
UNIT 1 : DRAVIDIAN TRIBES

Structure

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- 1.2 The *Gonds* of Central India
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1.0 OBJECTIVES

After having read this Unit you will be able to:

- learn about Dravidian tribes;
- discuss about the Ghotul or the youth dormitory and its importance in tribal life;
- know the names of certain tribes belonging to the Dravidian family; and
- describe the origin and myths of Gond tribe.

1.1 INTRODUCTION: THE DRAVIDIAN TRIBES

Many scholars consider the Dravidians to be the oldest tribal group of India. They are found from Ceylon to the Valley of the Ganges and cover all South-Eastern regions of India, mostly Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Central India, Orissa, and Bihar. The Dravidian tribal population is continuous with the Ghats on the east and west of the peninsular area of India. Farther north, it reaches on one side to the

Aravallis and on the other side to the Rajmahal hills. There are numerous Dravidian tribes of India. Here is a partial list: the Maria and Muria, Baiga, Mal Paharia or Male of the Santal Parganas, Oraon, the Badaga of the Nilgiris, the Munda, the Gond etc.

One the most important and dominant Dravidan tribe of India is the Gond. In the following unit, we are going to discuss ethnography, life style, occupation etc., and original myths of the Gonds of Central India.

1.2 THE GOND OF CENTRAL INDIA

The Gond tribes form the largest single tribal group in India. The Gond tribe is composed of several tribes. Their homeland extends from the Satpura range down to the River Godavari, from Uttar Pradesh (Gond District) and North Bihar to Andhra Pradesh, and from Maharashtra to Orissa. They have lent their name to Gondwana, a historical region which gained prominence during the medieval period. The Gonds established their political power, founded states and exercised influence far and wide. There are as many as four separate Gond kingdoms in the Gondwana region, mentioned in the medieval accounts. These four kingdoms include the Panna District in the north, Ratanpur in Bilaspur district in the east, the Raisen district of Madhya Pradesh in the west and areas of the Deccan in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh in the south.

According to the census of India 1961, the derivation of the name Gond is unknown. In fact, the Gonds call themselves Koitur or Koi. The name Gond was an appellation given to them by outsiders. According to some, the title of the Gonds, as of Khonds, is derived from the word "hill". Telugu speakers still refer to the Khonds as Gonds. Spread over seven contiguous states, the Gond population is largest in Madhya Pradesh. Their mother tongue is Gondi and it belongs to the Dravidian family of languages. However, now they are bilingual or even trilingual; they speak Gondi as well as Hindi and Marathi or Telugu depending upon their location.

The Gond tribe has an extremely rich tradition of folklore. During the rule of the Gond dynasties in Central India, the ruling class was the patron of the Pardhans group of bards, a sub-group of the Gond. The Pardhan played an important role as the custodians of Gond traditions and culture. With the fall of Gond kingdom, the relationship between the Gond and the Pradhan lost much of its importance, and was thereby reduced to a great extent.

Check your progress 1

Note: 1) Your answers should be around 30 words each;

2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of this Unit.

1) Where do the Dravidian tribes of India reside apart from Central India?

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1.2.1 Religion

Many Gonds still follow the traditional tribal religions, which is known as the Persa pen cult. In Madhya Pradesh, the Gonds are mostly Hindu and there are also a small group of people of Christian religion. In the traditional Gond rituals, each clan believes in a god of its own, Persa pen or Baradeo is the supreme deity and the Gond believe that they are the children of Baradeo. Each clan has a separate shrine of Baradeo where they gather and offer prayer to their deceased ancestors. These rituals consist of the usage of three small sticks of bamboo, paddy, areca-nuts and a copper coin wrapped in a piece of new cloth. A priest performs a puja to unite the deceased person's soul with Baradeo and once the soul is united with Baradeo, it was His will whether the deceased person would be sent back to the earth or not, and in what form they would be sent back. Baradeo is generally worshiped during the month of Magh (between mid-January to mid-February). Besides Baradeo, the Gond worship several gods and goddess, namely Kalimata, Narayandeo, Marchimata, Dulhadeo, Dulhidevi, Baisasurdeo, Dudh guriakhut, Dulhariakhut, Chowra, Bajara, Banjaridevi etc. The Gonds give importance to ancestor worship.

1.2.2 Economy

The basis of the Gond economy is agriculture, but they also practice animal husbandry. Though the traditional occupations of agriculture and animal husbandry have sustained their economy since time immemorial, these occupations have started facing mounting pressure due to the large scale immigration of people into their land. Currently, the Gonds of Central India are engaged in various economic operations simultaneously other than agriculture. Other than that, there are Gonds who are settled cultivators, forest laborers, agricultural laborers, wage laborers, workers engaged in mining and quarrying, skilled laborers and musicians. For the settled cultivators land and water are the main resources, which are controlled by individuals, but sometimes they cultivate in the forest lands, controlled by the Government. However, among the Gonds, the Raj Gonds are mainly a landowning community. Only men plough the land and women undertake agricultural operations which amount to almost seventy percent of the total agricultural activities. The Gond women are expert in the transplanting of paddy, besides which they have a role in animal husbandry, collection of fuel and potable water and other economic activities. The main crops of the Gonds are kado, kutki (millet), paddy, jowar, wheat, tur, urad, masur (all pluses) etc. They have direct links with the local market which is fully

regulated and they sell their products at the markets for cash to other business communities in the area. Most of the Gond tribes engaged themselves as agricultural labor, since many of them do not own any land.

1.2.3 Shelter

The Gonds use natural materials like mud, grass, palm leaves etc. to build their huts. The traditional Gond house has a large verandah, which is called the oser, sometimes it is larger than the rest of the house. The middle portion of the house is called narma lon. This portion contains the storeroom and winter quarters. The main living room is designated as the agha and angadi is the kitchen. All Gonds have the bari or garden in small or large proportion according to the wants and desires of the family. They grow tobacco, maize, chillies, tomatoes, sesamum and many other vegetables in their garden. Cattle are penned in the garden to take advantage of the manure.

The traditional Gond elite have substantial houses; they use heavy logs, carefully selected bamboos, mud mixed with straw and cow-dung to build their houses. Lately the heavy thatched roof, made with thick layers of grass is being gradually replaced by local mud baked tiles. Usually, the door of the houses faces the east and the walls of the houses are often made of vertical pole stock dings. The economically disadvantaged Gond people make their walls with bamboo wattle work and all floors, walls and portions are plastered with mud.

Check your progress 2

Note: 1) Your answers should be around 30 words each;
2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of this Unit.

2) What kind of economic activities do the Gonds pursue?

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3) What type of houses do well-off Gonds inhabit?

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1.3 SOCIETY AND CULTURE

1.3.1 Ghotul or the youth dormitory

The youth dormitory is not universally present amongst all the Gond tribes. On the whole it appears to be a result influence from Orissa, Bihar and Assam. There are usually separate dormitories for the boys, with two apartments: one at the entrance and another in the centre of the village. The boys and girls of the tribe meet after evening time to dance, sing and enjoy themselves. They sleep in their own barracks. If there is no dormitory, then the young men sleep in the granaries. The young men must not sleep near their parents.

The Gonds, like other societies, have an impressive body of traditional cultural practices and regulations. The most important of these is the Ghotul system (the organization of youth halls from both sexes). However, many sections of Gond population in India do not have Ghotuls due to various social influences to which they have been subjected during the last several centuries. The Maria and Muria tribes, which are sub-groups of the Gond tribe of Central India, have Ghotul and it has been mentioned by Verrier Elwin. His work *The Murias and their Ghotuls*, is one of the important contributions to the study of a vital aspect of society and culture in India.

The aim and objective of the ghotul is to function as an institution for developing in both the sexes a love of the clan, and training them in conjugal and civic duties, not excluding opportunities for obtaining proficiency in hunting, dancing, music and the cultural life of the group. It may appear a paradox to non-tribal societies that they enjoy sexual liberties, and at the same time develop obedience and discipline, receiving opportunities for leadership in the institution. The place possesses an atmosphere of happiness, where life is full, interesting and useful. Other than this, the ghotul consistently promotes co-operation in all economic, recreational, ceremonial and social activities of the entire group. Thus primarily, the ghotul is meant to deal with the sexual life of boys and girls as they reach maturity. It aims to prepare them for sexual, marital and family responsibilities that follow with the coming of adulthood. It promotes a mixing of both sexes without adult and parental control, and develops a sense of responsibility by imposing self motivated leadership. The Ghotul probably originated to fulfil the need of special training for each sex under different local and tribal conditions. The taboo on sexual intercourse before the communal hunt, during sowing, reaping and harvesting operations have contributed towards keeping alive the institution of the dormitory though it originated in a period of struggle with the forest, wild animals and alien men. The Maria ghotuls are institutions which serve to provide opportunities for young men and women to stabilize and strengthen intimacies, which may be a prelude to marriage.

The male leader of the ghotul has been known as sardar and the female leader is known as Belosa, but their names varies from place to place .They practically monitor various activities of the ghotul.

1.3.2 Marriage

The Gonds have several types of marriage practices. The oldest among them is marriage by capture, known as Poysceottur. This practice varies from place to place. Another type of marriage practice occurs when the girl elopes with the boy. In some marriages, even after consent of the parent is obtained, the couple prefers a marriage by elopement. Elwin found that it also could be because of economic reasons; if the parents found it difficult to collect the required grain for the communal feast, or were reluctant to face some opposition from influential clan members. Sometimes, it also happens due to impatience. Romance and thrill all combine to lead elopement, the boy and girl run away to a friendly house or ghotul. At times the girl is made pregnant to compel her parents to agree to the marriage. The couple then has to face the clan jury, who will demand the feast or Mahua (local liquor made from Mahua flower) drinks, or a fine before agreeing to regularize this marriage.

Amongst the Gonds, a man may marry his mother-in-law or co-widow, or any women related to him closely, where the classificatory system of relationship is not prevailing. However, he cannot marry his wife's elder sister. First, cousin marriage is most common amongst all the Gonds.

The practice of giving bride-price is common with the Gond tribes. This nature of the bride price, the articles and quantities given, their value and the amount of cash given with the gifts will naturally differ not only from place to place, but it also varies between different house-holds. The total expenses of marriage vary widely between a few hundred rupees amongst the economically disadvantaged Gonds, and more than a thousand amongst the Raj Gonds. The boy's father has to give to the girl's father grain and money as bride-price.

1.3.3 Death ritual

In earlier days the Gond used to bury their dead, but now they cremate the dead body. The Gond follow certain rules for dead body, for example if Gonds die of unnatural death, such as killed by tigers or commit suicide, are buried. It is believed that the Chanda, a sub-group of Gond might have introduced the cremation rituals. Now almost all clan follows the cremation rituals. It is also said that the old persons are burnt with special honour to save them from being devoured by beasts.

According to the Gond beliefs, any person should not die on a cot or bed. Because the body should touch the "bhum" or earth is easy to understand since death is believed to be caused by the earth spirit. The body, therefore, is put on the ground when life is ebbing out. In most cases death is attributed to the departure of breath,

though the ghost or soul is clearly identified as “hanal”. The dead body of a Gond anywhere is always placed such that the feet faced the north, and the head faces the south. The home of their deities is believed to be in the north. The Maria however, is known to place the corpse facing west. When the body is buried it is naked. The corpse is bathed in water, and sometimes milk is sprinkled on it. In some places it was rubbed with Mahuwa oil, turmeric and charcoal. Whenever burial is practiced, after the grave is dug waist deep the body is placed in position, face upwards, and the nearest relatives throw a clod of earth on the head of the corpse, saying “this is all I can do for you, and I give you my portion”. The female corpse is buried face downwards.

The Gonds believe in rebirth and life after death. They believe there is continuity beyond death because it is the substantial foundation of all worship of the dead. The dead have wishes, desires and needs which the living must satisfy for their own sake, as also for the benefits of those who survive after them. The ghost soul, in certain cases remains with the dead body till stones are discovered in which they will remain with the living forever. The ghost-soul is capable of leaving the body, and at times re-entering any other body, both during life time as well as after death. Thus are diseases explained, and belief arises in possession, black magic, or the power of ghost spirits. Baradeo is worshiped and ceremonies are performed to mingle the dead with Baradeo. Such ghost souls are expected to take a new birth.

Check your progress 3

Note: 1) Your answers should be around 30 words each;
2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of this Unit.

4) What is the importance of the Ghotul in Gond culture?
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5) What is marriage by elopement among the Gonds?
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6) What do you know about the Burial ceremony of the Gonds?
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1.3.4 Handicraft products

The Gonds have rich tradition of handicraft products which includes body tattooing, rangoli (floor paintings), pottery and basket-making, etc. The Gonds are proficient in wall painting, which they do in red and black on a white background. They draw many natural objects such as animal, birds, trees, human figures, hunting scene, dancing poses, as well as geometric forms to decorate their walls. The decorations are made with thick sticks, mud or clay mixed with chaff and water. The Gonds are also proficient in woodcarving and they decorate the doors and panels with beautiful carvings.

1.3.5 Ornaments

The Gond women can be identified by their ornaments. One of the most important is the bhimindia dhar (head ornament), various types of necklaces called as hamshi and a series of hairpins. They also tattoo their body with various patterns like half moon, star, cross, comb, flower, deer, rabbit, peacock, scorpion, flies etc. The men often wear a choker around their neck made up of two or three rows of cowrie-shells stitched to a cloth band. It is believed to possess magical powers and these little shells are also used by them as tassels for their purse-bags or on their waistcoats and belts.

1.4 ORIGINAL MYTHS OF GOND TRIBE

According to the Gond belief the primordial male ancestors of their society is Wen. There are four groups of Wen such as Yerung, Sarung, Siyung, and Nalung, they are numbered as 7, 6, 5, and 4 by the Gonds. The Gond belief that these four Wen who were emerged from the cave in which they had been imprisoned by the God Mahadeo. Later they married twenty daughters of four gods of the underworld and became the forefather of the Gond tribes. The four Wen and their wives divided into four groups which are the prototypes of the present Saga (Phratries) known as Yerung Saga, Sarung Saga, Siyung Saga and Nalung Saga. In the beginning the families of these four Saga lived in one village and later they shifted to other places and formed their own village. The names of this Saga can be found in the Gond legend. Apart from legends, the numbers corresponding the Wen (original ancestors) are found involved as persons, actions or as articles in many rituals associated in Gond life (Furer-Haimendorf, Christoph von.1956. Bulletin of the School of oriental and African studies. University of London. Vol.18.No.3.pp.499-511)

According to a Gond legend regarding their origin, that they had divine ancestors who were nurtured by the goddess Parvati, but her consort Sri Shambhu Mahadeo imprisoned them in a cave. These principal Gonds were ultimately liberated by the Gond culture hero Pahandi Kapar Lingal with the assistance of Jangu Bai, a goddess well disposed to the Gond, and still regularly worshiped. When the primeval Gonds,

referred to as the Parenda Khara Koya Wasi Penk, literally meaning the twelve threshing floors of the Gond gods, emerged from the cave, they appeared in four batches, and this division into four groups laid the foundation of the basic structure of Gond society.

Check your progress 4

- Note:** 1) Your answers should be around 30 words each;
2) You may check your answers with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

7) Who is Wen and what are the four groups of Wen?

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1.5 LET US SUM UP

The Gonds belong to a category of very large tribes (also including Santals and Bhils) that have traditionally dominated the regions in which they have lived. Traditional Gond religion involves a distinct pantheon of gods and spirits, practiced by many Gonds along with Hinduism. Gondwana or “land of the Gonds”, is a loosely-defined area of southeastern Madhya Pradesh, eastern Maharashtra, and parts of Chhattisgarh, Orissa, and northern Andhra Pradesh. The region was home to several Gond kingdoms from the 15th century to the mid-18th century, when the Marathas expanded into the region from the west.

The Ghotul or the Youth dormitory is a central institution in the life and culture of the Gonds. This institution not only gives both the sexes opportunities to mingle with each other, but is a highly developed and carefully organized institution. It is also a school which provides co-education in every aspect of tribal life, and it is here that boys and girls, at an early age, are trained for marriage (B.H. Mehta.1984. Gonds of the Central Indian highlands. Vol.1)

1.6 ACTIVITY

Look up pictures of the Gond tribes and more literature on them and other Dravidian tribes at the nearest library. If you live close to a tribal settlement try to visit them and learn more about their lifestyle. Write down your observations and discuss with your friends or co-students if possible.

1.7 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

- Furer-Haimendorf, Christoph von. The decent group system of the Raj group in the Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African studies, University of London. Vol. 18, No.3. Honour of J.R. Firth (1956).pp.499-511
- Mehta, B.H. Gonds of the Central Indian highlands.Vol.1 and 2. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company,1984.
- Singh, K.S. Scheduled tribes of India. New Delhi: Oxford University Press,1984.

1.8 GLOSSARY

Dormitory : An apartment with arrangements for rest or bedding for people to rest.

Communal Feast : A faest given by the host for his entire community.

Elopement : Running away to marry secretly, usually without parental consent.

Classificatory system of : A system of organizing various familial

Classification : relationships on the basis of kinship, blood-ties etc.

Egalitarianism : Relating to ideas of the social equality of all individuals.

1.9 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

1) The South-east regions of India including areas of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh and the states of Orissa and Bihar are the areas other than Central India inhabited by the Gond tribes.

2) The primary economic activities of the Gonds are agriculture and animal husbandry. Due to encroachments on their lands, of late the Gonds also work as forest-laourers, wage-labourers, mining and quarrying workers and musicians among other activities

3) Well-off Gonds live in substantial or large houses that are built of heavy logs, carefully selected bamboos and plaster of mud mixed with straw and cowdung. Lately local mud baked tiles are replacing the traditionally used thatched roofs made of heavy layers of grass.

4) The Ghotul or youth dormitory is a pair of apartments one for boys and one for girls situated at the entrance and center of the Gond village or settlement. Boys and girls meet in the evenings to socialize. The Ghotul is meant to prepare the young for sexual, marital and family relationships that will accrue upon adulthood. This is a

very important feature of Gond culture as this is where a love for the clan is cultivated along with values of self-leadership and responsibility.

5) The boy and the Girl in Gond communities may sometimes run away and find refuge in a friendly Ghotul or youth dormitory. At times, even after parental consent is obtained the couple may prefer to run away for various reasons.

6) Gonds prefer to bury those who die unnatural deaths such as by suicide or tiger-attacks etc. As death is believed to be caused by the earth-spirit, the body is placed on the ground when life is ebbing out. The body is usually placed with the feet pointing to the north and the head pointing to the south. The Grave is dug waist-deep and the body of male is placed face upwards, if female, she is placed face downwards. Nearest relatives throw a clod of earth upon the body thus placed saying, “this is all that I can do for you...”

7) According to the Gond belief the primordial male ancestors of their society is Wen. There are four groups of Wen such as Yerung, Sarung, Siyung, and Nalung, they are numbered as 7, 6, 5, and 4 by the Gonds.

UNIT 2 : MONGOLOIDS

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction: the Mongoloid tribe
- 2.2 Case study: the *Garó* tribe of North East India
 - 2.2.1 House and utensils
 - 2.2.2 Weapons
 - 2.2.3 Agriculture
 - 2.2.4 Food
 - 2.2.5 Dress and ornaments
- 2.3 Festival and ceremony
 - 2.3.1 Music and dance
 - 2.3.2 Musical Instruments
 - 2.3.3 Games
- 2.4 The Nokpante or the Youth Dormitory
 - 2.4.1 Marriage
 - 2.4.2 Divorce
 - 2.4.3 Adoption
 - 2.4.4 Laws of adoption
 - 2.4.5 Birth
 - 2.4.6 Funeral
- 2.5 Religion and belief
- 2.6 *Garó* etiological tales
- 2.7 Let us sum up
- 2.8 Activity
- 2.9 Reference for further readings
- 2.10 Glossary
- 2.11 Check your progress: possible answers

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you will be able to:

- write about the *Garó* tribe;
- discuss social and cultural life of the *Garó* tribe in details;
- explain about the bachelor's dormitory and its importance;
- describe about matrilineal society; and
- discuss about the original myths of the *Garó* tribe.

2.1 INTRODUCTION: THE MONGOLOID TRIBE

A large number of Mongoloid tribes of India are located in the North-eastern states of India. These tribes of North-East may be conveniently being grouped under certain heading like the Boro, the Khasi, the Naga, the Luchai-Kuki, the Arunachal tribes and “other”. The basis of these groupings is the one or the other factor like linguistic affinity, cultural similarity and common territory.

2.2 CASE STUDY: THE GARO TRIBE OF NORTH EAST INDIA

The Garos belong to the Garo Hills from one of the major constituent tribal population the state of Meghalaya in North East India. Apart from the Garo Hills, there is large number of the Garos live outside the Garo Hills district. They are found in the all over the Brahmaputra valley and other hill districts of north-east India. Other than these they are also found in Mymensing district of Bangladesh.

They are sub-tribes of the Bodo group of Mongoloid origin, speaking a language of the Tibeto-Chinese family. Originally, there were eleven groups among the Garos, each inhabiting a districts part of the Garo Hills districts. Each group lived in isolation and thereby evolved their own distinct culture and language.

Check your progress 1

- Note:** 1) Your answers should be about each 30 words each;
2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit.

1) Where do the Garo tribe of India belong to?

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2.2.1 House and utensils

The Garos build their houses on wooden piles on the slopes of the hills, but the piles are constructed with very little regard for regularly. Therefore, some of the piles are longer than others. These are platform houses: on the top of the floor posts, crossbeams are placed; over these a layer of whole bamboos, and lastly, a covering of rough bamboo matting. The walls are made of same matting, and the roof is constructed of thatching grass. If the thatching grass is not available, the bamboo leaves of a species of a cane are also used. The houses are quite long; they are divided into three principal parts. The first part is called Nokkra, which is a small

patio near the front door. The Nokkra is used for mortar and pestle for pounding paddy, a stock of firewood, miscellaneous household articles and even keeping cattle. The second part is called Nokcanchi. This is the public living room of the family and usually taken up about two-thirds of the whole building. Here, they have a fireplace, space for meals and space for unmarried women of the house to sleep. The last room of the house is called Nokoring, which is the sleeping room of the husband and wife.

The Garos use limited utensils mainly of cooking pots, large earthen vessels for brewing liquor, the pestle and the mortar with which paddy is husked. They have bamboo baskets of different shapes and sizes and few cutters and knives. Dry gourds are used for carrying water from streams and for drinking; a number of these gourds are of various shapes and sizes. The gourds are allowed to dry and are then converted into water-bottles by the process of cutting a hole and shaking out the seeds.

2.2.2 Weapons

The Garos have a number of indigenous weapons. One of the principle weapons of the Garos is a two-edged sword called Mi'lam, which has a blunt arrow-shaped point and made of a single piece of iron from hilt to point. Mi'lam has a decorative handle. It is useful for long journeys to clear the jungle, split firewood, cut up food and also for defense. Other weapons are the shields and they are two kinds; the *Sepi*, which is made of wood, or flat lengths of wood bound together and covered with very thin strips of cane or bamboo. The other is called *Danil* which is made of bearskin or cowhide stretched on a wooden frame. Both of them are of the same shape and size. They are fitted with handles made of cane. Apart from these, bows and arrows are also well-known to the Garos.

2.2.3 Agriculture

The Garos are mainly agriculturists. An important practice is that of jhum (shifting) cultivation of rice, fruit (like pineapple), and different vegetables. They construct a small hut known as a *Borang* or watch hut on top of the tree in the jhum field to guard the cultivation from birds and animals. These huts are often used for taking rest in the afternoon and for sleeping in the evening. The harvest is kept in granaries, located on the side of the village. The custom of building granaries away from the center of the village has its origin in the fact that the grain is more safe in case of fire breaking out in the homes.

2.2.4 Food

The staple foods of the Garos are rice, millet, maize, vegetables and fruits etc. One of their favorite foods is dry fish known as Na'kam. Tapioca is another main food article of the Garos. They also eat some forest produce like yams, bamboo shoots, and roots. They eat all kind of animal and bird meat like goats, pigs, cows, fowls, and

ducks. Some Garos eat non-poisonous snakes and lizards. The Garos drink local liquor called Bek or Pongsim, prepared from rice, millet, or maize.

2.2.5 Dress and ornaments

The principle garment of the traditional Garo men is the Gando. The lower half of the body is covered by strips of woven cloth about six inches wide and approximately six or seven feet long. The cloth is passed between the legs, brought up behind and wound around the waist; the end is tucked under the back folds. The other end of the Gando is hung in front. The Gandos is decorated with several rows of white beads made of conch-shells, along the end of the flap. Western-style shirt/pants are rare. However, the modern Garo men will sometimes wear shirts and pants. Turbans, made of blue or white cotton, are common types of headgear. On some important occasions like the Nokmas and the Laskars the Garo will wear silk turbans.

The Garo women wear a dress known as Re'king. It is a piece of cloth 18 by 14 inches. It is tied at the top, either on the left or right side by the strings, which allow it to remain open on the thigh. The modern Garo women have a great variety of dresses. They often wear a dress known as Marang-ja'sku, for ceremonies or dances. The dress is worn wrapped round the body passing under the right arm, and tied in a knot on the left shoulder. It hangs down to the knees and is open at the left side.

The Garo men and women are fond of ornaments; most of the ornaments are commonly used by both men and women. Some of the ornaments worn by both men and women are *Nadongbi* or *Otongga* or *Sishas* earrings, which is a brass ring worn in the lobe of the ear. Nadirong is another ornamental earring, which is small brass ring worn in the upper part of the ear. Other ornaments include the Natapsi, a long string of beads, and the Ripok, a necklace made of long, barrel-shaped beads of cornelian or red glass.

2.3 FESTIVAL AND CEREMONY

The Garos observe various festivals, closely related to agricultural cycles. All festivals are held annually, and consist of two parts, one religious and the other social. Here is some of the most common festivals:

O'pata: a ceremony celebrated before a man decides to clear and cultivate a plot of land for agriculture.

Den'bilsia: the festival marks the completion of the clearing of the new jhum field. It is celebrated sometime between the months of January-February.

Mi Amua: this festival is performed usually by the end of June or early July to ensure the good harvest.

Rongchu gala or Ginde gala: a thanksgiving ceremony to God for giving a good harvest.

Wangala: the most important festival of the Garos. It is performed in connection with the jhum cultivation. It is usually held in the month of October, but each village sets its own time for celebration. Wangala is celebrated in with great pomp and grandeur after the harvest. The Garos offer sacrifices to their highest god Saljong (sun god), and to seek his blessing for the future. By the evening the villager get together in the Bachelors' house and celebrates the festival with music and dance. After the sacrifice they take food and drink local liquor "Chu Rugala".

2.3.1 Music and dance

Music and dance is integral part of life for the Garos. They have mainly two types of dance, which are ceremonial and recreational. The former is performed only on religious festivals where as the latter can be danced at any time when the boys and girls dance not to please the gods but to please themselves. The Garo have various folk and martial dances, which are performed during ceremonies like *Gana*, *A' song Kosi* or annual worship at the site of the sacrificial stones, agricultural, mangona or the post-funeral rituals etc. Other than this, the *Nokdongga* or the inauguration of a new house, *Nokpante Nokdongga* or the inauguration of a bachelor's house.

The Garos people of the Rugas and the Chiboks divisions sing and dance only during funeral ceremonies, not on the normally expected times of celebration. John Elliot (Observations on the inhabitatants of the Garrow Hills, Asiatic Researches, Vol.III, pp. 17-37) who visited Garo Hills in 1788, gave a vivid description of the general pattern of the Garo dances as follows:

"20 to 30 men stand one behind one another, holding each other by their belts on each side, they go round in a circle, hopping first on one foot, then on the other, singing and keeping time with the music, which is animating through harsh, and quite pretension to distinct notes. The musical instruments are *tomtoms*, beaten by old people, and brass gongs, by young people, with marvelous precision. The women, modestly apart from the men, dance in rows, hopping on their feet like the men, but with arms, outstretched, and raising first one arm, then the other, to the clash of the musical instruments, and occasionally turning round rapidly". Generally, each dancing group has a leader who leads the group with sword and shield in his hands, and adds to the melody by cries of "*Kai Kai*". This kind of dancing is known as *Grika* and the leader as *Grikgipa*, and undoubtedly owes its origin to its old fighting day, when on occasions of public rejoicings the warriors wanted to dance and recount their deeds of velour to the audience.

One of the interesting dances performed during the *Gana* ceremony or the investiture of a *Nokma* is known as "*Gana Nokma*". This ceremony can be performed by a men when he becomes very rich, which mainly a feast is given liberally to all the

villagers. In the evening, the host wears *Kotip* or turban, *Jaksil* or elbow ring and holds the shield in his left, *Mi'lam* or sword in his right hand and dances with the rhythm of the drum. This is a solo dance by the host, no other relative or friends are allowed to dance with him. The Gana Nokma dance generally lasts for about three days but sometimes it may continue for several days. If the Gana Nokma dance continues giving such a feast and provides amusements for the people once every year, then some fresh bamboos with and without leaves will be planted every year in front of the host's house. That shows how successful he has become over the years. But in case it becomes opposite then he discontinues the annual feast and gives the feast according to his convenient or forever. Such *Nokmas* usually wear red turban and the elbow ring.

2.3.2 Musical instruments

The Garos have variety of musical instruments like drums, gongs or rang, cymbals etc.

Drums types: There are several big and small types of drums played by the Garos and they are dama (long narrow drum), kram (larger drum than dama), Nadik (small wooden drum), nagara (large drum).

Flute types: The Garos play different types of bamboo flute such as Otokra (long bamboo flute), Ilongma (small bamboo flute) and Bangsi (bamboo flute much smaller than Otokra and Ilongma), Imbingi (flute made of short piece of thin bamboo).

Gongs or Rang: the Rang or gongs are brass metal plates or basins. Besides playing as musical instruments, they are also used as a Gold reserve, because in the Garo society men of wealth and social standing are measured by the number of Rangs one possesses.

Cymbals types: the Garos play two kinds of cymbals: Kakwa (small brass cymbals) and Neggilsil (smaller than the former one, made of brass).

Besides these musical instruments, there are Gongmina or jews' harp (made of thin slit of bamboo), Adil (small wind instrument made of buffalo horn) and Singga (another type of buffalo horn).

2.3.3 Games

The Garos have some traditional games and sports. These games are held every year in the village ground. Some of the games and sports are:

Wa' pang ka'la (played by two men, by using a bamboo pole and big stone)

Garo makal pala (kind of wrestling, played by two men)

Sue goa (played the with big round bean, by two groups of player kind of marble game),

Ja'kol ka'la (played in groups, kind of chasing and catching game).

Other games are different types of wrestling and cock fighting, which include A'ding sala, Jakdia, Akkaru-bidil-sala etc. Besides these games, the young boys of the Nokpantas also enjoys long jumps, high jumps, throwing big or small stones, running up and down the hills, climbing the hanging ropes, tug of war, pushing each other by means of piece of bamboo. The Garos also play modern games like football, volleyball, basket ball, table tennis and number of other games.

Check your progress 2

- Note:** 1) Your answers should be about each 30 words each;
2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit.

2) What are the utensils the Garo tribe uses for cooking?

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3) What kind of musical instruments the Garo people play?

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2.4 THE NOKPANTE OR THE YOUTH DORMITORY

The Nokpante or the bachelor's dormitory is one of the commonest institutions of the Garos. Almost every Garo village has its own Nokpante or Nokpantes. In the big villages, each clan has its own Nokpantes for the young boys, but in some small villages there is no Nokpante and the bachelors sleep either with their parents or in the house of an old widower. The Nokpante is entirely the dwelling house of the unmarried young men. Women are not allowed to enter the Nokpante, only on certain occasions like socio-religious festivals.

The construction of the Nokpante is a little different from that of the ordinary family houses. The special features of this construction are that it is very strongly built and

usually much larger than the family houses. There is no sidewalls from the front up to about the half of its length, only rear half of the building has sidewalls connected with the backside walls. There are two doors; one in front and the other in the back side of the house. The bamboo floor is ten or twenty ft. high from the ground and a ladder helps one to climb up in Nokpante. Along the ladder a big and long cane stalk is hung from the roof of the house and it is used as support for climbing up and down. The ladder is a big log of wood with steps cut on it. Big timber posts of big trees are used for construction of the Nokpante. These posts are crossbeams. They are decorated with colored paint or carved designs of male and female human figures. In some Nokpante, pig heads and elephant tusks are also hung from the beams. In side the Nokpante house, a rectangular hearth is constructed where fire is lit during the winter to keep themselves warm and also to roast pork and other meat products.

The Nokpante is divided into two parts-one in the rear with enclosed walls forms the sleeping room and the other part is the verandah. The verandah is used as a sort of school room for learning various arts and crafts such as woodwork, cane carving, and bamboo design. Young boys about the age of seven or eight years are sent to sleep in the Nokpante at night. They usually go there after supper and spend the time chatting about their agricultural works, their experience in the weekly markets, love affairs etc.

In the Nokpante, young boys learn to play musical instruments, dance, sing from their older ones. There is also regular practice of gymnasium, wrestling, high jump and other games. Other than these, young boys are taught to be discipline and sense of duty. Tasks include collecting firewood, and fetching water. They are also told not to travel outside their family houses at night except on festivals.

Besides being used as an entertainment center, learning institution and community hall, the Nokpante is also used as a courtroom where the Nokma or Laskar holds his court. The villager hold important social meetings in the Nokpante. The married men of the village go to the Nokpante at leisure also some time to make baskets, mats, fishing nets. The Nokpante is also served as a place to entertain visitors of the village.

2.4.1 Marriage

There are various forms of marriage among different divisions of the Garos, out of them the **Do'sia** marriage happens in the presence of the parents, relatives of the both bride and groom. The priest takes a cock and a hen, holds them up so that their heads are close together and strikes them with a piece of wood. Then they are dropped on the ground. If both the birds lie on the ground with the beaks pointing towards each other, it is a good omen and if they lie the beaks apart, it is considered that marriage will be an unhappy one. Another type of marriage is **Marriage by capture**: in this type of marriage, when a girl attained the age of marriage and want to marry a particular boy, gives an indication to her parents or relatives. Then they would watch movements of the boy carefully and whenever they find and

opportunity, capture him unaware and bring him to the house of the girl where he is kept confined along with the girl for more than one night. If he makes noise, yells and tries to escape, then they consider it to be a good sign and that he would make a good and prosperous husband. But if not then they do not approve of it favorably.

2.4.2 Divorce

Divorce is valid in the Garo society under the following circumstances;

- 1) when the husband and the wife cannot live together any more. They desire separation by mutual consent.
- 2) when either party is guilty of adultery or having a love affair with someone outside the marriage.
- 3) when either the husband or the wife refuses to work for the support of the household.

Besides these, disregard and unruliness on the part of the wife, incompatibility of temper and negligence of domestic duties are some other grounds for divorce. When a divorce is sought, compensation is taken in kinds like a *dakmanda* (a garo cloth worn by the women) and brass gong in olden times. Since, the British times, money has replaced the old Garo custom, the rate has been fixed at Rs. 60/-.

1.4.3 Adoption

The Garo customary laws permit parents to adopt children under the following conditions:

- 1) when the parents have no daughters at all
- 2) when the parents have no suitable daughter to become a heiress
- 3) when the daughter, selected as a heiress, quarrel with her parents and run away and there is no other suitable daughter available.
- 4) the parents can adopt either a boy or girl, not necessarily for inheriting property

2.4.4 Laws of adoption

Male children can not receive or even claim any part of the property which they themselves may have acquired by their own labour. After marriage, the right of the possession of the family property is passed down from mother to wife; she becomes the “women” of the new home and its future mother. On the day of marriage the groom leaves his parents house and goes to his wife to form a new family. Their children will take their mother’s surname.

2.4.5 Birth

The Garos observe the birth of a child, in a ritual known as A'kawes. This ceremony takes place after a child is born. In this ritual an animal or a fowl is sacrificed by the priest. The priest recites a long incantation to avert the influence of evil spirits. The priest sprinkles rice in the floor of the house and around the child, then chant to remove evil spirits. The name the child after their ancestors but some cases they do not give the name of the relative who dies recently.

2.4.6 Funeral

The Garos usually burn their dead and the ceremony takes place at night. But there are certain funeral rule such as a leper is not burnt but buried. In olden days, the lepers were isolated in huts and in the last stages of the disease; in case of death, they burn them with their huts. A person who is killed by a tiger is cremated but cremation takes place in the day time. Moreover, the dead body would not be taken into the village and body will be cremated at the place where he was found dead. Besides that, no formal ritual would be done for the dead, all his belonging would be destroyed as they consider that it is taboo to make use of them after such an unnatural death.

Normally, when a person dies, all the relatives are informed and if they live nearby, then the cremation takes place immediately. But if the relative live at distant places then the dead body will be kept indisposed for two or three days. Before cremation, in the case of a rich person, the dead body is placed among a row of Gongs and other valuables, but if the person is poor, then is laid down upon the bamboo floor. The dead body of a rich person is washed with undiluted liquor and poor person's body is washed with water. The funeral pyre consists of four upright wooden or bamboo posts in a rectangular shape within logs of piled wood. They usually use good quality wood for burning the body, because they believe if the corpse is burned with bad wood, the spirit in it reincarnated with bad health. After the cremation, the bones and ashes are collected in a basket and left in the jungle.

Among the Garo, who are Christian, they do not burn their dead but bury them and funeral ceremony is performed according to the Christian practices.

2.5 RELIGION AND BELIEF

Originally, the religion of the Garos was a mixture of Pantheism and Hinduism. They were not animistic but they believed and presided over by the "Supreme God" as locally known as "*Dakgipa Rugipa Stugipa Pantugipa* or *Tatora Rabuga Stura Pantura*", or the Creator. It is in clear observation, the religion of the Garos is monotheistic with polytheistic stage, it lapsed into gross ritualism, in its highest

consummate form, it is purely monotheistic in its origin. The Garos believed in creation of Earth, all living beings on earth and the sea, heavenly bodies, rain and the wind including lesser gods and thereby completed different objects within eight days, as they believed. This is the background of the religion, various festivals and the ceremonies of the Garos. According the Garo mythology creation of Earth, all living beings on earth and the sea, heavenly bodies, rain and the wind including lesser gods and thereby completed different objects within eight days, as they believed. This is the background of the religion, various festivals and the ceremonies of the Garos. The Garos believes that the creator of earth is *Tatara-Robunga*, other then that, there are the deities of *Choradubi* (protector of crops), *Saljong* (God of fertility), *Goers* (God of strength), *Susince* (Goddess of riches) etc. (source: <http://westgarohills.nic.in/people.htm>).

The Garos believe in the existence of a Supreme Being. They call all the good and evil spirit as “Mite”, it covers all god, goddess, some lesser spirits. According to the Garos the spirit of Mite is everywhere-in the sky, on the earth beneath, in the depths of the waters, in the dark corners, mountains, trees and bamboo groves, river, lakes etc. there are different names of the Garo Mite such as; *Tatara-rabuga*, *Saljong*, *Nostu-nopantu*, *Chorabudi* etc.

The Garos believe in existence of a spirit in man which after death goes to a particular place i.e. the abode of the spirits. They also believe in trans-migration of souls, as a state of reward and punishment. The trans-migration means that when a man dies, his soul or his essence leaves the dying body and enters the body of some animal or human being at it comes into the world to begin its career. And the process may be repeated from generation to generation.

The Garos believe in natural phenomena like the thunder, lighting, earthquake, eclipse, wind, rain, shooting stars. They believe that each of these natural elements is controlled by a spirit and the object of their worship has to be done by offering sacrifice (Milton S. Herbert.1991. The history and culture of Garo).

Now most of the Garos are now Christians. The factor responsible for these changes are, the British rule from 1867 to 1947 that is almost 80 years. During that time Christianity entered the Garo Hills as a result of attempts made by the foreign missionaries and Western education was introduced in the traditional Garo society. Although, most of the Garo people converted to Christian religion but, some of the old ritual are strongly followed by the members of the newly converted society.

2.6 GARO ETIOLOGICAL TALES

The mother of salt

The mother of salt was a very dirty-looking old hag. On her eye sockets, nostrils and cheeks hung filthy mucus secretions. Her whole appearance was disgusting but she

was a grand cook. She could preserve every sort of delicacy in its pristine freshness and taste. No flesh ever decomposed and no foodstuff ever grew rotten under her skillful handling. However, both mother of the salt and terribly afraid of water. In fact she never bathed nor washed her hands, feet and face. She never hand handled water, but always used some sort of vessel when it was necessary to use it in the pursuance of her culinary art. Her daughter Karitchi was no less filthy.

Now, the son-in-law of the mother of salt had a special liking for the dishes of curry, soup, chutney, and so on prepared by her. But does not like both mother-in-law and wife's dirty appearances, one day he asked them to take bath. He gave them long sermon on the virtues of cleanliness; but it had no effect on them. They staunchly refused to go near the river then he decided to use force. He dragged both mother and daughter to the river side but Karitchi managed to escape from there. The son-in-law took mother-in-law into river and Karachi kept weeping seeing the cruelty and hard-heartedness of her husband. As the mother went to the river; the mother of salt dissolved and vanished completely before her eyes, after that incident the daughter wandered about the wild woods shedding tears, seeking consolation from the trees, plants and herbs. The trees and plants and herbs on which her tears fell became saturated with potash. She traveled on broken-heartedly and at last came to Aema Ditema Songduma Sagalma (the Ocean), to which the remain of her mother were carried by the river into which she was plunged. Karitchi, still weeping, leaped into water to discover the spirit of the mother of salt. Her congealed tears become pearls inside ocean (Birendranath Datta, Nabin Chandra Sarma, Prabin Chandra Das .1994. A hand book of folklore material of North-East India. pp.285-286).

Check your progress 3

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;

2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given the end of the Unit.

4) What is Nokpante?

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5) Who is "Mite" ?

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2.7 LET US SUM UP

The study of the Garo tribe, a branch of the Mongolian group are one of the important tribes of North East India. In the above mentioned article; we have given a general idea of the Garo tribe from the point of their social-cultural life and traditional beliefs. It may be noted that the most of the ritual and ceremony observed by the Garo people living in different parts of the North-east varies from each other. Here, we are giving a picture of a traditional Garo society, but there are many changes that have been taking place in the Garo society since then. The factor responsible for these changes are, the British rule from 1867 to 1947 that is almost 80 years. During that time Christianity entered the Garo Hills as a result of attempts made by the foreign missionaries and Western education was introduced in the traditional Garo society. Although, most of the Garo people converted to Christian religion but, some of the old ritual are strongly followed by the members of the newly converted society. They celebrate various religious and nature festival around the year for performing jhum cultivation. The Garo have a matrilineal society, where husband lives in wife's house after marriage and their children takes mother's surname, that an unique example of power of women (Milton, Sangma S. 1979. The history and culture of Garo)

2.8 ACTIVITY

We have together discussed about the Garo tribe. Try to write down from your memory any of the cultural activity and myths of the Garo tribe that you may have attended or read in books or journals.

2.9 REFERENCES FOR FURTHER READINGS

- <http://westgarohills.nic.in/people.htm>
- Datta, Birendranath, Das, Prabin Chandra and Sarma, Nabin Chandra. (eds). A hand book of folklore material of North-East India. Guwahati: Anundoram Borooh Institute of Language, Art and Culture, Assam. 1994.
- Herbert Risley. The people of India. New Delhi: The Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd.1991.
- Sangma, Milton S. The history and Culture of Garo. New Delhi: Book Today. 1979.
- Singh, K.S.The scheduled tribes. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1984

2.10 GLOSSARY

Jhum : shifting cultivation

Matrilineal : society in which a female is head of the family and decent is traced through the mother not by father. All property belongs to the women, remains with her till she is alive and is passed on from mother to daughter.

2.11 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

1) The Garos belong to the Garo Hills from one of the major constituent tribal population the state of Meghalaya in North East India. Apart from the Garo Hills, there is large number of the Garos live outside the Garo Hills district.

They are found in the all over the Brahmaputra valley and other hill districts of north-east India. Other than these they are also found in Mymensing district of Bangladesh.

2) The Garos use limited utensils mainly of cooking pots, large earthen vessels for brewing liquor, the pestle and the mortar with which paddy is husked. They have bamboo baskets of different shapes and sizes and few cutters and knives. Dry gourds are used for carrying water from streams and for drinking; a number of these gourds are of various shapes and sizes. The gourds are allowed to dry and are then converted into water-bottles by the process of cutting a hole and shaking out the seeds.

2) The Garos have variety of musical instruments like drums, gongs or rang, cymbals etc.

Drums types: there are several big and small types of drums played by the Garos and they are dama (long narrow drum), kram (larger drum than dama), Nadik (small wooden drum), nagara (large drum).

Flute types: the Garos play different types of bamboo flute such as Otokra (long bamboo flute), Ilongma (small bamboo flute) and Bangsi (bamboo flute much smaller than Otokra and Ilongma), Imbingi (flute made of short piece of thin bamboo).

Gongs or Rang: the Rang or gongs are brass metal plates or basins. Besides playing as musical instruments, they are also uses as a Gold reserve, because in the Garo society men of wealth and social standing are measured by the number of Rangs one possesses.

Cymbals types: the Garos play two kind of cymbals: Kakwa (small brass cymbals) and Neggilsa (smaller than the former one, made of brass).

Besides these musical instruments, there are Gongmina or jews' harp (made of thin slit of bamboo), Adil (small wind instrument made of buffalo horn) and Singga (another type of buffalo horn).

4) The Nokpante or the bachelor's dormitory is one of the commonest institutions of the Garos. Almost every Garo village has its own Nokpante or Nokpantes. In the big villages, each clan has its own Nokpantes for the young boys, but in some small villages there is no Nokpante and the bachelors sleep either with their parents or in the house of an old widower. The Nokpante is entirely the dwelling house of the unmarried young men. Women are not allowed to enter the Nokpante, only on certain occasions like socio-religious festivals.

5) The Garo believes the good and evil spirit as "Mite", it covers all god, goddess, some lesser spirits. According to the Garos the spirit of Mite is everywhere-in the sky, on the earth beneath, in the depths of the waters, in the dark corners, mountains, trees and bamboo groves, river, lakes etc. there are different names of the Garo Mite such as; Tatara-rabuga, Saljong, Nostu-nopantu, Chorabudi etc.

UNIT 3 : MIGRANT TRIBES / NOMADS

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
 - 3.1.1 Definition of nomads
 - 3.1.2 Characteristic of nomads
- 3.2 Food habits of nomads
- 3.3 Gypsies
 - 3.3.1 Sea gypsies
- 3.4 Classification of nomads
 - 3.4.1 Food gathering nomads
 - 3.4.2 Pastoral nomads
 - 3.4.3 Trader nomads
 - 3.4.4 Mendicant nomads
- 3.5 Case study: Banjara tribe
 - 3.5.1 Origin and myths
- 3.6 Let us sum up
- 3.7 Activity
- 3.8 References and further readings
- 3.9 Glossary
- 3.10 Check your progress: possible answers

3.0. OBJECTIVES

After having read this Unit you will be able to:

- explain about nomads;
- discuss about the characteristics of Nomad and their food habits;
- list the different types of Nomads and their life style; and
- explain about the origin and myths of Banjara tribe.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Nomads are found all over the world. It can be presumed that the early man was a nomad. Our remotest ancestors, who for millions of years were obliged to earn their livelihood through food gathering and later by hunting, must have lived as nomads. No other way method could have suited their environment, tradition and living conditions. “The term nomad is derived from the Greek word “*Nemo*” which literally means “to pasture”. It was applied by the ancients to hunter/ gathers and

herdsmen. These groups permanently or periodically wandered without any particular home or habitat, tending flocks of sheep or goats or herds of cattle; horses, mules, camels, yaks etc. Later, they began to trade in livestock, as is common now in Jammu and Kashmir, and in a few other Himalayan states. In Indian language a Nomad is denoted as “*Khanabadosh*” which means “a home on shoulders”. (V.Raghaviah.1968.Nomads.pp. 47-52).

3.1.1 Definition of nomads

The *Dictionary of Anthropology* defines a nomad as “a person who lives completely from his flock and does not domicile himself to plant”. The Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, in their work “Notes and Queries on Anthropology” (sixth edition) describe nomadic people as “those dependent principally on hunting or collecting for their food supplies, having no permanent abodes”. They further add that “it will generally be found, that the groups which habitually move about together, tend to be precisely defined, in terms of tracts of territory with which they are specially associated. A horde is a group of nomads, claiming exclusive hunting or grazing rights, over one or more defined areas, within which their wanderings are, as a rule, confined”.

B.H. Mehta, from the Tata Institute of Social Science, Bombay, describes the nomads as “grass landers” and cattle breeders. He describes nomadism as “regular, seasonal or cyclical movements of groups for sustenance. According to food supply, it may assume different forms, depending upon topography and climate. There are nomads, who hunt, and nomads who collect food, as well as pastoral and even agricultural nomads. Nomads are usually found in small kin-bands. They are not only grasslanders, but take to nomadic life, on account of economic insecurity, and lack of will for social adjustment.

The Encyclopedia of Social Sciences (Vol. 11 and 12, pp. 390-392) defines Nomadism, as involving the repeated shifting for subsistence and undirected wandering, but is focused around temporary centers of operation, stability of which depended upon food supply and the state of technical advance. It assumes different forms, according to methods of obtaining food, topographic and climatic conditions.

Nomadic tribes are found all over the world. Nomads are born as well as made. Nomadism is a pre-pastoral trait of all early humanity, passing through the digging stick stage of transition and civilization. It was pre-pastoral pattern of life, universally practiced in every country; West and East.

3.1.2 Characteristic of nomads

The following features can be considered as the main characteristics of nomadism.

- 1) Nomadism is a group or tribal trait, not an individual characteristic.

- 2) Timidity; modesty bordering on timidity of publicity and contact with outsiders. For example: dislike of photography, fear of police and village officers.
- 3) Fondness for open-air life, resulting in hardiness that can stand all kinds of weather. Aversion to artificial embellishment, ornaments and clothing, and relying confidently on their natural beauty and body-build, which they expose to the fullest possible extent.
- 4) Absence of understanding the capitalistic values of time, money and economy.
- 5) Aversion to monotony in work and positive dislike to daily wage labour obtained in factories.
- 6) Dislike of change to economic modes common to industrialized, Western society.
- 7) Suspicion of all others except their closest kin group.
- 8) Aversion to allopathic medicine and a preference for natural cures. They enjoy work and rest alternately to relive boredom and are so well contented that they refuse to work on days when they have enough to eat.
- 9) Few personal possessions.
- 10) Bigger groups of Nomads are called “Dals” which consist of larger numbers of families, numbering 200 to 300 members led by women leaders called Mukhyas.
- 11) Nomads are honest, sincere and hard-working, are happy and enjoy life more fully than others.
- 12) Like other tribes, they use weapons like bows and arrows for hunting. They are very skillful hunters. (V.Raghaviah.1968. Nomads. pp.53-55).

Check your progress 1

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;

2) You can check your answers with possible answers given at the end of the Unit.

1) What do you understand by the term “nomad”?

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2) Write few characteristics of the nomads

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3.2 FOOD HABITS OF NOMADS

The food habits of the nomads are dependant on their living conditions and environmental constraints, as well as the seasonal patterns of migration. Their eating habits are constructed by the environment in which they live. Walden observes “collecting the wild fruits of earth, and hunting its wild life for food are the simplest ways of earning a living. Life among the hunting tribes is one long struggle for food, broken by short periods of over-eating, sleeping and rejoicing. The hunting people have the least understanding of nature, and know least how to use her laws for comfort and support. There is truly a battle with nature, in which they are often the losers, for they are slaves of their environment. Only the simplest of the people living in the really luxurious zones of the earth’s surface remain in the purely hunting stage for long, the step to primitive cultivation being an easy one if circumstances permit”. Here are five examples of such tribes, the Semang and Sakai of Malaya, and the Pygmies of the South America, who subsist mainly on wild roots resembling potatoes, berries, the wild African banana, bread fruit and durain.

3.3 GYPSIES

The Gypsies are “a nomadic Caucasian minority race in Hindu origin”. According to Bhikshu Chaman Lal, writer of *Gypsies-Forgotten Children of India* (1962), the gypsies regard India as their motherland and believe that they originally emigrated from India when “barbarians invaded our motherland”. Bhikshu Chaman Lal who met the gypsies frequently in his travels, particularly in Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, France, England, Spain, Germany, Sweden, Russia and United states of America, believe that they belong to the Aryan stock of Punjab, Sind, Saurashtra, Rajputana and Malwa. The folk songs of the Hungarian gypsies, the system of panchayats, marriage customs, and thousands of gypsy words, prove the Hindu origin of the gypsies.

There are a number of theories available as to the period and causes of the gypsy migration from India. Some scholars believe that the earliest migrations might have occurred during Alexander’s invasion in 326 B.C. Others believe that the invasions of Muhmood of Gazhni in the 11th century resulted in enslavement of millions of gypsies from the North and North Western India, who were carried away by the ruthless conquerors. (V.Raghaviah. 1968. *Nomads*. pp.77-78).

3.3.1 Sea gypsies

The sea gypsy people live for most of the year in boats, like the Mawken tribe. It is stated of them that they had been driven to this plight owing to several adverse circumstances, one of which had been their expulsion from the land by superior war-like people since more than a century, on the South Burma coast. Several Chinese in the Canton Coastal state, live in boats, so that the small patch of land they used to

occupy for house-sites might grow rice, so much in short supply to meet the teeming millions of populous China. Several Chinese, perhaps do not have any sites at all. (V.Raghaviah.1968.Nomads.pp. 73)

3.4 CLASSIFICATION OF NOMADS

Nomadic groups found all over the world can be divided under the following division. They are:

- Food gathering Nomads
- Pastoral Nomads
- Trader Nomads
- Mendicant Nomads

3.4.1 Food gathering nomads

The searches for food dominates their lives and occupies most of their time, if not all their waking hours, the hunting and collecting people all over, have been called food gatherers. Nomads engaged in food gathering pursuits as opposed to food producing i.e. agricultural activities can be brought under this category. They can be more aptly called cultural nomads, as nomadism is an inseparable part of their culture, handed over from pre-historic times. Some of the food gathering nomads of India are Challa Yanadi of Andhra Pradesh, the Malapandaram of Kerala, and the Bihor of Bihar etc. An example of food gathering nomads is given below:

Case study: the Malapandaram of Kerala

According to A.A.D. Luiz's records in his book "Tribes of Kerala" The Malapandarams inhabit the high ranges in Kottayam and Quilon districts in the Achen Koil, and Sabarimala hills and forests, and are primitive hunters and food gatherers, "Preferring to roam unnoticed by the advanced society". It is indeed a very rare privilege, as Luiz states, to establish any contact with this most elusive group of primitive people. Luiz describes their day-to-day life in the following order. The Malapandaram have one important meal and that is at dusk. They collect, till produce, hunt fish and catch tortoise from the Pamba river and forest streams. Herbs, roots and the yam found in the forests, form the principle part of their diet. Collecting honey is done at nights and fishing is done by poisoning streams with the bark of wild trees. A digging stick and bill-hook are their chief implements. They are conversant with the use of the bow and arrow, blow pipe, spear, traps, nooses and snares. They are fond of pets, especially the parish dog which accompanies them in all their wanderings. They are known to live in caves, under overhanging rocks and in the hollows of trees during their temporary halts. They keep the fire glowing through the night. Before starting to use matches, they made fire with "Chakmuk"; rubbing stones or bamboo.

The Malapandarams are animists worshipping hills, trees and streams as even enlightened Hindus still do, throughout India. They do not bury or cremate their dead, but simply leave the corpse where death occurs and shift away. They sometimes use the bark of trees for clothing. (V.Raghaviah.1968. Nomads.pp.120-122).

3.4.2 Pastoral nomads

Pastoral nomads wander their entire lives and depend upon nature's bounty for their living. The Pastoral nomads of India are concentrated in hilly and forest areas, and are rarely seen in the plains. They are found in large number in the North-Western states of India, namely Kashmir, Punjab, western Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and, to a certain extent in Rajasthan. An example of Pastoral nomads is given below;

Case study: the Todas

These are pastoral nomad tribes of South India, who live in the Nilgiri groups of hills. Their main occupation is rearing the buffaloes. They have contempt for cultivation, and despite a large extent of potato land secured for them from the government, they have not shown much interest in utilizing it. They, instead, lease it out to the more enterprising and agricultural minded Badaga, who makes a good cultivator. The Toda hut is half-barrel shaped, oblong and has a small entrance through which the inmate creeps. A Toda hamlet which is called a Mand, consists of similar houses, less than half a dozen in number, with milk houses separately attached to every family house. It is in this house that milk is boiled, to which access is denied scrupulously to all women. The cattle pens are close by the huts.

H.C. Wilson writes in his report about the Toda; "during the annual migration of the buffaloes to the Kundahs and when they were approaching the bridle path leading from Avalanche to Sispara, I witnessed an interesting custom. Both the ordinary and sacred herds were on the move together. As soon as the sacred herd crossed the bridle path, the Toda men having put down all their house-hold utensils, went to where the women and girls were sitting and carried them one by one over the place where the buffaloes had passed, depositing them on the path above. One of the men told me that the females are not allowed to walk over the track covered by the sacred herd and have to be carried whenever it is necessary to cross it. This herd has a recognized track when migrating, and is led by the old buffaloes which appear to know the exact way". (V. Raghaviah. 1968. Nomads. pp.160-163).

3.4.3 Trader nomads

They are also known as "Khanabadosh" or wandering tribe, like gypsies. Some of the trader tribes of India are Yerukalas, Gadia Lohars, Kalbelies, Iranis, Dheas, Shitooras etc. An example of trader nomads is given below:

Case study: the Iranis

The Iranis are a small tribe of trader wanderers who keep to towns and cities where they sell cutlery, mirrors, scents, beads, and many kinds of fancy articles. Like similar nomads, they camp outside towns, or near railway stations, parks or open public spaces to vend their wares which are small and also cheap. They are fond of bright colors as all North-Western Indians are, they wear multifold short skirts, which keep rhythmically dancing on their hips, wear nose, ear and ankle ornaments plentifully. Being in every sense the better halves, they dominate their men-folk and take the lead in professional and domestic matters. The Iranis know more than one language. They are highly conservative in their social dealings; they do not marry outside their limited circles. The Iranis keep dogs and other animals as pets and even trade in them. They carry their belonging on small ponies or mules which they use as mounts also for the old and the infirm. (V. Raghaviah. 1968. Nomads. pp.179-180).

Case study: the Kalbelias

Kalbelias are a wandering tribe of snake-charmers found all over India. They are known as Pamulas in Andhra Pradesh. They belong to the profession of performers, an institution of moving zoos, organized in this country centuries back. They move about the countryside exhibiting the animals and collecting some fees in kind for the show, on the lines of an itinerant circus through on a far smaller scale. The Kalbelias and the Pamulas make their living by taming the king cobra and showing the same around. They are also experts in catching poisonous serpents and extracting poison from their fangs, which they sell to medical practitioners for medicinal use. The Kalbelias move about in small groups of twenty to thirty and stay in each camp for a fortnight and move in small portable huts, with small reed-roofs slanting on either side being barely of three to four feet height in the central position. As a side profession they also collect rags and used paper which they sell to merchants for converting the same into good paper again. (V. Raghaviah. 1968.pp.180-182)

It is not uncommon that the very snakes which are tamed sometimes bite the charmers and cause their death.

3.4.4 Mendicant nomads

These nomads live by collecting alms and begging. Some of the mendicant tribes of India are; the Gulgulias, the Dommaras, the Singiwalas, the Karwals, the Jogis, the Munduputtas and Kelas, Pamulas, Kakmaras etc. Examples of mendicant nomads are given below:

Case study: the Bynollu

The Bynollus are vagrant and carry stringed black cylindrical drums thoroughly exposed on one side and a sheet of thin leather covering at the other end with a wire

mounted upon it and also consisting of a number of bells fitted inside which can produce a jingling musical sound. With his right hand, the musician beats the hollow drum producing the effect of a thud, another keeps the chorus by playing upon the wire drum fitted with a single string. They entertain villagers by singing praises of Gods and Goddesses and their miracles. All able bodied Bynollu, are in great demand on occasions when village Gods are worshiped, as they sing the praises of Gods and can narrate “Ellamma katha” and other ballads. They are the priests for Madigas. They are found in Kurnool and Anantapur districts of Andhra Pradesh. (V. Raghaviah. 1968. Nomads. pp.247)

Case study: the Dommaras

The Dommaras are itinerant performers of acrobatic feats with which they entertain villagers and get compensated by doles of grains, cast off clothing as well as money grants. Their numbers are small and they must have originally migrated from Orissa. They are a nomadic tribe found all over the state rearing pigs and carrying all their worldly possessions, on donkeys. Their standard of cleanliness is low; though on that account they do not cease to be hardy and sturdy. They camp in portable huts, often choosing lonely spots on the outskirts of a village for camping places.

Edgar Thurston describes the Dommaras as a nomadic tribe of athletes and jugglers, exhibiting their feats as they wander about the country. A few of them have settled down as agricultural laborers dwelling on the outskirts of the villages in tiny huts or “guidiseys”, made of bamboos and plaited palm leaves. In social position they rank just above the Harijans. They rear pigs and make combs out of the wood. M.A. Stuart observes that “in the matter of food, the Dommaras eat all sorts of animals including cats, crows, squirrels, snakes and mongooses”. (V. Raghaviah. 1968. Nomads. pp.234-236).

Case study: the Kakmaras

The Kakmaras are a nomadic tribe of West Bengal. They correspond to the Bandas of Andhra Pradesh. Though the Telugu Bandas migrated to Bengal more than 200 years ago on account of their poverty, they still speak Telugu at home and are able to converse in Bengali. They are mainly a beggar community and get their name on account of their fondness for the crow flesh as is the case with the Bandas of Andhra Pradesh. The crow is a forbidden bird and unfit for the table for almost all Indians except very few tribes like the Kakmaras. The Kakmaras were classified in the census report of 1951 as “Madrasis”. They camp during their wanderings sometimes under the trees, near market places, near fairs or in open places.

It is difficult to describe the reason of migration of the Kakmaras. It might be due to poverty or recurring famines. They move in batches of 2 to 3 families and keep roaming for the major part of the year. Some times they return to some sort of

temporary habitation they keep in certain villages, though they do not have much attachment to them.

P.K. Bhowmick, made a close study of this small tribe, the population of which is below 300. They settle down for 10 to 30 days at a stretch and after exhausting chances of begging in the surrounding areas move to another place. When they go to any particular place, they keep their scanty belongings in the cavities of big trees or keep them hanging from the branches in the trees and move about within a radius of 3 to 4 miles for carrying on their only profession i.e. begging. They are mostly found in Contai, Tavailuk and in parts of Sadar sub-division of Midnapur; and a few of them in the districts of Balasur and Puri in Orissa. Bhomick observed that “the Kakmaras men dress themselves in a peculiar fashion with vermilion marks on the forehead and a colored head gear or crown is worn by them. They wear an iron bangle around the right wrist and carry a sharp knife without handle for use as well as for defense. They have bags made of palm leaf mats and spears for killing or catching birds. Dogs are trained and employed to keep watch on their bedding or other domestic kits hung on a tree. Women generally move about with the children carrying infants tied to their back with a piece of cloth. To get more alms, they recite loudly the name of God in melodious tone “Govinda” every time they approach a prospective giver. They have the dirty habit of spitting frequently and thus they soil the place they visit. Sometimes they make a gash on their bodies from which blood is allowed to flow. In this way they try to draw sympathy, more rice, vegetables, and torn clothes from people of charitable disposition in the village.

The Kakmaras keep very few domestic utensils, one or two iron or aluminum pots for cooking and a few earthen pots. They sleep on date-leaf mats and eat mongooses, otters, tiger-rats, crows etc. The Kakmaras employ a curious method to snare crows. The feathers of a dead crow are cleverly manipulated and tied to a pole which draws the attention of the crows which have a very communal sympathy for their fellow beings. As the crows come closer they are caught by a net. The Kakmaras worship Hindu goddess Kali, Sitala or Manasa, and sacrifice goat and fowls to propitiate their goddess. (V. Raghaviah. 1968. pp.248-252).

Check your progress 2

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;

2) You can check your answers with possible answers given at the end of the Unit.

3) Who are the food gathering nomads? Give an example.

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4) Describe about mendicant nomads with an example from the above mentioned writings.

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3.5 CASE STUDY: BANJARA TRIBE

The Banjara belong to nomadic tribal group. They are also known as Lamani, Lambada and Lambhani. The word “Lambani” derived from Sanskrit word lavana (salt), which they mainly transported and marketed along with other goods until the end of the 19th century. The generic name “Banjara” is derived from the Sanskrit word vanachara or “wanderers in forest”. They left their original occupation after the introduction of railways and roads transports by the British and adopted various skills for livelihood. In India there are a total of 36 nomadic and semi-nomadic tribal groups. They all claim to be from Rajput community. Many accounts suggest that the Lambanis are originally from Marwar region of Rajasthan.

The Lambani are spread mostly in Northern and Southern regions of India, a large number of their communities are settled in the state of Karnataka (South India). They are found in the Dharwad, Bijapur and Gulbarga districts of Karnataka. They speak Banjari dialect within their community. The Lambani have both nuclear and joint family. Property is divided equally among the sons; the younger son is required by customs to take care of the old parents and given extra property rights, for example if there is only one house, it is given to the younger son. The Lambani cremate their dead. On the 13th day of the death, a feast is given to all the relatives.

Most of the Lambani work as agricultural labourers. Because very small number of Lambani families possess own land. Apart from that, they also work as wage labour in various fields such as factories, roads, making tools or collect forest products etc.

The Lambani women have equal role in the management of the family and contribution to the family income. They do the day to day household work like cooking, cleaning, fetching water, collecting firewood from the forest etc. They are known for their colourful heavily embroidered work, studded with small mirrors and cowries (sea shells). The Lambani women have distinctive costume; they wear multi-coloured heavily embroidered costume with ornamented hairstyle and silver jewellery.

The Lambani celebrates number of festival which is closely associated with their traditional customs and rituals. Birth of a child (specially boy) is celebrated with drum-beats and considered to be a happy occasion, they distribute food and gifts among relatives. Later a number of ceremonies like dhond (community feast), Kalperu (thank giving) to the deity etc., are observed after child birth. Puberty rituals are observed for the young girls. Other than these, they celebrates major Hindu festivals such as Ugadi, Dussehra, Deepavali etc. (K.S.Singh. (ed). 2003. People of India: Karnataka. pp. 880-887).

3.5.1 Origin and myths

The Lambani believe the origin of the earth to Jambava and his two sons Heppumuni and Rudra or Raktamuni. Form the seed of the creator a beautiful girl was born, later she created a boy out of the sweat of her body. Then she desired to consort with him, but her offer was rejected. Again she created another boy for the similar purpose and her wish was fulfilled. Later they became progenitors of the human race, their descendants were given various names one of them are Dhaj. Later Dhaj had a son Kowdhaj and his son was Karan. Karan's son was Kachchap, and he had two sons Thida and Chada. The descendants of Chada are the settles tribes of towns and villages. While the descendant of Thida are the wandering tribes "Banjara". Thida had five sons: (1) Nathad; his descendant was Vagris like Shikaris, (2) Joghad; his descendant was the wandering Joghis, who rear pigs, (3) Khimad; who is the ancestor of the wandering blacksmiths like Bailukammaras, (4) Mota; who has given rise to the Labhans, and (5) Mola; who is the ancestor of the Banjaras.

According to another account Thida was a descendant of Sugriva (from the epic Ramayan) and Tara (his wife). Thida's son Mola was an attendant of Krishna, who was supposed to be in love with Radha. Mola earn goodwill by his patient service to Radha and both adopted the profession of dancer and acrobats. They exhibited their skill before the princes of Dhanjighad, Banoghad and Jagatghad. They got their three boys as a reward and they are Rathod, Pamhar and Chovhan. Later they became the progenitors of the clans which still bear their names. The descendant of these three boys were the Banjara (H.V. Nanjundayya and L.K Ananthakrishna Iyer. 1928. The Mysore tribes and Castes. Vol.II. pp.136-139)

3.6 LET US SUM UP

In the above mentioned article, we tried to appreciate and understand Nomadism with some definitions and descriptions. But other than that, there are several categories of nomads living at varying stages of Nomadism with their wandering habits in all over the world. Nomadism can be simply described as a wandering habit, pursued by a group or groups of people, who practice the same. It may also be assumed that, Nomadism is a cultural trait which results from want of ambition or aspiration, either total or partial. The degree of the occurrence of ambition can be

considered to be the criterion for determining the stage of Nomadism through which a particular tribe is passing. Nomadism might have been forced wholesale upon larger groups of people, sometimes even whole tribes, by natural calamities, earthquakes, floods, invasions, expropriation and other acts of God and man, resulting in large scale migration from a previously settled life, centuries ago.

Check your progress 3

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each;

2) You can check your answers with possible answers given at the end of the Unit.

5) Write about origin and myth of Banjara tribe?

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3.7 ACTIVITY

We have together, above, discussed about Nomads. Do you think that now you know different types Nomads and their culture? Try to discuss about Nomadic tribe by explaining it to another friend of yours and see how well you have understood it.

3.8 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

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3.9 GLOSSARY

Dals	:	groups
Mukhyas	:	head of the group
Khanabadosh	:	wandering tribes
Ellamma	:	mother goddess

Harijan	:	economically backward community
Kali	:	mother goddess
Manasa	:	serpent goddess
Sitala	:	goddess of small pox

3.10 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

- see section 5.1
- see section 5.1.2
- see section 5.4.1
- see section 5.4.4
- see section 5.5.1