
UNIT 4 TRIBAL COSMOGONIES AND COSMOLOGIES

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

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

4.1 INTRODUCTION

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

4.2 CREATION ACCOUNTS OF CENTRAL AND EAST INDIAN TRIBALS

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

(Mundu 2003: 26-62)

Munda

Earth was covered with *water*. *Haram* (Old One, Personal name of the Supreme Being, the Wise One.) had made only the *creatures in water*. He told the *crab* to fetch some *soil* from under water to make the dry land - Soil was washed away. He told the *turtle* to bring the soil and the same thing happened. Finally, he told the *earthworm* to go down the sea and bring the soil. It filled its mouth with soil and came back and gave it out on the Old One's hand. He

multiplied it and made the *dry land* and made all kinds of *herbs, plants* and *trees* and *animals* to grow. He made a *clay figure* of a *human being*. A *horse* kicked it. The second time a *tiger* chased it away. The horse was cursed and the tiger was praised. A large *Indian stork* laid 2-eggs. While hatching them a *boy* and a *girl* were formed. The Old One made the first *plough* for the boy (man) from a single, large tree, taking a long time. His wife sent a mosquito to disturb him in his work but he continued in fashioning the plough. So, she sent a tiger to frighten him. He threw a chip on the tiger and it became a wild dog and chased away the tiger. He brought the plough but his wife did not appreciate it. She told him to throw it on the ground and it broke into pieces! She made another plough with different parts which did not break when thrown to the ground. Therefore, he freed her and the women from the hard work of making the plough, they are not even to touch it. The Old One visited the boy (man) making fields and asked him questions: "When did you do this work?" He answered: "Now." The Old One asked again: "When did you do that work?" The boy answered: "Now." The Old One asked the boy yet another time: "When will you do that work?" The boy answered: "Now." So, the Old One arranged the sun-set and sun-rise. He made the sun for the day and the moon for the night. He told the boy to work by day and rest by night.

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

Santal

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

The crab tried to bring it between his claws and it got dissolved in the sea. Finally, he sent the *earthworm* to bring the earth which he agreed to do provided the *tortoise* floated on the surface of the sea. The latter was called and he floated on the surface of the sea. *Thakur* chained his 4-legs in 4-directions. The *earthworm* put his tail on the back of the tortoise and with his mouth down below swallowed the earth and brought it out on the back of the tortoise.

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

Ho

There was only *water* all around. *Singbonga* wanted to make land in its place. So, he made a *tortoise* and let it go into water to bring out *mud*. It brought the mud with its mouth and hands and placed it on the surface. The water washed it away. Then *Singbonga* made a *crab*. It entered into the water and clawed out mud and brought it up to the surface but it was washed away as before. *Singbonga* then rubbed some dirt out from his thigh and made *two earthworms*: one male and one female. They slipped into the water and began to raise and heap up mud within the water by eating and disgorging it. Those two earthworms multiplied and worked together. Land rose above the water. In some places it became mountains and in other places it became hard *land*. Then *Singbonga* made '*Surmi-Durmis*' (They are not seen by people. They dig ponds during the night and get a living source of water. People point to such ponds on the mountains that never dry even during the hot summer.) with hands and feet. They began to level the mountains and fill the ravines with their hands. *Singbonga* sent *tigers* and *bears*, *bisons* and *deer*, and *elephants* to help them. The *Surmi-Durmis* yoked the animals and leveled the land with leveling planks. They leveled even

the mountains. Later, in those fields they planted *trees* and *grass*. When the land had been made and the trees and grass had sprouted and grown, it looked very beautiful. *Singbonga* became very happy and made a figure like a human being in the shape of *Surmi-Durmis*. He breathed *jibon* (life) into him. He became a *Ho* (man) and was named 'Luku' by *Singbonga*. But Luku used to stay away from all other living beings. So, *Singbonga* put the man to sleep and took out one of his ribs and made a figure of a *woman* in the image of Luku. He gave life to that figure and placed it close to Luku. When Luku got up from his sleep, he asked *Singbonga*: "Who is this?" *Singbonga* said: "This is your companion. Her name is "Lukumi". You two will live together as *juri-juri tainben* (companions)." Thus, *Singbonga* made 2-human beings, male and female. They walked around happily in the land of trees and grass. They lived on the fruits and flowers of the trees. *Singbonga* had let them eat the fruits and flowers of all the trees except the *tamarind* fruits. However, seeing that fruit daily they were overcome by the desire of that fruit. So, they ate it and immediately experienced a ticklish sensation and shame. They hid themselves behind the leafy shrubs. *Singbonga* called them out. They came to him covering themselves with leaves. He realized that his *grandchildren* had disobeyed him. So, he banished them from that place. They provided themselves with food from the earth. There were other living beings too. They multiplied. However, the human beings remained only two. They used to keep a husking pole in between them without crossing it while sleeping during the night. One day *Singbonga* told them to ferment *diyang* (rice beer) and drink it. He taught them how to make it. After preparing it they drank it and crossed the husking pole and from that time they lived as husband and wife. Numerous children were born but they began to walk on evil path. Seeing this, *Singbonga* was displeased and destroyed them with *rain of fire*. However, *Nage Era* (water spirit) saved a pair of human beings and a pair of every other living beings. Through this pair of human beings, humankind increased again.

Kharia

There was only *water* in the beginning. A *crab* raised a pillar of clay on the surface of the water to enjoy sunshine. A *man* (figure representing the Supreme Being) began to play with the pillar. Seeing this, the crab extended its pillar into a huge island, the *earth*. The *man* used to make 2-clay figures everyday and leave them to dry there. A *horse* came flying and kicked those figures to pieces everyday. Man-God cut off the wings of the horse. He asked his 2-dogs to guard the clay figures. The dogs hid themselves under an *akwan* shrub to bark at the horse. The clay figures were thus saved from the horse. Man-God put the dry clay figures inside the *hollow* of a *banian tree*. The milk of the tree dripped into their mouths and they became alive - one *male* and one *female*. Human beings increased and fruits and vegetables were not enough. They prayed to God for more food. God caused a big whirlwind with dry leaves flying. They became birds. Human beings began to kill and eat them. Still food was not enough. Human beings became proud and arrogant and began to cut down fruit trees senselessly. God became angry and sent *flood* first to destroy the human beings. Some clever ones climbed the top of the mountains covering themselves with *gungu* (leaf cover). Flood subsided and human beings came down from the mountain but behaved the same way as before. God sent *rain of fire* to wipe out all human beings. Only a *brother* and a *sister* were saved who ran away towards the marshy land

where king *Shembhu* and queen *Dakai* pulled them inside the marsh and hid them. After the Rain of Fire, God felt lonely. He appointed the *kingcrow* as *sardar* (Leader), *koel* as *kotwar* (Assistant), *crow* as *bhandari* (grain store keeper), *lipi* as *susrai* (Care taker) and sent them to different directions in search of human beings. With hard work, birds grew thinner but the crow grew stouter. It had discovered human beings and was having food from their left-overs. God sent the birds to fetch them but queen *Dakai* refused to let them go. God Himself went to fetch them and made an agreement with *Dakai* that 7-parts of the human beings would belong to her and only 1-part to Him. God asked them to clear forests for fields. He gave them a seed of gourd to plant. The creeper bore 3-fruits. They offered the head of one of the fruits to God. They found the gourd full of *gundli* (millet). They roasted and powdered it and ate it. From the second fruit they discovered *gora* (coarse paddy) and made flat rice. Similarly, they found the third fruit full of low land paddy grains. They boiled, dried, husked, cooked and ate them. They kept a big *wooden log* between them while *sleeping*. God taught them how to make *rice beer*. They drank it and the boy crossed the log the other side. Thus, children were born: 9-sons and 9-daughters. The sons used to go hunting. One day they killed a big deer. They were thirsty and began to look for water from trees. They managed to locate one water pool. The eldest brother went and saw a snakelike fish. The second one saw a big tortoise....all of them thus met one thing or the other. Taking the equal share of deer meat, they departed. Opening the bundle at home, each one of them found what he had seen on the way to the pool of water. Accordingly, each one of them was called, *Dungdung* (Eel), *Kullu* (Tortoise), *Kerketta* (Hedge sparrow), *Tete* (a bird), *Kiro* (tiger), *Soreng* (rock), *Ba'a* (paddy), *Bilung* (Salt), *To'opo* (one kind of bird).

Kurukh (Uraon)

There was *water* everywhere and water creatures were living there. *Dharmes* (Supreme Being, Beneficent One) was interested in making the earth. Therefore, he sent the *crab* below the water to fetch the clay in order to make the earth. The crab went down swimming to fetch the clay. It dug up the clay and holding it in its claws returned. However, during its return journey, the clay got washed away. *Dharmes* asked the crab: "Where is the clay you have brought?" The crab replied: "While I was swimming back the clay in my claws got washed away *Dharme*." *Dharmes* cursed the crab. From that day the crab walks in a crooked way and looks at others from the corner of its eyes! *Dharmes* now sent the tortoise to fetch the clay. It immediately dived into the water and collected the clay on its back and came up to *Dharmes*. However, while swimming back all the clay was washed away. *Dharmes* now asked: "Where is the clay?" Feeling shy the tortoise hid its head, mouth and eyes. From that day on if it sees anyone, it hides its head. *Dharmes* now sent the *earthworm* to fetch the clay. It slipped down to the bottom of the sea and filled its belly with clay and came up to the surface of the sea and began to throw out the clay on the palm of *Dharmes* and it kept spreading out and drying up to become the present earth. *Dharmes* made all the *creatures* of the earth and the *birds* of the air. He made a pair of *male* and *female* human beings out of clay and kept them out to dry. After they were dry he would bake them in fire and put life into them. However, the *pankha-hansa* (winged horse) trampled the human beings of clay into dust. *Dharmes* made human beings of clay a couple of times more and kept them out to dry. The horse came to destroy them again.

So he made a *dog* to chase away the horse. Seeing the behaviour of the horse he put life into the human beings of clay that were not baked. That is why the human beings have to die in this world. In the beginning the human beings were a couple like a pair of eggs of a dove. From this couple, the earth was filled with human beings afterwards.

2nd account

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

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

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

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

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4.3 CREATION ACCOUNTS OF NORTH-EAST INDIAN TRIBALS

Source: (Panthanmackel 2009: 324-330)

Naga

The Nagas consist of a number of groups, each with its own identity and language. The Nagas believe that in the beginning a vast sheet of *water*, towered over by a hill where lived God *Sabrai*, covered the earth. One night a giant *bat* who was a god, having found no spot to land, flew to God *Sabrai* and told him that he came from another overpopulated world to look for a new world to land. Then *Sabrai* created land, trees, grass and the wind to blow. Crows made rivers flow through the land. Then birds, animals and humans were created to be placed on the land. Each species had its own king. In the beginning, all humans were one, and only later they broke themselves up into many. It took place in the following manner: A king had a daughter called *Sitoyle* who was exceptionally fleet-footed and she enjoyed wandering in the jungles. One day she was missing. The search party came across a python with a bloated stomach. Men attacked it with *dao* (Sharp sword). As they attacked it, their physical appearance began to change resulting in different kinds of language and groups. Concerning earthquake, once when a king died, he went to the home of gods and married *Sabrai*'s daughter. Then he tried to set himself as a rival to *Sabrai*. In order to resolve the issue, a wrestling contest was held. When the result seemed to hang in balance, the king's wife in sympathy with her father managed to tie up her husband's legs with her hair holding him to the ground. The agreement was that the vanquished would be confined to the middle of the earth. That is why whenever the king struggles to free himself from his confines, the earth suffers a big quake. If the quake occurs early in the morning or late in the evening, it is considered unlucky; if it occurs later in the day, it signifies good omen.

Ao

The Ao Nagas form an important branch of the Naga group of tribals. The district of Mokokchung in Nagaland is the traditional home of the Aos. The Aos believe in a supreme God whom they call *Lichaba*. He is the creator of the earth and all in it, the Lord of the earth and its vegetation. He has the greatest influence upon the earth and is responsible for natural calamities. He bestows both blessings and punishments on human beings. He remains under the earth holding it between his two hands and is conscious of all events. In the beginning *Lichaba* took his time to mould the plains of Assam. He started to mould the Naga Hills thereafter. Then a sea beetle came shouting, 'Enemies, enemies! Hurry! Hurry! Enemies are approaching to destroy the earth,' and he disappeared. So *Lichaba* had to mould the Naga Hills in haste in order to defend the earth from the attack of the enemies. That is why Assam is plain while Nagaland is mountainous. The Aos infer from the story that there was an evil force in the beginning in order to distract and bring confusion. So, a human being has both a 'good will' and 'bad will' simultaneously. In another similar story, in the beginning, the human being, tiger, birds and an angel lived in a place in the East. As their mother grew older and thin, each tended her in turn. As days went by,

the human being suspected the tiger of having an eye to eat the mother at her death. So, the human being and the angel sent the tiger to the field on the day the mother died. On his return the tiger did not see his mother since they had already buried her. After the mother's death they dispersed in different directions, and the human being decided to work in an open field. The tiger went into the jungle and the angel into the dark. In yet another story, the first human beings were created by God and thereafter destroyed by a flood due to sin and wickedness. The present humans are the descendants of a couple that survived because of their virtuous life.

Khasi

The Khasis inhabit the Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya. Many hold the view that they are an offshoot of the Monkhmer branch of the Austro-Asiatic stock. They hold the view that the earth had 5 children when God created heaven. The children of the earth are the sun, moon, water, air and fire. All the constellations have their origin in the sun and the moon. All things that cover the earth have their origin in water, air and fire. The mother earth asked God for a ruler of the beautiful world. God selected and sent seven tribes to the earth. The Khasis claim themselves as the people of the seven huts and seven nests. God made an agreement that He would be in touch with the Khasis as long as they led good lives. The symbol of this truth was a tree. An evil spirit from the sea plotted the downfall of the human beings. It convinced the people that the symbolic tree would menace them by filling the entire earth if it were not cut down. So the people cut down the tree at the suggestion of the evil spirit. As it fell down it shook the entire earth; and wherever its sap fell it turned the sand into coal. In this way, humans brought disaster upon themselves, losing God and turning life into ashes. But God took pity on the humans again and came down to help them start afresh their life when the *cock* interceded for humans. Because of the concern of the cock for the fallen humans, God gave the cock the gift of heralding each day by crowing. It is considered as a mediator between God and the humans. It lays down its neck for the humans. This is often interpreted as substituting human sacrifices by offering the cock which God accepted through a covenant. God also taught the humans how to till the land and produce food, and the rites and ceremonies that go with the daily tasks. God would not talk to humans face to face, but only through signs and symbols used in rituals. God also promised humans that He would make His will known through the entrails of the cock and in the shells of the hen's egg.

Adi

The Adis are a hill people constituting 20% of the total population of Arunachal Pradesh. In the past they were known as Abors. The curiosity of the Adis to know the creator and controller of the universe, led them to invent a number of myths concerning the origin of the universe. They are embodied in the ballads called *abangs* from which we know that all beings of the universe have been created by a supernatural power called *Sedi*. He is the creator of gods and goddesses who in turn gave birth to numerous spirits that control the various spheres of the universe. The entire universe is the physical embodiment of *Sedi* who manifests Himself in and through the earth. The earth, in fact, is His physical image with dual name *Sedi-Melo* (*Sedi*=the earth and *Melo*=the sky). *Sedi* has also a pair searching eyes with which He keeps vigil on the humanity.

The two eyes are *Donyi* (the Sun) and *Seeching* (the earth) as creators. After the creation, *Donyi* and *Polo* (moon) went to the sky and in course of time they became gods. *Donyi Polo* (the Sun-Moon god) comes next to *Sedi* or *Jimi*, the Creator who remains hidden after creation, and so no sacrifice is offered to His name. Hence, the Adis give popular divine dignity to *Donyi Polo*, who is regarded as protector and saviour. *Donyi Polo* physically and spiritually remains with the Adis. Some believe that it is a single god with a double personality, with functions of the sun and the moon. Some others believe that they are two, *Donyi* being the husband of *Polo*.

Bodo

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

Mizo

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

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

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

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

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4.4 CREATION OF HEAVENLY BODIES

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

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

Dharmes set about making the plough again. He saw a dove sitting on her eggs in the nest. He aimed his hammer at the dove and threw it on the dove but it

missed the dove which flew away from the nest. He next threw his file (agricultural tool) at it but again He missed it. This dove became the *Sirius* (a bright star) and the double eggs, *Double Stars* (Campion 1980: 4).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Sun, Moon and Stars

a. Munda and Kurukh Account

In the Munda and Kurukh accounts it is told that before the moon was made, the Sun was alone in the sky and it did not set. One day the Creator went out

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

b. Santal Account

In the Santal account the heavenly bodies are described as human beings in their metaphorical sense. *Thakur Baba* (Supreme Being) is *Sing Chando* (the sun) and *Nida Chando* (the moon) is his wife. At first there were as many stars by day as there are by night. They were the children of the Sun and the Moon. They had divided them between the two of them. At the evil deeds of his children *Sing Chando* blazed with fierce heat till they and beasts died. The *Nida Chando* took pity on their suffering and prayed to *Sing Chando* not to destroy them. So, *Sing Chando* saved a couple of young man and woman from whom many children were born. *Nida Chando* feared that *Sing Chando* would again get angry with the new human beings and destroy them. Therefore, she made a plan to trick him. She covered up all her children with a large basket and smeared her mouth and lips with red and going to *Sing Chando* told him that she had eaten up every one of her children and proposed that he should now eat up his children. At first *Sing Chando* declined to believe her but she pointed to her lips and said that they were red with the blood of her children. So, *Sing Chando* was convinced and agreed to eat up his children except two that were saved to become the Morning and Evening Stars. At night *Nida Chando* let out her children from under the basket. Seeing them alive, *Sing Chando* flew to *Nida Chando* in anger and the children at the sight of him scattered in all directions. That is why the stars are now spread all over the sky. Although the stars escaped, *Sing Chando* could not restrain his anger and cut *Nida Chando* into two. That is the reason why the Moon waxes and wanes. Before this she was always full like the Sun (Pereira 2007: 558-559).

c. Kurukh (Uraon) Account

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

4.5 DETERMINING TIME

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

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

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

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

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

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4.6 LET US SUM UP

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

4.7 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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