
UNIT 2 ESCHATOLOGICAL VIEWS OF THE TRIBALS

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

Tribals or Adivasis are put under the category of Scheduled Tribe according to the Constitution of India. They have their own distinct culture and worldview. Their eschatological beliefs are also different from those of other religious communities. By the end of this Lesson you should have:

- A basic understanding of what eschatology means;
- A knowledge of the way in which tribals view their end times;
- An understanding of the Adivasi concept of communion with their ancestors.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1987) defines *Eschatology* as the science of the four last things: death, judgement, heaven, and hell. The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language (1996) defines it as the branch of theology that treats death, resurrection, immortality, the end of the world, final judgement, and the future state. Applying these dictionary meanings to tribal eschatological views, it would mean, how the tribals view death and life after death.

2.2 THE WORLD BEYOND

The tribals believe in the life after death as in many other cultures and religions. They believe that after death the soul leaves the body and goes away to an unknown world which is known by various names.

The Oraons say that after death the soul goes *merxa* which corresponds to heaven. In their world view *merxa* is something like the happy ploughing ground where everybody has plenty of land and bullocks to plough it with, and plenty of rice beer to drink after their daily work. Hence, they have little anxiety about their life beyond. There is, however, one condition for a blissful life in the life after death, i.e. living in conformity with all customs of the tribe, which are monitored by the Panchayat.

The Oraons are not familiar with the concept of hell. There is no place of punishment for them. They believe that everybody will be happier in the other world than in this world. Everything in the next world, in the Oraon worldview, is like a replica of this world. Everybody is believed to be treated the same way as in this world. It is believed that everybody will be remitted to his/her ancestor in the life after death. The abode of ancestors which is known as *pachbalar*, is some kind of netherworld, something like the sheol of the Hebrews. It is not really a heavenly abode. People meeting violent deaths, such as by drowning (*dubal*), killing (*pasal*), hanging (*tangal*), killed by a tiger (*baghaut*), and a lady dying in pregnancy or childbirth, do not go to *merxa*.

The Mundas' belief in the world beyond is conceptualized in the concept of '*Parom Disum*'. It is a world coming out of primordial times, the world as made by Haram, the Supreme Being. If man had not fallen, he would have experienced this environment. However, due to the fall of man he lost his awareness and hence the world beyond is now beyond perception. It is not only the world of the spirits but also the spiritual world. It is the mysterious world in which there is consciousness, knowledge and power at a level not known to us. It is a world which causes much of what happens in the present world. It is a world to be feared, not only because of its impact on the present, but also because it is veiled from the present by a screen of fire. It can be entered only through death. When for the individual the chronological time comes to an end, he passes over into it. The world beyond is the world beyond the present, the world of man's future life, the world in which he has his destiny for ever. In this respect it is the opposite of chaos, it is a world of order in which the ancestral and other Bongas are subject to Singbonga. It is a world we cannot understand. As man's invisible existence is more important than his visible one, so on the cosmic scene the Parom disum is more important than the present world.

Kharias' belief in the world beyond is known as '*Bhatyug*' or Eternity about which they are not very clear. However, this state of existence seems to be a desire-free and action free state. Whether this state of life is a blissful one or whether this state is attractive good moral life to possess it, is not very clear either. They also believe in the communion with ancestors on the occasion of Kaman and *harboha*, which are considered to be spiritual marriage according to them. They believe that at death soul leaves the body which they call *jiom cholki*.

The Adivasis in general have a belief in the survival of the soul after death and in a sort of paradise where the *pachbalar* (ancestor spirits) live happily after an ordinary death and proper obsequies. The living descendants of the family have a filial duty of offering the dead regular sacrifices, offerings and libations. Hence the family landed property is jealousy guarded in the clan.

Sin is supposed to be visited by punishment already in this life. The Adivasis perform double obsequies for their dead. Persons dying before the sprouting of rice plants are burnt. Those dying later are temporarily buried.

The dead body is washed and anointed and then carried away on a bier covered with a piece of new cloth. On the way to the funeral grains of 'dhan' (paddy) and small pieces of cotton are dropped at short intervals and the bier is occasionally placed on the ground. At these halts, four heaps of dhan and wads of cotton are placed where the feet of the bier had rested on the ground. After arrival at the burning ghat the body is placed on the pyre after being carried round it three times. The head is made to rest in a northerly direction. A coin is placed in the mouth of the dead man and the pyre is lit by the eldest son or nephew. When the fire has already died out, the women present gather a few bones in an earthen urn, which is then carried home and suspended from a tree close to the house of the deceased person.

On their way back from the ghat, the mourners call the shade of the dead person back. The Oraons sacrifice a chicken to the shade in order to put it at rest. For about ten days after the death, the dead man is offered a datun (tooth brush) and water to cleanse his mouth; and rice and dal is served to him to appease his hunger. On the tenth day on the kaman feast day a pig is sacrificed to the ancestors and the mourning is brought to an end.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

- 1) What is your understanding of the tribal views of eschatological belief?

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- 2) What do you understand by the tribal obsequies of the dead?

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2.3 HAPPINESS AND FULFILMENT

Happiness is the key to salvation or total emancipation in the Adivasi worldview. One cannot claim to be emancipated without attaining happiness. Happiness is the criterion of a successful life either here on earth or in the life beyond. For Adivasis this happiness is collective. It is the collectivity that gives the individual a sense of achievement, a sense of satisfaction, a sense of direction and a sense of accomplishment. This happiness, for the Oraon,

is articulated in terms of three C's, namely "cattle, crops and children" as indicators of happiness and prosperity for their family. They even envisage their life after death as having plenty of fields to plough, with lots of cattle, children and bumper crop. Thus the criteria of happiness are underlined very clearly in the Oraon worldview.

What it is going to be like in the life after death is reflected in what it is now on this earth. The Munda, the Kharia, the Santhal, and the Ho, have similar criteria for their fulfillment. They are basically agriculturists and hence a longing for the land and a rich harvest is justified. The Kharia have a special respect and reverence for cattle and the latter are a part of their household as they are crucial to their survival. Children continue the generation of the parents. Every tribe looks up to them for its perpetuation. Therefore children who are well versed into the norms and values of the tribe, those who can uphold the dignity and pride of the tribe, are always held in high esteem. The philosophy behind their love for the land manifests a network of relationships, both in this world and in the next. The Adivasi characteristics of simplicity, truthfulness, contentment, hard work, hospitality, generosity, independence, a care-free attitude, egalitarianism and love for peace, etc., are indicative of their harmonious life. Thus Soares-Prabhu is convinced that in the midst of individualism, greed, aggressive competition and growing alienation from nature, the tribal values of solidarity with nature and egalitarianism, should show others the way.

Land is central to the tribes' existence. Without land they simply do not exist. In absence of land there is no space for their social, cultural, economic and ecological life. Sanjay Bosu Mullick opines that "identity of the indigenous peoples rests on two vital elements, space and speech". Spatial habitat or the geographical territory of their ancestors is their birthright. That part of "Mother earth" has been passed on to them by their fore-parents. Therefore, the rationale for their struggle for a separate land can be justified in terms of three J's, namely, JAMIN (the land), JAL (the water), and JANGLE (the forest), which belong to them from time immemorial.

The divine origin of the land and its stewardship by the tribes is an open secret. Singbonga, Dharmes, Chando Baba, Ponmesor, Thakur Jiv, the gods of their respective tribes have given the land to the tribe to be taken care of. Nirmal Minz rightly points out that the personhood of Adivasi is rooted in their concept of land. From earth comes all sustenance to human beings and non-humans. No land, no personhood of the Adivasis! Therefore ownership of the land alienates it from the user. For the Tribe land and forest, water and air and all nature's bounty are gifts of God. No king, no landlord, no Government has ever created the land. Land was there from time immemorial and the Adivasis have been using this gift as stewards and not as owners. On account of the Adivasi-land symbiosis, land forms a major part of their being in terms of culture, religion, socio-cultural organization, philosophy, history, economy, and geography. An Adivasi honours, respects, reveres and protects the land. The Adivasi intimacy with land results in a vast repository of knowledge of the flora and fauna, which have sustained them for centuries. The land forms the core of the education of the Adivasi to teach them how to exist in harmony with nature, so much so that "a tree in the hamlet ceases to be merely a tree, but an important member of the village community, so also animals and birds". It is said, "No other community can understand the

link between the Adivasi and the land than the one that knows and shares this sacred link of the “Holy Land”. For the Adivasi, their land is the “Mecca” of Islam, Jerusalem of the Christian and the Jew, the Bodh Gaya of the Buddhist. The sacredness permeates even the offspring of the land – the animals, birds, trees, rivers, and the people”.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How do Adivasis understand happiness and fulfilment in their life?

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2) What is the place of land in the life of an Adivasi?

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2.4 HUMAN SOUL

Tribals in general are staunch believers in the existence of *soul* which is distinct from the *body*. It continues to exist even after a person dies. Primarily, it signifies any *shade* or *shadow*. It is a quite fitting word to distinguish the invisible, intangible soul from the visible and tangible solid body. Even as the shadow resembles the bodily form so must the soul, as a life giving power and director of the body in acquiring various human faculties and virtues.

The Munda tribe is one of the major tribes in India and much study has been done on this tribe. The traditional thinking of the Munda tribals about human soul is quite illuminating. It explains the eschatological views of the tribals with much clarity. Their neighbouring tribes in central and eastern part of India have similar views on the human soul. According to the Mundas every human person has two souls: (a) the *ji* and (b) the *roa*.

The *Ji*

The *ji* is the principle of life, found not only in men but also in animals and plants. In plants, however, it has only the vegetative power. In animals it has moreover the faculty of sense perception and the appetitive and movement faculties. In human being, in addition to all these, it has *reason* and *will*. The *ji* as endowed with reason and will is called *mon* (mind). Strictly speaking,

animals have no *mon*. When a plant or animal dies, its *ji* wastes away into air and ceases to exist. The *ji* of human being is *immortal* and when the person dies it goes to *bitarpur* (the inner dwelling), also called *parom disum* (the country beyond), to receive there reward or punishment but what kind of reward or punishment that is not known.

The *ji* is considered the cause of all the processes of bodily life. It is, therefore, said to be present everywhere in the whole body and to act and watch over it even when it is asleep or in a state of unconsciousness. This is why our heart keeps beating and we continue breathing. It grows in strength together with the body of little children and decreases in old age.

The *Roa*

If *ji* is the first soul then *roa* is the second soul in every human being. While the former is the principle of *life*, the latter is the principle of *quality* or power (*gun*, *raisi*) in a person. Every human *roa* is endowed by *Singbonga* (Supreme Being) with a single *gun* or *raisi* which has the following effects on the *roa*:

First, it causes the *roa* to present the shape of a certain animal when seen by another *roa* in dreams. The *ji* cannot leave the body without causing death whereas the *roa* is not bound to remain continually in the body during one's life. However, its continued absence would in the long run prove equally fatal. While a person sleeps, it goes for an outing almost every night. What we call *dreams* is just what the *roa* sees and hears in its outings.

Often, if not always, it sees things not as they are actually in progress but as they are going to happen shortly. When free from the body, it is gifted with an insight into the near future. It may moreover either see the actors of events in their unveiled reality just as they are or may see them under symbolic appearances. Actually, the latter is the usual way in which an individual is almost always seen by the wandering *roa* under the shape of such animal as he/she resembles by character or at least a man/woman stands for an animal and vice versa. A dream may also be a warning of impending harm inflicted by a *bonga* (spirit) for the *roa* when free from the body is able to get a glimpse of the spirit world.

Second, the effect of the *gun* of the *roa* is that it influences a person's temperament and fate and causes in his/her life a similarity with the special habit, aptitude or efficacy which characterizes the animal the shape of which his/her *roa* presents. For example, (1) a person having a catlike *roa* is a grumbler and one who has a doglike *roa* is quarrelsome; marry the two such people and they will live together like cat and dog; (2) the one who has an elephant like *roa* is a ruinous eater serenely free of interruption or disturbance, on the other hand he/she knows no fear; (3) the one who has a viper like *roa* is quiet in his/her ways but successful, (4) contrariwise, the one with a cobralike *roa* is bound to poverty; (5) the one with a vulture like *roa* though a good hand at the plough, and always thorough master of his team, is nevertheless so poor that he has to find his sustenance as a hireling; (6) the one with a crowlike *roa* vainly shouts and thrashes his team, he cannot make his oxen go fast, they do not obey him; (7) the one with a river-snakelike *roa* is bound to become rich, is moreover a good swimmer and can cross a river in easy mind, the flood will never carry the person off; (8) the one with a rat-

snake like *roa* is a coward, quick to fly; (9) the one with a tigerlike *roa* inspires reverential fear, such a person commands respect and has influence and authority, especially in *panchayats*; (10) the one with a jackal like *roa* is cunning and with great ease invents excuses and creates stories; (11) a person with a bear like *roa* has the knack of finding honey; (12) a person with an otterlike *roa* makes a good fisher; (13) a person with a mongoose like *roa* gives knowledge of medicinal roots and happiness of curing many patients; and (14) a person with an ogre like *roa* eats like an ogre and consequently is vowed to dire poverty and want.

Third, in addition to the above special characteristics, the *gun* imparts to the human *roa* a quality of either slowness or quickness or disinclination to action or making energetic efforts with corresponding effects. Thus, every human being has either a *hambal roa* (heavy soul) or a *rambal roa* (light soul), according to whether, and in proportion to, the animal, the shape of which the person's *roa* presents is either slow-moving or quick-moving.

The good or bad influence believed to be produced by a person with a *heavy soul* is as follows: not only is such a person slow in whatever he/she does himself/herself, but he/she has a slowing influence on people and things around him/her. Such a person should never be the one to start a work. If for instance, he/she plants the first paddy seedlings in a field, the planting in that field will take no end of time. On the other hand, it should always be a person with a heavy soul to open a bale of paddy and take from it the first paddy grains, the provision in the bale will last so much the longer. Such a person has a damping effect even on the *spirits* which will not easily harm him/her. The mere presence of such a person makes even divination slow and difficult.

Fourth, both the elephantlike and the ogerlike *roas* have an effect of their own, namely, of making food or what is to produce food run short. For example, if a person with such a *roa* happens to plant the first seedlings in a field, the owner will soon find out that he has not enough seedlings for the whole field. Again, if the above person takes the first paddy grains from a bale, the paddy will soon be finished.

The *roa* like the *ji* is immortal but after death it does not go with the *ji* to the next world. It remains on earth and becomes a *spirit*. It is the disembodied *roa* which is called *umbul* (shade). Except *Singbonga* who is really God, and the only God, all other *bongas* (spirits) are nothing but disembodied *roas*, or shades of men and women. The guardian spirits of families are the shades of the ancestors of these families.

The disembodied *roa* is believed not be as immaterial as the *ji*, since it is supposed to be still in need of food and drink. That is why at the burial of the dead, some rice and coins are put with the corpse to enable the *roa* still present in the neighbourhood, to pull along until it is re-introduced into the *ading* (inner room) of the family to dwell there and find its sustenance in the few grains of rice and drops of drink offered to the shades of the ancestors at each meal of the family. If the *roa* is not brought back into the inner room of the house, it must look after itself and try to get its food somehow.

2.5 ANCESTRAL SPIRITS

Once introduced into the inner room of the house, the *roa* becomes one of the ancestral spirits of that family. These spirits are venerated by the family members and in return they are believed to intercede with the *Singbonga* for the good of the family and to protect them during their journeys or in difficult circumstances. Everyday before the food is distributed to the family members, the distributor drops a little of it on the floor for the household spirits. Similarly, before taking rice beer a few drops are first dropped on the floor for these spirits. If these services are neglected, somebody in the family will be the victim of a severe stomach-ache or some other sickness or mishap. When a new animal is brought home, one must put oil on its head or horns when taking it into the cattle-shed in order that the household spirits may recognize it and do not harm it. On all the main feast days of the village community, the household spirits are not forgotten. A reddish fowl is sacrificed to them. The household spirits are supposed to dwell in the inner store room of the house where no stranger may enter. Hence, the daily ordinary veneration to the household spirits is done by the women of the family

Communion with Ancestor Spirits

While the light shade remains among the living members of the deceased person's family, the *ji* of the departed person is believed to join the community of the dead ancestors on the *gami* day. With the *gami* (Communitarian religious ceremony assisting the deceased person to join the community of his/her ancestors), the dead person is believed to have found a resting place with his/her ancestors for ever. Among the Uraons (Kurukh speaking tribals) in the region mentioned above, the bones of all the members who have died in the course of the year are ceremonially drowned or deposited in the clan *kundi* (place for depositing the bones of deceased persons) on the annual *konha benjja* (great wedding) day in the month of December or January after the harvest season gets over. Through this ceremony it is believed that the dead person is fully incorporated into the community of the ancestors as one of their members living in the world beyond for ever in peace and joy. However, they still form part of the clan of their living descendants whom they now protect as clan guardians, with whom they converse in dreams, and over whom the dead ancestors keep a watch in times of sickness and ward off evil spirits. Thus, the tribals believe that they are always living in company with their ancestors. They are convinced that the ancestors still love them, take the same interest in their affairs as before, help and protect them in their earthly life.

In their turn, the living members of the clan discharge their filial duty towards the ancestors by invoking their aid in times of distress. They are especially remembered on the occasions of great annual feasts, such as, *phaggu* (The tribal new year day on the full moon day of the lunar month of February-March), *khaddi* (Spring or flower festival), *karam* (Festival of standing crops and unmarried maidens who are the prospective mothers for perpetuating and continuing the tribe) and *tusgo* (Feast of eating of the new harvest). At every meal, a devout tribal makes it a point to place some food outside his/her plate and to drop a few drops of his/her drink before eating or drinking, in honour of the ancestors. This is a way of expressing one's gratitude to them for providing the family with fields from which the family members make a living and continue their lineage.

Feast of eating the new harvest is the great feast in honour of the ancestors.

It is a day of rejoicing. Sweetmeats are prepared and it is certainly the best day of the year for the tribals. It is touching to see them remember their departed parents and grand parents with gratitude for feeding them in the past when they were helpless. No one would partake of the new rice before a little of it was offered to the ancestors. A handful of it is made into *alkhra* (flat rice) and spread on the ground in honour of the ancestors. Similarly, before anyone could drink *jhara* (rice beer), a little of it is dropped on the ground in honour of the ancestors. Sacrifice of a whitish grey fowl is made to them by the head of a household. He crushes the head of the fowl with his fist saying: 'O our departed mothers and fathers, you have always been so good and kind to us. Here we are rejoicing. We cannot forget you. Come and rejoice with us'.

During the name giving ceremony, a child is named after an ancestor who is requested to protect the child in a very special way. They invoke the ancestor by putting the child under his or her protection saying: 'See, now this child has taken your name. Kindly protect this child under your care'.

At the marriage of their sons and daughters, the fathers-in-law raise two brass jugs of water and together invoke the ancestors of both their families to take the married pair under their protection. They join arms on two occasions and drink the two jugs of rice beer in honour of their ancestors. On those occasions, they spill a little of the drink on the ground and say to them: 'Render your shade and protection to us. We have settled this marriage satisfactorily among ourselves. Now protect us and partake of the feast and drink the rice beer we offer you'.

In times of sickness or difficulties, they have recourse to their ancestors and say: 'You have left us your children. You see in what difficulties we are. Help us and do not forget us for we do not forget you and always give you sacrifice'.

It is believed by the traditional tribals that the heavy shade of a dead person hovers about after his/her burial homeless between the house and the burial ground. Food in leaf cups is provided for it. In the tradition of the Uraon tribals, after a lapse of ten days after the burial, the relatives of the dead gather together at his/her house on the *gami* day. Each one of them brings with him/her some rice in a leaf plate. A small space is cleaned and besmeared with diluted cowdung. An elder of the clan digs a hole in the centre of this cleared space with the help of a ploughshare. He draws the diagram of *palkansna* (A ritual performed in order to get (a) God's blessing upon oneself and one's crop, cattle and children, (b) God's protection against evil) around the hole. Rice and an egg are put on the diagram. He performs the *palkansna* ceremony invoking God and reciting the genesis story. He ends the invocation with words such as: "Now he/she is gone, look after him/her," and breaks the egg which is then cooked and given to children. The egg shell is put in the hole.

A pigling is next sacrificed to *Nasre*, the clan elder of the dead ancestors, and while the blood of the victim is poured into the hole, the person performing the ritual addresses *Nasre* as follows: 'Accept him/her among you. He/she is one of your children. Receive him/her as such and have pity on us also that remain behind'.

The rice in the leaf plate is heaped together and sent to be cooked but the leaf

plates are put into the hole which is now closed up. Henceforth the departed soul takes its place among the ancestor spirits of the clan. The assembled relatives now sit to a meal together.

When boys burn their forearm on three or five spots as a mark of manhood and girls tattoo their foreheads and temples, they are told to look toward the place of depositing the bones of their clan members, and not to mind the pain. It is quite painful but helps them to be courageous. On this occasion, the elders warn them: 'Look towards the burial place. Your ancestors are there. If you are not courageous, they will not receive you'.

Before occupying a newly built house, a householder first offers a sacrifice to his ancestors and recommends his family to their protection.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What have you learnt about the two aspects of the human soul?

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2) What is the significance of communion with ancestral spirits for Adivasis?

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2.6 A COMMUNION

Union of Shades, Bones: A Divine Communion

For the Munda even after death the 'roa' or 'umbul' (the disembodied soul) continues living. On the basis of this belief only the spirit of the deceased is brought back through a ceremony called 'umbul ader' (sheltering the spirit) which is conducted seven days after the burial. The 'umbul ader' ceremony marks the homecoming of the deceased person. This sets all the fears to rest as the spirit of the dead is said to settle down happily with Singbonga and the ancestors. The philosophy behind the 'umbul ader' ceremony and its feeding at the grave every evening is that in death the spirit of the dead becomes an outcaste and the family has to feed it separately until the spirit is sanctified.

This shows a spiritual solidarity among the dead and the alive. The *umbul ader* ritual is not just an empty rite. It is indeed a symbolic action of the Munda religious worldview. The immortal *roa* which is known as 'umbul' till it is taken into the *ading*, becomes *ora bonga* (the house spirit) by the *umbul ader* (*ading*) ceremony. It joins the ancestors in the *ading* and stays with

them for ever. It is united with Singbonga through the union with the ancestors. It prays to Singbonga for the welfare of the family. In response the head of the family offers it rice and curry in the *ading*, and expresses the relationship with the deceased who has now become the *ora-bonga*.

The ritual of 'Jang-Topa' or the 'Second Burial' also symbolizes their continuous solidarity with the departed ones. The sacrificial victim symbolizes a living worship to Singbonga and a living memory of the deceased. The function of the ritual is to unite the Mundas and strengthen their bond. This is also a reminiscent of the eternal happiness and a state of bliss after death. It is also an occasion for purification. It reminds one about a great future, a hope for eternal life, happiness and eternal fulfillment. Thus life here on earth is full of hope and promises because their communion with Singbonga and the deceased ancestors is a matter of joy and happiness. Thus the Munda fulfillment is attained through this very communion.

According to Dehon two main rituals of the deceased, namely: (i) *Ekh mankhna* (Chhain Bhitrana) or calling back the light shade of the departed into the house, and (ii) the *koman* or the re-uniting of the heavy shade with the shades of their ancestors, are reminiscent of the tribe's communion with the ancestors and the Supreme Being. The ceremony of *Harbona* or *Koha Benja* is a sequel to this. The Uraons are not satisfied with the reunion of the shades. They want also the reunion of the bones. Relatives over whom they put some rice, native gin and money collect bones. Then they take this urn to the river, which holds the bones of their ancestors. The *Bhuinyars* (first settlers and proprietors of their fields) have a particular spot called *kundi* in the river where they deposit the bones of all the members of the family. The *Koha benja* is celebrated in the month of January. After the banquet in honour of the dead, a procession is taken out to accompany the bones to their last resting-place. *Nasre*, namely the ancestors gone to *Merkha*, personifies the *panch* of the heavy shades. *Pachbal* personifies the light shades that remain with their relatives.

There is no hell for them, no place of punishment. They say, they go to *merkha*, which corresponds to heaven. The Red Indians speak of the happy hunting grounds and the Uraons imagine something like the happy ploughing grounds where everybody will have plenty of rice-beer to drink after their labour. Hence, they have no anxiety at all about their future life, provided that they conform to all the customs imposed on them by the *panchayat* of the other world, which they personify under the name *Nasre*. All their anxiety is about this world, and all their religious practices tend only to worldly things, namely to get good crops and be free from sickness. All evils are attributed to the 'evil eye' and 'evil mouth'. In such cases they have recourse to Dharmes in the 'Palkhansna', i.e., the breaking of teeth.

Separation and Communion – From Death to Life

Death is always mourned whether it is of an old person or an infant, whether it is a natural death or unnatural. The difference, however, in the case of the unnatural death is that there is fear in the minds of people. The one dying of 'dubal' (drowning), 'pasal' (murder), and 'tangel' suicide is said to turn into 'muan bongal' or harmful spirits. Such people have no hope of fulfillment. Thus there is hope only for those dying a natural death. In the category of 'unredeemable' spirits come also the infants who have not been formerly

incorporated into the tribe through the initiation ceremony called 'chchatti'. Those dying in a state of 'chchilan' (ostracism) are also meted out the same treatment. In Christian terminology their 'salvation' is not possible. Decision of the 'Panchayat' is final in matters relating to tribal identity. A person endangering tribal solidarity and peacefulness by way of violating taboos is bound to be excommunicated. It is like public conviction. Parapullil mentions three kinds of punishment among the Oraon, Santal and Munda tribes: (i) Ritual separation (e.g. birth, death in a family); (ii) Ostracising from the community for such crimes as inter-tribal marriage, theft; (iii) Total exclusion (Bitlaha) from the community (e.g. for marriage with a non-tribal, also called 'adultery'). In the wake of any or all of the above, reconciliation is a communal event, and in the event and experience of reconciliation there is fulfillment.

The event of excommunication is symbolically neutralized among some tribes by killing a fowl or a goat and the excommunicated drinking the victim's blood. This is the re-incorporation into the community. This is also an emancipatory sacrifice. Panchayat represents the community. The 'Sirpanch' (village elder) receives water/beer from the culprit's hands symbolising readmission and acceptance. Since the separation is communitarian, reconciliation, too, has to be a communal event. The Mundas have a belief that a bad person cannot obtain happiness after death. The bad are deprived of the community of the ancestors. The separation from the tribe is the greatest punishment for the tribes all over, either it be the Munda, the Oraon, the Kharia, the Ho, the Santhal, the Andaman Islanders. It is the experience of 'hell' for them, for without the tribe they fail to attain the destiny set for them.

2.7 LET US SUM UP

This unit attempts to explain what the eschatological worldview of the Adivasis is. It has presented some beliefs of the Adivasis in the end times. It has also presented the way in which two aspects of the human soul, namely the *ji* and the *roa* operate. The importance of ancestral spirits is described with whom a communion is required for salvation in the life after death. If there is no communion in this world with the community, there cannot be a communion with the community of the ancestors after death. Happiness and fulfilment are understood in terms of their union with the community, both on this earth and with ancestors after their death. The land is central to their identity, without which there is no happiness and fulfilment. The life beyond is an extension of the present life in union with the community.

2.8. KEY WORDS

Eschatology	: Views about end times and the life after death.
Obsequies	: A funeral rite or ceremony
Ex-communication	: A religious censure to deprive, suspend or limit membership of someone in a religious community.

2.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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