enslavement. This dichotomy has been often conceived because it is possible that contemplatives turn out to be recluse, confined to themselves and their comforts and conveniences under the pretext of personal salvation.\textsuperscript{391} This is a deviation and not a model of genuine contemplative spirituality. The whole ashram movement in Hinduism and Christianity developed in India and elsewhere seems to be alien to the tribal society.

The liberative form of spirituality can be understood in contrast to the traditional contemplative spirituality mentioned above. Emerging in modern times, the strong trend of spirituality called as liberative is attributed to this because the characteristic tone of this spirituality is powerful determination to liberate the oppressed, irrespective of caste, colour and creed.\textsuperscript{392} If it is assumed that for the tribal people like Oraons of Chotanagpur and others elsewhere, the ‘ashram’ movement and so also contemplative spirituality is alien, a detailed discussion on liberative spirituality underlying them is called for. Some of the elements may be common in both categories whereas different processes may be discerned. Of several important elements, reliance on the Power of the Spirit\textsuperscript{393}, commitment to justice, community-centeredness, dependency on land, forest and water, anti-greed attitude, human-nature-spirit continuum, equality between men and women and so on can be discerned. Some of the main characteristics of this spirituality are outlined in the following section.

4.2.1.3 The Liberative Spirituality of the Indigenous / Primal People

4.2.1.2.3 Reliance on the Power of the Spirit

Liberative spirituality emerges from the power of the Spirit which, once awakened, becomes both fearless and articulate (Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:16-24). It upholds a great spirit of tapas in the sense of determination to live with the oppressed, to participate in their struggle and starvation. In the light of the above famous Nazareth manifesto of Jesus (Luke 4:16-20) effort can be made up to what extent the primal people depend on the power of the spirit.

\textsuperscript{391}\textit{Ibid.} p.116
\textsuperscript{392}\textit{Ibid.} p.117
\textsuperscript{393}\textit{Ibid.} 117-119
The powerful spirit or the Supreme Being in the Sarna\textsuperscript{394} tradition of Chotanagpur has been described as ‘self-created’\textsuperscript{(Dalton)}; ‘the creator and sustainer of the universe’\textsuperscript{(Joseph Troisi)}; ‘maker, master and fosterer of all things living and inanimate’\textsuperscript{(J.B.Hoffmann)}\textsuperscript{395}. He is the author and preserver, controller and punisher of men, gods and spirits- of all that exists in the visible and invisible universe (S.C. Roy); He is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. His actions have lasting effect. He is the source of life… (He) existed before world or life started (Van Exem); ‘in purely philosophical terms he would be called the First Cause of all that is… (Ponette)\textsuperscript{396}.

In almost all of the tribal communities of Chotanagpur the Supreme Being is considered to be an ‘old man’ when conceived in human form\textsuperscript{397}. In this human form only he taught human beings how to prepare rice-beer, how to participate and how to make the plough share. As an old man, symbolizing wisdom, He offered them the knowledge of time, the means of avoiding evils, the cure of disease and the ways to lead an ethical life. In support of their cherished value system practiced in every sphere of life these peoples always refer to this ‘old man’. In the myths he is depicted with white hair and beard, who in some cases, rides white horses.

Indigenous scholars opined that in myths the Supreme Being/God has been shown as an uncreated Man, who makes his appearance unexpectedly- he comes from somewhere else\textsuperscript{398}.

The Supreme Being is variously named by various tribes-\textit{Ponomosor, Bero-Lerang, Sakhi Gosai} by Kharias; \textit{Singbonga, Marang Buru} by Mundas and Hos; \textit{Chando Baba, Thakur Jiv} by Santals and \textit{Dharmes} by Oraons\textsuperscript{399}. Indigenous Theologians affirm the name of Supreme Being as \textit{Thakur Jiv} by Santals that may mean either ‘God the Spirit’ or the ‘Spirit worthy of

\textsuperscript{394} By \textit{Sarna} meant the traditional religion of the indigenous people of Chotanagpur, the homeland of Oraon, Munda, Ho, Santals and others.


\textsuperscript{399} \textit{Ibid.}; S. Basumallick, \textit{OP.cit.p.75}. 
worship’. The creator God named as *Thakur Jiv* is essentially a spiritual power/force, *Jiv*, its meaning being equivalent to Greek *Pneuma* or Hebrew *ruah*. Similarly Oraon Supreme Being *Dharmes*, being the creator God, is never represented by sacred stones unlike other spirits. He is understood to be beyond any material representation. Oraons further believe that the *pachhalar* (ancestors) and the spirits are concerned with the welfare of the living and act as guardians of nature respectively.

The Supreme Being is never addressed as Father or Lord except among the Oraons during the *Danda Katta* ceremony. He is addressed as grandfather. To take God as a grandfather and human beings as his grandchildren has a great significance. It signifies close friendship of God just like the grandparents and grandchildren are related.

When Primal religions traditions are studied from the perspective of common structure of religion across the African continent and sometimes beyond, fourfold pattern are identified viz. Supreme Being, divinities, ancestors and objects of power. While studying the place of prayer among them, Alwyrd Shorter distinguishes six distinct types of religion, related to the way in which prayer is directed – ‘strict theism’, ‘relative theism’, relative deism’. In the first category falls ‘strict theism’ in which, as with the Meru and the Pygmies of the central rain forest, the Supreme Being is experienced directly in life and worshipped directly in prayer. Even where there is little or no formal worship of the Supreme Being is arranged, its power and presence are acknowledged in life. It reflects the difference in degree of reverence given to Supreme Being, but some way or other His presence is felt. Similarly the

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403 Virginius Xaxa, "Oraons: Religion and Customs" OP cit, p.102
404 P.Kullu, *OP cit*, p.19
406 Alwyrd Shorter referred to in Ibid, p.255.
belief in Supreme Being and His role in creation and liberation of the people are acknowledged in North American Indian religions.\textsuperscript{407}

From the perspective of liberation of the oppressed, the Oraon creation myths depict Dharmes, the Supreme Being as liberator. First Dharmes liberates the earth (land) from the defilement of human beings. Second, by his saving act he liberated human beings from starvation (poverty) by protecting their crop from harmful insects. Fourth, he taught them how to do things, especially by giving them knowledge of days he liberated them from ignorance. Fifth, by removing the marriage impediment, he established the sacred institution, and thus human beings multiplied.\textsuperscript{408}

\textbf{4.2.1.2.2 Commitment to justice}

In the liberative spirituality suffering in this world, especially suffering of the masses and the poor is taken very seriously and solutions are at least proposed, and in many cases actions planned and executed. This would demand serving the wounded and rejected members of the society, but also to make effort to put a stop to ongoing structures responsible for the marginalization of certain segment of the society. This would also require strong emphasis on enhancing community consciousness and preparing the people for group action.\textsuperscript{409} In other words this spirituality would include openness and commitment to reality. This draws inspiration from the liberative struggles in the Sacred Scriptures, the cry for justice to the poor by the prophets, people’s own tradition and the promises of the Lord, this becomes a spiritual movement set for liberating both the oppressed and the oppressors, preparing the way for a new earth and new heaven.\textsuperscript{410}

Liberative spirituality with concern for justice is a noble cause involving great risks to one’s own life and conveniences. But being community-oriented this underlines the thought that unjust structures established by traditions can be overcome only by the collective power of society. This spirituality should be understood as intrinsic to action for liberation from


\textsuperscript{409} V.F. Vineeth, \emph{Op.cit} p. 117.

\textsuperscript{410} Ibid.p.111.
various types and degrees of oppression and exploitation, the Oraons and others have been subjected to.\textsuperscript{411} Such spirituality is bound up with life and all that life involves; freedom and food, dignity and equality, community and sharing of resources, creativity and celebration of the God of life and liberation.\textsuperscript{412}

Did the Oraons and other tribes struggle against injustice, or have they kept silence compromising with the situation? Never! They put resistance to the British rule and revival movements began to mobilize people for joint action. When the people of Chotanagpur understood the ill intention of the British and that their freedom, peace and autonomy were in danger, so they took up arms. Insurrection and revolt became the rule of the day.\textsuperscript{413} Starting from 1796 at Rahe and Bundu near Ranchi, continuing through 1797 at Munda revolt of Tamad, 1798-99 of Manbhum, in 1800, the Cheros and Kherwas revolt against British, five thousand Mundas revolt in 1807, the 1812, thus went up to 1915. The Kol Rebellion(1831-32), Ganga Narayan revolt(1834), Santhal revolt(1855-56), the Mutiny(1857), Sardar movement(1875-95), Birsa movement(1895-1900), Tana Bhagat movement(1914-15) are some of the major expressions of the smoldering anger and resentment against the British and their agents in the period.\textsuperscript{414}

These revolts and movements had some new dimensions. They were directed against the middlemen, zamindars, mahajans government officials and the British colonists at large. They aimed at re-establishing their own ethnic raj. Among the above Sapha Hor movement, Birsa movement and Tana Bhagat movements were initiated with socio-religious reform within the tribal society\textsuperscript{415} in order to bring tribal solidarity for unified struggle against injustice.\textsuperscript{416}

\textsuperscript{411} For a detailed discussion on the exploitation and oppression of the Oraons and other tribles, see above at 3.1.3.
\textsuperscript{414} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{415} Manmasih Ekka "Background and Emergence of Neo-Religious Movements in Chotanagpur", Unpublished research paper SATHRI, Bangalore, 1992.
Here a qualitative change in the political ethos and attitude of the indigenous people is found. Now they were fighting against imperialism, feudalism and other exploitative agents to revive their age old autonomy and freedom, but their political vision and organizations were too weak and limited to fight out the enemy. The stringent laws were imposed. The militant tribals claiming for a separate State of Jharkhand were divided into different groups: tribals-non-tribals (Diku), Christians-non-Christian, zamindars – rayats and so on. However, the enactment of Wilkinson Rule(1837), Santal Pargana Tenancy Act (1912) and Chotanagpur Tenancy Act(1908) resulted from Adivasi revolts that could save alienation of their land to some extent.

The fifty years long struggle for a separate State of Jharkhand was materialized on 15th November 2000. But the continuation of exploitation and marginalization of tribals even after a new State formation as after the Indian independence calls for continuous struggle to overcome injustice, division and imposed poverty. The continuation and intensifying of people’s movement against Netarhat Field Firing Range and against Koel-Karo Mega Hydro-electricity Project in Jharkhand are some of the examples that justify the people’s struggle for justice. The then Director, Tribal Research and Training Centre, Chaibasa, Fr. Matthew Areeparampi correctly identified the Jharkhandis Forest movement in Singhbhum against planting of teak and commercialization of forests. Dhan kato andolan, or forcible harvesting of paddy in Dhanbad, Giridih, Santhal Parganas and Lohardaga areas for getting back the rights over the lands illegally taken away from the tribals by money lenders, mahajans and other exploitative elements as people’s struggle for humans rights. Similarly movements against construction of big dams like Koel-Karo, Subarnarekha, Kutku etc. and movements against large-scale alienation (both legal and illegal) of tribal land continue with even greater intensity.

Human rights issue is central to the process of liberation from economic and socio-political injustice and for historic-utopian liberation in Latin American context of Liberation theology\textsuperscript{421} or that elsewhere in the world. Rather it would be appropriate to say that tribals are not tired of struggle against injustice just as Minjung, the oppressed people of Korea and like the blacks of South Africa. Santals and other tribes are active agents of their own liberation. Conceptualization of Liberation Theology in fact takes struggles as central concern.\textsuperscript{422}

Tribals of India, like elsewhere, voice their concern of justice collectively beginning from 1993, which was declared as the International year of the Indigenous People. This is done every year on 9\textsuperscript{th} August and reminds the world about their demands.\textsuperscript{423} Justice implies punishment to the wrongdoers that is observed/executed by traditional tribal panchayats, without first going to law courts.\textsuperscript{424} For tribals justice always means justice for the community. What is generally called ‘social justice’ is central in the Biblical religion and spirituality.\textsuperscript{425}

Justice is related to peace. 'There is no peace without justice' is being asserted repeatedly. The question arises, do the tribals love peace? It is important to read about 'criminal tribes' at some points of history.\textsuperscript{426} However, this may not be justice to generalize it. Further, quite often there are reports of 'Tribal insurgency' in North East India, particularly in Nagaland and neighbouring States which the people consider as their voices for justice. In recent times, the formation of three tribal states, namely Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand in 2000 as a result of about fifty years demand for a separate State of Jharkhand may be understood as the partial fulfillment of people’s quest for justice. By implication, those who struggle for justice, they are lovers of peace.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{423} Nita Mishra & Arundhati Roy Choudhury. "Voices of the Indigenous People"
\item \textsuperscript{424} B. P. Kesari. "Development of Political Organization," pp. 120-123.
\item \textsuperscript{426}H. H. Presler. \textit{Primitive Religions in India}, Madras: CLS, 1971
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
4.2.1.2.3 Community-centeredness

African and Asian spirituality emphasizes the truth which the Bible too underscores that the "earth and its resources are not for the benefit of a few persons, nor for the benefit of one, -- our -- generation alone. They are for the good of the whole humankind, including those yet to be born". The community centered spirituality and non-acquisitive sobriety. It promotes 'being more' in shared fellowship rather than 'having more' in individualistic accumulation. This new life is made possible by community control of the common material basis of life and by responsible use of the earth's resources for the good of the whole human family.

In the indigenous tribal context a person is defined in terms of the group to which he or she belongs. This sense of community is gained through the family, the lineage, the clan, and the tribe. Among many tribals the family is not simply made up of father, mother and children and grand children and also his brothers and sisters with their wives and children, his nephew and nieces, in a word, all those persons who descend from a common ancestor.

In the growing trend of market economy and individualism, the present depiction of tribal society with communitarian spirituality may be suspected with romanticizing. But even today many indigenous people continue to draw energy and inspiration from their cosmic religiousness in their struggles and protests against anti-cosmic/anti-human forces of capitalism and imperialism. This spirituality has another advantage which can be absent from contemplative spirituality of the historical religious traditions. Unlike religiosities that promote "other worldliness" which prevents or tends to prevent the emergence of a socially engaged spirituality and praxis, African-Asian indigenous spirituality promotes a "this worldliness" and commitment to history. This type of spirituality would imply respect for the earth and her resources as per need and avoid greed. It has planetary dimensions calling for sharing of land and its resources among all people.

428 Ibid.
The relations extending beyond a nuclear family, a person is complete only in so far as he/she is part of the community. In tribal society, there is no individual life as such. For example, there are no individual dances. All their songs and dances are meant for common singing.\(^{431}\) As for the authority of the songs and dances too, there are generally no individual authors-nobody knows how much songs and dances have come into being. Community authorship behind the tribal songs and dances may be deduced. In addition to the above, tribals live, work, suffer and die in solidarity with one another. Sick in the family and the village are taken care of, needy are helped, agricultural activities are accomplished jointly through the system of *pacha* and *madait*.\(^ {432}\)

**4.2.1.2.4 Holistic view of life:**

The holistic view of life implies respect for humankind, animals, birds, trees, fish and relation with/respect for the ancestors, living ones and those to be born, that is of the past, present and future. Space and time are understood to be inclusive. "The spirituality of the indigenous people of Asia and Africa..." it is affirmed, "gives full value to creation as a dynamic and highly integrated Web of Life".\(^ {433}\) It exuds life-giving values: sacredness of the land, reverence for all creatures, judicious use and conservation of the earth's resources, compassion for the weak, oppressed and marginalized. These cosmic values, rituals and practices are often considered "superstitious". But they capture a cosmic inter-wovenness that can become a healing and transforming experience for people world over.\(^ {434}\)

The indigenous people’s view about the totality/wholeness of life is expressed and lived in various ways. A 'Song of Life' from the Indigenous people of Peru amply testifies this.

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\(^{432}\) *Pacha* and *Madait* (helping) are such joint operation where villagers voluntarily work for a family in rotation.

\(^{433}\) “African and Asian Spirituality”, p. 29.

A Song to Life

The melody of the original peoples has not been totally silenced.

For many years their song was heard by the mountains, the valleys, the flowers, the birds, the rivers, the rocks and the fertile earth.

They were the silent witness of this message, sent out by our ancestors as they clung to life.

Today we are reclaiming our speech.

Our voices are crying out, "Here we are! We are still alive!"

We have survived the onslaught of our tormentors.

We are crying out for humankind to be humanized, for we are all included in the song of life.

Brothers and sisters, the legacy of the original peoples points us to a better way, the way of living together, of sharing, of detachment, of being responsible for caring holistically for this our dwelling place given us by the God of life,

God has given us the divine gift of life, and so life must prevail over death.

The God of life continues to proclaim life, life in abundance.

and God is its defender.

What is our message?

Shall we keep on giving grand speeches?

Shall we continue to write about our pain and our hopes?

I believe that now in the time to sing out a melody that proclaims life.

Let the joy and enthusiasm of a new community arise!

Let the spirit of conviviality and community be strengthened!

It recreates the vision of life and health of humankind in balance in the great home that contains all other forms of life.
In the silence of resistance, we await the conversion of humankind and religions to join together in the struggle to build the life in which we shall all be more human.435

The above holistic vision of life comes from mother earth herself, the beloved Pachamma or Pats in Yanesha language. Earth is the mother of life having divine beauty and majesty. The vegetation is her skin, her clothing; the hills are her silhouette, her figure; and the flowing rivers are her veins. All parts of her serve as her arms436, which caress and protect people because all living beings are her sons and daughters. Peoples' relationship with Mother Earth is deeply spiritual. It is from her that people learn to love life, to love work, to respect all other living beings.

According to this understanding humans share life with rocks, the plants, the birds and the animals, which exist in complementary and not in solitude. The earth is the foundation for all that is human. Therefore, earth is sacred, it is the central point of reference and all religious activities are concentrated on the earth. In the Indigenous communities, land is held in high regard, managed and shared out according to people's needs, the number of children they have and so on. It is not inherited individually, passed on from owner to owner, but is redistributed and thus not regarded as private property.437

The indigenous peoples of the earth from time immemorial have held to this vision for humankind, which is life in its fullness in balance and harmony. It is believed that in this respect, all indigenous people do not differ.438 This applies to all indigenous people, those who have been converted to Christianity or not.

The gathering of Indigenous Theologians in Bolivia, in January 2011, realized that the present day face of this world in the capitalistic economic system, which is imposing the ideals of individualism and consumerism, thereby destroying, particularly among the young

436 Ibid. p. 365.
437 Ibid. p. 366
438 Ibid.407
people of indigenous communities, the community life and the sense of solidarity. The said gathering showed frustration that despite the progress made in the field of human rights and in legislation that is beginning to protect the culture, identity and life of Indigenous Peoples, the Indigenous ways of living and of understanding their role in recreating of life are still not recognized or respected. It was resolved to condemn the world order that has been imposed in the form of domination of entire continents. While affirming faith in God, the gathering came with a proposal that the Word of God can only be interpreted as life, life for all (John 10:10) without any discrimination. This also incorporated in its state of hope that churches do not separate faith from life, but rather deeply express the Gospel as commitment to life for all with the practice of more love, solidarity and justice. The spirituality of the Indigenous Peoples gives a holistic vision that is plural, life-centered and land-centered and reality is experienced as being inter-connected and inter-related.

"Land is life, there is no life without land" is the slogan of Indigenous people all over the globe. This is a part of indigenous People's holistic vision of life. Even those envisioning 'ecological' democracy for sustainable development, appreciate and support the struggles of Indigenous people of Orissa, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand or of other parts of India. The authors, in search of alternative model of development, have emphatically asserted that the "Indigenous peoples around the world have mostly lived by an instinctive sense of ecological integrity because they have stayed true to the place of their birth".

When the holistic vision of life of the Indigenous people is understood as interconnectedness among God, world and the humans, it is very much similar to the Christian way to booking into the spirituality for life. A “spirituality refers directly to one’s way of living, to one’s

440 Ibid.
441 Ibid.p.2
444 Ibid.p.251.
aspirations, hopes, ambitions and visions,” writes a theologian. Further he explains Spirituality as an enriching relationship among God, world and the humans. The question for demand of justice arises when the Indigenous Peoples are deprived of Celebrating of such life promised by God. The Celebration of life can be experienced only in community. Thus, justice and communitarian way of living are interrelated.

4.2.2 Spirituality of the Asur Myth

The discussion on the basic components of the spirituality of the Indigenous people world over requires the examination how far the Oraon people live and express that spirituality with special focus on their Asur myth. The anthropological study recognizes the biological, cultural and social dimensions of human beings which it claims to be the total study of human. But this totality may not be complete unless it is realized that human being has a spiritual dimension as well and it must be included within the scope of anthropology for a better and complete understanding of human being. The spiritual dimension of human considerably influences concept of self, basic attitude towards life, ethos and worldly view which in turn determine behavioural form and the nature and quality of the culture practiced. Culture has been created by human but obviously it follows that the culture will also have its share of spirituality, being created by the Supreme Being. For the Oraons, they do not have any idea of sacred and secular, even though they do not have a word to express spirituality in precise to express it. For them, spirituality cannot be separate entity but it is associated with their whole religio-socio-cultural life. For Oraons spirituality means human desire and effort to come into contact with the Divine and an endeavour to live a more human upright life. Following are some salient features of Oraon spirituality. At this point the spirituality found in Asur myth will be discussed on the following aspects: Dharmes-centeredness, justice-centeredness, ritual related, self-identity, the reformer's views, religion and culture, liberation from oppressors, holistic vision of life, eco-friendly, feminist spirituality, self-sacrifice and victory over evil.

446 Ibid.
4.3.2.1 Dharmes - Centered Spirituality

**Communion with God:** The Oraons worship their God in their own way and have communion with Dharmes by the medium of sacrifices.\(^{449}\) Offering sacrifice is one of the most important, efficacious and basic way of being united with the Divinity. The Oraons offer sacrifices for the well-being for people, village and good crops etc. Among the Oraons it is remarkable that the offering of sacrifice is invariably followed by a sacrificial meal. The meat of the sacrificial meal is cooked together with pearl rice. This is done to express their communion with the Divine.\(^{450}\)

**Relation to Creation:** Respect for creation, gratitude towards the Creator, non-transferability and non-possessiveness of the earth (land) are based on the belief that everything has its origin in and from God; it is, therefore, sacred, worthy of special respect\(^{451}\). Within the periphery of Asur myth of Oraons respect for creation, gratitude toward the Creator, non-transferability and non-possessiveness of the land are based on the belief that everything has origin in and from Dharmes. It is, therefore, sacred and worthy of special respect. For Oraons to sell or to transfer a piece of land is an unforgivable sin and crime. They believe in community ownership of the land. They follow the life-pattern of the nature remaining free and gay like the birds of the air.

**Relation to Socio-Community Life:** Oraons are God-fearing people and they are known for their simplicity. Indeed these are the constitutive elements in their spiritual formation. They share their goods freely with others and commit themselves to the service of humanity without counting the cost. The Oraon society is also known for sociability and equality. Sociability means “being together” either for work or for celebration. In every situation whether it is happiness or sorrow they are always ready to help one another.\(^{452}\) To carry out the heavy work they have evolved some mutual help systems called Pancha and Madait and as such heavy work is accomplished for just a meal and rice-beer. On another occasions like

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marriage the invited guests and relatives bring along with them rice, pulse, rice-beer and leaf-cups (Patri-Dona) so that the expenses of the family may be reduced. In brief of all these aspects an awareness of God’s presence in their life is called the Oraon spirituality. The Oraon way of life is spiritualized and materialized as their spirituality is based on justice. Their spirituality based on God-Creation-Community relationship toughly needs continuation declared and affirmed in the eras to follow.

Oraons being a people of oral tradition their experience of day-to-day life is a starting point of their philosophy. Their walk and talk itself are the sources of knowledge. For them the whole reality is experienced as inter-connected and inter-dependent. For them the philosophy of life is not just common humanization, spiritual enrichment, option for the poor but an option for the integrity of creation. Their philosophy does not base on the idea of Ex-nihilo-something from out of nothing. It means knowledge cannot be neutral and value free because knowledge is shaped by the particular cultural context and there is no knowledge from vacuum, because even silence can be a source of knowledge. Their philosophy is based on God-world-human relationship. For them every creature is an active participant in the Divine and has a measure of sensitivity and enjoys a certain degree of autonomy, spontaneity and freedom. According to the Oraon worldview the whole of creation is alive and dynamic. All knowledge, revelation and understanding come through observing the signs and listening to the voices of animals, trees, flowers, wind, thunders, rain sun and moon, flow of river and so on and so forth. All the natural phenomena are gifts endowed with and symbolized by the Supreme Being to disclose or reveal to people. They are the media through which the Supreme Being communicates message to humans. Without creation humans have no teachers and messengers. Without creatures the Supreme Being ceases to reveal and speak. Therefore for Oraons natural objects and animals are looked upon as friends, relatives, lovers, parents and messengers. Every creature and object in creation is participant in the divine activity. An essential character of Oraon philosophy is interrelatedness of all realities;\footnote{Prem Xalxo, \textit{Current Ecological Crisis and its Moral Dimensions: A Tribal Perspective}, Ranchi: Xavier Publications, 2008, p. 64.} interrelation is possible because of the affirmation of the integrity of all creation.
In this schema of life, relationship is understood in terms of co-workers and servants, not as rulers or masters.

In view of philosophical delineation for the Oraons the land is life. “The land is our origin, our nourishment, our support and our identity.” The land is not mere space; it is a place and a symbol of unity which gives identity to the community. The land owns the people. If there is no land, there is no community, personhood and identity. The misuse of land implies chaos among creation. It is the killing of one’s own mother. The land is also sacred for Oraon people. They worship land as mother earth. Land is regarded as a divinity. It belongs to Dharmes and as a result belongs to no one. By nature, it cannot be given nor can be taken because it is not of humans who possess the land but it is the land that possesses humans. The evils which affect the earth also affect their children of the earth. If anyone spits on the earth they are spitting on themselves. The Oraons know that earth does not belong to humans but humans belong to earth. How can a man own his own mother? Land is the foundation of the Oraon people. It is the seed of spirituality, the foundation from which Oraon culture and languages are flourished. The earth is thier historian, the restorer of events and bones of their ancestors. Earth provides food, medicine, shelter and clothing. It is the source of their independence. It is thier mother. The ownership of land by Oraon people is understood in terms of a mother-child relationship. Being, thus organically related to the land, the community as a whole, including non-human creatures may together claim the whole land as their mother.

Fundamentum inside of Asur theology is to be considered as the theology of tribe, it must contain the tribal elements as the sources of doing theology. As the people of oral/religious tradition, following are the considerable sources for doing Oraon theology:

**History:** Tribal history is the beginning point of tribal theology. For them history is not simply a past event but it is a historical consciousness in which they stand and affirm their identity and existence. In prehistoric period time immemorial the tribal belt-Jharkhand tribes lived in peace and harmony but now they are known as poor and marginalized people.\(^{454}\)

\(^{454}\) Sacchidananda, Op. cit., p.111
History as source for theology seeks to the relevance of history of the past but also the divine presence of today.

The books on history of the land and the people are replete with description of oppression and exploitation of Oraons and other tribal people. "Excessive exploitation by the non-tribal outside settlers, intermediaries and revenue collectors made the tribals highly aggrieved as a result of their deep discontent which ultimately led to many movements and revolts against the exploiters," of which more than half century long Jharkhand movement with the demand of autonomy and Statehood had been the latest one.

**Culture:** Culture is to situate the Oraons and other indigenous communities to find their identity and ultimate meaning. Culture is not confined to songs and dances as many understand their culture. Their culture is meant to terms with their environment, social relations and the ultimate questions of life. The culture is the common ground where tribals belonging to different religious allegiance can come together in order to assert their identity. Oraon culture is based on human and spiritual values; it is apt to lead into deeper reality. In the midst of poverty and misery culture plays a key role in the emancipation process in realizing economic development and political empowerment and more importantly in awakening the selfhood of people as they become the agents and subject of history.

**Land and Forest:** Land and forest shape Oraon life in an organic whole. A violation of any part of the organism creates an imbalance in it and its harmony is damaged. The exploitation of these life affirming entities also exploits their identity and existence. The Indigenous people of the land of Chotanagpur rather that of whole Jharkhand never failed to express their deep feelings of their relationship with the land and the forest. Land being the essential

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part of their existence is amply illustrated in a memorandum.\textsuperscript{459} The harmony in nature is intimately bound up with right and harmonious order in society and the overall being of the human. A sustaining relationship with these entities is not merely for survival but it is a necessary prerequisite for a healthy and good living. Peoples concern to save forest, land and water has been seen in all the movements of the region. As a result of those movements the Government of India, either in colonial period or in the post-independence time enacted land reform laws such as Chotanagpue Tenency Act (CNT Act 1908), as a result of Birsa movement (1890-1901), the Santal Pargana Tenency Act (SPT Act) after Santal Hool (1855) in the mid 19th century. One more important Act named as the Wilkinson Rule applicable in the Saranda area of Singhbhum District has the similar history. But it is sad to say that these land right Acts are being violated in spite of the special provisions in the constitution.\textsuperscript{460} In very recent time various tribal groups and movements have raised their strong voice against Government's step to forcefully acquire agricultural land for various institutions. There is a fear that a large number of tribal people will be displaced from Nagri village near Ranchi and similar places where such forceful acquisition of tribal land is done or planned. Even after the creation of Jharkhand as a Tribal State with the successive Chief Ministers, the head of the State Government being Tribals, alienation of Tribal land through unlawful means and methods and violation of Land Right Laws continue by land mafias, industrialists, timber businessmen and so on.

So far the forest is concerned, about 30\% of the land of the State of Jharkhand is occupied by forests in the districts of Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Palamu, Santal Parganas, Singhbhum, Gumla, Simdega and Latehar with dry and Peninsular forests.\textsuperscript{461} The Asia's biggest \textit{Saal} forest is located in the West Singhbhum District, the native district of the present researcher. The \textit{Asurs} described in the \textit{Asur} myth were primarily using \textit{Saal} tree in their furnace to melt iron. The cutting of \textit{Sal} tree for smelting iron was a matter of great concern for people. Depletion

\textsuperscript{459} “Memorandum to the Government of India” by JCC on the 10th of December, 1987, in R.D. Munda & S. Bosu Mullick (ed.), Jharkhand Movement, p.60


of forest not only affect ecology, agriculture, economy, but it also affects the community life of the people. Particularly the Saal/Sakhua tree has ritual significance for the Tribals of Jharkhand and elsewhere.\(^{462}\) It has a sacred place in Buddhism and Hinduism also. Unfortunately, in spite of existing Forest laws enacted in the country, the indigenous people have to face harassment from the Forest department. Several incidents have been reported by the tribal people including Oraons, and also by the Adivasi activists of **Jharkhand Jungle Bachao Andolan (Save the Forest Movement of Jharkhand)**, a mass organization working for the ownership rights of Adivasis on forests in Jharkhand.\(^{463}\) It is good, rather it would be essential to encourage and motivate people not only to support forest protection initiatives, but also to join hands with those engaged in reforestation initiatives. To this point as Oraon people who experience God in and through their relationship with the land and forest, theology cannot make light of this legitimate yearning.

**Language:** Language is not a mere speaking box; it is neither purely objective nor subjective. Language is a relational reality. It binds subject with the object and communicates depth to depth. There is no hermeneutics without language and no language without hermeneutics. Language and hermeneutics coalesce in hermeneutic. Language is a vehicle of knowledge; it is living expression of the culture of people, which constitutes the process of understanding. Oraon tribals are rich in their language heritages and the depth of Oraons’ life can be understood through language-dialogue. Their language contains their cultural identity. As language is necessary for expression of thoughts and also to share the Good News of the Kingdom of God, it is the bounden duty of Christians to make available the Bible in Oraon language. The efforts were made by early missionaries followed by successive generations. But as the Oraon society is still a divided society, it has to struggle hard even to address the challenges posed by Hindu fundamentalists over the **Nemha Bible** (Bible in Kurukh/Oraon language) controversy. Instigated by religious fundamentalists, one section of the Oraons practicing traditional religion have alleged that Christians want to destroy their Sarna religion. The controversy arose in 2008 over the translation of the term 'Green trees' (Deut. 12:2,3)


\(^{463}\) Gladson Dungdung, "Adivasis fighting to regain ownership rights" in *Whose Country is it anyway?* p.131.
and similar passages where the term 'Sarna' has been used which led to this misunderstanding. A very healthy approach taken up by some important members of the Kurukh Literary Society is commendable. Fr. Albinus Minz has compiled a huge value named 'Kurukh Granth'\textsuperscript{464} which includes among others, the text of Asur Myth which is the topic of this research. The Oraon Poetry included in this volume is part of the syllabus of M.A. in Oraon/Kurukh language in the University of Ranchi. This kind of work should be promoted even in interpreting the Gospel of Kingdom. The word Dharmes for God used in Churches and outside is acceptable by all without any controversy.

\textbf{Context or Situation:} Context or situation can be viewed as the broad ambit that includes experience as a subset; or the context and situation could be differentiated, making the context the broader dimension and situation as something specific. Here the context and situation in terms of Oraon tribals is in one sense and makes experience a distinct category, a more specific consciousness of situation encountered. Context covers a broad field-political, economic and cultural in both domestic and global aspects but it is a particular situation of the Oraon tribe that serves as the spring hood for theological formulation. The context or situation of the Oraon tribe is socially analyzed and interpreted through local source in which theological construction is carried out.\textsuperscript{465}

\textbf{Experience:} Experience is the starting point of theology for Asur myth of Oraons by punishing the greedy Asurs, Dharmes warns the disobedient and evildoers.\textsuperscript{466} Their experience is the experience of suffering which is shaped by their popular religiosity-stories, songs, myths, symbols, arts etc. They believe that all these fronts have a historical consciousness thereby when they actively participate in using of these, they involve in transformation as individual and communities. Their experience evolves and awakens them to find their true dignity. This insight helps them to discover and rediscover the power of liberating ‘Oraon talk’ and pass it on the next generation. The future recovery of this ongoing legacy is in the hands of the Oraons on all fronts and whatever means necessary in order to achieve task of liberation for all people.


\textsuperscript{466} S.C. Roy, \textit{Oraon Religion and Customs}, 1999, p.73.
**Asur Myth-Oraon Religiosity:** For Oraons religion is an experience, not a religion as such which is confined with a written scripture. One could find their religion in terms of their religiosity which is found in their festivals, in their walk and talk, even their silence. For them religion is not a matter of abstract dogmas and intellectual belief, but it is something that touches the very core of their existence. For the Oraons the Divine is experienced and not far away from them. They are bound up with the land and forest and life supported aspects and systems. It is primarily because Oraons’ life is interconnectedness of sacred and secular that overcomes the dichotomy of dehumanizing forces. This insight of Oraon religiosity can provide a source for constructing theology.

**Dharmes the First:** Within the ambit of aforesaid delineations there are obvious demonstrations that Dharmes is in the core centre of the Oraon’s life. He exists and his existence forces itself as an initial fact which needs no other explanation. Dharmes had no origin, no becoming. Asur myth of Oraons does not know those theogonies which, in the religions of the ancient East explain the beginning of the world by the birth of the gods. Because He alone is the ‘first and the last’, the world is entirely His work, His creation. Because He is first, Dharmes does not have to introduce Himself. He demands recognition by man’s spirit through the sole fact that He is God. In no way should there be thought of a discovery of Dharmes, a graduated approach of human’s resulting in the acknowledgement of His existence. To know Him is to be known and to discover Him at the source of one’s own existence; to fly from Him is to find oneself yet followed by His gaze. Because Dharmes is first, as soon He makes Himself known His personality, His reactions, His plans are sharply defined. Let an Oraon come to know Him just a little and he knows, from the moment when he discovers Him, that Dharmes wishes something very specific and that he knows very precisely where he goes and what he does.

Indeed the Oraons were able to recognize Dharmes as the true God only because already, obscurely but clearly they knew Dharmes; supreme and unique and as on this score Asur

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myth of the Oraons was not eclipsed by seductive and corrupt polytheism. Operation of Dharmes is mysterious and wonderful. He is determined to deliver the Oraons and to grant them prosperity. He manifests Himself corresponds to the work in which He is engaged. No one can force Him nor even penetrate to Him. But it also asserts something positive, and extraordinarily active and attentive presence, an invulnerable and liberating power; an existence designated always present and efficacious; a Being present rather than a Being. This presence embraces the universe from its first to its last, unifying past, present and future. There is the bond which can bind natural myths to the true Dharmes. His name is revealed only to the Oraon tribe and has meaning for its people who had experience of His guidance. Dharmes reveals Himself only by His own exclusive and supernatural initiative, the deed by which He owns the Oraons and makes His people. The impression is well expressed by Oraons in the presence of Dharmes, that of an extraordinarily active presence of an immediate and total spontaneity.

The Christian God is not one someone different from Dharmes described in Asur myth. The same God has here revealed Himself in and through the tribe of Israel. He remains the Lord of human history, through which He makes his works for humans known to him. He has, revealed himself personally and definitively when he 'spoke to us by the Son' Jesus Christ (cf. Heb.1:1-2). And here the Christian has no other name for God but Dharmes. The pioneering work of using the indigenous language of Oraon tribals was initiated by Ferdinand Hahn of Gossner Mission in 1870s. He realized that people were unable to understand the message of the kingdom in the prevailing dominant language that was Hindi. Moreover the Hindi language was the language of oppressors which people looked upon with suspicion.

4.3.2.2 Justice-Centeredness

The word ‘JUSTICE’ calls to mind a judicial order in which a judge dispensed justice by enforcing observance of custom or law. The moral notion of justice is broader extending itself to the fact that justice gives everyone his due, even though this due is not fixed by

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469 Boniface Tirkey, Oraon Symbals, p.68.
custom or law. The natural law of obligation of justice is based on an equality of exchange or
distribution. In the mythical context of man’s notions with God, the vocabulary associated
with justice finds only limited applications in modern languages. It is in current usage, of
course, to call upon God as the just judge and to speak of judgment as the final confrontation
between man and God. Modern religious usage of words pertaining to justice seems
extremely restricted. Although close in meaning to several other terms—rectitude, holiness,
uprightness, perfection etc. the word Justice is central to quite limited set of words such as
just, justify, justification.

In one of the main mythical themes, justice is the familiar moral virtue with its scope so
enlarged as to extend to the total observance of all Dharmes commands which is always
conceived as entitling man to a just return before Dharmes. Correlatively, Dharmes
demonstrates His justice in that He is the model of integrity; the people and each individual
person; and then as the Dharmes of retribution, either punishing or rewarding to one’s work.
Dharmes being the just God punished the arrogant and the greedy Asurs\(^{471}\) when they
disobeyed Dharmes and insulted his messengers. They continued to smelt iron day and night.
Yahweh, the God of Israel warned the chosen people and commanded them to repent or else
they would be punished (Amos 6:12-14). Infact the Babylonian captivity was the punishment
from Yahweh so that Israel and Judah may learn a lesson. God of Israel wished that justice be
done to all when Bible declares: “But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like
an everflowing stream” (Amos 5:24, NRSV).

Another perhaps a more profound view of order which Dharmes intends to produce in His
creation, gives justice an extended meaning and a more immediately mythical value. Human
integrity is never merely the reflection or product of Dharmes’ supreme sense of propagation
or the wonderful delicacy with which He manages the universe and fills His creatures. The
justice of Dharmes, which man attains through faith; ultimately coincides with His mercy;
and, like the divine mercy, designates at times a divine attribute, at other times the concrete
gifts of salvation which this mercy dispenses. In the context of demand for a separate State of
Jharkhand by Tribals was a justice issue rightly spelled out by a Supreme Court Judge V.R.
Krishna Iyer. When the demand was being delayed, very courageously he said, “Jharkhand

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\(^{471}\) S.C. Roy, *Oraon Religion and Customs*, 1999, p.73
must be considered not with blind hostility nor with secessionist allergy, but with sympathy and sense of justice, as a claim to a home within impregnable Bharat”. 472 Emphatically the Justice recognized the Tribal demand as a social justice issue which had a historic role, thus it should not be dismissed. 473

In view of the ancient legislation a just man is as the claimant or even at times as the righteous judge who must justify the innocent person by acquitting him or restoring his rights. The just man is the pious man the irreproachable servant, the friend of Dharmes. For him justice is as source of merit and prosperity. Thus as act of kindness becomes justice in the eyes of Dharmes which could almost be translated ‘merit’. Whosoever follows justice finds life and glory. The justice which one receives from Dharmes is the divine blessing in reward for devoted service. In the exercise of His justice Dharmes is most frequently seen as delivering the oppressed. In itself this liberation remains within the framework of justice but viewed as a divine favour it opens up a richer conception of Dharmes’ justice.

For the early missionaries the issue of justice was central when they tried to help poor Tribals through approaching the British Government legally for the repossession of their lands. But their approaches were ignored by the British administrators and, instead, the immigrant landlords were recognized as real owners of the Tribals lands on grounds of prescription. 474 However, the social worker Fr. Constant Lievens was confident that justice issue was a powerful tool to attract people to the Gospel message. It was a historic achievement for the Church of Chotanagpur during the 19th century land crisis. Many accepted the Gospel of Kingdom when they got help in repossession of their lost land. 475

Man cannot win divine favour by his own justice and that faith is of greater value for finding acceptance with Dharmes. This point of view provides another reason for conceiving justice of Dharmes as a witness to His mercy and as a means for justice which is the forgiveness of sin. But justification of the sinner is a paradoxical act and even contrary to judicial teaching where justification of the guilty party is the greater error.

473 Ibid.p.12.
474 Ibid.p.57.
475 Fedelis de Sa, Crisis in Chotanagpur, Bangalore: Redemptorost publication, 1975
Impiety is a universal fact for sinful humanity, hatred for Dharmes and for His law, it adds nuance of hostility and bluster. Wicked people have to suffer consequences for being unjust and impious. As they sow, so shall they reap! The human race seems divided into two groups: the just and wise as opposed to the impious and foolish. Between these two is an opposition and fratricidal battle which already gives a sketch of the separate activities of two realms. This battle extends to all periods. The godless man gives free reign to his instincts, trickery, violence, sensuality. He condemns Dharmes. He sets upon both the just and the poor. He has apparent success which sometimes can be lasting and is a source of genuine anguish for religious people. Out of a concern for justice, first of all, the persecuted asked Dharmes for the destruction of these misguided wicked people and in advance they take delight in a vengeance which astonishes all. Those faithful to Dharmes know very well that impious are headed for ruin. But this calm statement of retribution which still is pictured in a temporal setting clashes with some scandalous facts. There are some impious men who prosper as there was no divine sanction. However, the pious assuredly believe that in the last days they will see Dharmes destroy the impious and the godless. They will be exterminated at the ends of justice at the time of judgment. The anger of Dharmes reveals itself in a permanent way against all impiety and human injustice. All those who take part in the mystery of impiety will be confounded and punished. If punishment comes late it is because Dharmes patiently waits for the wicked to be converted.

4.3.2.3 Ritual-Related

The original phenomena of the spiritual life as such the greatest realities are in concealment behind the myth. The myth creation among people denotes a real spiritual life, indeed more real than that of abstract concepts and rational thought. Myth presents the supernatural in the natural, the supersensible in the sensible, the spiritual life in the life of the flesh; it brings symbolically two worlds together. This aspect of reality relates myth with spirituality. Subsequently myth is considered as a unique way of apprehending reality. Spirituality is a dynamic concept and phenomenon and not as a static thing. This further implies that there is an attempt to supersede a concern of acquiring sanctity and a sense of presence of God through prayer, meditation and other religious practices. Myth and ritual representing the beliefs and practices of any religious tradition is an accepted phenomenon. In connection
with relation between spirituality and ritual scholarship made research achieving impressive results but with question arising whether spirituality narrates the procedure of ritual or otherwise. In accordance with the view of Levi-Strauss myths and rites can be treated as modes of communication from gods to men (myths) or from men to gods.\textsuperscript{476} The close relationship between myth and ritual has come from many scholars by way of suggestion that myths are derived from rituals and in every turn rite is originally based on myth.\textsuperscript{477} It is significantly to be noted that as in the case of myth, in primal societies ritual has a divine model. To serve \textit{Dharmes} is in the first place to offer gifts and sacrifices and to assure maintenance of His holy place. In this sense the \textit{Pahans} are those who serve \textit{Dharmes}. The \textit{Pahan} in fact is defined as the keeper of the sanctuary, the servant of the \textit{Dharmes} who dwells there and the interpreter of the oracles which He gives. In his turn, the believer who performs an act of worship comes to serve \textit{Dharmes}.

Finally the expression designates the customary worship of \textit{Dharmes} and almost becomes synonymous adorable service. To serve \textit{Dharmes} is an honour for the people with whom He has established the bondage. But such honour has its obligations. \textit{Dharmes} is a jealous God who cannot endure divided allegiance. In all religions the form of worship institutes the relations between man and God. The initiative for these elations springs from the living God who reveals Himself. In answer man adores God in worship which takes a communal form. This worship not only expresses the need a man has of a Creator upon whom he entirely depends, but also fulfills a liturgical duty; God indeed has chosen people who are to serve Him. The chosen person therefore, is to perform its mission by worshiping God. Worship has evolved and in the course of its history there appear elements common to all forms of worship: sacred places, objects and persons-sanctuaries, altars, priests; sacred time-feasts; acts of worship-purifications, sacrifices, prayer in all its forms; religious prescriptions-fasting, prohibitions. True worship is spiritual. It is not necessarily without rites. The ritual worship has a triple aspect: it commemorates a past divine work, it makes this activity present and it makes it real. The Oraon people have not borrowed from neighbouring rituals

\textsuperscript{477} For a detailed discussion on the Myth-Ritual relationship and its importance in Primal Religious Traditions, see the earlier section 3.2.1.4.
elements that reflect the life of nomadism but their rites have descended from the prior cult. The past action commemorated is the offering for their salvation.

The rites of *Danda Katta*, center of the worship and channel of the new spiritual life is its signs and means.\(^\text{478}\) By this rite *Dharmes* mysteriously makes Himself present that the people may join themselves to Him in presence. Spirituality thus refers to experiential dimension and deals with the inner depth of the person opening to the transcendent; in traditions that affirm the divine, the experience of the divine and the journey of the person to a more intimate relationship with the divine. There is communion with *Dharmes*. In any religion the normal ways of establishing relationship with God or worshipping God i.e. worship and sacrifice, prayer and penance, self-purification and good works, upright and moral life etc. The Oraons worship *Dharmes* in their own way and have communion with Him by the medium of sacrifices. Offering sacrifice is one of the most important, efficacious and basic way of being united with the Divinity.\(^\text{479}\) The Oraons offered sacrifices for the well being of the people, village and good crops etc.\(^\text{480}\) Among the Oraons it is remarkable that the sacrifice is invariably followed by a sacrificial meal. The meat of the sacrificial animal is cooked together with pearl rice and all present at the sacrifice partake of the sacred meal. This is done to express their communion with the divine just as the Christian do in their Eucharistic celebration.

4.3.2.4 Self-Identity

The totality of the tribes’ life and values are rooted on three life giving entities: *Jal-Jangal-Jameen*. Without these there is no tribal identity. To save tribal Oraons, all these entities need to be saved. The Jharkhand Tribes say – ‘*JAAN DENGE JAMIN NAHIN DENGE*’ – ‘we will give our life but we will not give our land’. Their suffering, pain and pathos had been romanticized; on the other hand it is very sad that though they have a separate State but still they are at unrest struggling for their existence, identity and survival. Tribal theology takes seriously the issue of identity within the gospel-culture interaction. Though not polar opposites, gospel and culture prompt the question how a tribal can maintain one’s unique and

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separate identity, how one’s self understanding is reflected in practical life-situation to others. Identity becomes a methodical issue because identity qualifies theology as tribal. Tribal identity is understood in terms of tribal worldview which is underlying the tribal identity as patent worldview. It determines the voices, aspirations and mindset of a tribal. In tribal myths, the reality is an organic whole.\textsuperscript{481} There is an inseparable interrelationship between living beings, between being (biotic) and non-living (a biotic) and between the total ecosystems and the Supreme Being and spirits. The sacred-profane dichotomy of Western thinking becomes irrelevant as space-time and this world-other world differences are brought together. In bringing together the dichotomous poles, tribal worldview does not imply monism or pantheism but rather a unity of continuance where the boundaries of the dichotomy become obscure and shifting.

Land becomes a basic component of tribal culture as it sources, nourishes and supports tribal identity and symbolizes unity and community where the misuse of land implies chaos within tribal reality. This organic relation between the tribal and land is linked to that of a mother and child. Thus the tribal worldview, a defining factor in tribal identity, has had to face the challenges from various agents of change that have come to undermine the very identity of the tribal. The question of tribal identity seems to be threatened today. All tribals are going to be Scheduled Castes and then merged into dominant group. This process of assimilation is going on rapidly and it is a matter of few years or a decade or two when the tribals will be completely assimilated and their separate identity will be in oblivion. The Government of India has officially denied the existence of the indigenous people in India.\textsuperscript{482} They have done so in ILO and UNO working group on Indigenous/Tribal peoples Conference held regularly in Geneva. It shows that if situation and conditions prevailing among the indigenous continues for a few decades more as they are now, many tribal communities will disappear from the list of the Government of India. The bases of tribal identity can be broadly categorized into the historical, geo-political and cultural categories. Tribal history is the beginning point of tribal theology. For them history is not only a past event but it is a historical consciousness in which they stand and affirm their identity and existence. In prehistoric periods, the Jharkhand tribals lived in peace and harmony, but now they are

\textsuperscript{481} Joseph Marianus Kujur, “Tribal Religion in India”, pp.22, 23.
\textsuperscript{482} Jai Adivasi: A Political Reader on the Life and Struggle of Indigenous Peoples in India, Sarim (ed.), n.d., p.1.
known as poor and marginalized people. History as source for theology these people seek to the relevance of historical Dharmes who is not just a person of the past but the divine power presence today.

Culture of Jharkhand is to situate them to find their identity and ultimate meaning. Culture is not confined to songs and dances as many understand their culture. For Jharkhand tribals culture meant to terms with their environment, social relations and the ultimate questions of life. Their culture is based on human and spiritual values; it is apt to lead into a deeper reality option for culture and enculturation is an important perspective in making theology contextual and relevant. In the midst of poverty and misery, culture plays a key role in the emancipation process, a realizing economic development and political empowerment and more importantly, in awakening of the selfhood of people as they become the agents and subject of history. Land and forest shape tribal life in an organic whole. A violation of any part of this organism creates an imbalance in it and harmony is damaged. The exploitation of these life affirming entities also exploits their identity and existence. The harmony in nature is intimately bound up with right and harmonious order in society and the overall wellbeing of the human. A sustaining relationship with these entities is merely for survival but it is a necessary prerequisite of a good and healthy living. It was the land grasping attitude that many invasions and the world wars have taken place in human history and it goes on. To this point as tribal people who experience God in and through their relationship with the land and forest. Theology and spirituality cannot make light of this legitimate yearning. Language is not a mere speaking box; it is neither purely objective nor subjective. Language is a relational reality. It is a living expression of the culture of the people. The languages of the Jharkhand tribals contain their cultural identity. For them the context and situation is in one sense and makes experience a distinct category, a more specific consciousness of a situation encountered. Context covers a broad field-political, economic and cultural in both domestic and global aspects, but it is a particular situation that serves as the springboard or theological formulation. The context or situation of Jharkhand tribes is socially analyzed and interpreted through local sources in which theological construction is carried out. Experience is the starting point of doing tribal theology. Their experience is the

483 Victor Das, Jharkhand: Castle over the Graves, p.204.
experience of suffering which is shaped by their popular religiosity-stories, songs, myths, symbols, arts etc. All these fronts have historical consciousness and thereby when they actively participate in using of these, they involve in transformation as individual and communities in order to achieve the unfinished task of liberation for all people. For tribal people religion is an experience not a religion as such which is confined with a written scripture but is found in their festivals, in their walk and talk, even in their silence. For them, religion is not a matter of abstract dogmas and intellectual belief but it is something that touches the very core of their existence.

Spirituality as the energy for life in all its fullness implies the commitment to resist all forces, powers and systems which reduce, deny or destroy life. A renewed quest for spirituality can be seen among the Oraon tribals who are struggling for justice and human dignity; for them spirituality refers to the energy which sustains people in the struggle. Experiences of defeat and prolonged oppression but also occasional moments of victory and liberation have led many of those engaged in people’s movements to re-appropriate the value of their spiritual traditions.

4.3.2.5 The Reformer’s Views

As a matter of fact within the ambit of Jharkhand tribals the struggle for justice and human dignity has a spiritual dimension of their own. In fact the powers that be, whether political, economic or financial tend to cultivate their own spirituality, calling for sacrifices and asking for trust and faithful allegiance. Rebellions like Birsa Munda among the aboriginal tribesmen against the authority of an established administration are among the most tragic conflicts between the rulers and the ruled. It is always a hopeless struggle of the weak against the string, the simple minded and the ill informed against the concerted sources of a powerful system and too often a struggle of those who have been wronged against the representatives of an executive which, for the sake of maintaining law and order, supports the vested interests of those who have exploited and oppressed the ignorant tribesmen. Even simple perusal of the situation at time Birsa Munda demonstrated the unfortunate combination of insensitivity and short sightedness on the part of the Govt. authorities with the ruthlessness and wiliness of non-aboriginal landlords, moneylenders and petty officials. Under the leadership of Birsa Munda the defensive reaction against the encroachment of outsiders on
tribal rights developed gradually into a messianic movement of strong revivalist character. The lesson which can be learnt from the study of Birsa movement should not be lost on modern administrators, some of whom still believe that the more backward tribal populations can be coaxed or compelled to change within a single generation, their outlook and style of living and who do not realize that the enforcement too rapid a process of change may well lead to unexpected reactions. The interesting story of the life of Birsa Munda as one of the most outstanding members of the Munda tribe. Though Birsa’s mission apparently failed he has left his people a legend and an inspiration, which may help them in their struggle to retain their cultural identity in the face of powerful forces working for the assimilation of tribal groups into the locally dominant population. The end of Birsa was not the end of Birsaism. The Jharkhand Movement with a demand for a Separate Statehood was in reality a continuation of the Birsaite Movement and similar movements that preceded and followed it. The two lines of the movement, religious and political, ran through the endure course and explained the complexity of his make-up, the alteration between his role of a religious and political leader. At time one lay dormant while the other prevailed; often prophetic outbursts took place amidst the head of revolutionary activities, during the meetings at several places.

Against the background of the disintegrating tribal society, this socio-religious movement sought to reconstruct it in terms of its pristine values as Birsa understood and expounded them. The interpretation of the Asur legend was an appropriate prelude to Birsa’s religion: it constituted prayers refers to the enormously increased since in the Kaliyuga; seventy two epochs ago, the discrimination between children, mothers and sisters were not observed. Violence was indulged in with remorse or scruple. Then the Asurs ruled. They filled the earth (Mrityu Loka). Their remains, burial stones and other stones are found at places. They worked in ton: they ate it and relieved themselves of it. With the burden of their sins, the heat of their blazing furnaces, the earth and heaven cracked. The Asur legend and its interpretation provided the justification of Birsa’s attack on the old religion, its priesthood and widespread evils like drinking etc. To the legend, he, like his people, traced the twin evils of Munda society, the worship of the spirits (bongas) and the drinking of rice-beer thus Birsa proved to be a staunch reformer among the Jharkhand tribals.

484 Ibid., p.12.
The Tana Bhagat movement among the Oraons, though an independent movement, was probably influenced by Birsa and his movement. Birsa was the Bhagwan not only of the Mudas but of Chotanagpur as a whole. He had influenced the entire population including the Oraons up to Barway and Checchhari in Palamu who became convinced Birsaites. Birsa visited Lohardaga once. He spread the seeds of his religion in four directions including probably the Oroan religion. The Munda Tana Bhagats of Karra, specially Mago or Mangra Bhagwan and Gola of Timra were disciples of Bebo and Mangra Munda of Jurdag who were Birsaites of the Thursday School. Some of them later passed themselves for the Tana Bhagats and both share the same gamut of beliefs which testify to their mutual influence. They are vegetarians and teetotalers. They wear the sacred thread and take Thursday off from work. The mode of rendering prayer is similar: with their hands folded in prayer, they go in singing the superior power (sun, moon etc.) by those of other good powers they can conceive of, such as Birsa.

They believe that Birsa revealed the Tana religion:

O Birsa, you revealed the tana religion.

O Father of Chotanagpur, you revealed the religion.

O Father, you founded the religion for life.\textsuperscript{485}

In the course of explaining traditional tribal prayer and sacrifice it was said that there were no charismatic leaders among the tribals who could have taught them the way of worship and prayer. But in the beginning of twentieth century there have been a few charismatic leaders who tried to give a new orientation to the Tribals spirituality, specially the Kurukh/Oroan spirituality. Influenced by various Hindu Bhakti movements some tribal Bhagats, like Nemha Bhagat and Jatra Bhagat came forward to lead the Oroan people in a Bhagat spirituality. Although they were influenced by the Hindu Bhakti movement, especially as regards ritual

\textsuperscript{485} K.S. Singh, \textit{Birsa Munda and His Movement}…1996, p.187
purity and vegetarian food habits, they did preserve some tribal spiritual characteristics. Although the Bhagat spirituality cannot be called a traditional tribal spirituality, yet it is coming from tribals themselves therefore, further information about it would be necessary. Among the tribals other than Oraons the Bhagat movement could not grow into a specific spirituality.

In the *Adi Dharam* (original faith) prayers were more of a practical nature rather than devotional. They prayed to God for their daily practical needs, but the tribal hearts were not satisfied with it, they felt the need of Bhagat, a loving devotion to and adoration of a personal God, *Dharmes*. Finally in April 1914 Jatra Bhagat a charismatic leader started a new faith called Kurukh Dharam in order to satisfy the craving of the heart for a personal relationship with a loving Deity. Jatra Bhagat proclaimed that *Dharmes* Himself appeared to him and gave certain commandments: His followers should give up belief in spirits and the work of placating them; animal sacrifices, eating meat and fish, taking intoxicating drinks, to give up coolie work in the fields of the *Dikus*. *Dharmes* Himself told to collect disciples, known as Tana Bhagats, and teach them prayer hymns and incantation. There is a marked difference between the traditional prayer and Bhagati piety. The Bhagats have the custom of assembling together for prayer meeting. They invoke God in songs and hymns one of the most endearing words addressed to God in Baba (Father) with folded hands they pray to *Dharmes* who is their God and Father. They pray to Him for knowledge and understanding for gifts of wise speech and happiness; Holy virtues, holy kingdom, holy knowledge, holy happiness, holy life, holy thoughts, pure body and soul, and His choicest blessings.

### 4.3.2.6 Religion and Culture

The Oraons have their own religion, ADI (primal) religion which is known as *Sarna* religion. The Sangh Parivar (RSS) in the context of a mass re-conversion drive is trying to make the world believe that the tribes are Hindus with the inclusion of the Oraons. To this context the tribal intelligentia has made a clear statement that the tribals are neither Hindus nor Christians, nor Muslims. They are just *Sarna* people.

There are views regarding the name of tribal religion. Firstly *Sarna* is not a common word in all tribal languages. In Santali the word *Jaher* is used for *Sarna* (Sacred Grove). Then can the
term *Sarna* be applicable for the Santals. Secondly, *Sarna* religion cannot be to all tribal people at all times, or most of the time. The Mundas and the Santals do go to *Sarna/Jaher* or most of their religious rites, but Oraons go to *Sarna* only once a year i.e. on the *KHADDI (Sarhul)* feast and rest of them they have their own specific places of worship. Therefore the word *Sarna* is not very appropriate for the tribals. Thirdly, no other religion is named after the place of worship. The religion of Christianity is called Christianity and not church religion; of Hindus, Hinduism not temple religion, or Muslim, Islam not mosque religion. Then for what reason the religion of tribal people should be called *Sarna* religion rather that with a specific name e.g. *Santal, Munda, Ho, Kharia, Oraon* religion? Or with a more comprehensive name Tribal Religion. Perhaps one Tribal word ADI would be more appropriate which means patrimonial, primal or original Adi religion then only a tribal theology can be emerging in order to address the life-situation of the Jharkhand tribesmen.

The tribals believe in one God whom they call *Singbonga, Dharmes, Thakur Jiv, and Ponomosor*.\(^486\) Him they worship. Though the tribals do not have any written scripture, but it does not mean that they are the people without religion/scripture. The Jharkhand tribesmen are the people of oral tradition; their scripture is written in their hearts; talks and walks. That can be seen in their moral life. They are controlled by awareness of acceptable or unacceptable behavior and not by any pressure of religion. In this sense, for them religion is not the moral custodian but it is a village council who acts as a sole authority of its people.

The anthropological study recognizes the biological, cultural and social dimension of human beings which it claims to be Total Study of human. But this ‘Totality’ may not be complete unless it is realized that human being has a ‘spiritual dimension’ as well and it must be included within the scope of anthropology for a better and complete understanding of human being. The spiritual dimension of human considerably influences concept of self, basic attitude towards life, ethos, and worldview which in turn determine behavioural form and the nature and quality of culture practiced. Culture has been created by human and it acts as the basis of their identity\(^487\), but obviously it follows that the culture will also have its share of spirituality being created by the Supreme Being. For them spirituality cannot be separate

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\(^{486}\) Joseph Marianus Kujur, “Tribal religions in India”, pp. 23, 27.

entity but it is associated with their whole religio-socio-cultural life. For a tribal, spirituality means desire and effort to come into contact with the Divine and an endeavour to live a more human upright life. The outside factors have influenced the tribal life-situation to their root (land) and fruit (culture). Since they are being alienated from their land their cultural identity is at jeopardy to survive. The principles of life and land are the cultural values of the tribesmen. Without these there are no tribal people. A lemon without juice cannot be a lemon. Without land and culture tribal life is like a fish out of water.

4.3.2.7 Liberation from Oppressors

The spiritual confrontation with all forms of exercising power which refuse to acknowledge their accountability before God and the human community is inevitable. Spirituality stands for the active presence of the power of God in human life which aims at enhancing life for all and defends those who are being excluded, the poor, the strangers and those have been declared outcasts. Spirituality, therefore, will have to challenge prophetically any form of power which sets itself absolute and is not legitimizes by serving the common good. It will unmask false claims of authority and must seek ways of resisting policies and practices which serve to increase the power of the few while neglecting the basic needs and the right to life of the many. The prophetic spirituality demands involvement in struggle. Contemplative trend stands for the age old value of realizing God in oneself through contemplation and meditation. It postulates observance of austere practices, under a master in strict adherence to scared scripture, to be illumined by the spirit. Contemplative spirituality, to a large, much extent is individualistic and absent from the indigenous people. And as such this has been placed as opposed to liberative spirituality of suffering and struggling mass for the liberation from impoverishment. However the contemplatives turn out to be confined to themselves within the periphery of personal salvation and such alien to the tribal society.

The liberative spirituality can be seen in contrast to contemplative spirituality. The characteristic note of this spirituality is powerful to liberate the oppressed and the downtrodden. Some of the elements are common in both the categories. However, in the liberative spirituality suffering in the world and the struggles are taken very seriously, actions undertaken and solutions planned and executed. Such spirituality is bound with life and all
that life involves; freedom and food, dignity and equality, community and sharing of resources, celebration of the God of life and liberation.

The studies and experiences reveal that the Oraons, Mundas, Santals, Hos and other Adivasis of Jharkhand are in need of experiencing the fullness of life. Through the present ministries of Church, some individuals and families have abundance of material comforts and prestige, but their majority of brothers and sisters are deprived of even basic needs of life. The Adivasis are experiencing ‘half-liberation’.\(^{488}\) There is greater challenge before the Churches of Jharkhand for the liberation of the oppressed and exploited Adivasis who are in the Church as well as outside. It is believed that as Yahweh liberated the struggling and the oppressed Isralite society in history, He will also liberate the Adivasis of Jharkhand.\(^{489}\) In the Asur myth Dharmes has already shown His role as a saviour.

### 4.3.2.8 Holistic Vision of Life

The tribal spirituality is an awareness of God’s presence in their life. The Oraon way of life is spiritualized and materialized as their spirituality as based on justice and affirmed on the basis of God-creation-community relationship towards the omega point of total transformation. The Oraons are Dharmes-fearing people. They are known for their simplicity. Virtue of humility ever flowed in their bloodline. These are the constitutive elements in their spiritual formation. Their nature always tends to the service of humankind. They share their goods freely with others without any hitch. They commit themselves with to the service of humanity without counting the cost. They are known for sociability and equality. ‘Being together’ either for work or for celebration means sociability. In every situation be it of happiness or sorrow they are always ready to help one another. They are so well blessed with holistic vision of life that to carry out even the heavy works they have evolved some not only mutual but charitable help systems called Pancha and Madait which is accomplished for just a meal and rice-beer. On other occasions like the marriage the


relatives and the invited guests bring along with them rice, pulse, rice-beer and leaf-cups with a view to reduce expenses of the family related to.

Asur myth presents holistic vision of life where relationship with nature, one-another and with the supernatural is affirmed. This may be termed as ‘holistic spirituality’ of the Oraons and other tribal people and the fundamental element of Primal/tribal religions.

4.3.2.9 Eco-Friendly

The Oraons are the friend of forests. They are the sons and daughters of the soil and they are known as the children of nature. They walked, talked, danced all over places particularly in forests. Centuries ago, while the trees of their forests swayed and the moon played hide and seek among the branches, the green leaves soughed in symphony and dropped some fruits and flowers for them to eat, they picked up with obeisance, and looked over the hills, upon the sky and murmured with a spirit of gratitude so mysterious. Now their eyes long to see, their minds yearn to remember, their whole being loves to merge in the lands, rivers and forests which have nourished them over centuries. And what has happened today? Within the perspective of Spirituality of Asur myth, Asur evil spirits have been aggressive in different human forms whereby the forests have been shaven clean by industrialists, mining companies and forest contractors, enabling them to amass so much of wealth that can take care of their children for hundreds of years.

In lieu of the traditional trees, the forest department has planted exotic trees which are of no use to them. The elixirs and herbs which used to keep them fit, are no longer available, are no longer available. Everything needed for their well-being has been taken away from them, their land, forests and culture. Now they do not have anything left with which they can defend themselves and survive well. The Oraons have no hope of self-complacency and gaiety. They have been brought in colossal machines, established big factories and township and displaced them. These innovations are treated as the pride of this country wholly forgetting how much impoverishment they have caused to these tribals. The Asurs and

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Lodhars have totally contaminated this region of the earth. The scourge of the life of the Oraons, feared and hated is echoed in prayers. There is only one faith simple and earnest in personal God – *Dharmes* who will protect His votaries and be the sole object of their sacrifice and surrender. Only a note of defiance and denunciation of the evil spirits appear in the prayers of the Oraons.

4.3.2.10 Feminist Spirituality

The tribal society is a patriarchal society. According to their creation story, both male and female have been created together and simultaneously. It means there is equality of the male and female. But in practice women are underprivileged in many ways. For example they cannot inherit parental land. Women are not allowed to take part in community worship and community meetings because of their ignorance of the village traditions and village guardian spirits, as all married women normally come from other villages. For the same reason, the married girls of the villages also do not take part in these activities because it is not their village. They are meant to be married in other villages. However, when some girls cannot get married, they are given a portion of the parental land for their upkeep. In such cases they are looked after by one of their brothers. If the widow gets married, then she loses all her rights from her first’s husband’s house. If she does not get married, then she stays on in her deceased husband’s house.

Thus, in general, women are denied equal status which is strange enough to see how the societies with depth of spirituality ignore equal status. There are some taboos and orthodox views against women which need to be radically changed if the tribal societies really want to bring transformation. It is possible only through the active participation of women. A mother is the first teacher of the child; therefore if women are allowed in community worships and meetings, they can be more effective to run and nurture their family according to the tribal way of life. The tribal societies have to reflect deeply in view of female participation in order to bring transformation and establishment of a just and civil tribal society.\(^{492}\) Religion plays a vital role to justify the socio-cultural status in the case of women; if religion establishes the

norms of social life in terms of women’s subordination, then how can religion be a source of justice and equality?

Eco-Feminism is a spiritual response towards protection and renewal of Creation. It is an attempt to resist all forces, power and systems that reduce, deny or destroy. Each day one can see the deterioration of the earth and destruction of the community. Even liberation theologians failed to address the ecological crisis, the question of the integrity of the creation. In order to preserve creation people need a motherly love, care and nature, Tying the topic of ‘new woman’ and ‘new earth’ which the Oraons have traditionally seen the marriage of the mother earth with the sun-god and prior any first fruit of the mother earth maturely taken everybody does abstinence of food and drinks. This demands a transformation of humanways of living with each other and with the earth. In view of the feminist theology spirituality it is to be developed in three distinct angles;

a) It begins with a scripture of the past memory of women’s oppression.

b) It seeks alternative tradition that support women’s personhood, her equality in the image of God, her equal redeem ability and her participation in leadership.

c) Feminists set forth their own unique method of theology with clear cut indication of spirituality-way of life.

4.2.2.11 Self-Sacrifice

The Asur legend retold-12 Bhai Asurs and 13 Bhai Lodhars, with the burden o their sin, the heat of their blazing furnaces, the earth and heaven cracked. This Dharmes could no longer bear. He sent five birds as His messengers to the Asurs to stop them blowing their furnaces day and night; but they were too adamant not to obey Dharmes through His faithful servants who were punished by the Asurs. They were physically attacked and thus they lost their original appearance. Then Dharmes went down himself in human body i.e. incarnated. He sacrificed His blissful divine life\(^{493}\) and His whole body was full of itch scores. He went round the Asur village begging. He ate the stale food. He was known as a widow’s son. He helped her, spent days and night with her. She loved him and he loved her. In reality he was a

\(^{493}\) Boniface Tirkey, *Oraon Symbols*, p.74.
son to her and she was a mother to him. The Asurs represented the whole humans as evil ones. At a given time something went wrong with the furnace, so they consulted a soothsayer who told them that a human sacrifice was needed. All things then would be set right and the furnace would work smoothly.

In accordance with the advice the Asurs caught the widow’s son and dragged forcibly and pushed him into the furnace. After working at the furnace with their bellows intensified the heat as they were told by him. Ultimately as the furnace was opened, the widow’s son came out of the furnace clothed in gold and silver beaming. The Asur and the Lodha brothers were dumbstricken. Out of greed they too entered into the furnace to fetch gold and silver in order to become rich but alive they were cremated into the furnace. Their women being widows and helpless, were cursed by Dharmes to take vegetative shapes invariably who then in sorrow sobbing realized that it was the effect of the son of greed and disobedience. Dharmes like this on several other occasions was incarnated to redeem the Oraons and had victory over evils.

4.2.2.13 Victory Over Evil

Greed and pride are considered to be the root of evil.\textsuperscript{494} It has been discovered how a section of human kind (Asurs) responds to self-world (nature), human kind and divine. Their way of life is marked by greed and pride which was not acceptable to God and was harmful for the whole creation. In an effort to comprehend Oraons’ situation on enslavement, it is realized that their history has to be reconstructed. The histories written so far were attempted primarily by the aliens, who some way or the other may be classified among the oppressors and exploiters. In spite of several drawbacks there are opportunities to re-state the situation of oppression and the way of liberation in terms of the Asur mythic tradition. The Asur myth found among the Oraons gets a place in analyzing primal myths. Myths are neither false nor a historical but present people’s self-understanding and their effort has to be made to study values and spiritualities of the Asur myth. The methods employed by liberation theology in studying the third world situation may not be neglected or ignored the indigenous wisdom hidden in the indigenous population. In this process, the insights from the ‘Fourth World

Dynamics’ is of help, where the rich spiritual resources can be explored in the indigenous population of the world. Its insights can be adopted not only by the Oraons but also by others living in vicinity. Its ritual context is certainly most important as it is used in the worship of Dharmes-the Supreme God.

**Concluding Remarks**

The spiritualities of monotheism, justice, identity, reformation, transformation, liberation, holistic vision of life eco-friendly, feminism, and eco-spirit are few of the values found in the Asur myth. Anti-greed, love to animals and concern for the whole creation and proper respect and glory to the Creator is simply reflected in the Asur myth. The Oraons believe in Dharmes-the Supreme God while performing the Palkansna/Danda-Katta. Their love for nature does not disqualify them from worship of the Divine. Rather they act in the light and guidance of ‘Maanaa’ in all their activities temporal and spiritual without discrimination. They work out their liberation getting insights from the myth. The popularization and use of Asur myth can further strengthen the tribal and inter-tribal unity inspiring for joint struggle against injustice meted out to them from outside. A thorough study of the Asur myth is necessary for understanding deeper values for peaceful and harmonious human life in this region and at large. This can certainly add to the related literature dealing with the indigenous people in India. The ideal of unity in diversity may be promoted by giving proper place to the primal/tribal myth in theological literature.