
UNIT 1 HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE TRIBALS

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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.
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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, Sentelense 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, Dinaries and Armenois. 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-climatic 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 this 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 circulated 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, Dinaries and Armenois. 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 rake 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 Korku 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

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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.
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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?

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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
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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?

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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 of 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 Korku 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

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