

TRIBAL STUDIES IN INDIA: INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES AND APPROACHES

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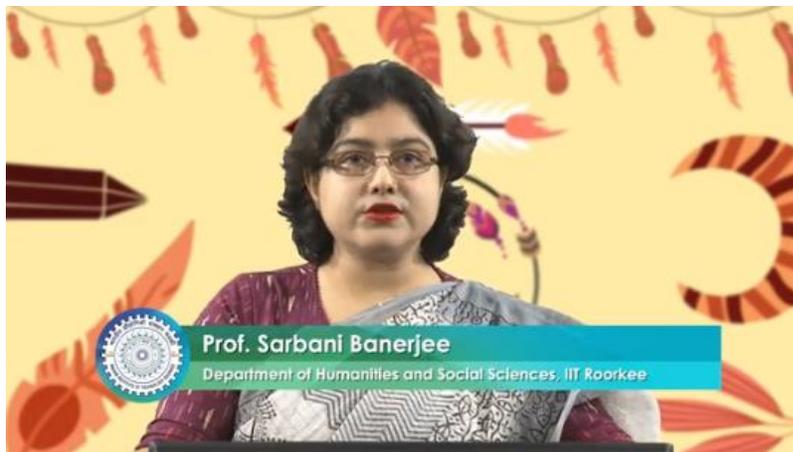
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Lecture 61

Lecture 61: Tribal Myths, Ecology and Nature Worship

Thank you. Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on tribal studies in India, interdisciplinary perspectives and approaches. Today, we are going to discuss tribal myths, ecology, and nature worship prevalent among the tribes. Tribal religion, or the religions of tribal people, have their roots largely in oral traditions, which are passed down or bequeathed from generation to generation through word of mouth. Thus, orality plays a very important role in passing knowledge from one generation to another.



According to Russian John Joseph, I quote, 'Every tribal religious system consists of three essential elements.' First, they believe in the existence of a superhuman world, which refers to the belief system of tribals. Second, they form a human relationship to the superhuman world, which refers to their value system. Third, to establish a relationship, they practice various rites and rituals, which refer to their action system. The rituals among the tribes are shared with each other through oral means.

INTRODUCTION

- Tribal religion has its roots largely in the oral traditions, passing down the generations through the word of mouth.
- Roshan John Joseph writes, "Every tribal religious system consists of three essential elements. Firstly they believe in the existence of a superhuman world which refers to the belief system of tribals. Secondly they form a human relationship to the superhuman world which refers to their value system. Thirdly for establishing a relationship they practice various rites and rituals which refer to their action system."
- The rituals are shared among each other through oral means. Many rituals are exchanged among the different systems of religions, the origin of which is difficult to specifically trace.



Many rituals are exchanged among different religious systems. The origin of these rituals, however, is very difficult to trace specifically because there has been no documentation. Most of these have existed in tribal societies in oral form and, you know, get lost. Between generations, when some myths are less prevalent in one generation or across one decade, they are less practiced and less disseminated. Some stories that are less disseminated tend to become lesser known.

And before long, they are effaced. Sometimes they also resurface. In another society, in another generation, right? So the transmission of knowledge through orality is not as unilinear or as definitive as the way knowledge is disseminated in a cryptic kind of community, a community that understands or studies through scriptures. So tribal religion does not signify any monolithic system of rituals.

There is no singular, unilinear, or definitive way of interpreting the rituals. The Indian population consists of numerous tribes, and their systems do not necessarily overlap with each other completely. The understanding of tribal religions through a single frame or through a single lens is could be challenging and even erroneous because it has a range of belief systems and rituals depending on the particular tribe. The tribal communities' worship ranges from the superhumans

that the Santhal community calls Bongas. So the Santhals call their spirits Bongas. And it ranges from the superhumans or demigods to trees, rivers, and other animate and inanimate aspects of nature. According to Tamu Mibang, I quote, 'Most of such tribes have their own notion of religion, which is shaped not only through the observance of various festivals, the institution of priesthood, the worship of a large number of gods and goddesses, deities, and beliefs in spiritual worlds but also remains embedded deeply

within various myths and other forms of oral tradition,' unquote. The three main components or aspects of the tribal worldview are human, nature, and God.

So tribal religion necessarily embraces the idea of an integrative and interactive relationship between the community, natural as well as supernatural forces. The tribal identity primarily churns out or evolves out of the totality of an interdependence among these three aspects, human, nature and supernatural or God, such that the meaning of one's existence can be manifested entirely only in conjunction with other aspects of the world that one lives in. So, Put simply, all we are trying to say is that God in itself or supernatural in itself does not mean anything unless it interacts with nature and human. Similarly, human in itself does not shape anything.

INTRODUCTION

- The three main components of the tribal world-view are human, nature, and God, and it embraces the idea of an integrative and interactive relationship between the community, natural and supernatural forces. The tribal identity primarily churns out of the totality of and interdependence among these relationships, such that the meaning of one's being is wholly manifested only in conjunction with other aspects of the world one lives in.
- The tribals are chiefly a congregational rather than an individual identity, and make religious offerings, sacrifices and libations at the level of a given social unit, such as a village, a sub-clan or even a family. Although a significant population of tribals like the Santals have migrated to different parts of the country and have nuclear units of households in urban areas, their ancestors looked at the village as the basic communal unit, and never settled alone or in an uncultivated land.



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a complete meaning unless in conjunction with nature and God. So these three aspects are completely interdependent and in conjunction, in togetherness, they shape a more holistic, a more comprehensive meaning of existence. So the tribals are chiefly a congregational rather than an individual identity. And they make religious offerings, sacrifices and libations at the level of a social unit. Usually the unit is a village or a sub-clan or at least the smallest unit which is the family.

So, in other words, a tribal never worships individually. Like we see in major religions, the worship and the prayers are very self-referential and it's kind of a one-to-one relationship between the devotee and God. Here, prayers are not done individually. Before the deity prayers are, you know, offered or presented to the deity in the form of a unit. A tribal person usually understands herself or himself as a part, a strand of a larger social unit, be it the village.

the sub-clan or the family. So it's a very collective existence that the tribals live. Although a significant population among the tribals such as the Santals have migrated to different parts of the country and have nuclear units of households in urban areas, Their ancestors had originally looked at the village as their basic communal unit and they never settled alone or in an uncultivated land. So the whole idea of origin, ancestral origin, where from one came, takes one's identity back to

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The village, the rural belonging and how the village was founded by the founding fathers, basically the few founding members who settled in one part. And they kind of cleared away the land. They made houses. And that's how they formed a larger community that supported each other, that protected each other and that settled together as a people, as part of society. one, you know, larger family.

So, that's how they appear during their prayers before the deity as a community, as a larger social unit and never as an individual. At the heart of the indigenous or Adivasi notion of spirit, there is the pantheistic view which suggests that that the supernatural and the ephemeral world, the divine world and the transitory earthly existence both influence each other and they cannot be really separated. So one exists because of the other, the divine and the earthly existence cannot be really dissociated. In this regard, Darmod Omurchu studies the indigenous spirit as, I quote, contained in this world in the realm of everyday events, yet transcends the material and personal creation, unquote.

The indigenous religions perceive humans as a strand or only a small part in the larger ecological web. From a child to a stone, from animate to inanimate, all contribute toward the knowledge of what the Great Spirit or the one, you know, one major God is. So, from the child to the stone, from animate to inanimate, all contribute to the knowledge of what the Great Spirit or the universal power, the superpower, is. The gratitude of humans

toward the birds and the trees results in the indigenous worldview emerging as a biocentric harmonious loop rather than a homocentric power-driven ladder of hierarchy. Now, this is very interesting and important to understand, as opposed to the major religions such as Christianity, which is essentially, you know, homocentric in nature.

- At the heart of the indigenous notion of spirit, there is the panentheistic view, which suggests that the supernatural and the ephemeral world influence each other and cannot be separated. Darmuid O'Murchu studies the indigenous spirit as "contained in this world, in the realm of everyday events, yet transcends the material and personal creation" (O'Murchu 87).
- The indigenous religions perceive the humans as a strand in the larger ecological web. From a child to a stone, all contribute to the knowledge of what the Great Spirit is. The gratitude of the humans towards the birds and the trees results in the indigenous worldview emerging as a biocentric harmonious loop than a homocentric power-driven ladder of hierarchy.
- The outward physical differences among various aspects of the nature are balanced by spiritual sameness and the existential necessity to share and become a part of the 'other.'



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At the heart of everything is the figure of the male. The male and then the female. The human, and then the male human species, and then his consort, the female. And everything else is at their disposal. They can use the resources of the Earth at their own will.

This is how Christianity views the world or earthly existence. Contrarily, the tribal religion or worldview is biocentric in nature. So, the human is not at the heart or at the center of the universe. The human is just a part of a harmonious loop. And so, humans do not have—neither does any other species—the right to destroy or disrupt this loop of existence, this balance.

And so the tribals or the tribal ecosystem does not believe in a homocentric order, a homocentric power-driven ladder of hierarchy. There is no caste system among the tribes. That explains how the tribe or the tribal society is never informed by hierarchical, you know, order of positions and powers. So, no one is less than the other.

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It is rather a harmonious loop where people are dependent on one another. The outward physical differences among various aspects of the nature are balanced by spiritual sameness and the existential necessity to share and become a part of the other. So the concept of individualism, which is prescribed by the Western values, does not hold as far as tribal religion and tribal worldview and philosophy are concerned. They believe, the tribal people, the Adivasi people believe that although our outward physical appearances are different from one another, within we are just in a continuum of And it is necessary to share and become a part of the other to, you know, belong to the larger ecological web or chain.

So our definition is derived through this belonging to the larger chain of existence. Right. Our spiritual sameness connects one with the other. So, we also see among the tribals the very interesting phenomenon of, you know, anthropomorphic spirits. The spirits that are very much human-like and they exhibit anthropomorphic traits.

The spirits are imbued with anger, jealousy, lust, desire and so forth. So it's not in any way the concept of spirit is not very prominently higher than the ephemeral existence. The humans and the demigods, the spirits are on exchangeable terms in many sense. So rather than focusing on the hierarchical relationship with one high god or great spirit, the tribals generally practice an equal relationship with anthropomorphic spirits, which intercepts their everyday lives and activities.

For example, if we look at the case of the Santals from eastern part of India, although the Santal considers Ponamosar or Dharam as the supreme deity and sun as the symbol of Ponamosar. So they worship the sun as the highest, you know, God or the great spirit. At the same time, the Santal also believes in satiating or propitiating the village spirits, the local demigods or smaller spirits as well as the spirits of the ancestors. So, at the highest

level, we have the concept of dharam or ponamosar, but at the level of everyday existence or secular existence, the domestic spirits, the ancestral spirits that surround one's day-to-day activities also need to be propitiated. It is believed that these domestic spirits, ancestors, spirits keep a watch over the villages and symbolize the betterment of the village, betterment of communal health and a general, you know, general sense of happiness and fulfillment.

ANTHROPOMORPHIC SPIRITS

- Rather than focusing on the hierarchical relationship with one high god, the tribals generally practice companionship with anthropomorphic spirits that intercept their everyday lives and activities.
- For instance, although the Santal considers *Ponomosar* or *Dharam* as the supreme deity and sun as the symbol of Ponomosar, he also believes in propitiating the village spirits as well as the ancestral and domestic spirits, who keep a watch over the villagers and symbolize the betterment of the village, communal health and happiness.
- In fact, the Santal myth alludes a clash between the high god or Thakur and the bongas or spirits, until the latter were defeated and sent to settle on earth as Thakur's messengers (Datta-Majumder 99).



So, in fact, the Santal myth alludes a clash between between the high god or Thakurji, Ponomosa. So these are different terms that the tribals use for the sun god. Some call it as the Thakurji, some call it as Ponomosa or Dharam. And there is this myth, like I was saying, that in the ancient times, there was a clash between the high god or Thakurji and the lesser spirits, the smaller spirits or bongas.

And finally, the lesser spirits were defeated and sent to settle on earth as the messengers of Thakurji. So these spirits would act as a liaison, a bridge between the supreme God and the ephemeral existence. God is not, therefore, an absolute and distant object of worship for the tribals, but is believed to accompany the tribals to the hunt and to the agricultural fields. And when we talk about God in this context, we are referring to the demigods, the smaller spirits, the lesser spirits that exist here. in the ephemeral world.

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So in the case of the Santals, we see that the Santals use their agency to nominate only certain species and render them the status of deities. So there are very many species. So, as an example, among the Santals, there is a practice of the Santal community using its agency to nominate only certain species and rendering them the status of deities. While there are many spirits, only some are chosen by the tribals and basically acknowledged by them and worshipped by them. Others can be simply ignored.

Santari folklores subscribe to the idea of the heaven and the earth as two platforms that are on interchangeable terms. They exchange and interact with one another. Santali myths have it that Thakurji and Thakurani, the great spirit and his consort, had once decided to come and stay on earth and they engaged this lesser spirit called Jaher buri or Jaher era along with Littabonga and Dhoram. to arrange for sustainable resources on earth. So these were the liaisons that communicated between the humans and Thakurji and Thakurani, the great spirit and his consort.

So Jahanera, Littabonga, and Dharam were the prominent demigods living on earth. They arranged for sustainable resources on earth. That's how the myth goes. The crisis of water on earth was discussed among gods, and Thakurji used an entire consignment of his spirits to resolve this crisis and fill the earth with water. So basically, humans' demands and requests are being channelized to the greater spirit through the smaller deities, the demigods.

Santal's sacred book, *Jamsin Binti*, uses short oral stories to describe heaven and earth, the creation of life by Thakurji, the lores of haria or rice beer, the stories of cotton harvesting, and the creation of clothes, etc. Among others. So this is actually a record of human civilization—how the different stages of human civilization evolved, how the earth was perpetually created, and how Thakurji created Earth. And how rice beer was

invented by humans, and then humans also invented food, harvesting, clothing, and so forth. So this is how humans became civilized and settled people.

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Similarly, the origin story says that Thakur Jiu consulted the lower spirits in creating the different creatures on earth, suggesting that the Santal's god and spirits function through a sense of accountability towards humans and earthly creatures.

Santali songs and poems suggest that it's a blemish on the God's image if he cannot reciprocate to human prayers and take care of the mundane needs.



So these stories reflect how the three limbs of the tribal religion—its philosophical aspect, its ritualistic aspect, and its organizational aspect—are deeply interspersed and interwoven with one another. Similarly, the origin story says that Thakurji consulted the lower spirits in creating the different creatures on earth. So Thakurji, or the major god, alone couldn't have created all the species on earth. For that, he needed the support of the demigods or the lower spirits. This suggests that the Santal's God and spirits function through a sense of accountability toward humans and earthly creatures.

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If humans are, you know, creating a request or a demand toward the higher spirit and it is communicated by the local demigods, the highest spirit or Thakurji or Ponamasar is bound to fulfill these requests, these requests that are deeply interwoven with human survival and sustenance on earth. So Santali's songs and poems suggest that it is a blemish, it is a shame. On God's part, if He cannot reciprocate human prayers and take

care of their mundane needs, because humans are God's children, their demands and requests also need to be fulfilled by God Himself. In the case of the Santals, they believe that primordial knowledge came to man from birds and animals.

So here we see that the religion involves a human-animal relationship, a deep connection between humans and animals. And this is something prevalent among almost all tribal religions. Their animistic and animalistic aspects or values entail that, you know, no existence in nature is dissociated from other existences. So they are all part of the great chain of being, right?

So humans are not the center of the earth, dissociated from and higher than other species. Other species are not at the disposal of humans. The human-animal relationship is greatly celebrated among the tribals. A biocentric view of the world shapes the values and basic habits of these tribes.

A common thread connecting humanity with animality is realized in the origin story. In the case of the Santals, the origin story says that the first man and the first woman on earth, whom they call *Pilchu Haram* and *Pilchu Budi*, were brought into existence by a pair of heavenly birds, the *Haas* and the *Hasil*, which were created from God's hair. So the first humans were essentially born from heavenly birds. They were children of birds.

HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONSHIP

The Santal believes that the “primordial knowledge came to [man] from birds and animals” (quoted in Bhattacharyya 18). A biocentric view of the world shapes the values and basic habits of the Santal. A common thread connecting humanity with animality is realized from their origin-story, which has it that the first man and woman, *Pilcu Haram* and *Pilcu Budi*, were brought to existence by a pair of heavenly birds – *Has* and *Hasil* – created out of God’s hair.

The fact that the human is a connecting point between opposing elements is understood from the fact that their predecessor birds were mediators of the heaven and the earth. They flew below the sun and above the earth, making a contact with both the worlds.



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The fact that humans are a connecting point between opposing elements can be further understood from their predecessor birds, *Hass* and *Hasil*, who were mediators between heaven and earth. As the origin story goes, these two birds, this pair of birds, flew below the sun and above the earth, making contact with both worlds. So humans become a point of contact. One aspect of humanity touches the ephemeral, the animality,

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the animal values or the animal qualities, and another part of humanity is connected with divinity. So humans are part god-like and part animal-like. So they have connections to both worlds. This can be understood from the fact that Hass and Hasil would fly below the sun and above the earth, making contact with both worlds, and they were the parents of the first human species.

So, the idea of a close-knit bond between the human and animal worlds is also reinforced through Santhali folktales, which refer to human mothers giving birth to animals and vice versa. The Santhali myth claims that the mortal world came into being through the earthworm, which consumed the earth and excreted it on the back of a tortoise for seven days and nights. Finally, this tortoise brought the earth above the all-pervasive water body. So, at the beginning, there was only water until the earthworm kept ingesting and excreting earth on the back of a tortoise. And that's how land surfaced over water.

The practice of totemism also points to the Santal's sense of connection with the animal world. So, this belief in a totem. Among the Santals, for example, the concept of individual body substance cannot be separated or dissociated from one's belonging to a particular clan and one's association with a particular totem. So, an individual identity is not recognized outside of a totemic circle and a clan. So, every Santhal clan is believed to have descended from a totemic animal, and this animal is supposed to be related to the birth and deeds of the ancestors of that particular clan.

HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONSHIP AND TOTEMISM

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So, as a way of showing respect, the totemic animal is considered a clan member. Such an animal or totemic plant cannot be hunted or consumed. In fact, killing a totem is considered taboo. It is equivalent to killing a member of one's own clan. Even seeing a dead totem requires one to observe death rituals.

Just as intraclan marriage suggests pollution caused by incest, marriage between two clans that share an antagonistic totemic relationship—for instance, the Kiskus and the Marandis—is prohibited. In the Santhal community, these two surnames, the Kiskus and the Marandis, can never arrange a marriage because Kisku represents the Kingfisher clan, whereas Marandi represents weed, and they share the relationship of the consumer and the consumed. So marriage between these two clans is prohibited. There are several more examples where marriage between two clans is prohibited, and it is believed that it will not result in a happy union.

By celebrating distinctiveness and specificity in terms of stories, totems, clothing, food habits, and worship of deities, each clan consciously avoids the possibility of

endogamous alliances. They want to maintain their uniqueness and separation from other clans so that marriage is more meaningful and fruitful. It is not seen as something incestuous, like two very similar clans arranging a marriage between themselves. So clans are specifically trying to maintain this uniqueness and a kind of cultural distancing from one another.

The Santal's socio-religious behavior is observed as follows. I quote Wilbur here. Deeply bound together with other people and with the surrounding non-human forms of life in a complex, interconnected web of life—that is to say, a true community. All creatures and things are brothers and sisters. From this idea comes the basic principle of non-exploitation, of respect and reverence for all creatures.

The Santals also believe in the transmigration of souls. Being part hunter-gatherer and part agro-based settlers, the Santals value crops and fields as much as the forests. So they have both kinds of professions among them. One is hunting-gathering, the other is agro-based settlement. In fact, the Santals see hunting as a spiritual exercise, which is done under the guidance of the hunt priest called Dihri, who is the spiritual and secular guide of the hunt.

The Dihri, or hunting guide, decides the day for commencing the hunt and the places where the hunters are supposed to spend their nights. He also arbitrates or decides disputes centering on the claim of a hunted game. For the tribals, it is never desirable and never recommended to challenge nature, such as by cutting or throwing stones at a tree when it is resting at night or by hunting a sleeping animal. It is strictly prohibited. To hunt a sleeping animal.

A tree that has fallen in their religious space called the Sarna. So they call their religious space the Sarna. And if a tree falls there automatically on its own, it cannot be taken away without the permission of the Pahan, who is the oldest representative or founder, both in religious and secular matters. In that case, sacrifices have to be offered before removing the tree from the Sarna region, lest the spirits in that region are angered or hurt. The tribals rear domestic animals as their own children and inherit them as valuable assets.

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There are many... celebrations and festivals throughout the year. In the case of the Santals, they have their Sohrai, where they worship the cattle. So, for example, they never deprive a newly born calf of its mother's milk immediately after birth. For fear that the animals might curse the householder.

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There will be some kind of bad energy coming to the house if a calf is separated from its mother at birth. The tribals' respect for the larger ecological system is understood from festivals such as the Dimtang Puja and the Sohrai, which entail the construction of a symbolic cattle shed with sal wood and leaves. Inside this structure, the images of cattle are kept on small heaps of newly harvested rice. So the tribals' thankfulness, their gratitude and obligation towards nature, towards the soul of animals, which are the potential sources of their food, is understood from their act of not touching any creature with their feet. They would never kick an animal, although they would hunt the animal

A tribal's respect for the larger ecological system is understood from festivals like Dimtang Puja and Sohrae, which entail the construction of a symbolic cattle-shed with Sal wood and leaves, and inside this structure images of cattle are kept on five small heaps of new rice (Sinha 53).

The tribal's thankfulness towards the soul of animals that are potential sources of food is understood from their act of not touching any creature with feet, lest its spirit is hurt (Bhattacharyya 25).

In hunting, the principal claimant of a game is the one who hits it first. However, the hunter is obliged to offer a small portion of the game to the deities and share his hunt with village members, keeping only a certain part to himself. Apart from being a source of food, dead animals and plants are utilized for medicinal purposes. Further, paintings of animals are used for rituals and are believed to ward off evil forces.



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for food, for food resources. They would never mistreat an animal lest its spirit is hurt. In hunting, the principal claimant of a game—if an individual has hunted a prey, or a game—becomes the principal claimant of that game. However, the hunter is obliged to offer small portions of this game to the deities and share the hunt with village members, keeping only

A certain part to himself for his own family. So this is once again the collective existence, the training of living collectively that the tribals have. So apart from being a source of food, the dead animals and plants are also utilized for medicinal purposes. Further, the paintings of animals are used for rituals that are believed to ward off evil forces or negative forces. The tribal's spiritual beliefs are deeply interwoven with nature and natural forces.

A tribal's respect for the larger ecological system is understood from festivals like Dimtang Puja and Sohrae, which entail the construction of a symbolic cattle-shed with Sal wood and leaves, and inside this structure images of cattle are kept on five small heaps of new rice (Sinha 53).

The tribal's thankfulness towards the soul of animals that are potential sources of food is understood from their act of not touching any creature with feet, lest its spirit is hurt (Bhattacharyya 25).

In hunting, the principal claimant of a game is the one who hits it first. However, the hunter is obliged to offer a small portion of the game to the deities and share his hunt with village members, keeping only a certain part to himself. Apart from being a source of food, dead animals and plants are utilized for medicinal purposes. Further, paintings of animals are used for rituals and are believed to ward off evil forces.



Swagati 14

He believes that the human psyche alters with climatic changes. For instance, the motherland that they call Dharti Mai is considered a female benevolent spirit who is revered by the entire community, and she is responsible for agricultural produce. Jaher

era or the lady of the sacred grove, who is invoked for the goodness of the villages, their cattle, and crops, is perceived as a benevolent old woman, and she is supposed to be concerned about the bodily needs of the tribals. Like a mother figure, she is concerned and fulfills the needs of the tribals. The Jaher than, as represented by a grove; the Gosai era, which is installed under a Mahua tree; and the Parganabonga, which is installed under a Saal tree—all these are spirits.

- The tribal's spiritual beliefs are deeply interwoven with nature and natural forces. He believes that the human psyche alters with climatic changes (Tudu 30). For example, Dharti Mai (literally: the Mother Land) is considered a female benevolent spirit who is revered by the entire community and is responsible for agricultural productions.
- Jaher Era or the Lady of the Sacred Grove, who is invoked for the goodness of the villagers and their cattle and crops, is benevolent and supposed to be concerned about the bodily needs of the Santals. The Jaherthan as represented by a grove, the Gosai era that is installed under a Mahua tree, and the Pargana bonga that is installed under a Sal tree – are all spirits that epitomize the ritual unity and social solidarity of a village (Patnaik 144).



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Or the demigods that epitomize the ritual unity and social solidarity of a Santhali or a tribal village. So through these sacred spaces, the solidarity and togetherness of a tribal village are symbolized. Spirits are also represented through tactile objects of nature, such as a carved wooden post or a large stone in the shape of a lid, which stands for the Mahadan bonga or the Mahadan spirit. Apart from bongas and deities, spirits are also believed to be present in peculiarly shaped objects, such as the gnarled bamboo shoot, tree roots, unusually shaped hills, and waterfalls.

So, anything that grows peculiarly in nature is believed to have some form of spirit living in it. Even if they are not worshipped, these spirits need to be pacified for time to time with the help of shamans. Prosperity of agricultural produce is ensured through planting Bhelwa and Mahadev Jata in the middle of paddy field with rice tied up in Bhelwa leaf packet at the top of the branch. So all these, you know, paraphernalia of practices, you know, are rooted to one principle. objective or aim that the, uh, produce the agricultural produce is not, uh, destroyed by any, uh, any, any negative, uh, force, any evil spirit.

- Spirits are also represented through tactile objects of nature, such as a carved wooden post and a large stone in the shape of a lid that stands for the Mahadan-bonga. Apart from Bongas and deities, spirits are also believed to be present in peculiar natural objects, such as a gnarled bamboo-shoot, tree roots, unusually shaped hills and waterfalls. Even if they are not worshipped, these spirits need to be pacified with the help of shamans (Biswas 137).
- Prosperity of agricultural produce is ensured by planting Bhelwa and Mahadeo Jata in the middle of the paddy field, with rice tied up in a Bhelwa leaf packet at the top of the Bhelwa branch. *Bandai* is an occasion for propitiating the cattle through washing their feet with raw milk and water, smearing their horns with oil, and offering sacrifices to deities for the cattle's wellbeing (Sinha 60-61).
- During the Jantal festival, the spirit for the "first fruits" is worshipped.



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Uh, they, they considered the famine, the pests and so forth as a manifestation of, uh, evil spirit. So as a way of warding off, such negativity, there are very many practices that are, you know, and rituals that are performed in the agricultural field itself as a way of protecting the produce. So, *Bandai* once again is an occasion for propitiating the cattle, which the resources from the cattle greatly boosts the tribal economy. So, cattle are worshipped.

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So in *Bandai*, they wash the feet of the cattle with raw milk and water, smearing their horns with oil and offering sacrifices to deities for the cattle's general well-being. They are agro-based communities, so their well-being is tied to the well-being of the cattle and the animals. agricultural field basically. During the *Jantal* festival, the spirit of the first fruits is worshipped. Without offering the first fruits to the spirit, one cannot consume it.

If they do, they believe that production of fruits will be hampered. So tribals also believe in tree or jungle spirits. In many cases they consider these as the spirits of their ancestors whose ghosts have not been ritually brought back to their house owing to abnormal death.

So ancestor spirits should be respectfully brought back and kept at the bheeter of the house, the inside of the house and they should be given offerings during festivals. If an ancestor dies accidentally then they become a tree spirit or a jungle spirit which needs to be feared.

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So malevolent spirits are believed to misguide the tribals from the right path. in forests and they also affect the harvest of crops. The boundary spirits, which is known as Simabonga, are made offerings to prevent drought and failure of crops. Similarly, Kisar Bonga is thought to cause disease and if not driven out in time, it is believed to eat up the entire household. So these are the very many stories that actually shape

- Tribals also believe in tree or jungle spirits, in many cases considered as the spirits of the ancestors whose ghosts have not been ritually brought back to the house owing to their abnormal death.
- Malevolent spirits are believed to misguide people from the right path in the jungle or affect the harvest of crops. The boundary spirits like Sima Bonga are made offerings to prevent draught and failure of crops. Similarly, Kisar Bonga is thought to cause disease, and if not driven out in time, it is believed to "eat up" an entire household.



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the tribal's ritual and religious world, their superstitions, their beliefs, their practices that they have been maintaining and observing since time immemorial. So with this, we come to the end of our lecture here today. Let's meet with another round of discussions with another topic in our next lecture. Thank you.

