

ISSN. 0972 - 8406

The NEHU Journal, Vol XIV, No. 2, July-December 2016, pp.1-16

Systems of Thought of Hill Tribes of North East India: Have They Achieved the Status of Philosophy?

BINOD KUMAR AGARWALA*

Abstract

The aim of the present essay is to meditate on the question whether the world-views or systems of thought of tribes of the Hills of North East India have acquired the status of philosophy, fit enough to be recognized as different schools of Indian Philosophy and to evaluate the arguments given for positive answer to the question. The conclusion is that the world-views or systems of thought of tribes have not yet reached the status of any school of Indian Philosophy, a well-established genre of Philosophy, recognized in Universities all over the world.

Keywords: Indian Philosophy, Tribal Philosophy, Oral Texts, Fixity of Texts, Death of Author.

Introduction

Some intellectual circles in northeast India, supported by Indian Council of Philosophical Research, have been arguing for recognition of the world-views of tribes of the region on par with the recognized streams of Indian Philosophy. The dominance of BrâhmâGic thought is blamed for non-recognition and marginalization of original systems of thought of tribes and is criticized for not according them a place among the schools of Indian Philosophy. In different academic seminars, without explaining that which makes the tribal philosophies distinct and great, and without showing how they are comparable to philosophies of ĀCkaora Buddha or others, this group of scholars have been glorifying the philosophies of the tribes without supporting arguments and evidences. They demand that the tribal world views be recognized as great philosophies of

*Binod Kumar Agarwala (binodkagarwala@gmail.com) is a Professor in the Department of Philosophy, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong.

India side by side with the other streams of Indian Philosophy. In their oral presentations, some of these scholars have even demanded that the tribal philosophies should be taught in North East India in place of the traditional schools of Indian philosophy, as teaching the latter leads to hegemonic colonization of the tribal mind by the BrâhmaGîc philosophy.

An attempt is made in this paper to interrogate the arguments put forward by them in support of their demand. The present paper questions the stand point of such scholars who claim that the tribes of Northeastern region have full-fledged philosophy and interrogates the arguments put forward by them in support of their demands.¹

Arguments Claiming Status Comparable to Indian Philosophy

Many Things to Learn from Tribes

The first major argument to claim that the tribes of the North-Eastern region have great philosophies worth including in the syllabi of departments of philosophy in India in general and in the region in particular was based on the claim that there are many things to learn from the tribes of the region. None of the scholars recognise the fallacious nature of the argument. During the cold war era the nuclear strategy of mutual deterrence was learned from the mutual hostage taking strategy of maintaining peace among the neighboring hostile tribes in Africa, but it did not lead logically to attribution of philosophy to these warring tribes.

Worldview of Tribes as Philosophy

The claim that there exists tribal philosophy is premised on the claim that every tribe has a distinctive worldview consisting of beliefs, values, and emotions etc. This argument is a slippery slope. Every human being has a worldview consisting of beliefs, values, and emotions. If philosophy is taken as the worldview then every individual and every people have a worldview. That is one of the dictionary meanings of philosophy. But when we talk of department of philosophy in the Universities and courses to be taught in them, the expression 'philosophy' is used in a technical sense and not in the popular dictionary sense of belief systems or worldviews of an individual or a people. Departments of philosophy in all universities world over use the criterion of technical sense of philosophy to design its course and do not include the worldview of man in the street qua the belief system of man on the street.

While the views of Thales, Parmenides, Heraclitus and others are included in the courses of classical Greek philosophy one does not find the worldview or the system of belief, values and emotions present in Homeric epics in a course of philosophy. Even if one talks of 'philosophy of Homer' to trace lineage of the classical Greek Philosophy as found in Plato and others, one still recognizes that philosophy originated with Thales and he is the father of Western philosophy, and Homeric ideas remain a mere fertile ground from which sprang the saplings of Western philosophy in Thales and others. The fit place for studies of ideas of Homer is philology and not philosophy.

The tribal worldview has yet to be presented as articulated as the worldview of Homer and its presentation is lagging much behind. One has yet to see a single article, which can be called even a philological study of a tribal idea or even a history of a tribal idea, what to speak of the entire worldview of any tribe of the North-Eastern region. What the scholars studying the tribes and their worldviews present is only a descriptive anthropological study of belief systems of tribes without rising to the sophistication of philosophical discussion of ideas.

Even if one goes by the standard of anthropological study of worldviews of tribes, for example standard set in Rosaldo, Renato: 1980, 1986, and Rosaldo, Michelle: 1980 in their study of the Ilongot, a tribe in Northern Luzon, or standard set in Geertz: 1973; 1974; 1983 in the practice of symbolic anthropology of natives of Java, Bali and Morocco etc., the available philosophical study of the belief system of tribes of North-East India do not even meet that anthropological standard. It is, therefore, too early and premature to demand inclusion of study of worldviews in the courses of philosophy in Departments of Philosophy. When there are Department of Anthropology, Culture Studies, Departments specially devoted to study of the specific tribes, like Department of Khasi Studies, Garo Studies, Mizo Studies, Tenemiya Studies etc. then instead of strengthening, sharpening, refining studies of worldviews and systems of beliefs, values and emotions of tribes in these Departments to meet standards of presentation of such studies accepted by the experts in the subject, to demand study of world views of tribes in philosophy on the strength of nativity or proximity is nothing but advocacy for mere second hand reproduction of studies in anthropology, sociology, culture studies, and tribal studies.

Mythos throbbing in the Logos

It is argued that 'mythos throbbing in the logos' is philosophy. One of the conditions of mythos throbbing alive in the logos, is that the logos has emerged from the mythos itself, but when a mythos is coupled with a logos which is alien, like the sociological theoretical logos of 'identity' couples with the original myths of a people, it drains away their vitality and turns them into fossil or dead relics of the past, to be used as mere instruments. The coming of Christianity has led to reading of Christian ideas in the local vocabulary. The word 'blei' in Khasi cannot be translated as 'God' nor omniscience be attributed to any of the 'bleis' as they are many and come with gender distinction, and the myth of sending of the people of seven huts to the world to rule it cannot be interpreted as creation myth of the type one finds in Genesis in the Old Testament, rather it is more of a migration myth. That shows that what is presented under the rubric of tribal philosophy is not really tribal philosophy. When tribal myths are coupled with alien logos, without proper examination of the latter's presuppositions and their suitability for the former, then the essence of tribal thought reflected in myths is lost altogether.

Myths in Philosophy

One may argue: if myths of tribal culture do not contain abstract philosophical truths, then how does one account for the presence of so many myths in Plato's philosophical dialogues, including the grand myth of the ideal city in words in the *Republic*? Is there any difference between the tribal myths as they are told in the tribal culture and philosophical myths as used by the philosophers? The answer is in the affirmative. The philosophical myth turns out not to be tribal myth at all, at least in significant respects. It is, rather, a counter image of the tribal myth. Philosophical myth is the philosophers' attempt to appropriate and to contain, i.e., to limit myth proper of folklore, even though this attempt can never fully succeed, owing to the divorce of language from reality itself, and yet philosophy must perforce use language. The philosopher tries to make philosophical myths to be intrinsically univocal, in response to the proliferation of meanings in myths of folklore that make philosophers – most notably Plato – so uncomfortable. The philosopher does this by tying Philosophical myth to demonstrative argument, to which it is in principle subordinated, unlike the tribal myths, which stand alone. The philosophers use myth self-consciously to raise second-order questions about language and reality, which does not happen in tribal myths.

The philosopher, like Plato, is able to raise the higher order questions due to the inherent tension between philosophy and the myths embedded within it. As a result of this tension, myth serves as a way to problematize the status of philosophical discourse itself to distinguish it from mythic discourse. This is how the movement from mythos to logos was effected in ancient Greek civilization.

It is the tension of myth and philosophy that finally threw the nature of philosophical discourse into relief. If someone, going against the philosophical wisdom, tries to unite myth and philosophy as does so called philosophy of tribal culture one should remember that the cycle of opposites, particularly in the form of the ouroboros or serpent biting its own tail, became for Nietzsche a symbol of the unity of myth and philosophy and of the rebirth of the former out of the latter. This marks the self-destruction of philosophy (in Nietzsche's language self-overcoming of philosophy) to make myth prevail.

The Analogy of Early British Perception of Indian Philosophy

Another argument for inclusion of courses in worldviews of tribes is in terms of analogy of early British colonial perception of Indian Civilization with present Indian perception of tribal civilization of North-East India. The argument is that in the beginning of colonial era British rulers perceived Indian people as primitive, barbarians, uncivilized or semi-civilized, immature, sentimental, irrational, without a proper religion and philosophy. This view changed by the end of the colonial era. Same is the case with the perception of India regarding the tribes. Now the Indians find that tribes lack a belief system comparable to their schools of philosophy, but given a chance the tribes will remove the perception of present scholars studying Indian Philosophy regarding the belief systems of tribes.

The analogy is not well taken. The academic recognition of Indian Philosophy came only after many generations of Indian scholars and sympathetic European scholars translated the existing Sanskrit texts like Vedas and Upanishads, discovered many manuscripts, which were critically edited and published and translated and interpreted and presented to the Western world. When the Western scholars could no longer dismiss it and had to take note of it, only then did the Indian Philosophy find respectable position by the side of Western Philosophy. But neither from within the tribes, nor from sympathetic others, that yearning and effort to present and the eventual mature presentation of the so called philosophy of tribes have emerged so far. So, so-called tribal philosophy's claim to place in or without

Indian Philosophy in the stream of Philosophy is too premature.

Analogy of the Oral Roots of Indian Philosophy

It is also claimed that Indian Philosophy has roots in texts like R̥gveda, which were oral to begin with. If Indian Philosophy can begin with oral roots why can't philosophy of tribe begin from the oral literature of a tribe? This question needs to be answered correctly.

For the possibility of philosophizing, which is a reflective or speculative thinking, a text is required to reflect or speculate on. As it was remarked earlier, philosophical thinking began with reflection on the Homeric ideas, which were embodied in oral text. This was possible because the special nature of the orality of Homeric epics. Orality of text is not of one type but of at least three types. First kind of orality is that of stories, which one hears on the lap of elders in the family passed down from generation to generation. The text of this kind of orality is too fluid and is not relatively fixed and do not provide a text for reflection, speculation and interpretation to generate a philosophical thinking.

The second kind of orality is achieved when a professional group of people emerge in the culture whose job is to memorize the oral text and produce in public places periodically for the public for their listening and understanding. These professionals ensure that there emerges a next generation of professionals to carry on the job of memorization of the text and its reproduction in the public places again. When this stage of orality is achieved then the text is relatively fixed in comparison to the text of first kind of orality, but it is not completely fixed, as it still remains fluid enough for local variation. In the ancient Greek culture before Thales, the professional rhapsodists and bards had emerged and used to memorize and sing the Homeric poems and the Homeric poems educated the whole of Hellas. With this kind of relative fixity rudimentary forms of speculation can emerge, as it happened in ancient Greece. But this kind of relative fixity even though can give rise to speculation, it will be only elementary, but full blown speculation emerges when text is fixed beyond the second kind of orality, which can be done by invention of writing. The fixity of text in writing in classical Greece according to Eric Havelock gave rise to sophisticated speculation of sophists and philosophy developed in leaps and bounds afterwards.

But in the Vedic tradition the absolute fixity of R̥gveda and other Vedic texts was achieved even in the oral stage with special mnemonic

techniques of various kinds of pâmhas, which is the third kind of orality of texts. The various pâmhas or recitation styles are designed to allow the complete and perfect memorization of the text and its pronunciation, including the Vedic pitch and accent. Eleven such ways of reciting the Vedas were designed - SaChitâ, Pada, Krama, Jatâ, Mâlâ, Úikhâ, Rekhâ, Dhvaja, DaGdò, Rathâ, and Ghana, of which Ghana is usually considered the most difficult. This kind of mnemonic techniques ensured the fixity of text as good as fixity in writing as neither a single letter nor a single accent can be missed, as it would be detected easily in the complex recitations.

Therefore, the so-called oral literature of the tribes cannot be compared to the oral roots of the Indian Philosophy. The oral literature of the tribes was mostly in the first stage of orality and was just entering the elementary form of the second stage of orality, but even before it crossed the elementary second kind of orality to achieve the full fledged form, the events overtook the tribal people, and they obtained gift of the Christianity first and then they received the gift of alphabets for their tongue for translation and dissemination of bible in their tongue rather than for fixing their oral literature, and when the fixation in writing of their oral texts took place they were already reading Christian ideas in their own texts. Even though the fixation in writing of surviving oral texts of tribes is taking place, the requisite reflection and speculation to filter and separate the Christian ideas from the traditional ideas has not yet taken place even at the philological level. So, what passes off as tribal world view is only a motley collection of sentences translated in Christian terminology without even tracing or showing their internal coherence and connectivity.

Arguments against the Status Comparable to Indian Philosophy

Now I present some counter arguments to claim why the tribes cannot have philosophy.

Fixity of Text, Apauruceya Veda, Death of Author, and Philosophy

Through fixity in writing text becomes independent of the author and he no longer commands authority over the meaning of the text. This idea is presented dramatically by Ricoeur in saying that a text becomes a text only when the author is dead.² What he means is that a text becomes a text, which is fit to be interpreted, only when it gains independence from the author, so that he no more controls the meaning of the text. Similarly the traditionary text must also be independent of the people, from whose tradition it has

emerged, so that its meaning is not controlled by the collective passion or force of the people, but is available to all to find meaning in it. The Indian tradition achieved this kind of independence of Vedas even at the oral stage by fixing it through various mnemonic devices explained above by declaring it to be *apauruceya* 'authore-less'.

But unfortunately even when the oral texts of tribes of North East are fixed in writing now, they have not yet achieved independence from the people, and hence it cannot be claimed that passion of people does not control its meaning. The fact, that this stage is not yet reached, is testified by the insider outsider distinction in reading of the traditional texts of tribes of North East and passion it arouses. Therefore, till the traditional texts of tribes have reached the kind of independence from the people required for understanding them philosophically, it is better that such native texts of tribes be left out of purview of philosophy. Till the traditional texts of tribes are cleansed of passions these remain as mere anthropological and cultural data without rising to the level of a philosophical text.

Finitude, Brokenness and Non-reflexivity of Tribal Thought and Language

Another factor that goes against the claim that tribes have philosophy is the finitude inscribed and exhibited by the Word of the tribes. I have studied in detail the Word of the Hills in one of my essays [Agarwala: 2014a]. Here I state the findings. Firstly word of the hills of North East is a finite word. One cannot really philosophize with a finite word. A dissent from the finite word and answering back to such word is a deduction of the word amounting to death of the speaker. The finite word cannot be cleansed of the emotions that are aroused when the finite word is deducted by some one dissenting from that word and answering back.

Secondly, the Word of the hills is not one word like the Word of God in John, it is a cracked or broken word. A cracked word because of multiple fault-lines is always seeking identity but not knowing what identity it is seeking, the identity of the whole mirror, or the identity of a piece of mirror across time or across space, or across traditions or across clans. The Word of the hills, like the image in a cracked mirror is an agitated word, agitated to move and moving, yet not knowing where to move. One cannot philosophize in and about the cracked word. A cracked and agitated word cannot harbor a consistent whole philosophy. It is the finitude of the Word which is the reason that it gets cracked creating multiple faultlines in it.

Thirdly, the word of the hills is a non-reflexive distorting word like the mirror that distorts the image reflected in it. Due to non-reflexivity the Word of the tribes is unaware of its distorting nature. The implication of the non-reflexivity and distorting nature of the word is that in the fables the figures human or animal one and all are externally focused, i.e. concerned with the external world. Each is responding to the changing circumstances as if by necessity to overcome the challenge of circumstances. Even desires, passions, love etc. are not internal to the person, i.e. under his volitional control; rather they are like part of the situation they are in to which they respond by necessity. The fables did not conceive of these matters as actions of the intellect or the soul. Figures are no doubt described, but the reactions of these figures, however significant, are not explicitly presented in their volitional or intellectual form as exhibiting 'character', i.e. as arising from individual intellect and individual soul. The human figures of the fables of hills do not regard themselves as the source of their decisions as there is no possibility of reflection on them. These actions are set only as response of necessity to the situation to overcome it. The 'character' of an individual is not yet recognized in the stories. None of the story ever indicates any self-reflection or self-awareness. Therefore, it is not the inner 'character' of the individual that determines the response but the elusive cunning rationality (*metis*) of the figures out of necessity of the changing situations responds appropriately by a lie, or deception, or a stratagem, a ruse, i.e. whatever the circumstance requires to overcome it. What one finds in the fables from the hills is the figure of man, emerging out of nature, with his natural powers fighting against the fateful forces of the same nature. He has to survive in this natural world, which is either indifferent or hostile to him. In such situation natural power of man has to be united with cunning calculative rationality, for each situation of fate requires an appropriate response suited for dealing with it. These Fables from the hills are attempts to solve this problem of man. In these stories the powers of nature have advanced to the level of forces of life, but they are yet to be tempered with transcendent good qualities or absolute values.

Native scholars from the Hills accept the view that myths express the ethics of a people as these are means of passing on value systems from generation to generation. For example, the story of Mauruangi, the legendary heroine of Lushai Hills, is supposed to articulate the human qualities that people of Lushai Hills, both ancient and modern, regard highly. Let me repeat according to a scholar from Lushai Hills, "In spite of all imaginable

suffering under a callous father and true-to-tradition wicked step mother, she grows up into a lovely woman. She possesses all the virtues, triumphs over all odds and has a happy ending” [Jacob:2008]. When scholars utter such words what is the sense of ‘morality’ espoused by them? These scholars understand by ‘morality’ any standard for word of praise and blame, intended to influence human conduct and ways of life that prevail in a society at a given time. In this sense every society has morality for the simple reason that the word of praising and blaming one another and of trying to influence each other’s behavior and life style is an inescapable part of a society. But these scholars forget that not all word of praising and blaming is *moral* praising and blaming. A person may be praised in words for his professional accomplishments without calling him a good person, for he may be ambitious who has achieved much professionally by always putting his own interest before the interest of others. When a person is praised in words morally there is evaluation of volition and the source of volition, especially the volition is not supposed to be based on self-interest. The folktales from the hills carry word of morality only in the first sense and do not utter word of morality in the second sense. No doubt native scholars of the hills understand word of morality in the first sense only. The people of the hills give word of praise and blame to one another for things that they do and do not do, but the issue of withholding word of moral judgment until a proper assessment of agent’s motives could be made is not a part of their scheme of use of word due to non reflexivity of the Word. The latter sense of morality and therefore, philosophy, is not possible for the people of the hills for the simple reason that there is no word of inwardness of self in folktales of the hills due to non-reflexivity of the word. The stories from the Hills espouse an ethic of success and of self-interest individual or collective, which is a value scheme of agon (competition, war, fight). And in such ethics results are clearly what count most. Success is so imperative that only results have any value. Intentions are unimportant and therefore there is no effort to develop an evaluative word for intentions by native scholars when they unfold the word of ‘morality’ embodied in the myths. So the only morality and the only rationality is that of cunning rationality in the stories from the hills. So, the study of folklore from the hills clearly demonstrates the word of the hills to be a cunning word, a deceptive word. In the words of another scholar from Lushai Hills, “Then, as now, life was hard, unfeeling, cruel, hopeless and morally unrewarding. The world then, as now, had no soft corner for people with soft constitutions and impractical ideals. Machiavelli in Mizo folklores is only the tip of his cold nose. He is with us, in all of us. Let us

admit it and make a virtue of our imperfections by being honest with ourselves.” [Thangvunga: 2009:10] Thangvunga is referring to the character called Chhura as Machiavelli in Mizo folklore. [Thangvunga: 2009:8-10] What can be a better confirmation of the fact that the word of the Hills is a cunning deceptive Machiavellian word?

Tribal Myths, Metis, Phronesis and Deinos

In another paper of mine [Agarwala:2014b] in which I studied the fables and stories from the tribes of Hills of North-Eastern India I came to the conclusion that these stories present *metis* or cunning rationality as the reason of these tribes. *Metis* or cunning rationality is resident alien in philosophy, i.e. a resident of philosophy yet alien to philosophy; in fact *metis* or cunning rationality is the *Other* of philosophy. *Metis* is present in philosophy only to provide a contrast to philosophy, to throw the latter in greater relief. For example when Aristotle elaborates practical reason called *phronesis* he makes the special nature of moral knowledge and the virtue of possessing it particularly clear by describing a naturally debased version of this moral knowledge without naming it as *metis*. [Raphals: 1992: 81] He presents it in the figure of the *deinos*, a man who has all the natural prerequisites and gifts for moral knowledge, a man who is able with remarkable skill, to get the most out of any situation, who is able to turn everything to his advantage and finds a way out of every situation. [Raphals: 1992: 82] The classical Greek *metis* once again resurfaces in Machiavelli with all its ambivalence in his concept of *virtu*, which is distinct from morality and uses morality if required as a means to fight *fortuna*.

The so-called philosophy of tribal culture reverses this and tries to give priority to the *metis* impulse over the philosophical impulse when it tries to locate philosophy in the heart of tribal myths, for the simple reason that at the heart of tribal myth lies the *metis*, the cunning rationality which it falsely declares as philosophy. The thought of *metis* or cunning intelligence is a pre-philosophical thinking. In the literature of ancient Greek culture prior to Thales, i.e. in the Homeric literature also a sense of ‘cunning intelligence’ (*metis*) was present.

The Greek people had an ambivalent attitude to *metis*, cunning rationality. It was condemned and also admired. The early Greek epic tradition exhibits this ambivalent attitude to *metis*, a word which ranges in meaning from “wisdom” to the practical use of wisdom as a plan (often involving cunning) or a skill. *Metis* is valued for its effectiveness, and yet, it

is by no means rated highly. Here it is interesting to note that Prometheus, who exemplifies *metis*, is an ambiguous figure whose deeds are both crimes (theft) from the point of view of gods and heroic act of beneficence for men, which indicates the ambivalent attitude of Greeks to *metis*. The tribes never suffered philosophical thinking by themselves in North East India. So, the tribes never overcame *metis*, i.e. the other of philosophy, the non- or anti-philosophical thought associated not only with error but with deception and lie.

The tribes of the North-East Indian region exemplified the *metis* tradition only without any trace of philosophical thinking. *Metis* is present without condemnation; in fact it is there with approval. In these traditions the polarity of *metis* and its other philosophy is missing, with only the former pole being present and the latter pole being conspicuous by its absence. This is confirmed by many folktales from Khasi, Mizo and other tribal traditions.

Power of Indian Philosophy

Indian Philosophy is a well-settled analytic category to designate a specific genre of doing philosophy, in spite of multiplicity of schools in this genre and it is now part of the curriculum of department of philosophy in many universities all over the world. There can be experts of Indian philosophy, who are not Indians.

The strength of Indian Philosophy's claim to be recognized as philosophy, and to be recognized as worth studying in universities, is neither dependent on the force of number of people who claim allegiance to it, nor on the political power of sovereign state of the geographical territory where it emerged. Even if all the people of India as well as the sovereign state of India were to be wiped out by some holocaust, the claim of Indian Philosophy to be recognized as Philosophy, and its claim to be worth studying in philosophy department of universities would survive due to the inner power, strength and appeal of the Ideas in Indian Philosophy. No amount of denigration, criticism, suppression or ridicule could make it disappear during the British Raj; rather it emerged unscathed with greater vigor due to the power of its own light to shine in front of the world to hold it in thrall. It survived the Muslim and Moghul rule too. It is the power (*úakti*) of shine (*jyoti*, *prakâúa*, *bhâ-rûpa*) of ideas which knows no limits, which prevents the idea from being hidden and lodges itself in the heart of people to hold them under own sway and gives them the strength as people. That's why

Hegel said that there are no people without metaphysics. The meaning was that people are actual people when they have metaphysics lodged in them by its own strength and not that metaphysics derives its strength from how many people claim allegiance to it.

If the ideas of the tribes and their tradition had that power of shine required by actual ideas and if that power had captured the respective tribes, it is yet to be established. Here one has to be careful not to conflate the strength of ideas with the power of people that back the idea. In lieu of showing the strength of ideas of the tribal thought blaming the imagined Brahmanical culture for neglecting the tribal ideas is pointless. The ideas to be philosophical need to emerge from and embedded in speech which is inherently infinite like the One Word mentioned in John 1:1-5. This was the case too with respect to Sanskrit, which was the emanation of the infinite Parâvâk or infinite Úabdabrahma, which was the speech in which ideas of Indian Philosophy were articulated. The language of the tribes as shown above was inherently based on recognition of its finitude and non-reflexive nature like a constant number subject to deduction and addition. Unless this finite language of the tribes changes to infinite language there is remote possibility of philosophizing with respect to tribal ideas.

Even if, for arguments sake, we invert the meaning of Hegel's saying mentioned above and accept that metaphysics gains strength from people who accept it or show allegiance to it, then also the strength of tribal ideas cannot be established so easily. One needs to find out and compare the strength of allegiance of tribal population to their tribal worldview and to Christianity and to Modernity. Without such study to stake a claim on behalf of the tribal ideas for a place as stream of philosophy is premature on its own terms.

The Demand for Removal of the Disciplinary Boundaries of Philosophy

Valorization of a supposedly existing tribal philosophy coupled with a demand of its recognition as a major stream of philosophy, a recognition comparable to that of Indian Philosophy, without really producing any discursive representation of what that philosophy is, and the available representation not rising above the anthropological description of tribal worldview, that too without much coherence and integration, is nothing but demand for weakening and removal of the disciplinary boundaries of Philosophy.

It may be recollected that the ideas constituting a tribal worldview are articulated in a language that inscribes its own finite and constant nature in whatever form possible. That is the defining character of a tribe itself. Hence a tribe is a stage of social formation in the history of evolution of societies. In this sense every society including the most advanced began as tribes but outgrew this stage of social formation long ago. The tribal social formation and tribal world-view are inherently unstable. Instability may arise internally when the finitude and constant nature of language is overcome to make it inscribe infinity by introducing reflexivity in the language. That is the stage when philosophy emerges and tribes cease to be tribes and move to advanced social formation. The advancement of tribal thought and language by its deconstruction can happen due to its encounter with a people whose language is of the Infinite Word, like the Word of Christianity, or of the mainland Indian. But if the language of a tribe fails to overcome its own finitude and constant nature neither internally nor through encounter with other people, then the social formation is arrested like that of the Jorawa tribe of Andaman Nicobar Islands. Fortunately the tribes of the North-East, one and all, have passed the stage of finitude and constant nature of their language for multiple reasons like coming of the Christianity, Modernity, and Mainland Indian Philosophy, but they have yet to come to terms with this transcendence of language fully and also its theoretical, social and political implications. Hence there is a total confusion of what to aspire for.

NOTES

¹ The persistent central theme of a three day National Seminar on “Teaching of Indian Philosophy in North-East India” sponsored by Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi, organized by the Department of Philosophy, North-Eastern Hill University, June 15-17, 2016 was that tribal systems of thought of North East India are schools of Indian philosophy. Santigiri Institute of Culture & Human Development, Trivandrum in association with Dept. of Philosophy, NEHU, Shillong, organized ICPR sponsored National Seminar on “Philosophy of Sustainability: Revisiting the Tribal Life & Culture in the North East India”, in NEHU, Shillong, September 28-29, 2016. In this seminar too it was proclaimed that the concerned tribes have philosophy in general and philosophy of sustainability in particular. None of the papers or abstracts of the second of two seminars were circulated and only a few papers of the first seminar were circulated, but the papers of those scholars who wanted recognition of tribal thought as philosophy comparable to Indian philosophy were not circulated. So, the present author is constrained in not being

able to give references of any paper from these two seminars. In a National Seminar on 'Philosophical Perspectives of Tribal Religion' organized by the Department of Philosophy and the Life-world, held at Vidyasagar University, March 25-26, 2015, Abhijit Guha presented a paper entitled "Philosophy of Tribal Religion in India" and stated in his abstract, "In a multi-cultural, multi-religious and pluralist country like India the exploration into the philosophical aspects of tribal religion becomes relevant for a comprehensive understanding of Indian philosophy which is not limited to Vedas, Upanishads, Manusanhita, Arthasastra and the Jain and Buddhist texts. If philosophy deals with the place of human beings in the universe, and speculations about the future of humanity, and if logic lies at the heart of philosophical methodology and wider sociocultural contexts form the basis of philosophy, then the non-textual and non-scriptural religious beliefs transmitted through the oral traditions of the preliterate peoples of India should also be regarded as philosophy." [http://www.academia.edu/11704470/Philosophy_of_Tribal_Religion_in_India at 11.10 a.m. on October 2, 2016.]

² Ricoeur insists 'it is when the author is dead that the relation to the book becomes complete, and, as it were, intact. The author can no longer respond; it only remains to read his work' [Ricoeur:1981:147]

REFERENCES

- Agarwala, Binod Kumar. 2014a. 'Environmental Ethics of Three Old Words from the Hills', in Saji Varghese (ed.), *Beyond Humanism: Philosophical Essays on Environmental Ethics*, in Concept Publishing Company Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi:1-21.
- Agarwala, Binod Kumar. 2014b. 'Tribal Reason as *Metis*: A Study of Folk Tales from Khasi, Mizo and Naga Traditions', Saji Varghese (ed.), *Nature, Culture and Philosophy: Indigenous Ecologies of North East India*, Laxmi Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi: 1-73.
- Aristotle. 1999, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in W.D. Ross (tr.), Batoche Books, Kitchener.
- Detienne, M. and Vernant, J.P. 1974. *Les ruses d'intelligence: la metis des grecs*. Flammarion, Paris.
- Detienne, M. and Vernant, J.P. 1978. *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*. J. Llyod, Harvester Press, Sussex.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books, New York.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1974. 'From the Native's Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding', *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 28 (1): 26-45.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1983. *Local Knowledge*. Basic Books, New York.

- Jacob, Malsawmi. 2008. 'Mauruangi, Ideal Woman of Mizo Folklore'. *Mizo Writings in English*, <http://mizowritinginenglish.com/2008/08/mauruangi-malsawmi-jacob.html>, accessed on 04/06/2011.
- Raphals, Lisa Ann. 1992. *Knowing Words: Wisdom and Cunning in the Classical Traditions of China and Greece*. Cornell University Press, New York.
- Ricoeur, Paul. 1981. *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*. John B. Thompson (ed., trans.). Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Rosaldo, Michelle. 1980. *Knowledge & Passion: Ilongot Notions of Self and Social Life*. Cambridge.
- Rosaldo, Renato. 1980. *Ilongot Headhunting 1883-1974: A Study in Society and History*. Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- Rosaldo, Renato. 1986. 'Red Hornbill Earrings: Ilongot Ideas of Self, Beauty, and Health', *Cultural Anthropology*, 1(3): 310-316.
- Thangvunga, R. 2009. 'Machiavelli in Mizo Folk Tales', *Indian Folklife*. Support Center, Serial No. 34, November.