



SAGE STUDIES ON INDIA'S NORTH EAST

# CONSTRUCTION OF EVIL IN NORTH EAST INDIA

Myth, Narrative and Discourse

EDITED BY

PRASENJIT BISWAS

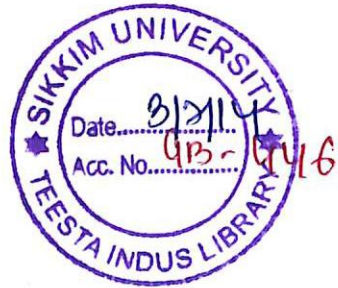
C. JOSHUA THOMAS



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# Construction of Evil in North East India

*Myth, Narrative and Discourse*



Edited by  
Prasenjit Biswas  
C. Joshua Thomas

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### The Eclipse

According to the Minyong tribe, a solar eclipse occurs because of the following reason: the Winyo Tameng-Taneak gets angry with the sun for being too hot and lets his shadow fall on it.

Source: Sujata Miri. 2005. *A Book of Paintings on Themes from the Hills of Northeast India*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications, p. 28.

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# Introduction

Each of us is guilty before the other for everything, and I more than any.  
(Dostoyevsky, 2003: 374,386)<sup>1</sup>

## I

The idea of 'evil' as opposed to the idea of 'good' limits the application of ethical, political and aesthetic judgments to the observance of 'unconditional' or 'categorical' moral laws. In contrast to such a limiting conception of evil, there is the classical notion of 'radical evil' as it arises in Judaeo-Christian moral thought in the name of 'guilt'. In the Indian epic context, the play of *law* (aesthetico-politico-moral) and *history* (in the sense of acts, events and tradition) throws up a quasi-dialectical alternation between *dharma* and *adharma*. Evil is identified with *adharma*, which is a negation of the practice of the 'right' and 'good'. But the primary problem in distinguishing between the *right* and the *wrong* does not lie in moral agency (as in deontic freedom of duty in Kant), but in immutability of human nature or soul. This immutability is pure consciousness in Advaita Vedanta, while in Buddhism it assumes the form of *bhavacakra* (cycle of suffering). Evil, quintessentially, then turns out to be the mutability of human character or the being of human from its regulative moral laws, which is a phenomenal possibility in terms of evolution of consciousness to 'I' or 'Self' (be it physical or temporal)—which is looked as a degeneration of soul. Such a metaphysical explanation of 'evil' in general and 'radical evil' in particular in 'embodiments' leads us to a problem of categorizing it in the world. Radical evil becomes inevitable as an infinitely extended domain of purposelessness and its agency.

In modern Indian thought such as thoughts of Gandhi, Tagore and Aurobindo, the idea of evil gets categorized and complicated. For Gandhi, 'evil' is a deliberate motivational concept of wrongdoing and harming.



It can be called the grid through which one can correct oneself, a kind of Protestant ethics of following both specific and generalizable virtues. In Tagore's terminology, 'evil' assumes a refined aesthetic distinction between *sreya* (the noblest) and *preya* (the desirable), setting in motion an aesthetic and artistic sensibility towards Self-Other relationship. Tagore refuses to give a distinctive place to 'evil'; it is considered as an invisible, transient and transitory phase of 'personal' history. In Aurobindo, 'evil' assumes the form of 'ugly accretions' and 'disorganized organization of things without centre and without any large harmonizing idea'.<sup>2</sup> In a word, the total absence of any harmony is the evil that needs to be overcome. In a little less than generalized fashion, one may take 'evil' in the modern Indian sense as a 'value' which is negative irrespective of the 'object' and the 'context' in which *it can find a locus*. But it has an origin that can be identified in introspection, and it can be indemnified against a vast plural and properly constructed domain of law and moral principles.

Sociologically speaking, 'evil' assumes 'personification' through socially constructed sites, institutions and spaces. For example, 'slum' as a metaphor of urban mass life often borders around a twilight zone of presence and absence of moral laws, while a religious shrine sanctimoniously reaffirms the supremacy of a theological law that can re-establish 'morals'. Such imaginations and counter-imaginings of evil in social sites reflect some of the inner dynamics of 'social forces' and structural determinations. At the level of politics, the supremacy of moral law assumes a self-regulatory jurisprudence that posits a domain of rights (pun intended) as the ultimate ground of legitimation. But such grounds, in both a normative as well as in defiance of the normative, echo the equal possibility of either good or evil. As Adorno (2002:160) told us that after Auschwitz, any genealogy of human progress is implicated in the dialectic of evil and enlightenment, understanding of 'evil' took a different turn.<sup>3</sup> Evil has been posited against 'progress', and the latter has been taken as 'resistance to perpetual danger of relapse'. The argument is further taken to its logical extreme as 'radical evil' is grasped as a 'limit to the ideal of humanity and progress'. This re-emphasizes Kant's 'moral evil as a radical limit' on the self-legislative human ideals (good or evil) such that there is a paradoxical relationship between humanity's political goals and cruelty and/or violence. For example, political discourses often dehumanize the 'enemy' to raise the 'fetishes and emblems' to make masses

rally that blurs the line between violence and cleansing of evil. The paradox can be formulated in disastrous terms: 'radical evil only legitimizes evil', 'machine is satanic', as if evil is some external object that is destructive! In an expanded sense of being utilizable, the concept of evil can only provide us a conceptual co-embeddedness with any other foundational notion of critique of progress, just as it provided a conceptual tool to Gandhi, the *mahatma*.

This also tells us about the 'banality' of evil, which probably is anti-redemptory and which can be resisted only in 'freewill'. Such freewill assumes various existential and aesthetic metaphors to answer the 'without a why' state of the 'inner' and the 'outer' world. This is also carrying out a politics without autonomy, a politics of self-preservation and survival, as such a politics would necessarily go without its own notion of legitimacy.

What emerges in the foregoing discussion is an idea of 'evil' that is saturated and that speaks of an impossibility of redemption. Such an image of the 'evil' is available in the literatures and oratures of India's North East. Ethnography is replete with various registers of evil. The symbolic register of evil poses shadowy and malefic entities and beings in their 'spirit' as manifested in what is unexpectedly true. For example, *Wiyus* in Arunachal Pradesh among the Abo-Tani group of tribes or the evil gods called *Igii-Lirung* attacking human bodies with incurable diseases are named with a symbolic spirit. Evil expressed in a symbolic manner is often redeemed by way of ritual practices. The imagery of 'evil' constructs a spirit world that ironically allows those things to happen almost by virtue of freewill of those spirit inhabitants. Many of the tribes in India's North East have something called a 'thread-square' symbol found in common from Indo-Austic to Tibeto-Burman group of people. Thread-square symbolizes thwarting of evil spirit by ancestral spirits. 'Evil' finds its imaginary representation in narrative construction of characters in folk tales. Chhura and Nahaia, the most popular characters of Mizo folk narrative in their manifold display of livelihood strategies and tricks that they play on others are talked of as devils in action. Another male character called Chemtatrawta, who emerges as the cause of a chain of events of attack, revenge and counter-attack involving humans, fishes, animals, birds and other living creatures, and who finally misleads angry public in identifying a prawn as the culprit for all the debacles, is penalized. Such an indigenous imagination of how

things happen in the animal world and how humans—animals and nature influence each others' lives by their misdeeds is essential for formation of an idea of 'good' in tribal belief and knowledge systems. Such misdeeds are often done deliberately and often to have pleasure at someone else's harm and pain. One can say that be it an evil spirit or be it humans tricking others, the larger frame of morality subdues such spirits. Whenever the lives of peoples face some uncontrollable crisis, evil is attributed as a cause and then it is represented in symbolic and imaginary terms.

Among the peoples influenced by Indo-Gangetic cultures, myths of 'mother goddess' as the primordial female principle led to institution of *devi* worship in India's North East. Cult of mother goddess has direct relationship with resistance to evil power, often called *asura*. Further the gendered identity of the feminine principle as the progenitor of the creation is often founded upon supplementing the incomplete singularity of the male, which otherwise would have turned into an evil force of nature. Narakasura turning into a worshipper of *devi* Kamakhya brings peace in his kingdom, who otherwise has been portrayed as going astray in his desire to consort with the goddess. This is an example of how evil desire leads to degeneration of the human frame and consequent subsumption of such desire in the acts of worship can sublimate the force of the evil in human character.

Through such tales of manifestation of evil and its redemption, one can investigate into the exact nature of evil as it manifests in human contexts. For example, conflict and extermination, as features of complex forms of State–Society relationship, assume a cyclic relationship between dominant discourse and defiance. The tension between violence and counter-violence, hegemony and counter-hegemony, elite and subaltern, etc., dichotomies is something like diabolic evil, in which one side keeps calling the other. An ontological calling between evil and its contrary keeps political embedding of a critical interpretative context alive. Such an enlivening context arises in the critique of evil as it is abused, say, post 9/11 in generating a discourse of alarm, suspicion and suspension of civic liberties and rights.

The idea of the North East conceived as a frontier space, right through the colonial to the postcolonial served the purpose of state-building in terms of a 'differentiated, describable and enumerable' populace inhabiting 'non-state' spaces in the hills that lacked the presence of modern forms of

biopower. The question is *whether modern form of biopower can be conceived as a complex synthesis between a formal notion of good with its instrumentality of power?* This 'monochromatic' and 'ocular' space gave rise to a sense of ethnic and cultural 'Othering' that grew out of a nascent Indian Self expelling its anxieties, contradictions and irrationalities onto the subalterns in the periphery in terms of being 'suspects' without any authentic sense of belonging. At times of crisis such as the immediate after-effects of partition, such an Othering of the North East was violently reversed by these peoples by an assumption of agency that can react and contest through an inherent conflictual circumstance. The very characterization of political and social space of the North East in the nationalist parlance turned out to be an act of exteriorization or Othering, which got transfigured and transgressed into a vengeance for the Other in the North East. This Cartesian division between a national Self and an Other not only remained confined between the dominant and the subordinate, but it got replicated within the North East in terms of dominant and non-dominant Others. Such an essentially contested North Eastern social space circumscribed itself on its internally coherent and meaningfully organized lifeworld, leaving a different vantage to describe them in their own terms. These terms are a mix of lifeworld conceptual artefacts and articulation of a response to the so called 'mainstream' Indian national identity.

Such a mix is experiential. There are examples of such a mix when a Naga girl from Manipur cannot recollect her school days without talking about the 'fight' that was going on all around between the army and the insurgents. The problematic of trauma and its psychical effects that is central to experience of time, the 'real time' that carries the trace of the un-representable beneath what one related to in the immediate. Phenomenal apprehension of time, therefore, opens towards the 'un-representable' expressed in language. In the context of the North East, when Mamang Dai says, 'we descend from solitudes and miracles'.<sup>4</sup> She means the trace of the 'unrepresentable' that the Naga girl assumes to know herself. One can understand the situation in terms of a return to a 'sublime and ungrounded' dimension of 'lived experience' that often assumes a discursive understanding of the 'Self' in terms of a conceptually imagined 'continuum' between the past and the present, the Self and the Other. The continuum is realized in a multiple fashion such as in sacred symbols and profane spaces. To exemplify momentarily, the Naga tribes

such as Lhota, Sumi, Angami, Rengma believe to have originated from the rock called Khezakhenoma, which forms a conceptual continuum with Ao Nagas symbolizing village states in the form of monoliths that metaphorically alter their primordiality. The continuum gets further manifested in the use of various kinds of thread-square symbols near the graves to catch heavenly flies that may disturb the spirits of the dead. Such thread-square symbols are found among the Kachins of Myanmar as well as among the Tibetans.<sup>5</sup> But this continuum cannot withstand internal ruptures, the alienation of communities from their own historical past, as Temsula Ao writes in her 'Prayer of a Monolith', 'They dislodged me from my mooring/They tore me from her side/They chipped and chiseled/They gave me altered dimensions'.<sup>6</sup> The unrepresentable trace arises in death and disjunction from lived past, but it arises in the present as an experience of 'thrownness'. The meaning of life emerges from such epiphany-filled moments of opposition between 'imaginary' and 'real', and the members of the tribe relate this opposition to a desire for the expanding the world. This can be exemplified in the oppositional role of 'male' and 'female' among the Abo-Tani group of peoples. The function of men is to face 'outside' in the form of encountering the Other in war, trade and exchange, while the function of women lies in protecting the space of the community. Defence is against the outside dangers by enclosing the community space. The Abo-Tani people perform the rite of controlling the war trophy and after the rite is over, they burn it and bury it under a big stone and pronounce, 'Go to your place, we send to you under the ground, we close the door of the earth .... Till ten generations you will not be able to hurt our descendents ....'<sup>7</sup> In other words, there is an opening before the closure and anthropologically, it is meant for self-defence. What needs to be investigated is how this picture of Self-Other relationship is now transformed into a dialogic possibility. The proposed book can address this in terms of experiential narratives from generic tribes and locate how such narratives find their local ramifications. Who now becomes an Other and whether the identity of the Other is determined only in an act of response or in a co-sharing of a continuum needs to be investigated. One can also enquire whether the imaginary continuum of a shared and lived space involves reciprocal recognition. The question can be deepened by asking what ontological barriers are created by an asymmetric federal State that localizes and pluralizes tribes in order to constitute the periphery. *How does one break through this logic of centre-periphery relations?*

Anthropological sciences as 'bricolage'<sup>8</sup> function to explain the 'natural' or the 'concrete', although they are designed to explain things specific to human cultures. Anthropological notion of State–Society relationship essentializes the existing methods of differentiation between nationality and citizenship, classes, tribes and produces the 'dominant subjectivity'. For example, totem as a marker of 'differentiation' belonging to a culture explains a fact that is 'natural' or 'biological', but its significance lies in the realm of culture in terms of meanings that can reproduce a structure of dominance. *When human beings as agents could see themselves as an extension of nature outside, they further evolved a linguistically mediated rational order that established a unity between 'nature' and 'culture'*. Such an anthropological production of a Subject converges with a politics of self-determination that gives politics the status of a 'bricoleur' that multiple origins of power can justify.

Similarly, any anthropological concept that is invoked in understanding and interpreting a 'form of life' originates from the natural world, but derives its meaning from the world of culture. This derived meaning acts as bricolage as it serves the purpose of explaining the natural phenomenon in cultural terms, which is an act of making it more cultural than merely instrumental. *What is culturally important for meanings is that they are liable to be transmuted from one kind of meaning into another within a body of linguistically coded myths and narratives*. Such an encoding, once again, is a part of a modern form of biopolitics in which meanings serve as bricolage themselves, as they often act like metaphor, analogy and perform some other functional roles. Such roles are performed in terms of transformation of elements of myths or narratives into some other meanings, and such transformations are guided by an anthropological reason of serving a purpose of nature as well as of biopower. Biopower as a modern form of power reduces every bricoleur into an already signified entity, which no longer is a body or mass, but a threat and risk that prompts a denial of the right to act. Once an anthropologically circumscribed 'form of life' becomes a threat or risk, it can be imagined that they can be constructed as 'target populations'.

The concept of 'evil' signifies such a complex formation of biopower in and around the anthropological transformations of natural into social, political and cultural as it obtains in the case of many tribal societies of India's North East. Such a transformation gives rise to a mutually implicated set of meanings. For example, in many of the tribes of India's

North East, for every disease there is a spirit and a sacrifice to that spirit. The word 'spirit' as looked at by anthropologists assumes the sense of either 'good' or 'evil' spirit and offerings of sacrifice is looked as 'spirit propitiation'. This is a reductionist notion of 'spirit' as they can be better understood as transformed meaning-entities, that is, bricolages that serve certain functions. As such meaning entities are closely knit with certain situations of life and death, they also emerge as conceptual token in folk explanations of political events that afflict the tribe or community. The incidence of famine called *mautam* in Mizoram gets related to 'flowering of bamboo' (*Melocanna baccifera*) that increases the 'rat population' in a cycle of every 48 years to eat up all the stored foodgrain. This is simultaneously an empirically true observation marked with an idea of 'flowering as evil' in cycles such as 1815, 1863, 1911 and again in 1958-1959. *Mautam*, therefore, stands for a kind of bamboo that flowers, and it also stands to signify the evil occurrence of famine.

Language acts as bricolages of signs,<sup>9</sup> which are made to do other things than they are originally intended, that is, to represent things or objects named within a culture. *Mautam*, supposed to name 'famine', stands for naming the bamboo that flowers as well. On the one hand, such names could become 'conceptual tools' for analysis of cultures and on the other, they can serve as signs meant for serving purposes other than they were intended, purporting 'transformations'. For example, an act of propitiation of dead spirits has architecture of transformations. E. T. Dalton reported in *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*<sup>10</sup> that a tomb was erected upon the remains of the wife of a chief, who had been dead and buried three months back. The tomb was covered with a roof under which the clothes and the drinking cup used by the deceased were kept. An attendant was employed to sing a mournful devotional song in the tomb and an initial ritual of sacrifice of a hen was done, and its blood was collected in a vessel containing some other fluid. The mixture was carefully examined to indicate whether the exercise has brought good to the dead soul or not. Such a ritual performance involves the transformation of what can be sensed into a reading of omen. Dalton, the ethnologists reads here an attempt to propitiate the dead soul and frighten the devil through ritual performances and celebrations. Such acts bring into light how the tragic can be a source of redemptive suffering and wounding the 'Self'. One can see here how through such ritual performances, there are transactions between Self and spirit. The

very connection between the two results into an agency that can assert a defiant will or make evil agency itself as will.

This anthropological search for a system of concepts or rather some kind of universals is perpetually destabilized by the empirical possibility of difference as it obtains in a variety of cultures occupying different mental universes demonstrating a kind of compatibility/incompatibility between signs. Interrelationship between signs as a cultural fact or norm brings us to the point that coincidence between signs in terms of compatibility of meanings is merely engineered, and it is a kind of engineering. But no amount of engineering can make 'signs'; the means of representations coincide with its 'end', the meaning, to make sign *self-identical* or something that is present to itself. Rather signs as means of representation would lead to other signs with a kind of discontinuity between themselves, which can take the form of substitution and displacement, instead of a systematic difference of particular meanings.<sup>11</sup> The difference is instituted in the form of a *rupture* in the relationship between the signifier and the signified as it is conceived within language in the form of a binary opposition or reciprocity. Both the signifier and the signified arise in a field of freeplay of signs not predetermined by given anthropological difference. It is the trace of this difference in empirical details that semantically makes difference between signs true within a field of infinite substitutions in the 'closure' of a finite discourse of anthropology. Such a freeplay within the field of anthropology does not allow the field to be completely determined by a prior theory of knowledge, rather keeps it open to interpretations, which is an infinite possibility of freeplay. This possibility of freeplay also ironically brings back the 'subjective necessity of evil' as a basis of the knowledge of evil. Freeplay between bricolages, signs and conceptual tools gives rise to a speculative concept of evil that alters between freedom and necessity as markers of choice. Freeplay can have a corruptible function in relation to stable and determinate agency of the moral principles, and it must be equally possible to overcome this possibility of evil by 'free power of choice'. Such choices are rationally inscrutable, they are metaphysically counter-intuitive and existentially dialetheiaic. Freeplay reveals what one of the components of a bricolage reveals about the other component in their contrariness, or rather how relationship of contrariness and contradictoriness leads to a semiotic retrieval of the concept of evil.<sup>12</sup>



In order to explore this embedded character of evil in its many dimensions, the volume brings together scholars and practitioners of Philosophy, Sociology, Ethnography, Politics and other such Human and Social Sciences to give possible meanings to the ideas of evil. In order to do so, the chapters in the volume are divided into the following sections: (1) Evil, Conflict and Politics, (2) Good and Evil in Society, (3) Representation of Evil in Myths, Folktales and Narratives, and (4) The Idea of Evil among Various Communities and Tribes of India's North East.

## II

In section one entitled, 'Evil, Conflict and Politics', the first chapter entitled 'The Idea of Evil in the Context of India's North East: A Philosophical Analysis' by Prasenjit Biswas argues that any linguistic and cultural construction of evil is a bricolage that is always used for resistance and representation of the very notion of 'evil' in the context of communitarian and ethnic life-worlds. As the bricolage is the construction of a tool that can be used for a purpose other than it is supposed to be used, the idea of 'evil' can be treated as serving a purpose other than itself being evil. In ethnographic imagination, bricolage arises often as a theoretical tool to bridge up the gap between cognition and imagination. Especially, when there is an experiential rupture between the signifier and the signified within any anthropological representation of the world, the idea of evil in native scheme of thought and language can appear only as 'an affect of the supernatural'. Such an affected concept of evil is a bricolage that is used to explain the world of unforeseen and unknown perilousness from a framework of 'wisdom'. Wisdom not only produces such ethnic, tribal and communitarian bricolages, but it also creates a dynamic tension between 'evil' and 'good', one constantly calling the other. V. Prabhu's chapter entitled 'God, Good and Evil: A Philosophical Perspective' argues that almost all religions and cultures have one or the other concept of evil just as they have one or the other conception of God and good. Theologians, philosophers, and thinkers are all perturbed with the concept of evil, maybe far more than they are perturbed with the concept of good and God. That is why it is not surprising that every major worldview, whether religious or secular, offers some understanding of the presence of evil. Historically, the 'problem of evil' has been a serious difficulty for theistic believers who

want to square their lofty claims about God's perfect power, knowledge and goodness with claims about evil in the world. The same perplexity continues when the post-national construction of other as evil returns with an internalization of evil in one's own society. Such an idea of evil resists an ethical response to the other and constructs a paranoid self obfuscated within a truncated imagination of lived experience. Vijaylakshmi Brara's chapter entitled 'The Good and the Evil: The Self and the Other' draws upon the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) coinage 'axis of evil' to bring out multi-faceted structuring of the idea of evil as a political, metaphysical and moral notion. The construction of evil therefore creates a direct opposite to what is good. It gives impetus to the continued binary opposites. This reminds me of George Bush's earlier all-so-famous statement, 'either you are with us or with the terrorists'. It is today helping more those whose ideas are becoming the hegemonizing principles trying to capitalize the whole world. We need to move out of what is good and what is evil and move into the realm of the liminal zones to understand the multi-dimensionality of human/societal mind incorporating their regional diversities and cultural specificities. The chapter argues that there are many of us who are neither with George Bush nor with the terrorists but have our own perspectives and also need to be heard. This opening into a dialogic imagination beyond dualities and trivialities of self and other, contestation between good and evil finds its place in tribal imagination. The chapter entitled 'The Discourse of Evil and the Mizo Folk Imagination' by Kailash C. Baral argues out a case for deconstructing the very notion of evil by following an argumentative strategy of de-disciplining 'evil' from its discursive grounds. One of such grounds lies in the folk past of many social formations. Baral contextualizes this folk past in the Mizo oral tradition. Contextualizing evil in Mizo folk life and in the author's understanding of the category of evil in philosophy and literature, and as it is represented in other domains as well, he argues that the folk imagination perceives evil in a way different from its characteristic vileness within their worldview, which is seemingly very significant for our understanding of evil vis-à-vis human well-being. The author comes to state that it may be better to live along with the evil spirits than giving in to evil ways of life or being evil. The chapter entitled 'A Window to Social Evils/Concerns Portrayed in the Contemporary English Poetry of Nagaland' by A. J. Sebastian, sdb argues that poetry written in English in Nagaland represents contemporary

concerns of Naga life, much of which centres around a variety of social evils. How such evils are represented in poems of Monalisa Changkize, Aungla Longchari, Ayngla Longkumar and other contemporary poets are the themes of the chapter. Esterine Iralu's moving lines on ethnic conflict, Temsula Ao's remorse for the lost values and meanings, Sedenguile Nagi's critique of substance abuse read like a true picture of Naga society and its multi-pronged problems. Nigamananda Das's chapter entitled 'The Idea of Evil among the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh: A Study of Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam*' discusses Arunachali woman writer and chronicler, Mamang Dai's ethnographic fiction on the in-between space called Pensam that lies between the lived world and the world of the supernatural, where the human world of Adi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh is supposed to be situated. Das engages himself with the Adi notion of evil, which according to his classification, can take five different forms, namely—supernatural, physical, ecological, symbolic, and mysterious/magical. Das describes paradigm cases of each of these evil types by citing a number of legends, tales and magical events. What is most commendable is the transition that each of these evil spirits brings in: from danger to security and well-being. In a strong sense well-being surpasses the evil intentionality, as evil spirits themselves show the way to good. Such a transformative–transitional quality of evil embeds a greater life-force into anthropological imagination of *Pensam* that is always rife with supernatural possibilities of events that takes the anthropological imagination in a realm beyond that inhabited by mystery spirits. Adi imagination, therefore, does not treat evil as an Other or Other as an evil, but it grounds 'evil' in an intrinsic quest for goodness in Pensam.

In section two entitled 'Good and Evil in Society', there are six chapters. The chapter entitled 'Psychoanalysis and Evil Within' by Ajanta Sircar uses Freud's insights as an entry point and presents a close reading of a film produced by the Children's Film Society of India to highlight the ways in which the insistence on acknowledging the violence within is especially urgent for us, given the deeply ruptured histories of the postcolonial world. She discusses Santosh Sivan's film *Malli* as the life of a little tribal girl from Kerala, who in one of Sivan's film is a dreamer, while in another is a terrorist who refuses to be a human bomb. Ajanta brings out the complex psychological layers of various levels of human wishes and desires, and contextualizes it in the breakdown syndromes of human relations as it

happens in contradictorily arranged social spaces of contemporary India. The next chapter entitled 'The Idea of "Evil" among the Bodos: Text and Context' by Anjali Daimari aptly discusses the instances of Bodo–Adivasi practice of witch-hunting and the resultant murder of poor women among them. According to her, it is believed that remedy of a disease caused by an evil spirit or black magic can be cured only by the *ojha* (medicine man) or *kaviraj* (shaman) who has the power to drive away the evil spirit. It is a belief that a disease caused by black magic can only be countered or cured by a counter-magic. The *dayna* (witch) and the *ojha* are, therefore, constitutive of the everyday life, health, sickness, cure and the culture of indigenous medicinal knowledge of the Bodos. *Dayna* is seen as perpetrator of evil and the *ojha* as propitiator of that evil. The majority of Bodos believe that one requires an *ojha* to identify a *dayna*, but the irony is that, as case studies reveal, the *kaviraj* is no different from the *dayna* and often uses his privileged position as the medicine man to marginalize and subordinate the *dayna*, associating her with all that is evil. This establishes a hierarchy of actors that functions in accordance with the contexts of need and belief in Bodo society. In this sense, evil gets embodied in the conceptual and functional hierarchy of the tribal social formation. It would not be an overstatement to say that evil arises from a hierarchical social order, and when the order fails to deliver, it attempts to sustain its legitimacy by those practices that have an evil effect. Without such a self-contradictory move, a social formation and its attendant functions cannot continue in a sociological–anthropological sense. Daimari's exploration into the conflict between *dayna* and *ojha* and the marginalization of the former by the latter brings out this not-so-easily understandable mechanism of authority and legitimation within Bodo social hierarchy. In a slightly different and yet correlated vein, the chapter entitled 'Good and Evil: Naga Society' by Visakhonu Hibo discusses the incidence of various evil spirits such as Thurülkepami, Tero, Temmai, etc., who also have their victims. Such victims arise in the social space, and the logic of victimization brings out the inner conflicts within Naga society. Hibo convincingly argues that modern forms of evil such as drunkenness, violence against women, drug addiction, etc., have replaced earlier forms of abstract interpretation of evil and their embodiments. Replacement of one form of evil by another is also a marker of how the present social order cannot negotiate certain inner conflicts that arise from the very social configuration of actors.

Jano L. Sekhose in her paper entitled 'Idea of Evil and Fear of the Supernatural among the Nagas with Special Reference to Angami Tribe' brings out a further elaboration of the idea of evil in terms of an 'effect' of some supernatural spirit, power or events. Evil arises as a consequence of an excess or an exclusionary practice. For example, when gods celebrate festivities in their world, epidemic diseases spread in the human world, meaning that all that follows from outbreak of an epidemic is not really done by humans. Festivities by gods are a notion of indirectly cursing the gods when human beings suffer. So evil brings curse even to the gods. To correct the situation, the ritual rule of *genna* is invoked and special food and drink are offered to *terhuomia*, the spirit of dead souls. A purification ritual is observed in the beginning of the new year called 'Sekrenyi' that offers feasts to guests. There is also a transition from the fear of 'terhuomia' to belief in a true god called Terhuo Ketho-u, which is also a kind of humanization of evil. The Angami Naga's sense of supernaturality on evil gets replaced by a humane god, a conceptual transition that the chapter brings out in its subtle nuances. The contrast between an ancient belief in evil supernatural entity and the relatively modern belief in a humane god has its positive impact in terms of connecting evil to the social. The chapter entitled 'An Analysis on the Reading of the Bible and Women Stories (Ao Tribe)' by Chubarenla Lima asks questions such as 'What is good?' or 'What is evil?'. Answers are given in terms of locating various imaginations of evil in Ao Naga society. According to the author, evil arises by a purported violation of social norms and therefore, assigns the supposed violator a place of evil. But this logic of social norms, according to Lima goes much against women, as they are stigmatized for adultery, even in the Judaeo-Christian tradition to which the contemporary Ao Naga society largely subscribes. Lima paints the picture how the traditional role of women in Ao Naga society gets relegated to the background by the patriarchal practices of the Baptist Church, which is a cultivated form of evil that degenerates women's dignity and honour. She passionately argues for a rational and religiously proper interpretation of the Bible that can accord the rightful place to women within and outside the church. Sukhendu Debbarma's chapter entitled 'Evil and Evil Spirit in Borok Society of Tripura' discusses the Borok beliefs pertaining to the evil spirits that reside in a variety of places and situations. For example, the belief that evil spirits reside in deserted homestead, joining of paths or the road

crossing 'Lampra', the hills, forest, big trees like 'Charua buphang', etc. Evil spirits can come during eating, and such a spirit called 'Khuango' can make someone suffer from different ailments. There are also incidents of being possessed by spirits, especially among the children. Such evil spirits can be turned away by *ochai*, meaning the shaman or the medicine man. The spirit possessing the man or the woman assumes the form of a witch. Witches are gendered in the Borok context. In both cases of male and female witch, they are possessed by spirits of different strength and effect. Male witch is possessed by 'Bedua', which is considered superior to the spirit possessing female, namely, 'Swkaljwk'. 'Bedua' is considered superior to 'Swkaljwk'. Debbarma discusses the possibility of *ochai* curing someone from the influence of such spirits. He also brings out the practice of killing female witches as it happened in some areas of Tripura and advocates for a law against witch-hunting. Once again, it could be observed here that the concept of evil spirit arising at the level of beliefs and rituals often take the turn of socially acceptable and yet vile practices. This is an area of folly on the part of the society to come to terms with its own underside, of which evil is a consequence.

Section three entitled 'Representation of Evil in Myths, Folktales and Narratives' discusses the representations of evil in narrative forms. Margaret Ch. Zama's paper entitled 'Taboos and Superstitions of the Mizo as Manifestations of the Dark Forces' discusses the very notion of evil takes us to a level where we wrestle with eschatological questions of what is good and evil, right and wrong. The most pervasive spirit entity called 'khua', usually connoting evil force in Mizo tradition now undergoes a linguistic transformation in the form of, say, 'khua (khaw) thra' and 'khua (khaw) chhia', meaning a bright sunny day and a rainy day respectively. Zama tells us how 'khua' linguistically is a marker of village, town or any lived space, while in belief, it has been a pervasive spirit that inhabited any place that one is trying to tinker with. She narrates the concept of 'khuarel' as a diktat of unforeseen fate, while the concept of 'khuanu' means mother's authority. Such transformed meanings of 'khua' as a pervasive pantheistic presence marks the influence of certain kinds of taboo that Mizo people developed through their life's experiences. Zama also narrates the practice of victimization of woman possessed by the evil spirit called 'khwahring' that generates envy on others. A woman suspected to be possessed with 'khwahring' is often found to die in mysterious circumstances. This

perception of evil spirit leads to evil practice of forcing someone to die, a replication of the practice of witch-hunting. The author shows a disjunction between spirits which purely live in nature and spirits which flow from nature to the world. Spirits of the latter kind become a source of evil as well as encourage superstitious practices of removing such evils by this or that means which are not commendable as morally right.

In his detailed paper entitled 'An Exploration of Dimensional Perspectives of Devils and Evil Designs among the Khasi-Jaintia People of Meghalaya', Rev. O.L. Snaitang, a tribal intellectual and religious leader discusses various connotations of U Lakajor or U Thlen myth and extrapolates it to other forms of evil such as *ki menshohnoh* and *ki nongritaro* to explore whether there is a common metaphysical and cosmological basis for evil in Khasi-Jaintia cultures. Snaitang finds out that evil in the realm of society creates encumbrances in determining what is to be done or not to be done—they are often hindrances to the good of the humanity, or alternatively they facilitate a kind of mischief-making. He offers a radically moral and spiritual critique of all such mythological constructions of evil from the point of view of a reformist. His argument is that the origin of devil and evil designs among the community started from the primordial period in antiquity. The first development lay in bringing out ecologically destructive spirits. He also mentions that the rise of U Thlen, Ka Taro, Ka Shwar and other related satanic forces that had the consequence of fostering violence and perpetuating a culture of bloodshed by mixing up both nature and culture. The other types of devils and evil plans arose from the emergence of deities accompanied with unnatural death, the prevalence of which resulted in the loss of a compassionate heart and humanitarian spirit in the ancient society. Some devils were responsible for bringing sickness to the neighbours, especially to the children. The impact of these forces on the community was evident in the rise of uncared spirit on natural plants, development of psychological phobia, the emergence of violence and shedding of indigenous human blood, superstitious belief system, individualistic interests and material gains at the cost of destroying precious human lives. The community called Hynñiewtrep will run the risk of survival, continuity and sustainability if the influence of materialistic gains at the cost of the community's security and identity continues to dominate and wreck havoc in political, social, religious, industrial or academic spheres. This entirely negative potential

of devils and evil spirits in the Hynñiewtrep community assumes such an embedded form that the author develops a critique by painstakingly going through specificities of all such devilish entities.

The next chapter entitled 'Concept of Good and Evil among Karbi Tribe of North East India' by Robindra Teron brings out the dialectics of good and bad in terms of god versus evil. Common belief is that good refers to God (*arnam*) and bad as devil or demon (*hi-i*) (pronounced as *he-e*), and Karbis take both the entities as possessing divinity and unseen power. They also enjoy equal status. While *arnam* is sympathetic and helpful to Karbis and humans in general, *hi-i* inflicts harm or brings sorrow without any provocations. *Hi-i* literally means devil or demon or any destructive entity/force. There are many popular Karbi folklores based on *arnam* and *hi-i* that are still narrated to children. One popular folklore often narrated is *hi-ipi* (woman *hi-i*) devouring children who were enjoying on *inglet* (mulberry fruits). Interestingly, in many families *hi-i* is propitiated as *arnam* and considered as a *hem angtar*. As for instance, the God *Peng* (the Protector) which is actually a *Chek kama*, an incarnation of *hi-i*, is propitiated by sacrificing fowls and one white male goat. The above description projects both *arnam* and *hi-i* as possessing almost equal divinity and capability. Further, often both are spoken together as *hi-i-arnam*, thus conferring equal status and divinity to both *arnam* and *hi-i*. The underlying difference, however, is that *arnam* is assigned with specific duties towards Karbis and its propitiation is meant for strengthening the bond of association. While *hi-i* has no such obligations and its propitiation is temporary, that is, only to appease *hi-i* not to harm Karbis. *Hi-i* always stays outside the house and its presence among the people is a taboo. This ambivalence between *arnam* and *hi-i* as equally powerful introduces a kind of uncertainty in the knowledge of evil. One very interesting aspect of this conceptualization is the presence of a spirit of another cultural origin such as *Khetor*, supposedly from Kuki-Chin sources, as believed by the Karbis. *Khetor*, a spirit originating from a neighbouring tribes, brings *bor*, a protective amulet and accepts propitiation by Karbis and even agrees to be names as *arnam* (spirit-god of karbis) with the qualification of being *Peng* (protector). One can see here a kind of transaction of beliefs through tokens of spirit gods and their benevolence between neighbouring tribes of Karbi and Kuki-Chin origin, which could be mapped as a shared ecology of spirits. Such spirits are constructed by keeping in mind which one of



them can have a greater power or spell. The chapter entitled 'U Thlen as an Evil: A Critical Study on its Metaphysics' by Basil Pohlong argues out that U Thlen is a metaphysical construction that juxtaposes evil and good in a manner that the boundary between the two depends on the social and cultural context, especially on both believers and non-believers. U Thlen, as a snake spirit that can only be propitiated with human blood, according to Pohlong is a belief in the power of the evil that can fulfill the desire for an unachievable level of material prosperity in humans. Going through various contextual versions of U Thlen, Pohlong comes to the position that the symbol of keeping Thlen or serpent in itself is not a spur to committing crimes, but it is the leitmotif of evil in greed for wealth that turns Thlen into a symbol of wealth earned through black magic and some amount of crime that can be justified in terms of propitiating Thlen's appetite. Such a complicated relationship between an individual's own choice and the justification of an evil choice in terms of a symbol and its popular persistence is a recipe for undermining moral principles that are supposed to be the foundations of Khasi-Jaintia society. Pohlong posits the idea of Ka Hok as the principle of earning that which is due or desert to someone, and in his understanding such a moral norm is far more stable than merely a tendentious belief in U Thlen.

The last section entitled 'The Idea of Evil among Various Communities and Tribes of India's North East' contains three chapters. The essay entitled 'The Tiwa Understanding of Evil' by Joy Kachappilly brings out in all intricate details of a hermeneutics of self that the Tiwa tribe does for itself. He brings out the basic theological contour of origination of evil by an opposition between the supreme god of creation Mahadew and the god of destruction *Shari Pahai* that manifests in human behaviour in such forms as *thángyawa* (undesirable behaviour) and *namyawa* (taboo). These forms of human behaviour involve a wide range of action such as believing in proverbs and legends that regulate human action, where it is seemingly necessary by a providential reason. For example, the Tiwa proverb that states *monso nanga libínggo ta hade, monso nangombe*, meaning that someone should not touch a person who has met with an accident, such as a fall from a tree or vehicle accidents or attack from wild animals, etc., lest one suffers the same. Such restrictive proverbs generate a lot of trepidation in the minds of a free thinking Tiwa person, but at the same time, it subjects them to a collectively credible norm. In other words, the Tiwa worldview constructs a

normative ordering between good and evil by anthropologically intelligible concepts, metaphors and linguistic expressions. This is also a mutual articulation by in-group members within their specific social relations in which the Tiwa king plays a major role of an arbiter. Joy Kachappilly bring out this arbitrating nature of social relations by identifying how evil power could be utilized for a range of activity starting from cursing the self to winning war, games and fights. How evil is also indicated through certain practices based on ordinary experiential content such as of *yanggŭljing mógudi cha* (meaning there are no eyes at the back and so the future will take care of itself). This results in the habit of not saving for the future on the part of the Tiwas. Indeed, saving for the future is considered as an evil that eats into one's present. It prevents the Tiwa from being frugal. The essay brings out this multiple realizability of the idea of evil in the Tiwa context. Linus Neli's chapter entitled, 'Evil in Mao Naga Culture: Contemporary Perspectives' discusses how the old practices of belief in literal evil spirits such as *chiihre kakei mei* (evil spellers), and *kakhe kosii mei* (chest wringers) gives way to conceptualization of evil in metaphors such as 'black heart' (*ole katei*). One sees an anthropological carry-over of the past of evil-spellers who would split the heart into contemporary construction of man with a black heart. Neli raises the crucial question of secularizing the notion of evil by asking ethical questions such as 'why the exercise of human cruelty against others who are incapable of defending themselves continues unabated?' and 'why is suffering, in the present culture, a desired result of 'evil' actions?' Neli indicates an ethical resolution of the problem of evil by turning to questions that perplex us on things of evil nature. Neli conducts an internal critique of Mao Naga cultural notions of evil. In another way, Saheni Loli in his essay entitled, 'Soul as the Dream-maker: An Essay on Mao Naga Philosophical Anthropology' brings out two forms of souls, *Raku* and *Ingo*. He presents the differing dimensions and transitivity between the two to have a transfer of meaning from one to the other. As far as *Raku* is concerned, it resides intrinsically in the consciousness and it is not active in the body, while *Ingo*, the subordinate dream-making soul resides in the body. The connection between dream and *Ingo* in the body is mediated by the absent presence of *Raku*. *Ingo*'s dreams lead it to protect the body from evil spirits and allow it to wield charm over the evil spirits. Here one gets a different concept of soul that wields power over evil spirits, as it can see the designs of the evil spirit in its dream, a

luminal zone of consciousness that gives rise to images, thoughts and a lot of intuitive meanings through which the knowledge of the world and the surroundings can be mapped. Apart from such epistemic roles, *Ingo* also manifests itself as a tiger-man, a typically Mao cultural construct that is a rediscovery of a narrative sustenance of its two layers of soul. The way tiger-man hovers around for wild animals also marks the yearning for food when *Ingo* is moving outside the body. Such a constitution of outside of the body in transformed forms is also a strategy to separate three layers of consciousness such as perception, dream and consciousness of soul in the transcendental world. The rich cultural repertoire of the Mao Naga notion of evil in terms of death of the body due to some causes and the later transcendence of this whole death experience in a different temporal order of dreaming and belonging to the space outside consciousness makes it a subtle way of refutation of the idea of evil. Therefore a peep at Mao Naga nature of consciousness and soul is extremely fructifying to recover the loss of meaning in the acts of the evil spirit.

### III

The foregoing discussion raises a number of issues such as the relation between language and thought and evil as the Other of thought. Seemingly, there is an embedded notion of good in thought that encounters the construction of evil. Such relations are ontological and they are disclosed to the human being in language. This ontological relationship between human being and language is manifold; the relationship between being and each of its expression is very different from each other and hence, it assumes inexhaustible meanings. It is rather the case that 'meanings', as they are interpreted within the 'horizon', guides our understanding of being. As is known, the horizon is already constituted by our being, which itself is 'a reflection on the source of our hidden history', as Heidegger had characterized it.<sup>13</sup> For Heidegger, being issues forth from 'concealment' and hence it is chiasmatic between becoming and non-being.<sup>14</sup> The non-being arises out of a deferral in becoming. Evil turns out to be a dialectic of concealment and disclosure in the phenomenal non-appearance of being within the horizon of culture. The in-appearing and non-appearing being within the horizon of understanding is aware of its otherness both in itself as well as in its non-relation with the other. This is how evil as an existential state of being posits Self-Other relationship as a disclosure

in language that is always inadequate to express the experiential reality. Heidegger puts it succinctly:

... Language is always ahead of us. Our speaking merely follows language constantly. ... When we speak of language we remain entangled in speaking that is persistently inadequate.<sup>15</sup>

The inadequacy of expressing what language is also shows a fundamental limitation of a hermeneutic understanding of being, which gets limited to reflection and contextualization. The idea of evil, therefore, remains a disclosure in the way language constitutes it from whichever field it attempts. An anthropological construction of evil in the language of a tribe often makes it a part of a larger world-constitutive process that involves a lot of intra and inter-community struggles. Evil as a constraining idea draws a limit upon an unfolding conflict of norms and expectation that arise in the historical experience of a community. So when we speak of evil, we remain entangled in speaking evil that is persistently inadequate. This persistent inadequacy of evil often diminishes it, creates a self-emptying situation in the domain of social relations only to magnify itself in the realms of imagination that necessarily calls for values. So, evil borders on an evaluative paradigm of good and evil duality without which its inadequacy cannot manifest in human experience.

Reflection makes language as already spoken, while contextualization situates the human subject in a historically limited horizon. What interpretation discloses is already affected by being and hence the received meanings of being are already given in language. This character of unconcealment that throws up the concealed 'given' in the interpretation and reflection never allows a full opening of the 'house of being', but it turns the game of language into an experience of bottomlessness in the very act of revealing the hidden history of being. *Evil signifies this hidden history of being in the unrecognized ethnography of tribal life-worlds from North East India.*

To understand this hidden history of being, Heidegger characterizes this unconcealment in a Parmenidesian way:

On the one hand, the word 'un-concealedness' directs us to something like 'concealedness'. What as regards 'un-concealedness' is previously concealed, who does the concealing and how it takes place, when and where and for whom concealment exists, all that remains undetermined.<sup>16</sup>

This irresolvable dialectic between concealedness and unconcealedness is part of the anthropological machine that conceals an already present hermeneutical consciousness to translate the nature into human and unconceals a cultural science that translates the humanized nature as artefactually cultural. This is a profuse confounding of senses that are distinguishable: natural, cultural and animal/human—all of which are spoken of in an insular and singular manner that excludes the outside. The notion of evil excludes an outside, and therefore constitution of an outside in terms of body and self emerges as a repertoire of specific cultural–anthropological being (as in Mao Naga or Tiwa or Karbi case). Heidegger states this cultural repertoire of anthropological confusion as an ‘entanglement’ in language:

Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man .... For strictly, it is language that speaks. Man first speaks when, and only when, he responds to language by listening to its appeal.<sup>17</sup>

This is Dasein’s own unconcealment of its being in its own vocabularies. Responding to language in an experiential categorization of evil remains as a given state of disclosure that every response discloses anew in the subjectness of the self and the other. This subjectness is inassimilable in any given world picture that an interpretative closure might suggest. This inassimilability is a source of anthropological confusion in terms of which a tribal community constructs an idea of self. Such a creative self cannot but produce an unending dialectic between good and evil.

The dialectic assumes the shape of a ‘blocked dialectic’, as Hegel would call it. Its dialectic of irresolution arises in the simultaneous construction of good and evil, which is also surpassed by any one of the two sides of this construction. In contemporary discourse on terror as an evil, we can see a subsumption of evil by means that are not entirely free from ‘evil designs’. This is a relapse into radical evil to fight the ‘evil’ back.

Evil can be constructed here in many different ways. Much of its constructions follow from the political, anthropological and cultural positioning of the ‘author’, if there is any. The idea of evil in its metaphysical flow subsumes its author and other actors as the fateful victims of a cosmic play. The cosmic play is of course realized in the

form of the rise and fall and defeat of a few actors in the mundane soil of the world as one among its multifaceted realizations. Other unknowable and seemingly un-anticipatable realizations are supposed to only awake a sense of being lost in the gigantic work of primordial forces. This brings us to the question: *Do evil and fear of the unknown go together, or, are the consequences merely paradoxical that turn into a strange awareness of danger in any desirable outcome that humans look for?* There is a strange dialetheia of evil in which evil acts to disclose how they are evil, and this disclosure often produces a contrast between good and evil in the same act. Especially when power and construction of evil are convergent, and it gives advantage to the advantaged, it discloses a strange contrary relation between the legitimate and the evil. Contrarily one can think of impartiality of a neutral agency such as the State that looks for an egalitarian criterion and does some justice in cases of some of the glaring cases of victimization. Such good acts reveal a deeper connivance between State and its agencies as an ideological apparatus that also commits acts of injustice. The same ideological apparatus once again does good as well. The strange contrariness of the same act discloses an uncomfortable coexistence between good and evil and an inadequacy of both the concepts only to be revealed within the given horizon of understanding.

Instead of further hair-splitting on such diabolic predicaments, one may take a look at a few simple instances of construction of 'evil' by engaging oneself in the experiential reality. The reported denial of enumeration by a section of orthodox Christians in Mizoram during the current census operation of 2010 in which a Biblical verse of Revelation 13:17 is invoked reads:

No man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name ... before the end comes, the number and the symbol of the beast or satan would be distributed to mankind and everybody would be counted by the Prince of Darkness.

This reading prompted a notion of evil in being identified with a number. The case points to an appropriation of a biblical narrative at a deep psychological level. But it also raises a moral question through the narrative: Can a human being be counted and represented by a number?

Looked at another way, one is compelled to take a look at the contemporary discussion on 'axis of evil' (Bush junior), or 'scourge of

evil' (Reagan) as some of the signposts of the time. 'Axis of evil' and consequent 'war on terror' come as a response to such a construction of evil. Nine years after the fight against Taliban guerrillas into the deep south and east of Afghanistan, there are a large number of civilian deaths. Much of this mediatized war on terror fails to justify its acts of violence, as it becomes more condemnable in terms of a 'regime of impunity', an exception to the right to life and its violators. The rhetoric of Bush junior is still not passé as one chillingly remembers his coinages, 'terrorists hiding in the dark corners of the earth, until they "slither" into cities'; 'global terrorists having the goal of entire human life under their control', etc., etc. Counter-terrorism as 'constant vigilance against a less-than-human and all pervasive enemy' results in 'militarized response, exceptional legislative measures and preemptive intelligence collection' compromising 'political and legal rights'. It premises itself upon the Hobbesian doctrine 'every man is supposed to promise obedience to him in whose power it is to save or destroy him'. War on terror assumes a Hobbesian path of an unrestrictive construction of evil on the part of an authoritarian power that produces 'subjects' of sacrifice. In dishing out a moral account of a sacrifice, one can also project the idea of 'negative responsibility' as a measure of making agents responsible for their failure to contain any undesirable harm that arises from someone else's action or from some acts with which the agent himself/herself is not at all related. Going by this, collateral damages, killing of innocents and such other consequences of someone else's action have to be borne out by every other agent who bears a sense of responsibility. In such a sense of 'negative responsibility' which arises without the act of the agent, the idea of evil acts as a predicament of any moral discourse involving measures to fight the evil.

This finds its echoes in Chomsky's drawing parallel between Reagan's 'scourge of terror' under the cloak of 'war on terror' that evidentially created Jihadi outfits of Afghanistan and left, what Chomsky describes in the following:

Reagan's war on terror became a savage terrorist war, leaving hundreds of thousands of tortured and mutilated corpses in the wreckage of Central America, tens of thousands more in the Middle East, and an estimated 1.5 million killed by South African terror that was strongly supported by the Reagan administration in violation of congressional sanctions.<sup>18</sup>

Chomsky drew here a parallel between ‘war on terror’ and ‘scourge of evil’ to establish that any such war on terror is never itself free from terror. This is a part of the notion of evil that calls for its ‘contrary’ all the time by an apriori dissociated from all the phenomenal figures.

## Notes

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10. E. T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (Kolkata: Govt. of India Press, 1872), pp. 16f.
11. Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), p. 117.
12. Umberto Eco’s notion of semiosis that involves exploration of semantic opposition between a term and its contrary and/or contradictory can be used to retrieve the notion of evil.
13. Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Yale Univ. Press Inc., 1959), p. 92.
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16. *Ibid.*, *Parmenides*, trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1992), p. 13.
17. *Ibid.*, *Poetry, Language and Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 215–216.
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Section I

**Evil, Conflict  
and Politics**

# 1

## **The Idea of Evil in the Context of India's North East**

### *A Philosophical Analysis*

Prasenjit Biswas

### **Between Nature and Culture: Evil as Heterology**

Franz Boas' methodological standpoint with respect to understanding a 'foreign culture' privileged a learning of constitutive elements of that culture in an empirical way. But such learning based upon observation and participation does not easily provide an understanding of that culture, as understanding would mean learning of the 'inner logic' or rationale of that culture. One could say that the empirical view of Boas conflates insider and outsider perspectives in a way that treats 'foreign culture' as an object given to processes of learning.<sup>1</sup> But such learning is a process of naturalizing epistemology that assumes culture as homologous to natural object as such an object could be learnt from its self-evident pre-giveness of the domain of culture that enters into a relation of founding to the acts of learning. The foundational idea of civilization lay in replacement of forces close to nature by a human genitor that found its expression in the choice of Totems such that the norm of belonging to the specie of one's progenitor or father have augured the primary norm of civilization.<sup>2</sup> This way of distinguishing between the savage and the civilized attributed

totems to various communities outside civilized societies, as Levi Strauss argued:

*Totemism* is firstly the projection outside our own universe, as though by a kind of exorcism, of mental attitudes incompatible with the exigency of a discontinuity between man and nature which Christian thought has held to be essential.<sup>3</sup>

Totems were the markers of resemblance and difference that a group of people establishes with others, and it functioned as the perception of the concrete that gave rise to schemes of classification through which the world was ordered in a rational fashion. Judeo-Christian thought in the West has developed this conceptual bridge between Humans and Nature by using reason. The reason was centred on nature, and it was used to interpret human cognition by extrapolating it upon human nature that resulted into an agreement between nature and culture within a certain conceptual scheme, moral order or form of life. When human beings as agents could see themselves as an extension of nature outside, they further evolved a linguistically mediated rational order that established a unity between 'nature' and 'culture'. An anthropological understanding of this linguistic mediation has resulted into a flurry of concepts and arguments. A look at them is worth at this point.

The most talked about concept of 'bricoleur' as developed by Levi-Strauss pertains to making things that can do something other than it is designed for. Anthropological sciences as *bricolage* function to explain the 'natural' or the 'concrete', although they are designed to explain things specific to human cultures.<sup>4</sup> Totem as a marker of belonging to a culture explains a fact that is 'natural' or 'biological', but its significance lies in the realm of culture in terms of meanings. Similarly for any anthropological concept that is invoked in understanding and interpreting a form of life originates from the natural world, but derives its meaning from the world of culture. This derived meaning acts as bricolage as it serves the purpose of explaining the natural phenomenon in cultural terms, which is more cultural than instrumental. What is culturally important for meanings is that they are liable to be transmuted from one kind of meaning into another within a body of linguistically coded myths and narratives. Meanings, therefore, serve as bricolage themselves, as they often act as metaphor, analogy or perform some other functional roles. Such roles

are performed in terms of transformation of some elements of myths or narratives into some other meanings, and such transformations are guided by an anthropological reason of serving a purpose of nature that enacts a cultural and social role as well. Such purposes move from continuous roles to discontinuous events.<sup>5</sup> This is further conceptualized as configurations of elements that are identified as 'objects' with culturally given names and when such names are combined in language through 'propositions', they mark a complete transition from 'states of nature' to 'states of affairs'.<sup>6</sup> In this transition, language acts as bricolage of signs, which are made to do other things than they are originally intended, that is, to represent things or objects named within a culture. On the one hand such names could become 'conceptual tools' for analysis of cultures and on the other, they can serve as signs meant for serving purposes other than they were intended. But this anthropological search for a system of concepts or rather some kind of universals is perpetually destabilized by the empirical possibility of difference as it obtains in a variety of cultures occupying different mental universes demonstrating a kind of compatibility/incompatibility between signs.<sup>7</sup> Interrelationship between signs as a cultural fact or norm brings us to the point that coincidence between signs in terms of compatibility of meanings is merely engineered, and it is a kind of engineering. But no amount of engineering can make 'signs'; the means of representations coincide with its 'end', the meaning, to make sign *self-identical* or something that is present to itself. Rather signs as means of representation would lead to other signs with a kind of discontinuity between themselves, which can take the form of substitution and displacement, instead of a systematic difference of particular meanings. The difference is instituted in the form of a *rupture* in the relationship between the signifier and the signified as it is conceived within language in the form of a binary opposition or reciprocity. Both the signifier and the signified arise in a field of freeplay of signs not pre-determined by given anthropological difference. It is the trace of this difference in empirical details that semantically makes difference between signs true within a field of infinite substitutions in the 'closure' of a finite discourse of Anthropology.<sup>8</sup> Such a freeplay within the field of anthropology does not allow the field to be completely determined by a prior theory of knowledge, rather keeps it open to interpretations, which is an infinite possibility of freeplay.

*This moment of freeplay in anthropology is conceptualized by a radical deconstruction of field into texts and vice versa. This also marks an overlapping*

*between the anthropological and the philosophical, meaning a strategic location of language within the discourse of epistemology and political economy. Earlier forms of ethnographic representations in terms of decoding of natural into cultural now assume a more complex institutional form of power that anthropological discourses attempt to rationalize. For example, the notion of 'writing machine' as advanced by George Marcus<sup>9</sup> that advances shifts in anthropological praxis from describing the richness of human culture in an ingenious way to participation in an already existing and contestatory world of representation. This is a kind of anthropology that reflects on its heteronomous origins: questions that are raised from points of view of cultural dominance, identity clashes and political conflicts, which are not just embedded in representations, but introduce a new politics of interpretation of the candidate's social facts by reorienting the usual contexts of meaning. Such heteronomous anthropology changes the very notion of embedding by following a challenging strategy of structural analysis with an emphasis on agency roles that emerge from the long-term trends of history.<sup>10</sup> This mode of anthropology re-embeds its usual conceptual tools drawn from ethnography not just in a form of life, but moves beyond by way of altering the subjects of observation and interpretation. The question is how are the subjects of ethnographic observation changed? First by refusing to assign them a 'given' place within their own societies, where the given is identified to either confirming or revising the already arrived at anthropological notion/R theory about a particular society. Next, by substituting the relation by which the native informant representing the essence of society's organizing principles of identity and difference becomes the anthropological discourse by a 'heterology'.*

## **Disciplining 'Evil': The Case of Apatanis**

The idea of being catapulted in the world of the anthropological Other turns out to be another conceptual product in the anthropologist's explanations. In the case of a tribe like Apatani, a native scholar interprets the identity markers as follows:

The tattooing of their lower chin, hair knot with skew on forehead, belting of loin cloth with dyed cane work hanging from their waist, putting on cane woven ring on the hinge etc. are the menfolk of the Apatanis. The tattooing on their forehead to the tip of the nose and lower chin, wearing of British

type skirt and jacket, wearing of blue beads and necklace, ear-ring etc. are the womenfolk. Both folks are characteristic of the tribe's identity and beauty, but more importantly of the cultural and religious traits of the tribe.<sup>11</sup>

The scholar seems to be emphasizing the uniqueness of cultural and religious traits of the Apatanis as reflected in their dress code, mostly described by him in terms of artefacts and ornaments. These artefacts and ornaments give meanings in terms of cultural and religious traits that are not merely representational of the identity and beauty, but express matters of faith and aesthetics. These expressions can't be understood from the 'representational affect', but they should be diachronically linked up with the statements of belief such as, 'Miyu saling La Gyunyang Santa Tiggo Santa Lingi Du' (Men is born with the religious rites and ceremonies and, therefore, we can't live a prosperous life without the ceremony of rites and duties.)<sup>12</sup> These statements of belief are correlated with artefacts. But this correlation is something internal to the community. Takhe Kani provides a catalogue of such diachronic correlations in the case of costumes of the Apatani priest:

1. *Zillang*: It is a piece of outer robe of the priest, which is used in ceremonies of *Myoko*, *Murung*, *Subu* only. It is highly designed on the body and borderline and is in technique of *Zillang Laying* (fret shape), *Abyopro* (a geometrical pattern), *Laying Pinchu* (fret shape), *Khiibolarko* (cross hatching), *Nessuarko* (cross-bold), *Karnii* (loop coil), *Obyatunii* (Zigzag), *Pesuuhiidda* (Horring bone) and other designs. The colour and designs are the choice of the weaver. Usually colour combination of this robe is *Nuhu* (red), *Pyallang* (light red), *Nupu* (white), *Tiipyra* (black-blue), *Pyami* (light-yellow). The priest and the layman cannot use them in other days.
2. *Zibo*: This type of outer robe is used only *Bulyang* or village council, who lead the community feast demonstration of *Myoko* known as *Khiibo Gyonii* during its ceremony. The colour combination is same as *Zillang* but designs are more simple than that of *Zillang*. This is not used by the priest.<sup>13</sup>

What emerges from this description of the design, function and the use of clothes is a complex weaving of belief and the design on the body of the wearer, who is a priest or leader of the village council. The relationship

between designs and their function in a ceremony is not articulated in terms of specific meanings for certain purposes. The meaning remains only functional, understood in terms of ritual roles or social roles that such meanings correlate with. Without the usual linguistic concept of meaning, the correlations through which the meaning is established gives rise to a different notion of embedding. Meanings get embedded through artefacts in occasions and contexts that link up artefacts and social roles that call for the use of such artefacts. Each of these artefacts present something like a matrix of meaning, the elements of which are constituted by rich textures of designs, colours and shapes that are produced within the culture. The matrix of meaning arises out of a presuppositionless relationship between what is humanely created in the form of artefacts and the realm of human meaning that is linguistic.<sup>14</sup> In a sense, forms of artefacts do not limit themselves to its constitutive limits but they overlap into the domain of language as 'beauty' or 'markers of identity' without any essentialization of their meaning.<sup>15</sup> Further artefacts deny the governing rules of language and therefore retain a willingness to say without saying, an intentionality that is decoded by the society where they originate. What makes this decoding possible is the role of the social by breaking and reordering the disciplinary relationship between meanings and 'subjects' of language. In the case of the Apatani priests, the roles played by them in religious rites and magical performances give them a special place in the society and the society, in turn, offers them with appropriate honorariums and gifts. The idea of the social here takes the form of a law without specifying quantities of exchange, but it only specifies the ritual well-being of the community. In doing so, the parables and hymns of belief acquire a kind of authenticity that spills into a larger realm of meaning of life than mere linguistic embeddedness of meanings. For example, a strange illness believed to be induced by ancestral spirits, called *Igii-Lirung* is believed to be incurable by modern medicine, as it is a sickness of the soul. Therefore, the cure comes from praying to ancestors and by offering them sacrifices.<sup>16</sup> The whole conception of illness in terms of sickness of the soul is not merely the bodily one, but it is supposed to be curable only by way of rituals that modern doctors cannot perform. This emphasizes the healing role of the priests, thereby meaning the presence of ancestors in somebody's present life. Also this has a deeper meaning dimension: it's not like a bodily cut, but an affect of the supernatural.<sup>17</sup> This calls for special sacrifices

such as sacrifice of castrated boar, which requires very special ways of performing the same.<sup>18</sup> One sees here an act of drawing of a harmony between meanings, artefacts, rituals and other aspects of Apatani life that is made possible only by an exercise of beliefs and associated reasons with it. Part of the domain of belief also remains 'inarticulate', as there are no sufficient reasons that can fully explain the wisdom aspect of beliefs.<sup>19</sup> One would also extend the argument by positing that the inarticulate aspects of cultures are those that cannot be brought within linguistic articulation because of the limited character of human language and, therefore, the articulate aspects of a culture emanate from those deeper inarticulate features and aspects that remain embedded within the culture. Here one moves beyond the realm of reason and tries to discover something that has not been properly articulated within the culture, yet without which the culture cannot be fully articulated. So the moot question is: Can any culture ever articulate something that is intrinsically inarticulate and that which is part of its wisdom?

What could be attempted here is to locate the wisdom that applies through artefacts. In case of Apatanis, wisdom takes the form of functional and organizational structures, which only provides a clue to meanings in the larger spheres of life. Such functional-organizational aspects of life get related to 'artificiality' of the rituals and performances. One needs to remember here that the sense of the term 'artifacts' as given in the disciplinary matrix of anthropology only includes 'cultural objects', meanings of which are determined within the culture. Artefactuality, in contrast, involves the basic human capability to discover the relationship between consciousness and the things in the world. The act of referring to things and having states of mind as part of a larger architecture of mapping the world and nature, the crucial property of artefactuality of all kinds of things of life serve the linguistic, imaginal and mental faculty of human beings concerned. The ambivalent meanings of artefacts are not all straightened by mere societal roles that they perform, rather they open up the possibility of meanings of various functional aspects of the society. It is in this way that artefactuality opens up the possibilities of discovering the internal and external relationships of the human subject and such a relationship is socially constructed and mediated by functions that it plays within the society. One such artefactual construction of the world of dead called *Neli* in Apatani society gives rise to an *eschatology of*



*continuity* of life in its current form. 'As an Apatani lived on this earth so will he live in *Neli*', wrote C. von Furer-Haimendorf,

... a rich 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.<sup>20</sup>

In Haimendorf's understanding of the afterlife of Apatanis, the relationship of life and death is that of vitality and recreation of life that move temporally and spatially between worlds. The interpretation given by him conceived *Neli* to be the underworld, while somewhere between the sky and the earth, there is an in-between world called *Talimoko*. He also attributed return of the dead souls from *Talimoko* back to their earthly homes.<sup>21</sup> Further, he mentioned the practice of shamans in making the souls return to their bodies in case such bodies lose consciousness due to some illness. What is interesting to note here is the emphasis of Haimendorf on the functional aspects of beliefs related to death and the return of souls in their dwelling places, but the emphasis only brings out the artefactuality of the world of the dead as a mirroring of the lived world. If one contrasts this Haimendorfean version with what the native anthropologist Takhe Kani says about the world of the dead:

The soul may not know the way to *Neli Myoko* or *Talii-Myoko*. So the priest and the woman who sing the funeral song tells them the ways. On the way to the *Neli Myoko*, there are different terrains, mountains, hills, rivers and streams which they have to cross. There is a big elephant called *Chango-Siibo* on the way to *Neli Myoko*. They cross him through his backbone. It is believed that when this elephant shakes its ears the earth-quakes occur in this world. On the way, there is a resting place called *Hissing Nyetu*. While they are down to the *Neli Myoko* they rest and take meal there.<sup>22</sup>

Takhe Kani's narrative description of the world of the dead is livelier in not only the details but also in belief with an element of fictionality that makes the *conditions of possibility* of belief. The conditions of possibility contain references to a landscape of dwelling, and it is not merely an

act of mirroring. Rather, the landscape that really exists turns into an imagined locale of soul, and such a locale is given a telluric dimension. This is recreation of a sphere of life for the souls, which is an intrinsic quality of cultural appropriation of an idea of connecting life and death. Such a cultural appropriation creates what is called 'non actual objects' or possible objects to which subjectivities conform in terms of reason and imagination. The above Apatani division of the world of souls attains a characteristic ontology of 'being there'. This is supplemented by a narrative of regeneration of souls, as represented in songs that tells the souls the way to the world of the dead. This is the artefactuality of songs as well as the beliefs that are embedded in them. In matters of regeneration of souls and spirits, sacrifice of wild boars as a ritual in ceremonies like *Myoko* and *Murung* goes with the belief that such spirits are propitiated by the offerings of rice beer and gracious meat. In Takhe Kani's words:

It is also believed that such spirits also bless the alive families and protect the entrance of evil spirits. So the alive family monthly performs a small rite called *Pilya* with sacrificing a chicken in the name of this spirit for blessing. The belief goes that God *Pilya* keeps him strong body.<sup>23</sup>

One can see here an ontological mixing up of the world of souls, spirits and gods with rituals that ensure transference of one into the other. In human imagination, such transformations are possible by artefactuality of belief that gives rise to the phenomenal reality for a piece of belief to be satisfied and how it gives rise to knowledge. The transformation of entities of belief into one another involves a kind of prescience or wisdom that refuses to fall into a framework of easy predictability and hence eludes a course of objectification. Rather, they inhabit a world of artefactuality of beliefs that require only an internal continuity that could be understood, but it cannot be either explained completely or dismissed in the vein of non-conformity to a given paradigm of anthropology. In other words, one can make a deontological claim about wisdom built in a certain culture: *wisdom inhabits in a culture but does not quite follow the logic of place or home* threatening its academic disciplines. Wisdom, therefore, takes the form of something like examination of omen among the Apatanis by asking the gods whether they would accept a particular act of sacrifice of animals<sup>24</sup> in the language of prayer and in the world that remains apart

from what happens as an event. This moment is represented in the rhythms of hymns like *UI NIIDI*:

Siiyang anayangsi, piidu piiyne dii holo,  
 Diiker diimer, murju  
 Saju anyang jaso, asing lyanding kir kilo ka kilo raddey, aha  
 Lyanko lyar lyalo ka lyalo radey ka doging pamiilo  
 Huing duso.<sup>25</sup>

This hymn is sung in rhythms of a prayer which seeks to know in which *lapang* the pig or boar is going to be sacrificed. In Kani's explanation:

... the main observation is begun with enquiry into gods who wills to have this boar in the name of god *Kiri* and *Killo* (*Myoko*) and the question in which *lapang* the pig would be sacrificed. The priest name out of the particular *lapang* and its god. It is asking to *Dokho* and if it is not in favour for it another omen will be asked for *siibo*. Thus such observations are not right for the sacrifice of pig in the *Myoko*, the solemniser postponed the sacrifice of boar in the *Myoko* ceremony.<sup>26</sup>

This indeterminacy of assent by gods and postponement of sacrifice happen through the rhythms of the hymn. Rhythm imposes itself on those who sing it and on those for whose welfare it is sung, without any active role of anyone in the process. This ensures a Levy-Bruhlean kind of participation<sup>27</sup> of everyone in it, which is a celebration of togetherness, in contrast to an activity of analysis or passivity of addiction. The argument could be understood from what Franson Manjali explained:

Lucien Levy-Bruhl had contrasted the 'law of contradiction' of the modern society with the law of participation of the 'primitive societies'. He was of the view that the two are not mutually exclusive: the primitive law has never been fully eliminated in the modern. Levinas's appreciation of Levy-Bruhl's work can be attested from the chapter 'Levy-Bruhl and Contemporary Philosophy' in his book *Entre Nous: Thinking of the Other*, 1998 (pp. 39–510). Levy-Bruhl as quoted in that book: '... things are (not) given first and afterwards they enter into participations. In order that they shall be given, that they shall exist, it is already necessary to have participations. In order that they shall be given, that they shall exist, it is already necessary to have participations. A Participation is only a mysterious and inexplicable fusion of things that

lose and preserve their identity simultaneously .... Without participation, they would not be given in any experience: they would not exist.<sup>28</sup>

This idea of participation is relevant in the participation of gods and spirits in human life as well as human participation in the world of gods and spirits without which they would not exist. The Levy-Bruhlean notion of primitive society turns out to be an abstraction that contradicts the enmeshing of the so-called primitive in the modern. Such a contradiction could possibly be overcome by way of a Godelierian understanding of 'social relations'<sup>29</sup> in terms of clans and other such formations and the exchange relationship that mediate between them. The mediating factors like sacrifices and its expression in rhythms of chants, the Apatanis only present themselves in terms of exchanges that do not have a material content and the space of communication between the living and the world of spirit has a subject, an *addressee*, who neutralizes the possibility of violence and unequal exchanges. The name and form of the addressee assume a different colour like a shadow or an image, which is anterior to the world of speech or communication. Such an anterior is the artefactuality of words and expressions that are contextually built up within Apatani hymns and prayers.

This brings us to the point that artefactuality does not merely reside in essences and forms. Rather, it is a non-object that takes an image-like form in which the reality does not refer to itself but to the process of representation or reflection that the subject makes for itself. The presence of the subject in the absence of the object does not divest it from the making of a world that refuses to articulate itself in line of correspondence between the subject and the object. It is rather a language that refuses to speak in an articulate voice as that would create a contradiction between the object and the subject by non-participation of one into the other within the culture. One of the central tasks of ethnography is to ensure such participation of entities in the cultural world of Apatanis.

## **Anthropocentrism in Defining an Agency**

Such ethnographic constructions of self-identity through tales and narratives basically aim at creating a world for themselves within which not

only their beliefs would find a place but they would also construct a place of dwelling. Such a place of dwelling is not guided by rules of social formations or other such abstract rules in operation, rather it gives rise to an anteriority that disengages itself from reasons and beliefs. This is the place of wisdom and it can transcend the borderlines of reason. Wisdom further creates the possibility of conceiving the material well-being of societies in terms of reliability of sharing cultural life and, therefore, opens up a greater possibility of freedom that is otherwise curtailed by anthropology's blank assumption of material progress as the key to development of societies. On a theoretical plank, wisdom discloses itself only when the borders drawn by conventional reason between language and the world is blurred by different beliefs and their practices. Beliefs, in other words, remain the mainstay of indigenous and native societies of North East India. Beliefs also signify various ways of constructing the world in language and this becomes possible only when beliefs start disclosing in concrete historical and cultural terms. This further produces a cognitive inclusion of belief within the world that is made by those beliefs themselves, and this is made possible by including language within the world as a medium of communication and representation. Such an inclusivity, definitely, does not in any way blur our capabilities of making distinctions, rather it multiplies such distinctions by an act of inclusion.

Such a process of inclusions and demarcation marks the growth of a proper classification—is it possible to move from 'abstract' linguistic classifications to 'ritual classifications'? From there on, can one bring out in formulaic terms the embedded 'forms of life' that such classifications represent? To what extent a scheme of classification influences the 'subjectivity' of a self-presenting identity?

Anthropology only narrates how such inclusions/exclusions are achieved in a certain mode of cultural practice or, more generally, in a certain society. The moment such a story of inclusion and world making is read from a perspective that is anterior to a culture of reason, there is a disengagement from the contents of what is only included and one *looks for an external reality* that would possibly justify such inclusions. In the context of the North Eastern tribes, performance of war rituals that included the act of feeding the spirits of the dead and enemy spirits as well constitutes an 'external reality' for justifying the war preparedness of a village community. Remembrances of such preparedness talks of the enemy as the 'Other' while they are symbolically included within the social rituals of a community.

But one cannot go externalist the whole hog, as one's perspective already lies within some anterior world view and therefore refuses to be closed upon itself and opens itself to the other. A level of well-defined vantage that could be transcendental and intersubjective could back such understanding and knowing the Other. How anthropology's 'artifactual objects' of knowledge deal with such philosophical backup has been the residual aspect of theory-building in anthropology, the primary aspect, nonetheless, has been a description of how a particular society achieves this level of self-understanding.

The idea of the artefactuality takes here the form of a law of sociality without specifying the gift of exchange, but it only specifies the ritual well-being of the community. In doing so, the parables and hymns of belief acquire a kind of authenticity that spills into a larger realm of meaning of life than mere linguistic embeddedness of meanings. For example, a strange illness believed to be induced by ancestral spirits, called *Iigii-Lirung* among the Apatanis is believed to be incurable by modern medicine, as it is a sickness of the soul. Therefore, the cure comes from praying to ancestors and by offering them sacrifices. The whole conception of illness in terms of sickness of the soul is not merely bodily one, but it is supposed to be curable only by way of rituals that modern doctors cannot perform. This emphasizes the healing role of the priests, thereby meaning the presence of ancestors in somebody's present life. Also this has deeper meaning dimension: it's not like a bodily cut, but an affect of the supernatural. This calls for special sacrifices such as sacrifice of castrated boar, which requires very special ways of performing the same. One sees here an act of drawing of a harmony between meanings, artefacts, rituals and other aspects of Apatani life that is made possible only by an exercise of beliefs and associated reasons with it. Part of the domain of belief also remains 'inarticulate', as there are no sufficient reasons that can fully explain the wisdom aspect of beliefs. In a similar vein, the Khasi notion of *Ka Rngiew* considered as innate personhood is embedded in the belief of being a human.

We can also extend the argument by positing that the inarticulate aspects of cultures are those that cannot be brought within linguistic articulation because of the 'limited' character of human language, and therefore the articulate aspects of a culture emanate from those deeper inarticulate features and aspects that remain embedded within the culture. Here one moves beyond the realm of reason and tries to discover something

that has not been properly articulated within the culture, yet without which the culture cannot be fully articulated. So the moot question is, can any culture ever articulate something that is intrinsically inarticulate and that which is part of its wisdom?

## In Lieu of a Conclusion

The dialectic between the 'inarticulate' and 'articulate' is concretized in a few foundational binary oppositions such as native and nation, civic and ethnic, underground and overground and so on. Such oppositions are sustained by a structure of correspondence between the Self and the Other without presenting a possibility of transformation. As an example of embeddedness of such a dialectic, one could locate in the language (1) the pre-ontic murmur, (2) prior contact with the Other, and (3) transformation of the natural world in interpretative uses of language. But such a combined functioning of what we call embeddedness in language is based on the condition of operation of practices, in terms of how language accesses these practices. Access to these practices does not happen as something prior to language that lies out there in the world but as an available representation of a concept, which is accessed in language to exhibit the original intentional experiences that present the referent instantiating the concept. This assumes the knowledge of conditions of assertibility by which the application of a concept would either be true or false. Such knowledge occurs in the specific context of a community that anthropologists establish through an intuitive knowledge of the Other. The radical alterity of the Other, which is the subject without alterity, appears with differentiating, non-relational and non-universal generality that produces discrete notions and concepts within culture, the value of which is contingent and undecidable. Embeddedness within language as a global notion becomes effective here without decidable and determinable value content, which makes the anthropologists' ascription of 'Otherness' possible.

It is this ascribed Otherness, from the point of view of ethnography's bare particulars, to a Khasi or an Apatani that a simultaneous assumption of stability of the subject in language and iterability of subject of language is constituted. The ethnographic-anthropological bias lies in a juridical

autonomy to construct their discursive subjects, as if such subjects are constituted by and in rules guiding their practices. Such subjects remain open to deconstruction of their assumed stability; rather they do not represent the truth of their lives by presenting them as mere candidates in a story of life. In case of assertion by smaller ethnic identities, it is not just repositioning themselves as ethnic elites, but it is also re-articulation against the dominant. Moving beyond affiliation, it sets a domain of articulation, a way to meet demands of democratization. Those who lose their non-representative power see it as an attempt of the 'Others' to reposition them. Therefore, they respond from a carefully designed strategy of ensuring their own power. The fear is that, if once given in, there will be other such occasions of those who had hitherto remained away from such assertions raising their voices. There is an expressed helplessness on such occasions from the rulers that be. It is at this moment that re-invoking old fault lines is blended and blurred by new alignments, and break-offs become a strategy of maintaining a potentially collapsing ideological hegemony.

In other words, clamour against political and economic inequality could be ideologically suppressed by the dominant, and this is what acts as the counterproductive mechanism in disarticulating the very peace process that is initiated in a given situation. Apart from such 'peace regime' types, the knowledge of peace assumes a distinct historical and cultural form. The knowledge is constituted phenomenologically by way of bracketing the non-textual connections with ground reality, which almost borders on an unrecognized ethnography of peoples of the region. Knowledge from such an ethnographic context holds the secrets of many an ethnic conflict, which epistemic-anthropological regimes overlook.

Contemporary state of India's North East can be best described as a state of 'rogue democracy' that stifles democratic action by those actors who draw up a narrow agenda of power. The continuation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, and the extermination by State and non-State actors constitute a different politics of self-preservation which is blind, self-directed and intransitive. Such a politics of self-preservation is a by-product of not just the weight of the world but it is also an instrumental end that serves a symbolic and ideological reproduction of the agenda of power. Power, in this context, is a mobile army of strategies, policies and interests that can relieve actors from reproducing themselves in their



lived experiences. There is a recovery of the agency not in the realm of actual acts of the subject, but in the realm of subjectivity that constitutes self-preservation subsumed by power. A 'politics of self-actualization' is presented in the economy of India's North East. The politics of self-actualization has its deeper ontological grounding on multiple economic and political strategies. The so-called Look East policy trumpeting a dream investment of ₹120,000 million in the next five years is one such deployment of ontology. Such a huge dose of public investment is a neoliberal strategy of inducing artificial demand in the market. When there is going to be soaring price rise due to recession in the national and the world economy, how can such artificial inducement of demand generate income and employment in the region? The plausibility of desirable consequences is now substituted by an artificial simulation of market demands that keeps politics of self-preservation going.

The promised impact of Look East policy on India's North East merely reduces the cultural and economic spaces of North East to a corridor through which mainland India's cherished dream of connecting itself with South East Asia is realized. Within the borders of the nation, clamour for rights of scheduled tribes, their access to higher education, industry and employment are all put up as items of a giant leap that enlightens the episcopo of development. The freedom of each of the collective group identities must have the freedom to choose their paths of self-development. If neo-liberal policies of the State subject such fundamental freedom to the vagaries of market, it builds up a 'structural violence' of institutions. Governments, institutions and agencies appropriate and monopolize the space of development as if they are authorized to replace peoples' expressions of choices. If such institutions engage themselves in these fractured terrains of the social space by prioritizing one group's proclaimed interest over others, it ends up shrinking liberties to the pre-decided set of economic and political options.

What is probably needed at this point of time is a steady conceptualization of various shifts that have happened within India's North East due to external interventions. The problematique of State versus Insurgency and its gradual dissolution in a development paradigm that alters the very social space needs to be conceptualized. Given the above description of the very idea of the 'social' that effectively leads us to a deterritorialization of the idea of the 'social' poses fresh theoretical challenges in understanding the transition from local to the global in India's North East.

The transition can be characterized as the North East being thrown overboard 'outside itself' (it was trying to claim independence and/or trying to become one with nation) as if it belongs to the Other, the South East—it is no longer itself, a strategy of exteriorization, you see what happens to your core by withdrawing as an 'onlooker'. As an 'onlooker', you are nothing but an already appropriated subject who has merged her self with the 'global'. A new faith of sovereignty is generated through the catered ideas by negating roles of rationality, freedom and choice. Seemingly, political freedom is no longer essential for informed economic choices, as choices are already given as 'options'. One needs to opt for and not choose with a definite sense of determination and satisfaction. This recalls Marx's description of advancement of Capital through concentration that purges out the region into the global and redeems it as a 'fiction'.

India's Look East policy reduces the actual process of choosing as a 'look beyond'. The look 'connects' India's North Eastern borderlands with South East Asian markets. It presents a complicated mechanism of 'maintenance of national boundary' and its 'suspension' necessitating a 'theoretical' linkage between 'deterritorialization' and 'logistics of global capital'. Look East policy's endorsement of trans-Asian highways, sub-regional integration between India's North East and South East Asia, a common currency within ASEAN, etc., is supposed to also play the role of binding diverse cultural identities within a South East Asian landscape. Remembrance of historical migration of most of North East Indian tribes from South East Asia and the Second World War memory of building 'roads' through Myanmar is *converted* into a 'cultural consumption' of free-market South East Asian economy. *Does it capture the imagination of being 'truly Asian', a deterritorializing effect of substituting what is 'truly Indian' or 'other Asian'?*

In this flow of developing situations that is so diverse and plural as forms of reality that any singular, coherentist and instrumental framework may prove to be just inadequate. The task before Social Sciences is neither an exploration into the tragicomic reality of the Commons nor is it an arrival at a prescriptive–altruist understanding of the 'emergent'. It should always give rise to a surplus of meanings such that Social Sciences explore meaning-constitutive processes in terms of ideas, reasons and ideologies that go into making of an event. For example, peace processes in a war-ravaged and insurgency-ridden area of India's North East need to involve the voices from within people, rather than finding an expert solution. As

people themselves take part in making their own history and deciding what is right and wrong, Social Sciences, in a true sense make a return to its ground realities. This will require a careful interpretation of 'social facts', especially the possibilities of mutual implication between communities and cultures, a task so arduously generated within the liberal–democratic framework without initiatives of 'doing' it. Social Sciences have to do it, instead of merely representing and distantiating itself as an 'objective' Science. It has to unburden itself from its fatigued frames and throw itself in the open dynamics of a social churning without pre-theoretical underpinnings.

## Notes

1. Franz Boas, *Methods of Cultural Anthropology*, Free Press Ed. (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1966), pp. 260–269.
2. This understanding of a culture emanates from J. G. Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy (The Collected Works of James G. Frazer)*, 1st edition, (London: Routledge, 2000). Totems are often treated as 'father', but it is given a maternal identity in consonance with the cultural norms prevalent in a society.
3. Claude Levi-Strauss, *Totemism*, trans. from the French by Rodney Needham, 11th printing (Boston MA: Beacon Press, 1963), pp. 2–3.
4. Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1966), pp. 16–17.
5. Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Mythologies*, vol. 1, trans. from the French by John and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1969), pp. 279.
6. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Revised 4th edition by P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Company, 2009):276. Section 445 says, 'It is in language that an expectation and its fulfilment make contact.'
7. Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, op. cit., p. 97.
8. Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Human Sciences', in *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, eds Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1970), pp. 247–272.
9. George E. Marcus, *Critical Anthropology Now: Unexpected Contexts, Shifting Constituencies and Changing Agendas* (Santa Fe, School of American Research Press, 1999), pp. 7–9.
10. Donald L. Donham, *History, Power, Ideology: Central Issues in Marxism and Anthropology*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999).
11. Takhe Kani, *Socio-Religious Ceremonies of the Apatanis of Arunachal Pradesh*, 1st ed. (Itanagar: Frontier Publishers and Distributors, 1996), pp. 4–5.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29.
14. G. Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 47–48. Agamben argues that experience of the limits of language,

- that is, a vision of language that does not presuppose a community as the end of language can give rise to the idea of a community that is formless. This is not to exclude those meanings of life that are not accommodable within a 'form of life'.
15. Artefacts are not 'objects' that could be perceived with an end or purpose, but they could just be understood as ties, links or connections between community and language. The functions played by artefacts are another bricolage that prefigures social relations in silence. Meaning here does not coincide with the artefacts, but emerges after they perform their bricoleur functions.
  16. Takhe Kani, op. cit., p. 35–36.
  17. Ibid., p. 36.
  18. There is a detailed description of such a practice of sacrifice and related myths in Ibid., p. 34.
  19. I draw this point from a conversation with Prof. Mrinal Miri. According to him, although there are ways of distinguishing wise decisions from unwise ones in every culture, but this distinction is not wholly articulable. Wisdom, therefore, remains inarticulate or rather inexpressible.
  20. Quoted in Verrier Elwin, *Myths of the North East Frontier of India*, Directorate of Research, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar, 1993 (1958 [1st edn], 1968 [2nd edn]), pp. 299–300.
  21. Ibid., p. 300.
  22. Takhe Kani, op. cit., p. 21.
  23. Ibid.
  24. During the celebration of *Myoko*, the sacrifice of pig and boars is conducted after taking the assent of Gods, and if the assent is not readily obtained, the sacrifice is postponed for the right omen. This whole exercise shows a phenomenon like 'not quite taking place of a sacrifice' in the very act of sacrifice, rather it takes place in a good omen, which is an assumption of establishment of a sense of time over place that neutralizes the affect of violence attached to an act of sacrifice. But the whole thing happens without the determination of a place, and it happens in chants and recitations, which are iterations for the omen. Therefore, texts of such chants do not really affirm good omen, but only yearning, a prayer to ancestors and gods.
  25. Takhe Kani, op. cit., p. 147. The next note explains the meaning of the hymn.
  26. Ibid.
  27. Franson Manjali, op. cit., p. 84, n.11.
  28. Ibid., p. 87, n. 35.
  29. Maurice Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift*, trans. Nora Scott (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 10–11.

## 2

# God, Good and Evil

## *A Philosophical Perspective*

V. Prabhu

This chapter tries to explore the relationship of good and evil with respect to God. Almost all religions and cultures have one or the other concept of evil as they have one or the other conception of God and good. But how do they reconcile the presence of good with evil within the purview of God? How do different religions try to understand and place the presence of evil in the world created by God? It is a problem faced by all the religions. Perhaps, different religions have different answers, but which of their answers are coherent? And how much does religion satisfy human rationale to questions similar to evil and other religious practices that people follow. Perhaps, that is the yardstick, which earlier anthropologists maintained in judging the supremacy of one religion over the other. Should coherence be taken as the sign of progress of the respective religion? Is not consistency and coherency a problem in other theologies as well? Instead of consistency, rather all religions are to be looked at as having a common concern for alleviating the sufferings of human beings through an appeal to something supernatural. I conclude that perhaps if we take the standard for understanding religion, not that of its rational appeasement, but its attempt to divinize humans, there is a shared commonness amongst all its religion, be it tribal or primitive or speculative religions. I try to show this through a philosophical discussion of the problem of 'evil'.

Almost all religions and cultures have one or the other concept of evil as they have one or the other conception of God and good. Theologians, philosophers and thinkers were/are all perturbed with the concept of

evil, maybe far more than they are perturbed with the concept of good and God:

It is not surprising that every major worldview, whether religious or secular, offers some understanding of the presence of evil. Historically, the 'problem of evil' has been a serious difficulty for theistic believers who want to square their lofty claims about God's perfect power, knowledge and goodness with claims about evil in the world.<sup>1</sup>

But, the idea of evil has crept in almost all the cultures, and the reason is also quite obvious. 'Pain, suffering, disease, deformity, injustice, catastrophe and many other negative features of our world perplex us and demand understanding.'<sup>2</sup> So, in order to give an 'answer' to these unwanted events that happen to us, we landed upon the idea of 'evil'. Evil as a supernatural force is available throughout cultures. In the North East for example, amongst the Adi tribe, there is a belief that while the earth was created, it was unstable because of one evil spirit.<sup>3</sup> The Bokars tribe believe that there are two kinds of spirits—beneficent and maleficent spirits.<sup>4</sup> Similar is the case with other tribes like Nyishis<sup>5</sup> and many others. Perhaps understanding nature through supernatural forces is part of the ancient cultures, which was noticed by Frazer, and hence he remarks:

If then we consider, on the one hand, the essential similarity of man's chief wants everywhere and at all times, and on the other hand, the wide difference between the means he has adopted to satisfy them in different ages, we shall perhaps be disposed to conclude that the movement of the higher thought, so far as we can trace it, has on the whole been from magic through religion to science.<sup>6</sup>

Earlier anthropologists were of the view that tribes' belief system lacked the rationale element in their religion. So, one way of 'developing' them is to bring the element of 'reason' in their faith and practices, maybe through conversion. Conversion, by itself is a contentious issue, which I do not want to discuss in this chapter, but still, one can find this as a very important issue in the religious life and practices of the tribes. Conversion to 'alien' religion from their traditional indigenous religion for varied reasons like social, cultural, political, etc., is one of the problems associated with tribal religions.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the converts and other members of the group see the local, indigenous religion as crude and unsophisticated practices.<sup>8</sup>

Generally, a primitive religion is differentiated from a systematic religion by the absence of its theology. A lack of systematic attempt to rationalize the beliefs and practices and not-so-rich philosophical speculations in terms of their metaphysical positions are those that mark the difference between, say, a local, indigenous religion and grand, systematic and institutionalized religions like Hinduism, Christianity, etc.

One way to sort out this problem is to try and show that the local, indigenous religions also do hold theories like systematic religions in order to keep them on par with the grand religions. One may succeed or fail, but again the attempt here is to rationalize their beliefs and practices. Though I do not want to vouch for all the practices that tribal religious people follow, but it may not be encouraging to see the other religions from the perspective of appeal to rationality in all their practices and customs. Moreover, whether the grand religions by themselves have sufficiently reasoned out their beliefs and practices is subject to discussion. But, by and large, almost all religions themselves have problems with their respective theology and theodicy. By taking one concept of religion, 'evil', I try to show how even for the sophisticated religions, consistently explaining the 'evil' is a big problem.

It is very difficult to reconcile the existence of evil when God exists. How is it possible that God being all-powerful, all-loving can accommodate evil to exist in His world? As a matter of fact, even the very thought of evil existing in His world is something going against the will of God. In that case, then how is it possible for evil to exist? Now, we can see that the existence of 'good' is not as such a problem for a mundane human being because that is part and parcel of God's existence. But the existence of 'evil' is a problem.

Thinkers, perhaps from almost all cultures would have tried to answer this long-standing issue. The answers could be in the nature of logical or/and evidential. Logical answers try to establish that there is not much of incoherence in maintaining that God as well as evil exist, whereas evidential answers often try to justify and substantiate God's actions in spite of the world of suffering that we experience. Logical arguments from evil contends:

[T]heism is irrational because it includes an inconsistent set of beliefs—the belief that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good, as well as the belief that evil exists in God's created world. Critics, such as David Hume,

and J. L. Mackie, charge that these two beliefs are inconsistent with one another and thus that both together cannot be rationally accepted. This is purely a logical point about the coherence of theism.<sup>9</sup>

While there are theologians who argue and debate for the logical consistency for God and evil to exist, there are also thinkers who seek to explain why God allows evil in this world:

Theistic thinkers, past and present, such as Augustine, Aquinas, Gottfried Leibniz, and Richard Swineburne, have all made important contributions to theodicy. These visions involve one or more of these kinds of themes: Evil is an inherent potential of free will, builds character, provides meaningful contrast to good, prepare us for heaven, is part of our development as imperfect creatures, and so forth.<sup>10</sup>

Though it may not be possible for me to read all their respective thoughts, I will try to categorize them in a specific way so that we can have an overall picture of their claims and positions. Of course, when I try to do this, it will be too much of a generalization which we should keep in mind, and it is given to additions/alterations.

Let us confine ourselves to religious cultures. That is, those segments of people who are having one religion or the other in their lifeworld. They are the people who will be worried about the existence of 'evil' along with the existence of God. For atheists, God doesn't exist, evil perhaps exists, since God doesn't! But for theists, it is not a cakewalk. Because there is God, how can evil exist? And worse still, if there is no evil, what is the purpose of salvation, liberation, etc.

Hence, all through the thought process, religious thinkers were trying to understand evil and how it can be placed within the sphere of God. So, if we see the possible combinations which they can think of with respect to good and evil, they may have the following possibilities.

Possibilities	Good	Evil
1.	Exists	Exists
2.	Exists	Doesn't exist
3.	Doesn't exist	Exists
4.	Doesn't exist	Doesn't exist



Now, we see that out of the four combinations of good and evil, religious thinkers should choose any one of these. Some religions like Zoroastrianism choose option one—for them good as well as evil exist. This will give rise to two powers existing parallel in this world. One is an entity with the power of good and the other is an entity with the power of evil. Option three is ruled out for theists as they cannot imagine a world where no good exists but only evil. So, often theologians take either option two or option four. While option two asserts the existence of good and not evil, option four denies the existence of absolute good and evil.

If we see option two, which talks of existence of good and not of evil, it is to be made a coherent one. One issue is how is it possible to have only good and not evil? The reason is that if evil is non-existing, so should good as one is dependent on the other for its existence. If good has to have any meaning, it is with respect to evil. If we do not have the concept as well as the linguistic usage of 'evil', how are we to have the concept and the usage of 'good'? If evil is taken to be something supernatural to the world, similarly good should also be taken to be supernatural.

Against the above-mentioned idea, we have option four which denies the absolute existence of good as well as evil. This may seem logically fine, but what about God then? What is the nature of God? Often answers to the description of such a God come in the negative, as the Advaitins (non-dual metaphysicians) hold. Alternatively, God is indescribable, who is referred to in the Upanisadas as *Brahman*.

So, if we see from all the four possibilities, we encounter the 'evil' problem in an unresolved way. As mentioned, the argument—be it logical or evidential—is still quite far from giving a convincing answer as to why 'evil' should exist in this world. The same problem is faced by every other religion with sophisticated arguments in trying to justify their particular position. In that case, which way are we to think about religion and religious practices? Should it be that all religious principles and practices need to be corroborating with logic and facts? Or does religion by itself have certain other functions to perform?

In this context, let me bring in Wittgenstein's idea on religion and religious practices. His thought shall perhaps throw some light on understanding religious beliefs in a different way. Wittgenstein felt that religious principles and practices need not be understood in a scientific, historical or logical sense. It has a different function to perform.

Throughout his later works, Wittgenstein attempted to show that the utterances within religion must be understood as moves within a distinctive system of thought and language. The proof of a religious belief lies in the commitment with which a religious believer alters his life. Wittgenstein is quoted in this regard as follows:

Suppose somebody made this guidance for this life: believing in the Last Judgement. Whenever he does anything, this is before his mind. In a way, how are we to know whether to say he believes this will happen or not. Asking him is not enough. He will probably say he has proof. But he has what you might call an unshakable belief. It will show, not by reasoning or by appeal to ordinary grounds for belief, but rather by regulating for all in his life.<sup>11</sup>

A man may be said to believe that the world will come to an end in 2000 years' time without being affected in any distinct way by his belief. But if he is said to have a religious belief in the Last Judgement or any other religious doctrine, then it is implied that what he believes affects him deeply. It is always before his mind and regulates his life.

In order to substantiate his views, Wittgenstein probes further to bring the practices of religion as expressing one's feelings and emotions. He wants to drive the point home that claiming cognitive explanations is uncalled for in religious language and religious practices, that is, in religious 'form of life'. For Wittgenstein, the essence of religion lies in the form of the religious life and not in the logical or factual content or in the 'results' (scientifically understood) of that life. He likened the ritual of religion to a great gesture like kissing a photograph. When a person kisses a photograph, it is not the case that the person in the photograph will feel the kiss or return it, or is it based on any other belief. Here, Wittgenstein uses the idea that those actions are to be considered as the way of expressing one's feelings. It is an expression of one's feelings, for example, to burn an effigy or kiss the picture of a loved one. This is obviously not based on a belief that it will have a definite effect on the object, which the picture represents. It aims at some satisfaction and it achieves it. Or rather, it does not aim at anything; we act in this way and then feel satisfied.<sup>12</sup> We have emotions, and we feel like discharging our emotions in certain ways—be it pain, anger, joy, sadness. But how can we have causal connections for expressing our emotions?

When I am furious about something, I sometimes beat the ground or a tree with my walking stick. But I certainly do not believe that the ground is to be blamed or that my beating can help anything. 'I' am venting my anger. And all rites are of this kind.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, we have seen that the meaning of religious statements are attitudinal (expressive) and not cognitive. We can see that a non-cognitivist approach fosters a better and considerate understanding of religious beliefs and practices. The intelligibility and justification of a religious belief consist in the way in which it works in the life of the believers.

While Wittgenstein's work is associated with religious language, beliefs and practices in general, the same idea could be applied to the specific instance of understanding the idea of 'evil'. I have shown that howsoever we try to understand evil, in a cognitive manner, we have to fall in any of the four options given above and hardly any of them could give a convincing answer to the problem of 'evil'. As mentioned, it is quite difficult for any religion to satisfactorily provide grounds for the existence of 'evil'. Even if some religio-theological framework does give us a convincing answer to the problem of evil, a question that very well remains is—what do we want from that religious doctrine?

Again, my intention is not to prove that all religions unsatisfactorily try to explain evil, but rather, I intend to say that any religion perhaps may not be intended for such a purpose, for religion works more with faith than reason. Be it tribal or indigenous or systematic religion, their purpose is to alleviate human sufferings with a strong binding with divinity. Instead of seeing whether the particular religious concepts are naïve or sophisticated, let us try to see how the religious beliefs help humans in their betterment of their life. Perhaps every religion comes out with the concept of God, good and evil not just to maintain a theology that maintains consistency and coherency, but more so in regulating the human's life and his or her attitude towards the world they live in.

## Notes

1. Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruch Reichenbach and David Basinger (eds), *Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 289.
2. Ibid.

3. Tagang Taki, 'Adi Mythological Belief—How Did the Cosmic World Came into Existence', in *Understanding Tribal Religions*, eds Tamo Mibang and Sarit K. Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2004), p. 97.
4. Bikash Banerjee, 'Religious Beliefs and Practices among the Bokars of Arunachal Pradesh', in *Understanding Tribal Religions*, eds Tamo Mibang and Sarit K. Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2004), pp. 145–146.
5. N. Rikam, 'The Faith and Philosophy of the Nyishis', in *Understanding Tribal Religions*, eds Tamo Mibang and Sarit K. Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2004), pp. 178–181.
6. J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), p. 711, <http://www.bartleby.com/196/pages/page711.html> (accessed on 22 February 2010).
7. Nani Bath, 'Religious Beliefs and Practices of the Apatanis in Transition', pp. 199–208; Jagdish Lal Dawar, 'Religious conversion and contending responses', pp. 159–171; Tako Davi, 'Relevance of Tribal Religion', pp. 9–17 in *Understanding Tribal Religions*, eds Tamo Mibang and Sarit K. Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2004).
8. Nani Bath, 'Religious Beliefs and Practices of the Apatanis in Transition', in *Understanding Tribal Religions*, eds Tamo Mibang and Sarit K. Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2004), p. 206.
9. Michael Peterson et al., ed., *Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 290.
10. Ibid.
11. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* (California: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 53–54.
12. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, trans. R. Rhees (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979), p. 72.
13. Ibid.