

A Tribal Theology From A Tribal World – View

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Tribal theology in India is in the making. There are more or less three approaches to tribal world-view evident in Tribal theologians while theologising. First is the approach of contextualisation and Indigenisation represented by senior thinkers like Nirmal Minz and the late Renty Keitzer. Here the suggestion given is for adaptation of the Tribal cultural values. The second approach takes a perspective that the gospel-values are already present in the Tribal culture and world view. For example, Timotheos Hembrom would hold that the Santhal creation stories are in line with the Genesis creation stories. The third approach insists that a Tribal Christian theology has to emerge from a tribal world-view. The space-centred tribal world-view contributes to the very content of Tribal theology. The younger creative theologian A. Wati Longchar is a major exponent of this approach. We briefly cover these approaches and their outcome in this paper. The first section is on some important characteristics of Tribal religion. Space-centred world view is the focus of section two. The third section deals with the myths of creation as well as understanding of land and Supreme Being. A reconception of Christian theology is attempted in the fourth section. The fifth section discusses contextualisation and indigenisation. Gospel-values which can be identified within Tribal culture is analysed in the sixth section and the seventh and last section provides our concluding observations.

1. Some Important Characteristics of Tribal Religion

The key characteristics of Tribal Religion are identified as the following¹:

- (a) There is an absence of any written scripture in Tribal religion. It is the religion of oral traditions. It is the religion of corporate 'memory' passed on from generations. Religious rituals, teachings and principles are transmitted orally from one generation to another.
- (b) No human-made images or temples are used for worship of the Divine. Natural objects are accepted as symbols of the divine presence and adoration and oblations are given seasonally. Life-cycles, birth, marriage and death, and annual cycles of major seasons and changes of nature accordingly form an integral part of occasional and seasonal festivals and scarifies.
- (c) A *nature-human spirit continuum* is the key to the tribal vision of life. All religious rites, observances, festivities are based on this holistic vision of reality. Tribal religion

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accepts the integral relationships of nature, humans and spirit in their experiences. The Tribal totem is one of the concrete examples of this continuum.

- (d) Another important characteristic of Tribal religion is the worship of ancestors. Ancestors are part of the life of those who are alive and they are interested in the welfare of the living. The Tribals offer grains of rice at the beginning of their meal to the ancestors and the faith is that they partake of the meal with the living ones.

2. A World-View in which space (the totality of creation) is Central

Today's ecological and human survival crises, particularly of the poor and marginalised are the product of the anthropocentric ideology. The tribals who live and work close to the soil are the worst affected community.² The tribal religion is very unique because of the affirmation of the centrality of space in understanding all realities.³ The distinctiveness of tribal tradition lies in affirming the centrality of land/creation or space as the foundation for understanding the tribal people's culture, identity, personhood and religious ethos.⁴ Tribal theology seeks liberation of whole humanity and God's creation. The distinctiveness here is, liberation is sought from the perspective of 'space'; space meaning not mere natural objects outside of us, rather a place, a sacred place which gives us an identity and sustenance.⁵ Tribal people always understand themselves as an integral part of creation/land and not apart from it. The issue of 'space' is not merely a justice issue to be set alongside other justice concerns. Rather it is the foundational theology of self-understanding out of which liberation, justice, and then peace will flow naturally and necessarily.⁶ Harmony with 'space' is the starting point of the tribal people's spirituality and their search for liberation. An awareness of being one with the whole of creation is the spiritual foundation of the tribal people.⁷

In the tribal world view space is the basis of all realities. Realities are not perceived dualistically. There is no clear cut distinction between sacred and secular, between religion and non-religions etc. The self of the Supreme Being is seen in space and not in history. We cannot perceive the Supreme Being apart from space. The earth is the focal point of reference for tribal religion, not any historical person. Creation is the scripture and creed, there is no written scripture and creed other than that.⁸ If in the dominant Christian traditions, humanity is the central point of reference and norm, creation is the key and central point of reference and norm in the tribal worldview. The whole reality, including humanity, the Supreme Being and the spirit or spirits are approached from the perspective of creation. In short, while the doctrine of creation is subordinate category in the main line Christian traditions, 'space' is the central for understanding all realities in the tribal worldview.⁹

Christian theological responses¹⁰ such as process, the eco-feminist and justice, peace and integrity of creation seem to view reality mainly from the anthropocentric perspective and not from the perspective of space itself. That is why, for them, the integrity of creation is one of the agenda along with other justice concerns. Humanity and their liberation is the central focus. Liberation of creation follows when humanity liberation. For example, the eco-feminists though they see the oppression of women and eco-justice and one whole, their main thrust is liberation of women. The justice, peace and integrity of creation process also approaches the issue of creation in the same way. Human liberation is placed as the central concern, making tribals, dalits and women as object of liberation.¹¹ In these different Christian responses, the tribal or indigenous people's view of space is not integrated. An insensitive

attitude towards the rich space-centred spirituality of the tribal people within the ecumenical family, gives an impression that all the Christian theologies of space are approached from the perspective of the western progressive and linear interpretation of history and philosophy. The theologies of space developed within the ecumenical family are not directly relevant to respond to the aspirations and the problems of the tribal people. Unless the perspective of space-centred spirituality of the tribal people is made a central focus in our effort to develop a theology of space, a genuine understanding of interrelatedness of creation may not be attained.¹²

3. Myths of Creation, Understanding of Land and Supreme Being

For the Tribal people space understood as totality of creation is the point of reference and the key to understanding human selfhood and liberation, God and spirit. Tribal myths of creation, their understanding of land and Supreme Being point to this.¹³ The creation myths tell us that reality is one coherent whole. Everything is organically related to each other. All creatures, including the Supreme Being and the spirits mutually affect each other. Though the Supreme Being and spirits are understood as creators and sustainers of all living things, they are also perceived, though distinct, as part of the total eco-system. In the tribal worldview, humans, nature, animals and insects have the same ancestral roots and therefore, they have a personal and social relationship. Animals participate in decision making; they too possess a strong sense of discernment and a sense of gratitude. Humans are integral part of creation and not above creation. People, the world and divinity form one family. Hence, humanity loses the status of primacy and dominion over other creatures. The myths reveal that we cannot separate creation, humanity and religion. It is not possible to understand the religious meaning of the people without referring to space. Creation is life, a scripture and a treasure of all knowledge. The love and wisdom of the Supreme Being are mediated through creation. People derive moral and spiritual teaching and wisdom from it, and make use of it in their daily life.¹⁴

The land occupies a very central place in the tribal worldview. Land is perceived as sacred and co-creator with God. It is the land that owns people and gives them an identity. It is the temple through which people become one with the Supreme Being, their ancestors, the spirits and other segment of creation. The land belongs to the Supreme Being. Human ownership of the land is only temporary. The Supreme Being is 'the real soil' (*Lijaba*). The Supreme Being is the one who enters or indwells, into the soil (*Lizaba*). The Supreme Being is believed to enter into the soil with the seeds and rise again along with the crops. Thus the blooming flowers and rice signify the presence of the Supreme Being. The whole creation is the manifestation of the Supreme Being. Without the land the Supreme Being ceases to work. The land is the symbol of unity of all living creatures and the spirit and the Supreme Being. The land is not a mere space to be exploited, but it is a place which gives identity to the community; it owns people. Without the land, there is no personhood and identity. The land is the symbol of unity. The land holds not only the clan, village and tribe as one, but it also unites the Supreme Being, spirits, ancestors and creation as one family. Without the land, it is impossible for people to co-exist with other living beings, with their ancestor and their creator. Land is conceived as mother. Most of the tribes have myths that they are born out of the earth, that their foreparents emerged from stones or from a big hole of the earth or from the bowel of the earth.¹⁵

The tribals experience time and history as related to the land. The land decides and creates the time and history. They count time according to their activities related to the soil. Unlike the western linear concept of time, the tribal people experience time in a circular way. People move along with the soil or earth cycle and surrounding environment. All the festivals and religious activities of the people are centred on the soil cycle. People expect the years to come and go in an endless rhythm, like that of day and night, and like the waning and waxing of the moon. They also expect the events of the rainy season, planting, sowing, harvesting, dry seasons, rainy season, planting, sowing, harvesting, dry seasons, rainy season again, and so on, to continue forever. The axis of the concept of time is the celebration of nature's life-cycle. All the year round, just as the vegetation and agriculture are rotated, the religious and other social aspects of life follow the same pattern. The rhythm of the cycles of the universe, the sun and the seasons recapitulates the cycle of human life as it moves from birth of death. Hence, the whole patten of history and time concept, for the tribals, is cyclic. It is centred on the soil. It is embedded in nature. It is the nature/the soil that creates history and time and humans move alongwith the rhythm of nature. Therefore, when the surrounding environment is destroyed, the tribals do not have time. They are left in a vacuum. People do not know what to do. Hence, the tribal concept of history and time is inter-linked to and rooted in creation.¹⁶

The whole religious system is centred and deeply rooted on the land itself. The religious practices, rituals, ceremonies, festivals and dance are all related to the land. The whole pattern of the tribal religious milieu moves with the soil. The pattern of the tribal people's social, ethical, economic life is directly related to the soil. The understanding of land provides an ethical basis of sharing, caring and responsible stewardship. The land is not a disputable property because it does not belong to humans. Land, according to the Tribal perspective, cannot be commercialised, rather should be preserved and protected for the future generations. Also, it should be shared by all in the village.¹⁷

Without minimising the transcendence of God, the Tribal people, for example the Aos, affirm His/Her immanence. *Lijaba* signifies the mundane nature of God, while *Lungkistsüngba* denotes the transcendence of God and *Meyutsüngba* expresses the omnipresence of God.¹⁸ *Lijaba* is the gust at home as well as one who indwells the earth. The Supreme Being then comes, dines and stays with us providing and attending to all our needs. *Lijaba* is regarded as one of the family members. *Lijaba* is also the earth-entering Supreme Being. *Lijaba* enters the earth with the seeds and rises again along with the crops. *Lijaba* is one who protects, upholds, sustains and gives life to all; one who created and continues to created the earth. Thus, all creation is a manifestation of the Supreme Being. The whole world is the Supreme Being's temple. Creation reveals the mysteries of the Supreme Being and the Supreme Being speaks to people through space. God is seen as actively present in all creation. The wind, the sun, the trees, the rivers, all signify the presence of the Supreme Being.¹⁹

4. A Reconception of Christian Theology

The space-centred worldview demands us to reconceive Christian theology in a new way. By the affirmation of space as the central point of reference in Christian theology, we conceive our vision of God-world-human relationship in a distinct way:

- (a) God is conceived here as the one who is organically related to the whole of creation. Though God is a distinct and transcendental being, God is also an integral part of creation. Without the land and creation God ceases to be God; God ceases to work and reveal. God becomes inactive without creation. This idea rules out a conception of God as monarch who rules the world from above imposing his divine laws or a God who is detached from the world. Since God is an integral part of creation, God suffers pain when creation suffers.²⁰
- (b) Such an understanding of God leads us to conceive Christ in a new way. Christ is no longer the one who works in the hearts of the believers alone. Rather the incarnate one is organically related to the total eco-system. Jesus shares His Being with the whole created order. Since Jesus Christ is an integral part of creation, all parts of creation are now reconciled to Christ. The incarnation of God in Jesus represents God's entry into finite space. It marks the concretion of all the hope for a land of peace, security and plenty. The event of Jesus Christ re-establishes the reality of 'sapce'.²¹
- (c) Here the Holy Spirit is reconceived as one who works not only in the hearts of the believes, but also in the whole creation. Holy Spirit sustains all creation. Holy spirit inspired all and speaks to all including animals and plants. It is the Spirit that makes all living possible and dynamic. Nothing exists without the work of the Holy Spirit. Since the Spirit enlivens the whole creation, nature and history becomes not only one whole reality, but dynamic and real.²²
- (d) The space-centred theology redefines personal, other worldly salvation. Since the self of the Supreme Being is seen in creation and humans are an integral part of it, humans attain redemption only in relation to the rest of creation. Salvation is a reality which can be experienced authentically here and now. A redeemed person is the one who lives in harmony not only with fellow beings, but also with the mother earth, God and spirit.²³
- (e) Nature and history here becomes integrally related. They are one whole. A space-centred vision of reality widens our perception of history. Creation becomes the basic component of the interpretation of history. One cannot interpret history without the land, trees, animals, flowers and spirit. It demands that human history is to be studied within the context of the totality of creation. It means that God must be conceived of not only as God of history but also as God of creation. In other words, history belongs not to the intelligent beings, but also to the whole of creation.²⁴
- (f) A space-centred theology enables us to see ourselves as an integral part of the macro-organism. Humans cease to be true humans without God, creatures and land. Living in harmony within the organic whole is the basis for authentic human existence. This view rules out the notion that elevates intellectual and rational nature as superior to other creatures.²⁵
- (g) A space-centred theology, brings about a radical change in our attitude and use of the natural resources. It demands a reciprocal use of natural resources. Since the whole earth is God's body and our mother the use of the earth's resources becomes an ecological sacrament for us. Space-centred theology demands a corresponding life-style and attitude.²⁶

- (h) A space centred theology enables us to conceive the church as an integral part of the Supreme Being and the earth. The church is God's micro-cosmos. We cannot therefore narrowly confine the mission of the church to human world alone. It opens us to the whole of God's cosmos; its transformation, which is God's cosmic mission.²⁷

5. Contextualisation/Indigenisation

A tacit process of contextualisation and indigenisation has been going on automatically since the beginning of Christianity in different parts of North-East India. The following are pointed out as some concrete examples : Many churches have adapted in its structure the traditional village-state polity which is democratic and representative. Secondly, Christian hymns and songs are set on a blend of western gospel music and local tunes. Thirdly, people's dress and costume in the villages are typically local. Fourth, many of the customs and practices such as marriage and inheritance, property and land ownership are retained without any change. Fifth, the exposition of sermons and Bible studies of village pastors and evangelists are characteristically local.²⁸

Many of the traditional values and virtues are already practised in the daily living of the people in interpreting Christian way of life. For example the Mizo concept of *tlawmngaihna* is the traditional code of morals and social manners, which foster basic ethical values and virtues such as skills, simplicity, honesty, integrity, courage, self-discipline, mutual help, good social manners, and soon. The Ao Naga term *sobaliba* comes close to *tlawmngaihna*. Similarly, the other people in North-East India have their own social mores and code of morals. The idea of tribal solidarity or communitarian life, institution of dormitory establishment like *Morung, Zawlbuk, Nokpantes, Mora*, etc. are all meaningfully adapted in Christian understanding of fellowship (*koinonia*) in the church. Above all, certain traditional religious ideas such as concepts of God, Supreme Spirit, spirits, relationship of humans and supernatural beings and animals, and the world around them, are meaningfully transformed and used in interpreting the Christian idea of God, Holy spirit, Trinity, ecology, etc.²⁹

It is claimed that the tribal world view is quite similar to the biblical view. A tribal person exists because others exist. The others are ancestors, the community, the created world and God. A person's existence is possible only in relation to his/her community including the ancestor and the created world, the trees, animals etc. as well as God and the spirits. Existence is a nexus of relatedness : God, humans, nature and spirit are organically related to one another. Only in this relatedness they find their true being and existence. The goal that a relevant church in India should strive towards achieving is the organic unity of all things in the human and material world, including all living beings. God has a plan to gather all things in His/Her Son Jesus Christ. The entire creation is groaning for redemption. A world view based on relationships of all things will open up new ways of looking at and understanding the realities in India and enable us to deal with it.³⁰

Tribes represent an egalitarian society in India. Men and women are treated as equal and work together in fields, sing and dance together in the open dancing ground as a community. They face life with song and dance. That the tribes were more open to the Gospel has to do with their world view. The relationship between the material, social and spiritual worlds is one of the key principles in the tribal worldview. The natural, the human and the supernatural are integrally intertwined with each other. There is a nature-human-spirit continuum in tribal

experience and thought. Their belief in ancestral spirits as part of the human society, and their observances of totems are key to their self-understanding.³¹

The indigenous people acknowledge their integral relationship with nature. The system of *gotra* is a affirmation of a direct relationship with plants, trees, birds and animals. The tribes have totems like *lakra* (tiger) *Kujur* (creeper), *toppo* (bird) and so on. The trees, animals and birds of this planet are directly related to humans. This relationship is maintained and expressed in two ways. One is, in the ordinary day to day life these totem animals, trees, birds and plants are respected and addressed in ways that honour them. Secondly, once in a year, a feast of the totem is prepared by the family to reinforce this integral and organic relationship with nature and natural beings.³²

The call is not to lose identity as tribal Christians. Rather what is needed is to bring the tribal world view to bear upon theological research and writing. For the indigenous people of the world, space is primary and time is secondary in their thinking. Land is life for the tribes of India. Ancestors are part of their social concept. Relations with all humans, natural objects and spirits around them constitute reality for the tribal mind. According to them we exist because we have a relationship with others and not because we think. There is a need to regain this worldview which is lost by the influence of the western Christian friends.³³

Dharme is the word used for God in the traditional Kundux (Oraon) religious ceremonies and practices and it means both male and female. In translation while finding a suitable word for God, to differentiate the Christian use from the traditional use, Christian Tribals have made simply a male God by adding an 's' to the end and made it Dharmes rather than Dharma. But the question is, why not use Dharme itself, which conveys the idea of both male and female?³⁴ Folk tales, folk songs and creation myths in tribal historical consciousness can be used for Christian theological interpretation. Jesus Christ as Saviour of the world can be interpreted through tribal culture. For example in the Munda Ashur Kahani (Ashur traditional story) and in Kudux folk tales there is the idea of a "suffering boy" sent by God to save the people from the terror and oppression of the Ashurs. This "suffering boy" (Khasra Kora-Mundari and Khasra-Khusru Kokkos-Kudux) comes and delivers human beings by sacrificing himself, by being put through the furnace of the Ashurs. But he did not die. He came out with a shining body as bright as gold.³⁵ Tribals take pride in being an egalitarian society. They claim that women and men work together, go to dance together must not be banned in the Christian church. Tribal communities have had women priestesses in their society and therefore women participation in the ordained ministry of the church is something natural for them.³⁶

Attempt has been made to discover how the ancient Santhal's worldview and belief system regarding the origin of creation and humankind help us in our understanding of the role and goal of humanity in today's world. This was done by exploring whether there is anything in common between the ancestral faith of the Santhals and the Judeo-Christian faith. The Santhal creation tradition represents *Thakur-Jiv*, *Malin Budhi* (i.e., Gosa Era), *Joher Era*, *Maran Buru* and aquatic creature as preexisting the world and humans. *Maran Buru*, *Jaher Era* and *Malin Budhi* are the national gods of the Santhals. They are revered as deities for their contribution to the creation and to the well being of humankind under *Thakur-*

Jiv's dispensation. The Santhal creation narrative as well as the two narrations of Genesis (P, *i.e.* Genesis 1.1-2.4a and J, *i.e.* Genesis 2.4b-3.24), all these narratives take for granted the existence of the creator God, who lives with other supreme beings who are subordinate to him. The nature of the creator God, the world view, and humanity's relationship with God as presented in the Santal creation narrative do not come into conflict in any big way with that presented in the first three chapters of Genesis. The difference between the three are not of theological motifs but of order and presentation, which is due to the human conditions in the midst of which the narratives were developed. Speaking from the Christian point of view, which holds Genesis chapters 1-3 as the doctrine of creation, the Santhals also hold the same faith as far as the first article of the Christian creed is concerned. But the Santhals are in an advantageous position as they transcend dogmatism and are more open to others.³⁷

6. The Gospel Values

The Indian tribal culture is egalitarian, democratic and eco-conscious. By virtue of imbibing this culture, we may be miraculously rediscovering some of the gospel values for the larger humanity. The tribal culture can contribute to resolve the tensions of modern culture arising out of extreme individualism, competition based on greed, consumerism which views earth as a commodity, consumption as a token of gratification and status and neo-colonialism based on the norm of survival of the fittest. The tribal economy is need based rather than greed based, which work on the principle of "small is beautiful." Tribal democracy is not based on the dominance of majority, but on the principle of concensus. Tribals justice is not based on blind law, but each case is executed in its context by the village community. Status is not based on a acquisition but on sharing and distribution of wealth. There is no caste distinction. They emphasise mutual help. Their sense or respect of nature, not as owners of it, but as caretakers are lessons to be learned by the modern advanced cultures. Tribal ideology precedes *sarvodaya*; it is socialism without its arbitrary and mechanical structure. An individual persons in it is defined in terms of community. Duty rather than right determines relation of individuals to the community. Their institutions social, political and religious are based on the principle of 'made for humans'. Their ideology of community does not deny the transcendent dimension of the self; it is a community of mutuality, each respecting the otherness of the other. Their society is not 'hierarchical' or 'patriarchal' but egalitarians. Thus we can say that the gospel values manifested in Jesus are already there in such a Tribal culture of India; we need only to rediscover them.³⁸

An assertion can be made that Dalits and Tribals are the indigenous or *adi* people oppressed nationally in India. A pan Indian political ideology of the indigenous people may be able to bridge the gap between the Dalits and Tribals. The tribal consciousness of an egalitarian society in which there is community ownership of means of production, distribution according to needs, democratic form of government and consensus in decision-making process, can contribute to the formation of an ideology of the *adi* people in their struggle for liberation in India. Both the tribals and dalits are oppressed nationally in India and their consciousness is also that of anger, protest and rejection of the existing socio-economic, political and religious order. Thus with certain elements of distinction, there is the possibility for a common dalit-tribal theology.³⁹

7. Conclusion

From the above discussion, we arrive at the following findings :

- (a) The distinctive characteristics of Tribal religion include the absence of written scripture, as well as human made images or temples. Oral tradition is in prominence and Natural objects are accepted as symbols of the divine. Also, a nature-human-spirit continuum is the key to the tribal vision of life. The worship of the ancestors is emphasized.
- (b) In the tribal worldview space in the sense of totality of creation is the basis of all realities. If in the dominant Christian traditions, humanity is the central point of reference and norm, creation is the key and central point of reference and norm in the tribal worldview. The whole reality, including humanity, the Supreme Being and Spirit or spirits are approached from the perspective of creation. The trees, animals and birds as *totems* are directly related to humans.
- (c) The Tribal myths of creation, their understanding of land and Supreme Being point to the centrality they give to space. Creation myths tell us that reality is one coherent whole. Everything is organically related to each other. Land is perceived as sacred. It is through the land that people become one with the Supreme Being, their ancestors, the spirits and other segments of creation. *Lijaba* is the earth-entering Supreme Being; one who enters the earth with the seeds and rises again along with the crops. Creation is the manifestation of the Supreme Being.
- (d) The tribal concept of history and time is interlinked to and rooted in creation. The axis of the concept of time is the celebration of nature's life-cycle. Unlike the western linear concept of time, the tribal people experience time in a circular way. People move along with the soil or earth cycle and surrounding environment.
- (e) Christian theological responses such as process, the eco-feminist as well as *justice, peace and integrity of creation* seem to view reality mainly from the anthropocentric perspective and not from the perspective of space itself. In these different Christian responses, the tribal people's view of space is not integrated. Rather Christian theologies of space are from the perspective of the western progressive and linear interpretation of history and philosophy.
- (f) Space-centred world-view helps the reconstruction of Christian theology. In tribal theology God is conceived as an integral part of creation; one who is organically related to creation. God is not a monarch who rules from above. Christ is there not in the believers' hearts alone, rather is organically related to the total eco-system. Jesus shares his being with the whole created order. The event of Jesus Christ is the re-establishment of the reality of space. The Holy Spirit works not only in the hearts of the believers but also in the whole creation. Since the spirit enlivens the whole creation, nature and history becomes not only one whole reality, but dynamic and real. Humans attain liberation only in relation to the rest of creation. Nature and history here becomes integrally related. God is not only the God of history but also of the entire creation. A space-centred theology enables us to see ourselves as an integral part of the macro-organism. Earth's resources are conceived here as an ecological sacrament for us. Church is understood here as God's micro-cosmos with a mission of cosmic transformation.

- (g) Contextualisation and indigenisation has been going on authentically among Tribal Christians in terms of adaptation of traditional songs and music, dress and costume as well as traditional laws related to marriage and inheritance, and also village-state polity. Institutions of dormitory establishments like *Morung, Zawlbuk, Nokpantes, Mora* etc. are adapted to understand fellowship (*koinonia*) in the church. Traditional code of morals and social morals and social manners (*tlawmngaihna, sobaliba*) are practised in daily living. Tribal terminologies can sometimes better express Christian theological concepts. e.g. The Oraon term Dharne can mean God as both male and female. Tribal folk takes can interpret the person and work of Christ. e.g. the Munda and Oraon story of the 'suffering boy' send by God to save the people. The Santhal creation story is in line with the Genesis stories.
- (h) The gospel values are already present in the Tribal culture of India. The tribal consciousness of an egalitarian society in which there is community ownership of means of production, distribution according to needs, democratic form of government and consensus in decision-making process, can contribute to the formation of an ideology of the *adi* people in their struggle for liberation in India. The Tribal society is neither 'hierarchical' or 'patriarchal'. That the tribes were more open to the Gospel has to do with their culture and worldview where there is integral relationship between the material, social and spiritual worlds; between the natural, the human and the supernatural.

NOTES

1. Nirmal Minz, "The study of Tribal Religion in India," in *Re-visioning India's Religious Traditions*, ed. by David C. Scott & Israel Selvanayagam, Delhi/Bangalore: ISPCCK/UTC, 1996, p. 122.
2. A. Wati Longchar, *An Emerging Asian Theology: Tribal Theology, Issue, Method and Perspective*, Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre, ETC, 2000, p. 1.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 20.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
6. *Ibid.*, cf. George Tinker, "American Indian and the Art of the Land", *Voice from the Third World*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, December 1981; "Spirituality and Native American Personhood: Sovereignty and Solidarity" in *Spirituality of the Third World*, ed. by K.C. Abraham and Barnedatte Mbuy, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994, pp. 127-28.
7. A. Wati Longchar, *An Emerging Asian Theology op.cit.*, p. 26.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-63.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67 cf. A. Wati Longchar (ed.), *An Exploration of Tribal Theology*, Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre, ETC, 1997; A. Wati Longchar and Yangkahao Vashum (eds.), *Traditional Tribal Worldview and Ecology*, Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre, ETC, 1998; A. Wati Longchar and Larry E. Davis (eds.), *Doing Theology with Tribal Resources*, Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre, E.T.C., 1999; A. Wati Longchar (ed.), *Encounter Between Gospel and Culture*, Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre, ETC, 2000.
13. A. Wati Longchar, *An Emerging Asian Theology, op.cit.*, pp. 68-88.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-75. cf. A. Wati Longchar, "A Creation Poem of the Ao-Naga: A Theological Exploration" in *Doing Theology with the Poetic Traditions of India. Focus on Dalit and Tribal Poems*, ed. by Joseph Patmury, Bangalore: PTCA/SATHRI, 1996, pp. 114-124; "A Critique of the Christian Theology of Creation"

A TRIBAL THEOLOGY FROM A TRIBAL WORLD-VIEW

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15. A. Wati Longchar, *An Emerging Asian Theology op.cit.*, pp. 75-78; *The Traditional Tribal World View and Modernity. Focus on North East India, op.cit.*, pp. 64-73.
 16. A. Wati Longchar, *The Traditional Tribal World View and Modernity, op.cit.*, pp. 83-89.
 17. A. Wati Longchar, *An Emerging Asian Theology, op.cit.*, 79-81.
 18. cf. O. Alam, *Tsungremology : Ao-Naga Christian Theology*, Mokokchung : Clark Theology College, 1994.
 19. A. Wati Longchar, *An Emerging Asian Theology, op.cit.*, pp. 82-88.
 20. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
 21. *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.
 22. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
 23. *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.
 24. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
 25. *Ibid.*
 26. *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.
 27. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
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 31. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
 32. Nirmal Minz, "Sarhul : A way of maintaining life in the primal societies of Jharkhand" in *Spiritual Traditions. Essential visions for Living*, ed. by David Emmanuel Singh, Delhi/Bangalore : ISPCK/UTC, 1998, pp. 129-30.
 33. *Rise up, My People , and Claim the promise op.cit.*, p. 87.
 34. *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.
 35. *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.
 36. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
 37. cf. T. Hembrom, *The Santhals. Anthropological-Theological Reflections on Santhali and Biblical Creation Traditions*, Calcutta : Punthi Pustak, 1996.
 38. cf. T. Jacob Thomas, "Indian Tribal Culture : A Rediscovery of Gospel Values" in *Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 1993, pp. 64-76.
 39. Nirmal Minz, "Dalit-Tribal : A Search for Common Ideology" in *Towards a Common Dalit Ideology*, ed. by Arvind P. Nirmal, Madras : Gurukul, 1990, pp. 103-106. For Tribal theology cf. C.K. Paul Singh (ed.), *The Report of Hermeneutics Consultation in Central Tribal Belt of India, 1984*, Ranchi : C.K. Paul Singh, 1986; "Special Number on Biblical Hermeneutics", *The Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 31, Nos. 3 and 4, July-Dec. 1982, pp. 293-327.