



Jnanadeepa

Pune Journal of Religious Studies

ISSN 2249-1503

www.punejournal.in

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4284689

Stable URL: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4284689>

Social Sanction and its Function in Tribal Societies

Agapit Tirkey, SJ

Abstract: There are 67.8 million Scheduled Tribes people in India, constituting 8.74 % of India's total population (Census 2001). Scheduled Tribes are those which are notified as such by the President of India under Article 342 of the Constitution. The tribals in India can be divided into two categories: (i) frontier tribes, and (ii) non-frontier" tribes. The former are inhabitants of the North-East frontier states with 12.02% of India's Scheduled Tribes population at the borders of Burma, China, Tibet and Bangladesh. They occupy a special position in the sphere of national politics. Different tribal groups together in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland form 64.22, 85.94, 94.46 and 89.15 percent of the state population respectively (Census 2001). Similarly, in Assam, Manipur and Tripura they form 12.41, 39.96 and 31.05 percent of the state population respectively (Ibid.). The rest of the 87.98% non-frontier tribes are distributed in most of the mainland states, though they are concentrated in large numbers in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. Their population ranges from 4.00 to 32.00 percent in these states (Census 2001)

Keywords: Tribals, Social Sanction, Sin in Tribal Societies, Punishment among Tribals

<p>Cite as: Tirkey, Agapit. (2008). Social Sanction and its Function in Tribal Societies (Version 1.0). Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies, July-Dec 2008 (Vol 11/2), 60-75. http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4284689</p>

Social Sanction and its Function in Tribal Societies

Agapit Tirkey, SJ

Asha Deep, Pathalgaon, MP, 18

Introduction

There are 67.8 million Scheduled Tribes people in India, constituting 8.74 % of the country's total population (Census 2001). Scheduled Tribes are those which are notified as such by the President of India under Article 342 of the Constitution. The tribals in India can be divided into two categories: (i) frontier tribes, and (ii) non-frontier tribes. The former are inhabitants of the North-East frontier states with 12.02% of India's Scheduled Tribes population at the borders of Burma, China, Tibbet and Bangladesh. They occupy a special position in the sphere of national politics. Different tribal groups together in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland form 64.22, 85.94, 94.46 and 89.15 percent of the state population respectively (Census 2001). Similarly, in Assam, Manipur and Tripura they form 12.41, 39.96 and 31.05 percent of the state population respectively (Ibid.). The rest of the 87.98% non-frontier tribes are distributed in most of the mainland states, though they are concentrated in large numbers in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. Their population ranges from 4.00 to 32.00 percent in these states (Census 2001).

Christian Dioceses in the North are working mostly among the frontier and non-frontier tribes. Both the tribal categories are known as tribes, *Adivasis* (original inhabitants), aboriginals, autochthons, etc. They have their own mother tongues, life styles, social structures, rites, rituals and values, differing in many ways from those of the non-tribal social groups in the country. Many of them are today settled agriculturists but forest still forms much of their economic resource base.

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

I Terms

Social Sanction

Broadly speaking, social sanction is any institution a consequence of which is to incline persons occupying certain roles to conform to the norms and expectations associated with those roles. A distinction has to be made between *norms* and *sanctions*, that is, between (i) institutionalized ways of doing things which themselves have certain implications for the maintenance of peace and good order in a society, and (ii) the consequences, themselves more or less institutionalized, which may follow from the violation of approved, normative behaviour (Beattie 1977: 165). With the distinction between (a) social institutions seen as systems of ideas and beliefs, and (b) social institutions regarded as components of systems of action, sanctions themselves may be regarded from two different viewpoints.

First, sanctions may be seen, at least in some degree, as the members of the society in the context see them as the possible or likely consequences of turning aside from socially approved norms. This is the sense in which they may be said to be more or less effective in preventing people from breaking the rules. It can be presumed that people will generally tend to avoid behaviour, which they believe will entail painful consequences for themselves. To understand social sanctions we have to conceive the social and cultural situations in which they operate and how people concerned understand them. Whether their understanding is scientifically 'true' or not is irrelevant here.

Secondly, the question to be asked is what actually happens when norms are violated. What new social activities are brought into play in such cases, and what consequences do these activities have? Sometimes

these consequences are not foreseen or even thought of by the members of the societies concerned. None the less they may be very important.

A complex social system can only be maintained when different people base their interrelationships upon agreements mutually arrived at. In traditional tribal societies, everybody does much the same kinds of things and produce much the same kinds of goods. Order is maintained through common submission to universally accepted rules. Reciprocity and mutual interdependence are important in these societies. They are probably more inclined than others to accept customary rules and beliefs that are prescribed by tradition. There is little room for skepticism or dissent in regard to established practices. By this I am not saying that custom is never violated or tradition is not criticized in tribal societies. With fast social changes affecting them, these societies also change.

In the above sense, social sanction is 'a reaction on the part of a society or of a considerable number of its members to a mode of behaviour which is thereby *approved* or *disapproved*. If a mode of behaviour is approved then the sanction is *positive* and if it is disapproved it is *negative*. The latter always entails the idea that something unpleasant will happen, such as the imposition of a penalty of some kind, if one does what one *ought not*. In most societies the stress is on the negative rather than on the positive aspect. Where there are organized negative sanctions backed by a constituted authority with the power to enforce its decisions, there are legal sanctions or 'law' in the strict sense.

In tribal societies, however, there is a traditional *panchayat* (council) in every village to express the *consensus* of the community there. Its decisions effectively backed by sanctions express *public opinion*. The village *panchayats* existed before the present day courts got legally established during the British rule. Today they co-exist with the public legal courts and operate at the lower *face-to-face* level of community relations. Disputes between fellow-villagers are often settled by the members of the above *panchayat* having the traditional right to impose a penalty on the party judged to be in the wrong. The penalty imposed on the accused is often in cash, a little of which is offered to the members in the *panchayat* as fee, which they may use for a drink in common and the balance is handed over to the injured party in the case. In a serious case, the accused party pays a heavy fine for an expensive *community meal* on an appointed day. Both the parties

to the dispute, as well as those neighbours who are concerned in the settlement, take part in the meal. It is clear that the aim of this way of proceeding is not so much to punish a wrongdoer as to *reconcile* the disputing parties and to *restore* the disrupted village *harmony*.

Ritual sanctions include many forms of religious belief, whether these imply reference to (i) a god or gods with the power to punish, either in this life or after it; (ii) the power of ancestors or other spirits which may cause injury on living persons who act in disapproved ways. Among the tribal people, the spirits of dead lineage ancestors are believed to attach high importance to the maintenance of good relations among the living members of the lineage. In this understanding, sickness is often diagnosed as being due to, (a) the failure of members to live near one another as they *ought*, (b) lineage members neglecting sacrifices to ancestors or other spirits at appropriate intervals. For a successful sacrifice, almost always it is a condition that the members should be on good terms with one another, and that none should be harbouring feelings of hostility or resentment towards anyone. In this way *joint participation* in sacrificial ritual may be an important ritual sanction for *good mutual relations* between the members of a lineage group.

Social Function

Associated with the notion of social function is the idea of social structure. The distinction between *function* and *structure* is really that of between *process* and *form*. When we speak of function we refer to the *causal implications* of certain kinds of events for other kinds of events, considered as *systems*. When we speak of structure we are attending to the *formal enduring aspects* of whatever it is that is said to have a structure. Its essential idea is that parts or components are arranged in an orderly way to constitute what may be comprehended as some kind of *systematic unity*. This unity may be an analytical synthesis, constructed to unify experience and to advance knowledge. By *social function* we mean the study of the causal implications of social institutions for other social institutions and systems of institutions in the same society. By *social structure* we mean those enduring aspects of social institutions which have appeared to be most important. In this *structural-functional* model, it is to be remembered that when it is

applied to communities of human beings, these beings are conscious, willing agents, having power of conceptual thinking, of representing their social and material universe to themselves, and of acting in accordance with these representations.

Context

Because of the marked differences and uniqueness of each tribal group in different parts of the country tribal reality is very complex. Any generalization of universal validity about tribal social life and moral behaviour would require a comparative study of representative samples of tribal peoples of the world. This is clearly beyond the scope of this essay. I propose merely to discuss certain forms of social and moral behaviour of some major tribal groups in eastern India. The points of this discussion may be applicable to other tribal groups also in the country because there are many socio-cultural elements which are common among them. In general, tribal people do not use the term 'sin' in their social-moral behaviour. What one does hear sometimes in their conversation is that there are some modes of social behaviour that are *good* and there are some others which are *not good*.

Systems of beliefs and values represent a distinct aspect of human social life, and their understanding calls for techniques different from those appropriate to the study of societies as systems of action. Social institutions have causal implications for other institutions, and the beliefs and values which people hold are important determinants of their institutionalized behaviour. However, the mechanical, cause-and-effect model is inadequate to the understanding of such conceptual systems in themselves. Cultures may be understood as systems of *symbols* and *meanings* understandable in other than causal terms. The discussion below follows from this understanding in the areas of the beliefs and values which the tribal people hold.

Almost in all tribal religious traditions *morality* bears imprints of mythical and cultic aspects. In them a state of perfection at the beginning of creation is recalled and cultic forms mark a connection between man's sinful state and creation of the universe. Generally, tribal ethical wisdom and moral sense is situated in the myth-tradition of a community. The myth[1] confirms how God has dealt and deals with

erring human beings. It also teaches what must be the standard of and rule for human actions.

The Mundas, Hos, Santals, Kharis and Uraons are the major tribal groups in Eastern India. In their traditional religious myths we find that there was only *water* in the beginning with its creatures. In creating this world God took voluntary help of the *crab, turtle, tortoise, crocodile, alligator, boarfish, prawn*, etc. in different accounts in bringing a little bit of *clay* to the Creator from the bottom of the sea. All of them failed in their task except the *earthworm* which succeeded in supplying the Creator with little bit of clay with which He created the *earth* with all its creatures.

In addition to this, one of the Kurukh (Uraon) accounts mentions that the *kingfisher*[2] dived into the sea till it reached its bottom where there were *earthworms* which gave a tiny *seed* of the earth to it. The bird swam back to *Dharmes* (Supreme Being) holding the seed in between its finger nail. God planted this seed in the sea by churning its water. It multiplied and formed into the present earth with its *seven* corners and got filled with all its creatures. In the *Kharis* account, a *crab* raises a pillar of clay in the sea to enjoy the sunshine on top of it. Seeing that *Ponomosor* (Supreme Being) was pleased with its work, the crab expanded the pillar to form the present earth with all its creatures.

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

At this stage, the Munda and Ho accounts mention that human beings became very numerous and began to walk on *evil paths*. The Santal account makes it more specific by narrating that the human beings

became like *he-buffaloes* and *she-buffaloes*. They did not respect one another. In the Kha,r,ia account, human beings became *greedy* for more and more food from the Creator. They also became *proud* and *arrogant* before Him, and challenging Him they began to cut down fruit trees senselessly. The Kur,ukh account narrates that the Creator had made a beautiful world which the human beings *polluted* with their *excreta* everywhere! The human excreta is the most dirty and stinking object one could imagine. Its disgusting stench can cause vomiting. This strong symbolic language expresses in the clearest possible way the stench of *evil* which human beings are capable of committing against their Creator. In all of these accounts the Creator sends *rain-fire* to destroy the human beings who had turned evil in His sight. However, in everyone of these accounts it is mentioned that one pair of human beings, a *boy* and a *girl*, were saved. God made them *husband* and *wife* to each other and from them human beings were again born to fill the earth. He divided them into different *clans* and thus established *inter-clan* marriage to take place among them. This is the *second creation* from which the human beings were born down the ages.

From the above mythical accounts it is clear that the tribals have a strong sense of morality which does not permit *greed*, *pride*, *arrogance*, and *animal-like mean* behaviour before their Creator. This way of life offends Him seriously. They depend on Him totally for their life, survival and happiness in this world by walking on a path which pleases Him. The tribal religious myths are, therefore, exemplary and universally valid sources which direct and control tribal social, cultural and religious behaviour.

II Good and Evil

Good

The tribal approach to life and happiness is based on a *concrete* life experience. The tribals consider rich *crop*, numerous *cattle* and healthy *children* as their most cherished possessions and abundant blessings of God upon them. They experience happiness in *good health*, *sufficient wealth*, *good crops*, *many cattle* and *children* with whom performing of ritual and offerings to *God* and the *ancestor spirits* are guaranteed. For the wellbeing of human beings depends on the good pleasure of these supernatural beings with whose favour upon the tribals,

continuation of the *family, clan and tribe* is the greatest good desired by them. Thus, the idea of *good* in the final analysis is inseparably tied up with what is good for the tribals in the *physical* order of *this world*. However, the goal of life as eternal happiness rests in their belief that after this life they will join the community of their *ancestors* in the next world free from all forms of suffering and death. This is the *ultimate aim* of their life in this world. It is in the *ancestral community* that all their legitimate aspirations will be fulfilled. This community enjoys eternal happiness under the divine care and protection of God. The *value* [3] of the living tribal community in *communion* with its ancestors has its *roots* in Him as the source of all *life, goodness and happiness*.

Evil

Evil for a tribal is again a concrete experience. It is understood as a *physical* suffering, such as sickness, death, loss of livestock and property. At the mention of it a tribal begins to talk of the *sick* child, *loss* of the animal, *failure* of crops, etc., and expresses his/her utter *helplessness* and *inability* to handle the situation and to deal with the forces behind such happenings. This suffering is evil because it inflicts *pain, injury* and *harm* upon members in the community. The tribal *ethical rule*, therefore, holds works like causing suffering and pain on others as really *bad* and deals sternly with persons alleged to be indulging in them. Such anti-social enemies when detected may be punished very severely. Therefore, actions which *endanger* the *good* of *individuals, family, clan or tribe* are evil.

Moral Evil

An action is judged to be *right* or *wrong* in reference to the *good* of the individual and all the members of the community. The tribal *moral ideals* to be followed by all are *peacefulness, equality* and *kindness*. *Peace* with men/women and the supernatural beings is a *sign* of *order* and *harmony* in creation. *Equality* among all promotes, fortifies and sustains the intended order. *Kindness* to all is to be fostered in this social order. The object of public morality is the good of the tribe. Therefore, the greatest moral evil is the *failure* towards the wellbeing of and harm done to the *tribe*. Throwing into *disorder* what is religiously required is understood in terms of *violation* of tribal customs and breaking of some important taboos.[4] 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.

Moral Law

Among the tribals, their *social custom* is regarded as having the *ultimate* power to *restrain, control* and *direct* individuals in their communities. Ethical understanding is shaped by aiming at the goal of life, that is, becoming a member of the community of ancestors in the next world after the life in this world. One's *moral conduct* is defined in terms of the idea of this good to be attained. The *norms* of conduct for a tribal are set in his/her *tradition* and *myth*, defined in the customs of the tribe and every tribal is bound to comply with them. Taboos are put forward to safeguard the *pure* form of the customs. For example, one is forbidden to associate with non-tribals in order not to endanger the *purity* of one's tribe and its *homogeneity*. That is why strict *social control* is applied and heavy punishment is enforced upon the erring person in the above matter. However, with changing times social customs too change without remaining static and yet retain their important function of social control in a modified manner.

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

Purity of the Tribe

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

Sexual Conduct

Extra marital relations (adultery), fornication[5] and incest[6] destroy the ordered *family* or *clan structure* and poison the *intimate* relations within the family and lineage. Thus, if a man were to have an affair with a woman, the community would exact heavy fines from him and punish him, if need be by boycotting the culprit. Generally, strict measures are taken against the whole family of the person for not keeping the social norms by not permitting the family members to have free association with the village community. They say, '*no chuuna tamakhu, no beti-roti, no madaït*' meaning, *no socializing* with the family members of the culprit, *no daughter* to be given in marriage to them and *no help* to be given to them in their agricultural and other household activities. Normal association with them may be restored only after a public meal has been served to the elders and others of the community in reparation for the offence committed.

Failing the tribe is a serious matter. Punishment for it is most severe. The offending person is expelled from the tribe temporarily or on a lifelong basis if he/she does not show any sign of repentance. Not observing the tribal customs is morally an evil action which may be put right by ritual *purification, reparation* and *reconciliation* with the tribe. It is a *breaking* of the order established and maintained by the Creator for the good of the tribe and its members. Enforcement of measures against any breaking of accepted norms and misconduct rests with the *panchayat*[7]. It has the duty to guard the tradition, to ensure the good of one and all. The *myth* is the *model* and *reference point* for their actions.

Marriage

As described above in the second creation account, marriage was *divinely* instituted by God. It is the sacred duty, therefore, of every adult tribal to get married in his/her own community and raise children so that the *family, clan* and *tribe* may continue. Thus, there will be members to offer sacrifices to God and the ancestors. Every family head is a sacrificer. In keeping with their inheritance law, non-tribals cannot inherit land from a tribal. Therefore, a tribal has to get married within his/her own tribe. Persons not observing this rule may be dismissed from their communities till they agree to observe the rule

which they had broken. Similarly, the community members may cut themselves off from the erring members in all social relations and activities till the latter correct their wrong social behaviour.

The tribals marry *within* their own *tribe* and *outside* their own *clan*. They practise adult marriage of one man to one woman (monogamy). It is the most common practice among them. *Widow* remarriage is allowed. *Divorce* is rare and allowed only in case of (a) partners not being faithful to each other, and (b) wife not bearing children. This is an indicator that their life of sexuality is both *unitive* as well as *procreative* in a healthy balance. *Cross cousin* marriage, that is, marriage between the children of a woman and those of her brother, may take place beyond *three generations*. Any marriage against this rule *offends* tribal feeling and fine taste for social life. Similarly, marriage within the same clan offends tribal sensibilities because the members of the same clan look at one another as brothers and sisters having *common ancestors* in the beginning. Both these forms of marriage therefore amount to *incestuous* relationship.[8]

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

Incest

Tribals consider the violation of incest prohibitions a grave evil. It is thought to corrupt the social order by undermining of morals. That is why it meets with horrified condemnation and is held to merit *exile* from the community. It provokes an emotional shock beyond

description. It is held in such a horror because it *upsets* the family structure by corrupting the *intimate relations* of the family members. It destroys the very *basis* of human society, turning it into a mere disordered crowd. This prohibition is, therefore, very important to preserve and maintain a tribal society.

Respectful Distance

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

Family

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

Inheritance

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

on their marriage go over to another clan do not inherit it at their parental home.

A childless widow or a widow with daughters only, provided she does not remarry or quit her late husband's house, is entitled to own his land until her death. *Sons* of a dead brother receive their father's share of land. A tribal without having any son, if he wishes, adopts one of his close nephews [9] of his choice to be his heir with the consent of the family members and the village *panchayat*. Moreover, if a tribal has only daughters, he takes a prospective son-in-law to his house to get married to one of his daughters and work at his house. If the young man consents to the arrangement, he may even be adopted as a son to succeed his father-in-law. However, this is rare these days.

Truthfulness

Before the British rule, formal judiciary and court procedures as well as prisons were clearly absent among the tribals. 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 them. Telling lies in the *panchayat* or showing disrespect and disobedience to it is a grave offence for which the offender may be subjected to *heavy fines* or even *expelled* from the tribe.

Justice, Peace and Unity

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

Kindness and Hospitality

An action is judged to be right or wrong in reference to the good of the individual and of all the members of the community. The approach

is based on an *egalitarian*[10]outlook which determines the moral conduct of individuals. The moral ideals to be followed by all are peacefulness, equality and kindness. Peace with men/women and the supernatural is a sign of order and harmony as intended in creation. Equality among all promotes, strengthens and sustains the intended order. Kindness, hence, is characteristic of the tribals. If one chances to enter a tribal house, it will not be long before one is made to feel at home and no longer a stranger among the house members. If the guest is very dear or respectable, the mother or sister or sister-in-law washes his/her feet with water. This is done to the guest as a part of hospitality expressing welcome, love, affection, appreciation, friendship, respect and gratitude. If a person does not share such quality of hospitality, he/she is looked down upon by the community members and loses his/her respect in their sight.

Conclusion

Tribal morality places an overwhelming emphasis on the *community* and *tribe*. The goal of life is the *good* of the community, *continuity* of the tribe, for therein lies the good of the *one* and *all*. 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 is swallowed up by the community, his/her personal good and wellbeing overwhelmed as it were by the *interests* of the tribe. Therefore, questions may be raised: What is the *identity* of an individual in a tribal society? Where does a person stand in relation to his/her community? Does he/she not find his/her personality and individuality sacrificed for the tribe? Yes, the person belongs to the tribe. Apart from the community he/she has no identity. This is what the *ethical* and *moral* behaviour of a tribal is based upon. However, the community and the tribe do not exist like concrete beings, it is their members who exist and constitute them as thinking, reflecting, desiring, willing and acting beings in freedom with accompanying consequences.

The nature of tribal existence has to be understood in this way that the tribe is created and cared for by the Creator for a *communitarian* life where there is *equality* and *harmony*. After this life in this world, a person joins the community of his/her *ancestors* in the next world provided he/she had walked on the sacred path they had shown in their

lifetime in this world. *Salvation* for a tribal means *union* with ancestors and God the Creator. Thus, an individual apart from his/her community has no meaning and a healthy *tension* between this person and the members of his/her community *dead* and *alive* continues. Thus, the life and existence of every person receives true value and *meaning* in the tribe

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

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

Bibliography

- 1 Beattie, J. 1977 (1964): *Other Cultures*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- 2 Desrochers, J. (ed.) 2004: *India's Social Challenges: Promoting Tribal Rights And Culture*, Bangalore: Centre for Social Action, pp. 2-6.
- 3 Draft National Policy On Tribals, Ministry of Tribal Affairs 2004: New Delhi: Shashtri Bhavan.
- 4 Kullu, P. 2000 (1988): *Khar+ia Dharm Aur Sanskriti Ka Vishleshan* (Hindi), Ranchi: Catholic Press.
- 5 Marshall, G (ed.) 1998 (1994): *A Dictionary of Sociology*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 6 Mundu, J. 2003: *The Ho Christian Community: Towards A New Self-Understanding As Communion*, Delhi: Media House.
- 7 Pereira, F. 2007: *The Faith Tradition Of The Kunr+ukhar (Uraons)*, Delhi: ISPCK.
- 8 Radcliffe-Brown, A.R. 1976 (1956): *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

- 9 Singh, K.S. 1994: *The Scheduled Tribes: People of India, National Series*, Vol. III, Delhi: Anthropological Survey of India.
- 10 Thanzauva, K. 2004: *Theology Of Community: Tribal Theology In The Making*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation.
- 11 Tirkey, A. 2004: "Tribal Culture and Identity," in John Desrochers (ed.), *India's Social Challenges: Promoting Tribal Rights and Culture*, Bangalore: Centre for Social Action, pp. 18-26.
- 12 Tirkey, B. 1984: "Oraon Ethical Values," *Sevartham*, Vol. 9, pp. 57-68.
- 13 Troisi, J. 2000: *Tribal Religion: Religious Beliefs and Practices among the Santals*, New Delhi: Manohar
- 14 Van Exem, A. 1982: *The Religious System Of The Munda Tribe*, Ranchi: Catholic Press.

Notes and References

- 1 Myth is a sacred or religious tale whose content is concerned with the origins or creation of natural, supernatural or cultural phenomena. The anthropological meaning differs from that which implies an untruth. Myths have been studied as clues to the society's dominant values as a 'social charter' and for their universal structures (Marshall 1998: 437).
- 2 Fish catching bird in water
- 3 Idea held by people about ethical behaviour or appropriate behaviour, what is right or wrong, desirable or despicable ((Marshall 1998: 689)).
- 4 Social and often sacred prohibitions put upon certain things, people, or acts, which render them untouchable or unmentionable ((Ibid.: 661).
- 5 Sexual intercourse between unmarried people.
- 6 Sexual relations between immediate relatives, usually between parents and children, and between brothers and sisters (siblings) (Ibid. 301).
- 7 Council of village elders or heads of families.
- 8 Marriage between mother and son, father and daughter or brother and sister.
- 9 Sons of his brother(s).
- 10 Seeing equality of condition, outcome, reward, and privilege as a desirable goal of social organization (Ibid. 185).