

**ENIGMA OF INDIAN TRIBAL LIFE
AND CULTURE**

Philosophical Investigations

Edited by
Vincent Aind



Association of Christian Philosophers of India **10**

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FOREWORD

This book is an important contribution to the study of the tribal world of our people who have been for many centuries subordinated by dominant social agencies and relegated to the periphery of Indian history. However, unlike in the past, the tribal reality is increasingly being represented in our contemporary mainstream culture and academy. This is, surely, a sign of significant impact factored by the subaltern process emerging from tribal people for self-affirmation of their identity and history through cultural and academic mediations.

Consequently, tribal art-forms, once unknown to the public but remained active at the micro level tribal communities located in the margins of the country's landscape, are now beginning to occupy the cultural space of our civil society. Similarly, tribal studies were in the earlier times assigned chiefly to ethnographic discourse. This was due to a misplaced perception of the traditional cultures as something static and stagnant, valued only for museum show-casing. On the contrary, tribal reality has today become a major part of subaltern study projects in our universities and research institutes. It appears that through these cultural and academic representations, the collective self of the subjugated tribal communities is consistently endeavouring to emerge as a subject of their history amid various strands of Indian history and turn out to be agency for social change so as to enhance the composite culture of India.

Culture is an important factor in tribal reality. It is because culture entails a whole way of life. It comprises totality of the distinct achievements of a group of people as a human community, articulating them through fine arts, religion, philosophy, social habits and customs, political institution and economic organization. In fact, in the public discourse, subaltern refers to culturally and economically dominated people, who are excluded from representation in the structures of mainstream political power and forced to live in the margins of the society. Their marginalisation is mainly characterised by their culture which has been looked down by the majority community as having no recognisable value worth mentioning. They are side-tracked and ignored as non-people. They do not matter for the mainstream discourse of the country. So, any sort of subaltern agency is bound up with culture as its marker for self-identity and history in a plural society.

The contributors of this book stand in solidarity with the subaltern agency of the tribal reality of this country. They have taken for their research the whole range of tribal reality stretching out to different branches of inquiry – social history, sociology of religion, folk-lore, fine arts, anthropology, religion and spirituality, phenomenon of globalisation, migration and displacement, etc. But their investigation paid remarkable attention to the tribal people of the Central India, known as *Adivasis*, and their cultural uprising for self-affirmation. Since the eighteenth century, the tribal communities of this region have been through a traumatic subjugation of their homeland by alien agencies, severely threatening their cultural identity, history and peoplehood. Alienated from their lands, they became serfs to *zamindars* and bonded labourers to *thikadars* (contractors). Whereas, in sheer desperation, many migrated in search of jobs and land, and some embraced Christianity; the rest of this subordinated people took recourse to ‘*adivasi* uprising’, namely the Kol Rebellion (1831-32) the Santal Rebellion (1855), the Sardar Movement (1858-95) and the Tana Bhagat Movement (1914-15). These movements gave them a realm for cultural identity,

autonomy, self-respect and subaltern agency to work for a better future that was denied to them in the public sphere.

I would underscore the *adivasi* uprising as a crucial phenomenon of the tribal reality of India because it stood for certain fundamental human values worthy of human dignity. This shows how people living in the margins of the society give meaning to their subjugated existence and negotiate their life-threatening situations by re-sourcing themselves with creative potential embedded in their culture. The source of their creative potential is their conscience – the sacred shrine of a human person – where one encounters the power of the Transcendent One that energises the people indexed as non-people for praxis appropriate to define their dignity as human persons endowed with reason and freedom, capable of deciding their way of life and destiny.

Many research papers of this book display suitable methodologies and apply tools that rest on well-laid academic foundations. Students of philosophy, cultural anthropology, and theology will benefit from this book to widen the ambit of their academic pursuit. I congratulate the Office-bearers of the ACPI for their extensive range of philosophical interest to include tribal wisdom in their annual research project and to bring out its universality to the general public; Dr. Vincent Aind, my colleague, for his editorial competence; and the contributors of this volume for their intellectual commitment to seek after truth wherever it is seen.

Barrackpore,
24 August 2009

Dr. D. John Romus
Dean, Department of Theology
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Barrackpore, Kolkata.

INTRODUCTION

This is the 10th book in series the Association of Christian Philosophers of India is bringing out. The members of this Association (ACPI) have never forgotten their typical identity as *Philosophers*, *Christians* and *Indians*. As *philosophers* they are aware of their serious responsibility “to critically understand and evaluate the world in which he/she lives.”¹ As *Christians* they are imbued with “Christ’s message of love and compassion, justice and equality” which has awakened in them “their responsibility for the subalterns.”² And finally as *Indians* they try to take up issues that are familiar and relevant to the Indian context. Keeping in line with these triple responsibilities this time the ACPI in its annual conference focused on the tribal reality of India.

India has one of the largest concentrations of tribals in the world. According to the Census 2001 the total population of the Scheduled Tribes in India is 84,326,240, which is 8.2% of the total population of the country. This gigantic tribal population is distributed into nearly 500 tribes and sub-tribes all over the country. It is not easy to represent all of them in one conference. Hence the ACPI chose mainly to focus on the Chotanagpur tribal community. Nevertheless, there are a few papers on a few other tribal communities of India too.

¹ George Thadathil, the Editor, *Subaltern Perspectives: Philosophizing in Context* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2005), p. 9.

² Johnson Puthenpurackal, Preface to the *op. cit.*, p. 7.

The Chotanagpur tribals have had a long tortuous history of being chased, uprooted, and displaced and to some extent exterminated as a community. Theirs has been a history of flights, struggles, revolt and uprising, discouragement and disappointment. Their history took turn for the worse specially with the advent of the Moghuls in the 16th century and eventually with the British rule in the beginning of the 18th century to their otherwise isolated and peaceful life. Yet in the midst of such a painful journey they have managed to cultivate and preserve some typical distinctness of culture, values, code of conduct and system of self-administration. When one is preoccupied with the question of survival there may not be a productive atmosphere for systematic thought processing and articulation. The tribals of Chotanagpur did not have a literature of their own. It is understandable therefore that they do not have any philosophy of their own in the traditional sense of the term. But if by philosophy we mean a world view of our own, our way of looking at nature, our way of understanding the meaning of life and death, etc. then there is such a philosophical outlook even among the tribals. It is this outlook which has guided them, organized them, and preserved them as a distinct society all these years. The ACPI, aware of its concern for the subalterns, wishes to bring to light this *lived* philosophy of the tribals. Thereby it is careful not to miss any wisdom latent in any group of people at any time and place. Wisdom in its plain simplicity is open to any garb and any way of expression. In his *inaugural address* Archbishop Lucas Sircar of Kolkata expressed his conviction that every culture has its seminal wisdom encapsulated in its cultural treasure. There is philosophy in every culture that needs to be unearthed and such a philosophy should not be allowed to submerge in mainline philosophy. In the Gospels and the teaching of the Church we find such a sympathetic approach to the marginalized, the subaltern.

This conference (and therefore, this book) has one speciality, namely it is far from being a “bourgeois project on behalf of the

subaltern.”³ In other words, there are more than half the number of authors who come from one or the other tribal backgrounds themselves and thus they have insiders’ view on the issues they deal with. The other half too does not represent an armchair philosophy, for they express their reflections and suggestions out of their genuine concern for the construction of an egalitarian society and humanitarian growth and development of the displaced and the digressed. Some of them are actively involved in social work and community building among the marginalized.

The articles are grouped into four parts so as to help us contextualize our philosophical investigations. The first part situates the subaltern position of the tribals in some time frame – past and present. The second part is a critical attempt on seeking some political solution if any. In the third part we enter into the life situation of the tribals. Finally in the fourth part we try to decipher some philosophical musings in the life of the tribals.

In the first part of the book, in the first chapter, **M. Livins Tirkey** with his career background as a strategist in the Indian Defence Ministry has a self-styled historical research on matters related to the tribals. In his article he traces back their probable routes of entry into Indian Territory long before that of the Aryans. In his opinion, first arrived the Mundas about 9000 years ago, (c. 7000-6000 B.C.) and then the Dravidians (c. 3200 – 2600 B.C.) in the Indus valley; that is long before the Aryans occupied it. He makes a strong conjecture that “the tribals of Chotanagpur had their own language, culture and ancestral religion, much older and very different from the Hinduism, the Vedic religion of the Aryans.”⁴ This shows that the tribals who are sidelined or marginalized today might have formed the mainstream at that time.

The second chapter brings us to the fact that the process of subjugation and marginalization of the tribals has never ceased ever

³ This was the fear expressed by George Thadathil some five years ago. Refer *op. cit.* p. 13.

⁴ M. Livins Tirkey, “Tracing the Roots: A Historical Look,” inside this book.

since. It has rather worsened further. In the name of development much harm has been done to them and to their environment. The tribals looked at nature as a gift, something to be shared and protected, not to be exploited or hoarded. Human beings are just one of the species inhabiting this planet. **Richard Vincent** is a passionate fighter for indigenous rights. He is of the opinion that the industrialization policy must include the indigenous people as partners, if it has to be successful in a humanistic sense.

The tribals have long been on the receiving end, always vulnerably displaced. This fatalistic saga is ever on the increase. The third chapter deals with this saga. **John Mundu**, in his lengthy research, studies various factors leading to displacement and migration of the tribals. In particular he makes a case-study of the tribals of Jharkhand State. He looks at their anthropological, psycho-sociological and existential consequences on the tribals. The major consequence is not economic but the loss of their very identity as a community. Displacement reduces them to a non-entity.

The fourth chapter deals with one of the latest forms of oppression and marginalization of the tribals. As it happens in the case of health, people with less immunity are more prone to diseases, so also in the field of economy, the poor, mostly the tribals, are likely to be easy victims of the onslaught of globalization. **Shailendra**, in his article "Globalization and Tribals," expresses this fear since, according to him, globalization is only and totally profit-oriented and devoid of humanistic objectives.

In part two, efforts are made to see if any political solution to the existing pathetic condition is possible. **Joseph Marianus Kujur** makes a scathing remark in his article regarding many apparently 'political' movements of the tribals both in the pre-independence period and the post-independence period. He laments over the lack of any intellectual group among them to spearhead these movements in an organized and effective manner. Some of the factors leading to unrest and revolt remain unchanged even after so many

movements. The percentage of the tribal population in BPL category and among those who sustain atrocities of various kinds is rather high. But there is no redress. If only there would be a formidable group of intellectuals to make their voices heard!

The tribals in general have not made much impact in the Indian political scenario. This is mainly due to the fact that they lack effective articulation, ability to mobilize, maneuver and network. This is the keen observation of **Victor Ferrao** in his article that constitutes the sixth chapter of this book. On the one hand, neither the policy of 'integration' nor that of 'isolation' both during the British rule and now under the Indian Government has proved much fruitful for the tribals. Nevertheless, the reservation policy of the Indian Constitution in the arena of politics (not to speak of employment and education) has made some difference for them. But for this policy, the tribals would not have made any inroad to politics, says Ferrao.

In the seventh chapter **Vincent Aind** dares to make a positive and hopeful observation. The tribals of Chotanagpur have something worthwhile to contribute to the mainstream Indian polity as much as they too depend on it for their own growth and development. With this conviction and expectation he highlights some of the democratic values prevalent in the tribal community of Chotanagpur. These values are easily reflected in the system of their social organization. They are natural to them. They are not imposed upon them.

The next part further highlights the positive elements of the tribal society. In spite of passing through much ordeal and hardship the tribals' life is so vibrant and colourful. There is much to admire and learn from their world-views, their festivities and celebrations, their respectful relationship with nature, other creatures and ultimately God. Thus, **Agapit Tirkey**, in the eighth chapter, poignantly brings out these positive aspects of the tribals. He underlines the fact that the tribals give maximum attention to harmony – harmony with one another, with their ancestors and the Divine as well as with the

cosmos. The tribals have had no philosophy in the technical sense of the term, because of their lack of articulation and any record. But they do have their own world views, belief in the Divinity, code of conduct in view of life on earth and for harmony with one another and with nature and also in view of life-after-death. These are expressed in their rituals and seasonal (mostly agricultural) festive celebrations. This is a ‘philosophizing’ tribe.

Life for the tribals is a celebration; it is communitarian and totally dependent on God. These aspects are expressed in their seasonal feasts, songs, dances and other cultic practices. So in the ninth chapter **Valentine Ekka** depicts the tribals’ cultural expressions beautifully and adds a point that there is no merely materialistic or Epicurean taste to their celebrations but that they are expressions of their relation to nature and to the Divine.

Benjamin Lakra, the Auditor General of West Bengal, was a special guest speaker in the conference. As a self-made man, one who has risen to a significant position in the Indian Administration after much perseverance and sincere hard work, remains deeply rooted to the tribal values and reality. Based on his personal experience he highlights in the tenth chapter some of the rich values of the tribals. Some of these values are the pillars of the Constitution of India which assure genuine peace and prosperity of a society.

Advancing the same theme in the eleventh chapter **Robert Pen** tells us that the tribals of earlier days knew how to spend their time usefully and purposefully. Even while working, mostly manual work, they would sing to overcome fatigue as well as monotony. That’s how folklore was born. Folk art could still be a very useful and effective media for communicating with tribal people. This media is more effective than the mainstream media, he claims.

The twelfth chapter is by **Samuel Lepcha**, who in his article “Tribals’ Outlook on Nature: Through Nature to God,” tries to establish the deep interrelatedness of man with nature and God. He goes on to say that nature is the meeting point of philosophy and

theology. According to Samuel, in the manner in which man deals with nature (which includes vegetation, environment, other living creatures and human beings) he does his philosophizing and theologizing. He finds and worships God there. This experience of the Divine Presence leads him to be concerned, caring and sharing towards the nature and one another.

Although very different from other tribes in many aspects, the Nilgiri Tribals too have their own typical spiritual outlook. Their spirituality is not primarily oriented to life-after-death. Rather it is very much related to this life. **John Peter** in his article, the thirteenth chapter, tells us that their spirituality is meant for living this life here on earth. Nevertheless, theirs is a fine example of how the tribals discover “the sacred in the secular, divine in the human, Spirit in matter and godliness in corporeal things.”

It was much easier for the tribals of Chotanagpur to accept Christianity because their world-views, belief in God and their concept of Him as the Creator and Father, code of conduct etc. proved to be a readymade and conducive platform for Christianity. **Francis Pereira**, in the fourteenth chapter, highlights such factors that make tribals and Christianity highly compatible. Moreover, Christianity helped improve the tribal concept of God. Christianity also made the tribals change their relationship with others some of whom they considered their enemies. It made them free from their undue fear of the evil spirit. It also enhanced the dignity of woman in the tribal society.

James Daniel too shares similar observations with regard to the Tangkhul Naga Christians in North-Eastern India. In the fifteenth chapter, James brings out the traditional belief system, code of conduct and social organization of these people. One can see for oneself how they found it easier to accept Christian concepts and teaching. One of the greatest changes that Christianity brought about in them was to stop their practice of ‘head hunting’ altogether.

The fourth part of the book is really philosophical in nature. The sixteenth and the seventeenth chapters delineate the philosophical trends in the tribal mythology as well as their way of living. **George Panthenmackel** tries to find what Ricoeur calls “surplus of meaning” in the literary form called narratives of the tribals. Like any other group the tribals also use narratives for explaining the mystery of the universe. So in his article “Tribal Narratives on the Universe: A Philosophical Response,” Panthanmackel says that the tribal narratives on the universe are both mythical and metaphysical, because myth is the metaphysics of the pre-philosophic mind. **Johnson Puthenpurackal** ventures into the task of introducing us to the philosophizing of tribals. He distinguishes between ‘philosophy’ and ‘philosophizing’. The latter is more existential in the sense that it is more lived than conceptualized. It is not rational in the strict sense of the term but pre-rational; and therefore it is philosophizing par excellence. In this sense of bringing philosophy ‘low’, Johnson tries to find philosophizing tribals who have hitherto been sidelined as ‘unreasonable’ or ‘unphilosophical’.

Lastly in the epilogue **Keith D’Souza** brings out the basic features of tribal philosophy. These are the features which reveal themselves in the tribal way of living, belief system, social organization and world views. This paper was not presented in the conference; it would not have been possibly prepared for that occasion, since the articles presented in the conference had to be used as its resources. But Keith has done an erudite task of bringing to surface what underlies in the tribal philosophy and thus he brings it to the attention of many other lovers of wisdom.

As the topic was concerning the tribals, many contributors of the articles were from the tribal communities themselves. Although the ACPI is the association of philosophers and the nature of the

conference is normally philosophical, the ACPI had invited most of these thinkers and writers who are not necessarily ‘philosophers’. But their contributions have been incredible. In fact, they were able to give firsthand information about the tribals, so to say. But for their contributions, neither the conference nor this book would be possible. So we express our sincere and heartfelt thanks to them. I would like to thank George Panthanmackel and Johnson Puthenpurackal, the President and the Secretary of the ACPI, respectively, for their trust in me first for organizing the annual conference and then for editing this book. They have been patient with me and have given a constant support and guidance. They are truly a source of encouragement and inspiration. I want to express my sincere thanks to Dr. John D. Romus for writing the Foreword. Finally, I am indebted to Pat Walsh, Henry Bright, Samuel Lepcha and Leo Jayaraj, my colleagues, and two seminarians Prasad Singavarapu and Jaunet Vijayaraj in Morning Star College for their editorial assistance. They gave their valuable time in sharing the burden with me, or else the work would have been more tedious and difficult. A big thank you!

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ACPI remains ever grateful to Missio, Aachen, for the financial help for printing the first six ACPI books. This initial support has enabled ACPI to go ahead with the printing and publishing of the other books of the ACPI Philosophy Series; the present volume (ACPI Book No. 10) is the fourth of this kind.

Series Editors, ACPI Books

PART ONE

***HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:
UNFRIENDLY CIRCUMSTANCES***

HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE TRIBALS AND THEIR STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

With Special Reference to Chotanagpur Adivasi Tribals

Mahali Livins Tirkey

The study of the historical origin of the tribals of India and of Chotanagpur is a complex one. There are different theories of scholars at different times. We will attempt at making a brief survey of them and analyse them in view of recent developments. We shall look into the historical roots of the tribals of Chotanagpur in particular. The major ethnic groups of tribals of Chotanagpur are Oraons, Mundas, Santals, Kharias, Hos, Asurs and Korwas.

In this paper we will try to understand who the tribals are, their population, their origin, their habitat and their struggles for survival.

The Tribes

The tribes are commonly known globally as the aborigines, or the indigenous people who first settled in the continents of Africa, America, Asia and Australia. With the advance of modern civilization, the aboriginal tribes have been pushed out and forced to take shelter in remote and isolated hilly regions. In the Indian context they are known as “Adivasis” meaning the first settlers of the soil. Stephen Fuchs, the Anthropologist says that they are called ‘primitive tribes or Adivasis’ or ‘scheduled tribes’ (selected for protection and uplift).

He also adds that the term ‘scheduled tribes,’ does not include all the so called ‘aboriginal tribes’, while practically all the scheduled tribes can safely be included in the category of ‘aboriginal tribes’.¹

An East Asian Consultation held at Sagrada in the Philipines defined the tribal community as forming – “a group of people generally constituting a homogeneous unit speaking a common language, claiming a common ancestry, living in a particular geographical area, generally lacking in scientific knowledge and modern technology and having a social structure based on kinship.”²

With reference to the concept of the tribal people, the ILO Convention 169 of 1989 says that these are the people whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community and whose status is regulated wholly or partly by their social customs and traditions.

The people are regarded as tribes and indigenous on account of their descent from population which inhabited the country or a geographical region of a state or country and who irrespective of their legal status retained some or all of their own economic, cultural and political institutions.³ Although the Indian government denied in the UN conference in Geneva in 1989 that there are any indigenous and tribal people in India and that only the scheduled tribes exist for whom constitutional provisions are made. It is well known that out of the very large tribal population only some are given government benefits. Such tribals are called the “scheduled tribes”. In another definition of tribe, T. B Naik gives seven criteria for a tribe:- (1) a tribe has at least functional independence with the community, (2) it

¹ Stephen Fuchs, *The Aboriginal Tribes of India* (New Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1992), 3rd Ed., pp. 11 & 13.

² Fuchs, p. 11.

³ ILO Convention, 1989, cited by B. K. Roy Burman and B.G. Varghese (eds.), *Aspiring to Be* (New Delhi: Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1998), Annexure III.

is economically backward, (3) it is geographically isolated from other peoples, (4) people speak common dialect which may have regional variations, (5) it is politically a unit under a common tribal authority, (6) its members are averse to change and (7) a tribe has its own laws (Customary Laws) which often differ from those of the majority communities.⁴

Population

According to the Census 2001, India's population has reached one billion (1000 million or 100 crore). Out of the total population of India there are 80 million scheduled tribes (ST), which comes to 8 percent of the national population. These scheduled tribes are divided into 692 different ethnic groups. It is estimated that more than three million aboriginal tribes are yet to be put in the list of scheduled tribes. They are not even recognised as tribes by the government. Since it is in the hands of State government to recommend any tribe for ST category, in one State a tribe is ST, but the same tribe may not be put in ST category in other States. We see that there are several tribes like Oraons, Mundas, Santals etc., in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, West Bengal and M.P. listed as ST's, but they are not in the ST category in Assam, UP, Maharashtra.

The six major tribes under ST category whose population is more than one million as per the Census 1971 are given below:

	(Million)	States
1. Bhil	5.2 mn.	M.P. Rajasthan, Gujarat
2. Gond	4.8 mn	M.P. Orissa, Bihar, Maharashtra
3. Santal	3.6 mn.	Bihar (Jharkhand), West Bengal, Orissa, Tripura

⁴ T. B. Naik, "What is a Tribe? Conflicting Definitions," cited by Fuchs op cit. p.11. Also see in L. P. Vidyarthi, Applied Anthropology (Allahabad: 1968), pp. 84-97.

- | | | |
|----------|---------|--|
| 4. Oraon | 1.7 mn. | Bihar (Jharkhand), M.P.
(Chhattisgarh), Orissa,
West Bengal |
| 5. Meena | 1.5 mn. | Rajasthan |
| 6. Munda | 1.1 mn. | Bihar (Jharkhand), Orissa, West
Bengal, M.P.
(Chhattisgarh), Tripura |

We may note that there are lakhs of Santals, Oraons, Mundas and Kharias in Assam and even in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat, but these states are not mentioned because these tribes are not recognized as ST in these states.

Since we are going to study the origin of the tribes of Chotanagpur in particular, we better see also the population figure in Jharkhand. The total population of Jharkhand as per the Census 2001 is 2.69 crore (26.9million). The tribal population is recorded to be only 26.3 percent which approximately comes to 72 lakhs (7.2 million) of the total population of Jharkhand. They are divided in 32 tribal communities.⁵ The tribal population is reported to have drastically reduced during the last one decade.

II. Origin of Tribes (with reference to Chotanagpur Adivasi Tribes):

The major adivasi tribals of Chotanagpur are Santals, Oraons, Mundas, Kharias, Hos, Korwas and Asurs. They are divided into two groups by scholars:- (1) the Kolarian and (2) the Dravidian. The Kolarian group includes the Mundas, Santals, Hos, Kharias, Korwas and Asurs. They have linguistic affinity and the austric accent in their pronunciation. It is for this reason the Linguists put them in one group. According to Gustav Oppert, Sir George Campbell is

⁵ Jharkhand: *Ek Addhyayan*, Code 808, Ed. Dr. Bhupal Kr. Mahto (Agra: Pratiyogita Sahitya Series, 2008), pp.6 & 104,

the inventor of the term Kolarian. Gustav Oppert says the generic name is usually applied by the Europeans to the aborigines of hilly country of Chotanagpur, Mirzapore and Rewa.⁶ They applied this term also to the Dravidian Oraons. The early Europeans who first came in contact with these aboriginals used them as Coles or Coolee, (labourer) and from this association of terms George Campbell appears to have coined the name Kolarian which we normally do not find in the history books of ancient India. Instead, the historians prefer to use the term “Munda race.” This name we find being used also in the Vedic literature written between c. 1500 BC - 1400 BC. The Oraons of Chotanagpur are put by scholars in the Dravidian family because of the linguistic affinity of the Oraon’s mother tongue Kurux with other Dravidian languages like Tamil, Telugu, Kannada etc.

The term Dravidian originally comes from the word ‘Dravida’, the language the Mediterranean peoples spoke when they moved South East to Mesopotamia and reached present day Iran. It was in Iran that the Dravida language began to take shape into slightly varied languages like Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Gondi, Kurux, Brahui, Malto, Tulu and Kotagu. After their Dravida language they are called the Dravidian race. About 3500 BC the Dravidians began to enter the Indus valley and settled down to develop the urban culture.

Having given a brief introduction of the Munda race and the Dravidian Oraons, we may further proceed in our analysis of their historical origins.

(1) The Munda Race

Without going far back into the history of man from the lower Paleolithic age (2,500,000 – 200,000 years ago) to the upper

⁶ Gustav Oppert, *The Original Inhabitants of Bharatavarsha or India* (New Delhi: Unity Book Service 1986), pp. 122-123.

Paleolithic age (40,000 years ago), we may now scan some major races in India to find out the origin of the Munda race (Kolarian race) that includes the Mundas, Santals, Kharias, Hos, Asurs Bhumij, Korwas with reference to Chotanagpur.

(i) Traditional Views: Mundas and Oraons traditionally believe that their ancestors were once upon a time the masters of Rohtasgarh on the Kaimur hills of Bihar. From here they migrated about the period 600 BC- 400 BC to the South into the deep forests of Jharkhand, later called Chotanagpur (by the British). They were attacked and driven out by the Chero tribe. Some writers, however, spread a wrong notion that the tribal Mundas and Oraons were attacked by the Muslims who drove them away from their Rohtasgarh. Historically it is untenable, because this event at Rohtasgarh in Bihar took place c. 700 BC whereas the Muslims first landed in the Indian soil from Arab at Karachi in Sindh only in 800 AD. The Mundas and the Oraons also take names of Azamgarh, Hardiban and Garhpipli somewhere in mid-India. Their songs at Karam festivals mention the rivers Ganga and Yamuna. These tribes also nostalgically associate their ancestors to ancient places like Mohenjo-daro and Harappa in the Indus Valley.

It is now accepted by the historians, archeologists and linguists that the Dravidians occupied the Indus valley as early as 3500 BC and stayed until 2000 BC. The Indus civilization was at its peak during 2500 BC- 2100 BC. Their centers of power and civilization were the cities of Harappa on river Ravi and Mohenjo-daro 350 miles south on the western bank of the river Indus. We shall examine different theories of scholars so far available with us in this regard.

(ii) Aravali and Vindhyan Ranges: In his book “Mundas and their Country” S.C. Roy says that Mundas and Kolarian tribes originally lived in the mountain ranges of Aravali and Vindhayan.

Gradually they moved to the North and settled in the Gangetic valley.⁷ Roy says that the Munda traditions speak of bloody warfare waged in the land of the five rivers against the invading Hindu intruders;⁸ when the Aryans attacked the Mundas, the latter moved eastward. According to Roy, when one group of Mundas moved to the East and reached Assam, the rest of them settled in Chotanagpur.

According to G.M. Bongard-Levin, a Russian scholar, it can be assumed that the appearance of the culture in the upper reaches of the Gangetic basin and in Gangetic-Yamuna Doab was the continuation of the process of spread of Proto-Munda tribes from Eastern India to the North-West, which also took place during the Neolithic period. The lower limit of this Neolithic culture in the upper reaches of the Ganga region goes back roughly to 2000–1000 BC. The proto-Mundas obviously were in contact with Harappan population (in eastern periphery of the civilization), which also resulted in some cultural similarity. Bongard-Levin also adds that under the pressure of the Vedic tribes the Mundas were forced to leave the fertile valley and move to the East.⁹

(iii) Yunan in South-East China: The original place of the Mundas, according to one theory, was Yunan in South-East China. Dr. Diwakar Minj in his book mentions two sets of scholars in this regard. One group consisting of W. Schmidt, Von Eicksledt and L. Von Haine Gelden believes that the Mundas moved southward from Yunan (Southeast China), reached Malay, then moved north to Burma and entered Nagaland and Assam. Another group of scholars which includes B.H.Hodgson and Sten Konow is of the view that the Mundas left Yunan and moved to the North and reached

⁷ S. C. Roy, *Mundas and Their Country* (Calcutta: The City Book Society, 1912), pp. 26-27.

⁸ Roy, p. 46.

⁹ G. M. Bongard-Levin, *Complex Study of Ancient India* (New Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1986), p. 16.

Mongolia. From there they moved south to Tibet. From here one group of Mundas entered Kashmir and moved to the Indus valley. And another group crossed the Himalayan range somewhere near Simla and came down to settle in the Gangetic valley. Later they moved to Chotanagpur.¹⁰

A well-known scholar of Mundari and the Mundas, P.Ponette SJ says that there are some scholars who believe that some Mundas have come from central Asia. They claim that there is much similarity between the Mundari and Russian Language. Obviously they try to prove that the Munda ancestors lived somewhere very close to Russia in the north. Refuting these theories Ponette says that so many millions of Mundas could not have migrated from so far and that in the supposition that their cradle is South East Asia, how is it that they are not slit eyed, or, if they hailed from Russia, why are they not fairskinned?^{10(a)}

(iv) In the Indus Valley: To trace the origin of the Mundas we may have a look at the racial elements of India. According to the most recent authoritative view viz. that of Dr. B.S.Guha, no less than six racial elements have contributed to build up the population of India.¹¹ They are (1) The Negritos, who migrated from Africa to India probably in the Paleolithic age (40,000 years ago). They are almost extinct except for a few in the Andamans Islands and some remote pockets of the Western Ghat. (2) Proto-Australoids came from Central Asia much later than the Negritos. (They are important for tracing out the origin of the Munda race and we will soon come to them). (3) The Mongoloids are divided in two groups: the Paleo-

¹⁰ Diwakar Minj: *Munda & Oraon Ka Dharmic Itihas* (Delhi: Oriental Publications, 1996), pp.14-15.

^{10a} P.Ponette, "*The Munda Language and the Future*" in Birsa Munda Jayanti-Souvenir, Vol.-1, 1995 (New Delhi: Published by Munda Sasankiran Jumba), p.49.

¹¹ R. C. Mazumdar, *The Ancient India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1971), 6th edition, p. 16.

Mongoloids are represented by the tribes living in Assam, Chittagong and the Indo-Burmese frontier. The other group, the Tibeto-Mongoloids, who were more pronounced and advanced, must have migrated to Tibet and later also to Sikkim and Bhutan. (4) Mediterranean peoples are considered as the ancestors of the Dravidians and had come from the west and spoke the Dravida language before entering the Indian soil in c.3500 BC. The Dravidian language is now represented by Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Gondi, Kurux, Malto, Brahui and a few others. (5) The Alpine, Danaric and Armenoid forming sub-groups of one physical type probably came from Central Asia. They form minor elements in the population of West Bengal, Orissa and Gujarat. (6) The Nordic group spoke the Aryan language, of which the earliest specimen is preserved in the Vedas. The Aryans first stepped on Indian soil c. 1750 BC.

According to the above description, the Negritos were the first race that spread in India. The second race that entered in India was the proto-Australoids. Supporting the theory of Dr. B.S.Guha, historian R.C. Majumdar writes that the Proto-Australoids who came from the West, form one of the basic elements of the Indian population. By admixture with others, specially with the Negritos, who came before, and the Mongoloids who came after them, they gave rise to Kol or Munda type, the Mon-Khmer type in Assam, Burma and Indo-China and various other primitive types now found in the islands of the Indian Archipelago and those of Melanesia and Polynesia. The speeches of these peoples, scattered in wide areas extending from Kashmir to East Island, belong to the same family of languages known as Austric.¹² Prof. Mazumdar adds that all the peoples who resulted from the admixture ultimately adopted one or the other of the four distinct languages, viz. the Austric, the Tibeto-Chinese, the Dravidian and the Aryan. It may be surmised that the Negritos belonged to the Paleolithic age (30,000 years ago), but it

¹² Mazumdar, op. cit., p. 16.

is almost certain that the proto-Australoids belonged to the Neolithic culture (8,000 years ago). If the above findings are correct and the Munda race has its origin through the admixture of the Negritos of dark complexion and curly hair and the Austroloids who spoke the Austric language, we may understand why the Munda race has a commonly dark complexion and has inherited the Austric character in the language which the Munda family speaks even today.

(v) Peoples of Kot-Diji Culture (3200-2600BC): Who are they?: The Negritos of upper Paleolithic age (40000-10000 BC) and the Australoids of Neolithic age (10000-5000 BC) gave rise to the Munda race through admixture in the course of long contacts. It is also said that the Munda race is 9000 years old (since c. 7000-6000 BC). We could assume then that the Munda race continued to dwell in the Indus Valley till the advent of the Dravidian race in c. 3500 BC. Professor Irfan Habib says that there were peoples of three cultures in the vast Indus Valley during period 32000- 2600 BC. He does not mention names like Munda race understandably because peoples were identified by their cultures rather than by any particular name. Irfan Habib says that the people of Kot-Diji culture had occupied almost the entire Indus Valley covering N.W.F.P, Punjab and North Sindh. The people of Sothi-Siswal culture were in South Rajasthan and the people of Amri-Nal culture were in Sindh and Gujarat. The peoples of the last two cultures were small in number and could not survive long. But the Kot-Diji culture had spread to the entire Indus Valley and its people survived even during the Dravidian Indus civilization.¹³ They obviously had contacts with the Dravidian culture. Could the people of Kot-Diji culture be the Munda race about whom R.C. Mazumdar the historian and B.S. Guha the anthropologist speak?

About the religion of the people of the Kot-Diji cultures not much is said. However, Habib says that pottery decoration and

¹³ Irfan Habib, *The Indus Civilization: The People's History of India – 2* (Aligarh: Tulika Books, 2002), p. 9.

terracotta figurines might tell us about their beliefs. Parallel to the bull portrayed in the Damb Sadaat ware is the horned deity on a pot from Kot-Diji. Female figurines in clay at Jalilpur, Gumla and Sarai Khola of Kot-Diji culture sites suggest the worship of some form of Mother Goddess. These beliefs survived in the religion of the succeeding Indus Civilization (of the Dravidians), but it is also true that neither the funerary rituals of the Indus Civilization nor most of its deities (of human or animal shape) can be traced to any of the early Indus Cultures.¹⁴ Habib further says that of the three early Indus cultures (3200-2600 BC) Kot-Diji, Sothi-Siswal and Amri-Nal, only Kot-Diji culture survived the onset of Indus culture (of the Dravidians 2600-2000 BC) in NWFP and North- Western Punjab. At sites such as Rehman Dheri, Gumla and Tarakai Qila in NWFP and Sarai Khola in Northwestern Punjab, we have remains of this phase largely corresponding to the period of the Indus Civilization. It is, however, noted that in Ghaggar valley of River Ghaggar numerous small Sothi-Siswal villages have survived. They have some influence on the Indus Civilization; though they do not have any characteristic features viz. distinctive writings, baked bricks, distinctive pottery etc.

Excavations that began in 1922 at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, by R.D. Banerji and Sir John Marshall, former Director General of Archeological Survey of India, show distinct differences between the early Indus culture of Kot-Diji peoples and the Indus culture of the Dravidians. The two phases of cultures are always found to be distinct, two exceptions being Harappa and Nausharo where overlapping phases between the Kot-Diji and Indus Valley cultures have been identified, says Irfan Habib.¹⁵ The core area of Indus civilization (of Dravidians) therefore lay possibly within the Kot-Diji culture area in the Punjab and northern and central Sindh. Whatever the areas of origin, Irfan Habib adds that the diffusion of

¹⁴ Habib, *op.cit.*, pp.12-13.

¹⁵ Habib *op.cit.*, p.16.

Indus Civilization could have been attained only by means of political expansion. Uniformity in such spheres as units of measures, town-planning and writing is not likely to have arisen. One must only imagine that the proto-Indus state using ox-drawn chariots and bronze weaponry subdued the territories of different Early Indus Cultures (Kot-Diji and others) and thereafter imposed its major features of economic and cultural life in all parts of the Indus Empire, which was now formed, says Irfan Habib.¹⁶

The above paragraphs describing the Kot-Diji people and their culture by Irfan Habib is given, because there appears to be a lurking suspicion that the people of Kot-Diji Culture in the Indus Valley before the arrival of the Dravidians in c. 3500 BC who established their Indus Valley Civilization during 2600-2000 BC, could very well be the people of the Munda race we are trying to identify. There is a point to note that there appear several names of places and rivers of the Early Indus Culture of Kot-Diji people (3200-2600 BC) and the Indus Valley Culture of Dravidians (2600-2000 BC). These names are: Gumla at the Gomal Pass of Hindukush Mountain, Nausharo near Mehrgarh in Baluchistan, Sarai Khola north of River Jhelum, Torobogo in the hilly region of NWFP, river Hakra-Ghaggar and so on. These names with little variations like Gumla, Saraikela, Naushera, Taraboga, river Ghaghar or Ghaghari, even Horapp forests some 20 miles away from Ranchi are found in Chotanagpur, the land of the Mundas and Oraons in Jharkhand State. This does not happen just by sheer chance. The Munda traditions claim that the names like Mohenjo-daro and Harappa come from their Mundari language. They also claim that names like Mehrauli (in Delhi) come from mehr-auli meaning sour mango. Whatever it is, about the names Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, Dr. H.D. Sankalia, former Head of the Archeological Survey of India says that “Harappa” and “Mohenjo-daro” are not Sanskrit words,

¹⁶ Habib, *op.cit.*, p. 16.16 Asko Parpola, *Deciphering the Indus Script* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.161 & 165.

though many well known scholars of Sanskrit in the past have thought them to be so and used diacritic marks, the former comes from the present Punjabi word Hadappa and the latter from Sindhi - Mohan-jo-dado- "This mound (dado) of Mohan or "dead" (*Times of India*, 23 Oct. 1983).

Migration of names from a certain locality occurs along with the migration of people who had been long associated with the locality, rivers or mountains in their ancestral history. Should we not then assume that the ancestors of the Mundas and the Oraons inhabited once the deep Indus valley thousands of years ago, and that they had their own cultures and religion much before the arrival of the Aryans (c. 1750 BC), with their Vedic culture and Hindu religion? These historical facts show that the tribals of Chotanagpur had their own language, culture and ancestral religion much older and very different from Hinduism, the Vedic religion of the Aryans.

(2) The Origin of the Oraons

Scholars have three views about the origin of the Oraon tribals of Chotanagpur who speak Kurukh language which belongs to the Dravidian linguistic family.

(i) South and south-east India: S.C. Roy holds that the Oraons possibly came from the Coorg, a small state in South India. Some even are of the view that they might have entered from the direction of South-East Asia.

(ii) Gujarat: Joseph Elfenbein is of the opinion that the Kurukh / Kurux (Oraons) and the Malto tribes earlier came from the north-west direction and settled around the river Narmada near Bharuch in Gujarat and later moved via Ujjain to Rohtasgrah, while the Brahui went to Baluchistan in the Western direction. But Asko Parpola, another scholar of the Indus Civilization, disagrees with Elfenbein about the location of the homeland of the north Dravidians.¹⁶

(iii) Harappa: Since 1922, besides Harappa and Mahenjo-daro, 1000 sites have been discovered spread in a wide area from the western India in the vicinity of Narmada River, northward across Gujarat and Kutch through the Pakistan regions of Punjab into Indian Rajasthan and eastern Punjab up to the vicinity of Delhi.¹⁷ The Indus Valley Civilization is also known as Harappan Culture. The people had the urban culture, also knew farming, domesticated animals and used copper and bronze for tools. The development of the Indus Civilization is attributed to the Dravidian race which embraces the speakers of the Dravidian languages like Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Gondi, Kurukh (Oraon), Malto, Brahui, Kodagu, and Tulu. It may be mentioned here that some scholars of Indian Origin (N.S. Rajaratnam and Dr. N. Jha) residing in America claimed that the Indus Civilization belonged not to the Dravidians, but to the Aryans. They tried to distort the history by claiming the Indus Civilization to be that of the Aryans because the Harappan seals had the imprint of a horse commonly domesticated and used for long only by the Aryans. On close examination by several scholars it was discovered that the animal Unicorn imprinted in the Harappan seal was cleverly modified through the help of computer to represent an imprint of a horse.¹⁸

We have already seen that the ancestors of the Dravidians were the Mediterranean peoples in the Middle-East and spoke the Dravida language till they reached from Mediterranean region to the region of present Iran. The first batch of these people entered the Indus Valley in c. 3500BC. We will try to trace the Kurukh speaking Oraon Dravidians without going into details of the Dravidians and their civilization (2600-2000 BC). We have two hints that guide us to trace the Kurukh speaking Oraons in Harappa through linguistic affinity and some Archeological evidences.

¹⁷ Walter Fairservis, Jr., *"The Script of the Indus Valley Civilization,"* Scientific America, Vol.248 (New York: 1983), p.58.

¹⁸ *"Horseplay in Harappa,"* Frontline, October 13, 2000, Monthly Journal (Chennai: National Press), (Read entire article), pp.4 -16.

(a) Linguistic Affinity: Ever since the excavations started in 1922 at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa about 4000 seals have been discovered with imprints of pictograms. Scholars are trying to decipher the meaning of these Indus scripts. Asko Parpola, a well known decipherer of the Indus scripts, now at the Helsinki University,

deciphers the man shaped sign in the seals () and says that this

sign can be read in Dravidian as **al/an** - ‘man, manly person, warrior, husband, servant’; in Tamil this word also means devotee (of the

deity).¹⁹ Fish sign () is a strong symbol of a deity which is read in

Dravidian as **min** which means fish; **m** is also read as **v** and so the **min** and **vin** are read with meaning Star. The signs () may be read

tentatively as **min-a al** which means “man of god” (represented by fish). In Kurukh language of the Oraoas man is called **al**, in singular

‘alas’, woman – ‘alee’, plural of ‘al’ is ‘alar’, women is ‘aleer’. In Kurukh there is fish called ‘Minj’. Likewise from ‘**vin**’ (star) Kurukh

word for star is ‘**vinko**’/‘**binko**’. The word ‘**min**’/v also refers to something glittering, shinning, - ‘bilichna’ in Kurukh. Over the sign

of pictogram fish a cap () is drawn and that is called ‘**mey**’ meaning roof. From this term comes Kurukh word ‘**meysga**’ which means

roof of a house. Parpola further says that the component ‘**vel**’ corresponds to sign () occurs in the same position in several other

names of Murukan.²⁰ The word ‘**vel**’ in Murukan’s name can be explained in several ways. A Proto-Dravidian etymon of this shape

meaning ‘chief’, ‘king’, ‘illustrious’ or ‘great man’, ‘hero’ can be posited by comparing Tamil ‘**vel**’ (pl. **velir**), which has all these

meanings, with North Dravidian (Kurukh) ‘**belas**’ (pl. **belar**) ‘king, god’; this would suit well the god of war. There are several words

deciphered from Harappan seals that bring Kurukh very close to Harappan language in its meanings.

¹⁹ Asko Parpola, *Deciphering the Indus Script* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.188 & 261.

²⁰ Asko Parpola, p.230.

(b) Archeological Evidences: Some seals at Harappa show the imprint of yoke carrier sign (). Parpola says that this may be exemplified by the spring festival of the north Dravidian Kurukh speaking Oraons of central India. The priest and his assistants each carrying two pots on a carrying pole, bring four pots full of water to a sacred grove. With one of the carrying poles, the priest traces out four grooves on the ground so as to make a rectangle. The pots are then placed in the four corners and left standing overnight. If any one of them has less water in the morning, this indicates the rains will be less abundant in that direction.²¹ Kurukh speaking Oraons know very well that this practice is meticulously followed even today in the spring festival of Sarhul. The Harappan seal showing signs of sacrificial vessels and a carrier with a pole in inscription on the obverse has shown on the reverse the worship of a fig tree deity. Michael Jansen also confirms it saying that some seals are more complex in their imagery and some have obvious religious significance – humans are depicted surrounded by animals, while other seals show groups of worshippers around a deity in a tree.²² The Oraons and fellow tribals of Chotanagpur may be inclined to think of their own Karam festival when they sit round the Karam tree (*Nauclea Parvifolia*) and worship the Karam raja, their God (Dharmes/Singbonga).

(c) Views of Scholars: About the Kurukh being in Harappa, Asko Parpola would say, “The Indus Language is likely to have belonged to the north Dravidian sub-branch represented today by the Brahui spoken in mountain valleys and plateau of Afghanistan and Baluchistan, the core area of the early Harappan Neolithic cultures and Kurukh spoken (by Oraons) is North India from Nepal and Madhya Pradesh to Orissa, Bengal and Assam.”²³ Another scholar,

²¹ Asko Parpola, p.110.

²² Michael Jansen, “*Mohenjo-daro City of Indus Valley*,” Endeavour, New Series, Vol.9, No.4 (London: Pergamon Press, 1985), p.161.

²³ Asko Parpola, *Visible Religion, Annual Religious Iconography*, Vol.VI (Leiden: 1988), p.118. Also see *The Image in Writing*, 1988, and see *Vergessene Stadte—Am Indus* (Aachen : Verlag Philipp Von Zabern – Mainz am Rhein, Germany).

Walter A Fairservis Jr. eliminates the candidacy of three languages spoken by Mundas, Aryans and Dravidian at large. The fourth one he picks up is Kurukh which is closer to Harappan language. He says: "a fourth possibility of course is that Harappan is related to none of the above. It is none the less worthwhile to consider the candidacy of Dravidian more closely than that of either Munda or Indo-Aryan. In addition to northern forms, Kurukh, Malto and Brahui, about 25 Dravidian languages are still spoken."²⁴

Despite some good reasons to the contrary, we are inclined to believe that the Kurukh language was most probably one of the languages spoken in Harappa some 4500 years ago. Yet our search for the Kurukh Oraons is not complete. If at all the ancestors of the Mundas and Oraons were in the Indus Valley, the question, however, arises, what made them leave the Indus Valley? The same question applies to other Dravidians. Why had they to leave en masse their prosperous cities like Harappa, Mohenjo-daro, Kalibangan, Kot-Diji, Mehrgarh etc. and flee south into the Deccan plateau? We will probe this issue as it relates also to the aboriginal tribes like the ancestors of the Mundas and Oraons who fled eastward to the Gangetic valley and subsequently reached the Chotanagpur plateau.

III. Leaving the Indus Valley

(1) Advent of the Indo-Aryans and Contacts with Aborigines

Professor R.C. Mazumdar the historian says that about 2000 BC or a few centuries later a new race entered the Indian soil. They were of fair complexion speaking Aryan language designated generally Aryans or Indo-Aryan who advanced from the North-West across the Hindukush mountains.²⁵ He further writes that the Dravidians had to fight against the invaders for their existence and

²⁴ Walter F. Fairservis Jr., "*The Script of the Indus Valley Civilization*," Scientific America, Vol. 248 (New York: 1983), p.62.

²⁵ Mazumdar, op.cit., p.30.

there are several passages in the Rig Veda (written in 1500-1400 BC) indicating the severity of the struggles. Noted here below are some examples by Michael Witzel:²⁶

(i) Rig Vedic Evidences: In Book 2 of Rig Veda it says: “Indra (war god of Aryans) destroyed the Dasic forts which had blacks in their laps; he created the lands and water for Manu, the Aryan man (2.20.7); “Indra dispersed the 100,000 men of Varcin” (2.14.6) (Varcin was the term used for the Dasyus). At 7.5.3: “out of fear of you (Agni) the black tribes moved away leaving their possessions behind...” See also 7.5.6: “You, Agni, drove out the Dasyus (aborigines) from their homes creating wide light for the Aryans”. The aboriginal tribes encountered the Aryans. Rig Samhita 9.41.1-2 speaks in two successive verses how “we (Aryans) slay away the black skin and subdued the irreligious Dasyus”.²⁷ According to H.D.Sankalia, the Harappan culture of Gumla (situated on the Gomal Pass of Hindukush Mt.) “was destroyed by fire and a fight in which sling balls and Terracotta missiles were also used”.²⁸

(ii) Archeological evidences: Sir Mortimer Wheeler writes “in ‘Rig Veda the invasions (of Aryans) constantly assume the form of an onslaught upon the walled cities of the aborigines. For these cities the term used is “**pur**” meaning rampart, fort, and stronghold. Both in Harappa and Mohenjo-daro men and women were massacred in the streets and houses and were left lying there at best crudely covered without last rites. Thus in a room in HR area (site name) the skeletons of 13 adult males and females and a child, some wearing bracelets, rings and beads were found in attitudes

²⁶ Michael Witzel, “*Rig Vedic History: Poets, Chieftains and Politics*,” *The Indo-Aryans of Ancient South-Asia*. George Erdosy (Ed.) (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1997), p. 324.

²⁷ Asko Parpola, “*The Coming of the Aryans to Iran & India and the cultural & ethnic identity of the Dasa*,” *Studia Orientalia*, Vol.64 (Helsinki: 1988), p.210.

²⁸ R. S. Sharma, *Advent of the Aryans in India* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1999), p.67.

suggesting simultaneous death (PI XXIV) the bones were in bad condition, but it was noted that one of the skulls bore a straight cut 146mm in length which could have been done during life with a sharp and heavy weapon such as sword, and that this was in all probability the cause of death". And another skull showed similar signs of violence.²⁹ No doubt there was terrible man slaughter as a result of fights between the people of the Indus Culture and the Aryans. Ultimately, the Dravidians had to succumb to the attacks of the invaders. Aryans destroyed their castles and cities, burned their houses and reduced a large number of them to slaves, says R.C. Mazumdar. He adds that the vanquished natives, the Dravidians as well as the Remnants of the predecessors (Early settlers) mostly submitted to them and became Dasas; but large bodies of Dravidian found shelter in the south and their descendants still use the languages known as Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam. Some other tribes retreated towards north, south, and east and maintained a precarious existence in hills and forests. Their descendants, the Kols (Mundas and Oraons) Bhils, Gonds and many Himalayan tribes are still to be found in the vastness to which their ancestors were driven by the Aryans about 4000 years ago.³⁰ The Mundas and Oraons moved eastward together towards the Gangetic valley, while the Aryans remained on their heels. As a result of long association the Mundas and the Oraons developed a common culture and lifestyle despite the difference of their mother tongues. They had a common enemy, the Aryans against whom they had fought several times. The bloody battle between the aborigines and the Aryans at Karamnasha River, the tributary of river Sone in Mirzapur district of UP is reported in the history.³¹ The immigration of Aryans in the Indus Valley is supposed to have begun around 1750 B.C and their first sacred book the Rig Veda

²⁹ Sir Mortimer Wheeler, *Indus Civilization, Supplementary Volume* (London:1953), p.90.

³⁰ Mazumdar, op.cit., p.30.

³¹ Mirzapur Gazeteer, Vol.XXVII, pp.12-14, 1911.

composed c.1500-1400 B.C in the region between Kabul and Ganga. Aryans are regarded as the immediate successors and possibly wreckers of the Indus Civilization.³² The Aryans were pastoralists and cows and cattle were in their eyes the main form of wealth. They later combined pastoralism and agriculture and for work they enslaved those whom they had conquered and subjugated them to serve as Dasas. The Aryans did not have any towns and took pride in their God Indra's destruction of the ones others had built.³³ As a result Rig Veda does not mention any granary the urban site.

(iii) Process of Absorption: The enslaved Dasas were not slaughtered. Some were enslaved so that slaves, both male (Dasa) and female (Dasis) appear in Rig Veda as desirable articles to be obtained as gifts. According to D. D. Kosambi, there are evidences of absorption of Dasas into the Aryan fold. These people who surrendered to the Aryans are the 'Sudras' recognized in the last portion of the Rig Veda as the fourth "Varna" (caste, class), beneath the "Vaisya" the old 'vis'.³⁴ Dasas were absorbed into Aryan fold, but kept at the feet of the Aryans. Aryanization and political dominance were achieved through cultural absorption of Dasas into the Aryan ethos, according to Kenneth A. R. Kennedy.³⁵

Those who surrendered to the Aryans were called Dasas (Sudras), but those who fought bloody battles against the Aryans and refused to surrender were called by the Aryans Dasyus, Rakshas and Asurs (aborigines). These were the real enemies of the Aryans, who later took shelter in forest and hills. In the first flush of the

³² Irfan Habib, *Essays in Indian History* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2002), 5th Print, p.61.

³³ S.K. Das, *Economic History of Ancient India* (Calcutta: 1937), pp.26-27, cited in Habib, *Essays*, p.61.

³⁴ Habib, *Essays*, p.62-63.

³⁵ George Erdossy, (Ed.) *Indo-Aryans of Ancient South-Asia*, 1997, p.57.17 R.S. Sharma, *Sudras in Ancient India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas Publishers, 2002), p. 21.

Aryan expansion, the destruction of the settlements and the peoples such as the Dasyus seems to have been so complete that very few people were left for absorption. But it may not have been the case in the succeeding stages of their expansion. While the majority of the survivors and specially the comparatively backward peoples would be reduced to helot age, the natural tendency would be for 'vis' of the Aryan society to mix with the lower orders and for the Vedic priests and warriors to mix with the higher classes of the earlier society. That in some cases the enemies of the Aryans were given high status in the new composite society, is clear from two references. At one place Indra (Aryan God) is described as converting the Dasas into Aryas (Rig Veda VI, 22.1) Sayana explains this as teaching them the Aryan way of life. At another place Indra is said to have deprived the Dasyus of the title of the 'Arya' (Rig Veda XI, 49.3).

R. S. Sharma clarifies the distinction between Dasas and Dasyus and says that they are not the same. Dasyus are represented as speaking probably different language and having different lifestyle which does not seem to be the case with the Dasas. Further the Dasas were organized into tribe called 'vis' which is a term used for Vedic people or tribe. Seen in this light the conflict between the Arya and the Dasa would appear to be one within the fold of the Vedic Tribes leading more or less the same type of life. Sharma further adds that it is significant that there are atleast 12 references to the slaughter of the Dasyus (non Aryan aboriginals), mostly by Indra, the Aryan God. On the contrary, although there are references of killing of the individual Dasa, the word 'Dasahatya' does not occur anywhere. This indicates that the two were not identical and may suggest that Aryans followed a policy of ruthless extermination towards the Dasyus (aboriginals), which in the case of Dasas was tempered with moderation.³⁶ The Dasyus and Nisadas appeared to be one and the same and they are different from Dasas. P.R.

³⁶ Sharma, p.10-11.

Chanda takes the Nisadas to be the true representatives of the *Anaryas* of the Rig Vedic age and the original speakers of the Munda family of languages. N.K. Dutt suggests that they belonged to a pre-Dravidian stock, presumably Munda – Monkhmer race, who had remained unabsorbed by the Dravidians.³⁷

(2) Making tribes fight against tribes

The Vedic policy of destruction of the aboriginal tribes still continues today. Kautilya, the Preceptor of Chandra Gupta Maurya (Mauryan empire period 322-184 BC), who was the grand son of Emperor Ashoka, refers to the word ‘tribes’ a dozen times in his book *Arthasastra*. He says that the hill tribes may be recruited so that they may destroy other wild tribes engaged in the enemies’ armies.³⁸ Kautilyan policy towards tribes suggests tribes be used against other tribes just as “a wood apple is broken by another apple”. While the wild tribes were to be used, they were not to be trusted nor were they to be protected. They were totally expendable and their destruction even when they belonged to the king’s own army, was clearly no matter for regret.

CONCLUSION

We have tried to explore in a limited canvas the origin of the tribes particularly of Chotanagpur. This is just an initiation for further studies. Therefore whatever is given here is in sense complete. Hence to come to any definite conclusion about the origin of these tribes at this stage would be unwise. We have also seen the historians’ observations that the more powerful race or the society subjugates, enslaves and assimilates into its own fold the weaker sections of the

³⁷ Sharma (Ed.), *Indian Society Historical Probing*s (New Delhi: Peoples Publishing House, 1974), p.68.

³⁸ Vasudha Dhagamwar, “A Search for the Tribal Identity : An Odyssey” B.K. Roy and V.G. Verghese (Ed.) *Aspiring to Be* (Delhi: Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1998), p.223.118 Dhagamvar, *op.cit.* , p. 223.

society. It is not always a smooth and friendly transition, nor shall it ever be so. As long as self-pride and self-dignity exist, particularly in the tribal blood with a sense of independence in their tribal society, struggles against an oncoming more powerful society will ever continue. In the past history the tribals in Chotanagpur were illiterate but were educated in other customs and cultures. They were united and fought against their enemies to affirm their identity and existence. In so far as the tribes of Chotanagpur are concerned, their biggest enemy today is an ignorance of the self even though they may be literate and educated. A Greek philosopher had rightly said “Gnoti Teknon” ‘Know Thyself’. The more educated the present day tribals are, the more self-centred they become. Unfortunately, their social concerns, their community feelings, consciousness of their cultural identity, their sense of their socio-political unity are all gradually growing dim, dismal and disintegrated. In the present day context, nobody is going to save them except themselves. They have to rise above all their petty differences of caste, creed or otherwise. They have to realize the urgent need of forging themselves into unity for survival.

There is a Chinese folk story: when a mother cockroach sees a tortoise its archenemy, in fear and utter desperation, it looks around for a rock shelter. Unfortunately in sheer ignorance and confusion it leads all its siblings to safety under the belly of the very same tortoise which, of course, for a moment stands still obligingly, and closing its eyes it smiles benignly. It has got its food for the day without much effort. The fate of the family of the cockroach is anybody’s guess. The tribals of Chotanagpur have got to study themselves, their own past history and existing political situation to understand their present better, and plan their future more wisely.

ADIVASI REALITY

A Saga of Displacement and Migration

John Mundu

“I sit on a man’s back choking him and making him carry me and yet assure myself and others that I am sorry for him and wish to lighten his load by all possible means—except by getting off his back.” (Leo Tolstoy)

Introduction

The paper primarily focuses on anthropological, psycho-sociological and existential consequences on the people (Adivasis) affected by the displacement and consequent migration and dehumanization. It presents a broad descriptive framework for understanding and managing the psycho-sociological and existential consequences from the perspective of the Adivasis (Mundas, Hos, Santals, Uraons, Kharias and other less numerous tribal groups) of central India’s (i.e., Jharkhand) displacement-migration from their ‘*khutkati-bhuinhari*’ land (ancestral land). Today displacement (‘development-induced displacement’) has become the major factor affecting the Adivasis of this region. We shall not deal with the voluntary migration in this paper.

The paper has a limitation, in a sense, that I have used the studies of others in order to sketch the tribal predicament. What seems to be obvious is that many scholarly studies done by the

social scientists, economists and social activists, are done from the perspective of the rationalist-integrationist paradigm of the dominant colonial discourse of the Indian state 'which seeks to further its twin goals of development and integration with the help of a bureaucratic planning and delivery mechanism.'¹ Such a discourse begins with the model of centralized to-down planning which emphasizes heavy industries, major and medium irrigation and power plants and heavy technology mostly serving the urban industrial complexes and bypassing the people who sacrificed everything for these projects. I would like to present the tribal situation from the perspectives of the victims of development discourse and planning.

First I shall deal with the concept and definition of the tribe and growth of tribal population; second, the phenomenon of displacement due to land alienation and the mechanism of land alienation will be dealt; third, the phenomenon of migration in Jharkhand, fourth, impact of the phenomenon of displacement and migration will be jointly dealt with; finally, direction of a response will be indicated.

Concept and Definition of Tribe

As far as the concept and definition of 'tribe' is concerned, the anthropologists, sociologists, social activists, administrators, academicians and people who are involved with tribes and their problems are not able to arrive at a common agreement. During the British rule, as seen in the 1931 census, the nomenclature referring to tribes is either 'aboriginal' or 'deprived classes'. However, these adjectives were dropped in the 1941 census and these communities were termed as Scheduled Tribes or 'Adivasis'.² Economic impoverishment and widespread illiteracy has led to categorization

¹ Amit Prakash, *Jharkhand: Politics of Development and Identity* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2001), p. 36.

² Ramanath Nayak, *Tribal Planning Process: People's Participation in Tribal Sub-Plan* (Delhi: Gagan Deep Publications, 2004).

of some of these communities as primitive tribal communities. The tribes of Jharkhand like to call themselves 'Adivasis'; because it rightly describes them as 'the original settlers' of this area. However, the term in vogue in the international forum is 'indigenous peoples'. In this paper I will use the terms Scheduled Tribes, Adivasis or indigenous peoples as synonymous according to the context.³

The term 'tribe' is nowhere defined in usual way in the Constitution of India. Article 342 of the Indian Constitution categorizes the 'tribes' or 'Adivasis' (indigenous Peoples) as Scheduled Tribes. It would be pertinent to quote the relevant article of the Indian Constitution regarding who is the 'tribal':

342. Scheduled Tribes. - (1) The President may with respect to any State or Union Territory, and where it is a State, after consultation with the Governor thereof, by public notification, specify the tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities which shall for the purpose of this Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Tribes in relation to that State or Union territory, as the case may be.

(2) Parliament may by law include or exclude from the list of Scheduled Tribes specified in a notification issued under clause (1) any tribe or tribal community or part of or group within any tribe or tribal community, but save as aforesaid a notification issued under the said clause shall not be varied by any subsequent notification.⁴

The perception of the Constitution is basically juridical and protective in nature, but it is done from the perspective of rulers and not that of the people. The Parliament can 'include or exclude from the list of Scheduled tribes' any tribe or part of a tribe. The

³ A detailed discussion on the term 'tribe' is found in Ramanath Nayak, *Tribal Planning Process*, pp. 40-43.

⁴ S.K. Awasthi, *The Constitution of India* (Allahabad: Dwivedi Law Agency, 1999), p. 382.

monumental work on *The Scheduled Tribes: People of India* K.S. Singh represents Indian Government's point of view on the Adivasis. He writes: "In any discussion of tribes in India has to proceed from the assumption that a tribe is an administrative and political concept in India."⁵ Nevertheless, the work provides a comprehensive introduction to 461 tribal communities of India found in different parts of the Country. In this background we must take seriously the history of the indigenous peoples and their struggles against all types of groups, which is the testimony of their determination of asserting their distinct peoplehood.⁶

A discussion or understanding of tribal and indigenous peoples in the world and in India in particular is guided by two streams of understanding: first, how the tribal and indigenous people understand themselves; second, how the Indian government understands them. The second stream of understanding is guided by the leaders and the anthropologist-sociologist who belong to the high-caste and upper-class non-tribal (non-indigenous peoples) espousing the sanscritizing and modernizing models. In reality both streams of understanding contradict each other. After the Independence of the country in 1947 when it came to the writing of the Indian Constitution, there were only a handful of persons to represent the interests of the Adivasi and indigenous peoples. The ruling class was faced with the existence of various Adivasi and indigenous peoples spread out in all parts of the country. Three main theories of isolation, of assimilation and integration were proposed to face the question of

⁵ K. S. Singh, *The Scheduled Tribes*, Vol 3 (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1997), p xiii.

⁶ The following books offer a reader how ruthlessly struggles to maintain their identity is crushed in the pre independence and post independence India: Jagadish Chandra Jha, *The Tribal Revolt of Chaotanagpur 1831-1832* (Patna: Kaship Jayaswal Research Institute, 1987); A.C. Mittal and J.B. Sharma (eds.), *Tribal Movement, Politics and Religion in India*, 3 vols. (New Delhi: Radha Publications, 1998).

Adivasis. The constituent assembly chose the third theory.⁷ Accordingly, two constitutional arrangements were made: first, a state wise list of Scheduled tribes was drawn and it was left to the Parliament to include or exclude from this list as it desired; second, the provisions for the administration and control of the Adivasis and their area as Scheduled Areas. The mention of these areas find place in the Fifth and Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The former notifies and denotifies that you are a 'tribal' by a sheer majoritarian act of the Parliament and the latter professedly protects the Adivasis. In concrete, these betray a clear leaning towards the integration approach of the high-caste and upper class combine of the majority community. The irony is that a member of a tribe remains a tribal only within the state he/she is enlisted as tribe and not in other states. For example, the members of Uraon, Munda, Santal are denied Scheduled status in Assam on the basis that the list in Assam does not carry the names of the tribes. This is a constitutional way of denying the identity of a person and his/her community as a tribal or indigenous people. Moreover, one has to produce a certificate from the representative of the government to prove that he/she is a tribal.

Growth of tribal population in India

Tribal growth during the census period (1951-2001)

A States	B 1951	C 1961	D 1971	E 1981 & % of total population	F 1991 & % of total population	G 2001 & % of total population
1. Andhra Pradesh	11,49,919	13,24,368	22,26,086	31,76,001	41,99,481	5,024,104
2. Arunachal Pradesh	-	-	3,63,408	4,41,157 (63.82)	5,50,351 (63.66)	705,158 (64.2)
3. Assam	17,61,434	20,68,364	16,06,648	-	28,74,441 (12.82)	3,308,570 (12.4)
4. Bihar	38,80,097	42,04,770	49,32,771	58,10,867 (8.31)	66,16,914 (7.66)	758,351 (0.9)
5. Goa	-	-	-	-	376 (0.03)	-
6. Gujarat	37,43,408	27,54,446	37,56,700	48,48,586 (14.23)	61,61,775 (14.92)	7,451,160 (14.8)
7. Haryana	-	-	-	-	-	-
8. Himachal Pradesh	-	1,08,194	1,41,610	2,18,349 (4.61)	2,18,349 (4.22)	244,587 (4.0)

⁷ Matthew Areeparampil, *Struggle for Swaraj: A History of Adivasi Movement in Jharkhand* (Chaibasa: Tribal Training and Research Centre, 2002), p. 242.

9. J. & K.	-	-	-	-	-	1,105,979 (10.9)
10. Karnataka	80,402	1,92,096	2,31,268	18,25,203 (4.91)	19,15,691 (4.26)	3,463,9869 (6.6)
11. Kerala	1,34,757	2,12,762	2,69,856	2,61,475 (1.03)	3,20,967 (1.10)	364,189 (1.1)
12. M.P.	48,44,128	86,73,410	83,87,403	1,19,87,031 (22.97)	1,53,99,034 (23.27)	12,233,474 (20.3)
13. Maharashtra	-	23,97,169	29,54,249	57,72,038 (9.19)	73,19,281 (9.27)	8,577,276 (8.9)
14. Manipur	1,94,239	2,49,048	3,34,466	3,87,977 (27.30)	6,32,173 (34.41)	741,141 (34.2)
15. Meghalaya	-	-	8,14,280	10,76,345 (80.58)	15,17,927 (85.53)	1,992,862 (85.9)
16. Mizoram	-	-	3,13,299	4,61,907 (93.55)	6,53,565 (94.75)	839,310 (94.5)
17. Nagaland	-	3,43,697	4,57,602	6,50,885 (83.99)	10,60,822 (87.70)	1,774,026 (89.1)
18. Orissa	30,09,580	42,28,757	50,71,937	59,15,067 (22.43)	70,32,214 (22.21)	8,145,081 (22.1)
19. Punjab	2,661	-	-	-	-	-
20. Rajasthan	17,74,278	23,51,470	31,25,506	41,83,124 (12.21)	54,74,881 (12.44)	7,097,706 (12.6)
21. Sikkim	-	-	52,056	73,623 (23.27)	90,901 (22.36)	111,405 (20.6)
22. Tamilnadu.	1,36,376	2,51,991	3,11,515	5,20,226 (1.0)	5,74,194 (1.07)	651,321 (1.03)
23. Tripura	1,92,293	3,60,070	4,50,544	5,83,920 (28.44)	8,53,345 (30.95)	993,426 (31.1)
24. U.P.	-	-	1,98,565	2,32,705 (0.21)	2,87,901 (0.21)	107,963 (0.1)
25. West Bengal	15,66,868	20,54,081	25,32,969	30,70,672 (5.62)	38,08,760 (5.60)	4,406,794 (5.5)
Andaman & Nicobar	-	14,122	18,102	22,361 (11.85)	26,770 (9.54)	29,469 (8.3)
Chandigarh	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	-	51,269	64,445	81,714 (78.82)	1,09,380 (78.99)	137,225 (62.2)
Daman & Diu	-	-	7,654	10,721 (12.70)	11,724 (11.54)	13,997 (8.8)
Delhi	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lakshadweep	-	23,391	29,540	37,760 (93.82)	48,163 (93.15)	57,321 (94.5)
Pondichery	-	-	-	-	-	-
India (total)	2,25,11,854	3,01,72,211	3,80,67,218	5,16,28,638 (7.83)	6,77,58,380 (7.95)	84,326,240 (8.2)

Note: The 1991 census has not been held in Jammu and Kashmir.

(Sources: BCDEF- Amulya Ratna Nanda, *Census of India 1991, Series-1 India, Paper-2 of 1992*.⁸

Adivasis of Jharkhand

Jharkhand State comprises an area of 79,714 square kilometers. It has a population of 26,945,829 according to the

⁸ *Final Population Totals: Brief Analysis of Primary Census Abstract*, New Delhi: The Controller of Publications, 1993, pp.190-196; Ram Kumar Tiwari, "Tribes of India: An Overview" in *The Tribal Scene in Jharkhand* edited by Anand Bhushan & others (Patna: Novelty and Company, 1999), pp. 7-8; G –Sunil K. Singh, *Inside Jharkhand* (Ranchi: Crown Publications, 2005), p. 194. .

Census of India 2001, out of which 7,087,068 are Adivasis who constitute 26.3 percent of the total population of the state.⁹ In seven decades the population of the Adivasis diminished by 12 percent. During the years 1931-2001 the tribal population had been 38.2, 38.62, 36.2, 33.92, 32.7, 32.26 and in 2001 26.3 percent respectively. Thus the tribal population of 38.2% of 1931 diminished to 26.3% in 2001. Therefore within seven decades 12% decrease is recorded in the tribal population. Statistically, both the total population of Jharkhand and the tribal population show an increase. However, the growth of tribal population is less compared to that of other communities.

Year	Tribal%	Others %
1943-51	2.01	13.97
1951-61	12.71	23.62
1961-71	15.89	26.01
1971-81	16.77	27.11
1981-91	13.41	28.67
1991-2001	17.19	25.65

(Courtesy: Safik Ansari, *The Hindustan*, Saturday 24 December, 2006, Ranchi.

It is to be noted also that the rise in tribal population is not fully even in all the districts of Jharkhand. In fact, in all the districts the percentage of the Adivasis is decreasing. Why is there this decrease?

In order to protect the interests of the Adivasis (Scheduled Tribes) with regard to land alienation and other social factors, provision of the Fifth Schedule has been enshrined under Article 244 (1) of the Indian Constitution. One hundred and twelve blocks of Jharkhand in 14 districts have been identified as Scheduled Areas

⁹ Courtesy to Sunil K. Singh, *Inside Jharkhand* (Ranchi: Crown Publications, 2005), p. 194.

under the latest “Scheduled Areas (States of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh) order, 2003” These areas have been the original home and hearth of the Adivasis down the centuries.¹⁰

It is interesting to know how in the name of ‘national interest’ the land is acquired for industries, developing urban centers, mining, forestry, power plants and dams, irrigation projects, wildlife sanctuary; and all of these have completely destroyed the landscape and demography of the Scheduled Area. The Adivasis are displaced from their original habitat and forced to migrate to ‘alien’ places and amidst the ‘hostile’ host communities.

Displacement and Migration (Dispersion): Adivasi Predicament

We shall make an attempt to understand the displacement of the Adivasis and their consequent migration throughout the country in two parts: first, in the pre-Independence period, and second, in the post-Independence period. Without understanding the first period we would not be able to understand the post-Independence phenomenon of displacement of the Adivasis and their situation. Given the limitation of this paper we shall only mention some significant points of these pre-Independence periods related to our topic.

Pre-Independence Period

Our discussion of the Adivasis in their pre-Independence times is relevant in order to understand whether the different Adivasi groups of this region have their own traditions to tell about themselves ‘how they settled down in the present location.’ The past of the Adivasis is kept alive in their oral traditions. It is found in their myths. Their history is preserved in their family tree

¹⁰ The list of Scheduled Areas may be found in Sunil K. Singh, *Inside Jharkhand* (Ranchi: Crown Publications, 2005), p. 415.

(*kursinama*), sayings, songs, sacred places and burial grounds. These oral traditions disclose two things: one, how the tribes have been driven out of their homelands by the late comers who were cunning and superior in technology; and second, how the tribes struggled in order to preserve their identity and homeland. The following translation of a Santal song illustrates this story:

“For just one span of stomach
(Just to get a little food),
Just to stay alive,
I have wandered from country to country,
I have traveled twelve (i.e. a great number) countries.”¹¹

Traditional history of Settling down in the Present Location

By traditional history, I mean the historical details which the tribes still cherish today. These histories are now available in the written form. People remain peoples in their memory of the history of their ancestors, in which factual details are not as important as the meaning of the history. We will not digress into giving the traditional history of the Mundas, Santals, Hos, Uraons and Kharias of Chotanagpur for it would be out of the focus of this paper.¹²

Traditionally it is said that the Mundas came to this area and then the other groups followed. The Mundas were already in occupation of the region when the Uraons came. It appears that the Mundas migrated further south of Chotanagpur leaving the areas under Uraons. The Mundari names of what are now Uraon villages

¹¹ Matthew Areeparampil, *Struggle for Swaraj: A History of Adivasi Movements in Jharkhand* (Chaibasa: Tribal Training and research Centre, 2002), p. 24.

¹² The details of the traditional history, see S.C. Roy, *The Mundas and Their Country* (Ranchi: Crown Publications, 2004), 3rd reprint, pp. 18-58; E.T. Dalton, *Tribal History of Eastern India* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1973), reprint, which gives traditional history of the major tribal groups of the central zone. On the Kharias, see S.C. Roy and R.C. Roy, *The Kharias* (Ranchi: Man in India Office, 1937).

in the north west of Ranchi-Lohardaga districts and the existence of Munda graveyards in many places of this part of the country testify to the Munda occupation of the country. Before any Nagvanshi Raja arose in Chotanagpur, the whole area was 'parceled out into groups of villages and patties. Each village was occupied by the descendants of the family by whom the land was originally cleared; and their rights were unquestioned.'¹³ Their 'democratic' village organization was something unique and unparallel in the early history of humankind. In addition, 'another fact not less significant than this is that in quite a number of Uraon villages along this track, the Pahan or village-priest is still a man of Munda extraction. The reason which the Uraons assign for this is that the Mundas were the first clearers of the jungles and, as such, the proper persons to propitiate the invisible gods or spirits of the localities'.¹⁴ It is during this period of their joint residence in the central plateau that the Uraons adopted their Parha-Rajas along the lines of the Munda system of patti or parha.

It is sometime around 64 AD the traditions of the Mundas and Uraons as well as the family traditions of the Rajas of Chotanagpur tell of the incident of choosing Phani Mukut Rai as their leader and proclaiming him as the Raja of Chotanagpur.¹⁵ The family tradition of the Raja of Chotanagpur traces its origin to the Pauranik times of Raja Jamejaya. What we find in the fusion of these traditions is creation of a new social situation. In the beginning the Mundas and Uraons, the original settlers (khutkatidars) gave a nominal attendance to the Raja. They gave military service and 'chanda' for his needs. But gradually the Rajas began to lord over

¹³ S.C. Roy, *The Mundas and their Country* (Ranchi: Crown Publications, 2004), 3rd reprint, p. xi.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

the people. The situation of the Adivasis is well documented in the following song:

The thorns we have reaped
Are of the tree we planted,
They have torn us and we bleed.
We should have known what fruit
Would spring from such a tree.¹⁶

Nagvanshi period

Who are the Nagvanshis? Their origin is shrouded in the myths and legends. It is not unlikely one of the branches of the Nagas came to Chotanagpur and where Madra Munda was already the Manki of the patti which included Sutiambi. Madra Munda might have been bewitched by the personality of Phani Mukut Rai and the latter endeared himself to the family of Madra Munda. Because of his personality the parha chiefs elected Phani Mukut Rai as their king in place of Madra Munda's son.¹⁷ The legend has reference to Vedic sacrifices and Brahminic origin of Nagvanshis points to the fact that they were non-Adivasis. This was upheld by the Patna High Court when one of the descendents of Nagvanshis Thakur Radheshyam Nath Shadeo filed his nomination for election from a reserved seat against Niral Enem Horo. The Court upheld the decision of the Returning Officer who rejected his petition on the ground that the Thakur Radheshyam Nath Shadeo was not an Adivasi in the year 1974.¹⁸

The real oppressive character of the Nagvanshis appeared after the Mughal invasion and occupation of the area. The first organized invasion of Chotanagpur was in 1585 A.D during the

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 80.

¹⁷ Sudha Sinha, *The Nagvanshis of Chotanagpur* (Ranchi: Classical Publishing Company, 2001), pp. 1-27.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 138-139.

Mughal Emperor Akbar. The Mughals came to know of this area as possessing diamond mines. The diamonds were found in the bed of River Shankh. Akbar sent Shahbaz Khan Kambu to bring Chotanagpur under his reign. It was the Mughal King Jahangir who sent the Governor of Bihar, Ibrahim Khan to Kukradesh (Chotanagpur) when Durjan Sal was the king. Ibrahim Khan defeated the King Durjan Sal (1616 AD) and imprisoned him in the fort of Gwalior with other Hindu kings. According to the Nagvanshi traditions and Colonel Dalton, Durjan Sal's imprisonment lasted for twelve years. It is said that the diamonds which he had offered for his ransom secured his release and former prosperity. He distinguished the real diamond from the fake one. In addition he requested the Mughal king to release the other Hindu kings who were imprisoned with him. It is this king who Hinduised his court, He brought in Brahmins, and others to serve him in the court in the model of the Hindu kings who had been his friends in the prison. He built a fort for himself, known as Nauratan, the five-storied palace at Doisa. The successive kings made temples in different places, Pithoria, Palkot, Chutia, Bharno, and Boreya. Thus Hinduism got rooted in Chotanagpur.

What did all these changes mean for the Adivasis? The king brought in Brahmins, Rautias from Bihar to serve him. The new comers had to be settled. So his advisors suggested him that he makes service grants to the new comers. The oldest pattah or lease which could be discovered is dated 1676 AD. Thus a class of jagirdars arose and breaking of the Adivasi system of land holdings and dispossession of land began. On getting the pattahs from the king they got the absolute right over the villages and its land. Furthermore, an alien idea of rent was introduced among the Adivasis. Earlier the Adivasis used to give the king some produce of their fields. The new comers completely destroyed the original land system and began dispossessing the Adivasis from the ancestral

land.¹⁹ In place of Kutkhathi and Bhuinhari lands two more classes of lands were introduced in the land: first, Rajhas, a plot of land of the Adivasis in which a certain portion of produce was collected by the jagirdar and the produce was changed into money, thus introducing the idea of rent. Jagirdars later began to claim such plots as their own; and second, Manjhihas, a plot of Rajhas land which the grantee took for himself. S.C. Roy describes this situation thus: "It was in the villages inhabited by the comparatively docile Uraons that the division of the cultivated lands of the village into Bhuinhari, Rajhas and Manjhihas appears to have been first introduced. The Mundas always zealously tenacious of their own institutions and averse to any change naturally resisted tooth and nail all attempts at a disintegration of their village commune. Their blood boiled with indignation at the sight of these foreigners "whom the Maharaja let loose over the country and who sought to reduce them from their position of village proprietors to an inferior status. And their fierce hatred of these aliens, the Mundas expressed in indignant songs...in which the unwelcome strangers are compared to the greedy vulture, the ravenous crow, the upstart peacock, and the ominous owl."²⁰ Rather than submitting to being the tenants of the newcomers, some of the Mundas left their lands and emigrated further south of the region. The saga of dispossession of the ancestral land of the Adivasis began with the entry of the outsiders under the protection of the king of Chotanagpur.

Kokrah, (Chotanagpur) had formed part of the Subah of Bihar. After the Battle of Buxar in 1764, the Emperor Shah Alam made the grant of the Dewani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to British East India Company in the year 1765. Chotanagpur being the part of the Subah of Bihar passed to the British. It was in the year 1770 that the first entry of the British took place in the person of Captain

¹⁹ S.C. Roy, *The Mundas and their Country*, pp. 81-98; Fidelis de Sa, *Crisis in Chotanagpur* (Bangalore: A Redemptorist Publication, 1975), pp.33-37.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

Camac as the head of a troop of soldiers into Chotanagpur. Captain Camac was there to reinstate the Raja of Palamu and the Raja paid a Nazrana, received Khillat and promised to pay an annual tribute of three thousand rupees and undertook to assist the Company against the Marathas. One by one the Company subjugated the Rajas of Ramgarh (Muchchun Singh) and then of Chotanagpur (Durpnath Sahi). With these developments three things happened: first, the Rajas became more Hinduised and thus brought in more Hindus and others from Bihar to assist them and for their services the Rajas gave them grants of the village. The jagirdars after receiving grants of lands began to oust the original holders of the land and also began to oppress the Adivasis. Second, the British who were more interested in collecting revenue from the Rajas protected them from the Adivasis who rose against the rajas and zamindars and thikadars and all outsiders whom they called 'diku' (who were mostly Hindus, and Muslims). All the uprisings of the Adivasis in Santal Parganas or in Chotanagpur were directly against the 'dikus' and indirectly the British for they supported the oppressors. In addition, they brought in new laws (i.e. Forest Act 1855) for commercial exploitation and revenue, administration of the area (setting up Ramgarh Hill Tract, Non-Regulation Province, Zamindari System, and courts) and land settlement surveys. All these were forced upon the Adivasis. Third, the Christian missions came in 1885, which not only invited the Adivasis to become Christians but also fought against the oppression of the zamindars and the Rajas within the British law. Thanks mainly to their effort that the British had to enact the law (i.e. Chotanagpur Tenancy Act 1908) for Chotanagpur for checking the land alienation of the Adivasis. A similar law was enacted in the Santal Parganas also.²¹

These protective laws came too late. Much of the Adivasi *khutkhati –bhuinhari* lands, which their ancestors had snatched

²¹ S.C. Roy, *The Mundas and their Country*, pp. 81-135. Fidelis de Sa, *Crisis in Chotanagpur*, pp. 44-71.

from the claws of tigers and fangs of snakes, had slipped away from under their feet. The whole Chotanagpur and Santal Parganas came under colonial mode of production and administration. The region emerged as the best place for recruiting labour for various economic operations in the country and abroad. For tea plantation in Assam the British began recruiting labour from the Uraons, Santals, and Mundas. We see the exploitative face of Adivasi migration to tea gardens and to Andaman Islands during British times.²² These out migrations are not the direct result of dispossession of land. Today they have no identity as indigenous peoples (Scheduled Tribes) in those states.

Post-Independence Phase

During the British rule, the Adivasi population was, by and large, concentrated in four major areas-Northeastern parts of the country (erstwhile province of Assam), the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), the Western Adivasi region (in the Bombay Presidency, i.e. south Gujarat and western Madhya Pradesh) and the Eastern Adivasi region (in the Province of Bengal and later that of Bihar and Orissa). The necessity of maintaining peace and order in the frontier provinces prompted British administrators to develop a system of exclusion that to some extent incorporated the traditional Adivasi elite. As long as the British frontiers were safe, they allowed a degree of autonomy to these regions. The inaccessibility of these frontier territories, combined with the relatively low levels of economic returns from them precluded the necessity of active direct rule. On the contrary, the eastern Adivasi belt was rich with mineral wealth and forest so in order to effectively utilize the economic resources of the region, the British wanted to have a far greater degree of direct rule. Therefore, the aim of the Scheduled Districts Act 1874 was to exploit the resources of the Adivasi areas. This was brought to effect by placing the region under the Governor of the Province who ruled the region through district officers.

²² Toppo, *Dynamics of Tribal Migration in India*, pp. 92-101.

After Independence the Constituent Assembly, government and the nationalists adopted not only the basic British structure of government, but also some fundamentals of the colonial discourse. Amit Prakash has made a relevant comment on this predicament: "Due to the nationalist belief in the desirability of Western rationality in the realm of the material, the Constituent Assembly tried to implement an integrationist policy with a development model premised on industrialization and a rationally organized bureaucracy as the delivery mechanism for public policy."²³ We see how political and economic aims are twined together.

Development has two accomplices, modern science and colonialism. What development got from science is the belief that we go on increasing the power of the human beings over the non-human cosmos for the world has enough resources to meet not only the needs but also the greed of all humans. Development has inherited from colonialism the belief that those on the higher rungs of history have the right to shape the ways of life of those on the lower.²⁴ Modern science and colonialism are operative in the 'development-induced displacement' in Jharkhand. The first Prime Minister of the country, Jawaharlal Nehru's policy of setting up of mega projects relating to industry, dams etc. as 'new temples' of India is continuation of the British colonial approach to development. These projects have left thousands of families homeless, thousands of persons jobless, hundreds of village communities, especially Adivasi communities uprooted, displaced and the rehabilitation colonies as *mrityulok* (land of death).

Industrialization of the area had begun even before the independence, for example, TISCO 1907 (Jamshedpur), and the mining operation Raniganj began in 1774. Since then a chain of collieries was established in the Dhanbad district. Industries gave birth to towns (urbanization process) and consequent change of environment of the area leading to ecological degradation and

²³ Amit Prakash, *Jharkhand*, p. 49.

affecting human life; for example, in the beginning of twentieth century, there were very few towns in this area. After independence this region has registered phenomenal growth in urbanization. According to the census reports there were only eight towns in this region in 1872 while by 2001, it has risen to 152. It is an irony that within these towns the number of Adivasis is negligible. They are pushed to the peripheries of the towns deprived of all the civic amenities while the townspeople are living on the lands once owned by the people of the peripheries.

Since independence the government adopted the Western model of industrialization following the rhythm of erstwhile Soviet Union's planned Five Year Plan. Hence, massive industrialization was thrust upon Jharkhand for rapid development of the economy. Huge amount of investments freely flowed into the region from the Central and the State governments as well as private entrepreneurs. A Web of government owned projects such as Damodar Valley Corporation, Sindri Fertilizer, Bokaro Steel (1950), Heavy Engineering Corporation, Uranium Corporation of India Ltd. Mines, Subaranrekha Multi Purpose Project 1974), Koel-Karo Project (1955), Patratu Thermal Plant (1960), several opencast coal-mining projects of Bharat Coking Coal India Limited were begun. In each of these cases the development rationale and model remained the same as it was during the British colonial rule. Land was to be acquired unmindful of a massive displacement of the Adivasis.

The people of Jharkhand are basically agriculturists. Since independence there has been a massive thrust towards industrialization and economic growth. The Adivasi economy was considered inefficient. Their lands were ruthlessly taken from them for the setting up of major industries and growth in production. The total land acquired in the name of development project between

²⁴ Ramanath Nayak, *Tribal Planning Process: People's Participation in Tribal Sub-Plan* (Delhi: Gagan Deep Publications, 2004), p. 37.

1951 and 1995 is 6,258.895 sq. km. of land out of total area of Jharkhand 79,714.000 sq. km.²⁵

Let us have a quick look at the situation of actual and proposed displacement and land alienation in Jharkhand during 1950-1995:²⁶

1. TISCO: 7000 families; 35,000 persons were displaced; 3,564 acres acquired in Jamshedpur and 34,432 acres in Adityapur.

2. HEC (Ranchi): 12,990 families, and 64,950 persons were displaced; 9,200 acres of land was acquired.

3. Bokaro Steel Plant: 12,487 families were affected, 62,435 persons displaced and 34,224 acres of land was acquired.

4. Tenughat Thermal Power: 76,3000 families, 3,81,500 persons affected, 97,843 acres of land was acquired.

In this light let us see the land situation in Jharkhand:

Total area of Jharkhand	79,714.000 sq. km.
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1. Land already acquired by the government Forest area already declared	23,417.082 sq. km.
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Total land acquired in the name of development (upto 1995)	6256.109 sq. km.
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Land acquired illegally	3238.000 sq. km.
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²⁵ See Alex Ekka and Mohammed Asif, *Development-Induced Displacement and Rehabilitation in Jharkhand, 1951 to 1995: A Database on its Extent and Nature*, A Research Project supported by OXFAM India Trust (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 2000), p. 67.

²⁶ I am indebted to Stan Lourduwamy for the statistical picture of Jharkhand.

Total land acquired (1951-1995):	32,911 sq. km.
Percent land acquired:	41%
Land available in Jharkhand after 1995:	46,802 sq. km.
Percent Land available:	59%

2. Future Acquisition Planned by the Government

1.1 Area offered to the army of firing range (*The Hindustan Times*, Patna, 14-01-1994): 19,857 sq. km.

2.2 Area contemplated by the Jharkhand Industrial Policy of industrialization of the State: 10,060 sq. km.

Total land planned to be acquired: 29,916 sq. km. (36%)

3. Balance Land Left for the People for Survival: 16,886 sq. km. (23%)

When we look at the persons displaced especially the percentage of the Adivasis, due to the industrialization of the area, the figure is an appalling one. Alex Ekka²⁷ gives us the figure of the displaced as much as 15, 03,017. Of this total displaced persons 41.27% are Adivasis, 14.16% dalits and 45% others. All these projects were launched with the professed aim of proper rehabilitation and compensation, but the actual story is different. There had been neither a proper rehabilitation nor an adequate compensation. The whole process of land acquisition to displacement and subsequent predicament tell of the inhuman exploitation and forced eviction of the Adivasis and other weaker groups of people by the rich class with the full support of the government. Stan Lourduswamy has the following statistical gory story to tell of the displacement and so-called rehabilitation of the persons displaced.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid., p. 95. I am indebted to the author for the facts.

²⁸ Stan Lourdusamy, *Jharkhandi's Claim for Self-Rule – Its Historical Foundations and Present Legitimacy*, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1997, p.25.

A Conservative Estimate of the Displaced Persons by Various Categories of Projects (1951-1990)

Type of Project	Total displaced persons	Number of persons rehabilitated	Backlog
Mines	25,50,000	6,30,000	8,75,000
Dams	1,64,00,000	41,00,000	19,20,000
Industries	12,50,000	3,75,000	1,23,00,000
Wildlife	6,00,000	1,25,000	4,75,000
Others	5,00,000	1,50,000	3,50,000
Total	2,13,00,000	53,80,000	1,59,20,000

After eighteen years we can ask a question: what has happened to those displaced people who were not rehabilitated till 1990? Is there any guarantee that they will ever get justice? The experience of displacement is still fresh in their lives.

After the creation of Jharkhand in 2000 under the BJP government, calling industrialists to invest money in the State it accelerated the industrialization process. According to Sunil Choudhari, the State government has signed 98 companies (74 steel and 24 power plants) with the total investment of 4,67,240 crore rupees with a professed aim of creating employment for 25, 00,000 persons. These companies require 2, 00,000 acres of land.²⁹ In addition to the land required for the plant they would need more land for townships and all the amenities associated with it. Already Jharkhand is filled with a network of industries causing a monstrous phenomenon of displacement even as the government signs new MOUs with companies for new industries. The gravity of Adivasi displacement will be unmanageable. The following table is self-explanatory:

Industries and Investments in Jharkhand (December 2002)

Type of industry	Number of industries	Investment (in cores)	Employment
1. Small-scale industries	6,48,175	441.43	20.03,344
2. Large & medium Scale industries	309	11,578.62	73,845
Total	6,48,484	12,020.05	20,77,189

(Taken from Sunil K, Singh, *Inside Jharkhand*, p.159.

²⁹ *Prabhat Khabar*, 16 September, 2008, p. 13.

It is also to be noted that the government of Jharkhand proposes to set up two Special

Economic Zones (SEZ) along the Ranchi-Jamshedpur Highway predominantly populated by the Adivasis and it is under the Scheduled Area. Accordingly, the State can acquire land from owners in the name of public purpose and sell it out to the industrialist and corporate families at lower price. The concept of SEZ is expected to bring up dividends to the state in terms of economic and industrial development and generation of employment. The concept of SEZ serves the interests of the 'corporate colonizer'. Implementation of SEZ means more land acquisition and consequently more displacement. They would in effect be 'special eviction zones'. We can imagine what will be the fate of people (mostly Adivasis) who have been continually displaced since centuries.

It is in the light of the past experience of being cheated by the powers of industrialization that people of these regions are vehemently opposing the officials of the companies that have begun their work in these areas. The discourse of the government surrounding industrialization of the region revolves around the talk of investment and employment they bring, but there is no place for the people who would be affected by these industrialization plans. In the discourse of development only the rich industrialists and political leaders and bureaucrats will benefit at the cost of uprooting the Adivasis. The Project affected people have no share whatsoever in the profit of the industries. In fact, the model of development adopted by the Central and State governments after independence is based on the colonial pattern of exploiting the natural resources and the people who are at the command of such resources. There is no place for socio-cultural factors because it does not have avenues for the involvement of the local communities. The development model premised on centralized rational bureaucratic planning and implementation of industry led development is hardly suited to the Adivasis.

Mechanism of Land Alienation (Displacement)

We have already stated that the Constitution of India has provision to safeguard the Adivasis. But the actual picture is quite different. The Dhebar Commission (1960), instituted by the government, has pointed out mechanisms of how the Adivasi land is usurped by the outsiders in spite of the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act and Santal Parganas Tenancy Act. There is a clear alliance of the Government and the rich class and the outsiders. To enumerate these forces:

a. From the government for

- i. public purposes such as hydro-electric and irrigation projects;
- ii. developmental works, industrialization and administrative purposes;
- iii. mining operations and commercialization of forest

b. From the rich non-Adivasi people

- i. utilizing the courts before which an Adivasi is more or less powerless;
- ii. by offering him temptation of immediate gain in terms of money;
- iii. by intimidation an Adivasi is forced to 'voluntarily' surrender his land even though his land is possessed illegally by an outsider.³⁰

The worst thing to happen to the Adivasis is joining hands of the democratically elected government with the corporate families to make those families and persons in the government rich. The

³⁰ U. N. Dhebar, *Report of the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission*, Vol. 1, 1960-61 (Delhi: The Manger of Publications, 1961), pp. 110-116.

nexus of government and corporate families is so nefarious that they are leaving no stone unturned to crush the resistance movements of the people. The periodic delimitation process after the decadal census appears neutral, but it is the process of politically reducing the political power of the Adivasis, reducing them to a minority. After the last census (2001) the Delimitation Commission of India (DCI) had proposed a reduction of Lok Sabha and State Legislature reserved seats for the Scheduled Tribes in Jharkhand. The Proposal of the DCI was:

	Total Seats	Reserved Seats (RS)	Proposed reduction of RS	Less Seats
Lok Sabha	14	5	4	1
Legislative Assembly	81	28	21	7

However the Adivasis opposed this proposal of the DCI and the Central Government has to stay the implementation of this proposal. Why did the census show less Adivasis in the Jharkhand region? How did the population of the Adivasis get reduced? The Government does not see any sense in answering these questions.

Furthermore, increase in the de-scheduling of the town areas is another way to further reduce the political power of the Adivasis. Under the democratic system the government can impose its will on the Adivasis to surrender their resources or face eviction by legal means or violent intimidation. The ultimate expression of it is seen in using the highest court of the land to legitimize the power of the state to acquire land by employing the 'law of eminent domain' (in fact, it is to offer legitimacy to state's law for acquiring land for its purpose - the state which follows a Colonial Land Acquisition Act of 1894). The important question is: Is the State neutral? Can a State remain neutral? The reality is far different; for policy of SEZ is a government policy of development plan which begins with the state acquiring land and then selling it to corporate families to set up their economic empire. The state government is in the clutches of the rich and powerful, urban middle class. A study of Hasrat

Arjjumend of 57 mining enterprises (stone quarries) in Santal Paganas has unearthed how the Adivasi land is alienated from them despite the state legislation to protect it.³¹ This completely crushes the resistance of the powerless people and makes them to dig their own graves. To quote N.C. Choudhary:

...with the extension of industrialization the Hindus will invade their territory, they will put an end to the relative degree of independence and isolation which they have so far enjoyed and by which they have been protected, and finally reduce them to economic and social slavery. The old Aryan did indeed degrade them on the plains, but he spared them in their wilds. The industrialized Hindu State will carry the servitude and degradation to the home territory of the aboriginals.³²

Migration: Dispersion of People and Loss of Peoplehood

Migration in the quest of food is not a new phenomenon, since during the entire period of the Paleolithic age human beings had adopted migration as a means of survival and food quest. The Paleolithic people were hunters and gatherers and in pursuit of hunting and collecting fruits, roots and tubers from forests they were moving from place to place but migration was then a group activity in which the entire band and all households were migrating together. In Neolithic age, people took resort to agriculture as the major economic activity and the dependence upon forests for hunting and food gathering reduced to leisurely or ritual activity. After introduction of trade, industry, mining and large-scale plantation or construction works as new ways of economic activity, human migration revived for the sake of availing of

³¹ Hasrat Arijjument, "Land Alienation: Tribal's Accountability in Jharkhand" *Jharkhand Journal of Development and Management Studies* 2(4/ Oct-Dec 2004), pp. 1071- 1092.

³² N.C. Choudhary, *The Conctinent of Circe* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1966), p. 82.

the employment opportunities. Migration became easier with gradual expansion of transport and communication facilities and consequently, people adopted different categories of migration.³³

This is a popular summary of the phenomenon of migration of peoples. The goal of migration is an economic activity of procuring ‘food.’³⁴ But is it the whole picture of migration of peoples? Simultaneously we see a change of style of human life; change of needs and the ways of meeting those needs also change from simple producing or growing ‘food’ to a more complex operation. The author has pointed out twelve categories of migration.³⁵ The basis of categorization includes, distance covered within the state or outside the state, (short, medium or long distance), period of time (temporary or lifetime), direction of migration (rural-rural; rural-urban, urban-urban or urban-rural), number of people involved (individual or a household or a community). Such categorization presents to us merely a phenomenological description of migration. Today various theories are proposed to analyze the cause, effect and overall impact of migration on the individual and social-cultural life of the people.³⁶

Although each theory looks at the reality of migration from different perspective, one common element among them is that all of them have looked at the phenomenon from the economic point of view alone. They are fundamentally individualistic in approach

³³ P. K. Acharya, “Migration and Trafficking of Women” *Women’s Link* 13(1/Jan-Mar, 2007), p. 25.

³⁴ Although the author has used the term ‘food’ merely to indicate its literal meaning of ‘something to eat and thus satisfy the most fundamental need of satisfying of hunger and avoid death’. I would use this same as a symbol of ‘fullness of human life’ which points to all aspects of what it means to be a human.

³⁵ Acharya, *ibid.*, p 25.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 25 – 26. Among them are ‘push and pull’ theory, income differential rural-urban migration theory, autonomous migration theory, and survival migration theory.

except the ‘survival migration theory’ that has highlighted the communitarian aspect of migration. We must ask a question at this juncture: are these theories capable of adequately addressing the issue of migration in Jharkhand? Answer seems to be in negative. These theories reflect the perspective of the mainstream, economically and politically powerful forces and the governments (who make economic policies) of the country. If the issue of migration is looked at from the perspective of the people affected by this phenomenon, it appears to be a case of their enforced migration; in other words, they are forced to disperse. Such migration (dispersion) results in the loss of peoplehood.

Migration has been studied from the perspective of gender also. There are ample evidences to show that the factors that encourage men migration may not be the cause for women migration. To give a few examples, in patrilineal societies, marriage is the prime cause of women migration but not of migration of men. Similarly, in the country like India, where cohesiveness of family is of prime importance, women out-migrate just to accompany the out-migrating male earning member of the family – father or husband. Women migration due to self-motivation is not a significant phenomenon in India as yet, though it is growing in dimension. It is the survival migration along with the marriage migration that seems to be at work. Socio-cultural constraints, dependency of women on men for their physical and social security plays an important role in women migration. But what cause shall we impute to women of Jharkhand going to cities as domestic helpers? It is a complex matter.

In the light of preceding considerations, the mainstream migration discourse considers it merely as a natural human phenomenon of ‘voluntary’ movement of an individual or a group (family, families belonging to an ethnic group) from its place of origin to a new place in search of ‘food’. The securing of ‘food’ is ensured through offering oneself to another person or juridical person (company, group). The migrant does not produce ‘food’ but gets

money to buy 'food'. Thus in this system a person is completely dependent on another. Employer is certainly more powerful than the employee for the former determines the goal and reward of the labour rendered by the one employed. A migrant universalizes himself/herself who is available in exchange for money. He/she changes his/her identity in terms of universal exchangeability and equivalence – labour (human resource). Moreover, the migrant has to compete with others (enter into a war of all against all) in order to secure 'food'. Although in principle a migrant can attain whatever he/she desires, in practice, he/she does not attain what he/she desires because he/she enters into an already established systemic aggressive economic system. Aggressiveness takes the form of individual competitiveness among those who desire to be employed and between the employer and employee. Also at the deeper level the economic system itself becomes an aggressor, which is neither localizable nor identifiable. It destroys alternative rival economic systems. This creates a psycho-structure of aggressiveness in everybody through persuasion and mass conditioning (advertisements, the media and educational system).

Migration in Jharkhand

For the treatment of migration in Jharkhand I am indebted to the work of Ranjit Toppo.³⁷ The author has offered an excellent study on the migration of the Uraon of Jharkhand (Blocks of Ratu, Bero, Mandar and Kanke) using the 'push and pull factor theory.' In addition to his sociological findings, he has also retraced a historical overview of migration of Uraons of the abovementioned areas.³⁸ His findings speak of four kinds of migration: first category migrate mainly to "brick kilns situated at the peripheries of cities like Patna, Gaya, Kolkata, Burdwan, Murshidabad, Gorakhpur, Lucknow ... (etc). They migrate in these places as carriers of raw and baked

³⁷ Ranjit Toppo, *Dynamics of Tribal Migration in India* (Ranchi: Department of Research and Publications XISS, 2007).

³⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 81-109.

bricks. They travel to these distant places and usually settle down for work for five to seven months. For the rainy season they come back to their residential villages.”³⁹

The second type of people migrate to the near by cities as coolies and rejas. They start arriving at various crossroads of the cities from where they are picked up by contractors or anyone on daily basis.⁴⁰

The third type of migrants consists of domestic workers. This concept of domestic workers in this area is exclusively associated with the women migrants who work in households of city-based families. The middle class and the rich class families in big cities like Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Goa, Lucknow, Patna, Ranchi, to name a few, desire to look for the teenaged and unmarried who are willing to stay with the family. The general works done by the domestic workers include kitchen work, housecleaning and housekeeping, laundry, care of children and elders.⁴¹

The fourth category of migrants are the “skilled workers who move out to the cities to work as mechanics, masons, carpenters, cooks, sales-persons, rickshaw-pullers, small supervisors in the road construction, stone crushers and the like.”⁴² Though they do not possess technically advanced skills, yet they have made a definitive shift from the agricultural related skills. The new skill enables them to earn more money. They tend to move toward cities, but they keep touch with agriculture also.

We may add the fifth category of migration, namely, educated people who move out of Jharkhand because they qualify to be

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 124

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 124-125.

⁴¹ Dipak Prasad et al. (compiled by), *Childhood in Fire: A Study of Domestic Workers in Jharkhand* (Ranchi: Action Against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children in India (ATSEC), 2005), p. 5.

⁴² Toppo, *Dynamics of Tribal Migration*, p. 125.

employed in the central government civil services or industries or companies. Because of their relative strong economic base and benefit of modern education they have moved away from the rural-agricultural economy and life style to urban-industrial-market economy and life style. In the process they find themselves uprooted culturally, and spatially. They and their children do not want to go back to their ancestral places of birth. There is a marked difference between this group and the other four groups with regard to migration from their places of origin. The fifth category of migrants has accepted the predominant new situation (capitalist-monetized economy and so-called secular democratic polity) and outlook of life in place of their rural agricultural economy and tribal way of life. In a multi-ethnic country like ours in which the dominant culture has been that of the dominant race (the Aryans) and of the dominant caste (the Brahmins), what would be their identity?

In relation to the aforementioned categories, Toppo has listed the following as pull factors: better job, better wages, safe work, better food, better living condition and social factors. Among these factors 'better wages' and 'safe work' are considered first and second respectively.⁴³ Among the seven enlisted push factors, unemployment and under-employment during the rainy season, low wages, and poverty, lack of means of irrigation, lack of agricultural land, loan and social reasons – the first reason is poverty as the major cause of the migration to brick kilns or other places. Unemployment and underemployment is the second biggest factor that forces to migrate from the rural areas. Although there is some employment in the rural areas, the wages are very low.⁴⁴ Therefore the people are attracted to move out of their places of origins in search of better wages. The research of ATSEC on the migration of domestic workers (Toppo places them in the third category of migrating people) is quite revealing. The latter report came with the

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 139-140.

similar findings: 69.9% migrated to various cities because of unemployment (push factor), and 23.1% moved out of their villages because of 'better opportunities' available (pull factor) in the distant places.⁴⁵ In a predominantly agro-based society, the next two factors, namely, lack of adequate amount of land and lack of irrigation facilities are significant. The lack of land is indicative of fragmentation of land of the family as every son depends on it. The lack of Irrigation of agricultural land seems to be due to sheer lack of agricultural planning. The finding of Toppo has highlighted a significant common point found among the above mentioned four categories of migrants, namely, the respondents do not want their children to migrate.⁴⁶ This response points to the fact that migration does not deliver all the expectations of the people who migrate. It is only the skilled workers who responded that they would like their children to migrate. The perspective of 'pull and push factor theory' seems to only highlight the symptoms of migration and not the root of migration: why at all people have to migrate? Why is there poverty or no work and as a result people from Jharkhand have to migrate to other cities? The root of poverty and no work is to be sought within the larger context of the country, namely, in the historical process of people finding themselves under the clutches of complex economic and political process of nation building in the country and eventually the state of Jharkhand.

In the two studies just referred, the root cause of migration is the 'depressed economy' (poverty) and its impact is explained in an individualistic way. They consider migration as a natural human phenomenon. When it is looked at critically we find that it is the result of historical and economic pursuits of the powerful groups (internal or external) who forcefully displaced them from their material base – land. Once the migrants are out for whatever reason, because of their powerlessness they accept the social-economic-

⁴⁵ Prasad, *Childhood in Fire*, p. 18,

⁴⁶ Toppo, *Dynamics of Tribal Migration*, p. 131.

political and cultural (meaning systemic-religio-cultural) status of the new place and people who overwhelm them. This leads us to look for internal cause and effect relationship between migration and displacement of the Adivasis of Chotanagpur, rather than two distinct phenomena and accept them as a natural course of history at the cost of the annihilation of the Adivasis.

Principal Impacts of Land Alienation – Displacement and Migration

1. Destruction of All Symbols of the Sense of Community and Its Worldview

Displacement of an Adivasi village means destruction of not only individual home and hearth but also their material base of livelihood – land. Land always provided a sense of security for their life at present as well as for the future generations. This security is absolutely destroyed by displacement and along with it all the symbols of the sense of community, common water resources, forest and fruit-yielding fruits in the village, common burial ground, sacred groves, dancing ground, common pasture ground. These connected the individual to the present and past. An individual and the community are emotionally, physically and spiritually charged with rootedness and security of life and livelihood. These symbols perhaps do not economically yield much economic dividends, but such things are the source of identity and collectivity notions in the community.

Furthermore, at the meaning level the worldview of the community is destroyed at the core. The Adivasis have a cosmotheandric worldview which may be expressed in terms of an abiding interrelatedness and intercommunion among the Divine, human and cosmic spheres. This triadic reality and life is expressed in their language, art and culture, rites and rituals, and social structures. When the ‘other’ (*diku*) – non-Adivasi people – come as colonizers to exploit the natural resources that are in the control

of the Adivasis, they attack the nucleus of their world-view. The new comers replace that with their core-values of competition, individualism, greed and materialistic consumerism and intolerant ethos and religious meanings. They aggressively display their cultural values and propagate that the other cultures are primitive. The Adivasis are made to feel ashamed of themselves and coaxed into adopting the language, values, life style of the colonizers to feel 'good'. But in fact, they are assigned an inferior place. The Adivasi values – social, economic, political, cultural and religious values – are lost forever.

With the newcomers in this region the cosmotheandric harmonious reality has become the arena of religious fundamentalism of the majority community. The urban centres have become the breeding ground of fundamentalism. The outsiders have become its instigators in order to get political power and economic prosperity. Fundamentalism of the majority is always a violent one. The new comers have made the region their colony and its original inhabitants as labourers for building castles for the colonizers. They turned people into their slaves who were once 'masters' of the area. The community is dispersed in the hostile environment. Displacement, as a result of industrialization of the region, is the last blow to Adivasi communities as it took away their only power, namely, the natural resources. This is the process of dispersion and dispersion means destruction.

2. Irreversible degradation of *jal-jungle* and *jamin* and evolution of anti-life ecosystem and imprisoning the Adivasis in the *mrityulok* (colonies of death)

The *jal-jungle-jamin* – all three are degraded to the extent that the water is polluted, underground water streams and external water resources dry up, air is polluted, forest cover is denuded, fertile lands have become arid and toxic unable to produce any more. The rural people of the area suffer from incurable diseases

and their life span gets shorter and shorter. The preview of it is narrated in the Munda, Ho and Uraon Asur Legend.

On the other hand, where do the displaced people live? They are only relocated in a new alien place and not rehabilitated with all that they lost in their places of origin. Rehabilitation has to be done at the material as well as at the physical-psychological, socio-cultural, political, economic and religious level. The government of Jharkhand has no policy for rehabilitating the displaced people. The government and the corporate families think that merely handing a paltry sum in exchange of the lands acquired is enough as a rehabilitation package. The government and the company decide arbitrarily the so-called compensation for the land. For example, in Pakur district of Santal Paraganas a private company (Panem) has been given license to do coal mining. Under its rehabilitation policy the company has announced to offer Rs. 50,000 to the first acre of land, Rs. 30,000 for the second acre, and Rs. 20,000 for the third acre. What is the logic behind it is anybody's guess. How exactly the three acres of land which is lying side by side and is of the same quality and producing the same yield, can be rated differently? Rightly the people have rejected this policy. The people who are displaced know that they can never be rehabilitated in true sense. In actual practice no displaced community has ever been rehabilitated.

Eight years have passed since the creation of Jharkhand, yet there is no Rehabilitation Policy in Jharkhand. This is an example of insensitiveness and injustice of the government and the corporate families when 36 lakh Adivasis have been displaced forcibly. It is equivalent to tell the Adivasis: "We need the resources in your land, but we don't need you."

3. Enforced Migration of People to Cities and Nearby States

In such a scenario of displacement migration in one form or another becomes a necessity for survival. Due to forced eviction

from land and degradation of existing *jal-jungle-jamin*, people are compelled to migrate to far away places. It becomes hard for the people who are illiterate in the modern sense of the term. Those who have got modern education look for government jobs and company jobs in the cities. This brings in two major negative effects: it divides the community into rich and poor, educated and uneducated, rural and urban, skilled and unskilled. The people are alienated from their land, from a social sense of belonging to an Adivasi community and its world-view of interdependence. Each one is left to fend for his/her survival in a hierarchical and exploitative world. Thus they settle for inequality and dependency in place of a community where life was joyful in an atmosphere of cosmothandric solidarity, equality and mutual interdependence.

The exploitation of the women domestic helpers is appalling. In many cases the women face non-acceptance by their own people in their places of origin and physical and sexual exploitation in the cities. The situation of educated people in cities is less pathetic. Economically they feel strong but their sense of being a distinct people is lost. The worst impact is seen in their children for they neither feel at home in the original identity (Adivasis) nor in the new world.

4. The Myth of Inevitability of Displacement and Migration

Some believe that displacement of people from their own land is inevitable if we want development. But more than mere economic displacement its psycho-sociological implications are painful and degrading. It breaks not only an individual but the whole community. Displacement is to be placed in overall national and international context of globalization. The forces of modern science and technology have initiated the globalization process, which is nothing but a particular world-view colonizing the rest of the world-views one by one. We must understand every world-view in all its dimensions – economic, political, social, religious and cultural.

However, it is the economic interest that determines different spheres. Science and technology are two accomplices of economic pursuits of a people. Consequently, any community, in control of science and technology, becomes more powerful in all spheres of human life, and then this community tries to enforce its way of life on everyone. Anyone who does not fall in line is either violently or subtly displaced or forced to migrate (disperse).

However, certain resistance movements have sprung up among the Adivasis to protect themselves from such hegemonic globalizing forces. The irony is that even these efforts are crushed in one way or another. The globalizing forces first attack at the periphery of the world-view of the people, weaken them and then make a final assault making displacement and migration inevitable. Actually resources at the periphery are of low value to the people and have least priority in the need of conserving and sustaining them. First, through media and advertisement or whatever means is possible people are weaned away from their cherished non-monetized values and made to embrace a sense of materialism around monetized cultural values. Gradually the Adivasis begin to assign monetized values to their natural resources, land in particular, under their control. Secondly, a group or individuals are identified who have been convinced of the monetized cultural values and are co-opted so that these in turn could make others to believe in the myth of development as the only way to material affluence. Such groups also work as 'virus' to corrupt the unity and to weaken any resistance from the community. Finally, state terrorism through a group of people is let loose on the vulnerable people who are forcefully evicted from their places. Thus, a saga of displacement-migration (dispersion) and dehumanization of the Adivasis continues.

Call to Give Life to the Subaltern Philosophy

It is my view that the tribals have a primordial sense of philosophy which is at once rational, intuitive and experiential. They

have an immediate way of understanding the reality in which they find themselves. However, the tribal philosophy has been eclipsed by the rationalistic, binary, Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy and Eastern hierarchical and organic Brahminic philosophies. The Tribals' philosophy is a lived philosophy characterized by an egalitarian and abiding interrelationship and intercommunion of the divine, human and nature. Their 'seeing' and 'being' is immediate, wholistic and primordial. The phenomenon of displacement and migration has destroyed not only their identity but also their philosophy. At present the Adivasis are physically as well as psychosocially displaced and forced to migrate. A point of warning must be made that this process of displacement and migration is pushing to the brink of extinction not only the tribals but also the whole humanity and the entire cosmos along with it. Global phenomena of changes in the cosmic and human sphere are pointers to this. Need of the hour is that the philosophers retrieve the tribal philosophy and present it as an alternative philosophy so that the world learns tribal mode of 'seeing' and 'being' and becomes a better place for all – human, nonhuman and material reality.

Secondly, the tribals as people can be no more taken for granted. The resistance movements against their displacement and migration are signs that the current dominant way of achieving material progress is both anti-human and anti-earth. It is the fastest way of heading towards cosmic annihilation. The philosophers could help the tribals articulate their cosmotheandric vision that would be pro-human and pro-nature.

Conclusion

The Adivasi reality of India in general and Jharkhand in particular, is a saga of displacement, migration and dehumanization. The Adivasi identity and their world (external and inner world) have been vandalized by the 'outsiders' in the name of national development' or 'national interest'. The Adivasis have never been treated with

dignity, neither in the past nor today. They are continually being pushed out of the places which they made inhabitable, and are made to live on the peripheries of the land which was once their own. The discourse of development as practiced in our country is not only anti-human, anti-Adivasi, but also unjust. Leo Tolstoy's words have become true which I have quoted in the beginning: "*I (Governments, rich class, development, national interest, majority community) sit on a man's back (Adivasis⁴⁷) choking him and making him carry me and yet assure myself and others that I am sorry for him and wish to lighten his load by all possible means – **except by getting off his back.***" It is the philosopher among the tribals, a seer of the subaltern reality, who can come to save the tribals and the whole humanity and cosmos from annihilation.

⁴⁷ The words in the brackets are mine to qualify "I" and "a man's back" respectively.

DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATION OF TRIBALS

V. Richard

Introduction

The history of the human species is marked by a continual quest for a philosophy to provide answers to questions that have no answers, as for instance, the meaning of life and of suffering and the question of life-after-death. Therefore, we may unanimously endorse what Gertrude Stein once remarked, “The answer is that there is no answer, and that is the answer.”

In a forum of eminent Philosophers present here, it may be unwarranted to dwell on the concept, context and content of development. Instead, permit me to probe into the philosophy of life that guides and governs every aspect of the life of the tribals in contrast to the philosophical assumptions of the others.

Indigenous World

There are 250 million indigenous people living in over 70 countries, constituting 4 percent of the global population. Earliest among the present inhabitants of the country, the tribal people are an integral part of the Indian civilization. Computed to 39 million at the time of 1971 census, the tribal population increased to 52 million in 1981 with the Amendment Act of 1976. Today, over 7.85 percent

of India's population follows a distinct life-style, identified as tribal culture.

Such a culture is tied up with land and forest, and characterized by their own language and heritage, love for freedom, self-identity and self-sufficiency. The tribal people in India have a history of their own, a distinct economic, socio-cultural and political system that has stood them in good stead for several generations.

Tribal Age of Human Florescence¹

The history of mankind can be divided into four ages: (1) Primal Age; (2) Age of great civilizations; (3) Scientific-technological age; and (4) Ecological Age. Baking of bread, domesticating plants and animals, weaving cloth, metal working, navigation and social-systems were born during the primal age. Then there was art and languages, all of today's languages developed during this period. Poetry and song, music and musical instruments, painting and carving, decoration were inventions of the tribals. All religious traditions are based on tribal revelations and visions, so also all basic religious symbols.

In the Name of Development

Forests have been denuded, rivers and oceans polluted, soil rendered lifeless, and atmosphere has been contaminated; material progress has been achieved at the cost of passing on a wasteland to the future generations. The Western models of industrial development have failed, depleting the globe of its resources and degrading the environment.

The human race, at the beginning of this turbulent century, is called upon to radically alter its ways of life, patterns of consumption,

¹ Rex Mansmann, "Bio-Cultural in Regionalism in Tribal Context," Coady Institute (1989).

value systems and the manner of organizing our societies if we are to ensure the survival of our mother Earth with all the species therein. We are beginning to realize that we must live simply, live sustainably, or possibly face extinction.

Critical lessons for the future perhaps lie with the indigenous people in whose culture are found a judicial balance between their needs and respect for nature, and the notion of sustainability. A successful transition to a more secure and sustainable future will have to enroll the indigenous people as indispensable partners. The views of the indigenous people on the possible union of development and conservation could become central to decision-making. As such, they may come to occupy a position of considerable influence.

Underlying Assumptions - An Analysis²

There are some fundamental assumptions about the nature and purpose of human existence which have undermined human development process all over the world. It may be necessary to understand them in the context of modernization and its consequences.

1) That human beings are the rightful “masters and possessors of nature.”

Basically, the indigenous people consider that the human person is *one of the species* inhabiting the cosmos, an inter-dependent part of the broader web of life. Being an indigenous person means being able to understand and live with their world in a very special way. It means living with the land and forests, with the animals, with the birds and fish as though they were sisters and brothers, to be loved and respected as co-existing side-by-side with men in this cosmic world.

² Michael Bopp, “Modernization, Culture,” Position paper prepared for UNESCO, International Symposium (1990).

As such, co-existence and communion constitutes the essence of indigenous spirituality. Such spirituality gives birth to the tribal value-system of simplicity, honesty, truthfulness, solidarity, equality and community.

Indigenous institutions of governance enshrine such a value-system. The basic idea of tribal economy is that all wealth must circulate; wealth is to be shared, not stored, for harmonious co-existence of all people inhabiting the earth. *The rich person, therefore, is not the one who has the most, but the one who needs the least.*

On the contrary, the pro-industrial mind views *Nature as cosmic elements to be conquered, studied and dissected ultimately for economic purposes.* This again operates on the wrong principle that “*having more is being more.*” For one to have more, others are forced to have less. Exploitation is then justified as a necessary means to an end, and violence becomes the implicit option. Such a paradigm of development dehumanizes the vast majority of people in favour of a tiny minority. The political domination, economic exploitation, unjust legislation, and increasing moral degeneration, prevalent in the present system of society, are symptoms of a serious ‘spiritual malaise’ in the human mind.

This first assumption underlies a process of development which depletes natural resources through strip mining, large-scale commercial farming practices, vast deforestation projects, all leading to soil erosion, ecological imbalance, acid rain and dumping of toxic and nuclear waste.

2) That man is a machine in the workshop of production-consumption

This assumption, on the other hand, places the human person in a position of subservience to land and capital, reducing him to a

simple component of labour in the production line to fulfill his basic human need of food, clothing, shelter and health care. Such a view reduces the human person to the level of servant or slave in perpetual servitude to other people in a state of oppression, non-participation, and constant manipulation. Here, the spiritual nature of the human person is stifled. Whereas, the indigenous view of man is that he is both fully human and spiritual.

3) That man is an economic being, “*homo economicus*”; as such, development is primarily economic

The assumption here is that the human person is no more than an economic being. All other aspects of human development – cultural, spiritual, social, political and personal dimensions – are excluded. Such an imbalanced and non-integrative approach leads to individualism and materialism.

4) That man is an animal conditioned by stimulus-response training of irrational instincts (post-Darwinian theory of Evolution)

This assumption understands the human person as good as an animal with the need to satisfy his biological needs. It gives little attention to the fact that the human person is also spiritual endowed with soul that outlives human earthly existence. Such a view underlies the dominance theory of one race or group over another, the law of the jungle, “might is right” and “survival of the fittest”. The mass manipulation of whole populations like the genocide committed by Hitler in Germany, apartheid in South Africa, the colonial and neo-colonial domination of the “First World” countries over scores of “Third World” countries, and racism/casteism are examples of such a theory of development. Such a view is seriously offensive to the intrinsic dignity of the human.

5) That human beings are material beings, and that human happiness depends on material goods: Progress principle

The logic of this assumption is the following: To have is to be; the more one has, the more fulfilling the quality of one's life. Therefore, to have fuller life, one should ceaselessly have more! Personal happiness and selfish individualism at the cost of everything else seems to be the dictum.

This is completely contrary to the view that the indigenous people have about life and human happiness. To be more is to have more sustainable relationships with the earth and nature; having more is not the same as absolute ownership, but a mark of a better symbiotic relationship.

As a doctrine for development, the materialistic progress principle has led to the undermining of masses of people on every continent of the globe. This principle has deeply affected the cultural, political, personal and spiritual dimensions of the human person. "The image of man as producer-consumer and a belief that to "have" is to "be" presents to humanity the ultimate conceit of indus-try", so says Michael Bopp.³

The Indigenous Stand-point

The tribal people have generally rejected dominant cultural values of individualism (Me-first), and materialism (money-first). They have been unwilling to abandon families and communities for the sake of long-term economic gains. At the core of tribal culture are found:

- ★ a profound reverence for life, and a deep sense of connectedness to the spiritual realities underlying all creation;

³ *Recreating the World*, (Ontario: Canadian Academic Press, 1991).

- ★ a view-point that human beings are a part of the natural universe, and as such spiritual beings;
- ★ a deep love for “mother” earth, for the natural landscape, for the animals and birds and fishes and skies and waters and mountains and oceans. They have an abiding sense of responsibility for restoring the ecological balance between human beings and mother earth.

It is casteism / racism, cultural diversity, linguistic differences which are the main reasons for the so-called civilized societies and their national governments to under-estimate the soundness of the viable system of life of the indigenous people. The industrial world must accept its moral failure to understand this alternative world-view.

Essential Elements of Indigenous Culture & Development

1. ‘Mother Earth’

The tribal people revere the Earth as ‘*Mother*’, to whom they belong, the source of life, a gift from the Creator, and that humankind can never be more than a trustee of the land, with a collective responsibility to preserve it. The Earth is the core of their culture, and the origin of their identity as a people. It is the land that connects them with their past as the home of their ancestors, with the future as the legacy they hold in trust for their children and their children’s children. Along with its economic significance, the traditional land base holds important symbolic and emotional values for tribal people. It is the repository for ancestral remains, group origin sites and the place where their sacred spirits dwell.

Instead, with little or no respect for the sentiments of the tribal people, their land has been systematically taken away from them, thus uprooting them from their cultural roots. Dominant societies hold the view that “*the land belongs to the people*” and

it is an economic commodity. Progress is measured by the ability to extract wealth from the earth. Therefore, the land is demarcated and passed to the hands of private individuals, corporate investors, or to the state, and thus can be disposed of by its sole possessor.

2. Forests

Forests are the natural habitats of many indigenous people as well as abode of spirits that they worship—*Jaher* and *Sarnas*. The Santals and Paharias have their annual hunt called ‘Sendra’ Nearly 5 million indigenous people find in the world’s rain-forests their home and source of life. For, forests also provide them their daily food in the form of roots, fruits, vegetables, meat and herbs and drug plants as cures for specific ailments and prevention of many more diseases.

Indigenous people have words for plants and insects that have not been identified by the botanists and entomologists of the world. It is well acclaimed that the Hanunoo people of the Philippines distinguish 1,600 plant species in their forest, 400 more than scientists working in the same area. Admittedly, of the estimated 250,000- 500,000 plant species in the world, more than 85 percent are in environments that are habitats of the indigenous people. Forests are not simply a source of timber and fire-wood, but the very basis of their biological, cultural and spiritual sustenance as a people of a certain identity, as a distinct people.

Most National Governments see the forests only as treasure chests that should pay off foreign debts, besides being a source of timber and fuel. Deforestation, therefore, done with an eye on economic benefit alone fails to see the damage it does not only to the eco-system, but to the indigenous people and their culture as well.

3. Social Institutions

Mahatma Gandhi said, “India is in its villages”. The village is the basic unit of the political system of most tribal communities. The Village-Council is headed by a Manjih who looks after village affairs. Then there is the cluster-system of governance, Parganas headed by a Pargana among the Santals, Tapas headed by Sardars among the Paharias. Then, there is the Supreme Council, Lo Bir or Disom Baisi, headed by a Dehri. Tribal leaders are often those who enjoy acceptability in their community and they are accountable to the community that elected them.

The Village leaders stand on an equal footing with other members of their community. The main characteristic of such a socio-political institution is that decisions are arrived at by consensus and not by votes as is in a modern democracy. The headman and his council-elders are conversant with the customary laws and regulations of their traditional tribal societies, based on tribal values and moral sensibilities. Adherence to customary laws and regulations is considered divinely sanctioned in order to maintain the right order or relationship, life and culture of the tribal community. The present day law-courts and entire legal system are not within the cultural ethos of the indigenous people.

Tribal Development

Tribal development, therefore, is not just economic development at the cost of spiritual values and social relationships which govern the economic activities of the indigenous people. Development has to do with the human aspiration for meaning in human dignity. The crisis of civilization goes deeper than failures in the economic system; it lies in the minds and hearts of the human person. Development has to do with the human person as subject and agent, as well as his / her integration into human society.

The present day tribal people and their major problems can best be understood in the context of European colonialism, being perpetuated in its subtle forms by national governments in the tribal region. It has resulted in the displacement of the indigenous peoples from their original habitats of land and forest, and loss of cultural identity through a process of cultural and religious invasion, subjugating the tribal psyche to the colonizers' false sense of racial superiority.

There appears to be lack of clarity among national governments and major development agencies about the ultimate objective of tribal development. It is often stated that the objective is to enable the tribals to join the main stream of national life. What exactly is this "main-stream" is left to anybody's guess!

Whereas for centuries, tribal people inhabited the resource rich land and forest, the Government, with its present legal system, denies property right to them, claiming instead that all rights to access and control of the forest land belong to the state. There are the 'reserved forests', 'protected forests'. Now the question is reserved for whom? Protected for whom?

And in the past decades, indigenous people have suffered from the consequences of some of the most destructive aspects of 'development'. They have been separated from their traditional lands, way of life, and deprived of their means of livelihood. They have been forced to fit into societies in which they feel like aliens. Often, the indigenous people are considered culturally inferior, and taking over their land has been justified as "civilizing" the natives or more recently, as bringing development into their part of the world!

The irony of the development process in India is that the inhabitants of the areas, where industries, mines, dams and wild-life sanctuaries are undertaken, have never been consulted about them, nor are the benefits of these projects shared with them. Even if

some compensation were made, it was not always land for land. In the name of development, which benefits only a few, the poor in their large number have been forced to pay a heavy cost. Such a policy is in contradiction to the tenets of India's professed humanistic ideals and the respect for the value and dignity of the human person.

Tribal Resistance and Rebellion (1855)

The Santal Rebellion 'HUL' in 1855-1856

It was the volcanic eruption of the molten lava of the aspirations of the Santal tribals to be freed from the clutches of the local money-lenders, law-courts, tax-collectors, police and the British reign. It was the precursor of India's first war of Independence. The Santals, for the first time in their history, rallied around their leaders, the Sido and Kanhu brothers, and fought a bitter battle with their bows and arrows against the mighty guns and bullets of the British soldiers, who were armed to the teeth. Over 10,000 Santals perished in the Rebellion. The creation of Santal Parganas as a homeland of the Santals and Santal Pargana Land Tenancy Act became possible because of the valour of the Santal people.

The Munda Rebellion (1895)

Under the brave leadership of Birsa Munda, numerically one of the important tribes in India, 6,000 Mundas fought tooth and nail against the pervading exploitation and tyranny of the zamindars and the British. His aim was to drive away all outsiders and establish a Munda state flagged off by the Hul Jharkhand Party, formed in 1939. This was the beginning of the Movement for a separate state which came into existence in the year 2000.

The Indigenous people in India have demonstrated, more than once, that they can put up with injustice and exploitation only

for a time; their patience has a limit and, when they hit, it can be very hard. Let no person or nation mistake the meekness of the tribal people as weakness. In recent times, we have been witnessing the 20 year long sustained resistance put up against Koel-Karo Hydel Project. It had been the longest fight against any dam in the country.

Koel-Karo was a Rs. 2,300-crore hydel-project capable of generating 710 MW of electricity; (electricity for whom?). It would have displaced 800, 000 people from Torpa and Tamar area. The people of the area had the audacity to build a barricade across the approach road to the dam site when the struggle began in 1974. The project was shelved despite the Supreme Court ruling for Rs.130 crore as rehabilitation in the year 1990.

Conclusion

However benevolent and committed the Government may be, no lasting solution to problems of under-development can come about without restoration and respect for the traditional rights of the tribals to own their original lands and forests, to self-government and to the way of life dear to their hearts.

GLOBALIZATION AND TRIBALS

Shailendra

Globalization is a buzz word in the twentieth century. Many are overwhelmed by its advantages and many feel dismayed with it because of its vice-like grip on the poor. I would like to state at the start that my position in this paper is not anti-globalization but rather, a view that this phenomenon has done nothing marvellous in the life of the tribals of Thane district of Maharashtra State and generally the poor of India and the world at large.

What is globalization? Many definitions have been given of this obscure concept and it is difficult to accept any one single definition as the correct definition. Globalization is not a completely new phenomenon, but it has definitely caught the imagination of people in the modern world. Maximus Fernano points out four forces of globalization: free trade, migration and intermarriage, missionaries, and war.¹ The prominent American politician and thinker Henry Kissinger defined globalization in one word – ‘Americanization.’² This definition is agreed upon by those who are globalized [Third World Countries] by the globalizers [the developed world countries]. We can have a look at a couple of more definitions to have a better understanding of it. William Pfaff defines it, “as aggressive programme

¹ Cf. Maximus P. Fernando, ‘How Christian is Globalization,’ in *Religious Life Asia: Globalization and Consecrated Life*, Vol. III (April-June, 2001), p. 36.

² Henry Kissinger as quoted in John Madeley, *A Peoples World: Alternatives to Economic Globalization* (London: Zed Books, 2003), p. 3.

for the imposition of Western norms of national economic management, economic deregulation and market opening and facilitating takeovers of indigenous industries and agriculture by multinational companies.”³ Held David says, it is “the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life, from the cultural to the criminal, and the financial to the spiritual.”⁴ Hence, we see, “...global flows occur in different physical and mental dimensions [as] usefully divided by Arjun Appadurai into ‘ethnoscapes,’ ‘technoscapes,’ ‘mediascapes,’ ‘finanscapes,’ and ‘ideoscapes’.”⁵

This process has its basis in the economic sphere which seeks to transform the world into one global market, yet it affects every sphere of life. No doubt, the world is turned into a global village because transformation in communication and transportation systems has brought drastic changes in connecting people. We see this in the advertisement of Nokia phone with its slogan ‘connecting people.’ The question remains who and how many are really connected by these changes in transportation and communication? The fact is that most of the population of this planet is outside the so called World Wide Web because there are many people who probably have never made a phone call in their life time or even seen a computer. The compression of space and time has taken place due to these means of communication. Now many people can travel faster in a shorter period of time and feel that the world has become a small global village with breaking of the territorial boundaries. Breaking territorial boundaries is something positive but it has created other new boundaries between the haves and the have nots – that is, it has given birth to globalizers and the globalized.

³ William Pfaff, as quoted in John Madeley, p. 4.

⁴ Held D, as quoted in Ray Kiely, ‘US Hegemony and Globalization’ in *Globalization and After* Ed. Samir Dasgupt and Ray Kiely (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006), p. 98.

⁵ Arju Appadurai as quoted in Mafred B. Steger, ‘The Future of Globalization’ in *Globalization and After*, p. 117.

Globalizers Vs Globalized

The globalizers are the developed countries whose multinationals in collaboration with their governments see the world as one big market where they can amass wealth without economic barriers. They are the ones who control food, medicines, arms production and technology in general. In short, we can say these are the people from developed countries. The globalized are the people who do not have control over food, medicine and arms production units. As we saw above, in the one word definition of globalization as ‘Americanization’, the globalized feel that it is a Western concept with hidden imperialist motives to dominate the world and to seek unlimited economic opportunities. Rules for all economic activity are set by dominating Western markets and multinational companies supported by their politically and economically powerful governments. Even the institutions like the United Nations [UN] the International Monetary Fund, [IMF] and the World Bank [WB] which function for a more equitable world economic order are situated in the West, strongly dominated by the Western lobbies. Though these institutions have more than 180 member countries, yet when it comes to voting rights they are governed by archaic rules framed in 1994, without taking into account the fast changing globalized world. “In the WB, votes are weighted according to the amount of money each country subscribes to it...The US being the largest shareholder with over 17 percent votes can veto any amendment. China and India together have only 5 percent votes, although they represent 36 percent of the world’s population.”⁶

G8 is a group of countries that create advanced technology; it controls not only these institutions, but, to a certain extent, the world at large. People from these affluent countries, that is, about 20 percent of the earth’s population, consume 80 percent of earth’s

⁶ Kavaljit Singh, *Questioning Globalization* (New Delhi: Madhyam Book, 2005), 123.

natural resources and now when they feel the pinch they are blaming India and China for their food extravagant and travel habits in spite of living a life in brazen luxury and enjoying guilty pleasures. In fact, the Western life style is insulting for the poor of the Third World because of the luxury and comforts they enjoy and the rich food they consume. The reality is that these globalized countries are the ones who produce much of world's food and yet the starving majority is found here in the Third World. In developing countries the poverty situation is worsening and inequality is increasing. "A new face of apartheid seems to be spreading across the globe; millions of people live in wretched conditions side-by-side with those who enjoy unprecedented prosperity, says a UNICEF Study".⁷

In fact, it is corporate driven globalization, which is called 'regressive globalism'. It is associated with the Bush II Doctrine. Regressive globalizers 'are individuals, groups, firms, or even governments that favour globalization when it is in their particular interest and irrespective of any negative consequences for others.'⁸ Condoleezza Rice had made a statement a few days after the Indo-US nuclear deal was cleared at Nuclear Suppliers Group [NSG] that the US President does not sign on documents which are not in the interest of the US. She demanded wages for the American support saying "we have talked to the Indian government about not disadvantaging American companies and I think they recognise and appreciate American leadership on this issue."⁹ These countries interfere in the affairs of developing countries in the name of 'human intervention' and then seek their business interests. Victorial Tauli-Corpuz, a former member of the International Forum on Globalization says, "It is the process wherein former imperialist countries are ensuring their continued economic, cultural and political

⁷ Madeley, p. 9.

⁸ Kaldor M. as quoted in Ray Kiely, 'US Hegemony and Globalization' in *Globalization and After*, p. 99.

⁹ DNAindia (Newspaper) Mumbai, Tuesday, September 9, 2008.

domination of the world through the creation of international laws on trade, finance and investment liberalization.”¹⁰ In such a world scenario it looks like the globalizers are selling the dream of a better life of comfort to the globalized.

Global Village: A Dream

The word has spread around with regard to globalization that the world is becoming smaller, national boundaries are breaking, people are coming closer and life is becoming more comfortable as never before. No doubt globalization has helped people from the West to improve their living standards but it has not touched the majority of people from the developing countries. For people in the Third World countries this seems to be a dream being sold in the global market. With the process of global economic integration, the process of cultural, social and ecological disintegration too is taking place. The proponents of globalization have been promising to turn the world into a land of milk and honey. “The idea of a global village was predicated on the promise of widespread prosperity and economic globalization, and the further belief that this prosperity went hand in hand with delivering the fruits of liberal democracy. The betrayal of these promises, however, is evident in growing inequalities and increased poverty.”¹¹ There are around 827.5 million people in over 50 countries that are malnourished and 40,000 die from hunger related causes. The World Bank 2006 reports:

Globalization has not worked for about half the world population that is living on less than US\$2 per person a day. Even worse is the case of the 1.1 billion people, or one-fifth of humankind, who is chronically poor and barely survive on less than US\$1 a day. The poverty situation in the least

¹⁰ Victorial Tauli-Corpuz, as Quoted in Madeley, p. 15.

¹¹ Dasgupta & Kiely, ‘Introduction’, p. 23.

developed countries is much worse than in the rest of the developing world: about 760 million people, 19 percent of the total population, were seriously undernourished in 2002-04.¹²

In such a world scenario the Indian situation is also grim. The WB's latest report on global poverty shows that the rate of post-reform poverty decline is slow, that is between 1990 and 2005. The new assessment shows that about 42% of the population is living below the new international poverty line, that is, \$1.25 per day. Hence, we can say 4 of 10 Indians live below the Poverty Line. The Indian poor also constitute 33% of the global poor. 75.6% of our population lives below \$2 per day. This scenario shows that in spite of globalization the ranks of the poor are swelling.¹³ This is the reality of the world and "...in showing globalization as a way of rectifying the injustices of the past, as a brave new world order that could liberate crawling economies from the misery of poverty by breaking boundaries, and opening doors of economic opportunities to the developing countries that is grossly inflated to the point of being a taint on the truth..."¹⁴

The basic force behind globalization is economy hence it creates inequality by creating winners and losers. Pro-globalizers say that globalization creates opportunities and some seize opportunities and others do not. Those who do not are the losers. True, but how many people know market mechanisms? How many people know that there are opportunities to be seized? Are these opportunities available to the Third World countries? These Third World countries tried to industrialize after independence but found

¹² Sartaj Aziz, 'Changing Paradigms During Globalization' in Joachim von Braun & Eugenio Duaz-Bonilla, Ed. *Globalization of Food and Agriculture and the Poor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 289.

¹³ Cf. The Times of India, Mumbai, August, 27, 2008.

¹⁴ Abbas Mehdi, 'Globalization: Whose Benefit Anyway? In *Globalization and After*, pp. 135-6.

themselves depending on their colonial masters for money, technology, expertise and arms.¹⁵ It looks like, “that the soul of globalization is made of Darwinian natural selection of survival of the fittest.”¹⁶ Mass poverty in the developing countries and sickening prosperity in the developed West makes one agree with Jay Mazur that Darwinian Principle is at work in the process of globalization. The fittest from the developed world survive and the unfit from the developing world perish. This leads to the de-humanization of the people at large, because what happens on the Wall Street and the Dalal Street affects common man on the street. The present situation even if not global doom leads irrevocably to global gloom.

De-Humanizing Effects of Globalization

On the one side, prosperity, and on the other side, poverty—this is the basic trademark of globalization. Since it lacks social concern it has de-humanizing effects on the rights of the labourers, farmers and the poor in general. It also creates ecological and cultural problems too. Ecological problems are threatening the very existence of the planet. The last G8 summit discussed these problems with a firm resolve to do something about it. Basically globalization looks at the planet as a mine to be explored and exploited and not a garden to be nurtured. Madeley describes the ecological situation beautifully saying:

Globalization is based on the promise of limitless economic growth. But already many limits have been exceeded. To fulfil the promise of US lifestyle for all would need another two planet’s worth of natural resources that we do not have. We have become too big for our ecological boots. Already to

¹⁵ Cf. Avinash Jah, *Background to Globalization* (Mumbai: Centre For Education And Documentation, 2000), pp. 4-5.

¹⁶ Jay Mazur, as quoted in ‘Globalization: Whose Benefit Anyway?’ Abbas Mehdi: 136.

support the profligate lifestyles enjoyed by the minority rich, the earth's biosphere needs at least one year and three months to regenerate the amount lost to human consumption in a year.¹⁷

The ones who suffer most in this scenario are the workers in the industrial units and farmers whose land is acquired for industrial development under the name of Special Economic Zone (SEZ). There has been a methodical assault on their rights. The state of Haryana does not allow Worker's Union to please multinationals in Gurgaon and other parts of the state. In such states not labour friendly but investor friendly laws are being enacted. Privatizations, acquisitions, mergers of industrial units are taking place without taking workers into confidence and this affects their rights and basic job security.

Owing to SEZ farmers have lost their land and are shifted to some other site for settlement. It is not mere uprooting from the place but from the culture too. It is uprooting of their traditional ways of living, of social and moral values. In short, a total assault on their lifestyle. The feelings of these uprooted people are well expressed in these words "Our food is disappearing, land is being taken away... We are struggling to maintain our identities, our essence. Globalization and the way it is being pushed, is promoting monoculture – one kind of culture only. And that for us is unthinkable."¹⁸ This has produced cultural frictions which, has led to the phenomenon of cultural suspicion. As Samuel Huntington writes:

It is primarily my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nations

¹⁷ Madeley, p. 28.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

states will remain the most powerful actors in the world affairs, but the principle conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.¹⁹

Globalization in fact does not create any global village but a global market where money matters and not the human person. It creates multinational companies which exploit the environment to prolong and perpetrate their interests. They fix environmental standards even though they are responsible for 'eco-dumping' in developing countries. They also use the environment to impose hygienic standards and ban certain products from developing countries.²⁰ 'Eco-labelling' is another technique used by them to make profits. "...eco-labelling is a way of telling the consumer that what he is buying (with eco-label prominently displayed on it) is environmental friendly, and has been produced by a process that has not degraded the natural environment, e.g. products of plantations made by MNC's rather than those delivered from natural forests by indigenous produces."²¹ Hence, the poor farmers who do not have access to latest technology and expertise to handle such technologies in farming, suffer loss. A clear example of this is the case of farmers from Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. Finally, the words of Paunga would make a beautiful summary for this section. He tells us how globalization exploits helpless man and the generous nature.

Globalization is an instrument of gain and profit, thus, divorced from its humanistic objectives. Its ultimate concern is FREE

¹⁹ Samuel P. Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilization,' in *Globalization Reader*, p. 27.

²⁰ Cf. B. Dasgupt, *Globalization: India's Adjustment Experience* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005), pp. 95-6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

MARKET and not FREE PEOPLE. It is a system where economy grows without the poor. Technology has become its handmaid. Furthermore, it exploits nature and its resources for the purpose of quick profit. In this sense, technology is used to destroy the life support system of nature on which the poor depend very much...There is hardly an iota of solidarity in it for suffering humans. What reigns supreme is the worst brand of individualism and self-seeking which wants to exclude the weaker ones.²²

In the process of globalization the poor are culturally uprooted, environmentally displaced, economically exploited and politically suppressed. It leads to a total disintegration of the person. We need globalization which works for the poor, protects their lives and interests. Above all globalization should get an ethical dimension or to use Levinas' expression it should get a 'face' – the expression stands for the 'vulnerable' – that is to say it should consider the vulnerable in the society while doing trade. The most prominent among the vulnerable are the tribal communities of our country.

Tribals and Globalization

From the very ancient times, that is, from 8000 BCE the domestication of plants and animals made village life possible. From 3000 BCE this development of agricultural skill led to development of cities. Urbanization of life became an important step in the human history of globalization. With urbanization took place the loss of harmony within the family and harmony with nature because in cities human beings came from different tribes bringing with them altogether different cultures. Society became more complex and specialization of tasks took place which in turn led to transformed human identity. In the tribe it was collective identity as all shared the same culture. However, the city was composed of communities where every

²² Mikaele N. Paunga, 'Globalization and Culture: A View from Oceania,' in Michael Amaladoss sj Ed. *Globalization and Its Victims* (New Delhi: Vidyajyoti Education & Welfare Society, 2000), p. 139.

person was a stranger to the other. The city lacked the collective consciousness which led to individuation of identities. This loss of collective life due to the emergence of an impersonal city life led to a world of suffering and cruelty in India and many other ancient civilizations.²³

Traditionally, in India the tribals inhabited forests or lived in the vicinity of the forest. The tribals of Maharashtra's Thane District still live in close proximity to the forests. Defining who is tribal, S.C. Dube gives a few characteristics. I would like to quote just two of them which suit our purpose here. First, tribals live in the relative isolation of the hills and forests. Second, they have a low level of techno-economic development.²⁴ Dwelling in the forests and enjoying its benefits was considered by them as their birth-right. However, with globalization not only their birth rights but even their human rights have been grossly violated. To understand the consequences of globalization "one should remember that in India at least 30 million persons have been displaced by development projects since 1951. More than 40% of them are tribals who form only 7.58% of the country's population."²⁵

Adivasis account for a little over 9 percent of the population of the State of Maharashtra. There are 47 tribes in Maharashtra. This makes Maharashtra the second most populous state in terms of the numbers of Adivasis. In spite of being large in number, these people have faced an assault on their livelihood in India's most prosperous industrial state. The tribal villages of Thane district are the most backward villages of Maharashtra. Basically two types of tribals inhabit this area, they are *Warlis* and *Katkaris*. The Warlis

²³ Cf. Esposito, Fasching & Lewis Ed. *Religion and Globalization: World Religions in Historical Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 16-7.

²⁴ S.C. Dube, 'Introduction' in S.C. Dube Ed. *Tribal Heritage of India: Vol. I: Ethnicity, Identity and Interaction* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1977), p. 2.

²⁵ Walter Fernandes sj, 'Globalization: Its Social Consequences' in *Globalization and its Victims*, p. 9.

are mainly located in the Dahanu Taluka of the Thane District and are also found in the adjoining areas of Murbad, Talasari, and other areas of the Thane District. It is generally believed that the Warlis once inhabited the region near Dharampur which was also known as the Varalata, and this, perhaps is the reason the Warlis acquired the name by which they are known today. Kathkaries are also known as Kathodi, who are nomads. The name Kathkari appears to be derived from *Kator Kath*, the thickened juice of the *Catechu* tree and *kame* – to make; the makers of *catechu*. The name is given to them because of their occupation.²⁶

Like other tribals of India they too live in forests of Thane district. Their houses are built of bamboo and teakwood, plastered with cow-dung. Some of them have a small piece of land but many of them do not possess land and work on the land of the *Saukars* (landowners). Their food is very simple. It consists of rice, dal and the vegetables grown in their own fields. Meat is a delicacy and eaten only when there is a guest in the house, or on some feast. Education is imparted by some government schools, NGOs and Christian missionaries. Though the education standard is low, it has made some changes in the life style of the young generation. Politically, most of them vow allegiance to the Communist Party. In the 1940s Communist leaders Godavari and Shamrao Parulekar led a militant Warli uprising during the harvesting season. They refused to work for the *Saukars*. Since that period, the Warlis have remained loyal to the Communist Party of India.

I visited Mokhada and Wada missions of Vasai diocese (infamous for annual malnutrition mortalities). If we have to describe the overall situation of these areas I would say that these places lack adequate educational, medical, transport and communication facilities. In short, there is a lack of all the facilities which are supposed to come along with globalization and yet these places are

²⁶ Linus D'Mello, (an unpublished paper).

not outside the sphere of globalization as they are declared to be industrial zones. These areas are not connected by WWW network but are trapped in the WWW network.

The worst effect of globalization in relation to tribals is deforestation, which has led to ecological disaster. Small dams are already built and the big dams are coming up in the area. This has led to the displacement of tribals from these areas to the other locations creating dissent among the displaced tribals and local tribals. The water from the dam is not for the tribals to use for farming or drinking but for factories like coca-cola which have already begun exploiting the area. Due to this, people do not get drinking water easily and have to travel a long distance to fetch water which in turn leads to de-humanizing effects on women. Like other tribals of India they too depended on the forest for food and wood. But now with the felling of the trees and forest for commercial purposes the search for food and wood has become increasingly difficult. Again it is women who suffer as they are the one who collect firewood for cooking.

On the one hand, there is displacement due to construction of dams and highways; on the other hand, there is mass poverty. In search of better living conditions many tribals have migrated to the urbanized areas of Vasai and Mumbai where they live as refugees. They stay in open grounds or some shanty huts and work on the construction sites, and carry out other menial jobs. The government agencies do not bother about their hygienic conditions. Many women are sexually exploited at their work places. Complete uprooting from their culture and shattering of religious beliefs too takes place with this displacement. With deforestation their sacred groves too are destroyed and many trees they considered sacred are cut and sold. Their concern for the forest helped to maintain the ecological balance of the area but the changing global situation is affecting this eco-fragile area. It looks like the Warli curse, 'May your children eat coal' is befalling mankind with ecological disaster in sight.

The life style of young boys and girls is also undergoing change. They are giving up their traditional dress and food, falling prey to consumer tendencies. Hence, the money earned during the stay in urban areas is spent on consumer goods without any savings. This in turn leads to the problem of malnutrition. An NGO study reveals that none of the 600 children of the 15 tribal villages in Sanjay Gandhi National Park is adequately nourished. About 25 of them were found to be in the grade IV of malnourishment that is almost on the verge of starvation or death at any moment. Globalization is invading forests and hunting the hunters. It is driving out the tribals from the forest to urban areas where they are left with begging bowls in their hands.

Globalization with a Human Face

Owing to the process of globalization we can have markets as wealth-creating machines but that does not help in building a just human society because markets lack ethics. M. S. Swaminathan makes certain relevant suggestions with regard to making globalization work for the poor or giving it a human face. According to him:

First, there must be a global commitment to eliminate unsustainable lifestyles and unacceptable poverty... Second, project design must aim at social inclusion. Third, it is important to change the mindset from patronage to partnership. Referring to the poor as 'target groups' is reflection of a patronage mentality that must be modified if we want to achieve poverty reduction...Fourth, there must be a shift from unskilled to skilled work. So long as people are unskilled, the maximum they can expect is to receive the minimum wage, which is more than what most people get in a majority of developing countries. Finally, it is clear that we

must promote job-led economic growth particularly , in population-rich but land hungry countries.²⁷

In the same article he quotes Gandhi's saying, "Production by masses is the need of the hour and not just mass production."²⁸ However, the current requirement is the reversing of globalization process. Instead of a top-down method it should be a down-top method. We need to make the rural economy strong by helping in the agricultural process. New technology in farm production, fisheries, forestry etc. should be introduced in the rural areas. The introduction of new technology and just trade can make a great difference to the society and bring about better social equality. International agreements must be governed by the ethical principles. Besides Swaminathan's suggestions we need change in agricultural policies of industrialized countries especially pricing of produce from the developing countries. Decent prices for agricultural products from developing countries should be fixed which would help fight poverty.

Globalization has structures to produce wealth but not to distribute it. Markets are well organised to maintain the profit-making balance sheets of multinational companies but not to balance growing inequality between the poor and the rich. Hence, an ethical dimension should be added to globalization. Defining global ethics Hans Kung writes, "The global ethics is a basic consensus on binding values, irrevocable criteria and basic attitudes which are affirmed by all religions despite their dogmatic differences, and which can indeed also be contributed by non-believers." (According to him) it is based on two basic principles: 1. every human being must be treated

²⁷ M. S. Swaminathan, 'Making Globalization Work for the Poor: Technology and Trade,' in Ed. Von Braun & Diaz-Bonilla, *Globalization of Food and Agriculture and the Poor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 81-82.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

humanely; 2. what you wish done to yourself, do to others.”²⁹ In short, we can say that we need to give priority to eradicate poverty and create basic food security for the poor over economic prosperity of the nation at large. Basically the transformation of the conscience of the rich towards poor is required.

Indian Christian Philosophers’ Response

In history free-trade movement was supported by the philosophers too. Philosophers like Montesquieu, Hume and Kant were convinced that free-trade would bring about peace and prosperity to mankind. Kant thought that the power of money would bring about peace. Hume thought of ‘benevolent sympathies’ and Montesquieu thought that people would behave better.³⁰ However, their dreams may not have been fulfilled. Karl Marx reminds us as Philosophers about what we are to do in the world. He says, ‘The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.’

Besides Karl Marx’ advice we have a few soul searching questions from Serge Halimi. He asks:

What should we... intellectuals—do in a world where 358 billionaires have more assets than the combined incomes of nearly half of the planet’s population? What should we do when Mozambique, where 25 percent of children die before the age of five from infectious diseases...? What should we do in a world where... “*if present trends continue, economic disparities between industrial and developing nations will move from inequitable to inhuman?...can we do something in this global world that is “comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable, being a counter-power, a voice for the voiceless...*”³¹

²⁹ Hans Kung, ‘Global Ethic as a Foundation for Global Society,’ in *The Globalization Reader*, p. 40.

³⁰ Cf. John Ralston Saul, *The Collapse of Globalization and the Reinvention of the World* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 42.

³¹ Serge Halimi, ‘When Market Journalism Invades the World,’ in *The Globalization Reader*, p. 17

Markets have failed to reconcile economic gains with social causes because they lack ethics. It is here that we need to create awareness of false promises of governments, multinational companies and advertisers about overall development of the region, and jobs assurances. We need to expose the advertiser's hidden agenda to increase consumption at any cost. Hence, as Maximus Fernando articulates, we need to add a 'transcendental dimension' to the greed for consumerism. He says that, "the production of wealth and consumption should be governed by a set of higher transcendental values or goals beyond material existence. In other words, religion functions to create a culture of sublimating crude human drives towards transcendental goals and values."³²

DNA, a newspaper from Mumbai, in an editorial 'Going Hungry' writing about tribal children dying of malnutrition concludes, "Neither socialism nor capitalism are the answers for a nation which does not prioritise alleviating the symptoms and causes of such extreme poverty. Whether it happens in tribal Madhya Pradesh or throbbing Mumbai, the shame attaches to all of us."³³ Hence, as Indian Christian Philosophers let us not remain 'intellectual potters' but instead, respond like Samuel to the Lord's call, "Here am I' (1Sam. 3:4). This is the right response to a call from any person and the tribals in particular. "To read the Bible properly is to realize that the land flowing with milk and honey is not for us to take but to be given to the other."³⁴ Hence, as Indian Christian Philosophers we are to create social awareness of man's responsibility towards the Other, in particular the Tribals.

³² Maximus P. Fernando, 'How Christian is Globalization' in *Religious Life Asia*, pp. 38-9.

³³ DNA, Mumbai, September 15, 2008.

³⁴ Kevein Hart, *Postmodernism*, (Oxford: One World Publication, 2006), 101-2.

PART TWO

POLITICAL ASPIRATIONS

FROM CONSCIENTIZATION TO CONSCIOUSNESS

Tribal Movements for Survival and Assertion in Chotanagpur

Joseph Marianus Kujur

Introduction

The article “Is there a Tribal Intellectual Class in Jharkhand” by Xaxa¹ raises a significant issue in the discourse of tribal movements. The crux of the matter is whether the intellectual and ideological dimension, which is the backbone of any movement, is also the domain of the tribal society and its movements. The pertinent question here is whether an intellectual engagement, which means a pursuit of knowledge in terms of its generation and transmission, has been giving orientation and direction to tribal movements down the centuries, because conscientization cannot take place unless there is consciousness.

It is due to lack of literate tradition in the tribal society that there is absence of an intellectual class in the traditional tribal social setting. Xaxa points out that a priest/shaman in the tribal society generally performed the role of intellectuals as we see in the modern society, and that despite the fact that he enjoyed higher rank than others did, he was not set apart from others. Hence, the priests/

¹ V. Xaxa, “Is there a Tribal Intellectual Class in Jharkhand,” in J. Marianus Kujur and S. Minz, *Indigenous People of India: Problems and Prospects* (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 2007), pp. 120-21.

shamans did not emerge as a distinct class in the tribal society. This, in Xaxa's view, was in sharp contrast with that of the Hindu caste group, which was differentiated in terms of castes, subsumed under the fourfold hierarchy of Brahmin, Khashtriya, Vaishya and Sudra, whereby the Brahmins occupied the top position. Moreover, they were literate class and hence the intellectual class in the traditional Indian society was restricted to the Brahmins.²

Further, with the process of differentiation in the tribal society – socially, economically, religiously, politically – there was an emergence of the tribal middle class. It is from the upper middle class that one finds articulation about the tribal society. Civil servants, doctors, engineers, managers, higher education teachers, politicians, etc., comprise this class in the context of tribal society. Yet not all of them hold the same role and influence in creation of a new form of society. Those who do it are known as the elite. The major components of elite are politicians who are associated with the exercise of power, higher government officials, managers of industry and intellectuals. Of these four components, the intellectuals are the most difficult to describe.³

Intellectuals are restricted to small group of people, who are connected with the creation, transmission and criticism of ideas/knowledge. It is from this category that we get an idea and understanding of the structure, process and nature of transformation of the society. Such contribution comes primarily from the intellectual class, which comprises mainly of writers, artists, scientists, philosophers, lawyers, journalists, religious thinkers, social theorists, etc. This segment from among the middle class, however, is the weakest in the tribal society. This means that not all who comprise the middle class are engaged in the production and dissemination of knowledge. Intellectuals thus constitute a very tiny segment of the

² Xaxa, p. 119.

³ Xaxa, p. 120.

tribal middle class, who have been reflecting on the tribal situation in general or on specific tribes or region in particular. The influence they are expected to exercise in shaping and guiding the society is almost negligible. This is not to deny the role of some active individual intellectuals. However, as a class intellectuals are yet to act as a cohesive force in Jharkhand.⁴

The theme of discussion, i.e. tribal movement as tribal consciousness because of conscientization from various quarters, implies intellectual and ideological inputs. These inputs, however, have to be understood in their proper perspective. Obviously, the tribal movements in the colonial and some of them even in the post-colonial periods had no presence of the ‘intellectuals’ in modern sense of the term. Each of the movements, however, was guided by certain ideological underpinnings howsoever crude it may now look. Each of the tribal movements had its origin in the discontent because their hopes were belied and the dreams shattered whenever there was an encounter with the ‘alien’ people and external forces.

The present paper examines the process of mobilization of tribals as a movement and the reasons for doing so. The paper will not engage in discussing the conversion movement which is significant from the point of view of liberation of tribals from the clutches of landlords and moneylenders.

Tribal Movements through the Ages

There are usually multiple reasons behind each of the tribal movements, although it cannot be ruled out that some of these factors are more decisive and predominant than the others. Sachchidanand says, “At the root of each movement are multiple of factors, each reinforcing the other.”⁵ S. P. Sinha, in relation to the category of the rebellion type, has the following to say,

⁴ Xaxa, p.122.

⁵ Sachchidanand, “Foreword” in S. P. Sinha (ed.), *Tribal Leadership in Bihar* (Ranchi: The Bihar Tribal Welfare Research Institute, Morabadi, 1990), p. i.

These tribal movements, *ulgulan*, agitation, rebellion, etc. formed part of the whole, that is, the Tribal wrath against the system which was thrust upon them. They were mainly against economic exploitation, territorial encroachment, cultural imposition and social domination. Some of them could at best be movement for entry into existing power structure or movement for generation of alternative power structure or movement for entry into existing structure of prestige without visualizing any alternative structure of power.⁶

While tribal movements in the northeast India where tribals are majority, have primarily been political and secular in nature with a few exceptions, their character in central India has been quite complex. Tribal movements in the northeast come under the categories of religious and social reform movements, movements for separate statehood, insurgent movements, and movements for assertion of cultural rights.⁷ The movements such as the Naga movement (1879, 1963-71), the Zeliangrong movement, the ethnic and script movement of Manipur, the Mizo political movement (1966-71), the cultural revivalism among the Christian Khasis, the Nativistic Seng Khasi movement, the Khasi solidarity movements, and the Brahma movements of the Bodo-Kachari, etc. fall in one of the above categories.

In central India, a two-pronged struggle of tribes has been primarily been for physical survival and identity assertion for a life of dignity. Their main problems today are – a struggle for survival, abject poverty, indebtedness, displacement, alienation of natural resources, militarization of tribal areas, human rights violations, etc. These have often resulted in male and female migration, and

⁶ S. P. Sinha (ed.), *Tribal Leadership in Bihar* (Ranchi: The Bihar Tribal Welfare Research Institute for the Government of Bihar Welfare Department, 1990), p. 180.

⁷ S. M. Dubey, "Inter-Ethnic Alliance, Tribal Movements and Integration in North-eastern India," in K. S. Singh (ed.), *Tribal Movements in India*, Vol. I (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1982), pp. 11-12.

trafficking and prostitution of women. Moreover, a sense of insecurity, crisis of identity, environmental degradation, identity and resource related conflicts, dehumanization at various levels, a breakdown of socio-political fabric, and constant exclusion from economic and political rights, etc.⁸ has given rise to numerous protests, movements, and the so-called revolts for self-assertion.

Sinha has categorized tribal movements in mid-India (1832-1990) into a seven-fold typology. These are as follows: (1) *Encroachment on traditional rights* – Birsa Rebellion (1895-1990) and Tana Bhagat Movement (1912-30); (2) *Revolt against economic exploitation and unbearable tyranny* – Tana Bhagat Movement; Kisan Tana Rising (1918); Wild Korba Rebellion (1978); Birsa Ulgulan (1895-1900); Khond Rebellion (1893); Gond Rebellion (1888); Bamangha Rebellion; Santhal Discontent (1860-61); and Santhal Unrest (1871); (3) *Revolt against cultural imposition and social domination* – Tana Bhagat Movement; Jharkhand Movement (1950-2000); Movement of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha; Sapha Hor Movement; Movements led by Lok Bodra and Ram Dayal; Kherwar Movement; Birsa Movement; Rai Movement; Kisan Sabha Movement; Karticism; and Sardari Larai; (4) *Movement for generation of alternative political power structure* – Kisan Tana Rising; Jharkhand Movement; Movement of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha; Birsa Seva Dal Movement; All Jharkhand Students' Union (AJSU) Movement; Kherwar Movement (1832-33); Rai Movement; Chotanagpur and Santhal Pargana Yuva Sangharsh Vahini; and Plateau Parishad; (5) *Movement for entry into existing structure of power* – Tana Bhagat Movement; Independence Movement among tribes; Karticism; Bhumij Movement; Kherwar Movement; Bangam Movement; Sapha Hor Movement; and Hari Baba Movement; (6) *Movement for entry into existing structure of prestige without*

⁸ Joseph Marianus Kujur, "Human Misery and Tribal Development: Process of Globalization and the State's Response," in Sebasit L. Raj et al (eds.), *Eradicating Human Misery* (Jabalpur: XID Publications, 2008), p. 139.

visualizing any alternative – Tana Bhagat Movement; Hari Baba Movement; Chetriya Samaj Sudhar Sabha; Sapha Hor Movement; Coordination Committee for Jharkhand; Bagam Manjhi; and Sardari Movement (1889); (7) *Revolt against political encroachment* - Bamanghati Rebellion; and Bhuiyan Rebellion of Keonjhar, etc.⁹

Thus, it is obvious from the above typology that there are many factors responsible for each movement. For instance, the Birsa Rebellion emerged in protest against encroachment on tribal rights and against economic exploitation and unbearable tyranny. Similarly, Tana Bhagat Movement was against encroachment on traditional rights; economic exploitation and tyranny; cultural imposition and social domination; for entry into existing structure of power; for entry into existing structure of prestige without visualizing any alternative structure of power; etc. Jharkhand Movement and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha emerged primarily against cultural imposition, social domination and for generating alternative political power structure. The ‘Karticism’, i.e. the movement started by the late Kartik Oraon, was in protest against cultural imposition and social domination; and for entry into existing structure of power.

A Christian Contribution

In the northeast, the Christian presence contributed to the tribal movements in three ways: first, unification of the tribes across ethnic line, second, identity assertion, and third, education.¹⁰ Moreover, movements of ethnic groups like Naga Mother Association (NMA), Naga Baptist Christian Conference (NBCC), and Naga Ho Ho, etc. have a huge influence in some north-eastern states. While the NMA,

⁹ S. P. Sinha, p. 181, and R. C. Verma, *Tribes Through the Ages* (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2002), pp. 273-75.

¹⁰ Isaac Padinjarekattu, “Christianisation or Northeasternisation? A Challenge for the Church,” in Thomas Manjaly et al (eds.), *In the Service of Mission* (Shillong: Oriens Publications, Oriens Theological College, 2006), pp. 162-72.

NBCC, and Naga Ho Ho are engaged in the unification process, the NMA is also working very effectively against drug addiction and alcoholism. Majority of the members of these ethnic groups are Christians. Some of the Christian dominant prominent Adivasi organizations in Assam like the All Adivasi Students Association of Assam (AASAA) and the Assam Tea Tribes Students Association (ATTSA) are spearheading movement in Assam for the granting of Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to the Adivasis.¹¹

Tribal movements in other parts of India were also motivated by the protection of the tribes and promotion of their interests. For instance, the Koli disturbances in Maharashtra (1784-85), the Kova uprising in the East Godavari (1803), the Bhil revolt in Gujarat (1809-28), the revolt of Assam tribes (1828), the Naik revolt in Gujarat (1838), the Khampti rising in Assam (1839-43), the Bhil revolt in Gujarat (1846), the revolt of Chakra Bisoi in Orissa (1850), the Naikda's revolt in Gujarat (1858), the Juang revolt in Orissa (1861), and the Warli revolt in Maharashtra (1956-58), etc.¹² were motivated by protection of the tribal groups.

In central India, practically all the tribal movements were in protest against the colonial and neo-colonial hegemony of the exploitative and oppressive British and the Indian elites. The tribal struggle has primarily been in relation to land, forest and water, which are the main sources of livelihood for them. The tribal movements in central India, as mentioned above, were in protest against injustices and oppression either by the State or the local exploiters.

The Jharkhand Movement has been a struggle of self-assertion. The Christian presence in the longest struggle for the Jharkhand autonomous State has been quite vibrant and substantial.

¹¹ Sriram Ananthanarayanan, "India Together: Long disenfranchised and struggling for status" 2008.

¹² Verma, pp. 273-75.

The lay Christians among others who made a mark for the tribal cause in the pre and postcolonial period were Ignace Beck, Theodore Surin, Boniface Lakra, Paul Dayal, Jilophil Tigga, and Samuel Purty. Ignace Beck was one of the pioneers of the Jharkhand Movement. He held several responsible offices, such as Vice-Chairmanship of Ranchi Municipality (1941-43), President of Catholic Sabha of Chotanagpur for four years, General Secretary of Adivasi Mahasabha (1948-50), Secretary of Jharkhand Party (1950-62), Member of Bihar Legislature (1937-51), and Member of Parliament (1957-62). He played a significant role in organizing and steering the Jharkhand Party in its formative years. He is credited with uniting all the Adivasi Organisations and founding the Adivasi Mahasabha. Theodore Surin was the first President of Adivasi Mahasabha and Boniface Lakra was a Member of Constituent Assembly.¹³

The Chotanagpur Unnatti Samaj was formed in 1915 with the support of various sections of the Adivasis. However, while Gossener Evangelical Lutheran (GEL) Mission, the Anglican Church, and the non-Christian Adivasis supported it, the Catholic Church boycotted it. Any Catholic occupying an Executive post in the Unnatti Samaj (CUS) was ex-communicated. Initially CUS did well but slowly it had its decline due to undesirable activities, which resulted in many able and intelligent members leaving the organization. A few others were expelled from the Society. Hence, the Sabha became like a defunct body.¹⁴

Those who were out of the Chotanagpur Unnatti Samaj formed the Kisan Sabha to counter the Unnatti Samaj's activities.¹⁵ Though Catholics were prohibited to join the Unnatti Samaj, they

¹³ Mahali Livins Tirkey, "Life Sketch of Shri Ignace Beck, M. P." in Ignace Beck, *Political Awakening of tribals in Jharkhand* (New Delhi: Sinagi Dei Publications, 2002), pp. 1-3.

¹⁴ M. L. Tirkey, pp. 8-9.

¹⁵ M. L. Tirkey, p. 9.

could not be kept in a vacuum. Hence, they formed the Chotanagpur Catholic Sabha in 1932-33. The formation of Catholic Sabha (CS) was also necessitated because despite prohibition to join the Unnatti Samaj some Catholic had secretly enrolled themselves as members of the Society and even occupied the Executive posts. The Catholic Sabha's aims and objects were religious. However, it represented a large section of the Adivasis, and could tender advice to Government on matters relating to Adivasi interests. For example, CS could advice the Government on Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas in Jharkhand; submitted Memorandum on the States Reorganisation Commission demanding a separate Jharkhand state; and presented Memorandum to the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission, etc.¹⁶ The Munda Sabha, led by J. C. Hyward, remained confined to the land rights of the Mundas. Thus, when the Adivasi Sabha was born, there were four Adivasi Organisations in Jharkhand area functioning in socio-economic, socio-political and socio-religious front, in which Christians had some influence.

As per the 1935 Act of India there was a provision for six tribal reserved seats (for Bihar Provincial Assembly in Patna) in Jharkhand – one in each district of Santhal Parganas, Singhbhum, Ranchi, Manbhum, Hazaribagh and Palamau. In the election of 1937, Congress captured all the reserved seats. However, some of the adivasis contested the General seats as Independents and were declared successful. These were Devendra Nath Samanta (General - Singhbhum) as Independent, Boniface Lakra (General – Ranchi) as a nominee of the Catholic Sabha and Ignace Beck (Indian Christian seat) as a nominee of the Catholic Sabha. Thus, most of them were Christians.¹⁷ Ignace Beck tried to unite different adivasi organisations.

¹⁶ M. L. Tirkey, p. 10.

¹⁷ M. L. Tirkey, p. 13.

Adivasi Sabha was formed in 1938 in which Bandi Oraon, Theble Oraon and Ignace Beck played an important role. In 1930 in the Ranchi Municipal Election, the adivasis elected were Bandiram Oraon, Paul Dayal, Jilophil Tigga, Samuel Purty and Ignace Beck. They were five out of the total 24 Commissioners. Paul Dayal and Ignace Beck became the Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively, and Jilophil Tigga the President.¹⁸

Contact with friendly European missionaries and Christians injected new courage into the adivasis who had so far been dejected and felt helpless. They were no longer submissive to their lot but stood up against the oppression of the landlords and asserted their rights.¹⁹

The Sardari Larai, which was political agitation of the adivasis for the restoration of their ancient agrarian rights and for self-rule of their village communes as enjoyed by the Hos of Kolhan. The agitation started after the Bhuinhari settlement of 1869-80 and was at its height in 1889-90. Some Munda Lutheran teachers and catechists who came to be known as the “Sardars” or leaders, led the movement. They seemed to have been disillusioned by the promises of regaining the dispossessed tribal land. They broke away from the church.²⁰ However, their Christian credentials may be accredited with the leadership despite their alienation from the Church.

Birsa Munda, the tribal hero who took on the British, was christened Daud at the Burju Mission station and was later confirmed at Chaibasa Lutheran church on 7th May 1886. However, he slowly became estranged from the mission. Probably Sardar agitation was

¹⁸ M.L. Tirkey, pp. 29-30.

¹⁹ Agapit Tirkey, “Role of Christian Missionaries in the Jharkhand Movement,” in Beni A. Ekka et al (eds.), *The Catholic Church in Jharkhand* (Ranchi: Xavier Institute of Social Service, 2003), p. 150.

²⁰ A. Tirkey, p. 157.

a deciding factor in his involvement in the Munda movement. Birsa advised his followers to defy the authorities of the British. The Birsa Revolt demonstrated to the Government that the agrarian discontent had to be addressed. The passing of Chotanagpur Tenancy Act 1908 was one of the ways in which the Government tried to reduce the tension between the landlords and raiyats.

Contemporary Movements

In contemporary times, the major movements, such as Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save Narmada Movement), Jungle Bachao Andolan (Save Forest Movement), Netarhat and Koel-Karo Movements in Jharkhand, etc. are efforts to protect the interests of the tribals.

Even after the formation of the States of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, the concerns of the tribals at the regional, national and international fora have multiplied. Civil society groups have been outraged against development-induced displacement because of programmes such as mining, industries, hydroelectric projects, field firing range, big dams, national parks, etc. There have been movements supporting the Tribal self-rule to make the democratization of power a reality through the effective functioning of the Gram Sabha.²¹ In bringing about political consciousness among the tribals, missionaries played an important role. Together with modern education, the Christian missionaries were also instrumental in bringing about social justice in favour of the Adivasis that gave them a sense of victory, respect and dignity in the prevailing socio-economic and political situation at different points of their history in pre-independence and post independence period of India.²²

²¹ Savarimuthu, "People's Movement and Panchayat Raj in Jharkhand," in Beni A. Ekka et al (eds.), *The Catholic Church in Jharkhand* (Ranchi: Xavier Institute of Social Service, 2003), pp. 135-47.

²² A. Tirkey, p. 165.

Discontent in the Extremist Affected Areas

The Planning Commission set up an Expert Group on “Development Issues to deal with causes of Discontent Unrest and Extremism” in May 2006. It had 16 members. The terms of reference (TOR) included - identification of processes and causes contributing to continued tensions and alienation in the areas of unrest discontent, such as wide-spread displacement, forest issues, and insecure tenancies and other forms of exploitation like usury, land alienation, etc.(No. 0.1). Here we briefly spell out the findings from the *Report of an Expert Group*, Government of India, 2008.²³

The fact is that discontent and unrest continue to surface despite statutory enactments and institutional mechanisms for addressing various aspects of deprivation (No. 1.1). The main issue for a large section of population is ‘survival’.

It should be noted that 58 per cent of Indian labour force is still engaged in agriculture and allied occupations, landless is an important root of poverty (No. 1.2). The Indian state recognized the link between land and livelihood and launched land reform-measures, which included three components: first, abolition of intermediaries such as *zamindars*; second, security of tenancy; and third, a ceiling on agricultural holdings for distribution of the surplus to the landless (No. 1.2). However, the commitment to land reform remains to be fulfilled. The poor depend for their livelihood on Common Property Resources (CPRs), i.e., forests, pastures, water resource, etc. for their survival.

The Committee also mentions that inequalities on the basis of classes, castes, and divide between rural-urban, country-town, and privileged-underprivileged communities. This is potential for

²³ *Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas*. Report of an Expert Group to Planning Commission (New Delhi: Government of India, April 2008), p. v.

tremendous unrest. There seem to be two worlds in India – one of the rich and the other of the poor in areas of education, health, and transport, to name a few (No. 1.3).

The very institutions, which were expected to support and sustain every citizen of the country, have failed the hopes and aspirations of the people. Hence, this failure of the Indian democracy has made a large section of people angry and alienated from the polity. In response to such a situation, while some groups are trying to find a solution within the democratic framework, the Naxalites are trying to find the solution outside the system. Naxalism is one form of agitation against the State lethargy and passivity to the concerns of the common people.

The Committee came to a conclusion that “excepting occasional knee jerk responses there had not been any sustained administrative and developmental action, including to eliminate the causes and reduce the discontent of the masses” (No. 1.6).

The Naxalite movement is four decades old, which began with a single state West Bengal. The Movement is now active in more than 125 districts over 12 states. There is “social and economic background to the rise of the movement” (No. 1.1.3). These causes specific to the naxalite movement are part of an overall scenario of poverty, deprivation, oppression and neglect in large parts of the country (No. 1.1.3).

Plight of the Poor

The main support for the naxalite movement comes from Dalits and Adivasis. Dalits and Adivasis constitute one fourth of India’s population. There are more than 16 per cent Dalits and 8.2 per cent tribals in the country. Of the total Dalits 80 per cent live in rural areas. About 92 per cent of the tribals live in rural areas (No. 1.2.1). Thus, there is a very high level of rural poverty.

According to the report of the Expert Committee, high distress has been observed in Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Bihar. About 70 per cent of the Scheduled Castes (SCs) are poor in these states, while only 55 per cent of the SC population of the country is in these states. About 63 per cent of the Scheduled Tribes (STs) are poor in these states whereas only 49 per cent of ST population inhabits these states (1.2.1). They suffer from much oppression, injustice, and discrimination at all levels - social, legal and political.

If one were to assess the impoverishment of the adivasis based on human development indicators, one will be shocked. As per the study of the *Ethnic Group Inequality, 2000*, the poverty of the STs in rural areas was 46 per cent and in urban areas 35 per cent. While percentage of the poverty of the ST agricultural labourers in rural areas was 61, it was 64 for the casual labourers in urban areas.

There was rampant mortality and under nutrition in tribal areas. Thus while the ST infant mortality (per 1000 live births) in 2005/06 was 44, the under five mortality in 2005/06 was 96.

Literacy Rate of the Scheduled Tribes as per the 2001 census in rural areas was 45 per cent, whereas it was 69 per cent in the urban areas.

One of the main reasons of the tribal disillusionment was atrocities on and discrimination of tribals. Within a period of 1992-2001, the number of registered cases of discrimination against STs was 876. In the same period, the number of registered cases of atrocity on STs was 7,648. In addition, total cases of discrimination and atrocity in 1992-2001 were 47,225. The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) indicates that the figures of atrocities against tribal communities in the central tribal belt of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh have shown a significant increase between 2001

and 2004, from 2021 in 2001 to 3012 on 2002 and 2553 in 2003, reaching 2343 in 2004 (No. 1.3.10). It does not mean that there were no other cases of discrimination and atrocities against STs. These were only the registered cases. Many more such cases may have gone unnoticed, thereby contributing to the dissatisfaction of the tribals (No. 1.3.1).

The percentage of the STs below poverty line (BPL) in rural areas was 47.3, whereas it was 33.3 in the urban areas (No. 1.3.2). There were limited employment opportunities for STs. They were politically marginalised as well. They had no participation in the decision making process in matters of development as well.

Certain articles of the Constitution are exclusively devoted to the cause of tribal people, including 244, 244A, 275(1), 342, 338(A) and 339 (No. 1.4.1). In 1970's the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) was introduced and the tribal majority areas were brought in under 5th Scheduled. There were 73rd and 74th amendments of the Constitution and the Provision of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, called PESA, was promulgated, initiating a new model of self-government and people's participation (No. 1.4.2).

In spite of numerous programmes and schemes of development and activities initiated in the tribal areas, the majority of STs still live in deprivation and poverty. They have remained backward in all aspects of human development including education, health, and nutrition. Apart from socio-economic deprivation, there has been a steady erosion of traditional rights and their command over resources (No. 1.4.2)

Unrest and discontent are not new to tribal areas. It is not just a post-independence phenomenon either (No. 1.4.3). On the whole, the gap between the tribal communalities and the State has become sharper, giving rise to conflict between the two in many areas (No. 1.4.4).

There is a deep sense of exclusion, alienation and marginalisation almost all over the tribal areas including Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Assam, Jharkhand, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. These feelings of disillusionment, frustration, and anger have been manifesting themselves in different forms (No. 1.4.4). In the words of the Expert Committee,

Apart from poverty and deprivation in general, the causes of the tribal movements are many. The most important among them are absence of self governance, forest policy, excise policy, land related issues, multi-faceted forms of exploitation, cultural humiliation and political marginalisation. Land alienation, forced evictions from land, and displacement also added to unrest. Failure to implement protective regulations in scheduled areas, absence of credit mechanism leading to dependence on moneylenders and consequent loss of land and often even violence by the state functionaries added to the problem (No. 1.4.5).²⁴

Land is the key to the tribal uprisings – past and present. According to the Forest Survey of India Report 2003, nearly 60 per cent of the forest covers of the country and 63 per cent of the dense forests were in 187 tribal districts, i.e. districts covered by the Fifth and Sixth Schedules to the Constitution, giving special rights to the tribals (No. 1.4.6). It implies that any State policies legitimising the depletion of forests and alienation of land adversely affects the tribals. Land Acquisition Acts, Forest Laws and Special Economic Zone Act, etc. all have contributed largely in reducing the agriculturist tribals to sheer daily wage labourers and rickshaw pullers.

²⁴ *Report of an Expert Group*, p. 9.

People's Resistance to the So-Called Development Projects

According to a recent study of 'Development-induced Displacement' jointly carried out by Action Aid India, Indian Social Institute and LAYA, in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Orissa, one of the first reactions of the displaced people was to organise protests against the development projects and their instigators. The protests took the form of either participation in people's movements or legal intervention. Thus, the State has witnessed heightened resistance of the people against its indiscriminate acts of land acquisition and displacement. The period between 1996 and 2007 witnessed systematic, organised, and determined protests questioning the very legitimacy of the principle of eminent domain on the basis of which the State acquires property through its legal arm, i. e. the Land Acquisition Act, 1894.²⁵

The resistance movements in the above-mentioned states are quite vibrant. In Andhra Pradesh, there is resistance against Polavaram Dam, which is expected to acquire 24840 areas with an investment of Rs. 8000 crores, affecting about 365 settlements. The struggle against the proposed Bauxite mining in Vishakhapatnam district is also going on. This project is suspected to displace 247 villages, 9,312 families comprising 44,000 tribals.²⁶

In Jharkhand people's movement against Koel-Karo dam project and Netarhat Pilot Project Field Firing Range have been successful until now. People's movement against Jindal in Ghatsila Sub-division covering Ghatsila, Musabani and Potka Block have been going on. Bhumi Raksha Sangharsh Samiti in Khairboni in Jamshedpur Block and Asanboni of Potka Block initially took initiative to strengthen the movement.

²⁵ Action Aid, Indian Social Institute, LAYA, *Resource Rich, Tribal Poor: Displacing People, Destroying Identity in India's Heartland* (New Delhi: Action Aid India, 2008), p. 57.

²⁶ Action Aid, pp. 58-59.

In Orissa, the displacement situation of tribals is very bad. Campaigns and social action against displacement in Orissa are going on in a big way. People's Organisations like Sachetan Nagarika Manch, Niyakgiri Surakhya Samiti in Lanjigarh, Keonjhar Surakhya Parishad in Keonjhar, etc. have brought positive results by influencing the report of Central Empowered Committee (CEC) in favour of the affected people. The SHAKTI network in Sundargarh, is an initiative of 12 NGOs/CBOs to campaign for right to work and equal and minimum wages. Bishapan Birodhi Manch is a tribal movement in Kalinga Nagar Industrial area of Jajpur district. Machkund Displaced Committee and RITES are accredited with several achievements against the displaced due to dams and hydroelectric projects.²⁷ The movements against Tata Steel at Kaling Nagar and Vedanta Alumina Limited in Orissa, have shown people's unity against 'development terrorism'.

Conclusion

There is a special place of the intellectual class in bringing in consciousness and giving orientation and direction to the movements whether tribal or non-tribal. However, intellectual class in the sense of the modern times, is absent in the tribal society. Despite the absence of the intellectual class in tribal society, movements for survival and assertion of their rights and dignity have taken place, both in the colonial and post-colonial periods.

What emerges in the paper is the fact that unrest and discontent are not new to tribal areas. It is not just a post-independence phenomenon either. Further, there are multiple reasons for movements, although one or more causes may be more dominant than the others. However, invariably all the tribal movements have been related with social, cultural, economic, historical, geographical, religious and political concerns.

²⁷ Action Aid, p. 60-61.

With the British introducing the private ownership of land, the system of land settlement and records of rights in land, were also initiated. A new system of taxation, including rent, excise and other levies in cash, was imposed²⁸ The introduction of Court of Justice, of Commissionership,²⁹ of the language used in the courts, and of *begari* (forced labour) system, in the British regime, added fuel to the fire.

The drastic changes in tribal life and polity included landlordism, *zamindari* police, private ownership of land instead of communal ownership, and imposition of rent even on the *khuntkatidars*³⁰ or *bhuinhars*³¹. Monetary economy took the place of the barter system. *Parha*, a confederation of villages, and the *Panchayat* systems were undermined by the court system. All these changes had tremendous bearing on the culture and identity of the tribals. In the midst of these transformations there was confusion in the minds of the tribals. Hence, the tribals rose in revolt against the measures introduced by the British. All the major tribal uprisings were against the exploitation and oppression by both the *Zamindars* and the British. The Jharkhand Movement was waged under similar grievances.³² These struggles for freedom were born out of frustration and anger.

²⁸ Singh, 1983, p.9.

²⁹ In 1854, by Act XX of 1854, the districts of the Agency were formed into a Non-Regulation Division under a Commissioner. This office was given to the Agent whose Principal Assistants came to be known as Principal Commissioners and the other assistants as Senior or Junior Assistant Commissioners (See Beni A. Ekka et al (eds.), *Catholic Church in Jharkhand* (Ranchi: Xavier Institute of Social Service, 2003), p. 90).

³⁰ In the Munda system, *khuntkatidars* were the founding family of the village, clearing the forest and making the land cultivable and liveable. They never paid rent to the Raja but the Moghuls and the British forced them to pay rent upsetting thereby a fundamental social institution.

³¹ 'Bhuinhari' system among the *Oraons* was similar to that of the 'Khuntkati' among the Munda.

³² M. L. Tirkey, pp. 46-70.

In the post-colonial period, despite numerous schemes of development initiated in the tribal areas, the majority of STs still live in abject poverty. They have remained backward in all aspects of human development, such as education, health, and nutrition. There has also been a steady erosion of traditional rights and their command over resources. There is a deep sense of exclusion, alienation and marginalisation almost all over the tribal areas. These feelings of disillusionment, frustration, and anger have been manifesting themselves in different forms.

The confusion, frustration and anger at the rampant onslaught on their existence and identity pushed the tribes to look for alternatives. One of the alternatives that they had was to take to arms and fight the 'aliens' to protect their culture, identity, resources and territory. Thus, the causes of tribal discontent and resistance in the past and the present are the same. The only difference is in the form of the expression of their frustrations and anger.

POLITICAL ARTICULATION AND PARTICIPATION OF TRIBES IN INDIA

Victor Ferrao

Groups and communities identified as tribes during the British rule had been at different levels of polity formation prior to the coming of the British. It was confined to the level of village council for a large number of tribes. In some of them it was coupled with the institution of chieftainship, which was broadly of two types. Either the chiefs could not go against the will of the village councils or they were all-powerful and autocratic. In some cases villages formed a confederation under a chief, known as Raja or similar such names. In a few cases tribes had even evolved into principality/ kingdom and had a form of centralized authority structure viz. state.

The British brought tribes under one political structure otherwise so variegated. Earlier they had done the same with the dominant and larger Indian population. Following this, a process of integration of tribes with the larger social system was set into motion. Tribes/ tribal areas began to be integrated not only with uniform civil law and administration of the British rule, but also through land, credit and labour market. These had devastating consequences on tribes. Tribal people's responses to these changes were varied, especially the political sphere. Description of such responses in colonial ethnography as revolt, rebellion, and insurrection was a pointer in this direction. It is within this backdrop that the British's

initiative for somewhat different system of administration for tribes from those of the larger Indian population to be situated. Such an arrangement did provide some space for tribes, limited though it may be, to be governed by its own traditions and customary practices. To that extent tribes had some autonomy even under the colonial administration. It is a different matter that such autonomy had much to do with political expediency than with genuine interest of protecting the tribal people.

Even under the British rule, the general Indian population did succeed to carve out a limited power towards self-rule and governance in the form of some control over the colonial state. Tribes remained outside of such decision-making bodies and processes largely due to the policy of the colonial government. It was a considered view of the colonial government that tribes were not politically ready to represent themselves and their interests. Hence rather than facilitating their integration into the state power, they were kept outside of it. Laws, rules and regulation formulated by the state for the general population were not applicable to tribes. In addition regulations and special administrative measures were worked out, which aimed at preventing tribes from social interaction with non-tribes. It is in this sense that the British followed a policy of isolation towards tribes. However, the process of integration that was already set into motion went on unabated with varying pace, scale and intensity in the tribal areas. On the one hand, tribes then went on losing control over their lands, forests and other resources. On the other hand, because of social isolation, they remained socially, educationally and economically backward. It is in this context that the special rights enshrined in the constitution for tribes are to be understood.

Constitutional Provisions

The constitution contains many provisions, which are oriented for the benefit and welfare of the tribal people. The provisions so

made may be broadly categorized into two headings: one, rights granted to them as citizens of free India; and the second, rights conferred on them as members of a distinct community.

The post-Independence India conferred right of citizenship to its people. Tribes as citizens of free India were extended the same rights as those given to others. Citizenship is an urge for fuller measure of equality. It is a kind of equality, which each member is entitled to as a full-fledged member of a society. Citizenship is generally composed of three elements. These are civil, political and social. Civil consists of rights necessary for individual freedom and may concern speech, faith, thought, justice, property etc. Right to justice is considered primarily in terms of equality with others. Political rights mean rights to participate in the exercise of political power as members vested with political authority or as electors. Social right means right to modicum of economic welfare and security, and share to the full in the social heritage and life of a civilized being.¹ The civil and political rights have been enshrined within the purview of the fundamental rights of the Indian constitution.

Besides conferment of rights to tribes as any other citizen, the post-independence India also extended certain special rights to tribes. These rights were conferred on them in their capacities as members of a distinct community. Such rights among other things, include provisions for statutory recognition (article 342); proportionate representation in the parliament and state legislatures (articles 330 and 332); restriction on the right of the ordinary citizen to move freely or settle in particular areas or acquire property in them (article 19/5); conservation of one's language, dialects and culture (article 29). The constitution has also clauses that enables state to make provision for reservation in general (article 14/4) and in particular in jobs and appointments in favour of tribal communities

¹ T. H. Marshall, *Class, Citizenship and Social Development*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

(article 16/4). There is also the Directive Principle of the constitution that requires that the educational and economic interest of the weaker section of the society including tribes is especially promoted (article 46). Besides these, there are provisions in the constitution that empower the state to bring the area inhabited by the tribes under special administration. In administrative parlance such areas are known as the 5th or 6th schedule areas (articles 244 and 244/a). The provisions laid in the constitutions thus range from creation of the scheduled and tribal areas to providing representation in the parliament and state legislature to special privilege in the form of reservation of a certain percentage of posts in the government services and seats in educational institutions. In short, the constitution aimed at safeguarding, protecting and promoting the interest of the tribal people.

Participation in Larger Political Processes

As observed earlier, though tribes were brought under the one single political authority, they had little role in regulating and determining such political authority. It is only after independence that tribes were given space to participate in the state structure of the Indian society to which they were already drawn during the colonial rule. Until then the integration with the state and the larger society was more in the form of revenue and land, labour, capital and credit market. The political, social and cultural integration was conspicuous by its absence. Hence, the general thrust of orientation in respect of the tribal population in the post-independence era has been one of integration into the larger social structure.

Of all the provisions in the Indian constitution for protecting and promoting the interests of the tribal population in India, the provision of reservation has been the most debated. Reservation has been provided for in three domains- politics (parliament and state legislatures), employment (government and semi-government sector) and education, especially in the institutions of higher education

and learning. A lot has been written on the issue of reservation in educational institutions and employment. These concern more with the issues of the merits and demerits of the reservation policy, implications for building casteless and classless society and aspects of implementation in different segments of the state and state sponsored institutions. Paradoxically enough, there are hardly any studies that examine the consequence of reservation practice in India. The same is the case in regard to reservation in the political domain.

The constitutional provision of reservation for the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes in the parliament and state legislatures was made initially for a period of 10 years. Such a time frame has not been there in case of reservation in employment and educational institutions though such a misconception prevails. All the same the provision of reservation in politics has been extended after the expiry of each ten year period. It was last extended in October 1999.

Reservation and Its Significance

It is worth while then to make an assessment of gains and losses accruing to tribes from such a provision. This assessment could be made from two angles- one, in terms of tribals' relation or position vis a vis the Indian state and the larger Indian society, and second, in terms of gain and loss accruing to their own society.

Had there been no policy of reservation for tribes would they have been able to represent themselves? It is unlikely, at least in the earlier phase of the electoral politics. After all, tribes' participation in the freedom struggle movement through political action if not rare was marginal. Neither would there have been a serious and systematic effort by political parties to recruit tribes in its cadre if there was no provision of reservation. The fact that most of the political parties were constrained to build cadre from within tribes arose from the constitutional compulsion of reservation. Even after cadre has been built from within, tribes have on the whole been deprived of any

position of importance in the political parties. Such situation cuts across political parties of all persuasions. Interestingly, this has not been the case only with the political parties but also organizations like trade unions. As an illustration, the tea garden labour force in West Bengal and Assam is comprised primarily of tribes. It is a different matter that the scheduled tribe status has not been accorded to those in Assam. Now there are a large number of trade unions affiliated to different political parties, which have been working among the tea garden population. Yet the leadership of the trade unions even at block level has always been in the hands of people from outside the tribe and outside of the labour force. It is only in very recent years that one can see some shift in the social composition of the trade union leadership in tea gardens of Assam and Bengal. But this shift again has only been at the local level. The scene is similar if not identical in case of political parties. If there were no obligation of political reservation, tribes would have been represented largely by non-tribes rather than their own people.

This is not to argue that only tribes can represent the interests of the tribes. Non-tribes can do so as effectively because of their better articulation of the issues, networking, mobilizing and capacity to maneuver. More often than not, however, there has been a wedge (social, political, economic, and cultural) between tribes and non-tribes and the special interests of tribes have often been sacrificed. At least that is the history of reservation of tribes for last fifty years. No national tribal political party has emerged in the last fifty years.

If this is the scene after fifty years of reservation, one could have well imagined what would have happened if there were no reservation. Well, there were two possibilities. There may have been intense and widespread articulation and demands for secession from India especially among tribes with higher level of development and sizeable population from northeast India. The fact that the Indian State has been able to contain such demand by tribes from the region has to do in part with the policy of reservation in politics as

well as other domains. At the same time, it is worth noting that despite the provision of reservation, the integration of tribes from the region to the “so-called” mainstream has been extremely weak and tenuous. Elsewhere in the country, despite tightening geographical, political and economic integration, the emotional integration of tribes with the rest of the population has been far from smooth. This has been so largely due to economic and political subjugation of tribes by non-tribes. The emotional alienation especially of the emerging middle class from within the tribal society has been partly alleviated by measures of reservation.

The Indian state has made a big gain in another sense. In extending political reservation, it also acquired legitimacy of its rule over the tribes especially over their land and resources. In the absence of it, the whole control of the state over the resources of tribes would have been more like an illegitimate plunder. Industries, dams, hydraulic projects have been set up in tribal areas. Minerals and forests therein have been exploited. Yet the benefits arising from it has not gone to tribes. Rather these have led to their displacement. In fact, a larger proportion of tribal people live below the poverty line compared to other social segments in India. In fact, the tribal people living below the poverty line in rural areas in 1993-94 was as high as at 51.9 per cent as against 37.3 per cent of the general population. As for the people affected by the displacement, tribal population has a share up to 40 per cent in it as per the planning commission figure.² Tribes then have lost much more than they have gained from the reservation extended to them.

The extension of reservation provided tribes space for share and participation in the state decision making process. However, one wonders if their participation at the parliament and state legislatures has not been more than merely formal and symbolic. Have they made any contribution in terms of posing of the questions

² Planning Commission 2000.

and participation in the debates on the issues or specific enactments? In the event they did, has their contribution been effective and substantive? The evidence suggests the overall impact has been negative.

One can also ask to what extent have tribal legislators been able to effectively address and articulate the interest and problems of the tribes themselves? Have they been able to initiate any bill towards welfare and protection of the tribes and promotion of their interests and pursue it? Have they been able to stall any bill or project that had the potential of adversely affecting the tribes? If at all such projects (Narmada, Netarhat Field and Firing, Koel Karo project etc.) have been stalled, it is more on account of mobilization of the people than the political initiative of the legislators.

This has been so due to various factors. The major factor has been the demographic size. The share of 7.5 per cent of seats in parliament or state legislatures is hardly of significance where decisions are made on the basis of the majority vote. Even on issues that have adversely affected the tribes such as displacement and land alienation, tribes could have hardly altered the situation because of their small demographic space in the parliament and legislatures. Tribes have to invariably sacrifice their welfare and interests to the interests of national development or general good of the people. There has been still another factor. That is, the tribal legislators have not been able to effectively articulate the interests of the tribes. This has been so due to factors emerging from the morphology of the tribal society in India. The category called tribes comprise of more than 400 distinct communities. They inhabit different parts of the country, possess different physical features, speak different languages and are situated at different levels of development. Hence, there is a problem of unity and cohesiveness among them and therefore even among their political representatives. In the absence of lack of unity, they are not able to act as a cohesive force in protecting and promoting the interests of the tribal communities. Besides, electoral

politics invariably takes place along political party lines. The fragmentation of tribes along the lines of party loyalty and ideology has often been counterproductive to the collective interests of the tribes.

Have there been then no benefits or gains arising from the policy of reservation in politics? Much progress has indeed been made but not in the direction of protecting tribes' interest in land and forest and other resources. For the tribes the gains from the political reservation have been in another direction. It is in the direction of expanding the catchments of the tribal leadership. The electoral politics have thrown up new, young and modern leaders in place of the old and traditional leadership. There has also been a circulation of leadership in the form of parliamentarians and state legislators. The individual legislators have been able to make same gains both in terms of prestige and status on the one hand and material benefits on the other. The material gains made have been, however, of a very limited nature. Their role as parliamentarians and legislators has expanded their knowledge and understanding of how the larger political system and politics work. They have been able to extend some benefits to members of their community/constituency in terms of help extended to the people and in initiating some small and minor development projects or infrastructure facilities in the constituency. Of course, their support has generally not moved beyond the ethnic or religious community of which they have been members. It is worth noting that there is hardly any constituency which is inhabited by a single community. Often tribal elective representatives forget this and tend to focus on their own community. On the whole, then the fruit of reservation to tribes in parliament or state legislators has been marginal as far as their material benefit is concerned. The reservation had little consequence in providing space for protection and welfare of the tribes. What would have been perhaps of greater consequence is the extension of such facilities as the district council, like in the 6th schedule areas. What would have been even more

significant is the kind of provision that has been granted now almost after four decades under the 73rd amendment or the Panchayat Act 1996.

While reservation served one kind of interest for the state, it served quite another for tribes. The intended consequence of the reservation as pointed out earlier was integration of tribes and not their political empowerment. But this is precisely what happened to the tribes. It is indeed very doubtful if tribes in India excepting those from the northeast would have been able to participate in the decision-making bodies of the state and get empowered if there was no reservation. The reservation in politics, though a positive development was not without limitations. To begin with, discrimination and domination was endemic within organizations in which politics worked. This sharpened the tribal consciousness and aspiration for greater participation and share in the political decision-making process. The emergence of regional political parties like APHLC (All People Hill Leaders Conference) in what was erstwhile Assam; the Jharkhand Party in adjoining districts of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and erstwhile Bihar; Gondwana Raj party in Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, have to be seen within this context. With the formation of these political parties, there has been increase in political consciousness and demand for greater share not only of political power and autonomy but also guarantees in employment, development benefits and even control over land, forest and other resources. Indeed the Panchayat Act, 1996 emerged out of this process of greater awakening among tribes with respect to protection of their land, forest, water and other resources.

Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes in Comparison

In keeping with the size of the population, 15% and 7.5% of seats in parliament are reserved for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes respectively. In state legislatures the percentage of seats earmarked for them varies corresponding to size of their

respective populations in the concerned state. Now the question is how the two categories have fared at the regional and national levels? In general services or education the relative position of the two categories can be discerned from the statistical figures. After all, the statistical figures are to a greater or lesser extent related with performance. In politics one cannot judge the relative positions of the two categories in terms of their share in the parliament or state legislatures for two reasons. First of all, the share of each category is invariably related to the size of its population. Secondly, and more importantly, there exists in political sphere congruence between what is stipulated and what is actually held. In 1999, the share of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in the parliament was 79 (14.5%) and 41 (7.5%) respectively. The corresponding figure for the legislative assemblies was 562 (13.8%) for the scheduled castes and 539 (13.2%) for the scheduled tribes.³ The higher share of the scheduled tribes in the Assemblies is due to the creation of tribal states, mainly in the northeastern region. The performance of the two categories in politics has to be therefore examined elsewhere. Over the question of what should be those dimensions, there is surely going to be a difference of opinion among scholars. All the same criteria such as political appointment within the parliament/legislatures or in the government such as council of ministers or membership in the standing committees, even an office within political parties may be considered of critical significance in this context. And yet the share in the two categories in respect of the above may greatly depend on the nature of their participation and mobilization. The two together may therefore be taken as the domain where relative performance of the two categories can be assessed. There are, however, no data at our disposal on the subjects of service and education. All the same evidence, sketchy though they may be, are not altogether absent. In democratic politics, the numerical strength that the groups or categories enjoy is of strategic importance both at the national and regional levels. The numerical strength that the scheduled castes enjoy over the scheduled tribes gives them an advantage over the latter in national politics. It is true that the

scheduled castes and scheduled tribes do not constitute a homogeneous and cohesive social group both in the parliament and in the state legislatures. They are fragmented along lines of political party and linguistic/regional considerations. Yet any government cannot ignore the issue of adequate representation of groups described as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. In all these, the scheduled castes have had an edge over the scheduled tribes. It may not be out of place to point out here that the scheduled castes have invariably had better representation in the government in the form of holding ministerial portfolio or other positions like state governors through the years. Further, whereas the scheduled castes can boast of having produced leaders and administrators such as B.R. Ambedkar and Jagjivan Ram in the past and K.R. Narayanan, Buta Singh, Paswan, Kanshi Ram and Mayawati in more recent times, it is hard to find any from the scheduled tribe category. P.A. Sangma may be considered one such leader, though he does not even have a following within a region, let alone among tribes across regions. In short, tribes have not been able to carve out a space akin to that of the scheduled castes in national politics. Even at the regional level, where tribes have been sharing power with the scheduled castes, their presence is hardly noticeable.

Struggles/Movements as Modes of Political Participation

The most prominent mode in which tribals have acted politically is in the form of resistance and struggle. Indeed the earliest form of political engagement of the tribals in India has been in the form of resistance and struggles, which one can trace to the colonial period. These struggles had primarily to do with the issue of overthrowing the colonial rule and administration. Hence, it would not be altogether out of place to describe these early struggles as a kind of struggle for autonomy. Of course, autonomy as it came to be articulated in the post-independence era has been different in a very substantive sense from the ones under the British rule. And yet there has been much overlapping at least in spirit if not in letter. That this

has been so can be inferred from the way struggles of the time had come to be described in colonial administration. Terms broadly used to describe the struggles were revolt, resistance, insurrection etc. Even the scholarly historical works have adhered to such description of the struggles. An interesting aspect of the tribal struggles of the period is that in the post-colonial official history these have come to be seen as a part of the freedom struggle movement. Such characterization of the struggles tends to equate the struggles of the tribes with the struggle of the people at large against the British rule. In the process it is often forgotten that tribal struggle was not only against the British but also against the non-tribal people engaged in struggle against the British. The non-tribals were invariably seen as the ones who took advantage of the administrative and other structures created by the British and squeezed out tribes from their lands and other resources by fraud, coercion, debt and bondage. In fact, tribal struggle was more intensely fought against the non-tribes, as they were seen as the immediate exploiters and oppressors of the tribes.

After their resistance had failed and the British consolidated their rule and administration, tribals did not pose a challenge to the system as they had done earlier. This did not mean there was no political articulation. Rather the articulation moved to issues connected to their livelihood. More commonly, issues to which the resistance was directed were revenue, rent, tax, forced labour etc. Even social and cultural movements of the times were not devoid of political overtones in terms of resistance to payment of tax or revenue or other dues. With the momentum of freedom struggle movement since 1920s, agrarian and forest issues came to the forefront of the movement among the tribes but with a difference. This time, the movements were parts of the larger mobilization process of civil disobedience or non-cooperation movements launched by the Congress or other nationalist leadership. Agrarian movement not only took the form of non-cooperation and civil disobedience against

the colonial state but also of struggle and resistance against the exploitation and oppression of the landlords. Primarily the left wing political parties mobilized both in the colonial and post-colonial period. Such struggles were aimed broadly at security of tenure, reduction of rent, increased share of produce etc. In these struggles tribals aligned with other exploited classes of the agrarian society. The struggles were directed at the colonial rule as well as the exploited section of the Indian society.⁴

Autonomy as envisaged was one which provided tribes freedom from oppression of the state and exploitation of the landlords. Indeed the idea of autonomy from state oppression and zamindari exploitation was so strong that other form of domination exercised by non-tribals over tribals was glossed over. That explains as to why these movements never articulated the demand for greater autonomy for tribals. Even in the post-independence period, this remained unarticulated for a long period of time. The problem with these movements was that they treated other movements primarily as land and forest based movements. Hence tribes were treated as not more than peasants or forest dwellers. Hence, the concerns came to be exclusively addressed in terms of economic livelihood. Where such movements did take place they have invariably been led by outside agencies such as political parties, activists, social workers etc. Where tribals on their own have taken to such issues, they have invariably been part of the wider issues such as demand for political autonomy or general control over land, forest and other resources by the tribals. This has been the case especially with the movements in post-independence India. The former has taken the form of demand for separate state for tribes in different parts (especially North-East India) either within the union of India or cessation from it, the latter has taken the form of struggle against the displacement brought about by the large industrial, mineral and infrastructure projects.

³ Planning Commission 2000.

⁴ Gopal K. Iyer & R.N. Mahajan, *Agrarian Movements in Tribal Bihar*. Dhanbad: (Name of the publisher), 1986.

COMMUNITY-CENTREDNESS OF THE TRIBALS

A Potential Model for a Direct Form of Democracy

Vincent Aind

1. Introduction: Abraham Lincoln has given one of the most common and simplest definitions of ‘democracy’. Perhaps the visionary President was honest about it and he meant what he said when he defined it as “A Government of the people, by the people and for the people.” We in India belong to one of the largest democracies in the world today. After six decades of practising the democratic form of government, can we truly say that ours is such an ideal form of democracy? As far as the process (i.e. election and representation) is concerned, our governments are democratically formed. But most of them do not fulfill what the people want or need. “India’s democracy has been a violent one. Every conceivable kind of conflict has taken place.”¹ Discussing a number of issues one wonders if the type of democracy we have is effective. Democracy sometimes turns out to be *democracy*. There are moments of disappointments and despair. Some people are looking for alternative forms of democracy.

Our main objective in this paper, however, is not to discuss good or bad democracy. We are here to study ‘Tribal Reality in

¹ John Desrochers, *Towards a New India* (Bangalore: Centre for Social Action, 1995), p. 83.

India' from a philosophical perspective. Among numerous tribals in India, the Tribals of Chotanagpur (the Adivasis) have had a democratic form of governance among them. In fact, many a time it has been claimed that these Tribals (of Chotanagpur) have had one of the best forms of democracy!²

Now, democracy or democratic form of government is originally a Western concept and it is normally understood as a product of western 'civilization'. So much so even India as a whole has not yet fully become democratic, that too after six decades of trial and error. She is still on the way to become democratic. How much similarity with the Western concept of democracy would one find in the (Chotanagpur) Tribals' social organization? And is not a Tribal society, to many a mind's understanding, a 'primitive' society? What can a 'primitive' society offer to a 'civilized culture'? Against these odd questions and presumptions we intend to say that the (Chotanagpur) Tribal society has some seminal signs of democracy.

This audacity is backed by a postmodern philosophy that encourages a celebration of difference, a celebration of variety. It destroys the myth of the higher and lower, or the centre and the periphery. Derrida's deconstruction theory does away with the binary opposites. According to the postmodern philosophical conception, "today no culture can claim to be universal and perennial, posing itself as model and superior to all the rest."³ Encouraged by this philosophical stand we can say that the (Chotanagpur) Tribals' society or culture is neither 'primitive' nor 'inferior'. It is only *different*. This society or culture too has something worthwhile to offer to the Indian polity. This offering does not imply a *giver* and a passive *receiver*. Rather this offering is mutual and a kind of *giving*

² Vincent Aind, "Tribal Culture: A Special Focus on the Chotanagpur Tribals," *Culture as Gift and Task: Philosophical Reflections in the Indian Context*, Ed. Keith D'Souza, ACPI Publications (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2008), pp.241 & 245.

³ Johnson Puthenpurackal, "Cultural Rootedness and Cultural Openness," *op. cit.*, ACPI Publications, pp. 66-67.

which is more personal than material, more participatory than doling out or imposing. In other words, our contention is that, the (Chotanagpur) Tribals can contribute mightily towards the fuller democratization of Indian polity, because they come from a rich background of a really *democratic* form of governance. They can come forward in active politics and help the larger polity of India inculcate and develop a refined form of democracy. To the otherwise individualistic tendency in Indian politics they could gradually introduce their communitarian, community-based and egalitarian characteristics. They could take advantage of the *Panchayat Raj System* which the Indian Govt. has introduced at the village level of administration. They could convert it into the pattern they are familiar with. And in turn, they (the Tribals) themselves would enrich their own culture and identity. This is the true meaning of “integration” and “enculturation”. Many tribal authors and opinion-makers are opposed to the policy of integration adopted by the Indian Govt. Therefore, it is an opportune moment to clarify what we mean by “integration”. The notion needs some clarification. J. Puthenpurackal clarifies it well. He says:

Literally it means ‘making something complete’, which implies that it was incomplete or imperfect. In our use of this term we keep to this meaning of ‘making complete’ not in the quantitative, but in the qualitative sense. So it has primarily the meaning of ‘being enriched’, ‘being ameliorated,’ etc. Integration of a culture with another culture does not mean that one takes parts from the other, and inserts them into one’s own. It means rather to be touched, to be coloured, to be influenced, to be inspired, by the other without losing one’s identity. That is why integration (openness) has to be based on rootedness. In one word, integration has to be understood in the sense of ‘complementarity.’⁴

The same author again explains the concept of ‘enculturation’ pretty well. Taking cue from its etymological meaning the author tells us

⁴ Puthenpurackal, *op.cit.*, p. 71.

that “Culture ... implies the *cultivation* of the mind. ... In this sense of ‘cultivation’, enculturation does not have the rigid active meaning of *manipulation*, but a passive-active meaning of *letting* or *enabling* a person be/become in its essence.”⁵ In other words, we are envisaging a kind of give and take between the (Chotanagpur) Tribal culture or society and the rest of the Indian polity in this passive-active meaning. For this integration and enculturation to take place in the sense just explained, the Tribals need to be rooted first, in their own culture.

Enculturation can have its desired depth and meaning only insofar as each cultural group is well rooted in its own culture. ‘Going back to one’s own’ (*chez soi*) or ‘coming back to one’s own home’ (*Heimkehr*) is a philosophically pregnant notion in the contemporary thought. ... ‘To be rooted in *one’s own* – one’s own culture, one’s own ‘how’ of social existence ... has to be taken not in the sense of mere intellectual knowledge, but in the sense of ‘to be at home with’, ‘to be inspired by’, ‘to be nurtured by’, etc. Thus one’s own culture has to become part of one’s own *being*, rather than one’s own *knowing*. When each cultural group is imbued with the ‘spirit and message’ of its culture, it will be able to give *depth* and *width* to it.”⁶

With this ‘integration’ and ‘enculturation’ as explained above between the Tribal society of Chotanagpur and the rest of Indian polity we hope to grow towards a direct form of democracy, where the people have a strong feeling of “We the People”, and in which the people of a community decide together, on an inclusive basis, the major policies and programs of their community. As in the case of Chotanagpur tribals, of the Mundas in particular (according to A. Van Exem, S.J.), “the tribe has precedence over the individual, and in the tribe all are equals.”⁷ The sense of belonging to the tribe

⁵ Puthenpurackal, *op.cit.*, p. 62.

⁶ Puthenpurackal, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.

⁷ A. Van Exem, SJ, *The Religious System of the Munda Tribe* (Ranchi: St. Augustin, Haya Voelker Und Kulturen, 1982), p. 256.

is rather strong and the socio-economic and religious customs in the tribe are meant to foster the tribal values and strength. Hence, there is a potential model for a “We the People” type of democracy in the Tribal society of Chotanagpur. But we must take the warning of Van Exem seriously when he reminds us: “Tribal culture should be studied in its own right before its potentialities can be fruitfully explored.”⁸ Our philosophy is the same, in fact, to go to the roots, to go back to one’s own (*chez soi*), before seeing the positive integration. Accordingly, let us begin making our observation regarding the community-centredness of the Tribals of Chotanagpur in the first part of this paper. In the second part we shall try to explore the possibility of applying its potentialities to the vision of a direct form of democracy.

I

2. Community-centredness⁹ as the special characteristic of the Social Organization of the Chotanagpur Tribals

We follow the approach of “pure functionalism” of Bronislaw and Malinowski to some extent in our effort to observe the Chotanagpur Tribal community. First we begin with the Village Panchayat system and Parha Federation. Our time-reference is the past, because one hardly finds these systems any more functioning at present, unfortunately.

2.1 Village Panchayat – the tribals lived in villages that made a community living conducive. The houses would be clustered around each other. They were so close to each other that a sneeze or a cough at night in one house would be heard in the house on the outer fringe. The rest of the village would know before dawn that a

⁸ Van Exem, *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹ For brevity we mention here the village panchayat and parha federation only. But there are many other aspects of the social activities which manifest strong communitarian sense of the tribe; like their dances, songs, hunting, field work, belief in the God of the tribe, and their ethics— all these indicate the community-centredness of the tribe.

guest had arrived in one house past night. While the daily humdrum would be the concern of a family or its individual members, matters like childbirth, naming of a child, search for a marriageable partner, marriage proper and death-related rites would be necessarily communitarian in nature. Then, “disputes about partition of family property, certain offences against marriage, suspected cases of witchcraft, and sometimes even cases of assault and theft” etc.¹⁰ would be submitted to the Panchayat. A Panchayat “in theory includes the entire village-community but in practice is represented by the village-elders.”¹¹ There would be a headman called *sarpanch*, among them; and all the rest were called *panch*. The Panchayat expressed the common will of the community. The authority of the Panchayat would be binding. Everyone in the village was expected to respect its authority. Even if a *panch* or *sarpanch*, outside the Panchayat, was just an ordinary member of the village-community and equal with any other member, his say in the Panchayat mattered and the decision or a verdict of the Panchayat carried weight. Any affected or beneficiary party would swear in the following orthodox formula – “I swear by God in heaven, and the Panch on earth.” This power of the *panch* or *sarpanch* collectively was only an *executive power*.¹² The Panchayat stood on behalf of the community and expressed the common will of the community. It saw to the preservation and continuation of the traditions, rites and customs of the tribal community or the tribe as a whole. The concept of authority was more for service than for ‘power’ in political sense of the term.

2.2 Parha Federation – Small or big in size, a village-community would need the support of other villages for “self-protection against natural and supernatural foes”.¹³ Thus a confederation of several

¹⁰ S. C. Roy, *The Oraons of Chota Nagpur: Their History* (Ranchi: The Bar Library, 1915), p. 231.

¹¹ S. C. Roy, *Ibid.*, p. 231.

¹² Linus Kujur, SJ, “Tribals and the Church in India Today,” in the *Christ among the Tribals* (Bangalore: SAIACS, 2007), p.69.

¹³ S. C. Roy, *Ibid.*, p. 235.

villages was formed, not so much on the principle of kindred as on the basis of local contiguity.¹⁴ The central organization would be known as the Parha Panch. It would be constituted of Raja (King) village, Dewan (Prime Minister) village, Panrey (Clerk) village, Kotwar (Bailiff) village, and so on. Other villages without denominations would be the Parja (subject) villages. Although in actual function some headman of a particular village would officiate, the designation goes to the village he resides in. This speaks of the functionary role he plays. The power thus entrusted is not for anyone's personal aggrandizement or exploitation but for the service of the larger community, in this case all the member villages. The officiating person was not really a 'king' or 'prime minister' in ordinary sense of the terms. Over and above the judicial and deliberative duties, the Parha Panch would perform some important social or socio-religious functions. Its jurisdiction would cover even such communitarian activities like hunting and some esoteric disciplines like sorcery etc. "Each village would co-operate in the pursuit of the common objects of the federation. These common objects were, broadly speaking, the protection of the allied villages from human and non-human foes, from natural and supernatural

¹⁴ There are also other forms of Alliances – There would be also inter-Parha alliance or association of several Parhas. Such an association would be known as "The Twenty-Two Parhas," irrespective of how many Parhas actually take part. In their plenary sessions "The Twenty-Two Parhas" would be the highly respected body and would decide "on all major cases of reinstatement into the tribe" Sometimes, over and above Parha-fellowship, some villages would seek closer bond among themselves. *Bhayari* was one such bond. A number of boys of one village would enter individually into what was called *sangi* form of friendship with individual boys of another village. This kind of friendship was often as strong as, if not stronger than, a blood relationship. It was like a communion of individual souls. "*Sangis* ... are sworn friends to each other, who sit side by side at all social gatherings, eat together on all possible occasions, and stand by each other in weal or woe. Marital relations between the families of the two *sangis* are forbidden, and the wives of the *sangis* become *sangins* to each other." Another kind of alliance was known as "Dudh-bhaya". "A 'Dudh-bhaya' village of a Parha is a village which, though belonging to a different Parha, entered in the days of tradition into a ceremonial alliance with another Parha of which it thus became a 'Dudh-bhaya' (*lit.*, milk-brother) or foster-brother." Although artificial in its inception, this bond or alliance was regarded so intimate that between them no marital alliance was allowed, as if it would be a serious impediment. As such a Dudh-bhaya village would be an integral part of its own Parha, and at the same time, would have also its recognized duties and privileges in connection with the other Parha of which it is a 'Dudh-bhaya'.

dangers that beset them on all sides and, generally, securing 'luck' for themselves."¹⁵

2.3 The Procedure of the Parha Panchayat – The meeting of panchayat would normally be held in the village from where the dispute or the cause of the complaint arose. On receiving a complaint the Raja or the Dewan would ask the headman of the said village to inform the member villages of the Parha about the agenda and the date and obviously about the venue. "On the appointed day, some representatives from each, or at any rate the majority, of the villages of the Parha assemble at the 'hadri' or usual meeting-place of the Panch – generally under some old wide-spreading tree near the Sarna or Sacred Grove of the village in question."¹⁶ Once they are seated (normally in semi-circular manner), the substance of the complaint would be explained, the defendant would be given fair chance to explain his/her case, witnesses from both the parties would be heard, and then whatever decision or agreement arrived at by the Panch would be duly signed by the disputants. "The individual or village at whose instance the Panchayat is assembled entertains with rice and pulse-soup the representatives of the other villages on their arrival; and before they disperse a more sumptuous feast is got up for them which is the fine generally imposed on the party against whom the verdict is passed."¹⁷

3. Other Salient Features of Tribal Community – Equality, Fraternity and Kinship:

3.1 Equality – In the lack of social stratification there is much homogeneity. There is group-consciousness or ethnocentrism among the tribals. "The (Munda) women do not have the feeling that they are treated as less than equals. They are not subservient, but confident and free, and have their own ways to achieve their ends."¹⁸

¹⁵ S. C. Roy, *Ibid.*, p. 239.

¹⁶ S. C. Roy, *Ibid.*, p. 240.

¹⁷ S. C. Roy, *Ibid.*, p. 240.

¹⁸ Van Exem, *Ibid.*, p. 252.

At Panchayat women too (present only if they are litigants) get fair listening of their case or version. Leadership is respected and authority honoured, but the people on whom they rest remain equal with others. Their authority is honoured because it comes from tradition and tradition itself from Singbonga. "The authority which these leaders command is not so much based on their personality or particular knowledge, (as) ...on the fact that they personify the common patrimony. Their responsibility consists in convoking the panchayat, introducing complaints that have been brought to their knowledge, recalling customs and sayings, and at most suggesting solutions."¹⁹

3.2 Fraternity – The very terms they use to call themselves speak of a natural fraternity such as *Kunrukhar alar* (Oraon people), *Horoko* (Men), or *Munda-honko* (Children of the Munda). The element of fraternity and equality can be easily seen also in the manner a "dhangar" (a helping hand) is contracted among the tribals. A 'dhangar' is not a 'servant' or a hired laborer in ordinary sense of the term, though he is given remuneration, often in kind. Once the remuneration, called "*pogri*", is agreed upon, the young man is invited along with his parents to the house of the employer for a ceremonial engagement.

On their arrival at the house, a mat is spread out for them to sit upon. The mistress of this house comes out with a small cup of mustard oil and a wooden comb, anoints the young man with this oil on his head, shoulders, arms and legs, and combs his hair with the wooden comb. The young man then gets up from his seat and makes obeisance (*johar*) to all present. The young man and his parents are next treated to drink of rice-beer especially prepared for the occasion, and finally to boiled rice, pulse-soup and other delicacies. Now the engagement of the young man as dhangar is complete, and from that day he becomes the dhangar of the family.²⁰

¹⁹ Van Exem, *Ibid.*, p. 253.

²⁰ S. C. Roy, *Ibid.*, p. 115.

He gets his board and lodge free. He is practically a family member as far as the treatment of the family goes with him. At the end of the first year there is another ceremony meant for his farewell in the presence of his parents. If he likes to stay for another year, he says that the rice-beer meant for the occasion is sweet.

3.3 Kinship – While kinship within a family circle is strong enough, it is extended even to other members of the same village. Every one in a village is a brother, a sister, uncle, aunt, father, mother, grandfather, and grandmother. In the case of a Munda village it would make sense, because by and large every family belonged to the same *kili* (clan). But it is rather common among the tribals to address each other with endearing terms of some relation or familiarity. Marriage alliances (normally exogamy) would extend this kinship to other villages and Parhas. There was the institution called “Sahiaro” which is the bond between the kith and kin or family members of the husband and those of the wife. As if these were not sufficient, tribals would go for other kinds of friendship peculiar to them only. Thus the young girls would go for “goi”, “karamdair” and “jarul” friendship. The boys would go for “iar” and “sangi” form of friendship.²¹ This kind of friendship, although artificial, was so serious that no matrimonial relations were permitted, even if they belonged to different clans.

4. Present Situation: A Critical Look

Most of these above-mentioned institutions have been motivated by the fear of some common danger and a consciousness of the common good. “The prime care of the people – the dominant idea directing and controlling the tribal soul – has been how to live and multiply, how to maintain an independent tribal existence and solidarity, how to secure good luck and avoid ill luck in so far as

²¹ The terms ‘goi’, ‘karamdair’, and ‘jarul’ for the girls and the terms ‘iar’ and ‘sangi’ for the boys respectively may literally mean just a friend or a name of a tree or a branch. They all signify intimate friendship.

tribal security, health, progeny, cattle, and agricultural interests are concerned.”²²

Unfortunately, today only at the village level some semblance of a Panchayat may be found, with its functions limited to some socio-religious ceremonies only. There may be only some debris of the old Parha federation here and there. Some of the causes for these traditional institutions of the tribals becoming dysfunctional are the fast changing political situation and for sometime establishment of peace and order by the British and eventually Indian Government. Displacement and migration are other factors that have led to the inanities of these institutions. But the time has come to re-think and modify their usages for reinforcing the tribal solidarity and identity.

5. Some Negative Features of the Tribal Community

The social organization (Panchayat and Parha system) was good enough or adequate for village level administration. It mainly relied on the common bond of tradition. In this system there was no opposition party. Simple or absolute majority did not decide their votes. They had to be unanimous. It was the tribal allegiance that decided any dispute or dissension. But territorially, where there are others (non-tribals) also, the leadership was fragmented. With the introduction of new *gram-panchayat* (officially sponsored and recognized *village councils*), the tribe could not control and withdrew itself within.

The ‘Raja’ was not really their leader. The people themselves were the real rajas of the country. Raja was only a representative. It was the ‘Raja’ who brought the ‘Dikus’ in their country. Today the tribal representatives in the governments have not been able to bring justice and welfare for the tribals. They seem to be mere puppets or rubber stamps in the hands of the more powerful.

²² S. C. Roy, p. 245.

The element of envy (*hisinga*) is rather strong among tribals and this is an antidote to their sense of equality and fraternity. Money economy has replaced the former barter system and along with this has come individualism and worsening of jealousy or a 'crab mentality'.

The practice of witchcraft or accusation of its practice is another form of envy and jealousy that weakens the community. The traditional religious system could not uproot it. Even after turning to other faiths tribals still struggle to come out of this menacing evil.

In the agricultural sector conservatism has kept them at a lower level of productivity. Today's youth are going to some big cities with a hope to make quick and more money. As a result there are no able-bodied people to do the work in the fields. In some areas having joined the underground outfits (MCC) the youth are hardly available for the work in villages. Those who persevered in their studies and got qualified have left the villages for seeking jobs in some far away towns and cities.

On the basis of religion serious disunity has crept in among the tribals. Only culture can still be a common platform for the tribals of Chotanagpur or in the Diaspora to unite. But the culture itself is passing through a perilous stage. In spite of various efforts being made to preserve the tribal culture, the new generation is tempted ever more vigorously to opt for the neo-culture instead of the tribal culture.

II

6. Some Reflection and Some Challenges

We have made a quick survey of the fact of community-centredness of the tribals. While that itself is a strong point, there are also limitations and weak points in the tribal community. Now the time has come to see if the strong points can be further improvised

and made good use of in today's context. The efforts of integrating the tribals into the mainstream through 'sanskritization' or through other means have not been proper. That's why one can see "'de-sanskritization' or 're-tribalization', in economic, political and social life in India now."²³ Could there be a better way of integrating the tribals without depriving them of their identity, their culture, their values and their wisdom? Their social structure seems to be based on such democratic values as equality, fraternity and freedom, with such a strong sense of belonging. All these traditional values of the tribals should not be lost sight of. These values speak of their wisdom. Therefore they cannot be left aside as primitive and barbaric. Going by the historical evidences it looks feasible to presume that the (Chotanagpur) tribals shared, if not borrowed, their panchayat and Parha system with (or from) the prehistoric Harappa Culture and the Aryans of *Rg Vedic period*. A. L. Basham speaks of such terms and positions as '*raja*', '*sabha*' and '*samiti*' etc. among the tribes of that period.²⁴

Affirming one's tribal identity through culture, language and values should not be understood as communalism. On the contrary, in the multicultural society like India every community (tribal or otherwise) must be seen as 'a piece in a puzzle'. Every society or community has some worthwhile contribution to make towards the national integrity and harmony. Everyone can be 'a part of the answer'. You don't need to agree on religion in order to build a barn together. To propagate 'one religion, one nation' creates only division between 'us' and 'them'. To belong to one fabric we must all be individual and particular threads in the tapestry.

Have the tribals come to a stage of such a consciousness? Perhaps yes, but not fully as yet. But they will. Their levels of education, migration to other cities and industrial belts, and the

²³ P. K. Bhowmick, *Rethinking Tribal Culture in India* (Calcutta: R. N. Bhattacharya, 2001), p. 245.

²⁴ A. L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India* (Calcutta: Fontana Books, Rupa & Company, 1967), p. 34.

present political fabric, all of these, have contributed towards bringing them out of their ghetto. It is true that they are tired of being pushed and chased, degraded and marginalized. So they react. But if given their due share in equality, justice and freedom as ensured by our Constitution, they will surely contribute their mite. They do realize their present plight but also their co-responsibility to change their own status and that of the nation. They share their sentiments with Frances Moore Lappé, who in her article “Time for Progressives to Grow Up” has said:

We’ve lived so long under the spell of hierarchy – from god-kings to feudal lords to party bosses – that only recently have we awakened to see not only that ‘regular’ citizens have the capacity for self-governance, but that without their engagement our huge global crises cannot be addressed. The changes needed for human society simply to survive, let alone thrive, are so profound that the only way we will move toward them is if we ourselves, regular citizens, feel meaningful ownership of solutions through direct engagement. Our problems are too big, interrelated, and pervasive to yield to directives from on high.²⁵

Talking about a New India or a New World for that matter, John Desrochers, CSC, has this to say:

Along with a sense of responsibility and solidarity, we must finally be filled with an inspiring, comprehensive vision and a concerted plan of action. “The new generations of the world need not only economic solutions, they need ideas to inspire them, hopes to encourage them, and first steps to implement them. They need a belief in man, in human dignity, in basic human rights; a belief in the value of justice, freedom, peace, mutual respect, in love and generosity, in reason rather than force.”²⁶

²⁵ “Time for Progressives to Grow Up” in <http://www.commondreams.org/views05/0526-28.htm> accessed on 20.07.08.

²⁶ Desrochers, p. 12.

The founding fathers of our nation had envisioned an ideal nation. That's why they included the four fundamental values in the Preamble of the Constitution; namely, justice, equality, freedom and fraternity. Tribal society gives a good base for these fundamental values. In fact, these values find their roots in the Indian cultural traditions. "They fully meet the demands of national integration. 'At the same time, they cut across narrow domestic walls and have become acceptable at the international level as well.'" ²⁷ Ramnika Gupta, who endorses this characteristic of the Tribal society, says, "Though weak economically and politically, it is nevertheless equipped with the feeling of equality and cooperation." ²⁸

Traditional tribal culture provides also a good base for "a people-centred development", which is "a process of development achieved through the active participation of the people, in their own interests as they see them, relying primarily on their own resources, and carried out under their own control." ²⁹

Therefore, the need before the nation is to be open to its cultural plurality. It has to re-legitimize the cultural localism and decentralize its governance. One of the founding fathers of our nation, Jawaharlal Nehru, had humbly accepted "... I am not sure at all which is the better way of living ... the tribal or our own. In some respects I am quite certain that theirs is better. Therefore, it is grossly impertinent on our part to approach them with an air of superiority, to tell them how to behave or what to do. There is no point of trying to make them a second rate copy of ourselves." ³⁰ Only in a participatory system of government will be born and grow "a vibrant and active society wherein objective conditions and subjective perceptions tally." ³¹ It could do well by recognizing the distinct

²⁷ Desrochers, p. 18.

²⁸ Ramnika Gupta, *Tribal: Contemporary issues – Appraisal and Intervention*, Tr. Anup Beniwal (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2007), pp. 37-38.

²⁹ Desrochers, p. 33.

³⁰ Quoted in Ramnika, p. 45-46.

³¹ Desrochers, p. 112.

identities of all cultures, their dynamic character and integrating features. It is in this sense the Chotanagpur tribal community provides or could provide a good conducive atmosphere. It is only when their legitimate aspirations and democratic urges are rejected and/or suppressed that the underprivileged and discriminated people rise against the government. It is in such circumstances that “the very diversity that had been the basis of Indian unity and diversity” causes a threat to the national integrity.³²

The challenge before the Chotanagpur tribal community is to maintain a balance between its allegiance to the tribe and its belonging and responsibility to the nation. It (tribal community) must look for the ways and means of putting into practice some of its traditional values also on the macro level (that is, on the national level). It may be necessary to change in order to safeguard what is essential. “What is needed, is not a romantic return to an idealized past but a lucid and well-balanced combination of inculturation and acculturation. Each people will have to forge its own modernity, its own new response to present day challenges.”³³ The Tribal community cannot assert its identity or essence by sticking to its own tradition in isolation, independent of its relatedness to other traditions. If it tries to do so, “[i]t makes one’s own tradition an island, a windowless monad, an isolated atom, a self-sufficient and self-functioning signification system.”³⁴

7. Conclusion

At a time when there are forces that are getting disenchanted by parliamentary democracy and political leaders who say, “Secularism, constitution, democracy, these by themselves have not been adequate inspiration for the masses”, and who have been

³² Stanislaus Swamikannu, “Nationalism and Regionalism: In the Indian Constitution,” *The Constitution of India: A Philosophical Review*, ACPI Publications, Ed. George Panthanmackel, (Delhi: Media House, 2003), p. 90.

³³ Desrochers, p. 143.

³⁴ Swamikannu, p. 88.

proposing China as a good model, we need a subaltern perspective. Community-centredness of the tribals of Chotanagpur is the best anti-dote for today's individualism and selfishness, or even for the totalitarian kind of nationalism. The tribal community has helped maintain the supremacy of the tribe over the individual. Nevertheless, every individual enjoyed the fruit of equality, fraternity and freedom the tribe provided. But the adherence of the individuals or the community to the norms and to the code of conduct established by the tribe was like maintaining a status quo. What may be needed today is a progressive allegiance; i.e. one needs to fulfill one's responsibility towards the community in such a way that the community advances and grows, makes progress in every sense of the word. Today the Tribals of Chotanagpur have to realize the fact that they cannot go back home, because the home they knew once has changed.

The national community can provide such a progressive growth of every people. Thus both – the national community and the tribal community – need each other. Representing the national community Ramnika Gupta acknowledges this mutual need when she says, “Till date we have thought only in terms of *teaching* them; we have never tried to *learn* from their democratic and egalitarian system. Instead of imposing our half-baked or immature culture and civilization on them, we need to *learn* from them the *real meaning of value based society*, freedom, equality and brotherhood.”³⁵ Smaller cultural units or communities need the national community and the national community needs the sweet collaboration of the smaller and particular communities. It is hoped that in such an atmosphere of mutual dependence there will grow the sense of belonging to the nation in every particular community without this latter losing its distinct identity. When the sense of “We the People” grows stronger, a good democracy can function better and more effectively.

³⁵ Ramnika, p. 42. Emphasis added.

PART THREE

***LIFE OF DOGGED PERSEVERANCE:
A CELEBRATION***

WORLDVIEWS OF THE TRIBALS IN CHOTANAGPUR

Agapit Tirkey

Introduction

The plateau of Chotanagpur includes (a) Chotanagpur region of Jharkhand, (b) districts of Jashpur, Surguja and Raigarh in Chhattisgarh; (c) districts of Sambalpur, Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj in Orissa; (d) districts of Purulia, Bankura and Midinapur in West Bengal. It is a *cultural territory* which is popularly known as Chotanagpur. It has three major cultural streams of India: (i) Austro-Asiatic, represented by the Mundari-Santali language groups, (ii) Dravidian, represented by the Kurukh and Malto language groups, (iii) Aryan, represented by the Sadani and Sadri language groups. The first and the second together form the *Adivasi* (original inhabitant) and the third *non-Adivasi* groups though some *Adivasis* in some areas of Jharkhand speak *sadri* instead of their own mothertongues. The *Adivasis* are original inhabitants. The word 'Adivasis' is used in the place of 'tribals' throughout this paper.

In the last 160 years or so, many *Adivasis* of Chotanagpur have migrated to Assam and North Bengal to work in the tea gardens and settled there. Similarly, they have also gone to the Andaman and Nicobar islands and have become the inhabitants of those islands. The major groups of the *Adivasis*, namely, the Mundas,

Uraons,¹ Kharias, Santals and Hos, of the region have benefited from modern education. It has helped them to enter into different public as well as private sectors in towns, cities and rural areas of various states in the country by way of getting employments. In this process they have carried their culture and religion along with them wherever they are today.

Worldview

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

Within the framework of worldview, there are two types of ‘views’ to be distinguished: (i) ‘inside’ view, and (ii) ‘outside’ view. If we are to understand the worldview of a people, we need to begin with the ‘inside’ view. We need to see the meaning, understand the valuation, and feel the feeling connected with the object or act in the mind of the native. Only after this we can shift to an ‘outside’ view point. The ‘outside’ view consists in detached and abstract understanding of a view point. Thus, delineating the worldview of a

¹Their mother tongue is Kurukh

given culture entails objectifying and describing the interpretation of the 'world' of that particular culture – as people in that culture see it. Initially this term came into English as a rendering of the German *Weltanschauung* which is an overall perspective on life encompassing the way a person perceives the world, evaluates and responds to it (Makkreel 1975: 346).

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

Adivasi Worldview

It involves, first of all an understanding and describing the Adivasi world as the Adivasi traditions look upon it, and then, conceptualizing and abstracting it. Indeed, the inside view of the Adivasi world involves, (a) collective interpretation that is reflected in Adivasi language, cosmology, rituals, customs, beliefs, myths, songs and stories; (b) the way the Adivasi traditions interpret time-space dimensions, (c) the way the Adivasis see their own identity and that of others, and (d) the way they interpret ethical dimensions.

In the Adivasi worldview space (totality of creation) is central. Everything has to be understood in the perspective of creation. Harmony with space or creation is the starting point of their spirituality and their search for liberation. An awareness of being one with the whole of creation is, therefore, the spiritual foundation of the Adivasi people. In this unity of creation and spirituality, there

is no clear cut distinction between sacred and secular, religion and non-religion. One sees the Supreme Being in space/creation and not outside of it.

Since each Adivasi group is unique and different from one another, it is not possible to discuss their various worldviews in this paper. However, the Mundas, Kurukhar (Uraons), Khar?ias, Santals and Hos, are the major tribes in Chhotanagpur, and therefore, it is hoped that they represent the Adivasi worldviews of the region in a satisfactory manner. Their relationship with the Supreme Being and their experience of Him through generation after generation would express some of their worldviews in common. They are reflected in their various creation accounts as given below in their *classical* traditional sense.

God

Each Adivasi group has a very clear idea of the Supreme Being as its creator and of the universe and its creatures. He is known by different names by different tribes as given below:

Supreme Being

Tribe	Personal Name	Relational Name Grand Father	Symbolic Name (In likeness)
Munda	Haram (Old One)	do	Sing Bonga (Sun-Spirit) Maran Buru (Great Mountain)
Ho	Gusia (Master)	do	do
Santal	Thakur Jiu (Spirit)	do	Chando Baba (Sun -Father) Maran Buru (Great Mountain)
Kharia	Ponomesor (Unchanging One)	do	Bero Lerang (Sun-Moon)
Kurukh	Dharmes (Beneficent One)		Biri Belas (Sun- King)

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

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

World

Before the Supreme Being made the present world, in all the accounts there is a mention of the *sea* with its *creatures* hovering everywhere. In His works of creation the Supreme Being takes the help of His own creatures, especially the sea creatures, such as, *crab, prawn, fish, turtle, tortoise*, etc. separately in bringing a tiny bit of clay to Him from the bottom of the sea in order to make the present earth. However, all of them failed in their mission because the sea water washed away the clay which they had tried to carry to the Supreme Being for making this world. However, the *earthworm* finally succeeds in fetching this bit of earth to the Supreme Being in the Munda and Kurukh accounts. He takes this bit of earth and makes the present earth. In the Ho account, one pair of male and female earthworms swallow and empty the clay at the bottom of the sea and that rose up to form the present earth. In the Santal account, the Supreme Being tied the legs of a huge tortoise in four directions to float on the surface of the sea. An earthworm then keeping its tail at the back of the tortoise swims down to the bottom of the sea and swallows the clay and evacuates it on the

back of the tortoise till the present earth was formed. When the tortoise changes its position, the earth shakes today! Having made the earth the Supreme Being filled it with all other animate and inanimate beings.

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

In the Kharia account, a *crab* raised a pillar of clay from the bottom of the sea above the surface of the water and began to enjoy sunshine everyday lying down on top of the pillar. One day a man came from somewhere and was pleased to play with the clay of the pillar. He is also known as *Ponomosor* (God). Seeing this the crab extended its pillar into a huge island. Thus, the earth came into existence. The primordial man used to make 2-clay figures everyday and leave them there to dry. Once they were dry the Man-God put them inside the hollow of a banian tree and when the milk of the tree dripped into their mouths, they became alive. There were thus two *male* and *female* human beings created from whom other human beings were born in the world..

In the Munda account, a large Indian *stork* laid two *eggs* on the land. A *boy* and a *girl* were born from these eggs. Similarly, in the Santal account, the human beings take their origin from the *eggs* of *hans* and *hansil* (male-female swans). In the Kurukh and Kharia accounts, the Supreme Being makes them out of clay, bakes them in the sun and gives life to them. All of this point out clearly that the tribals cherish and support the *eco-friendly* world of their Creator. Interestingly, the Ho account mentions that the first woman was made from the rib of the first man.

Man

In the creation accounts above, the Munda and Ho traditions say that human beings filled the whole earth and offended their Creator with their *evil ways* and lost His favour upon them. According to Santals the human beings *did not respect* one another in their social behaviour. In the Kharia account they became *proud* and *arrogant* before their Creator by their destructive ways. Similarly, in the Kurukh account they with their own *excreta* polluted the earth which was a beautiful creation of their Creator. The last comment is a strong symbolic way of saying that the human beings had committed a very serious offence against their Creator. Offended by their evil deeds, the Creator sent *rain of fire* on them for 7 days and 7 nights. All the human beings perished except the *bhaiya-bahin* (brother-sister). The beloved of the Supreme Being had hidden this pair of male and female children in the hole of a *crab* covered with the *gangla* thicket (Job's tear) of the low-land. In the Khar'ia account, the king *Sembhu* and queen *Dakai* pulled the *brother* and *sister* inside the marsh and hid them.

With destruction of the human beings, food supply to the Creator by way of offering sacrifice to Him by them ceased. He was thus very hungry and not happy without human beings. His beloved told Him that His happiness could return only with the finding of human beings alive. He found *bhaiya-bahin*² after many disappointments and distress. After seeking and finding them, He brought them to His abode with great joy. He kept them with Him, fed them and looked after them lovingly with His fatherly care. He called them His *grand children*³ and they in return called Him *grand father*⁴. Thus, the Creator renewed His relationship with the surviving human beings as their *grand father* who is very fond of His *grand children*, ever loving and forgiving. In this personal relationship with Him there is no oppressive fear. It is quite liberating.

² Brother-Sister, i.e. male-female

³ There is a fun loving relationship between grand parents and their grand children.

When the *bhaiya-bahin* grew up, He gave them *field* to cultivate, *oxen* to plough and *seeds* to sow and reap. When their *crops* were growing, some insects and pests attacked them and thus they were destroyed. The *bhaiya-bahin* then went up to the Supreme Being to tell Him their problem. After listening to them, He taught them the ritual of *danda-katta*⁵ (Kurukh). The *bhaiya-bahin* used to sleep separately by putting a log⁶ of the *simbali* (silk cotton) tree. One night they drank *hanria*⁷ (rice beer) and went to sleep. The Supreme Being and His beloved removed the log between them and they slept together as husband and wife. On reporting their experience to the Supreme Being, He said that it was all right. Thus, He instituted *marriage* and introduced human beings to the secret of procreation so that they might multiply in this world. He divided them into various *gotars* (clans) in order to enter into marriage relationships outside one's own clan⁸. The tribal clans consist of *animals, birds, fish, plants, minerals*, etc. They are called *totems*. This is the *new creation* of the Supreme Being and all men and women today are the *stewards* of this creation by not destroying and polluting it. His creative activity in this world thus continues to this day through the cooperation of human beings with Him.

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

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ A ritual of destroying the effects of evil.

⁶ In the Munda and Ho accounts there was a *husking pole* between them to separate them while sleeping at night whereas in the Kharia account it was just a *log*.

⁷ The Creator Himself had taught them how to prepare it.

⁸ Members belonging to the same clan consider themselves as brothers and sisters of one family.

worshipping Him. They depend on Him for their life and existence. Since He is the Supreme Being, they pray to Him to protect them from every form of evil.

Response to God

Symbolically, this ritual expresses protection of *Dharmes*⁹ (Supreme Being) against evil. As life is experienced in a paradoxical existence of good and evil, life and death, the twofold end of this ritual is first, to obtain blessing, viz. happiness and prosperity of life in terms of sound health and increase in *progeny*, *cattle* and abundant yield from *crops* and secondly, to ward off evil.

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

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

⁹ Personal name of the Supreme Being among the *Kurukh* (Uraon) Adivasis

keero (*Semecarpus anacardium*) twig (wild cashew) rests on the egg.

The significance of these articles is explained as follows: The rainbow being the greatest bow in creation is the most potent weapon of *Dharmes* against the *evil eye* and the *evil mouth*. The egg is a pure source of life. It is a *nirmuhi* (faceless) sacrifice to faceless God. It is broken in order to symbolise and also effect together with the split *keero* twig the bursting of the *evil eye* and the splitting of the *evil mouth* of witches and sorcerers and thus destroy the evil doings of the spirits let loose by them. It is hoped that through the ritual no harm would be caused to the *crops*, *cattle* and *children* of those on whose behalf the ritual is performed. The oil of the *keero* nut is poisonous and a drop of it in the eyes is sure to cause permanent blindness. Hence, there is the use of the *keero* twig over the sacrificial egg in order to impart its dreaded effect on the evil doers. The pearl rice is the symbol of life. This ritual is always performed with or without the full recital of the creation myth at all important events, such as, on the name giving ceremony of a child, during a wedding, after a funeral ceremony, while going for the ritual hunt, before paddy transplantation, at the beginning of threshing, while occupying a new house, etc.

Belief in *Dharmes* as the source of all good and in the *najar* (evil eye) and *bai-bhaakh* (evil curse) as the causes of all evil is held by the *Kurukhar* to form the most primitive tenet of their religious tradition. They neither make any statue of God nor any temple for Him. The cult of the deities and spirits was instituted later when they came in contact with other Adivasi and non-Adivasi groups. The spirits cause fear in the minds and hearts of the Adivasis but they are under God's power and control over them.

First Plough

In the Munda creation account, the ‘Old One’¹⁰ started to make a plough for the man he had made. Taking a large tree he carved out of it the plough with its shaft, grip and handle; all in one piece. He took a long time to finish this work. His wife sent a *tiger* who rustled the leaves around him to distract him. Taking a chip, the ‘Old One’, threw it at the tiger. At once the chip became a *wild dog* which chased the tiger away. That is why even to this day the tigers are afraid of wild dogs. The Santals share the similar worldview..

After making the plough, he took it home. Looking at the plough his wife said: “What a poor kind of plough you have made? In making such ploughs, the children of men will lose much of their time. They will not find trees big enough for making such ploughs. Such a plough will not last long. Come let us see, throw the plough on the ground!” The ‘Old One’ threw it on the ground and lo it broke off into pieces! She told him, “I shall make another kind of plough.” And so, she made a plough, its shaft, handle and grip in separate pieces and joined them together in a short time. When the plough was ready, she told the ‘Old One’ to throw it on the ground and they saw that nothing was broken. The ‘Old One’ then said, “You have beaten me in making the plough. So, from today I free all women from the hardship of making ploughs. They will not even touch them!” That is why to this day the women are forbidden to touch the plough.

Division of Time

Before the moon was made, the Sun was alone in the sky and it did not set. One day the ‘Old One’ went to see the man making fields and asked him some questions: “When did you make

¹⁰ Supreme Being

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

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

Life and Death

a. On the *Chhati* (name giving) day of a child, one of the elders takes his seat with a pot of water and some paddy grains. He removes the husk of a grain with his finger nails and drops the grain gently on the still surface of water in the pot to float. It represents *God*. Likewise, he drops the second grain representing the *panches* (elders). Similarly, he drops the third grain in the name of the *child* and lastly he drops the fourth grain naming at the same time one *ancestor*. If the last two grains meet while floating, the child is named after the ancestor in whose name the fourth grain was dropped. Rice grain is a symbol of life. Only after the name-giving, the child belongs to the *community*, *clan* and *tribe*. It is an initiation of the child into the clan and Adivasi community to grow and mature in them as a full Adivasi.

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

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

Good Omens

- (a) a lamp burning: it is a mark of prosperity;
- (b) a woman carrying water: presence of water symbolises life giving power and vitality;

Bad Omens

- (a) a thorn pricking: loss of blood and, therefore, loss of life;
- (b) an empty pitcher: sign of lack of life giving power and vitality;

- (c) a corpse being removed: death is out of the way, opportunity for a new life,
- (d) seeing monkeys on the way: monkey is the nephew of God, therefore is sacred symbolising God's favour;
- (e) itching in the palm of the hand: sign that one will get money;
- (f) a jackal crossing from left to right: going away from the life centre: symbolises that death is on its way out;
- (g) seeing or hearing a pigeon or a kingcrow singing: sign of humble, patient, loving and hard-working housewife.
- (c) an empty handed girl: absence of property or wealth;
- (d) a woman carrying ashes or clothes in an earthen vessel for washing purposes: sign of weakness;
- (e) a dead animal being removed: destruction of property;
- (f) a snake on the path: a danger symbol;
- (g) a vulture overhead: it feeds on carrion and, therefore, associated with death;
- (h) hearing an owl: its cry suggests harm and horror;
- (i) a jackal crossing the road from right to left and hearing its howling: moving to left is moving to life centre, a sign of imminent death;
- (j) suddenly a tree or branch coming down on the path is a sign of impending death.

With bad omens observed on the way, marriage negotiation generally would not proceed further while with good omens observed, they would go ahead with their marriage arrangement.

Marriage gives the fullest participation of an individual in the life of the community with duties and responsibilities to shoulder for the good of the *family*, *clan* and *tribe* as a full grown up and mature adult. It marks and strengthens the ties of union between husband and wife and also of the two families and their ancestors. The use of *sindri* (vermilion) during the marriage ritual is a blood substitute and blood is a life symbol. According to their age old custom the Santal and Munda couple in this context, exchange real blood taken from the small finger of each partner and mixed together. At the

central marriage ceremony in the *Kurukh* tradition, the *thatching grass*, *yoke*, and *grinding stone* displayed are economic symbols, stressing the fact that marriage means establishing a new home in which the husband has to work in the field, the wife has to do household works and both of them need a secure dwelling place for themselves and their children.

In keeping with their inheritance law, land belongs to the clan. Hence, women who on their marriage go over to another clan do not inherit it at their parental home. By the same rule a non-Adivasi cannot inherit land from an Adivasi. Thus, an Adivasi has to get married *within* his/her own tribe. He/she has to get married *outside* his/her own clan because the members of the same clan look at one another as brothers and sisters having *common ancestors* in the beginning. There is a practice of giving *bride wealth* among the Adivasis consisting of livestock or cash. The payment of the bride wealth publicly *seals* the marriage contract, confers marital rights upon the spouses and legitimizes their children.

c. *The Adivasis believe that the soul of a person after death continues to live in the form of light shade and heavy shade. That is why through a ritual after burial, the light shade of a departed person is brought back home. A cock is sacrificed and its blood is dropped in a corner of the house to put the shade at rest in its abode. Now that the light shade has come to its resting place to remain peacefully among its living members, they take care of the heavy shade of the departed person. It can be helped to come into the company of the ancestors through a ceremony called gami or kamaan. The heavy shade is believed to hover around homeless between the old house and the burial place until the above ceremony is performed. During the gami ritual, one of the elders prays to God saying: 'This person (naming the deceased one) had been living among us. Now he/she is gone. See that everything is right for him/her.' Next he prays to the ancestors as follows: 'Deign to accept this person*

among you. He/she is one of your children. Receive him/her as such and have pity on us that remain behind'. Mourning period comes to an end with this ceremony followed by community drink and meal. At the end of the year, the Adivasis deposit some bones of those persons who died during the year. They have specific places for this ritual. With this internment of bones, the dead are believed to be fully incorporated into the rank of the ancestors.

Nature

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

The *phagua* feast is celebrated on the full moon day in the lunar month of *Phagun* (February-March). As nature renews and bedecks itself with new, tender and beautiful leaves and flowers, this feast ushers in the *New Year* for the Adivasis. The *sarhul* feast is celebrated in the lunar month of *Chait* (March-April) when the *sal* trees (*Shorea robusta*) are full of flowers. It is the biggest annual spring festival of the Adivasis. The celebration centres around the *sarna* deity. She is the guardian spirit of the whole village with its inhabitants, their children and cattle. This deity is believed to be very fond of children. She is responsible for good monsoon and bumper crops during the year. She shares in the joys and sorrows of the people in the village. Her abode is the *sarna* (sacred grove) near the village. It is also believed on this feast day that *marriage* between the *earth* and *sky* takes place and due to this mystical union that nature brings forth plenty of good things for the living and

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

Nawakhani is the feast of eating the first fruits of the new harvest. It is celebrated when the new paddy crop is ready in the lunar month of *Kuwanr* (September-October). The head of each household sacrifices a chicken to the *ancestors* for giving the gift of life, land and livestock to their descendants. The choicest portion of the festal meal is first offered to the ancestor spirits and a libation of rice beer is poured to them and prayers are offered to them to get their blessing and protection upon them. The *sohrai* feast begins on the eve of the new moon day in the lunar month of *Kartik* (October-November). It is celebrated to honour the cattle helpful in agriculture. The cattle are indispensable for the Adivasis in agriculture. They are the tribe's most prized gifts and possessions given by God. That is why they are given a royal treatment on this day. Their hoofs are washed with rice beer, horns are anointed, necks are garlanded and heads are adorned. They are fed on soaked pulse grains mixed with salt. According to a myth¹², God once came down to destroy a monster unseen which used to eat up human beings. He brought along with Him a *bull* and took shelter in the hut of a kind, old and poor widow. The dung of this bull in its shed

¹¹ Tirkey, A., "The Karam Festival Myth," *Sevartham*, Vol. 12, 1987, pp. 3-20.

¹² Tirkey, A., "Religious Dimension of Sohrai: The Uraon Way," *Sevartham*, Vol. 21, 1996, pp. 123-129.

turned into gold and the poor and needy widow became rich. Thus, the *sohrai* feast is celebrated in the background of this mythological account.

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

Good and Evil

a. Adivasi approach to life and happiness is based on *concrete* life experience. They consider rich *crop*, numerous *cattle* and healthy *children* as their most cherished possessions and abundant blessings of God upon them. They experience happiness in *good health, sufficient wealth, and good crops, many cattle and children* with whom performing of ritual and offerings to *God* and the *ancestor spirits* are guaranteed. For the well being of human beings depends on the good pleasure of these supernatural beings with whose favour, continuation of the *family, clan and tribe* is the greatest good desired by them. Thus, the idea of *good* in the final analysis is inseparably tied up with what is good for the Adivasis in the *physical* order of *this world*. However, the goal of life as eternal happiness rests in their belief that after this life they will join the community of their *ancestors* in the next world free from all forms of suffering. This is the *ultimate aim* of their life in this world. It is in the *ancestral community* that all their legitimate aspirations will be fulfilled. This community enjoys its eternal happiness under the divine care and protection of God. The *value*¹³ of the living Adivasi community in *communion* with its ancestors has its *root* in Him as the source of all *life, goodness and happiness*.

b. *Evil* for an Adivasi is again a concrete experience. It is understood as a *physical* suffering, such as, sickness, death, loss of livestock and property. At the mention of it a tribal begins to talk of the *sick*

child, *loss* of the animal, *failure* of crops, etc., and expresses his/her utter *helplessness* and *inability* to handle the situation and to deal with the forces behind such happenings. This suffering is evil because it inflicts *pain*, *injury* and *harm* upon members in the community. Therefore, actions which *endanger* the good of individuals, family, clan and tribe are evil.

Ethics

An action is judged to be *right* or *wrong* in reference to the *good* of the individual and all the members of the community. The Adivasi *moral ideals* to be followed by all are *peacefulness*, *equality* and *kindness*. *Peace* with men/women and the supernatural beings is a *sign of order* and *harmony* in creation. *Equality* among all promotes, fortifies and sustains the intended order. *Kindness* to all is to be fostered in this social order. The object of public morality is the good of the *tribe*. Therefore, the greatest moral evil is the *failure* towards the well being of and harm done to it. Throwing into *disorder* what is religiously required is understood in terms of *violation* of Adivasi customs and breaking of some important taboos.¹⁴ In doing so *disregard* is shown for what has been determined and willed by God. Breaking of taboos is a violation of the profound reverence for the *value* protected by them.

Among the Adivasis, their *social custom* is regarded as having the *ultimate* power to *restrain*, *control* and *direct* an individual in their communities. Ethical understanding is shaped by aiming at the goal of life, which is, becoming a member of the community of ancestors in the next world after the life in this world. One's *moral conduct* is defined in terms of the idea of this good to be attained. The *norms* of conduct for an Adivasi are set in his/her *tradition* and *myth* defined in the customs of the tribe and every Adivasi is

¹³ Idea held by people about ethical behaviour or appropriate behaviour, what is right or wrong, desirable or despicable ((Marshall 1998: 689)).

¹⁴ Social and often sacred prohibitions put upon certain things, people, or acts, which render them untouchable or unmentionable ((*Ibid.*: 661)).

bound to comply with them. Taboos are put forward to safeguard the *pure* form of the customs

The Adivasis hold that the conduct of an individual is of interest and concern for the *whole* community. Preserving and maintaining of *order* is their *collective* responsibility. Every Adivasi member has thus to behave in ways which are *approved* and *accepted* by his/her community. On him/her rests the responsibility and sacred duty to preserve and foster the *purity* and *homogeneity* of the tribe. It is because the tribe is understood to have taken its origin directly from God. The unmarried person may, however, not observe this restriction as he/she has not got as yet the responsibility of the married members.

Extra marital relations (adultery), fornication¹⁵ and incest¹⁶ destroy the ordered *family* or *clan structure* and poison the *intimate* relations within the family and lineage. Not observing the Adivasi customs is morally an evil action which may be put right by ritual *purification*, *reparation* and *reconciliation* with the tribe. It is a *breaking* of the order established and maintained by the Creator for the good of the tribe and its members. Enforcement of measures against any breaking of accepted norms and misconduct rests with the *panchayat*¹⁷. It has the duty to ensure the good of one and all.

The Adivasi societies consider the violation of *incest* prohibitions as grave evil. It is thought to corrupt the social order by undermining morals. It provokes an emotional shock beyond description. It is held in such horror because it *upsets* the family structure by corrupting the *intimate relations* of the family members. It destroys the very *basis* of human society, turning it into a mere disordered crowd.

¹⁵ Sexual intercourse between unmarried people.

¹⁶ Sexual relations between immediate relatives, usually between parents and children, and between brothers and sisters (siblings) (*Ibid.* 301).

¹⁷ Council of village elders or heads of families.

Before the British rulers came, formal judiciary and court procedures as well as prisons were clearly absent among the Adivasis. Instead of them there was a *panchayat* in every village to look after the smooth running of social life in the village. This institution still continues among the Adivasis in their villages. Telling lies in the *panchayat* or showing disrespect and disobedience to it is a grave offence because its members take the place of God when it is in action.

Every member of the tribe has a right to possess land and a home for the upbringing of his/her family. No one may deprive the other of it by *encroaching* upon or *misappropriating* what does not belong to him/her. *Anger, envy, theft, quarrels, injury and murder* do serious harm to individuals and inflict suffering on them. They destroy peace and harmony existing among them. Practice of *witchcraft* and *sorcery* brings about *enmity, disunity and division* among the community members. Such actions are, therefore, severely condemned.

The approach for an action to be right or wrong is based on an *egalitarian*¹⁸ outlook which determines the moral conduct of individuals. The moral ideals to be followed by all are peacefulness, equality and kindness. Peace with men/women and the supernatural is a sign of order and harmony as intended in creation. Equality among all promotes, strengthens and sustains the intended order. Kindness, hence, is characteristic of the Adivasis. Welcome and hospitality promote love, affection, appreciation, friendship, respect and gratitude between the guests and their hosts.

Conclusion

The Adivasis place an overwhelming emphasis on the *community* and *tribe*. The goal of life is the *good* of the community,

¹⁸ Desirable goal of social organization is to see equality of condition, outcome, reward, and privilege. (*Ibid.* 185).

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

The nature of Adivasi existence has to be understood in this way that the tribe is created and cared for by the Creator for a *communitarian* life where there is *equality* and *harmony*. After this life in this world, a person joins the community of his/her *ancestors* in the next world provided he/she had walked on the sacred path they had shown in their lifetime in this world. *Salvation* for a tribal means *union* with ancestors and God the Creator. Thus, an individual apart from his/her community has no meaning and the healthy *tension* between this person and his/her community *dead* and *alive* continues. Establishing and maintaining happiness and well being is a *collective* duty and responsibility. Everyone is responsible for the peace and prosperity of the other in the community.

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

CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS OF TRIBALS

Valentine Ekka

1. Introduction

The tribal people consider themselves the Adivâsîs, the original settlers of the place they are spread over. They are over 67.8 million in number constituting over 8.08% of India's total population, speaking different languages/dialects and having their own histories, cultures and social and political structures. As they are spread all over India eking out their livelihood under various climatic conditions and in different terrains, it is not possible here to speak about the commonalities among them except for a few pertaining to some prominent tribes, like Ho, Kharia, Kurukh, Munda and Santhal, in Chhotanagpur belt covering the states of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, and West Bengal. As the original settlers, all the tribes have occupied and continue to own some measures of land wherever they are today. This leads us to claim that they are tillers and cultivators of the land in their possession. So, they are agriculturalists by profession, totally dependent on the seasonal cycle and on cattle to help them in carrying on their farming activities. Living in the very lap of nature, the tribal people not only enjoy the forest foliage, flowers, fruits and other things but also are very much in touch with the changes, the mood, and the pulse of nature.

2. Culture

As the theme of the paper is the cultural expressions of the tribal people, it will be worthwhile to recall here what is meant by culture. There are as many definitions of culture as there are scholars interested in the subject. But to get started,

Culture may be described as the organic whole of ideas, beliefs, values, and goals which condition the thinking and acting of a community of people. Understood thus, culture finds conceptual expression in ethics, philosophy and law; symbolic expression in art, literature, myth and cult...It is equally enfolded in the psycho-structure of individuals – in their reflexes, reactions, sensuousness, expectations and hopes. Even ordinary artifacts and products are bearers of culture. The beliefs and values of a people can be read from the kind of houses built, dress worn, food eaten and implements used.¹

Culture, then, as the organic whole of ideas, beliefs, values and goals finds symbolic expressions in art, literature, myth and cult. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, an expression is anything that people say, write or do in order to show their feelings, opinions and ideas. When the word 'expression' is preceded by the qualifying word 'symbolic', it takes on a deeper dimension. Though a symbol is a kind of sign, there is a world of difference between the two in so far as meaning is concerned. A sign signifies just one thing and is universally accepted in the given system of signs. The signified is univocal, cut and dry. But a symbol not only symbolizes something but makes present the symbolized. In other words, a symbol partakes of the symbolized which is loaded with emotions, feelings and sentiments. "In all symbols the signifier forms a continuum with the signified. Hence the density and the concentration of meaning in symbolic language. A universe of meaning

¹ *Sebastian Kappen*, *Jesus and Cultural Revolution – An Asian Perspective (Bombay: The Bombay Industrial League for Development, 1983)*, pp. 9 – 10.

can crystallize into a symbolic word, gesture, deed, or object.”² So, the symbolic expressions here would consist of those things (the arts—poems, music, dance, paintings—festivals, literature, and rituals) that embody the shared meanings and values of the tribal people under consideration.

3. The Symbolic Expressions

The Arts: Art has something to do with the day-to-day life of the people. Following the dictum that art imitates life, art is taken here in a broad sense to include those activities and artifacts that, besides being the carriers of specific meanings and values, inspire a certain sense of aesthetics and beauty as well.

Festivals: Harvey Cox mourns and wails at the disappearance and loss of festivities in the twentieth century West with the advent of industrialization and capitalism.

Mankind has paid a frightful price for the present opulence of Western industrial society. . . . But part of the price has been paid by affluent Western man himself. While gaining the whole world he has been losing his own soul. He has purchased prosperity at the cost of a staggering impoverishment of the vital elements of his life. These elements are festivity—the capacity for genuine revelry and joyous celebration. . . .³

Joining Harvey Cox in his lament of the deplorable lack of festive occasions, Dorson says, “The industrial work ethic has blighted the impulse for communal festivals that enlivens much of the rest of the world.”⁴ Now in stark contrast to the lack of festive

² Sebastian Kappen, *Tradition Modernity Counterculture: An Asian Perspective* (Bangalore: Visthar, 1994), p. 45.

³ Harvey Cox, *The Feast of Fools: A Theological Essay on Festivity and Fantasy* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 7.

⁴ Richard M. Dorson, “Material Components in Celebration,” *Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual*, ed. Victor Turner (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982), p. 34.

celebrations in the Western society, the tribal society is very rich in festivals that can be divided into two groups. The first group consists of rites of passage to celebrate the various stages in the life of a person. The second stream of festivals revolves in accord with the seasonal cycle and can be called the nature celebrations to underline the deep bond existing between nature and the tribal people.

Ritual: By ritual is not meant here a series of actions that are always performed in the same way. What is meant here is a religious act, a ritualistic act of invoking, or worship of the Supreme Being. No festivity or celebration takes place without rituals. Sometimes a ritual precedes a festivity, and other times a ritual coincides with the celebration itself. It is so because all festivals and celebrations have religious origins. "Secular as well as religious festivals have their roots in the rituals of worship."⁵ To underline the importance of it, Pieper ropes in Nietzsche and says, "Nietzsche is perfectly right: festivals are doomed unless they are preceded by the pattern of ritual religious praise. That is the fire that kindles them."⁶

Literature: If by literature is meant pieces of writing that are valued as works of art, especially novels, plays and poems, the tribal people have very little of it. Agriculturalists by profession, they were most of the time busy with tilling and cultivation of land in season, and with all sorts of odd jobs out of season, and with taking care of the cattle they possessed round the year. They were content and happy with their way of life. The awareness of the importance of formal education among the tribal people is a recent phenomenon, perhaps as late as the early 19th century. Without formal education the availability of a full-fledged literature in any society is unthinkable. What is available in the tribal society are the myths, folklores, and folk songs passed on orally from generation to generation. Some Christian missionaries took initiatives to write them down at first.

⁵ *Josef Pieper, In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973), p. 27.*

⁶ *Ibid., p. 28.*

But the conscientious attempt to commit all these to writing is a very recent undertaking with the growing interest among anthropologists and sociologists—by and large non-tribal—in the lives and cultures of the so-called ‘primitive people’. Now that the tribal people are educated, they are very much interested in writing down their myths, folklores and folk songs to preserve them for the posterity to peruse, reflect and delve deep to discover their meaningfulness and richness. This very seminar is one more welcome step forward in this direction.

Cult: By cult is meant here a system of certain beliefs and practices. The tribal people do have a cult of venerating their ancestors but not of ancestor worship as many tend to think and say. It is a practice of expressing a sense of being in communion with, and a strong feeling of love and respect for their ancestors. There is no fixed time for this. It can be shown before taking one’s meals by setting aside a few grains of food in a corner of the plate one is eating from, or before consuming rice beer by dipping one’s right index finger into it and dropping a few drops to the floor meant for the ancestors of the family.

4. Meanings and Values of the Cultural Expressions

So far we have endeavored to enumerate the ways in which the tribal culture is expressed in the forms of arts, festivals, rituals, literature, and cult. These cultural expressions are concrete acts and can be seen, heard, described and read about. As said earlier, these are only visible and perceptible mediums, carriers of those hidden meanings and values the tribal people cherish most and live by. We know the expressions but do not know what is expressed in and through them.

Taking another definition of culture would facilitate the proceeding here. “A culture is a set of meanings and values informing a common way of life, and there are as many cultures as there are

distinct sets of such meanings and values.”⁷ The tribal people have their own way of life, i.e. the tribal way of life, informed by or pregnant with, a unique set of meanings and values. In other words, it is this set of meanings and values that informs or leavens the cultural expressions of the tribal people. It is to these invisible meanings and values that we now turn.

The tribal people in the Chhotanagpur plateau are basically farmers by profession, totally dependent on the mercies of nature to carry on their agricultural activities, living in the very lap of nature and exposed to different natural climatic conditions, and given to hard physical labor. All these have contributed to shaping their attitude to **life as celebration, communitarian, and totally dependent on God**. These three dimensions of tribal life will disclose and manifest themselves as we reflect on the cultural expressions mentioned above.

(a) **Festivals:** The tribal people’s prime possession is land which gives them a sense of dignity, status, and independence. Their wellbeing and survival depends on the cultivation of land in season and round the year wherever possible. The method of cultivation is still primitive in the countryside. So are the ways of harvesting, transporting, and threshing that require hard physical labor in very adverse climatic conditions. They do take help from others and do extend their helping hands to others regularly. But it is a matter of experience that human beings cannot keep themselves busy with manual labor all the time. Human beings are no machines. Even machines need to be switched off sometimes for cooling down and maintenance. Much more do human beings need a complete break occasionally from their back-breaking manual labor to give rest to their bodies and to enliven their spirit. Festivals provide the tribal people such much needed occasions. The tribal people have many festivals. The whole year is dotted with or punctuated by different

⁷ Bernard Lonergan, S. J., *Doctrinal Pluralism* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1971), p. 4.

kinds of festive occasions. The tribal people are not completely given to work and more work to produce more and to make more profit as it is the case in the industrialized society. Profit making to ensure their future comfort and ease is the only motive that makes the Westerners workaholics at the great cost of enjoying and reveling in the present. This is the state of life of the Western man Harvey Cox laments:

Now, however, we can begin to see that our productivity has exacted a price. Not only have we gotten it at the expense of millions of other people in the poor nations, not only have we ruined countless rivers and lakes and poisoned our atmosphere, we have also terribly damaged the inner experience of Western man. We have pressed him so hard toward useful work and rational calculation he has all but forgotten the joy of ecstatic celebration, antic play, and free imagination. His shrunken psyche is just as much a victim of industrialization as were the bent bodies of those luckless children who were once confined to English factories from dawn to dusk.⁸

The tribal people, on the contrary, being an agrarian lot and leading a simple life in the panoramic natural surrounding, have perhaps the maximum number of festivals. It is not that they never think about and plan for the future. Yes, they do but not to the extent of depriving themselves of enjoying the present, as it is clear from their constant refrain while singing and dancing: 'Kerkâ samay mâl kirro haire' (Time gone by will never return again.) One cannot help wondering as to how so many festivals came to be celebrated by them! If asked, they would perhaps say that it is God himself who wanted their ancestors to keep these festivals in the same way as He made night and day so that man would work by day and rest at night instead of working incessantly, according to one Munda myth.⁹ "Festivals are, it would seem, traditional in a very special

⁸ Harvey Cox, *The Feast of Fools*, p. 12.

⁹ A. Van Exem, S. J., *The Religious System of the Munda Tribe (St. Augustin I: Haus Völker und Kulturen, 1982)*, pp. 35 – 36.

sense, a traditum in the strictest meaning of that concept: received from a superhuman source, to be handed on undiminished, received and handed on again.”¹⁰

What is a festival? According to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, it is a day or period of the year when people stop working to celebrate a special event, often a religious one. Now simply to stop working on a particular day does not make it a day of festival. What marks a day of festival is to stop working in order to celebrate, among other things, “life experiences (birth, puberty, marriage), work (planting and harvesting of crops . . .).”¹¹ Further, what does the word celebration mean? “The word celebration is derived from the Latin *celeber*, ‘numerous, much frequented,’ and relates to the vivacity—akin to what the great French sociologist Durkheim called ‘effervescence’—generated by a crowd of people with shared purposes and common values.”¹²

The tribal people as agriculturalists work hard in the scorching heat of summer, in the pouring rains of monsoon, and in the biting cold of winter. They are not completely free from all worries of the present and about the future. They are quite aware of the vicissitudes of life. And yet, they are neither crushed under the heavy physical labor nor choked by the worries of life. Life for them is not all work. It is also a celebration. Recognizing the presence of the unconquerable spirit for celebration in human beings, Ralph Rinzler and Peter Seitel write, “Wherever the human spirit is free, people celebrate. All cultures commemorate what makes them distinctive and worthy in their own eyes. Periodically, a common humanity in us all sets aside the work and worry of everyday life and blossoms into festivity, sometimes even in the face of cultural domination and

¹⁰ *Josef Pieper*, *In Tune with the World*, p. 26.

¹¹ *Victor Turner*, “Introduction,” *Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual*, ed. *Victor Turner*, p. 12.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

economic deprivation.”¹³ In other words, a festival is a celebratory event which stands for an affirmation of life in the face of all sorts of challenges, difficulties, and uncertainties in life. “[F]estivity—the capacity for genuine revelry and joyous celebration” is “absolutely vital to human life.” It enables “man to relate himself to the past and the future in ways that seem impossible for animals.” So, the festival is a “special time when ordinary chores are set aside while man celebrates some event, affirms the sheer goodness of what is”.¹⁴

How true it is of the tribal people! As farmers, they are totally at the mercy of nature for the success or failure of their crops. But they never fail to celebrate because life for them is neither all happiness nor all misery, neither all sunshine nor all overcast with dark clouds, neither all hopes nor all disappointments, but a mixed bag of both. Festive celebration as an affirmation of life does not exclude difficulties, poverty, scarcity, miseries, worries, sufferings, and death but absorbs all these and goes beyond. This is made manifest in the two streams of celebrations, i.e. those pertaining to the seasonal cycle and those to the life cycle.

Secondly, “festivals are public by nature; they are affairs of the community, in fact its ‘self-portrait,’ and consequently visible, ‘objective’ events.”¹⁵ None of the tribal festivals, be it part of the seasonal cycle or life cycle, is private in the sense of being limited to any one family or a few select families. They are communitarian, open to all the villagers and often to the neighboring villagers. Instead of saying that festivals are open which sounds rather passive, it will be more appropriate and fitting to say that people are given an invitation to come and join in the festivity. Coming together of the tribal people for celebrations is as expressive of their community spirit as their coming together to help out in getting some work

¹³ Ralph Rinzler and Peter Seitel, “Preface,” *Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual*, ed. Victor Turner, p. 7.

¹⁴ Harvey Cox, *The Feast of Fools*, p. 7.

¹⁵ Josef Pieper, *In Tune with the World*, p. 33.

done, like ploughing, sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, carrying the sheaves to the barn, putting hay on the haystack, collecting and carrying fire wood, etc. These collective activities are called *sangat*, *madaït*, *sahâ*, etc. and are mutual.

Thirdly, almost all the tribal festivals of the seasonal cycle include drinking rice beer, singing, dancing, and drumming either in the courtyard or on the *akhârâ*, the common village dancing ground. The middle aged tribal people drink rice beer together and sing together to the accompanying rhythm of *mândar tâl*, the most common drum found in the tribal society. The young men and women, boys and girls, holding each other's hands behind or with their hands on each other's shoulders, dance and sing together on the *akhârâ* to the rhythmic drum beats of *mândars*, *dhôlaks*, and *nagârâs*. The more the number of drums the better it feels. The more the number of dancers the merrier it is. There could be only one drum to accompany the tribal group singing and dancing but never one individual drumming, singing and dancing all alone. Festive celebrations are communitarian. People joining hands with each other or holding each other, and dancing and singing together to the rhythmic drum beats given by the drummers is visible and audible to the spectator but what is not seen or heard but only felt or sensed is the underlying community spirit animating and informing it all. Together they labor, slog, and struggle in life; together they eat, drink, drum, sing, dance and "enjoy those traditional gestures and moments of human conviviality without which life would not be human".¹⁶ The atmosphere that prevails during the festivals celebrated by the natives of the Trobriand Islands is so true of the festive seasons in Chhotanagpur.

The men who celebrate such a festivity, who perform their magical dances, are fused with each other and fused with all things

¹⁶ *Harvey Cox*, *The Feast of Fools*, p. 5.

¹⁷ *Ernst Cassirer*, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1944), p. 95.

in nature. They are not isolated; their joy is felt by the whole of nature and shared by their ancestors.¹⁷

Fourthly, for the tribal people who are agriculturalists by profession, no festival ever commences without a religious act, a ritualistic act of invoking, or worship of the Supreme Being as said above. In fact, it is an inalienable dimension of any tribal festival for basically two reasons. First, the Supreme Being as the Giver, the originator of all the festivals for the good of the people cannot be left out on the festive occasions. In fact the divine blessing is as much needed for the success of the celebration as for the success of their crops on which depends their wellbeing, survival and existence. "In practicing the rites of worship men hope that they will be vouchsafed a share in the superhuman abundance of life. From time immemorial, this very thing has always been considered the true, the immanent fruit of all great festivals."¹⁸ Secondly, the people who totally depend on the Supreme Being for their existence, survival and wellbeing can in no way not express their gratitude and indebtedness to him. Their festive celebrations are an affirmation of the Supreme Being's goodness and bountifulness to them. Their prayers and sacrifices to the Supreme Being for blessings and for protection from all evils, and their inner attitude of thankfulness, both express the deepest reality of their total dependence on Him for everything. Festivals and celebrations cannot take place without religious ritual of one kind or other. There is no dichotomy either between the sacred and the secular, or between the religious and the social when it comes to the tribal celebration of festivals:

The annual festivals and the passage rites are neither merely social nor purely religious; the social and the religious are connected and intermingled. They are ritual actions; they combine worship, sacrifice and festivity. The aim ultimately is supernatural, i.e. to share in life and prosperity in the perspective of the harmoniously ordered

¹⁸ Josef Pieper, *In Tune with the World*, p. 29.

¹⁹ Boniface Tirkey, *Oraon Symbols* (Delhi: Vidyajyoti, 1980), p. 25.

cosmological whole, that is the right relation with the cosmic elements, with the supernatural, and with God.¹⁹

(b) **Cult:** The tribal people have a cult of **ancestor veneration**, not ancestor worship as many outsiders are inclined to say. This is based on the firm belief the tribal people have that there begins another life in an invisible world—a sort of paradise—for those who die a physical death in this visible world. The souls of the departed do not get dispersed without any trace. Community life is the most distinguishing mark of the tribal people because every one gets his or her identity as a member of this or that community or tribe. For “apart from a community an individual has no identity, he does not exist”.²⁰ “An individual as such never exists, makes no sense. He is fulfilled in the community.”²¹ And so, they live in the community while in this world and join the community of the departed after death. In fact, getting ultimately “incorporated into the community of the ancestors, the ‘pacchbâlar’” is what every kurukh tribal wants. It is the ultimate destiny every living tribal aspires for, hopes for. “Incorporation with the Pacchbâlar is salvation.”²²

The incorporation of the tribal man or woman into the community of the ancestors implies DEATH. And so, how does the celebration aspect come in this cult of ancestor veneration? The departure of someone from this visible world through the event called death implies a complete breakdown of all visible and sensible relationships, and an utter impossibility of physical or sensible communication and interaction thereafter which cause mourning or sadness in the hearts of the physically living members of the community. Interestingly, one of the dictionary meanings of the verb ‘to mourn’ is to feel sad because somebody no longer exists or **is no longer the same**. The highlighted part is a clear indication that

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

the event of death is not the permanent end or destruction of the departed one but only a door to the new state of life. "Death does not mean the end, but transformation of life. The dead live as 'spirits,' as 'pacchbâlar,' in the company of the ancestors, and they protect their living descendants."²³ There is here a clear **denial of death** in the sense of permanent end or complete destruction of the departed one. It is typical of the religious beliefs of the tribal people or of the so-called primitive people.

If anything is in need of proof it is not the fact of immortality but the fact of death. And myth and primitive religion never admit these proofs. They emphatically deny the very possibility of death. In a certain sense the whole of mythical thought may be interpreted as a constant and obstinate negation of the phenomenon of death. By virtue of this conviction of the unbroken unity and continuity of life myth has to clear away this phenomenon. Primitive religion is perhaps the strongest and most energetic affirmation of life that we find in human culture.²⁴

It is this strong belief and conviction in the continuity of life beyond the event of death that prompts them to bounce back to the celebration in memory of the departed ones. A week later, a ceremony called kamân is held in the family of the deceased to pray to the ancestors to receive the departed in their company, and to bring to an end the mourning period. The villagers gathered on this occasion are given a dinner in the name of the dead by the family. The villagers being treated to a dinner is for sure a celebration which includes the inalienable element of any tribal celebration, i.e. drinking rice beer. The celebratory aspect becomes all the more transparent in yet another ceremony held at the beginning of January.

In the month of January the bones of the dead of the year are carried in procession with singing and dancing, and

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²⁴ *Ernst Cassirer, An Essay on Man*, p. 84.

deposited in their respective clan kundis or ossuaries. This is known as the “kônhâ benjâ”, the ‘great marriage’ or the “hârbôrâ”, the ‘bone-drowning’. With this internment of the bones the obsequies to the dead are completed, and the dead are incorporated into the community of the ancestors, the “pacchbâlar”.²⁵

The pacchbâlar, the community of ancestors, is not on its own. The “ancestors are taken up into the world of Dharmes and make a community with him”.²⁶ The ancestor spirits do not lose their individual identity when taken up into the world of Dharmes²⁷ to make a community with him “from where they guard and protect their living members of the family”. As the community of the living in this world centers around Dharmes, so does the community of the departed in the world beyond. “This community of the living is a sign and witness to the community of the ancestors made spirits and beyond the order of the perceptible, or as the Mundas (a sister tribe in Chotanagpur) have it, ‘of the bonga-ed ones’.”²⁸

(c) Literature: As mentioned above, the tribal people do not have a full-fledged literature in the strict sense of the term. All that they have are myths, folklores, and folk songs transmitted orally from generation to generation. The unusual spurt of interest in the lifestyle, religious beliefs, and worldviews shown by some anthropologists, ethnologists, and sociologists, on the one hand, and the fear felt by the educated tribal people of losing forever their cultural heritage, on the other, have resulted in the conscientious effort to record or commit to writings some myths, folklores and folk songs of late.

²⁵ Boniface Tirkey, *Oraon Symbols*, p. 50.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁷ John Lakra, S. J., *Tribal Culture: Selected Features (Gumla: St. Ignatius High School, 2007)*, p. 36.

²⁸ Boniface Tirkey, *Oraon Symbols*, p. 30.

Of utmost importance are the **myths of creation, the fall of man, and the saving act of the Supreme Being**. These myths are kept alive in the tribal society and consciousness by being narrated and interpreted time and again during the year. The myths graphically and dramatically describe and depict how the Supreme Being (Dharmes for Kurukhar, Haram for Mundas, Ponomosor for Kharias, Thakur Jiu for Santals, and Singbonga for Hos) created them and everything there is in the universe, how they went away from Him through their failure to do His will, and how He saved them from their fallen state. Listening to the myths narrated on various occasions, the tribal people are reminded of their unique **identity** in the vast mass of people belonging to different races the world over.

The next in the order of importance come the **folk songs** comprising of dance songs, seasonal songs, and marriage songs. The dance songs speak for themselves that they are meant for dance to the accompaniment of the rhythmic drumbeats of musical instruments, like mândars, dhôlaks, and nagârâs. Some seasonal songs are accompanied only by dance without any musical instruments, like Khaddi-Tunta. "The Khaddi-Tunta dances are independent from any musical instrument. The dancers themselves by their full throated singing in unison give the timing for their steps. . . The dancers jump up and come down on the ground with a loud stamp."²⁹ Some other seasonal songs are just sung without the accompaniment of any musical instrument and dance, like the ropâ (transplantation) song. "To break the monotony of the tedious work the women while busy transplanting go on singing the Ropa (transplantation) melody in a slow and free style."³⁰ Then, there are the marriage songs accompanied neither by dance nor by musical instruments. "Marriage songs are sung without the accompaniment

²⁹ John Lakra, S. J., *Tribal Culture*, pp. 90 – 91.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

of any kind of musical instruments. Marriage songs are non-dance songs. They are meant to be sung to one's heart's content."³¹

The whole body of **songs**—either in the tribal language itself or in Sâdrî (a local common dialect), classified³² on the basis of their relations to either dance, or cultivation, or marriage, and transmitted orally from generation to generation—constitute the **poetic patrimony** of the tribal people “through which they have expressed their mind and their emotions, their dreams, hopes and aspirations in life”.³³

The poems are indeed a patrimony, a heritage and, hence, communitarian in nature in the sense that they are the expressions of the thoughts, feelings and experiences of the whole tribe to be preserved and handed down from generation to generation. “Almost all the poems are ancestral and are the result of a process of oral tradition working on a basis of group composition.”³⁴ Secondly, they are not made but are the free or spontaneous flow or expressions of life experiences. “There is nowhere any wish to invent, and if a new poem is made it is the accidental result of the excitement of a dance or a chance offshoot from a previous poem. A new poem happens rather than is made.”³⁵

The tribal people are agriculturalists by profession and live in interior villages still sparsely surrounded by forests and mountain ranges. They observe very closely and experience deeply the freshness and newness in the wonder of birth, the slow and gradual growth to maturity, the beauty, joy and fruitfulness of youth, the

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

³² W. G. Archer, *The Blue Grove: The Poetry of the Oraons* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2006), p. 11.

³³ Boniface Tirkey, *Oraon Symbolism*, p. 53.

³⁴ W. G. Archer, *The Blue Grove*, p. 26.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

anxieties and worries of decline, and the pains and suffering of separation at death in the cycle of human life. They know what love is, what bonding means, and what separation does. They toil and struggle, feel satisfied and sometimes disappointed and frustrated, need rest and relaxation, long for some time to celebrate and let go all worries and anxieties of life. They are aware of the phenomenal changes recurring in nature round the year: in the plant world and in the animal world. Who can say that the tribal people never wonder, never make inquiries, or never look for answers to the problems in life? Any piece of literature is supposed to be a mirror that reflects the life of the people it belongs to. As the classification shows, the tribal poetry is about tribal life and covers and mirrors the entire life of the tribal people. The poems are rich in imagery all taken from nature. They tell not only about all life's important aspects but also about the lighter side of life. A few examples from the treasury of tribal poetry tell it all.

Marriage poems use a lot of imageries of dove, 'maena', calf, parrot, 'hira' (diamond), etc., to address the bride "because they are considered fitting symbols for the girl by their qualities of beauty, choice, humility, docility and domesticability".³⁶ Here below is one example.

Gharâ kerâ sugâwâ urî chalî gelae,
Anakar sugâwâ lîhôr-lôhôr baisâe ge âyô.

Gharâ kerâ maenâ urî chalî gelae,
Anakar maenâ lîhôr-lôhôr baisâe ge âyô.
Gôrâ khete, Gondlî khete,
Ankara sugâwâ/maenâ lîhôr-lôhôr baisâe ge âyô.
Gharâ kerâ betiyâ chalî gelae,
Anakar betiyâ lîhôr-lôhôr baisâe ge âyô.

³⁶ Boniface Tirkey, Oraon Symbolism, p. 57.

(The parrot/maenâ of the family has flown away,
 Parrots/maenâs from the strangers' gather happily.
 In the paddy field, in the millet field,
 Parrots/maenâs from the strangers' gather happily.
 The daughter of the family has parted and gone,
 The daughter from the family unknown makes her home.)³⁷

The reading or reciting of the poem is not able to rouse and “convey the intensity of the mood and of the emotion” as when it is sung.

Very often the melody of marriage songs is very pathetic especially when it deals with the farewell theme. Among the tribals giving farewell to the beloved daughter or sister is very moving. At this time plaintive melodies are sung, words of departure are pronounced and it fills the whole atmosphere with the pain of departure. People start crying. The special melody of farewell ringing in the ears of a tribal has so much penetrated in the heart that the very melody is enough to produce such a sentiment any time this melody is struck or a farewell song is sung.³⁸

Dance poems include the themes of love (between parents and children, brothers and sisters, the spouses), state of mind, daily chores of tribal life, and leg-pulling (joking).

1. Ayo-abâ ujjanâ gûti
 Barâ çkh dabachki rai: (sonâ)
 Ayo-abâ kheo:r hole re
 Barâ ekh tarkûti mano (sonâ)

(So long as parents are alive, it is like living under the shade of a banyan tree. When parents will die, it will be like the disappearance of the shade of the banyan tree.)

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ John Lakra, S. J., *Tribal Culture*, pp. 103 – 104.

2. Chhote gunâ râ:dan dadâ,
engan dadâ amake bîsâ (re)
Ringî-chingî dâurâ, bannâ-chunnâ keter,
Akhrantâ dhulin dadâ keson-bechon (re)

(I am still very young, brother; do not give me away in marriage. Buy me a colorful basket and a winnowing fan, and I shall keep playing with the dust of the dance ground.)

3. Partâ mainyâ pâidikan jûdî,
khekhel kiyyâ menderâ kâ malâ (re)
Menderâ gâ menderâ jûdî,
Asim kâ ne tangahai bâ:dan (re)

(I did sing on the mountain top, my love. Did you hear it down below? I heard it, beloved. But I wondered who it was!)

4. Lipu se lipu ayo ghar-durâ re,
Lipu ayo angenâ-dowâr.
Soroli gâi kerâ gobera re,
Hirî-jurî nadiyâ kâ pâni re, jhakâmakâ nadiya kâ pâni.

(Mother, smear our house and door; smear our courtyard. With the dung of the cow called Soroli; mixed in the sparkling water of Hirî-jurî river.)

Dance: The above poems are lyrics which are meaningful but not enough to make the young and the old restless to dance. They need to be given a tune (râg) with appropriate accompanying drum beats (tâl). The drum beats give the wake-up call, so to say, and the dancers' hearts start throbbing and the feet getting restless. The drum beats are the cause of tension and excitement within, and the singing and dancing the outward expression of the celebrative joyful release. The whole body—the hands, feet, eyes, ears, head and mouth—is fully involved in singing, dancing and drumming. So many pairs of feet moving forward and backward, being thrown in front and behind, synchronizing so well with the drum beats and the song

is something marvelous to witness and experience. The ever present and effervescent community spirit comes alive so powerfully. There seems to be a forgetfulness of time and space, toils and troubles. Though spoken about the Kurukhar (Uraons) as having “a capacity for cheerful hard work . . . , and a sturdy gaiety, exultation in bodily physique and a sense of fun,”³⁹ I think it is true of all the other tribal communities. All these characteristics express themselves so powerfully on the dancing ground. Some dances are slow, relaxing and soothing in which the young and the old, men and women, the feeble and the strong can all participate. But there are also dances which are very brisk and vigorous requiring a lot of energy and endurance, for instance, the Painkhî or the Tribal War Ballet and the Domrâ Khel or the Stag-Horn Ballet. The Painkhî “takes the form of a mock battle where the dancers, all men and the best of the clans, are armed with swords and shields.”⁴⁰ The Domrâ Khel is also strictly reserved for men and is a mock fight dance performed by the drummers strapped with Sîng-Bandhâ Nagerâs or drums tied with horns of the spotted deer fitted with metal blades. They chase “each other pounding their drums in challenge, like stags infuriating their rivals. . . . You can hear the clash of blades, the knock of horns.”⁴¹ Though only men are involved in such dances, the crowd is there to watch and enjoy thoroughly the display of valor, strength and sturdy gaiety by their own.

Whatever be the pace of dances, the celebratory community spirit is at its best there for all to see and experience. There is no greater joy-giving and life-enhancing experience than that of coming together, being together, holding each other, singing and dancing together, and affirming together that life, despite its vicissitudes, is a long celebration in communion with the ancestors under the protective care of the Supreme Being.

³⁹ W. G. Archer, *The Blue Grove*, p. 19.

⁴⁰ Victor Rosner, *The Flying Horse of Dharmes (Ranchi: Satya Bharati Publications, 1982)*, p. 74.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

(d) Art and Aesthetics: Put narrowly, art consists of the paintings and drawings as expressions of one's ideas and feelings with the help of the imagination. Looked at from this perspective, the tribal people who are agriculturalists by profession have neither paintings nor drawings to show mainly for three reasons.

First, art is part and parcel of culture and the production of any piece of art requires leisure.⁴² But as agriculturalists, the tribal people do not have so much free time to devote to any such activities.

Secondly, the tribal people are not interested in holding and wielding sketch pens or paint brushes and colors. They are more at home with handling the tools of their trade, i.e. agriculture-related tools.

Thirdly, paintings and drawings fall within the category of 'art for art's sake' which is of no interest at all to the people who are pragmatic in their approach and outlook on life. That does not mean that they have no sense of form and beauty in nature. They have it perhaps more than others because they live surrounded by nature. They may not be able to give a discourse on beauty but they do appreciate and marvel at whatever is beautiful and attractive.

They do feel, dream and imagine but are not inclined to give expression to their feelings, dreams and imagination in paintings and drawings which are neither spontaneous nor have anything to do with the kind of pattern of life they are used to. Such activities are personal or individualistic or solitary, carried out without involving in any way the community or other members of the community.

Music and Dance: The spontaneity with which they express their inner feelings and ideas is to be seen and experienced in their music and dance.

⁴² Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* (New York: The New American Library, 1963), p. 20.

Tribal art and aesthetics is expressed best in tribal music, which consists in singing, dancing and drumming. For the tribals singing and dancing is part and parcel of their lives. They are fond of singing and dancing. It is so natural to them that it is said about their singing and dancing, "Talking is singing, walking is dancing." It means that singing is as natural as talking, dancing is as spontaneous as walking.⁴³

So, the tribal art and aesthetics is expressed in the community dance and music. **First**, the songs are seasonal, and music changes accordingly. It is in keeping with the music that drum beats also change. **Secondly**, the steps of dances too change. Some of the steps are rather complicated. But it is so awesome and thrilling to hear and see the dancers singing and dancing away in perfect synchronization with the drum beats. "Since the tribal dancers do two activities, i.e., singing and dancing, or drumming and dancing, at times three activities, i.e., singing, drumming and dancing, at the same time it requires greater attention and skill and dexterity in order to synchronize these different actions."⁴⁴ This can definitely be called a feat. **Thirdly**, the drummers express their own artistic and aesthetic sense by dressing up and wearing some extra decorations for the occasion, like pagri (turban), white dhoti, long peacock tail feathers fixed on the back, nets of cowrie (small shells) with scores of tassels, colorful handkerchiefs on their wrists, ghunghrôs (jingles) on their ankles, etc. In short, the artistic and aesthetic expressions are to be found and experienced in and through the songs and dances which are always celebratory, communal and seasonal. "The very nature of the tribal dance needs a group, a community. There is no room for a solo performance in tribal dance."⁴⁵

Designs on the Walls: Some other artistic and aesthetic expressions are to be found in the designs on the floor and walls of their houses. The walls of the tribal houses are painted either white

⁴³ John Lakra, S. J., *Tribal Culture*, p. 96.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

using the mixture of lime and water, or light black using the mixture of cow dung, ashes of straw and water. Painting is either in plain white or light black, or with some design. By and large, the design consists of columns of inter-locked half-circles perhaps symbolizing unconsciously the communitarian dimension of tribal life, celebration and dance.

5. Conclusion

Every society has its own culture which is given expression in a unique way. The expression is two-fold: the act of expression and what is expressed; the act of expression is visible but what is expressed is invisible. The invisibles are the meanings and values the people live by. The tribal people of the Chhotanagpur plateau cherish and revel in their cultural expressions. As agriculturalists, living in the lap of nature, they have a very practical outlook on life. Life, to them, is a long celebration, communitarian, and totally dependent on the Supreme Being. This is what they express through their festivals, rituals, and songs and dances. As agriculturalists, they do hard physical labor all through the year. But there are also days of seasonal cycle and life cycle festivals when they put aside all work and relax and revel. The setting aside all physical labor on festival days puts work in its place. "It suggests that work, however rewarding, is not the highest end of life but must contribute to personal human fulfillment."⁴⁶ Manual labor is a must for their survival and sustenance. But they are not slaves to labor which is surely necessary but not sufficient to be fully human. Human beings have not just material needs which they meet by working in their fields. They also have spiritual needs which are fulfilled in and through the celebration of festivals, an absolutely vital dimension of human life. The tribal people do experience the lively community spirit when they extend their helping hands to each other in times of need. But they experience it all the more on festive occasions when they worship the Supreme Being together, sing and dance together in unison and in complete abandon to throbbing drumbeats of all kinds.

⁴⁶ Harvey Cox, *The Feast of Fools*, p. 5.

TRIBAL VALUES

Benjamin Lakra

This paper, let me confess at the very outset, is not based on any systematic or serious study of the literature available on the subject on the shelves. It is also not the result of any serious reflection on the subject. Unlike most of the members of this august gathering, I am neither a thinker nor a philosopher. What I say is based purely on my simple observations of the lives of my fellow brethren called the Tribals of Chhotanagpur, namely the Oraons, the Mundas, the Kharias, the Hos and the Santhals, and the opinions about them from the Non-Tribals I have met in my long career as a bureaucrat. The subject matter of this paper, therefore, is limited only to the values of the Tribals of Chhotanagpur, whose lives and times I share in some measure. This paper speaks mainly about those values, I am extremely proud of as a Tribal.

The Tribals of Chhotanagpur are extremely honest, extremely simple and extremely hard working

During 1830s the British started tea-plantation industry in the Northeastern region of India in what is now Assam and North Bengal. The industry was highly labour intensive. Many ethnic groups, locals as well as people from various parts of the country were employed who would provide maximum profit for minimal wages to the owners. The Tribals of Chhotanagpur were preferred

over others because of their honesty, simplicity and hard work and my forefathers started migrating in large numbers. The first batch started their journey from Chhotanagpur around 1840. Almost half of the first batch died on their way. Migration to the tea gardens continued as late as the fifties of the last century, which was basically due to the famines caused by the vagaries of the monsoon, which failed more often than not. The following song testifies to this:

एते बड़ा नागापुरे न मिले जीना खाना
 चइल जाबूँ ओहे असाम राजी रे
 चइल जाबूँ ओहे भोटांग राजी।
 दे तो गे आयो मोरा चालीस रूपया
 चइल जाबूँ ओहे असाम राजी रे
 चइल जाबूँ ओहे भोटांग राजी।

*In this such a big country of (Chota)
 Nagpur there is nothing to eat.
 I will go away to Assam.
 I will go to Bhutan (meaning North Bengal).
 Mother, please give me Forty rupees.
 I will go to Assam. I will go to Bhutan.*

The tea gardens of Assam and Doars which almost monopolize the industry are simply captivating with their rich greenery, the fruit of honesty, simplicity and the hard work of the Tribals of Chhotanagpur.

As the 1st World War broke out in 1914 the British Empire, which was at its zenith and where they say, the sun never sets, appealed desperately for help from India in its war efforts. The Allied powers were looking for people who could take up the most difficult task of digging the trenches for their armies in Europe. Again the most suitable people for this tough job were my forefathers, the Tribals of Chhotanagpur because of their honesty, simplicity and hard work. A new regiment was raised and named the Labour

Corps, comprised almost exclusively of the young Oraons, Mundas, Kharias, Hos and Santhals of Chhotanagpur. The Tribal boys studying in the 9th and 10th class of St. John's High School, Ranchi, were taken with them as their interpreters. The trenches dug by the Tribals of Chhotanagpur in France, Spain, Netherlands and other countries of Europe helped the Allied powers win the 1st World War in 1918.

Soon after the 1st World War the Freedom Movement started under the leadership of the Father of the nation, Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi. The British rewarded the war efforts of India with the Rowlat Act and the whole of India started boiling. The rulers needed a place safe enough to keep the freedom fighters as prisoners from where it was impossible for them to escape. No place was more suitable than the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. These, however, had to be cleared of their thick forests before they could become habitable for the keepers and Kalapani for the prisoners. This tough task of clearing the forests of Andaman and Nicobar Islands was given to my forefathers, the Tribals of Chhotanagpur. The migration to Andaman and Nicobar Islands continued up to the 1950s.

As per one of the studies conducted very recently, there are more than 1, 50,000 young Tribal women of Chhotanagpur in the four metropolitan cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai working as domestic workers. They are preferred over others only because they are honest, simple and hard working. Similarly there are very many young Tribal men working in the fields of Punjab and Haryana as agricultural labourers, and equal numbers as industrial and construction labourers building giant factories, roads, flyovers, multiplexes, malls and stadiums in various cities of India. The Asian Games 1980 could not have been show pieced had there been no Tribals of Chhotanagpur to build the various state of the art stadiums. The honesty, simplicity and hard work of the Tribals of Chhotanagpur have made the green revolution a success, the homes

of the affluent safe and the cities of India grand. Listen to this:

रौरकेला कारखाना के के बनाया (2)

सरकार नहीं बनाया, रेजा कुली बनाया (2)

हटिया कारखाना के के बनाया (2)

सरकार नहीं बनाया, रेजा कुली बनाया (2)

Who made the factory in Rourkela?

It was not the Government. Labourers made it.

Who made the factory in Hatia?

It was not the Government. The labourers made it.

The grand human values of Equality, liberty and fraternity are preached by all, the Tribals of Chhotanagpur practice them

Equality, liberty and fraternity, the war cry of the French Revolution are the grand human values preached endlessly by almost all but honestly practised only by the Tribals of Chhotanagpur. Please try to peep into their lives and you will be amazed to see how these values are inseparable from their lives. In fact, they are the basic features of their very nature. Please go to the *akhra*, the village dancing floor, strategically situated in the middle of the village. You will find there the young men and women dancing together in a circular formation, a perfect manifestation of equality and fraternity. All of them are bound together holding each other's hand behind their waists. No Tribal ever dances alone. People dance and sing together to the same tune and rhythm of *mandar* and *nagara*, arm-in-arm, inter connected with each other like a chain or a garland. Together their feet move forward and backward and together their bodies turn, twist and swing in the same direction. The concept of a stage, indicating high and low positions is an alien concept in tribal culture and against their value system. As regards liberty, any one is free to initiate or lead the dance or the song. The same thing can be

witnessed whenever they assemble to deliberate upon any serious issue, social or otherwise. All of them sit again in circular formation in the thick shade under a tree. Everybody in the assembly has the full liberty to express himself without any restriction. There can not be a better manifestation of equality, liberty and fraternity than this.

Hunting and fishing are the other occasions, where equality, liberty and fraternity are manifested in their fullest. Every body comes out for the game. The catch is not important, the participation is. Most often the catch is just a tiny rabbit or a hare or a few squirrels. The ultimate form of equality and fraternity is witnessed at the time of distributing the catch. Utmost care is taken to see that everybody gets an equal share. Even the hunting dogs are not forgotten, and get an equal share of the largesse. In this very country of ours, there are some people who consider their fellow human beings inferior than the animals; the Tribals of Chhotanagpur consider the animals equal to human beings. The servants or *dhangars* in a house hold are equal to anybody in the family, sharing the same food and drink with their masters sitting side by side on the same mat. In fact, most often in the fields, it is the servant who leads at the front with *agua har* and the master who follows him with his *pichhua*. There are any numbers of instances, where the servants end up becoming the son-in-laws and given full respect and honour. Widows, orphans disabled, old and incapacitated are looked after properly, hence there are no beggars amongst the Tribals of Chhotanagpur. "There is discrimination, slavery, slaughter and starvation" as Robert Kennedy once said, "in this world", the Tribals of Chhotanagpur can teach a few lessons on equality, liberty and fraternity to this world, so devoid of these great human values essential for human progress and development.

Respect for women is the defining feature of Tribal value system. As far as equality between men and women among the Tribals of Chhotanagpur is concerned, I must say, the women enjoy sweetness of equality more than the men. This is obvious from the

fact that it is the boy's side which starts looking for the prospective bride. The girl has the right to accept or reject the boy as her future partner. There is no dowry and no bride burning. On the contrary there is a bride price the groom has to pay, though most often it is nominal. That does not mean that the parents send off their daughters empty handed. They send her with whatever they can afford. The best thing, however, is the boy never demands for any thing nor does he complain for not having received anything from his in-laws and they live happily ever after. This is because the parents are equally concerned about the well-being of their daughters. This song brings out very well the treatment the girls get from their parents:

केकर लगिन आयो ऋण बारन कराले
 केकर लगिन आयो संपत्ति रखाले (2)
 बेटी लगिन आयो ऋण बारन कराले
 बेटा लगिन आयो संपत्ति रखाले (2)

O mother, for whom did you go into debt?
 For whom did you keep wealth?
 For your daughter you went into debt.
 For your son you kept wealth.

Hospitality is unique and unparalleled in Tribal societies

The treatment a guest receives in a Tribal family is unique and unparalleled. Normally the guests come when the sun is about to set, the time when every body is out except a lady member busy preparing the evening meal. They only have to announce to her that they are the guests. No sooner is the announcement made than the lady greets them. She spreads a mat for them to sit and washes their feet. She gives them water to quench their thirst and arranges for tobacco. Only when they have fully settled down and comfortable, she very sheepishly asks them as to who they are and from where they have come, as she being the youngest or the recently

married one, does not know them. Nowhere in the world do strangers and unknown persons ever get such warm treatment. This is indeed unique and unparalleled. Needless to say, much more warmth follows after that, when the rest of the family members are back. The best of the food comprising of chicken with rice preceded by *hanria* and *chakhna* is served. Merry making invariably follows with songs and dance.

Relationship with the departed ancestors is ever alive

The Tribals of Chhotanagpur are always one with their ancestors dead and gone. They do not just pray on the All Souls' day or perform few rituals during *Pitripaksha* for the departed souls, but always feel their presence in their midst. Some time after the dead body is laid to rest, on an appointed day his soul is brought back home with great reverence in the presence of all his near and dear ones. Some call it *konha benja*, literally meaning the great marriage. The departed soul is symbolically assigned a permanent place inside the house for all time to come. Every one drops some of the drink on the floor with his little finger for the ancestors to drink before he himself consumes it. Similarly a few grains of food are dropped on the floor for them by everybody before every meal. The ancestors are the silent listeners to all conversations and the unseen guests at every meal. The newborns are named after the ancestors in a very special ceremony on the sixth day after the birth. The ancestor whose name the baby gets becomes a sort of his guardian angel and guides him in all his actions in life and delivers him from every evil.

Sharing and spending is the life philosophy of the Tribals

The Tribals earn to consume and share. They have an inherent tendency in their characters to share and to give whatever they have, which is the exact opposite of acquiring and hoarding. In tribal life wealth is meant not to be hoarded but to be shared and

used. The young ones are taught that if there is honey or milk at home and some one in need of is not given it, the honey and milk simply evaporates in the thin air. People live in the present and they are not bothered about the future. We may call this sweet contentment. It is because of this trait of sweet contentment that there is relative peace and love in the tribal communities. It is because of the tendency to collect more and more that there is corruption and plunder everywhere today. I think the world has a lot of things to learn from the Tribals in order to bring peace and happiness and thus ensure the development of humanity.

Community feeling is another defining trait of the Tribals

Community feeling is another defining trait of the tribal people, a trait directly linked with their value system. The responsibility of conducting the rituals related to birth, marriage and death belongs to the entire community. A child is named not by his parents but by the community elders in the presence of his ancestors dead and alive. The responsibility of finding a bride for a young man is that of the entire community. During a marriage ceremony, everyone in the community is directly involved. However poor, nobody remains unmarried, since the entire community contributes its share towards the expense of marriage. Similarly, performing all the rites related to death is the responsibility of the entire community. This community feeling can be seen in all aspects of tribal life. Every member of the community helps a person through the institutions of *madait* and *pancha*. The more people who participate in cultural activities, such as dance, *jatra-sendra*, the better it is supposed to be. Such sense of unity and community feeling is difficult to find nowadays.

These are some of the values of the Tribals of Chhotanagpur, my own brothers and sisters. Unfortunately these values are fast disappearing with the rapid processes of detribalization. Modern education, geared towards providing degrees, and not wisdom and knowledge; modern economy geared towards the exploitation of

nature and not its enrichment; a lifestyle based on luxury and self-aggrandizement; a modern civilization in which the craze for material comfort has replaced spiritual yearnings are some of the reasons for detribalization and debasement of the rich tribal values. If this process continues unabated, it might acquire its own momentum, and humanity-at-large will ultimately be the loser.

FOLK MEDIA AND TRIBAL CULTURE

Robert Pen

Introduction

India is a land of myriad cultures and peoples. Indian culture is as old as the hills and encompasses a wide range of ancient dances and folk music. Every region in India has a traditional dance and folk music that is an art handed down from generation to generation. India's folk music and dance has a history spanning over a period of hundreds of years and, developed over several eras, remains an essential part of the lives of Indians today as a source of religious inspiration, cultural expression, emotional bonding and entertainment.¹

India has a rich tradition of folk performing arts. These are characterised by a staggering multiplicity of genres, forms, styles and techniques. These are also living expressions of the life styles and cultures of various communities evolved through the ages in a variety of forms as dance, dance drama, song, theatre and play.²

Unlike Western theatre, folk performance is a composite art in India. It is total art with a fusion of elements from music, dance, pantomimes, versification, ballad recitation, graphic and plastic arts,

¹ S.P. Pandey and Awadhesh Kumar Singh, *Folk Culture in India* (New Delhi, Serials, 2005), p. 15.

² Pandey, *Folk Culture in India*, p. 16.

religious and festival pageantry. It imbibes ceremonial rituals, beliefs and a social value system. It has deep religious and ritualistic overtones and is able to project social life, secular themes and universal values.

Folk culture has always been very popular in the country. In the earlier days folk theatres and other folk forms such as dance, dance drama, song, folklores were used to convey important messages. This form is very popular even today in tribal villages where communication is not so advanced. Folk performing arts have developed in the various tribal belts of the country in response to certain socio-cultural and psychological needs of local people. Moreover, these performing arts and traditions have contributed significantly to national integration, social change, socio-economic development and overall preservation of our cultural heritage.

The present article outlines the perspective of tribal folk culture and analyses the dynamics of socio-cultural folk traditions, particularly songs, theatres, dance dramas and dances of various tribal communities of India.

Folk Media: Definition

Folk media consists of a variety of forms: folk theatre, puppetry, story telling, folk songs, folk dances, ballads, mime, and more. These forms have served as vehicles of communication and entertainment in Asia, Africa and Latin America for centuries. "Through the use of dialogue, action, music, song, and dance the stage has presented a vitally important view of the cosmos which has implanted basic beliefs and behavior patterns in rural audiences."³

³ D. Van Hoosen. "The Barefoot Actors: Folk Drama and Development Communication in Asia" in G. Wang and W. Dissanayake (Eds.) *Continuity and Change in Communication System: An Asian erspective* (Norowood, NJ: Ablex, 1984b), p. 127.

Wang and Dissanayake define folk media as a “communication system embedded in the culture which existed before the arrival of mass media, and still exist as a vital mode of communication in many parts of the world, presenting a certain degree of continuity, despite changes.”⁴ Ranganath defines the traditional media as “living expressions of the lifestyle and culture of a people, evolved through the years.”⁵ These definitions reiterate the origin and nurturing of the folk channels in and by the richness of the indigenous culture.

Tribal Culture and Folk Media

The tribal people of earlier days spent their time usefully and purposefully. The labourers in agricultural fields and in rural industries sang songs to overcome the weariness of their work. These are known as Folklore. Folklore is a medium through which the soul of a people expresses itself colourfully. In such creation, they find an artistic fulfilment and entertainment combined with dance that is called Folk art. Folk art does not involve any formal training. The children pick up the song and dance as they pick up their language. The needs and peculiar problems of the village people’s life find an expression in folk art. Their daily life is full of religious customs and ceremonies. Myths and legends are required to be illustrated interestingly and conveyed to the public. Children require toys and dolls to play with. Changing tastes of women are to be satisfied with new types of ornaments. Shrines and idols are to be built. While satisfying the needs of the people, folk art attains a certain aesthetic level. Folk art has its own individuality and character and it exists by its intrinsic merit, i.e., the flight of fancy of the artist, its symmetrical form, rhythm of design and efficient workmanship. Materials used in folk art are local and not imported from outside. Folk art is closely connected with the soil, linked up with the customs

⁴ G. Wang and W. Dissanayake (Eds.). *Continuity and Change in Communication System: An Asian perspective* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1984b), p. 22.

⁵ H.K. Ranganath, “Traditional Media.” *Instructional Technology Report*. No. 12 (September).

and belief of the people. It is in no way art for art's sake. It is utilitarian in outlook and based on the socio-religious life of the people. It is anonymous and its origin cannot be traced to any particular period of time.⁶

It is impossible to categorize or even list out neatly the multiplicity of tribal folk forms. Although fundamentally one in spirit, they defy systematic categorisation. Folk culture in a tribal society is seen in the following four different forms:⁷

1. **Oral Tradition:** These include mostly verbal arts or expressive literature consisting of spoken, sung and voiced forms of traditional utterances like songs, tales, poetry, ballads, anecdotes, rhymes, proverbs and elaborate epics.
2. **Material Culture:** These are visible aspects of folk behaviour such as skills, recipes and formulae as displayed in rural arts and crafts, traditional motifs, architectural design, clothes, fashions, farming, fishing and various other types of tools and machinery.
3. **Social Folk Customs:** These are areas of traditional life that emphasize the group rather than the individual skills and performances. They include large family and community observances and relate to rites of passages such as birth, initiation, marriage and death or annual celebrations, festivals, fairs, ritual and ceremonial gatherings, market occasions and rural meets.
4. **Performing Arts:** These consist of traditional music, masquerades, dance and drama.

⁶C.S. Sreekumar, "Folk Arts as Mass Communication Media", pp. 1-2, <http://www.sikhspectrum.com/112007/folkarts.htm> visited on 8 December 2007.

⁷ Sreekumar, "Folk Arts as Mass Communication Media", pp. 2-3.

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

Various Types of Tribal Performing Arts

The tribal folk media can further be divided into the following types of performing arts: folk songs, folk dances, folk music, folk theatre and poetry. We shall look at each of them briefly.

Tribal Folk Songs

Tribal family ties were fostered by age-old customs. People had supreme faith in an all-powerful providence. Often, this faith in a Superior being manifested itself in their love for a tree, a stone, an animal, a river, a hill, a forest, or even an idea. Until they developed agriculture, the main occupation of the people was hunting and food gathering. Later they began tilling the land, after converting it into small plots for ploughing and working hard to reap a seasonal harvest. Agriculture demanded their full attention and they were kept fully occupied while sowing and reaping. In between, there was leisure and rest from the basic demand of the tiller's life – hard manual labour. This was the time for recreation, for song and dance to lighten their lives. When they had a satisfactory harvest, their feeling of joy and exhilaration found expression in song and dance. Social and family gatherings and celebrations also gave rise to song and music. There are the folk songs that colour and reflect the lives

of the tribals in all their variety and fullness. The anonymous folk songs are rich miniatures representing the lives, the joys and sorrows of the village folk. These songs and dances convey to us the aesthetic sense of people. The unique feature about them is that they belong to the community. The authorship of the songs is not of our concern because they are preserved by oral tradition.⁸

In cultured societies, a song may be distinguished from music. The functions of the two artists, i.e., poet and musician are quite different here. However, among the tribal people, they are one; song and music go hand in hand. Apart from entertainment, folk songs are sung to teach the child to walk, to dance, to drink milk, to eat food, to play, to count, to be industrious and good-natured. The child receives home education through folk songs, which are unforgettable and permanent.⁹

The spirit of singing is the source of folk poetry and music in its very soul. The intensity of emotion, which the oral repetition imparts to the folk song, is its heartbeat. The peculiarity of the folk song lies in the fact that every member of a community takes a more or less active part in its ceremonial function, though everyone may not exactly sing the song, the song is known to and enjoyed by all to the heart's content. Their active participation is in contrast to the passive hearing of an audience assembled in musical and literary gathering in a city nowadays. In a folk song, we have only the singer. He may sing alone or in a group with or without the accompaniment of musical instruments. It is believed that the folk feeling and melody are inseparably intermingled in a folk song. Actually, the text of the song and its melody do not form an integral unit and the bond may be broken. The same song may be sung in different tunes in different parts of the country or even in the same locality. This is corroborated by the fact that the singer forgets the basic melody and sets the

⁸ Sreekumar, "Folk Arts as Mass Communication Media", p. 5.

⁹ Sreekumar, "Folk Arts as Mass Communication Media", pp. 5-6.

song to his own melody. The tunes may change from age to age or from one person to another. There is no fixed notation of music or a set tune though it becomes difficult to find out the basic melodies. A few melodies in comparison with a large number of texts testify to this fact. We find different versions of the text and melody prevalent in a country. One tune of the text expresses joy and another tune of the same text sounds sad and depressing. The tie of the musical features with the emotional aspect of the song seems strong. But it is not always inseparable. Folk people are unable to express a mood or emotion unless they make use of musical terms of city usage.¹⁰

Tribal songs thus contain various human sentiments which may include amorous love and affection, affection for child, brother-sister affection, bravery, humour, teasing etc. But the most favourite subject regards gods and goddesses, spirituality, origin of earth and mankind, intricacies of nature. The local gods and goddesses and the clan gods take priority over other gods. Those forces of nature which are queer also occupy a large part of the subject matter. Nature is one of the main inspirations and also a subject matter of many songs. Sun and Moon, Earth, Trees, Animals and Birds are described or referred to in many songs. But out of these some are the signs of the tribal totem. Such animals or trees get priority as subjects for songs. Many social and economic aspects and issues are also reflected in the songs, e.g. poverty and riches, market and marketing, bride price, the condition of tribals. Many songs are dedicated to praise of the Chief/Patel or King and to the brave deeds of past leaders.¹¹

Folk Dances

Folk dances are a spontaneous human expression of the joy of living. The forms may change from place to place but the rules,

¹⁰ Sreekumar, "Folk Arts as Mass Communication Media", p. 7.

¹¹ S.G. Deogaonkar and Shailaja Deogaonkar, *Tribal Dance and Songs* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2003), pp. 116-117.

or the lack of them, in this field, are guided entirely by the spontaneity of the moment. Every country has its own variety of folk dances. Folk dances in tribal belts of India have always had a spiritual purpose and religious background and through them the fundamental principles and philosophic truths of the tribal religions permeate into the minds of the community. At the same time, they reflect the community life and belief, the social customs and manners, and the hopes and aspirations of the people at large. Unsophisticated simplicity, spontaneity and gaiety are the characteristics of folk arts.¹²

The tribal folk songs are sung only while dancing (tribals are not accustomed to sing while sitting) and hence these songs should be correctly called 'Dancing-songs'. One may say that their songs are not 'sung' but 'danced'. Dances are very common and are a matter of daily routine. All occasions in personal and social life are celebrated with dancing. Right from the birth-ritual to marriage or even in death rituals dancing and singing are very common. On festivals, during farming, working in the forest or elsewhere, everywhere songs are sung and dances are danced.¹³

Tribal folk literature is mainly found in their songs and the singing and dancing is traditionally a collective or a community affair. This means that there is no audience as such, because the whole community participates in singing and dancing. At the time of dancing and singing two things are very commonly observed, the bon-fire by burning firewood, and consumption of liquor. The *Mahua* or the *Toddy* liquors are commonly used to give the necessary vigour and enthusiasm for the strenuous performance of dance.¹⁴

Folk Music

Music appeals to the physical, intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual instincts of a human being. A child is constrained by the

¹² Sreekumar, "Folk Arts as Mass Communication Media", p. 4.

¹³ Deogaonkar, *Tribal Dance and Songs*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁴ Deogaonkar, *Tribal Dance and Songs*, p. 10.

soft strains of music though it does not understand the language and meaning of the song. The smoothing tones of the lullaby have the power to put the baby to sleep. Adults find rest and relaxation in times of stress and worry by listening to rhythmic music. In all spheres of life – private or public, in villages and in towns, in times of peace and in times of war, in social and religious functions and in the life of the individual – music is absolutely essential.

In tribal belts of India, more than anywhere else, music is the inevitable form of all these activities. Music is remembered more faithfully because to the folk singer the whole meaning of the song is emotional rather than logical. The appeal lies in the elemental simplicity of the musical styles that have the power of getting people involved in group behaviour. In tribal societies folk music plays an important role in the daily life. Most of the activities of the members of these societies revolve round the rituals and festivities associated with their traditional music. The music functions as a communication device when it is employed through the language and accepted melodic patterns of a community.¹⁵

The tribal tradition is based on dancing and singing to the tunes of music. It is very often observed that the tribal men and women first start dancing, with music based primarily on rhythm and then only they start singing the songs. The music is based on the various natural tunes, notes, and chords which they come across in Nature. The sounds of the birds and wild animals, the sounds of the rivers and waves of winds are the sources of their music. Consequently many of the words in their music are onomatopoeic. For setting the tune, rhythm or chord of the music one person leads, and others follow suit.¹⁶

¹⁵ Sreekumar, "Folk Arts as Mass Communication Media", pp. 4-5.

¹⁶ Deogaonkar, *Tribal Dance and Songs*, pp. 9-10.

Tribal Folk Theatre

Primitive man began to express his thoughts and views by way of raising some alarming sound to convey fear, trumpeting his success in war with animals and fellow beings and by crying to express loss and grief. The signs of bodily expression and vociferous acclamations of human beings have been pruned, polished and changed. Refined forms of such sounds are classified as lullabies, dirge, music and songs. The raising of voice with physical expression became folk art. When folk arts were staged as entertainments, they became folk theatre. Folk theatre performances are closely associated with celebrations such as birth, marriage and death. There are a number of fertility rites linked to food gathering, the earth, the sun and the moon. In these, the immediacy of life experiences is recalled in sound, rhythm and movement. Dramatic action with the form of spoken words and gestures makes its appearance. Since Indian society was nurtured in the oral tradition, where the bulk of learning was transmitted through the narration of stories, myths, hymns, and songs, it is only natural that one of the ways through which people expressed their feelings about social problems was the theatre.¹⁷

Folk theatre emerged as a powerful means of social communication in traditional societies. Man utilized his talent in folk arts and theatres not only as a mode of entertainment but also as a way of conveying information. The folk dramas that originally yielded pleasure to the villagers and the town people alike were transformed into stage plays. These stage plays have moved into street plays, which deal with the day-to-day problems of people. The street plays being realistic are devoid of the traditional make-up, costumes and scenes, and the characters are more life like. Their sole aim is to communicate to the people. These street plays are able to reach people at everywhere. The feedback is immediate. The language employed is the common idiom of the society. Hence, it is easily

¹⁷ Sreekumar, "Folk Arts as Mass Communication Media", pp. 6-7.

comprehended by both the educated and the uneducated audience. Therefore, the folk dramas were very popular from the medieval period and they are being used even today. The folk dramas staged by the rural troupes help in promoting mass communication.¹⁸

The tribal people are experts in the performing arts specially the folk-drama. They have developed different art forms the most common of which are, Dandhar and Ramlila. They also have specialised dances befitting the occasion, such as the *Khamm* dance of the Korku, the *Ghusadi* dance of the Kolam, the *Rela* or the *Dussera* dances of the Madia etc. Tribal folk theatre represents a combination of dance-songs and the performing art. For example, the Danhar continues for hours together and the themes also go on changing. They have their own methods of makeup, developed indigenously from locally available natural material like stones and soils, resins from the trees, animal skins and features of the birds. Their musical instruments like drums (*Dhol*) of different types, flutes, trumpets etc. are also locally prepared. Of late, they have adopted modern musical instruments like the harmonium, *Ghungroos* or brass and so on.¹⁹

Tribal Poetry

Most of the tribals are, by nature, quick poets. They compose songs or may change the subject matter of songs on the spur of the moment to suit the occasion such as welcoming a guest, describing modern education, elections, development etc. In some poems besides metaphors and similes even transferred epithets are used. Singing a poem is a peculiarity of tribal poetry because for oral transmission this was essential. These poems are sung collectively especially while dancing.²⁰

¹⁸ Sreekumar, "Folk Arts as Mass Communication Media", p. 7.

¹⁹ Deogaonkar, *Tribal Dance and Songs*, p. 10.

²⁰ Deogaonkar, *Tribal Dance and Songs*, pp. 116-117.

Tribal poetry is in a real sense a spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions because based in their natural environment, tribal people are more responsive and sensitive to stimuli from nature. The joy and ecstasy resulting from their response to nature flow out in the form of poetry.²¹

Characteristics of Tribal Folk Media²²

The tribal folk media all over India tend to vary according to the group and the geographical situation. However, many characteristics are seen as common. Here we illustrate a few of them.

1. **The expressions of the human body are highlighted.** The tribal folk media is very expressive and symbolic in nature. Thus various bodily gestures, facial expressions, mudras and other postures are often used along with songs and poetry.
2. **Nature and the mysteries of life are recurring themes.** They are the fruit of human experience and observation. Right from the birth-ritual, to marriage or even in death rituals dancing and singing are very common.
3. **Tribal folk media are dynamic living forms, not static.** They undergo a historical updating according to the time, place, event and issue. They are thoroughly life-based and relate directly to life issues.
4. **They are based on an oral tradition.** Since they develop among non-literate people, almost all information is transmitted orally.

²¹ Deogaonkar, *Tribal Dance and Songs*, p. 9.

²² Boscom –India, *'Shepherds' for an information age*, (Mumbai: Tej-Prasarini, 2000), pp. 124-126.

5. **Folk art and songs are linked to the cycles of human life.** For instance there are special songs for the rites of passage and for the agrarian seasonal changes. On festivals during farming, while labouring in forests or elsewhere songs are sung and dances are danced.
6. **Legends of an area have a close impact on the regional folklore and often reflect the minds of the people of the region.** The folklore of tribals of Maharashtra projects the virile, martial, down-to-earth, even raucous character of the people of Maharashtra, while Manipuri dances have very light steps indicating the lively characteristics of the people of this north-eastern state.
7. **Folk media contains the collective wisdom of the people** – which includes ideals, beliefs, faiths, concepts, philosophy, weather lore, information about various occupations, and medicinal knowledge. Various tribal saints and mystics figure largely in folklore as their noble teachings containing ancestral wealth of spirituality and wisdom of the past is narrated over and over again.
8. **Folk forms are open and flexible.** Each performance is unique to the time and need of the place. The musicians and drummers in a procession, for instance, are able to keep the music going till it is time for them to stop.
9. **The inherent logic is circular.** This is very different from western logic. Western logic is linear, moving in a fixed direction, towards the final proof or punch-line. Eastern logic instead is circular, going round the subject and looking at it from various angles, involving therefore quite an amount of overlapping. This may seem unnecessary and repetitive to a western mind.

Advantages of using Folk Media in order to communicate with Tribal Peoples Folk media are still the most *effective means of communication to tribal peoples*. The print media is not very effective since illiteracy is still high. The radio, though the most acceptable form of mass communication to rural folk, is still limited in its impact and outreach. The television that is making inroads into rural societies is having a great impact, but it is not certain whether this medium has a healthy effect on the minds and culture of rural folk. Firstly, it is very western in presentation and very urban in its concerns; rural and tribal societies are rarely, if ever, represented in television. Secondly, even when it does make use of rural art forms, they tend to be depleted of their real spirit and meaning. It is therefore important to make use of tribal folk art and folklore in order to further the development of tribal peoples.

The impact of mainstream media on the attitudes, behaviour or decision-making of rural and tribal masses is only skin-deep. It is necessary to use traditional media because they play a reinforcing role. While mainstream media is quickly transmitting information and news, the traditional media can supplement these effects by having a better impact on the motivational, behavioural or attitudinal aspects of the rural or illiterate people.²³ It has been proved by studies and experiments that traditional media, to a greater extent, affect the attitude of illiterate masses, because they reflect the cultural aspects and are closer to the hearts of the common people in rural areas.²⁴

Furthermore the use of folk media has quite a few advantages over mainstream media because it involves the local people, uses a familiar medium known to them, uses their local language that is known to them. The folk forms are traditionally the people's forms.

²³ Suresh Chandra Sharma, *Media, Communication and Development*, (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1987), p. 104.

²⁴ Vasanthi Rajendran, "Traditional Media as Agents of Change," *Communication and Development: Issues and Perspectives*, ed. S.R. Mehta (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1992), p. 221.

They are familiar with them for centuries. They have grown out of the people's traditional culture and they have been primary vehicles of social and cultural learning since their infancy. They are active forms of communication in which the whole person of the performer as well as of the entire community is involved.²⁵ Therefore they are always participative and democratic.²⁶

Folk Media thus:

- Involves the people
- Uses a familiar medium
- Uses local language
- Passes relevant messages
- Addresses itself to local issues, needs and problems.
- Uses local talents and artistes
- Uses locally available resources
- Is cheaper than print, projected or electronic media.
- Exploits local creativity and enthusiasm

The basic principle of communicating through folk media in a tribal context is to maximize perception since information is received in a social context. The use of folk media is adopted because it:

- Overcomes the barriers of illiteracy as it does not depend on the printed word
- Does not use expensive or complicated technology and can be easily understood by the people.
- Offers entertainment, is a crowd puller, holds undivided attention, stimulates and sustains interest.

²⁵ Desmond. A D'Abreo, *Voice to the People: Communication for Social Change*, (Chennai: Cultural and communication, 1990), p. 122.

²⁶ D'Abreo, *Voice to the People: Communication for Social Change*, p. 23. visited on 9th February 2008.

- Offers opportunity for repeated performance and presentation of numerous messages within a short time.
- Uses popular and familiar cultural techniques acceptable and appealing to the community.
- Provides equal educational opportunities to all regardless of their age, social and cultural differences
- Is suitable for motivation, creating awareness and spreading mass information without causing boredom or personal suspicion.
- Makes learning more interesting, increases perception and understanding.
- Encourages community participation in organizing activities and uses community channels and respected community folk artistes as communicators in their own community.
- Gives the target audience a chance to approach, view and understand the issues in their own perspective and accent, thus encouraging faster innovations and change.
- Provides immediate feedback; impact assessment can be visualized from audience response, reaction and audiences interviews.

Use of Folk Media for Tribal Development and Social Change

1. Folk art and folklore is the *expression of the tribal and rural masses* of our country. They were once a means to propitiate rural deities and sources for the transmission and dissemination of news and information through face-to-face live communication but as time went on they became means of entertaining and educating the masses. Being ancient forms of art, folk media is very close to the heart of the people. Its appeal is

universal and its understanding is direct and at a personal level. So the folk media can effectively be used as mass communication among tribal people.

2. Folk media are instrumental in *motivating and educating* rural and tribal people – particularly those who are exploited and degraded. They prepare the ground for developmental work or for conscientization.
3. Folk media have played a very important role in *solving several emotional problems and channelizing the destructive forces into constructive ones*. In India folk music, folk dances and folk dramas have always played an important role in combating destructive elements and in harmonizing emotional outbursts relating to caste, creed, religion and language issues. Several folk forms of entertainment prevalent in different parts of India were powerful media of public instruction and a unifying force for emotional integration. Various organizations, movements and government bodies can effectively make use of these folk arts for developmental activities.
4. Folk media are most effective in *changing the unscientific attitudes, superstitions*, etc. inherited as a part of tradition by the people in rural areas. In the course of folk performance, they transmit information and project ideas that may influence attitudes and behaviour as well as entertainment. Folk arts are a good medium for informing people about superstitious beliefs.
5. Folk performing arts have developed in the various tribal belts of the country in response to certain socio-cultural and psychological needs of local people. Moreover, these performing arts and traditions have contributed significantly to *national integration, social change*,

socio-economic development and overall preservation of their cultural heritage.

6. Studies have proved that the hold of the folk media on the rural and semi-urban masses is still strong. Realizing the potentialities of folk media, some State Directorates of Public Relations and non-governmental organizations make imaginative use of the folk art. Through live entertainment movements they have made several experiments by employing many of these forms *for dissemination of ideas and innovations*.

UNESCO Guidelines for the use of Folk Media for promoting Tribal Development²⁷

Many development planners in the Third World now appreciate the use of folk media as a mode of communication to explain development programmes. This may be because of the ineffectiveness of the mass media in reaching those to whom its messages are targeted. Therefore, decision makers have started to take a second look at the use of folk media to generate local participation in development projects.

In the 1974 meeting in New Delhi, the seminar workshop of UNESCO discussions focused specially on the potentiality of the various forms of traditional media and the technique of their production as well as integration with the mass media for motivational purposes. This particular seminar-workshop was notable for its enunciation of a number of guiding principles for the use of traditional or folk media for promoting development programmes in a tribal context.

²⁷ Durgadas Mukhopadhyay, "Folk Arts and Traditional Media for Environment Education", Zparta Institute of Social Studies India, topics.development-gateway.org/environment/rc/filedownload.do?itemId=1077045,

- The folk media should be an integral part of any communication programme for tribal development. Wherever possible, these should be integrated with mass media but in all cases, integration with the on-going extension work is vital.
- The prerequisites for the use of the folk media are:
 - a. an understanding of the tribal audience; and
 - b. the use of these media to provide the tribal people with recreation, to attract their attention, and to ensure their participation in developmental activities.
- The utilization of folk media in communication programmes should be viewed not only from the perspective of socio-economic development but also of cultural development.
- Folklore should thus retain social authenticity. The folk forms have evolved gradually, and wherever they are flexible they retain their appeal to the tribal people.
- Not all folk forms can be used for developmental or environmental communication purposes; thus they should be carefully studied from the point of view of content and significance with a view to their possible adaptation so as to carry effective developmental or environmental messages.
- Folk media productions should be consistent with the needs of the social environment and related to the customs and beliefs of the local tribal communities.

- Since folk media have sociological roots, their utilization should be related to local events and their function in the local communication strategy should be properly assigned.
- Efforts should be made to preserve the originality of each folk form; adaptation need not alter nor destroy the form.
- For effective community-level communication strategies, an integrated and planned use of both folk and mass media is necessary to achieve optimum impact and for desired feedback.
- Collaboration between the folk artistes and the media producers is absolutely essential for the successful integration of folk media and mass media communication strategies for developmental purposes.

Conclusion

In India, peasants, agricultural labourers, women, tribals, bonded labourers and other oppressed groups are rediscovering the potential of traditional arts and media as weapons in their struggle for land, water, forest, better working and living conditions, human rights. Folk arts are used for peace education and conflict resolution on a wide scale in India. An increasing number of people are turning to theatre which is by the people, for the people and of the people, as a means of mobilizing people for action and the achievement of social justice, peace and harmony.²⁸

Among the tribals too there is an urgent need to recreate, innovate, perpetuate and maintain the tribal or native folk media in the face of modern mass media which threatens to assimilate, absorb

²⁸ Arvind Kumar, *Encyclopaedia of Mass Media and Communication* (New Delhi: Anmol Publicaitons Pvt. Ltd., 1998) 2, p. 467.

and then wipe away the tribal culture and identity. Not all the tribals are awake and aware of their need to unite in order to preserve, protect and propagate their own culture through tribal folk media.

There is an innate valuable tribal wisdom buried in the noble teachings and thoughts of Adivasi and tribal saints and mystics, which is not found in the day-to-day living of other people. This ancestral wealth of spirituality, wisdom of the past, needs to be unearthed and preserved. Such a process could be initiated through compilation and collection of their oral myths, legends, folk-tales, proverbs, riddles, mimics and other sayings.²⁹

The communication expert must learn to utilize tribal folk media to achieve maximum impact through symbols and a system with which the tribal community is already familiar. Once that level of understanding has been achieved, the tribals themselves will participate in devising the most effective medium from a wide range of folk media. Communication experts must understand these by working with the rural tribal community. In that way, when they come to modernize or nationalize the message for purposes of nation-wide dissemination, they will concentrate on using symbols and images that make sense to the folk in the villages. Local trees, animals, landscape and weather will begin to play a major part in the way messages are echoed and delivered.³⁰

Sometimes it had been that traditional folk media was utilised only for the sake of entertainment. If they are used only for pure entertainment they lose the value of communicating to the rural tribal folk. It degrades the development of communication and social change. The other limitation of the traditional folk media was that sometimes it was purely didactic. There should be a proper balance between entertainment and information in their content material. The traditional folk media should not be used for propaganda. The appeal

²⁹ Mahipal Bhuriya, *Adivasikaran: Tribalisation and Aboriginalisation* (Jhabua: Centre for Art, Culture and Communication, 2004), p. 53.

³⁰ Durgadas Mukhopadhyay, "Traditional Media and Development Communication," *Issues in Mass Communication: The Basic Concepts*, eds. J. S. Yadava and Pradeep Mathur (New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, Distributors, 1998), p. 110.

of traditional media is more emotional than intellectual. Their purpose is more to inspire than to inform.³¹

It is very essential that the performers live up to what they advocate in their plays. People are very sensitive to see how the performers themselves are living their lives. One of the set backs of folk art forms is the gap between precept and practice in the lives of the artists themselves. Some of the forms have become pure propaganda for different parties. Sometimes the demands of the party are too much for the artists. Folk art claims to touch the issues that are vital to the lives of the people. A culture which represents a society's awareness of its values, aims, visions and dreams can, no doubt, provide an important incentive for development. They should focus on seeking justice and equality that is true to their culture. Sometimes there is a lack of continuity in transmitting culture. If all folk art forms are to be really effective, the total participation of the people is a must. The tribal people should not be considered merely repositories of information rather they should be trained to promote their own traditions and cultural values.³²

We have elaborately dealt with the significance of traditional folk media for effective communication among tribal communities. We have seen that folk media can efficiently be used even in the modern world. I feel that in the coming days the folk media will be given more importance and will be used by many more people among the tribal communities to promote social change and development. If all of us join our hands and heads together, we can promote more effective communication among the tribal communities through folk art forms, which are more credible, personal and appeal to the concrete daily lives of the people.

³¹ R. K. Ravindran, *Media and Society* (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1999) p. 182.

³² Jacob Srampickal, *Voice to the Voiceless: The Power of People's Theatre in India*. (New Delhi: Manohar, 1994), pp. 222-223.

TRIBALS' OUTLOOK ON NATURE

Through Nature to God

Samuel Dingrongmoo Lepcha

I believe in the cosmos. All of us are linked to the cosmos. So nature is my god [?]. To me, nature is sacred. Trees are my temples and forests are my cathedrals.—Mikhail Gorbachev

Introduction

As a young student of seventh standard in St. George's High School in Pedong, I didn't think it was so bad a thing to pluck "that red China rose" from the plant near the Principal's residence. The then Parish Priest—cum-the acting Principal, Fr. M. Rey CR, came out of his room and asked me to put back the flower in its place. When I told him that I couldn't do that, he told me, "**If you cannot make, then you have no right to break.**" Today, as I make this study, I have the same feeling: **If I cannot make this world, I have no right to break it in any way.**

Nature, the sum total of all the living and non-living beings is important to all of us, especially to the tribals. To the tribals, the nature is a gigantic tabernacle perennially open for eternal adoration. Between them there is continuous and intimate interaction. The tribal-Nature interaction therefore, transcends a botanist's approach to nature. Their relationship is deeper and holistic. For the tribals, nature

invariably leads to God. In fact, the tribals' outlook on nature could be defined as: **through nature to God**. Relationship between the tribals and the nature is filled with a "sublime sense of the supernatural in every sphere of their lives, the extraordinary values of solidarity with nature and with the whole of creation..."¹ Thus, we see an intrinsic bond between the tribals and the nature.

This bond helps sensitive tribals to take a leap from what is 'visible' to the 'invisible' realities of life. Their sensitivity towards the nature makes them see the realities around them quite differently from the ways the non-tribals perceive them. Where the tribals see an enormous presence of human-nature-relatedness, a non-tribal might perceive that as a mere co-existence of the opposites. The Tribals' outlook on the nature is therefore, mystical. It is mystical in the sense, that there is an experience of transcendence in their approach to the nature. Hence, it is also different. It is different from many approaches we are used to.

The Tribal-nature relatedness is based on their interdependency. Their interdependency and inter-relationship appear to be intrinsically established. The nature is close to them and vice-versa, even while living amidst highly urbanised places. The tribals relate with the nature and its realities in varied ways; because the tribals find all these natural realities relatable. The tribals' relatedness with the nature makes them feel that they are immersed in and existing with it. It gives them tremendous sense of belonging to the nature.

This relatedness of the tribals with the nature and the sense of belonging to it have given rise to the tribal arts, folklores, folk-songs, tribal or primal religions and complete pattern of life. As a result a triangular but interactive relationship of the humans (tribals), nature and divine is formed. This interaction among the tribals, the

¹ Mathew George Kariapuram, *Tribal Hermeneutics for a Contextual Theology*, (Noida: Academy Press, 1999), 73.

nature and the divine has given birth to a unique tribal-culture which could be expressed through a mathematical equation: **Nature X [Hu] Man X Spirit = Culture [Eco-Culture]**.² In other words, the product of this interaction gives rise to the **tribal-eco-culture** which is encompassing in character. According to this, the **tribal-eco-culture** is determined by the quality of interactions among the three factors, viz. Nature, human and divine. The resulting culture [Eco-culture] changes in quality depending on the quality and type of interrelationship among the three factors.

Hence, when a Polar bear starts freaking out endangered by the fast melting snow caused by the global warming, the tribals whose mountains are abode of God/s and snows the Prime-matter of their origin, also begin to fret because they cannot bear looking at the abode of God/s melting down. For instance, each ice block that melts down from the Mount Kanchenjunga threatens the Lepchas living at the foot hills of Kanchenjunga because, with this melting process, they feel that their beginning begins to melt.³ It is the beginning of their end. These tribals begin to feel the change in the equation. The indigenous Lepcha tribe of Dzongu⁴, in North Sikkim and those of Kalimpong, Darjeeling and all over the country agitated

² Pradip Singh, "Nature-Man-Spirit: A Constant?" in *Nature Man Spirit Complex in Tribal India*, Ed. R.S. Mann (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1981), 295.

³ Anthony Lepcha, (cU d _AN l B *Chyu Da Aun Lep*), (Kalimpong: ani Printing Press, 2006), 10. In his poem (*Chyubi*) cUi b (Mountain) he expresses the general sentiments of all the Lepchas: that the creation of the Lepchas is as old as the mount Kanchenjunga. (*kingchum chyuu naam satyet thak Rongkupsung ithobula naam otyetdo thaknon ma o*) (Vi k g M cU n M s t De T X Vo r k B/u s i A A T b U l a n Ma A t De d T X n Nm a A. According to the Lepcha traditional belief, every Lepcha has a designated *Chyu (mountain) Da (lake) and Lep* (passage) to which one returns after his or her earthly life.

⁴ Lyangsong Tamsang, *Aachuley, A Quarterly Lepcha Bilingual News Magazine*, Vol.12, No.1 (April 2008), 24-29. Ren Lyangsong Tamsang, the present President of Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association (Estd.1925), Head Quarter Kalimpong, in his letter addressed to Dr. Pawan Chamling, the Chief Minister of Sikkim dated 8th Feb.2008 clarifies the meaning of **Dzongu**. According to him **Dzongu** is a

against the NHPC projects which wanted to build dams on river Teesta⁵ because for them disturbing the pristine beauty of Teesta amounted to the molestation of their identity.⁶ For them altering the perfect order of what was natural was something more than acting unnaturally.⁷

At the outset of this discussion, the questions that arise in my mind are: Can we have a philosophical reflection on the tribal-nature relationship? What do we call such a philosophical reflection? What could be that unique contribution of Christian Philosophers towards this tribal-nature interaction? Do we have to contribute to fill the barn of the tribals wisdom or do we need to learn from

mispronunciation of the correct word “*Dzongbu*” meaning the land of plenty, abundance and prosperity. The Lepcha priests: *Bongthing* and priestesses (*Mun*) call it “*Faokraam Takraam*”! f r M Xr M which means “The source of Lepchas origin and life.”

⁵ Teesta River (*Rongnyu*), which is the life line of Sikkim and Darjeeling hills starts from *Pansang-pla Chyu* at the foot of Mount Kanchenjunga. This river meets the *Rongeet* (Rong-it) river which starts from *Dangkya Chyu* on the other side of Mount Kanchenjunga, near Peshok [*Panjaok*=forest in Lepcha). The Lepchas have a folklore about the love story of these two rivers of whom, *Rongnyu* is Female and the *Rongeet* is the male. After having decided to meet at *Panjaok* near present day Peshok a little beyond Teesta Bazaar, the two lovers *Rongeet* and *Rongnyu*, guided by “*Tutfo* a bird” and “*Paril-bu*=a snake” respectively started the journey. The female, *Rongnyu* reached before the male *Rongeet*. The male after arriving late asked the female “*Thi satha?*”(i T _ s Ta) When did you come? Thus, the name of the river *Teesta* and the place Teesta Bazar began.

⁶ D.T. Tamlong, *The Mayel Lyang & The Lepchas (About Sikkim & Darjeeling)* (Darjeeling: Mani Printing House, 2008), 184-191. Cf also Vibha Arora, “Gandhigiri in Sikkim,” *Economic & Political Weekly*, September 20, 2008, 27-28. In June 2007, an NGO called the ACT (Affected Citizens of Teesta) led by Ren Dawa Lepcha and Ren Tenzing Gyatso Lepcha of Dzongu spearheaded two hunger strikes of 63 and 96 days in front of the B.L. House Gangtok, supported by chain hunger strikes and protests by people across the ethnic lines in Kalimpong Thana Dara, Darjeeling Chowk Bazaar and Kurseong compelled the Sikkim government and the NHPC to scrap off four projects. Hitherto quiet Lepchas went ahead with powerful democratic movement (Gandhigiri in Sikkim) to tell the world that the land belonged to them. No one was allowed to disturb the sanctity of this “Holy Land” of the Lepchas by destroying the ecosystem.

⁷ www.weepingsikkim.com

them? Is it supposed to be movement towards the unwritten wisdom of the tribal-nature relationship; or is it an alienation from the normal way of doing philosophy? Or is it a reciprocal movement of knowledge and wisdom?

In this paper titled: **Tribals' Outlook on Nature: through Nature to God**, we shall delve into some of the basic aspects of the interconnectedness between the tribals and the nature. The paper aims at presenting the overall tribal-nature relationship by presenting a close interpretation of the Lepcha Tribe's outlook on nature in their **MUKJYEK DING, RUMFAAT**⁸ which in fact appears to me as a valuable source for Lepcha Ecosophy.

Tribal Ecosophy⁹:

The tribal-nature interaction perceived from a philosophical perspective gives rise to a Tribal Philosophy which could be called "Tribal-Ecosophy." It is said that, "Their philosophy is *lived* ... in their eco-friendly nature, their seasonal feasts and seasonal dance and music seeking harmony with nature..."¹⁰ The tribal-ecosophy can be compared with many well developed ecosophies of the world. Thus, the tribals' ecological experience could be cited as an example of "deep ecology."¹¹

⁸ Lyansong Tamsang, *Aachuley: A Quarterly Lepcha Bilingual News Magazine*, vol. 7, No.1, April 2003, 26. Reporting on the *Muk Zik Ding Rum Faat* [*Mukjyekdingrumfaat*] of the Lepchas at Riyon-Dabling *Kung*, Kalimpong, the reporter writes, "Muk Zik Ding Rum Faat means the Lepchas' love, respect, and worship of Mother Nature and her creations. It can also be described as the offering to Mother Nature. It is a Lepcha festival as well as education in ecology, environment, and surroundings."

⁹ The tribal-ecosophy can be compared with **Green-Philosophy**, which has attracted the attentions of many thinkers and scholars very much because of the ecological concerns all over the world in our days.

¹⁰ Vincent Aind, "Tribal Culture of Chotanagpur at Peril," in *Sevartham*, Vol.33, 2008, 24.

¹¹ Freya Mathews, "Deep Ecology," in *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy*, Ed. Dale Jamieson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2001, 2003),

Furthermore, one would be tempted to call the Tribal ecosophy as “Deep Ecosophy” because, that which Arne Naess proposed as the constituents of Deep-ecology, can be traced even in mostly unwritten but lived experiences of the tribal ecology. For instance, Naess proposed metaphysics of inter-relatedness, an ethos of biospherical egalitarianism, the values of diversity and symbiosis, an anti-class posture, opposition to pollution and resource depletion, the value of complexity and an emphasis on local autonomy and decentralization as the main canons of his Deep Ecology. These are already found in the tribals’ outlook on the nature. In their relatedness with the nature, the tribals are not “[hu] man-in-environment,”¹² but humans with all that is there in the nature.

According to the metaphysics of inter-relatedness, each individual is fundamentally related to the rest of the reality. This relatedness leads to the ethics of interrelatedness. In the nature, all forms of life have equal right to live and grow. The humans are no exceptions. In this equality of privileges, all the living beings share symbiotic existence without sacrificing uniqueness and diversity. Symbiotic existence is to ascertain mutuality rather than exploitation and suppression.

These are the lived experiences of the tribals for whom the concern is to have a natural balance by reaching out to the realities around them with the sense of fraternal care. Even affected and influenced by the air of materialism and consumerism, the tribals are reluctant to permit any imbalance to be brought by human

218-231. Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosophy professor was the first one to introduce this expression through his short article in 1970. He labeled it “ecosophy T” after a name of a cabin called *Tvergastein*, situated high above the snowline in the Norwegian mountain. He distinguishes between a deep -ecology and shallow ecology. The latter according to him will concern about the peripheral issues such as pollution and resource conservation, which is actually the concern mostly of the developed countries. Deep-ecology questions the why and how of the ecological concerns which otherwise is unattended by the shallow-ecology.

¹² Arne Naess rejected this attitude in favour of relational model.

carelessness. The tribal ecosophy has maintained the equilibrium much needed in the nature. It is noted that the "Environmental sensitivity has been the hallmark of tribal culture. It has been their conviction-expressed in so many ways in their traditions, culture, ways of life, values, etc., -that the harmony in nature (*rta* ...) is bound up with right and harmonious order--*dharma*--in society and the overall well-being of the human"¹³

Tribal Eco-Theosophy

The Tribal ecosophy does not remain at this point. The tribals' outlook on the nature is **Eco-theosophical** too. In their outlook on the nature, philosophy and theology meet. The search for ultimate reality carried out through their relatedness with the nature leads them to the ultimate experiences of the realities which transcend the material experiences. This they manifest through various celebrations, both religious and cultural. If we spend a little more time on studying the tribal-nature interaction, we see a transition taking place from and through **tribal-ecosophy** to **tribal-eco-theosophy**.¹⁴

The **Tribal-eco-theosophy** is built on a philosophy called **Green-Philosophy**¹⁵ which derives wisdom from the Green realities of the nature. It tries to experience the divine wisdom revealed in and through the nature. From the tribal's outlook on the nature, a natural theology can be built. God can be touched as green and fresh as a plant in your garden. Reflections of God can be seen in little dew that falls on the leaves of the plants in your garden. Thus,

¹³ Mathew George Kariapuram in *Tribal Hermeneutics for a Contextual Theology* (Noida: Academy Press, 1999), 76.

¹⁴ This phrase puts together, tribal, nature, philosophy and theology to bring out a conglomerate experience.

¹⁵ Though different people have used this expression from different perspectives, ver here it is being used from the perspective of a philosophical trend which reflects on the ecological concerns.

the tribal's outlook on the nature seen from this perspective appears similar to **Environmental Theology or Green-Theology**.¹⁶ This gives them **Green-Spirituality**.¹⁷ However, the tribals' view on the nature takes them beyond the stands taken by the Green-theologians.

Therefore, it would be unjust to limit the tribal-eco-theosophy to the green-theology which would limit them to the experience of the nature. Rightly understood, tribal-eco-theosophy transcends the limit of their interaction with the nature. It is always through the nature to God. It is here the distinction has to be made between the tribal eco-theosophy and Green Theology.

Often times, they are considered animists because of their intimate interaction with the nature. They are also considered as Pantheists, because they speak about the presence of God in every reality of the nature. However, most of the tribes see the presence of God in the created realities around them. They see the presence of God in those places and things. For them, these are sacred but they are not gods/God. This approach of theirs helps them to be at home with the finite and the infinite realities. It is a movement from something seen to the unseen.

We shall now try to see how all or some of those things we have discussed so far about the tribals' outlook on the nature can

¹⁶ http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ecology_bishop.pdf: Steve Bishop in his article "Green theology and deep ecology: New Age or new creation?" gives the following summary of the Green Theology: (i) God is the source of all things. (ii) God as creator is separate and distinct from his creation. (iii) All of creation belongs to God. (iv) All of creation is good. (v) Humanity is inextricably linked to the earth. (a) humanity is created from the earth. (b) humanity is to steward the earth. (c) humanity's fall results in the earth's fall. (d) humanity is to take the gospel to all of creation. (e) humanity's manifestation as the sons of God results in the earth's redemption.

¹⁷ Green Spirituality is derived from a deep awareness of the interconnectedness of beings: especially with the nature. It is an invitation to reconnect with the Earth. It could be called indigenous spirituality.

be seen in **MUKJYEK DING, RUMFAAT OF THE LEPCHA TRIBE** who are the indigenous tribe of Darjeeling district of West Bengal and State of Sikkim.

Mukjyekding, Rumfaat of the Lepcha Tribe¹⁸

Mukjyekding Rumfaat¹⁹ of the Lepchas²⁰ is one of the sacred sacrifices wherein they experience their relatedness with the nature. With the nature and its reality, they form a **web-of-existence**. Thus, theirs is a **symbiotic-existence** lived in concord with everything that forms this cosmic reality: the Universe (**suk-dum-lung-ming-taam**). In this universe (**suk-dum-lung-ming-**

¹⁸ The Indian tribal population is about 8.08% of the total population. They fall under three main racial categories: The Proto-Austroloids; the Mongoloids and the Negritos. The Lepcha tribe falls under the Mongoloids group of the Himalayan region. Numerically, the Lepchas are dwindling fast.

¹⁹ ***Mukjyekding Rumfaat*** is one of the many sacrifices offered by the traditional Lepchas on 20th of February (**Thaon lavo**) (0TN I 0V) every year. For quite sometimes now, this has been celebrated at Rayon Dubling of Kalimpong Sub-division in Darjeeling. This tradition existed as an oral tradition of the Lepchas from time immemorial. Very recently, the verses were put together by **Ren Sonam Tshering Rongkup** (Lepcha) of Bom Kyong, Kalimpong and published by the **Backward Classes Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal in 2005** for the protection, conservation, maintenance and development of the ancient Lepcha language and literature ; one of the richest languages of the world (perhaps under the threat of extinction). From now onwards, ***Mukjyekding Rumfaat*** will be referred as ***MJDRF***.

²⁰ Lepchas are one of the Himalayan tribes who have been living in the hills of Sikkim and Darjeeling District of West Bengal, in the Western Bhutan and in the Ilam District of Nepal. They call themselves "**Rong**" or ***Rongkup-Rumkup*** or the Children of God. The Non-Lepchas called them ***Lapche*** and the British called them ***Lepchas***. The Lepchas are one of the rare tribes of the world who have their own language and script of Tibeto-Burmese origin. They have their ***Namthaars*** or **sacred books of wisdom** which could lead the researchers into the depth of their lives, belief systems and philosophy of life. According to Dr. Heleen Plaisier, there are about 182 original manuscripts of the Lepchas preserved in the **Kern Institute of Leiden University in the Netherlands** (cf. Heleen Plaisier, ***Catalogue of Lepcha Manuscripts in the Van Manen Collection*** (Leiden: The Kern Institute, 2003), 9.

taam) everybody is interrelated, inter-dependent and everything appears to deserve understanding and compassion.²¹

Etymologically, *Mukjyekding Rumfaat* would mean the worship of the sprouting of grass.²² It could also be interpreted as the celebration of the origin of the mother-nature.²³ It is the sacrifice offered to the fact of mother creator's creative exercise being extended through nature. According to this, the creator mother's body came forth from the five sources; viz. Stone(*long*), soil (*faat*), water (*ung*), fire (*mee*) and wind (*somut*) which formed bones (*arhet*), flesh (*mān*), blood (*vi*), spirit (*vaat*), breath (*aasaom*) respectively.²⁴ For the Lepchas, it is a sacred moment because it reminds them not only of the act of creation but also of the divine-participation in the created world. The creator- mother and the created realities share the same space and time. It is a meeting point between finite and the infinite.

The Lepchas express their sense of belonging to the nature in many ways. They express their oneness with it, in fact, with the whole of cosmos in and through *Mukjyekding Rumfaat* celebration. Thus, it is the expression of their cosmic unity. Like other tribal communities of the world, the Lepchas also interact with all living and non-living realities of the world. In fact, according

²¹ Aai z _i k Nd v o S huyU l a k ayUvu za d o g . (*Aajii kin dyokshyo huyula kayuzongdo go*) "O, it is pitiable they too are like us." is a common expression among the Lepchas.

²² m j d _ (*mukjyekding=muk* (grass)+*jyek* (to sprout)+*ding* (to stand forth)).

²³ m j d could be written also as AamU j d (*Aamu jyekding*=the growth or the development of mother. Here, mother would certainly mean the mother-nature.

AamU (*Amu*)=mother; j jyek)=to begin, to sprout, or to develop; d (*ding*)=to stand.

²⁴ A va Aai A'ka i A'U d U r u) h u d s a m u z u r e n f o G n u i A o T M U s u q X l a v , s o h R k R d u A a S n a B s u X J A a o l X i J .(*aya ayitka ayithurum hadosa majre nurfangona ayithombu sachuk, lavo, sahaor, kardu aan*

to them, all the realities have life (*aasaom*). They speak to the particles (*Aajyum*) to the stars (*Sahaor*), constellations (*Sa-haor-mup*), land (*lyang*) rivers (*Ung-kyaong*) stones and rocks (*long*) hills (*kung*) and mountains (*chyu*) and every living and non-living beings during these prayer sessions. Through this sacrifice or the worship, the Lepchas wish to strike a cosmic balance and create an atmosphere of brotherhood and sisterhood, with the whole of cosmic realities. It is an attempt to have a cosmic fraternity.²⁵ The Lepchas have over the years tried to bring this cosmic balance locally and trans-locally through a principle called *NUNG-NAHAN*²⁶. Literally speaking, it would mean, the “**guest first**”. The *NUNG-NAHAN* principle of the Lepchas has not been spelt out in black and white before this, as it is being done over here. It manifests the core of the Lepcha philosophy of life where, the guest or the other is more important than himself or herself. This philosophical attitude has pervaded every aspect of the lives of the Lepchas and has influenced the very existence of the Lepchas both positively and negatively.

In the context of our discussion, that is, while speaking about the relationship between Humans and the nature, it is the nature that takes precedence. It is the nature that occupies the first important place. It is the nature that deserves care and respect. That is to say that it is not an anthropocentric but an eco-centric approach. Thus, **it is through nature to God**. Creator God is thanked for creating everything for the *Mayelmukup* (mayɛnU k uɓ) or mother's children or the Lepchas. The *Mun- Bongthing*²⁷ or any Lepcha traditional

²⁵ Like St. Francis of Assisi, the Lepchas reach out to various realities of the nature and wish them well.

²⁶ The word *NUNG-NAHAN* (V n U n h aN) has been coined by the author of this article to depict the philosophy of the Lepchas comprehensively. More on V n U n h aN principle of the Lepchas will be dealt with exclusively later.

²⁷ *Mun-Bongthing* (muNv0 b V T) are the Lepcha Priestess and Priests who normally offer the sacrifices on behalf of the people. (cf. also: Samuel Lepcha, "The Primal Religions A Philosophical Overview," in *Romancing The Sacred? Towards an Indian Christian Philosophy of Religion*, Ed. George Karuvelil, (Bangalore:ATC,

believer together with other members of the community offers the offerings of **Chi** (i c =rice beer) and **Jo** (0 z =rice) set on the bamboo altar called **Posaong plaong** (p ʋo s ʋo ʏ).²⁸

Ecosophy of the Lepchas manifested through **Mukjyekding Rumfaat** can thus, be done by presenting some of the instances from their text itself. The very second paragraph of the opening text begins by thanking the creator God (**Itbumoo**) (i A b U m U) for creating perfume and oil giving plants. The worshipper addresses the plants, animals and natural forces such as storm, and whirlwind as individual persons.²⁹

The worshipper tells the creator God who created day (**suknyi**) (s ʏ J) and night (**sonap**) (a s n ɒ), stars (**Sahaor**) (s o h ʀ) and moon (**lavo**) (l a v) and lives of various forms that for all these, we are gathered here to offer to you the gifts and offerings of the world.³⁰

The cantor continues to express that it is God who created the mountains (**chyu**), the snows (**sonaong**) and primogenitors of the Lepchas: **Fodongthing** and **Najaongnyu**.³¹ However, the responsibility of molding and shaping of the nature rests in the hands

2007), 131-148. Also see Samuel Lepcha, "Philosophizing From the Perspective of the Tribals," in *Subaltern Perspectives Philosophizing in Context*, Ed. George Thadathil, (Bangalore: ATC Publications, 2005), 177-198.

²⁸ **Po** (p ʋ) or Bamboo is very important in the lives of the Lepchas. The relationship between the two is such that they say, "As long as the Bamboo lives, the Lepchas will live too and vice-versa." Hence, almost all the altars for offering sacrifices are built with the help of bamboos.

²⁹ Cantor addresses the oil-giving plants as maternal aunt (**numpotmunyu** = (n u ʔ u ɒ U J U).

) n u ʔ u ʔ u (oil); p u ʔ u ʔ u (fruit); (**munyu**) m U J U, =mother's sister.

³⁰ . s ʏ d m v l v a A a r e i A b U r m A a d m s ʋ o r s ʏ d m s a 0 Q Q u ʋ o n P u ʔ d _ m 0 A . (*sakdum lyang aarey ayitbu rum aadom saraong sakdamsa Tcho Tchunaong fuding ma O*), *MJDRF*, 4.

³¹ **Fodongthing** and **Najaongnyu** (f ʋ o d ʔ T _ A a n n ʋ o z J U) are considered the first parents of the Lepchas whom the creator mother created out of the pure-

of prime -baby-grass (*mukkup*) , *Mukjyekding*.³² The worshipper says, we worship you O creator God by offering the gifts on the altar of *Pasaong*. Through this sacrifice of *Mukjyekding*, we wish to reach out to the creator who created varieties of bamboos, the wild animals like tigers and leopards; it is you O God who created broom-grass, and wild grasses. For all these we worship you through this sacrifice of *Mukjyekding*.

In fact *Mukjyekding* not only represents the creative moment of the creator God, but slowly it is presented as (God) *Rum* Himself/ Herself³³. *Mukjyekding* is the sustainer (*gyutbu*) of the world. She is the creator of the languages (*Aaringpong*) of wild animals (*punzaok*) like tigers (*Sathaong*) and giver of lives to the wild plants of various kinds. Creator extends herself in and through soils (*faat*) of various kinds.³⁴ Thus, through the sacrifice of *Mukjyekding Rumfaat* we would like to reach out to the creator of all, present in these. The presence of the divine is seen everywhere. Thus, the monumental stones (*lungChaok*)³⁵ are

virgin snow of the pinnacle of Kanchenjunga, where God himself resides. This metaphorical presentation has very high (as Kanchenjunga itself) philosophical and theological implication.

³² At this juncture, *Mukjyekding* can be interpreted as **Primal grass** from which all other natural vegetations began.

³³ This is because, for the Lepchas God is a Mother (*aamu*) (AamU).

³⁴ f aD a f aD ÷ f aD v , ...MJDRF, 5.

³⁵ Out of the few *Laongchaoks* mentioned here, *kavi laongchaok* (k ai v Wu l ! q) in North Sikkim is historically laden. It is a rocky monument to remember the blood treaty between the Lepcha leader ThikungTek and the Tibetan *Khye- Bumsa*. Thus, this historical place is mentioned not only during *Mukjyekding Rumfaat* but also by the *Bongthings* and *Muns* in their spontaneous incantations. It was blood Treaty to keep the Lepchas of the land and the intruder Tibetans at par with each other. It stands as the witness to the innocent past of the Lepchas which got betrayed by the successive socio-political and religio-cultural advances from the part of the Tibetans. The latest and a comprehensive analysis of various opinions regarding Kavi Longchaok is given by D.T.Tamlong in his book: *Mayel Lyang & The Lepchas (About Sikkim & Darjeeling)* (Darjeeling: Mani Printing House, 2008), 62-71.

addressed through this sacrifice.³⁶ The cantor goes on addressing various aspects and realities of nature. S/he addresses the rivers, streams, and the waters³⁷ and fishes³⁸ therein and says that through the sacrifice of *Mukjyekding Rumfaat* we address you too with respect.³⁹ O you winds (*somut*) and whirlwinds (*somut tyukchep*) through this sacrifice, we are offering prayers and sacrifices to you.⁴⁰ And now to you fires too, on this occasion of *Mukjyekding Rumfaat*, we are offering this sacrifice.⁴¹ Then the mountains or the *chyu* where the Primogenitors of the Lepchas were created are addressed saying : we are offering this sacrifice to you through this *Mukjyekding Rumfaat*⁴². With united hearts and mind, transcending religious and traditional prayers, let us go beyond and offer these gifts to *Vaarto*⁴³ *Aamu Mukjyekding* who created all the animals and humans, says the cantor. *Vaarto Aamu* is understood

³⁶ ...Vu l ! q Vu l Vo b k a...*MJDRF*, 5-6, 16.

³⁷ The cantor addresses the waters of the rivers flowing down from the lakes of the Himalayan Mountains saying: In Lepcha, Water is called Ung (VAU). He writes: VAUmU VAU k uB s a t x l va 0 s VAU AayUnu Seq bu AaVo f l v_l v_l a z x bu s x d m j DbU VAU AayMl a s aVo r r Mf D d Rf D s a l umbl uVoy Aar el M Q QuVo n s a i c Oz P D Pu d_m 0A. (*ungmu ungkupsa tyuklyang soung aayunun shelchaokbu aafaong lyu-lyula zukbu sukdam jyutbu ung aayumla saraong rumfaat darfaatsa lumenna luyaong aarelaom tcho tchonaonga chi jofut fuding ma O*).

³⁸ The fishes of the rivers are also addressed fondly for being a part and parcel of creator mother's plan. Cantor says, AaVo l GU k B AayMl a s Vo r 0 s s a 0 s Vmva i F s a s M s aorvDrM f D m x k uBm x j x d_s a l umen l uVoy oM M c P D 0 z P D 0 Q QuVo n pu m 0A. *MJDRF*, 23.

³⁹ ...VAU k a VAU s)VAU j x... *MJDRF*, 6.

⁴⁰ AaVo l 0 s muD x a 0 s muD/tuVoS, 0 s muDt x q B. *MJDRF*, 6.

⁴¹ ...imi l) im d vaX, im & g, im! b... *MMJDRF*, 6.

⁴² ...Vo r k uB s s a JUViT_ nVo z JU s a fVo g ?Vi T i A x l va cUVu p k a...vaRt AamU m x j x d_r Mf aB s a l umen l uVoy o l M Q QuVo n Pu m 0A, *MJDRF*, 6.

⁴³ According to *The Lepcha-English Encyclopaedic Dictionary* by K.P.Tamsang, one of the best dictionaries available to us so far, the nearest word is the verb, &V (*Vaor*) which means **to hold firmly**. From this I interpret *Vaarto Aamu* as the mother who holds the whole creation firmly together. She is the Unifier.

as the unifying force of all the divine and mundane realities.

Since, according to the Lepcha creation myth, the mountains and the snows are very important, the worshipper takes the names of the mountains starting from *Kinchumjaongbu chu* and ends it by saying: now it [God] is present in these mountains too, thus, through this offering to *Vaarto Aamoo Mukjyekding*, we offer this to you also.⁴⁴ Turning towards the plants and trees, such as, medicinal plants (*maontyam kung*), oil giving plants (*num plyashet kung*) and beneficial plants, the worshipper says, now *Vaarto Aamoo Mukjyekding* is in the green plants also. You have the power of chasing the evil spirits and sanctifying the place; hence, to you powerful green plants we are offering this sacrifice.⁴⁵ The worshipper thanks medicinal plants for bringing good health, for replacing the need for meat, for giving flowers and fruits, roots and tubers. The names of plants, mountains, caves⁴⁶, forts⁴⁷, rocks, hills and hillocks, brooks and streams, rivers and lakes⁴⁸ of the *Mayel Lyang*⁴⁹ of the Lepchas are carefully taken indicating the intimate relationship they are having with the nature and the natural

⁴⁴ AaVo l cUib AarUp ka la yuMa Aey vrt AamU mXj d_r Mf aD a l am l uVoyo l MQ Von Pu m0A.(*Aalaong chyubi aareypongkala yumba eyyung vaarti aamoo mukjyekding rumfaatsa lamem luyaong laom tcho tchonong phu ma O*)

⁴⁵ *MJDRF*, 7-10.

⁴⁶ The cantor takes the names of some of the old caves which according to him gave shelter to the Lepchas of the olden times. To all these caves, that have the stories of our traditions, we offer this sacrifice. Vu l Vu l haBAa reV l Ut vW s ubu GaUUVu p r l a s Vo r 0Q PuD a ic! l PuM d_m0A, *MJDRF*, 15.

⁴⁷ Forts are called *Di*(i g ?). For the protection given to the Lepchas of the past, the forts viz., *Daling Di*, *Damsang Di*, *Pakyong Pangdam Di*, *Mangjing Di*, *Yang Di*, *Bom Di*, *Suvaongdang Di*, *Longshaol Di*, *Tamlaong Di*, *Parmek Di*, *MJDRF*, 17.

⁴⁸ dVu p s a AaV b?va, *MJDRF*, 15. The cantor carefully takes the names of the lakes and water bodies leaving behind tremendous significance for us.

⁴⁹ The Lepchas call their mother land as *Mayel Lyang*.

surroundings. The names of various species of insects⁵⁰, reptiles⁵¹, animals, plants⁵², birds⁵³, grains and all other living and non-living entities of the **Mayel Lyang** are taken with love and gratitude for being of great help to the **Mayelmookup**.⁵⁴ No one is taken for granted especially when it comes to each one's share towards building a cosmic unity.

Time (**Tachot**) is part of nature and listens to what **Vaarto Aamoo** commands it to do. Therefore, on this occasion of **Mukjyekding Rumfaat**, the Lepchas thank times of all kinds for being good to **Mayelmookup**.⁵⁵ Various times and seasons provide various things needed for the children of God. **Vaarto Aamoo** is the queen of time (**Tachotsa Pundi**).

⁵⁰ The cantor mentions the variety of names of bees and wasps (**h u**) (hu) of the jungles of **Mayel lyang** and addresses them, **MJDRF**, 18.

⁵¹ The snake is called **bu** (b U). The snakes like **Pamaol bu**, **pahrukbu**, **puvaot bu**, **puveing bu**, **pugo bu**, **pu rang bu**, **pu laong bu**, **pano bu**, **plhaok bu**, **pushyik bu**, **pu jjob bu**, **pufaong bu**, **pugryet bu** are addressed with love, **MJDRF**, 18.

⁵² The creepers and climbers (**shying-ripkup**) edible fruits like banana (**kunduungpong**) (k ɲ d Uv u p); green-vegetables both wild and domesticated (**thaamfaong-bi-pong**) (T ɲ o f i b V u p); edible vegetables (**jobaambu thaamfaongpong**) (0 z b ɲ b U T ɲ b f V u p); food-grains (**jokumdaak**) (0 z k ɲ d ɲ) all are addressed with gratitude for what they have been to the Lepchas and their livelihood. **MJDRF**, 18-19, 21-22.

⁵³ The cantor at the **Mukjyekding Rumfaat** is also a great ornithologist. S/he takes the names of all the birds (**Foyu-fokup**) (0 f y u 0 f k ɲ) of **Mayel lyang** and thanks them for foretelling times and seasons for crops. No bird goes unnoticed and unrecognized. On the 20th day of February every year, each bird of **Mayel Lyang** is offered best wishes for being the part and parcel of **Mayel lyang** and (**suk-dumlung-ming-taam**) (s ɲ d ɲ l u m t ɲ) and **mayelmookup**. **MJDRF**, 20-21.

⁵⁴ The Lepchas call themselves, **Mayelmookup** (may ɲ u k u ɲ) meaning children of mother **Mayel**.

⁵⁵ In gratitude for being so good to the Lepchas, **time** is thanked in this way: "Vaarto aamu honu sukdumtaamsa, thambik thamchyangpangsa numsumnum-bumnyusong tantachotpongyem aalaom katnu kayu tan ayok jukbaonbuka tokschi phulungnu huyumla saraong tachotsa rumfaatsa lumen layaonglaom tscho tschunaong phu ma" O. **MJDRF**, 23.

Mukjyekding Rumfaat ends with a note of gratitude and wishful prayers for unity, prosperity, health and the longevity of the *Mayelmookup*. The cantor makes a prayer to Rum saying may the *Mayelmookup* would stand above the petty adherences which bring divisions, and ill feelings.

With Special Reference to the Tribals of Nilgiris

Global environmental crisis has threatened the existence of the whole world and all that it has. Unfriendly attitude of the humans towards nature has created innumerable problems. In order to save the world from an inevitable annihilation a new approach is a must. We need an approach which is a win-win all the time. Humans should switch over to a mode of interaction with the nature which is not suppressive, oppressive and annihilating. Humans should learn to live side by side and hand in hand with the rest of the living and non-living realities of the world. Humans will have to approach the nature and her resources with concern. The father of our nation, Mahatma Gandhi expressed it clearly when he said that we have enough for our need but not for our greed.

Tribals' interaction with the nature has often been moderate and need based. Leaving out some exceptions, it is noticed that most of them take benefit from their interaction with the nature to the extent they are in need of. Tribal outlook on nature: through nature to God is a harbinger of hope which assures all of us that if we are at home with the nature around us, this world becomes a **HOME OF LOVE** where all of us will be interrelated through mutual respect and gratitude. No gift of nature is to be taken for granted. As the Lepchas celebrating *MUKJYEK DING RUMFAAT* express *Tokshi* (Thanks) to every reality around them for being of help to them; we should learn to receive from the nature with gratitude and give with generosity of heart. It would be ideal to do everything with moderation. I remember my father telling me that "we should not denude the fodder and foliage giving trees by

cutting all the branches laden with leaves; or else, she will have nothing to offer next time. If you leave something behind for the trees, it will give you something when you need something next time.” He would teach me to cover the young bamboo shoots with old rotten straws so that in return she would give us healthy bamboo shoots for our later use. As a tribal who was so much attuned to the nature, my father knew exactly how to benefit from the nature and knew very well how to protect and sustain it. He never studied philosophy but the nature had taught him a philosophy which helped him to live symbiotic relationship with all around him. He knew that he was more than a steward. He knew that he was an integral part of this nature. He taught me how to experience God’s presence through nature. I was being educated the tribal way: Through nature to God.

CONCLUSION

Imbalance caused by the faulty human approaches to nature has brought global environmental crisis. We need to address it sincerely and collectively. People of various walks of life think and feel that we need to go to the roots of these problems. We need to revamp our vision. We are supposed to reconsider our attitude towards the nature.

Tribal outlook on nature could be considered as one of the most needed options for the world suffering due to faulty relationship with nature. This outlook invites the so called sophisticated but defeated world to rediscover hitherto neglected “primitive dimension of spirituality called the cosmic vision.”⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Fr. Desmond De Souza, CSSR, “Towards a Christian Perspective on Environment and Ecology,” in *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, Vol. LVIII, September 1994, No .9, 587.

Cosmic vision provided by the Tribals' outlook on nature reminds us of the need of embracing the fact of inter-wovenness of the realities of the world. The realities in this world are not only interwoven but are necessarily interconnected and interrelated. Continuation of this planet in any form depends on our life styles and renewed vision about the realities around us. Turning to Tribal-Eco-theosophy could be one of the most important turning points for the world which is plagued with ecological crisis. Most important awareness that would help improve upon the human-nature relationship could be derived from this statement: '[hu] Man did not weave the web of life; he [/ she] is merely a strand in it.'⁵⁷

I would like to conclude this discussion on the **tribals' outlook on nature: through nature to God** by citing few words from the conversation between Robinson Crusoe and an aboriginal in the film **Robinson Crusoe**. When Robinson Crusoe tries to convince the aboriginal that the true God is Spirit and the tribal God/s is no God, the aboriginal Friday pours out his Eco-Spirituality to Robinson Crusoe saying:

"You say that your God is unique and almighty but cannot be seen; He is a pure Spirit...

But I can see my God present in every reality around me, I speak to the spirits, they speak to me...The crocodiles speak, [The trees speak, the mountains speak, the rivers speak, and the clouds, the rains and stars speak] I like my God who speaks to me through all these...."

⁵⁷ Steve Bishop, Green theology and deep ecology: New Age or new creation? http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ecology_bishop.pdf.