

TRIBAL CONCEPT OF LIFE AFTER DEATH (WITH REFERENCE OF GONDS FROM BAIHAR BALAGHAT)

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From the tribal communities, Bull is deeply associated with their life from birth to death

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**Hold fast the time!
Guard it, watch over it every hour, every minute!
Unrewarded it slips away...
Hold every moment sacred.
Give each clarity and meaning,
each the weight of thine awareness,
each its true and due fulfillment.**

~ Thomas Mann ~

Men commonly believe that their conscious being will not end at death, but that it will be continued for an indefinite time or forever, long after the frail corporeal envelope which lodged it for a time has mouldered in the dust. This belief in the immortality of the soul, as we call it, is by no means confined to the adherents of the great historical religions, It is held with at least equal confidence by most, if not all, of those peoples of lower culture whom we call savages and barbarians, and there is every reason to think that among them the belief is native. My interests ranged over the whole world, tried to trace the belief in immortality and an indestructible soul also among the simpler peoples of India. But at that time the ethnographical literature on India was sadly lacking in reliable monographic accounts of individual peoples, and the information contained in the compilations of the various 'Castes and Tribes' Do not add up to a very complete picture of aboriginal eschatology.

It was particularly the indiscriminate use of the word 'soul' that led to continual confusion and prevented from arriving at a true understanding of Indian tribal beliefs about life after death. For Western observers writing about the eschatological ideas of Indian tribes had used the English term 'soul' to translate two entirely different concepts, namely that of the impersonal life-substance, which animates man from birth to death, and that of the incorporeal dead, who continue an existence as individuals long after the decomposition of the body. Let me demonstrate the nature of these two fundamental concepts by a concrete example drawn from the Gonds of Baihar (Balaghat) Madhyapradesh.

The Gonds share with many Central Indian tribes the belief that a child in the mother's womb is lifeless, until a *jiv* or life-force enters and animates the embryo. This *jiv* is sent into the child by Bhagavan, the supreme deity, to whom the Gonds refer usually as Sri Shambhu Mahadeo. The arrival of the *jiv* results in the quickening of the child, and if no *jiv* is sent into the embryo the child will be still born.

During a Gond's lifetime little attention is paid to the *jiv*, which is unrelated to a man's consciousness or emotions. But when a Gond's span of life draws to its end, Bhagavan recalls the *jiv*, and thereby causes death. There is a story which relates how Bhagavan once sent his messenger Yama to summon the *jiv* of a certain carpenter, and how this clever carpenter outwitted and imprisoned Bhagavan's messenger, thus delaying the recall of his *jiv* and prolonging his life for many years. Ever since, Bhagavan has sent fever and disease to weaken those whose *jiv* he intends to recall, so that when his messenger arrives they can offer no resistance.

When a *jiv* has returned to Bhagavan it is added to the pool of *jiv* available for reincarnation, and it would seem that the link between the personality of the deceased and his *jiv* comes to an end as soon as the *jiv* reaches Bhagavan. It is generally held that a *jiv* returned to Bhagavan's pool of life-forces may be incarnated in any living creature, be it animal or man. Nevertheless, there is a strong belief that a man's *jiv* is likely to be reincarnated in the son of one of his sons, and if a new-born child bears marks reminiscent of a recently deceased grandparent, the reincarnation of the latter's *jiv* in the child is considered proven. Moreover, it is thought that a Gond's *jiv* will be reincarnated in a Gond, a Brahman's in a Brahman and so on, a view which is clearly contradictory to the orthodox Hindu belief that a person may be reincarnated in a higher or lower caste according to the merit or demerit acquired in a previous life.

The personality of the deceased adheres after death not to the reincarnated *jiv*, but to the *snnal*,

which in Gondi means literally the Departed, the Dead. Nearly all the rites and ceremonies of the funeral, the memorial feast and the subsequent cult of the ancestors relate to the *sanal*, in whom the personality of the Departed is perpetuated. While the *jiv* departs to the realm of Bhagavan in the moment of death, the *sanal* is believed to linger near the corpse and throughout the funeral rites the presence of the *sanal* is very much in the minds of the mourners. From the house of death, the *sanal* follows the bier-carriers to the grave or the burning-ground and hovers close by while the mourners dispose of the corpse. Whether the corpse is buried or burnt, immediately after its disposal the mourners go to a stream and put down a miniature seat, a twig such as is used for cleaning the teeth, and a leaf-cup of water. They then address the *sanal* and admonish him to sit on the seat and to rinse his mouth, in the belief that the *sanal*, too, should purify himself from the pollution of death. This is followed by the sacrifice of a chicken or goat, the cooked flesh of which is offered to the *sanal* with the request to eat of it and to grant his favour to the living. Most of such prayers end with the phrase: 'You have died and become a god', and this idea that the Departed assume a status similar to that of the gods is reflected in the entire cult of the dead.

On the day after the funeral, the mourners gather outside the village and perform an elaborate rite whereby the recently Departed is joined with the company of the *sanal* dwelling in field and forest. At that time food is offered to these *sanal*, who on such occasions are believed to gather outside the village.

Throughout these rites no thought is given to the *jiv*, and it is quite clear that the personality of the Departed is believed to survive in the *sanal* long after the *jiv* has returned to Bhagavan and lost its identity in a new incarnation. Only one phase in the funeral rites concerns the fate of the *jiv*, and this one phase appears to be unconnected with all the other rites. On the spot where death occurred a mound of rice is hidden under an upturned basket and there it is left for a whole night. The following morning the basket is removed and the flour scrutinized for traces and impressions which would indicate the shape in which the deceased's *jiv* has been reincarnated - in a man, a dog, or perhaps in a bird or a snake.

No great importance, however, is attached to this test and the *jiv* is neither addressed with prayers nor propitiated with food-offerings. If no marks are discovered in the flour, the relatives conclude that the *jiv* did not revisit the house of death; and they perform the remaining funeral rites with no concern for the negative result of the flour-test.

The *sanal*, on the other hand, continues to see the object of various pious observances. The mingling of the *sanal* with those previously departed on the morning after the funeral is later followed by its formal introduction to the Persa Pen, the clan-deity. This rite can be performed only at one time in the year, namely during the feast in honour of the clan-deity in the lunar month of Pus, which corresponds to December-January. On this occasion the deceased's kinsmen must provide a goat, which the clan-priest sacrifices to the clan-deity in order to secure the *sanal's* admittance to the company of the clan-deity and the ancestors.

Thus we are left in no doubt that all the care which the Gonds bestow on their Departed is concerned with the fate of the *sanal*, and we may now ask what kind of existence the dead are believed to lead in the world of the *sanal*. Unlike other Indian tribes, the Gonds have no shamans who travel to the Land of the Dead and inform the living about the fate of their deceased friends and kinsmen, but nevertheless it is generally believed that life after death is very much the same as life in the world of the living. The *sanal* are divided into phratries and clans and every man and woman is believed to live with his or her original marriage-partner. If a man predeceases his wife he remains single until she joins him in the Land of the *Sanal*. There she is believed to return to the man to whom she was first married even though that marriage may never have been consummated and she subsequently spent a lifetime with a second or a third husband. For a woman can be married only once with full wedding-rites and it is these rites which determine her status in the society of the Departed.

Marriage is an indispensable qualification for admittance to the company of the clan-god and the ancestors; a Gond who dies before marriage may not be cremated with full rites, and his *sanal* may not be joined with the clan-deity. All those who die unmarried go to an underworld ruled over by the god Bhimal, who is himself believed to be unmarried.

Although the Departed live in a sphere of their own, they are not far removed from the world of the living, and in some prayers they are addressed as 'Departed, you who live in the forest. They also come to

the habitations of their living kinsmen and cluster about the housetops, and at the time of the Eating of the First-Fruits offerings for the Departed are placed on the roof. On other ceremonial occasions, too, small morsels of food are scattered for the *sanal*, who are begged to partake of this ritual food.

Far from dreading contact with the Departed, the Gonds believe in the beneficial influence of friendly *sanal*. Together with the clan-god they are believed to bestow substantial benefits on their living clansmen and the Gonds consider it desirable for a village to have on its land a shrine that contains the sacred symbols of prominent clan-ancestors.

It is only when the cult of the departed is neglected that they may withdraw their favour or visit their kinsmen with misfortune. In this respect their behaviour is no different from that of a god or godling annoyed with his worshippers, and as soon as a diviner has traced the cause of illness or ill-luck to the displeasure of a deceased member of the family, the offended *sanal* is propitiated with sacrifices and offerings.

Let us pause for a moment and consider the relevance of the Gonds' on the nature of the soul and the fear of the dead. In *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul* suggests that primitive man explains the phenomena of life and death by the assumption that the movements and the whole activity of a man are produced by a little man inside him. The soul, and as the activity of a man is explained by the presence of the soul, the repose of sleep or death is explained by its absence. A number of examples of beliefs in such manikins functioning as the enlivening principle, but it would seem that this hypothesis cannot be related to a situation where the animating principle is considered distinct from the personality surviving after death.

The *jiv*, the life-giving principle of the Gonds, is certainly not a 'soul' in the western sense. On its return to Bhagavan the supreme deity, the *jiv* seems to lose its identity, and even a reincarnation within the same family does not imply that the individual, once animated by this *jiv*, returns to earth. For this individual has a continued existence as a *sanal*, and in this existence is even subject to social obligations contracted on this earth, such as for instance, the bonds of his or her first marriage.

The *sanal* is the person himself after death has deprived him of his body and the *jiv* has departed to the Deity. And being the dead person minus the material body and the animating life-force, the *sanal* retains also the personality of the deceased, and remains within the framework of the social system which places him in certain prescribed relationships to the living as well as to the dead members of Gond society.

It may be argued that the *sanal* has the same airy, and ghost like quality as the Homeric psyche, and is believed to hover invisibly round cremation- and burial-ground, even while the corpse is still intact. No doubt the death of the body is believed to bring about a change, but it is a change in the status and not in the identity of the departed. The mourners emphasize this change of status when again and again they address the *sanal* with the words: 'You have died, you have become a *pen*, a god, stay now in your place.' The Gondi word *pen* is otherwise used for any deity, from Bhagavan, the Supreme Being, to the most insignificant godling of field or forest, and its application to the *sanal* suggests that man in his post-mundane existence is to some extent equated with those invisible beings who constitute the company of the gods. It suggests also a real transformation, and not simply the setting free of a spiritual 'soul' after the death of the body.

I am inclined to see in all such concepts as the *sanal*, a 'soul' in the sense of the Homeric psyche. But it would seem that the continuity between the personality of the living and the departed in a primitive eschatology such as that of the Gonds is due to a more naive idea of the after-life, an idea reflected in a number of myths which tell how in primeval times the dead used to return to the houses of the living soon after the funeral there to resume their old life, and how only when the world grew too crowded Bhagavan put a stop to this practice.

In the eyes of the Gond there is complete identity between the *sanal* and the personality of the deceased; and he cannot envisage a *sanal's* losing this identity and becoming a *bhut* or malignant ghost. Although many Gonds are aware of the Hindu belief in such ghosts, they say that only the dead of certain Hindu castes, but never their own Departed turn into evil ghosts.

There is one apparent exception to this attitude to the Departed. The Gonds share with most

Central Indian communities, both Hindu and tribal, the belief that the ghosts of women dying in childbirth or while pregnant are a danger to the living and may haunt the locality of their grave in hideous shape. But whereas other tribes believe that *every* woman who died under these circumstances turns into an evil ghost, the Gonds maintain that only if a village is deserted may a woman buried there reappear to the living in such shape. To guard against this eventuality a woman who died in childbirth is buried with her hair tied to the roots of a tree. This raises the question whether it is the woman's *sanal* that is believed to appear as a ghost, or whether the character of a revenant is ascribed to the corpse. As the *sanal* is thought of as an entity separate from the corpse already at the time of the funeral one wonders how the fastening of the dead woman's hair can be considered effective in preventing the *sanal's* appearance as a malignant ghost.

Though the problem of the *borali*, as the Gonds call such ghosts, is still very obscure, it is certainly significant that all those Gonds of my acquaintance who claimed to have seen *borali* described these hideous and frightening apparitions as the ghosts of non-Gond women, and particularly Lambara women. No concrete case of a Gond woman seen in the shape of a *borali* has ever come to my notice.

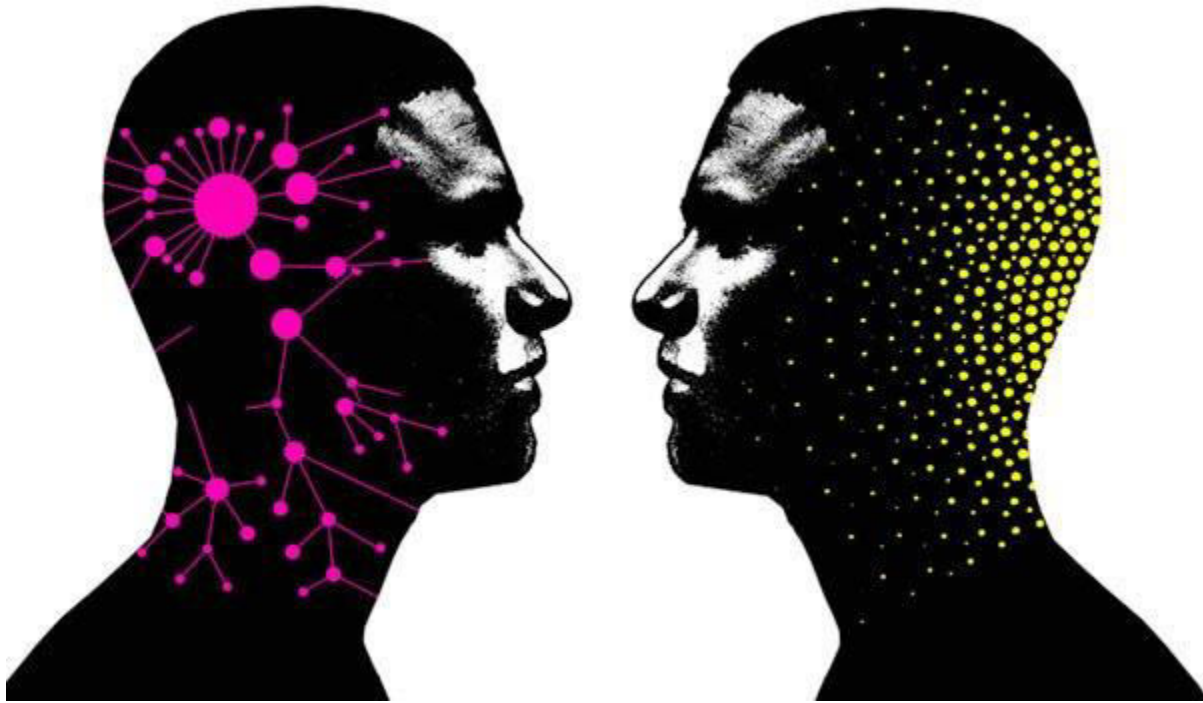
Indeed it would seem that the *sanal*, whose favour is believed to benefit men, cattle, and crops, are never viewed with horror, and that the various rites of purification in the course of a funeral are not intended to afford the living protection against the departed but to neutralize the pollution of death. This pollution associated with the corpse has nothing to do with the *sanal*. It falls into the same category as the ritual pollution of a woman during menstruation or after childbirth, and just as little as those avoiding such pollution are afraid of the woman from whom it emanates, do those guarding against death-pollution fear the surviving personality, the immaterial and intangible *sanal*. Such an interpretation of the various rites aimed at isolating the corpse and everything pertaining to its disposal would seem to resolve that apparent inconsistency had in mind when he spoke of customs exhibiting a tender regard for the spirits of the dead which is very different from that fear and scrupulous avoidance which often, if not generally characterize the attitude of primitive man to the souls of the departed'. The funeral customs of the Gonds are certainly not expressive of any fear of the dead *per se* and all rules of avoidance imposed on the mourners seem to be directed towards limiting the pollution of death.

If we now return to the dual concepts of the *jiv*, that goes to the supreme deity and loses all identity, and of the *sanal*, in which the personality of the deceased is perpetuated we find that similar ideas occur among other tribal peoples of Central India, but that the distinction between the two concepts is not everywhere as clearly pronounced as among the Gonds. In some cases we can even observe how these concepts are becoming blurred in the process of a linguistic change. Among the southern neighbours of the Gonds, of Baihar, for instance, the replacement of the tribal dialect by Chhatigarhi, the language of the surrounding Hindu peasantry, has resulted in a modification of eschatological beliefs. The concept of the *sanal*, the departed, as distinct from the *jiv*, has disappeared together with the Gondi word *sanal*; today the Koyas say that the departed and the ancestors are all *jiv*. At the same time they maintain that after a man's death the *jiv* goes to Bhagavan, later to be reborn in another body; the *jiv*, they say, 'leaves a body as one leaves old clothes and puts on new. But this belief seems to conflict with their idea that the *jiv* of certain persons of merit retain their identity and develop into divine ancestors entitled to the worship of the living.

The confusion arises from the use of the one word *jiv* for two different concepts, namely the impersonal life-force which animates one body after the other, and the human personality surviving after death as an ancestor spirit. In other words, the Koyas on losing their tribal language have fallen into the same trap as those Western observers who applied the word 'soul' to two distinct concepts.

Before we compare these eschatological beliefs of Central Indian aboriginals with those of traditional Hinduism, which incidentally impinges to an ever growing extent on aboriginal thought, I propose to turn to a group of Indian tribes, which is altogether remote from the influence of Hindu ideas. This group consists of the Tibeto-Burman speaking tribes on India's north-east frontier, and I shall take my examples mainly from those of whom I have personal experience.

The most characteristic feature of the eschatological beliefs of most of these tribes is a very detailed picture of the Land of the Dead, including the often tortuous path by which it is reached. This



Is it possible that being with a soul can have such behavior?

"A significant percentage of people who daily meet in the street are completely empty inside as if they were already dead. We are happy that we do not know and cannot see what people are like that. If you knew how many people among us actually dead and that such govern our lives, to crazy with terror. "

It is not only believed that people without souls, empty slot machines - machines that live among us - but he was sure that they govern our lives and destinies and that most of them were in the top of the pyramid of power. But some modern scientists have noticed some differences between normal human beings and those who need a psychological and character does not resemble, scientists call them psychopaths.

As if such knowledge is not enough shocking, today's science in all ways trying to ignore the research because in this way reveals that the planet does not actually live one kind or that we all have a soul.

It was also aware of the possibility of human development with that people without souls have the option of self-observation and spiritual progress that is awakening, he wrote:

"Self-observation helps us to understand that it is necessary to change. When a human being observes itself then self-observation lead to secure a change in the inner prosecuted. "

He is also a people without a soul described as having perfectly mimic the human personality, but give the impression of any careful observer that something is missing.

picture is provided by shamans who visit the World of the dead either in their dreams or while in a state of trance brought about for the specific purpose of releasing the shaman's personality from all bodily ties.

The Apa Tanis of the Assam Himalayas, for instance believe that the souls, *yalo*, of all those who die a natural death go to Neli, the place of the dead, which looks like an ApaTani village with long rows of houses. At the entrance to Neli, they are met by Nelkiri, the guardian spirit who questions all newcomers about the exploits of their earthly life. He inquires how many enemies and wild animals they have slain, how many slaves they have bought, and how much land they have owned. As an Apa Tani lived on this earth so will he live in Neli: a rich man will be rich and a slave will serve his old master; a

man will find the cattle he has sacrificed during his lifetime, but those animals which have passed to his heirs are for ever lost to him. Every woman returns to her first husband, but those who died unmarried may there marry and beget children. Life in Neli is similar to life on this earth: people cultivate and work, and ultimately they die once more and go to another Land of the Dead.

When a man is ill and loses consciousness, his soul or *yalo* may leave his body and stray to Neli. A shaman priest, called to minister to the sick man, may trace the errant soul to the house of one of the many gods and spirits, *jiv*, who dwell in Neli, and are ever avid to draw unsuspecting souls into their sphere. Once the shaman has located the *yah*, he offers to ransom it with the sacrifice of an animal; if the spirits accept the ransom, the *yalo* returns to its earthly body, and the patient regains consciousness.

Neli is believed to be under the earth, a real underworld, but without any gloomy associations. Another Land of the Dead is situated somewhere in the sky, and to this abode, known as Talimoko, repair all those who died an unnatural or inauspicious death. Men who were killed by enemies and women who died in childbirth go to this Land in the Sky and are henceforth referred to as *jiv*. Both the departed in the underworld and those in Talimoko are believed to return at times to the dwellings of the living, but their visits are not welcomed and are thought to result in little good.

Very similar views on the after-life are held by the Apa Tanis' neighbours, the widely scattered Dafla and Miri tribes. They, too, believe in a Land of the Dead where life is very much the same as on this earth, and tell of a guardian of the underworld, who questions all newcomers. Deeds of valour and enterprise find his approval, and a man who has killed many enemies, married many wives, and acquired great wealth in slaves and cattle is received with honour and entertained with food and drink for several days. The meek and the humble, on the other hand, are dismissed curtly as having achieved little of note in this world. Yet, after passing this guardian spirit, rich and poor, warriors and slaves, go to the same place and ultimately they die again and move to another Land of the Dead, a land believed to lie somewhere in the distant southeast, where on clear days the Dallas can see the faint outlines of the Naga Hills.

Those who were killed in war, on the other hand, go to a place in the sky, but while the manner of death determines the future place of the dead in under- or upper-world, there is no idea of reward or retribution in the after-life.

The part of man that goes to the Land of the Dead is called *yal*, but besides this *yal*, there is another element in man, which after death remains in touch with the living, and partakes of offerings. This element is called *orum* and its exact nature is still somewhat obscure.

Food offerings for the *orum* are left in the fields at the time of sowing and the Dallas believe that the *orum* of their deceased relatives will help the growth of the crops and protect them against rats and other pests. When the seed is dibbled a few holes are made with a special digging-stick, known as *orumchinia*, the stick of the *orum*, and the grain sown in these holes is described as *orumgola*, the share of the *orum*.

Does this imply that a part of a Dafla's spiritual essence is believed to remain on or near the earth and in close contact with the living, while the *yal*, the vehicle of the personality, proceeds on the journey to Nilitu?

Although we have not sufficient material on Dafla beliefs to answer this question we may profitably compare the corresponding beliefs and customs of some of the Naga tribes and particularly those of the Konyak Nagas, whose Icha to logical concepts I studied long before I came in contact with Daflas and Apa Tanis. When a Konyak dies his being splits into three different spiritual entities. The 'soul' or *yaha*, to which most of the personality attaches, immediately sets out on a complicated journey to Yimbu, the Land of the Dead, at the gate of which the dead are stopped and questioned by the powerful guardian of the nether world. Shamans can enter the Land of the Dead in dreams and in trance, and occasionally they are able to recover a soul or *yaha* which has been kidnapped by some spirit while straying from a sleeping body. The absence of the *yaha* does not immediately cause death, but this separation cannot last longer than a few days and is fraught with danger.

Life in Yimbu does not last for ever, for there, too, people die, and then go to another Land of the Dead not accessible to shamans of this world. While the *yaha* thus vanish into more distant regions,

another part of man, remains attached to the skull and is capable of benefiting the survivors in various ways. This soul-matter is called *mio* and is entirely distinct from the personality that passes to the next world. A men's house was rebuilt and the villagers had been pursued by ill-luck in the ritual hunt which forms part of the building-ceremonies. They therefore decided to sacrifice a cock on the skull-cist of a prominent member of the men's house who had died that year. They cast a fishing-net over the skull-cist in order to catch the *mio* or soul-matter attracted by the sacrifice, and carried the net together with the captive soul-substance to the men's house. When next day the chase was resumed an antelope fell to the spears of the hunters and it was supposed that this success was due to the beneficial influence exerted by their clansman's *mio*.

The periodic feeding of the skulls, both of relatives and of slain enemies, is also indicative of the belief in the power of the soul-matter which remains on this earth while the *yaha* has long settled down to a new life in the next world.

Apart from the *yaha* and *mio*, there is still a third element, which may manifest itself after a man meets a violent death. This is called *hiba*, and can best be translated as 'ghost'. When a man is killed in war and his head is taken by enemies, the members of his men's house assemble at night in the house of the deceased and wait for the return of the ghost. When they hear crackling or rustling, they clap their hands together as if catching something floating in the air and shout: '*Hiba, hiba*'.

This belief in the return of a dead man's ghost to his own village and house does not conflict, however, with the belief that the *yaha* or souls of those killed in war go to the Land of the Dead. Indeed, a warrior's arms are hung up on his funeral monument so that on his way to Yimbu he may fight and slay once more those he has killed in this life.

The eschatological concepts of the hill-people of Assam follow on the whole a consistent pattern, which differs fundamentally from that prevailing in Central India. Its most characteristic feature is the belief in a soul of the psyche type which can leave the material body already in a man's lifetime, and, if straying to the Land of the Dead, can be recovered by a shaman. This soul is clearly a separate entity and not merely the personality which after the death of the body appears as 'the Departed' in the sense of the Gond *sanal*. The independence and even elusiveness of this type of soul is demonstrated by certain prayers. In these prayers the truant soul was promised sacrifices and offerings as inducements to return to the body of the sick man, who at the time was fully conscious and took part in the ritual. Similarly after the celebration of a wedding the Abors perform elaborate rites in order to persuade the soul of the bride to reside happily in her new home. For it is believed that if her soul were to escape from her husband's house, the bride would pine and ultimately die.

These examples show clearly that such a soul is something more, and perhaps also something less, than the living man's or woman's personality, and when this principle, so easily detachable even from the living body, finally enters the Land of the Dead, there seems to remain a residue of energy, which according to Konyak beliefs constitutes the *mio* or soul-substance attaching to a dead man's skull.

Although the soul-concepts and the eschatological beliefs of the Indian tribes fall into a certain pattern, showing a major division between those of the eastern Himalayas and the Assam hills on the one side and those of Central and Peninsular India on the other, it would be unprofitable to view them in isolation from the concepts and beliefs of classical and popular Hinduism. Contacts between tribal communities and Hindu populations have extended over countless centuries and we have every reason to believe that concepts stemming from pre-Aryan civilizations have found their way into Hindu thought and scriptures, just as concepts of orthodox Hinduism have been assimilated by many of the primitive forest and hill-tribes.

Let us first consider the eschatological beliefs reflected in the Rig-Veda. The older Vedic view of the fate of man after death was comparatively simple. The departed referred to as *preta* were believed to go to *svarga*, a heaven of eternal light where they dwelt with Yama, the first of the mortals who found the path to the upper world, and all those other Departed who had become *pitri* or Fathers. *Swrga* was thought of as a pleasant place, furnished with all the good things of life, and inhabited by the gods. Besides this belief in a heaven, there was also the idea of an underworld, which though less desirable than the celestial abode of the gods was, at least in the early period, not conceived as a place of

punishment. It is only in the Atharva-Veda that we find the concept of Naraka Loka, a dark place inhabited by goblins and sorcerers, where retribution awaits murderers and other evil-doers.

While the Rig-Vedic hymns speak clearly of an after-life in the realm of Yama, they do not contain a single unambiguous reference to a true soul-concept or to a belief in reincarnation. The *preta*, who proceed to the next world are never described as 'spirits' or the 'souls' of the dead, but simply as the Departed, and it would seem that their entire personality is believed to move to another sphere of existence.

If we then assume, as in view of the existing literary evidence we must, that the Rig-Vedic Aryans had only this simple belief in a survival of the personality, but lacked the concept of a separable soul and any idea of a transmigration and reincarnation of souls, we are faced with the problem how to account for the rise of these ideas in post-Vedic thought. The very fact that the concept of repeated rebirth and repeated death is peculiar to India and that it is absent among other Indo-European peoples, suggests that, the gradual transformation of the earlier Aryan beliefs and practices occurred under the influence of certain indigenous concepts held by populations with which the Vedic Aryans came in contact after their arrival in India. And it would seem that the idea of an interminable series of 'Lands of the Dead' and the Inevitable death of a person after a span of life in any such 'Land of the Dead', as it is still to be found in the belief of the Assam tribes, may have contributed to the development of the Hindu concept of successive existences in a chain of rebirths. For, carried to its logical conclusion, this series of similar worlds through which men pass in an unending sequence of lives resembles closely the wheel of rebirth of Hindu and Buddhist thought. And one could well imagine that once a more sophisticated and at the same time more pessimistic philosophy replaced the naive life-affiliation of primitive tribesmen, this eternal repetition of similar existences would come to be contemplated with apprehension. Deliverance from rebirth through the attainment of Nirvana was one of the principal aims of Buddha's teachings, and it is perhaps no coincidence that Buddhism which laid much greater emphasis on the idea of reincarnation than did the older Brahmin religion, originated not in Madhyadesa, the Aryan 'Midland', but in Bihar and the Himalayan foothills.

Another characteristic feature of the eschatological beliefs held by many of the Assam hill-tribes is the figure of a guardian-spirit who question the departed, before admitting them to the Land of the Dead. In a paper on the religion of the Assam tribes, I put together the information on this guardian of the underworld then available from some of the Naga tribes, the Lusheis and the Garos. In the course of subsequent field work I found a very similar figure among the Konyaks and finally also among the Himalayan tribes. Among some tribes, such as the Lusheis, this guardian of the Land of the Dead is identified with the first man and in others he shows certain traits usually connected with figures of lunar mythology. Is it, then, we may ask, entirely fortuitous that in the Kausilaki Upanishad the moon is described as a kind of gatekeeper of the world beyond, who examines (he dead as they pass him. and lets through only those who know how to answer

This questions the links between the doctrine of reincarnation and lunar mythology is correspondence between the guardian of the Land of the Dead in the belief of the Assam tribes and the personified moon in the role of the gatekeeper of heaven as referred to in the Kausitaki Upanishad adds to the problems created by the unexpected parallels between eastern tribal religions and post-Vedic Hinduism.

I do not suggest, of course, that contact with any of the Tibeto-lurman-speaking tribes *now* living on India's northeastern borders was responsible for this development in religious thought during post-Vedic times, but rather that the Aryans, moving eastwards down the Ganges valley, there came in touch with populations holding eschatological beliefs conceptually similar to those still found among some of the more isolated hill-tribes.

But let us return to the idea of an independent and separable soul, for which in the earlier Vedic literature there is little evidence. Could the growth of such a concept in post-Vedic Hinduism also be due to stimulation from Eastern sources? Among the Himalayan tribes and the Nagas of Assam we have found the almost universal belief in a soul of the psyche type which exists independently of the body and can be captured and dragged to the Land of the Dead during sleep or in a state of unconsciousness. The

same concept provides the key-motif of the Subandhu legend, which has been preserved in several of the Brahmanas.' This legend is based on the idea that the *asu*, the soul, can not only be forcibly separated from the body, but that it can also be restored to its bodily frame. The Subandhu legend tells of a certain priest whose *asu* is kidnapped while he sleeps and hidden by a rival magician. Subandhu, deprived of his *asu*, fails to wake up, but his brothers, diagnosing his condition, set out to find and recover the missing *asu*. In this they are successful, and when they have located the hiding-place, they call upon the *asu*, as though addressing Subandhu himself; whereupon the *asu* returns to the body of Subandhu who is restored to life and health. From the manner in which the brothers call to the *asu*, it would appear that here the *asu* and the dead Subandhu are considered identical and that there is indeed no difference between the personality and the aru-soul.

Although the primary meaning of *asu* is undoubtedly 'breath of life' or 'life-principle' there is good reason to believe that *asu* has gradually assumed the significance of a separable soul comparable with the *yalo* of the Apa Tanis or the *yaha* of the Konyak Nagas. Several of the magical incantations of the Atharva-Veda refer to the 'bringing back' or the 'fastening' of a sick man's *asu*, and it is significant that the earliest account of such practices, which to this day belong to the repertoire of every Naga or Dana shaman, occurs in the Atharva-Veda, the latest of the Vedic collections, and generally believed to embody a great many non-Aryan concepts.

In Vedic literature *asu* is often identified with *prana* and *atman*, two concepts based on the idea of an impersonal life principle, materialized in the 'breath of life' and inseparably linked with the functions of the living organism. Both *prana* and *atman* attained enormous importance in the philosophical speculation of the Upanishads, and finally *atman* assumed the meaning of a single, universal soul. But there is no indication that the Vedic Aryans conceived of the survival and reincarnation of either *prana* or *atman*. Although these elements represent the immaterial principle animating man, they do not seem to have been equivalent to the *jiv*, the immortal life-force, of present-day popular belief. It is only in the Mahabharata that we find a concept which resembles in some, though not in all, respects the *jiv* of Gond belief. Outwitting Yama, and thereby delayed the recall of his *jiv* by Bhagavan. The Savitri episode in the Mahabharata deals with a somewhat similar motif, but the treatment and the implications are significantly different. In this episode Yama comes to fetch the soul, *purusa*, of Savitri's young husband Satyavan, who, ill and exhausted, rests his head on her lap. Yama, with one quick movement pulls the *purusa* from Satyavan's body, binds it with ropes and carries it off to the Land of the Dead. Leaving Satyavan's lifeless body, Savitri follows Yama and pleads for the release of her husband's *purusa*. Yama yields to her entreaties and as soon as he sets free the *purusa* the body of Satyavan revives. In this tale the *purusa* is patently identical with the personality of Satyavan, who on regaining consciousness speaks of the incident as if he himself had been carried off by Yama.

Both *jiv* and *purusa* are subject to Yama's summons, and their separation from the body causes immediate death, but there is nevertheless a great difference in their basic nature. While the *jiv* is believed to rejoin Bhagavan's pool of life-forces awaiting reincarnation and in doing so loses its identity, the *purusa* is described as being dragged to the Land of the Dead, and there is no reference to any subsequent reincarnation.'

It is difficult to trace all the eschatological beliefs of present-day Hinduism to sources mirrored in Sanskrit literature. Despite a literary tradition of unparalleled antiquity and continuity, we are faced with innumerable concepts and beliefs which must have had their origin in spheres outside the direct line of this literary tradition. While Brahman priests and philosophers developed and refined the ideas contained in the ancient scriptures, popular religion seems to have developed on parallel and sometimes independent lines by taking its concepts and mental pictures from many sources, sometimes harmonizing them and sometimes absorbing contradictory ideas without resolving their inconsistency.

Many a Hindu of today believes that a dead man's *jiv* manifests itself in the crows which eat the food offerings put down at the cremation-ground, and if no crow touches the food it is taken as a sign that the Departed is angry or distressed. At the same time he believes that the *jiv* must go before Yama's court of judgement, and if able to show sufficient accumulated merit or *karma*, will be admitted to the company of the sainted dead or *pitri*. Yet he also believes that a dead man may be reborn in a grandchild; and

besides holding all these apparently inconsistent beliefs, he acknowledges his duty to perform for his deceased father a series of rites, known as *sraddha*, which are aimed at providing and sustaining a new, ethereal body for the Departed.

To approach these conflicting customs and ideas solely through the classical literature or the Brahmanical tradition is not likely to lead us to a full understanding of their basic nature. For the discrepancies are obviously due to a super imposition of different traditions stemming from different cultural horizons and I believe that familiarity with the eschatological beliefs prevailing among the various groups of India's tribal populations can be of great assistance in isolating and interpreting concepts and customs which appear inextricably interwoven in popular Hinduism.

Let me conclude by pointing out to what an extent the results of recent anthropological research and the comparison of these results with the material contained in Sanskrit literature have led us to a view of Indian eschatological beliefs which differs from the picture drawn and interpreted many funeral customs as designed to prevent the return of the Departed, it is now clear that most of Such precautions were directed not against the Departed but against the impersonal pollution attaching to the state of death in just the same manner as to childbirth or, in certain cases, against malignant spirits that have caused one death and must be kept away from the surviving members of the family.

The Departed themselves, on the other hand, are considered a source of help and propitious influence rather than of danger, and the cult of the dead and of the ancestors is, in its various forms, an essential part of tribal religion. The cult of the clan-deities and the Departed in their company is the centre-piece of Gond religion, and the megalithic ritual of many tribes is aimed at providing imperishable vehicles for the soul-matter of dead kinsmen. The belief that the dead can promote the fertility and prosperity of the living is widespread, and a great deal of elaborate tribal ritual is directed towards gaining this support of the departed.

The knowledge of Indian tribal religions gained during the last twenty years enables us also to distinguish between the more or less impersonal life-principles, and the personal Departed to whom prayers and offerings are directed. Even among the tribes of Central India there is a wide range of variations in the respective roles of *jiv* and Departed, and where the two concepts merge we may meet confusion and inconsistency or see the emergence of a unified single soul-concept.

The eschatological beliefs of the hill-people of the eastern Himalayas and Assam, on the other hand, include a detailed picture of the Land of the Dead and its divine guardian. Here we find a clearly-developed concept of a soul of the psyche type, separable from the body even during this life. It is this soul which finally enters the Land of the Dead, there to lead an existence closely resembling life on this earth and then to die again and move to the next Land of the Dead. Such a belief in a sequence of nether worlds may have played an important part in developing the idea of the transmigration of souls, an idea which has become one of the cardinal principles of the great historical Indian religions.

The concept of moral retribution which lies at the root of the doctrine of *karma*, on the other hand, is absent from many tribal eschatologies. Life in the next world is determined by the mode of death rather than by the deceased's moral conduct on this earth. Yet, some of the hill-tribes of Assam and Burma, such as the Lushais, believe that success in war, in the chase, and in amatory adventures, as well as the expenditure of wealth at elaborate feasts of merit, will secure to a man a privileged fate in the Land of the Dead, and it may be that the quest for such merit which outlasts death foreshadows the idea of *karma*.

Here I cannot attempt to correlate beliefs about the after-life with types of social behaviour. But we have only to consider the integrative role of the cult of the clan-deities and forefathers in Gond Society, the position of influence held by shamans claiming to have direct access to the Land of the Dead, or indeed the enormous importance of the beliefs regarding the *sraddha* rites for the stability of the Hindu family, to realize to how great an extent eschatological ideas determine social attitudes and norms of behaviour.