
UNIT 1 TRIBAL WORLD-VIEW AND PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

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

1.1 INTRODUCTION

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

1.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN TRIBES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.3 WORLD-VIEW OF THE TRIBAL POPULATION IN INDIA

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

1) Close attachment to ancestral territory: All the tribal people have a very close attachment to the territory that they have been living in. In fact there are some tribes that have not been civilized yet and they are fierce and may even kill at times when they are disturbed and are made to go away from their ancestral land (Kumar 2010).

2) Close to natural resources: Most of the tribal population in the forests of India lives in areas that are rich in natural resources. These resources include those like iron ore, manganese and even precious and semi precious stones. These make it a hot spot for all the mining companies who try to make many mines in these areas, but the tribals and their support groups are against this.

3) Self-identification and identification by others as member of distinct cultural group: This is true because many of the tribals have their own language and they have their own culture that is very different and unique from that of the other groups of the population.

4) Indigenous language: Another unique characteristic of the tribals is that they have their own language. Each of the tribal groups has its own language and this also makes them to be very unique when compared to other large groups of populations. In fact there are some tribal groups where there may be only a few hundred people, but they have their own language.

5) Presence of customary, social and political institutions: In spite of the various problems, they do have their own social and political institutions and live a life that is full of rituals and other traditions.

6) Vulnerability to severe dislocation, disruption and exploitation: The tribal population is very vulnerable to all the problems mentioned above because of the caste system in India and also because of the isolation they face so that they will give up their land to the mining companies (Kumar 2010).

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What are some of features of tribal life?

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

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1.4 INTERCONNECTEDNESS AND TRIBAL PHILOSOPHY

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

1.5 CONNECTED TO NATURE

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

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

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

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2) How do the adivasis view the rivers?

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1.6 CONNECTED TO ONE ANOTHER

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.7 CONNECTED TO THE COMMON DESTINY (GOD)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Bench *inter alia* observed as under;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

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

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

1.9 LET US SUM UP

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

1.10 KEY WORDS

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

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

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UNIT 2 HUMAN VALUES AND MORAL OUTLOOK OF THE TRIBALS

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

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

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

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

2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN TRIBES

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.3 TRIBAL VALUES AND MORAL OUTLOOK

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

- Awareness of all pervasive influence of the Transcended
- Respect for elders
- Gender equality
- Spirit of sociability and hospitality
- Solidarity and sharing
- Community feeling
- Democratic style of functioning in decision making
- Openness to other religions
- Basic honesty
- Hard work
- Creativity
- Contentment and joy in simple living

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

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

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Mention some core values of adivasis?

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2) How does Majumdar define a tribe?

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2.4 A TRIBAL STORY

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

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

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

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

Collective Decision Making

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

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

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

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

Sharing and Collaboration as Natural

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

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

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

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

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

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2.5 MODERN HUNGER FOR TRIBAL VALUES

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

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

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

Who is my neighbour: A Tribal Story

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

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

The Tribal Consciousness

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

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

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

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

Need for Re-Tribalisation

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.6 REDISCOVERING THE SACRED SPACE

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

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

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

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

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

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What does re-tribalisation require?

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2) How is tribal consciousness related to the sacred?

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2.7 LET US SUM UP

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

2.8 KEY WORDS

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

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

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UNIT 3 TRIBAL AESTHETIC OUTLOOK

Contents

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 - 3.1 Introduction
 - 3.2 Characteristics and Functions of Tribal Aesthetics
 - 3.3 Beauty and Art (a philosophical outlook)
 - 3.4 Tribal Art Forms
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 - 3.6 Festivals
 - 3.7 Embroidery, Painting and Drawing
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3.0 OBJECTIVES

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

3.1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

3.2 CHARACTERISTICS AND FUNCTIONS OF TRIBAL AESTHETICS

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

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

The functions of tribal aesthetics are the following:

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

3.3 BEAUTY AND ART (A PHILOSOPHICAL OUTLOOK)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.4 TRIBAL ART FORMS

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

One may find also the other types of art:

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

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

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

Storytelling

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

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

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

3.5 MUSIC AND SONG

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

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

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

Musical Instruments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dance

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The functions of tribal dances are the following:

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

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

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

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

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

3.6 FESTIVALS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.7 EMBROIDERY, PAINTING AND DRAWING

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

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

Tattooing

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

3.8 LET US SUM UP

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

3.9 KEY WORDS

Adivasis: aboriginal, first dwellers of the land.

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

3.10 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 4 TRIBAL COSMOGONIES AND COSMOLOGIES

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

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

4.1 INTRODUCTION

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

4.2 CREATION ACCOUNTS OF CENTRAL AND EAST INDIAN TRIBALS

Source for the following accounts: (Pereira 2007: 433-439, 555-562, 564-567, 568-571)
(Mundu 2003: 26-62)

Munda

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

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

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

Santal

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

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

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

Ho

There was only *water* all around. *Singbonga* wanted to make land in its place. So, he made a *tortoise* and let it go into water to bring out *mud*. It brought the mud with its mouth and hands and placed it on the surface. The water washed it away. Then *Singbonga* made a *crab*. It entered into the water and clawed out mud and brought it up to the surface but it was washed away as before. *Singbonga* then rubbed some dirt out from his thigh and made *two earthworms*: one male and one female. They slipped into the water and began to raise and heap up mud within the water by eating and disgorging it. Those two earthworms multiplied and worked together. Land rose above the water. In some places it became mountains and in other places it became hard *land*. Then *Singbonga* made '*Surmi-Durmis*' (They are not seen by people. They dig ponds during the night and get a living source of water. People point to such ponds on the mountains that never dry even during the hot summer.) with hands and feet. They began to level the mountains and fill the ravines with their hands. *Singbonga* sent *tigers* and *bears*, *bisons* and *deer*, and *elephants* to help them. The *Surmi-Durmis* yoked the animals and leveled the land with leveling planks. They leveled even the mountains. Later, in those fields they planted *trees* and *grass*. When the land had been made and the trees and grass had sprouted and grown, it looked very beautiful. *Singbonga* became very happy and made a figure like a human being in the shape of *Surmi-Durmis*. He breathed *jibon* (life) into him. He became a *Ho* (man) and was named 'Luku' by *Singbonga*. But Luku used to stay away from all other living beings. So, *Singbonga* put the man to sleep and took out one of his ribs and made a figure of a *woman* in the image of Luku. He gave life to that figure and placed it close to Luku. When Luku got up from his sleep, he asked *Singbonga*: "Who is this?" *Singbonga* said: "This is your companion. Her name is 'Lukumi'. You two will live together as *juri-juri tainben* (companions)." Thus, *Singbonga* made 2-human beings, male and female. They walked around happily in the land of trees and grass. They lived on the fruits and flowers of the trees. *Singbonga* had let them eat the fruits and flowers of all the trees except the *tamarind* fruits. However, seeing that fruit daily they were overcome by the desire of that fruit. So, they ate it and immediately experienced a ticklish sensation and shame. They hid themselves behind the leafy shrubs. *Singbonga* called them out. They came to him

covering themselves with leaves. He realized that his *grandchildren* had disobeyed him. So, he banished them from that place. They provided themselves with food from the earth. There were other living beings too. They multiplied. However, the human beings remained only two. They used to keep a husking pole in between them without crossing it while sleeping during the night. One day *Singbonga* told them to ferment *diyang* (rice beer) and drink it. He taught them how to make it. After preparing it they drank it and crossed the husking pole and from that time they lived as husband and wife. Numerous children were born but they began to walk on evil path. Seeing this, *Singbonga* was displeased and destroyed them with *rain of fire*. However, *Nage Era* (water spirit) saved a pair of human beings and a pair of every other living beings. Through this pair of human beings, humankind increased again.

Kharia

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

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

Kurukh (Uraon)

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

2nd account

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

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

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

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

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

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4.3 CREATION ACCOUNTS OF NORTH-EAST INDIAN TRIBALS

Source: (Panthanmackel 2009: 324-330)

Naga

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

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

Ao

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

Khasi

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

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

Adi

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

Bodo

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

Mizo

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

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

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

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

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4.4 CREATION OF HEAVENLY BODIES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Sun, Moon and Stars

a. Munda and Kurukh Account

In the Munda and Kurukh accounts it is told that before the moon was made, the Sun was alone in the sky and it did not set. One day the Creator went out to see the man making fields and asked him some questions: "When did you make this field?" "Now" was the answer. "When did you make that field?" "Now." "When did you make the yonder fields?" "Just now." "When did you eat from these fresh leaves?" "Now." "When did you eat from those dry leaves?" "Now." "When do you rest and when do you work?" "I rest *now* and work *now*." The Creator said: "You will not live on with such work and eating without regular times." So, He made the Sun to set and rise - thus *day* and *night* were made to work and to rest. He also made the moon to shine during the night (Van Exem 1982: 35-36).

b. Santal Account

In the Santal account the heavenly bodies are described as human beings in their metaphorical sense. *Thakur Baba* (Supreme Being) is *Sing Chando* (the sun) and *Nida Chando* (the moon) is his wife. At first there were as many stars by day as there are by night. They were the children of the Sun and the Moon. They had divided them between the two of them. At the evil deeds of his children *Sing Chando* blazed with fierce heat till they and beasts died. The *Nida Chando* took pity on their suffering and prayed to *Sing Chando* not to destroy them. So, *Sing Chando* saved a couple of young man and woman from whom many children were born. *Nida Chando* feared that *Sing Chando* would again get angry with the new human beings and destroy them. Therefore, she made a plan to trick him. She covered up all her children with a large basket and smeared her mouth and lips with red and going to *Sing Chando* told him that she had eaten up every one of her children and proposed that he should now eat up his children. At first *Sing Chando* declined to believe her but she pointed to her lips and said that they were red with the blood of her

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

c. *Kurukh (Uraon) Account*

One day the moon invited the sun to dinner and gave him a good meal of sweet potatoes cooked in butter. These were so delicious, that the sun asked what the food was and how it had been prepared, for he wanted to have the same menu again. The moon shamefacedly confessed that the food she had served were her own children. "Well," said the sun, "My children must be as good as yours!" So saying, he killed them all. Only as he began to eat them did he realize that he had been tricked. So he went in a rage to punish the moon. Seeing him coming, the moon hid behind a mango/banyan tree. The sun saw this ruse and with his sharp sword he slashed the moon. At the same time, he cursed her saying: "Now you shall keep that cut all your life! You will try to get cured every month. But as soon as you think you are all right, the cut will reappear and go on increasing." And so it is (Tirkey 1989: 56). From that time onwards we have the different phases of the moon. The shadow of the mango/banyan tree remains printed upon the moon's face. From that time, also, the moon carefully remains hidden from the sun. She appears only when she knows that he has gone to sleep.

4.5 DETERMINING TIME

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

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

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

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

.....

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

4.6 LET US SUM UP

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

4.7 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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