

**Development and Culture**  
**A view from India's Tribal World**

Tribals account for nearly 8% of India's population. They number 52.3 million as per the 1981 Census. They are largely concentrated in 10 States of the Central Highlands, the Chhotnagpur plateau, the Eastern Ghats in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh and the Western parts of the country. This region accounts for about 85 percent of the total tribal population in the country. The north-eastern States account for the remaining fifteen percent.

**TABLE 1**  
**Population of Scheduled Tribes in India by States.\***

	1981		1971		Increase 1981-71 (%)
	Population (millions)	Percent of total p.	Population (millions)	Percent of total p.	
Andhra Pradesh	3.2	5.9	2.2	5.1	45.4
Assam	2.2	11.0	1.6	11.0	37.5
Bihar	5.8	8.3	4.9	8.8	18.4
Gujarat	4.8	14.2	3.8	14.7	26.3
Madhya Pradesh	5.8	9.2	3.8	7.6	52.6
Meghalaya	1.1	80.6	0.8	80.4	37.5
Orissa	5.9	22.4	5.1	23.1	15.7
Rajasthan	4.2	12.2	3.1	12.2	35.5
West Bengal	3.1	5.6	2.6	5.9	19.2
Others (incl. VI)	4.2		3.4		
All India Tribals	52.3	7.6	41.1	7.5	27.2

\*Only States with tribal population over 1 million.

They occupy around 18.7% of the total geographical area of the country, usually in the difficult and inhospitable terrain in the hills and valleys. The soil has generally low productivity. The tribal communi-

ties of India vary widely in their degrees of isolation, levels of acculturation numbers and ethnography. There are about 250 tribal communities in India speaking 105 languages and another 225 subsidiary dialects. So far as numbers are concerned the tribal communities range all the way from the Santals, the Bhils and the Gonds who number more than 4 million each, to small groups like the Chenchu who number less than 100 or communities like Mankidia and Tharua who number less than 1000 each. Obviously their social and cultural values, life-styles and the pace of modernisation and economic development vary very widely. The tribal communities range all the way from hunters and gatherers to settled peasant cultivators. Agriculture is mostly at the subsistence level, often based on slash and burn techniques or shifting cultivation. A recent study conducted by the Administrative Staff College of Hyderabad reveals that production from land is inadequate to maintain a house-hold at subsistence level. They have therefore to depend on gathering minor forest produce for maintaining a reasonable economic balance and to supplement the meagre produce from the land. Geographically isolated, they live in areas which are not well-communicated and have poor infrastructural facilities. Their economy is only slowly getting monetised. Enrolment in schools is low and the drop out rate very high. Percentage of literacy compares very unfavourably with the general literacy except in Meghalaya and Assam (North Eastern States) where the tribals are more westernised and christianised than the rest of the country.

**TABLE 2**  
**Literacy Rate in Scheduled Tribes Compared to**  
**Total Population by States (Census 1971)**

	<b>Tribal</b>	<b>Population</b>		<b>Total</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Population</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Andhra Pradesh	5.3	8.3	2.1	24.6
Assam	26.0	34.6	17.2	28.7
Bihar	11.6	18.4	4.8	19.9
Gujarat	14.1	21.8	6.5	35.8
Madhya Pradesh	7.6	13.0	2.2	22.1
Maharashtra	11.7	19.1	4.2	39.2
Meghalaya	26.4	30.1	22.8	29.5
Orissa	9.5	18.4	2.6	26.2
West Bengal	8.9	14.5	3.1	33.2

Many of them possess a well-knit socio-cultural system, strong kinship bonds, a stable village organisation and a fairly high level of perform-

ing arts. They also fabricate many exquisite art objects in metal, bamboo, timber, local grass and leaves of trees. Their textiles produced manually in small looms and the pottery are of a very high order of excellence. They also have a high level of plastic arts. Their wall decorations with mural paintings, using local earth colours and other supplemental primary colours, are also of a very high level of sophistication and complexity. The Saora pictograms painted on the walls by the priest (Kudan) have attracted world-wide attention. Verrier Elwin had documented some of it in *The Tribal Art of Middle India*. A more comprehensive documentation and analysis done by this author, linking this plastic art-form to its ritual base to cure/ward off diseases and natural calamities, is shortly going to be published. The Santals of Eastern India build houses which are well-known for their symmetry, cleanliness, elegance and they paint the walls with floral motifs and geometrical designs. Most of the tribal communities have a vast repertoire of songs and dances linked to ritual performances at the recurring festivals of the agricultural cycle and occasions of life-crises or rites of passages such as birth, marriage, death and attainment of puberty. This author has translated and edited with critical introductions seven anthologies of such oral poetry of the Indian tribes. These song-poems reveal a high degree of competence in using language, a preference for use of symbols even in matter-of-fact day-to-day social communication and an attitude of celebrating life even in the midst of poverty and deprivation. They reveal a sense of gratitude for the fact of being alive and a mood of acceptance of life on its own terms almost in an existential way. There is no fashionable despair, cynicism or turning back on life.

Thus a fairly high level of social and cultural expression coexists with economic backwardness and isolation in the tribal world of India.

Right up to the end of the sixties the low density of population in the tribal areas made possible a reasonable balance between the system of agricultural production through shifting cultivation and dependence on the forest. However with the passage of time the population of the tribal communities has increased. On the other hand population pressure in the plains have also pushed up the non-tribal people to these areas. Besides this a number of industrial, mining and irrigation projects have come up in the tribal areas which has resulted in the acquisition of tribal land for public purposes and depletion of public land. All this has resulted in the loss of good arable land and the tribals have been forced to become even more dependant on the hill slopes and the forest. On the other hand, increasing demand for fuel and timber in the plains has also multiplied and this has resulted in the shrinkage of forest areas.

Combination of these above factors has resulted in the tribals living today in a deteriorating economic and environmental situation. As the area on which they depend for sustenance decreases the rotation of shifting cultivation on a particular patch becomes faster. This in turn results in decrease of soil fertility, less yield and in some areas even accelerated soil erosion.

Since independence, public policy in India has sought to protect the tribal communities in the face of their vulnerability to exploitation. Article 46 of the Constitution of India provides that "the State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and, in particular, of the Scheduled Tribes; shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation." There are other provisions in the Constitution which reiterate this basic principle. Over the years there has also been a host of special legislations and action programmes for protection and economic advancement of the tribals.

On the whole the central objective of tribal development has been their socio economic progress with a view to integrating them with the rest of the community on a footing of equality while maintaining their cultural autonomy to the largest extent possible. There has been a search for a proper design of development which will marry their natural talent, cultural forms, value-systems and personality-traits with the imperatives of growth and modernisation.

The objective of the development policy is thus to work through their socio-cultural institutions, putting a proper emphasis on the ecology of the region and taking into account the tribal's dependence on the forest and hill-slopes.

All generalisation about the tribal world of India, will suffer from a degree of over-simplification. However, certain general aspects of the mechanism of change and modernisation can be examined and conclusions drawn. This author has had the privilege of working among a large number of tribes in Eastern India particularly in Orissa, Bihar and West Bengal including some of the major communities like the Santals, the Mundas and the Kondhs as well as the smaller communities like the Juangs and the Koyas.

It is possible to speak of a folk-tribal continuum in the Indian social situation. However, the real folk tradition and the tribal traditions differ in certain essential features. The rural-folk social system is dominated by the non-tribals, the majority of whom happen to be caste-Hindus. Value-systems, traditional mores, life-attitudes, social hierarchy and patterns of authority differ significantly. The tribal societies, on the other hand, have some degree of commonness and parallelism in the above aspects as also in their approach to disease and

sickness, life and death and the community's attitude to religion and modern values, modernisation and tradition. Informing all such attitudes and value systems there is also often a search for their own identity, the roots. Ethnic culture tends to bolster socio-cultural egoism. Writing about Mexican Americans faced with the anonymity and sense of loss in the setting of urban life, Americo Pareds (1968) notes the responses of the individual in seeking "to give some meaning to existence, some dignity and individuality to himself, by shoring up his ruins with the bits and pieces of his ethnic past."

Ethnic identity takes shape in a desperate mass of ethnic folklore. The supernatural and the symbolic aspects of asserting such identity are enshrined in the folklore. Milton M. Gordon (1964) speaks of two types of such group-identification—historical and participational. The former is based upon a sense of "peoplehood" and "shared fate" while the latter is based upon a sense of being comfortable with some, as distinct from others. The tribals often have an elaborate historical-mythological account of their ancestry, peoplehood and shared fate. An ethnic group consists of those who conceive of themselves as being alike by virtue of their common ancestry, real or fictitious, and who are so regarded by others.

This sense of identity and cultural self-image defines a tribe's degree of ethnic solidarity and often sets it apart from the non-tribal world which encysts it. It is in this sense that the tribal societies in India are significantly different from their counterparts in Africa where they constitute the predominant majority and in many cases control political power and authority.

Significant political and economic changes are taking place in India's tribal world. New technologies in agriculture, family planning and health, irrigation projects and sub-plans for the tribal areas, the Panchayatiraj system of political decentralisation and participation have come into the area. The tribal can no longer remain geographically or socially exclusive. On the one hand there is a discernible vested interest in the maintenance of an exclusive sense of identity emphasising a Great Tradition. On the other there is a growing awareness that the new political and economic system alone can bring in the benefits of economic development, such as roads, drinking-water wells, modernised agriculture, schools, dispensaries, cooperative societies, branches of rural banks and extension workers engaged in the task of development. There are the traditional, often hereditary leaders, the old-world elites, who despite their declining authority in the present political context, still hold sway over the minds of the people. There are again the modern political leaders, the power-élites of C. Wright Mills, the ward members, the Sarpanches, the Panchayat Samitz

Chairmen who have access to the new world of development through community development blocks, intensive rural development programmes and the integrated tribal development programmes. There are existing traditions in education, agriculture, and health practices which are anchored to the old value-system on which the modern processes of growth and the new technology impinge. Sometimes there is the difficult task of reconciling the old and the new, the traditional and the modern, in different fields of personal and social life. How is the resultant tension and conflict to be resolved and a new sense of identity forged? In brief how do the modern political process and economic development act on the ritual-based cultural matrix of the tribal world and its tradition-dominated socio-political culture? The tribal societies are face to face with two worlds which are sometimes in binary opposition. The intuitive supernatural and the matter-of-fact rational; the mythological yesterday of glorious traditions and the real to-day with its degradation and poverty; ethnic syncretism linked to socio-economic discontinuities and the dream of a possible pan-tribal unity. Such problems are unavoidable in a society undergoing rapid transformation. That however generates an attitude of ambivalence both towards tradition and the modernisation process.

The confrontation between the old value-system and modern economic processes can be illustrated by the following two examples which the author studied in detail in the Santal society. The first relates to the modernisation of Santal agriculture. Santal society happens to be one of the most accultured tribal societies and the extension methods in agriculture, the new techniques and package of practices have been better assimilated by them. Even in this society acceptance of the new technology and practices sometimes presents certain problems. After all technology is not merely a matter of tools and equipments. It also implies a particular intellectual and emotive structure. Modernisation of agriculture implies a growing complexity in intercultural operations. Seed has to be sown at a particular time, the application of fertilizer, weeding, etc. have also to be at specific and prescribed times. In other words, the farmer has to orient his mind to the needs of the time-sequence and duration. The Santals, like most other tribal groups, find it difficult to become a slave to the time-machine. Rarely is the tribal bothered about time and its flux. A whole village may spend a whole day running curiously after a wounded pigeon hopping away from tree to tree with the fond hope of catching it when it falls. This may be what Huizinga in his *Decline of the Middle Ages* calls the play-element in culture. Man the *homo sapiens* in the tribal world is more of man the player, the *homo ludens*. Lewis Mumford in his *Technics and Civilisation* rightly pointed out that the

time-piece and not the steam-engine was the real father of the industrial revolution.

Right from the sowing of seeds to harvesting, the Santals have a number of ritualistic festivals which are accompanied by appropriate songs, dances and feasting to propitiate the relevant Gods and Goddess. One of these, the Erok ritual, is celebrated before deweeding operation in the village Sarna. It involves the offering of fowls and rice-beer to Jaher Era (Mother Earth). The following invocation song is recited:

Let twelve seeds come out of each seed  
 Let not disease attack the seeds  
 Let not weed and grass eat up the crops  
 Let dark and heavy rain-clouds come from the sea and turn the Earth green.

This ritual is partly a vegetative and partly a fecundity ceremony. The Santals believe that proper propitiation of Gods and Goddesses is essential for good crop and crop failure is due to their wrath. In a year of crop failure an old man told this author that the Erok ritual was not properly done and the crop started dying in September and there was not even a drop of rain from the sky. "They tried to save the crop by working a pump. Still there was no rain and the standing paddy crops finally died. Could they save the crop? No. How could they when Jahar Era wanted it the other way?" he asked.

Belief in propitiating Gods and Goddesses and beginning certain agricultural operations by relevant worships sometimes affects agriculture adversely in another way. One Santal village had, after a lot of extension work and persuasion, taken to hybrid maize. The fields were properly cultivated. The crop was coming up very well. But the *Asadia* festival was delayed. The village Manjhi had gone a fortnight prior to the festival to his father-in-law's house nearly forty kilometres away and there he lay very sick. He had not been able to decide, in consultation with the village elder, the date for *Asadia* and, as such, the festival had not been held. And nobody in the village would enter the field for deweeding as the *Asadia* worship had not been done and it was a taboo to do so. Some young boys who had read up to ninth and tenth class argued that the weeds had grown very fast and the fine maize crop was going to die unless deweeding was immediately done. They were described as "faithless" and finally the voice of the elders won. The de-weeding was done only after *Asadia* but more than a fortnight's delay had considerably damaged the crop.

It is evident that the modernisation of agriculture which demands timely inter-cultural operations sometimes comes into conflict with

the ritualistic basis of agriculture. Here technology and ritual must mix creating a new system of ritual, flexible and liberal enough to absorb the demands of the new technology. For instance, there could be greater adaptability in the timing of the festivals and the authority or agency who decides the date for different festivals.

In the sphere of water-supply a similar situation was witnessed in a Juang village. The villagers depended on drinking water from the running hill-stream for ages. Due to deforestation the hill-stream slowly dried up and the community development block dug a well. Initially the Juang villagers were somewhat reluctant to use this new facility. When they eventually tried to draw water with earthen pots a number of such pots were broken because of their inexperience and word went round that an evil spirit or *Bonga* inhabited the well and that it was a sin to have dug up mother earth. It took a lot of persuasion and a physical demonstration of drawing water with aluminum buckets to prove that there were no *Bongas*. In another village a resourceful Block Development Officer utilised their own value-system by offering a worship to the *Bonga* at the well site and then demonstrating that thereafter there was no damage to the buckets. On occasions of sickness, disease and death, similar situations of confrontation between the old and the new have often taken place.

The tribal's pain-threshold is generally very high. He would not run to a dispensary or a doctor unless the matter is really very serious or he feels he is dying. It is for this reason that modern health practices and the dispensaries are not easily accepted by him. No doubt the old and traditional thing is slowly dying under the growing impact of modernisation. But the *Ojhas* (spirit-healers) and the *Jans* (the priests) still hold sway in many interior areas. The ritual performances in many tribal societies are extremely costly. This generates a cycle of poverty, indebtedness and more poverty. The ritual basis of agricultural festival as also of the life-crisis festivals of birth, marriage and death is slowly getting diluted and eroded under the modernisation process.

There was a time when social anthropologists and economists used to look upon the value-systems of the tribal world as inherently and irrevocably opposed to growth and economic development. Luckily today there is a more rational approach to the subject and there has been a growing awareness among all concerned that in tribal social values and personality traits there are growth-positive as well as growth-negative factors and a proper design of development has to utilise the former and try to eliminate or side-line the latter. The tribal's love of life, zest for living, strong sense of community, lack of anxiety and an over-riding preference for happiness are positive factors that deserve to be recognised and utilised. There is a story, perhaps some-



what apocryphal, of an American agricultural expert waiting with his Indian counterparts at a river-crossing for the ferry. He found two boys sleeping in the shade of the banyan tree on the river bank. The time was ten in the morning and he asked them, step by step, through the interpreters as to how they should work, earn more, save and then go and enjoy. They replied that they had worked hard the last 3 days and earned quite a bit. They told the interpreter to tell the expert that he wanted them to work hard, earn, save and then enjoy and that is precisely what they were doing then. Economists have often bemoaned the lack of the acquisitive instinct and the ability to save and re-invest among the population of the Third world. That is quite right but can we totally ignore the extreme end-product of the process of growth? There are two groups of planners and developers. One would like this world to be a happier and better place to live in with other men in society and nature. Another group would like to make it an increasingly efficient engine for progress. We need to reconcile the objectives and strategies of the two groups somewhere.

A word about tribal education and its relevance for economic growth and development. The tribal's traditional education was never very formal. It emphasised community involvement and a measure of intense socialisation. Moral instruction was at its core and the techniques of instructions were also well adapted to suit the typical needs of that society. In brief, traditional education was supposed to make the child ready for the world which he was to face. This cannot be said to be true of the new education that has been taken to them. Emphasis is now on conceptualisation rather than on the informal learning of techniques. On the other hand, they excel in the ability to fabricate and assimilate techniques. Primitive education in the words of Margaret Mead "was a process by which continuity was maintained between parents and children. . . Modern education includes a heavy emphasis upon the function of education to create discontinuities; to turn the child of the peasant into a clerk or the farmer into a lawyer, of the illiterate into the literate." From this point of view, the kind of education which we plan for the tribal societies in transition is of great relevance. Too much emphasis should not be placed on conceptualisation or formal learning. The education that is to be imparted should have more to do with the manipulation of objects and processes and learning of techniques. This is not to ignore or under-estimate the importance of the rational process and the need for developing logical thinking in the tribal mind. It is rather to say that this need should be put to a later stage and should be slowly brought into operation by a process of gradualism only after the tribal has learnt a few techniques by the natural intelligence which he possesses.

The idea of the good life is integrally linked to the relationship between the social order and the moral order. Writing way back in 1930 Franz Boas held that "it is much more difficult to speak of progress in any cultural activity" and that fundamental ethical attitudes have shown a "lack of change" (Boas: 1930). This was another way of saying that in terms of the historical evolution of societies, one could only speak of the development of *technology* and not of *culture*. The good and happy life which the tribal believes in is integrally linked to his view of culture which incorporates an emphasis on health and disease-free life, love of fun, a reasonable degree of freedom and leisure opportunities, an intimate balance between the individual existence and the natural, social and the supernatural orders. The emphasis is thus on a balance between different orders of realities. It was Kroeber who had observed that there are three approaches that seem to yield at least a partial standard of what constitutes "higher" or more advanced culture. No doubt, one of these three is the cumulative development of technology and science.

The other two standards Kroeber proposed lead us into recognition of differences between the more urbanised societies and the tribal societies with regard to their view on the "true" and the "good." (Kroeber: 1948).

The first is linked to the criteria of magic and superstition. The visions and magical beliefs of the individual give place to a rationalised scientific attitude in the quest for truth. The second criterion for progress was described by Kroeber as "the decline of infantile obsession with the outstanding physiological events of human life." The primitive, according to him, allows the obtrusion into public recognition and the social order of 'blood and death and decay.' On both these counts the tribal society could be said to be rapidly moving from the so-called pre-civilised society to a literate civilised society. Even though the life-crises such as birth, attainment of puberty, marriage and the funerary rites are celebrated with a great deal of ritualistic rigidity, slowly, with the spread of education, its importance seems to be getting eroded. The younger generation is no longer seriously interested in it. Nor are they interested in what they consider the expensive and time-consuming rituals which punctuate the agricultural cycle. The same thing has also happened to magical beliefs and superstitions. No doubt such beliefs still continue. Belief in witchcraft and consequential murders is still prevalent. But in terms of frequency of occurrence there is a perceptible decline over the last 50 years. The acceptance of the natural order constitutes an integral element in the tribal view of life. The tribal working on the land does not set himself in opposition to it. He works with the elements and not against them, is in

harmony with them and not in conflict. There is no attempt whatsoever to conquer but to coexist. He depends on rain, sunshine, the soil as a part of a benign mutual inter-dependence. Nature is not exploited. It is enjoyed with a spirit of humility, thanksgiving and love. And the enjoyment is mutual.

The propitiation of the supernatural order which determines the moral order is also intense and intimate. There are significant contrasts in the thinking processes between the tribal society and other more urbanised societies. It is not merely in the modes of social cooperation or the use of linguistic patterns: it is also discernible in the personality-type and the general world-view, the latter meaning the "designation of the existent as a whole." This basic conception that the natural and the supernatural order, the physical and the moral order should remain in close and intimate cooperation and organic balance is integral to the tribal's way of life and thinking.

The elaboration of the rituals, the songs and dances which accompany them and the invocation of blessings for the prosperity and well-being of the community as a whole, reveal the sense of intense community-participation and the regard for a moral, supernatural order that determines the fate of the social and physical order (Mahapatra: 1977).

The erosion of belief in rituals is linked to the awakening and intensification of a spirit of rationalism. Rituals depend upon an intuitive perception of reality by a mind attuned to such perception and an implicit faith in the efficacy of the activities associated with the ritual for solution of the life-crises. The foundation of such belief is an unquestioning faith that accepts things either because they have been handed down from posterity and are, therefore, sanctified by tradition or because non-observance of them is taboo. Rationalism impinges on this kind of unquestioning faith and starts asking disturbing questions. It is not satisfied by explanations readily offered. It would like to go beyond simple answers. Technology is the product and the expression of a temper based on such a logical frame of mind and is thus, in a way, directly inimical to primitive ritual. The confrontation between these two frames of mind, the two mental climates as they were, is evident in several fields of economic activity and societal relations such as agricultural operations, the attitude towards sickness, disease and death, divinations and the supernatural, the approach to medicine, political and social leadership and, above all, in attitudes towards life and death.

Such confrontation has a relevance for modernisation and development. Sometimes an entire village is face to face with such opposing forces. "When a village is faced with a suggestion of change, there

exists a balance of forces. On one side of the scale are those forces which are against change — conservatism, apathy, fear and the like: on the other side are the forces for change — dissatisfaction with existing conditions, village pride, and so on. Successful community development consists largely of choosing those projects where the balance is almost even, and then trying to lighten the forces against change or to increase the factors making for change.” (Jackson: 1956:30)

The art and science of development consists in discovering the modalities of bringing about an optimal balance between them or making the forces of tradition and heritage strengthen, through a well-conceived and well-directed process of reinterpretation of the tradition, the forces conducive to change, modernisation and economic growth. Lucy Mair suggests as a generalisation of wide application that “the conservative force of tradition is never proof against the attraction of economic advantage, provided that the advantage is sufficient and is clearly recognized. In the case of land it is abundantly clear that the emotional and religious attitudes towards it which are inculcated by native tradition have not prevented the development of a commercial attitude.” (Mair: 1957:52)

The confrontation is equally in evidence between different sections of the same society — let us say, the traditional hereditary village leader and the new elected leader under the Panchayati Raj system; the older generation still immersed in the lore of the tribe and its sanctified heritage and the younger modern generation coming under the influence of the new system of education and social intercourse with outsiders. The tensions generated as a result of such confrontation between tradition and modernity and technology and ritual can thus be looked upon both as psychological and sociological phenomena. At one level it leads to the development of an ambivalent personality-structure with one face looking to the supposed and imagined Great Tradition, fortified in the belief that the present is only a passing phase of decadence to be suffered and what needs to be done is to resuscitate and revive the glorious tradition; and the other face looking all the time to the pragmatic benefits of modernisation, the flow of economic benefits, the access to and the advantages of political power which it offers; in short, towards what Martin Orans called the “political rank-path.”

The relationship between myth and rituals on the one hand, and their relationships to personality and social structure on the other have been variously studied by anthropologists. Monica Wilson, for example, emphasises that “rituals reveal values at their deepest level . . . men express in ritual what moves them most, and since the form of expression is conventionalised and obligatory, it is the values of the

group that are revealed. I see in the study of rituals the key to an understanding of the essential constitution of human societies." (Monica Wilson: 1954). Kirk connected them to two primary functions both of which had socialisation as their objective. "Apart from routine acts of propitiation and sacrifice, rituals tend to be either *rites de passage* or connected with agrarian fertility. The continuation of social and natural regularity in more general ways accounts for other types (of rituals)." (Kirk: 1971).

The tribal ethos in Summer's sense of "some of the characteristics, usages, insights, standards and codes by which a group is differentiated and individualised in character from other groups," is thus a very well-formed ethos. It had enabled him to take a fairly rational approach to the growing technology that invades his life today. But the capacity to pinpoint the impediments to the modernisation process is sadly lacking. The economic benefits of the process are gradually becoming clearer but even here also ambivalence remains, at least on two counts. Firstly, whether the agency that ushers in the benefit, namely the new political institutions, is to be looked upon as intrusive and resisted or welcomed; whether participation in them should be total and enthusiastic or one should withdraw. Secondly, whether the new modes of leadership devoid of folklore and mythology should be accepted or the traditional leadership should continue to hold sway and command allegiance and loyalty. On the other hand, and because of this ambivalence, the so-called ritual basis of society and the Great Tradition have neither been fully accepted nor acted upon by the rank and file. Thus neither the new technology and its ally the new political system and the leadership nor the traditional ritual and the leadership based on it has been able to bring about the very necessary rapprochement or reconciliation between the two opposing value-systems and forms of socio-economic organisation. Basically socio-cultural development and a new renaissance of economic growth and flowering of autonomous culture demand the capacity for corporate action and individual dedication. Neither of these determinants seem to be very much in sight.

Like most under-developed societies, the tribal society shows a typical inability to maintain an organisation. The capacity of a culture to maintain an organisation depends on its related capacity of synthesising and bringing together a large number of social values to the level of community-acceptance and participative action. The incompatibilities and contradictions within a culture which impede corporate objectives and actions are precisely also those that impede modernisation. The new technology is based upon what Benfield calls "the ethos of amoral familism." As he observes "we are apt to take it for granted that

economic and political associations will arise wherever technical conditions and natural resources permit. If the state of the technical art is such that large gains are possible by concerting the activities of many people and organising skill will appear from somewhere, organisations will spring up and grow. This assumption is wrong because it overlooks the crucial importance of culture" (Banfield: 1963)

Modernisation has its impact on the ritual-based social structure of the tribal world in several dimensions. The most important area of interaction between tradition and ritual has been the pattern of leadership. Political change in a traditional society comes slowly but it tends to affect almost all aspects of community life. The approach to life and death, to pleasure and pain, to self and the others, flow from certain given systems of value. These value systems are part of the cultural orientation of the community and are often deeply enshrined in the personality structure. The value systems in their turn are linked to a host of socio-economic factors, tradition and mythology, approach to disease and death, the view point on the natural and the super-natural and the nature and role of political changes.

The new political system which is alike the new technology has not been able to throw up this capacity for corporate action. On the other hand, it has only resulted in either distorting or killing the earlier forms of corporate action in socio-cultural matters. This is a problem that has to be tackled at many levels so that the new technology and old rituals are brought together or nearer with a view to formulating patterns of human cooperation that would make corporate action both for economic development and cultural autonomy possible. At the moment, there is a growing dichotomy between the awareness and demand for cultural autonomy and the ability to forge an organisation for economic and political development and social action. This only further alienates the élite (more particularly the political-economic élite) from the masses and tradition and ritual from the new demands of political organisation and economic activity. This may be looked upon as part of the complex process of the adjustment between the political-economic integration of encysted societies with the greater community around them as a result of the growth process, and the preservation of cultural autonomy. The dominant ethos of ritual structure is in conflict with new developments of secular democracy and technology. The tribal finds himself helpless in this new situation. He must perhaps discover a *modus vivendi* that will take him out of this impasse." (Mahapatra: 1977).

The confrontation of technology and ritual is not a simplistic factor. After all a technological system also tends to develop its own rituals. But ritual in the traditional religious cultural sense implies a host of

symbolic functions which are kept outside the realm of logic and rationalism. The technological world, on the other hand, calls for less and less of intuition and more of reason, and the ability to analyse and coordinate details rather than to take an intuitive world view. In his foreward to Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of The Oppressed*, Richard Shaull referred to the "paradoxical" dual role of the new technology which according to him holds a hope for the future." Our advanced technological society is rapidly making objects of most of us and subtly programming us into conformity to the logic of its system. To the degree that this happens, we are also becoming submerged in a new 'culture of silence.' The paradox is that the same technology which does this to us also creates a new sensitivity to what is happening. Especially among young people, the new media together with the erosion of old concepts of authority open the way to "acute awareness of this new bondage." (Richard Shaull: 1972). The new political system and the new technology in the field of agriculture, medicine, education and economic development, therefore bring in value-systems and attitudes which are in direct conflict with the ritual-based puristic approach to life and reality. Technology also is secular in its impact just like political democracy or the Panchayati Raj.

In the words of Roy Burman "The crisis of modern man has made growing numbers of tribal *élites* conscious of the fact, that there is no single great tradition to be emulated. This has led to the search for new meaning in their age-old tradition, to invest the same with the ethos of universalism and to project tribalism as alternative great traditions" (1972).

David J. Siddle (1978) has drawn our attention to some of the inadequacies and pitfalls in planning rural development and tribal development in the Third World. According to him there are 3 major factors which militate against the creation of proper conditions for development and modernisation. These are "errors associated with demands made by Governments for short-term political solutions to intrinsically long-term problems; the errors deriving from an overwhelmingly self-confident belief in the efficacy of the Euro-American approach to development in which progress is equated with urbanisation and industrial growth; and the mistakes associated with a lack of knowledge concerning patterns of life in rural areas."

What is required, on the other hand, is an appropriate awareness of and sympathy for that world, and an apprehension of the process of change in rural and tribal areas in the Third World so that we understand clearly the impact of planned, urban-oriented modernisation on the structure of rural society and economy. The time is very opportune for the reassessment. Many social scientists, both marxist and capital-

ist, have worked hard to point out that there are discernible distinctions between the rural and urban. They have tried to do this by emphasising the existing class differentiation and economic motivation as also the growing linkages between the urban dwellers and rural dwellers. It exposes the attitude of planners that what is basically intended is not so much the development of rural societies as their incorporation in the metropolitan milieu. The recent emphasis of research on the village level is a step in the right direction but it has to be remembered that the village is only one of the levels of focus for a proper study of rural-tribal development problems. After all the village does not exist in isolation and individual settlement is one element within wider vertical and horizontal structures. The socio-economic reciprocities and exchange mechanisms define the vertical structures while horizontal structures are revealed through settlements, linked by kinship and the associated evolutionary process of colonisation. In the words of Siddle "While we must obviously continue to work towards the alleviation of physical distress, uncertainty concerning the long-term viability of our own economic and social system makes it possible to take a more sanguine view of the rural systems within which seven-tenths of the population of the world still operate. The long-term stationary equilibrium or the low-level equilibrium trap within which many rural economic systems in the third World are thought to be contained may require a less patronising attention. Contained within some of their structures are complete adjustment mechanisms and sophisticated calculations of man-environment interaction, from which we could do well to learn. Radical new approaches in the social sciences are essential if the problems of rural (tribal) as opposed to agricultural are to be faced."

While the transformation of tribes into castes has lost force and the nation has taken pains to preserve the autonomy of tribal cultures, the logic of socio-economic transformations has been breaking down, modifying and re-orienting traditional tribal cultures. The emphasis on tradition, ideological or counterfeit history and cultural exclusiveness have been given a sharper focus by the power-élite in the context of socio-economic transformation. This appears to be a kind of resurgence or perhaps, more appropriately revivalism. But one has to look deeper both into the social structure and the emerging social stratifications to understand the nature and direction of this new emphasis on cultural forms. Myths, symbols, oral literatures, religious beliefs, traditional values no longer remain as they were; they are revised, re-oriented, sometimes even without conscious design or sense of direction. Interest in culture becomes often vicarious, gratuitous, a part of the search for the new dynamics of political rank-path. And yet, superim-



posed on all these, is an awareness of the essence of community, the small community. This itself surely holds hope in a world of growing-impersonalisation and loss of individuality due to the large size of organisations. Discussing ritual processes not merely as a structure but also as an anti-structure, Victor W. Turner refers to their role in achieving *communitas* which is basically an egalitarian relationship between persons stripped of status and property. In discussing the formation of Franciscan Order in the Middle Ages he quotes M.S. Lambert as saying that Francis was a "supreme spiritual master of small groups; but he was unable to provide the organisation required to maintain a world wide order" (Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, 1961). This is where the tribal culture as small community culture can serve as a basis. Martin Buber observed in 1966: "an organic Commonwealth (and only such a commonwealth can join together to form a shapely and articulate race of men) will never build itself up out of individuals, but only out of small and even smaller communities; a nation is a community to the degree that it is a community of Communities" (*Paths in Utopia*). It has been the greatness of the Indian nation that it has always sought to create such a living, growing community which is in essence a community of communities.

Secondly, among different models of integration of tribal culture and society with the larger society for so long emphasis was placed only on the theory of a melting point with constant give and take and cross-cultural co-existence. The time has come also to emphasise the inherent search for universal human values in their own cultural matrix by the tribes. The search for a great Tradition, for abiding historical values transcending the demands of here and now, point to this. This is a positive sign for cultural growth and efflorescence *vis-à-vis* the arid confrontation or withdrawal of earlier years.

Thirdly, and this is most important, there are signs of an emerging force of counter-alienation in this new search for cultural roots by the tribal groups. Over-emphasis on ethnicity leads to a drying-up of sources; an anomie grows in the heart. Tourain (1971) has rightly told us that "today it is more useful to speak of alienation than of exploitation: the former defines a special, the latter merely an economic relationship. Alienation means cancelling but social conflict by creating dependent participation. Ours is a society of alienation, not because it reduces people to misery or because it imposes police-restraint, but because it reduces, manipulates and enforces conformism." A genuine awareness and growing interest in tribal culture will keep our commitments to universal values which emphasise community, instinct and imagination and help us look even on cities as a conglomeration of neighbourhoods or as Buber's community of com-

munities with varying cultural patterns, beliefs and value-orientations fitted into its mosaic.

Examining various devices which may reduce, and even prevent, social confrontation and conflict, Coser in his *The Functions of Social Conflict* suggests that mass culture and popular entertainment are primary means of diverting aggression from regional sources of institutional conflict by providing for vicarious, safe release of hostile impulses. Institutionally, therefore, art is in the nature of a safety valve to release tensions. Directly and indirectly art helps bolster the morale of groups and helps to create a sense of social solidarity and unity; it may also function as a nucleus for organising social actions and social change. The aesthetic need is as important in a community as those of hunger and sex, even though they are different from the mechanisms of hunger and sex in that they do not involve consummatory activities to relieve internal tensions. They are non-cyclical; they occur as gratuitous satisfactions without the necessity of seeking them and without any demand for instrumental action. The role of art in a primitive community is thus to identify a cultural field. This is something akin to what Marcuse identifies as the subculture in present western societies existing as the Great Refusal or the posture of defiance. In western societies avant-garde art has been called a negative culture and as "the radical negation of a general culture by a specific one" (Benito Poggioli — "The Artist in the Modern World"). It has also been called as "Contra-culture" by J. Milton Yinger. One extreme mode of expression among artists is Bohemianism. The continuity and universality of a culture improves in a small community and rules out cultural conflict by way of formation of sub-cultures and contra-cultures. This is all the more the reason why culture as the mode of living in society is appropriately confined to small communities. A homogeneous culture can rise only in a small community.

One good thing about the Euro-American conception of fine arts and culture is that with its development perceptions were transformed so that the artifacts, dances, songs and the myth of people all over the world whose forms expressed aesthetic qualities became "visible." Andre Malraux has rightly pointed out that "before the coming of modern art no one saw a Khmer head, still less a Polynesian sculpture, for the good reason that no one looked at them (*The Voices of Silence*, page 603). It has now become possible to conceptualise various intricate aspects of primitive culture so that world culture may benefit from it. For, to participate in the work of art is to re-assert its existence as object rather than as individual personal expression. This is apparent from the various studies on the theory of diffusion by Paul Wingert in his *Primitive Art: Its Traditions and Styles*. The small community

makes possible these expressions to be preserved in a unique and authentic way. The distortions are less, the genuineness and true-to-life character still predominate. This makes preservation of the authenticity of culture and its transmission a simpler and natural task. This is all the more reason why in a country which has the philosophy of unity in diversity, we must re-emphasise the need for maintaining small communities and their culture and allowing them to grow in their own style.

Technology and tribal culture are very much in need of each other today. At the heart of each is an emptiness. A cultural anomie and blankness on one hand; stark and unmitigated poverty and lack of formal organisation on the other. The former explains the loss of the sense of community and the desperate search for alternatives in the West: "Communes rural and urban; voluntary primitivism; organic homesteading; extended families; free schools; free clinics; handicrafts cooperatives; community development co-operatives; Gandhian ashrams; neighbourhood centres; labour gift exchange." (*Where the Wasteland Ends*; Theodore Roszak 1972). Maybe if we appreciate the sense of the traditional little culture as the bond that keeps man together in small communities someday, as our economic growth proceeds, we won't be required to trudge the same troubled way as in the past centuries.

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