

## A quest for a structural tribal formation of knowledge

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### Abstract

The cognitive view of life and the total environment that an individual holds or which is characteristic of a society's members is frequently referred to as *Weltanschauung*, or world view. It is thus the life scene as people look out upon it. Worldviews grow with cultures. Generations of anonymous human beings contribute to the unending quest to make the unknown knowable, to transform meaningless bafflement into meaningful understanding. There are individuals in every society, no doubt who are thinkers and systematizes, the idealists who crystallize the myths, shape the ceremonies, express the concepts in art – symbolic creators. However, even they must work within the cultural framework. The tribal people are known to have a strong worldview. The way they perform, perceive and explain the natural and supernatural phenomenon, social and cultural events, relationships within themselves and outside, and diseases and grievances reflect a manifestation of their concept of different aspects of life, often referred to as 'worldview'. However, tribal knowledge has often been criticized as unscientific or incoherent with science, and therefore, lacks philosophical explanation. The present study, therefore, aims to investigate tribal worldviews. This paper acknowledges that since each tribal group is unique and different from one another, it is not possible to discuss their various worldviews in this paper. However, this paper attempt to x-ray basic assumption that cut across most tribal worldviews.

### Keywords:

Worldviews; tribal worldviews; tribal knowledge; myths.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The Chambers dictionary defines "worldview" as an outlook on or attitude to the world or life (Chambers 2002). The definition suggests a general view of the world. But this does not reveal the conceptual complexity involved in worldview. A worldview constitutes an overall perspective on life that sums up what we know about the world, how we evaluate it, and how we respond to it volitionally. "Worldview" is a term calqued from the German word *Weltanschauung* which means "look onto the world". It describes a consistent and integral sense of existence by providing a framework for generating, sustaining and applying knowledge. It refers to a set of presuppositions and beliefs that one uses to interpret and form opinions about his humanity, purpose in life, duties in the world, responsibilities to family, interpretation of truth, social issues, etc., Numerous authors have offered a variety of definitions.

Phillips and Brown states that "A worldview is, first, an explanation and interpretation of the world and second, an application of this view of life. According to one definition, a worldview is a set of beliefs about who we are, the way things are, and what we ought to do about it: state of mind, metaphysics, morality (Majumdar 1958). Redfield (1962, p. 270) says that "Worldview attends specially to the way a man, in a particular society, sees himself in relation to all else. It is the properties of existence as distinguished from and related to the self". In simpler terms, our world is a view of the world and a view for the world. To put it simply a worldview may be seen as a system of generalized views of the surrounding world and man's place in it, of man's relationship to the world and himself, and the basic positions that people derive from this general picture of the world, their beliefs, socio-political, moral and aesthetic ideals, the principles by which they know and appraise material and spiritual events. A worldview may exist on the ordinary, everyday level generated by the empirical conditions of life and experience handed down from generation to generation. It may also be scientific, integrating modern science achievements concerning nature, society, and humanity itself. 'Worldview' is a term used to describe the collective thought process of a people or culture. Thoughts and ideas of a culture are organized into constructs and paradigms, which together create worldviews. While it possesses a relatively independent existence in the sphere of social consciousness, the worldview also functions as something individual. A person becomes an individual when he forms a definite worldview.

This process of formation indicates the maturity not only of an individual but also of any given social group, social class or its party. We speak of the philosophical, the socio-political, the natural-scientific, the artistic, the religious and even the ordinary man's worldview. And this is quite natural. If we picture the various types of worldview in the geometrical form of circles, the central position should be given to the philosophical worldview circle. And this circle will intersect with all the others and form their nucleus. In this way, we find that the meaning, people and social groups attach to the term "Worldview" is extremely diverse. But despite this diversity, every worldview reveals a certain unity in the sense that it embraces a certain range of questions. For example, what is the world that exists outside us? What is the relationship between spirit and matter? What is man? What is his place in the universal interconnection of phenomena? How does man come to know reality? What are good and evil? What laws guide the development of society?. As Miri (1988, p. 2) puts: "A worldview is that part of conceptual system, which is crucial in the articulation of a culture's view of man's place and role in the world, his relationship to things other than himself (including other men) and also his relationship to himself. Concepts which are crucial in the constitution of a worldview would be such as the following: man, and his specific capacities, man's destiny and his pursuit of it and man-women, man-child, man-animal, man-nature, man-god relationship and so on."

## 2 THE COMPONENTS OF A WORLDVIEW

A vital component of the worldview is the model of the world. It should allow us to understand how the world functions and how it is structured. "World" here means the totality, everything that exists around us, including the physical universe, the earth, life, mind, society and culture (Edet, 2019). We ourselves are an important part of that world. Therefore, a worldview should also answer the basic question: "Who we are?" The second component of the worldview is supposed to explain the first one. It should answer the questions: "why is the world the way it is? Where does it all come from? Where do we come from?" This is perhaps the most important part of a worldview. If we can explain how and why a particular phenomenon (say life or mind) has arisen, we will be able to better understand how that phenomenon functions. It will also help us to understand how that phenomenon will continue to evolve. The third component of the worldview is about the futurology. It should answer the question "where are we going to?" It should give us a list of possibilities, of more or less probable future developments. The future developments of a society are determined in relation to the worldview of that society.

The theory of values defines the fourth component of a worldview. It includes morality or ethics, the system of rules which tells us how we should or should not behave. It also gives us a sense of purpose, a direction or set of goals to guide us our actions. Together with the answer to the question "why?" the answer to the question "what for?", may help us to understand the real meaning of life. Knowing what to strive for does not yet mean knowing how to get there, though. The next component is a theory of action interweaved with epistemology. It would answer the question "how should we act?" It would help us to solve practical problems and to implement plans of action. Plans are based on knowledge and information, on theories and models describing the phenomena we encounter. Therefore, we need to understand how we can construct reliable models. This is the component of knowledge acquisition. It is equivalent to what in philosophy is called "epistemology". It should allow us to distinguish better theories from worse theories. It should answer the traditional philosophical question "what is true and what is false?"

## 3 CLASSIFICATION OF MYTHS AND THE ROLE OF MYTHS IN TRIBAL WORLDVIEW

Social scientists normally label the rich depository of tribal heritage, which we may term as their worldview, as tribal mythology. Vergilius FERM in "Myth and mythologies" defined mythologies as "... organized bodies of myths belonging to peoples having in common a tradition and inheritance. Mythology in a scientific sense is the exact study of the origin, history, and nature of myth. It has been through the science of mythology that modern man has been able to survey, interpret, and interrelate the numerous mythologies" (1945, p. pp. 514-15). Myth is the thought, conviction, and faith of those tribes that are non-existent now. For some people myth may be 'falsehood' or irrational. But it is important to realize that myth is a distinct form of thought for which scientific standards of 'truth' and 'falsehood' have no meaning. Myth makes no distinction between a subjective world of personal experience and the objective world that is deciphered through empiricism. Modern science makes such a distinction. That is why science cannot reproduce/or reveal the richness of 'primitive' perceptions. Myths are unique in the sense that they stimulate human thought patterns and emotions that allow them to make of particular dimensions of their world, which cannot be usually explained away. It is a meaning that plays with its hearer and reader rather than imposing itself. This is the secret of the universal and continuing appeal of myth.

Myth may be classified according to the dominant theme they portray. The most important myth in a culture, one that becomes the exemplary model for all other myths, is the cosmogonic myth. It relates how the entire world came into being. In some narratives, as in the first chapter of the book of Genesis, the creation of the world proceeds from nothing (creation ex nihilo). Stories of creation are central to all indigenous peoples and are at the center of their being. Many tribal cosmogonic myths agree that at first there was nothing, nothing at all- neither earth nor sky, only water. Other cosmogonic myths describe creation as an emergence from two great eggs. For example, the Sherdukpen (A.P) myth describes that everything was water before the earth was made (Vidyarthi, 1978). The Hrusso Aka myth tells us of two great eggs which shone like gold (Vidyarthi 1978). The Singpho myth describes that in the beginning there were only clouds and mist (Vidyarthi 1978). The water, the golden egg, cloud and mist." is a concrete representation of the unspeakable mystery that shrouds the cosmos. The mystery deepens further as the 'life' emerges and the original unity is broken. The earliest form of life comes from things incomprehensible: woman in the form of cloud: soft moving rocks: revolving soft golden eggs and the like. The woman cloud gave birth to a pair of male and female snow. From the rocks a female rock was born; from her another female rock which united with a male rock. The eggs broke open; from one came the earth, her husband from the other the sky. From the union of these two, the other things and creatures came into being. The first principle of the cosmos is, then, 'one- two- and many'. None of these accounts look for verification by successive generations; rather, they are accepted as the ancestors' truths or visions. They acquire the status of myth only when interpreted by other or alien cultures. Other myths describe the actions and character of beings responsible for discovering a particular cultural artifact or technological process. These are the myths of the cultural hero. In Greek mythology Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods, is a prototype of this kind of figure. The Ao/Naga myth also describes how water was discovered by two brothers *Imsenpirong* and *Sempirong*. According to this legend, in Chungliyimti when Aos first began cooking their food, they had no idea about the use of water (Ao, 2004). It is said that the rainwater, dew drops, and sap of roots and trees were used for drinking and cooking. But one day the two brothers were surprised by the call of a 'bulbul' from a nearby tree. It sang- *Imsenpirong*, *Sempirong*, haven't you seen the water in the cave? The two brothers surmised that there must be a water source nearby, and when they searched for it, they found the water (Chakraborty 2017).

Usually related to initiation rituals, birth and rebirth myths tell how life can be renewed, time-reversed, or human transmuted into new beings (Allam 2018). The truth of the unity of all experience is expressed in the tribal eschatological

belief. According to the Ao Nagas, for example, life in the village of the dead is like life on the earth, except that there is no social organization in the village of the dead (Shikhu 2007). The Apatanis make the two worlds similar, even in conjugal and occupational contexts. In the world of the dead called Neli, 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. Thus, the ontological experience of life and death is the same. Death brings to man only a new existence (Chandra & Das, 2007). The errant soul moves on in the cosmos from one abode to another. Among the Nagas, there is a belief that if one leads a good and worthy life upon the earth after his death his soul (Mangla) flies away into the realms above, to a higher place of life and becomes a star. Again, the Nagas believe that the soul does not die with his body's death (Pattanaik 2008). If a man has led a bad life he has to pass and ultimately through seven stages of spirit-life and ultimately transformed into insects like bees, locusts and butterflies the same life, but different forms and formless stages.

The belief in continued existence is a support to the tribal perception of death as beneficent. According to the Hill Miri, before death came, the world was so full of people that there was not enough land to give them food, and they were hungry and unhappy (Kolkman & Blackburn 2014). Most miserable of all were the old: they became dry as sticks, there was no blood in them, and they had nothing to do. They grew older but did not die. Death was then brought to men by Abo-tani for their benefit (Kolkman & Blackburn 2014). When life in earthly existence loses the savor of youth and becomes a burden, death comes to men as a boon and takes him on to the heavenly existence. A Wancho tale describes how first men did not die but changed their form, just as the caterpillar and silkworm do; with the result that the world got too full of human beings who gave a lot of trouble to the birds and animals (Chaudhuri 2006). Death came to the world, not in this case as an act of mercy to men (who did not grow old and miserable but constantly renewed their youth) but out of pity for the animals and birds. Theories stating that myth constitutes a form and way of knowledge are as old as the interpretation of myth itself. The classical Greek philosophers confronted the overlapping of mythic and rational modes. In formulations of the relationship between myth and knowledge, two major orientations recur. In the first, myth is examined as an intellectual and logical concern. In the second, myth is studied in its imaginative, intuitive meaning—either as a mode of perception distinguishable from rational, logical kinds of knowledge, or as one that preceded rational knowledge in human intellectual evolution. Knowledge, then, becomes a worldview when it acquires the character of conviction of complete and unshakeable confidence in the rightness of certain ideas, views, and principles, ideals, which take command of a person's soul, subordinate his actions, and rule his conscience. The worldview influences standards of behavior, a person's attitude to his work, to other people, the character of his aspirations in life, his everyday existence, tastes and interests.

#### 4 THE LINEAR AND RELATIONAL WORLDVIEWS

Today, there are two predominant worldviews—Linear and Relational (Hiebert 2008). The linear worldview finds its roots in western mainstream thought. It is logical, time oriented and systematic, and has at its core the cause-and effect relationship. To understand the world is to understand the linear cause-and-effect relationships between events. In human services, workers are usually taught that if we can understand the cause of a problem by talking a social history, then we will better know how to help. Interventions are targeted as the cause or symptom, and the relationship between the intervention and the symptoms are measured. Yet, the linear view is narrow. It inhibits us from seeing the whole person. It is not good or bad. It simply is the mainstream culture dominant. However, tribals have not used linear cause-and-effect thinking. Rather, the approach could be called a relational or cyclic view.

The relational worldview sees life as harmonious relationships where well-being is achieved by maintaining balance between the many interrelating factors in one's circle of life. We may show in this chapter how tribal functioning can be understood from the relational worldview perspective. The relational worldview, sometimes called the cyclic worldview, finds its roots in tribal cultures. It is intuitive, non-time oriented and fluid. The balance and harmony in relationships between multiple variables, including spiritual forces, make up the thought system's core. Every event is understood in relation to all other events regardless of time, space, or physical existence. Wellbeing exists only when things are in balance or harmony in worldview. They are taught to see and accept complex (sometimes illogical) inter-relationships that can be influenced by entering the world of the client and manipulating the balance contextually, cognitively, emotionally, physically, and/or spiritually. Interventions need not be logically targeted to a particular symptom or cause but, rather, focused on bringing the person back into balance. Nothing in a person's existence can change without all other things changing as well. Thus, an effective helper is one who gains understanding of the complex interdependent nature of life and learns how to use physical, psychological, contextual, and spiritual forces to promote harmony. The relational worldview model for assessing tribal knowledge can be illustrated with a four-quadrant circle.

The four quadrants represent four major forces or sets of factors that together must come into balance. These quadrants represent context, mind, body and spirit. The mind includes our cognitive processes, such as thoughts, memories, knowledge and emotional processes such as feelings, defenses, and self-esteem. The body includes all physical aspect, such as genetic inheritance, gender and condition etc. the context includes culture, community, family, peers, work, institution and social history. The spiritual area includes both positive and negative learned teachings as practices as well as positive and negative metaphysical or innate forces. These four quadrants are in constant flux and change. We are not the same person at 5 a.m. and then at 3 p.m. our level of sleep is different, and our context is likely different. Thus, our behavior will be different, and what we think about will be different. The system constantly balances and rebalances itself as we change thoughts, feelings, and our physical states or our spiritual states. If one is able to stay in balance, one is said to be in good stead, but sometimes the balance is temporarily lost. We can keep our own balance for the most part, yet our different cultures provide many mechanisms to assist in this process. Spiritual teachings, social skills and norms, and

family roles are among the myriad of ways we culturally maintain our balance. When performing an assessment of a tribal worldview, one needs to look not only for linear cause-and-effect relationship to isolate the causal factors, rather one should ask, “what are the holistic and complex interrelationships that have disrupted the balance altogether? What factors can come into harmony and allow a family not only to survive but to grow strong?”

The context within which tribal worldview functions are filled with strength-producing or harmonizing resources. For all its damage to the tribal, oppression creates an environment where survival skills are developed and sharpened. They teach their children to recognize the subtle clues that may spell danger. They learn how to cope with the dynamics of different and pass our strategies on to their offspring. Healthy interdependence is the core of the tribal family. It does not foster dependence and does not stifle independence. Rather, it is a system in which everyone contributes in some way without expectation of reciprocity. Their intellectual growth is supported by the stories they hear about how others or their ancestors have managed. Sitting around the kitchen or on the doorsteps, they learn strategies for interacting with the world or how to use resources. In passing on the stories of their lives, they pass on skills to their children for resiliency. They instill relationships, get by, do not need, and hard work for little return. Perhaps, storytelling is their most incredible teaching resource for communicating identity, values, and life skills. The stories also let them know who their people are and what they stand for and provide role models. In a nutshell, in the tribal worldview, the casual factors are not considered independently rather it is the consideration of the interdependence of the relationships among all factors that gives understanding of all behavior.

In western European linear assessment, one is taught to examine a problem by splitting the factors into independent linear cause-and-effect relationships. This has value in the development of knowledge of each factor and does tend to give us specific interventions to try. However, such splitting tends to leave us with incomplete knowledge and services that fail to acknowledge the spirit. In the linear view, the person owns the problem. Whereas in the tribal relational view, the problem is circumstantial, and resides in the relationship between factors. Based on the available ethnographic literature on preliterate people, Redfield (1962) postulates certain universal elements of tribal worldview and their integration in the ‘primary tribal worldview’. Broadly these elements are man, nature and God. He also observes that ‘the separation of God from nature and of these two together from man is .... made in some degree and in some sense in every tribal worldview’ (p.271). With this basic notion on the conceptualization and nature of tribal worldview and philosophic endeavors among the preliterate people one may study the tribal worldview in India.

## 5 THE HOLISTIC CHARACTER OF A TRIBAL WORLDVIEW

In contrast to the non-tribal people, the tribal appear to be perpetuating a distinct outlook on life. Of course, in terms of language, numerical strength, and economy levels, the tribal exhibit a wide range of diversities among themselves. The tribal groups in India are no longer stationary, nor are their tribal worldview static. With the passage of time, they have come across various kinds of faiths, categories of people and their customs and institutions. There have been tremendous changes in the life-situations of the people, and with these, the elements of their tribal worldview are also undergoing changes. The tribal people are, however, found to constantly adjust with the changing situations, trying to weave their new experiences with the old ones in a meaningful way, thereby perpetuating a ‘characteristic outlook’ on life. Mehra (1977) describes the worldview of the tribal groups in terms of ‘origin and creation’, ‘man-super nature’ relation, ‘man-nature’ relationship and ‘man-man’ relationship. The tribal worldview of the tribal people is depicted here in terms of their place ‘in nature and society’. In the tribal worldview, one can focus on the ‘community’ factor because this community-feeling regulates their arts and crafts because of their beliefs and practices, strenuous enterprises, and activities. Community here should be understood in an extended sense to include the close relational setup of the members of a tribe regulated by the ancestral mother, the ancestral father and the ancestor maternal uncle of each clan which constitutes the foundation of its society with the injunctions and prohibition such a setup entails; it also means interaction with the material conditions of environment- the land, water and forest. So, it is needless to ask what A or B may feel qua individuals, in the accidental sense of their own personal experiences, for they feel and think qua members of a given community. In this capacity, their outer behavior and mental states receive a certain stamp, becomes stereotyped by the institutions in which they live, circumscribed by the influence of tradition, of folklore, and by the language they use. The social and cultural environment in which they move, forces them to think and feel in a definite manner. Thus, a man who lives in a polygamous community cannot experience the same feelings of jealousy, worldview concerns his vision of his world, his relation to life only in the grand panorama of community living, dictated by the institutions, customs, codes of law and morality of the tribal organization which rewards his virtues and punishes his defections. Consequently, the individual’s only friends are his clans’ man, and ‘stranger’ means ‘enemy’.

This holistic worldview achieves balance with regard to the multiple elements that constitute the human condition. The major elements are physical procreation, i.e., birth and death, which correspond to the human condition of being embodied; the extra-corporeal realm of spirits corresponding to the human soul; and the sacred element to life-force. Tribal worldview often recognizes the human, the natural and the spiritual realms as being three bases on which to build understanding of natural things”. In some tribes for example, the Annangs of the Southern part of Nigeria, in the holistic vision of life, there is no distinction between sacred and secular, but all together constitute the wholeness of life. Such a holistic vision of life transcends the idea of dualism or duality of the western world and establishes equality and community. According to this vision, life of all together constitutes an organic unity. In this sense, human, nature and spirit do not stand apart from each other as opposing factors. The Annang worldview affirms that the whole of creation is a single family in which there is a continuous search for wholeness and meaning by each other. Mention may be made here, how the traditional tribal society could maintain such an organic eco worldview. For the Annangs, it was possible

through the practice of their culture, which embodies the traditional etiquette, social manner, honesty, integrity, virtues and much more than that. It is the socio-ethical principle that makes this eco-vision of the Annangs a reality. Though there have been some significant changes in their nature of dependence on the forest ecology, the Annangs are still found to form a world of their own in which the nature, the supernatural phenomena and the people themselves are morally bound together.

Tribal mind, all over the world believes that not only animals and plants but an inanimate thing also passes life and the inference that whatever moves has life. Not only moving, but stationary objects like rock and earth are endowed with life. In many tribal religions, the earth is the source of all life, and therefore, the 'living mother'. The Kond of Eastern India sustains the myth of the Earth Goddess with malevolent intentions and powers and is held in check by the beneficent Bura God of light (Shulman 2014). A careful probe into their worldview reveals that the new experiences of the wider world, though entered into their consciousness, lack meaning in the context of their life and culture and, as a result, do not get their emotional and affective support. The people, therefore, try to perpetuate their socio-cultural identity either by carefully preserving their knowledge of, and relations with, the nature or by perpetuating a cover of 'mysticism' around themselves. The scales of society among the tribal hardly exceeded the level of a small hamlet, comprising a few nuclear families, and lacked any perceptible social differentiation in terms of education, wealth and power. The experience and meanings were, therefore, shared by all the members of the community concerned. They pursued agriculture and lead a sedentary village life in close association with different castes and communities. There are, however, tribal groups who live at a different level of economy and are much intensely enmeshed into the larger society. Many of these people are even exposed to the forces of modern education, industrial economy, and power politics and, consequently, have got education, employment, and also political party affiliation. These individuals with their new perceptions of, relations with, the larger societies are, in many instances, found to consciously build up a new worldview for their respective communities.

## 6 CONCLUSION

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