Chapter 2
A Philosophical Study of Tribal Culture from the Perspectives of Religion and Morality

The second chapter deals with the philosophical study of Tribal Culture from different perspectives. It is mainly viewed from the moral and religious perspective keeping in mind the misconceptions which often arises among the urbanized masses when it comes to anything tribal. A hermeneutical understanding of the tribal religion is thoroughly analyzed and discussed, bringing out a clear picture of the tribal concept of religious system – Supreme Being, the Spirit, Myths, Magic, Taboo, Mana, Totem, Omen, Lycanthropy and their various religious functionaries. Adjacent to Tribal Religion, a critical analysis of Tribal Culture from a moral perspective is also discussed, bringing out a view on how different cultures have different moral codes and understanding the tribal morality in the present times. A moral analysis on tribal discriminations and tribal exploitations are also critically examined.
A. Philosophy and Culture

Philosophy is an important subject connected broadly with culture. Philosophy itself belongs to culture and always is somehow culturally determined.

The term Culture is used as a plural noun: there are different cultures, whose differences are strongly underscored in a "global" society, especially for their proper values against totalitarian "colonialistic" tendencies. Philosophy, in contrast, generally is used in the singular, but frequently with an added adjective such as ancient, modern, contemporary, Greek, German or Chinese, etc. But one should not forget Husserl’s advice in his *Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften*: that "philosophies can live only in the plural"\(^{86}\). So even philosophy, generally is considered part of culture.

One of the most intriguing philosophical aspects of culture is the methodology by means of which its specimens have been and are studied. It seems, in fact, that in order to study a culture one has to remove oneself from it, which in some sense it means that the only way to study a culture is by not sharing it.

The study of culture poses thus one of the hardest questions with respect to human nature: to what extent can you really understand yourself? To what extent can a society assess its own practices? If the capacity of self-analysis of an individual or a group is

limited, who is entitled to a better analysis and why? Is there a point of view, which is
best suited for the study of an individual or a society?

How to study a culture? This is still an open question. To date, there certainly are several
instances of research that try and address the questions raised above by means of
sophisticated methodologies. And yet the foundation seems to be still in need of being
addressed, or re-addressed, from a philosophical point of view.

Each tribal community has its own philosophy at least at an implicit level, and an
understanding of life and independent cultural identity. To get a clearer picture of the
philosophical study of tribal culture, we shall discuss in detail what actually the terms
“tribal” and “culture” stand for.

1. What is “Tribe” or “Tribal”?

When people say ‘Tribal’, to many people, it means backward or uncivilized ordinary
people living in hills and forests. Again, to some people, simple folk with pre-machine
economy, unsophisticated rituals and social customs, lack of spirit etc, yet famous for
their songs and dances and so on.

The word “Tribe” originated in the 13th century derived from the Latin *tribus*, (tri =
three, bhuour or bu = to be) which literally means “to be three”. It was used for
identification among the three original tribes of Rome - the Tities, the Ramnes and the
Luceres.\textsuperscript{87} It was used primarily for the division of Roman citizens without a derogatory connotation. The ‘head of a tribe’ was known as a \textit{tribunus}. All Roman citizens, both provincial communities and individuals who were granted Roman citizenship under the empire were enrolled in one or other of the tribes. This division was used for the purpose of taxation, military conscription and census taking.\textsuperscript{88} Using it in ancient roman sense, L.M. Lewis argues that the term ‘tribe’ need not be discarded.\textsuperscript{89} According to Oxford Dictionary, "A tribe is a group of people in a primitive or barbarous stage of development acknowledging the authority of a chief and usually regarding themselves as having a common ancestor. Again in the same Dictionary, the word “Tribe” is cited as “A group of persons forming a community and claiming descent from a common ancestor”\textsuperscript{90}.

The range of meanings however, has grown even further over the intervening years, for example, “Any of various systems of social organization comprising several local villages, bands, districts, lineages, or other groups and sharing a common ancestry, language, culture, and name”\textsuperscript{91}. Morris also notes that a tribe is a “group of persons with a common occupation, interest, or habit,” and “a large family.” Today, the range of groups referred to as tribal is truly enormous. Not everyone however, can be deemed to be a member of a tribe. Those people who resisted joining in larger nation-state entities were soon labeled by the nation-states themselves to be “tribes.” These people were

\textsuperscript{87} Tribe – \textit{Encyclopedia Britannica, Micropaedia,Vol.x,} (1979, p.115)
\textsuperscript{88} Tribe - From Wikipedia, encyclopedia and Word-origins.com
“known to the world at large by names that have no relation to their own self-appellations. Worse, a good many are called by derogatory words.”\textsuperscript{92}

Fried argued that,

\begin{quote}
The precipitation of tribes, it seems to me, was triggered by the emergence of the state, but did not really get into high gear until the emergence of the ancient empires and, later in a greater burst, after the appearance of colonialism and imperialism\textsuperscript{93}
\end{quote}

His observations are useful, for the maintenance of the term “tribe” probably necessitates the existence of nation states or other large political entities that can and do cast aspersions upon smaller and more distinctive groupings of people.

According to Fried,

\begin{quote}
Tribes are the product of specific political and economic pressures emanating from already existing state-organized societies.\textsuperscript{94}
\end{quote}

The term “tribe” then, was often more than a little bit derogatory, but it served to differentiate the minorities and deviants and those only partially colonialized from the mainstream or the colonial powers.

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., p. 98
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., p.44
D.N Majumdar defines tribe as a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous with no specialization of functions ruled by tribal officers hereditary or otherwise, united in language or dialect recognizing social distance with other tribes or castes. According to Ralph Linton tribe is a group of bands occupying a contiguous territory or territories and having a feeling of unity deriving from numerous similarities in a culture, frequent contacts and a certain community of interests.

There was a distinction made between tribal societies and modern societies based upon their legal institutions and political institutions in the nineteenth century. Morgan describes tribal societies as having social, but no political organization. For him the tribal society is kinship, not political system or geographic boundaries. Further research in this regard has made it clear that tribal societies did have forms of political organizations and a sense of geographic territory or boundary. Therefore, twentieth century anthropologists no longer accept the earlier ideas of what constitute the difference between modern and tribal societies. Now they define tribal societies as consisting of a relatively small number of members restricted in the spatial and temporal range of their social, legal and political relations and possessing a morality, religion and world view of corresponding dimensions. However, tribal society was still contrasted with modern society as a pre-industrial, pre-literate folk-society.

The usage of the term “tribe” or “tribal” did not originate with those people who were identified as tribals. It is the term used by Anthropologists to denote “a group of people speaking a common language”. Observing uniform rules of social organization and working together for some common purpose such as trade, agriculture or warfare. Other typical characteristics include a common name, a contiguous territory, a relatively uniform culture or a way of life and a tradition of common descent.\footnote{Ibid 82. p.115.}

In India, generally the word ‘tribe’ has been used in a prejudicial sense. It suggests the primitive people living in the hills and forests, the original but not highly developed inhabitants. Names used for their identifications are Pahari (hill dwellers), Vanjajati (forest caste), Vanvasi (primitive people), Adimjati (primitive people), Janjati (folk people), Adivasi (first dwellers), and Anusuchit Janjati (Scheduled tribes) which is the term used in the Indian constitution.\footnote{L.P Vidyarthi and B.K Rai. The Tribal Culture of India, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company (1985.p. 25)} In the contemporary discourse, the expressions ‘tribe’ and ‘tribal’ stand for a group of people and their culture who inhabit relatively inaccessible area and whose language, literature, culture and technology are not so very well developed.
The eminent Anthropologist Evans-Pritchard wrote that;

_Tribal communities have just as long a history as our own, and while they are less developed than our own society in some respects they are often more developed in others._ 99

Every tribe has its own way of life and to understand its way of life is to study its culture. For some time, the word ‘tribe’ has been under attack by the concerned academies, as also by others who show some concern for such population. Yet another feeling is of the so-called tribals themselves. A variety of perceptions, in this regard, and significantly differing social-cultural realities have led thinkers, empiricists and the natives to two fronts of consensus and conflicts. For quite some time most of the tribal societies are in a sway of change. Their transitional state of affairs has pressurized scholarly world, and even others, to review the earlier conceptual framework conceived for tribal social formations. It is chiefly the others, normally referred to as non-tribals, who decide and label certain sections of population and their social-cultural milieu as tribal. 100

The tribal society is classless. Social stratification does not exist. The tribal society is classless in economic, social, and even in political aspects. The father of communism,

---

Karl Marx wrote ‘Class Struggle’, but his theory did not contribute any new system to the tribal people.\textsuperscript{101}

2. What is Culture?

Culture is such an intricate concept that it almost admits any definition about it as acceptable or true. The concept itself is full of ambiguities that often create confusion in the minds of those who study it. Volumes have been written on culture and definitions for the concept abound. Yet none of these definitions could claim to have successfully succeeded in establishing everything about culture. No definition of culture can be pointed out as comprehensive.

What exactly is culture? Unfortunately a fixed, universal understanding does not exist; there is little consensus within, let alone, across disciplines. Often the expression “culture” is applied so broadly, merely as “social pattern,” that it means very little. Highly specific, idiosyncratic definitions also abound where the term is used in various contexts in support of any agenda.

Culture is a complex phenomenon. It includes everything that humans do, have, think or say collectively in a particular space and time. It means even more. Many disciplines like anthropology, sociology, history, philosophy have tried to define culture in ways and

\textsuperscript{101} C. Walu Walling. \textit{Sacrifice and Salvation in Ao-Naga tradition}, 1997. p.2
paradigms particular to these disciplines. But no specific conclusion is arrived at. Emphasis of various researchers vary – some have placed emphasis on behaviour patterns, others on outward manifestations of belief, art, knowledge, and still others on values, meaning, etc. However, there is a common running theme on almost all considerations of culture, that is, ‘a way of life’ of people living in a particular society in a particular time.\textsuperscript{102}

When the word “culture” first appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary around 1430, it meant “cultivation” or “tending the soil,” based on the Latin culture. In the 19th century the term “culture” was associated with the phrase “high culture,” meaning the cultivation or “refinement of mind, taste, and manners.” This generally held to the mid-20th century when its meaning shifted toward its present American Heritage English Dictionary definition: “The totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought.”

While the complexities of the culture-concept were being debated in the mid-20th century, surveys of its different definitions yielded a few common threads that are helpful in organizational research. Most simply, culture involves three basic human activities: a) what people think, b) what people do, and c) what people make. Further, several common properties arise: culture is shared, learned, transmitted cross-generationally, symbolic, adaptive, and integrated.

The etymology of the modern term "culture" has a classical origin. In English, the word "culture" is based on a term used by Cicero in his *Tusculan Disputations*, where he wrote of a cultivation of the soul or "*cultura animi*", thereby using an agricultural metaphor to describe the development of a philosophical soul, which was understood teleologically as the one natural highest possible ideal for human development.\(^{103}\)

It is a curious fact that the very origin of the word culture contains the wisdom of the people's understanding of culture as the worshipful cultivation of something, particularly the land.

The word "culture" was, thus, from the beginning, related to good action. And action usually means assimilation of our world in some form or another. It may, therefore, be said that culture is a kind of prism, through which everything essential to us is refracted. Every nation, every level and form of Civilisation, and every individual attains knowledge of the world and a mastery of its principles and laws to the extent that it masters culture. The forms of culture are a kind of mirror that reflects the essence of every enterprise, its techniques and methods, and the contribution which it makes to the development of culture itself. In this sense, man himself is a phenomenon of culture, and not only of nature. If we may attempt an analogy, it may be said that culture is the opened, read and understood pages of the "book of life", pages which when assimilated by the individual become his selfhood.

\(^{103}\) *Culture*, From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture))
Culture is not merely a matter of skill raised to the level of art, but also a morally sanctioned goal. Culture manifests itself in ordinary consciousness and everyday behaviour, in labour activity and the attitude that one adopts to such activity, in scientific thought and artistic creation and the vision of their results, in self-control, in one's smile and manner of laughing, in love and other intimate relationships, which the individual may elevate to unexpected heights of tenderness and spiritual beauty. The truly cultured person shows all these facets in every manifestation of his selfhood. Culture is characterised by the vital ideals of humankind, of the individual, the social group, the class and society as a whole. The more significant these ideals are, the higher the level of culture.

To speak of culture as being shared, narrows the field of relevant activity to that which is common and social. A particular action is not cultural if it is unique to one or relatively insignificant number of individuals. Also, culture is learned (actively or passively) and is transmitted cross-generationally through formal or informal social interaction; we are not born with the understanding that stealing is wrong or that lying is wrong.

One of the primary characteristics of human life, over animal life, is that we assign symbolic meaning to ideas, behavior, and objects, as well as have language and speech. We say that humans have culture while animals do not. This is largely due to their inability to ascribe arbitrary symbolic meaning to their world. A chimpanzee could not designate his banana to signify honesty, for example.
Culture is also adaptive in that it can and does change in response to various influences and conditions. No culture is truly static; many aspects of world-cultures are radically different in the wake of the Internet, the dot-com bubble, and global terrorism. And finally, culture is integrated in the sense that it permeates society and becomes part of the social machinery. Culture is the ever-present, ethereal medium in which members live and through which they act

Clifford Geertz in his book, “The Interpretation of Cultures” writes:

*Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action and is an ordered system of meaning and of symbols in terms of which social interaction takes place.*

Culture rules virtually every aspect of our life and like most people, we are completely unaware of this. If asked, one would likely define culture as music, literature, visual arts, architecture or language, and we wouldn't be wrong. But we wouldn't be entirely right either. In fact the things produced by a culture which we perceive with our five senses are simply manifestations of the deeper meaning of culture. Culture is taught and learned and shared, there is no culture of one. And yet, culture is not monolithic, individuals exist within a culture. Finally, culture is symbolic. Meaning is ascribed to behaviour, words and objects and this meaning is objectively arbitrary, subjectively logical and rational.

For example, a "home", is a physical structure, a familial construct and a moral reference point, which is distinct from one culture to another.\textsuperscript{105}

Culture is vital because it enables its members to function with one another without the need to negotiate meaning at every moment. Culture is learned and forgotten, so despite its importance we are generally unconscious of its influence on the manner in which we perceive the world and interact within it. Culture is significant because as we work with others it both enables us and impedes us in our ability to understand and work effectively together.

We live in a small planet with many cultures. Sometimes it is difficult to understand someone from another culture because we have not taken the time to listen to what they believe, and because we assume that they should believe what we believe. Learning about other cultures helps us live together and respect each other's ways of life, without misunderstanding or hurting each other.

\textbf{a. In What Forms does Culture Exist?}

Culture exists in the form of human activity, which is generalised into certain modes or methods of its realisation, in the sign or symbolic forms of the existence of the spirit, and finally in palpable material forms, objects, in which the individual's purposeful activity

\textsuperscript{105} Centre for Intercultural learning.\url{www.intercultures.gc.ca}
finds its embodiment. As something created by human beings, culture is at the same time a necessary condition for humanity's cultural existence and development. Outside culture the individual cannot exist as a human being. As water permeates soil, culture permeates every pore of social and individual life. When studying one or another culture, we usually think of it as something relatively independent. In reality, culture exists as a historically evolved system comprising its objects, its symbolism, traditions, ideals, precepts, value orientations and, finally, its way of thought and life, the integrating force, the living soul of culture. In this sense culture exists supra-individually, while at the same time remaining the profoundly personal experience of the individual. Culture is created by mankind, by the nation, the class, the social group and the individual. The objective forms in which culture exists are the fruit of the creative activity of the people as a whole, the masterpieces of geniuses and other great talents. But in themselves the objective and symbolic forms of culture have only a relatively independent character; they are lifeless without man himself and his creative activity. All the treasures of culture in their palpable material form come to life only in the hands of a person who is capable of revealing them as cultural values.

Culture is a social phenomenon that embraces not only the past and the present, but also the future. Like everything else in life, culture is historical. The primitive horde and the tribal society and all the subsequent forms of organisation, all the stages of Civilisation are characterised by their own peculiar way of life, perception of the world, and levels of consciousness. The culture of all peoples throughout history is permeated to some extent by religion. This is expressed in various rituals, forms of worship, in deities, in art, in
philosophy and even in science. It is hidden in the very fabric of language—even an
atheist, for example, may say several times a day "goodbye", which originally meant
"God be with you". Without some fundamental knowledge of the history of religion it is
impossible to understand our human biography, the biography of the human race, and to
become a cultured person generally. For example, primitive society was full of animist,
magic and mythological beliefs and this left its imprint on the whole system of the life,
thought, emotions and interrelations of people and their relationship with nature.

Culture is the living process of the functioning of values in the context of the existence of
the individual and society. It is the process of their creation, reproduction and use in
historically changing ways. Culture arose and is developing together with society,
creating an enormous tradition. The history of culture is full of stagnant phenomena, rigid
dogmatic systems and conservatism, and also of revolutionary innovations. The previous
achievements of culture are not parted from us. Their finest examples continue to live and
"work". No child can become a developed personality without absorbing some of the
treasures of culture. Culture always survives those who have created it and that which it
originally served.

Cultural values are expressed in all kinds of symbols and systems of symbols, which
constitute a huge layer of our value consciousness. An important place in this system
belongs to the names of famous people, of heroes, various kinds of rituals, memorials,
and so on. A person is born with symbols. His whole conscious life is surrounded by
them. He dies with them. They accompany him on his last road. Symbols pursue us even
into "the other world". Historians are known to have long disputes about the place of burial of some historical personalities.

B. Tribal Culture from a Religious Perspective

A Tribal culture from a religious point of view may be best understood in terms of what it is not: it is not one which claims to have a religious message for all of humanity, it does not offer any means of universal salvation, it does not purport to have a unique insight into the will of any gods, and it does not expect anyone else to care very much about what it has to say.

Religion would simply mean living in spontaneous awareness of, an encounter with, acknowledgement of, and obedience to the active reality of the presence of the Supreme Being. Religion permeates all aspects of life. In the traditional tribal society, there were no irreligious people. In fact, people did not know how to live without religion. The tribal religion does not have written creeds to be recited; instead the creeds are contained in the hearts and minds of the people and therefore, each individual, family, clan and village is a living creed. In short, for the tribals, religion exists within the whole system of their being. A unique characteristic of tribal religion is that, it is basically a community religion. To be truly human is to belong to the whole community, including the ancestors.

---

and creation, and to do so, involves the active participation in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of the community.\(^{107}\)

The legends of the dead told by ancient or tribal people are perhaps the most accurate indicators of their religious thought. And from what can be assumed from the burial rites of early humans, they pondered the same kinds of questions concerning the afterlife as humans do today. Where had their friends gone? What do they do and see when they disappear into the unknown? Will they live again? Can their spirits return to communicate? Or are they just gone—forever? Early humans could not answer these great questions, and so, to temper their fear of death, it is believed that they created rituals, rites, and religions to comfort them.\(^{108}\)

Although the process of death and the reasons why the once animated body became lifeless were puzzles, aboriginal tribal societies understood that there was something in their departed friends and family members that survived somehow in another existence. The reason for this belief can be easily imagined. As they slept, early humans saw those persons whom they knew to be dead, alive and well in their dreams. Perhaps they themselves had witnessed their friends being killed in a dispute with another tribe or mangled by a predator, yet now they saw them and spoke with them, just as they had before their death.


These vivid dreams of the dead undoubtedly led to the belief that there existed an immaterial aspect of human beings, a part that managed to survive the dissolution of the body.¹⁰⁹

In tribal culture, an individual life and the community life are inseparable. One cannot understand the core of tribals without understanding the religious journey of the individual from the womb to physical death and hereafter. For the tribals, belief and action cannot be separated; they belong to one single whole. Worship and action go together. The tribals do not have a sacred scripture or scriptures like other religions. The religious ethoses are contained in the people’s hearts, minds, oral history and rituals. Oral transmission in a sense, people themselves are a living sacred scripture and the world of creation is the exegesis of the Supreme Being.

The tribal religious meaning cannot be grasped without creation. People see the self of the Supreme Being in creation and the Supreme Being speaks to people through creation. Thus, for the tribals, creation is a part of the scripture. Unlike other religions of the world, it does not have a founder or a reformer. Their religion is not centered in a historical person or persons. Rather, their religion is centered on earth/creation. Like other religions, the tribals too have a tradition of divine birth and manifestations, but they are not worshipped. They also have priests, officiating elders, diviners and other famous men and women in the body of beliefs and mythology.

Tribals have a holistic view of religion in which they have a holistic view of realities. Their religious life does not make distinctions between sacred and secular, spiritual and physical, heavenly and earthly, all these together constitute the wholeness of life.¹¹⁰

Taylor said that according to African traditional religion, an essential feature of primal religion is the sense of cosmic oneness. He states:

...not only is there less separation between subject and object, between self and not-self, but fundamentally all things share the same nature and the same interaction one upon another – rocks and forest trees, beasts and serpents, the power of wind and waves upon a ship, the power of a drum over a dancer’s body, the power in the mysterious caves of Kokola, the living, the dead and the first ancestors, from the stone to the divinities in hierarchy of power but not of being, for all are one, all are here, all are now.¹¹¹

Similarly, M.M Thomas writes, that in tribal world-view

...there is the sense of spiritual continuum within which the dead and the living, natural objects, spirit and gods, the individual, the clan and the tribe, animals, plants, minerals and man form an unbroken hierarchical

¹¹⁰ John England, “Folk-literature and Culture as sources from Theology – A Bibliographical Survey”, EAJY, 3: 2/85, p.259
unity of spiritual force. The self of man is not an individual self, present and actively participating in all the parts of the totality.\textsuperscript{112}

For the tribals, nature is life, and its powers are distinguished as personal because human self directly experiences them.

\textbf{1. A Misconception of Tribal Religion}

Industrially-developed society considers tribal people inferior. Material backwardness is taken to mean that the tribal religion is underdeveloped and primitive. Tribal religion and culture are therefore looked down upon and considered to be devoid of morality and spirituality.\textsuperscript{113}

We are forced to believe and accept a philosophy which declares the human development is rectilinear and progressive and that the mind tends necessarily towards greater and greater rationality and complexity. It is an unending process. The more we are developed industrially, the more we are higher up the ladder. The tribal people are industrially under-developed, and therefore are considered inferior. Thus, even in the realm of religion and culture, the tribal religion and culture are looked down on.


Anything that does not conform to the Western world-view is ‘devilish’, ‘irrational’, ‘inhuman’, ‘inferior’, ‘backward’, ‘primitive’ and so on. Since the tribal religion and culture are centered on earth, their religion is described as the earliest stage of religious consciousness. That is why the tribal religion has been designated by the colonizers, missionaries, students of anthropology, sociology, comparative religion and theology as a religion without any system of thought, devoid of morality and spirituality.\textsuperscript{114}

This whole concept of religion appears to be preconditioned by popular Western value judgment. The tribal religion has still been designated as animism and primitive. We shall see how different scholars have interpreted them.

a. Animism:

The word ‘animism’ carries with it the idea of soul and spirit. It is a word derived from Latin ‘\textit{anima}’, meaning ‘soul’. It conceives a human being as passing through a life surrounded by the ghostly company of powers and elements mostly impersonal in character.\textsuperscript{115}

It has been viewed that the tribal people believe in the presence of supernatural powers at the back of high mountains, flooded rivers, big trees and epidemics. They try to please


these powers by means of different types of propitiations and worships. Sometimes they are worshipped even without being given any name.

According to Edward Taylor, soul is a fundamental concept of tribal religion. In Taylor’s view, it is a belief that objects and natural phenomena are inhabited by souls of spiritual beings. Accordingly, hills, trees, rocks, streams, oceans, animals, each have a radiant soul.

John Mbiti explains this theory:

…all the spirits of the rivers would have one major spirit in charge of them and the same tree, rocks, lakes and so on. Accordingly, this gave man the idea of many Gods (polytheism) which in turn involved further to the state of one supreme God over all the departmental spirits.¹¹⁶

Therefore all this type of interpretations by different scholars places the tribal religion at the bottom of the supposed line of religious evolution while Christianity, Islam and Judaism are placed at the top since they are considered monotheistic religions.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 110. p.6.
It undoubtedly creates a sense of inferiority in those who have faith in tribal religion and people who come from tribal background. An interpreter, to look at the religion in that way is quite dehumanizing and irrational.

b. Primitive Religion

Primitive religion denotes an inferiority of the people who practice them. There is also another term that describes the term tribal religion. The whole concept of religion is preconditioned by popular Western value judgment.

J.H. Thumra writes that people:

…tend to use the term primitive in the sense of being inferior, and thus when it is applied to human beings and their religions, it implies the mistake notion of mental processes which are pre-logical and qualitatively inferior to that of the so called civilized people. This attitude comes from the standpoint of value judgment of people who assume superiority of race, knowledge and culture over against other races.  

It is unfortunate that material backwardness is taken to mean that the tribal religion is under-developed and primitive. That is why many writers have reduced the traditional

tribal religion and culture to the status of mere preparation evangelic. This is a wrong understanding of the tribal religion. Refuting the understanding of popular tribal religion, J.H. Thumra writes:

> When we examine the so-called ‘primitive’ people’s mentality or other ways of life objectively, we will find that they are not ‘primitive’ mentally, spiritually and in their moral standard. These people have acute mind and intrinsic intelligence and have a profound thinking and rationalistic ability in their own way. They have a long history, though unwritten, behind them.\(^\text{119}\)

From a close study of tribal religion, one will discover that certain traditional religious ideas such as the concept of the Supreme Being, the Spirit, spirits, relationship of humans and supernatural beings and animals, also the world around them, and ethical values are well developed. Thus, the tribal religion cannot be termed as *animism* or *primitive*. This misleading label should be completely relegated by all.

It is unfortunate that in the eyes of the dominant society, the tribal religion still lacks the cogency of reasoning. They think that symbols cannot be studied systematically as symbols, but have to be translated into reasoned concepts and that all people in the world have to evolve from a symbolic stage of thinking into a philosophical or scientific stage.\(^\text{120}\) Likewise, we should not reduce religious expressions to mere thinking activity.

\(^\text{119}\) *Ibid.*, p.46

It is, in fact, a denial of the tribal people’s humanity. Indeed, it is a complete rejection of the tribal people’s spirituality.

When we say tribal religion, it does not mean the people who practice this religion are in tribal stage of organisation, because the term is not applicable to modern generation. The term is used simply to mean a living religion, practice or belief by many people in different parts of the world, and the religion which still continues to uphold and preserve society. It is still a growing religion.

Tribal people are not inferior mentally, spiritually or in their moral standard. They have intrinsic intelligence, profound thinking and rationalistic ability in their own way. Besides that, the concept of a Supreme Being, of spirits, the relationship of humans and supernatural beings and animals, the world around them and ethical values are very well developed.

2. Hermeneutical Understanding of Tribal Religion

Tribal religion is the most primitive from of religion found in human society. The following are the important characteristics of tribal religion.
The tribal people perceive their Supreme Being as the creator, sustainer and dispenser of the Universe. Belief in the existence of a Supreme Being is common to all the tribal people. Although there are no written dogmas as such, their idea of God and faith in the Supreme Being is well expressed in their traditional songs, myths and folktales. No daily offering of sacrifice is offered to the Supreme Being. The Supreme Being is the ultimate hope of everybody and the source of all wisdom, nourishment and reproduction. Many tribals identify the Supreme Being with the natural objects such as the Sun, the Moon and the Earth.  

L.P. Vidyarthi, in his book, “The Tribal Culture of India” states:

Worship of nature is another form of belief which prevails among the tribals. Sun, Moon and Earth are considered the creator or supreme power.  

The tribal people see the Supreme Being as the creator who is always active, giving life and vitality to all creation. He is the one who protects, upholds, sustains and gives life. The Supreme Being not only created, but also continues to create, and thus the earth continues to be a constant source of fertility for the growth of all vegetation providing food for both animals and humans. The tribals perceive the Supreme Being as involved in the outside and beyond creation. The Supreme Being is personally involved in creation.

---

121 Ibid. 110, p.9
and yet it is outside of him and within his reach. Thus, the Supreme Being is both transcendent and immanent. He is rather manifested in natural objects and phenomena. Natural objects are instruments for worship of the Supreme Being. That is why, with any object, the tribals can turn to the Supreme Being.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.} 110, p.11.}

The whole world is the Supreme Being’s temple. The Supreme Being is an integral part of creation and therefore, cannot be restricted to any location of the earth. This explains why the tribals see the dynamic presence of the Supreme Being in creation. In tribal world-view, creation is the exegesis of the Supreme Being; creation expresses the Supreme Being’s beauty, creativity and presence and in return creation reveals the mysteries of the Supreme Being, and the Supreme Being speaks to people through creation.

People experience the involvement of the Supreme Being not only in terms of his continuing acts of creating, sustaining, providing, nourishing, healing and saving, but also see goodness and activity in his averting calamities, supplying rain, providing fertility to people, cattle, fields and so forth. The tribals consider the rich harvests, prosperity and wealth as blessing from him. The tribals see the Supreme Being as being actively present in all creation. The wind, the sun, the trees, the rivers, all signify the presence of the Supreme Being.
b. The Spirit

Belief in the existence of spirits or spirit occupies the core of tribal religion. Because of this belief, the tribal religion has been categorized by many anthropologists, sociologists and Christian missionaries as animism. They had created an impression that all the spirits are malevolent, mischievous and dangerous. Places like thick forests, rocky mountains, brine springs and lakes, big rocks and trees and other natural objects that appear supernatural or unusual are thought to be the abode of the spirits. These spirits may appear in the dream, by voice, as peculiar shape, as wind, etc. However that is not true. They too have faith in benevolent spirit. The tribal people see two types of spirits working in the cosmic order: the benevolent and malevolent spirits.¹²⁴

i. The Benevolent Spirit

This spirit is generally thought to be the spirit responsible for the welfare and prosperity of the humans. It guards and protects the villages from diseases, pestilence and natural devastations like failure of crops, storms and flood. This spirit not only creates but also sustains and controls the earth. Thus the benevolent spirit is worshipped and people offer sacrifices not out of fear but worship out of reverence and love. If right offerings are not given on time, the spirit might not guard the people. Consequently, disease, epidemics and failure of crops might take place in the village. Hence the spirit must be worshipped through proper sacrifice.

The benevolent spirit creates, sustains and upholds not only humans but also the whole of the Universe. The spirit as indweller brings the earth, the human and the divinity as one community. It is something like the spirit the Bible tells about. The spirit as creator and upholder is rooted in tribal religion. Thus, the presence and working of the spirit in the total creations of god is part and parcel of tribal religious ethos.

ii. Malevolent Spirits

The malevolent spirits are always thought to be dangerous and destructive to all human affairs. These are the spirits, for instance, of person who died in child birth or in pregnancy and infants who die in mother’s womb or before the cleansing ceremony is completed or those who die of accident such as drowning, falling from tree, killed by wild beasts and so on. These spirits are thought to live outside of village, on the roadside, in fields, rivers, ponds, trees and stones. It is believed that all forms of human sufferings such as damage of properties, diseases, accidents of various kinds and madness are attributed to these spirits. Because of these negative elements associated with the spirit, people had to offer sacrifices of domestic animals, food and the libation of rice beer. If this is not done, they are believed to be liable to do all sorts of harm. Thus, many anthropologists, sociologists and Christian missionaries have categorized the tribal religion as animism.\(^{125}\)

\(^{125}\) Ibid. 110, p. 20
Besides benevolent and malevolent spirits, the tribal people give respect to other spirits which are as follows:

### iii. The Ancestors’ Spirit

It is believed that the spirits of the ancestors never depart from the family members. They continue to live with the family members in the form of spirit. They are often invoked for health and for the welfare of the living family members and clan. In all major festivals, a portion of the food is offered to him. Therefore, the worship of ancestor’s spirit forms an integral part of tribal religion.

### iv. Human Spirit

The tribal people believe that all human beings possess a spirit. Some tribes believe that woman possess five spirits and man, six, while each animal and plant possesses only one spirit. This difference made the human distinct from other animal creatures and plants for the tribal. The tribal’s concept of this type of spirit is almost equivalent to understanding of logos in Greek thought. This spirit is understood as a vital force of a person and it is very intimately connected with the human person that it makes the person capable of human activity. It enlivens the body to become part of it. Even when someone is asleep, the spirit does not stop animating the body. The activity of the spirit is felt in the body. It is because of the spirit that a person keeps breathing and does not die. Some

---

people believe that the spirit leaves the body and wanders around while sleeping. That is why, when a person is fast asleep; he or she must not be awakened suddenly but gently. If we do so, the spirit may not have sufficient time to re-enter the body. This is dangerous because a conscious person cannot live without the spirit. In some cases if the spirit remains away too long the person might eventually die.127

v. Animal’s Spirit

The tribals believe that animals have spirit too. It is the spirit that enables animals to move around seeking their food. Animals have a sense of understanding, desire and care because of the presence of spirit in them. It is through the spirits that the animals could multiply in great numbers.

vi. Plant’s Spirit

The tribal people see that the plants have spirit too. The spirit is responsible for the germination of plants, growth and bearing of food. All plants bloom because of the power of spirit. Thus, for the tribals, even the blooming of the trees signifies the presence of spirit.

In conclusion, the tribal people see spirit/spirits in all of the creation. There is nothing on the earth that has not been touched by the spirit/spirits. Hence the tribal people keep in contact with them for prosperous and secured life.

c. Myths

The tribal people do not have a scripture or creed that provides a systematic exposition about their world-view. Their whole religious ethos is embedded in myths, oral history and rituals. Myths teach how the Supreme Being works and reveal his/her mysteries through creation; it uncovers the place of the animal kingdom in this universe. Thus, myths are their scripture and creed. Mircea Eliade defines the myth as “a ‘true story’ and, beyond that, a story that is most precious possession because it is sacred, exemplary, significant”.\(^\text{128}\)

He further elaborates,

*Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial time, the fabled time of the beginnings...Myth tells how through the deeds of Supernatural Beings a reality came into existence, be it, the whole of reality, the cosmos or only fragment of realities – an island, a species of plants, a particular kind of human behaviour, an institution. Myth, then, is always an account of a ‘creation’, it relates how something was produced, began to be. Myth tells only what really happened, which manifested itself completely. The actors in myths are Supernatural Beings.*\(^\text{129}\)


Similarly, David Scott defines,

*A myth is a story that is sacred to and shared by a group of people who find their most important meaning in it; it is a story believed to have been composed in the past about an event in the past, or, more rarely, in the future, an event that continues to have meaning in the present because it is remembered… Myth, then, is a story…about the sorts of questions that religion ask, stories about such things as life after death, supernatural/divine intervention in their lives, transformations, the creation of the world and of human nature and culture – and basically about meaning itself.*

Therefore, the myth becomes the foundation of religion. It contains the religious truth of a particular community. However, if we apply modern scientific methods of analysis while interpreting the tribal myths, their true meaning tends to be dissipated. The use of scientific methods of analysis is crucial in the discernment of the truth, but this is not adequate to uncover the full truth. Therefore, one must go beyond systematizing and classification if we want to grasp the true meaning of the myths, because the whole reality is a totality for the tribals.

131 Ibid. 110, pp.22-23.
d. Magic

The idea of magic probably must have been originated with the Cro-Magnons, the first fully modernized humans who appear in the Upper Paleolithic period. Strong evidence of this belief comes from their cave-art which is centered on south-western France and northern Spain with other sites located in southern Spain, Portugal, Sicily and eastern France.\(^{132}\)

Magic can be defined as a rite and verbal formula projecting human desires into the world on a theory of human control to some practical end. The verbal element in magic is extremely important in some societies, and is regarded as the fundamental constituent, and the believed source of occult power. In Oceanic societies, the form of words is thought to be fixed and invariable, so much so that a mistake in the recital is thought to spoil the effects of magic.

In others, however, particularly in Africa, the form of words is variable and consists rather in a conversational address to the "medicine" (magic-objects or compounds) to perform its work, the occultist modifying his phrases as he sees fit. According to Africans, the power of the magic resides in the medicine rather than the spell.\(^ {133}\)

The term ‘Magic’ has been defined in various ways by different scholars. H. Presler defines magic as;

* A systematic of imaginary laws of cause and effect, supposed to operate regularly through the spell and rituals, which are handed down by tradition, and which presume to manipulate the impersonal power of mana*\(^{134}\)

For author like Stephen Fuchs, magic is the art of manipulating the force of nature by certain techniques and formulae that are outside the nature and if the art is correctly applied the result is supposed to be infallible Hence, magic is an ability to do certain work with the help of spirits. There are at least four different forms of magic: Imitative, contagious, sequential, and divination which will be explained below:

**e. Imitative magic**

In imitative magic, the Magician seeks to bring about an event by symbolically causing it to happen; for example, the ceremonial pouring of water in order to bring rain. Imitative magic is based on the principle that like produces the like.*\(^{135}\)

---

Edward Norbech calls it “imagic magic”, and “symbolic magic” by Stephen Fuchs.\textsuperscript{136}

To perform the magic, the magician makes an effigy resembling the living enemy in shape in wax or some other substance and performs destruction upon the effigy by imitation such as stabbing, mutilating, burning, searing with acid, etc. It is believed that, like the damage done to the effigy, it would similarly affect the body of the enemy through mana power. People believed that the supernatural power controlled by the magician will come about in actuality even without physical contact.\textsuperscript{137} The ultimate aim of this kind of magic is to torture, cause sickness or death of an enemy. Thus, this kind of magic was generally disapproved by the society.

The imitative magic can be applied for white-magic or love-magic too. In this process the magician reproduced the behaviour of the heart-sick lover who is over-whelmed by passion. Being an imitative magic, the magician expresses the same expression of emotion as it is in the real love of a boy, for example for a girl. While performing the magic, the magician may use scents and flowers. Sometimes the magician makes a mixture out of roots or plants or animal parts and puts it in the food.\textsuperscript{138} This magic is also operated in secret and thus considered as anti-social, though white magic is not as dangerous as black magic.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.110. p.75  
\textsuperscript{137} J.H Thumra, op. cit. p.63.  
f. Contagious magic

Contagious magic is based on the idea of association. It is believed that by performing acts on something that is related to or has been in contact with a particular object or being, one may gain control over the original; for example, ceremonial burning of someone’s hair in order to injure them. Contagious magic assumes that things which were once related or in contact continue to be connected.

The contagious magic was done mostly for the purpose of harming someone.

Raghuvir Sinha states the operation of a contagious magic this way:

He manages to procure one of her belongings, a necklace or a garment and identifies it with his beloved. He keeps the object of his magic in a hallow jar of bamboo and plastering it with mud from all sides, put it into some pool, or in the trunk of a tree. He also chants some magical spells at this time. The magic may bear the desired result within a year. If the object is kept under water, it is believed that his/her intestine would get enlarged or some other part of her body may get swollen. If the object is kept in a tree, she may be reduced to skeleton like a barren tree and thus lose her life.\(^{139}\)

It is believed that anything which has once joined together is never separated. There is always sympathetic relation with each other even though they are separated. When

something is done to one, it affects the other. Therefore, any part of a person, like hair, ornaments, comb, nails, etc. can be used by the magician to affect another person.

g. Sequential magic

Sequential magic includes most beliefs and actions dealing with supernatural cause and effect which are neither imitative nor contagious in nature. It operates by assuming that when one event occurs after another, the first must have caused the second and will continue to do so. Most superstitions can be classified as sequential magic. For example, breaking a mirror brings bad luck.

h. Divination

The magic of divination is not concerned with causing or preventing the occurrence of various events. Its aim is to predict. Towards this end, a large variety of devices and procedures are used. Palmistry, for example, uses the lines, size, and shape of the hand. The word ‘divination’ is derived from the Latin word deus or divus meaning ‘a god’ or ‘divine’, and therefore, divination is a practice of fore-telling the future with supernatural aid.\textsuperscript{140} It is believed that through divination, the supernatural reveals the future.

Some of the common practices of divination are as follows:

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.110. p 38.
i. Divination by cock

Divination by strangling cock is one of the commonest forms of divination among the tribals. A cock with a good color combination is cut in the throat and its blood is sprinkled around the earth invoking the name of the spirit or spirits. When the cock dies, the diviner examines the position of the legs and the way the excreta comes down. If the right leg is placed over the left and the excreta comes down on the right side, then the omen is good, but if vice-versa, it is bad. If the legs are parallel and the excreta are passed out, it is not a good omen. However, the worst one is when the position of the legs is in disorder.141

ii. Divination by Bamboo

One method of divination is to split a bamboo and observe its fibers. This is done to detect sickness, loss of properties and so on. In this method, a piece of bamboo is cut in the middle, then it is pulled apart invoking the name of the spirit or spirits until it is split and the fibers come out. Then the position of the fibers is observed. If the right hand is higher than that of the left, it is a good omen, but if it is vice-versa, it is a bad omen. If the bamboo is split without any fiber, it’s a bad omen.142

iii. Divination by Rice

Some Tribals used to make divination by packing out the unbroken grains of rice from a pot by placing them by fives and tens in a pentacle or other fashion. Then, the priest counts it. If in the groups the odd grains predominate, then the omen is good.143

I. Taboo

Taboo is another sacred belief which is rather negative custom of any belief. It has become superstition for the people. Some regard taboo as “holy dread”, an objectified fear of the demonic power thought to be concealed in the tabooed object. Majumdar, a renowned Indian scholar, takes the religious side of taboo as safeguard ritual operations to protect religious persons and places of worship and prevent irreligion from spreading. He further believes that the sanctity of taboo is still inspired by the idea of bonga and when a taboo is violated, the tribal believe, it may result in disaster.

The word taboo comes from the Polynesian dialect which simply means ‘population’. It could mean forbidden activity, something that is not permitted, and something which is against social approval and is disallowed by norms of behaviour. The word taboo was introduced in to the English language by Captain Cook in 1777. According to Henry Presler, taboo or taboos are those “caution established to guard against supernaturally

dangerous things like plants, animals or person especially those who possess *mana*.” Taboo extends to action also. Any act that violates the community norm brings the supernatural penalty. Therefore, the taboo object is not to be violated, seen, touched, heard, smelt and tasted. If violated, the person or community will automatically face the supernatural anger or penalty. A person could become infected with the impersonal supernatural power by touching a plant, animal or any object containing *mana*. It is believed that such power is transmissible. Thus, the infected person or object is as dangerous as the original taboo object. However, taboo can also be avoided by ritual performance. The practice of taboo covers the whole activity of the tribal society. Some of the taboo practices are mentioned below:

i. Taboo related to killing of animals

A man may not kill an animal when his wife is pregnant. A warrior or priest is not allowed to kill any animal while observing taboo. During community taboo days, the whole village is also not allowed to kill any animal. Women are not allowed to eat fish that have no scales such as the stinging cat fish and the butter cat fish.

There are certain taboos which prohibited the killing of animals at certain stages of their life. For example, hunting and keeping traps are not allowed during the breeding seasons. The same rule is applied to hunting pregnant animals also. Fishing and the use of certain

---

144 Ibid. 130., p.10
146 Ibid.
poisonous roots and leaves that kill fishes in the rivers or springs during the spawning season are restricted. If a calf is born or there is a new litter of pigs, or if chickens are hatched in the house, the whole household observes taboo to preserve, dedicate and welcome the life of the new born calf, piglets and chicks. A period ranging from three to six days is devoted to caring and welcoming the new born to the family as the tribals attach great importance to domestic animals. In fact, for the tribals, domestic animals are also part of the family. The observance of taboo is thus applied to all beings regardless of whether they are human or animal. When it comes to agriculture, taboo is observed to ensure good crops and bounteous harvests.

ii. Taboo related to plants

Trees like the banyan, peepul, oak, etc. are protected throughout the tribal land. Cutting these trees is considered to be highly taboo by the tribals. Unless the priest performs the appropriate ritual to gain divine approval these trees were never cut down.

In that way the tribal people pay great respect to trees because they belong to the Supreme Being and the spirit and they are regarded as their indwelling place. Young people were prohibited not only from cutting such trees but they were also not allowed to remove the outer bark of those trees. If they do it, they would displease the spirit indwelling the tree which could cause sudden death or shorten their life span. Young people were even prohibited from transplanting trees like the oak, banyan, etc. because these trees grow fast and become large in size within a short period of time. This
indicates that, for the tribals, trees/forests are not just mere objects to be used, but they are alive and active and thus, must be respected and protected.

The tribals believed in the existence of many spirits, gods and ghosts who dwell in trees, plants, animals and birds and rocks. These spirits are appeased because of the fear that they would destroy the individual, family or the entire village by causing sickness, storms, unnatural death, and so on. Significantly, these beliefs are closely associated with the preservation of the species and the origin of the tribe, thus linking the survival of the community with the preservation of the species. Hence, trees, animals and birds were protected by those cultural values and beliefs.\textsuperscript{147}

iii. Taboo related to sex

In the tribal society, taboo against incest is universal. The strictest form of all incest is sexual relation between a mother and her son, between father and daughter and between brothers and sisters. Any sexual intimacy between these sets of relationship is unthinkable in the tribal society. Many tribal societies consider even clan relationship as incest, though in some tribes it is relaxed. The incest taboo is extended even to immediate kin. It is believed that all the members of a particular clan are related through blood and have to avoid sexual intimacy. The violation of this taboo is punishable, not only by the member of the clan, but by the whole community. It is believed that persons indulging in

such sexual behaviour would invite supernatural anger and punishment. Thus, a couple who commit incest is immediately driven out from the village for fear that their sins would bring divine curse.\textsuperscript{148}

iv. Taboo related to a woman

Women observe a number of taboos. It is taboo for a woman to drink water from a yam leaf during pregnancy. She is also not allowed to eat twin bananas or any creeping plants that bear fruit. She is also not allowed to pick up any fallen eatables whenever she goes out. A woman also maintains taboo during menstruation and childbirth. It is also taboo for a woman to hunt, climb on the roof and carry corpses. Strict taboo is also observed in entering the \textit{morung} (bachelor’s house). Under any circumstances, women cannot enter the \textit{morung}. It is also a taboo for a woman to participate in the funeral of those who die an unnatural death, touch and use the sacred drum, musical instrument, weapons, and they should not go near the head tree.\textsuperscript{149}

v. Taboos related to man

A husband is restricted to kill any animal when his wife is pregnant. He must also abstain from eating honey. Warriors maintain strict taboos while undertaking hunting. They abstain from sexual relations, talking with others and receiving food cooked by others.

\textsuperscript{148} \textit{Ibid.}, 110, p.46.  
\textsuperscript{149} \textit{Ibid.}, 110, p.47.
Even the vessels and weapons they use are sacred and should not be allowed to be touched by anyone else. Men are also tabooed from weaving, husking rice, etc.\textsuperscript{150}

\textbf{vi. Taboos related to certain persons}

Persons like priests and chiefs are considered taboo. They are believed to be charged with mana. Garments, vessels, weapons and other properties which they have used are believed to be taboo. Mourners are also taboo. Persons who handle a corpse or touch a dead body especially of those who die of unnatural deaths are taboo. They cannot enter a house before the cleansing ceremony.\textsuperscript{151}

\textbf{vii. Taboo related to religious observances}

In the tribal religious system, taboo is also observed in every religious act. It is a sacred holiday from work, and a day of rest and prayer. Taboo takes place in different durations and intensity. Some are for one day, others for a few days, a week or more. While some taboo days are observed by the whole village, some are observed by the clan and family only. While observing taboo, people do not talk to strangers. The daily routine work comes to a standstill, nothing goes in or out of the house, no animals or birds are allowed to be killed and sexual contact is to be avoided. Everything is left to rest completely. It is a period of rest for the land, family and community. It is also a period meant for the revitalization of the earth as a whole bringing holistic benefit to the community. Taboos

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 110, p.48.

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 110, p.48.
also provide opportunity for people to be more charitable to themselves and others, to the animals and the plants around them and to the paddy fields.\textsuperscript{152}

Without taboo with its ample rest, the tribal people may not have been able to develop a healthy relation with creation. Taboo, therefore, enriches the whole land and community, along with the flora and fauna.\textsuperscript{153} Such an observance is essential to protect nature from over-exploitation.

A taboo is observed with awareness that it affects the whole community. When the observance of taboo is neglected, it is not only the human community which suffers but even the animals and plants are affected. Taboos are, therefore, the signs that the whole world is interrelated and interconnected. When one part is misused, the whole pattern of life is adversely affected. Thus, the practice of taboo imposes harmony with nature and prudent use of natural resources.

i. Mana

The meaning of mana has been explained in different ways by different scholars. R.H. Cordington defines mana as follows:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{152} \textit{Ibid.}, 110, pp.48-49.
\item \textsuperscript{153} K. Khamrang, K. “Towards an Eco-Theology: Resources in the Primal Religion of the Tangkhul Nagas”, an unpublished M.Th. thesis submitted to the senate of Serampore College, 1990, p.50.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
A force altogether distinct from physical power which acts in all kinds of ways for good and evil, and which it is of the greatest advantage to possess or control... It is a power or influence, not physical, and in a way supernatural, but it shows itself in physical force or in any kind of power or excellence which a man possess.\textsuperscript{154}

Maritt defines mana as “co-extensive immaterial, the unseen force, it works behind the scene. Mana is like an electric current.”\textsuperscript{155} In short, we may say that mana is a supernatural power infused in an object. It could be found in any object such as a peculiar stone, tree or plant. It may also be found in animals and human beings. It is an extraordinary or supernatural power distinct from physical power which a person can possess. However, this power cannot be possessed by any person; it is limited to certain persons only. Certain plants and roots are mana because they are medicinal. Some birds are mana because they do strange things. Mana could be contained in any persons but more particularly in chiefs, priests or people of high birth. Mana flows from high to low and thus can affect others through contact.\textsuperscript{156}

Defining faith in Mana found in tribal society Codrington has pointed out that Mana is, "a force altogether distinct from physical power, which acts in all kinds of ways for good and evil, and which is of the greatest advantage to possess or control." Thus Mana is a

\textsuperscript{156} R.H. Godrington, “The Melanesian”, p.48
supernatural power which is useful to man in the control of many natural phenomena beyond his power. According to Majumdar and Madan, "Entire religious life of the primitives, is born out of their belief in certain understandable, impersonal, non-material and un-individualized supernatural power which takes abode in all the objects, animate and inanimate, that exist in the world." According to Maxmuller, Mana is an attempt to define certain natural phenomena in terms of an impersonal power. The high mountain, the river, the thunder and all other natural phenomena according to the tribal people, act with the power of Mana. This power acts both for good and for bad. It is connected with the soul, ghost of the departed man and the living being.\textsuperscript{157}

\textbf{j. Totem}

The word ‘totem’ comes from the language of the Ojibway Indian tribe of North America which simply means ‘brother-sister kin’. Emile Durkheim in his book, \textit{The Elementary Forms of Religious Life} discusses different aspects of totem manifestations and arrives at a conclusion that totem is an elementary form of religious life.\textsuperscript{158} He sees this as a social and religious institution through which divisions of tribe are believed to be systematically and permanently associated with species of animals, plants and inanimate objects.\textsuperscript{159} A totem signifies a close relationship, blood kinship as between members of a family. A totem, according to J.H. Thumra, is usually “a species of an animal or of plant or insect

\textsuperscript{157} The important features of Indian Tribal Religion, Sourav Pyakurel Articles


\textsuperscript{159} \textit{Ibid.}, pp.124-211.
or bird and very rarely a class of inanimate object, very closely related to a group in that the group is believed to descend from the animal or any of the species."\(^{160}\)

Henry Presler also explains that “a totem is an animal, plant or natural object from which a clan name is derived and with which the sib members feel related, and towards which they display religious attitudes.\(^{161}\) Some of the most common totem animals are tiger, peacock, and tortoise. Cobra, monkey, jackal, dog, deer, cock, buffalo, fish, owl, etc. and the plant totem are like rice, cereal, cucumber, mushroom, etc. A common phenomenon of totem belief is that the clan which traces its origin to such a totem is sometimes named after the totem, and attributes to themselves its supernaturalism. The clan also does not consume the totem as it is sacred for them. It has both social and religious significance and prevails all over the world especially in the tribal areas and among the indigenous people. It signifies the establishment of mystic kinship between the totem and the clan.

Among the tribals in mid-India, there are definite manifestations of the prevalence of totem. R.V. Russel and Raj Bahadur Hari Lal argues that there are about 35 tribes in mid-Indis that bear the sign of totem, viz. among the Mundas, Horo means ‘tortoise’, Hao means ‘red ant’, and among the Oraons, Trikey means ‘red ant’, Tete means ‘small chirping bird te te’, Bisonhorn Marias of Madhya Pradesh have their clan names such as Bakraban meaning ‘goat race’, etc.\(^{162}\) All these indicate the existence of totem. Marriages cannot be contracted among the male and female of the same totem, because they are thought to be having blood relationships.

\(^{160}\) Ibid. p.46
\(^{161}\) H. Presler, op.cit., 28
\(^{162}\) Ibid., p.65.
Totem is the fundamental basis of the religious organization among the tribal. It strengthens community consciousness and brotherhood among the members of the group. It acts as a symbol of group unity. It can undoubtedly be said that totem occupies an important place in tribal religion.

**k. Omen**

The tribal people observe omen meticulously before undertaking anything whether it pertains to such as going on a journey, farming, war or hunting. According to H.H. Presler, omen is “any phenomenon believed to have supernaturally inherent potent”.\(^{163}\) An omen is not an immediate event, it is a warning, an alerting. People look forward for indications and warnings likely to happen in their lives. It is believed that certain animals or birds are charged with mana and meeting these can be a dangerous sign or vice-versa. This observation is called omen.

There are both good and bad omens. Some of the examples of omens are:

i. If lightning strikes a tree on a paddy-field, it is believed that there will be sickness in the household.

ii. If the sun is seen encircled by a rainbow after a shower, it is believed that some rich persons or warriors would die soon in some other village.

iii. If the new moon appears to be red it indicates rainfall.

iv. If a dog barks while circling around with its tail up and curled, then there will be a death soon in the family.

v. While fishing in small rivulets if fishes are seen flopping in the pool, this indicates heavy rain soon.

vi. When a dog climbs on the roof of the house, a misfortune will come to the owner.

vii. If a tree falls without strong wind or storm, an important person in the village is sure to die.

viii. If a pet runs away and takes shelter in somebody else’s house, sickness or death or divorce in the owner’s house is indicated.

ix. If a wild cat crosses a path in front of someone going on a trading expedition, it is believed that the day will bring little luck.

x. The presence of a butterfly in the house indicates the sudden arrival of guests.

xi. If somebody is bitten by a scorpion, it is believed that he will be bitten by a snake too.

xii. If a bird makes a nest in or near the sacrificial posts, it is a sign of rich harvest.\(^\text{164}\)

1. Lycanthropy

Lycanthropy is a very common phenomenon in the tribal society. Lycanthropy simply means transformation of a person into an animal. Physical transformation into a tiger was the commonest among many societies. A person could transform into a tiger and then to human form time to time due to the influence of supernatural power. It is said that while changing into animals for the first time, the person suffers from terrible pain, gnashes teeth, cries and shakes the body beyond control. However, in the subsequent occasion,

e.g. those who had transformed several times could easily turn into tiger and reverse to human without much difficulty. It is also said that some persons possess a tiger permanently as his/her own. In this case the person’s physical body does not change into a tiger. The physical body remains as before, yet a separate tiger distinct from the body exists. However, they are inseparably related to each other. If one is affected, the other is also affected.

According to a case study in Ao Naga, Lycanthropy exists among a particular family or clan. If a tiger-man dies, then the phenomenon reoccurs in one of the blood-related persons. This is somewhat like the reincarnation theory. During the entire stages, a person acquires the inter-relationships with an ordinary insect and ends with a tiger, which is the highest power in the world of lycanthropy.165

m. Religious Functionaries in Tribal Religion

There are three types of religious functionaries166 in the tribal religion. They are:

1) Formally constituted religious functionaries;

2) Informally constituted religious functionaries; and

3) Intermediary religious functionaries

---

165 This case study was conducted by Dr. Lanunungsang, Professor of Sociology in Nagaland University. This essay was originally published in “Journal of Tribal Studies”, Vol IV. No. 1, January-June 2000, pp.32-46.

166 These categories were made by H. Presler. “Primitive Religion in India”, p.84 ff.
n. Formally constituted religious functionaries

The priest, medicine-man, and diviner come under this category. Their roles and functions may be discussed below:

i. **The Priest** – Priests are those who offer prayer and make sacrifices on behalf of the village and community in shrines, sacred groves or any other sacred places. The office of the priest is hereditary among some tribes, while among others the office is on a term basis for a specific period. The priests are normally selected from each clan in each village according to the need of the village. The priests are usually chosen from the elder generation, normally retired people. in this selection, public opinion is normally sought and the selected priest is publicly initiated into the office. Among the priests, one of the priests is again selected as the chief priest.\(^{167}\)

The office of the priest is usually confined to the males alone. They are the chief intermediary between God and human. They act as a medium between the people and their gods, deities and spirits. Their main task is to offer sacrifices at all the festivals and other important occasions in the social and individual life of a tribal. Some of the duties of the priests are as follows:

- **To name children:** The priests offer sacrifice and name the child according to the opinion of grandparents or parents.

• **To offer sacrifice:** Sacrifices of animals like pig, dog, cock, etc. are made to get blessings, prosperity, good health, etc. in one’s life and community.

• **To administer festivals:** Appropriate offerings are made during the celebration of different festivals observed as a sign of giving thanks to God for all that he has done for humans, which are administered by the priests.

• **To conduct marriage ceremonies:** The priests perform marriage ceremony. They kill a cock and a hen to find out the fortune of the couple. They invoke God’s blessing and prosperity upon the life of the married couple.

• **To heal the sick:** The priests are usually called upon whenever a person gets sick in the community. They offer sacrifice to propitiate spirits.

**ii. The Medicine-men**

The medicine-men could be both men and women. They are the specialists in the use of herbal medicines. To heal sickness, they use herbs, plants, leaves, roots as medicine. They also exorcize the evil spirits, combat witchcraft and magic, and warn against
impending dangers. They possess special gifts or power. Many medicine-men are diviners. They are officially recognized and are respected by the community.\textsuperscript{168}

\section*{iii. The Diviners}

The person who carries out the process of divining is called diviner. The role of a diviner is to detect the causes of sickness of a person, natural calamities, future events, etc. Through divination, they also warned the people against the impending events and prescribed the ritual to follow or otherwise to avoid the dangers that are supposed to come.

The office of the diviner is not hereditary. Anyone can become a priest or priestess or a diviner provided he/she knows the techniques of divination and the traditional procedures of propitiating the spirits responsible for the diseases or natural calamities. The diviners in general are regarded and respected in the village by everyone.\textsuperscript{169}

\section*{o. Informally constituted religious functionary (Witchcraft)}

Under this category we may include witch-craft. The practice of witchcraft is considered as evil, dangerous and anti-social. Hence, they operate in secret. Witchcraft is a special type of magic applied for the purpose of harming others. They are believed to possess

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 110, p.101.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 110, p.102.
extraordinary power. It is generally believed that while the witches may be fast asleep physically, the spirits or souls escape from the body and make another person sick or die or cause miscarriage to a pregnant woman. They are believed to be in league with forgotten spirits, demons and ghosts. Those evils teach different kinds of black art to harm others. The practice of witchcraft is strongly condemned by the society. Thus, it is categorized as informally constituted religious functionary.\(^{170}\)

**p. Intermediary religious functionary (Shamanism)**

Shamanism comes under this category. Shamans claim to be in league with gods, spirits, etc. through whose help the shamans could do extraordinary works. A common phenomenon of shamanism is that they often reach an ecstatic state; it is during this ecstatic period that their souls wander through other worlds and acquire super-human power and knowledge. Shamans are not magicians and they simply derived their power from any supernatural being. Their knowledge of the spirit would help them to act as an intercessor between the spirit and human by means of prayer and chants to defend their employer from danger and peril, as well as to bless with fortune. In general, the shamans acted as mediator between the living and ancestor’s spirit. The shamans have considerable influence in the society. They do get involve in healing work yet their method of finding the cause of any kind of misfortune or diseases is by means of taking

omen and divination, but not by magic. Thus, the function of shaman is considered an intermediary religious functionary.\textsuperscript{171}

\textbf{C. Tribal Culture from a Moral Perspective}

We humans are recognized as unique species, capable of both incredible compassion and unequaled brutality. We are also unique in the degree to which we congregate in social communities. Social Psychologists refer to this propensity to gather as we do, as being ultra-social. Unlike other ultra-social species (e.g., wasps, ants, bees, termites, and naked mole rats) who band together in kin-based groups for procreation, we humans join together for other more complex reasons.\textsuperscript{172} Those things that bind us, it is argued, are also the things that fuel our brutality.

We are particularly good at joining together when in competition with other groups. Evidence suggests that this has been true since the very beginning of humankind, and it is evidenced today by family loyalty (e.g., I can bad mouth my brother but an outsider cannot). There is substantial evidence to believe that this proclivity to be drawn together, and at the same time, to be divided, is driven by morality. We humans have evolved, it seems, innate moral values that transcend all cultures.

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., \textit{110}, pp.102-103.
Survival of the group is of paramount importance in tribal community. Without secular means of control (police, etc.), ways must be found to make group members adhere strictly to codes of conduct. Tribal people have developed communal ways of coping with the world, embodied in religious traditions they are fearful of changing. In many basic areas moral standards are much the same throughout the world. Lying, cheating, stealing, and murder are generally forbidden. But often those rules apply only within the group. Generally a sense of conscience is aroused only when some disaster occurs. If it is felt that an illness, for example, is the result of a wicked deed, then the person will repent before the god.

Tribal morality is thus largely a matter of transactions, of acting in ways that will benefit the self and the community. Also, although tribal men are not devoid of natural feelings of love, their morality is largely legalistic. "Sins” are usually a matter of overstepping concrete rules, even when the reason for those rules is not understood.

1. Understanding the Tribal Morality

Indigenous and tribal people have their own cultures, ways of life, traditions and customary laws. But throughout history, lack of respect for these cultures has led to social conflict and bloodshed in far too many cases around the world.
During the two million years of human development, tribes were isolated, and the entire worldwide populations of the tribal were quite small. Each tribe developed genetic and social differences. These differences were in both outward appearance and inner neural mechanisms. Each tribe developed unique behaviors, dress, customs and speech. In some cases the difference was so marked as to become racial rather than ethnic differences. Each tribe was economically isolated and self-sufficient. Although some trade between tribes was probable, it was inconsequential to the survival of the tribe. Even then tribal conflict was common and, in fact, may have been a major factor in the intellectual and social development of the human during that period.

Tribes still exist, though now swollen in population and geographically overlapping. Some geographic areas contain many tribes within the same boundaries. Geographic isolation, once so necessary for controlling conflict, has essentially disappeared with huge overlapping populations and modern transportation. Communication has become even more chaotic with the advent of voice, video and digital communication via the internet and satellites. Different languages and customs, as well as other tribal behaviors, become quite troublesome, the human struggles, often violently, to retain its individual tribal identity. As the population expands, tribal conflict can only become worse.

Within the human sub-cultures across the earth there is a chaotic mixture of personal behavior systems. All descended from ancient tribal cultures and are based on opinion, conjecture, spirituality, philosophy, imagination, political ideology and other forms of
dogma. Since the bases of these behavioral systems are variable, the resulting behaviors are also variable. These differences in behavior can be quite severe. Acceptable behavior in one sub-culture is often viewed with loathing by another. Individual movement between sub-cultures can be quite difficult, often requiring several generations to make the transition. If an individual moves into one sub-culture from another sub-culture and makes no attempt to change his behavior to match the new, he remains an outcast. Due to variations in language and behavioral systems, worldwide human interaction and communication suffers, often to the point of warfare. The productivity (intellectual advancement, invention) of the species is thereby diminished by the amount of intellectual assets lost in dealing with these variations, a loss that could be eliminated through a uniform ethical and moral behavior system

2. How Different Cultures have Different Moral Codes

Darius, a king of ancient Persia, was intrigued by the variety of cultures he encountered in his travels. He had found, for example, that the Callatians (a tribe of Indians) customarily ate the bodies of their dead fathers. The Greeks, of course, did not do that—the Greeks practiced cremation and regarded the funeral pyre as the natural and fitting way to dispose off the dead. Darius thought that a sophisticated understanding of the world must include an appreciation of such differences between cultures. One day, to teach this lesson, he summoned some Greeks who happened to be present at his court and asked them what they would take to eat the bodies of their dead fathers. They were shocked, as Darius knew they would be, and replied that no amount of money could
persuade them to do such a thing. Then Darius called in some *Callatians*, and while the Greeks listened, asked them what they would take to burn their dead fathers' bodies. The *Callatians* were horrified and told Darius not even to mention such a dreadful thing.

This story, recounted by Herodotus in his History, illustrates a recurring theme in the literature of social science: different cultures have different moral codes.173

What is thought right within one group may be utterly abhorrent to the members of another group, and vice-versa. Should we eat the bodies of the dead or burn them? If you were a Greek, one answer would seem obviously correct; but if you were a *Callatian*, the opposite would seem equally certain. It is easy to give additional examples of the same kind. Consider the Eskimos tribes. They are a remote and inaccessible people. Numbering only about 25,000, they live in small, isolated settlements scattered mostly along the northern fringes of North America and Greenland. Until the beginning of this century, the outside world knew little about them. Then explorers began to bring back strange tales.

Eskimo customs turned out to be very different from our own. The men often had more than one wife, and they would share their wives with guests, lending them for the night as

---

a sign of hospitality. Moreover, within a community, a dominant male might demand—and get—regular sexual access to other men's wives. The women, however, were free to break these arrangements simply by leaving their husbands and taking up with new partners—free, that is, so long as their former husbands chose not to make trouble. All in all, the Eskimo practice was a volatile scheme that bore little resemblance to what we call marriage. But it was not only their marriage and sexual practices that were different. The Eskimos also seemed to have less regard for human life. Infanticide, for example, was common.

Knud Rasmussen, one of the most famous early explorers, reported that he met one woman who had borne twenty children but had killed ten of them at birth. Female babies, he found, were especially liable to be destroyed, and this was permitted simply at the parents' discretion, with no social stigma attached to it. Old people also, when they became too feeble to contribute to the family, were left out in the snow to die. So there seemed to be, in this society, remarkably little respect for life.\(^{174}\)

To the general public, these were disturbing revelations. Our own way of living seems so natural and right that for many of us it is hard to conceive of others living so differently. And when we do hear of such things, we tend immediately to categorize those other peoples as "backward" or "primitive." But to many thinkers, there was nothing

particularly surprising about the Eskimos. Since the time of Herodotus, enlightened observers have been accustomed to the idea that conceptions of right and wrong differ from culture to culture. If we assume that our ideas of right and wrong will be shared by all peoples at all times, we are merely naïve.

To many thinkers, this observation “Different cultures have different moral codes” has seemed to be the key to understanding morality. The idea of universal truth in ethics, they say, is a myth. The customs of different societies are all that exist. These customs cannot be said to be "correct" or "incorrect," for that implies we have an independent standard of right and wrong by which they may be judged. But there is no such independent standard; every standard is culture-bound.

The great pioneering sociologist William Graham Sumner, writing in 1906, put the point like this:

*The "right" way is the way which the ancestors used and which has been handed down. The tradition is its own warrant. It is not held subject to verification by experience. The notion of right is in the folkways. It is not outside of them, of independent origin, and brought to test them. In the folkways, whatever is, is right. This is because they are traditional, and*
therefore contain in themselves the authority of the ancestral ghosts. When we
come to the folkways we are at the end of our analysis.¹⁷⁵

This line of thought has probably persuaded more people to be skeptical about ethics than
any other single thing. Cultural Relativism, as it has been called, challenges our ordinary
belief in the objectivity and universality of moral truth. It says in effect, that there is no
such thing as universal truth in ethics; there are only the various cultural codes, and
nothing more. Moreover, our own code has no special status; it is merely one among
many. As we shall see, this basic idea is really a compound of several different thoughts.
It is important to separate the various elements of the theory because, on analysis, some
parts of the theory turn out to be correct, whereas others seem to be mistaken.

We may distinguish the following claims, all of which have been made by cultural
relativists:

1. Different societies have different moral codes.

2. There is no objective standard that can be used to judge one societal code better
   than another.

3. The moral code of our own society has no special status; it is merely one among
   many.

4. There is no "universal truth" in ethics—that is, there are no moral truths that hold
   for all peoples at all times.

5. The moral code of a society determines what is right within that society; that is, if the moral code of a society says that a certain action is right, then that action is right, at least within that society.

6. It is mere arrogance for us to try to judge the conduct of other peoples. We should adopt an attitude of tolerance toward the practices of other cultures.

Although it may seem that these six propositions go naturally together, they are independent of one another, in the sense that some of them might be true even if others are false on a comparative basis of practices in different cultural settings.

3. Tribal Discrimination – A Moral Analysis

Our understanding and knowledge of the world owes a lot to man’s ability to see differences or to discriminate. To many people there is a nasty ring to the word ‘discrimination’. The context to which we most frequently encounter is that of racial discrimination, and “racial discrimination” is generally taken to mean something like ‘treating people differently simply on the grounds of their racial differences.’ As such, it is generally and quite rightly regarded as objectionable. But what is wrong here is the particular practice of excluding a group of people from various advantages simply because of their race.176 We can critically examine and see a clear picture from the discriminations that are taking place in India for decades, since independence.

During the last years of British rule in India, there raged a passionate controversy about the policy to be adopted vis-à-vis the aboriginal tribes. While anthropologically minded administrators advocated a policy of protection, which in specific cases involved even a measure of seclusion, Indian politicians attacked the idea of segregation and seclusion on the grounds that it threatened to deepen and perpetuate divisions within the Indian nation, and delayed the aboriginals' integration with the rest of the population. Today this controversy, though occasionally revived in newspaper articles and political speeches, has largely abated. It has become obvious that, on the one hand, a measure of integration is coming about automatically even in protected regions such as Arunachal Pradesh, but that, on the other hand, compulsory integration, even if rapidly progressing, has rarely benefited the tribals in the sense of assuring them a satisfactory place in the wider Indian society.

The protagonists of integration usually ignore the fact that there exists no homogeneous Indian society with which tribal groups could merge by adopting a standard cultural pattern. The so-called advanced Indian society, with its linguistic, religious, and caste divisions, is far from uniform, and it has never been specified into which of the numerous divisions any particular tribal group could be integrated. India's tribal population is equally divided, for its heterogeneity extends to race, language, and cultural levels, quite apart from its scattered distribution over numerous disparate environments.177

Tribal people have always been there in our country, yet most of the people here are unaware of their existence or are simply ignorant towards their existence and their customs. The surprising thing is that Indian tribals are not backward — as many of us might assume; instead, their beliefs and thoughts resemble the city people. There is no system of dowry, no caste division, even divorce and widow remarriage are socially accepted among them. They are an exemplary society when it comes to social practices, yet they lead a life of poverty and discrimination.\footnote{Youth Ki Awaaz, (http://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2011/01/tribals-in-india-current-status-and-treatment-given-by-public/)}

Even before the British took over our country, the tribal populations were looked upon as wild, barbaric and unruly. Then they were treated as untouchables and this practice still exists in many parts of our country. Independence in 1947 did not bring about any difference in their lives. Instead, because of absence of any monetary funds, these people had to leave their native places in search for work which led to the loss of their rich heritage. Many of these places today are converted into holiday destinations and resorts by contractors who are driving out the tribals and taking away their resources. Those people that have escaped such fates and still continue to make artifacts, like masks, paintings, wood cutting, get meager prices for their products even though the artifacts are generally sold for large sums of money as most of it is pocketed by the middle-men. The state of the tribal people in the city is even worse; they live as daily-wage earners and endure hardships all their lives. This neglect on the part of the nation for a fraction of its population is the reason of uprisings such as Naxalism.
A recent incident in this light took place in Maharashtra, when nearly 1,960 tribals were imprisoned for demanding ration cards. They had been asking for a ration card and the implementation of the Forest Rights Act to help them claim the land they had been tilling. People from 28 villages from the Nandurbar district had gone to the collector’s office on December 13 and submitted a charter of demands. But they failed to get an assurance from the authorities; hence they staged a demonstration outside the collector’s office for two days. The tribals were protesting peacefully till the collector called up the police and got the whole group arrested. They were then produced before the court where all of them were sent to judicial custody for 7 days despite the fact that many of them were women.  

The attitude of the Government of India and the various state governments to the tribal languages is ambivalent.  

In Andhra Pradesh, the use of Gondi as the medium of instruction in primary schools for Gond children was abandoned, and since the breakup of Hyderabad State no more books in Gondi have been printed. The Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission set up by the Government of India in 1960 under Article 339 of the Constitution severely criticized the reluctance of state governments to satisfy the tribals’ demand for primary education in their own languages. Under Article 350A of the Constitution, every state must  

---

endeavour to provide children of minority groups with adequate facilities for
instruction in their mother tongue at the primary stage of education, but the
commission pointed out that some of the states had taken this matter very
casually, and failed to provide textbooks in even the major tribal
languages.\textsuperscript{180}

The voluminous publications issued by the office of the commissioner for scheduled
castes and scheduled tribes and other agencies concerned with tribal welfare contain very
little information on the problem of tribal languages, and it is difficult to avoid the
conclusion that politicians and officials alike regard their ultimate disappearance as
inevitable and even desirable in the interest of the integration of the tribes with the
majority communities.

Even considering tribal religion;

\textit{For many years the factor of religion was a criterion by which the tribes were
distinguished from such communities as Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, or
Christians. Until 1931 millions of aboriginals were written in the census
reports as adherents of tribal religions, but in more recent census reports
tribal religions were not separately listed but were included under the head
"Others."}\textsuperscript{181}

\textsuperscript{180} \textit{Ibid.} 173, p.316.
\textsuperscript{181} \textit{Ibid.} p. 317.
Tribal religions are clearly not as easily definable as Islam or Buddhism, and whereas no doubt usually exists whether a person is a Muslim or an adherent of a tribal religion, it is not so easy to distinguish between some tribal cults and certain types of popular Hinduism.\textsuperscript{182}

It can easily be seen that in our country the tribals are discriminated against their will, but we forget that by doing this we not only lose rich heritage and skills that have no parallel in the world, but also the knowledge of how to live peacefully with nature, the way tribal people have been living for many centuries.

4. Moral Exploitation and Unrest of the tribes

For ages tribals are considered primitive segment of Indian society. They lived in forests and hills without any contact with civilizations. During British rule they consolidated their position and their political aspirations and administrative needs necessitated to open up the entire country. The British introduced the system of landownership and revenue. Annual tax was trebled which was beyond the paying capacity of tribal cultivators. Many non-tribals began to settle in the tribal areas offering credit facilities. Initially it provided relief to tribals, but gradually the system became exploitative. Over the years the tribal population faced all types of exploitation. This aroused the tribal leaders to mobilize the tribals and start agitations.

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid. p. 318.
Thus it is the cumulative result of a number of factors.\textsuperscript{183}

a. Indifference from administrators and bureaucracy in dealing with tribal grievances.

b. Harsh and unfriendly forest laws and regulations.

c. Lack of legislation to prevent the passing of tribal land into the hands of non-tribals.

d. Lack of credit facilities.

e. Ineffective government measures to rehabilitate tribal population.

f. Delay in implementation of recommendations of different committee

g. Discrimination in implementation of reform measures

\textbf{a. Problems Faced by the Tribals in India – A Critical Analysis}

\textbf{i. Land Alienation}

The history of land alienation among the tribes began during British colonialism in India when the British interfered in the tribal region for the purpose of exploiting the tribal natural resources. Coupled with this tribal lands were occupied by moneylenders, zamindars and traders by advancing them loans etc. Opening of mines in the heart of tribal habitat and even a few factories provided wage labor as well as opportunities for factory employment. But this brought increasing destitution and displacement. After the British came to power, the Forest policy of the British Government was more inclined

towards commercial considerations rather than human. Some forests were declared as reserved ones where only authorized contractors were allowed to cut the timber and the forest-dwellers were kept isolated deliberately within their habitat without any effort to ameliorate their economic and educational standards.

The expansion of railway in India heavily devastated the forest resources in India. The Government started reserving teak, Sal and deodar forests for the manufacture of railway sleepers. Forest land and its resources provide the best means of livelihood for the tribal people and many tribes including the women engage in agriculture, food gathering and hunting they are heavily dependent on the products of the forest. Therefore, when outsiders exploit the tribe's land and its resources the natural life-cycle of tribal ecology and tribal life is greatly disturbed.

ii. Poverty and Indebtedness

Majority tribes live under poverty line. The tribes follow many simple occupations based on simple technology. Most of the occupation falls into the primary occupations such as hunting, gathering, and agriculture. The technology they use for these purposes belong to the most primitive kind. There is no profit and surplus making in such economy. Hence there per capita income is very meager much lesser than the Indian average. Most of them live under abject poverty and are in debt in the hands of local moneylenders and Zamindars. In order to repay the debt they often mortgage or sell their land to the
moneylenders. Indebtedness is almost inevitable since heavy interest is to be paid to these moneylenders.

iii. Health and Nutrition

In many parts of India tribal population suffers from chronic infections and diseases out of which water borne diseases are life threatening. They also suffer from deficiency diseases. The Himalayan tribes suffer from goiter due to lack of iodine. Leprosy and tuberculosis are also common among them. Infant mortality was found to be very high among some of the tribes. Malnutrition is common and has affected the general health of the tribal children as it lowers the ability to resist infection, leading to chronic illness and sometimes to brain impairment. The ecological imbalance like cutting of trees have increased the distances between villages and the forest areas thus forcing tribal women to walk longer distances in search of forest produce and firewood.

iv. Education

Educationally the tribal population is at different levels of development, but overall the formal education has made very little impact on tribal groups. Earlier Government had no direct program for their education. But in the subsequent years the reservation policy has made some changes. There are many reasons for low level of education among the tribal people: Formal education is not considered necessary to discharge their social obligations. Superstitions and myths play an important role in rejecting education. Most
Tribes live in abject poverty. It is not easy for them to send their children to schools, as they are considered extra helping hands. The formal schools do not hold any special interest for the children. Most of the tribes are located in interior and remote areas where teachers would not like to go from outside.

v. Cultural Problems

Due to contact with other cultures, the tribal culture is undergoing a revolutionary change. Due to influence of Christian missionaries the problem of bilingualism has developed which led to indifference towards tribal language. The tribal people are imitating western culture in different aspects of their social life and leaving their own culture. It has led to degeneration of tribal life and tribal arts such as dance, music and different types of craft.