
UNIT 1 TRIBAL WORLD-VIEW AND PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- Tribal worldviews
- Meaning systems

1.1 INTRODUCTION

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

Within the framework of worldview, there are two types of ‘views’ to be distinguished: (i) ‘inside’ view, and (ii) ‘outside’ view. If we are to understand

the worldview of a people, we need to begin with the ‘inside’ view. We need to see the meaning, understand the valuation, and feel the feeling connected with the object or act in the mind of the native. Only after this we can shift to an ‘outside’ view point. The ‘outside’ view consists in detached and abstract understanding of a view point. Thus, delineating the worldview of a given culture entails objectifying and describing the interpretation of the ‘world’ of that particular culture – as people in that culture see it. Initially this term came into English as a rendering of the German *Weltanschauung* which is an overall perspective on life encompassing the way a person perceives the world, evaluates and responds to it (Makkreel 1975: 346).

The cognitive view of life and the total environment which an individual holds or which is characteristic of the members of a society is frequently referred to as *Weltanschauung*, or *world view*. It carries the suggestion “of the structure of things as man is aware of them,” (Redfield 1953: 86) and it is thus the life scene as people look out upon it. It is the human being’s *inside view* of the way things are coloured, shaped, and arranged according to personal cultural preconceptions. The planet we live on, a world of physical objects and living things, is by no means the same world to all peoples. Indeed, a simple description of the most basic observable components of this world (the sky, the land, water, trees) by a member of one culture might prove totally unintelligible to a member of another. Institutions, relationships, arts, and technologies vary throughout the world in manifestly observable forms, but underlying them are the existential postulates that orient a people’s particular slant on life and the ways in which they organize their culture.

Etic, Emic, and Ethos

When seen from the outside and reported by an observer who is not by training and living, thoroughly enculturated with the culture observed and written of, the view is called *etic*. The inside view is labeled *emic*. Worldview, as a concept, focuses on the ways of knowing and identifying the component elements of the world – the existential and cognitive. *Ethos* expresses a people’s qualitative feeling, their emotional and moral sensing of the way things are and ought to be – their ethical system (Hoebel & Frost 1979: 324).

Not all persons can by any means articulate systematically what their worldview is. Usually, it is up to the anthropologists or philosophers descriptively to analyse and formulate a people’s worldview from what they learn of their thinking, feelings, and actions. Worldview and ethos are found expressed in technology, personal relations, myth, song, dance, art, and religious and magical ritual in a multitude of gross and subtle ways. They are the reflected essence of a people’s inner feelings and their ways of knowing *the way things are* (Ibid.).

No worldview is a given, in spite of the numerous peoples who believe that their way of life was bestowed upon them by culture heroes or the divine revelation of prophets (such as the early Hebrews, Christians, and Muslims). Worldviews grow with cultures. Generations of anonymous human beings contribute to the unending quest to make the unknown knowable, to transform meaningless bafflement into meaningful understanding. There are individuals in every society no doubt who are thinkers and systematisers, the idealists who crystallize the myths, shape the ceremonies, express the concepts in art – symbolic creators. However, even they must work within the cultural framework.

Check Your Progress I

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What does the notion of *worldview* encompass in human life?

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1.2 TRIBAL WORLDVIEWS

If we want to understand the tribal worldview, it involves, first of all an understanding and describing the tribal world as the tribal traditions look upon it, and then, conceptualizing and abstracting it (Redfield 1960: 83). Indeed, the inside view of the tribal world involves, (a) collective interpretation that is reflected in tribal language, cosmology, rituals, customs, beliefs, myths, songs and stories; (b) the way the tribal traditions interpret time-space dimensions, (c) the way tribals see their own identity and that of others, and (d) the way they interpret ethical dimensions.

In the tribal worldview space (totality of creation) is central. Everything has to be understood in the perspective of creation. Harmony with space or creation is the starting point of their spirituality and their search for liberation. An awareness of being one with the whole of creation is, therefore, the spiritual foundation of the tribal people. In this unity of creation and spirituality, there is no clear cut distinction between sacred and secular, religion and non-religion. One sees the Supreme being in space/creation and not outside of it.

Since each tribal group is unique and different from one another, it is not possible to discuss their various worldviews in this paper. However, the Mundas, Kurukhs (Uraons), Kharias, Santals and Hos, are the major tribes in the Chhotanagpur plateau, India, it is hoped that they sufficiently represent the other basic tribal worldviews as well. Their relationship with the Supreme Being and their experience of Him through generation after generation would express some of the worldviews common among other tribal groups too. They are reflected in their various creation accounts as given below:

a) Kurukh Account

According to one of the Kurukh (Uraon) creation accounts, there was *water* everywhere in the beginning with sea creatures. *Dharmes* (God) wanted to make the *earth*. So, he sent the *kilkila* (king fisher) to the world of the earthworms beyond the sixteen seas to fetch a tiny *seed* of the earth. The bird went down the sea and brought the seed from the earthworms and gave it to *Dharmes*. He churned the sea till it got muddy and dropped the seed there. That seed multiplied and took the present form of the earth as *saat-pati-raaji* (kingdom with 7 corners).

After making the earth, *Dharmes* began to form human beings in a mould like tiles and dry them in the sun but *Hansraj* horse thought, 'If the human beings fill the whole earth, they will kill me by constantly riding on me,' and, therefore, it trampled them underfoot. This is a winged horse of *Dharmes* in the Kurukh mythology. Seeing this, *Dharmes* made male and female *dogs* of clay and put them to dry in a corner of the fireplace. That is why even today the dog likes to sleep near the fireplace. When they were dry He baked them, put blood in them and they became alive and ferocious to drive away the *Hansraj* horse.

Dharmes now began to make human beings with clay, dried and baked them, put *jiya* (life principle) and blood into them. They became alive and filled the earth. Similarly, He made other creatures of the earth and the sky. He fed them personally, lovingly and faithfully everyday till they were able to find food for themselves. Human beings multiplied in great number and filled the whole face of the earth. One day, *Dharmes* went hunting quails and partridges with the help of His *besra* (hawk). On His way, however, He could not put His feet anywhere on the earth because the human beings had dirtied its surface everywhere with their excreta! This was a great offence against *Dharmes*. He regretted to have made the human beings. Offended by their mean act, He sent *rain of fire* on them for seven days and seven nights. All the human beings perished except the *bhaiya-bahin* (brother-sister). The beloved of *Dharmes* had hidden this pair of male and female children in her bun of hair and thus saved them from perishing. Afterwards she hid them in the hole of a *crab* covered with the *gangla* thicket (Job's tear) of the *sira-sita-naal* (sira-sita low paddy field) in the kingdom with seven corners.

With destruction of human beings, food supply to *Dharmes* by way of offering sacrifice to Him ceased. He was thus hungry. His beloved told Him that His happiness could return only with the finding of human beings. He asked her where to find them. She told Him to go to the *sira-sita-naal* in order to find them. So, He went there and found the *bhaiya-bahin* (literally brother-sister), male and female human couple. He brought them to His abode with great joy. He kept them with Him, fed them and looked after them lovingly with fatherly care. He called them *grand children* and they in return called Him *grand father*. There is a fond relationship between grand parents and their grand children free from fear.

When the *bhaiya-bahin* grew up, He gave them *land* to cultivate, *oxen* to plough and *seeds* to sow and reap. When their *crops* were growing, some insects and pests attacked them and thus they were getting destroyed. The *bhaiya-bahin* then went up to *Dharmes* to tell Him their problem. After listening to them, He taught them the ritual of destroying the effect of evil and receiving God's abundant blessing upon one's crop, cattle and children.

The *bhaiya-bahin* used to sleep separately by putting a log of the *simbali* (silk cotton) tree. One night they drank *hanr?ia* (rice beer) which *Dharmes* Himself had taught them how to prepare and lay drunk. When they were in deep sleep, *Dharmes* and His beloved removed the log between them and they slept together as husband and wife. When the *bhaiya-bahin* reported the change of their behaviour and experience to *Dharmes* in their innocence, He said to them that it was all right. Thus, He revealed to them the secret of procreation and human beings multiplied and filled the whole world.

Dharmes divided human beings into various *gotars* (clans), such as, *Bara, Barwa, Baxla, Beck, Ekka, Kerketta, Kindo, Kispotta, Kujur, Lakr?a, Minj, Panna, Tigga, Tirkey, Toppo, Xalxo, Xaxa, Xess, etc* in order to enter into marriage relationships outside one's own clan. These *totems* belong to the species of *animals, birds, fish, plants and minerals*. Thus, through marriage, the creative activity of *Dharmes* among human beings continues even to this day.

b) Santal Account

In the beginning there was only *water* and the earth was under water. *Thakur Jiu* (God) created the *crab, crocodile, alligator, raghop boarfish, sole prawn, earthworm, tortoise* and others. Then He made 2-human beings of clay. The *Sing Sadom* (day-horse) came down from above and trampled them to pieces and left the place.

Afterwards *Thakur* made *hans* and *hansil* (male-female swans) with the matter from his breast. They were beautiful. He breathed in them and they became alive and flew upwards. Since there was no place to alight, they used to alight on *Thakur's* hand. The *Sing Sadom* came down to drink water and spilt some froth of his mouth and left. It floated and foam was formed on water. The two birds alighted on the froth and moved about over the whole sea. The birds asked for food from *Thakur*. He called the *alligator* and asked it to bring up the earth. It tried to bring it on his back but the earth got dissolved in the sea. Next, *Thakur* called the *prawn* and sent it to fetch the earth. It tried to bring it between its claws but it got washed away in the water. *Thakur* then called the *raghop boarfish* for the same purpose. The fish bit the earth in its mouth and put some of it on its back, but it got dissolved in the sea. Since that time the boarfish has no scales on its body. Following it, *Thakur* called the *stone-crab* for the same work. It tried to bring the earth in his claws but it got washed away in the water. Finally, *Thakur* called the *earthworm* for the same work. It agreed to fetch the earth provided that the *tortoise* kept floating on the sea.

The tortoise agreed and *Thakur* chained its 4-legs in 4-directions. The earthworm put its tail on the back of the tortoise and with its mouth down below, swallowed the earth at the bottom of the sea and took it out on the back of the tortoise. The earth got spread out like a hard film and the present earth got formed. *Thakur* harrowed the earth when some of it got heaped up becoming mountains. The foam that was floating on the sea stuck to the earth. *Thakur* sowed seeds of all kinds of trees and plants on the foam and they sprang up and filled the earth.

The 2-birds mentioned above made a nest on a plant and laid 2-eggs. They hatched the eggs and 2-human beings were born, 1-boy and 1-girl. *Thakur* gave some cotton to the birds and told them to press the juice of whatever they ate into the cotton and put it into the mouths of the children to suck. When the children grew up, the birds flew towards the setting sun taking the children along with them.

The names of these 2-human beings were: (1) *Haram* or *Pilchu Haram*, (2) *Ayo* or *Pilchu Burhi*. They ate the grains of grass and lived in great peace. One day *Lita* or *Maran Buru* (great mountain) came to them and asked: "Where are you *grand children*? Do brew *beer*, it has a very sweet taste." The three of them went to the forest. *Lita* showed them the roots. *Pilchu Haram* and *Pilchu Burhi* dug them and brought them along and made them into the fermenting stuff and made rice beer by putting this stuff into the boiled grains.

Fermentation was complete in 5-days. They filled 3-leaf cups with beer and poured the content of one of them on the ground in the name of *Maran Buru* and drank the remaining 2 cups and went to sleep together. *Lita* was pleased with their behaviour. They gave birth to 7-boys and 7-girls. They went to different countries. There they became like he-buffaloes and she-buffaloes. They did not respect one another.

Thakur got offended with their behaviour. He sent *Pilchu Haram* and *Pilchu Burhi* to the cave in the *Harata* mountain and sent fire-rain for 7-days and 7-nights and destroyed mankind and animals. Only the two in the *Harata* mountain cave were saved. They gave birth to 12-sons and 12-daughters and mankind descended from them. They were divided into 12 groups.

c) *Munda Account*

Separation of Land and Sea

The sky was empty of stars and the earth was covered with *water*. The 'Old One' (Supreme Being) had made only the creatures that live in water. He ordered the *crab* to bring some earth from under the sea to make dry land. The crab brought it between its claws but it got washed away in the sea. He then ordered the *turtle* to fetch a bit of earth. It brought it on its back but it got washed away in the sea. Finally, he tried the *earthworm* for bringing the earth from under the sea. The earthworm went down to the bottom, filled its mouth with the earth and came out and gave it out in the hand of the 'Old One'. He multiplied it and made the dry land whereon he made all kind of herbs, plants and trees and created all kinds of animals.

Origin of Human Beings

Having made a clay figure, the 'Old One' gave a soul (principle of life) to this figure. Before life was put into the figure, a *horse* kicked it to pieces. He made another figure and the *horse* tried to kick this second figure too, but a *tiger* chased the horse away. The 'Old One' cursed the horse because it had kicked the first human figure into pieces. The curse was, (a) men would put iron into the mouth of the horse, (b) they would break wind on its back, and (c) they would scourge it at the hind quarters. Pleased with the tiger, he gave it tremendous strength and power. After making the dry land, the 'Old One' created animals on it. A large Indian stork laid two *eggs* on the land. A *boy* and a *girl* were formed in those eggs and the bird brought them up safe and sound.

Division of Time into Day and Night

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

The Rain of Fire

When the world was filled with human beings, *Singbonga* (God) rained fire and all died. Only two persons - a *brother* and a *sister* - escaped. The *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*. *Singbonga* made a house for them and let them live therein. But while sleeping they placed a husking-pole between themselves. One day *Singbonga* taught them how to prepare rice beer. When it was ready they drank it and went to sleep. At night *Singbonga* removed the husking-pole and the boy and girl slept together. Next morning they told *Singbonga* what had happened during the night. Listening to them He said: "You did well *grandchildren*."

Afterwards a child was born and *Singbonga* sent a sickness to that child. The parents told *Singbonga* about the sickness. He told them to offer a sacrifice of a *white* fowl to *Singbonga*. He also told them how everything had to be done. After the sacrifice they went home but forgot their sacrificial knife behind. Therefore, the boy returned to bring back the knife. On reaching the spot, behold, he found *Singbonga* licking off the leaf plate, that is, the remains of the sacrificial meat. The boy said: "Hello, *grandfather*, when we invited you refused and now you tried to eat the left over!" From that moment *Singbonga* disappeared and after that they never saw him again. From these two human beings, all others were born afterwards.

d) *Kharia Account*

In the beginning there was only *water*. A *crab* raised a pillar of clay from the bottom of the sea above the surface of the water and began to enjoy sunshine everyday lying down on top of the pillar. One day a man came from somewhere and began to play with the clay of the pillar. He is also known as *Ponomesor* (God). Seeing this the crab extended its pillar into a huge island. Thus, the earth came into existence.

The primordial man used to make 2-clay figures everyday and leave them there to dry. A *horse* used to come flying and kick the clay figures to pieces. Getting tired of this, he cut off its wings and asked his two *dogs* to guard the clay figures. Once they were dry the Man-God put them inside the hollow of a banyan tree and when the milk of the tree dripped into their mouths, they became alive. There were thus two *male* and *female* human beings created. They increased so much that fruits and vegetables were insufficient for them. So, God made different kinds of *birds* for them to kill and eat.

Destruction of Human Beings

The human beings increased and became more and more demanding on their creator. They became proud and arrogant. All this displeased God. He sent flood to destroy them but the clever ones climbed the top of the mountain covering themselves with *gungus* (leaf-coats). Their behaviour did not change. So, he sent *rain of fire*. All died except the *brother* and *sister* whom king *Sembhu* and queen *Dakai* pulled inside the marsh and hid them.

Human Beings after the Rain-Fire

God felt very lonely and so he brought the *brother* and *sister* back to the earth. He asked them to clear the forest and make fields. He gave them the seed of a

gourd and asked them to plant it. The creeper bore 3-fruits. They made an offering of the head of the fruit to God. As soon as they did this, they found the fruit full of *gondli* (millet) grains. They roasted them, made powder and ate it. They did the same with the second fruit and found *gor?a* (upland paddy) grains in the fruit. They made flat rice from it and ate. They did the same with the third fruit and lo, the fruit was full of the lowland *paddy grains*. They prepared rice from them, cooked and ate. Thus, agriculture became their prime occupation.

While sleeping they kept a big wooden log between them. God taught them how to make *rice beer*. They prepared and drank it on one occasion and got drunk and the boy crossed the log and slept with the girl. Thereafter, children were born from them. They had 9-sons and 9-daughters. The sons went hunting everyday. Once they killed a deer. But they were very thirsty. So, the eldest son went to a pool of water to drink and saw a snakelike fish swimming in the pool. The second one saw a tortoise crawling in the pool. Similarly, all the brothers met one creature or the other, for example, a big flat rock, a tiger, some salt, a Kerketta bird, a Tete bird, a To'opo bird and paddy grains. Thus, they and their descendants were known by the names of those creatures that they had seen, namely, (1) *Dungdung* (eel, a snakelike fish), (2) *Kullu* (tortoise), (3) *Kerketta* (hedge-sparrow), (4) *Tete* (bird), (5) *Kir?o* (tiger), (6) *Soreng* (rock), (7) *Ba'a* (paddy), (8) *Bilung* (salt), and (9) *To'opo* (bird).

e) *Ho Account*

There was only *water* all around. *Singbonga* (God) wanted to make land in its place. So, he made a *tortoise* and let it into water to bring out the clay from the bottom of the sea. It brought it and placed it on the surface of the sea but the water washed it away. Then *Singbonga* made a *crab*. It entered into the water and clawed out the clay from the bottom and brought it up to the surface but it was washed away as before. Next, *Singbonga* rubbed some dirt out from his thigh and made *two earthworms*, one male and the other female. They slipped into the water and began to raise and heap up mud inside the water by swallowing 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 hard *land*.

Next, *Singbonga* made '*Surmi-Durmis*' (proto-human beings). 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. They began to level the mountains and fill the ravines with their hands. *Singbonga* sent *tigers* and *bears*, *bisons*, *deer* and *elephants* to help them. The *Surmi-Durmis* yoked the animals and leveled the land with leveling planks. They planted *trees* and *grass* in those fields. When the land had been made and the trees and grass had grown there, 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*. However, 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'". The two of you will live together as *juri-juri tainben* (couple of companions)."

Thus, two human beings, *male* and *female*, 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 also who increased but the human beings remained only two. They used to keep a husking pole in between them 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 who began to walk on evil path. Seeing this, *Singbonga* was displeased and destroyed them with *rain of fire*. However, *Nage Er?a* (water spirit) saved a pair of human beings and pairs of all other living beings. Through this pair of human beings, humankind increased again. Likewise, other creatures also multiplied.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What do we need to keep in mind if we want to understand the tribal worldview?

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1.3 MEANING SYSTEMS

Cultures

Cultures are basically meaning systems, which people have evolved over centuries. We ask questions both individually and collectively about the meaning of life and death, about happiness and suffering, and about human destiny. We try to make sense of the existence of good and evil. Culture “denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life”(Geertz 1975:89). Human beings by their very nature need to interpret and make sense of the world and in that process constantly create meaning. This creation of meaning is done not only individually, but also collectively. Various cultures have sought answers to questions pertaining to human existence. But there are no simple, straightforward answers to these questions. The answers to these questions are woven into myths, epics, scriptures, stories, doctrines, symbols,

rituals, folklore and beliefs. These answers and interpretation become a meaning system of people who share a common culture.

Oral Cultures

Oral culture differs very much from literate culture which is in possession of alphabets, writing, print and electronic media. In a tribal culture which is primarily an 'oral' culture, the knowledge needs to be organized in such a way that it is easy to recall. In a tribal culture, which is deeply embedded in an oral intellectual structure, sound, speech and memory play a fundamental role. Thus, knowledge is stored and retrieved in and through memory. Things have to be committed to memory and then recalled.

Unlike literate cultures, given the interpersonal immediacy that is required in orality, oral/tribal cultures show a remarkable tendency towards conformity to the group and adherence to tradition. In oral cultures people tend to solve problems by common consensus and in the tradition of the tribe. Oral cultures also institutionalize public pressure on individuals to ensure conformity to tribal modes of behaviour. Orality tends to encourage personality structures which manifest strong kinship patterns. Given the close-knit tribal kinship pattern, conformity to the tribe is seen as an important value.

Orality, which organizes its complete supply of knowledge around memory, speech and personal immediacy, entails certain characteristic features. Oral cultures prefer a descriptive approach in their interpretation of reality. This interpretation tends to reflect their proximity to the life-world with which they are most familiar. Further, given the interpersonal immediacy that is required in orality, oral cultures tend to have a strong 'communitarian' dimension. Instead of abstractions and analytical categories we find in oral cultures a basic orientation towards descriptive approach to reality in the form of myths, stories, and songs. Vast amount of descriptions arranged according to formulations of memory skills are possible in oral cultures. Thus, oral cultures show predominantly descriptive tendency, which is close to the life-world.

In the above context, Plato's lamentation over the disappearance of orality and the use of script is highly significant: "The discovery of alphabet will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust external written characters and not remember of themselves... You give your disciples not truth but only the semblance of truth; they will be heroes of many things, and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will gradually know nothing" (McLuhan et al. 1967: 113). Oral world of Plato is a lively world full of epics, verbal contests, debates, rhetoric, and dialogues – all spoken words. Written and printed word is inert, it is tucked away in manuscripts and books. It does not have the same dynamism of the spoken word.

Tribal myths, which embody a significant portion of tribal worldview, follow the same patterns exhibited by the predominance of oral-aural culture. The same is true of epics, which are prime examples of oral structures. Originally they were either sung or recited by specialists who did not 'memorise' verbatim, they rather assimilated the narrative in terms of themes and formula. They used striking visual symbols in their narratives. If the poets did not engage in the activity of repetition, saying things again and again, then, much of the knowledge in an

oral-aural culture would disintegrate. The mystery of the universe and the wonder of the world are what speak to us through all myths and rites.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) How are cultures basically meaning systems? Explain.

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2) Why did Plato lament over the disappearance of orality and the use of script?

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1.4 LET US SUM UP

From the perspective of philosophizing, worldview functions as a window to the cultural life-world of a people. It opens up the meaning system evolved by a cultural community over a long period of time, perhaps over centuries. Eliciting the ‘inside’ view of a given culture requires a reasonably close acquaintance with that culture and the linguistic code. In tribal context communitarian aspect cannot be brushed aside which is embedded in tribal cultures. Most tribal cultures value equality and sharing and these values are reflected, among other things in their stories, folklore, rituals and dances.

Equally important is the attitude of respect for authority and tradition in an oral-aural culture. Figures such as *gurus*, village headmen, priests, teachers, and medicine men command respect as they are seen as embodiment of wisdom and knowledge. Unlike literate cultures, in oral cultures knowledge is more personal and the carriers of wisdom command respect. Orality tends to encourage personality structures, which exhibit strong kinship bonds uniting members of a given group with their religious and secular leaders. Oral cultures reflect a strong emphasis on relational, personal and existential dimension, which shape and mould the tribal worldview.

One of the important values of tribal socio-cultural life is the strong sense of community. This is characterized by sharing, a strong sense of common good and life in communion. Dignity of the human person is upheld with scrupulosity.

There is basic respect for every person irrespective of his/her gender or economic status.

In a world, which is so much entrenched in consumerism and with its serious negative effect for ecology, tribal worldview has important implications. Tribal values do reflect a sense of harmony and balance in human beings’ relationship to nature. It is not primarily a relationship of exploitation and domination of nature, rather tribal worldview reflects an approach to nature more in line with custodianship.

‘Worldview’ is the structure of things as human beings perceive them. It refers to the way the world looks to that people ‘looking out’. It denotes the way a given people in a particular society, see themselves in relation to all else. Concepts of culture and worldview are related but carry subtle differences. On the one hand, if we try to describe the important qualities of people we can say something about those aspects, which include the mode of life, principal customs, practices, beliefs and institutions of that group. Such description amounts to the ‘culture’ of a people. On the other hand, the ‘worldview’ of a people ‘is the way a people characteristically look outward upon the universe’

Check Your Progress IV

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) How does a worldview function as a window to the cultural life-world of a people?

2) Is the strong community sense of tribal societies important in an individualistic and consumeristic society today? Give your reasons.

1.5 KEY WORDS

Etic

: When seen from the outside and reported by an observer who is not by training and living, thoroughly enculturated with the culture observed and written of, the view is called *etic*.

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| Emic | : The inside view is labeled <i>emic</i> . |
| Ethos | : It expresses a people’s qualitative feeling, their emotional and moral sensing of the way things are and ought to be – their ethical system. |
| Totems | : Natural species forming different clans in a tribal society. |
| Orality | : It organizes its complete supply of knowledge around memory, speech and personal immediacy, entails certain characteristic features. |

1.6 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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1.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

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

Answers to Check Your Progress II

- 1) Tribal worldview, involves, first of all an understanding and describing the tribal world as the tribal traditions look upon it, and then, conceptualizing and abstracting it. Indeed, the inside view of the tribal world involves, (a) collective interpretation that is reflected in tribal language, cosmology, rituals, customs, beliefs, myths, songs and stories; (b) the way the tribal traditions interpret time-space dimensions, (c) the way tribals see their own identity and that of others, and (d) the way they interpret ethical dimensions. In the tribal worldview space (totality of creation) is central. Everything has to be understood in the perspective of creation.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

- 1) Cultures are basically meaning systems, which people have evolved over centuries. We try to make sense of the existence of good and evil. Culture “denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life.” Human beings by their very nature need to interpret and make sense of the world and in that process constantly create meaning. This creation of meaning is done not only individually, but also collectively.
- 2) The discovery of alphabet would create forgetfulness in the learners’ souls, because they would not use their memories. They would trust external written characters and not remember of themselves. Oral world of Plato is a lively world full of epics, verbal contests, debates, rhetoric, and dialogues – all spoken words. Written and printed word is inert. It is tucked away in manuscripts and books. It does not have the same dynamism of the spoken word.

Answers to Check Your Progress IV

- 1) It opens up the meaning system evolved by a cultural community over a long period of time, perhaps over centuries. Eliciting the ‘inside’ view of a given culture requires a reasonably close acquaintance with that culture and the linguistic code.
- 2) In a world, which is so much entrenched in consumerism and with its serious negative effect for ecology, tribal worldview has important implications. Tribal values do reflect a sense of harmony and balance in human beings’ relationship to nature. It is not primarily a relationship of exploitation and domination of nature, rather tribal worldview reflects an approach to nature more in line with custodianship.