
UNIT 3 TRIBAL AESTHETIC OUTLOOK

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to familiarize a student about the rich cultural heritage of aesthetics among the Tribals of India and in particular among the Chotanagpur Tribals (who are mainly agriculturists and partly hunters) who are also scattered in other parts of India as well, viz., West Bengal, Orissa, North East India and Andaman-Nicobar Islands. The principal goal of this outlook will be to discover something more about the tribal aesthetics which form part and parcel of their daily life, nay their world view. Not much has been down in this area of the tribals. It will also serve as an impetus and challenge to others to undertake more scholarly research into this important theme of aesthetics among the tribals especially of Chotanagpur.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As per Census India 1991, out of a total population of 843,930,861, as many as 61,628,683 belonged to the category of scheduled tribes. In other words, they constitute 7.76% of the population of India, divided into over 600 communities (*Manorama Year Book* 1991, 411). Tribals in general have a rich heritage of aesthetics based mainly on oral traditions. Our main interest will be to delve deeper into the aesthetics of the Chotanagpur tribals (who are also called *adivasis*) who live presently in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, West Bengal, NE India (especially in Assam) and Andaman-Nicobar Islands. Aesthetics of the tribals takes concrete forms in beauty and art, art forms, storytelling (folktales, riddles, proverbs, myths), music and song (types, functions), musical instruments, dance, embroidery, painting and drawing, tattooing, and tribal feasts. Making deeper reflections into each of the above aspects truly brings out the prominence of the so-called 'backward, primitive or uncultured tribals'.

One can firmly opine that the concept of aesthetics is never an absolute term rather is a relative one. What is accepted as aesthetics in a culture need not necessarily be so in other cultures. However, aesthetics can be generally applied to all the tribals of the world. And interestingly, among the Chotanagpur Tribals the sense of aesthetics is very high. Since they belong to the 'primitive groups', their aesthetic sense soars higher than the so-called 'the cultured groups'. The reason is not far to seek. These tribals, predominantly agriculturists, are one with nature. We may even say that their aesthetics is 'eco-aesthetics' which the present world is waking up to now only.

3.2 CHARACTERISTICS AND FUNCTIONS OF TRIBAL AESTHETICS

Tribal Aesthetics is unique because it is predominantly dependent on and adapted to the culture of a tribe (life, society, religion). The main characteristics are the following:

- i) handing down is done mostly by oral tradition with practically no written documents,
- ii) they reflect the social structure and local reality,
- iii) their author or origin is unknown,
- iv) they are uncomplicated or devoid of any complexity; their music, songs and language are simple and so they are learnt easily by the younger members,
- v) there is a face to face, live contact with the audience with plenty of scope for feedback,
- vi) they are very flexible and easily filter down to grassroots,
- vii) being rooted in the folk culture they easily appeal to the masses,
- viii) they are economically very feasible and viable,
- ix) in decision-making, democratic process like *panchayat* (tribal village council) are followed,
- x) they give importance to relationships,
- xi) community feeling is promoted through mutual sharing at every level of life,
- xii) they communicate and strengthen spirit of solidarity and equality through group participation in dances and festivals.

The functions of tribal aesthetics are the following:

- i) to mirror familiar details of a culture and incorporate a common situation of everyday life,
- ii) to validate culture, justify rituals and institutions,
- iii) to educate especially in non-literate societies where oral tradition is prevalent,
- iv) to maintain conformity to accepted patterns of behaviour,
- v) to entertain, and
- vi) to have a cathartic function.

3.3 BEAUTY AND ART (A PHILOSOPHICAL OUTLOOK)

The Tribal Worldview consists of all that a member is, viz., life, death, religion, afterlife. Thus Beauty and art become integral to tribal life. One major issue in aesthetics is whether it should concern itself with beauty or with art. Hegel was reluctant to accept aesthetics as the science of beauty, because he was interested not in beauty in general, but in 'fine art' and the philosophy of art. In this Heidegger follows him: he says he is concerned only with art, and that too with great art. Kant instead was interested in that particular and peculiar response which is evoked in us which we call 'aesthetic'. Whether this response is evoked by real flowers or by a painting of flowers, whether by nature or by art, is secondary for Kant. Thus Kant would not, like Hegel, equate aesthetics with the philosophy of art.

Given that historically human beings have reflected on both beauty and art, they are both issues for aesthetics. So we ask: What is beauty? What is art? We could also ask about the relationship between beauty and art. Is all art beautiful? Should all art be beautiful? What if it is not? Is there some other dimension to art? There is one of the most frequent questions in aesthetics, viz., 'Does beauty lie in the eye of the beholder?' and, indeed, even by the average 'educated' person on the street. It is a question that is raised and answered most notably by Hume and Kant. How is art/aesthetic experience related to the rest of life? What place, function, and status does it have? And what explains the enormous amount of time, energy, resources and passion dedicated to the making and interpreting of works of art? And why are we moved by the beauties of nature? Many philosophers are interested not so much, or not only, in beauty or art itself, as in its relation to the rest of life, or in its place in the overall scheme of things.

Thus Hegel asks about the relation of art to religion and to philosophy; its relation to truth; its place within the culture of peoples. Kant asks what the aesthetic experience reveals about the nature of human beings and their place in the universe. Schiller tries to show that the function of 'aesthetic play' is to harmonize the cognitive and sensual aspects of our existence that are normally in conflict. Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) who restated and developed the main theme of the Indian aesthetic tradition, argues that aesthetic pleasure is indicative of the religious sense of a universe that is a beautiful whole. Dewey shows the continuity between art and life. Heidegger proposes that the identity of a people is partly forged by its great works of art. Others like Plato, Mo Tzu and Tolstoy, on the other hand, downplay the importance given to art. They feel it is either a distraction from the chief and important purposes of life, or else downright unhelpful, evil or corrupting.

Art can be defined as the '*idealization* of the purely experiential pattern'. It is selective, rather than merely autobiographical or confessional. Therefore it is truer, leaner, meaner, more effective, more to the point (Lonergan, *Topics in Education* CWL 10:218). Art is abstraction of a form, but the form is not conceptual. In fact, it cannot be conceptualized. It depends on certain material conditions; it cannot be freed from these, as for example, a scientific hypothesis can be freed from determinate material conditions (Lonergan, *Topics in Education* CWL 10:218-9). Representative art: when there is isomorphism not

only between what is produced and the idealization of the experiential pattern, but also between the product and something else, e.g. a house (Lonergan, *Topics in Education* CWL 10:219).

Objectification of a purely experiential pattern can be concretized through the following:

i) Music: sound, ii) Song: sound and linguistic meaning, iii) Sculpture: mainly the human body, iv) Dance: the human body in movement, v) Painting: colour, vi) Drawing and Embroidery: shapes and forms, vii) Literature: language and oral tradition, viii) Drama: human life situations, ix) Architecture: space of homes and village, x) Food: types, colours, tastes, smells, forms.

From the point of view of the senses, one can surmise the following:

i) Seeing: drawing, painting, embroidery, weaving, architecture, dance; ii) Hearing: music, song, poetry, folklores, iii) Seeing and hearing: drama, iv) Tasting: food ceremonies, treatment of guests, v) Smelling: use of the correct and appropriate housing and worshipping materials, clothing, vi) Seeing, tasting, smelling: food, vii) Touching: all of the above applies to this.

In every culture there is beauty and art. Unfortunately, what is old, traditional and rural or even rustic is often uncritically discarded as outdated and even irrational. On the other hand, what is new, scientific, logical, modern or western is just as uncritically absorbed as 'true' beauty and art. When we look around, modernity seems to be dominant ideology in any society. This attitude has changed not only the bulk of the urban elite consciousness, but also permeated all levels of society, the rich as well as the poor, the rulers and the ruled masses, planners and pawns of development, the urban as well as the rural population. The tribal ethos however has preserved its beauty and art in its life and environment. This has caused tension between the governments and the tribals. What is beauty and art in the eyes of tribals is to be exploited for 'human development and scientific progress'.

3.4 TRIBAL ART FORMS

In the world of aesthetics of the Chotanagpurians, one discovers that they have a rich sense of aesthetics which may not come up to the 'world standards' but in their own culture, they are masters of it. Unfortunately, today's postmodernity is gradually swallowing up such great sense of aesthetics among them. Oral Tradition occupies the first rung of the ladder of tribal art forms. It is part of the folk culture or folklore (traditional beliefs, legends and customs current among tribals) which cannot be dissociated from one another. The term 'folklore' was coined by the English Antiquarian William Thorns in 1846 which substituted the older term 'popular antiquities' (*New Catholic Encyclopedia* 1967, V, 989). Oral tradition refers to things handed down from antiquity of a group to the younger generation. This tradition consists of ballads, folk songs, stories, traditions, beliefs, games, dances, music and musical instruments, social customs and popular arts and crafts. It is the transmission from one to another, or from one generation to another, of statements, beliefs, rules, customs, practices, etc., by word of mouth or by practice without writing.

One may find also the other types of art:

i) plastic arts seen in drawing, painting, sculpture, ii) cloth weaving and embroidery, iii) oral literature, including drama and poetry, iv) music, v) dance, vi) architecture, vii) decorations with flowers, cloth, materials taken from nature.

Another interesting art form among the tribals is the whole ceremony of food-taking which is considered not simply a physiological act but above all a religious one. Lonergan says that humans don't just eat but make an art of eating. This is applicable to the tribals in every sense of the word. Every element in food is taken care of: not only taste, but also its presentation, colour, form, amount, etc.

Storytelling

Storytelling is old as humanity itself and invariably forms part of aesthetics. All primitive societies made use of this as an indispensable means of education in tribal values and for entertainment. It includes narration of folktales, myths, proverbs, riddles, etc. A folktale can be described as 'a prose poetry, traditional in content, transmitted orally through many generations' (*New Encyclopedia Britannica* 1986, IV, 861). Folktales contain elements of myth, often devoid of religious meanings as in fairy tales, household tales, local traditions and legends, animal tales, trickster stories, tales of heroes, jests or merry tales and etiological tales (used to explain how a natural phenomenon, animal feature or institution of a society came to be).

Among the Chotanagpur tribals such storytelling was transmitted in the common youth dormitories (boys and girls separately - *gitiora*) and around the warm hearths of the people. These consisted of *Kaji-kahani* (orally narrations in prose form), and *durang ka-ani* (through singing interspersed during the narration of the above). Riddle has been defined as 'a question or a statement intentionally worded in a dark or puzzling manner, and propounded in order that it may be guessed or answered' (*The Oxford English Dictionary* 1989, XIII, 898). Tribal riddles occupy a prominent place in storytelling and indispensable in the life and work among the tribals.

Proverbs are 'short, pithy saying in common and recognized use; a concise sentence, often metaphorical or alliterative in form, which is held to express some truth ascertained by experience or observation and familiar to all' (*The Oxford English Dictionary* 1989, XII, 712). Proverbs are closely associated to folk wisdom, although they often have a literary origin unknown to the speaker. They are vivid and easily remembered since they are easily spoken than written. They are connected to folk life and comment on matters of daily life such as weather, medicine, religion, law and family. Myth is 'a narrative that portrays an event' (*New Catholic Encyclopedia* 1967, X, 185). The Chotanagpur tribals have numerous myths but the chief ones deal with creation, fall and punishment, and restoration or redemption. Interestingly, such myths are in similar to the great myths of the Middle East and other tribes.

3.5 MUSIC AND SONG

Tribal music and song is learned through hearing. It is disseminated within families and restricted social networks such as the clan and the tribe and are performed primarily by and for the members of that tribe alone. It is characterized by collectivity in performance, recreation in oral transmission and in performance,

emotional content, and association with a particular geographic area. On the other hand, it is also characterized by its close association with dance and its functional quality and its lack of direct interaction with art music. In order to survive, a folk music or song must be accepted by the community and in some way reflect that community's values and tastes. The composers are usually anonymous but anyone is free to vary and embellish or simplify the original models as they are handed down from generation to the next. Most traditional folk melodies are monophonic (having one part) and strophic (having repeated stanzas, often with four lines). Rhythm in folk music and songs often depend on the local language and its patterns of emphasis. Music and song often embody aspects of a tribe's characteristics. Individual tunes, song lyrics, drum patterns and musical styles of each tribe are unique as are the steps and styles of their dances.

Tribal songs are characterized by their appropriateness to each of the different seasons and activities carried out during those seasons. These different classes of songs are distinguished from one another mainly by their differences in interval, rhythm and modulation of the voice, and also by the peculiar vociferation with which a song or part of the song is begun or ended. The songs can be divided into two general categories: dance songs (for various festivals) and function songs (for the rites of passage). The dance songs are primarily performed in accompaniment to their dances either for the various festivals during the year (as per seasons) and on occasions like birth, puberty, adulthood, marriage, death. No tribal song is devoid of any meaning for they bring out the poetic patrimony of the tribe, sentiments and emotions, dreams, hopes and aspirations in life. Their function can be the following: i) amusement and recreation, ii) sanctioning tribal customs, and iii) emphasis on standards of conduct and assertion of values.

Musical Instruments

Tribals in general use numerous musical instruments as accompaniment to their songs and dances. The rhythm, beating or blowing of them depends on the tribal ethos of each group and that add richness to their aesthetics. We have the following Chotanagpur tribal instruments (Marie C. Babiracki, *Musical and Cultural Interaction in Tribal India: the Karam Repertory of the Mundas of Chotanagpur* 1991):

- i) *Banam* is a single-string fiddle, without frets and with a skin-covered soundbox, played with an arched bow and horse string.
- ii) *Rutu* is a tranverse reed or bamboo flute, with mouthhole and finger-holes. It is a side blown bamboo flute normally played by men to accompany song and dance. At times it ranges from roughly 30cm to 51cm long, although smaller flutes are preferred. It is played while walking or tending herds, or to accompany the otherwise unaccompanied marriage songs. It is also played in the larger instrumental ensemble which accompanies seated small group-singing and community singing and dancing in the *akhra* (village dancing/meeting ground).
- iii) *Bher* is a long straight trumpet with integral mouthpiece made of copper or tin in several sections,
- iv) *Damua* is a large kettledrum with a bowl-shaped iron body and single laced buffalo-hide head. It is one of the most important drums to signal

gatherings, including the hunt and as an essential percussion accompaniment for community dances,

- v) *Dhak* is a large wooden drum ranging from 65cm to 95cm long with two equal heads, stretched over bamboo hoops and placed to the body. It hands from the player's left shoulder and is held at his left side with its goat skin or calfhide playing-head facing forward. The drummer beats the head with thin reed sticks, one in each hand, or with a thick wooden stick in his right hand and a bamboo stick in his left. The drum's rear head is of ox-hide, with a temporary paste of resin and/or burnt oil residue applied in a circular patch at the centre. The *dhak* has traditionally been associated with hunting and warfare (also used for community dances, on occasions of marriage and sword dances).
- vi) *Dhapla* is a wooden tambourine-like frame drum covered with goatskin and in the early decades of the 20th century was used by the tribals as part of the percussion ensembles accompanying community songs and dances.
- vii) *Dholki* is generally barrel-shaped, with one head about 28cm in diameter and the other, usually played with the right hand, about 25cm in diameter. The smaller head is made of goatskin and the larger, deeper in pitch, of unspoilt calfhide. A paste of iron filings or tree resin (sometimes a paste of cooked flour or incense and oil) is often applied to the centre of the outer surface of the left head. The player hold the drum horizontally before him, slung from his neck by a leather or cloth strap. The right head is played directly with the hand and the left is beaten with a stick, slightly wider at its playing end and sometimes wrapped in hide. *Dholki* is not only a supporting drum in the percussion ensemble but often assumes the lead role.
- viii) *Ektara* has a bamboo stick fingerboard about 86cm long and 3.5cm thick. The stick passes through one side of a bowl-shaped bottle gourd, roughly 15cm by 21cm, and projects a few inches out of the opposite side. A piece of goat or lizardskin (scaly side out) is attached with metal tacks or with wooden pegs and string over a mouth about 11cm in diameter cut in the face of the gourd. One or two brass playing strings pass over a wooden bridge and arc secured at the gourd's lower end to a peg or to the bamboo stick's projection. At the upper end, the strings are fastened to pegs about 25cm from the bridge. The player hold his instrument upright, gripping the neck just above the resonator and plucking the playing string or strings with the index finger of the same hand. *Ektara* is played by men as a drone accompaniment of definite or indefinite pith accompaniment.
- ix) *Gugucu* is a small pyramid-shaped or conical hollow earthen aerophone. The narrow end of the instrument, which stood 15cm to 23.5cm high, was covered with a spider's web and the instrument was blown through an opening in the opposite end.
- x) *Karah* applies to the double-head drums such as the *tapar*, *rabaga* and *dholki*. A drum functions as *karah* when only the larger of its heads is played with two small sticks to provide a rapid and regular pulse for other drummers. In a traditional ensemble of *karah*, *dholki* and cymbals, the *karah* drummer's fast, even strokes, four or eight per beat, alternating with rapid rolls, also fill in the more complicated syncopated patterns of the other drummers.

- xi) *Kendra* is a plucked or bowed chordophone of the tribals. It may include lute kendra, gopiyantara kendra, stick-zither kendra, fiddle kendra and majhi kendra.
- xii) *Mandar (dumang)* is a double-headed drum, 50cm to 66cm, with baked clay body and laced skin heads. It is used as the most important drum in the percussion ensemble in singing and dances.
- xiii) *Murali* is an end-blown notched flute of thick bamboo about 20cm to 30cm long, with five to seven finger-holes and an optional thumb-hole.
- xiv) *Nagara* is a large single-headed kettledrum, ranging in size from small, with a head diameter of 45cm and height of about 40cm, to extremely large, with a head diameter of about 114cm and a height of about 110cm. It is played with a pair of sticks, each about 30cm to 40cm long and slightly curved at the playing end. When used in the percussion ensemble which accompanies community dancing the drum is slung from the player's neck by a leather or cloth strap. Often the drummer dances as he plays. Sometimes the nagara accompanies small group singing, in which case it is placed on the ground in front of the seated drummer. The nagara is primarily associated with outdoor community dancing and processions. Because of thunderous sound it is also used to call the people to such gatherings as the hunt.
- xv) *Narsiga* is a S-shaped metal trumpet, often made of brass, copper or silver and measuring about 115cm in length.
- xvi) *Perened* is a double-reed aerophone with six finger-holes. It has two parts: a wood or bamboo tube about 15cm long and an engraved conical bell of brass or bell-metal about 10cm long.
- xvii) *Rabaga* is a double-headed drum with truncated-conical wooden body and laced skin heads. It is played by a man, who hangs it from a neck strap at his left side, with the larger head facing forward. He plays only the large head with two thin bamboo sticks, one in each hand. Although, traditionally *rabaga* was associated with the *akhra* and *gitiora*, it is also used in the percussion ensemble. The player also plays the *karah*, a series of fast, equal strokes, normally four to eight to a beat, alternating with fast rolls. Thus he helps keep the beat and fill in the more complicated patterns of the other drummers.
- xviii) *Kunj* is a heavy, cylindrical drum, about 34cm long and 22cm in diameter. At times it is a double-headed drum with a waisted clay body and laced skin heads. Both heads are of goatskin and played with curved wooden sticks.
- xix) *Soekho* is a ring-rattle idiophone, composed of a pair of large iron rings, each about 23cm in diameter and placed one on top of the other, soldered together at one end and remaining slightly parted at the other. Around each ring there are a number of loose-fitting smaller rings, each about 2cm in diameter. The player holds a pair of the rings by their soldered ends in each hand and shakes them back and forth. It is part of the percussion ensemble which accompanies community dances, particularly the *karam* dances.

- xx) *Thecka* are wooden clappers, set in wire frame. In the double-clapper variety a movable oblong wooden plate is fitted on an arched wire frame whose two ends, each with a wooden disc attached, run through holes in either end of the plate. The player holds the top of the frame with one hand and claps the plate against the discs with the other. It is part of the percussion ensemble accompanying community dance and song.
- xxi) *Tuila* is a single-string fretless plucked stick zither. It is normally played to accompany group marriage songs or the player's own singing. The *tuila* repertoire includes songs for common dance but the instrument itself is not played with drumming or dancing.

Dance

Dance is one of the commonest phenomena of folk or tribal life. It is part and parcel of their daily life, nay integral to the adivasi culture in Chotanagpur. It is not merely a source of amusement but the very breath of their life which includes beliefs and rituals. It is said that a tribe that dances that cannot die (LP Vidyarthi, *Cultural Contours of Tribal Bihar* 1964, 163). It is described variously as traditional dance as it evolves from daily activities (following various seasons of cultivation and occasional hunting), as native dance possessing magical or economic functions, or as dance performed non-professionally. Rural folk dance often manifests ancient ritual roots and serves recreational functions, whereas their urban equivalents may be more recent and fulfil other secular aims. However both celebrate original festivals, like those based on local calendars for agricultural ecology. In almost all cases the older, experienced men and women serve as leaders in dances, with the children following as novices, though normally the individual of any age or sex is submerged in the larger society and is required to fit harmoniously in the dance party. Cultivation alternates with the change of seasons. Following this agricultural work-pattern their dances too go on changing. Thus each season has its own dance and as there are many months and seasons there are many types of dances.

- i) *Hario Dance* is performed in the months of *Magh* (Jan-Feb) by boys, girls, young men and women in the *jatras* (dancing meets). Normally the dancers arrange themselves in columns but sometimes spread out in line, each dancer placing his/her hands on the neck of the next dancer on either side. The steps are martial, the movements quick and at times the dancers seem running. Sometimes they stand erect in a row, holding hands and dancing round in circles. Male drummers beat the *mandar* drums (K. Chattopadhyay, *Tribalism in India* 1978, 276-77).
- ii) *Faggu Dance* is held in the lunar month of Falgun (Feb), marking the end of the old year and the commencement of the new year. After the feast, the men go for hunting called '*faggu-sendra*' (February hunting). During this season, they sing the *faggu* melody. It is often accompanied by vigorous dance like the *khaddi* dance.
- iii) *Kinbhar Dance* is held from Phalgun to Baisakh (Feb to May) which is known as *angan* or courtyard dances. In the season of transplantation of seedling while the *ropa* (plantation) melody is sung in the fields, the *angnai* is sung and danced in the courtyard by way of relaxation to fight away the fatigue of the heavy day's work.

- iv) *Khaddi Dance* is performed weeks before and on the day of the *Sarhul* festival in Chait (March). This dance is very virile. The dancers jump up and down with heavy steps, sometimes in a simple style, other times in a more intricate manner. In the evening of the *khaddi* feast (*sarhul*) itself *khaddi-tunta* dance is performed with *tunta* melody.
- v) *Jadur and Gena dances* begin when the *mage* feast ends with the *jarga* dance in December to welcome the beginning of *sarhul* or *baporob* festival in Chait (March-April; SC Roy, *The Mundas and their Country* 1995, 307)). Either women alone or men and women dance together clasping one another's arms. They advance and recede with measured steps in a low stooping posture. The feet of the dancers alternately go up and down in unison, the drummers, in the opposite row, also do the same; and while one row recedes, the other row also does the same. But when there is only one row of dancers, then as the dancers advance the drummers recede, and vice versa.
- vi) *Halka Dance* belongs properly to the Kharia tribe of Chotanagpur. Men and women dance together in an orderly fashion. It is accompanied by songs but without musical instruments.
- vii) *Dhuria dance* is performed when the monsoon is delayed so as to bring down rains on the newly sown paddy in the dry land and make it germinate and grow without much delay. This continues till the start of the rainy season (J. Lakra, *Sevartham* 8, 1983, 70).
- viii) *Asari Dance* is performed to welcome the rain-laden clouds with the melody of the rain season: *asari*, which is also named *tunta* when danced as *khaddi*. *Asari* songs often speak of the cloud, rain and other events and activities of the rainy season.
- ix) *Karam dance* is performed during *karam* festival, one of the most important festivals of the adivasis. It is celebrated on the 11th of the lunar month of *Bhado* (August) when the fields are already green with growing paddy plants. These dances commence soon after the *ropa* (transplantation in the lunar month of *sawan-bhado*/July-Aug) and reach the climax on the day of the *karam*. The boys and girls cut three *karam* branches, plant them in the *akhra* (dancing ground), venerate them, take them from house to house for family veneration and finally immerse them in a nearby tank – all this amidst singing and dancing. The *karam* season has the greatest variety of dances, like the *chali*, *lahsua*, *tharia*, *lujhki*, *thapri rinja*, *brinjhia*, *rasika*, *arjho*, *jugia*, *dhenguria kram* dances, each having their own variety of actions, steps and movements (SC Roy, *The Mundas and their Country* 1970, 307). These dances go right up to the feast of *sohrai* in *kartik* (Oct-Nov).
- x) *Kudhing or Jatra dances* are performed in the season of *Kuar* or *Aswin* (Sept-Oct). In the month of *kartik* (oct-nov), the *indrail* dance is performed by young men and women, and the *halka* dance by old men and women. In the *tharia*, *lahsua* and *doyor* dances, dancers sometimes carry sticks in their hands or over their shoulders.
- xi) *Tusgo dances* come soon after the *karam* festival. This is to celebrate the eating of the new rice. It resembles the *karam* dances so closely that they are almost an appendix to the *karam* dances. Soon after the *tusgo* dancing season, in some areas *matha* dance is held.

- xii) *Mage or jarga dances* begin after the sohrai festival in *kartik* (Oct-Nov) and continue till the *kolom sing bonga* (threshing floor feast) and the mage festivals in *aghan* or *pus* (Dec).
- xiii) *Marriage dances* have combinations of joy and sorrow. One is to highlight the sorrow at the separation of the daughter from her family and village and the other is joy for the groom. There are two instances of the marriage when dancers are performed: the first being a blessing dance. Women carrying the *kanrsa bhandra* (marriage pot) perform the *benja-lesna* dance accompanied by the biggest kind of drum called *dhak*. This is a silent, ceremonial dance without songs. The second is the *painki* dance which is performed when the groom's party enters the girl's village. The bride's party also welcomes them with the same *painki* dance. Men dancers wield swords in their hands and dance singly to the accompaniment of the *dhak*. This is a type of silent, war dance without songs.
- xiv) *Domkach dance* does not follow a seasonal pattern because it seems to be borrowed from the Hindu neighbours. Its melody is lighter but the dance steps are often very intricate. While dancing the *domkach* the drum used for accompaniment is *dholak*.

The functions of tribal dances are the following:

- i) **Magico-Religious:** From the earliest times the functions of most tribal dances in almost every part of the world was to control and propitiate the spirit world. It was performed for the preservation of the individual and the tribe as a whole (as the *karam* dance is used as a mark of respect and veneration to the *Karam Raja*, a deity worshipped during the *Karam* feast). Later on, among the peasants of Asia, Europe and the Americas, dances continued to be used as magico-religious rituals to ensure good hunting, fertility, victory in war, and smooth passages through the major crises of life. In the eastern countries, with all its all-inclusive, all-pervasive, folk dance to this day retains much of its ritual function. Nevertheless, dances were performed to celebrate the commencement of spring, mid-summer, harvest, weddings and funerals and gradually lost the specific ritual significance of the movements and danced mainly for amusements (Gertrude P. Kurath, *Encyclopedia Americana* 1977, XI, 498d).
- ii) **Strengthening of solidarity:** Many of the traditional dances are stylised versions of movements derived from various forms of work. Originally they possessed a kind of ritualistic function as they elicited enthusiasm for the work at hand. However, the onset of industrialization has brought doom to manual labour, cooperative work sessions and agricultural celebrations, the concurrent dances have been gradually forgotten or have become simply a source of entertainment. The Chotanagpur dances are meant for all, men and women, boys and girls, young and old and without much paraphernalia. The experienced dancers lead the dance, followed by others, while join the rear trying to learn the art and aesthetics of dancing from their elders. Such collective dancing and singing become channels through which cultural traditions are expressed and confirmed. Community solidarity and tribal confidence is inspired on such occasions (Manoharlal, *The Munda Elite* 1983, 89).

- iii) **Entertainment functions:** Together with the above functions mentioned, many of the tribal dances provide also pleasure through patterned movements in groups. They often give opportunities for courtship. When derived from fertility rites, courtship dances stressed with varying degrees of mime, the interplay between men and women. During *sarhul* and *karam*, main dances are performed but even weeks prior to the feasts, people start dancing in the evenings. After the day's hard toil in the fields, dancing is often the only means of relaxation and amusement to them.

In sum, tribal songs and dances are not just means of entertaining the members and enlivening their seasonal feasts and ceremonies but they bring out the great aesthetic sense that the tribals possess.

3.6 FESTIVALS

Celebration of feasts has been a common feature among peoples of all times, places, religions and cultures. Feasts are 'periodically recurring occasions for the expression of religious joy. Generally they occur annually, but weekly, monthly and other celebrations are also common' (GW Mac Rae, *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 1967, V, 867). The Chotanagpur festivals are seasonal and coincide with events in the agricultural cycle. Some of these festivals are the following:

- i) *Phagua* is celebrated in the lunar month of *Falgun Purnima* (Feb-Mar). It corresponds to the Hindu festival of *holi*. It signals the end of the old year and the dawn of the new one. Only after the *phagua puja* jungle produce may be gathered and game killed for food. Ploughing and manuring of the fields may not be done before this.
- ii) *Sarhul or khaththi* is celebrated in the month of *chait* (March) one month after the *phagua* when the sal trees are in full blossom. It is the principal religious spring festival of the Chotanagpur tribals. It introduces the agricultural cycle. In fact, due to the abundance of *sal* flowers, the Mundas call it *baporob* (flower feast). This feast is celebrated in order to obtain more rain the current year and for the fecundity of the soil.
- iii) *Hariyari and kadleta* are associated with crops. *Hariyari* (greening) is observed when the tender paddy seedlings are ready for transplantation; while *kadleta* (making the field muddy for transplantation) is celebrated when the early upland crops and millet are ready for harvest and is generally observed on the eve of the *karam* festival. During these two feasts prayers are offered for protection of the crops and for a good yield.
- iv) *Karam* is very important for the Chotanagpurians. It is a critical period for the standing crops in the fields. They are at the mercy of invading insects and animals. The feast is celebrated to ward off attacks of the enemy and to secure protection of the green crops as well as to obtain the gift of happy and healthy children. *Karam* is predominantly a feast of the unmarried but recently also of the engaged girls.
- v) *Nawakhani* (new eating) is the feast of eating the first-fruits of the land and is observed when the crops are harvested and collected. It generally occurs in the month of Bhado (Sept). a large rice cake is offered to the ancestors. Rice beer is poured in libation to them and their blessing protection is invoked on the descendants, cattle and crops.

- vi) *Sohrai* is solemnized by the Chotanagpurians on the new moon day in *kartik* (Oct-Nov) to honour the animals who toil in the various cultivations. On this day the cattle are treated royally: they are bathed, their hoofs are washed with rice beer, their horns anointed with oil and their heads adorned with flowers. In some places a fowl is sacrificed to the spirit presiding over the shed. Being indispensable for agriculture, cattle are very precious to the tribals.
- vii) *Khalihani* is last but one of the agricultural feasts. It is the 'threshing floor' feast which is celebrated in the month of *aghan* (Nov) to signal the beginning of harvest and threshing season. During this feast, the tribal god and the ancestors are thanked for being propitious and protective. Just as they were invoked in the beginning, they are remembered at this close of the cultivation season.
- viii) *Maghe* feast closes the agricultural feasts. It is observed to honour the house servants. The housewife washes the feet of the servant, oils his hair and combs it. Next she offers him rice beer. If the servant wants to continue serving in the same house, he says that the drink is good. If he wants to leave, he just keeps quiet and is released from service after due remunerations. This feast brings in two main ideas: servants are useful and helpful in the domestic chores; with their service they contribute to the well-being of the family, clan and tribe.

The importance of festivals in the life of a tribal cannot be downplayed. From the remotest times, in nearly all primitive societies, festivals have had a religious significance. To some extent, they continue to be so even today. They also manifest natural human desire to rejoice in the blessings of life and to periodically evade the vexations of daily life. Moreover, they express man's turning towards the gods, the givers of life and nature, in an effort to unite with the realm of the divine. The much diffused tradition of honour the dead ancestors shows clearly the role of the festivals in linking with the world beyond. Similarly, the ritual, symbolism, and mythology of the festivals enable the celebrants to participate in the world of mythical origins seen as an eternal present.

3.7 EMBROIDERY, PAINTING AND DRAWING

Another important aspect of aesthetics is seen in the tribal embroidery, paintings and drawings. Each tribe had its own 'coat of arms' to identify itself from the others. This is seen in their weaving and embroidery, primitive paintings and drawings. The cloths of cotton and silk (shawls, scarves, clothing) are woven and embroidered with their 'trademarks'. In the earlier times, the shields together with the weapons of war bore the clan-protectors or the clan-symbols. The weapons of war (bow, arrow, axe, spear, swords, iron-bound stick, pincers) would be identified by the motifs they bore. The tribal architecture (homes, common youth dormitories, village ground, etc) too were beautified with the clan-drawings and motifs. At times, skulls of prized animals were displayed at the front of such architecture. Some clans had also some sort of drawings on rocks or erected monoliths (in the cemeteries or at the village gates) to keep the memory of their ancestors or a war victory. The tribal motifs were also embossed in the jewellerys and ornaments that the men and women wore, viz., ear rings, finger rings, rings for the toes, nose rings, brass bracelets-armlets-necklets-anklets, wooden hair-combs, etc.

It was customary among the Chotanagpur tribal-clans to take their surnames (Totems: *tuti*, *mundu*, *soe*, *horo/kachua*, *nag*, *sandi*, *hemrom*, *barla*, etc) from nature (trees, animals, birds) or environment and they would display that symbol in their life and activities. This would be displayed in their weapons of war and agricultural tools as well. Household utensils and furniture, musical instruments and other implements too had this.

Tattooing

There was a time when the civilized world looked down upon the tribals because of their tattooing. Because it appeared to be 'ugly' or 'dirty'. Today even the postmodern world is crazy about it; of course the method of tattooing differs. The Chotanagpurians held tattooing as a sign of honour and status, beauty and ornamentation, respect and remembrance; of reaching the age of puberty and adulthood. Both boys and girls at young age (8 or 9 years) were tattooed. The parts of the body to be tattooed are pricked over with a needle and then a kind of black vegetable-dye is injected into them and left to dry. No washing is to be done till it is dry and strong. The body-parts for tattooing are the following: forehead, temples, chin, back, chest, arms, hands, feet. Another interesting or painful way of tattooing (for boys only) was to have the flesh of a portion of their arms scalded with a red-hot iron-rod into a circular mark which was regarded as a sign of decoration, honour and prestige; above all, it was a sign of manhood or adulthood.

3.8 LET US SUM UP

We have undertaken this tribal aesthetic outlook journey and it has not been in vain. One discovers that a rich cultural and aesthetic heritage lies among the Chotanagpur tribals. In the mainstream of the Indian society, they are looked down upon. But one finds that in aesthetics they are no less than any postmodern usage and understanding.

3.9 KEY WORDS

Adivasis : aboriginal, first dwellers of the land.

Eco-aesthetics : aesthetics which takes into account whatever is found in nature.

3.10 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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