

The local group is a distinct system. It comprises of number of families who are living in a common settlement tola or village. It is a permanent unit of those who live in settled villages. They play a vital role in social and economic life. The clan is an important part of tribal social system. It is defined as an exogamous division of a tribe, the members of which are held to be related to one another by some common ties, may be belief in descent from common ancestor, possession of a common totem or habitation of a common territory. Clan can be observed on the basis of their extension and expansion. It can be calculated as conical clan, dispersed clan, territorial clan and local cognatic descent groups which functions as clan.

Lineage is group of families having a common ancestor. It is enumerated in terms of matrilineal and patrilineal lineages decent groups. In some cases lineage groups are classified into two types based on the phase of settling of their members in a village namely the lineages of original settler (the dominant lineage) and the lineages of later comers or tenants (subordinate lineage).

Family is the primary institution which has its own functions and forms in different communities. In tribal families, both men and women take collective responsibility in order to take care of their offspring as well as take collective responsibility in the physical proximity of their living arrangements. There are different forms of family but the forms can be categorized on three ways namely on its condition, on its marital ties and on its compositional types. Patterns of tribal social systems discusses about the seven types of tribes classified by Das. Further, it tells about the various zonal dimensions of tribe such as north-north eastern, central, western, southern and the tribes of Andaman Nicobar and Lakshadweep Islands. Thus, we have discussed in detail the tribal social systems.

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The most important spirit is *Maran Buru* (Great Mountain), who is invoked whenever offerings are made and who instructed the first Santhals in sex and brewing of rice beer. Maran Buru's consort is the benevolent Jaher Era (Lady of the Grove). A yearly round of rituals connected with the agricultural cycle, along with life-cycle rituals for birth, marriage and burial at death, involves petitions to the spirits and offerings that include the sacrifice of animals, usually birds. Religious leaders are male specialists in medical cures who practice divination and witchcraft. Similar beliefs are common among other tribes of Northeast and Central India such as the Kharia, Munda and Oraon.

Tribes of Southern India

The Todas are a small pastoral community living on the Nilgiri Hills in South India. They believe in 1600 or 1800 superior godlike beings, the two most important being *On* and *Teikirzi*. One is the male god of Amnodr, the realm of the dead, and he created the Todas and their buffaloes. He was himself a dairyman. Teikirzi is a female deity and more important for the people, whom she once ruled when she lived in the Nilgiris and established Toda social and ceremonial laws. Most other deities are hill-gods, each associated with a particular hill. There are also two river-gods belonging to the two main rivers. Toda religion is based on the buffaloes and their milk. The temples are the dairies. Many tribes in India show considerable syncretism with Hinduism, such as the Kadugollas of Karnataka, who worship gods such as Junjappa, Yattappa, Patappa, and Cittappa, but in reality are more devoted to Siva, who dominates their festivals and religious observances. Local deities are still of importance, though, as with the Bedanayakas of Karnataka, who worship Papanayaka, a deity supposed to have lived 300-400 years ago as a holy man among them and who performed miracles.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) Discuss the concept of tribes and religion in any one of the zones in your own words.

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2.4 SHAMANISM AND BONGAISM

Among the Saoras tribe of Orissa, in every village there are always a number of shamans and shamanins, whose duty is to protect the living from the onslaught of the dead spirits and of malevolent deities. A man or woman does not become a shaman or shamanin by free choice. Generally, they are sought after by some spirits and if they refuse or hesitate, they are stricken by grievous punishment, which comes in the

shape of illness or accident. A shaman or shamanin has to lead a pure life, and remains completely dedicated to any call or service from his master or suffering neighbours, even if that is under a kind of 'supernatural' compulsion .

Bongaism

Among the Mundas and the Ho tribes in the Chota-Nagpur area there is a belief in a supernatural power which exists as a quality or attribute of objects. Such a religious complex of beliefs found among these tribes is called **bonga**. The **bonga** are vaguely understood as powers definite and impersonal, they do not seem to have any objective appearance or existence. The impersonal **bonga** use the medium of dreams to foretell, daydreams being used for warning about bad things. **Bonga** is the manifestation of a vague supernatural power, one that is the cause of all energy. Differences between individuals, differences of power, prestige and so on are regarded to be to the degree of the **bonga** power possessed by a person. Anything that is new requires a new adjustment, and anything that upsets the personality- environment adjustment is a **bonga**.

2.5 HINDUISM AMONG THE TRIBALS

Hinduism has not been a proselytizing religion. The indigenous population of India is supposed to have contributed in the past generally to the building up of what is known as Hinduism. The tribes retained the principal elements of their faith and practice though this was modified to a greater or less extent. In addition, they shared some of the Gods and Goddesses and even participated in the social festivals and ceremonies of their Brahmanical neighbours, without any effort on the part of the latter for conversion. That participation did not turn them into Hindus. One might indeed say that the tribes can be regarded as being fully absorbed in the Hindu fold of Brahmin priests who perform Brahmanical ceremonies for them during the three critical events of birth, marriage and death. If the latter are still celebrated by tribal rituals then the communities are still true to their own faith in spite of the fact that in the entire fringes of their culture, they participate in some of the ceremonies of the Hindu neighborhood.

2.6 PRE-CHRISTIANITY TRIBALS

The most common tribal traditional religion is generally known as animism. The traditional religion of tribals is more negative than positive. They do not have any fixed place to worship and never worship idols. Offerings and sacrifices are made at any place in the house, on the road, under the tree, upon a rock, by the river side, at the paddy field and other places where spirits are expected to have their abode or expected to visit.

All the hill tribes of Manipur believe in the existence of a supreme –being or God. They all believe He is the creator and sustainer of the universe, and thus worship him so that 'the soul may find its place in heaven' 'They also believe that those who live a good life in this world will have a good life in another world. They believe the Supreme Being is a judging God. It is a common practice among the tribals that whenever a critical case

arises to be settled in the village court, the elders under the chairmanship of the Chief ask both the parties to swear in the name of the Supreme-Being, judgement upon the wrong-doer, which implies a fatal punishment from above within a certain period of time, is fixed before they act by swearing. The most important practices of swearing in the critical cases include biting the 'Raihai Stone' which is a small black round stone, the abode of a war deity, kept on a pile of stones or platform at the premise of the village chief's house. The stone cannot be touched because if anyone touches it, he or she will face serious illness, even to the point of death or becoming mad. Second is eating 'chicken's intestine' by sharing half with each of the parties. The third is eating a piece of 'liver' by sharing half with each of the parties. The fourth is, biting the 'fresh soil' of the disputed land, and the last is drinking the poisonous juice prepared from the plant of an 'ai' which is called 'Aituidawn'. All of these are to be done while swearing in the name of the Supreme-being. After the ritual, if death occurs in one of the two families within the stipulated period of time, this is interpreted as revealing the wrongdoer and consequently the judgment of God upon his family. So, God is seen as a God of judgement. Sacrifices are offered to appease God for both individual and community prosperity and protection from any natural calamities. They have also faith in the existence of certain friendly and evil spirits. The abode of these spirits is stones, trees, rivers, streams, forests and mountains. Thus, there are 'plenty of rooms for the embodiment of spirits in this thing, as found in the traditional religions of the hill tribes.

They also believe in the existence of individual house-hold deities who help the welfare of families, and individual paddy field deities who protest and bless the crops. They, therefore, offer sacrifices very often to these gods to appease them, especially during the time of sowing seeds, harvesting, and festival times. Illness is often conceived to be caused by the evil spirits. So, a physician, fortune-teller, or sorcerer is called in to placate the evil spirits. Among the Kuki Chin, the practice of a 'sacrifice known as Gampi' in the forest is done to appease the spirit so as to release the soul of a particular sick person. Thus the tribal traditional religion is centred on 'fearfulness'. Ancestor worship was practiced among some tribes of Manipur, although some tribes only revere their ancestors. They also strictly observe taboos, gennas and ceremonies. Omens, divinations, and dream are interpreted on all important occasions. In traditional tribal religion the practice of sorcery, wizardry and necromancy were common and even today among the non-Christians the same practice is found.

In the Tribal religions the concept of *Sin* is very vague. The life of the tribal is remarkably free from lying and stealing as a general habit and adultery is a crime punished with a heavy fine according to the tribal custom and law. However, the punishment varies from tribe to tribe. While adultery among the tribals is regarded as a heinous crime, the practice of 'promiscuous intercourse' among the un-married youth is not only condoned but encouraged by the elders, among some tribes. So there is no clear concept of sin. Sin is an offence against tribal custom or taboo, and what is morally evil may be regarded as good if it does not transgress the tribal customs and law. All the tribals believe in the existence

of life after death. They believe that the soul of the deceased goes to the 'Land of dead'; the Kuki-Chins call it 'Misi khua'. It is believed that in the world of dead, there is an exact repetition of the life in this world. So the soul of the deceased goes to his or her own family in the land of dead. As a matter of fact, the Tangkhuals practice the presentation of gift to the dead when a relative dies, a present is brought to the deceased person telling him or her to give the gift to his family members who died before and are already in the 'Land of Dead'. And all the friends and relatives give presents of any kind to the dead person so as to help him continue his life and journey to another world. They believe that the soul of a good man will go to heaven to live with the supreme god, but this concept is also very vague and hard to explain.

One of the universal features of tribal faiths in India is that all being are supposed to be endowed with a living spirit. Animals and plants, rivers and mountains are an exception to this rule. The dead who have apparently left us are still with us; and it is through remembrance and offerings that we have to renew our relationship with them on due occasions. The dead are reborn in the shape of offspring in the present generation. The span of man's comradeship is thus extended to encompass all that he sees around him as well as those whom he loved and apparently lost.

What is significant in the tribal religion, or 'animistic' belief is that tribes like Mundas, the Oraons or the Santhals is that the whole world peopled by spirits is thus rendered holy. In the forests where some of the more isolated communities live, a few trees are never touched or cut, for they represent the primal grove. They are symbolic of the whole forests which men, under the pressure of needs, have had to cut down. The mountains are holy and there are rocks of extraordinary shape or colours which are taken as proofs of their sacredness. If the spirits dwells everywhere and if all are at peace with them, men enjoy freedom from illness and a long life. If anyone falls ill, the general belief is that some relationship has been violated; when, by means of particular magical ceremonies, men or women skilled in the art decide what should be done by the sufferers. And when this is done, health is once again believed to be restored.

Among the 'animistic' tribes of India, all places are holy as they are the seats of spirits. Some have accused the so-called animists of living in perpetual fear of ghosts and spirits. But there does not seem to be any particular justification for this. All men have their hopes and fears and to single out a few elements of tribal religion and say that the latter are born only of fear would be a grave injustice to them.

2.7 CONTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIANITY TO TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT

Christianity provided an ideology that helped the tribal people maintain their identity in the face of serious erosion of their traditional religious, social and political institutions. In fact, there is hardly any custom that needs a metamorphosis. What is needed is to modify and make it suitable for the present times. For example, the dead could be buried in a common place and not within the house compound, or, stop or reduce rice beer

brewing so as to save for the future, say for example, for the education of the children, or again folksongs that sound archaic could be turned to modern music. However, the change from the old to the new must be gradual so that both the old and new generation feels at home with the changes. Some churches have definitely contributed much towards the preservation of culture. Dances, folk-songs dresses and the like have been integrated for the sacramental worship and in church functions and at public functions as well. Today Christian institutions are doing their maximum for the preservation of the cultural identity of the people except in some places where there may be some who are still not aware of the importance of it and may impede its preservation. Pre-Christian social life consisted of hunting of wild animals, and elaborate celebrations after that. Eating and drinking continued for days. If there was a good harvest, feasts of merry making were made, often emptying the granary with all sorts of festivities. At present, the people get together in the churches to thank for the harvest. They also offer the best of products to the Church seeking God's blessing.

In the past, the tribal people were considered primitive, ferocious and dangerous. By listening to the preaching's of the missionaries, the tribals developed a new outlook. For the tribal to become a Christian was to become a man more refined and polished. The Christians missionaries taught the tribals how to read and write. The missionaries taught them to abstain from intoxicating drink. Abstaining from drinking especially led to decrease of social get together which led to spending of more time with families. They started wearing proper dress and understand the value of cleanliness. They realized the value of education. Personal cleanliness, cleanliness in the house and better ways of life were taught by the missionaries and the Evangelists which the tribals started to follow. If a person falls sick in the pre-Christian time the tribals believed that the sick person can be cured by sacrifices of birds and animals, this was a costly affair especially for the poor. When the tribals became Christians, all kinds of sacrifices became unnecessary. The new faith brought peace among the tribals. The tribals found in Christianity, a religion that met their needs which sets them free from the bondage of evil spirits. The work undertaken by the missionaries have led to a number of schools, colleges and other learning institutions being established which have led to a lot of the tribals becoming mobile in their sphere of occupations. They are no longer just farmers, cultivators, but many of them have gone on to become doctors, engineers, administrators, etc. The services which the churches rendered to the tribal people were indeed of a high order. Apart from spreading the message of the Gospels, great service was rendered by the missionaries in the economic distress to which people had been subjected for long time. The missionaries made enquiries about the oppression of land-lords and money –lenders and when the cases came up to court, helped the converts by their counsel and in every possible way. This included exercising their personal influence on officers of the Government. Help of this kind was sorely needed, and a large number of tribal folk were attracted towards the Church, which not only defended their rights but also treated them with a dignity which had never been accorded to them by other mainstream people.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) Discuss in brief the changes brought about by Christianity to the tribal way of life.

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2.8 LET US SUM UP

Religion serves the central and crucial function in society, supporting what has been variously called social integration, social solidarity and social cohesion. Religion is an all pervading supernatural phenomenon in man's life. In this unit we discussed the meaning and definition of religion. Explanation has been given on the different forms of religion practiced by various tribes all over India. This unit also throws light on the changes brought about by Christianity among the tribes of India.

2.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 3 RITES OF PASSAGE

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Pregnancy and Child Birth Rites
- 3.3 Puberty and Initiation Rites
- 3.4 Marriage Rites
- 3.5 Funeral Rites
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 Further Readings and References

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the meaning of rites of passage;
- describe the various types of rites of passage; and
- distinguish between rites of transition, separation and incorporation.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Rite of passage is any of numerous ceremonial events, existing in all societies that mark the passage of an individual from one social or religious status to another. The term was coined by the French anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep in 1909. Many of the important rites are connected with the biological stages of life — birth, maturity, reproduction, and death. Other rites celebrate changes that are wholly cultural, such as initiation into special societies. In modern societies, graduation from school is a rite of passage. Scholars often interpret rites of passage as mechanisms by which society confronts and incorporates change without disrupting the equilibrium necessary to social order.

In all societies, major events in the life cycle are subject to ritualized forms of recognition. Across the world, such events are celebrated in diverse and sometimes elaborate ways, with different cultures singling out different stages of life for attention. Where ancestry is important, as in China or many of the societies of Africa, death may be the subject of extended and intricate mortuary ceremonials, which act both to separate the living from the dead and to transform the dead from elder to ancestor. In others, death may be neglected and cultural salience given rather to marriage, to the installation of office holders, or to initiations into adulthood or into cult groupings. In these cultural processes, actual biological events are subsumed and transformed, even negated in the various schemas of culture. Despite the variety in the forms and meanings of such rituals, a certain unity has been given to the category by the work of Arnold Van

Genep. Van Genep envisioned life in society as a house with many rooms, in which the individual has to be convened formally from one defined position to another. From this perspective, life is not a matter of gradual development and change but rather consists of a series of abrupt and ritualized transitions. Rites of passage are special rituals societies employ to assist their members at key times of biographical change. These life transitions follow a recognizable pattern of behaviour in many cultures; for example, babies are given a name and social identity, youths enter adulthood or marry, others retire, gain particular qualifications such as degrees or enter particular professions, or pass from the world of the living to the world of the dead. Changes of status can be related to changes in identity because the term *identity* embraces social and psychological aspects of life. The term *status* tends to refer to sociological values without reference to the personal feelings and self-evaluation of individuals. In this sense, the term *status* emphasizes the social dimension and identity of the psychological aspects of an individual's life. The idea of status in passage rituals was first introduced by the anthropologist Arnold Van Genep, who saw regeneration as the law of life and described rites of passage as a threefold process with phases of separation, segregation, and integration. For there to be a new self the old self must ritually die. Candidates for some rite would be separated from the status to be left behind, leaving familiar companions, surroundings and home, perhaps encountering actual or symbolic aggression in being wrenched away or carried off. Second, they enter a "between" period devoid of distinguishing marks of status and expressions of their old identity, such as names or clothing. In the case of passage to adulthood, adolescents may together undergo a degree of discipline and share a mutual sense of hardship, bonding them together. Their curtailed freedom begins a reorientation toward their future status and life obligations. This may involve learning the traditions of their society or the skills of some particular profession or trade. Only after this period of learning and endurance is complete do they undergo the third phase of reincorporation into society. However, they do so with their new status and identity, perhaps involving a new name or title, forms of dress or style of language and, almost certainly, new patterns of behavior with appropriate duties and responsibilities.

Van Genep likened society to a house with people moving over thresholds from room to room. The Latin word for threshold is *limen*, hence his three phases of rites of passage as preliminal, liminal, and postliminal. He also argued that, depending upon the final goal of a ritual, the preliminal, liminal, or postliminal phase would be stressed over and above the others. Rites of passage sometimes involve more than one type of status change. In a marriage, for example, it is not only the bride and groom that pass from being single or divorced to being married but their parents also become parents-in-law. Parents, siblings, and friends may all enter new relationships.

Van Genep's scheme was constructed to describe patterns of life in those traditional societies often described as primitive or tribal societies. In such communities of relatively few people and high levels of face-to-face contact, many would acknowledge the change of status and identity of an individual during rites of initiation into manhood, womanhood, or

motherhood. However, caution is required when the idea of rites of passage is applied to events in contemporary and large-scale societies where little recognition exists. Such understandings of ritual permit insight into the significance of funerary ritual, a rite of passage observed in a great majority of human societies. Numerous changes of identity are associated with funeral rites, affecting the statuses of the dead, surviving relatives, and members of the broader community.

3.2 PREGNANCY AND CHILD BIRTH RITES

The ceremonies of pregnancy and childbirth together generally constitute a whole. Often the first rites performed separate the pregnant woman from society, from her family group, and sometimes even from her sex. They are followed by rites pertaining to pregnancy itself, which is a transitional period. Finally comes the rites of childbirth intended to reintegrate the women into the groups to which she previously belonged, or to establish her new position in society as a mother, especially if she has given birth to her first child. At the onset of pregnancy, a woman is placed in a state of isolation, either because she is considered impure and dangerous or because her very pregnancy places her physiologically and socially in an abnormal condition.

Among the Todas of South India, the order of pregnancy and childbirth rites are as follows:

- i) When a woman becomes pregnant, she is forbidden to enter the villages or the sacred places
- ii) In the fifth month, there is a ceremony called “village we leave.” At this time the woman must live in a special hut, and she is ritually separated from the dairy, the sacred industry which is the heart of Toda social life.
- iii) She invokes two deities, Pirn and Piri.
- iv) She burns each hand in two places.
- v) A ceremony marks the leaving of the hut; the woman drinks sacred milk.
- vi) She goes back to live in her home till the seventh month.
- vii) During the seventh month “the ceremony of the bow and arrow” establishes a social father for the unborn child as the Todas practice polyandry.
- viii) The woman returns to her home, performing the appropriate rites. (The last two ceremonies occur only during the first pregnancy, or if the woman has a new husband, or if she wants her future children to have a different father from the ones she has previously chosen).
- ix) The woman delivered in her house, in someone’s presence and without special ceremonies.
- x) Two or three days later, mother and child go to live in a special hut; the rites performed for the departure from the house, then the departure from the hut, and the return to the house are the same as those marking the woman’s previous trip.

- xi) While in the hut, the woman, her husband, and the child are tainted with impurity called *ichchil*.
- xii) Ceremonies are performed to protect them against the evil spirit *keirt*. They return to ordinary life by drinking sacred milk.

Among the Oraon tribe, before a child is born as well as after birth, all the precautions are taken to protect the mother and child. As soon as the child is born, the *Pahan* is asked to make sacrifices to the principal deity. The period of impurity following the child birth is the most dangerous period, as it is during this period; the mother and child are more liable to its attacks than at any other time. The relatives always keep a watch on the room where they are secluded. Until the purification ceremony is performed, the whole house is considered unclean.

Commenting on birthing rites, Van Gennep cites at length W. H. R. Rivers's 1906 ethnography of the Tonga tribe of India. Among these people, a series of pregnancy rites are performed, first to separate the pregnant woman from her village. After an extended period, a ceremony is held in which the woman drinks sacred milk to purify herself, her husband, and their child. Subsequently, the family is reintegrated into their social group. No longer a polluting woman, she is re-established in her village as a mother.

Among the Gonds tribe many restrictions are placed on pregnant woman. A pregnant woman should not go for fishing and all kinds of arduous tasks are also tabooed. During the first pregnancy, she is sent to her parents' house either in the seventh or the ninth month. A special medicine with boiled and dried ginger, pippali (long pepper) and garlic is prepared and given to the woman after delivery. It is believed that this medicine generates heat and keeps mother and child in good health. The child and mother are given ceremonial bath on 9th or 11th day. After this purificatory bath, it is believed that pollution period is over and she can attend to her routine domestic duties.

Among the Kolam tribe of Andhra Pradesh, the women generally work and attend to normal domestic duties till delivery time. No food taboos or other restrictions are imposed on a pregnant woman. The only restriction imposed on such woman is that she should not see either solar or lunar eclipse else she may give birth to a blind child. In case of partial observation, the child will lose one eye. In case she observes the eclipse through the holes of roof of the house, the child will be born with clefted lips. They believed that delivery within the house is very inauspicious. When an expectant mother reaches the advanced stage of pregnancy, a temporary hut is constructed at the corner of the village. This hut is known as *Mala gudisa* or *Maila gudisa* in their dialect. When a pregnant woman develops labour, she retires to the *mala gudisa*. When the pregnant woman is in labour in a separate house, some of the elderly women also stay inside the house but they do not touch her nor render any kind of assistance. The pregnant woman takes care of everything. The experienced women guide her what to do. The mother herself has to bury the placenta. As the woman who delivered a child is considered unclean and impure, she has to take bath and wash her clothes daily in the stream. She should not go to the stream through main path but from

outskirts of the village. The food is cooked in the actual house and is daily sent to the delivered woman. She has to remain in solitary confinement till the umbilical cord has dried up and fallen off. The mother and child are given purificatory bath at home and community dinner is arranged. After this ceremony, a woman, can attend to her routine domestic duties.

During pregnancy, rites of separation is most heighten as the pregnant woman is usually separated from her family, social circle, members of her society by going and living in a separate hut isolated from the rest of the society. From her delivery to till she is purified, the woman is in a transitional state, and when she is purified by taking bath, drinking milk and other rites of incorporation, she is accepted back in the society.

In this section, you read about the meaning of rites of passage and rites of pregnancy, child birth.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) What do you understand by rites of passage?

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2) Illustrate with an example pregnancy and child birth rites.

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3.3 PUBERTY AND INITIATION RITES

The physical puberty of girls is marked by a swelling of the breasts, an enlargement of the pelvis, the appearance of pubic hair, and above all the first menstrual flow. The physical puberty for boys are marked by change in the voice, enlargement of the testes and the lengthening of the penis, the skin over the scrotum begins to thin and redden and there is the beginning of a sparse amount of pubic hair at the base of the penis. There is an increased amount of pubic hair that is noticeably coarser and darker than before, boys also gain in muscle mass, the voice deepens, acne frequently becomes bothersome.

Initiation rites are usually performed when girls and boys attain physical puberty; these initiation rites are performed to initiate the boys and girls into the world of adulthood.

Among the Kolam tribe of Andhra Pradesh, at the time of first menstruation, no specific rites and rituals are observed, but the girl is considered as unclean and impure. Soon after menstruation, the girl takes bath in a nearby stream. In case she menstruates outside the village, a temporary hut is constructed for her. If she menstruates inside her own house, she has to sit in a corner of the house. She should not touch others. She sleeps on the floor and eats in leaf plates. She should not even touch the house. If she touches the walls of the house, the parents think that some misfortune would happen to them and they rebuild the house. Even utensils and other household articles are sold and new articles bought. The menstruating woman is strictly prohibited from moving in the house and entering from the front door. The Kolams believe that if menstruating women do not follow strictly all these taboos, the members of the family may be eaten by the tiger when they go to the forest. She takes bath and washes her clothes in the nearby stream, when the menstruation stops, she is permitted to enter the house. After being cleaned, she performs her household duties.

Initiation ceremony is a unique and distinct social institution among the Kolams tribe. The initiation ceremony is solemnised in order to recognise socially a boy as an adult and to lift certain taboos imposed on them earlier. This ritual is usually observed in the month of Pola (July) prior to full moon day. Every male member who attains the age between 15 to 18 years has to undergo this ceremony before marriage; otherwise one is not eligible for marriage and he is also not eligible to accept sacred food offered at shrines of their deities during festivals or rituals. Before this ceremony, a boy is given the status of that of a girl and restrictions generally imposed on a girl with regard to eating of ceremonial food is imposed. All the Kolams of the settlement meet and decide the day for celebration of the ritual in consultation with the village priest. On this day, the boy, who has to be initiated, is dressed like a woman with sari and other ornaments. He is accompanied by his own brother-in-law and village priest and visits the village deity. They carry along with them bread made of jowar or wheat flour, roasted cakes made of black gram and a cock. The number of pairs of cakes should be equal to the number of divine spirits of his phratry. All these offerings are placed before the village deity and immediately the boy and brother-in-law turn back. The village priest worships the village deity and sacrifices the cock. After completion of the rituals and prayers, the boy and his brother-in-law turn towards the shrine and offer their prayers. Then the priest offers food to the boy and then they return to the village. After this ritual only, the boy is recognised as an adult member and he is eligible to accept sacred food offered to gods and goddesses. Eating of sacred food also makes him eligible to marry. Unless this initiation ceremony is observed, eating of sacred food or marriage celebrations are tabooed. It is significant to note that women folk are not at all eligible to eat the sacred food offered ritually to gods and goddesses till the stoppage of menopause. After this period, the women folk are entitled to eat sacred food offered to gods and goddesses.

Among the Korwa tribe of Chotanagpur region in Bihar, girls who are menstruating must sit apart from the other persons at the time of eating. They should not jump, should not eat cold things or pickles. Menstruating women remain in isolation. They enter into the house or leave the house only by an outer room of every house which has one small door which opens to the backside of the house and never by the main entrance. If there is no other female member in the family, the husband cooks the food. They are also not to visit sacred places. After four days they go to the nearby stream to take bath for purification. They also wash their hair and clothes.

Among the Cholanaickans tribe who can be found in the Nilamdar Valley in Malappuram of Nilgiri District in Tamil Nadu, rites of separation is performed for girls who are menstruating. The menstruating girls are secluded for 4 days in one corner of the cave. During this period, the woman is considered to be unclean.

3.4 MARRIAGE RITES

Marriage constitute an important transition from one social category to another, because for at least one of the spouses it involves a change of family, clan, village, or tribe and sometimes the newly married couple even establish residence in a new house. The change of residence is marked in the ceremonies by rites of separation, always primarily focussing on territorial passage, as the newly married woman almost all the time permanently shift from her own parental house to her husband's house.

Furthermore, because of the number and importance of groups affected by the social union of two of their members, it is natural that the period of transition should take on considerable importance. This is the period commonly called the "betrothal". Among a great number of people it consists of a special and autonomous part of the marriage ceremonies, including rites of separation and transition and terminating with rites which insure either a preliminary incorporation into the new environment or a separation from an autonomous transition period. Then come the rites of marriage, which consist chiefly of rites of permanent incorporation into the new environment.

Among the Kabuis tribe of North-East India, wedding ceremony is solemnised at the residence of the bridegroom. In the early morning of the day, an omen taking ritual called Guak-Pai-Jaomei is performed in which a healthy pig on behalf of the bride is offered to the supreme God. This ritual is performed at the residence of the bride. The spleen of the victim is examined by the present elders in search of good indicators. Guak-pai-jaomei literally means observation of the pig's spleen; (Guak = pig, Pai = spleen, Jaomei = to observe). The pig is roasted and cut into small pieces and then it is boiled. This boiled meat will be taken to the groom's house. After morning food is over, the bride will take bath and put on traditional marriage dress and costume and she will be helped by her sister-in-laws of the family in dressing. Then, she along with her companions will start the journey for her final destination which symbolises that she is separated from her family and her village.

When the bride along with her companions arrives at the residence of the groom, the bride is warmly received by her mother-in-law and a leaf cup of drink is offered which she drinks it (Jouduimei). Before she enters the house, she is purified by contacting the smoke of kham that brings her in as free as possible of the evil adhering to her. Then, she will enter the house by crossing the door with her right foot which symbolises that the bride is incorporated into the new environment.

Finally, the marriage ceremony called Lang-daimhailak is performed in which a fowl, a ginger and a hoe are offered to the supreme God with singing of religious hymns. In this ceremony, the bride and bridegroom are made to sit on a big bed called Langdai. The groom is authorised to sit on the right side of the bride hanging their legs in that side. The right and left legs of the groom and bride are made to press on the iron hoe until the sacrificing cock breaths last. It is performed by one of the Nouthanpous who officiates as priest. In these rites, the initiate (i.e the person undergoing the rites) will be symbolically and in many cultures physically removed from the world to which they have belonged. Separation rites often involve symbolic actions as removing clothing or removing parts of the body.

Among the Khond tribe of Southern India, when agreement between the families has been reached, the girl is dressed in a red blanket and carried to the groom's village by her maternal uncle in the company of the young women of her village; the retinue carries gifts for the groom, who stands in the road, accompanied by young boys from his village armed with bamboo sticks. The women attack the young men, hitting them with sticks, stones, and clods of earth, and the boys defend themselves with their sticks. Bit by bit, they all approach the village, and when they reach it, the fighting stops. The groom's uncle takes the bride and carries her into the groom's house. "This fighting is by no means child's play, and the men are sometimes seriously injured." After the bride has reached the village, there is a communal meal at the groom's expense.

Among the Bhotiya, who inhabits Sikkim, the following ceremonies take place during marriage:

- i) Astrologers determine whether the projected marriage will be favourable
- ii) Uncles of the girl and the boy act as go –betweens and receive presents of money. They meet in the boy's house and then go with gifts to the girl's, to ask for her in marriage.
- iii) If the gifts they bought are accepted, the matter is concluded, and the amount of the dowry is decided upon.
- iv) The intermediaries are given a feast , and there are prayers to invoke blessings upon the bride and the groom. After the last two ceremonies, which are obviously rites of incorporation of the two families, the boy and the girl may see each other in complete freedom.
- v) A year later comes the *nyen* ceremony, it is a meal (at the expense of the boy's parents) attended by all relatives on both sides; the bride price is paid at this time.

- vi) A year after the *nyen*, the *changthoong* ceremony is held: a) An astrologer is called upon to determine a favourable date for the bride's departure from her parents home and to decide in detail those arrangements which would be auspicious. b) A great celebration to which lamas are invited is organized. c) Two men, at that moment called "thieves", force their way into the house, supposedly to steal the girl, and a fight is simulated; the "thieves" are beaten, and half-cooked meat is thrown into their mouths, although they may escape this treatment by giving money to the bride's guardians. Two days later, the "thieves" are honoured and named "the happy strategists". d) Guests give presents to the bride and to her parents. e) A retinue departs with rejoicing. f) The boy's mother and father go to meet the retinue and take them to their home; there are celebrations for two or three days. g) The girl and her relatives return home. h) A year later, the *palokh* ceremony is held; at this time the parents give the bride her dowry (which is double the amount that has been paid for her) and she is escorted to the boy's home; this time she remains permanently.

Thus the betrothal and marriage ceremonies among the Bhotiya last at least three years.

Rites of incorporation are the most prominent during marriage as the married girl enters a new household where she establishes new relations with her groom, her groom families and relatives.

3.5 FUNERAL RITES

Death separates the deceased from their statuses of living parent, spouse, or co-worker. The period of preparing the dead for burial or cremation moves them into a transitional phase when they are neither what they have been nor yet what they will become. Such moments of transition often involve uncertainty and potential danger. The ritual impurity of the corpse derives from its inability to respond to others, yet is still "present" in their everyday routines. Accordingly, people pay their respects to the dead, marking their former identity with them, express sorrow for the bereaved and, by so doing, reaffirm their continuing relationship with them.

Robert Hertz argues that funeral rites involve a kind of parallel process in which the decay of the dead reflects the path of grief in the bereaved. Bereavement involves both the social change of status of people—from, say, being a wife to being a widow, from being a child to being an orphan, or from being a subordinate adult to becoming the head of the family. It also involves psychological changes of identity associated with such shifts. Human beings become dependent upon each other and, in a sense, each identity is made up of elements of other people's influence. People become "part of" each other, and thus when one dies a portion of one's self perishes as well. Some theories of grief discuss this in terms of attachment and interpret bereavement as the loss that follows when attachments are removed.

The fear of ghosts or spirits, for example, can be related to both the dimensions of status and identity. In terms of status, ghosts and spirits

can be seen as the dead who have not been successfully moved from their place in this world to that of the next. They are those who are caught in between the realm of an unintended state, potentially dangerous entities, or phenomena as they symbolize radical change that challenges the social life set up against such change. Sometimes funeral rites exist to try to get such spiritual forces finally to leave the world of the living and get on with their future destiny. At its most extreme, rites of exorcism serve to banish the dead or other supernatural entities and prevent them from influencing the living. In terms of identity, this time the identity of the living, ghosts and spirits, perhaps also include vivid dreams of the dead, all reflect the individual experience of a bereaved person who is still, psychologically speaking, caught up with the identity of the deceased person. Physical death has also been widely employed as an idiom to describe the leaving of an old status and the entry into a new one. In the case of death befalling on an Oraon family, the lineage members have some obligations.

Gonds cremate or bury their dead. Children, unmarried persons, and individuals dying an inauspicious death (for instance, in an epidemic) are buried without much ceremony. Gonds believe humans have a life force and a spirit. On death, the life force is reincarnated into another earthly existence, but the spirit remains in the other world. Gonds perform death rituals to help the spirit move into the other world and to ease its acceptance by other clan spirits. This rite, known as *karun*, must be done to fulfill an obligation to the deceased. Memorial pillars honor the dead. Gonds believe ancestral spirits watch over the living, punish offenders, and guard Gond communities.

Among the Majhwâr, Mânjhi, Mâjhia—a small mixed tribe who have apparently originated from the Gonds, Mundas and Kawars. When a man is at the point of death they place a little cooked rice and curds in his mouth so that he may not go hungry to the other world, in view of the fact that he has probably eaten very little during his illness. Some cotton and rice are also placed near the head of the corpse in the grave so that he may have food and clothing in the next world. Mourning is observed for five days, and at the end of this period the mourners should have their hair cut, but if they cannot get it done on this day, the rite may be performed on the same day in the following year.

Among the Kol tribe of India, the funeral rites takes place in the following way:

- i) Immediately after death, the corpse is placed on the ground “so that the soul should more easily find its way to the home of the dead,” which is under the earth.
- ii) The corpse is washed and painted yellow to chase away evil spirits who would stop the soul on its journey.
- iii) For the same purpose the assembled relatives and neighbours utter pitiable cries.
- iv) The corpse is placed on a scaffold with the feet facing forward so that the soul should not find the way back to the hut and for the same reason the procession travels by detours.

- v) The cortege must not include either children or girls; the women cry; the men are silent.
- vi) Each man carries a piece of dry wood to throw on the pyre.
- vii) Rice and the tools of the deceased's sex are placed there, and in the mouth of the corpse there are rice cakes and silver coins for the journey, since the soul retains a shadow of the body.
- viii) The women leave, and the pyre is lighted; the litter is also burned to prevent the deceased's return.
- ix) The men gather the calcified bones, place them in a pot, and bring the pot back to the deceased's house where it is hung from a post.
- x) Grains of rice are strewn along the route, and food is placed in front of the door so that the deceased, should he return in spite of all precautions, will have something to eat without harming anyone.
- xi) All the deceased's utensils are carried far away, because they have become impure and because the deceased may be hidden in them.
- xii) The house is purified by a consecrated meal.
- xiii) After a certain time, the ceremony of "betrothal," or "union of the deceased with the population of the lower world," is the woman who carries the pot, leaps with joy.
- xiv) A marriage retinue with music, etc., goes to the village from which the deceased and his ancestors have originated.
- xv) The pot containing the bones of the deceased is deposited in a small ditch, above which a stone is erected.
- xvi) On their return, the participants must bathe.

Among the Lushai tribe of North-East India, funeral rites takes place as follows:

The deceased is dressed in his best clothes and tied in a sitting position on a scaffold of bamboo, while next to him are placed the tools and weapons of his sex. A pig, a goat, and a dog are killed, and all the relatives, friends and neighbours divide the meat; the deceased is also given food and drink. At nightfall, he is placed in a grave dug right next to the house. His nearest relative says goodbye and asks him to prepare everything for those who will come and join him. The soul, accompanied by those of the pig, the goat, and the dog, without whom it would not find its way to the land of *mi-thi-khua*, where life is hard and painful. But if the deceased has killed men or animals on the hunt, or if he has given feasts to the whole village, he goes to a pleasant country on the other side of the river, where he feasts continuously. Since women can neither fight nor hunt nor give feasts, they cannot go to this beautiful country unless their husbands take them there. After a certain time, the soul leaves one or the other of these regions and returns to earth in the form of a hornet. After another lapse of time, it is transformed into water and

evaporates in the form of dew, and, if dewdrops fall on a man, that man will beget a child who will be a reincarnation of the deceased.

Rites of separation are the most prominent in funeral rites as the deceased is separated physically from the other members of the society.

In this section you read about of rites of marriage and funeral.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) What do you mean by betrothal?

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2) Why is funeral rites call rites of separation?

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3.6 LET US SUM UP

Rites of passage have three phases - separation, transition, and re-incorporation. In the first phase, people withdraw from their current status and prepare to move from one place or status to another. 'The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group...from an earlier fixed point in the social structure'. There is often a detachment or 'cutting away' from the former self in this phase, which is signified in symbolic actions and rituals. For example, the cutting of the hair for a person who has just joined the army. He or she is 'cutting away' the former self - the civilian.

The transition (liminal) phase, the second is the period between states, during which one has left one place or state but hasn't yet entered or joined the next. 'The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous'.

'In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation) the passage is consummated [by] the ritual subject'. Having completed the rite and assumed their 'new' identity, one re-enters society with one's new status. Re-incorporation is characterized by elaborate rituals and ceremonies, like debutant balls and college graduation, and by new ties, thus 'in rites of incorporation there is widespread use of the "sacred bond", the "sacred cord", the knot, and of analogous forms such as the belt, the ring, the bracelet and the crown'.

3.7 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 4 TRIBAL LANGUAGES, ART AND CULTURE

Structures

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Tribes in India
- 4.3 Tribal Languages in India
- 4.4 Tribal Culture in India
- 4.5 Tribal Art
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 Further Readings and References

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit gives a description about the language, art and culture of the tribes which are a part of India. Every tribal society in India is very rich in terms of their tribal language, culture as well as their art forms which are not only vibrant but also conventional. Tribal language, culture and art generally reflect the creative energy found in the tribal areas among the tribal people. This unit attempts to provide information about their origin, social and cultural characteristics and their present status with the object of developing an understanding in the learner about the distinct features of the tribal language, culture and art. After reading this unit you, should be able to:

- trace the origin of the tribes in India;
- understand the different tribal languages in India;
- feel the tribal culture that has been a part of the Indian society; and
- trace the growth and development of tribal art.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

India, as we know, is a land of multicultural diversities. Defining India has never been an easy task with respect to its cultural plurality and diversity. India encompasses millions of cultural and linguistically diverse languages and dialects. If one tends to define a particular culture or a part of India, it would still be incomplete in the sense that, it would still lack the knowledge of another scholar or researcher in that particular field. Hence, the task of defining and understanding India in one specific arena becomes a researcher's plight.

The primary objective for us, then remains, that it should concentrate on the objective factual findings and not subjective conclusions since terms such as 'culture' or 'tribes' has to be dealt carefully and with much contemplation. India, a country with 29 States and 7 Union Territories consists of people and traditions which vary from each other from one state to the other.

In this chapter we shall try and study the various tribes of India with special attention to their languages and cultures.

4.2 TRIBES IN INDIA

The word 'Tribe' according to sociology means, "A unit of sociopolitical organization consisting of a number of families, clans, or other groups who share a common ancestry and culture." Hence, the term 'Tribe' can be traced back to the 13th Century medieval English where 'tribe' was meant to be the biblical connotation of "the twelve tribes of Israel". The word is from Old French *tribu*, in turn from Latin *tribus*, referring to the original tripartite ethnic division of the Roman state : Ramnes (Ramnenses), Tities (Titienses), and Luceres.

In India, on the other hand, it seems 'tribes' has inhabited the Indian sub-continent for a very long period of time. The species known as *Ramapithecus* was found in the Siwalik foothills of the northwestern Himalayas. The people of India belong to different anthropological stocks. According to Dr. B. S. Guha, the population of India is derived from six main ethnic groups:

- 1) **Negritos**: The Negritos or the brachycephalic (broad headed) from Africa were the earliest people to inhabit India. They are survived in their original habitat in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. For example the Andamanis tribe in India.
- 2) **Pro-Australoids or Austriacs**: After the Negritos, the Austriacs came to inhabit India. They represent a race of people, with wavy and curly hair plentifully distributed over their brown bodies, long heads with low foreheads and prominent eye ridges, noses with low and broad roots, thick jaws, large palates and teeth and small chins. Austriacs tribes, which are spread over the whole of India, Myanmar and the islands of South East Asia, are believed to "form the bedrock of the people". They were the main builders of the Indus Valley Civilisation.
- 3) **Mongoloids**: The Mongoloids are the people who have features that are common to those of the people of Mongolia, China and Tibet. These tribal groups are located in the Northeastern part of India in states like Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Meghalaya and also in Ladakh and Sikkim.
- 4) **Dravidian**: The Dravidians spread all over India, surpassing the population of the first two peoples Negoritas and Austriacs. It is believed that they are the group of people who formed the backbone of the Harappan and the Indus Valley civilisation. This group comprise of the whole of Mediterranean. This group constitutes the bulk of the scheduled castes in the North India. This group has a sub-type called *Oriental* group.

- 5) **Western Brachycephals**: There is not much information on this particular group. But it is believed that the Parsi population of India belongs to this group.
- 6) **Nordics**: Nordics or Indo-Aryans are the last immigrants into India. They comprise the group of Indo-Iranians. Their first home in India was western and northern Punjab, from where they spread to the Valley of the Ganga and beyond. Many of these tribes belong to the “upper castes”.

Apart from the origins of these tribes in the Indian Sub-continent, they are now, in present day, divided into several units of tribes having different cultures and languages. We shall now look into a list of tribal languages in India which constitutes much of the linguistical data in India.

Indian languages have evolved from different sets of stocks and are closely related to the different ethnic groups in India. Broadly the Indian languages can be divided into six groups such as:

1. Indo-Aryan
2. Dravidian
3. Sino-Tibetan
4. Negroid
5. Austric
6. Others

4.3 TRIBAL LANGUAGES IN INDIA

Languages of India, like the culture and tribes of India are numerous. It is often believed that in one set of tribe, there is also another dialect spoken within the same tribal group. These tribal languages are initially considered to be folk languages spoken by a particular group of tribe. Indian tribal languages can be defined as essentially “folk” languages, spoken by people of ethnic groups who prefer to live in relatively isolated groups. Indian tribal languages can simply be defined as the traditional languages utilised by the tribal folk. ‘Folk’, in its simplest of definition means “group of people”, these languages emerge from the tribal languages spoken during time immemorial. Since the languages of the Indian tribes are complex and vary from one another they are preserved orally in the form of songs, folktales and legends. The tales of the folk mainly comprise of these languages and dialects.

Some of the tribal languages prevalent in India are Abujmaria, Garo, Aaria and Tsangla, Saurashtri etc. The Garo Language is spoken by the tribal communities residing in and around Garo Hills, Meghalaya, Tripura, Western Assam and Nagaland. Several dialects of this language include Megam., Chisak, Atong etc. Another tribal language is Abujmaria which is spoken by the people of Abujmar hills in Bastar district. The Paite, Thadou, Hmar, and the Tangkhul languages are some of the tribal languages spoken in most of the north eastern parts of the Indian sub-continent. Some of the leading tribal language speaking groups comprise: Garo Tribes, Chakma Tribes, Naga Tribes, Gond Tribes, Mizo Tribes, Santhali Tribes, Khasia Tribes, Oraon Tribes and Manipuri tribesmen.

Apart from these tribal languages, there are some other tribal languages namely, Gadaba spoken by the people of Koraput district of Orissa, Ariya spoken by the tribal communities of Madhya Pradesh, Tsangla which is spoken in some villages of Arunachal Pradesh.

Indian Tribal languages are extremely orderly and well organised, owing to a developed past and the enlightened educational interference. Garo and Chakma languages have a slight Chinese hint to their diction. There lies an elementary similarity between the Garo and Magh Languages, as both tribes belong to the same origin. Munda, Santhali, Kol, Khasia, Garo and Kurukh are interrelated languages. Munda and Karukh regarded as equivalent languages, due to the syntax and verbs of both are almost identical. Munda, Santhali and Kol languages are even more ancient than the Indo-Aryan languages. These tribal languages further belong to Austro-Asian, Indo-Chinese, and Chinese-Tibetan, Tibetan –Burman or Dravidian Families. As these tribal groups have mostly migrated from places mentioned, they have adapted their languages principally from those nations.

Some of the popular languages spoken by the tribes of India are as follows:

Bhatri, Bhilli, Bhunjia, Chakma, hhatigarhi, Dhanki, Dhodia, hundhari, Gadiali, Gamit/Gavti, Garasia / Girasia, Gojri / Gujjari, Gujarati, Hajong, Halbi, Harauti, Hindi, Jaunsari, Kachchi, Konkani, Marathi, Mavchi, Mewnri, Nagpuri, Naikadi, Nimari, Oriya, Rathi, Sardohi, Shina, Tharu, Wagri, Warli among many others.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) List the different tribal languages prevalent in India.

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The Indo-Aryan Tribal Languages

From time to time, the number of the tribal languages varies. Indo-Aryan tribal language speakers are distributed and scattered over a huge geographical territory of the country. The speakers of this family of tribal language comprise over a total population of almost 491 million people. The northern, eastern, western and central portions of India are full with people who speak the Indo-Aryan languages. More than 574 mother tongues comprise of this family of tribal language in India (Ishtiaq, 1999). Some of the languages are supposed to have great literary traditions and activities. In the family of Indo-Aryan tribal languages there is actually no dearth of literature.

Among the tribal languages spoken under the Indo-Aryan families the three main languages are Bhili language, Khandeshi and Halabi. These three languages

have been categorized as tribal languages. They are mainly spoken in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

Khandeshi group of language in the Indo Aryan family of tribal languages comprises almost five main mother tongues. This language is spoken by a total of almost 1.2 million people.

Kawari and Katkari languages belonging to the Indo Aryan tribal language family are spoken by people of areas of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra. It is spoken by the tribes of some parts of Gujarat and Maharashtra. Tribes of the state of Jammu and Kashmir speak Kishtwari, belonging to the Indo Aryan group of tribal languages. Koch is spoken by tribes of Tripura and Assam and in Cooch Behar district of the state of West Bengal. Konkani and Goanese are two very popular Indo Aryan tribal languages that are spoken in coastal areas of Maharashtra and Goa. Hence, looking at the number of states which speaks these tribal languages shows us that there can be no one specific area identified to a particular tribal language, which, on the other, brings us to understand that the people in the past had migrated and immigrated from time to time over centuries, hence proving an amalgamation of cultures.

The third main language of this group of tribal language that is the Halbi or Halabi is spoken by over 5.25 Lakh people in the states of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh (Ishtiaq, 1999). Thus, 26 per cent of the total population of the country speaks these major tribal languages belonging to the Indo-Aryan family of languages.

Hence, it is proved by the fact that the major regions where the Indo-Aryan tribal languages are spoken include states of eastern, central and western India.

Tibeto-Burman Tribal Language

This family of language is mainly spoken in the northern and north east regions of India. Since the languages spoken by this family of tribes is also similar to that of the language spoken in Myanmar (earlier Burma) hence the name, Tibeto-Burman. Nine languages of the Bodo sub-family of the Tibeto-Burman language family constitute the largest group of tribal languages in the country. These major nine languages of this sub-family are Bodo, Garo, Tripuri, Mikir, Rabha, Dimasa, Lalung, Deori and Koch. These languages are spoken by over half of the tribal population spread in the Brahmaputra valley, North Cachar Hills in Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura. Languages that are belonging to other sub-groups of the Tibeto-Burman tribal language family are spoken by smaller number of populations. Like for instance, twenty four languages of Naga group forms 19 per cent in the states of Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and North Manipur Hills; twenty five languages of Kuki-Chin group forms 15 per cent in the states of Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura. Here the prominent languages are Lushai/Mizo, Thado and Paite. The Tibeto- Burman tribal language family has been divided into three separate branches and these are Tibeto Himalayan, Assam Burmese and North Assam. Further, Tibetan and Himalayan groups are two of the major groups of this family.

Two other prominent tribal communities of the North-East, those belonging to the Naga group and to the Kuki-Chin group (Lushai/Mizo), have after a long-

drawn agitation, succeeded in acquiring a degree of autonomy in the federal set up. But the most numerous tribe speaking Bodo, along with Mikir, and other allied languages like Rabha, Dimasa, Lalung, etc. in the same sub-family of the Tibeto-Burman tribal language family constitute only five to six per cent of the total population in the entire state of Assam.

Among the tribal communities that belong to the Bodo ancestry, Garo speakers form the majority in four districts of the state of Meghalaya and Tripuri speakers along with their allied communities (Reang, Noatia, Jamatia) are concentrated in Tripura itself. But with the continued emigration of the Bengali speaking population in these areas, the region has seen a tremendous decrease in the language spoken from 40 to 20 percent.

Many of the languages belonging to the Tibeto-Burman tribal language family have been affected by the Indo Aryan languages and are restricted to the valleys only. However, Tibeto-Burman tribal languages are spoken by huge tribal population of the country extending from Ladakh to north eastern region of the country. This language is also a sub family of the Sino – Tibetan family of tribal languages

Examples: On the western, northern and the southern borders of the country, Garo tribal people speak either Bengali language or closely connected dialect of Assamese language. The influence of Bengali language is generally strong among the Gar tribal community of Bangladesh as in this country, the mode of all primary education is Bengali. The impact of Bengali as well as English language over Garo language generally comes with the borrowed words. Bodo language is written by using the Devanagari script. It also has a history of using Roman script. Bodo language shares some common salient features with the other languages belonging to the Bodo group.

Bodo language is one of the popular Indian tribal languages. This language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family, which is a sub-group of the Sino-Tibetan language group. It is mostly spoken by the Bodo people residing in the north-eastern region of India and also by the people of the neighbouring country that is Nepal. Bodo language has got the status of one of the official languages of the state of Assam. Bodo language is closely associated with the Dimasa language of the state of Assam and with the Garo language of the state of Meghalaya. This particular language of this Tibeto-Burman family is due to Bodo struggle of the tribes of north eastern part of India. It has attained numerous recognition and it is now also used as one of the official languages in India. The language also has post graduate diploma courses in the state of Assam.

Garo language is one of the most popular languages of India. It is spoken by majority of the people residing in Garo Hills in the state of Meghalaya. Garo language is also popular in several districts of the state of Assam like Dhubri, Goalpara, Kamrup, and the Darrang. This popular tribal language is also spoken in the neighbouring country of Bangladesh. Garo language uses Latin alphabets. This language also has a close association with Bodo language, the language is spoken by the Bodo tribal community, which is one of the most prominent communities of the Indian state of Assam. Garo language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family. Garo tribal language does not

comprise any tones. Interestingly, the syllable structure of this language is very similar to that of other Asian tone languages. Syllable boundaries in Garo language are phonologically very sharp except in the borrowed words.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) Describe in brief the distinction between Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman Tribal Language.

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Dravidian Tribal Language

This family of language spoken in the Indian sub-continent mainly comprises of the tribal languages spoken in the southern parts of the country. In the states of Chennai, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, etc. the group of Dravidian tribal languages is spoken by near about 158 million people. They account for a total of 24 per cent of the total population of the country. In the Dravidian language group there are basically four prominent literary languages and these are Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada and Tamil. Some of the initial languages in this family such as Kudu are not considered to belong to this family of languages since it has been merged with the Kanada language. A lot of the languages have been included as mother tongues and the most important among them are Kolami, Kui, Konda, Koya, Gondi, Oraon/Kurukh, Parji and more. Little information is available regarding the Dravidian tribal languages. Thus, it can be said that the Dravidian tribal languages are mainly **Kaikadi** that is another major Dravidian tribal language that is spoken by the Kaikadi tribes in several parts of Karnataka and Maharashtra. Another Dravidian tribal language is **Kanikkaran** that is spoken in Ernakulam, Thiruvananthapuram and Kozikhode districts of Kerala and Tirunelveli district of the state of Tamil Nadu.

Konda-Dora is another Dravidian language and it is spoken in several areas of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. Koraga is spoken in parts of Kerala. Kota is another hugely spoken Dravidian language. It is mainly spoken in parts of Tamil Nadu. Koya is spoken in several parts of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. Its main dialects are Podia, Malakanagiri Koya, Chintoor Koya, etc.

Kamar is another tribal language belonging to the Dravidian family and spoken by the tribal communities in areas of Rewa district of the state of Madhya Pradesh and in Raipur district of the state of Chattisgarh. It is also spoken in parts of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra and Orissa.

Austro-Asiatic Tribal Language

Here are the details of a few of the Austro-Asiatic tribal Languages. These languages are spoken mainly in states of West Bengal, Jharkhand and in some parts of the north eastern states of India.

Kharia language is an Indian tribal language that refers to a tribal or ‘adivasi’ group of the country. This language belongs to the Austro-Asiatic language

family and is mostly spoken by the tribal people living in the states of Jharkhand and Orissa. The other major Kharia speaking states are southern Bihar, northern Orissa, Assam, and eastern Madhya Pradesh.

Santhali is an Indian tribal language that belongs to the Santhali sub-family of the Austro-Asiatic language family. This language is very closely associated with Ho and Mundari languages. It is also spoken in neighbouring countries of India like Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan. In India, this language of the Austro-Asiatic language family is spoken in the states of Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa and Tripura. Santhali language is mainly spoken by the Santal tribal community. This tribal community is the largest tribal community of the country and the people of this tribal community are considered as quite backward. Most of the people of Santal tribal community work in coal mines or steel factories of Jamshedpur and Asansol. Santhali language is basically a dialect of Munda tribal language.

It is generally believed that Santhali Language is much older than the Aryan language. Currently, the Santhali tribal language is not much in use anymore. The Santhali pundits use the language for literary works and religious documents. This Language is very famous for its numerical classifier which is alien to those of the Dravidian family of languages.

Khasi language, a popular Indian tribal language, belongs to the Austro-Asiatic tribal language family and is spoken mainly by the tribal people of the state of Meghalaya. This language is a part of the Khasi-Khmuic group of languages. Khasi language is vaguely connected with the Munda branch of the Austro-Asiatic group of languages that is mainly found in east-central region of India. In India, most of the speakers of the Khasi language are found in the state of Meghalaya. However, this language is also spoken by huge number of people of the hill districts of the state of Assam. Quite a few speakers of Khasi language are found in the neighbouring country of Bangladesh. Khasi language is tremendously rich in legends and folk stories. Interestingly, this language had no script of its own in the past.

To conclude, it can be said that the various dialects of Khasi language, namely standard Khasi, Langrin, Bhoi, Nongtung and Lyngngam show the extent of diversity found amongst them mainly from the word order point of view. Among the five varieties, standard Khasi, Langrin and Lyngngam are similar whereas Bhoi and Nongtung are very different. Lyngngam though is similar to the first, is quite different in various other aspects

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) Describe briefly the distinction between Dravidian and Austro Asiatic tribal language in your own words.

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4.4 TRIBAL CULTURE IN INDIA

Having discussed the various families of languages in the Indian Sub-Continent, the cultures of India are as diverse as that of the languages. ‘Unity in diversity’ is one of the most spectacular features amongst the population of India. Tribal culture of India, their traditions and practices interpenetrate almost all the aspects of Indian culture and civilisation. From the Aryan, Dravidian to the Indo-Tibetan languages, Indian tribal culture has also seen a tremendous merging of cultures within its own people.

It is considered to be very important to live within the tribal cultures of India, in order to understand their ways of life. Some of the tribal communities share similarities and yet are diverse in their religious and traditional beliefs. Some are prominent worshippers of the Hindu deities while others follow the path of the Christian missionaries. Animism and all forms of pagan worship are still prevalent in these communities. The festivals in these communities are also much of a delight to see with its colourful and joyous celebrations; the tribes in India indeed form the very basis of incredible India! The societies by which these tribal communities survive are very patriarchal in their outlook although some tribal communities have gradually inherited the modern forms of society where each one is respected for his or her own set of views and beliefs.

A lot of the tribal population in India is still backward. They lack education and literacy policies are yet to dawn in a few rural and tribal areas of the Indian –Sub-continent. There are tribes who still practice witchcrafts and tantric forms of religion. The different tribes in India if ever counted can move up to a mind boggling number, with all their ethnicities and impressions. In India a new dialect can be witnessed almost each new day; culture and diversification amongst the tribals can also be admired from any land direction. These various tribes still inhabit the different parts, especially the seven states of the North-eastern region and almost each and every nook of the country. The specialty of the Indian tribes lies in their customs, cultures, and beliefs and, in particular, the harmony in which they survive in unanimity with nature. Tribal living perfectly portrays a well-balanced environment, a procedure that in no way upsets the ecological balance.

The tribal population of India is over 104 million according to 2011 Census. Each of the tribes is a distinctive community, either migrated from a different place or the original denizens of the land. All in all, the tribes of India encompasses the real and colourful traits of India that the whole world knows. Since it is from the tribes that some of the tribal languages developed to become official languages, we can be safe in saying that the cultures which are considered to be “developed” also has their roots in the Indian tribal cultures.

Tribal people generally firmly cling to their identity, despite external influences that had threatened tribal culture, especially after the post-independence chaotic period. However it is observed that Christianity has brought about a change that can be termed as a ‘total transformation’ in tribal lifestyle and outlook, particularly in the North-eastern states of India.

In discussing a few tribal cultures of India, we shall try to cover the widely prominent cultures of north, east, west and southern tribes of India. Since it would be a remarkably tedious and an acutely impossible task to study all the

tribes of India, we shall take one or two tribal cultures from each of the prominent four regions in India.

Northern Regions

The tribes of Himachal Pradesh have marked their own charts in the Indian sub- continent and are known for their distinct tribal cultures. Tribes of Himachal Pradesh are scattered in different parts of this state and have occupied a considerable percentage of India. Dancing, musical melodies, festivals, fairs etc. bore evidence to it. They are as such nomadic people and their physical appearances make them distinctly visible from each other.

The tribes of Himachal Pradesh belong to the famous Indo-Aryan family group. As far as the physical appearances are concerned, these tribes of Himachal Pradesh also have got identifiable features of that of an Indo-Aryan or Mongoloid.

The major tribes of this region include **Kinnaura tribe**, **Lahaul tribe**, **Gaddi tribe**, **Gujjar tribe**. As far as the occupations are concerned, these tribes of Himachal Pradesh have taken up the occupations including cattle rearing and also much of the tribal population works for raising of wool. Since it is situated in the cold northern region of the Indian subcontinent, raising of wool is considered to be one of the main occupations of the tribes. There are quite a handful of tribes of Himachal Pradesh who have adapted to occupations like cultivation and also horticulture.

Dresses that these tribes of Himachal Pradesh wear also are quite exquisite to look at. The male dresses include long coat and woolen pyjama, and the women of Himachal Pradesh have a woolen saree, popularly known as Dhori as their attires. Shoes that are made up of wool and goat hair protect their feet. It is also a known fact that the dresses are similar to those of the people in Jammu and Kashmir states of India, since these two states have a similar geographical existence.

Although these tribes of Himachal Pradesh celebrate all the important festivals, these tribes of Himachal Pradesh also have added fervor to the festive season by incorporating their own traditional customs and beliefs. Since they are a number of tribes in the region, each tribe follows its own sets of beliefs. One of the major tribes in Himachal Pradesh is the **Gujjar tribe**. Gujjar tribal community has developed the practice of carrying on conversation in numerous languages namely, Urdu, Hindi. They have also adopted the religion of **Islam**. Since the existence of this tribe is dated back to the 6th century, these tribes have been a result of all cultural diversities from then on. Another tribal group, **Kinnaura tribal** community, is one of the Scheduled tribes of Himachal Pradesh state. Their language is called Kinnauri and it is considered to be one of the most beautiful dialects in the state. It has been assumed that the Kinnaura people belong to the Kinner group who got mentioned in Mahabharata. Their physical stature bears some similarities with the **Aryans**. The people of the **Lahaul tribal** community of Himachal Pradesh converse in the beautiful language of Pattani. They are the inhabitants of Lahaul and they are the amalgamation of Munda tribes and Tibetans. Their societal structure is divided into upper and low castes and this tribal group are followers of Buddhism.

The Gaddi tribes of Himachal Pradesh dwell in districts like Chamba, Kangra etc. the people of this tribal group are not nomadic in nature and they have their own villages where they reside in a cluster. The notable thing about the Gaddi tribe is their costumes. Most of the people of this community are shepherds hence, they wear a cloak like dress in order to keep them warm from cold however some are engaged in other occupations too.

Major Tribes of Madhya Pradesh

Bhaina tribe is one of the most ancient tribes which has resided mainly in the forest areas of Madhya Pradesh. These tribal groups are reckoned as scheduled tribes and are found in the Bilaspur District in the state, which is presently included in the state of Chhattisgarh.

Gond tribe stands first in terms of population not only in the state but also among the other major tribes of India. Although, the tribal people inhabit almost entire area of Madhya Pradesh, yet, they are mainly found in Vindhya hills and Satpura mountain range.

Bhil tribe is third largest tribe in India and second in Madhya Pradesh. The habitat of Bhil tribes is found mostly in Dhar district, Jabua district and West Nimar district. This tribe follows the Hindu form of religion and mainly practice cultivation.

Bharia tribe is found in the Patalkot valley and its adjoining areas in this state. The people of this tribal community are known for their usage of medicinal plants to treat different kinds of diseases.

Binjhar tribe, the costumes of this tribal community deserve appraisal and the people of this group are adept in making jewellery from cane, grass, or beads. Sometimes the tribes also use silver as a metal.

Other major tribes in Madhya Pradesh are **Boneya tribe**, **Damaria tribes**, **Dhanwar tribe** who engage in all forms of Indian art and crafts. They form the Rajput families of Madhya Pradesh. They lead nomadic lives and rear cattle. This tribal group has developed its own cotton industry for its own betterment.

The other known and important tribe in this state is the **Kawar tribe** and they are thought to have descended from the family line of the Kaurava rulers. The Kauravas were the religious characters in the book of Mahabharata who fought with the Pandavas.

Another tribal group of this state is the **Kharwar tribe**. They fall into the Dravidian family group. It is believed that they are also in the family line of Suryavanshi Rajputs.

A multitude of **Kolam tribe**, also identified as Kolamboli, Kulme and Kolmi, has settled down in every corner of the state of Madhya Pradesh. They were workers as Priests in the villages of Madhya Pradesh. Their main form of occupation was food collection through farming. Another tribe which constitutes the line of tribal families in Madhya Pradesh is the Majhi tribe, who make boats in order to sustain their livelihood. Their facial features and physical appearance is similar to the Mongoloid tribes and they practice the tantric religion. It is a form of witchcraft in the Hindu religion.

The **Majhwar tribe** celebrates various colourful festivals throughout the year in the state of Madhya Pradesh. They also celebrate different festivals which enrich the whole of the state.

Another is the **Mina** tribe which has settled down in various places of the region and also has got an inheritance of festivals, fairs, dancing and also singing.

Other major tribes of Madhya Pradesh are the **Pao tribes** and the **Saharia tribes** who engage in the beliefs of Hinduism. Their main deity is Lord Vishnu. They celebrate all the Hindu festivities. Mouth-watering dishes, multihued festivals as well as variety of religious exercises are what comprise the rituals and culture of these Saharia tribes. The society of this tribe is divided in several sub groups.

Fairs and festivals of tribes of Madhya Pradesh

Mainly at the time of festivals and other joyful social occasions, the tribes of Madhya Pradesh deck up in quite colourful dresses. Ornaments worn by the tribal women also add to their glamour and beauty.

With the building up of tempo, spectators start to join spontaneously. Every year the tribal groups celebrate variety of festivals with lots of merry making, dancing and singing. Exquisite dresses both for males and females have become the style statement of these tribes.

Infact, fairs and festivals form the basis of the tribes of Madhya Pradesh. The fairs of the tribes of Madhya Pradesh display a colourful spectacle with celebration by the entire community. The fairs which in the Hindi language are called 'Mela' fill the whole of Madhya Pradesh with colour and joy during the festivities. Dancing and singing are not limited to a selected few. The government of Madhya Pradesh have launched many developmental programmes for their development. The tribes of Madhya Pradesh have thus maintained their unique characteristics and have preserved their traditions even if they have been or are being exposed to a great extent to the influences of other cultures. They have succeeded in preserving their own separate identity with time.

Tribes of Madhya Pradesh are the true representatives of the state. The culture of the tribes of Madhya Pradesh is distinguished by the composite remains of the Scythian and Dravidian culture. Very much similar to a number of tribal communities of the Indian subcontinent, the tribes of Madhya Pradesh are widely oriented towards religion and spiritualism. Their prevalent religion is Animism. Although much of the tribal population in Madhya Pradesh is influenced by the Hindu religion, some of the other prevalent religions are Jainism, Christianity and Islam. The tribal population of Madhya Pradesh has carried on the practice of farming and cultivation. In order to supplement their income, some of these tribal groups become labourers in factories, industries etc. No wonder, the enrichment of the culture of these tribes of Madhya Pradesh largely has been possible due to its efforts to preserve it. In Madhya Pradesh, it is a known fact that the tribal population inhabits at least 50% of the districts, although the number varies from place to place.

Western Region

There are over 6 million Adivasis or tribal people in Gujarat. They mainly inhabit the terrain adjoining the Aravalis (LN, 1996). The Adivasis consist of numerous different tribal groups, the term 'Adivasi' meaning the 'original inhabitants'. Tribals such as the Siddhis, Rabari tribe, Padhar tribe, Mers and Bharwads live in the coastal Saurashtra districts of Junagadh, Jamnagar and Kutch. They work as casual labourers, cattle breeders and find employment in the ports. The Siddhis are known to have come to India from East Africa and they have a distinct feature similar to that of the negroids. The Australoid Adivasis (who have Australoid features) live in two different regions. One group lives in the river valleys of the Surar, Broach and Bulsar districts and are known as the Voknas, Varlis and Gambits. They have Konkan features. The other group lives in the hill tracts along the state's eastern border and comprise of the Bhil Garasias, Dungri Bhils, Ratwas, Naikas, Dangi Bhils and others.

In the plains of the Surat, Broach and Bulsar Districts, there are also other tribals, such as, the Dhodias, who might have migrated from the Dhulia region of Maharashtra. The festival of light, Diwali, has also been adopted by the Hindus, which was originally the festival of the aborigines. It is also believed that the Hindu religion borrowed the worship of Lord Shiva and Paravati from the Adivasis of Gujarat. The tribes of Gujarat are engaged in different occupations. In olden days, the Bhils depended on the slash-and-burn cultivation system under which they cleared thick forests by cutting trees or burning them and cultivated crops in this land for a few years until the natural fertility of the soil was exhausted. They then moved on to new forests, leaving the land fallow for it to recover its fertility. Their occupation was hunting, forest remains and fishing. Most of the Adivasis depend on agriculture either as landowners or as farm workers.

The social set up of the tribes in Gujarat is quite different from that of a usual Hindu community. The women in these communities have more freedom than their Hindu counterparts in matters of marriage, divorce and remarriage. Besides this, the customs and lifestyle of the tribes vary as well. The colourful costumes of the tribal people of Gujarat add charm to the onlooker. The tribes of Gujarat also enjoy various festivals and celebrate fairs, festivals with much gaiety and joy.

Eastern Region

Tribals of Nagaland constitute a major percentage of the total population of the state. Angami tribe, Ao tribe, Chakhesang tribe, Chang tribe, Khiamniungan tribe, Kuki tribe, Konyak tribe, Lotha tribe, Phom tribe, Pochury tribe, Rengma tribe, Sumi tribe, Sangtam tribe, Yimchungru tribe and Zeliang tribe are the prominent tribes of Nagaland. Even the tribes like Angamis, Aos, Konyaks, Lothas, and Sumis are predominant. The tribal communities of Nagaland are scattered over a large portion of the state. One of the significant aspects of the culture of tribes of Nagaland is the distinctive character and identify of each tribe in terms of indigenous traditions, customs, language and dresses. The tribes of Nagaland have their own distinctive language. In Nagaland, the different tribes speak around 60 different dialects, which belong to the Sino-Tibetan language family. Traditional songs and dance forms are an integral part and parcel of the rich culture of the tribes of Nagaland. The costumes

of tribes of Nagaland are very colourful. Interestingly, some of their dresses are designed as per the different occasions. Tribal dances are performed during the celebration of the festivals and marriage ceremonies. They also wear colourful jewellery.

Nagaland is a land of festivals. All the tribes celebrate their distinct seasonal festivals with a pageantry of colour and a feast of music. They regard their festivals sacred and participation in these celebrations is compulsory. Most of these festivals revolve around agriculture, being the mainstay of the tribal society of Nagaland. Although some religious and spiritual sentiments are interwoven into secular rites and rituals, the pre-dominant theme of the festivals is offering prayers to the Supreme Being having different names in different Naga dialects. The tribal festivals are celebrated all over the state. Like for instance, Nazu festival is one of the most popular festivals of Pochury tribe of the state. This festival is celebrated for 10 continuous days in February. These festivals are celebrated with glitter and gaiety.

Tribes of Manipur

The Paite tribe, originally, belong to the Kuki-Chin-Mizo group. This group hails from the Tibeto-Burman family. In Manipur, the Paite tribes are considered to be one of the scheduled tribes, mainly located in Lamka Town of Churachandpur district. The Paite tribe, originally known as belonging to the KUKI family of tribes in Manipur gained their recognition of a separate tribe in the early 1950's, hence, they are now recognised by the constitutions as Paite. From then on they were known by their present name. The word Paite also has got etymological significance. If one dissects Paite in to two terms, 'pai' stands for marching, while 'te' means people. As a whole, Paite means "a group of people marching." Besides Manipur, the Paite tribes also inhabit Mizoram. The Paite tribes are pious and religious minded. Majority of Paite tribe are the followers of Christianity. Most of them were converted to this religion in the nineteenth century due to the intervention of British missionaries. They also worship their Gods, "Pathian". Just like many of the Paite tribal communities, they were known to have originated from the mountain caves, known as Khul.

Dance, songs, tales, all linked to every day chores of the life of these Paite tribe is one of the very interesting features of this particular tribe. *Zangtalam* is a popular dance style performed by this community. Both Paite males and females folks actively take part in it. These Paite tribe converse in a dialect, popularly known as Paite.

By nature the Paite tribe are timid, recluse people who are truly committed to whatever they do. Although the Paite tribe are mainly agriculturists, many of them have achieved remarkable fetes. Apart from the Paite tribe in Manipur, the state has more than 20 tribes currently. Some of them are Thadou, Kuki, Simte, Zou, Hmar, Tangkhul Naga, Kom, Zeite and many more. The lifestyles and ways of living of these tribes are of no much difference to one another but due to the different tribal languages, they form different tribes and communities.

Southern Region

Tribes of Goa form an integral part of the rich cultural heritage of the state. Tribal communities of Goa have managed to retain their ancient and indigenous

ways of life and traditional practices, customs and way of living. The chief tribes of this smallest state of India are Gowdas tribe, Kunbi tribe, and Dhangars. Like some other states of India, Goa too was invaded by the **Aryans**. Some of the tribes of Goa are considered as the original settlers of Konkan region much before the invasion of the Dravidians. There are no concrete records regarding the origin or how they have migrated to Goa. Goa has the lowest proportion of Scheduled Tribes that accounts for around 0.04 percent of the total population.

Gowdas tribe is the largest tribal group inhabiting the interior villages of this state. In their society, women enjoy a high status and rights. Further, they also play a prominent role in the economic matters. The major tribal communities of Goa live in isolated villages. Their indigenous lifestyles, traditions, ceremonies, customs, religious beliefs, practices and superstitions form a significant part of the culture of the state. The tribes of Goa differ from one another in terms of dress pattern, rituals and customs. The region of Goa being a very important aspect of colonisation, the tribes in Goa do share an element of the colonial powers. Besides the English form of protestant Christianity which was prevalent during the centuries of colonisation, the tribes in Goa had to adapt also to the different French, Portuguese and Dutch colonial settlements. Since during those times there were a lot of inter culture marriages, the tribes in Goa can be considered to have one of the most diverse cultures in the Indian sub-continent.

Tribes of Tamil Nadu

Tribes of Tamil Nadu are mainly prevalent in the district of Nilgiris. Of all the distinct tribes, the Kotas, the Todas, the Irulas, the Kurumbas and the Badagas form the largest group, who mainly had a pastoral existence. The men from this family of the tribes are occupied in milking and grazing their large herds of buffaloes and pastoral farming. This tribe is distinguished by its traditional costume, thick white cotton cloth having stripes in red, blue or black, called puthukuli worn by both women and men over a waist cloth. They settle mainly in Munds comprising of five-six typical wagon shaped, windowless split bamboos, reeds and thatch huts. They do not worship any god and their consciousness is cosmic.

The Badagas belong to the backward class and are not classified as tribals. They comprise of an agricultural community and settle near Nilgiris of Tamil Nadu. They are engaged in tea cultivation and potato growing. They speak a language which is a mixture of Tamil and Kannada language. They form the largest group of tribes and boast a rich oral tradition of folktales, songs and poetry. These tribes are Hindus and belong to the Shiva sect. The Badagas celebrate the hindu festivals such as diwali and one among the very famous festival celebrated by this group is Pongal.

The Kotas are mainly concentrated in the Tiruchigadi area in the Nilgiris Hills. They are distinguished by their colourful folk dances and are basically musicians. They are mainly engaged in producing handicrafts. This tribe of Tamil Nadu are expert iron smiths, potters and carpenters. Their population is very small and they live in huts that have a living and sleeping area and a place of worship. Their language is similar to that of the Badagas. They speak Tamil and a form of Kanada language.

The Kurumba tribe of Tamil Nadu inhabit the intermediate valleys and forests in villages. They were mainly known for their black magic and witch craft. They use to hunt and gather for living in the past, but they have shifted their cultivation into coffee and tea plantation.

The Irulas tribe of Tamil Nadu occupy the lower slopes and forests at the base of the Nilgiri Hills. They constitute the second largest group of tribes after the Badagas and they are largely similar to the Kurumba tribe of Tamil Nadu. This tribe produces honey, fruits, herbs, roots, gum, dyes etc., and trades them with the people in the plains. This tribe is famous for snake catching and removing the venom. They are also gradually changing from the earlier ways of hunting to a more modern form of life.

Check Your Progress IV

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) How would you, in your own words, describe the tribal culture in India.

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4.5 TRIBAL ART

Another field in which the tribes of India have gained recognition is in the field of arts. Tribal art has been prevalent since centuries from the time India came into existence. In the earlier civilizations, such as the Indus Valley civilization or the Mohenjodaro civilizations, art as a whole, has been a part and parcel of tribal life, society and culture.

Indian tribal art is rich in its expression and have a sense of sensitivity and creativeness. Traditional Indian tribal art tries to wholly recreate the immortal charisma of Indian tribal life. Through solemn efforts, the Indian tribes try to keep alive a culture that is thousands years old, comprising music, traditions, rituals and art. They live in complete harmony with nature by preserving their resources and blending with the environment. Tribal paintings usually belong to the remote tribal regions, in forests or high up in the mountains.

The tribal art has developed to gain significance in the modern world encompassing several dimensions. Its rich, exotic and intense forms of art can be seen not only in the gond, Kurumba or Saura paintings but also in the daily woven shawls or other forms of art such as pottery, home-decorations, handicrafts and ornaments.

The rural folk paintings of India bear distinctive colorful designs, which are treated with religious and mystical motifs. Some of the most famous folk paintings of India are the Madhubani paintings of Bihar, Patachitra paintings from the state of Orissa, the Nirmal paintings of Andhra Pradesh, and other such folk art forms.

Tribal art with its full energy and life, ethnic, vibrant and colorful in its forms has gained significance in the mainstream art forms. Tribal dance, tribal music, tribal handlooms, handicrafts and paintings have become a daily product of most of the Indian households today.

Check Your Progress V

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) Discuss in brief the Tribal Art in India.

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4.6 LET US SUM UP

As mentioned earlier, to encompass the cultures and traditions of each and every tribe existing in India is a tedious task since they are numerous but the overwhelming fact remains that India, being the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious country, shares a very important sense of unity in its diversity. It is believed that languages form community, communities form a society and a society forms a nation-state, hence, the Indian tribal languages being diverse in its kind, forms the basis of the Indian Democratic, Sovereign, Federal and Republic Constitution. Amidst several languages, cultures, traditions, religion and socio-politico conflicts it still remains a country of diverse qualities and the largest democracy in the world.

4.7 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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