
UNIT 2 HUMAN VALUES AND MORAL OUTLOOK OF THE TRIBALS

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

2.1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN TRIBES

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

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

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

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

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

2.3 TRIBAL VALUES AND MORAL OUTLOOK

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

- Awareness of all pervasive influence of the Transcended
- Respect for elders
- Gender equality
- Spirit of sociability and hospitality
- Solidarity and sharing

- Community feeling
- Democratic style of functioning in decision making
- Openness to other religions
- Basic honesty
- Hard work
- Creativity
- Contentment and joy in simple living
- Love of nature
- Attachment to land and forest,
- Love of freedom with proper parental discipline,
- Celebration of life through feasts and festivities
- Hope for the future.

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

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Mention some core values of adivasis?

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2) How does Majumdar define a tribe?

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2.4 A TRIBAL STORY

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

At daybreak, the first women awoke, tended their fires and began preparing food. A baby cried and a mother strapped him on her back. Another woman

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

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

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

Collective Decision Making

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

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

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

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

Sharing and Collaboration as Natural

As the above story makes it clear, there is a life of caring, sharing and collaboration. As a community they are dependent on each other. They abandon themselves to the tribal collectivity for their common good and so collaboration comes naturally to them. In fact their very survival hinged on tribal solidarity.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

- 1) What is the characteristic feature of tribal societies with regard to decision making?
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- 2) How does sharing and collaboration become natural for adivasis?
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2.5 MODERN HUNGER FOR TRIBAL VALUES

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

Tribe offers us a very different perspective on our relationship to the present, the past, and the future. When we can see ourselves part of a larger whole, one

that extends beyond our own lifespans into the infinite continuum of the cosmos, our singular lives take on meanings that connect us to that continuum that spiritual teachers urge us to seek—our relationship to the life force itself (Pandikattu 2002).

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

Who is My Neighbour: A Tribal Story

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

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

The Tribal Consciousness

Ask a Kalahari tribesman (made famous through the movie, "The Gods Must Be Crazy") where his food comes from and he may probably take you out on a hunt with him, or suggest that you spend the next few days gathering wild melons, herbs and native root crops with the women. In the process, you'd

learn about the terrain, when things were ready to pick, when they were not, how to harvest what you needed without damaging the plant or surrounding environs. Mostly, you'd learn about the close relationship between hunter, gatherer and the Earth. You'd touch the sacred each time you harvested a vegetable or fruit, or tracked, killed and dressed out a game bird or other animal. That is, in fact, the emergence of tribal consciousness. (Tirkey 2004)

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

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

Need for Re-Tribalisation

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.6 REDISCOVERING THE SACRED SPACE

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

we may not see it or experience it. This is the invisible reality that forms the very foundation of all existence. This is the essence of tribal consciousness.

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

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

What is tribe if not that wondrous container that mirrors back to us all the sacred parts of ourselves? Tribe helps us to remember our love and our important place in life. It helps us know and understand and live in harmony with life, with what life calls us to do, with the fact that there is a greater purpose than ourselves. We can each begin to take steps to humanize our lives and restore tribal consciousness as part of all of our lives—embracing the realization that this is our rich inheritance of being. Through our humanness we build what the ancient teachers called the “unseen” or “invisible”—the powers of the emotional and spiritual realms that none of us can escape from, and which are the deep well from which each of us can draw for the nourishment of all life (Gold and Kammen 2011).

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What does re-tribalisation require?

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2) How is tribal consciousness related to the sacred?

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2.7 LET US SUM UP

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

2.8 KEY WORDS

- Re-tribalisation** : the act of returning to a tribal way of life in terms of its values and vision. It can be also done in our modern society, without physically returning to the tribal surroundings.
- Tribal Consciousness** : An awareness of and pride in one’s identity as a member of a tribe and share in its general values, world-view and outlook.

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