pro-humanity. This is the contribution the tribal culture and spirituality make to the humanity at large. This is the only solution to the survival of the tribals and also the world.

4.7 LET US SUM UP

This Unit has tried to understand the complex concept of identity. There has been a rich trajectory of the identity studies from psychology to anthropology, from individual to collective, and from self to communal. The identity concept has been understood not as rigid but as fluid and porous. While some aspects of identity seem to be flexible, the core values are relatively more stable than the others. Identity is shaped around relationships and interactions. It is a process and not an end product. In the context of tribals the concept of identity becomes extremely engaging as they have been going through a process of crisis ever since the advent of the British who were instrumental in the break down of their social institutions. Even after the independence, the tribals continue going through this crisis as their land, which is central to their identity, is being alienated rampantly. Identity of the 'tribe' was imposed on them from outside. Once they are comfortable with that identity, there is a threat even to that identity. Ironically, the term tribe which was once looked down upon has now become a symbol of identity assertion. Self-rule or participation in the decision making process is the only solution to safeguard tribal identity and culture. In fact, tribal societies have a larger contribution to make to the survival not only of their societies but also of the entire universe. Their worldview of symbiosis with nature teaches other cultures and faiths and especially the modern industrialists to make use of all that is created in so far as it facilitates a peaceful co-existence.

4.8 KEY WORDS

Adivasis : Original inhabitants; living from ancient times
 Identity : Characteristics, feelings or beliefs that distinguish people from others.
 Social identity : A feeling of belonging to a social group
 Sanskritization : the process of social change in India by which lower castes seek upward mobility by emulating the rituals and practices of the upper or the dominant caste.

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Tribal Philosophy

Block 4

RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

UNIT 1

Belief Systems and Rituals Among Tribals

UNIT 2

Eschatological Views of the Tribals

UNIT 3

Tribal Religion/s Vis-à-vis Impact of Other Religions

UNIT 4

Future of Tribal Religions

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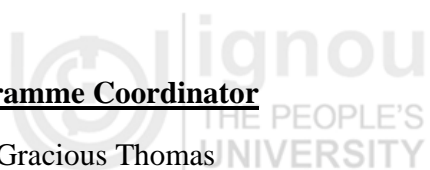
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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Religious behaviour is a ritual behaviour involving a belief in non-human spirits. Like all ritual, religious behaviour is essentially expressive, though it is generally thought of as instrumental as well. Ritual may serve to co-ordinate and regulate co-operative human behaviour in a variety of social situations. Religious beliefs may serve as means of social control, through the fear of incurring supernatural punishment if approved norms are broken. Generally, tribal religion is tribe-oriented. It is lived by a tribe in the light of shared traditions. Religion among tribal societies is concerned with supernatural beings who are endowed with some human attributes. This means that living people may enter into some sort of social relationship with them.

The tribal communities mentioned above have developed the idea of a supreme spiritual being known by different names, by different tribal groups, such as, *Dharmes*, *Singbonga*, *Chando Baba*, etc. He is conceived as the creator of the universe and most powerful among the supernatural beings. He is everywhere and everything is under His power and control. Faith of tribals in God is deep rooted. They profess it communally and privately. The belief of tribals in immortality stimulates a frequent awareness of their link with the invisible world through their family, clan and tribal ties. This awareness is the reflection and also the projection in the world beyond the family. This explains also a good deal of their serenity, particularly in the face of death. Death is not the end of everything; it is the continuation of their temporal life in a new mode of existence in the company of an innumerable number of family, clan and tribal brothers and sisters. Survival after death is not absorption of the tribal individuality into an anonymous existence. He/she does not disappear in an anonymous mass of spirits. On the contrary, death is a family reunion. The way to salvation is the tribe. The main religious preoccupation of a tribal is to safeguard the integrity of his tribal identity by the observance of the code established by the Creator.

Unit 1 presents the belief systems, religious practices and symbolism of major tribal groups especially from central and eastern Indian states. Although it focuses on certain tribal groups tribal religious philosophy of the tribes emerge from the lesson.

Unit 2 deals with the eschatological understanding of the tribal communities giving basic knowledge of the way in which tribals view their end times and their concept of communion with their ancestors, death, judgement, heaven, and hell. The tribals believe in the life after death as in many other cultures and religions. They believe that after death the soul leaves the body and goes away to an unknown world which is known by various names.

Unit 3 aims at giving the account of tribal religions and their encounter with foreign religions. The relationship is very well known from the different tribal movements that have characterized themselves as defenders of tribal religions or as speaking for the adaptability and accommodation.

Unit 4 speaks of future of tribal religions. Many tribes in India demonstrate considerable syncretism with Hinduism. Local deities are still of significance. Oral tradition is one of the trademarks of all tribal religions. Oral tradition also preserves creatively the intent of the lessons.

UNIT 1 BELIEF SYSTEMS AND RITUALS AMONG TRIBALS

Contents

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Tribal Religion
- 1.3 Totemism
- 1.4 Belief in God, Ancestor Spirits and Spirits
- 1.5 Belief in Blessing, Cursing and Oath-taking
- 1.6 Religious Rituals
- 1.7 Symbolism
- 1.8 Let us Sum up
- 1.9 Key Words
- 1.10 Further Readings and References

1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit presents the belief systems, religious practices and symbolism of major tribal groups especially from central and eastern Indian states. Although it focuses on certain tribal groups tribal religious philosophy of the tribes emerge from the lesson.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Nearly 700 tribal groups in India are spread out in different parts of the country in the bigger or smaller numbers. Their number is very high in the Tribal Areas of the North East. Similarly, in the Scheduled Areas of the main land in the central belt of the country, tribal population is quite large. Each tribal group is unique in its socio-cultural life. In the present paper it is not possible, therefore, to cover the belief systems and rituals of all the tribals in the country. Here an attempt has been made to discuss the topic with reference to the major tribal groups, such as, the *Mundas*, *Uraons*, *Santals*, *Hos*, *Kharias*, etc. in the central and eastern parts of India. They are mainly in the states of Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. By migration for tea industries they form a large population in the North East, especially in Assam. Similarly, they have a large population in the Andaman and Nicobar islands. Through modern education they are employed both in public as well as private sectors all over the country. They are also in different parts of the country as unskilled labourers in large numbers.

1.2 TRIBAL RELIGION

Generally, tribal religion is tribe-oriented. It is lived by a tribe in the light of shared traditions. In the religious traditions of the *Mundas* and *Uraons* in particular, their religion is illumined by a myth where they found in a crucial encounter with the hostile, greedy and arrogant community of *Asurs* (a community of iron smelters), the key to the mystery of suffering in the world they live in. (Ponette 1984: 70). Other tribal groups mentioned above also share this belief. This key is the

transformation of the Creator of the universe and humankind in a voluntary ordeal by fire in the hands of His Asur enemies. He had taken the form of a young boy full of sores in his body in order to encounter the Asurs. In the bargain, they put him in a new furnace with full-scale burning fire in it. However, when the fire was extinguished he came out of the furnace completely changed into a golden boy free from all his pain and suffering caused by his sores. After this personal transformation, the primordial time was over and the new era began. There and then the Creator made the spirit-world, source of recurring harassment and suffering.

1.3 TOTEMISM

Durkheim was the first one to see that *totems* were symbols, standing for something other than themselves. He argued that what they stood for was the social group itself. He thought that all religions originated in totemism. He was led to the view that all the gods that men worship are but man-made symbols of society itself. Society is the indispensable condition of human life as we know it, and in worshipping God man is really worshipping his own social system.

Durkheim's theory of religion has been subjected to a good deal of well-deserved criticism. It is important to keep in mind that society is not a *thing* but rather a system of relationships. Social relationships, involving beliefs, expectations and values as well as human interactions in space and time, are not *given* empirically, in the same sense that the data of the natural sciences are. It is one thing to say that totemism, or religion, means that a man worships the actual group of people, the social aggregate, of which he is a member. It is quite a different thing to say that what he is revering is a complex system of moral imperatives, of rights and obligations, the observance of which is a condition of ordered social life. It was the latter that Durkheim should be taken as having meant, not the former. Most modern students of religion would hold, as against Durkheim, that religious belief and practice are more than merely a system of social and moral symbolism (Beattie 1977: 221). Such group symbolism can be very important, in secular as well as in religious contexts, and it was to Durkheim's great merit that he pointed this out. Totems are symbols, therefore their significance for the people who have them must be looked for elsewhere than in themselves.

Religion among tribal societies is concerned with supernatural beings who are endowed with some human attributes. This means that living people may enter into some sort of social relationship with them.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Which is the key to the mystery of suffering in the world the tribals live in?

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.....

.....

2) What is the condition of an ordered social life?

.....

.....

.....

.....

1.2 BELIEFS IN GOD, ANCESTOR SPIRITS AND SPIRITS

The tribal communities mentioned above have developed the idea of a supreme spiritual being known by different names, by different tribal groups, such as, *Dharmes*, *Singbonga*, *Chando Baba*, etc. He is conceived as the creator of the universe and most powerful among the supernatural beings. He is everywhere and everything is under His power and control. There is one common theme running through all their creation accounts, namely, human beings in the first creation of the Creator displeased Him with their evil ways of living which He did not approve. For example, they were proud, arrogant, greedy, disrespectful to Him and to His creation and to one another; and disobedient to Him. They could not co-exist with Him with such ungodly behaviour. Therefore, He destroyed them as the creatures of His first creation by sending rain of fire on them. However, His beloved hid two human beings, one male and the other female, by hiding them from the rain of fire. The Creator felt lonely and unhappy without human beings after destroying them. Happily, His beloved helped Him to find the two human beings whom she had hidden in the hole of a crab in a field. The Creator and His beloved looked after these two human beings with love, care and affection and when they grew up they made them husband and wife to each other and it is from them that the human beings multiplied down the centuries and we are the members of this human family today. This was the second creation of God after He had destroyed His first creation.

Faith of tribals in God is deep rooted. They profess it *communally* and *privately*. The high point in their communal profession is the recurring seasonal sacrifice offered to God in the sacred grove by the *pahan* (village priest) in his own name and that of the village community on most of the feasts that inaugurate a new agricultural operation. Many *individual* expressions of the same belief can only be detected on closer acquaintance with their customs and way of life. For example, during marriage negotiations both parties on their exchange visits are on the look out of auspicious or inauspicious omens which they firmly believe are indicative of God's choice in the matter. When the rites of passage are celebrated, there will always be some one who will address those present mentioning that God is the Master of life, the Provider, the Ruler, the All Knowing, the Bountiful (Ponette, *op. cit.*: 74). Similarly the head of the family will offer at least once a year a sacrifice to the family ancestors in the privacy of the house to obtain their intercession with the Creator on their behalf. Such sacrifices are repeated whenever unexpected or unexplained misfortune hits the family.

Belief in Ancestor Spirits

The belief of tribals in immortality stimulates a frequent awareness of their link with the invisible world through their family, clan and tribal ties. This awareness is the reflection and also

the projection in the world beyond the family. This explains also a good deal of their serenity, particularly in the face of death. Death is not the end of everything, it is the continuation of their temporal life in a new mode of existence in the company of an innumerable number of family, clan and tribal brothers and sisters. There is grief, no doubt, but no despair. In that fond memory the Creator is never dissociated from their dear departed ones. There is no cycle of rebirths to go through to atone the past misdeeds. Survival after death is not an absorption of the tribal's individuality into an anonymous existence. He/she does not disappear in an anonymous mass of spirits. On the contrary, death is a family reunion.

The way to salvation is the tribe. The tribals mentioned above now know their destiny. They know that to reach this destiny they must overcome evil, which is essentially any behaviour that would break up their tribal status. The main religious preoccupation of a tribal is to safeguard the integrity of his tribal identity by the observance of the code established by the Creator. In their organized society they have a priest to preside over the ritual offering and sacrifices.

In the classical worlds of Greece and Rome an attitude of piety and respect was maintained towards the family ancestors: the Chinese had an elaborate ancestral cult (Beattie, *op. cit.*: 225). The above mentioned tribal communities have deep piety and respect for their ancestors. Among these communities, the lineage is thought of as a single unit, including both the living and the dead ancestors. In such cases the ancestors are believed to be concerned above all with the unity and well-being of the lineages descended from them. In this way the belief acts as a social consent in keeping with the behaviour approved by the ancestors and helps to sustain the existing social system. The ancestors are remembered collectively as a community.

Belief in Spirits

Interestingly, in the religious tradition of the above mentioned tribal communities, spirits created were once persons of flesh and blood that were given the form of spirits by the Creator. They were given precise functions in keeping with their previous earthly status. For example, the Asur widows were made the guardians of the village ecology. The widow who was kind in taking care of the Creator in disguise of a young boy full of sore, was made to reside in the sacred grove (*sarna*) to be venerated at the flower feast in every spring season of the year. She is responsible for the good monsoon during the year and also for the good health of cattle and children in the village. Such functions of different spirits can be multiplied.

These spirits are even considered to have retained some human traits in their trans-human condition. They still retain the grosser appetites for food and drink and the personal character traits of their former existence. If they are not looked after properly or are shown disrespect in one way or the other, they show their displeasure by inflicting sickness or some other misfortune upon those failing in their obligation towards the former.

The tribal communities discussed above, believe that there are non-human spirits and these may affect human beings. Therefore, they enter into a sort of human relationship with them through their priest. He speaks to the spirits as if they are persons. In this regard, God the greatest spirit, is thought to be vastly greater and more powerful than human beings, the address to Him takes the form of humble entreaty. A tribal does not attempt to impose terms on Him. He approaches Him submissively. Apart from God, tribals think that spirits are dependent on them, as they are on them. Thus, there are rights and obligations on both sides. In such cases the relationship is

thought of as involving exchange. Just as a person needs the good-will and protection of the spirits, so a spirit is thought to need the attentions of human beings if it is to be remembered, and to be given the opportunity to manifest itself in the human world. Here the underlying principle is *I give to you so that you may give to me* (Beattie, *Ibid.*: 233).

1.3 BELIEF IN BLESSING, CURSING AND OATH-TAKING

There is one further sphere of human behaviour in tribal communities involving reference to spiritual beings or forces, namely, of blessing, cursing and oath-taking. In the first two a human agent gives verbal expression to his wish that something may happen to another person or persons, often through the instrumentality of some non-human power, which may or may not be specified. Thus, the blessing or cursing which is generally believed to be most effective is that of a person to whose wishes the powers invoked are most likely to attend. That is why the blessing or cursing of religious specialists like priests is often thought to be the most potent of all.

In oaths the action of the non-human power referred to is invoked upon the swearer himself. A man who swears an oath deliberately puts himself in a condition of ritual danger unless he does what he has sworn to do. It may be supposed that the power referred to may act directly upon the oath-taker, as a man who swears falsely on the Bible or the Koran may be thought to place himself in danger of divine punishment. The expressive element in these forms of behaviour is evident. Often it is the mere saying of what is wished that is thought to be effective, and here as elsewhere its expression in symbol and rite is believed to enhance its effectiveness.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Do the tribals manifest their deep rooted faith in God? How?

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2) Does the tribal belief in ancestor spirits show that there is no cycle of rebirths? How?

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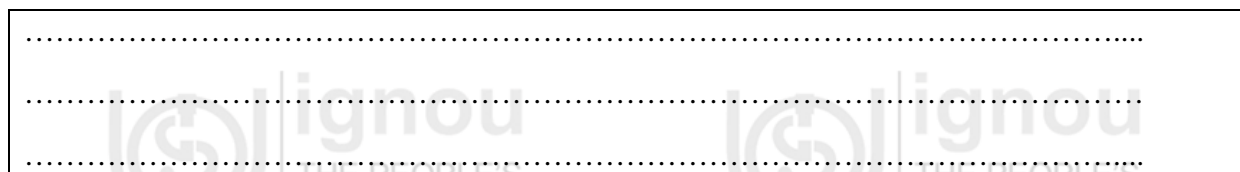
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3) How do the tribals approach God and spirits?

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1.3 RELIGIOUS RITUALS

Sacrifice

The offering of sacrifices is the most practiced activity of the tribals. The sacrifices they offer are intercessory. They have no set prayer formula with the exception of the traditional chanting of the Asur myth by the *pahan*. A short improvised invocation accompanies, of course, the offering of the sacrifice. It is the Creator Himself who enjoined them to provide sustenance to spirits of nature and by extension to all other spirits who people the spirit-world. We can broadly classify their sacrifices into *community* and *individual* sacrifices. Their society is *communitarian* and, therefore, community sacrifices for them is most important. They are offered by the village priest in the sacred grove with the participation of the villagers. They are performed at every agricultural feast during the year. Sacrifices are offered to (a) the Creator, (b) ancestral spirits of the village, and (c) minor spirits. Apart from this, the head of each family offers sacrifices to his family ancestors at least once a year at the new harvest feast and whenever an unexpected misfortune is ascribed to the displeasure of these spirits.

Prayer

Prayer generally is associated with sacrifice. The spirit's attention is drawn to the beast or other object which is being sacrificed to it asking that it should accept its mutual obligation to do what it is asked. Spirits may become harmful if they are not propitiated. The aim of much invocation, prayer and sacrifice is to turn away evil rather than to solicit positive good.

Symbolic Present

Since there is usually an element of exchange in the relationship between human beings and spirits, it often involves the symbolic presenting or making over to them of some material or sometimes non-material thing. Hence, the almost world-wide institution of sacrifice. Sometimes this involves the destruction of what is offered, frequently the killing of some living creature. Sometimes, however, food or drink is left for the spirit, for example at a graveyard. Sometimes living animals or chickens are dedicated to a spirit, and actually not killed. In these rituals there is always the idea of some deprivation on the part of the sacrificer. There is always something made over, transmitted from human being to God or spirit. Among the tribal communities under discussion, any animal or chicken to be offered to God has to be of white colour. The pig is not offered as a sacrifice to Him because it is considered to be an unclean animal. Similarly, non-material things, such as, rice, egg, etc. to be offered to Him have also to be of white colour. White colour is a sign of God's purity and holiness. In the case of sacrifice, an observer of the ritual needs to ask not only what are they doing? but also what do they think they are doing?

The notion that something is given over to God or spirit, is universal. When spirits are regarded as separate and individual powers, dependent on human beings and the latter are dependent on

the former; the rule of *I give to you so that you may give to me* may prevail, and a sacrifice may be thought of as a kind of bargain. However, it is never simply this. Spirits are not people. Sacrifice is a symbolic act whereas the trading in the market is not. If we regard sacrifice as the making of a gift to a spirit, we must ask just what it is that is given and received. Symbolic behaviour is not to be understood simply as a means of achieving something. It is also and essentially a way of saying something. Its manifestations are not always to be taken absolutely literally, as if they were a kind of technology.

Sacrifice, then, is a symbolic gift-giving. Now in giving a gift a person gives, in a sense, part of himself/herself. In sacrifice this identification is often made explicit. This is why the sacrifice of living things among tribal communities is so often specified. For an ox or a goat or a chicken shares the quality of life with the human being who sacrifices it, and so may appropriately stand for him. Also, and more practically, when a man sacrifices a valuable beast like an ox he is giving up a most prized possession. However, the giving of a gift is always a symbolic act, a rite, and in the last resort it is the rite, and not the object sacrificed, that matters most. A person who makes a sacrifice is symbolically giving a part of himself.

The identification of the sacrificer with the object sacrificed is always marked with an act of consecration, either by a laying on of hands or if it is a chicken then by making it pick and eat the consecrated rice grains at the spot of sacrifice. By consecration, the object sacrificed ceases to be just an ox or a goat or a chicken or a handful of rice. It becomes something more, namely, a man-made symbol. Sacrifice is often a moral cleansing, a washing away of evil, a means of disposing of ritual impurity.

Scapegoat

When the expiatory element is dominant, and the emphasis is rather on getting rid of evil and impurity than on making a gift to a specific spiritual power, the tribals have not sacrifice, but a rather different kind of institution, of which the most familiar example is the scapegoat. In this case evil may be ritually transferred to a chosen animal or a chicken and then driven out of the community believing that it has taken with it all the evil of the village, thus purifying it.

Sacrificial Meal

Sacrificial meal with spirits by the community members gathered together is essential among the tribals under discussion. The meaning of meal together is one of mutual respect and good will. Thus, sharing food or drink with a spirit, like sharing it with anybody else, implies friendly relationship and especially reconciliation. When two tribals have quarreled, once the dispute is settled they eat a meal in common, and after that the matter is supposed to be completely finished. However, not all sacrifices are communions, though some of them are.

With the discussion above, what becomes plain is that the concept of sacrifice is by no means a simple one. All the same, what is common to all sacrificial rites, whether the emphasis is on (a) gift exchange and propitiation, (b) communion with the spirit world, (c) purification or some other aspect of the relationship between man and spirit; it is their symbolic character. Like all ritual, sacrifice is a way of saying something as well as a way of doing something. We can only understand it if we ask not only what the tribals who practise it are trying *to do*, but also what they are trying *to say*, and in what language they are trying to say it.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Sacrifice is a symbolic gift giving. Explain.

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2) What is the idea behind the ritual of scapegoat?

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1.5 RELIGIOUS SYMBOLISM

Tribals in general think about the world in which they live in terms which are often symbolic rather than scientific. Coherent thinking can be symbolic as well as scientific, and if we are sensible we do not subject the language of poetry to the same kind of examination that we apply to a scientific hypothesis. Here it is important to determine with reasonable clarity what we are to mean by the term 'symbol'.

Signs

It is not useful to regard everything that stands for something else as a symbol. It is therefore useful to distinguish between two different kinds of signs, of things that have meanings and which stand for something other than themselves. First, there are signals, which give information about some state of affairs. What they do is to convey a specific message. Signs can be merely conventional but this is not the case with symbols. For there is usually some reason why a particular symbol should be appropriate in a particular case. There is an underlying reason which may be discovered, even though it may be by no means obvious, and may even be quite unknown to the persons who use it.

Symbols

The grounds on which a symbol's appropriateness to what is symbolized is based may vary. They may lie in some real or fancied resemblance between the symbol and what is symbolized. They may derive from some historical occurring at the same time in the individual's or the culture's past. However, whatever the ground of the association between symbol and referent, it

will generally be found that it entails some kind of appropriateness. An important difference between symbols and signals is that symbols commonly stand for or imply some abstract notion: they do not refer just to some event, or to a concrete existing reality. What we find to be symbolized in various ways in different cultures are more or less abstract notions like power, group solidarity, familial or political authority. Sociologically, this is the most important thing about symbols. They provide people with a means of representing abstract ideas, often ideas of great practical importance to themselves indirectly. It would be difficult or even impossible for them to represent these ideas to themselves directly. A 'totem' for example provides a convenient and understandable symbol for essential group values.

Symbolic Behaviour

Symbolism is essentially expressive, it is a way of saying something important, something which it is impossible or not practical to say directly. What is said symbolically must be thought to be worth saying. What is symbolized is always an object of value. This means that people's attitudes to their symbols are rarely neutral. They are always more or less affectively charged. People tend to have sometimes extremely strong feelings about their symbols.

How are we to identify the symbolic element in behaviour? It requires a clear distinction between what have been called the *instrumental* and the *expressive* aspects of human behaviour. Instrumental activity is directed to bringing about some desired state of affairs. It is oriented towards an end. Expressive activity is a way of saying or expressing something, usually some idea or state of mind. The instrumental aspect of any activity is understood by seeing what it is aimed at whereas its expressive aspect by understanding what is being said. So, symbolism is a kind of language and it is appropriate to ask of any symbol what it means.

A difficulty is that much human behaviour exhibits both instrumental and expressive aspects at the same time. However, instrumental behaviour must be understood in terms of the consequences it aims at and achieves while expressive behaviour in terms of the meanings, the ideas, it expresses. Symbolism therefore must be studied on at least two levels. First, it has to be studied on the level of meaning. A community's values may often be understood by analyzing their symbols. However, symbolic behaviour must also be studied on the functional, *action* level of analysis, for as well as having meanings it may also have social consequences. Symbolic behaviour often does have socially significant consequences.

Check Your Progress IV

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is the distinction between signs and symbols?

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2. How are we to identify the symbolic element in our behaviour?

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1.6 LET US SUM UP

Religious behaviour is a ritual behaviour involving a belief in non-human spirits. Like all ritual, religious behaviour is essentially expressive, though it is generally thought of as instrumental as well. Instrumentally regarded, religious beliefs and practices form part of systems of action. They have consequences, even if they are not always those envisaged by the people who have them. On the level of knowing, they provide satisfactory answers to otherwise insoluble questions. They fill gaps in human knowledge and experience and so diminish areas of doubt and uncertainty. Thus religious belief and practice may give confidence in the face of dangers which would otherwise be overpowering. They provide institutionalized means of coping with such dangers, and even if these means are generally scientifically ineffective, they are morally and emotionally satisfying. Ritual may serve to co-ordinate and regulate co-operative human behaviour in a variety of social situations. Religious beliefs may serve as means of social control, through the fear of incurring supernatural punishment if approved norms are broken.

On the level of idea and meaning, all kinds of ritual forces and powers are highly important for the people who respect them. However, none of them is given as an empirical datum, though their presumed effects are. Everywhere people are dependent, whether they like it or not, on extra-human forces lying outside their physical control. Ritual both enhances the importance of the things and events with which it is associated, and provides a means of dealing with them. What is affirmed in various forms of symbolic behaviour is always something of value for the people who have the ritual, and generally it is something more or less abstract, not concrete.

Much ritual and religious behaviour translates uncontrollable natural forces into symbolic entities which, through the performance of ritual, can be manipulated and dealt with. Ritual is a language for saying things which are felt to be true and important but which are not subject to statement in scientific terms. In the areas beyond science, there is no way of expressing man's awareness of the universe and its ultimate meaning except symbolically. To say that religious symbols are man-made is not to decry the validity of religion, for ritual is a manifestation of something and not just of itself.

Check Your Progress V

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How do religious beliefs and practices provide satisfactory answers to otherwise

insoluble questions?

2) Why is ritual a language for saying things which are felt to be true and important?

1.7 KEY WORDS

Totemism: The term *totem* comes from a North-American Indian language, but it has been widely used to refer to animal, bird, fish, plant, mineral species which are respected by the tribal groups in central and eastern India having them as symbols of their group identity.

Sacrificial meal: Sharing of meal during religious activities by the community members gathered together is essential among the tribals

1.8 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 2 ESCHATOLOGICAL VIEWS OF THE TRIBALS

Contents

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The World Beyond
- 2.3 Happiness and Fulfilment
- 2.4 Human Soul
- 2.5 Ancestral Spirits
- 2.6 A Communion
- 2.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.8 Key Words
- 2.9 Further Readings and References

2.0 OBJECTIVES

Tribals or Adivasis are put under the category of Scheduled Tribe according to the Constitution of India. They have their own distinct culture and worldview. Their eschatological beliefs are also different from those of other religious communities. By the end of this Lesson you should have:

- a basic understanding of what eschatology means;
- a knowledge of the way in which tribals view their end times;
- an understanding of the Adivasi concept of communion with their ancestors.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1987) defines *Eschatology* as the science of the four last things: death, judgement, heaven, and hell. The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language (1996) defines it as the branch of theology that treats death, resurrection, immortality, the end of the world, final judgement, and the future state. Applying these dictionary meanings to tribal eschatological views, it would mean, how the tribals view death and life after death.

2.2 THE WORLD BEYOND

The tribals believe in the life after death as in many other cultures and religions. They believe that after death the soul leaves the body and goes away to an unknown world which is known by various names.

The Oraons say that after death the soul goes *merxa* which corresponds to heaven. In their world view *merxa* is something like the happy ploughing ground where everybody has plenty of land and bullocks to plough it with, and plenty of rice beer to drink after their daily work. Hence, they have little anxiety about their life beyond. There is, however, one condition for a blissful life in the life after death, i.e. living in conformity with all customs of the tribe, which are monitored by the Panchayat.

The Oraons are not familiar with the concept of hell. There is no place of punishment for them. They believe that everybody will be happier in the other world than in this world. Everything in the next world, in the Oraon worldview, is like a replica of this world. Everybody is believed to be treated the same way as in this world. It is believed that everybody will be remitted to his/her ancestor in the life after death. The abode of ancestors which is known as *pachbalar*, is some kind of netherworld, something like the sheol of the Hebrews. It is not really a heavenly abode. People meeting violent deaths, such as by drowning (*dubal*), killing (*pasal*), hanging (*tangal*), killed by a tiger (*baghaut*), and a lady dying in pregnancy or childbirth, do not go to *merxa*.

The Mundas' belief in the world beyond is conceptualized in the concept of '*Parom Disum*'. It is a world coming out of primordial times, the world as made by Haram, the Supreme Being. If man had not fallen, he would have experienced this environment. However, due to the fall of man he lost his awareness and hence the world beyond is now beyond perception. It is not only the world of the spirits but also the spiritual world. It is the mysterious world in which there is consciousness, knowledge and power at a level not known to us. It is a world which causes much of what happens in the present world. It is a world to be feared, not only because of its impact on the present, but also because it is veiled from the present by a screen of fire. It can be entered only through death. When for the individual the chronological time comes to an end, he passes over into it. The world beyond is the world beyond the present, the world of man's future life, the world in which he has his destiny for ever. In this respect it is the opposite of chaos, it is a world of order in which the ancestral and other Bongas are subject to Singbonga. It is a world we cannot understand. As man's invisible existence is more important than his visible one, so on the cosmic scene the Parom disum is more important than the present world.

Kharias' belief in the world beyond is known as '*Bhatyug*' or Eternity about which they are not very clear. However, this state of existence seems to be a desire-free and action free state. Whether this state of life is a blissful one or whether this state is attractive good moral life to possess it, is not very clear either. They also believe in the communion with ancestors on the occasion of Kaman and *harboha*, which are considered to be spiritual marriage according to them. They believe that at death soul leaves the body which they call *jom cholki*.

The Adivasis in general have a belief in the survival of the soul after death and in a sort of paradise where the *pachbalar* (ancestor spirits) live happily after an ordinary death and proper obsequies. The living descendants of the family have a filial duty of offering the dead regular sacrifices, offerings and libations. Hence the family landed property is jealousy guarded in the clan. Sin is supposed to be visited by punishment already in this life. The Adivasis perform double obsequies for their dead. Persons dying before the sprouting of rice plants are burnt. Those dying later are temporarily buried.

The dead body is washed and anointed and then carried away on a bier covered with a piece of new cloth. On the way to the funeral grains of 'dhan' (paddy) and small pieces of cotton are dropped at short intervals and the bier is occasionally placed on the ground. At these halts, four heaps of dhan and wads of cotton are placed where the feet of the bier had rested on the ground. After arrival at the burning ghat the body is placed on the pyre after being carried round it three times. The head is made to rest in a northerly direction. A coin is placed in the mouth of the dead man and the pyre is lit by the eldest son or nephew. When the fire has already died out, the women present gather a few bones in an earthen urn, which is then carried home and suspended from a tree close to the house of the deceased person.

On their way back from the ghat, the mourners call the shade of the dead person back. The Oraons sacrifice a chicken to the shade in order to put it at rest. For about ten days after the death, the dead man is offered a datun (tooth brush) and water to cleanse his mouth; and rice and dal is served to him to appease his hunger. On the tenth day on the kaman feast day a pig is sacrificed to the ancestors and the mourning is brought to an end.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is your understanding of the tribal views of eschatological belief?

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2) What do you understand by the tribal obsequies of the dead?

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2.3. HAPPINESS AND FULFILMENT

Happiness is the key to salvation or total emancipation in the Adivasi worldview. One cannot claim to be emancipated without attaining happiness. Happiness is the criterion of a successful life either here on earth or in the life beyond. For Adivasis this happiness is collective. It is the collectivity that gives the individual a sense of achievement, a sense of satisfaction, a sense of

direction and a sense of accomplishment. This happiness, for the Oraon, is articulated in terms of three C's, namely "cattle, crops and children" as indicators of happiness and prosperity for their family. They even envisage their life after death as having plenty of fields to plough, with lots of cattle, children and bumper crop. Thus the criteria of happiness are underlined very clearly in the Oraon worldview.

What it is going to be like in the life after death is reflected in what it is now on this earth. The Munda, the Kharia, the Santhal, and the Ho, have similar criteria for their fulfillment. They are basically agriculturists and hence a longing for the land and a rich harvest is justified. The Kharia have a special respect and reverence for cattle and the latter are a part of their household as they are crucial to their survival. Children continue the generation of the parents. Every tribe looks up to them for its perpetuation. Therefore children who are well versed into the norms and values of the tribe, those who can uphold the dignity and pride of the tribe, are always held in high esteem. The philosophy behind their love for the land manifests a network of relationships, both in this world and in the next. The Adivasi characteristics of simplicity, truthfulness, contentment, hard work, hospitality, generosity, independence, a care-free attitude, egalitarianism and love for peace, etc., are indicative of their harmonious life. Thus Soares-Prabhu is convinced that in the midst of individualism, greed, aggressive competition and growing alienation from nature, the tribal values of solidarity with nature and egalitarianism, should show others the way.

Land is central to the tribes' existence. Without land they simply do not exist. In absence of land there is no space for their social, cultural, economic and ecological life. Sanjay Bosu Mullick opines that "identity of the indigenous peoples rests on two vital elements, space and speech". Spatial habitat or the geographical territory of their ancestors is their birthright. That part of "Mother earth" has been passed on to them by their fore-parents. Therefore, the rationale for their struggle for a separate land can be justified in terms of three J's, namely, JAMIN (the land), JAL (the water), and JANGLE (the forest), which belong to them from time immemorial.

The divine origin of the land and its stewardship by the tribes is an open secret. Singbonga, Dharmes, Chando Baba, Ponmesor, Thakur Jiv, the gods of their respective tribes have given the land to the tribe to be taken care of. Nirmal Minz rightly points out that the personhood of Adivasi is rooted in their concept of land. From earth comes all sustenance to human beings and non-humans. No land, no personhood of the Adivasis! Therefore ownership of the land alienates it from the user. For the Tribe land and forest, water and air and all nature's bounty are gifts of God. No king, no landlord, no Government has ever created the land. Land was there from time immemorial and the Adivasis have been using this gift as stewards and not as owners. On account of the Adivasi-land symbiosis, land forms a major part of their being in terms of culture, religion, socio-cultural organization, philosophy, history, economy, and geography. An Adivasi honours, respects, reveres and protects the land. The Adivasi intimacy with land results in a vast repository of knowledge of the flora and fauna, which have sustained them for centuries. The land forms the core of the education of the Adivasi to teach them how to exist in harmony with nature, so much so that "a tree in the hamlet ceases to be merely a tree, but an important member of the village community, so also animals and birds". It is said, "No other community can understand the link between the Adivasi and the land than the one that knows and shares this sacred link of the "Holy Land". For the Adivasi, their land is the "Mecca" of Islam, Jerusalem of

the Christian and the Jew, the Bodh Gaya of the Buddhist. The sacredness permeates even the offspring of the land – the animals, birds, trees, rivers, and the people”.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How do Adivasis understand happiness and fulfilment in their life?

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2) What is the place of land in the life of an Adivasi?

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2.4. HUMAN SOUL

Tribals in general are staunch believers in the existence of *soul* which is distinct from the *body*. It continues to exist even after a person dies. Primarily, it signifies any *shade* or *shadow*. It is a quite fitting word to distinguish the invisible, intangible soul from the visible and tangible solid body. Even as the shadow resembles the bodily form so must the soul, as a life giving power and director of the body in acquiring various human faculties and virtues.

The Munda tribe is one of the major tribes in India and much study has been done on this tribe. The traditional thinking of the Munda tribals about human soul is quite illuminating. It explains the eschatological views of the tribals with much clarity. Their neighbouring tribes in central and eastern part of India have similar views on the human soul. According to the Mundas every human person has two souls: (a) the *ji* and (b) the *roa*.

The *Ji*

The *ji* is the principle of life, found not only in men but also in animals and plants. In plants, however, it has only the vegetative power. In animals it has moreover the faculty of sense perception and the appetitive and movement faculties. In human being, in addition to all these, it has *reason* and *will*. The *ji* as endowed with reason and will is called *mon* (mind). Strictly speaking, animals have no *mon*. When a plant or animal dies, its *ji* wastes away into air and ceases to exist. The *ji* of human being is *immortal* and when the person dies it goes to *bitarpur* (the inner dwelling), also called *parom disum* (the country beyond), to receive there reward or punishment but what kind of reward or punishment that is not known.

The *ji* is considered the cause of all the processes of bodily life. It is, therefore, said to be present everywhere in the whole body and to act and watch over it even when it is asleep or in a state of unconsciousness. This is why our heart keeps beating and we continue breathing. It grows in strength together with the body of little children and decreases in old age.

The Roa

If *ji* is the first soul then *roa* is the second soul in every human being. While the former is the principle of *life*, the latter is the principle of *quality* or power (*gun, raisi*) in a person. Every human *roa* is endowed by *Singbonga* (Supreme Being) with a single *gun* or *raisi* which has the following effects on the *roa*:

First, it causes the *roa* to present the shape of a certain animal when seen by another *roa* in dreams. The *ji* cannot leave the body without causing death whereas the *roa* is not bound to remain continually in the body during one's life. However, its continued absence would in the long run prove equally fatal. While a person sleeps, it goes for an outing almost every night. What we call *dreams* is just what the *roa* sees and hears in its outings.

Often, if not always, it sees things not as they are actually in progress but as they are going to happen shortly. When free from the body, it is gifted with an insight into the near future. It may moreover either see the actors of events in their unveiled reality just as they are or may see them under symbolic appearances. Actually, the latter is the usual way in which an individual is almost always seen by the wandering *roa* under the shape of such animal as he/she resembles by character or at least a man/woman stands for an animal and vice versa. A dream may also be a warning of impending harm inflicted by a *bonga* (spirit) for the *roa* when free from the body is able to get a glimpse of the spirit world.

Second, the effect of the *gun* of the *roa* is that it influences a person's temperament and fate and causes in his/her life a similarity with the special habit, aptitude or efficacy which characterizes the animal the shape of which his/her *roa* presents. For example, (1) a person having a catlike *roa* is a grumbler and one who has a doglike *roa* is quarrelsome; marry the two such people and they will live together like cat and dog; (2) the one who has an elephant like *roa* is a ruinous eater serenely free of interruption or disturbance, on the other hand he/she knows no fear; (3) the one who has a viper like *roa* is quiet in his/her ways but successful, (4) contrariwise, the one with a cobra like *roa* is bound to poverty; (5) the one with a vulture like *roa* though a good hand at the plough, and always thorough master of his team, is nevertheless so poor that he has to find his sustenance as a hireling; (6) the one with a crowlike *roa* vainly shouts and thrashes his team, he cannot make his oxen go fast, they do not obey him; (7) the one with a river-snakelike *roa* is bound to become rich, is moreover a good swimmer and can cross a river in easy mind, the flood will never carry the person off; (8) the one with a rat-snake like *roa* is a coward, quick to fly; (9) the one with a tigerlike *roa* inspires reverential fear, such a person commands respect and has influence and authority, especially in *panchayats*; (10) the one with a jackal like *roa* is cunning and with great ease invents excuses and creates stories; (11) a person with a bear like *roa* has the knack of finding honey; (12) a person with an otterlike *roa* makes a good fisher; (13) a person with a mongoose like *roa* gives knowledge of medicinal roots and happiness of curing many patients; and (14) a person with an ogre like *roa* eats like an ogre and consequently is vowed to dire poverty and want.

Third, in addition to the above special characteristics, the *gun* imparts to the human *roa* a quality of either slowness or quickness or disinclination to action or making energetic efforts with corresponding effects. Thus, every human being has either a *hambal roa* (heavy soul) or a *rambal roa* (light soul), according to whether, and in proportion to, the animal, the shape of which the person's *roa* presents is either slow-moving or quick-moving.

The good or bad influence believed to be produced by a person with a *heavy soul* is as follows: not only is such a person slow in whatever he/she does himself/herself, but he/she has a slowing influence on people and things around him/her. Such a person should never be the one to start a work. If for instance, he/she plants the first paddy seedlings in a field, the planting in that field will take no end of time. On the other hand, it should always be a person with a heavy soul to open a bale of paddy and take from it the first paddy grains, the provision in the bale will last so much the longer. Such a person has a damping effect even on the *spirits* which will not easily harm him/her. The mere presence of such a person makes even divination slow and difficult.

Fourth, both the elephantlike and the ogerlike *roas* have an effect of their own, namely, of making food or what is to produce food run short. For example, if a person with such a *roa* happens to plant the first seedlings in a field, the owner will soon find out that he has not enough seedlings for the whole field. Again, if the above person takes the first paddy grains from a bale, the paddy will soon be finished.

The *roa* like the *ji* is immortal but after death it does not go with the *ji* to the next world. It remains on earth and becomes a *spirit*. It is the disembodied *roa* which is called *umbul* (shade). Except *Singbonga* who is really God, and the only God, all other *bongas* (spirits) are nothing but disembodied *roas*, or shades of men and women. The guardian spirits of families are the shades of the ancestors of these families.

The disembodied *roa* is believed not be as immaterial as the *ji*, since it is supposed to be still in need of food and drink. That is why at the burial of the dead, some rice and coins are put with the corpse to enable the *roa* still present in the neighbourhood, to pull along until it is re-introduced into the *ading* (inner room) of the family to dwell there and find its sustenance in the few grains of rice and drops of drink offered to the shades of the ancestors at each meal of the family. If the *roa* is not brought back into the inner room of the house, it must look after itself and try to get its food somehow.

2.5 ANCESTRAL SPIRITS

Once introduced into the inner room of the house, the *roa* becomes one of the ancestral spirits of that family. These spirits are venerated by the family members and in return they are believed to intercede with the *Singbonga* for the good of the family and to protect them during their journeys or in difficult circumstances. Everyday before the food is distributed to the family members, the distributor drops a little of it on the floor for the household spirits. Similarly, before taking rice beer a few drops are first dropped on the floor for these spirits. If these services are neglected, somebody in the family will be the victim of a severe stomach-ache or some other sickness or mishap. When a new animal is brought home, one must put oil on its head or horns when taking it into the cattle-shed in order that the household spirits may recognize it and do not harm it. On

all the main feast days of the village community, the household spirits are not forgotten. A reddish fowl is sacrificed to them. The household spirits are supposed to dwell in the inner store room of the house where no stranger may enter. Hence, the daily ordinary veneration to the household spirits is done by the women of the family

Communion with Ancestor Spirits

While the light shade remains among the living members of the deceased person's family, the *ji* of the departed person is believed to join the community of the dead ancestors on the *gami* day. With the *gami* (Communitarian religious ceremony assisting the deceased person to join the community of his/her ancestors), the dead person is believed to have found a resting place with his/her ancestors for ever. Among the Uraons (Kurukh speaking tribals) in the region mentioned above, the bones of all the members who have died in the course of the year are ceremonially drowned or deposited in the clan *kundi* (place for depositing the bones of deceased persons) on the annual *konha benjja* (great wedding) day in the month of December or January after the harvest season gets over. Through this ceremony it is believed that the dead person is fully incorporated into the community of the ancestors as one of their members living in the world beyond for ever in peace and joy. However, they still form part of the clan of their living descendants whom they now protect as clan guardians, with whom they converse in dreams, and over whom the dead ancestors keep a watch in times of sickness and ward off evil spirits. Thus, the tribals believe that they are always living in company with their ancestors. They are convinced that the ancestors still love them, take the same interest in their affairs as before, help and protect them in their earthly life.

In their turn, the living members of the clan discharge their filial duty towards the ancestors by invoking their aid in times of distress. They are especially remembered on the occasions of great annual feasts, such as, *phaggu* (The tribal new year day on the full moon day of the lunar month of February-March), *khaddi* (Spring or flower festival), *karam* (Festival of standing crops and unmarried maidens who are the prospective mothers for perpetuating and continuing the tribe) and *tusgo* (Feast of eating of the new harvest). At every meal, a devout tribal makes it a point to place some food outside his/her plate and to drop a few drops of his/her drink before eating or drinking, in honour of the ancestors. This is a way of expressing one's gratitude to them for providing the family with fields from which the family members make a living and continue their lineage.

Feast of eating the new harvest is the great feast in honour of the ancestors. It is a day of rejoicing. Sweetmeats are prepared and it is certainly the best day of the year for the tribals. It is touching to see them remember their departed parents and grand parents with gratitude for feeding them in the past when they were helpless. No one would partake of the new rice before a little of it was offered to the ancestors. A handful of it is made into *alkhra* (flat rice) and spread on the ground in honour of the ancestors. Similarly, before anyone could drink *jhara* (rice beer), a little of it is dropped on the ground in honour of the ancestors. Sacrifice of a whitish grey fowl is made to them by the head of a household. He crushes the head of the fowl with his fist saying: 'O our departed mothers and fathers, you have always been so good and kind to us. Here we are rejoicing. We cannot forget you. Come and rejoice with us'.

During the name giving ceremony, a child is named after an ancestor who is requested to protect the child in a very special way. They invoke the ancestor by putting the child under his or her

protection saying: 'See, now this child has taken your name. Kindly protect this child under your care'.

At the marriage of their sons and daughters, the fathers-in-law raise two brass jugs of water and together invoke the ancestors of both their families to take the married pair under their protection. They join arms on two occasions and drink the two jugs of rice beer in honour of their ancestors. On those occasions, they spill a little of the drink on the ground and say to them: 'Render your shade and protection to us. We have settled this marriage satisfactorily among ourselves. Now protect us and partake of the feast and drink the rice beer we offer you'.

In times of sickness or difficulties, they have recourse to their ancestors and say: 'You have left us your children. You see in what difficulties we are. Help us and do not forget us for we do not forget you and always give you sacrifice'.

It is believed by the traditional tribals that the heavy shade of a dead person hovers about after his/her burial homeless between the house and the burial ground. Food in leaf cups is provided for it. In the tradition of the Uraon tribals, after a lapse of ten days after the burial, the relatives of the dead gather together at his/her house on the *gami* day. Each one of them brings with him/her some rice in a leaf plate. A small space is cleaned and besmeared with diluted cowdung. An elder of the clan digs a hole in the centre of this cleared space with the help of a ploughshare. He draws the diagram of *palkansna* (A ritual performed in order to get (a) God's blessing upon oneself and one's crop, cattle and children, (b) God's protection against evil) around the hole. Rice and an egg are put on the diagram. He performs the *palkansna* ceremony invoking God and reciting the genesis story. He ends the invocation with words such as: "Now he/she is gone, look after him/her," and breaks the egg which is then cooked and given to children. The egg shell is put in the hole.

A pigling is next sacrificed to *Nasre*, the clan elder of the dead ancestors, and while the blood of the victim is poured into the hole, the person performing the ritual addresses Nasre as follows: 'Accept him/her among you. He/she is one of your children. Receive him/her as such and have pity on us also that remain behind'.

The rice in the leaf plate is heaped together and sent to be cooked but the leaf plates are put into the hole which is now closed up. Henceforth the departed soul takes its place among the ancestor spirits of the clan. The assembled relatives now sit to a meal together.

When boys burn their forearm on three or five spots as a mark of manhood and girls tattoo their foreheads and temples, they are told to look toward the place of depositing the bones of their clan members, and not to mind the pain. It is quite painful but helps them to be courageous. On this occasion, the elders warn them: 'Look towards the burial place. Your ancestors are there. If you are not courageous, they will not receive you'.

Before occupying a newly built house, a householder first offers a sacrifice to his ancestors and recommends his family to their protection.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What have you learnt about the two aspects of the human soul?

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2) What is the significance of communion with ancestral spirits for Adivasis?

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2.6 A COMMUNION

Union of Shades, Bones: A Divine Communion

For the Munda even after death the 'roa' or 'umbul' (the disembodied soul) continues living. On the basis of this belief only the spirit of the deceased is brought back through a ceremony called 'umbul ader' (sheltering the spirit) which is conducted seven days after the burial. The 'umbul ader' ceremony marks the homecoming of the deceased person. This sets all the fears to rest as the spirit of the dead is said to settle down happily with Singbonga and the ancestors. The philosophy behind the 'umbul ader' ceremony and its feeding at the grave every evening is that in death the spirit of the dead becomes an outcaste and the family has to feed it separately until the spirit is sanctified.

This shows a spiritual solidarity among the dead and the alive. The *umbul ader* ritual is not just an empty rite. It is indeed a symbolic action of the Munda religious worldview. The immortal *roa* which is known as 'umbul' till it is taken into the *ading*, becomes *ora bonga* (the house spirit) by the *umbul ader* (*ading*) ceremony. It joins the ancestors in the *ading* and stays with them for ever. It is united with Singbonga through the union with the ancestors. It prays to Singbonga for the welfare of the family. In response the head of the family offers it rice and

curry in the *ading*, and expresses the relationship with the deceased who has now become the *ora-bonga*.

The ritual of 'Jang-Topa' or the 'Second Burial' also symbolizes their continuous solidarity with the departed ones. The sacrificial victim symbolizes a living worship to Singbonga and a living memory of the deceased. The function of the ritual is to unite the Mundas and strengthen their bond. This is also a reminiscent of the eternal happiness and a state of bliss after death. It is also an occasion for purification. It reminds one about a great future, a hope for eternal life, happiness and eternal fulfillment. Thus life here on earth is full of hope and promises because their communion with Singbonga and the deceased ancestors is a matter of joy and happiness. Thus the Munda fulfillment is attained through this very communion.

According to Dehon two main rituals of the deceased, namely: (i) *Ekh mankhna* (Chhain Bhitrana) or calling back the light shade of the departed into the house, and (ii) the *koman* or the re-uniting of the heavy shade with the shades of their ancestors, are reminiscent of the tribe's communion with the ancestors and the Supreme Being. The ceremony of *Harbona* or *Koha Benja* is a sequel to this. The Uraons are not satisfied with the reunion of the shades. They want also the reunion of the bones. Relatives over whom they put some rice, native gin and money collect bones. Then they take this urn to the river, which holds the bones of their ancestors. The *Bhuinyars* (first settlers and proprietors of their fields) have a particular spot called *kundi* in the river where they deposit the bones of all the members of the family. The *Koha benja* is celebrated in the month of January. After the banquet in honour of the dead, a procession is taken out to accompany the bones to their last resting-place. *Nasre*, namely the ancestors gone to *Merkha*, personifies the *panch* of the heavy shades. *Pachbal* personifies the light shades that remain with their relatives.

There is no hell for them, no place of punishment. They say, they go to *merkha*, which corresponds to heaven. The Red Indians speak of the happy hunting grounds and the Uraons imagine something like the happy ploughing grounds where everybody will have plenty of rice-beer to drink after their labour. Hence, they have no anxiety at all about their future life, provided that they conform to all the customs imposed on them by the *panchayat* of the other world, which they personify under the name *Nasre*. All their anxiety is about this world, and all their religious practices tend only to worldly things, namely to get good crops and be free from sickness. All evils are attributed to the 'evil eye' and 'evil mouth'. In such cases they have recourse to Dharmes in the 'Palkhansna', i.e., the breaking of teeth.

Separation and Communion – From Death to Life

Death is always mourned whether it is of an old person or an infant, whether it is a natural death or unnatural. The difference, however, in the case of the unnatural death is that there is fear in the minds of people. The one dying of 'dubal' (drowning), 'pasal' (murder), and 'tangal' suicide is said to turn into 'muan bonga' or harmful spirits. Such people have no hope of fulfillment. Thus there is hope only for those dying a natural death. In the category of 'unredeemable' spirits come also the infants who have not been formerly incorporated into the tribe through the initiation ceremony called 'chchatti'. Those dying in a state of 'chchilan' (ostracism) are also

meted out the same treatment. In Christian terminology their 'salvation' is not possible. Decision of the 'Panchayat' is final in matters relating to tribal identity. A person endangering tribal solidarity and peacefulness by way of violating taboos is bound to be excommunicated. It is like public conviction. Parapullil mentions three kinds of punishment among the Oraon, Santal and Munda tribes: (i) Ritual separation (e.g. birth, death in a family); (ii) Ostracising from the community for such crimes as inter-tribal marriage, theft; (iii) Total exclusion (Bitlaha) from the community (e.g. for marriage with a non-tribal, also called 'adultery'). In the wake of any or all of the above, reconciliation is a communal event, and in the event and experience of reconciliation there is fulfillment.

The event of excommunication is symbolically neutralized among some tribes by killing a fowl or a goat and the excommunicated drinking the victim's blood. This is the re-incorporation into the community. This is also an emancipatory sacrifice. Panchayat represents the community. The 'Sirpanch' (village elder) receives water/beer from the culprit's hands symbolising readmission and acceptance. Since the separation is communitarian, reconciliation, too, has to be a communal event. The Mundas have a belief that a bad person cannot obtain happiness after death. The bad are deprived of the community of the ancestors. The separation from the tribe is the greatest punishment for the tribes all over, either it be the Munda, the Oraon, the Kharia, the Ho, the Santhal, the Andaman Islanders. It is the experience of 'hell' for them, for without the tribe they fail to attain the destiny set for them.

2.7 LET US SUM UP

This unit attempts to explain what the eschatological worldview of the Adivasis is. It has presented some beliefs of the Adivasis in the end times. It has also presented the way in which two aspects of the human soul, namely the *ji* and the *roa* operate. The importance of ancestral spirits is described with whom a communion is required for salvation in the life after death. If there is no communion in this world with the community, there cannot be a communion with the community of the ancestors after death. Happiness and fulfilment are understood in terms of their union with the community, both on this earth and with ancestors after their death. The land is central to their identity, without which there is no happiness and fulfilment. The life beyond is an extension of the present life in union with the community.

2.8. KEY WORDS

Eschatology : Views about end times and the life after death.

Obsequies : A funeral rite or ceremony

Ex-communication : A religious censure to deprive, suspend or limit membership of someone in a religious community.

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UNIT 3 TRIBAL RELIGION/S VIS-À-VIS IMPACT OF OTHER RELIGIONS

Contents

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Contact with other Religions
- 3.3 Bhagat Movements among the Uraons
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- 3.11 Further Readings and References

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The unit aims at giving the account of tribal religions and their encounter with foreign religions. The relationship is very well known from the different tribal movements that have characterized themselves as defenders of tribal religions or as speaking for the adaptability and accommodation.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Religious leaders, who have been acknowledged as genuine *prophets* in the Judaeo-Christian traditions, have always claimed to speak in the name of God. They were His spokesmen, and their vocation has an origin from a call of God Himself rather than from their fancy or choice. Through several difficult, critical periods of Jewish history, the prophets claimed to be the authentic interpreters of the voice of God, the revealers of His plan, and the guardians and guarantors of the divine promise to God's chosen People. In the present study too the religious leaders initiating them have claimed to be inspired either by God or some other supernatural power. The messages they communicated to their followers, they maintained, were from God or spirits, and that they were merely their mouthpieces. Hence, we may be permitted to call these leaders 'prophets'.

Similarly, in its original restricted sense, the term *messianic* refers in the Judaeo-Christian traditions to the expectation or belief in a Messiah, a redeemer, or a Saviour for the whole world born of the Jewish people. In a broader sense the term may be stretched to include the expectation of salvation in other religions as well. It may in fact be used broadly to denote a mass liberation of a people from oppression. At any rate, at least in the context of Western cultures, messianism refers to the expectation of a saviour or redeemer, who in the form of either a historical person or a historically identifiable group of people, is a bearer of salvation and possesses the means of effecting it. In the movements under study too, the religious leaders promised to their oppressed people a deliverer in the person of either God Himself or some other superior power or the religious leader himself. And their followers expressed their vehement desire to see such a saviour and took concrete steps to facilitate his coming. Hence the term 'messianic' is used to express this feature of the cults.

The term *millennium* is used in Christian theological vocabulary in connection with eschatology or the body of doctrines concerning the final state of the world. Those who expected a millennium, believed that one day, in the near future, the Messiah of the world would establish an enduring (a thousand years') reign over the elect, a humanity at once perfectly happy and good. The participants of the movements described here also expected their world to be utterly transformed, their long drawn out misery and oppressions to cease, and an era of peace and plenty to follow in the immediate future. Hence, these movements are described as *millenarian*.

Contact of tribal societies with non-tribal societies in India has often disturbed the traditional set up of the former. Their institutions were often gravely affected if not rendered quite useless, and the whole fabric of their traditional life was in danger of dissolution if no new steps were taken to make these people find their bearings and strike out for a new mode of existence. Precisely in such situations, there have often emerged religious leaders or *prophets*, who claimed to be divinely inspired and proclaimed to their people a message from above, and made them adopt new norms of living in preparation for a blissful existence in this world in the near future. Unbelievers were threatened with exclusion from sharing this happy future or even with dire destruction.

Recourse to millenarian hopes is commonplace in human history. In times of severe distress, when men have felt themselves dissatisfied with the existing world and looked forward to a better one, prophets have often arisen and assured them that better days were imminent. Millenarian movements have not been confined to tribal societies alone. It has been observed that in other societies too traditional beliefs about a future golden age or messianic kingdom takes the form of mass disorientation and anxiety. The ideologies of such popular movements turn out to be of a peculiar kind in which there is absence of order.

Messianic movements appeal to the inspiration of supernatural beings to justify their cults and thus they have strong religious aspects. Yet, political, economic and racial factors may often be involved in the process. There may be in these movements a struggle for reallocation of power based on wealth and organisation. Messianic movements would seem not so much to sanction political and social aspirations as to give them an expression in symbolic forms.

Tribals involved in messianic movements, no doubt, feel oppressed, frustrated and overwhelmed. This oppression may, however, cover not only the political and economic grounds, it may also be felt in the psychic and moral spheres. Again, oppression in itself is a negative aspect of the

situation and it may be useful to note that messianic cults also manifest a positive will of the dissatisfied tribals to reassert their integrity as men and to participate in a wider world created by their contact with non-tribals. Messianic movements are 'Religions of the Oppressed', but with hope. Communities caught up in messianic movements may often be obliged to reformulate their native assumptions in the face of new constantly changing material and moral environment.

A hero, a prophet or a messiah, if true, will be accepted as such only in a community which is ready for such a personality. But, there may be more than mere religious fervour involved in the development of the messianic situation. There could be political or economic tensions caused by a privileged few enjoying undue advantages. There could be no way of communication between the rulers and the ruled which the prophet alone may be thought capable of breaking down or, he may serve as a nucleus on which the oppressed people may choose to build their ideals and hopes. He may be the very image of what they may be striving to become.

This study looks at similar movements among the major tribes of Central and Eastern India in the 19th and 20th centuries during the British rule till Independence in 1947. The regions inhabited by these tribes form an area which has a common culture based on agriculture. This area is in Jharkhand today but its culture spills over into the adjoining districts under the states of Chhattisgarh, Orissa and West Bengal and beyond.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Who are called *prophets*? What are their claims?

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2) Which are the characteristics of messianic and millenarian movements? Explain.

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3.3 BHAGAT MOVEMENTS AMONG THE URAONS

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, there appeared in the Uraon country of Chota Nagpur sporadic examples of holy men known as *Bhagats* (from *bhakti*, meaning devotion). These men were disposed towards devotion and contemplation of God. Some of them advanced in their contemplation to such a degree that they would spend whole nights in meditation. In such a state, or in an alleged vision of the Deity, or in dreams, a *Bhagat* fancied he saw a stone emerging out of the ground in his courtyard or somewhere in its neighbourhood. This was presumed to be a manifestation of the deity *Mahadeo*. The stone would then be promptly sheltered under a shed where the devotee would worship his deity. These men were known as *Bhuiphat Bhagats* (from *bhumi*, meaning ground and *phatna*, to split), because they had adopted an image of a deity that had emerged from the ground.

The *Bhagat* cult lays stress on a personal reverent adoration and loving service of a beneficent God by an individual devotee. While still acknowledging the existence of the old officially recognised deities among the Uraons, this cult regards these deities, with the exception of ancestor spirits, as evil beings to be deliberately avoided. Unlike the *Mati* (witch doctor and exorcist), a *Bhagat* never allies himself with harmful spirits for furthering his selfish ends. In Roy's opinion the fact, "that Hindu influence had been at work in developing and to some extent perhaps giving shape to the *Bhagat* cult cannot be denied, but such influence would appear to have been less direct than Riseley supposes. Ancient tribal tradition and certain tribal customs would appear to indicate that the germ of *Shakti* cult had been long present in the tribal soul." (Roy, S.C., *Uraon Religion and Customs*, Ranchi, 1928, p. 323.)

The *Bhakti* cult spread, as it were, by cultural osmosis, especially in the western and southern part of the Ranchi District and its adherents numbered a few thousand in 1928. It was not a proselytising movement and its tenets of ritual purity were exacting. It was generally the immediate family circle of the *Bhagat* blessed with a revelation from God that assumed and carried on the tradition of the *Shakti* cult.

In some cases the descendants of well to do *Bhagats* have nominally accepted as their *Gurus* (spiritual guides) *Gosains* or itinerant mendicant Hindu *Vaisnava* Brahmins coming from north Bihar. These *Gurus* used to confide to their disciples secretly the name of the tutelary deity which was to be remembered and invoked daily. As an expiation for their past sins and ceremonial impurities the disciples were required to make their *guru* the gift of a *Bachhi* (heifer), whence they came to be known as *Bachhi-dan Bhagats*. These *Bhagats* also adopted a vegetarian diet. The mercenary spirit of the itinerant *Gosains* quickly brought an end to their influence on the Uraon *Bhakti* movement. The *Bhakti* cult preached by Kabir also once found its way from Bilaspur and Raipur in central India through Gangpur in Orissa State into the south of the Ranchi District, in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

Uprightness and regard for truth are natural to simple unsophisticated Uraons. Almsgiving to the needy and hospitality to guests were regarded as natural virtues to them. While they use meat in their diet, they are kind to their domestic animals. Their own *Bhagats* had introduced the idea of total abstaining from all animal food and intoxicating drink. So the teaching of Kabir would have seemed very appropriate to those Uraons who aspired to break away from the cult of minor spirits to a higher spiritual ideal. One tenet of Kabir's teaching, however, went counter to the tradition of the Uraons, namely, they could not for long adore their deity without an outward symbol and without an elaborate cult.

The Uraon converts to the sect of Kabir were allowed to retain such tribal customs of marriage, birth and death that did not conflict with the teachings of Kabir. They were allowed to marry their daughters according to the rules of clan exogamy and even with non-*Kabirpanthi* Uraons. Girls thus married out of the sect were not allowed to cook or serve meal for their parents' people or to sit down to a meal with them. Animal sacrifices were prohibited, as also the cremation of the dead and offerings to their spirits. At birth, marriage or death in these families a service known as the *Chowka*, (Roy, 1928, 331-335) was gone through by a *Mahant* (a *guru* of the sect). At this service the kernel of a coconut was ceremonially broken and distributed to the congregation, together with *betel* leaves, as a substitute for sacrificial flesh and meal.

With the exception of this *Chowka* service and the communal meal that followed, there was little else in this new cult to fire the enthusiasm of the Uraons looking for an institutional religion permeated with a personal devotion to a deity. The *gurus* of the new sect did not always inspire the personal devotion of their disciples. So already by the year 1928, when Roy was writing his *Uraon Religion and Customs*, the movement had long ceased to make further progress among the Uraons.

In all these religious reform movements, one notices a strengthening of *monotheistic* belief and an insistence on the personal practice of religion as against the customary clan or tribal approach to spirits. Abandonment of dance and drink and meat, on the other hand, seems to have taken its origin from Hindu inspiration. The marriage and kinship system of the Uraon tribe, however, remained intact and marriage outside one's own clan as well as marriage within one's own tribe persisted, preserving the tribal identity in spite of sectarian differences.

To conclude, religious movements, such as, Hindu proselytising bodies like the *Arya Samaj* had made very few converts among the Uraons. This was due to the fact that these bodies offered little relief to the economic ills of the Uraons, who were also suspicious that, if converted to Hinduism, they would be relegated to a low place in it below the *Twice Born*. The Uraons, as it was shown above, were indirectly influenced by the *Bhakti* sects of the Hindus because these had no caste implication for the converts. A few Hindu deities like *Mahadeo* and *Dharti Mai* have also been adopted by some Uraons because these squared with their traditional notions of *Dharmes*, the Supreme Being, and *Chala Pachcho*, the old lady of the *Sarna* (sacred grove) whom they used to worship and venerate.

3.4 THE KHERWAR MOVEMENT (OR KHARWAR MOVEMENT)

The period following the Santal Insurrection (*Hul*) of 1855 was not entirely peaceful. The oppression by the *Mahajans* still continued in Santal Pargana. A spirit of resentment swept throughout the district brining the Santals once again to the point of mass upsurge. They felt that no good could be achieved unless a revitlisation of their society was brought out. This realisation was the beginning of a new consciousness which manifested itself in another social movement called the Kharwar movement. It was motivated by the desire to return to the Golden age of tribal independence and glory that is celebrated in the Santal myths.

A millenarian cult, called the Kherwar movement, was observed among the Santals at this period. The aim of the movement was an attempt to return to their golden age when the Santals

worshipped *Chando* (God) only and were undisputed lords of their land. An early account describes the movement as follows:

“It appears to have been first noticed in 1871, when a Santal named Bhagrith (Hinduised as Bhagirath) set himself as a religious teacher, exhorting the Santals to give up eating pigs and fowls, as well as the drinking of liquor, and to abandon the worship of *Marang Buru* (mountain god) for that of the one true God. The burden of his preaching, however, was that the land belonged to the Santals, and no rent should be paid for it. He used to have a tray loaded with grain carried round his meetings and would ask who made the grain. The reply would be *Chando* or God. He would next ask, “who cultivated the grain?” The answer would be “we cultivated the grain.” Bhagirath would then say: “If we cultivated the grain and God made it, why should we pay rent?” His adherents were known as *Kherwars* or *Saphahors* (Clean men), and were to rise at a given signal and drive all the non-*Kherwars*, i.e. foreigners of all kinds, out of the land.... There were many *Saphahors* in the district, who would not eat pigs and fowls or drink intoxicating liquor, but worship *Mahadeo* (Shiva) and never kill animals except in sacrifice. In this and other aspects there was a decided tendency to adopt Hinduistic practices, but many of the *babajis* (ascetics) have been pervert Christians and their teaching shows traces of Christian influences. The movement is especially apt to revive in times of scarcity when the people attribute their misfortunes to their having fallen from a state of pristine purity when they worshipped God.” (1911 *Census of India* Report, Vol. V, Part I, p. 216.)

The aim of the movement itself was very straightforward; the recovery of the ancestral lands from foreign landlords and the ensuring of tribal independence. The means to achieve these ends appear rather mysterious. They included the abandoning of the *bongas* (spirits), the worship of the one true God, and the adoption of Hindu rules of purity (vegetarian diet and total prohibition) in imitation of their Hindu antagonists the landlords.

Bhagirath had numerous imitators, who were also called *Babajis*, or in some cases *guru*, and worked much as he did. Several of them declared to the people that they had been commissioned by God to spread their doctrine. Most of them had come into contact with Protestant Christianity. They declared that it was God and not they who cured the people. Only those who believed were healed, and doubters were not to expect assistance in any way. The people must live clean lives and abstain from obscene language and impure thoughts. Some of the *Babajis* started regular meetings for the people on Sundays, and prohibited hard labour on that day (presumably in imitation of Christians).

The *Kherwar* movement seems to have been originally of a religious character. The Santal tradition asserts that their ancestors had no *bongas*, but worshipped God alone. They were conscious of having become degraded due to their abandonment of their original and purer belief. Their leaders ask despairingly why God has punished them and permitted them to lead a vagrant life, moving like a silk worm from place to place, without any abiding home. In ordinary years a Santal will not give much thought to these questions; but the dormant memory of God is awaked in times of a crisis on a national scale, when the movement revives. When calamities cannot be explained by the traditional beliefs in the malign influences of the *bongas* (spirits) or witches, their thinking would be that they would improve their lot by altering or reforming their religious practices and beliefs.

It is also noticeable that on its religious side the Kherwar movement has shown a tendency to Hinduism in matters of outward ritual purity (e.g. vegetarianism, ritual baths, etc.) but a leaning towards *monotheistic* beliefs and not to Hindu polytheism. The leaders of the movement seem to model themselves on the Hindu *guru* or *fakir*. The very name of *Saphahors* (clean men) assumed by the Kherwars is a pointer to their insistence on ritual purity, to attain which they abandoned meat and liquor.

Much of the vitality of the Kherwar movement, no doubt, derives from the contact of the Santals with Christianity. Several of the *Babajis* have been apostate Christians, and the first, Bhagirath, either had been a Christian or at any rate had attended a Christian school. The assumption of a prophetic role by these leaders and their appeal to divine inspiration for their message were probably of Christian inspiration. Their preachings were often on Christian themes, such as the Ten Commandments.

3.5 CHRISTIAN MOVEMENTS

German Evangelical Lutheran Mission

Pastor Gossner of Berlin sent out 4 missionaries to Calcutta without assigning them any definite region for their work. While they were waiting at the house of Dr. Haberland, another German missionary, he pointed out to them some tribal people of Chota Nagpur (now in Jharkhand) who were working in the streets of Calcutta as casual labourers. They looked strong and athletic and capable of hard work, docile and good humoured. Favourably impressed by these men, the German missionaries made up their minds to establish a mission in Chota Nagpur. They arrived in Ranchi, the principal town of this division on 4th November, 1845. They came in contact with tribals first in and around Ranchi and began to teach them Christian doctrine. Their monotheistic teaching with humanistic approach appealed to the tribals who had been also practising a monotheistic religion. Their traditional religion got enriched by Christianity. Naturally, they became members of Christian community in big numbers.

Roman Catholic Mission

Rev. C. Lievens, Jesuit missionary, arrived in Ranchi in 1885. He applied his great natural talent to the study of the laws and customs of the country. He studied the laws governing the land tenure, the extent of the rights of the *zamindars* (landlords) and also the limits of these rights. He consulted magistrates and lawyers and he had soon mastered the whole extent of the duties and rights of the poor tribal *raiyyats* (cultivators) in relation to their oppressors. Now he was able to give them effective advice and help when they came to him with their tales of oppression. He made them understand their legal rights and at the same time pointed out to them the way to obtain redress. Justice prevailed and the court decisions were in favour of the *raiyyats*, and many a tyrant saw an end to his tyranny. Naturally the news spread rapidly among the tribals and they hailed Lievens as their protector. From all sides people flocked to him. While helping them, at the same time he explained what the Catholic religion would do for them. The people listened to him readily and believed in his teaching which was liberating from the oppression of (a) *zamindars*, and (b) evil spirits. This was an integral liberation from both socio-economic and spiritual bondage which their traditional religion was not able to liberate them from.

Consequently, they embraced Christianity in increasing numbers and stood by this new found faith with utmost loyalty both in good and bad times. It was their free decision.

3.6 BIRSA MOVEMENT

In 1895, under oppression of the Mundas by foreign landlords, Birsa Munda rose as a prophet, a great religious leader in the Munda country. He was between 20 and 25 years of age when he started his movement. He had received a little education and a smattering of English in the German Evangelical Lutheran mission-school at Chaibasa. He had been a Lutheran, but later preached his own religion. One day while out walking with a companion a thunderstorm broke overhead. A brilliant flash of lightning seemed to light up his features. His companion reported this to his villagers, maintaining that the Deity itself had appeared to Birsa in a marvelous interview. Very soon Birsa was credited with astonishing healing powers and drew great crowds of listeners and sick persons in search of cures. After months of reflection, the prophet preached his new religion: "And, at length, the prophet opened his lips. Out came the message he had received from *Sing Bonga*, God Himself for the salvation of his tribe. Hundreds of Mundas listened with eager and reverent attention to every word that fell from his hallowed lips. The Mundas were henceforth to worship one only God. They were to give up their customary sacrifices to a multitude of *Bongas* or deities, abstain from eating any animal food, lead good lives, observe cleanliness in their personal habits, and wear the *janeu* or sacred thread in the manner of the twice-born Hindu castes. Such were the doctrines of his new religion, apparently a mixture of Christianity and Hinduism." (Roy, S.C., *Mundas and their Country*, Calcutta, 1912, p. 328.)

The Birsa movement was a manifestation of the socio-economic and religious unrest among the Mundas. They saw in him a prophet and saviour who would redeem them from the oppression of the *dikus* – the hated foreigners whether British or Indian and would establish for them a Munda *raj*. His religion was a combination of the Munda belief, Hinduism and Christianity. The movement was agrarian in its root, violent in its means and political in its end. Birsa in his speeches emphasised the agrarian factors and sought a political solution of the problems facing his people, that is, the establishment of the *Birsait Raj* under the new king (himself)' (Singh 1966: 191). The movement had such a tremendous impact that the foundation of the British rule in Chota Nagpur was once shaken for sometime.

3.7 TANA BHAGAT MOVEMENT

In the month of April 1914, when a certain Jatra Kachhua, an Uraon tribal of Chingri village in Bishunpur circle, Gumla police station of the Ranchi district, proclaimed that *Dharmes* (God) had appeared to him in a vision and gave a message to him for the Uraons. He was 25 years old and got an enthusiastic following. He proclaimed that it was God's order that henceforth the Uraons should adore God alone through prayer and *bhakti* (devotion) and that they should completely abandon the worship of *bhuts* (minor spirits) and do away with animal sacrifice. It was also God's command that they should lead an ascetic life and give up meat, alcoholic drinks, traditional singing and dancing and coloured dresses and showy ornaments. Jatra taught his followers what he claimed were divinely inspired prayers and incantations for exorcising spirits, curing diseases and neutralising the evil spells of witches. He warned them that those who did not follow him would all perish soon. The foreigners would soon be expelled from the country

and the Uraon-*raj* was about to begin and he would be its first king. Because of his refusal to allow his followers to work for the *zamindars* or the Government, Jatra and his leading disciples were arrested and sent to the subdivisional court, tried and sentenced to imprisonment.

Other prophets took over the leadership of the movement. The *Bhagats* abandoned the cult of *nad* or *bhut* (minor spirits) as they were brought in among the Uraons from the Mundas? (There may be some truth in this allegation, since after their entry into Chota Nagpur, the Uraons have adopted the Munda priesthood in the villages where they reside with the Mundas, for the sacrificing of victims to the village spirits. The exclusive Uraon *Palkansna* ceremony to God needs no priest and is in the *Kurukh* language, whilst all the invocations to the minor spirits and the magic formulae of spirit doctors are in *Sadri*, a local Hindi offshoot.) They took to the worship of one God, and started leading a very austere life. Formerly they had been accustomed to offer countless sacrifices of animals and fowls to the *bhuts* suspected of causing sickness, drought, famine, death and other calamities. Now these *bhuts* were not only left unappeased, but they were to be chased right out of the Uraon country by an extensive rite of exorcism. (Roy, S.C., *Oraon Religion and Customs*, Ranchi, 1928, pp. 347-53. Cfr. Also Tea Districts Labour Association, *Hand-Book of Castes and Tribes*, Calcutta, 1924, pp. 28-29.) The refrain '*tana baba tana*' (pull father pull, i.e. out with it father!) recurring endlessly in the exorcism hymns gave outsiders the idea to dub these exorcists "*Tana Bhagats*". The expulsion of these deeply entrenched *bhuts* was understood to be no easy task and in order to assure its success, the *Tana Bhagats* had to lead an ascetic life free from alcoholic drinks and meat eating. They had, besides, to learn long hymns and *mantras* by heart and to sing these in chorus often throughout the nights. In these nightly noisy sessions, the singers called on God and on all the mighty *babas* (powers, such as, the sun, moon, stars, etc.), to come to their aid in expelling the evil spirits, freeing the sick from their ailments. Even in the far-off tea plantations of the *Terai* at the foot of the Himalayas, the Uraon labourers took enthusiastically to the new movement and an insurrection of the Uraons there was feared.

The *Tana* rules of conduct clearly indicate an approach to a Hindu ideal of ritual purity and asceticism. The appeasing of minor spirits and the practice of witchcraft is taboo. Untruthfulness, thefts, quarrels and resort to violence are vehemently condemned. Ceremonial cleanliness is strictly enjoined.

3.8 THE HARIBABA MOVEMENT IN SINGHBHUM (1930-31)

Led by Duka Ho, called *Haribaba*, this movement swept through northern parts of Singhbhum and the whole of the Ranchi district. It directed its attack against the *bongas* (spirits). Everything suspected of *bongas* was discarded. Duka's followers cut down the trees of the *sarnas* (sacred groves), abodes of the spirits. The *Haribabaites* worshipped *Hanuman* and wore the sacred thread. They insisted on cleanliness. They did not eat meat and stopped drinking liquor. They believed that a saviour would come and save them from oppression. The movement was influenced by the Birsa movement. *Haribaba* was alleged to be seeking to unite the tribals with the aim of restoring to them their pristine rule over lands and forests. The movement subsided with the arrest of *Haribaba*.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Did the Bhagat movement bring about any radical change in the religion of Uraons? Give reasons to your answer.

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2) Which were the religious characters of Kherwar movement among the Santals?

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3) How did Christianity play the role of liberating tribals in the prevailing socio-economic and religious situations?

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4) What was the message of Birsa Munda for his people?

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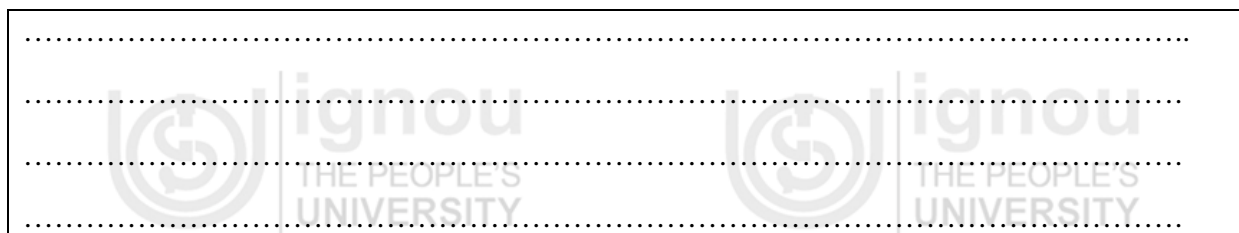
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5) What was the doctrine of Tana Bhagat Movement?

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3.9 LET US SUM UP

One of the distinguishing features of these millenarian cults is that they occurred in a confrontation of the Hindu landlords and money lenders against tribal groups. In their external behaviour the sectarians of the new cults adopted the observances of the Hindu rules of ritual purity by giving up animal sacrifices, meat and liquor and tribal dances and adornments, and took to the wearing of the sacred thread, and taking of ritual baths. They did all these things in order to raise their social status before the Hindus coming in contact with them but they did not bring about any structural change in their social and religious institutions.

A student of social change is primarily concerned with *institutional changes*. He attempts to follow the changes that may have occurred in some such institution as the political, economic, kinship, or religious organisation of a society in its social, cultural and ecological setting. When doing this, he does not assume that by tracing out the origin of some custom in time he will have explained it. Nor does he imply that a simple knowledge of the diffusion of a cultural trait in space will have helped him to understand its nature adequately. When two different societies come into effective contact the resultant changes that occur are rarely simple or one sided. Innovations borrowed from neighbouring societies may modify pre-existing institutions and radically affect the complex network of relationships.

Another kind of social change is more dramatic, for it alters the very character of the social system itself. Some of its constituent institutions are so altered that they no longer fit in with the other existing institutions as they previously used to do. This structural change is *radical change*. The conflicts it gives rise to are not resolved in terms of the existing values of the society. Tradition provides no cure for these unprecedented conflicts. Hence, they are confusing and a source of great stress. If the social system is to survive, radical modifications must be made in it before long. And in the process, the society will become something other than what it used to be.

Millenarian movements have occurred generally in situations of severe social conflicts and stresses often caused by radical institutional changes in societies. But institutions are ultimately social abstractions. How is one to observe radical social conflicts and stresses? When a particular institutional complex changes in one or two of these aspects but not in all, various stresses follow.

Any social movement which is based on the expectation and anticipation of a coming Messiah (anointed one), who will release people from their current misery is called a messianic movement. Messianic movements, especially in Third World societies, are typically associated therefore with deprivation. Messianic beliefs offer hope for a better world. In this sense, the above mentioned reform movements among the tribals were messianic movements no doubt.

Their leaders were prophets who prophesied the coming of imminent, total, ultimate, this-worldly, collective salvation.

As regards the beliefs themselves adopted by the converts, we note in all these religious movements an insistence on monotheism. Taking the example of the Oraon tribals, their belief in a Supreme Being, Creator of all things, was not new to them. In fact they never forgot to invoke God on the big ceremonial occasions. They always offered Him a white (pure) victim, and when all else failed, they finally turned to Him saying, “*akkuga ninim ra'day*,” meaning “It is up to you now.” What was new was the renunciation of the minor spirits and the propitiatory sacrifices to them in case of sickness and trouble. The converts had to turn to God in all their troubles. The exorcism of the minor spirits and the abandonment of their worship also formed an important feature of the Tana Bhagat movement.

The adoption of new religions entailed some structural changes in the society of converts. Christianity, for example, made the old centres of Oraon worship quite redundant. The *sarna* or the sacred grove, where the minor spirits were once solemnly propitiated, the *darha* and *desauli* fields, i.e. fields associated with these spirits, where regular sacrifices were offered, and the clan ossuary where the bones of the dead were interred at the second burial, all lost their relevance. In their stead, a room in the convert's house, the village chapel, and the church at the mission station now became the centres of prayer and worship.

The personnel, too, of the traditional cults were now rendered unnecessary. The *Pahan* (village priest) was no more called on to perform the communal sacrifices and his assistant, the *Pujar*, had nothing more left to do. The service lands attached to these offices no more served their old purpose. The Christian Catechist now assumed the status of the village religious headman. He led the prayers, presided over the meetings of Christian elders and his decisions were liable to be vetoed by his parish priest. The traditional privilege of the founding clan to supply exclusively candidates for the village priesthood was broken, for any suitable candidate was able to become a Christian clergyman or a religious nun.

The traditional rituals of animal sacrifices to minor spirits, ancestor spirits and *Dharmes*, the Supreme Being, were now reduced to recital of prayers, the singing of hymns, and participation in sacraments and religious processions. Witch-hunting and punishing of suspects was now discouraged. With the possible exception of the retention of a modified version of the harvest festival and the feast of the cattle, all the traditional agricultural feasts were abandoned.

S.C. Roy, a great authority on the Mundas and Oraons, says the following on the *Tana Bhagats*:

“A section of the Oraons of Chota-Nagpur have within recent years developed a new religion which is a curious result of Hindu and Christian ideas on primitive Animism The main-spring of the new movement appears to have been a desire in the agitators of the movement to raise the now degraded social position of their community to the higher level occupied by the Hindu and Christian converts among their tribe-fellows and to remedy, if possible, their long standing agrarian grievances and the present wretchedness of their economic condition. And thus the social and economic aspects of the movement are bound up with its religious aspect.” (Roy, S.C., “A new Religious Movement Among the Oraons,” *Man in India*, Ranchi, Dec. 1921, Vol. I, No. 4, pp. 266-267.)

Among the problems raised by the typical messianic cult rituals, it is the question of the apparent incongruity of adoption of mystical means in these movements for attaining straightforward political and social goals after the failure to attain them by rational means. How are we to explain the reversal of the Mundas and Uraons to strict *monotheism*, their abandonment of the worship of village spirits and the adoption of Hindu rules of ritual purity in their attempt to expel foreign landlords and to regain their lost ancestral lands, village autonomy and traditional ways of life?

These ritual steps will perhaps appear less incongruous if we regard them as symbols or as understandable signs for some notion, more or less abstract, to which cultural values, either positive or negative get attached. The central problem of these rituals is that of expressing what cannot be readily thought of. The basic question in these rituals is not whether they are true (i.e. whether they are in fact capable of expelling foreigners and restoring ancestral lands) but whether they say in apt symbolic language what the Mundas and Uraons sought and held important to say. To the followers of messianic movements of course, these cultic rituals are more than mere symbolic expressions of their desire, they are to them also effective means of attaining these desires. J. Beattie suggests that “fundamentally, ritual’s efficacy is thought to lie in its very suggestiveness.” (“Ritual and Social Change,” *Man*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1966, p. 69.)

The certitude of the believers in the effectiveness of rituals would seem to stem from the fact that they are attributed to divine inspiration. Prophets are looked upon as divine ambassadors and their charismatic powers are taken as their credentials for the genuineness of their claims. The messianic cults attempted, it would seem among other things, to solve a moral problem. Something other than a mere economic or political recovery was involved.

For *Tana Bhagats* the exorcism of spirits and the abandonment of tribal habits was a symbolic break with the past. The *Bhagats*’ adoption of strict *monotheism* and congregational prayer gatherings on a fixed day were clear imitations of their relatively better organised Christian neighbours. The adoption of the Hindu rules of ritual purity (vegetarianism, ritual baths, wearing the sacred thread, the adoption of non violence, etc.) was a sign of their imitation of their better off Hindu landlords. A sociological explanation of a millenarian cult therefore views them as a pattern of social change in which societies under radical institutional change reassert, in the face of bureaucratic and cash centred systems, a new integrity in a totally new environment. This study thus leads to the conclusion that the cult itself reveals the moral efforts of a dissatisfied people to rise up as new men in a new social and moral environment.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What was the observation of S.C. Roy on Tana Bhagats?

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2) Did Hindu religion have any radical impact on tribal religions? How?

3.10 KEY WORDS

Birsa movement: it was a manifestation of the socio-economic and religious unrest among the Mundas.

Haribaba: this movement swept through northern parts of Singhbhum and the whole of the Ranchi district. It directed its attack against the *bongas* (spirits). Everything suspected of *bongas* was discarded. They cut down the trees of the *sarnas* (sacred groves), abodes of the spirits.

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UNIT 4 FUTURE OF TRIBAL RELIGION/S

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- 4.0 Objectives
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4.0 OBJECTIVES

- To study the religious situation of the tribals.
- To learn some of the religious practices of tribals, especially that of Santals.
- To draw insights on the future of tribal religions.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, esp. a personal God or gods. Clifford Geertz's definition of religion as a "cultural system" was dominant for most of the 20th century and continues to be widely accepted today. Religious life among tribes in India is an astounding variety of unknown customs and venerations. Amongst the 68 teeming million citizens of India who belong to tribal groups, Indian tribal religious concepts, terminologies and practices are as wide-ranging as the hundreds of tribes. However, members of these groups possess one thing in common: they believe in the constant insistency to remain united under religious faiths and customs. Most of the insistency, however, comes from the process of consolidation within a national political and economic system that brings tribes into increasing reach with other groups and uncountable prestigious belief systems. On the whole, those tribes that remain geographically separated in desert, hill, and forest regions or on islands are able to retain their traditional cultures and religions for a longer period of time. The tribes that make a changeover, moving ahead from hunting and gathering and towards a sedentary agriculture are generally low-status labourers. These men always encounter their ancient religious forms in disintegration and their place being filled by practices of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, or Buddhism. Whatever be the cases or worries, religious life amongst Indian tribes is an exemplary situation, wherein everybody follows by the essential norms.

4.2 VARIETY AND DIVERSITY OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Indian religions tribal concepts are intricately interlaced with ideas regarding nature and dealings with local ecological systems. Normally in the tribal religions, religious specialists are drawn from the village or family and serve a vast range of spiritual functions focussing on appeasing potentially dangerous spirits and coordinating rituals. We will see a few examples of variety and diversity in the religious beliefs and customs of tribals.

The Nagas

The Naga tribes live in the mountains of north-east India. They believe in a specific earthquake god who created the earth out of the waters by earthquakes. The sons of this God now watch over mankind and punish those who perform wrong deeds. Religious life in this Indian tribe is quite quaint and secretive, compared to the others. Other deities without name or form reside in the mountains, forests, rivers and lakes, who need mollifying, for their hostile attitude to men. Omens and dreams are also generally believed in. Witchcraft is wide practised and some men are also believed to have the capability to turn into tigers. Some tribal groups sacrifice dogs or pigs when making a wood carving; otherwise the carver will soon fall ill or die. This most likely belongs to the older tradition of only allowing a man to carve a human figure in a *morung* (bachelors' dormitory) when he had taken a head. Head-hunting was a significant practice, since fertile crops depended on a sprinkling of blood from a stranger over the fields. Reincarnation is believed by many Naga tribes and the dead are buried in the direction from which their ancestors have arrived. The doctrine of genna (tabu) involves the entire social groups: villages, clans, households, age groups, sex groups, in a series of rituals that are regularly practised; this genna ritual is also the result of an emergency such as an earthquake.

The Bhils

The Bhils are one of the largest tribes of western India, living in parts of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra. Many Bhils are Hinduised. Religious life amongst this Indian tribe is known to be much varied and curious. There exists a myth of descent from a tiger ancestor. The Jhabua Bhil and others believe in Bhagavan or Bholo Iswor, who is a personal supreme God. They also believe in minor deities who have shrines on hills or underneath the trees. Worship of Bhagavan is generally performed at the settlement's central sanctuary. There lies a human-oriented cult of the dead amongst the Bhils, whose main ritual is named Nukto and is practised in front of a dead person's house. Nukto purifies the spirit of the dead and merges it with Bhagavan. Gothriz Purvez is the collective ancestor. The perception of a spirit-rider is crucial in Nukto and Gothriz Purvez accompanies the spirit on part of its journey to the after-world.

The Todas

The Todas are a tiny pastoral community living on the 7000 Nilgiri Hills in South India. Religious belief in this Indian tribe is in the 1600 or 1800 superior godlike beings, the two most important being On and Teikirzi. On is the male god of Amnodr, the kingdom of the dead and he had procreated the Todas and their buffaloes. He was himself a dairyman. Teikirzi is a female deity and more imperative to the people. She once ruled when she lived in the Nilgiris and is known to have established Toda social and ceremonial laws. Most other deities are hill-gods, each linked to a particular hill. There are also two river-gods belonging to the two main rivers. Toda religion is based primarily upon the buffaloes and their milk. The temples are the dairies.

Many tribes in India demonstrate considerable syncretism with Hinduism, like the Kadugollas of Karnataka, who worship gods such as Junjappa, Yattappa, Patappa, and Cittappa. In reality they are more devoted to Shiva, who dominates their festivals and religious observances. Local deities are still of significance, though, the Bedanayakas of Karnataka worship Papanayaka. This deity is supposed to have lived 300-400 years ago as a holy man among them and who performed miracles.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Who are the Bhils?

.....

2) Are there syncretic elements in tribal religions?

.....

4.3 SANTAL RELIGIOUS LIFE

After briefly going over the religious setup of some tribe, we want to focus more on the Santals, one of the most studied tribal religious groups. They are found Orissa, Jharkhand and West Bengal and are one of the largest tribes in India, with a population estimated at 4.2 million.

The Gods and Goddesses

According to the Santals, the supreme deity is Thakurji, who ultimately commands over the complete universe. However, the primary reverence of belief falls on a court of spirits (bonga), who address different aspects of the world. These spirits must be appeased with prayers and oblations in order to ward-off evil influences. These spirits operate at the village, household, ancestor and sub-clan levels, along with evil spirits that induce disease. Going by religious beliefs in Indian tribal life, such evil spirits have possibilities to inhabit village boundaries, mountains, waters and the forest. A distinctive feature of the Santal village is a sanctified grove on the perimeter of the settlement, where numerous spirits live and a series of annual festivals go on.

The most important spirit residing amongst Santals is Maran Buru (Great Mountain), who is conjured up whenever offerings are made. Religious beliefs in this Indian tribe instructs that the Maran Buru first dictates the Santals in sex and brewing of rice beer. Maran Buru's consort is the benevolent Jaher Era (Lady of the Grove). An annual round of rituals linked

with the agricultural cycle, along with life-cycle rituals for birth, marriage and burial at death, calls for petitions to the spirits and offerings that include sacrificing of animals, usually birds. Religious life in this Indian tribe is dictated by the religious leaders, who are male specialists in medical cures. They like to practice soothsaying and witchcraft. Similar beliefs are common among other tribes of north-east and central India like the Kharia, Munda, and Oraon. Smaller and more isolated tribes often manifest less articulated classification systems of spiritual hierarchy, delineated as animism or a widespread worship of spiritual energies associated with locations, activities and social groups.

Santals do not consider themselves to be Hindus. They have a religion of their own which is completely different from Hinduism. It is called *Sarna Dhorom*. A yearly round of rituals connected with the agricultural cycle, along with life-cycle rituals for birth, marriage and burial, involve petitions to the spirits and offerings that include food articles and sacrifice of animals and birds. Religious leaders are male specialists in medical cures who practice also divination and witchcraft. In every village there is a *jaherthan* or sacred grove. Usually the *jaherthan* is found at the boundary of every village, with a number of Sal trees (*Shorea robusta*), and the sacrifices are offered in this particular place by the *naeke* (priest). It is believed that many spirits dwell in the sacred grove and many festivals are held during the year. For all the festivals there is a *puja* (sacrifice) held here.

Santals are a joyous community; *raska* meaning joy, pleasure, happiness as a motto in life. They are happy and contented even in the worst situation of utter poverty. Thus there are numerous seasonal rites and festivals by the Santals to keep them happy. Their behaviour during these festivals is characterised by a carefree, uninhibited attitude and a joyous frame of mind.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Who is the most important spirit among Santals?

.....

2) How do the Santals express their joy?

.....

The Santal Life-Cycle

Our human life has basically four important stages, birth, initiation, marriage and death. The Santals have very special rites/ceremonies on these occasions. All these different stages of transition are significant moments in their life and they make these occasions important through various symbolic activities. Santals consider these rites of passage as religiously significant. These rites and ceremonies are mainly concerned with securing active help of

benevolent spirits and passive forbearance of the malignant ones. This is to ensure the safety and well-being of the individual. They are also collective occasions to emphasise the mutual harmony and solidarity between the individual and society. I explain briefly these aspects because to know a people we need to know their life-cycle too. It is good to know who they are, what they are, and how they form and organise their life.

Birth and Purification (*Janam Chatiar*)

“One of the greatest things a Santal married couple dreads is to have no offspring. They will secure adult respect only when they beget a child. So important is a child, especially a son, that a husband can lawfully divorce a wife if she is found to be barren and a wife can divorce her husband if he is found to be sterile. In some cases, the husband is persuaded to take a second wife. This however, is done only with the consent of the first wife” (Troisi 1978).

The birth of a child is announced by saying, “The new relation has arrived.” Children are spoken of as the gift of the Supreme Being and so they are a blessing to the family. It is true that every family likes to have a male child at first because they want to keep the family clan and inherit the father’s lands. It is also important that he needs to assist at his father’s funeral ceremonies and perpetuate the worship of his own ancestors. Girls are welcome but not in the same priority. The first girl is not considered as a curse as seen by many Hindus. A villager on hearing the birth asks, “What is it? Does it carry on the shoulder (a boy) or does it carry on the head (a girl). Or he may say, “Is it a hunter or is it a water carrier?” (Culshaw 1949).

Once the child is born the message is announced to the people in the house. Later the whole village is notified about the birth. All the villagers are expected to know this because of the impurity involved as well as the happy message of the new member. The next important ceremony is the ritual purification (*janam chatiar*). The ceremonial uncleanness resulting from birth is shared by the whole village. There are three reasons for this ceremony. First there is the purification of the house and village from the defilement caused by child birth. The second is giving the child a name and admitting the child into the father’s clan and giving the child protection of the father’s spirits. The third is incorporating the child into the tribe. For this ceremony the relatives are invited. The removal of defilement consists in shaving and bathing. A barber shaves all the men of the village, starting from the *naeke* (priest). A few locks of hair are also cut from the child’s head. Once this is complete all the men folk go to the river and bathe themselves. After they return the women folk bathe.

Once the people have returned to the house after their bath, the child’s mother is made to sit on the veranda of the house with the child in her lap. The midwife sprinkles cow-dung water on the mother and child. Then the child is given a name and thus the child receives a definite status in the family and village. In order to be united with the ancestors the boy child receives the name of his grandfather and the girl child the name of the grandmother. The ceremony is complete when all are given rice boiled with neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*, a medicinal tree) leaves (*neem dak mandi*). Part of the boiled rice is offered to the spirits for the protection of the child (Culshaw 1949).

Initiation (*Caco-Chatiar*)

The second important period in the life of the Santal is initiation or *caco-chatiar*. This ceremony may be observed any time before marriage and no Santal boy or girl may be permitted to be married before the initiation is performed. Once this is done they become full-fledged members of the tribe with all the responsibilities and privileges. The members enter into a new relationship with the *bongas* (spirits) who can now be approached with sacrificial offerings and also share in the sacrificial meal (Troisi 1978).

On the fixed day the villagers are summoned to the house where the ceremony is to take place. At times there may be more than one member to undergo initiation. The midwife who presided at the birth may be present. She or some other elderly woman bathes the children by pouring water over them. After that the midwife or a girl from the village anoints all the people present with oil and turmeric, starting with the *naeke* (priest). Rice beer brewed for the occasion is served to all present and after that they sing and dance. At this juncture an old man comes to narrate the story of creation, and the wanderings of the Santals as narrated in the myth. It is important that they know their tribal tradition. It also helps to transmit the tribal lore, ensuring certain continuity in the tradition (Mukherjee 1980).

The practices of tattooing (*Khoda*) the girls and cicatrisation (*Sika*) of boys are also associated with initiation. Many Santals say that these marks are very important for them to reveal their identity. The boys are branded on the hand/arm (in odd numbers) and girls are tattooed on the arms, shoulders and breasts. These marks are a guarantee for life in the next world to prove that they are Santals.

Marriage (*Bapla*)

“The Santals cannot simply understand the proposition as to how a man can go on in a state of single blessedness. So both sexes despise the unhappy wretch and do not hesitate to call the solitary one, ‘a thief, a witch, or a no man.’”(Mukherjee 1980) Even today bachelors and old maids are few among the Santal tribe. Marriage (*bapla*) is the most important stage in the Santal life cycle because they want to protect the solidarity of the tribe. Tribal endogamy and clan exogamy are practised very strictly by the Santals. These people enjoy abundant freedom in social contacts and they find their own partners although it is not always the case; marriages may be arranged by the parents. It is common among the Santals to marry quite young, many of the girls get married just after reaching puberty; many boys get married before they are twenty. They do not practise polygamy unless the wife is barren.

Bride Purchase (*Kirin Bahu Bapla*)

Though there are various forms of marriage (traditionally seven) the usual form is called *kirin bahu bapla* (bride purchase). It means the wife is bought by the bridegroom by paying a price to the bride’s father. This is usually arranged by the elders. The relatives (would-be) meet each other and a day is arranged to visit the boy in his house. On this occasion the bride price (*gonon*) is fixed as well as other matters related to the marriage. This ceremony is called *nepel* (meeting each other). It is the same as betrothal. Later the bride is visited at her place. On both the occasions sacrifices are offered to the village spirits and to the ancestral spirits for the protection of the couple (Troisi 1978).

The preparations for the marriage are very important and many people of both the villages (bride's and bridegroom's) take part. The houses and the streets (*kulhi*) are decorated. The bridegroom bathes and then oil and turmeric are applied on his body. After this the procession starts with drums and cymbals beat to the accompaniment of merry music. When the groom's party enters the bride's village they are received with traditional ceremonies. The best-man carries the groom on his shoulder and the bride is carried in a palanquin. Both are sprinkled with water. The bride's face is uncovered and the groom applies *sindur* (vermilion) on her forehead. (This is equal to putting the rings on each other's fingers). This is accompanied by loud shouting, drumming and cheering. Then the couple enter the house. The priest offers sacrifice to the village spirits at the *jaherthan* (sacred grove) for the welfare of the couple. After these rituals are over they begin the meal (Orans 1965).

Other Types of Marriage

The other forms of marriage are for convenience and at times due to the prevailing situation. *kirin jawae bapla*: when a husband is acquired/bought for a girl who is made pregnant by a man who, either does not want to marry her, or cannot marry her because he belongs to her clan. In such a case the cost of acquiring/buying (*kirin*) a husband (*jawae*) is borne by the offender. *Tunki Dipil Bapla*: This is observed by people who are poor who cannot bear the expenses of a regular marriage. No bride price is paid. The bride gathers all her belongings in a small bamboo basket (*tunki*) and she is brought to the groom's house with the basket on her head (*dipil*). *Sanga Bapla*: This is contracted by a widow or a divorced woman, a widower or a divorced man. In this case the bride price is half of the normal rate. The reason for this is because it is believed that after death the woman will re-join her first husband. *Ghardi Jawae Bapla*: This is resorted to by the parents who have only daughters and no sons. So a man is brought in to help in the work of the household. All marriage expenses are borne by the girl's party. The groom pays no bride price either. Normally only boys from poor families agree to this kind of marriage. He is obliged to stay in the bride's house for five years. After this period he may go back to his house. In the case of *Ghar Jawae Bapla* he stays permanently in his in-law's house. However he continues to retain his rights on his father's land and property. He cannot make sacrifices to his father-in-law's *bongas* but he keeps his father's *bongas*. Two other types of marriages (*Itut Bapla*, *Nir Bolok Bapla*) are rare because there is force involved. In the case of *Itut* (to mark with paint) *Bapla* the boy takes the initiative because he does not know if the parents agree to the marriage. So in a public place he forcibly applies vermilion (*sindur*) on her forehead claiming her as his wife. In *Nir Bolok* (intruding) *Bapla* it is the girl who takes the initiative. She intrudes into the house of the boy because he has had sexual relations with her and refuses to marry her. So she forces him into marriage (Troisi 1978).

Marriage is understood as a relationship not merely between two persons but between two families and villages. The following words indicate the union of two villages, "From now on our villages have become as one. Formerly you were strangers and you used to pass by our village. Now if any of your people is passing this way he must stop and ask for a drink" (Orans 1965).

Death (*Gujuk*) & Funeral Rites

The Santals do not recognise the possibility of natural death. They attribute death to the malignancy of certain *bongas* (spirits). Though one has to fight against these *bongas* all through life, finally the *bongas* put an end to human life. When a death takes place in the tribe, the village headman and the villagers flock together in mourning. They anoint the body with oil and turmeric. The corpse is then taken out of the house in a cot and is kept on the courtyard. Without much delay, when most of the villagers are present, they carry the dead body to the outskirts of the village and bury it. Usually women do not go to the burial place (Mukherjee 1980).

A grave is dug at the outskirts of the village facing north south. The body is buried there with the head facing south. It is buried with the cot and above it dry branches or bamboo sticks are placed so that mud does not fall directly on the corpse. They then cover the grave with earth and place some stones above it. After this the chief mourner, usually the eldest son, has his head shaved completely. Then all go for their purificatory bath because the Santals believe that after the death of a person the whole village is polluted. The next important ceremony after the funeral is known as '*tel nahan*' (oil washing). It is also known as *umul ader* (bringing in the shadow). Until this ceremony is performed the dead person will remain in the clutches of the hostile agency.

The *tel nahan* ceremony takes place five days after the death of the person. The ceremony is important because of the double effect; one is for the redemption of the dead person and the other for the purification of the village. The village men gather at the dead man's house. After all have been shaved, some male relatives of the deceased accompanied by other villagers go to the grave. Here, the chief mourner collects a handful of earth which he burns and puts into a new earthenware pot. On returning to the end of the village *kulhi*, where they are met by womenfolk, the pot is smashed to pieces and the burnt earth is sprinkled with water and turmeric. Then everyone goes for his purificatory bath. The chief mourner carrying the burnt earth keeps it on a leaf plate. After taking bath and rubbing themselves with oil given by the deceased's family, the chief mourner, surrounded by his male relatives and villagers, makes offerings of oil cakes and *sal* twigs to *Maran Buru* (Supreme God), *Pilchu Haram* and *Pilchu Budhi*, and to the departed soul. He implores *Maran Buru* to lodge the deceased's soul in the shadow of the house till he reaches his final rest (Troisi 1978).

Though with the *tel nahan* ceremony the departed spirit is said to have been released from the underworld, he has not reached his final abode. The last part of the funeral ceremony, *bhandan* is what joins the spirit of the dead with the realm of the ancestors. Several relatives and villagers are invited for this celebration. They bring along goats and chicken and rice beer to be offered to the spirit. After the sacrifices are offered the people's mourning comes to an end. The meal is cooked with the meat offered to the spirits. All eat and drink and celebrate the occasion because they know that the dead has joined the world of the ancestors. Santals believe that death is essentially an interruption of the normal process of living. They in fact speak of *hormo* and *jion* (body and life or soul). The body remains here on this world (*noa puri*) and soul (*jion*) goes to the other world or sky or heaven country. Life in the other world depends on the type of life one has led here in this world. If one has led a good life on this earth one is rewarded with a happy life in the other world; if one has led a bad life on this

earth one will receive punishment and will remain in hell which is known as *ich kund* (excrement heap) (Culshaw 1949).

In all societies, major events in the life cycle (as mentioned above) are subject to ritualised forms of recognition. Across the world, such events are celebrated in diverse and sometimes elaborate ways, with different cultures singling out different stages of life for attention. Because rites of passage appear around the world and concern deeply human transitions, it is easy to lapse into universal claims: When there is a death, you should grieve; everyone rejoices at a birth; weddings are dramatisations of love. The point in examining other people's rites and ceremonies is not to steal or even borrow them but to evoke more appreciation and understanding towards them. Each tribe or race has its own unique customs and practices. These are elements that make a tribe rich and worthy of attention.

Santal Festivals

Religious and secular festivals and feasts have many uses and values beyond the public enjoyment of a celebration. In Santal society, festivals provide an opportunity for the elders to pass on folk knowledge and the meaning of tribal lore to younger generations. Their festivals and feasts focusing on the customs of their traditional or ethnic group enrich understanding of their heritage and religion. Communal feasts are also occasions for eating, drinking, and merrymaking for the Santals. It fosters common living and religiosity.

4.4 THE FUTURE OF TRIBAL RELIGIONS

As we reflect on the future of tribal religions, we need to note the creative, flexible and oral aspect of tribal religions. We also need to be aware that tribal religion is central to one's identity. Another aspect of tribal religions is the "power of now" or the celebration of the present. Oral tradition is one of the trademarks of all tribal religions. The religious stories repeated told make it easy to understand the spiritual and moral lessons that are intended by them. Rather than try to explain what God is in literal terms, stories are woven with the use of nature and animals to show what God is like. Oral tradition also preserves creatively the intent of the lessons. The written word is often taken literally and the essence of its meaning is lost in the lines. In primal cultures, the tribal life and religion is central to the individual's identity. However, the tribe in this sense extends beyond the individual human beings. It is everything in the ecosystem of the group. It is all of nature, animals, and objects, animate and inanimate, in addition to the people. As such, great emphasis is placed on the existence of Spirit in everything. Everything has its place and value in the tribe. Everyone is taught to honor everything within the tribe, as well as the tribal entity.

The "eternal now" is significant for them. It seems the Aborigines believe that they can become their archetypal heroes, or gods, in every moment. They can, of course, embody this god for continuous moment and, as a result, merge with it. Tribal religion – without fixed structures, written scriptures, clear doctrine and hierarchical authority - is in a fluid state. But the three aspects mentioned above will revitalise their religiosity and collective consciousness. The primal religion is experiencing another boom in the contemporary society. Here we may see some similarities between the concepts of primal religion and

“New Age” religions. Many seekers, in an effort to get to the Truth, adopted the ideas and traditions in primal religions. There is a tendency today to go back to the sources and draw religious inspiration from the tribal and primal spiritualities, which are so close to nature.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How do the tribals understand marriage?

.....

2) What is the significance of oral tradition in tribal religions?

.....

4.5 LET US SUM UP

For tribals religion is very vibrant giving them personal and collective identities. This unit described the varieties of religious life of the tribals and then focussed on the Santal religious life. It also spoke about the future of tribal religions.

4.6 KEY WORDS

Tabu: Tabu or taboo is a prejudice that prohibits the use or mention of something because of its sacred nature.

Jaherthan. It is sacred grove, very significant for Santal Religious practices. Usually the *jaherthan* is found at the boundary of every village, with a number of Sal trees (*Shorea robusta*), and the sacrifices are offered in this particular place by the *naeke* (priest).

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