
UNIT 2 HUMAN VALUES AND THE MORAL SENSE OF THE TRIBALS

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

There are 67.8 million Scheduled Tribes people in India, constituting 8.74 % of the country's total population (Census 2001). Scheduled Tribes are those which are notified as such by the President of India under Article 342 of the Constitution. The primary factors used to determine which groups should be classified as tribes in India are basically two: (1) they do not belong to either the Hindu or the Muslim communities, and (2) they are economically poor, illiterate, technologically simple and socially marginalized people. While the first set of categorization here is fully valid, the second set cannot be accepted in this simplistic manner at present time. For some of the major tribal groups, such as, the Uraons, Mundas, Kharias, Santals, Hos, etc. of Central-Eastern India and the Mizos, Nagas, Khasis, Garos, etc. of North-East India are highly educated and socio-economically and politically much more advanced than many other Indian societies in the country today. In this Unit you will study:

- Human Values of Tribals
- Tribals' Conceptions of Good and Evil
- Their Approach Towards Moral Law
- Tribal Morality

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The tribals in India can be divided into two categories: (i) frontier tribes, and (ii) non-frontier tribes. The former are inhabitants of the North-East frontier states with 12.02% of India's Scheduled Tribes population at the borders of Burma, China and Bangladesh. They occupy a special position in the sphere of national politics. Different tribal groups together in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland form 64.22, 85.94, 94.46 and 89.15 percent of the state population respectively (Census 2001). Similarly, in Assam, Manipur and Tripura they form 12.41, 39.96 and 31.05 percent of the state population (Ibid.).

The rest of the 87.98% non-frontier tribes are distributed in most of the mainland states, though they are concentrated in large numbers in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. Their population ranges from 4.00 to 32.00 percent in these states (Census 2001). Both the tribal categories mentioned above are known as tribes, *Adivasis* (original inhabitants), aboriginals, autochthons, etc. They have their own mother tongues, life styles, social structures, rites, rituals and values, differing in many ways from those of the non-tribal social groups in the country. Many of them are today settled agriculturists but forest still forms much of their economic resource base.

The tribals in India thus constitute almost two thirds of the Muslim population and more than 3.4 and 4 times the Christian and Sikh populations respectively. Among the frontier tribes in the North-East and non-frontier tribes in the mainland, there are many tribal societies which are segmented into numerous tribes and sub-tribes speaking different languages, having distinct cultures and origin of their own. Though more and more communities have been declared as Scheduled Tribes in recent years, there are still many more who should have rightly been designated as Scheduled Tribes but have been omitted for reasons not known by the public. Thus, for example, the tribal labourers in the tea gardens of Assam have not been given Scheduled Tribes status though they have this status in other states. Tribal societies in India today form a wide range of big and small, modern and technologically simple and linguistically quite distinct ethnic groups.

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

Tribal Context

Tribal reality is very complex because of marked differences and uniqueness of each tribal group in different parts of the country. However, almost in all tribal religious traditions *morality* bears imprints of mythical and cultic aspects. In them a state of perfection at the beginning of creation is recalled and cultic forms mark a connection between man's sinful state and creation of the universe. Generally, tribal ethical wisdom and moral sense is situated in the myth-tradition of a community. The myth confirms how God has dealt and deals with erring human beings. It also teaches what must be the standard of and rule for human actions.

Any generalization of universal validity about tribal social life and moral behaviour would require a comparative study of representative samples of tribal peoples of the world. This is clearly beyond the scope of this paper. I propose merely to touch on the religious beliefs of some major tribal groups in India and to examine whether they are related to *ethical rules*. These rules would be applicable to other tribals also in the country on some points common among them.

The Mundas, Hos, Santals, Kharias and Uraons are the major tribal groups in “Central-Eastern India. In their traditional religious myths we find that there was only *water* in the beginning with its creatures. In creating this world God took voluntary help of the *crab*, *turtle*, *tortoise*, *crocodile*, *alligator*, *boarfish*, *prawn*, etc. in different accounts in bringing a little bit of *clay* to God the Creator from the bottom of the sea. All of them failed in their task except the *earthworm* which succeeded in supplying God with little bit of clay with which He created the *earth* with all its creatures. In addition to this, one of the Uraon accounts mentions that the *kingfisher* made by God dived into the sea till it reached its bottom where there were *earthworms* which gave a tiny *seed* of the earth to it. The bird swam back to *Dharmes* (God) holding the seed in between its finger nail. God planted this seed in the sea by churning it. It multiplied and formed into the present earth with its *seven* corners and got filled with all its creatures. In the Kharia account, a *crab* raises a pillar of clay in the sea to enjoy the sunshine on top of it. Seeing that *Ponomesor* (God) was pleased with the work of the crab, it expanded the pillar to form the present earth with all its creatures.

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

At this stage, the Munda and Ho accounts mention that human beings became very numerous and began to walk on *evil path*. It is not specified in what way it was evil. The Santal account makes it more specific by narrating that the human beings became like *he-buffaloes* and *she-buffaloes*. This statement is open for various interpretations to show the *evil ways* of human beings. However, one thing is clear that they were *not respecting* one another in their social behaviour. In the Kharia account, human beings became *greedy* for more and more food from God and also became *proud* and *arrogant* before Him and challenging Him they began to cut down fruit trees senselessly. The Uraon account narrates that God had made a beautiful world which the human beings made *dirty* with their *excreta*! Now, the human excreta is the most dirty and stinking object one could imagine. Its disgusting stench can cause vomiting. This strong symbolic language expresses in the clearest possible way the stench of *evil* which human beings are capable of committing against their Creator. In all of these accounts God sends *rain-fire* to destroy the human beings who had turned evil in His sight. However, in everyone of these accounts it is mentioned that one pair of human beings, a *boy* and a *girl*, were saved. God made them *husband* and *wife* and from them human beings were again born to fill the earth. He divided them into different *clans* and thus established *inter-clan* marriage to take place among them. This is the *second* creation of God from which the past and present generations of human beings were born down the centuries.

From the above mythical accounts it is clear that the tribals have a strong sense of *natural law* of morality which does not permit *animal-like* and *mean way* of behaviour, *greed*, and *pride*, before God. This way of life offends Him deeply. This sense of morality has thus its origin in their religious tradition of knowing God and worshipping Him as their Creator and Master. They depend on Him totally for their life, survival and happiness in this world by walking a path which pleases Him. The tribal religious myths are, therefore, exemplary and universally valid sources which direct and control tribal social, cultural and religious behaviour. It is this point which needs to be closely paid attention to in understanding any tribal *moral rule*.

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 is the understanding of morality in tribal socio-religious traditions?

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2) Religious myths are exemplary sources of moral behaviour among the tribals. Explain.

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2.2 HUMAN VALUES OF TRIBALS

Tribals are sometimes set at one end of several variously defined ahistorical *conitnua*: (i) the tradition-modernity paradigm (leading to G.S. Ghurye’s conception [1963] of tribals as ‘backward Hindus’), (ii) the tribe-caste *continuum*: (like Srinivas’ [1966] Sanskritisation model leading to assimilation but change arising from it was only positional and not structural), (iii) the developmentalist traditional-modern *continuum* for administrative purpose. Hindu perspectives of tribal societies as mentioned above have to be rejected outright and new perspectives have to be adopted which would be independent from the Hindu caste model because the tribal societies do not belong to Hindu society.

In the context of the major tribal groups in general, it is to be noted that (i) the *clan* and *lineage* are important structural units, (ii) land and forest constitute their main means of livelihood, (iii) they foster communitarian living and decision

making, (iv) their village communities are relatively homogeneous and unstratified – economic inequalities exist in them no doubt, but they are of a totally different order from the inequalities present in village communities in which Brahmin or Rajput or Muslim landlords reside, (v) they have been exploited in the past by the ‘outside exploiters’ – moneylenders, revenue farmers, landlords. The process is on even in the post independence period. Again, the tribals have few external social ties, whereas a caste is by its nature a part of a larger whole being linked by multifarious ties with other castes. Further still, each tribal group speaks its own special *mothertongue* which is different from the major Indian languages. There is no denying the fact that some tribal groups in some pockets in the country have lost their mothertongues under certain socio-political situations.

Tribal Culture

Culture is the way in which a group of people live, think, feel, organise themselves, celebrate and share life. In every culture, there are underlying systems of *values*, meanings and views of the world that are expressed visibly in languages, gestures, symbols, rituals and styles. Culture is also what a social group considers as the best and sum-total of its thinking, living and expressing. In this context, over the years tribal culture has attained a distinctiveness by fostering a balance between nature and culture. Economically, *natural resources*, which are gifts of nature, are shared in common among the tribals. Politically, *consensus* is a way of their decision-making. This manifests itself fully in their village council. All the heads of families have equal voice in this council. The head of the council is not a chief, but he is the ‘first among equals’, a chairman. He articulates the opinion of the members and allows them to come to a unanimous decision. A tribal swears by God and the council elders. The council in action thus fosters and promotes democratic political thinking at the grass roots level. This is important because the present day systems of administration and other institutions depend on the ruling elite and not on the people. Socio-culturally, there is no place for *caste hierarchy* among the tribals because they do not belong to any caste society. There is egalitarianism in their social structure, secular attitude in their religious outlook, and a people oriented art expressed in their seasonal and communitarian songs and dances.

Tribal Core Values

Values referred to above do not exist in their totality in the tribal society today. This society has considerably been fragmented, resources have been individualised, social stratification and competition have sharpened. The present day phenomena of growing materialism, consumerism, individualism, dishonesty, lust for power and money, use of violence, lack of concern for others, trampling ruthlessly on the rights of the poor, the weak, women and children are some of the devastating ill effects of industrialisation and modernisation that have affected the tribal societies too. However, these effects are opposed to tribal *core values*, such as, awareness of all pervasive influence of the Transcendent, 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, contentedness and joy in simple living, love of nature, attachment to land and forest, love of freedom with proper parental discipline, celebration of life through seasonal feasts and festivities, hope for the future. These values may be there at present or may have

been there in the past. They are a kind of ideal types in terms of which the tribal societies may be evaluated or reconstructed.

Social Change

Before modern education began to influence the tribals, their belief in (a) God, (b) ancestral spirits, (c) survival of souls, etc. formed a complex religious system. Their economy was largely based on consumption and reciprocity. Their customary laws and government safeguarded by sanctions were safe without the aid of any police or jail. Not only were all these features very interconnected, but they were also in a perpetual flux of change. Due to interconnection of the institutions, when modern education began to influence them, there took place a chain of reflection, accommodation, adaptation, acceptance, rejection and integration. These social changes met their certain needs in a meaningful way. These needs were social and religious, temporal and spiritual, never one or the other alone.

These changes brought about a transformation in tribal societies. Their outlook widened and their behaviour patterns also changed. They became enlightened and stronger in their *tribal identity* and selfhood. This new identity was no more the old one and yet maintained many of its features. In this identity, the tribals crossed the social boundary of their own *collective* tribal community while becoming further a part of the larger tribal and non-tribal world. Through modern education, this identity has helped them to get adjusted to modern world confronted with fast social, economic and political changes taking place in the country and the world at large.

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 are some of the general characteristics of tribals which form their distinct identity in India?

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2) Are the tribal core values human and universal values? Explain

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2.3 GOOD AND EVIL

Good

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

Evil

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

Moral Evil

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

2.4 MORAL LAW

Among the tribals, their *social custom* is regarded as having the *ultimate* power to *restrain, control and direct* an individual in their communities. Ethical

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

Purity of the Tribe

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

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

Sexual Conduct

Extra marital relations (adultery), fornication (sexual intercourse between unmarried persons) and incest (sexual relations between immediate relatives, usually between parents and children, and between brothers and sisters) destroy the ordered *family* or *clan structure* and poison the *intimate* relations within the family and lineage. Thus, if a man were to have an affair with a woman, the community would exact heavy fines from him and punish him, if need be by boycotting the culprit. Generally, strict measures are taken against the whole family of the person not keeping the social norms by not permitting the family members to have free association with the village community. They say, '*no socializing* with the family members of the culprit, *no daughter* to be given in marriage to them and *no help* to be given to them in their agricultural and other household activities. Normal association with them may be restored only after a public dinner has been served to the elders of the community in reparation for the offence.

Failing the code of the tribe is a serious matter. Punishment for it is most severe. The offending person is expelled from the tribe temporarily or on a lifelong basis in the case of unrepentance. Not observing the tribal customs is morally an evil action which may be put right by ritual *purification*, *reparation* and *reconciliation* with the tribe. It is a *breaking* of the order established and

maintained by the Creator for the good of the tribe and its members. Enforcement of measures against any breaking of accepted norms and misconduct rests with the village council. It has the duty to guard the tradition, to ensure the good of one and all. The *myth* is the *model* and *reference point* for their actions.

Marriage

As described above in the second creation account, marriage was divinely instituted by God. It is the sacred duty, therefore, of every adult tribal to get married in his/her own community and raise children so that the *family*, *clan* and *tribe* may continue. Thus, there may be members to offer sacrifices to God and the ancestors. Every family head is a sacrificer. In keeping with their inheritance law, non-tribals cannot inherit land from a tribal. Therefore, a tribal has to get married within his/her own tribe. Persons not observing this rule may be dismissed from their communities till they agree to observe the rule which they had broken. Similarly, the community members may cut themselves off from the erring members in all social relations and activities till the latter correct their wrong social behaviour. Since the *tribe* is the *highest good*, these punishments are the greatest tragedy that could befall a tribal.

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

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

Incest

Tribal society considers the violation of incest prohibitions a grave evil. It is thought to corrupt the social order by an undermining of morals. That is why it meets with horrified condemnation and is held to merit *exile* from the community.

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

Respectful Distance

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

Family

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

Inheritance

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

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

Truthfulness

Before the British rulers came, formal judiciary and court procedures as well as prisons were clearly absent among the tribals. Instead of them there was a council in every village to look after the smooth running of social life in the village. This

institution still continues among the tribals in their villages. Telling lies in the council or showing disrespect and disobedience to it is a grave offence for which the offender may be subjected to *heavy fines* or even *expelled* from the tribe. No one may have any association with that person.

Justice, Peace and Unity

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

Kindness and Hospitality

An action is judged to be right or wrong in reference to the good of the individual and of all the members of the community. The approach is based on an *egalitarian* (Seeing equality of condition, outcome, reward, and privilege as a desirable goal of social organization) outlook which determines the moral conduct of individuals. The moral ideals to be followed by all are peacefulness, equality and kindness. Peace with men/women and the supernatural is a sign of order and harmony as intended in creation. Equality among all promotes, strengthens and sustains the intended order. Kindness, hence, is characteristic of the tribals. If one chances to enter a tribal house, it will not be long before one is made at home and no longer a stranger among the house members provided one introduces oneself to them speaking their language. They get relaxed and become friendly, happy and kind. The guest is first greeted and is requested to be seated. If he/she is very dear or respectable, the mother or sister or sister-in-law washes his/her feet with water, followed by applying mustard oil on the feet, and washing the feet again with water and drying it with a towel. This is done to the guest as a part of welcome, hospitality expressing love, affection, appreciation, friendship, respect and gratitude.

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) What are the social and moral customs among tribals in order to preserve the purity of the tribe?

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2.5 TRIBAL MORALITY

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

The nature of tribal existence has to be understood in this way that the tribe is created and cared for by the Creator for a *communitarian* life where there is *equality* and *harmony*. After this life in this world, a person joins the community of his/her *ancestors* in the next world provided he/she had walked on the sacred path they had shown in their lifetime in this world. *Salvation* for a tribal means *union* with ancestors and God the Creator. Thus, an individual apart from his/her community has no meaning and the healthy *tension* between this person and his/her community *dead* and *alive* continues. Tribal creation myths reveal that the individual never existed. Thus, the life and existence of every person receive true value and *meaning* in the tribe

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

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

2.6 LET US SUM UP

Tribal morality places an overwhelming emphasis on the *community* and *tribe*. The goal of life is (a) the *good* of the community, and (b) *continuity* of the tribe, for therein lies the good of the *one* and *all*. The good is understood as a happy living protected from physical evils. From the tribe alone does life derive its meaning and orientation. It thus appears that an individual has no personal *value*, the person is swallowed up by the community, his personal good and wellbeing overwhelmed as it were by the *interests* of the tribe. Yes, the person belongs to the tribe. Apart from the community he/she has no identity. This is what the *ethical* and *moral* behaviour of a tribal is based upon.

The nature of tribal existence has to be understood in this way that the tribe is created and cared for by the Creator for a *communitarian* life where there is *equality* and *harmony*. After this life in this world, a person joins the community of his/her *ancestors* in the next world provided he/she had walked on the sacred path they had shown in their lifetime in this world. *Salvation* for a tribal means *union* with ancestors and God the Creator. Thus, an individual apart from his/her community has no meaning and the healthy *tension* between this person and his/her community *dead* and *alive* continues. Tribal creation myths reveal that the individual never existed. Thus, the life and existence of every person receive true *value* and *meaning* in the tribe. The outlook on life and happiness is based on *equality* and *harmony* in the tribe. Establishing and maintaining happiness and wellbeing is a *collective* duty and responsibility. Everyone is responsible for the peace and prosperity of the other in the community. It is thus the community or tribe which determines tribal *moral conduct*.

2.7 KEY WORDS

Culture	: The way in which a group of people live, think, feel, organise themselves, celebrate and share life.
Good	: The idea of good for a tribal is tied up with what is good for him/her in the <i>physical</i> order of <i>this world</i> .
Evil	: For a tribal evil is again understood as a <i>physical</i> suffering, such as, sickness, death, loss of livestock and property.

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2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

- 1) Almost in all tribal religious traditions *morality* bears imprints of mythical and cultic aspects. In them a state of perfection at the beginning of creation is recalled and cultic forms mark a connection between man's sinful state and creation of the universe. Generally, tribal ethical wisdom and moral sense is situated in the myth-tradition of a community. The myth confirms how God has dealt and deals with erring human beings. It also teaches what must be the standard of and rule for human actions.
- 2) Tribal religious myths are exemplary and universally valid sources which direct and control tribal social, cultural and religious behaviour.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

- 1) *Economically*, natural resources, which are gifts of nature, are shared in common among the tribals. *Politically*, consensus is a way of their decision-making. This manifests itself fully in their village council. All the heads of families have equal voice in this council. The head of the council is not a chief, but he is the 'first among equals', a chairman. He articulates the opinion of the members and allows them to come to a unanimous decision. *Socio-culturally*, there is *no* place for caste hierarchy among the tribals because they do not belong to any caste society. There is *egalitarianism* in their social structure, *secular attitude* in their religious outlook, and a *people oriented* art expressed in their seasonal and communitarian songs and dances.

- 2) Awareness of all pervasive influence of the Transcendent, 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, contentedness and joy in simple living, love of nature, attachment to land and forest, love of freedom with proper parental discipline, celebration of life through seasonal feasts and festivities, hope for the future. These values may be there at present or may have been there in the past. They are a kind of ideal types in terms of which the tribal societies may be evaluated or reconstructed. They are also human and universal values.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

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

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