

PLIGHT OF ANCIENT TRIBES TO MODERN PERIOD

INDIA has been rightly described as a 'melting pot' of race and tribes. Considering the enormity, magnitude and complexity of the problem it is really a very difficult task for the pre-historian and anthropologist to arrange the people and cultures of India in the chronological sequence of their appearance on this sub-continent 'Fuchs (1973) has rightly states that even their subsequent history well up to the Aryan invasion is shrouded in obscurity.'¹

THOUGH stone implements of prehistoric man have been found in various sites dating back to the Lower Palaeolithic period, so far no skeletal finds have been of these earlier times. And the human fossil finds of later periods are too few and insignificant to enable us to draw any definite conclusion as to the racial history of India in prehistoric times. But it has now become an established fact that the aboriginal tribes in India are, in most cases, survivals from the later prehistoric groups. Some tribes may even have degenerated from a higher technological level due to adverse circumstances.

IT IS now pretty clear that the aborigines of the Indian sub-continent do not form a uniform race. Entering India from various directions and from various regions of Asia, they also belong to different races. It has not yet been possible to arrange the aboriginal tribes of India into definite racial groups. Attempts were made by Risley, Guha, and Majumdar etc. but so far they have not been very convincing. Hence, more anthropological research is necessary before racial and

cultural history of Indian aboriginal population can be presented in a definite perspective.²

Though our knowledge is vague about the origin and subsequent history of the numerous aboriginal tribes of India in the absence of sufficient archaeological and Pala ontological data, yet a story of their glory and decline may be arranged as far as the historic period is concerned. This historical data do shed some light on their life and we start picking up threads of reliable proof instead of clinging to the conjectural schemes of things. This has become possible only due to the invention of script and commencement of written records.

Let us first brief review the rise and fall of Indus Valley Civilization and advent of Aryans on the Indian soil as background to ascertain the role of earliest known aboriginal tribes of India. The Indus Valley Civilization is most probably a genuine gradual growth on Indian soil, not an importation by immigrant foreigners establishing a colony in India. The sudden, almost explosive rise of this civilization and its spontaneous growth may have several causes. One of them was the highly favourable ecological situation of the Indus Valley. The great fertility of the soil caused the population to increase rapidly. Though initially the population of the Indus Valley civilization may have been a uniform race, it did not remain so, for the skeletons found in the cemeteries of the sites show a mixed racial composition. The reasons for its decline and final disappearance cannot yet be definitely stated. One cause might have been a disastrous alteration of the course of the Indus River resulting in destructive flooding of settlements and silting of fields. "Since the chronology has been revised

and the end of the civilization fixed at about 1750 B.C., the old hypothesis has been revised that the Aryan invaders the early forerunners of Rig Vedic Aryans – might have destroyed the centres of Harappan civilization and killed or dispersed its population.³ The discovery of unburied skeletons on the steps of a building in Mohenjodaro seem to support such an assumption” (Fuchs, 1973).

The racial immigration that took place in the last phase of prehistoric times and caused the most profound change in shaping the cultures and history of India was that of the Aryans, somewhere in the second millennium B.C. when exactly the first Aryans appeared on the border of India is still unknown. Pre-historic evidence for the early phase of Aryan immigration and conquest is very scanty and some important questions still demand convincing answers.

The Rig Vedic period (2000 to 1000 B.C.) witnessed wild Aryan tribes pouring into the north-western parts of the country, fighting not only among themselves but waging a war unto death against non-Aryan tribes. Indra, the thunder-wielder armed with his bolt, is invoked to shatter the forts of Dasas, cast his dart on Dasyus and increase the Aryan’s might and glory. He slays both Dasyus and Samyus-Saraswati kills the Parvatas or hostile tribe who dwelt on the banks of the Parushni; Vishnu conquers in his battles the bull jawed Dasyus and together with Indra destroys Sambara’s castles. The Asuras, who captured an Aryan sage Dabhitis city, were defeated by Indra and dispossessed of their booty. K.S. Singh (1966) comments that “Indian tribes have not lain ‘torpid’ on the fringe of civilization but have responded to ‘static and dynamic’ rhythms of history.

Their role is limited not merely to references to such of them as 30 Saoras, Kinnaras and Kiratas (Historical Nagas) in ancient texts; it is part of the process of the fusion of races and cultures in the sub-continent of the growth of Hinduism and its amorphous mass of myths and legends, magic and religion, traditions and customs. Tribal contents in Indian life may be compared to an ice-berg in an ocean and these can be identified as much as the Aryan or the Dravidian. The erosion of the tribal mass, ethnic and cultural, and its absorption in the dominant society is a process working then today". The thread of this story is to be carefully picked through an ancient literary texts, archaeological and epigraphic evidence, medieval historical works and British records and documents.⁴

The process of fusion of Aryan and non-Aryan tribes continued. The later Vedic period (1000 to 600 B.C.) is marked by further working of the twin processes of emerging Hinduism, Aryanisation of the tribals and great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, whatever their historical value, refer to tribals such as the Sudras, Abhiras, Dravidas, Pulindas and Sabaras or Saoras. Of these "Sabaras are the most familiar and they are probably the only tribe existing today whose earliest references could be traced to Aitareya Brahman". Sabari, who offered fruits to Rama, has become in Verrier Elwin's words, "a symbol of the contributions that tribes can and will make to the life of India". Most of the then known tribes claimed to have participated in the Mahabharata and its innumerable episodes. Eklavya, Bhil, has gone down in legends as an ideal disciple who offered his thumb to Dronacharya – Munda and Naga claimed to have fought on the side of the Kurus against the five brothers. Bhima's

son wife Ghatotkacha, who performs prodigies of valour in the war, is born of his tribal; Arjuna marries Chitrangada, a Naga princess.

The Nagas deserve comprehensive study in view of their significant contribution and participation in the Indian mainstream of earliest historical period. The historical or mythical Nagas have been absorbed so completely into the Hindu society that no trace of them is left today. Significantly the Nagas of Nagaland have no relation with their celebrated namesakes. The extent of the Naga influence may be measured by the observance of Nag Panchami, the influence of the snake-cult on the Vishnu creed (Vishnu's snake-bed) and Shaivism, Naga motifs in sculptures of Mahabalipuram and Rajgriha and such place names as Takshila, Anant Nag, Nalanda, Nagpur and Chhota Nagpur. The Mahabharata is in a way, an essentially Nag-story. Buddha converted a few Nagas. Naga cult survived in the Kashmir Valley and Nag power in central India till second century A.D. The abundance of names with a Naga prefix Nagdatta, Nagsena, Nagdeva etc. further testifies to their influence.⁵

During the earliest phase of historical period, small tribal pockets were subjugated by invaders or indigenous imperial powers. Ajatsatru destroyed the tribal republic of Vaisali. Alexander wiped out tribal pockets on the north-western border. The Arthashastra refers to Atuikas who are looked upon as potential trouble shooters, Asoka threatens north-western tribes with dire consequences if they rise in revolt, while assuring forest tribes, in his dominion of his compassion.

Sharma (1961) dwells at length about the social structure of this period. He states the Dhamasutra (600 to 300 B.C.) and the Manusamriti

(200 B.C. to 200 A.D.) continued the old process of fusion and assimilation. The concept of mixed castes is only a fanciful and convenient Brahmanical way of explaining this trend. These so-called mixed castes were the supposed progeny of male of one begotten on the woman of another caste. A few of these probably Brahmanised tribes, labelled as mixed castes were Nishadas who lost during this period their earlier position and lived by hunting; Medas, Andhras, Madgas and Chenchus hunted wild animals; Ksabras, U gas and Pukkakas who caught animals and birds; Ayogavas worked in wood; Dhigvana and Karavras in leather; Pondusopake in cane; Margavas were boatmen; Veras played on drums and Sarendhas acted as servants and skilled dressers. The Chandalas, a tribe, were absorbed in Hindu society and assigned the task of removing dead bodies of animals and human beings as also whipping and chopping off the limbs of criminals. Thus the process of downgrading of tribals continued.⁶

That the tribes were not leading an isolated and alienated existence is borne out by the fact that many of them participated in the sub-Puranic and epic traditions of myths and folklores. The impact of epic heroes like Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Ravana, Bhima etc. on some of the tribes in central India is evident from their treasures of myths and lores. Gonds call themselves children of Ravana. Many are another Puranic figure who has deeply exercised the tribes, and Mundas call themselves Manoako after him.

Ancient Sanskrit literature is replete with their descriptions. Panchatantra and Kathasarit Sagar present them in a romantic and friendly perspective. Vishnu Puran describes them as "dwarfish with flat nose". In

Kadambari and Harsha Charita, Bana presented detailed description of the Saora Chief.⁷

The feudal period (400 – 1000 A.D.) saw a greater opening of tribal areas and Hinduisation of tribal chiefs. The Brahmin priests prepared suitable Puranic genealogies for them and the ruling Brahmin class spearheaded the process of Sanskritisation or Brahminisation of tribals. Subsequently in the wake of Muslim invasion in the 11th and 12th centuries, there followed the influx of Rajputs (who did not submit) into the tribal areas and the destruction of tribal pockets. Thus Parmar Rajputs expelled Cheros from Shahabad and the Chandels replaced Bhuinya in South Monghyr district of Bihar.

The Muslim rules (12th to 18th century) witnessed a new phenomenon the Turko-Afghan and Mughal rulers mostly secured a mere formal allegiance of tribal chiefs or of Hindu rulers in tribal areas of Central India and Bihar. In 1585 and 1616 A.D. Muslim armies marched into Chotanagpur and subjugated the Raja of Khukra. Similarly the tribal areas of Assam were also subjugated by another Muslim general.⁷

One Daud Khan subjugated the Cheros of Palamou around 1661 A.D. During this period the conversion of tribals in the north-west frontier region to Islam took place. Some Muslim saints worked and preached on the fringes of tribal areas, like Pir Syed Shah Kamal who worked among the Kols.

Some streams of Hinduism like Bhakti movement also affected the tribals such as Munda, Oraon, etc. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu passed through

Jharkhand and Vaishnava preachers like Binand Das working in Munda area converted many tribals. The Bhuinyas were completely Hinduised and lost all of their tribal traits. "The roots of subsequent Bhagat movements among the tribals could be traced to the Vaishnava influence. Nothing illustrates more eloquently than the conversion of the Ahoms in Assam". (K.S. Singh, 1964).

Now appear the British colonialists with their modern technology, new approach and vested interests. The advent of British rule meant opening up of tribal areas along the sea coast and in Bihar and Bengal. The construction of Grand Trunk Road through tribal pockets accelerated the influx of aliens such as merchants, money lenders and land grabbers. Furthermore, the presence of growing population and ruthless exploitation and oppression but zamindars facilitated migration peasants and artisans to inaccessible tribal areas. The Christian missions also got their pound of flesh.⁸

The monumental endurance and patience of the tribals exhausted in the wake of the breakdown of tribal order in tribal areas in the 18th century. Paharia uprising towards the end of the 18th century, Munda uprising (1789-1901), the Santhal insurrection (1855-56), the Bhil rebellion (1879-80), Bastar uprising (1910-11) and Gond rebellion (1940) are some of the examples of the new awakening among the tribals of India.

Another very significant point to be noted in this historical journey of the Indian tribals is the status of the three major religions of India. While Hinduism and Islam had stopped short at the fringes (in most of

the cases) Christianity penetrated deep into the tribal areas under the patronage of British rulers. This led to revitalisation movements among the tribals like Kherwar movement (1895-80), Sardari movement (1881-95), Birsa movement (1895-1901), Tana Bhagat movement (1920-35) and a host of others. The agrarian-cum-cultural movement threw up politico-religious leaders of stature who deeply influenced the tribals' thinking for decades to come.⁹

With the departure of British colonialists and rise of independent India, the tribal citizens of the country were promised a fair deal – in some case privileged – to become partners in progress. Upliftment of the tribals was an article of faith for over Constitution makers.

Tribe and Tribal Culture:

Before entering into "Tribal Culture" it is pertinent to discuss what 'tribal' in English is really means. According to 'Concise Oxford Dictionary' tribal means 'group of primitive class under recognized chief' or 'any similar division whether of natural or political origin' or 'set number of persons esp. of the profession etc.'¹⁰

Thus it literally means a number of one's clan or 'profession'. The very word a tribal' is an adjective form of a tribal which means 'a number of the same clan or profession'.

In fact, it means a closed isolated, self-confined, self contained society – a kind of folk like bearing the traces of primitive or aboriginal tribals of hunting in nomadic days before the cultivation of food crops began as a basic art for the preservation of human life.

Here lies the necessity for a definition of the words 'clan' and 'profession'. Because such a stage or form of society and its conditions are ingrained in 'civilization' and its conditions are ingrained in 'civilization' and what its known as 'diffusion of culture'.

The word 'clan' in English means, "Scottish Highlanders with common ancestor esp. white under patriarchal control". It also means "a party coterie, genus, species, class.

In Folklore 'clan' means a sub-tribe or family group with a common identity and identical pattern of social behaviour, retaining the traits and characteristics of primitive mode of living. Unaffected by the phenomenon of social changes for centuries together. Even the process of rapid industrialization and urbanisation has not changed them.

To sum up, the words 'tribe' and 'tribal' as defined by the C.O.D. means primitive men living together under a common identity and cultural type.¹¹

However, the other word "culture" in English was first coined in 1846 by English anthropologists.

It literally means 'cultivation, refinement, improvement' while 'cultured' means refined, 'well-educated'. A cultural person means a well educated one who nourishes one's own culture in a refined manner for the uplift of the human society.

In fact the word "tribal" bears an affinity with primitive. In the modern sense a tribal does not means merely a group of nomads. Originally as

maintained by a few scholar's, men of all races living in 'tribes and tribes and lived nomadic life. With the discovery and inventions of the methods of agriculture, men began to settle in one place.

Since the beginning of English education in India in the early nineteenth century, the closed, self-contained and sometimes migratory ancient and primitive people, non-Aryan, especially the Koles, Bhils, Gonds, Mundas, Santhals and also the 'Keeratas' i.e., the people of non-Aryan Mongoloid origin have begun to be called 'tribal'. There can be no denying the fact that even the Aryans in ancient India lived in a sort of tribal and however, the aim here is to focus on the meaning of 'tribe' as it is used today in the developing countries with reference to the comments of the ancient and modern writers.¹²

The word 'tribe' today may be used in the sense of a closed isolated. Self contained group of people withy primitive ways of life as not affected or contaminated by the modern changes. A narrow outlook, at times, the concept of small nationality seems to have filled in their minds for the protection and defence of their cultural interests.

In anthropology, tribe implies a group of people sharing common heritage, language, values, customs, dresses, traditions, lores, legends, arts, handicrafts, food habits, and political institutions etc, as common traits or features in a closed society with a concept of small nationally within the limits of self-confinement. Hence, many tribes consider themselves as the only human beings.

Of course, in modern days, the terms 'ethnic group' and 'ethnicity'

are preferred to the usage 'tribal' and 'tribalism'. In the Indian context, the tribes are those which retain the qualities of primitivism in e.g. dress, custom, religion, superstition etc. largely common to all members who have remained unaffected by changes through centuries.¹³

A "Tribe or Ethnic Group" may live within a contiguous territory comprising a few thousand of people or may be extended to several small groups numbering millions. Sometimes with a denigrating implication. Ancient European writers used the word 'Tribal' in a different sense. In modern sense it means a closed society. In ancient Greece the isolated people of the self-contained city-states were considered as tribes. Similarly in ancient Rome the word 'Tribes' applied to the concept of small nationality. In their popular belief or superstition. Many of them believe in a supposed common ancestor. The Cambridge Encyclopaedia calls it, 'A term to describe ethnic minorities which formerly enjoyed political autonomy, but which have been incorporated into a nation-state. In practice it is usually applied to such groupings in Third World countries, and its use carries a denigrating implication that the 'Tribe' is backward and that its political inspirations if any are illegitimate'.¹⁴

Though some scholars have spoken of 'Aristocratic culture, folk culture etc. yet the very characteristics of all cultures are similar in eminence. Inspire of the racial, religious and linguistic differences, the very human felling of love, merriment etc. are almost same in every civilized society. In fact the special customs and traditions have been fully maintained by those who are unaffected or not influenced by the changes in modern days. Of course, what is truly called 'tribal culture' in India has been less affected by modern scientific inventions.

At the same time it cannot be denied that some of the tribals, as they are known today, have not deviated from their social customs and traditions in spite of western education. The age-old social customs are more respected in tribal society than in others. Of course it does not mean that in the caste ridden Hindu society assimilation has taken place in a tremendous way. But changes have affected the least in a tribal society. The tribal in the past lived in isolation for the sake of security and the fear of pollution of customs and traditions. Similarly in this Third World sub-continent the people of various castes, ethnic and linguistic communities have not been able to get rid of the conservative attitude to social life. A Brahmin unless enlightened and sophisticated will hardly like to sit and dine together with a Shudra or a so called 'mlechcha', if we look into the basic qualities of human nature, a man cannot have fellow feeling unless he has given up the conservative attitude and lores. Hence, the study of Indian culture is a very complex phenomenon. However, the scholars have termed tribal culture as self contained. At the same time it cannot be denied that what is known as "folk-culture" is almost a kin to tribal culture as against an "Aristocratic culture" which is confined to few of the society. In this connection, it is worthwhile to quote Robert Redfield's view.¹⁵

I shall say that the societies that existed before the rise of cities were folk societies and I shall say that the societies that are found today unaffected by the great civilizations are folk societies.

However, the aim of this work is to highlight the tribal culture of the north-eastern India in the context of 'unity in diversity'.

In India, for thousand of years, primitive tribes persisted in forests

and hills without having more than casual contacts with the populations of the open plains and the centres of civilization. According to Haimendorf (1977), co-existence was possible because there was, on the whole, no pressure of population and the advanced communities did not feel any urge to impose their own values on people placed potentially outside the orbit of Hindu civilization.

NOT until the British appeared on the stage of Indian history and consolidated their position in the country was any stir felt and experienced in the midst of these people. Such stir was slowly and steadily brought about by several factors, in accordance with the colonial needs and aspirations of the British rulers. The colonial rulers, for obvious reasons, had to 'open up' the entire country to be able to rule effectively and intensively. They were left with no other option but to evolve eventually an effective and extensive communication system including postal, telegraphic, roadways and railway services. Nihar Ranjan Ray (1972) pushes the argument forward by stating that effective and intensive rule called also for a common administrative system that aimed at drawing, as much as possible, the entire country within its orbit, obliging the administration to send its officers, police and army to the farthest and deepest depth of the land. Also, for long, at least upto 1887, there remained primary obligation of British mercantile colonialism, to make the military conquest as complete as possible from one end of the country to the other. This called for, internally, a political and military policy that demanded maintenance of a strong thrust into all of the resistance areas including the forest depths and hill sides and hill tops.¹⁶

S.C. DUBE (1972) supports this assertion by saying that in respect of law and order the British rulers had maintained a stern posture throughout their sojourn in India, and even in tribal areas they enforced them with an iron hand. Their attitude to the tribes otherwise was paternalistic and protective. But the compulsion of the situation forced them to send their engineers and contractors, and civil and military officials of all ranks and their provision suppliers, the traders and shopkeepers into all these inaccessible regions of the interior and frontiers. Thus, a money economy was introduced among the tribal communities. This was not terrifying in itself but what came to disturb the tribals most was the land hunger of the non-British vested interests. "Taking advantage of their vantage position they started acquiring lands and introducing cash-cropping through the means foul rather than fair, lands that belonged to and were used by local communities. Ultimately this land hunger affected not only their agriculture but also their hunting and fishing rights" (Nihar Ranjan Ray, *ibid*). Still, the friction between the tribals and the non-tribals was limited to a restricted scale due to the British policy of exclusion or partial exclusion of tribal areas which kept the economic competition between the tribals and the non-tribals to a minimum. Indirectly, it also helped the tribes to pursue their distinctive lifestyles relatively undisturbed. Though Christian missionaries of various shades were allowed access to these areas yet their influence was restricted to the north-eastern region and some areas of Central India. S.C. Dube summarises the situation in a realistic way by commenting that culture change did come about but in dribs and drabs. Unsupported by dynamic and purposeful social action, this policy resulted

in perpetuation of primitiveness. The tribes, thus were precluded from having a foretaste or even a vision of things that go into raising the standards of living and in adding to material comfort and well-being. Their isolation from the main currents of Indian life helped the tribes in preserving their traditions, but at the same time it also hindered the growth of competence in them to face growing competition in a wider society and to meet some of the challenges of the contemporary world. They could not cope with the modern economic system and were trapped in the vicious circle of exploitation at the hands of the land hungry peasantry and the blood sucking money lenders. The rapidly increasing interference and exploitation resulted in clashes and bloody uprisings (discussed in the chapter on Discontent and Rebellion) that still continue, though in different forms.¹⁷

This narration will be incomplete without a word or two about the contribution of the earliest ethnographers. For the British rulers, or for that matter any ruler, administering these areas involved detailed and objective knowledge of these tribal communities. It was imperative to know their social religious life, their political and economic organizations, and their behaviour patterns and so on. Thus was initiated a series of studies undertaken by Dalton, Risley, Thurston, Enthoven, Crooke, Russell and others which led to the foundation of what today we call Indian anthropology. The ethnographers mentioned above were all administrators and their investigations involved deep probing into the lives and societies of these people which led eventually to the formulation of policies meant to guide the administration of these tribal communities.

Despite numerous uprisings, social movements and participation in the freedom struggle, though on a restricted scale, the tribal people remained at the periphery of consciousness of the average Indian masses. They were hardly even taken note of by our social and political thinkers and leaders of even the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Thus we see that our thinkers and leaders like Surendranath Banerjee, Aurobindo Ghosh, Bipin Chandra Pal, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Gopal Krishna Gokhle, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and host of others were unaware and unconcerned with their tribal fellow countrymen. Nihar Ranjan Ray (1972) remarks that the attention of the Indian National Congress was never drawn to this growing socio-political problem, though the question of the lower and depressed orders and untouchables of Hindu society had started receiving attention from about the 1880's. Not until Gandhiji entered the scene was this matter looked at as a national issue. His concern for the Adivasi or Adimjati gave a new awakening to our national leadership.¹⁸

After Gandhiji, among our modern national leadership, Jawaharlal Nehru was a vociferous champion of the tribals. He has been most outspoken in condemning the imposition of the Hindu way of living on tribal communities reared in other traditions but he could not restrain the so-called reformers from their chosen task of 'civilizing' the tribal people. Logically, as long as Muslims, Christians and Parsis are free to follow their traditional ways of life, the tribal communities should also enjoy their natural right to follow their social system howsoever distinct it might be from that of the majority community. Nobody has got the right to convert tribal people into carbon copies of any model.

The independence of India has changed the whole scenario. The Constitution of free India is committed to the welfare and development of the tribal people in a special way. The tribal people have an awakened from their centuries old slumber. In the words of Verrier Elwin, "roads are everywhere urging their way into places which have hitherto been virtually inaccessible. Education, as it spread, is revolutionising the social and economic conditions of the tribal villages and is creating new demands as it generates new skills". The most important fact that we have to face is the effect of changes of every kind that are sweeping across the hills and forests in India – changes initiated by people, government and by the tribes themselves. The tribal people today are faced by an unprecedented evolutionary crisis in their history.

The most heartening feature of the present tribal situation in India is that a great segment of the tribal population has awakened to the need of finding a solution to their problems and is responding. But they rightly demand that the 'progress' and 'advancement' should not disturb the essential harmony of their life. They like to be assisted largely through their own institutions. A tribal's home and family is the precious and fundamental basis on which the future edifice of his welfare is to build. "A freedom that does not guarantee him the freedom to decide how he will mould his destiny, official programmes that do not give him the choice of how he will organise his own development and to what end, will be sad imposition on him" (Elwin, 1963).

A very crucial issue in contemporary tribal situation in India confronting us is the harmonization of national and tribal interests. Such

harmonization cannot be attained easily. The issues implicit in the problem touch extremely sensitive areas and even the slightest mishandling is likely to evoke violent reactions. S.C. Dube has struck a note of realism when he says that the tribes have to find for themselves a place in Indian society consistent with their conception of honour, but this must be done without detriment to the integrity on the strength of India as a nation. Tribal competence has to be developed to enable them to have the growing competition of a developing society and to meet the challenges of an uncertain future.¹⁹

We are standing at the threshold of a new era. The tribal people have made an entry into that era with other members of the Indian society but they are not prepared to allow anybody to shatter the harmony of their life. They deserve a better appreciation of their life, mores and problems from planners, administrators and general masses.

The North-Eastern India is, thus proved of a unity amidst diversity of folk culture. The lores traditions of above 131 tribes and sub-tribes have laid deep imprints on the social life of the general people. The oral traditions, lores, legends, dresses, customs, handcrafts and others still bear the brand of rich ethnic identity and cultural heritage.

The modern changes and scientific developments can not destroy the ethnic groups. Rather a new jolt for cultural consciousness is necessary in the context of Indian cultural heritage through syncretism which can possibly uplift the socio-economic conditions of the large variety of the people of heterogeneous origin. It is the feeling of love and mutual

cooperation as against hatred, barbarism and bloodshed which alone can pave the path of prosperity and peaceful co-existence.

Indian history is really not sure about the process of settlement of any particular ethnic or racial group. Because in the nomadic days before the formation of village community in ancient India called "Samiti" like the institution of "folk-moot" in Europe, men seem to have lived an essentially nomadic or barbarous life. Beside, all men lived migratory life before the beginning of the practice of settled agriculture in the river valleys inundated and made fertile almost every year. The changes in ecological features too can not be surely denied. The natural calamities, aggressions, epidemics, scarcity of wild animals enough ground for hunting and fishing once led these people who had migrated mostly from Indo-China, Tibet, Burma to move from one hill to another and at the same time from one riverside to another. Besides, the protection by a powerful monarch for the defence of their conservative life, religion was an almost necessity for the people who had lived under a certain chief and several chiefs together under the powerful protection of mighty rulers. In England, the British primitives were influenced and civilized by the conqueror Anglo-Saxons. In India too, the conqueror Aryan imbibed many ideas and materials from the non-Aryan hill-dwellers who were living in proximity with the more civilized Aryans who by turns have received influences through centuries. ²⁰

It was in fact because of the feeling of mutual help and cooperation between one ethnic group and another that human survival has been possible. Also, it has been noticed that even in a specific 'ethnic group';

and 'ethnographic area too, all the sections of people do not belong to the same ancestor or descent. It has been noticed that even one sub-tribe can have different customs. Now, even the families of a particular caste or tribe or sub-tribe too have different popular beliefs, practices, traditions, legends etc. Besides, all the social institutions and customs are man-made while the life is even in a process of constant change.

Also, the concepts on which any culture and civilization depends are reflected by the attitude and social behaviours of the people. The present social behaviours of the people. The present social, political organizations too change their attitudes in accordance with the changes of their chiefs or political leaders. The tribal notion of the 'self' as the only human being possible gives rise to selfish attitude with culminates in narrow patriotism as against the modern concept of nation society. In this last decade of the twentieth century, the thinkers and scientists consider the world as a global village. So the context of the history of Indian civilization, there has been no age which has not seen a peaceful cooperation among many ethnic groups. Besides, in this age of competition, all the people have to love one another. If one knows how to love another, it generates a sense of true love for the self. Indeed, eccentric self love with an avowed hatred for another does not beget true patriotism.

The exploration of all ethnic groups and to highlight their culture is necessary in order to add to the treasure-house of human knowledge. Because, human society has been changing fast since the later half of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, the post-independent decades in India have given rise to an abnormal growth of population and increasing

unemployment problem especially among the educated youth. Both the capitalists and feudal and the politicians of vested self-interest are to be blamed. Because one desires for more profit. While the others fore the perpetuation of the old practices and the conventions of by gone days more for the purpose of self-aggrandisement and less for the uplift of the poor and downtrodden.²¹

Few anthropologists of modern days believe in an urge for new pattern of living for the preservation of responses of primitive men to social challenges. Although some tribes remain unexplored from the point of view of folklore and folkloristic, we can not but admit that efforts are being made through the governmental machinery and such other agencies for the amelioration of miseries of the masses. In the north-east the problems are so varied and complicated that a state like Arunachal Pradesh has the largest geographical area with a small population. But it has not been adequately facilitated by means of transport and communication. In Assam, there has been an abnormal rise in the rate of growth of population. Besides there have been constant ethnic clashes. The recent clashes between the Indian Adivasi Santhals and the Bodos in Bongaigaon and Kokrajhar districts have caused bitterness among people in the name of narrow patriotism with a love for one's own small nationality alone.

It is true that there has not been much of industrialization in the entire north-eastern region. Also, there is no proper railway communication in the state like Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh and many parts of Assam.

Man by nature desires for enlightenment and social progress. The fact that the spread of western system of education in India, the advancement in science and technology and the enlightenment and refinement of the spiritual and political leaders. Simultaneously with a spiritual awakening social and economic consciousness of the masses, alone can bring about progressive changes in the process of preservation of tribes and their cultures. As no 'folk' especially in the western concept, is destructible or perishable despite industrialization and urbanization, so there can be no alternative to peaceful cooperation and co-existence among men of all races, castes, languages, religions, tribes, sub-tribes even in the context of any particular ethnographic area of Goalpara.

In the context of north-east in India, the transport facilities by roadway, railways should be increased and improved so that there can be rapid industrialization. Besides further spread of education producing idealistic quality and the true removal of mass illiteracy alone can improve the people's lot. What is true of the north-east is perhaps true of entire India. This developing region needs a sure development through the prosperity of the masses with the promotion of the feeling of oneness among all. Insurgencies, violence and such other anti social elements caused perhaps by socio-economic backwardness, if shunned with restraint, will positively lead to peace and prosperity. May it be master good wishes, benefit of envy and the motive for socio-economic exploitation?

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