

JUST-PEACE IN A GLOBALIZED CONTEXT FOCUS ON NORTH EAST INDIA



Editors

Yangkahao Vashum
Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro

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Tribal Study Series 25

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Yangkahao Vashum

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FOREWORD

Interfaith Cooperation Forum intended its thematic workshops as a gathering of young people of a particular country on a national level to discuss pertinent peace issues. In early 2019, the idea of holding a thematic workshop in North East India that same year came up in a conversation with Dr. Wati Longchar. The schedule in December 2019 did not push through. It finally came into fruition when we set to hold the workshop on 11-16 February 2020 in Jorhat. The staff of the Interfaith Cooperation Forum was ready to fly to India a couple of days earlier, with visas, tickets, and all. Unfortunately, the virus began to spread. The governments and the airlines canceled the flights to and from India. On February 11, 2020, the World Health Organization announced the name of the pathogen as the “severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).” Yet, the workshop must go on, and it did.

We are deeply grateful to Dr. Wati Longchar and to Dr. Yangkahao Vashum. They made the thematic workshop a reality. Dr. Longchar is an International Associate Missionary and Consultant of International Ministries (IM) for the Theological Education Ministry of East and South Asia. Dr. Vashum is a theology professor and the current dean of Eastern Theological College. They worked together, invited the resource persons for the workshop *cum* consultation, and the participants from different faith traditions. Dr. Vashum collected the resource persons’ manuscripts, and he serves as co-editor for this book project. We are equally thankful to Christian Fischer of the Bread for the World for his encouragement and support.

This book entitled *Just Peace in a Globalized Context: Focus on North East India* is an outcome of the thematic workshop in Jorhat, Assam. The Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) and the Tribal Study Centre of the Eastern Theological College (ETC) forged a partnership in organizing the workshop with the theme used as the title of this book. This book focuses on North-East India’s search for peace. This book also comes out as a volume under ETC’s Tribal Study Series 25.

Many people outside India do not know or hear much about North East India. This book seeks to project North East India's voices about the struggles of the Indigenous Peoples there. The authors of the essays in this book stand at the intersections of gender, religions, ethnicities, professions, and even political persuasions. They all deserve the commendation for taking the time to prepare their manuscripts. This book is worth reading, as one will hear the different, nuanced voices and perspectives of the Tribals or Indigenous Peoples on the conflicts and peace issues in North East India. The writers speak through their essays about their experiences and struggles as citizens of North East India.

We, therefore, invite the readers, especially the young people of Asia, to listen to the voices projected through this book with their hearts. Be open to the insights that the writers share. Discern the implications of their reflections on the interfaith dimension of peacebuilding in Asia and the global context. Peace is a gift from God. This righteous and just Supreme Being we recognize as God shows us the path to enduring peace. However, it takes much of humanity's commitment, participation, and hard work to make this just peace a reality.

Nam Boo Won
General Secretary
Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs

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Forum

Introduction

Yangkahao Vashum

A thematic workshop *cum* consultation on “Just-Peace in a Globalized Context: Focus on North East India” took place at the Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam, in India on February 11-15, 2020. It was a joint program of Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) of Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs (APAY), Hong Kong and the Tribal Study Centre, ETC, Jorhat. The consultation brought together 43 young people and prominent resource persons from various religious traditions, disciplines, NGOs, social and human rights activists, and scholars from various North East Indian region comprising seven states. The consultation also featured a day’s interactive and exposure trip to the famed Majuli Island, the world’s largest river island, and home of Assamese neo-Vaishnava culture that began in 15th century with a revered Assamese saint Srimanta Sankardeva, who also established several *satras* or monasteries. The trip enabled the participants to interact with the monks of *Auniati satra* (monastery) as well as with the Christians whose church building that the Vaishnavite Hindus partially destroyed in recent past.

Rationale for the Consultation

The world, we know, yearns for peace. India yearns for peace. So are the people of North East India. It is not yearning merely for peace but for peace with justice. It is for JUST-PEACE. Peace continues to remain elusive. Every passing day suggests that things are not normal. Violence, conflicts, *bandhs*, rallies and protests have become the norms of our life. All forms of conflicts and crises, tensions, violence, etc. characterize our world. Today a number of issues confront us, including the infamous Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the National Register Commission (NRC), National Population Register (NPR), issues of immigration and refugees, ethnic and communal conflicts, and so on. All kinds of vitiated political and ideological divides have torn our society apart. Our society continues to reel under the forces of religious as well as political fundamentalism. The society is ever divided based

on religious, ethnic/communal, and political affiliations. The politics of hate and narrow chauvinistic interests have hit at the rock bottom of our society today.

Globalization with all its might continues to perpetuate injustices and oppressions in the region. The poor and the weak, the minorities and the indigenous people are the worst affected people; they continue to bear the brunt of the unjust systems and structures of the land. The indigenous people and other minority communities continue to struggle and fight for their rights and identities; their voices are very often silenced and subdued. Issues of human rights abuse and violation go unabatedly. We continue to witness sexual and all forms of abuse and assault meted out against women and children in our society; rape, molestation and gender biased-violence occur at an alarming rate.

The world, as we know, is facing another critical challenge due to the human assault on nature and creation. Global warming, climate change and other ecologically destructive forces are staring right at us. The burning of Amazon forest, the bushfire in Australia and America, and the rampant hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons resulting in the loss of lives and properties all over the world are great reminders of the danger we are in. The world we live in is at great peril.

The successive governments of India have neglected Northeast India for so long. The region comprising of eight states – Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim – is separated from the rest of India by a narrow strip of land called the “chicken’s neck.” This narrow strip of land has also come to symbolize the decades-long discrimination, neglect, and exploitation that the people of the region suffered in the hands of India. Among the many ills and grievances of the people, the region has become the “dumping ground” for refugees and immigrants from the neighboring countries. The recent protests against the introduction and passing of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA-2019), reminds every one of the continued injustices and discriminations perpetuated against the people of the region by the government of India. In addition, the successive

governments at the centre have ruled the region following the divide and rule policy. The Indian government has treated the people of the region as secondary citizens in their own land. The region continues to suffer racial discriminations both at the national and regional levels. The recent spates of harassment and racial abuse meted out against the Northeast people in various Indian towns and cities; speak volumes about the discrimination they suffer. The right wing agendas of the ruling governments, both at the centre and states, have succeeded in dividing the people. Discrimination of minorities, women, and children continues unabatedly.

Today, more than ever before, there is a need for people of different faiths, ideologies, ethnic communities, and people of different professions including social and rights activists, and NGOs to come together. At this juncture, all right thinking citizens, activists, academicians, and religious leaders must come together to work for just-peace and harmony in the region. To protest against forces of division and fundamentalism and to explore common strategies to fight against such forces in the region and beyond is the need of the hour. This consultation calls for joint efforts to combat against any forms of exploitation, oppression, and discrimination because of caste, tribe, gender, religion and community. Analyzing the contemporary reality of forces that perpetuate violence and discrimination, the participants in the consultation explored and deliberated on cultural and religious resources for building peace and harmonious society.

I, on behalf of the editors, take this opportunity to thank all the esteemed contributors for their insightful and resourceful articles. On behalf of the Tribal Study Centre, Eastern Theological College, I would like to express our profound gratitude to Dr. Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro and the Interfaith Cooperation Forum of APAY, Hong Kong for co-sponsoring this important consultation-workshop with us. We are deeply indebted to you and your organization! We also thank Dr. Wati Longchar, for his kind initiative and help in carrying out this consultation successfully.

Part I

Analysis of Global and National Unjust Structures

Peace! Be Still!

Mark 4:35-41

Wati Longchar

*He (Jesus) woke up and rebuked the wind,
and said to the sea, “Peace! Be Still” (Mark 4:39)*

The symbol of a boat has a very strong theological significance and many ecumenical organizations like the World Council of Churches (WCC) and National Council of Churches (NCCs) use the symbol of a ‘ship’ or a ‘boat’ to signify the Greek word ‘oikumene’ or ‘oikos’ – the household of all inhabited world. They use this symbol to imply that life is on a journey and the boat signifies struggling together for a better future. In an airplane or a bus, the pilot or driver is the person who is in complete control of the aircraft, or the bus. Their duty is to maneuver the vehicle and transport the passengers to their destination. The passengers must not disturb the pilot or the driver, thereby taking a passive role. Passengers should obey the command of the driver and sit in their respective seats until the vehicle reaches the destination. However, on a simple boat, everyone is a driver. Everyone has to hold the paddle to row the boat or take turns to row the boat. While others are rowing, some should take care of the mast and sail to propel the boat towards the intended direction. Only with cooperation and united efforts will the boat reach the destination. Sam Kobia, the former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches once said, “If you want to run fast, run alone, but if you want to reach the destination, run together.” Hence, the ‘boat’ signifies journeying together hand-in-hand.

Jesus and his disciples went on board a boat and sailed the Sea of Galilee, leaving the crowd behind. The other name of the sea is Lake of Gennesaret. This lake is about 13 kilometers wide and 19 kilometers long. It would take at least two hours to cross from one end to the other. Since Jesus was very tired, he laid his head on a cushion and soon fell asleep. At that time, a violent storm arose. The Sea of Galilee lies at

the foot of two mountains. The lake serves as a tunnel to carry strong winds, and often the winds sweep down on the lake and violently agitate its water. Jesus and his disciples faced a sudden storm in the midst of the sea. The storm filled the boat with water, threatening all on board to drown. The disciples were all terrified and felt helpless.

However, Jesus was still sleeping. They shouted at Jesus, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” Jesus woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be Still.” Amazingly, the storm stopped, and then Jesus turned to his disciples and said, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”

Life is a journey. Humanity as one community is on the move. On our journey, we face many storms in our life. At one time or another, all of us are afloat on a troubled sea. The world has faced the storms of colonialism, World Wars, the U.S. war on terror, storms of many natural disasters, and different pandemics like the Spanish flu and HIV & AIDS. The poor are facing storms of starvation, homelessness, uncertain future, fear, loss of a job, and stigmatization. Today, the whole world is facing the storm of COVID-19 that has claimed many precious lives.

Since the last decade, the world has been experiencing many storms of wars and conflicts between and within nations. The peaceful coexistence of people faces the threats of the presence of global military power, the emergence of religious fundamentalists, and the uprising of ethnic minority groups, armed or unarmed, as a political force in many Asian countries. There is no stability, security, and peaceful cohabitation among people. Killing and kidnapping of innocent people, segregation of religious places, and the destruction of properties are rampant. The people live in fear and uncertainty.

The India-China border tension continues along the Sino-Indian border, including the areas near the disputed Pangong Lake in Ladakh and the Tibet Autonomous Region. The areas near the border between Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, and the Tibet Autonomous

Region also felt the tensions. The two countries boast of their arms - both nuclear and non-nuclear weapons. The United States of America, France, and Russia continue to sell to India their cutting-edge military hardware for its special forces, including the technology to pinpoint the location of a target within meters and sensors to detect bomb-laden intruders walking across the mountains. The tension continues to escalate day-by-day. Pakistan, North Korea, and Japan have now joined the race in escalating the pace of their hi-tech military acquisitions. The military expenditure in all the Asian countries has increased twofold in recent years, while the poor die of starvation. Some examples of these situations are the following:

1. India has the world's third-largest military, after China and the United States. Both India and Pakistan have over 1 million soldiers deployed along their disputed border and each nation has armed itself with dozens of nuclear-tipped missiles.
2. Japan is rebuilding its military capabilities, arguing that it should be able to launch pre-emptive strikes against countries that the Japanese government considers to pose an imminent threat. Japan is among the world's top five military spenders. China and North Korea see it as a threat to their security. Chinese leaders have warned on several occasions that Japan's efforts to seek a combat role for its armed forces would greatly impede a genuine reconciliation between Japan and other Asian countries.
3. Though engaged in diplomatic dialogue, the Korean Peninsula continues to live under threat. Analysts perceived the continuing missile and nuclear development programme of North Korea as a security threat to the entire region. It will not only directly endanger the security of Japan and South Korea; it will also jeopardize the strategic goals of the United States in Asia. In anticipation of the North Korean nuclear attack, South Korea had already started a space program twenty-five years ago. It is launching a three-stage liquid-fueled rocket and is unveiling plans for a blue water navy.
4. The Philippines and the United States have been in joint combat operations since 2003 when they renewed their agreement on

“*Balikatan 03-1*” which means shoulder-to-shoulder offensives against the Muslim rebels in Mindanao.

5. Russia is also trying to reassert its presence in the continent by its building military power.
6. To defend against China’s attack, Taiwan continues to spend on military equipment and is one of the biggest buyers of U.S weapons. There are talks that the island acquired delivery of U.S. arms worth 14.6 billion dollars, making it the second-biggest purchaser of U.S. weapons after Saudi Arabia.

The storm of threat continues all over Asia and while the poor countries and poor citizens suffer from poverty, the rich countries benefit from the arms race. Escalation of tension, threats of conflict, and war benefit the weapon-producing countries.

Religious fundamentalism is another storm that persists all over Asia. To advance the political agenda of the dominant ruling class, political leaders and parties misused and abused religions. The storms of religious fundamentalist groups are making a serious impact on the stability, security, and peaceful cohabitation of people. The violence brought about by the militant religious groups in countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar is intensifying in the name of religion. We can categorize them as Muslim–Christian conflicts in Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh; Hindu – Christian conflicts in India and Nepal, Hindu – Muslim conflicts in India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan; Buddhist – Christian -Muslim conflicts in Myanmar, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Cambodia. As religion plays a major role in politics, different political parties manipulate religion leading to religious conflict. The conflict leaves behind not only physical but also mental and emotional scars among many people. The victims are ordinary citizens, women, and children.

In India, the Hindu fundamentalist militant organizations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), *Vishva* Hindu Parishad (VHP), the *Bajrang Dal*, are misusing religion to ignite communal violence

by propagating *Hindutva* ideology. The *Hindutva* ideology is a fundamentalist socio-political ideology that asserts a unifying Hindu culture for all Indians irrespective of India's multi-religious tradition and culture. The *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) represents the politics of *Hindutva*. The affirmation of that the ideology of "One Religion, One Culture, One language, One Uniform Civil Law" will consequently identify and render all non-Hindus as Hindu traitors and as second-class citizens. The proponents of the *Hindutva* ideology have already introduced anti-conversion bills in four Indian states. Due to these ideologies and anti-conversion bills, many Christians face persecution and discrimination. *Hindutva* ideology enthusiasts allowed the killing of some Christians. They have also permitted the stripping of some pastors naked, paraded them on the streets, and beating them. They have also burned down churches to ashes. It is deplorable that religious minorities continue to live in fear and uncertainties in the largest democratic country in the world. The storm of the use and misuse of religion by the political leaders for their vested personal, political, and even economic interests is the biggest challenge to the continuity of peaceful coexistence. The freedom of religion and expression is under threat.

The unjust practices of those in power and authority are the sources of violence and violation of human rights. The root of storms that brought catastrophic damages among different communities is injustice. Unjust and unequal distributions of resources that include land, water, food, and money, have been the source of violence. We need to recognize that unequal and unjust concentration of power in the hands of a few will also lead to violence. Such unjust practices produce many devastating storms in society and individual life. The people in the margins experience the pain of violence. They must stand together in solidarity for peace.

When we are in the midst of a storm, we often remember the words of Jesus: "Peace! Be Still." We want Jesus to wake up and solve the problem, neglecting our responsibility. We point fingers at others to solve the problems. The storm in our lives, in our communities, and the churches will not stop just by creating a commotion. People just

screaming from the back end of a boat cannot control the storm. We often forget to act together in solidarity. Instead of working together, we often question others just as the disciples of Jesus question him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” Jesus said, “Are you afraid?” “Have you no faith?” Jesus is pointing out to the disciples to have the courage and trust one another. Faith in God demands:

1. speaking out against injustice, impunity, and violence;
2. offering support to the victims;
3. supporting struggles for human rights; and,
4. proclaiming nonviolence, justice, hope, and, reconciliation.

The National Security Act (NSA) of India is not about peace. Arms cannot bring a permanent solution. Hence, religious communities should promote and engage in the following just-peace actions:

a) *Dialogue* – We live in a pluralistic world. We must recognize plurality as the structure of the creation of God. We must work in all possible ways to protect the beauty and richness of diversities. All religious communities must stand together and be open to engage in dialogue against the forces of dehumanization and protect diversity for the celebration of life. Dialogue in action is what we need today. It involves mobilization of all communities in the local context, regardless of race, religion, caste, ethnic groups, gender, language, and regions. Only through collective action and resistance can engender effective change.

b) *Development* – The people who are struggling in life without adequate food and shelter will never experience peace and harmony. The market capitalist perpetuates a few rich people to acquire more than they need, leaving the poor to suffer. Deprivation leads to destructive acts. The religions must focus on effective programs of just development – jobs, education, housing, health – that give people reason to hope. People need sustainable development. War, violence, and arms race intend to protect the interest of the rich. They have nothing to do with bringing peace and development.

c) *People-centered Government* – People all over the world want governments that express and respond to the needs and well-being of the citizens. Governments that do not represent the people and are not responsive to their demands will never bring about peace. Corruption, misuse, and abuse of power deprive the poor to experience peace in life. Religious communities can make a difference and must strive for peace by favoring the process of honest and people-centered government for all.

d) *Human dignity* – Wars and violence mostly affect ordinary people. Innocent people suffer most of the consequences of any violent conflict. Any war and violence should never be justified. We must resist war and violence together and work for peace and justice.

e) *Justice* – Although perfect justice will never be achieved in this world, the religions must strive together to defend the victims of systemic injustice and oppression. Religions need to build structures that bring greater justice to more people. This commitment must be universal. This commitment should not simply defend g our own group from victimization but also advocate and work for justice for all.

f) *Repentance* – This is the other side of forgiveness. There will be no justice without repentance on the part of oppressors. It is not easy to be self-critical, to admit that we have harmed others, or to ask for forgiveness. It is the same with nations and religious groups. The natural tendency of people, nations, religions, and groups is to engage in self-justification, to point out how others have been at fault. However, if we want to achieve peace, our religious convictions must lead us to an honest admission of our own misdeeds.

g) *Forgiveness* – Justice is not enough without forgiveness. So long as people only remember the wrongs and injustices they have suffered but have not forgiven, the resentment remains. It could only serve as a basis for continuing the judgments against others. This could even ignite anger, hatred, and violence at the slightest provocation. All religions

teach forgiveness. The followers of religions must view forgiveness, not as weakness or indifference, but as the only way to move beyond the past and constructively build a better future. The alternative of refusing to forgive makes us prisoners of our past. On the contrary, forgiving past mistakes should become a stepping-stone for building a better future.

h) *Simplicity of life* – Advocate for a sustainable lifestyle. Lavish systems of living and lifestyle – on a personal and national level - lead to greed, competition for markets, and control of resources. Then, an aggressive economic rivalry will lead to conflict and war.

i) *Solidarity with the human family* – Indifference and rugged individualism allow suffering, victimization, and violence to occur all over the world. Our religions must insist that our deepest allegiance is to the welfare of the human family. Our religious beliefs must lead us to active solidarity with all our sisters and brothers, not just those of our religious or ethnic group.

In our journey of life, Jesus is in our midst, struggling with us even though we may sometimes feel that he is sleeping. An abrupt storm can be overcome if people in the boat respect each other, work together, care for each other, and forgive each other. 🕊️ 🕊️ 🕊️

Peacebuilding is Learning to Live Together in God's Household

Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro

The Challenge of Living Together

Almost five decades ago, a movie entitled *Lost Horizon* portrayed Shangri-La as a place where people are healthy and live many years with youthful appearance. It was a place of abundance and peace. The strangers who wandered off into this lost paradise celebrated the experience of close-knit families expressed in the song “Living Together, Growing Together”—

It just takes wood to build a house.
Fill it with people and you have a home.
Fill it with love and people take root.
It's just like a tree
Where each branch becomes a family that's
Living Together, Growing Together, just being together,
That's how it starts.
.....
Pulling together, working together, just building together,
That makes you strong.
If things go wrong
We'll still get along somehow, living and growing
together.¹

Bonding and togetherness sustained the life of individual members of the community. In the film, the people in Shangri-La did not experience suffering, but they knew pain when things go wrong in their

¹ Burt Bacharach and Hal David, “*Living Together, Growing Together*,” 1973. Interpreted by the band called The 5th Dimension. [database online Available from Available from https://www.google.com/search?q=living+together+growing+together+composer&rlz=1C1RLNS_enPH712PH712&oq=living+together+growing+together+composer&aqs=chrome..69i57j0.27257j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

relationships. If things go wrong, people “still get along somehow” and continues to live and grow together. However, the moment a member leaves the community, he or she dies and disintegrates physically. The story, one may say, is a utopia. However, it points to one truth: one could not sustain life apart from one’s household, apart from one’s community. Somehow, this story tells us of the life-sustaining role of God’s household.

Earthlings² are the inhabitants of the Earth. In this essay, I proffer that as earthlings, human beings must learn to build peaceable communities by re-learning to live and grow together with fellow earthlings in God’s household.

Conscious of my community of accountability, I write this essay as an Asian Christian Filipino woman. Although I belong to a lower-middle class family, I am still rooted in the lives of the small-scale farmers, my paternal and maternal grandparents. I have spent a big part of my childhood in the farming communities and that experience gave me some handles and lenses on life’s challenges that farmers and people in the margins face for survival.

Living in God’s Household

Both my maternal and paternal grandparents were first generation converts to the Presbyterian strand of Protestantism. My siblings and I, along with my cousins grew up in the nurturance of the faith in this Protestant household, my extended family. The human family is the “primary household” where one experiences the basic love and nurturing. In the Christian tradition, the church is the “household of faith” and a “second household.”³ Christians may have differences in theologies and rituals, but they all attempt to respond to the prodding of the one they call “Lord,” Jesus of Nazareth, to unite in faith. Jesus prayed for the people “that they may be one” (Jn. 17:22b). Hope

2 Shaun Monson, *Earthlings*, 2005 [database online]. Available from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w8B547L5VkQ&has_verified=1 (accessed May 9, 2020)

3 Hope Antone, “Living Together in the Household of God: Becoming Household of Love, Faith, and Hope” (Digos, Davao del Sur: UCCP, 2006). Keynote speech during the General Assembly of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

Antone, a Christian educator, noted however, that sometimes this concept of unity keeps the household of faith “from venturing into meaningful relationships with people from other households of faith.”⁴ I, myself, have observed that Christians also misconstrue ecumenism as the same with interfaith collaboration. However, these are two different concepts. I argue on the one hand that ecumenism is an effort to fellowship and work together with fellow Christians from different denominational traditions, such as the Roman Catholic, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, United Church of Christ, Baptists, Methodists, Disciples of Christ, among others. On the other hand, interreligious dialog and collaboration is an engagement – a fellowship and collaboration – among and between adherents of different religions, such as the Baha’is, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Shintoist, Taoists and others religious groups. The adherents of religions express their faith in different ways. However, faith is not a monopoly of the religious groups. One must also recognize that there are people who do not belong to an institutional religion, but they have their own faith traditions. The indigenous peoples around the world have their own expressions of faith that they would rather refer to as indigenous spiritualities. The humanists do not belong to religions because they reject the idea of revealed knowledge, but they have faith in the goodness of humanity and human reason that give rise to ethics, and a sense of right and wrong. These groups could be part of a more inclusive notion of interfaith cooperation.

It is unfortunate, though, that some Christians tend to have a narrow and exclusivist understanding on the meaning of the “household of God.” They tend to forget that God’s mission is their mission in the world.⁵ Some have difficulty going beyond their denominational box and fail to understand that the church is only a segment of God’s household that goes beyond one’s religious tradition. Thus, while Protestants and Roman Catholics alike belong to one roof as Christians, the people who

4 Ibid.

5 United Church of Christ in the Philippines, “Living Together in the Household of God: Its Nature, Purpose and Mission,” in *Delegates’ Handbook, 8th Quadrennial General Assembly of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines* (Digos, Davao de Sur: UCCP, 2006), 31.

claimed to follow Jesus still need to continue to learn about the skills of living together. Yet, before I proceed, first, let me quickly refresh our minds about the biblical view of the phrase, “household of God.”

The Biblical Understanding of the “Household of God”

The term “household” is a word with a family of meanings. First, the Hebrew Scriptures use the word *bayith* (בַּיִת) and the Greek word *oiketerion* (οἰκετερίον) to refer to a dwelling place. The term can mean a house, a place for dwelling and a structure where people live. Second, the Hebrew concept of *bayith* (בַּיִת), and of the Greek word *oikos* (οἶκος) in the New Testament go beyond the idea of physical structure. *Bayith* (בַּיִת), like *oikos* (οἶκος, οἶκία), also refers to those who belong to, or live in the same house.⁶ The term is inclusive of the affairs of the people in that house and their properties. (Gen. 39: 4; 44:1, 4). It also means the family or the descendants as an organized body. In other words, it is a social unit that we call family, clan, tribe, bloodline, kinsfolks, or relatives. The *oikios* (οἰκεῖος), people who are bound by kinship or “normal familial connections” (Eph. 2:19-22),⁷ compose these units.

The church as “the household of God”

Third, Christians commonly associate the “household of God” with the church. This concept emerged towards the end of the first century, and mostly from the Deutero-Pauline writings. The writers of the epistles who used the authority of Paul’s name lifted up the concept of *oikos* in reference to the church as the “household of God.” To them, the “household of God” (οἶκος τοῦ Θεοῦ, οἰκοὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ,) means a gathering of people who were once strangers and aliens, but who decided to become part of the community of believers. This community of faith is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with

6 Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001), 109.

7 From the root word *oikos*, the term *oiketerion* (οἰκετερίον) refers to a place for living, dwelling, habitation of all (2 Cor. 5:2). See Frederick William Danker, et.al., eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd edition (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 694-96.

Christ Jesus as the cornerstone” (Eph. 2:19). It is “the church of the living God” (1Tim. 3:15, 1 Peter 4:17).

Instead of *oikos*, Paul used the term *ekklesia* to refer to the house churches (1 Cor. 1:2; 16:19). The word *ekklesia* simply means a casual gathering of people. Paul appropriated the term to refer to an assembly of people who shared a belief, pointing to the Christians who gathered to worship God together. The Christians have inherited this terminology and translated *ekklesia* into *iglesia* in Spanish, or church, the community of faith that worships together in one place.

The concept of church vis-à-vis the ‘household of God’

Does the concept of church exhaust the meaning of “God’s household”? The phrase “household” certainly captures the traditional notion of family, the view stuck in the idea that families share residence. However, we need to widen our view about families. Families are becoming so diverse. Not all members of a family share residence, and certainly, not all members of a household belong to the same family that as defined by consanguineal or affinal ties. As social constructions, families today go beyond the spatial boundaries of residence to include wider kinship networks. Today, a family even includes the pet dogs, cats, and other kinds of pets that the members of the family hold dear. Yet, the family continues to be an institution that provide stability to people’s lives, and it encompasses the prevailing societal beliefs.⁸

The Scriptures do not remain silent on this reality. The Greek terms *bayith* (בַּיִת) and *oikos* (οἶκος) carry a third meaning that goes beyond the physical structure of a house and of the “normal familial connections” as defined by the consanguineal ties and/or affinal or marriage links. In this sense, “household” refers to people thrown into situations that draw them together to form a closely-knit group. These people forge relationships as a common cause bind them. Household refers to a place for living and habitation for all. (2 Cor. 5:2). While Paul had a bias for the members of “the family of faith,” he recognized

8 Cathy McIlwaine, “Family,” in Linda McDowell and Joanne P. Sharp, eds., *A Feminist Glossary of Human Geography* (London and New York: Arnold, 1999), 183.

that the task of working for the good of all people is basic for the members of the household of God. (Gal. 6:10).

Therefore, we cannot limit the meaning of the “household of God” to the usual notion of church. On the contrary, among the Filipinos, one will understand the nature and mission of the church better when they could think of it in relation to the Filipino concept of *sambahayan* (family), the *sambayanan* (nation), and the *sanlibutan* (world). The interrelatedness of the church with the world is inevitable because each living human being is part of the web of life in this world that encompasses the non-human citizens of the Earth. The church is people, but it is impossible to isolate the church from the social realities and from the whole of creation. The human beings cannot leave apart from the seas, the land, the rivers, and mountains. The social realities that include the degradation of the Mother Earth affect the human being as earthlings. These affect the household of God that encompasses the families, nations, and the planet Earth.

Pope Francis issued his second encyclical *Laudato Si'*, or “Praise be to You,” with a subtitle, “On Care for Our Common Home.”⁹ The Pope challenges the Christians to pay attention to the destruction of the Earth, and the consequent suffering of the people. Climate change has brought about many problems that beset the Earth. These problems and devastation have affected everyone -families, churches, and nations. The Pope laments on the weak response of the human beings to the ecological destruction. He pointed out that such attitude goes back to the human being’s anthropocentric view of the Earth.

The Earth, our Mother Earth is in distress. Wars have devastated the lives of people in many parts of the world. Yet, poverty has taken the lives of people more than the wars did. People are dying of HIV/AIDS and other preventable diseases. Then, the COVID-19 pandemic came, taking more and more lives as it rages across the globe. What makes it even deplorable is the fact that some leaders of nations took

9 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015).

the pandemic as an opportunity to advance their own political and economic interests at the expense of the ordinary people. Greed is prevalent! These and more only tell us that we cannot isolate ourselves from the cares of the world beleaguered with injustice and unpeace.

The concept of *oikoumene* (οικουμένη) in the New Testament is therefore, crucial. In ancient times, the Greco-Roman world understood the word *oikoumene* to refer to the whole world as an administrative unit, and for some time, it equated *oikoumene* with the Roman Empire. However, the New Testament writers understood *oikoumene* as the earth and all of its inhabitants (Lk.2:10; 4:5; Rom. 10:16; Acts 17:30-31). As a caveat, one must not use the concept of *oikoumene* to pursue an imperialist project.

If this is the scriptural understanding of the “household of God,” what does “living together” in it, mean? Why is the concept of stewardship a failure in making people take seriously the task of caring for the Earth? Why are there so many conflicts in various levels of the household of God? Is living together in the household of God a utopia?

The reality of conflicts in the household of God

Conflicts are real in the household of God. Some manage to hide these conflicts by wearing the masks of civility. However, unbridled conflicts crush the human spirit, destroy the body, and tear down communities.

Conflicts arise from the roots of differences in goals, motives, approaches, and views. People differ in perspectives and practices, gender biases, class or social locations, race and ethnicity, culture, political and economic interests, and many others. Human beings tended to refuse to embrace differences. They do not think that it is possible to agree to disagree. To some members of the household, unity means everyone must think the same way, and do things the same way.

Some years ago, a parent who was a church elder went to the University’s office of the vice president for academic affairs. He demanded that the office reprimand the faculty member of the Religious

Studies department simply because the professor did not teach his dear view about hell. The church elder's daughter reported to him that the professor told his class that there is another way of looking at "hell." The professor said that the image of "fire and brimstone" in the scriptures and in Dante's "Inferno" are metaphorical ways of describing the suffering that people inflict on themselves and to the world. This drove the church elder to storm the gates of the University for allowing a faculty to teach about things that are supposedly "not biblical." Indeed, conflicts arise when people become so attached to their ideas and interpretations and use these as their security blanket. Conflict escalates when people impose their ideas that perhaps serve as the theological and philosophical underpinnings for their exercise of power over a given group of people or an imaginary territory.

Whatever the root, conflicts arise when people cling on to something. In the Buddhist tradition, one of the four Noble Truths points to the reality of impermanence and imperfection in this world. Our attachment to ideas, things, positions, and others will lead to suffering not only of ourselves but also of the world.¹⁰ This attachment makes us do anything, even at the expense of other beings and the earth. In his sermon on the mount, Jesus also taught his disciples about non-attachment. (Matt. 6:24-34)

Many Christians still cling to the old type of Western missionaries' teachings that discriminate the Muslims and the indigenous peoples – the Lumads (natives) as "pagans" and as "heathens." This was evident when a pastor insisted passionately that the people of other faith would have no place in the household of God unless they become Christians. He sounded like Peter who thought the Gentiles must become Jews first in order to be part of the table fellowship (Gal. 2:1ff). The pastor follows the Barthian line of thinking on religions.¹¹ That pastor held on

10 Walpola Sri Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (New York: Grove Press, 1974), 16-18.

11 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, tans. G.T. Thomson and Harold Knight, 14 vols, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 296. Barth held that through the "Christological doctrine of *assumptio carnis* we can speak of revelation as the abolition of religion."

to Karl Barth's assertion that the "church is the locus of true religion"¹² because it lives by grace, as if God does not bless and is not giving grace to the people who belong to other religions and faiths. Yet, who are we, Christians, to define that other faiths do not live by God's grace and so we must not consider them as part of the household of God? Who are we to limit God's love for the Christians alone?

Attachment to something, whether it is to an idea, object, person, position of power, leads people to "play God" and abuse God's gift of power. The diversity in God's household makes life beautiful. Yet, people forget that they are in God's household, not their own household. We forget that we are only guests in God's household. Consequently, we experience violence because people do not know how to share power and impose their ideas and their ways. These people tend to monopolize power. They purge and kill those who question their ways of doing things and those who do not conform to their dirty politics. Power-hungry people do not only resort to labeling or red tagging of dissenting voices, they also resort to illegal arrests and extrajudicial killing of the modern-day prophets. Another example of an attachment to power is the rising competition between big nations, as empires, in their desire to control the world and its resources. These empires are working to impose a "false consciousness" among the people. They retrieve the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, weave it into the discourse of Constantinian Christendom, give a new name to their imperialist projects, and attack the nations that refuse and resist domination. This kind of attachment becomes even more dangerous as they intersect with other forms of attachments that manifest in racism, ethnocentrism, classism, patriarchy, sexism, heterosexism, and homophobia.

To sum up, conflicts arise within the different levels of the household of God because people allow greed, arrogance, and desire to drive and control them. They have no sense of sharing of power. Rather, they misuse and abuse power.

¹² Ibid., 280.

Learning to Live Together in the Household of God

Christianity is an old religion. Other religions are even older. One thing is sure, however. The disagreements among these “households” within God’s household intertwined with the conflicts in the wider household of the *sambayanan* (nation) and of the *sanlibutan* (world). What then is the meaning of “living together” in the household of God? What makes it possible for people to “still get along somehow,” and live together in harmony in the “household of God”? I challenge each reader to work out the answers to these questions. For the moment, let me offer some principles.

1. *Living together means learning to accept that we live in a diverse world.* God’s garden is an image of plurality and diversity. Our lessons in biology remind us that such diversity is necessary for life to continue. Life requires biodiversity to flourish. This means we need to learn that unity does not mean uniformity. I am not saying something new here. However, I want us to bear in mind that accepting diversity does not mean we can do anything we want. In the household of God, whether we think of the family, the church or religious group, the nation or the world, there are always responsibilities and guidelines to live by. The guidelines are socially constructed, and they may be imperfect. Yet, such imperfection precisely reminds us that in the household of God, people must live their life according to a sensible, overarching norm. What could be this norm or standard?

2. *Life is an overarching norm that should guide us in our daily living.* People must take this one norm seriously. We must make life flourish for all citizens of this earth. This is the mission of Jesus of Nazareth, and he clearly said it: “I came that [you] may have life and have it abundantly.” (Jn. 10:10) To wallow in abundance at the expense of others is not a virtue in the household of God. Greed stifles life. Thus, living in the household of God means to uphold and sustain the beauty and diversity of life. This is a challenge for all of us. We need to ask, what do our religious practices contribute to make life flourish? What impact does our brand of Christianity make in sustaining life? What have we done to transform our families so that they cease to be the

primary site of children's, and women's oppression through exploiting their unpaid labor and abusing their sexuality? Do our worship services infuse new life into the church? Or, do they simply perpetuate the Constantinian tradition of patriarchal hierarchy and social caste within the church and society? Do our theologies and practices help us in dismantling bigotry, classism, racism, ethnocentrism, and homophobia? Do our reading and interpretation of the sacred texts liberate us from our narrow-mindedness and prejudices? Does it move us to work for equality and respect of life, human rights, and earth rights, including animal rights? Does our faith keep us from greed and arrogance? Alternatively, do we use it to manipulate and strangle the life of others?

3. *God calls each person in the household to be an oikodomos* (from the verb form: οἰκοδομέω). An *oikodomos* is one who builds up and strengthens the household by helping improve the ability of each member to function in living responsibly and effectively. It means peacebuilding is an important dimension of life together in the household. When tensions and conflicts arise, let these be creative and transformative — ones that raise the community to a higher level of understanding.

The nemesis of *oikodomos* is an *oikophthoros* (οἰκοφθόρος), a house destroyer. An *oikophthoros* is one who causes corruption in a household, a destroyer of families, and seducers of [married] women (1 Cor. 3:16-17). Have we been an *oikodomos*? Rather, have we been an *oikophthoros*? Sometimes, we believe we build peace but actually, we do not. Jesus' advice is to remove the log out of our eyes (Matt. 7:4). Then, let us ask ourselves, in what ways does each one of us build up the household of God in various levels – family, church, community, nation, and world? In what ways does each one of us cause corruption or destroy families, victimized women and children? Do we make our homes safe and protect our children from the danger of various forms of abuse, including incest and child sexual abuse? Do our families simply cover up such crime?¹³ I have seen how congregations abuse

13 Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro, "Close Family Ties and Incest," in *In God's Image* 25, no. 2 (2006). See also Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro, "The Church and Child

their pastors, but I have also seen how pastors abuse their power in the church.

We have witnessed the stark corruption in different countries' leadership and government agencies. We have witnessed the same even within the system of different religions. Many Christians have ceased to become God's people; they have become people of the lies! How then can we live peacefully live together in the household of God?

The Call to Work and Build Peace Together in the Household of God

The household of God is a habitation for all. Thus, plurality and diversity are its characteristics. Living together in this household demands that we embrace difference and celebrate the irruption of native wisdom, or what Michel Foucault calls, the “insurrection of the subjugated knowledge.”¹⁴ Ultimately, living together in the household of God challenges us to become peace builders – be it in the levels of the family, church, nation or the world. With this in mind, we need some handles to hold in order to face the realities of our contexts.

I would like to lift up the concept of *oikodomeo* (οἰκοδομέω) that I have mentioned earlier. An *oikodomos* builds up, strengthen, and enables more the household to do its task and get better at living responsibly and effectively. This is the task of a peace builder (Acts 9:31; 20:32). I, therefore, take the liberty to interpret and appropriate the image of *oikodomos* as the peace builder. I hold on to this concept as an alternative to the model of *oikonomos*, the manager or steward who controls the affairs of a large household on behalf of the master. I choose *oikodomos* over *oikonomos* because I have seen how the managers and stewards have turned the world into a mess. The managers and stewards of God's household played as gods and abuse the power entrusted to them. Our anthropocentric theology of stewardship is evidently inadequate because it did not save the Earth

Sexual Abuse,” *In God's Image* 25, no. 2 (2006).

14 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, trans. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 81.

from degradation. Rather, it has historically endorsed the plunder and rape of Mother Earth. What does it take one to be an *oikodomos* in the household of God? The following principles guide one to become an *oikodomos*.

Practice the Ethics of Loving and Caring

Loving and caring begins as we lament over the sufferings of the people. Jesus wept over the arrogance of Jerusalem because he cared for the people there. In ancient times, people recited lamentations to express collectively their grief over the calamities and tragedies that had come upon them. As peace builders, we need to lament and be in touch with our pains without these pains overcoming us. A communal lament of the people is an important step towards empowerment, to stand and act out for what we have hoped.¹⁵ In fact, W. Brueggemann argues that weeping is the crucial first step towards prophetic action.¹⁶ Thus, an *oikodomos* must learn to follow Jesus' way of loving and caring.

Yet, weeping is not enough. An *oikodomos* must reclaim the "power of anger in the work of love."¹⁷ One must be angry against any form of injustice, dehumanization, and violence. Is anger compatible with our pursuit for peace in the household of God? Jesus did not only weep for Jerusalem. Jesus entered the city and overturned the tables of the merchants who turned the temple into "den of thieves." The creative power of anger in the work of love opposes oppression and manipulation. The love of Jesus for the marginalized and the outcaste gave hope for life to flourish. Therefore, an *oikodomos* understands that peace encompasses the wholeness and well-being of individuals and of the whole nation.

An *oikodomos* strives to make household of God become a "sign of

15 Emilie M. Townes, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 23-25.

16 Walter Brueggeman, "The Costly Loss of Lament," in *The Psalms: The Life of Faith*, edited by Patrick D. Miller. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 98-111.

17 Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Making Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*, ed. Carol Robb (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 3-21.

healing and justice in the world.”¹⁸ This is possible when the members of the household live as peace builders and render service (θεραπεία)¹⁹ to bring healing and restore wellness and wholeness to the household (Luke 12:42). Jesus fed the hungry, healed the sick, and comforted the lonely. Jesus restored the sight to the blind and made the voiceless speak out. These were experiences of resurrection. The believers who believe in resurrection rise to resist the forces of evil that bring sudden death to people. This means, therefore, that the task of healing entails the dismantling of cultures of abuse and violence. An *oikodomos* is inevitably required to take up the prophetic and healing ministry.

Practice the Ethics of Truth Telling

The prophetic ministry includes speaking the truth and exposing the evils at work. It encompasses exposing the weakness of beliefs and religious discourses that manipulate the truth. It is, therefore, important in living together in the household of God as *oikodomos*, we seek to revisit doctrines that perpetuate cultures of silence and violence. As peace builders, we need evaluate our creeds and theologies that the thoughts of the colonizers and of the dominant groups had shaped. Ideas have been powerful tools used by those who have social interests. Thus, to be an *oikodomos* means to take up the ministry of truth telling. We need to express our understanding of the world, the human being, the earth, God, the Christ, community, sin, salvation, and others in light of our experiences of the present realities, and our re-reading of the scriptures.

Honesty with one's self is the foundation of establishing a strong relationship within the society. On the contrary, lying seems to have become the public policy of the Philippine government system. Husbands lie to their wives, pastors lie to their congregation, and government officials lie to their constituency. People who could not accept their own weakness and failures also tend to dwell in self-

18 Letty M. Russel, “Signs of Healing and Justice: A Bible Study,” in *Women's Ways of Being Church*, ed. Letty M. Russel and J. Shannon Clarkson (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005).

19 Danker, et.al., 452.

deception. Regrettably, people caught in the middle of the warring factions and live in the atmosphere of fear somehow also develop the ability to lie for survival. All these affect our community life. We have to get things straight. We cannot live together peacefully in the household of God when people lie to each other. With God's grace, let us start all over again and make relationships right at home and in our communities

Practice the Ethics of Mutuality and Solidarity

“Ang lahat na bagay ay magka-ugnay.” All things are interconnected. No one can live alone. This is native wisdom. We therefore need to learn to live with people. Most importantly, we need to live in solidarity with those who make our daily life easier and possible because of their hard work: these are the farmers, the fisherfolks, the vendors, the workers. They bring food to our table, they build our houses and make our lives comfortable. Yet, they are the ones who suffer. The farmers and the fisherfolks could hardly eat three times a day. The workers do not have decent homes to live. Rather than condemning them, they who made the sacrifices to walk in the streets to protest unfair practices in the workplaces, we need to forge mutuality and solidarity with them. Mutuality in love is important in doing justice and making right relationships that go wrong. Solidarity respects and embraces difference, yet it does not stifle the task of doing justice into obscurity.

As *oikodomos*, we must reclaim life-giving symbols. The Jesus movement celebrated the memory of Jesus' life and work around the table fellowships. They lifted up the symbol of the fish (ἰχθῦς) when the Empire of their time persecuted their movement. We know that the word *ichthus* also served as a code for their statement of faith: Jesus, the Son of God and Savior. Through the symbol of the fish, the Jesus movement forged solidarity with each other. The symbol of fish reminds us of Jesus' post-resurrection mandate: to tend and feed his sheep. Yet, this also points us to Jesus's reminder that there are also sheep outside the fold that he must be attending. (Jn. 21:15-17; 10:16) The fish and the table fellowships are powerful symbols of mutuality and solidarity.

Practicing mutuality and solidarity is an important aspect of living together as *oikodomos* in the household of God. Considering the church as a household of God, Christians must see it in the midst of the world. The church must redefine itself as “a piece of the world where Christ is taking community form.”²⁰ When it claims to be “the” body of Christ, then, it must see to it that its practices truly embodies the Christ in our midst to sustain life in the wider household of God. In this way, we — as individuals and as a community of faith — are able to realize, in Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s words, the “Christ existing as community.” The Christian community must therefore take seriously its moral agency.

Conclusion

I have not exhausted the meaning of “living together in the household of God.” However, I hope that this discussion will challenge us, Earthlings, to “still get along somehow” in the face of differences as each one constructs one’s identity as *oikodomos*. This is possible if we focus on the vision of making abundant life for all a reality. We only need to constantly evaluate ourselves and ask, Is my personal life, and are our collective lifestyle life affirming, life sustaining, and life giving? Is it, on the contrary, life stifling and death dealing? Then, we can learn to sing:

Living together, growing together, just being together,
that’s how it starts, Three loving hearts
all - pulling together, working together, just building together,
that makes you strong, if things go wrong
We’ll still get along somehow, living and growing together.



20 Larry Rasmussen, “The Meaning of the Cross for Social Ethics in the World Today,” in *From Christ to the World: Introductory Readings in Christian Ethics*, ed. Wayne G. Boulton, Thomas D. Kennedy, and Allen Verhey (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 311.

Liberation or Assimilation: An Indigenous Perspective

Wati Longchar¹

With the uprising of oppressed people's movements, many governments have come up with welfare schemes and economic packages. Will this effort liberate indigenous people from the yoke of oppression? In several countries, such as Taiwan and Australia, the governments have even made a public apology for the crime committed against indigenous people. Some governments have given special economic package and adopted reservation policies in education, employment, and other opportunities. Unfortunately, all those policies ultimately seek to integrate indigenous peoples into the colonial project and framework. Assimilation is not liberation but a process of continuing oppression. We need to ask hard questions: What kind of liberation are the indigenous/tribal people or ethnic minorities looking for? How do we define our liberation? Is it about moving towards a mechanized life? Are we looking for an urbanized life? Is it a better economic condition in life? Do we seek to achieve a self-rule government? Are we aiming to be free from gender discrimination and racial discrimination? Who defines liberation for marginalized people? What kind of liberation are marginalized people looking for? Are the marginalized people looking or demanding for welfare schemes, economic package, and reservations in education and employment? Some countries have offered an apology for the crime committed against IP. But, what is next? Are the Accords enough for liberation?

Commonalities in Liberation Theologies

The method, content, and vision of liberation theology in the two-third world are different from dominant Euro-American theology. Theology starts with an analysis of context. It is a response to the cries of the people in a specific context. All contexts differ considerably from

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one region to another. Thus, we have Black Theology in the U.S., Liberation theologies of Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Europe. Social groups have identified liberation or contextual theologies such as *minjung* theology in Korea, *dalit* theology in India, women's theologies, indigenous theologies, and theology from the marginalized group like persons with disabilities and LGBTIQ+. ² The degree and layer of marginalization differ from one group to another. The realities of deprivation, of class, caste, race, gender, and ethnicity, intertwine with the local, regional, and global political and economic structures. Some people experience multiple layers of marginalization than others. ³ Another challenging reality is that an overwhelming majority of the marginalized are people of other faiths who are located in the two-third world. The religious-cultural context within a region also differs considerably, and thus the vision and content, the meaning, and experience of liberation differ.

2 People's movement against the repressive role of the state for democratic right has been a top priority in popular movements all over Asia. In those struggles protest against traditional forms of oppression – such as caste, patriarchy, discrimination of minorities – converges with protest against new forms of victimization, caused by modern development promoted by the state and hitting first, the same vulnerable groups. Workers and peasants struggling for survival are fighting for their rights to organize. Women's movements fighting patriarchy and violence in the family and in daily life expose the militarization of state and society as a culmination of the same. Eco-movement protesting against ecological destructive dams or large-scale logging forests are defending the livelihood of tribals and forest-dwellers, who have been the victims of marginalization by traditional society long before. Ethnic and religious minorities are protesting that the government and private companies denied jobs and other benefits of modern development, and deprived them of their rights to protest. Sometimes students are in the forefront of these movements. What emerges, as pointed out by some new social movements, is that the post-colonial state that pursues the modernization of economy unavoidably tends to become repressive and dictatorial as it turns out to benefit only some at the cost of others.

3 Bastiaan Wielenga cites an example of a dalit girl. "A dalit girl working in a factory in an export-processing zone in India is exploited as an underpaid worker – like other workers around the globe – and suffers from a lack of protection by trade-union rights, while as a woman she suffers from male domination and violence – as other women do – whereas she shares her plight as an "untouchable" suffering from caste oppression with other castes, male and female in India." See "Liberation Theology in Asia" in *Liberation Theology*, ed. Christopher Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 26.

The Indigenous people's theology is a contextual and liberation theology. Despite differences in context and issues articulated in two-thirds world liberation theologies, indigenous theologies share many commonalities with other liberation theologies.

a) The Context - Not the Rich but the Poor and Marginalized

Some people considered the dominant theologies as sciences of faith drawn from the scripture and tradition. It takes the history and realities of the context of dominant groups and communities. The perspectives and experience of the rulers and elites become the paradigm for doing theology. Whereas in contextual theologies, the experience, hardship, and spirituality of the marginalized people like the indigenous people, women, the poor are vital sources for doing theology. The specific context of liberation theology is "non-person." Gustavo Gutierrez said:

.... in the case of liberation theology it is non-person, those who are not recognized as person by existing social order: the poor, the exploited, those systematically and legally deprived of their status as human beings, those who barely realize what it is to be a human being. The "non-person" questions not so much our religious universe but above all our economic, social, political and cultural order, calling for transformation of the very foundations of a dehumanizing society.⁴

b) The Sources - Not Philosophy, but People's Stories

Dominant theologies draw their language, content, and framework of theologizing from philosophical insights and categories. A notion in dominant theologies is that theology must be rational, critical, logical, and scientific in form and content. To do so, one must take the philosophical system and fit in the received theological concepts into that philosophical system. For example, we have a brilliant exposition of the existential philosophy by Tillich, Bultmann, and

4 Gustavo Gutierrez, "The Task and Content of Liberation Theology," in *Liberation Theology*, ed. by Curt Cadrette, *et.al.*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 28.

the process philosophy by John Cobb, to name a few. In Asia, S.J. Samartha, K.P. Aleaz, and many others have articulated theology exploring the advaita philosophy of Hinduism. A major focus is to engage in systematic constructions of supposedly timeless theological concepts, beginning from the doctrine of God, the Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity, the Problem of Evil, the Creation, Humans, Sin, the Atonement, the Church and Ministry, the Sacraments, Salvation and Christian Hope. The primary objective of theologizing is to help people understand and interpret God's act and to provide a rational basis for their faith. A major function of theology is to defend the Christian faith from the forces of secularism. In this theologizing process, both God and the world are somewhat abstract concepts and, therefore, there was a serious failure to relate the Gospel to the concrete reality of brokenness, oppression, and dehumanization. In short, theology became mere abstract and intellectual exercises unrelated to the real-life situation of the people. However, in contemporary contextual theologies, the theologians draw out their sources from the experience of the people themselves. For *Minjung* theologians, it is the socio-biography of the people's collective suffering in an oppressive regime. Women theologians take the stories of women's marginalization perpetrated by patriarchy. Here, stories mean people's symbols, myths, songs, dances, and other forms of expression that become the sources of doing theology. Instead of philosophical language, indigenous theologies draw out insights from other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, economics and other forms of reflective expression for the analysis and articulation of the experience of people.

c) Method—Not mere Theory but Liberative Praxis

In dominant theologies, the pattern of theologizing as in many other disciplines has been, first to enunciate a theory, as in Biblical, Systematic Theology, and then apply it as in Practical Theology, Ethics, etcetera. The assumption in this procedure is that the pure and true thoughts about reality can occur only when it is set apart from act and practice. Doing is an extension of knowing. However, in contextual theologies, liberative praxis is the method of doing theology. Here

the locus is the liberation of the poor from injustices. They make a distinction between theory and practice on the one hand and praxis on the other, but they are interconnected. This is praxis-theology. It involves rigorous theoretical reflection, but it insists that it should emerge from the practice that is oriented to transformation.

A Glimpse of “Liberation” in Contextual Theologies

The primary objective of the theological reflection of contemporary contextual theologies and indigenous theologies is to help people in their struggle for the transformation of their situation of injustice and oppression. The essence of the gospel is seen as the liberation of the oppressed from socio-political humiliation for new freedom in Christ Jesus.⁵ Theologizing is, therefore, a process that empowers people to transform their situation following the utopia, or the vision of the gospel. It aims to provide a vision for the future and empower people to change the existing values and relationships. It is a process and integral to people’s on-going search for their identity and struggles for justice. The ultimate aim is liberation. Though all contextual theologies speak of “liberation,” its priorities, though related, differ from one another due to the context and degrees of marginalization.

Latin American theologians identify the unjust economic and political system as key factors for the marginalization of the poor. The suffering of the poor is not simply a matter of accident but is a result of the way some systems control the world’s resources. Poverty is a product of an unjust economic structure. Poverty is a manifestation of an unjust system. The hunger, marginalization, and the suffering of the poor contradict the will of God in history. Marilyn J. Legge opines that liberation in such a context of systemic injustice involves dismantling the network of the dominating powers and oppression that prevails around the world. Injustice stifles freedom and excludes the majority of humans from meaningful work and participation in shaping their destinies according to God’s purpose of creation.⁶

5 James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, revised edition (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 47.

6 Marilyn J. Legge, “The Church in Solidarity: Liberation Ecclesiology,” in *Liberation*

The salvation/liberation that Jesus announces is not simply a gift that we passively receive. This salvation is a process wherein we engage in several levels, such as:

- a) Political-economic-social liberation - This involves the elimination of immediate causes of poverty and injustice, especially concerning socio-economic structures. The goal is to achieve greater justice, especially in favor of the weak and powerless.
- b) Personal transformation and historical actions –This requires people to stop blaming their fate and instead take responsibility for their own destiny and strive for the construction of a new society. Liberation must encompass all aspects of life – not just in the social sphere that limit people’s capacity to develop themselves freely and in dignity.
- c) Liberation from sin – Sin is the root of all injustices and communion with God.⁷

In short, the salvation/liberation that Jesus Christ announced includes the dismantling of all dehumanizing forces and social structures that perpetuate domination by the privileged ones at the expense of others. It is an injustice, a form of social sin. The Indigenous people’s search for liberation cannot ignore systemic exploitation of economic, social and personal aspects raised by Latin American theologians.

Black theology seeks to liberate non-white people from multiple forms of racial discrimination manifested in political, social, economic, and religious subjugation. The goal of black theology is not about claiming special treatment. It is a struggle for freedom and justice. Black theology is an “affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both

Theology, ed. by Curt Cadrette, *et.al.*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 165.

⁷ Marrie Giblin, “Jesus Christ in Liberation Theologies,” in *Liberation Theology*, ed. by Curt Cadrette, *et.al.*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 84. See also Gustavo Gutierrez, “The Task and Content of Liberation of Theology” in *Liberation Theology*, 26.

white and black people. It affirms the humanity of white people in that it says NO to the encroachment of white oppression.”⁸ Reflecting on white racism, Black theology explicates the meaning of the liberating activity of God for the oppressed black so that they will know that their struggle for political, social, and economic justice is consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ. James Cone expounds on black liberation concisely, saying:

Liberation as a future event is not simply *other* worldly but is the divine future that breaks into their social existence, bestowing wholeness in the present situation of pain and suffering and enabling black people to know that the existing state of oppression contradicts their real humanity as defined by God’s future.⁹

In many countries, the indigenous peoples are not only a racial minority; they are also racially discriminated as in the case of India, Australia, and North America. The dominant societies still treat them as inferior, backward, and incapable. The indigenous theology must integrate the challenge for freedom and justice posed by Black Theologians

The feminist and womanist theologies reflect on the struggle of women in male-dominated structures. They identify patriarchy as sin and the root of women’s oppression and exclusion. God created all human beings in God’s image, and thus liberation entails the realization of God’s image in the full personhood of woman as a created being. The feminist and womanist theologians argued that God in Christ takes on the conditions of the woman – the conditions of weakness, misery, injustice, and oppression. In his time, Jesus rejected the androcentric culture of the Jewish people. He gave special attention to the downtrodden and the marginalized of the society – the prostitutes,

⁸ Edward Antonio, “Black Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, ed. by Christopher Rowland (New York, USA and Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 81.

⁹ Cone, 146.

beggars, sinners, tax collectors, and ritually unclean people. Most of these people were women. Jesus came to heal the broken humanity. He empowered and enabled the downtrodden in society to realize their dignity and worth as persons. He continues to empower and enables women today as they discover their identity as created in the image of God.¹⁰

The indigenous society is not free from patriarchy. Patriarchy denies women freedom and justice in all aspects of life – in the decision-making process, property rights, and religious rights. Many capable and wise women cannot take up a leadership role due to unjust practices. The Indigenous people's search for liberation will be incomplete without dismantling the patriarchal construct of church and society.

Minjung Theology is a product of the Korean people's struggle against the dictatorial regime in the 1970s for democracy, social justice, human rights, and social reforms. It is an oppressed people's theology seeking justice. *Minjung* theology attempts to discern and create divine meanings in the events and stories of the most powerless people. After the struggle of two decades by the *minjung*, South Korea achieved democracy to a certain degree and economic prosperity. Yet the *minjung* remains in captivity by the contemporary neo-liberal economic-social structure. "Liberation," according to Kwon Jin Kwan means a "*koinonia* of equals" and it can be realized only when the *minjung* becomes the subject of history. Kwon Jin Kwan said:

Liberation starts when the oppressed classes become conscious of their being historical and social actors. The *minjung* become historical actors as they remember their past and assume the responsibility for the future. In addition, the *minjung* become social actors as they become critically conscious of the social structure into which they find themselves. The *minjung* become social actors in history as

10 Anne Nasimiye-Wasike, "Christology and an African Women's Experience" in *Liberation Theology*, ed. by Curt Cadrette, *et.al.* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 99.

they participate in creating justice, the “*koinonia* of equals.”¹¹

The life of self-sufficiency and eco-friendliness is an integral part of the *koinonia* of equals. It can be possible only when it constructs a structure that allows the liberation of the *minjung*. The indigenous peoples all over the world are powerless politically. They are struggling for self-determination and political rights. Armed resistance movement and violence are taking place all over Asia. The indigenous people need to search for a political system that affirms diversity, ushers equality, justice, and progress without any imposition of an alien political system and discrimination of minorities.

Dalit theology emerged to address the issue of caste-based discrimination and stigmatization. It is theology from and of the oppressed community that has lost almost everything, including their land, culture, language, color, religion, and political and social rights. The focus of *Dalit* theology is to rediscover their roots and dismantle the oppressive caste structure. The system of oppression finds its roots in the caste-based social order. This system fixes the socio-cultural status of certain groups, especially the *Dalit*. The caste-based social order puts the *Dalits* collectively in the lowest and deprived position for ages. In response to this condition, the Dalit theology looked in their community-identity, community-roots, and community- consciousness.

Locating their experiences of suffering and exclusion, Dalit theology attempts to articulate the vision of realizing their full humanness by analyzing age-old traditions. Its aim is not simply to gain rights and privileges but the realization of the ideal Imago Dei, the image of God in them. James Massey articulates that -

Dalit theology has to create the possibility of full liberation or salvation, basing upon the Christ event of redemption, which will not stop only with freeing the dallits from the oppressive structures, but will go further to achieve the salvation for

11 Kwon Jin Kwan, *Theology of Subjects: Towards a New Minjung Theology*, PTCA Study Series No. 1, (Kolkata: PTCA, 2011), 14.

the whole people of God including their oppressors. And in this way, Dalit theology will enable the Dalits to become an instrument of establishing a just society in which all will enjoy the equal human dignity.¹²

Liberation is an affirmation of the image of God. It is a celebration of the fullness of life with respect. Without justice and affirmation of diversity, liberation is like an empty gong. Many indigenous people have lost their roots because of successive colonization, evictions, and the imposition of the dominant value system. Liberation involves the recovery and affirmation of one's identity.

Theology from people or persons with disability (PwD) points out that due to misconception and prejudices, the abled people have looked down upon them as objects of charity along with paternalistic and patronizing attitudes. The abled people also consider them as sinners, faithless, and a curse, among many others. The PwDs challenge the existing triumphalistic theology that espoused the perfect images for God, the doctrine of sin and suffering, and the faith-spirituality constructs. Abled people's construct of theology consciously or unconsciously promotes not only alienation of PwDs from the theological discourses. They also perpetuate the exclusion of people with disabilities in the church and society. Disability theology challenges indigenous people to embrace both embodiments – of the able and disable at once, affirming dignity, justice, wholeness, and harmonious coexistence of all in unity with differences.

In summary, the above discussion helps us to understand that liberation involves dismantling the dehumanizing condition, social, economic, and political structures that perpetuate domination. There is no liberation without respect for diversity. It involves demolishing patriarchy that denies women's participation in decision-making processes. It is working towards a political system that will usher equality, justice, and progress without discrimination of the minority groups. It involves the

12 James Massey, *Dalit Theology: History, Context, Text and Whole Salvation* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2014), 224.

realization of the Imago Dei, the image of God in them.

Method and Content

All liberation theologies, though they differ in their approaches, start from 'below' and the 'underside of history.' Liberation theologies take the marginalized and the abandoned people as the locus of the divine. These theologies do not treat the people as *objects* but as *subjects* of history. One can apprehend God by what one has done and is doing for the marginalized people in the concrete historical context. The *ochlos*, the marginalized people, are thus the critical principle in contextual theologies.

All liberation theologies affirm that God in Jesus is not neutral. The God of the Bible is the God of life and liberation. The biblical story focuses on God's liberation of Israel from slavery. It is among the oppressed that God revealed the Godself as liberator, compassionate caregiver, mother, and father. The history of salvation gives special attention to justice to the poor of the community: widows, orphans, the stranger, and those in debt. God is the one who takes sides with the poor and the oppressed. Liberation theologies speak of a God whose purpose for history is the coming of justice and righteousness.

Jesus took liberating and transforming action through his miracles and exorcisms. He broke down barriers among people by forming community, sharing meals with the outcasts, encouraging women followers, defending the prostitutes, respecting and reaching out to the Samaritans, lepers, and persons with disabilities – all those that the religious leaders considered being sinners and unclean at that time.¹³ Jesus challenged the rich people who abused power by affirming the blessedness of the poor for they are the bearers of God's reign. Jesus' condemnation of the rich, and his insistence that the kingdom of God is for the poor threatened the oppressors. These declarations resulted to the crucifixion of Jesus. Referring to the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, James Cone writes,

13 Giblin, 83-84

The theological significance of the cross and resurrection is what makes the life of Jesus more than just the life of a good man who happened to like the poor. *The finality of Jesus lies in the totality of his existence in complete freedom as the Oppressed One who reveals through his death and resurrection that God is present in all dimensions of human liberation.* His death is the revelation of the freedom of God, taking upon himself of the totality of human oppression; his resurrection is the disclosure that God is not defeated by oppression but transforms it into the possibility of freedom.¹⁴

The Indigenous people affirm God's revelation among those who are in the margins. What is missing in third world liberation theologies is the spiritual relationship of people with the land. For the indigenous people, without protecting the land and its resources, there will be no human liberation. Although the indigenous theology is part of larger liberation theology, we can say that methodologically speaking, the point of departure of indigenous theology from other liberation theologies is that indigenous theology seeks liberation from the perspective of "space." In our search for liberation, the issue of space is central and crucial. The issue of "space" is not merely a justice issue to be set alongside others. Rather, it is the foundational theology of self-understanding out of which liberation, justice, and then peace will flow naturally and necessarily.¹⁵ That means one cannot understand oppression, poverty, ethnic conflict, and identity issues without relating to the integrity of creation and land. Justice to creation and land is the key to liberation, human dignity, and fullness of life. That is why harmony with the land is the starting point of the theology of the indigenous people and their search for liberation.

14 James H. Cone, "Jesus Christ in Black Theology," *Liberation Theology*, 147

15 For this insight, I owe deep gratitude to Prof. George E. Tinker's articles. See George Tinker, "American Indian and the Art of the Land," in *Voices from the Third World*, Vol. XIV, No.2 (December, 1981), 22-38. Cf. George Tinker, "Spirituality and Native American Personhood: Sovereignty & Solidarity" in *Spirituality of the Third World*, ed. by K.C. Abraham and Bernadette Mbuy-Beya (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 125-136.

Creation is the first act of God's revelation. In the biblical tradition, one cannot perceive God without water, wind, trees, vegetation, sky, light, darkness, animals, human creatures. In this first act of revelation, God revealed Godself as co-creator with the earth. The most striking aspect in this first act of God's revelation is that "God is actively present in creation." The presence of God makes this earth sacred. That is why God entered into a covenant relationship with all creatures. There are many stories, myths, parables, and even fairy tales of how the Sacred Power and the land sustain life together. This why the prophet said, "the whole earth is full of God's glory" (Isa. 6:1-3). People always conceive of God-world as very much attached to them in their everyday life. To perceive God detached from creation or the earth, or God as a mere transcendental being who controls life from above is not the biblical faith. We believe in God because God, the Creator, is present and continues to work with the land, river, and the seas to give life, sustain life, and give hope. This affirmation is the foundation for life. The major inadequacy of liberation theology is its faith articulation of human history that neglects the rest of the created beings in the earth's family.

Assimilation or Liberation?

The process of assimilation took place at different levels in the past. The oppressed people voluntarily adopted the dominant view due to various forms of oppression and discrimination. It involves the adoption of the dominant language, religious and cultural practices, costume, names, and food habits. It was an upward social mobility process adopted by both the individual and social groups.

Assimilation through colonization was severe among the indigenous people. Colonization refers to the exercise of power and control over one people by another. It employs both formal and informal methods (behaviors, ideologies, institutions, policies, and economics) that maintain the subjugation of, or exploitation of indigenous peoples, lands, and resources.¹⁶ In other words, it is an aggressive, forced,

16 Waziyatawin and Michael Yellow Bird, "Beginning Decolonization," in *For Indigenous Eyes Only: A Decolonization Handbook*, eds. Waziyatawin and Michael Yellow Bird (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 2008), 2.

violent activity. It attacked the territorial, cultural, spiritual, social, and political life of the people. The first phase of the colonizing process involves land or territory confiscation through military approach, or sometimes through diplomatic dialogue or treaty agreement. In many cases, the colonizers forcefully evict the colonized people, oftentimes creating fear and tension to drive the people away. In extreme cases, the colonizers massacre the whole community to take over the land. The prime lands were the colonizers' target of forceful confiscations, making colonized people landless. With the loss of land, which is the main source of their livelihood, the Indigenous peoples live in abject poverty. Along with the loss of land, they also lost their culture. The Indigenous people, therefore, articulate liberation in relation to the protection of land and all living beings.

Though their history, context, racial composition, ideological basis are different, many indigenous peoples share similar forms of oppression, e.g. land alienation, economic deprivation, political exclusion, and social stigmatization. During the colonial era, the prevailing understanding of liberation was about "civilizing people" using absolute and exclusivist language. The colonial powers propagated the idea that the indigenous peoples would attain liberation only when they demolish their culture and language, as these are products of "pagan and devilish" cultures. Following Christ meant "acceptance of the existence of colonialism and the abolition of local cultures and languages."¹⁷ The imposition of the notion about the inferiority of indigenous people's value system made tremendous negative impact on the indigenous people's life culture. Consequently, the Indigenous people internalized that imposed inferiority of their culture. The idealization of the white culture and religion brought great damage to God's rich blessing of cultures. Until today, many indigenous peoples think that their religion, spirituality, economic system and cultural values are inferior and backward, and so they aspire for westernization. Young people aspire to adopt western lifestyle. This shows how deeply the colonial mindset has taken root in our way of thinking and perceiving. Through this

17 Josef P. Widyatmadja, *Re-routing Mission: Towards a People's Concept of Mission and Diakonia* (Tiruvalla: CCA, 2004), 23.

civilizing mission approach, many indigenous people lost their land, their mother tongue, cultural and social structure and assimilated into colonial framework. George Tinker's observation is right when he writes that -

The freedom imposed on American Indians by the colonial power center is freedom to forget our past, our traditional values, our community bondedness; freedom to forget that we were once peoples; and freedom at last to enter the White economy and generate our own personal wealth – by selling our most sacred traditions.¹⁸

Therefore, the whole approach to liberation is to assimilate or to integrate into the dominant social, political, and religious value system. Is this liberation? No. Liberation, for the indigenous people, involves the recovery of our self-respect, traditional wisdom, and respect for diversity of culture.

After disarming and controlling the colonized territory militarily, the second phase of the colonization process followed. This is the process of cultural and social colonization. Robert Odawi Porter expounds on the process of cultural colonization as follows:

Cultural change at this level could be called “acculturation” or “assimilation” but the more accurate term is “social engineering.” At first, the colonizer uses violence to force the colonized people to change who they are as a people. This occurs through the application of new laws and punishments that outlaw traditional behaviors, such as religious practices, dancing, and certain family and marital relations. The next phase is equally as violent, but takes the less overtly threatening form of taking children away from their home and raising them in the colonizer's educational institutions. This “educational” process, often referred to as “promoting

18 George E. “Tink” Tinker, *American Indian Liberation: A Theology of Sovereignty* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), 144.

civilization,” involves beating, hard labor, and psychological abuse. The “benefit” associated with this is that the seeds of the colonizer’s culture are planted deeply in Indigenous Peoples at a very early age.¹⁹

The colonizers carried out the social and cultural colonization in several ways. First, the colonizer changes the name of the native villages, towns, and even mountains and rivers. They did not allow the people to identify themselves by their indigenous names but by the names that the colonizers give. The colonizers carried out this strategic process of assimilation in countries like Myanmar, Taiwan, Australia, Argentina, India, the Philippines, and many countries. Second, the colonizers used these indigenous names, icons, symbols, and cultural practices for the undignified, demeaning purpose to inculcate the feeling of lower self-esteem and negative image of their culture and wisdom to their colonized children.²⁰ In many cases, the colonizers forced the people to change their religious beliefs, educational practices, economic system, and political system. Therefore, for the indigenous people, liberation involves the recovery of our history, land, cultural, and religious rights.

Language gives an identity to a particular community, and it is through language that we analyze, express, and relate to the world around us. Language is also one of the most important social agencies that create the feeling of community as it provides distinct cultural identity.²¹ However, today many indigenous languages have already gone extinct. Most of the indigenous languages are dangerously close to extinction. With the loss of land and language, indigenous culture would disappear. The colonizers have attempted to eradicate indigenous languages as a strategic colonizing mechanism. This is the reason why in many countries, the government systems do not recognize the indigenous

19 Robert Odawi, “The Decolonization of Indigenous Governance,” in *For Indigenous Eyes Only: A Decolonization Handbook*, eds. Waziyatawin and Michael Yellow Bird (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 2008), 89.

20 Suzan Shown Harjo, “Just Good Sports,” in *Indigenous Eyes Only*, 31.

21 M.P. Joseph, “Introduction: Searching Beyond Galilee,” in *From Galilee to Tainan: Towards a Theology of Chhutpthau-thin*, ed. by Huang Po Ho, (ATESEA Occasional Paper No. 15) (Tainan: ATESEA, 2005), 6.

languages as legitimate language and also punish those who speak their mother tongue even in their own places. Thus, James Brooke warns that within the next century, we can expect that half of the world's 6,000 languages will disappear.²²

The colonized educational system has taught us all that English is important for our survival in the modern world, while the indigenous language has very limited or no usefulness. Its agents told the indigenous people's children would have the disadvantage of survival for not speaking the colonizer's language. Protection and recovery of language, which is the mother of our identity, is thus crucial in the liberating process for indigenous people.

The so-called democratic system of government is an imposed political machinery to take control of the indigenous peoples' self-governance and customary law. It favors the majority or dominant community because of the number matters in the imposed political structure. It is a mechanism to exclude the minority from active political participation. The imposition of the dominant culture, religion, education, and language threatens the existence of the indigenous people and their indigenous identity. Liberation for indigenous people involves the right to political participation, decision making, justice, and self-governance.

Colonization continues even today through market capitalism. It operates at the expense of the land and its resources, and it exploits the indigenous people and other poor communities. They pushed the indigenous and poor communities to abject poverty and forced them to live in misery due to their unjust systems. The market capitalism of the colonizers treated many indigenous peoples like mere commodities and beasts. The slogan that says, "the minority should sacrifice for the sake of the majority," led to forcing many indigenous people in Asia to sacrifice their land, forest, and water. The dominant extractive growth model has become a threat to the survival of indigenous people and communities. Unmindful extractions of natural resources of all kinds, of

22 Waziyatawin, "Defying Colonization through Language Survival," in *Indigenous Eyes Only*, 116.

minerals, natural gas, petroleum, timber, and hydropower, etcetera, have devastating impacts, as -

- it threatens the waters that are sacred to people and life for all human beings and all of creation;
- it removes people from their traditional lands and threatens the food web that human beings and all creation are dependent upon; and
- it enables genocidal effects to human beings, where the indigenous peoples, the vulnerable peoples, and the poor are displaced, poisoned, and killed so that multi-national economic systems can reap benefit for the sake of a few beneficiaries.

Furthermore, the neoliberal economic project promotes commercial tourism as its tool everywhere. To meet the demands of the arrival of tourists, the hosts have to sacrifice many things such as their culture, bodies, water, electricity, land, and a variety of infrastructures.

One serious negative impact of this tool is the *objectification* of the indigenous people and nature. It means treating an individual merely as an instrument of sexual pleasure, making them sex objects without respect to their person and dignity. It also involves objectifying indigenous people's culture, customs, rituals, sacred shrines, places of worship, sacred music, and ceremonial dress, among others. Commercial tourism regards traditions as mere market or a commodity. This phenomenon is a violation of human rights. The natural environment is not a mere object for gazing and enjoyment. They have inherent rights and dignity. Liberation is not just about regaining political and economic rights; it involves justice, respect of all life.

Therefore, indigenous people are challenging us to redefine liberation. One core aspect is that human beings cannot live in peace, harmony, and experience freedom without relating and affirming the integrity of God's creation. The voice of the indigenous people for liberation should integrate the following elements:

- community transformation over individual freedom;
- relationality or interconnection between all living beings, even inanimate beings such as rocks, animals, rivers, mountains, etc.;

- simple functionality over luxury;
- a respectful and reciprocal attitude to and use of natural resources;
- sharing over the accumulation of wealth;
- alternative definitions of privilege, power, and prestige; and
- promotion of people-oriented development and management of resources.

The indigenous people affirm progress, development, and liberation as important components for human life, but without neglecting their spiritual connection to the earth's family. *The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*²³ gives a wider framework of liberation.

Affirming that God revealed among the marginalized indigenous people and that God continues to journey with us in our struggle for liberation, we need to affirm and work toward the following aspects²⁴ in our search for the liberation of the IPs:

- 1) the right to the ownership of indigenous lands as the territorial base for the existence of their populations;
- 2) the right to use, manage and dispose of all natural resources found within their ancestral lands;
- 3) the right to control their own economies, and the right to economic prosperity;
- 4) the right to restore, manage, develop and practice their culture, language, traditions and way of life in accordance with their worldview, and to educate their children in them;
- 5) the right to determine the form of self-government, and to uphold indigenous political systems;
- 6) Involves recovery of our self-respect, religious rights, traditional wisdom and respect of diversity of culture; and
- 7) Right to political justice and self-governance. It is not just regaining political and economic rights; it involves justice,

23 Adopted by the UN General Assembly on 13 September 20017. *General Assembly Resolution 61/295* (Annex1, UN CAOR. 61stSecs., Supp. No. 49, vol. III, UN Doc., A/61/49 (2008), 15.

24 Ibid.

respect of all life. 🕊️🕊️🕊️

Citizenship Amendment Act and Its Impact on Indigenous People in North East India

Bondita Acharya

My task was to speak on Citizenship Amendment Act and its impact on Indigenous people in Northeast India. I am not sure I will be able to justify with the topic given to me, however, I would like to discuss it within the framework of Human Rights.

Before going to the complexity of the issue of migration, politics over citizenship during colonial and post-colonial era, it is important to understand why the people of Assam are opposing the act from the beginning and now in rest of India. This act is unconstitutional as it violates the Article 14-right to equality and article 21-right to life and liberty of the Indian Constitutions, which are available to all persons regardless of citizenship. The preamble declares India to be Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic republic. So, this act will destroy the basic idea of India as Secular Country. Then why this present regime is so much in a hurry to bring this legislation? They are implementing RSS agenda to divide the nation on religious line and making India as Hindu Rashtra.

India has a Citizenship Act 1955, which says a person can be a citizen of India by birth, descent, registration, naturalisation, and by incorporation of foreign territory into India. With the signing of Assam Accord in 1985, section 6A added to the Citizenship Act 1955 that introduced a new category to become the citizen of India. The new category was exclusively applicable to Assam that says- all persons of Indian origin who came to Assam before 1 January 1966 from a specified territory (meaning territories included in Bangladesh) and had been ordinarily resident in Assam. These are the people that India considers citizens from the date indicated, unless they chose not to be so. The Act also added provisions accommodating the persons of Indian origin from the specified territories, who came on, or after 1 January 1966, but before 25 March 1971. These people must have been

resident in Assam since the indicate time frame, had been detected as “foreigner” in accordance with the provisions of the Foreigners Act in 1946 and Foreigners (Tribunals) Orders in 1964. Moreover, upon registration, the state will consider them as citizens of India, from the date of expiry of a period of 10 years, and from the date of their detection as foreigners. In the interim period, they will enjoy all facilities including Indian passports, but will not have the right to vote. All other persons who entered the state on or after 25 March 1971, upon identification as illegal migrants under the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) (IMDT) Act, 1983, will be deported. The IMDT Act scraped in 2005 by Supreme Court.

Again, in 2003, the Citizenship Act underwent two significant changes. First, the recognition in law of the category of Overseas Citizen of India (OCI), and second, the constraining of citizenship by birth, by confining it only to those whose parents were Indian citizens already; or if one of the parents was an Indian citizen and the other was not an illegal migrant.

The whole controversy of Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2016 and now Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 is for *“any person belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian community from Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan, who entered into India on or before the 31st day of December, 2014”* will grant citizenship through this new legislation. Another change says, *“The person belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, or Christian community in Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan, the aggregate period of residence or service of Government in India as required under this clause shall be read as “not less than five years” in place of “not less than eleven years”*.

What is the safeguard provided by this Act for North East is- tribal area of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram or Tripura as included in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution and the area covered under “The Inner Line” notified under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873. This is now important to understand and ask, will this provision in the CAA really safeguard and protect Northeast India?

That is why many argues that for Northeast, especially for Assam the protest against CAA is not only for the constitutional rights and secularism, it is also for protecting ethnicity, language, culture, land and resources of the region.

The Constitution of India provides safeguards to the Northeast States (under article 371 A, B, C, F G, H) by providing special status. For example, 371A in Nagaland, 6th Schedule Areas Act for the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura; and the Hill Areas Act in Manipur under the Hills Area Act. The Inner Line permit applies to four states namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur. It is a travel document issued under the Eastern Frontier Regulations in 1873 by British Government to protect their business interests by preventing Indians from doing business in these areas.

Now the question, is despite of all these constitutional provisions, will the provisions protect the land and resources of Northeast India? If we look back, we can see that the Indian Government is doing exactly the same now and earlier, what the British Government did to rule and protect their business interest in Northeast India.

After the Treaty of Yandabo in 1824, the initial plan was to retain the fertile plains of lower Assam in the British colonial empire, and hand over the upper Assam to the Royalty of Assam, who had invoked them to save Assam from the Burmese invasion. However, the discovery of tea and the rosy prospect of a prosperous tea industry, The British did not only take over the entire province. They also created a separate administration for Assam to safeguard the growing plantation industry. The province, which was devastated by decades of insurgency, warfare and a ruthless foreign invasion, did not produce enough to bear the expenses of an elaborate colonial administration. Hence, they transferred the surplus generating, permanently settled regions of Bengal Sylhet, Goalpara and Cachar under the Assam administration in 1874 to make up for the deficit revenue. Hence, in late 19th and early 20th century, the Brahmaputra Valley witnessed a large-scale migration from other parts of the British India, then East Bengal, Chota, Nagpur

Region of Central India.

I want to put forward my argument here that the whole issue of citizenship started in Northeast India since then. The Colonial Rule made a hassle-free migration of Muslim peasants to Assam, and similarly, of the Adivasis from Central India who were brought to work as bonded labour in the Tea Industry. This had led to greater insecurity, threat to the indigenous communities of Assam on ethnic and linguistic identity. After partition though Sylhet being transferred to East Pakistan, a huge number of Bengali Hindus refugees were settled in Cachar due to influx, which added to the already existing Bengali Muslim population. Not only Cachar demanded for a separate state/ Union territory status outside Assam Even the Assamese intelligentsia favoured the separation, but the Center did not pay much attention to. The tension between Assamese and Bengali on linguistic identity has been a permanent issue in Assam and hence the new amendment to the Citizenship Act has escalated insecurity amongst people in the Brahmaputra Valley.

The Bengali speaking Muslim Peasants in the Brahmaputra Valley accepted the Assamese Language and culture and assimilated with the local culture. In 1941, they enrolled themselves as Assamese Speaking Muslim in the census and similarly the Adivasis in the tea gardens that increased the number of Assamese Speakers.

There was always the perception of ethnic identity as a threat among the indigenous communities. And, because of that perception, the region has been witnessing several ethnic conflicts from time-to-time. The conflicts between the Bodo-Adivasi, Bodo-Muslim, Adivasi-Naga, Hmar-Kuki, etcetera, are some examples of such conflicts. I now fear of escalation of such conflicts again, particularly in Assam after bringing this Act into implementation.

Now, I will proceed to the issue of land and resources. The Central Governments, whoever is in power, always looked at the North East region for their potential business interests, rather than protecting the

lands and resources of indigenous communities. The decision on the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir implies the same. The present regime has done this by capitalising Hindu and ultra-nationalist sentiments, and dividing the country based on the religious line. Then, it has become easy for them to brand people like us as Anti- Nationals who are opposing these kinds of anti-people acts, policies of the government.

Though the government is saying that it will not affect North East India, we should not ignore their corporate interests in bringing up this particular piece of legislation. Despite the constitutional provisions like special status, the 6th Schedule, inner line permit, lands and resources are given to the corporations. Today, who has control of the lands in the tribal areas? It is the politicians, the businesspersons, and the corporations. Earlier, through the Look East Policy and now the Act East Policy, the government has signed agreements with the corporations without taking the consent of the local people. The greatest example is the construction of 138 dams in Arunachal Pradesh itself, the extractive and mining industries coming up in large scale in North East India. The Geopetrol International of France, Gail India, Hindustan Oil Exploration Company (HOEC), and Jubilant Energy are active players in the North Eastern states. The GOI's decision to sell 12 oil fields of Assam to private companies is one of the examples of such intention. The article 1 of the UN Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social, Cultural Rights, recognize Self-Determination where people have the liberty, freedom to decide and even control of their resources. India has not ratified Article 1 of the two covenants. It declared at the UN General Assembly in 1966 that "the right of self-determination" appearing in [this article] apply only to the peoples under foreign domination; and that these words do not apply to sovereign independent States or to a section of a people or nation, which is the essence of national integrity.

India already has a Citizenship Act, so there is no purpose to amend the act to give citizenship based on religion from certain neighbouring countries. Therefore, we must understand CAA is an intention to divide the people of the country on religious line and also to divide the people

of Northeast India on ethnic identity. This will divert the attention of people from the economic issues so that Government can fulfil their business interests the way the British Government did. 🐦 🐦 🐦

One Nation, One Language, One Religion: An Indigenous Perspective

Shimreingam L. Shimray

The slogan, “One Nation, One Language, One Religion” is a philosophical ideology that is of interest to modern India. This is an expression of Indian nationhood of the present time manifesting the interest of the political parties in the country. In our modern politics, governance is becoming secondary while upgrading, modifying, and changing the laws is the priority. In recent times, we have seen too much of new laws in almost all aspects of the nation in the judiciary, executive, economy, politics, taxation, revenues, gender, religion, etc. What makes me sad is that next time when a new government comes to the Centre, it would again spend one term of five years in redoing the changes that the present has installed. In other words, they may not be interested to talk about this fragile definition of nationhood.

All correct-thinking Indians know that it is especially important to have a stable national government in New Delhi but not a party government. The political party is important to identify a person involved in electioneering during the election. That is a political party. However, after winning, and forming the government, it should not remain as a mere political party government but a national government that looks after the needs of the citizens. I also do not expect one to derive political ideology from one’s religious perception, but politics must be politics.

As such, we should carefully acknowledge that India is a big nation and a complicated nation in terms of race, caste, religion, and culture. That was the reason the framers of the Constitution of India in 1950 favored the concept of “Unity in Diversity” because the concept of Unity in terms of uniformity was an impossible thing to realize. They were right.

For instance, let us define ONE as One nation – whose nation are we talking about? Do we speak of the Mauryan kingdom of Ashoka? Or, of

the Mughal Empire of Akbar?

The fact is that before the British Rule in India there was no concept of a nation. We only had a history of kingdoms and empires, but not of a nation. Let me refer to a text written by John Strachey, a British colonial administrator who wrote in 1888 a primer called India.

The “first and the most essential thing to learn about India,” he advised his colonial masters, is that “there is not, and ever was possessing, according to European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious ... that men of the Punjab, Bengal, the North-Western Provinces, and Madras, should ever feel they belong to one great nation is impossible.”¹

The propagation of the idea of One Nation would rather invite the question of ONE in terms race. What race shall we be speaking of? Shall we speak of the Aryan race? Shall we talk about the Dravidian race? Shall we talk of the Mongoloid race?

Similarly, One Religion has also no meaning because it would only initiate religious enmity among the religions of India.

I am simply exposing the indigenous mentality because, by nature, they did not have a dialect but dialects. They understood the nation in relation to other tribes. The idea of one nation, one language is like a myth to them. It has no meaning to them.

Tribals are beautiful because of their diverse colors, ethnicities, cultures and they make it more beautiful when they assemble those values. They have the concept of a festival of festivals. The differences in colors, dances, costumes, etcetera, make indigenous people comfortable and good.

¹Cited by Neil Ten Kortenaar, *Self, Nation, Text in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 147. Cf. Ian Copland, *India 1885-1947 – Unmaking of an Empire* (London & New York: Routledge, 2014), 37.

They can never think of assimilation of tribal groups into another. For example, the Nagas can never become the Assamese and use the Assamese language as a national language. Assamese cannot become Mizos.

In India, people are too advanced, too civilized, too creative and adventurous to think of ONENESS in terms of Uniformity. However, in the indigenous worldview, it is more suited to uphold the value of Unity in Diversity. They would never like to think of any concept beyond this.

One Religion

Let me remark that a political party should not determine people's religious faith. The majority, in the name of democracy, cannot decide on people's religious faith. Faith is a personal inclination to the divine. I have no suggestion for you about what religion you should adhere to and I do not expect anyone of you to choose a religion for me as well.

I know that we have the Hindus as the biggest religious group in India, but we do not expect them to impose their religious ideology on other faiths. We need to make ourselves noticeably clear that religion does not define the nationality of a person. One does not become a citizen of an Indian state because he/she is a Hindu, a Muslim, or a Christian. This means religion is not the criteria to become a citizen of a nation.² Nevertheless, a religion that provides good ethics to a nation is good. A religion that upholds the nation by following its norms and protecting the citizens of the country is the right religion.

Religion is not simply a ritual that one must follow. It is all about personal attachment to a doctrine. Therefore, in terms of performing the ritual, anyone can be a part of any religion. However, when we understand religion beyond ritual, then we must respect personal choice of religion.

² Indian citizenship can be acquired by birth, descent, registration, and naturalization (not illegal migrant), and only when the Central Government is satisfied with the case.

In a multi-religious nation like India, it is difficult to claim that we are the majority therefore others will have to follow our faith. A religious faith that does not have personal appealing is never meaningful. Thus, from the perspective I take, it is proper for us to think in terms of appreciating the differences between and among all races, ethnic groups, and accept each other's value of ethnicity, language, and religion. Therefore, a nation belongs to many people of diverse identities.

“Unity in diversity” is a phrase that people used as an expression of harmony and unity between dissimilar individuals or groups. It is a concept of “unity without uniformity and diversity without fragmentation.”³ This concept shifts focus from unity based on a mere tolerance of physical, cultural, linguistic, social, religious, political, ideological, and/or psychological differences towards a more complex unity based on an understanding that difference enriches human interactions.

The concept of unity in diversity is not an Indian concept. Many nations in the world have used this expression as a national motto. For instance, if we browse Wikipedia, we see how people and groups use commonly and prominently the term. Modern politics, Ernesto Teodoro Moneta first used this concept as *In varietate unitas*, in the context of Italian Unification.

Canada

Adélard Godbout, while Premier of Quebec, published an article entitled “Canada: Unity in Diversity” (1943) in the Council on Foreign Relations journal. He asked,

How does the dual relationship of the French Canadians make them an element of strength and order, and therefore of unity, in our joint civilization, which necessarily includes not only Canada and the British Commonwealth of Nations, but also the

3 Roxanne Lalonde, “Unity in Diversity: Acceptance and Integration in an Era of Intolerance and Fragmentation,” Edited extract from M.A. thesis (Ottawa, Ontario: Department of Geography, Carleton University, April 1994) retrieved January 9, 2014.

United States, the Latin republics of America and liberated France?

The phrase has since become somewhat of a staple of Canadian multiculturalism in general.

European Union

In 2000, the European Union adopted ‘United in Diversity’ (Latin: *In varietate concordia*) as its official motto, a reference to the many and diverse member states of the Union in terms of culture.

In India, against the British administrator of 1888, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India and leader of the Indian National Congress, vigorously promoted unity in diversity as an ideal essential to national consolidation and progress. He wrote at length on this topic, exploring it in detail in his work *The Discovery of India*, 1946.

The diversity of India is tremendous, and it is obvious. It lies on the surface and anybody can see it. It concerns itself with physical appearances as well as with certain mental habits and traits. There is little in common, to outward seeming, between the Pathan of the North-West and the Tamil in the far South. Their racial stocks are not the same, though there may be common strands running through them. Yet, with all these differences, no one could make a mistake in noting the impress of India on the Pathan, as this is obvious on the Tamil. The Pathan and the Tamil are two extreme examples. The others lie somewhere in between. All of them have their distinctive features, and all of them have still more of the distinguishing mark of India. In Indonesia, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, an Old Javanese phrase translated as “Unity in Diversity” (*Out of many, one*), is the official national motto of Indonesia.

The slogan Unity in Diversity in the Malay language is inculcated nationwide, and known as “Kesepaduan dalam Kepelbagaian”.

Nepal

Nepal is a multilingual, multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multi-

religious nation. The people with different faiths, cultures, and ethnicities have been living harmoniously since ancient times. Unity in diversity is the defining characteristics of the Nepali society. In Nepal, 125 different castes are living together and there are 129 different spoken language spoken.

Papua New Guinea

The national motto for the nation of Papua New Guinea on the Eastern side of the island of Papua is Unity in Diversity.

South Africa

When apartheid South Africa celebrated 20 years of independence on 31 May 1981, the theme of the celebrations was “unity in diversity” (Afrikaans: *eenheid in diversiteit*).

Indigenous peoples of America

The Gwich'in Tribal Council represents the Gwich'in, a First Nations of Canada, and an Alaskan Native Athabaskan people living in the northwestern part of North America, mostly above the Arctic Circle. The Council adopted the motto of Unity through Diversity.

People of different parts of the world are convincingly accepting and adopting the concept of ‘unity in diversity’ and an Indian nation has prospered in all aspects of her national life under such a concept. It will be wrong on the part of modern India to question this ideological principle of nationhood. It will be wrong because if India denies this principle, people will protest with their best effort in any attempt to assimilate smaller groups of people and religions. The nation would either slowdown in its journey or move back to barbarism.

We are living in a competitive world and we do not need to make any big mistake that might hamper the progress of the Indian nation-state. Let India remain as a strong nation without any disrespect of religions of India but by accepting all differences under one national trait.

The concept and practice of ‘unity in diversity’ do not question the

nationhood of India. It only makes India strong and beautiful. State and regional presentation of different cultures and costumes during the celebration of Indian Independence Day expresses the value of diversity.

We all know that Hindi is our national language. However, it is universal to have a second language. In India, under the national language, there are several regional languages recognized for education purposes. This is among the wisest things the Ministry of Human Resources did in India. It is making citizens of India know that Hindi is important, but never imposed on them that Hindi is the only language in India. India is rich enough with languages and thus, we should be happy to recognize officially several Indian languages as a second language to many ethnic groups. Then we will be able to understand the meaning of the richness of culture, religion, and language. If we try to maintain the monopoly of one, then it will be undermine and weaken the others. We should not allow that to happen in modern India. 🙏 🙏 🙏

One Nation, One Language, and One Religion: A Christian Perspective

Imli P.

Introduction

Unity in diversity is a very complex matter in India. Moneeb Barlas, a columnist in *The Express Tribune*,¹ writes that Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India, spoke about the revocation of special constitutional status of Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) during his Independence Day speech. Modi exclaimed, “The spirit of one nation, one constitution has become a reality now.” Perhaps, Barlas writes, Modi forgot to add the other emerging uneasy reality concerning the notion of “One Religion.” This religion is Hinduism. For Modi, “One Nation” never meant a pluralistic society comprising Hindus alongside Muslims, Christians, and adherents of other faiths that form India’s body politic. Rather, Modi’s vision of “One Nation” is for an India where only Hindus have exclusive rights to life and liberty. The non-Hindus, in general, and the Muslims in particular, must either convert or find some other place to live in.² Modi’s statement has recently ignited a controversial debate again in a secular country like India.

On September 14, 2019, on *Hindi Divas*,³ the Union Minister of Home Affairs said that if one language can do the work of uniting the country, then it should be the language spoken by most people in India, and that is Hindi. This statement has revived the debate on the imposition of Hindi in the name of One Nation, One Language⁴ and subsequently,

1 The Express Tribune is a daily English-language newspaper based in Pakistan.

2 Moneeb Barlas, “Towards One Nation, One Constitution, and One Religion” (25 August 2019) <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/editorials-columns/why-one-nation-one-language-is-bad-for-diversity-> (10/02/2020).

3 People observe Hindi Divas to mark the decision of the Constituent Assembly on September 14, 1949 to extend official language status to Hindi. It was observed first in 1953.

4 Editorial, “Can Hindi Unite” (20 September 2019). Available in <https://www.drishtiiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-editorials/one-nation-one-language> (10/02/2020).

of “One Religion.” Therefore, every right-thinking citizen of India should ask certain questions, such as, can one language and one religion truly play the role in uniting a nation like India? Had the people or the government divided India? How do we interpret “Oneness” in a multi-religious society? Every Christian, on the other hand, should re-read the Bible to see how it could be relevant in a multifaceted society such as India. After all, there are crucial issues and questions that Christian communities in India need to address urgently.

There may be no immediate ready-made answers to the above questions from the Christian perspective. However, this debate calls the Christian communities of India to re-examine once again the “exclusive claims” of their faith, on the one hand, without syncretizing their faith, on the other hand. Although most of the Christian institutions today propagate the theology of religious tolerance, this topic failed to be a part of Christian hermeneutics in many local churches.

In the later part of this paper, I will highlight the Christian perspective on this subject. But before I proceed, I will give a brief and basic background on the ideology of “One Nation, One Language, and One Religion.”

Background

When dealing with such a complex and sensitive issue one must have the primary knowledge of the development of this ideology. Here are some basic points of its development.

Context

1. The Constituent Assembly of India adopted Hindi written in *Devnagari* Script along with English as the official language of the country on September 14, 1949, under Article 343(1).
2. The people in many non-Hindu states contested the imposition of Hindi, especially in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. Violent protests broke out in southern India leading the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, to introduce the ‘Official Languages

Act' in 1963, which assured the continuation of English along with Hindi as the official language of the Union of India.

3. The Anti-Hindi protests of 1965 marked an important turn in India's official language policy. The amendment of the 'Official Languages Act' in 1967 guaranteed the "virtual indefinite policy of bilingualism" for all official purposes of the Union.
4. Article 25-28 of the Indian Constitution of India provides the right to freedom of religion. It imparts freedom of conscience and free profession, practice, and propagation of religion.⁵

It may be true that a large number of people in India speak Hindi, but it is equally true that a majority of Indians do not speak this language. India always believed in unity in diversity. This idea of imposing Hindi as the official language of India is not in tune with our history, culture, and civilisation as India is a multilingual society. India, as a Union of States, must keep a space for diversity. India is a country united in its diversity. Diversity is a great philosophical idea and people should not see it as a cultural burden.

Definition of Oneness

In the case of diverse India, people must not conceive "oneness" in terms of the mathematical principles of quantity, such as 1, or $1+1=2$. Rather, we should take the concept of "oneness" in terms of the quality of relationships and togetherness of the people. Sundar Sarukkai, a philosopher based in Bengaluru, could help us understand this concept when he said that –

Those who talk about 'one nation' must realise that the true meaning of oneness lies in its quality of unity and togetherness. It does not arise through measurable and majoritarian views but only as a quality that comes through recognising the common

⁵ Editorial, "Can Hindi Unite?," in *Drishti*, September 20, 2019 (database online). Available in <https://www.drishtias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-editorials/one-nation-one-language> (10/02/2020)

humanity in all of us, independent of our gender, caste, class, and religion.⁶

One Nation One Language and One Religion: The Origin of the Ideology

The project of achieving a Hindu-only India had begun much earlier, even before India became independent from British control. Its most celebrated champion is Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. Savarkar espoused the radical ideology of *Hindutva*, which entails a belief in Hindu superiority and has little if any, tolerance for the followers of other faiths. Today, the “*Sangh Parivar*,” a family of extremist Hindu nationalist organizations led by the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), is preoccupied with translating Savarkar’s dream into reality. The *Sangh* is the chief architect behind the so-called “Saffronization of India.”⁷

India: A Secular Country

India is home to many heterogeneous people who speak many languages and dialects, and who hold multi-religious beliefs. Former president Pranab Mukherjee, in one of the events organized by the RSS in June 2018, said that the people should recognize the divergent strands of views in public discourse on the “Saffronization of India.” We may argue against it. We may agree, or we may not agree with the idea. He pointed out the undeniable reality of the prevalence of multiplicity of opinion. Moreover, the recognized only “through a dialogue can we develop the understanding to solve complex problems without an unhealthy strife within our polity.” Stating that the soul of India resides in pluralism and celebration of diversity, he said, “This plurality of our society has come through assimilation of ideas over centuries.

6 Sundar Sarukkai, “The meaning of oneness in ‘one nation,’ in *The Hindu*, September 26, 2019 (database online). Available in <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-meaning-of-oneness-in-one-nation/article29511161.ece>

7 Moneeb Ahmad Barlas, “Towards One Nation, One Constitution, and One Religion,” in *The Nation*, August 25, 2019 (database online). Available in <https://nation.com.pk/25-Aug-2019/towards-one-nation-one-constitution-and-one-religion> [https://www.khaleejtimes.com/editorials-columns/why-one-nation-one-language-is-bad-for-diversity- \(10/02/2020\)](https://www.khaleejtimes.com/editorials-columns/why-one-nation-one-language-is-bad-for-diversity- (10/02/2020)).

Secularism and inclusion are a matter of faith for us. It is our composite culture which makes us into one nation.”⁸

The Politicization of Religion: A Threat to the Secular State

People had always mixed religion and politics in the long history of the country. The increasing politicization of religions is a disturbing feature of contemporary Indian life. Politicization is the use of religion by political or religious leaders for the benefit of one community at the expense of others. Stanley J. Samartha writes that although religion and politics relate to each other closely in the history of the country, what is new today is the intensity of communal passions that go against the very spirit of religion. The politicization of religions threatens the secular character of the state, hinders the process of national integration, gives rise to anxiety, fear, tension, and conflicts in society, and has global implications as well because the major religions of India extend beyond the frontiers of the country.⁹

Christianity in a Secular State

Stanley J. Samartha, in his book *One Christ Many Religions*, opines that in a religiously plural world, a plurality of scripture is to be expected. In a multi-religious community such as India, there are different scriptures that people accept as authoritative by their respective adherents. However, can one scripture extend its authority to operate over other communities of faith that have their own scripture? Who decides? Therefore, Christians in a multi-religious world cannot ignore other scriptures that provide spiritual support and spiritual guidance to millions of the adherents. Christian hermeneutics today has to respond to a double challenge, namely, from the side of the scientific enterprise, on the one hand, and the scriptures of neighbours of other faiths on the other. The manner in the reading of the scriptures in a multi-

8 Pranab Mukherjee, “‘India’s Nationhood Not One Language, One Religion’: Pranab Mukherjee Concerned About Rise in Violence,” in *News 18 India*, October 23, 2019 (database online). Available in <https://www.news18.com/news/india/indias-nationhood-not-one-language-one-religion-pranab-mukherjee-concerned-about-rise-in-violence-2357225.html> (10/02/2020).

9 Stanley J. Samartha, *One Christ Many Religions: Towards a Revised Christology*, 1991, Reprint (Bangalore: SATHRI, 1994), 58.

religious society depends very much on the way one interprets the Bible concerning the scriptures of other religions. The teachings of Jesus was developed in the mono-scriptural situation in the west in response to the western challenges that may indeed be helpful to Christians in Asia and Africa, but it cannot be “normative” to them because they have yet to develop new hermeneutics in a multi-scriptural society.¹⁰

Change in Christian Response to other Faiths

There are significant changes taking place officially in Christian attitudes towards neighbours of other faiths. In 1979, the World Council of Churches (WCC) accepted a theological statement about the neighbours of other faiths. The statement said: “We feel able with integrity to assure our partners in dialogue that we come not as manipulators but as fellow-pilgrims.”¹¹ To propagate unity in diversity, Christianity needs to change her approach towards neighbours of other faith with the attitude of relational and not as manipulators.

Christians are moving from the “normative exclusivism,” towards a position of “relational distinctiveness” of Christ. It is *relational* because Jesus connected with the neighbours of other faiths. For instance in Luke 9:51-56, Jesus refused to curse the non-believers. The inhabitants of a village in Samaria rejected Jesus’ teachings. His disciples asked that he exterminate the people of the village by issuing a curse. Jesus refused to do it, and simply move on to the next village. This is about *distinctiveness*. Without recognizing the distinctiveness of the great religious traditions as different responses to the Mystery of God, no mutual enrichment is possible.¹² Moreover, the Hindu response to religious pluralism should become a part of Indian Christian theological reflection.

A Christian Response

Unity in diversity is part of God’s plan. Even in creation, God uses a colorful brush to paint our varied and perplexing world, full of plants

¹⁰ Ibid. 66-67.

¹¹ Ibid., 88.

¹² Ibid.

and animals that astound the scientific community and probably always will. The Tower of Babel narrative in Genesis 11:1–9 explains why the world’s peoples speak different languages. According to the story, a united human race in the generations following the Great Flood, speaking a single language and migrating westward comes to the land of Shinar. There they agree to build a city and a tower tall enough to reach heaven. God, observing their city and tower, confounds their speech so that they can no longer understand each other, and scatters them around the world. The confounding of the people’s speech was a deterrent to the arrogance they displayed, “to make a name for ourselves” (v. 4).

The New Testament talks about the different gifts God gives to the people, and how each is equally valuable, though very different from each other (I Corinthians 12:1-11). Further, we are urged to recognize that the “Body of Christ,” composed of many different, varying parts, like a physical body, will not function correctly if we do not honour each part and recognize its unique role (I Corinthians 12:12-31). We must challenge ourselves to walk the walk of diversity, not just talk and talk.¹³

To realize a peaceful co-existence in pluralistic India, and to safeguard India from the disastrous theory of One Nation, One Language, and One Religion, I propose some measures for consideration.

Dialogue

Christians should consider responsibly the kind of “mission” they are committed to in a pluralist society. Does Christian mission mean the extension of the Christian community and the extinction of all other religious communities? What will happen if the Hindus and the Muslims would decide also on the same procedure? The fact that not just Christians but Muslims and Hindus too have their “missions”

13 Alia Stowers, “Unity and diversity are part of God’s plan,” in *Springfield News Leader*, August 5, 2014 (database online). Available in <https://www.news-leader.com/story/opinion/contributors/2014/08/05/unity-diversity-part-gods-plan/13640003/> (10/02/2020)

demands that the whole matter of the content and practice of mission has to be reconsidered, maybe with all three and others coming together in dialogue.¹⁴

Rediscovery of Role/s

Every religion in a multi-religious society and a secular State has to rediscover its role in the changing situation. There is an urgent need for a theological reorientation, reform of religious education to the younger generation, drastic revision of syllabus for the study of religions in theological colleges and seminaries, and for developing links with other religious communities. These things will enable all religions to make genuine contributions to the strengthening of the foundational values of the nation and the growth of public morality.

Re-Institutionalizing of the Religious Councils

According to Wesley Ariarajah, the time has come to “institutionalize” the reconciling potential of religion. Communities can set up inter-religious councils, multi-religious fellowships of religious leaders in the communities. In schools, peace education, organize studies on peacebuilding and conflict transformation, education for justice and peace, exposure to each other’s prayer and spiritual practices, could be implemented to supplement the institutions that offer education, healing and service to communities. Peace does not come about by wishing for it; we have to be peacebuilders. One has to work and build peace, and strive to preserve it.

Conclusion

The imposition of one common language and religion will be an imposition of Hindi imperialism for other non-Hindi speaking groups. This imposition is also a threat to people of other faiths who are minorities in India.

India is a secular state, and therefore it should not oblige the people to adhere to any one religion or language. Such a move is a violation of the Indian Constitution that safeguards the secular in nature of India.

14 S. J. Samartha, 60.

As India is a diverse country with many languages and religions, the imposition of Hindi as a common language and Hinduism as religion will break the beauty of diversity in languages and religions.

We should love and respect all people, as Christ commanded us in Mark 12:31, “the second is this; ‘Love your neighbour as yourself, there is no commandment greater than these.’ India should unite to stand against the use of communal riots in the name of religion. Take a close look at Jesus. He met with a centurion who, as a soldier, was probably a worshipper of Mithras (Matthew 8:5-13). He spent time with the Samaritans (John 4:4) and the Gentiles (Mark 7:24-30). Does the New Testament ever record him as saying, “I do not respect your religious belief?” Qualitatively, the notion of “oneness” is not possible without diversity. 🌸 🌸 🌸

Part II

Religio-Cultural Structures and Peace Initiative Processes

Patriarchy and Marginalization of Women: North East India Tribal Context

Lovely Awomi James

Introduction

The subject of just peace is both novel and critical. Novel because it is something that is hardly ever been truly experienced by anybody; It is critical because it is not at all as simple as it sounds, to venture into, or to achieve it without serious challenges, and we mean serious challenges. Peace can be particular, sectional, general, and superficial or can even be seemingly comprehensive without justice. However, peace with justice for all concerned, for all sides, is complicated and usually impossible. Yet, we must strive for that kind of just peace at all costs. Let me recall here a small example from an experience that Wati Longchar shared in his keynote speech of our thematic workshop cum consultation¹ concerning his real predicament when he met a young girl who had lost her family in a conflict. He shared how it was very hard for him to tell her to be at peace or to forgive the perpetrators who had raped her sister and destroyed her family, unless and until the military personnel who committed the crime voluntarily come forward and genuinely in repentance, plead for forgiveness. Just-peace is as hard and as complicated as that. Speaking for the tribal women in the context of North East India (NEI), and to envision just-peace, is a huge challenge because of the patriarchal culture of the Tribals. How do we even contemplate peace and justice within a culture that marginalizes women? How do we break down the existing edifice of patriarchy to envision just peace for our people and our land?

This paper offers a critical discussion upon the select concerns and issues, engaging the active interaction of participants for viable

¹ A Consultation on “Just-Peace in Global Context: North East India Focus,” organized by the Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF-APAY), Hong Kong and Tribal Study Centre, ETC, Jorhat, Assam from 11th to 15th February 2020 at Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam.

responses at the end. I do not pretend to provide or propose solutions to the problems addressed here. I build upon the issues that emerged during the consultation and on the outcome of the critical engagement that transpired in that consultation. I am limiting my research concentration to my own Naga tribal context and experiences to serve as a window to the wider NEI tribal context. I base this paper solely on my knowledge, experiences, recollections, and observations as a tribal woman living in a patriarchal tribal culture. The hypotheses of this paper are the following:

- a. Just-peace will prevail if there is women's liberation and empowerment;
- b. Justice for women means justice for the tribal society; and peace for women is equal to peace in the tribal society.

1. Tribal Culture and Patriarchy

Some basic, raw, and concrete seeds of patriarchy in NEI are the following:

- In many tribal societies, the man is the decision-making authority.
- There is a prevailing preference for a male child over a female child.
The treatment and upbringing of a male child are different from the upbringing and treatment of a female child.
- The Tribal society has different culturally codified behaviors, liberties, and expectations for boys and girls.
- Many of our cultural mores and social conducts still goes back to the old, obsolete traditional beliefs and customs that practiced in ancient times and generations.

An example to illustrate the above immediate point is a practice still prevalent in the villages today. Imagine a picture of a husband and wife walking on their way to their field. –The man holds a *dao* (long knife) or, probably a staff. The woman carries a heavy basket full of food or crops on her back while carrying an infant on her front, trudging along. Once I asked why we have this unsettling practice. The people told me that in the past, it was necessary for the man to stay alert, to be on guard on the way to protect the woman, children, and others from sudden,

unsuspected attacks from the enemies. My further questions, though in silence were, Ok. Fine. But what about now? Is that still the case? Where are the so-called lurking enemies? Relevant? Seriously.²

Tribal women still struggle for a lack of power in decision-making and fight for their rights. For the majority of families, the men are the decision-makers and women are the compliant, non-compete followers. If one were to ask, “On what grounds are women expected to be unquestioning followers?” The answer is, “On biological grounds, on sex, and gender grounds, what else?”³ The patriarchal culture of the Tribals permeates the whole expanse of tribal life and practice, in all aspects of life and existence. The saddest part of the issue is that many women believe it to be the gospel of truth that God created women as inferior and created mainly for servitude to men. They believe that women should make their marks in the family, church, and society by how much women can bear hardships; how far they can sacrifice their own needs for others, and how much they can set themselves as examples of service and contribution. Tribal culture and tribal society extol such supposed ideal traits in women and make them examples up against other women who do not conform to such character or lifestyle.

A recent development among the Sumi tribe, even in the Western Sumi Baptist Akukuhou (WSBAK) initiative, compels Sumi women to resign from their ministry in places among the Sumis if they married to non-Sumi men. I will cite a few examples of cases here to substantiate my argument.⁴ A theologically trained woman graduate had to resign and leave her place of ministry because she married an Ao Naga man.

2 This is one example of how we still practice irrelevant and insensitive traditional customs until today especially in the rural areas.

3 The system expects people to follow the cultural norms without question. Society has nurtured men, women, and children within such a worldview that men become the authority in the overall matters of life and women become “faithful” followers.

4 I am withholding the real names of the women for confidentiality. I gathered these sources through my contacts and telephone interviews. These are the real experiences of real tribal women. And to realize that these discriminatory laws are endorsed or rather laid down by the church is just unbelievable.

Another is the case of Mrs. A, a Sumi woman missionary who married a Hewa Naga. A woman pastor, Mrs. H from the village in Dimapur married a Nepali man. However, the women's department of the church intervened and retained her for two more years that ended her ten years of tenured service.

For the Sumi woman, marriage to a non-Sumi man would mean losing or stripping off her original parental and cultural identity. The Sumi women will be stripped of their original tribal identity. The Tribe will no longer count a woman who married a non-Sumi man as a Sumi in the real sense of the term. There is no formal or official customs or rituals of stripping off of one's parental and cultural identity, but the general attitude of the people will ostracize and them as outsiders, as no longer a Sumi, and will stigmatize them in every possible way. Moreover, in inter-tribal marriages, the tribe into which a woman marries will also not accept her fully as belonging to their community simply because she is from another tribe or community. Her tribe as well as her husband's tribe would marginalize her because of the patriarchal culture. These Tribal communities are so deeply entrenched in a patriarchal culture that they allow these man-made laws and customs to become absolute and binding, and thus, victimize the tribal women who are caught by its predatory web.

2. Discriminatory Customary Laws

The men have created these beliefs, codes, and customs. The communities and groups held on to these customs and made it serve as the backbone principles, codified or not, upon which they adhere. After some time of living the tradition for some years, the discriminatory customs eventually become binding and absolute.

The constitutional provision gave the Tribals and indigenous communities the privilege to retain, maintain, and exercise to a certain extent, but it has two sides. Article 371 of the Constitution safeguards the Tribal customary laws, which accorded special provisions to the states especially in the Northeast to preserve their tribal culture. This has caused a fair amount of problems for the region just as it

has safeguarded some areas. The government cannot carry out the development projects (read as community/society/public developmental projects) due to the unrestricted rights of individuals or private entities to retain or own their lands and plots. This provision greatly affects women, and I will come back to that later. Promulgated when Nagaland took the status of statehood in December 1963, Article 371(A) of the Indian Constitution states that:

Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, no Act of Parliament in respect of religious or social practices of the Nagas, Nagas customary law, and procedure, administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law, ownership and transfer of land and its resources, shall apply to the State of Nagaland unless the Legislative Assembly of Nagaland by a resolution so decides.⁵

2.1. Women and the Inheritance Rights

According to the customary laws of the Tribals, daughters cannot inherit immovable properties such as landed properties. Since traditionally, people trace one's descent through the male heir, the family or clan cannot pass on their landed properties and other immovable properties to the daughters or the women. This is because of the idea that the women would assimilate themselves into other men's families through marriage. While this sounds logical enough to a certain degree especially on grounds of the patrilineal system, it does not wholly justify the sheer discriminatory objective towards tribal women. In the patrilineal custom, the family retains and passes on the ancestral land and property to the family's male heir, but why should daughters, and women be deprived of enjoying other land properties of the family?

Very recently, I put my belief to the test by asking my father to give me a landed property, a plot of the family field in the village. I did not ask for a plot in the town for residential purpose as commonly practiced. By cultural diktat, it is his land and my only brother's rightful claim to

⁵ See also Article 371(G) for Mizoram; 371(B) for Assam, Meghalaya; 371(C) for Manipur; 371(F) for Sikkim and 371(H) for Arunachal Pradesh.

inheritance will only take place after my father's time. I know it was a ridiculous idea. Upon hearing about my request, my sister-in-law, my brother's beloved wife, confronted me with her disbelief and nearly crushed my spirit with her disdain. She must have thought that I have lost my head with all my theological learning. I am 99.9% sure that my father will not grant my request, as I know how he and my brother are hard-core and loyal to our customary laws. At least I took comfort in the knowledge that I tried, and that I spoke up, and disturbed the men in my family, including a woman who adheres to that customary law.

God has blessed my husband and me with two children – a son and a daughter. We are committed to the goal that the two of them will equally inherit whatever we have, or own in the future (not that we have anything to show off for now as evidence). The discriminatory laws of inheritance rights for tribal women are a serious reality that cripples tribal women and robs them of their rights, voices, power, and strength to live confident, fearless, and wholesome lives.

3. Place of Women in Patriarchal Politics

Why are tribal women not at the forefront of politics? Are they not qualified? Yet, tell me how many men are seriously qualified, as in being TRULY QUALIFIED. Tradition, customary laws, codes of conduct, the sexual division of labor, etcetera, are still embedded, or lodged inside the people's brains. In the recent past, in 2017, the Tribal bodies, especially under the Naga Hoho, fought tooth and nail to suppress the women's voice and presence against the 33% seat reservation to the Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) election. They succeeded. It was not a surprise. The Tribal culture nurtures their women to be non-competitive and subservient members.

The Hindustan Times on February 15, 2017, reported that “[D]espite constitutional guarantee, Nagaland women are fighting a protracted battle to extract their rights from a system socially embedded in patriarchy.”⁶ Our gender-based civil war nearly erupted. Women

6 Utpal Parashar, “In Nagaland, it's a long march for women's quota in local governments,” *The Hindustan Times* 15, February 2017 (database online). Available

stepped down in *submission* withdrew their petition from the high court, and the case died down. It was a move towards the idealized goal prescribed for ideal women. That historic event is very pitiable. The threats of ex-communication and social boycott, among other threats, forced the 140 candidates to withdraw. Among the different tribes of Naga Tribals, there are existing regular dissension, tribal, ethnic conflicts, unfounded suspicion, and animosity. However, when it comes to subjugating, discriminating, silencing and dehumanizing women, all tribes automatically become one as though they had always been such sworn brothers for the good of the tribal people in general.

Rosemary Dzuwichu was the lone courageous Naga woman who filed for the implementation of the women's seat reservation at Guwahati High Court and won the case. She deserves respect and honor. Not everything was in vain. Twelve of the 32 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) were able to hold the election. The Tribal women became victims of our own patriarchal culture and the Constitution of India's complex legal provisions. For instance, there is a conflict between Article 243D and Article 371 of the Constitution. Article 243D provides a 33% seat reservation to women in the ULBs, but Article 371 blocks tribal/Naga women from accessing that right of reservation. Only a few men saw the need for change and showed their support toward tribal women in the elections. However, the majority, including the young educated, the supposedly learned men did not support the women. Two young lives were lost in the protest against giving a 33% seat to women in the ULBs. Protesters vandalized and damaged properties. There was so much commotion. Many Naga tribal men are victoriously going down the annals of Naga history as men who fought *against* the human rights and progress of their women. Yes, these men leave behind them a negative legacy.

4. Women and Patriarchal Religion/Church

Tribal women, in general, have occupied secondary if not very low place in traditional religion. They played a secondary role, only

assisting male-dominated leadership behind the curtains in the realm of invisibility. Men were the priests, the main, legitimate actors of the religious realm be it in the privacy of the home or the public, village realm. This reality does not preclude the fact that many female shamans and mediums contributed so much to the religious and spiritual life of the Tribals. However, the church classified these women under a special or exceptional category, whose services the people used under very special and urgent circumstances. Hence, as far as the visible religious life of the community is concerned, only the men held the office of administration and function of the priesthood.

When the western missionaries entered the tribal lands, the people experienced both positive and negative outcomes. The positive legacy includes without question, education, better standard of living, personal cleanliness or hygiene, and so on. The negative legacy includes the change of outlook that made the tribals dislike and belittle their own cultures, lives, practices, and way of life. The western missionaries made the Tribals turn their hopes, aspirations, and aim toward emulating western culture and western way of life, and, re-enforce patriarchy in human relationship.

The western missionaries helped solidify the socio-cultural myth that perpetuates the idea that the woman's place is in the kitchen and home. They instill in the Tribal mind that the rightful place for a woman in the economy of God's plan for humanity and salvation is behind and under the authority and protection of her husband and menfolk. The teachings and sermons in the churches present submissiveness as the spiritual ideal for Christian women. One cannot deny that the missionary women championed and taught western education for the tribal women. Certainly, the path toward tribal women's progressive history of empowerment was all due to the committed contribution of those great women of God. Having acknowledged that, we are also aware of the critical reality of the missionary women themselves and their western world. Those women also could not do much as they would have possibly wanted to, owing to their own patriarchal culture and upbringing. Women missionaries could not go out to evangelize

the unreached peoples and cultures apart from the shackle beside the male missionaries as their wives, sisters, and daughters.⁷ Several of them went through a shotgun kind of marriage to be able to go out as missionaries to other lands. In their world and society then, the policies of their government, their churches, and organization would not allow them to go as single women. The countless reasons that their sending church and organizations put forth to convince the women was the argument that all those policies about their safety and benefit. However, one of the negative results is that they become trapped and rendered invisible under the shadow of their husbands, fathers, or brothers. They merely became appendages, assistants, and helpers of their men – men whose names went into the pages of history as the sole or main, giant figures as missionaries.

We have inherited that missionary legacy coupled with our very own patriarchal Tribal traditions. Our churches have a preferential option for the male servants of God. This is 2020 and the church is still steep in a patriarchal structure. The theological education, the whole exercise of conscientizing, molding, training, teaching theology of equality, and partnership seemed to be just a noise mostly. These are clanging cymbals, as in reality there is so much lack of praxis. Male colleagues, classmates, and hitherto best friends are not willing to change their patriarchal mindset and characters once they step out of the training grounds and enter into the ministry.⁸ Maybe those men will never move unless women “transform” themselves to become men literally and join in the male-structured ministry of the church. Is this what they want? I am purely frustrated with this situation. The trained and qualified

7 Narola Imchen, “Woman’s Work for Women: The Life and Work of Anna Hasseltine Kay Scott,” in Lovely Awomi James and Akani Kinimi eds., *Tribal Women’s Voices in Theological Discourse* (New Delhi: WSC-CWI, 2020), 64.

8 While in the seminaries or colleges, most men are supportive and even extremely vocal in their stand for empowering women and in advocating for Christian equality based on the Gospel principles. However, once they join the local church ministry, they change their colors. They become silent and start moving ahead at the cost of discriminating against their fellow women colleagues and leaving them behind in secondary, insignificant, and subjective positions.

tribal women still struggle to find their place in the ministry of the tribal Christian church. Men occupy almost all the leadership offices and roles, pushing women to the secondary and assisting positions and roles.⁹ I have few but provocative questions for the men in the church: What exactly are you afraid of? Are you afraid that women will supersede or outdo you in the field? Or, are you just plain irredeemably egotist to the core?

5. Tribal Women and Economic Justice

Economic justice is a serious concern for tribal women. Economic liberation empowers women largely across the world. In the tribal context, man is traditionally the breadwinner; the woman is the cook and manager of resources provided by man. She does nothing more. Her reputation and status even depend on how best she manages the resources, and yet she is always under the mercy of the men who provide, sometimes not even enough. Thank God, today the tables have turned around for many. Many tribal women are now economically independent. They no longer depend on their men. They now earn their living. Many have jobs, own properties, and they can support not only their selves but also their families including their non-earning husbands. While acknowledging that many tribal women are no longer stuck in the house, or no longer husband-dependent, the saddest part for many of them is that the husbands still expected women to do the bulk of the household chores in addition to their office and business works outside the homes. Men still want to continue to live as if they are the only breadwinners. They still expect their women to serve them, make their lives comfortable by taking care of all the family, childcare, and household chores. The men return home from work and laze around. In contrast, most women return home from work and do the housework even if they are tired, despite their pain and sorrow at the unjust structure and culture of the society. Some people feel offended at such a blunt view and generalizations. Indeed, the cultural diktat that expects women to remain subservient is still there. No matter how educated, or

⁹ Narola Imchen, "A Brief History of Women in the Church in North East India," in Marlene Ch. Marak, *Inspiring Change: Tribal Women and Men Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (Jorhat: WSC-ETC, 2015), 90-93.

how much a woman earns, or how high a status a woman has achieved, the patriarchal culture sees to it that a tribal woman does not forget her culturally-assigned place and responsibility: the house, kitchen, and servanthood at home. This is the bitter truth.¹⁰

Today, many men are looking for economically stable women for life partners. They understand that it is time for them to stop being the sole earners for the family and that it is necessary to bear the responsibility of earning a livelihood by both the man and the woman. However, they do not realize that the hitherto gap of the sexual division of labor between the men and women has now been removed. Both women and men ought to share in breadwinning as well as in household care, now the woman is also taking up paid work. The point I am driving at is that the tribal women, whether economically empowered or otherwise, are still bound by patriarchal cultural customs and practices. Tribal culture still views women as created to take care of the household works, husband, and childcare on top of their careers. The Tribal women, especially the professionals, have a double burden of marginalization within the patriarchal context of the Tribals today.

‘Just’ self-critique is always good and beneficial for anybody who is positive and courageous enough to accept the critique. I offer a small critique on a section of tribal women who are economically stable today. I have noticed that greed or monetary drunkenness has overtaken many. I am referring to women in the business sector. At the heart of their economic ventures are theirs and their families’ survival, peace, comfort, and wellbeing. However, not all women follow the moral-ethical means and measures of business and trade. I do not completely blame the individual woman in businesses, yet there is truth in the observation that some Tribal women are yielding to the bug of capitalist greed. The disease of insatiability for wealth and profit has infected the women, and they have become insensitive toward the poor and

10 Everybody expects this from a woman in a tribal society. It is not just the men but the women themselves, especially the elderly women – mothers, mothers-in-law, and those who are steeply indoctrinated in patriarchal traditions.

struggling people who come to buy their goods. They sell products that cater to wealthy customers who purchase their goods without even a blink at the skyrocketing prices. The wealthy, in turn, pushed themselves to do deceitful means of earning money so they can enjoy the exotic products sold by those tribal women who sell their products at exorbitant rates in the local markets. We can talk about the saying, “what goes around comes around,” and that is corruption, is it not? Seriously speaking, many of these tribal women engaged in business seem to have lost their humane sides and their moral-ethical senses and responsibilities toward God, toward fellow-beings, and even toward their selves. This is one serious concern that I observe from my encounter and interactions with several of them. I discuss this point here in light of just peace because of all aspects, all groups, all parties are interconnected in one way or the other. It affects one another and the whole system within the economy of life that God has created and blessed us.

6. Tribal Women in Peace Movements – Women Organizations/Bodies

People know North East India as the infamous region for conflicts, violence, and corruption besides its fame for the unique beauty of people, cultures, and languages. On the one hand, several women organizations and bodies are popular in their active engagements in social movements and activities. We can cite a few for our reference here. There were Nupi Lan (Women’s War - 1904, Manipur), Meira Paibi (Torch Bearers - the 1970s, Manipur), Mizo Women’s Movement (Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl – MHIP), Naga Women’s Union (Manipur), Naga Mothers Association (1984 - NMA), and Asom Mahila Samiti (later Asom Pradeshik Mahila Samiti, 1926 – Assam). Many of these and individuals and groups of women are often seen in peace ventures both officially and voluntarily. Whenever, wherever there is conflict, violence, and war that our brave and courageous men have brought on, of course, our women, especially mothers, are at the forefront - risking their lives. They do not care for anything but the peace and safety of our men, our families, and whole communities. This is how tribal women commit to stand, fight, and safeguard their homes,

families, land, and communities.

On the other hand, there is another side of tribal women's real-life story. Any attempt by tribal women to stand, speak up and fight for their selves, for their rights, and for their wellbeing, the society regards it all together as an ugly story. Any attempt by tribal women to oppose or to resist oppressive customs and traditions, our tribal men and their organizations translate it as an affront to our revered Tribal traditions and customary laws – labeling us women as rebellious and anti-cultural beings, etc. I mention this to show that the tribal women's historic journey of life is very complex and even baffling within the deviously woven web of patriarchal culture.

In the context of Nagas, the Naga Mothers Association (NMA) founded in 1984 is one of the most powerful civil bodies in Nagaland. The women established this organization to protect their families – their children, their husbands, and themselves; to combat and eradicate alcoholism and drug addiction that breaks the families and homes; and to check moral and ethical lapses in the society, among others. In the past, it organized a series of workshops, protest rallies, and raids against drug trafficking and alcohol. It also fought against the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (1958). The NMA came to be the most feared body in Nagaland. It was indeed a very powerful body to oversee the law and order in the society especially in matters of checking moral, ethical lifestyles and actions.

Having mentioned the strength and significance of women's organizations like the NMA, let me also mention that the women's organizations and bodies tended to function within the patriarchal cultural context. And it is not without limitations. This could be because tribal women are still victims of patriarchy no matter how much we, the women, try to convince ourselves that we have knowledge, liberty, and power to know and do what we believe to be right. Yet repeatedly, we play into the hands of patriarchy wittingly or unwittingly. Let me highlight an unforgettable incident that unfolded under the banner of NMA in Kohima, the capital of Nagaland.

A very tragic, sad, and loathsome incident took place in the late 1980s, around 1988,¹¹ when I was still a high school girl. A Naga woman, a neighbor, lived in a house about 200 meters from our house. My friends and I used to call her “aunty” with much admiration, as she was a beautiful, elegant, and learned woman. The police arrested her upon charges of allegedly having illicit affairs with married men, for partying, drinking, and drug peddling. She did not have the chance and space to defend herself, nor was there anybody to defend her or give her the benefit of the doubt. The mothers and married women, dragged her out of the house, shamed by stripping her, and paraded in public. An unidentified assassin finally pumped bullets into her battered body in her hospital bed at Naga Hospital in Kohima.

The womenfolk of the Naga Mothers Association turned wild in rage and violence that they passed judgment upon her, condemned, and tortured her. This is a clear case of the tribal married women’s weakness, perhaps a wave of displaced anger against their husbands. Possibly, as they were completely dependent on their men for their financial support, peace of mind, comfort, and for their own families, they went into denial of their husbands’ role in the whole story. This tragic incident went down as the historic background of many of the young girls’ lives in the colony, including myself. It made a huge impact on our spirits as the incident still haunts us today. The lynching of that woman makes us question the injustice meted out to her and consequently, to the women she represents. It makes us wonder why the men are left scot-free, they who probably just went back home with smugness to the bosoms of their wives – the wives who unjustly acquitted them by scapegoating and crucifying another woman. These wives inflicted murderous violence on a defenseless woman and led to the woman’s death so she could not tell her story at all. These women of the Naga Mothers Association *silenced* her and unjustly *freed* their guilty husbands.

¹¹ I called up my childhood friends who are still in Kohima to confirm the date and I received this confirmation from one of them namely Mrs. Honili Swu, who also consulted other friends and received the same confirmation.

Every time I come across the biblical story of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) that tells us of men dragging the woman to Jesus, this Kohima crime always comes to mind. The only difference is, if this gospel incident were to take place in our context it would be the women dragging the adulterous woman to our Lord Jesus, while raining curses on her, convicting her, and carried out punishment upon her for supposedly luring, tempting, harming and abducting their helpless, innocent, faithful, pure and unwilling husbands/men to sin! We wonder what Jesus would have done or how he would have responded to these women.

The Tribal women should be women first and secondly only as wives and mothers. Most importantly, we should possess the wisdom that comes from God to discern what is right and what is wrong, what is just, and what is unjust. We should be courageous enough to resist any oppressive and unjust worldview, customs, and practices, to right the wrong and to put a stop to our marginalization through the wiles of patriarchy and its culture. If we, as women are unable to affirm our femaleness and womanhood, respect, love, and value ourselves just as God intended us to be, then we are not worth the time, love, and grace of God, our Creator. We would not be living the God-intended lives of purpose and fullness.

Conclusion

I would like to leave a few thoughts to conclude this paper.

1. Just-peace is a long shot. It is a faraway dream. There is no such place yet in our tribal context. Seriously speaking, as it is, to speak of just peace in the context of the stark reality of patriarchy and marginalization of tribal women, one cannot help but question: Whose peace and whose justice are we talking about? As such, as long as tribal culture disrespects, discriminates, marginalizes, and dehumanizes its women, the dream of just-peace will only, and will always remain a dream.
2. The Tribals in the North East would often argue based on our

customary laws, our age-old traditions, revered beliefs, and customs. To some degree, it is fine. However, we ought to learn that life, history, and reality are not static or dormant. Life itself is dynamic, so is everything in and around us. The thread that connects us with our revered past should be one that is clean, strong, life-supporting, valuing, and positive; not one that is negative, dragging, destructive, and life-devaluing. We can reclaim, revive, and hold on to the good beliefs and values, not the opposite. We need to move on with the strong, positive legacies, rather than with the negative and destructive legacies. We should be able to recreate new stories, new histories for our progenies so that one day, they will look back and learn of us, to enable and encourage them to redefine, filter, and take with them what they find good in ours, and thenceforth to weave their own stories ahead into the future.

3. The just-peace theory¹² holds that the principal source of conflict and violence in the world is a structural sin or structural evil. The keynote address during the thematic workshop points to the idea that the source of violence is unjust action rather than the usual conclusion people causing violence. While that may also make sense, I would still strongly hold that it is the people, us, humans, who are the principal architects, designers and actors, and perpetrators of those unjust actions and structures of sin and evil. If we desire to mend and heal the structures, first we ought to heal ourselves - humans, peoples, individuals, and groups - of the disease of blindness, insensitivity, greed, self-centeredness, injustice, violence, and godlessness. Individuals, people, and human communities should own up to their roles and actions that either create 'just' or 'unjust' structures and systems.
4. My concluding thesis is this: until society addresses and challenges patriarchy, deconstruct its "power-over" philosophy, and until society stops marginalizing tribal women - mothers,

12 Pierre Allan and Alexis Keller, *What is a Just Peace?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

wives, sisters, and daughters, there can be no justice and peace in our lives, in our land, and our world. The Tribal society must install liberating and empowering structures for the tribal women in the social, economic, political, and religious spheres. This is necessary for the tribal dream of just-peace. To that end then, may God help us all! 🕊️🕊️🕊️

Achievement of World Peace through Interreligious Harmony

Lalit Shyam

Peace for all humankind or ‘world peace’ has been the main stated goal of almost every major religion in the world. However, it is indeed ironic that many wars and battles began or fought in the name of religion because of inter-religious friction and conflict. These wars resulted in human suffering.

Therefore, it is important and meaningful to discuss how to promote inter-religious harmony so that world will achieve peace, or at the least, reduce the frictions and conflicts. Religion can and should be the seedbed for mutual understanding, goodwill, and harmony among people, instead of becoming a hotbed for suspicious, mistrust, and hostility. The question is how to promote inter-religious harmony in the real world so that it will contribute to peace.

Firstly, we take the case of the relationship between two countries or societies, each being mono-religious but different from the other. Inter-religious harmony and peace between the two peoples of different religions in two separate sovereign states are possible and often sustainable. This is feasible on the premise that there is no serious conflict of economic and political interests between the two, and as long as they follow normal diplomatic and other international rules.

Secondly, the case of the relationship among different religious groups within the same country or region may be more complicated. This is because the groups must be in frequent contact and have to compete for and share resources. Inter-religious harmony is often difficult to maintain. Very few countries in the world are one hundred percent mono-religious.

A major and crucial prerequisite for inter-religious harmony is religious tolerance. There are two main inter-related components to religion for

the individual believer. The first component is the personal and internal aspect, that is, the person's own belief and conviction, the nature and intensity of which may vary from individual to individual. The second component is the external or outward expression of this conviction. This usually takes the form of participation in an act of worship or any form of ritual. Both aspects are characteristic of almost all religions. When we speak of religious tolerance, it must apply to both aspects.

The basis for religious tolerance comes first, and foremost, from the principle of freedom of belief, which is nowadays widely accepted as a basic and inalienable human right. Freedom of belief applies to all areas of human belief and conviction, including religion. In fact, from the point of view of any religion, it is particularly crucial to recognize that an individual has an inherent right and freedom to hold and develop his or her own religious conviction. True conviction in a religion can only come about because of an individual's proper understanding of that particular religion, as well as his or her own mental, emotional and spiritual development as related to that religion. In religion, force or coercion is unacceptable. Force cannot, does not, and will not lead to a true conviction. To deny the individual the right to decide his or her own religion is to go against the very nature and basis of religious conviction. Actually, if the religious conviction could be achieved and maintained only through coercion and brainwashing, there would be no place for religious tolerance.

One should even extend the principle of self-determination in religious belief to one's stand with regard to the religion of one's children. Most parents contribute to the religious teaching of their children from a very early stage in their children's lives. This is a basic right of the parents, as the right of parents to choose the type of formal education. However, parents cannot ultimately determine and dictate their children's basic beliefs, especially after their children have grown up.

One source of inter-religious conflict is the tendency for overzealous believers of religion to claim that theirs is the only true path, superior to others. It is all right to have faith and a sense of confidence that one has

made a correct choice in religion, but it is wrong and counterproductive to take a “holier than thou” approach. Believers of different religions also tend to go into the mesh of arguments over differences in views regarding the beginning and the end of life and of the universe, or different interpretations about the ultimate salvation. While such matters may be important as far as providing a mythological and theological basis for each religion, these should not become issues for inter-religious conflict. Such differences in view are not due to the difference in environmental, historical, social, and cultural factors that prevailed at the time of the founders of the different religions.

If there is real respect for the basic right of freedom of belief, conflict over such issues should not arise. Indeed, any act of castigation or contempt of another religious belief is an indication of a lack of understanding of one’s own religion because all religion preaches patience and tolerance. It would be fruitful and enriching to identify common values and virtues in different religions while appreciating and respecting differences.

The same principle of tolerance should also apply to differences that arise within one religion or among people who see themselves as followers of the same religion. Such intra-religious differences are common as different interpretations and practices emerge among followers who come from different social and cultural backgrounds. These differences also arise in the process of the expansion of the religion, as sub-groups or sects emerge. Antagonism and conflict arise when each sect claims superiority or greater legitimacy over another.

Different sects should conduct dialogues in a frank and sincere manner. The adherents of religions should minimize the differences, especially those that are minor or merely semantic. At the very least, they can agree to disagree, and there should be mutual respect among sects as among religions. The individual has the basic right to determine and hold his own belief. This is not very problematic or controversial because belief and conviction are within one’s own heart and mind. However, it is important to recognize the extension of this right into the

second component of religious life, that of expression and practices. An individual has the right to express one's convictions in the form of rituals or worship prescribed by the chosen religion, to live one's life in accordance with its tenets, to strive for ultimate fulfillment as destined by the religious ideals. External expressions and practices of religious convictions are more vulnerable and open to objection, attack, or control than the right to private belief. This is because these adherents express and manifest their convictions publicly. Intolerance of or discrimination against a religion usually takes the form of forbidding religious gatherings, rituals, and other forms of public expressions of belief that are considered "unacceptable" in the eyes of the other group. Such prohibitions or restrictions often make it inconvenient or impossible for an individual or a group of individuals to continue practicing.

However, while we must uphold the inalienable right of an individual to hold and practice one's religion, we must also recognize the need for self-restraint or even some regulations, especially in a multi-religious society. This is to prevent certain religious practices and customs from disturbing and causing inconvenience, discomfort, or even harm to other people. In such cases, there is a need for mutual understanding and tolerance. Should there be any regulation or restriction, it must be arrived at through a process of mutual consultation and consensus-based on mutual respect. This is religious tolerance in real practice.

Inter-religious conflict arises sometimes not because of intrinsic differences in concepts and practices between the two religions but because of other reasons. Two groups of people holding different religious beliefs may have lived together and tolerated each other for generations and yet suddenly conflict arises over minor matters in the name of religion. This has happened quite often in several countries. It may be because people adhering to one particular religion may have become more aware of what is required of them by their religion. Furthermore, they may have accepted a more stringent interpretation of their religion due to influence from some revivalist movement. However, the real cause of the strife is the emergence of conflict of

economic and political interest between the two groups resulting from a rapid socio-economic or political change. Thus, groups use religion as one of the weapons in the fight, as they can mobilize this force easily because of its emotional content. True believers of all religions must therefore put an end to this tendency to politicize religion, and prevent the forces from committing acts of intolerance and violence in the name of religion. After all, true belief flourishes and becomes firmer at times of adversity.

Some people have proposed to solve the problem of inter-religious conflict permanently if only all humankind holds a common religious belief. To me, this is not realistic as it can only come about in two ways – one is to convert everyone to an existing religion; the other is to unify all religions. In fact, the first approach is not possible, except perhaps by force, which will surely generate resistance and resentment. The second approach is too idealistic. There were attempts to do this now and then, but without much success. These attempts failed because major religions have indeed many basic differences, and each religion has established its worldview, as well as its philosophical and theological foundations. The objective of tolerance is not to impose uniformity. Rather, it is to recognize the differences and to establish communications at a feasible level that will lead to understanding, mutual respect, and appreciation.

Establishing communication among religions involves the identification of some specific and concrete goals, such as efforts to relieve human physical suffering caused by hunger or disease, and to combat social ills such as drug addiction and crimes. The collaborating religious groups could translate such goals into actual projects on which people from different religions can work together. Believers of different religions can come together on such common goals. We need not be involved in disputes about whose ways or whose path is “better.” Through such a process of working together at everyday levels on specific and limited goals, bound by the objectives of the immediate project that people are committed to collaborating, good will slowly build up. A genuine spirit of mutual respect will eventually emerge. 🌸 🌸 🌸

Tribal Movements in Arunachal Pradesh

Tugaso Manyu

Introduction

On 20 January 1972, the government renamed the area popularly known North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) as the state of Arunachal Pradesh formally and officially. The state lies on the extreme northeastern part of the union of India. Around its borders lies the Republic of China in the north, the state of Assam in the South, Myanmar, and the State of Nagaland in the East, and the Royal Kingdom of Bhutan in the West.

Almost all the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh believed that a supernatural power created the universe out of nothing. The customs and customary laws gradually evolved according to their needs. The tribes transmitted these customs and practices to the younger generation through myths, legends, folklore, songs and dances, rituals, and beliefs since many tribes do not have a script. The tribes classify their customs such as those related to harming the human body, marriage, and divorce, relating to a breach of contracts, nuisance, guardianship, inheritance or succession, customs of adoptions, customs related to rituals, and belief system, and agricultural laws.

There is no identical set of customs for every tribal community. Each tribe maintains a distinct and different set of customary practices and usages from any other tribes. Customary law varies from tribe to tribe, and within the same tribe, the customary law varies from village to village. The sole purpose and aim of all these customs of every tribe are to bind people and bring peace and justice to society. The sense of justice connects everyone involved with the problem and handles the problems in their entirety.

The following are some of the movements that yearn for peace, justice, and equality in the society of Arunachal Pradesh.

Feminist Movements

The tribal society of Arunachal Pradesh, one of the most remote states in northeast India, has been predominantly patriarchal and patrilineal, resulting in a significantly lower status of women. Some tribes such as Nyishi, Adi, Mishmi, and Hill Miri practice polygamy and the husband pays the bride price. Thus, women become the property of their husbands. Women enjoy no right over parental properties except for some amount of movable properties such as ornaments, cloth, fowls, etc. Their active participation in religious performance is also restricted in most of the societies.

The feminist movement strives for women to unite and strive towards a set goal where men and women enjoy equal status. Women have to deal with their peculiar problems and prospects, pride, and prejudices while maintaining their womanhood. The women's movement in Arunachal Pradesh led by various socio-cultural and voluntary organizations constituted of educated and enlightened women folk. October 10, 1979, marked the formation of the All Arunachal Pradesh Women Welfare Society and the establishment of its headquarter at Itanagar. Since its inception, the organization has taken up various measures for the upliftment of the womenfolk in general, by eradicating various evil practices of the societies such as child marriage, polygamy, payment of bride price, among others. However, the women of Arunachal Pradesh have enjoyed comparatively greater freedom in different aspects of traditional lifestyles compared to women in other parts of India.

Student Movements

The All Arunachal Pradesh Student Union (AAPSU) is the apex body of the student union in Arunachal Pradesh. Its main mode of activities was to pray with petitions. It forges a partnership with the government to draw its attention to some of the problems of the student community, in particular, of the people of the state in general. In the meantime, the demands of the APPSU became more specific and broad-based. Some of the important ones were as follows:

- (1) Solution of Assam-Arunachal boundary problem,
- (2) Detection and deportation of foreign nationals from the state,

- (3) Withdrawals of land allotment permit and trade license from the non-Arunachalees, and
- (4) Effective checks against further infiltration of foreign nationals.

The government has treated Arunachal as the dumping ground for refugees and immigrants from the neighboring states and countries. The refugee problem in Arunachal Pradesh has created apprehension and danger in the minds of the students, people, and the government of the state. Following the eruption of ethnic riots in 1961 in Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT) of erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), thousands of tribal people, rendered homeless, fled to India. Again, in 1964, the religious persecution of the Chakmas and Hajongs of the tract in East Pakistan compelled them to leave their country to join their refugee kinfolds in Tripura. As the government of Pakistan showed no signs of taking their people back and as the Tripura government had to take a tough stand because of the heavy burden of refugees there, the refugees moved further east. Mahavir Tyagi, the then union relief and rehabilitation minister, tried to settle them in Bihar by offering cash doles. However, the majority of the Chakmas refused to move to Bihar on the plea that the climate of that state would not suit them.

At that critical juncture, the government of India contemplated a plan of settling these refugees in NEFA. Thereafter, the history of the settlement of Chakma and Hajong refugees in NEFA began. Even those refugees who went to Bihar for settlement at the Gaya district came back to join their brothers in NEFA in 1968. Thus, the flow of refugees continued from 1965-66 to 1968, and they settled in the three districts of Papumpare, Lohit, and Changlang.

The Chakmas and Hajongs became legal residents of India. In 1964, the government of India granted migration certificates to approximately 35,000 Chakmas and 1,000 Hajongs. The government of India settled the migrants in the erstwhile NEFA, an area that comprises the present-day districts of Lohit, Changlang, and Papumpare in Arunachal Pradesh. These certificates indicated legal entry into India and the willingness of the government of India to accept the migrants as future citizens.

In the case of the Tibetan people, they began to migrate to India in 1959. The migration began when the Tibetan religio-political leader Dalai Lama, together with his followers, entered India via Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh and took political asylum in India. The Indo-Chinese war of 1962 further stoked the flow of refugees into NEFA. The Indian government then decided to allow the settlement of a limited number of Tibetan refugees distributed over the district of NEFA. Even as the Tibetans settled in Changlang and Lohit, the main population concentration remained confined to Kameng and Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) allowed the settlement of the Chakmas, Hajongs, and the Tibetans in NEFA up to 1965, and then later, the settlement continued under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) until 1972. In retrospect, when the Indian government has sown the seeds of a future critical problem in the area, it consulted neither the people of NEFA nor their representatives in settling refugees there.

Movement against Discrimination

The people of Arunachal Pradesh in particular, and people of the North East at large, experience different forms of discrimination. I will discuss the two main areas of discrimination here.

Compensation Matter

On February 13, 2018, Mr. Maram from Itanagar expressed his feeling in Arunachal Times on the discrimination that the government did concerning land compensation. Bomja is a village under Tawang district and the native district of Chief Minister Pema Khandu. In Bomja, thirty-one families received from the government 40.8 Crore¹ to acquire 200 acres of land. Whereas the government has expropriated land for free to establish different projects and development works. Left with no choice, the people of the Jote area gave up their land free to the government for the establishment of the National Institute of Technology (NIT),

¹ 1 Crore is equal to 100 lakh Indian Rupee, and 100 lakh is around USD 1,566.72. So 40.8 Crore is roughly equal to USD 6,392,217.60.

College of Law, Film Institute, Government Engineering College, etc. Throughout India, the government pays compensation for the construction of road, port, airport, railway, and others. However, in Arunachal Pradesh, the government always expects and encourages people to give up their land at no cost.

Racial Discrimination

Arunachal's Beauty Queen Model Chum Darang went viral when she posted an open letter to PM Modi and described the racial discrimination against the people of the North East. She writes, "My name is not 'momo', 'chow chow,' 'chinky,' and most importantly, it's not CHINESE."

The mainline Indian people often discriminate against North Eastern people by calling them different names. They treat the North East people as foreigners. They stare at North East people with contempt. The people of North East India continually face and endure racial discrimination in other towns and cities of India.

Conclusion

It has been a general observation that people who are treated unjustly eventually rebel and make the abuser pay greatly. There is a fear that one day, such a rebellious group may arise and the society might have to face the consequences. The natives of Arunachal Pradesh feel insecure in terms of how the government considers giving the same rights to the refugees. The refugees have already encroached beyond their designated camps especially in Lohit.

As a tribal person of Arunachal Pradesh, I have always felt that the people in the mainland India should not make it hard for us, the Tribals, to find work, to live in peace, marry whom we want; travel where we want, and so on. In other words, we can co-exist, live well, and have equal opportunities with the rest of the Indian citizens. 🙏🙏🙏

The Rights of the Tribals in Manipur

Solemwon Ramson

Introduction

Within a nation-state, the indigenous people are distinctly different from those of the dominant groups. They are indigenous to their territory and they have a special attachment to their traditional land and forest. Such attachment to the land emphasizes their survival as “peoples.” The indigenous people further experience and continue to suffer discrimination due to their differences. Though there has been no universally accepted definition of the indigenous people, the one developed by the United Nations Special Rapporteur Jose Martinez Cobo, is used as the working definition. It reads:

...indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having continuity with the pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They now form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop, and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions, and legal systems.¹

The United Nations adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) on September 13, 2007. It asserts the equality of all people, and the right of the indigenous people to the full enjoyment of all human rights as collective or as individuals. According to article 5, “Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions.” It affirms the right to live as distinct people and

¹ United Nations, “The Concept of Indigenous Peoples”, PFII/2004/WS.1/3 (Database online). Available in https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/workshop_data_background.doc+&cd=2&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=in

ascertains the right to land, territories, and resources that they have traditionally owned. It further emphasizes the need for free, prior, and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerning their land and territories.

In India, the government considered the Scheduled Tribes as the Indigenous people. No legislation defined the term “tribe” during the British period. However, the Constitution created the “Scheduled Castes and Schedules Tribes” for inclusive policies to secure special privileges and ensure their accelerated progress because of backwardness due to historical reasons. The Government of India adopted the following characteristics and criteria for identifying a tribe:

- autochthonous;
- groupism or strong community fellowship, if not descent from a common ancestor
or loyalty to a common headman or chief;
- a principal, if not an exclusive habitant;
- a distinctive way of life, primitive or backward by modern standards, apart and aside from the main current of culture;
- economic, political, and social backwardness.²

The conditions of indigenous peoples in Asia are among the most discriminated against, socially and economically marginalized, and politically subordinated parts of the society in their countries.³ In Manipur, there are about 34 recognized Scheduled tribes, and they constitute 35.12% of the total population in the State. The Hill area comprises 90% of the total area of the State, while 10% comprises the valley area. The Tribals in the Hill areas have their own social structure, distinct culture, and possess their own unique system of landholding. This landholding system is rooted in the peoples’ deep sense of attachment and socio-cultural connection to the land.

2 *Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes* (Delhi: Manager of Publications, Government of India, 1952. Cited in J K. Das, *Human Rights and Indigenous peoples* (A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, 2001), 33.

3 Rodolfo Stavenhagen, “General considerations on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples in Asia,” A/HRC/6/15/Add.3 (1 November 2007). This is the report of Stavenhagen, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people.

Special Provision for the Hill Areas of Manipur

The Scheduled Tribes are the predominant inhabitants of the Hill Areas of Manipur. There has always been special protection for the tribal people in the Hill Areas since the colonial period. When the British conquered the Manipur kingdom, the hill villages were not disturbed, keeping the Hills directly under the control of the British Crown.⁴ There were two regulations that applied to the hills of Manipur – the Chin Hill Regulation and the Manipur State Hill People's Regulation Act 1947.

In Manipur, the rights of the tribals are not covered by the Fifth schedule or Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. To safeguard the interest of the tribals, special provisions were made under Section 52 of The Government of Union Territories Act, 1963, concerning the Union Territory of Manipur for constituting a Committee of the Legislative Assembly that consists of members from the Hill Areas. However, when The Union Territory of Manipur became a State under the Re-organization Scheme, the Committee ceased to exist. As a part of the Scheme of safeguards for the people in the Hill Areas, a special provision corresponding to section 52 of The Government of Union Territories Act, 1963 was inserted in the Constitution. This resulted in the amendment of the Constitution under the Constitution (Twenty-Seventh Amendment) Act, 1971 that inserted Article 371(C) with respect to the State of Manipur, which came into effect on February 15, 1972.

In exercise of the power conferred under Article 371(C) of the Constitution, the then President of India, V.V. Giri, issued an Order dated 20th June 1972, called “The Manipur Legislative Assembly (Hill Areas Committee) Order, 1972.” By virtue of this Order, the Hill Areas Committee (HAC) was constituted within the Manipur Legislative Assembly. The HAC is constituted by the elected members of their respective constituencies of the Hill Areas of the State. There are 20 tribals constituting the HAC out of the 60 total MLAs of Manipur.

4 U.A. Shimray, *Tribal Land Alienation in Northeast India: Laws and Land Relations*. Indigenous Women's Forum of North East India & North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati, 2006.

Paragraph 4 of the order stipulates the function of the Hill Areas Committee, which is to look into all the “Scheduled Matters” in the Hill Areas.⁵ It also conferred a Special Responsibility upon the Governor with regard to the proper functioning of the Hill Areas, as stated in paragraph 9 of the order. It says,

The Governor shall have special responsibility for securing the proper functioning of the Hill Areas Committee in accordance with the provisions of this Order and shall, in the discharge of his Special responsibility, act in his *discretion*.⁶

Land rights of the Hill people

The land system of the Hill and the Valley has always been different. Tribals have their own system of land possession and maintenance of their land and forests. The people in the hill areas, like most indigenous communities, practiced community ownership of land and followed a customary landholding system. This system does not require specific recognition such as governmental official documents or title deeds.

The land system in the valley area has been completely under the control of the Raja. After the Second World War, the Assam Land revenue Regulation of 1886 was enforced in the whole valley, excluding the hill areas. Later, the Manipur Land Revenue and the Land Reforms Act, 1960 was introduced. In the original version of the law in 1960, there was no provision on the coverage of this Act over the hill areas. However, through an amendment made in 1976, the Manipur State government enabled the extension of the Act to any hill areas. This is a provision spelled out in part 1 (2) of the Act, which reads:

...provided that the State Government may, by notification in the official Gazette, *extend the whole or any part or any section of this Act to any of the hill areas of Manipur* also as maybe

5 There are thirteen items listed under *Scheduled Matters* in the Second Schedule of The Manipur Legislative Assembly (Hill Areas Committee) Order, 1972.

6 The Manipur Legislative Assembly (Hill Areas Committee) Order, 1972.

specified in such notification.⁷

There has been subsequent amendment to this Act that raised concerns for the hill people regarding the extension of the Act. In the latest amendment of the Act, the State Assembly passed the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (seventh Amendment) Bill, 2015, by inserting section 14A and 14B under Section 14 of the Principle Act. Article 14A (1) reads:

*Notwithstanding anything contained in this Act, Non-Manipur persons, firms, institutions or any other similar entities who intend to purchase any land in the State of Manipur shall submit an application to the Deputy Commissioner of the District concerned where the land purchased is situated for obtaining the prior approval of the State Government before such purchase is made by him.*⁸

The Act does not mention any exclusive clause of non-application in the hill areas, neither on securing the consent of the hill people. As such, the amendment further strengthens the implementation of the Act that ignores the role of the Hill people representatives and its authorized bodies.

The Mapithel Dam project, also known as Thoubal Multipurpose Project, is a project that the Government of Manipur undertook with the Department of Irrigation and Flood Control. The project outlaid its plan since 1976 and began the construction in 1980. It was undertaken with no proper compensation and rehabilitation, without free, prior and informed consent, without environment/forest clearances and without the approval of the HAC. The project affected about 40 villages and declared 44 villages as catchment areas. The project encroached into

7 K. Jila Singh, *Land Laws of Manipur* (Imphal: Eastern India Standard Offset & Letter Printing Press, 2003), 11.

8 *The Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (seventh Amendment) Bill 2015* (Database online). Available in https://www.e-paolive.net/download/education/2015/ILP/Manipur_Land_Revenue_and_Land_Reforms_Seventh_Admendment_Bill_2015.pdf

the long-standing social customs of the Tribals and led to the loss of land of the Tribals, disruption of the village and its inhabitants. A case of Appeal from Green Tribunal is pending before the Hon'ble Supreme Court and another case of PIL is pending before the Hon'ble High Court of Manipur.

Regarding the transfer of land, C. P. Steward, then President of the Manipur State, issued a Standing order No. 9 on December 10, 1934. It reads:

Transfer of land from one village to another by sale or any other way is not allowed except with the permission of the President, Manipur State, and terms and conditions of any such be clearly laid down and agreed before such permission will be given. ⁹

This order further protects the tribal land of the hill areas in the State. The atrocity of the State in the wrongful dispossession of a member of Scheduled Tribe from his land further violates the provision of section 3 (v) of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. Under article 26 of the UNDRIP, in which India is a signatory, guarantees the Indigenous Peoples the right to lands, territories, and resources that they traditionally owned. It also holds the States responsible for adjudicating the rights of indigenous peoples and give due recognition to indigenous peoples' laws, tradition, customs, and land tenure systems.

Right to prior and informed consent

The Scheduled Tribe in the hill areas constitutes the non-dominant groups in the State. In order to include the participation of the hill minority in decision making on matters concerning hill areas, the Hill Areas Committee (HAC) has the responsibility and the authority to look into all the Scheduled Matters relating to hill areas. The right to prior and informed consent continues to be a significant provision for the protection of indigenous people. As James Anaya, a UN

⁹ Ramsan Daniel, *Commentaries on The Manipur (Village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act, 1956 (80 of 1956) & The Manipur Hill Areas (House Tax) Act, 1966.*

Special Rapporteur of the Indigenous Peoples rightly explained, the consultation could not be a matter of simply informing the indigenous communities on measures that will affect them. Beyond that, the indigenous people have the opportunity to give their voice and allow influence on the decisions that affect their interest.¹⁰ To achieve this, the government has to fully engage with the indigenous people through discussion and see to it that the decisions taken thereafter do not infringe on their rights.

Land plays a very important role for the indigenous people in the hill areas. The passing of Bills, Orders concerning the hill areas and the amendment of Acts without the knowledge of the HAC bring insecurity to the people of the hill areas. It threatens the protection of tribal rights in the hill areas provided by the Constitution under Article 371(C).

A mention of a rather controversial order issued on July 11, 2014, bearing No. 26/20/2011-TD (misc) that the State passed is contrary to the rights of the tribals guaranteed under the Special provision of Article 371(C). Through the order, a list of 10 (ten) items relating to the Tribal and Hill areas have been brought under the purview of the “Tribal Affairs and Hill and Scheduled Castes Department.” This order is ironic because it brings a Constitutional body such as HAC within the purview of the said Department of the State. When the State issued the order, it did not secure the consent of the HAC. While the civil society demanded the revocation of the said order, the Government issued another impugned order on October 14, 2016. As aggrieved by the action and inaction of the State, the Tribals approached the court with a plea to revoke the impugned order which supersedes the special provision of Article 371(C) and its subsequent order of 1972.

Non-allocation of a budget for the tribal village

A village is a social and political unit on its own, and every village is the custodian of their social custom. They have their own recognized and accepted code of conduct. The Parliament passed the Manipur

¹⁰ James S Anaya, *Indigenous Peoples in International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 154.

(Village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act, 1956 for the administration of the villages. According to section 16, the Village Authority shall maintain law and order of the village, and Section 19 provides the constitution of village court.

The village elects from time to time the members of the village authority in accordance with section 7 of the said Act. The elected members discharge the duties in maintaining law and order. The villagers construct their own office where the village authorities hold meetings and sessions, etcetera. The villagers contribute the funds to meet the expenditures of the village authority. The authorities perform all the duties of secretary, *chowkidar*, etc., and render service to the state without any pay as such.

The councilors of the Municipalities and Gram Panchayat in the valley areas have their own separate budget, where the members get remunerations. However, the tribal villagers have not enjoyed any of such benefits.

Conclusion

The tribals in the hill areas of Manipur have their own culture and they follow their own traditional and customary ways of landholding. Recognizing land right is crucial for the full realization of indigenous rights for the people in the hill areas. Land has been their source of sustenance since time immemorial and their culture and ways of life are connected to their land. The procurement of land in the hill areas through the Acts, amendments, bills, and impugned orders violates the rights of the tribal people in the hill areas.

The interference of the State in matters concerning the hill areas without the prior and informed consent of the HAC becomes a potent threat for the existence of the tribes in the hill areas. Neglecting the views of the indigenous people is an act of discrimination as it violates the principle of equality and suppresses the full enjoyment of their rights.

To bring justice and to provide equal opportunities to all, there are special provisions for certain excluded areas, and reservation for politically disadvantaged sections. The State needs to ensure the proper implementation of the Manipur (Village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act, 1956 and allow full enjoyment of the special provision guaranteed under Article 371(C) of the Constitution and its subsequent order 1972, in order to protect the rights of the tribals in the hill areas of Manipur.

And that, the realization of the UNDRIP which constitute “the minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and wellbeing of the indigenous peoples of the world” (article 43) depends upon the effort of the Member State by making laws in line with the existing standard and ensuring the implementation of it. 🐦🐦🐦

People's Movements for Justice in North East India: Tribal Movement in Mizoram

Vanlalhruii Ralte

Mizoram has undergone two-and-a-half decades of insurgency that taught the Mizos the value of peace. Since the government of India and the Mizo National Front signed the peace accord in June 30, 1986, the true nature of peace prevailed. Once fearless warriors, hunters, and fighters, the Mizos are transformed into peace lovers. They no longer want to have troubles with others. They do not want to disturb others, and they neither want others to disturb them. As long as possible, they want to stay at peace with others. They respect others, and they do not want to involve unnecessarily in others life. There is a deep mutual understanding among them. They do not want to overtake or undertake others. That is why if you go to an ATM, they will stand on queue and wait for you from outside until their turn comes. No one will intrude and disturb you. If you walk down, or up on the street, you will see a line in the middle of the small road that divides the road into two lanes. Everybody knows which side to take the ride. Even if there is no vehicle on the other side, they let it stay vacant. You will not hear an impatient blow of horn except from an ambulance or a rushing government VIP vehicle. The Mizo's street behavior reveals their peace-loving nature. However, one has to remember that the peace that Mizoram enjoy is the fruit of the movement against injustice for more than two decades.

The contemporary Mizo society faces three major issues, namely: the ethnic tension with the Bru, the ethnic tension with the Chakma, and the issue of alcoholism and illegal drug smuggling. The civil societies tackle these issues. This paper is an attempt to delineate how the Mizos move against the injustice done to them.

Brief Introduction to Mizoram and the people

Mizoram is the 23rd state of India, located in North East part of India. It shares borders with the states of Tripura, Assam, Manipur, and with the

neighboring countries of Bangladesh and Myanmar.¹ Sitting between mainland India and Myanmar, it became the convenient corridor of smuggling between mainland India and Myanmar. Mizoram is home to Zo ethnic clans, such as the Hmar, Mizo, Lai, Mara; and the non-Zo ethnic groups such as the Chakma, Bru, and Gorkhali. During the colonial period, Mizoram's name was Lushai Hills. The term Lushai was a modified form of Lusei, a particular clan. Though the colonial power used the term to refer to the whole of the present Mizoram, the Mizos thought that the term was not inclusive enough. As a result, the Government of India through its Act 18 of 1954 under the title 'Lushai Hills District (change of name)', changed officially the name from Lushai Hills into Mizoram.² Majority of the population of Mizoram speak the same language, called Mizoṭawng [translated as Mizo dialect] that is used in the schools. Lai, Mara, Chakma, Bru and Gorkhali have their own dialect though. These various dialects are conversable with the Mizo dialect. The people of Mizoram are happy and satisfied with the life they lived within the country. As they can communicate with each other using the same language, they felt less need for other people. The media and producers have translated or dubbed the movies, TV shows, and others into Mizo and broadcasted through TV. Language played an important role in the solidarity of the people of Mizoram. The people are satisfied with being Mizos first, rather than their particular clan identity. Maybe due to this situation, other ethnic clans labeled the Mizos as racists by Chakma and Bru social activists. The existence of civil society like YMA (Young Mizo Association) in which every adult is a member, the MZP (Mizo Students' Association), the MUP (Mizo Elders Association), and MHIP (Mizo Women United Association) unites the people of Mizoram. The Bru, Chakma and Gorkhali who do not have blood and ethnic relations are not part of these associations. They have their own associations among themselves. Among the different communities, all the Zo-ethnics are Christians. The Brus are Hindu while Chakmas are Buddhist.³

1 M.C. Arun Kumar et. al., *The Tribes of Mizoram. Maxwell Dynamic Series of Tribal Studies*, vol. v (New Delhi: Maxford Book, 2012), 1145.

2 Government of India Act 18 of 1954.

3 S.P.Talukdar, *The Chakmas: Life and Struggle* (Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1988).

Attitude of the Churches in Mizoram towards the Bru and the Chakma

Like other tribes in the North East India prior to the colonial and Christian transformation, the Brus lived a nomadic lifestyle. They have low capability for settled life, economically poor and unstable due to their nomadic life. On the one hand, the Mizo pioneer missionary who worked among the Chakmas considered them as ‘cold blooded and shrewd.’⁴ S.P Talukdar, on the other hand, regarded the Chakmas as ‘peace loving community.’⁵ The Mizos embraced Christianity wholeheartedly. They took the gospel as the mirror through which they perceived themselves and the world around them. They perceived that non-Christian Brus and Chakmas needed the Gospel. The two major churches, the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram and the Baptist Church of Mizoram carried out mission among them. The Baptist Church of Mizoram started mission among the Brus and Chakmas in 1939.⁶ The Presbyterian Church of India - Mizoram Synod started mission work among the Brus in 1948 and among the Chakmas in 1961.⁷ The government of Mizoram accepts baptismal certificates issued to the converted Brus and Chakmas as primary valid document for the proof of identity. The Mizos associated with the Brus and the Chakmas with good heart and for good cause. The mission among the Brus and Chakma includes evangelization, church planting, education, health, and agriculture. The works of the two major churches in Mizoram among the Brus and Chakma brought positive and constructive changes among them. They are the true beneficiaries of the Mizo Christian love. In fact, the Bru leaders are the graduates of Salem Boarding School, a mission school established for the Brus by the Presbyterian Church of India, Mizoram Synod Mission Board. Both churches invested huge

4 Thangzawna, *Bru Zinga Rawngbawlina: Bru Hnam leh Chanchintha* [translated as Mission among the Brus: The Brus and the Gospel] (Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, 1988), 85.

5 Talukdar, *The Chakmas: Life and Struggle*.

6 Baptist Church of Mizoram, “Mission Buh Thar Hlan Ni Lo Chhuah Dan” [translated as How We Start Observing The Day Of Offering New Harvest Rice] (Database online). Available in <https://www.mizobaptist.org/mission-buh-thar-hlan-ni/> (4.2.2020).

7 Thangzawna,, 55, 80.

amount of money for their mission with the Bru and the Chakma. The Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) annual budget of mission among the Chakma is 57.01 lakhs and the annual budget of mission among the Brus is Rs. 34.11 lakhs (USD 46,491.70).⁸ The Presbyterian Church of Mizoram kept Rs. 1,30,30,000.00 (around USD 177,598.97) for Home Mission, the places where Chakma and Bru settled within Mizoram.⁹

The Active Communal Tension between Mizo and Chakma

The murder of Presbyterian Church of Mizoram's woman missionary to Chakma by two Chakma men in 1989, the killing of two Mizo men by Chakma in 1992, the sharp rise of Chakma population from 1981 to 1994, and the Chakma's petition of Union Territory in Mizoram alarmed the Mizos. The Mizos realized that their guest, the Chakmas, has done injustice to them. The Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZO or Mizo Students' Association) responded by spearheading an oust-Chakma movement. They held a long march from Aizawl to Chawngte, the southern tip of Mizoram and the location of the Chakma Autonomous District headquarters. The Young Mizo Association (YMA) supported the MZO and the movement became a whole Mizos' movement. Due to the movement, many illegal Chakmas and other non-Mizos left Mizoram. In 1995, the Election Commission of India organized an intensive electoral roll revision. During that time, the MZO played a vital role in the exclusion of foreigners. To some extent, the MZO infiltrated the illegal migrants. In the meantime, the Baptist Church of Mizoram saw the movement as a hindrance to their ministry because Chakmas became so afraid of the Mizos. Eventually, many Chakmas lost their trust on the missionaries. However, the missionaries won over them and some Chakmas run to Mizo missionaries in search of safety. They thought that the Mizo missionaries could provide them security.¹⁰

8 Baptist Church of Mizoram Estimated Budget for the year 2019-2020. Unpublished material.

9 Presbyterian Church of India, Mizoram Synod, *Budget 2020-2021* (Aizawl: Presbyterian Church of Mizoram, 2019), 97-114.

10 L.H. Liandinga, "Mizoram Baptist Kohhranin Chakma Zinga Rawng a Bawlina" [translated as Baptist Church of Mizoram's Mission to Chakma] in *Kum 75 Chhunga BCM Mission Rawngbawlina Chanchin 1939-2014: BCM Compendium*, edited by K. Lalrinthanga and J. Lalduhawma (Serkawn: BCM Publication, 2014), 79.

From their side, the Chakma leaders submitted a petition of Union Territory to the Prime Minister of India in 1985 and 1990. According to Shyamal Bikash Chakma, “the central government set up a Rajya Sabha Committee on Petitions, which then recommended the extension of the autonomous district council.”¹¹ In response to the Chakma petition, the MZP submitted another memorandum both to the person who recommended the Chakma Union Territory in Rajya Sabha Committee on Petitions and to the Union Home ministry. The MZP pointed out that the Chakmas were foreigners. The Union Home Ministry rejected the Chakmas’ petition on the Union Territory. For a while, there was peace in the area. The churches continue their mission among Chakmas.

Many things happened between the Chakmas and the Mizos during the next decades. In 2014, the tension reached its climax brought about by the two factors. The first factor was the outcome of the previous unsettled problem. In 2012, the MZP wanted to construct a Zo-Ethnic rest house in Borapansury. The Chakmas protested against the move. The MZP secured the permission from the government of Mizoram in 2013. In 2014, the MZP received the permission to construct the structure in a given site. They posted the signboard in the site. The Chakma civil societies protested against the signboard and demanded its removal. In 2014, the Chakmas boycotted the state election under the leadership of Buddha Dhan Chakma, one of the Council of Ministers in Mizoram Legislative Assembly. The MZP and YMA consequently demanded for his resignation from his post due to his involvement in anti-governmental activity.¹²

The second factor that heightened the tension was the inclusion of thirty-eight Chakmas and other three non-Mizo students in State Technical Entrance Examination (STEE) for medical and engineering courses under category I. According to The Mizoram Rules, 1999 that governs the Selection of Candidates for Higher Technical Courses, there are three categories in selecting the STEE candidates. The slot

11 Chakma, “No State for Chakmas.”

12 *Vanglaini Daily News*, June 13, 2014 (Database online). Available in , <https://www.vanglaini.org/tualchhung/20340> (Accessed February 20, 2020).

reservation for Category I is 85%, and this is allocated for the local permanent residents of the state, which means, the Mizo community. The Categories I and II share the slot of 15%. Category II is available for the non-indigenous, which means the non-Mizo people who have permanent settlement in Mizoram. Category III is accessible to others who do not have permanent settlement in Mizoram. Category I is exclusively reserved for the indigenous Mizo community and the inclusion of Chakma under it is an encroachment on the privileges of the indigenous Mizo community.¹³ The MZP continually carried out protest activities like picketing, marching, and other activities beginning August 12, 2014. The settlement of the issue came when the government of Mizoram promised to amend the rule of selection of STEE on September 26, 2014. From a different angle, the Chakma Law Forum (CLF) took their stand to protest against amendment of The Selection of Candidates for Higher and Technical Courses Rules 1999. They argued that it was unconstitutional since Chakmas are will be excluded from the Category I. They made a statement against it and the CLF president, Dilip Kanti Chakma, sent the copies of the protest statement to the Mizoram chief minister, chief secretary, Union Ministry of Home Affairs, National Commission for Minorities and the media.¹⁴

In pursuance of the accord between the MZP and the government of Mizoram, the Higher and Technical Education (HTE) released The Mizoram (Selection of Candidates for Higher Technical Course Sixth Amendment) Rules, 2015 on March 24, 2015. The amended rules put the Chakmas under Category II. However, the Mizoram Chakma Students Union (MCSU) filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) to High Court. Government of Mizoram rescinded the rule and installed the Chakmas to Category I, in effect, ending the Public Interest Litigation filed by the Chakmas. However, on April 20, 2016, the Mizoram Higher and Technical Education released a new rule, the Mizoram (Selection of Candidates for Higher Technical Courses) Rules, 2016.

13 Roluahpuia, "Mizo Chakma Ethnic Tension in Mizoram," in *Kangla Online*, July 2016 (Database online). Available in <https://kanglaonline.com/2016/07/mizo-chakma-ethnic-tension-mizoram/> (Accessed February 23, 2020).

14 *Vanglaini Daily News*, August 22, 2017 (Database online). Available in <https://www.vanglaini.org> (Accessed February 23, 2020).

According to this amendment, the definition of people who belong to Category I are the Zo-ethnic, and they have an allocation of 95% of the total slots. Category II is for the non-Mizo permanent settlers, including the Chakmas. Category II has only 4% of the slots for admission. The remaining 1% is available for the non-permanent residents such as the children of central service personnel. Mizoram Chakma Students Union (MCSU) filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) No.49/2016 to High Court, citing their indigeneity in Mizoram. The High Court stayed or suspended the proceeding on the rule under PIL on June 24, 2016. However, due to the continual absence of Chakma lawyers in the court, the High Court removed the stayed order shortly.¹⁵

The year 2017 witnessed ethnic tension at the peak of intellectual competition. The inclusion of six Chakmas and one non-Mizo in Category I of the Bachelor of Surgery, Bachelor of Medicine (MBBS) and Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) through National Eligibility & Entrance Test (NEET). The MZP spearheaded the protest movement again. BD Chakma, member of Mizoram Legislative Assembly fought for the Chakma students. (He took part in the boycott of election in 2014 and resigned from his post at the demand of Mizo civil societies. At the height of MZPs protest, he sought security protection from the Mizoram police and led the four Chakma students to face counselling. In the protest, the Mizoram Police and MZPs fought against each other. There were casualties on both sides.¹⁶ That incident unites all the Mizos and all the NGOs including Mizo Upa Pawl (MUP; translated as Mizo Elderly Association). The vehemently opposed the inclusion of the Chakmas in Category I. However, the Chakmas were conscientized during the process of Mizoram (Selection of Candidates for Higher Technical Courses) Rules, 2016 to accept themselves as Zo-ethnic community like Lai and Mara who uphold their distinguish cultural identity but accepted their affinity with the Zo ethnicity.. The Chakmas refused. Due to this, R. Romawia, Higher Technical Education minister

¹⁵ *Vanglaini Daily News*, June 27, 2016 (Database online). Available in <https://www.vanglani.org> (Accessed February 23, 2020).

¹⁶ *Vanglaini Daily News*, July 20, 2017 (Database online). Available in <https://www.vanglani.org> (Accessed February 23, 2020).

affirmed that inclusion of Chakmas in Category I was impossible. The Mizo civil societies blamed BD Chakma for his activity of bringing Chakma students for counseling while protest was at the peak. They accused him of neglecting the sentiments of the Mizos. The civil societies demanded for his resignation for the second time. He resigned, however, “by his own will” in protest against the denial of four Chakma students the MBBS seat.¹⁷ The protest resulted to the cancellation of the seat given to the four Chakmas. While it was a triumph for the MZP, the Anurabh Saikia called the incident “Institutional discrimination.” by.¹⁸ Meanwhile, the All India Chakma Social Forum (AICSF) filed a complaint against Mizoram to United Nations Organization (UNO). They pleaded for UNOs intervention as the four qualified Chakmas passed the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) and yet the institution did not give them the MBBS seat under the Mizoram quota, simply because they were Chakmas. They further elaborated the involvement of the state government in their exclusion.¹⁹ Similarly, Shyamal Bikash Chakma reported in his article the issue as racial discrimination, “No state for Chakmas: In Mizoram, a minority battles for rights against a former minority.”²⁰ The Chakmas renewed their Public Interest Litigation filed before High Court. The High Court ordered Mizoram to put the Mizos and the Chakmas together as both parties belongs to Scheduled Tribe. The Mizos could not accept this order. They appealed to Supreme Court. Thus, they were fighting to each other. In fact, they bring their fight in every platform they can find.

When the Chakmas raised the issue of indigeneity due to the State Technical Entrance Examination, the Mizos have to ascertain the foreigner and the real citizen. YMA resolved to carry out Chakma

17 *Vanglaini Daily News*, August 22, 2017(Database online). Available in <https://www.vanglaini.org> (Accessed February 23, 2020).

18 Anurabh Saikia, “In Mizoram, old ethnic fissures show up again as Chakma students are denied medical seats,” in *Scroll.in* blog, Aug 10, 2017 (Database online). Available in <https://scroll.in/article/846561/in-mizoram-old-ethnic-fissures-show-up-again-as-chakma-students-are-denied-medical-seats> (accessed February 20, 2020).

19 *Vanglaini Daily News*, August 25, 2017 (Database online). Available in <https://www.vanglaini.org/tualchhung/74558> (Accessed February 22, 2020).

20 Chakma, “No state for Chakmas,”(Accessed February 22, 2020).

census.

However, the state home government did not allow them to do so in order to prevent severe ethnic tension.²¹The high rate of growth of Chakma population is the key issue in Mizoram. *The Vanglaini Daily News* came out with a table that showed the growth rate of Chakma population in comparison with the Mizos based on a census report.

a). Growth rate of Chakma in %

| Year | Chakma | % of growth |
|------|--------|-------------|
| 1901 | 198 | - |
| 1911 | 302 | 52.50% |
| 1921 | 680 | 125.10% |
| 1931 | 836 | 22.94% |
| 1941 | 4,088 | 508.60% |
| 1951 | 15,297 | 200.64% |
| 1961 | 19,337 | 26.41% |
| 1971 | 22,393 | 15.80% |
| 1981 | 39,905 | 78.20% |
| 1991 | 54,194 | 35.80% |
| 2001 | 71,283 | 31.53% |
| 2011 | 96,972 | 36.04% |

b). Population growth rate in %, Mizoram vs. Chakma during 6 decades.

| Year | Mizoram | Growth % | Chakma | Growth % |
|------|-----------|----------|---------|----------|
| 1961 | 2,66,063 | 36.38% | 19,337 | 26.41% |
| 1971 | 3,32,390 | 25.64% | 22,393 | 15.80% |
| 1981 | 4,93,757 | 46.41% | 39,638 | 77% |
| 1991 | 6,89,756 | 40.04% | 54,217 | 36% |
| 2001 | 8,88,573 | 28.59% | 71,283 | 31.48% |
| 2011 | 10,91,014 | 21.63% | 96,972 | 36% |
| 0 | Average | 33.12% | Average | 37.12% |

²¹*Vanglaini Daily News*, August 12, 2014 (Database online). Available in <https://www.vanglaini.org/tualchhung/23052> (Accessed February 22, 2020).

From the table we can see that the growth rate of Chakma population is higher than the overall growth rate of Mizoram. The figure of the Chakma growth rate is suspect. For example, during the decades of 1931-1941, the population increased with 3,252 persons. The question is this: from where did they come? If we considered human reproductive system, we know that a person can have only one baby in a year, although there may be rare cases of twins or triplets. We do not know how many couples were there among the 836 people. If we considered 836 individuals have spouses or partners, then less, there could have been 418 couples. Moreover, if the 418 couples have a baby each year for ten years, the number of increases would be 2090. Then the rest 1162 peoples must have come from other means rather than reproduction. Even then, everybody knows that having baby every year for ten years is impossible. Therefore, to say that illegal influx of Chakmas to Mizoram is axiomatic. Again, if we look at year 2001, the growth rate of Chakma population is higher than the overall growth rate of Mizoram. The period 1991-2001 is the decade when MZP and YMA tried their best to push out illegal Chakmas. Even in this decade, the percentage of growth of Chakma is still higher than the overall growth of Mizoram.

The civil bodies attempted to stop the immense increase of the Chakma population. It was not successful as it was expected. The government created a Task Force in the 1990s to address the issue. In 2010, the YMA and the government of Mizoram jointly made the Village Population Register to have an in depth study of the illegal migration of the Chakmas in the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) areas.²² However, the attempt was not successful as usual. The Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) or Mizo Students Association reported that the illegal Chakmas who entered Mizoram acquired legal access through fake birth certificate from their fellow Chakma Birth and Death registrar, and they flooded in, carved villages wherever they like without permission. The Mizo youths think that they should rightfully dismantle an established village without permission, and they urged

22 *Vanglaini Daily News*, November 17, 2014 (Database online). Available in, <https://www.vanglaini.org/tualchhung/27711> (Accessed February 2, 2020).

such villagers to move back. In 2017, the Task Force submitted its report: there is no Chakma foreigner found. However, the report of the Task Force and the Census report did not correlate with each other. Because of this, the civil societies could not take rest. Consequently, the Young Mizo Association (YMA), the largest civil society in Mizoram resolved to dissolve CADC, which was formed illegally on 1972, legally in the general conference on October 17-19, 2017. The All India Chakma Social Forum (AICSF) pleads again to UNO's intervention in Mizoram, stating that Chakmas in Mizoram were facing different kinds of atrocities.²³

The Bru Episode

The Brus started the ethnic tension between Brus and Mizo. The Brus live in the border of Tripura. They held a national convention on September 23 and 24, 1997. They passed resolution to acquire an Autonomous District Council (ADC) status in Mizoram. Their resolution alarmed the Mizos as they had enough troubles with the Chakma ADC. They no longer want to lose an inch of land to the immigrants. The MZP Mamit Headquarters made the first response. . They passed a resolution to stand against the resolution of the Brus. On their side, the Bru National Union, Bru Students Union, and Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF) ordered their people to leave Mizoram on or before 22 March 1988, mentioning that whoever does not leave Mizoram will stay at their own risk. Then they carried out a well-laid plan. It was a plan through which the Mizos will get the blame and the Brus will take the profit. On October 21, 1997, they killed a forest game watcher. Then the BNLF activists visited Bru villages, and they ordered them to leave for Tripura, telling them that their lives were in danger. Even before the Mizos came to know that someone was killed, the Brus fled Mizoram and went to Tripura. On October 23, 1997, the Mizos came to know the news of the killing, and they set out to search the corpse. As they were hurt deeply, the church leaders, workers, missionaries and Border Security Force (BSF) tried their best to cool down the tension. The Brus reported to the National

23 *Vanglaini Daily News*, August 25, 2017 (Database online). Available in www.vanglaini.org (Accessed February 2, 2020).

Human Rights Commission that the Mizos burnt 1391 houses of 41 Bru villages, raped 44 women, killed 8 persons, and destroyed 8 mandir/ temples, and 8 others persons were lost. They also sent a copy of the report to the government of Mizoram. In pursuance of the report, the Mizoram police carried out an investigation. They interviewed the so-called rape victims. However, these women did not have proper answer to the questions asked and they could not prove the rape. The Mizoram police also carried out investigation against the alleged killing of 8 persons. They found that some of the names given in the report died of normal death. Nobody lost their life in the hands of the Mizos. The Central government granted the Brus the status of refugee in Tripura.

In 2000, Niranjon Chakma published a Bengali book titled, *Tothyer A Lookey Riang Soronarathi Somosya*. (Please supply the translation in English) In the book, he mentioned that within three years almost 35,000 Riangs (Bru) refugees entered the Konchonpur sub-Division, Tripura. He further mentioned that all these refugees belong to Mizoram; and they left Mizoram when the Mizos attempted to assimilate them. He also mentioned in detail the Brus' low standard of living in Mizoram. He portrayed the Mizos as oppressive, who are rapists, kidappers, thieves, imposed forced marriages and so on. He also presents the NGOs such as Young Mizo Association (YMA), MZP, the Mizoram police, and MAP as practicing atrocities against the Brus such as ransacking Brus households and gang-raping Brus women. Niranjon Chakma launched his book during the Kolkata book fare and it became one of the bestsellers. However, in contrary to the information, the BCM mission compendium recorded that during the Bru exodus some elements burned the Baptist Church Mission's mission quarters and a school along with other Bru houses. There were tenable rumors that the Brus burned their own houses.²⁴ This information makes me believe that Niranjon Chakma's book contains false information. However, what was remarkable about the book was that the author urged the government of Tripura to allow the Brus to settle permanently

24 L.H. Liandinga, "Bru Zinga BCM Rawngbawlina," in *Kum 75 Chhunga BCM Mission Rawngbawlina Chanchin 1939-2014: BCM Compendium*, edited by K.Lalrinthanga and J. Lalduhawma (Serkawn: BCM Publication, 2014), 33-34.

in Tripura.²⁵ In the meantime, at the Tripura refugee camp, the Brus live a pathetic life without having minimum requirements for living. Observers accused and blamed the Mizos for not allowing its people to stay in Mizoram.

As to the peace process, the BNLF and government of Mizoram carried out peace talk for thirteen times. In April 29, 2006, the BNLF and the Mizoram government signed the Memorandum of Understanding. The Brus confessed and asked for forgiveness for making and spreading false news. Then the process of repatriation followed. However, the Brus in Tripura refugee camp made higher demand on the repatriation grant. The movement did not allow those who wanted to go back to Mizoram to do so. Kidnappings of Mizo and non-Mizo from Mizoram often happened. In the same year, the Asian Center for Human Rights (ACHR) and Asian Indigenous and Tribal People's Network (AITPN) led by Suhesh Chakma made a human right report. The report blamed the Mizos and Christianity. Whatever the report says, for the Mizos, truth is truth. The Brus in Tripura refugee camps are none other than those who fled from Mizoram on their own will by threatening themselves. Bearing the pain of blame, the Mizos continue the repatriation program.. The Mizo system welcomed those who were in the electoral roll in 1995 to come back to Mizoram. At the same time, the Bru leaders in the refugee camp played different politics. They claimed their political rights to cast their vote during the election. They did it so. But the Mizo Zirlai Pawl or Mizo Students Association (MZIP) actively protested the new enrollment in the voters list. In 2010, the Mizos slowly and steadily showed solidarity with MZIP. They protested the attempt of the Brus to cast their votes while in border of Tripura. They sent busses to Mizoram to let the Brus come to Mizoram to cast their vote during elections. However, the Brus leaders kept on changing their demand in relation to repatriation. When the government of Mizoram accepted their demand, they refused to come back, saying

25 See, Niranjon Chakma, *Tothyer A Lookey Rieng Soronarthi Somosya* (Agartala: Khorang Publishers, 2000); cf., Laldova, *Kanu An Hekna Zozai Che Hi* (Aizawl: Laldova, 2018).

that they are not safe in Mizoram.²⁶ Meanwhile, the Brus in Mizoram had no complain about their safety. The Brus in the border of Tripura only proved that they do not want to come back to Mizoram. They re-directed the plan for their repatriation and the place where they were supposed to stay towards Tripura. With the warm acceptance of the government of Tripura, the government of Mizoram, the government of Tripura, the union government and the Mizoram Bru Displaced People's Forum (MBDPF) signed the quadripartite peace accord on January 16, 2020. According to this peace accord, the Brus will permanently settle in Tripura, and the repatriation packages will be borne by the central government.

After the quadripartite signing of the peace accord, the chapter on the Bru issue was over and closed with positive hope.

The Fight against Liquor and Drugs Smuggling with Special Reference to Young Mizo Association (YMA) Supply Reduction Scheme (SRS)

As mentioned in the introduction, Mizoram with nine kilometers free border access zone with Myanmar is the smuggling corridor between mainland India and Myanmar. Mizoram is also the first stop of smuggled drugs.²⁷ From 1980s, substance abuse and drug addiction are prevalent among the Mizo youths. Proxyvon is the most common

26 Bruno Msha, the secretary of the Mizoram Bru Displaced People's Forum (MBDPF) that signed the July 2018 agreement with state governments of Mizoram and Tripura and the Centre, said it is difficult to convince people to go back. He said none of the demands put forth by the Brus including inspection of land allotted in Mizoram, one-time payment of cash benefits, and re-identification of families excluded from the list of people to be repatriated have been accepted by Mizoram. See Sadiq Naqvi and Priyanka Deb Barman, "Difficult to convince refugees to go back to Mizoram as demands remain unfulfilled, says Bru leader," in *The Hindustan Times*, September 28, 2019 (Database online). Available in <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/difficult-to-convince-refugees-to-go-back-to-mizoram-as-demands-remain-unfulfilled-says-bru-leader/story-5ZoJR2HUOx2i42FSVI5a8N.html>

27 Sarita Santoshini, "India's Hill Country Is the First Stop on Heroin's Deadly Route," in *Foreign Policy* blog, October 2, 2018 (Database online). Available in <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/02/indias-hill-country-is-the-first-stop-on-heroins-deadly-route/> (Accessed February 20, 2020).

drug before the year 2000. Proxyvon is a pain reliever used to treat acute pain. It comes in pills and injectable form. Some people use it for opioid effects. Deaths resulted to abuse of this drug. Many youths lost their life. Beginning the year 2000, the addiction of heroin began to disturb the Mizo society. Unlike proxyvon, heroin did not change the appearance of the users. Heroin is an opioid used as a recreational drug for its euphoric effects. In 2004, 143 youths lost their life due to drugs overdose, mainly with heroin.²⁸ The government and civil societies searched for the solution of drug addiction. They assumed that legalization of liquor could solve and reduce the addiction of drugs. However, in its move for sale of liquor legalization, some people see the government as standing on the side of the alcohol sellers. The civil societies tried to bring it down, but the government became the obstacle. The price of heroin was getting lower, and the smugglers became freer as they are equally getting the support of some elements of the government. The year 2010s is the dawn for the coming in of smuggled methamphetamine drugs from mainland India to Myanmar. The Mizos in Mizoram are also involved in this smuggling. The finished product of the recreation drug called as “Meth” is highly addictive. Myanmar sends back this finished product to India and Mizoram is the first stop and first destination. The death rate of men due to the abuse of this drug is getting much higher than the death rate of women. The Mizo society was, and is in a mess.

The Central Young Mizo Association²⁹ gave a bold response by declaring “Anti-Drugs movement” as the theme for the coming year in its 2004 general conference. During 2004-2005, the movement started in Aizawl by dividing the branches of YMA into 8 different zones and

28 Excise and Narcotics Department, government of Mizoram, “Drug Related Death, (Year Wise),” February 30, 2020 (Database online). Available in <https://excise.mizoram.gov.in/page/drug-related-death-year-wise->, (17.3.2020).

29 Young Mizo Association (YMA) is Non-Governmental Organization. Every Mizo adult are members. It exists in every Mizo villages. It has its headquarters in Aizawl; district capitals have sub-headquarters, and all the villages are the branches. Every year general conference is held and during the conference important decisions are made. In every general conference, theme for the coming year becomes the guiding principle of the Mizos social life until the next theme is resolved.

they formed Supply Reduction Scheme (SRS) volunteers. In December 2005, they combined the different zones and called it Central YMA SRS. The movement lasted only until 2008. Due to criticisms, the movement puts on hold the SRS in 2009-2010. The Flying Squads or small groups of police trained to act quickly replaced SRS, but that too did not last long. During these years, the cases of drug abuse were increasing and deaths due to drugs overdose increased again. On May 29, 2010, the Central YMA renewed its anti-drugs movement under the name of Central Anti-Drugs Squad (CADS), and it lasted until November 6, 2013. Repeatedly, due to criticisms from different corners, they dissolved the CADS movement in 2014. However, the increases of death due to drug overdose revealed the fact that the community needed the SRS for the social health of the society. Upon the request of parents, the people, and local council leaders, the movement revived the SRS on April 11, 2015. At that time, SRS got the support of the people. Individuals, groups and civil societies gave fund for the SRS to carry out the task. At the same time, they also started the Demand Reduction Scheme (DRS) on the premise that, as long as there is demand, the supply will continue uncontrolled. Until 2019, the movement continued to exist and operate.

The SRS and the DRS go hand- in- hand. The main task of SRS volunteers is to catch the addicts and drug sellers. They send these drug addicts and sellers to the Demand Reduction center. The main task of the Demand Reduction Scheme volunteers is to provide counseling to addicts and drug sellers. The CYMA linked with the rehabilitation centers and they sent addicts there for their recovery. Gospel camping were organized for them in order to instill moral and behavioral change. Sub-headquarters and branches carry out the movement's goals according to their conveniences.

Within a short period, SRS volunteers became adept in catching drug sellers. Though they are not police officers, their love for the country and the society are the motives that made them fervent warriors against drug smuggling and the smugglers. When they catch a smuggler, they hand them over to the department of Excise and Narcotics that in

turn, put the smugglers for trial before the court. Most of the heroin supply comes from Myanmar, and majority of the Mizo people who are engaged in the selling of heroin are usually from the poor and broken families. The SRS movement almost cleared the liquor factory in the outskirt of Aizawl. However, the church leaders raised a new perspective on the local liquor sellers as many of them were church members. Leaning towards the side of the liquor sellers, the church leaders tended to blame the SRS and the volunteers. For some reason, some people criticized the anti-drugs movements. In 2010, the movement focused to reach out to the middle-class people. However, a stronger and severe criticism against SRS movement arose through mass media and social media. Some people attack the volunteers in different localities. Along with drugs and heroin, the SRS movement volunteers also confiscate other smuggled items like gold and arms. In fact, SRS function as the guardian of the Mizo society. In spite of the criticisms, the society felt the significance of the movement. The estimated market value of the drugs and heroin captured by CYMA through SRS, CADS, Flying Squad from 2004 – 2019 is Rs. 103,462,540.00. Had the SRS not captured the drugs and heroin this much, and had the Mizo people used it, the result will be devastating.

The Contenders

From the episodes of the three movements against injustice, it is difficult to know who are the the conflicting parties. In case of Chakma and Bru, it is apparent that the adversaries are the Brus and Chakmas versus MZP. In the case of drug smuggling, it is the YMA versus drugs sellers, who are usually the people from Myanmar. However, the real struggle is between the Mizo civil societies and the government. On the issue of the “foreigner,” the Mizos felt that the Central government was unjust. Jagadish K. Patnaik pointed out that the Christian majority of the Mizo population regarded the increase of the Chakma population in Mizoram, either through naturally or illegal migration, as a potential threat.³⁰ Lalthara dug into the reason

30 Jagadish K. Patnaik, “The State and Civil Society in Mizoram: The Post-Accord Syndrome,” in *Mizoram Dimensions & Perspectives* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2008), 83.

behind the Chakma's carving of ADC and found out the Indian officers wanted to make use of them to weaken and block the movement of the Mizo National Armies, the insurgency activists, in light of the Mizos' struggle for independence.³¹ The Chakmas openly inferred their involvement towards the subjugation of the Mizos in the memorandum and petition of Union Territory in 1995 submitted to Prime Minister of India.³² The modern youth saw the existence of CADC as a political mistake, and thus, illegal. The government did not consult the Mizo community on the matter, and there was no public hearing about it. Nevertheless, the Mizo political leaders were there to accept the creation of CADC. Patnaik points to the truth that the Indian officers used the Chakmas for their own interest, capitalizing on the difference between them and the Mizos. In modern days, they make use of their difference with the Mizos by continually showing their solidarity with the central government anytime when the Mizos protest against central government's agenda. Knowing their minority right they keep on reporting to Human Rights, filing PIL to Courts, and even to UNO. As much as they do not want to affiliate themselves in Zo-ethnic community, the Mizos could not accept the Chakmas as the true owner of the state. The MPZs defined them as "implacable overstaying guests."³³ The government has neglected the issue of illegal immigrants, but there is always it stands behind the Chakmas and the Brus as alleged illegal migrants in Mizoram. For the Mizos, the central government does this injustice to the Mizo people.

Can there be a Viable Solution?

Viewed from different angle, both the Mizos and the Chakmas are the victims of climate change. On the one hand, the Chakmas are the primary victim as their home place Bangladesh is submerging gradually under water. The Mizos, on the other hand, owns the land. The Mizo

31 Lalthara, "Chakma th hi tute nge an nih?" *Chhemdam Thlifim* (blog), 18th April, 2013, <https://chhemdamthlifim.blogspot.com/2013/04/chaka-te-hi-tute-nge-nih.html>, 5.2.2020

32 R. Lalrintluanga, "A Historical Survey of the Baptist Church of Mizoram Mission Among the Chakmas," appendix -I, 'A Memorandum to the Hon'ble Prime Minister Sri: Rajiv Gandhi,' unpublished thesis submitted to the Senate of Serampore College (University) in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of M.Th., 2015.

33 Saikia, "In Mizoram, old ethnic fissures show up again."

people bears the brunt by allowing the carving of Autonomous District Council, giving ADC while other state like Arunachal grants citizenship but not ownership of land. The wisdom and their rapid increases in population, vigor in legal knowhow, and their fight for survival is unmatched by the Mizo's meekness towards their fellow human. That is why Patnaik's observation maybe valid for the Mizos. In CADC area, all the Birth and Death registrars are Chakma; they issued fake birth certificates to the newly arrived Chakmas from Bangladesh. Consequently, the Chakma population is increasing year by year but without a record of illegal migrants. As Mizoram is the place where they can get land legally, the legalized Chakma will continue to make way for their fellow Chakmas. On the other hand, the Mizos are afraid that they will become the minority within their own territory.

The differences in sentiments and temperaments bring up the clash between the two communities. On the one hand, the Chakmas, unlike Talukdar's observation, tend to make use of the law and the court to settle disputes. On the other hand, the Mizos customarily settle disputes through verbal talk. Normally, the Chakmas would create a problem, and when the Mizos respond with brute force, the Chakmas seek legal help, putting the Mizos into their bait and catch them as violating human rights. The Chakmas do not stop until they get their demand through legal means. In this way, they move ahead towards gaining national and international acceptance while the Mizos got the blame. Consequently, the Mizos pushed themselves to go to court.

The focus of the Mizo civil societies is to check on the infiltration of illegal migrants. To do this, Zonunsanga suggested by that the Church should stop issuing Baptismal Certificates. With the baptismal certificates, any illegal Chakma can make all other important document for securing citizenship. This explains why there are no records of illegal migrants among the Chakma. Another is to upgrade the development in CADC and post Mizo teachers as birth and death registrars. As of now, all the officials are Chakma who will make way for their fellow to enter to Mizoram. The Mizos attempts to infiltrate illegal Chakma equally hurts the sentiments of the Chakmas. They never allowed any kind of census or counting people within their

territory.

For sustaining peace and justice, both parties have to develop mutual understanding and acceptance. If the legalized Chakmas will cooperate with the Mizos in their attempt to stop illegal migration, peace will prevail apparently. 🕊️🕊️🕊️

Just-Peace in a Settler Colony: Indigenous Perspective from Tripura

R. K. Debbarma

Politics of Indignity

The Indigenous people's movements across the globe argue that the indigenous communities were autonomous long before the creation of the liberal constitution of the nation-state. Our autonomy is organic, and it cannot be a gift of the constitution of the settler-state or the nation-state. This premise demands that for justice and peace to prevail, the state must acknowledge the historical violence it has inflicted against indigenous people. Moreover, there is a need to dismantle the unequal relationships and power imbalance that perpetuate the dispossession of our people and the exploitation of the indigenous resources. The goal of the dismantling of unequal relationships and imbalance in power is just-peace or peace anchored on justice. At the heart of this process is decolonization and critique of the capitalist state.

Decolonization can mean different things for different indigenous communities across the globe. In essence, decolonization is the process of destabilizing the notion of western colonial privilege and superiority. Self-determination seems to be the desired political aspiration of many indigenous groups. In Northeast India, many indigenous communities demand self-determination. In one of the recent writings on Nagaland, Akum Longchari argued that it is a mistake to blame self-determination as the cause of conflict in the region; rather it is the lack or absence of self-determination in Naga communities that leads to conflict.¹ He rightly points out that self-determination is the resource for just-peace in Nagaland. I think this is an important dimension in the understanding of conflict in the region. We must analyze the very nature of the Indian state and its continuing metamorphosis within the global capital to envision a just society. As such, self-determination is only the beginning of attaining just peace; it is not the final stage. We cannot fully know in

¹ Akum Longchari, *Self-determination: A Resource for Just-peace* (Dimapur: Heritage, 2016).

advance, what a just-peace would look like. We can only know this as a product of the kind of politics we pursue. Let me explain what I mean by this.

Indigenous groups in Northeast India imagine self-determination in two different ways: one, as an autonomous territorial unit within the Indian constitutional frameworks, which are often styled as a demand for a separate state. Second, some desire to be a separate nation and aspire to have an independent sovereign state of their own. These aspirations are universally recognized and they affirmed the political rights of a collective. What is troubling though is the style of our politics. In our imagined self-determination, either as an autonomous territorial unit or as a separate nation-state, there is no heart for the oppressed minorities and groups acknowledged as immigrants. In our scheme of politics, self-determination is a monochromatic society with no corresponding rights and entitlements for minorities and immigrants. Such a monochromatic vision of society has no historical and geographical basis. This way of doing politics merely seeks to produce another state, where the state demonize the minorities, subject them to violence, and deny them equal human rights. We merely seek to replicate another state without an alternative imagination of politics and society. If self-determination is to become an approach to make just-peace prevail in society, we will need to envision different ways of being. It must be different from the Western liberal state and the capitalist society that are inherently colonizing and exploitative of indigenous societies.²

Unless we can imagine a different vision of a society, no matter the form of self-determination we institute, the market imperatives of global capital will control and tie down our lives and resources to it. The indigenous people at Standing Rock and in the Amazon have been waging the battle for this alternative vision of society and state.³ An alternative vision of the society of Northeast India is possible only

2 Derrick Jensen, *How Shall I live My Life?: On Liberating the Earth from Civilisation* (USA: PM Press, 2008), 243-272.

3 Bikem Ekbarzade. *Standing Rock: Greed, Oil and Lakota's Struggle for Justice* (London: Zed Books, 2018).

through solidarity, dialogue, and respect for minorities and immigrants. It cannot result from our rapid obsession with the National Register of Citizens (NRC).⁴ In the case of Tripura, there are indigenous groups who are demanding an NRC exercise, while others are demanding to have a separate state for the indigenous communities. However, I believe that an alternative vision of society can only begin by acknowledging Tripura as a settler colony and eschewing the politics of anti-immigrants.⁵ I am unsure of what the alternative might look like, but we can begin to imagine it once we acknowledge that it is a settler colony founded on continuing dispossession of indigenous people. To create just-peace we need a politics that is mutually enabling.

Across Northeast India, groups demanding for NRC and Inner Line Permit, to check immigrants, cite Tripura as an example of what they should not become. Tripura became a mere demographic minority, and consequently, it lost its political power. While it is beyond my scope here to explain the possibility of such a future for many groups in various parts of this region, the fear of becoming like Tripura is evident in the Tripura experience of dehumanization and violence against immigrants. This kind of politics forecloses the future possibilities of just-peace. The demographic transformation of Tripura is a consequence of the history and geography of the state and the spatial ideology of the Manikya kings who ruled the state until Tripura's merger with independent India.⁶ However, the subsequent transformation of the

4 TOI-online, "What is NRC?," In *The Times of India*, January 9, 2020.

Available in http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/73154912.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst Based on the Citizen's Rule 2003, the state will create a register of recognized as citizens based on the list of the National Population Register. Based on Citizens Rule 2009 and Citizens Act of 1955, the authorities create the NRC list according to people's citizenship by birth, descent, registration, nationalization and incorporation. It has become an issue in Assam because it has been facing illegal migration for ages. When the authorities released the final NRC list in 2019, only 31 million names out of the 33 million population were in the list, leaving out 1.9 million applicants.

5 R. K. Debbarma, "Conflict Resolution in Tripura," *Seminar*, August Issue, 2020.

6 Deryck O. Lodrick, "Tripura," in Britannica [database online]. Available in <https://www.britannica.com/place/Tripura-state-India/Government-and-society>. The last ruling maharaja of Tripura, Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya, ascended the throne in

state into a settler colony is a by-product of the contemporary social, economic, and political arrangements. These arrangements were difficult, given that these arrangements confer privileges and power to the settler. However, the people can transform this arrangement. After all, before the Manikya king merged Tripura with India in 1949, the state was on the cusp of different a political future. The Tripur Jatiyo Mukti Parishad (TJMP), a Tripuri nationalist group was the only mass-based political association that brought Tripura on the cusp of replacing the feudal Manikya rule. There were Bengali communists and Congress activists who were active in and around Agartala, but both these parties did not have a mass following. The merger changed the course.

The Congress-led government that replaced the Manikya rule banned the TJMP. Its leaders who went underground transformed the Parishad as a tribal wing in the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI (M)] and changed the name to Gana Mukti Parishad (GMP). They expelled the Tripuris who were in high-ranked government positions. The government also forcibly expelled from the state the Muslims, who were the second largest population until then. Rehabilitating and settling the new Bengali immigrants became the primary goal of the government. The new political elites allowed the grabbing of large-scale land by the new settlers. The government justified this land grabbing by refusing to recognize any notion of “tribal land.” This demographic transformation, political power, and land grab meant that the new state required a new narrative about Tripura. The control over who writes the story of the past and how the writer writes and teaches about Tripura’s past became the site of the ideological investment and conflict.

Tripura as a Settler Colony

As I write this article, a controversy on the historical distortion is raging

1923. In 1947, before he died, he conceded to the annexation of Tripura to the newly independent country of India. Tripura officially became part of India on October 15, 1949. Later, it became a union territory of India on September 1, 1956, and it became a state on January 21, 1972.

Agore Debbarma, *Upajitider Proti CPI(M) Pratir Biswasghatak Aitihasik Dalil* (Agartala: Self published, 2003).

in Tripura. A political science textbook named Administration and Politics in Tripura produced by the Directorate of Distance Education, Tripura University cites a claim that “about 550 years ago hilly Tripura was ruled by Hindu Bengali Kings of Bengal” who fought against the tribal “intruders” from Burma. However, the kings, according to the account, later allowed the “homeless refugee tribal” to settle in “Sri Bhumi.” The claim has no historical merit. It is neither a historical fact nor an evidence-based historical interpretation of the past. But the insertion of such a preposterous claim about the past in a university curriculum is instructive of a settler colonialism in Tripura. The claim serves three discursive strategies of the state: it inscribes Bengali’s presence in pre-colonial Tripura, it attempts to validate Tripura’s connection to Bengal; and it naturalizes postcolonial demographic change in Tripura.

These discursive strategies perform two ideological functions. One, they legitimize the narrative of settler society as a civilizing force, and thereby hide the on-going dispossession of indigenous people in Tripura. Two, they legitimize the narrative that the conflict in Tripura is a product of misguided indigenous armed groups. What follows from this narrative is that the civilized and developing tribals – also read as incorporated/assimilated tribals within the settler society – can bring about conflict resolution and peace in the state. These discursive strategies have political consequences. Here, I will only focus on what can be termed as violence on memory, tied to the erasures of indigenous claim over the place.

The settler society begins by erasing indigenous presence on the land. The notion of terra nullius is a Latin word that means “nobody’s land.” This concept allows the seizure of land that nobody owns supposedly as legitimate. This notion of terra nullius became the basis of white settlers in colonizing Australia. The Bering Strait theory – the theory that human beings came to North America crossing the Bering Strait – provided implausible support for the story that indigenous people in America were not the original inhabitants of the land. The theory makes one believe that the Americas were a wilderness, a vacant territory that

could belong to anyone who can cultivate and own it. Such stories erase the indigenous presence and ownership over the land. The state of Israel continues to erase any sign of Palestinian presence over land in the ongoing settler-colonial violence. In Tripura, the process of erasure began by appropriating historical sites, such as the Unnokoti, and renaming the rivers as proofs of Hindu-Bengali presence in Tripura since ancient times.⁷ The designation of places using Bengali names is a process of the erasure of the indigenous names.⁸ The tripartite agreement signed with All Tripura Tribal Force (ATTF) in 1998 contains a provision for officially changing these names back to their original indigenous names. They have one common effect – to erase the indigenous people from history.

Unlike other settler colonies, in Tripura, the settler society did not create a new state. They took over the Manikya state and transformed or cloned it into a settler state. In fact, one of the state-sanctioned narratives of Tripura was that the “great” Manikya rulers allowed the “blooming together of two cultures” – the tribals and non-tribals. However, these former Manikya rulers were never part of state-sanctioned commemoration in Tripura. This is because after Gana Mukti Parishad (GMP) became a tribal wing within CPI (M), new nationalist groups emerged and articulated a new language of indigenous autonomy and self-determination.

In the 1960s, the Tripura Upajati Mukti Parishad (TUJS) and Tripura Students Federation (TSF) emerged. In the 1970s, the Tribal National Volunteers (TNV) emerged and re-appropriated the Manikya history. The three discursive strategies that I pointed out earlier served to counter this new indigenous claim to history. History became an important site for ideological battle. Since the 1980s, the powerful-armed groups such as the All Tripura Tribal Force (ATTF), All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), and the Nationalist Liberation Front of Twipra (NLFT) became important forces in the politics in the state. The Left

7 K. D. Menon, *Tripura District Gazetteer* (Agartala: Department of Education, 1975).

8 Rabindra Debbarma, *Tripurar Gram* (Agartala: Tripura Darpan, 1998).

Front government in Tripura under Manik Sarkar expended its energy in trying to counter the ideological basis of indigenous struggle in Tripura. His government attempted to erase remnants of Manikya's past by renaming important sites after prominent Bengali personalities. In the process, he did not only communalize the Bengali population but eroded the support base of the Left Front among the indigenous population.⁹ While the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) gained from the communalisation of the Bengali population, the Indigenous People's Front of Twipra (IPFT) that demanded a separate state gained the support of the indigenous population. In the last Assembly election, the BJP-IPFT alliance ended 25 years of Left Front rule in the state.

Just-peace and Politics

The contemporary politics in Tripura is highly divisive. While indigenous political groups demand separate state and National Register of Citizens (NRC), the communalized Bengalis celebrate the new Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). Signed on December 11, 2019, the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 (CAA) seeks to fast track the process of bestowing citizenship for the persecuted minority groups in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. The CAA has identified six minority groups, namely, the Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians, and the Parsis. It changed the definition of "illegal immigrants." The CAA, however, does not have a provision for Muslim sects like Shias and Ahmedis who also face persecution in Pakistan.

What is alarming is the re-emergence of the rapid communal organization such as "Amra Bangali," which claimed that the Bengalis are the original indigenous people of Tripura. One must read the controversy over the textbook cited earlier against the backdrop of the on-going communalisation of the Bengali population. These new political tendencies are the product of a state that has become a settler colonizer. This is the reason why I believed that just-peace requires politics that are mutually enabling, and this is possible only through decolonization of the locations that have become the object of on-going

9 R. K. Debbarma. "Where to be Left is no Longer Dissidence: A Reading of Left Politics in Tripura," in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. LII, No. 21, 2017.

settler colonialism in Tripura.

In Northeast India, if indigenous identity politics gives rise to fear of becoming minorities in their own state, then we need to examine our politics and the political system. No people should be reduced to a minority through demographic change or otherwise. However, the political premise that minority is a bad thing and is a politically worrisome notion. Minorities are the facts of every political life. Our people must envision an alternative imagination of a political life that seeks to enable minorities and immigrants politically. Political disablement is an artifact of our politics, which are inherent to the western liberal state form. This is the reason why we should be critical of desiring just another state, without alternative imagination of politics and political life.

The indigenous societies can be the basis for imagining alternative political life, but it cannot be the only criteria for individuals to pursue a politically enabling life. Just-peace is possible only through politics that is mutually enabling. In the case of Tripura, just-peace requires unsettling the settler ideologies and institutions. 🐦🐦🐦

Part III

Mobilizing Just-Peace Resources

Pan-Naga is a means to co-existence with ‘One Nation’ India

Joel Naga

“One Nation, One Culture”?

Prime Minister Modi is an adherent of the philosophy of “One nation, One culture.” The permeation of this worldview into the arena of life is pervasive. Various government policies – whether implemented or still in the debate stage- reflect this ideology. Some policies are progressive, such as, One nation, One ration card, One nation, One card for digital transactions, One nation, and One election, which means simultaneous for the Lokh Sabha and the Legislative Assembly elections. However, some policies are regressive, such as One Nation, One constitution. This is an abrogation of Article 370, which is a special constitutional provision concerning the state of erstwhile Jammu & Kashmir. Another regressive policy is the One Nation, One uniform civil code, or “One nation, One language” that imposes Hindi as the primary language. While India is passing through a strong majoritarian upsurge, the Nagas are facing an identity crisis. Moreover, it could not have come at a worse time.

The representatives of the different tribes such as the Angami, Kacha Naga, Kuki, Lotha, Sumi, and Rengma signed the Naga Memorandum to the Simon Commission on 10 January 1929. They spoke for all Nagas, including for the absentee Aos, the eastern tribes of eastern Nagaland and Burma (Myanmar), the western tribes of Assam, the northern tribes of Arunachal, and the southern tribes of Manipur. They all share the same inheritance. The Naga idea of “One people, One nation” did not stop here. The 9-Point Agreement known as the Naga-Akbar Hydaryi Accord, signed in June 1947 incorporated the integration of all Naga inhabited areas to India.

The Nagas declared their independence on August 14, 1947, based on the principle that Nagas everywhere –in India and Burma – were and are still a free people. Some descendants of the 1929 signatory

tribes have failed to realize that this declaration was legitimate only because the British never have fully subjugated the eastern tribes. The foundation of the broad-based Naga movement stood on that single fact that the eastern tribes were free peoples. The Mughals or the British have never conquered them.

Later on, the 16-Point Agreement signed between the Naga People's Convention (NPC) and the Government of India in 1960 - led to the creation of the Indian state of Nagaland on December 1, 1963. This agreement incorporated the idea of 'One nation' and integration of Naga inhabited territories.

At present, a cross-section of people in Nagaland has raised the slogan "Nagas of Nagaland." They believe that India should conclude the Indo-Naga peace talks with the 7 Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs). The NNPG is a conglomeration of seven different factions ostensibly representing the inhabitants of the state of Nagaland.

The peace talks between the Government of India (GoI)-National Socialist Council of Nagaland [NSCN (IM)] have dragged on for twenty-three years with no end in sight. On the contrary, the 7 NNPGs claimed that their talks with the GoI Interlocutor R. N. Ravi have already concluded as of October 31, 2019. The talks between the GoI and 7 NNPG started the talks only on November 17, 2017.

Whatever the facts and arguments, this slogan is out of tune with historical realities, painfully divisive, and flawed. The slogan makes the simplistic argument that India is prepared to ink two separate settlements with Nagas, which is undeniably wrong. Instead of facilitating settlement, the slogan seems to have prolonged the Indo-Naga settlement by giving India the handle to implement its favored "wait and watch" policy, thanks to discord in the movement.

Pan-Naga body is only a means to an end

Naga-lim refers to all Naga inhabited lands. Lim means land. Naga-lim is a political thought about the land and its people. However, the stakeholders do not fully understand the concept of *Naga-lim* as

an overarching political thought. The Naga Political Groups that spearhead the Naga discourse do not appreciate the meaningfulness of the 16-Point Agreement and Article 371A, specifically the special provision concerning the state of Nagaland in the Indian Constitution. They do not understand the points of the proponents – the politicians and intellectuals - of the 16-Point Agreement and Article 371A that it is not the intention of these agreements and instruments to stop the peace process in the Naga journey. This fractured and incomplete understanding of the Naga journey muddled the political waters and later on divided Naga opinion into “for” and “against,” and “us” vs. “them” narrative.

The creators of the Nagaland state did not meant it to be an end of the process. It is not the end of the process in dealing with the issues related to the concept of the Naga-lim. So is the Pan-Naga body as proposed by the NSCN (IM). The formation of the Pan-Naga Hoho was part of the “competencies of the framework agreement between the Center and the NSCN (IM).” Its task is to “look into the welfare of all the communities living in North-East India and beyond.”¹

Just like the Nagaland narrative, any settlement brought about, including Pan-Naga, can only be a part of the Naga-lim narrative and not the whole experience. To reject the Pan-Naga means the rejection of the notion of Naga nationhood. Therein lays the very root of the identity crisis that the Nagas are experiencing. The debate has drawn the impatient and gullible masses into the debate questioning the relevance of the Pan-Naga body set against the larger canvas of “us” vs. “them” narrative.

The opposition to the Pan-Naga body reeks of petty tribal mindset with an irrational fear that the “them” will dominate the “us.” The imagined fear of south Naga dominance in a post-settlement Nagaland is so

1 Ratnadip Choudhury, “Naga Integration through Pan-Naga Council: Muivah.” Available in <https://www.deccanherald.com/content/497309/naga-integration-through-pan-naga.html>

pervasive that the public believes it will happen. People have severely criticized the next best alternative arrangement, as a vehicle for south Naga dominance. Thus, unwittingly playing into the Interlocutor's scheme of things, ideas emerged that the Naga integration is now impossible after decades of war and countless sacrifices.

The parody is therefore that of a scene where people reduced the Naga issue to a mere tribal squabble for land and resources in the Dimapur sector, which is an unimaginable scenario. Collective failure is humongous. As a nation, we have failed to realize that the greater danger lies not in the south, or the east, nor north but in the possible assimilation of the Naga nation into the ideologically driven "One nation, One culture" subtext as propounded by the minds in Nagpur -the radical Hindu fundamentalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The problem is existential and our only solution lies in a unified approach.

Pan-Naga as a means to co-existence with 'One nation' India

The Nagas and by large, the Northeasterners face a far stronger, greater and resilient nation led by committed adherents of a radical ideology than the combined might of all of us can muster. This is the right time for the NSCN (IM) and the Working Group (WC) of the NNPGs to come together without the power-broker leaders of Naga civil society. The people and different groups must now allow the Pan-Naga body to address the larger aspirations of the Naga people. Federalism has always been a contentious issue in India and the institution of the Pan-Naga body should be a good start in addressing the issue and the aspirations of other ethnic nationalities in Northeast India. India should take this opportunity to settle the Naga issue when the Naga people are in favor of a settlement.

India should realize that plurality, not majoritarianism, is the true test of whether India is one nation or not. The same holds for those Nagas who adhere to the claim "Nagas of Nagaland." 🙏🙏🙏

Religious Resources for Just-Peace: A Christian Perspective

Fr. Joseph “Joy” Pallikunnel

“Peace before us, peace behind us, peace under our feet, peace within us, and peace over us, let around us be peace.”

“May the peace of God that is beyond all understanding, guard our hearts and our thoughts in Christ Jesus.” - Philippians 4:7

“Peace of sky, peace of mid-region, peace of earth, peace of waters, peace of plants, peace of God, peace of the universe, peace of peace, may that peace come to me.” -Yajurveda 36:70

“Send me the love that keeps the heart still with the fullness of peace.”
-Rabindranath Tagore

“God, make me an instrument of peace.” -Francis of Assisi

These are all ancient prayers expressing longings for peace by individuals as well as by humanity. People from all over the world longed for peace. Leaders expressed it from all categories, civil, political, or religious. From different religious sources, we have numerous sayings, desiring, and exhorting people to practice peace within one’s desires and actions. They lead us not only to ensure a negative peace where people sometimes use violence, or nations wage war to establish peace. There are also nuances exhorting a positive or just peace that ensures equality, dignity, and justice to everyone irrespective of age, sex, or class, or caste.

Buddha states, “Perfect peace can dwell only where all vanity has disappeared.” “Victory breeds hatred, for the defeated live in pain. Happily live the peaceful, giving up victory and defeat.” Zoroaster says, “In this world, may obedience triumph over discord, may generosity triumph niggardliness, may love triumph over contempt.”

Adi Granth of the Sikhs says “No one shall cause another pain or injury; all mankind shall live in peace together under a shield of administrative benevolence.”

Jainism says, “Force of arms cannot do what peace does. If you can gain your desired end with sugar, why use poison?”

Islamic Holy Book Quran says “Fight those who fight against you along with God’s ways yet do not initiate hostilities, God does not love aggressors.”

Atharva Veda 19:9 says “Peace be to earth and to any spaces. Peace be to heaven, peace be to the waters, peace be to the plants and peace be to the trees! May all the gods grant me peace!”

From the Holy Bible’s Old Testament, we read in Psalms 34:4 that say, “Turn away from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it.”

Then, in the New Testament, we read from the Gospels Jesus’ parting words to his disciples that says, “Peace I bequeath you, my own peace I give, a peace which the world cannot give, this is my gift to you” (John 14:27). Then in his letter to the Romans, Paul said, “As much as possible and to the utmost of your ability, be at peace with everyone. Never try to get revenge” (Romans 12:18).

Looking at these inspiring words, we see the universal yearning as well as exhortations for peace from all religious backgrounds. In all races and groups of people peace in general and turning away from violence and war is clearly expressed and desired. Yet in the modern days, another concept has come up with regard to peace. It is about establishing and living peace that either ensures peace through the absence of war, or through waging a so-called “just war.”

Some countries, nations, communities, or regions wage the so-called “just war” to resolve conflicts, whether internal or external, purportedly to establish peace. They employ “just war” to prevail upon po-

litical unrest, ideological differences, or interest. Those in power may enforce through armed oppression, ethnic cleansing, and elimination of disagreeing elements or parties. They ensure subjugation or instill a semblance of peace in regions or areas or countries. The powerful often suppress the media, exploit women and the subalterns sexually, deny equality of gender rights, engage in human trafficking, and many other unthinkable things to counter or even silence dissenting. It is in this perspective from a Christian understanding that we can focus as to how we can ensure **JUST PEACE**.

The concept of **JUST PEACE**, it began with the idea that peacemaking and peacebuilding are gradual processes. Instead of engaging with or declaring war to eliminate the injustices done to a community, ethnic group, religious group, minority, there must be an effort to initiate several peace-making steps. Among them are -

1. Supporting a non-violent action or involvement
2. Taking initiatives to reduce threats;
3. Employ collaborative steps towards conflict resolution;
4. Conscientizing the involved parties or groups to acknowledge one's lack of tolerance or failures in order to repent and change.
5. Taking steps to promote democratic and human right based actions.
6. Promote actively just and sustainable development programs for all groups.
7. Persuade international organizations to intervene.
8. Reducing or preventing trade and supply of weapons.
9. Ensure the participation of grassroots groups in decision-making.

JUST PEACE is possible through cooperation, interdependence, giving respect and dignity to people. The one in a position of power should know that it is power with, and not power over, that will lead to solutions. Partnership in building and promoting conflict resolution or peacemaking is possible when based on mutual respect. All parties of the conflict need to understand there is a connection between our concerns and all human concerns. We cannot act alone, as though others do not belong, in any situation. Hence, no leader, or group, or nation

ought to flaunt his or her, or their will over another, group, or nation. The leaders, on behalf of their constituency, must ensure true respect and security of all parties. The golden rule says, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

JUST PEACE is possible when all parties ensure and uphold the truth without diluting it. It ensures respect for all human beings of whatever background. It respects national and international organizations and recognizes nature as a mother of all and our common heritage. Nobel Peace Laureate General George Marshall says, “Lasting peace requires a spiritual regeneration.”

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, after the World Wars and the Cold War, the Christian teachings, and particularly the official Roman Catholic teachings, have strongly condemned the arms race. Not only that, the teachings denounced the exploitation of peoples through subtle and manipulative ways. Moreover, Christian teachings criticized the conflicts created and promoted by the powerful rich and economic giants with ulterior motives by creating unjust systems that deprived people of wealth, learning opportunities, economic and property rights, and many others.

‘PACEM IN TERRIS’ (Peace on Earth) that Pope John XXIII issued in 1963 focused on issues of peace in the nuclear age. If earlier, one condoned a JUST WAR to establish peace against an unjust situation, the document revisited this idea in the nuclear age, in the light of the development of new weapons of mass destruction in the war and post-war situations. It examined the relationship among human beings, the relationship between citizens, public authorities, states, people, and international communities. It reaffirms the sanctity of human rights. It also stresses that the world can achieve peace by obeying God’s Law. It examined the characteristics and signs of the times and explored how the word of God must guide peoples.

The pope addressed this papal encyclical to all people of goodwill, not just to the Roman Catholics but also to all Christians, stressing

the respect for human rights everywhere. It spoke of the rights of the workers, the advancement of women, and the spread of democracy and affirmed that war is not the way to obtain justice. It explained how each country has the right to existence, to self-development, and the means for development. Moreover, the encyclical points to the rights of minority groups to protection, and to related with other groups within a state. Every nation must assist other nations in economic development. Furthermore, the pope, through the encyclical insisted that Christians must assist non-Christians. This papal encyclical gave a new direction for the church in its involvement in people's development. It also urges the church to continue to uphold the four pillars of peace: truth, justice, love, and freedom. The church has a pontifical commission for justice and peace, to monitor the pursuance of peace internationally through organizations like Caritas Internationalis.

The church groups are to work for **JUST PEACE** going beyond negative peace. For that, they need to work with other partners and institutions, including government agencies and international organizations. The church groups are to expand their efforts among local communities and civil society to advocate for a just and lasting peace. Thus, it is important to be aware of new forms of social conflicts brought about by human trafficking, environmental destructions, scandalous economic inequalities, exploitation, violence against women, and many others. There are issues calling to respect for economic, cultural, and social rights, rights of indigenous groups, minorities, right to a healthy environment, and unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. These issues call for healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation of the old hurts, of the victims of violence, displacements. Moreover, these call for a provision of space for dialogue with prior oppressors.

These things have been followed up until the time of the present pope, Pope Francis, who gives continuous compassionate leadership in words and actions. Pope Francis challenged church leaders to go out into the streets and into a world torn apart by violence, divided by greed, wounded by selfishness, and human trafficking that is the most extensive form of slavery in the twenty-first century.

Looking at North-East India's situation, we have gone through years of struggles and conflicts, both from internal and external agents, in religious persuasions, and civil conflicts with state powers, and with internal militant groups. Many are the hurts and needs for healing, dialogue, and reconciliation. We need to overcome selfishness and greed for money and power and promote **JUST PEACE**, respecting everyone's right to everything just and rightful.

As predominantly Christian states in North-East India, we need to set examples too in ensuring **JUST PEACE** in our own household and surroundings, intra- and inter-tribe, and in communities and in the states. Peace is a habit that we have to build up day by day. So let me be just as friendly as I can be, be grateful to all not critical about all, and contribute my best at work. I do not have to worry about what is my gain and not boast about my accomplishments. Instead, I give glory to God in everything and to many others who make me what I am. "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to people of goodwill." Luke 2:14 🙏🙏🙏

Does Hinduism preach Hindutva?

Paresh Malakar

I was born in a Hindu family. We were Vaishnavites. I was fiercely religious in my school days. When I joined college, I slowly became indifferent towards religion. I studied philosophy in my post-graduate course, and my special paper was religion. I was not particularly interested in religion, but the next option was logic, which I did not like much. I liked what I studied in religion. Subsequently, I had forgotten everything, as I was not interested in it. When the dark waves of Hindutva have gripped everything in India, I started reading and rereading the original texts of Hinduism. Hindutva is a radical Hindu ideology espoused by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, abbreviated as RSS. I am still grappling with it.

Recently, I read the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, the great Indian epics. I grew up with these epics through the oral tradition because our uncles told us the stories of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. During our childhood, we would huddle in the corner of a house on rainy days or around a fire on winter evenings to listen to these stories. These stories were, in fact, our staple intellectual diets in our childhood. I also bought the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*. I tried to read them carefully. While reading them, I also got attracted to the *Bible* and the *Qur'an*, and the *Dhammapada*.

Why is religion still alive and around in a modern world when science and technology have thrived so much? Perhaps, it is important to look back and ponder over the religious reality of thousands of years. Was not religion an integral part of the people's lives in the past? What is the relation of religion with culture and language? Religion was not a private affair then. It was a culture and a lifestyle. This was the history of religion. A human being cannot live by bread alone; he needs a culture to go with it. Without this culture, human civilization would not have progressed, and a human being would not have become a human. Religion was a culture for the ancient people. All religions evolved

through the challenges of their times.

My simple question to the supporters of Hindutva is this: are they really Hindus? Where did they get the lessons of hate mongering? The studies of religious texts and scriptures are a serious thing. It needs a deep understanding. However, to say that Hinduism is not Hindutva is a simple thing. I will try to explain this understanding with three examples from three books. Wendy Doniger is an authority on Hinduism. She has authored many scholarly books on Hinduism. She is currently a Mircea Eliade Distinguished Service Professor of History of Religions at the University of Chicago. What is her view on Hinduism? This is what Doniger says:

It is true that before the British began to categorise communities strictly by religion, few people in India defined themselves exclusively through their religious beliefs; their identities were segmented on the basis of locality, language, caste, occupation and sect. Even today, despite attempts by extreme right-wing groups like the Rastriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the more mainstream Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to 'Hinduize' India, most people in the country would define themselves by allegiances other than their religion. There is after all no Hindu cannon; ideas about all the major issues of faith and lifestyle-vegetarianism, nonviolence, belief in rebirth, even caste are subject of debate, not dogma. And yet, if we look carefully, there are shared ideas, practices and rituals that not only connect the diverse people generally called 'Hindus' today, but also link the people who composed and lived by the Vedas in northwest India around 1500BCE with the Hare Krishna converts dancing in the street of twenty-first-century New York.¹

This is an analytical and scholarly analysis of Hinduism. This is seeing Hinduism without it influencing the viewer and without involving in it. One cannot find anything that could be a basis for disagreeing with her.

¹ Wendy Doniger, *On Hinduism* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2019), 3-4.

Then, Juan Mascaro translated *The Bhagavad Gita* into English. He was Spanish who spoke Catalan as his mother tongue. He liked The Bhagavad Gita so much that when he read it during his childhood in a poor translation. Thus, he wanted to translate it into English. He learned the English language and Sanskrit and subsequently translated “*The Bhagavad Gita*” into English with great care and patience. At times, he translated and retranslated some portion of it even twenty times. His introduction to *The Bhagavad Gita* is like a treaty on Hinduism. Look at the portion below:

In the Vedas, composed long before writing was introduced into India, and before grammarians could analyse language, we see man watching the outside world with joy and wonder. He feels life and prays for victory in life. He watches the beauty of the dawn and the glory of the sun and he feels that the fire and air, and the waters and winds are living powers: he offers to them the fire of sacrifice. His life depends upon nature, and he knows that between nature and himself there is not an impassible gulf. Man loves this beautiful creation and he feels that his love cannot but be answered by a greater love. And he sings to Varuna, the God who loves and forgives.² (This is somewhat the essence of Shlokas or song in the Rig Veda 11.28.1-9; 3-41924. CWMG, Vol.XXIII,349)

Then as the last example, I want to refer to Gandhiji. Remember Gandhiji was a devout Hindu. For him, religion was more important than the nation. What does he mean by religion?

I want to identify myself with everything that lives. In the language of the Gita I want to live at peace with both friends and foe. Though, therefore, a Mussalman or a Christian or a Hindu may despise me and hate me, I want to love him and serve him even as I would love my wife or son though they hate

² *The Bhagavad Gita*, translated from the Sanskrit with an Introduction by Juan Mascaro (London: Penguin Book Ltd., 2003), 11.

me. So my patriotism is for me a stage in my journey to the land of eternal freedom and peace. Thus it will be seen that for me there are no politics devoid of religion. They subserve religion. Politics bereft of religion are death traps because they kill the soul.³

It is up to the supporters of Hindutva what lessons they wish to draw from all these. 🕊️🕊️🕊️

³ Mahatma Gandhi, *Young India*. In *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XXIII, 1896-1897. (1958), 349. Available at <https://www.mkgandhi.org/cwmng.htm>

Buddhist Contribution to Inter-religious Dialogue for Peace

Lalit Shyam

In Buddhism, the intra-religious dialogue goes into the searching and identifying the basic commonality in the teachings of Theravada, Mahayana, and Bajrayana, or Tantrayana schools and sects. Aside from the joint celebration of the Vesak,¹ the world forum is proof of an ever-increasing dialog among Buddhists. Some examples of these world forums are the following: World Fellowship of Buddhist, the World Fellowship of Buddhist Youth, the Buddhist SAARC (South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation), the Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace, the International Sangha Council, and the Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist women, among others. As notable evidence of its success, Bukkya Sento Kyokai of Japan has donated the excellent non-sectarian anthology, *The Teachings of the Buddha* to thousands of hotels throughout the world.

The Cardinal Purpose of Inter-religious Dialogue

Dialogue is a proven antidote to tension. The need for a dialogue presupposes the existence of tension due to diverse points of view. Religions have valid claims that others should consider with respect and tolerance to reach a point of agreement. It is the day-to-day experience of the international community. There are multilateral negotiating mechanisms that encourage and support interreligious dialog such as the United Nations. The UN system encourages religions to engage in such dialogue in fashioning their courses of actions, and in making their joint declarations on crucial world events and problems.

The achievement of verbal agreement or compromise among the

¹ Vesak is one of the important Buddhist festivals. Known also as Buddha Day, Vesak is a celebration of the Buddha's birthday and connects it with his enlightenment. It is also an occasion to meditate on the Buddha's teachings. The Buddhist world celebrates the Vesak once a year on a movable date, during the first full moon of the ancient lunar month of Vesakha, which usually falls in May or early June.

participating religions should not be the direction of inter-religious dialogue. Some of the proponents of dialogue assert that for the sake of effective dialogue, a Buddhist should not be “too Buddhist,” or a Hindu “too Hindu,” or a Christian “too Christian,” or a Sikh “too Sikh” or a Muslim to be not “too Muslim,” and so on. Interreligious dialogue should aim at realizing that tensions arise because of prejudice and bigotry, which in turn, are due to mutual ignorance of the contending parties.

Buddhist attitude towards other religions

From its very inception, the Buddhist attitude towards other religions has been one of critical tolerance. Buddhism has effectively combined its missionary zeal with tolerance. One could not, in any way attribute the spread of Buddhism beyond the confines of the land where it was born to military might or imperial power. Its spread is solely due to the intrinsic appeal of the doctrine, the universality of the *Dhamma*.

It is pertinent to mention some intrinsic features of the Buddhist doctrines that promote an attitude of tolerance towards other faiths.

One can attain the ultimate goal of Buddhism only by an understanding of reality through each one’s own effort (*paccatain veditaboo*).

Deliverance comes not through faith or the strength of one’s subjective conviction (*annatra saddhaya*), but by wisdom and understanding of the nature of things (*panna*). The *Kalamasutta* represents the Buddhist approach to truth. Dogmatic acceptance or prejudiced rejection removes us further and further away from the truths.

The Buddha criticizes fatalistic doctrines, whether they are theistic or non-theistic because they are harmful to any spiritual endeavor. He also made constructive criticism of other beliefs. He attempted to re-direct the attitudes of those who professed them not by hastily rejecting them, but by attempting to transform them gradually towards acquiring a new moral and spiritual significance. Asoka was the classic example of a Buddhist King who attempted to put into actual practice the spirit of tolerance.

The foremost Buddhist contribution to inter-religious dialogue is

the readiness to participate in any effort that eradicates bigotry born out of prejudice and ignorance. Buddhism should also seek to end all fundamentalisms arising from misplaced religious fervor. Their participation should be the promotion of tolerance and mutual respect. However, one should not make shallow slogans like, “After all, every religion is the same,” or “One religion is good as the other,” as the basis for tolerance and respect. On the contrary, a full understanding of the distinctive characteristics of each religion generates respect. Similarly, tolerance must emanate from the conviction that the spiritual needs of humanity are diverse, and so what caters to them should be equally diverse.

Secondly, another significant contribution would be to promote in-depth discussions of vital differences. Inter-religious dialogue is not an effort to make concessions or equations.

Lastly, the Buddhist contribution should be in the promotion of understanding the ethical importance of religion in the present-day context of materialistic preoccupation. This consumerist obsession generates violence and threats to peace. It leads to the ruthless exploitation of the weak and the helpless, and deterioration of interpersonal relations. Buddhism has a remarkable ethical base. Its strength comes from the conviction that a particular behavior is desirable because it is for the good and happiness of the many.

The Buddhists should not only encourage but also support with all the moral strength and material resources at their command, an interreligious dialogue. This interreligious dialog will serve as a preparation and a base for a universal spiritual awakening founded on lofty ethical values that contribute to the improvement of relations - of an individual with individual, nation with nation, and among humanity as a whole.

May there be world peace. May all beings in the universe be happy. 🙏🙏🙏

Religious Resources for Just- Peace: Indigenous People's Wisdom in North East India

I. Ayangla

Introduction

Approximately 20 million indigenous peoples live in different parts of the world. The majority of the indigenous peoples live in Asia. Though living in different geographical locations, they all share some common heritage, e.g. non-written tradition, respect of elders, value for the land, communitarian life, etc. In the contemporary world, they all suffer alienation from their land, from the inferiority of culture; identify crisis, and extinction of the language. North East Indian indigenous communities also experience similar discrimination and exclusion.

Different communities have developed their own method of peacemaking. Indigenous communities in North East Indian have been practicing different methods of peace making in times of conflict and war. In a context, where people live in isolation due to high mountains, lack of communication, and headhunting, they have developed their own ways of making peace. However, one will notice that most of the peace-making practices are within the framework of patriarchy. This paper attempts to analyze and highlight some elements of indigenous resources for building a community of peace from women's experience.

Indigenous Peoples' Wisdom in Northeast India:

One can broadly categorize Indigenous wisdom/spirituality under two areas: (a) Just-peace in relation to Land/creation and (b) Just-peace in relation to other fellow beings. One must note that the indigenous people do not write their wisdom and thoughts, and so it is not fixed. It is dynamic. The community owns this wisdom and interprets it. It is also important to note that elders are the custodian of traditional wisdom. They are authoritative and are highly respected. However, attempts to use local resources for community peacebuilding is a recent phenomenon as Christian missionaries considered the traditional practices as evil practices. Our people are still reluctant to use our local

resources due to their colonial mindset.

Just-peace in relation to Land/creation

Wati Longchar and many tribal scholars have made extensive research in this area. We generally understand that there is “No peace without doing justice to the land.” Many indigenous pearls of wisdom and practices emerged and developed towards the protection of land and its resources. We can best describe the Indigenous peoples’ worldview as a spirituality of interconnectedness of all life. For the indigenous people, this interconnectedness is possible not only because of God but also because of the Mother Earth. The land is the mother of all life. The land sustains the people and gives them an identity. Many indigenous societies maintain a special relationship with the land. Land, for them, is more than just a habitat or a political boundary. It is the basis of their social organization, economic system, and cultural identification. The land is the basis that enables them to co-exist with other living beings in peace.

Since indigenous people view the land and all living beings are interdependent, they maintain a close balance between people and ecological needs in such a way that they protect and preserve both the life of people and of the Earth. Thus, their culture, beliefs, and practices seek to maintain a balance between human and ecological needs. Such a balance is essential to protect nature from the danger of over-exploitation. Through their practices of taboo and totem, the people maintain this crucial balance. I wish to elaborate on some of the ideas expounded in this discussion by Wati Longchar in his recent book *Transforming Culture and Praxis*.¹

1. Taboo

It simply means ‘prohibition’ or a forbidden activity. It is something that the community does not permit, something that stands against social approval, and behavior that the cultural norms do not allow. The practice of taboo covers the whole activity of the indigenous society.

¹Wati Longchar, *Transforming Cultures and Praxis* (Kolkata/Hualien: PTCA, 2018).

It applies between sexes, different age groups, households, different clan members and village, and even according to change of seasons. The people observe a taboo with the awareness that it affects the whole community. When the people neglect the observance of a taboo, it is not only the human community that suffers, it also affects even the animals and plants. Taboos are, therefore, the signs that the whole world is interrelated and interconnected.

Some examples of taboo practices are the following: A husband should not kill any animal when his wife is pregnant. He must also abstain from eating honey. A warrior or priest must not slaughter any animal while observing the restricted day(s). The whole village should not kill any animal on a restricted day(s), too. It is taboo for a woman to hunt. Women must not eat fish that have no scales such as the stinging catfish and the butter catfish. This prudent use of resources protects nature from destruction. These taboos allowed one group or sex to utilize the resources while the other was restricted from doing so. This culture of restraint prevents the overexploitation of nature.

There are certain taboos that prohibit the killing of animals at certain stages of their life. For example, one should not hunt and keep traps during the breeding seasons. The same rule applies to hunt pregnant animals. Fishing and the use of certain poisonous roots and leaves that kill fishes in the rivers or springs during the spawning season are restricted. If a calf is born, or, when there is a new litter of pigs, or when there are newly hatched chicks in the house, the whole household observes taboo to preserve, dedicate, and welcome the life of the newborn calf, piglets, and chicken. The family must devote a period ranging from three to six days to caring and welcoming the newborn to the family as many societies give great importance to domestic animals. In fact, in many indigenous societies, domestic animals are also a part of the family. The observance of taboo applies to all beings regardless of whether they are humans or animals. When it comes to agriculture, people observe the taboo to ensure good food crops and bounteous harvests. The community gives time-space for the land to rejuvenate its fertility through the observance of rituals and taboos. In addition, one

must not cut certain trees because the community considers the trees as sacred. Throughout the villages, the people protect the trees like the banyan, oak, and others. The people highly consider the cutting of these trees as taboo. Unless the priest performs the appropriate rituals to gain divine approval, one should not cut down these trees. Many communities believe that such trees are the dwelling place of spirits. This is different from the Christian understanding that views the spirit indwelling the heart. This understanding is personalized and limited. However, the indigenous people always perceived the spirit in relation to the preservation of nature. The spirit works not only in the human person but also in the whole of creation.

The indigenous young people cannot only cut such trees. They should also not remove the outer bark of those trees. If they do so, they would displace the indwelling spirit that could cause their sudden death or shorten their life span. Young people should not transplant trees like oak, banyan, etc. The Indigenous people believe that these trees would outgrow the good fortune of the planter. Besides, many communities set aside some places as sacred space where the community could congregate for different rituals, festivals, and ceremonies. Therefore, many societies regarded the trees and forests, sacred places, and animals not as mere objects for human use, but that they are alive and active. Thus, people must respect and protect them.

Religious sanction reinforces this prudent act of resource utilization. In the primeval religious system, the taboo is part of every religious act. It is a sacred holiday from work and a day of rest and prayer. Taboo takes place in different duration and intensity. People observe some taboos in one day, others for a few days, a week, or more. While a whole village observes some taboo days, some observances are limited to the clan and family only. While observing taboo, people do not talk to strangers. The daily routine work comes to a standstill. Nothing and no one goes in or out of the house, no slaughtering of animals or birds, and people must avoid sexual contact. Everything must be on complete rest. It is a period of rest for the land, family, and community. It is a period meant for the revitalization of the earth so it could bring holistic benefit to the

community. Taboo also provides opportunities for people to be more charitable to themselves and others, to the animals, to the plants around them, and to their rice fields.

Without the taboo of ample rest, the indigenous people may not have been able to develop a healthy God-world-human relationship. Taboo, therefore, enriches the whole land and community along with the flora and fauna. Such observance is essential to protect nature from exploitation. This culture of restraint and spirituality of interrelatedness are the foundations of harmony, peace, and justice to nature and human beings.

2. Totem

The totem is another practice that ensures balance and harmony in society as well as with the environment. The indigenous communities restricted their members from exploiting certain animals and plants by maintaining a totemic relation with natural objects. A totem is usually “a species of an animal or of a plant or insect or bird and very rarely a class of inanimate objects, very closely related to a group in that the group of people is believed to descent from the animal or any of the species.”² Some of the common totem animals are tiger, tortoise, cobra, monkey, jackal, deer, dog, buffalo, cock, peacock, owl, fish, and so on. The plant totems are like rice, cereal, cucumber, and mushroom. A common phenomenon of totem belief is that the clan that traces its origin to such a totem sometimes gets its name after the totem that they attribute with supernatural power.

The practice of totem reinforces interconnectedness and harmony of life. For example, while some clans kill certain animals and consume, the others do not. While one clan eats beef, the other clan prohibits its eating. While some clans kill birds, the others do not. Almost all the clans prohibit the killing of monkeys, tigers, bears, elephants, and pythons. Some clans would kill and eat the totem animals and plants without any restrictions to gain blessings and protection from the

2 J.H. Thumra, “The Primal Religious Tradition,” in *Religious Traditions of India*, ed., P.S. Daniel, *et.al.* (Kottayam: ITL, 1988), 51

deity. Some clans will kill and eat the totem plants and animals only on certain occasions, followed by a period of mourning. People look upon this practice of eating as a re-establishment of the bond between the clan and its totem. For some clan, the totem is so sacred to the clan bearing its name that the totem becomes the focus of reverence and awe that they do not kill and eat. This practice is common to many indigenous communities.

The indigenous communities maintain a very strong symbiotic relationship with the environment because of their totemic roots. They personify their surroundings by attributing to them some kind of personality. Each clan considered it an obligation to protect their totem. Because of this totemic relationship and the myths related to animals and plants, the indigenous communities revere them greatly. In that way, their interconnectedness with nature in turn protected and preserved the natural resources from being over-exploited.

However, we need to be critical that some of those practices operate within the patriarchal structure. I am a woman, but my culture does not allow me to inherit a piece of land. Without land, women are second-class citizens. We need to re-examine some of our inherited traditions from women's perspectives.

Just-peace in relation to humans

Many communities have developed social ecology to promote peace. One is intermarriage between different clans. It is taboo to marry within one's own clan, though it does not apply to some tribes, like the Kuki, Mizos, Chin, and others. The practice of inter-clan marriage continues among some tribes and we need to promote such practices. For the Tangkhul tribe, the woman who marries someone who comes from another tribe or village becomes *pukhriela*, the one who mediates between two conflicting villages or tribes. For the Ao tribe, when the two warring communities come face-to-face in war, only women can speak during this time. In some tribes, when someone takes shelter in a woman's *meghala* (abode), the enemy will not attack the man. Women have been contributing immensely to peacebuilding but society has

always treated them as inferior.

The Ao tribe has a practice of *Aksu*, which means giving of pigs as a present. The AOs practice this with other tribes, villages, clans, and between families to bring reconciliation, friendship, acceptance, recognition, to renew and affirm the old age relationship and goodwill. Though this practice is very patriarchal in nature, the Ao villages still practiced it to promote “brotherhood,” and not so much of sisterhood. It is important to note that there is an effort to modify the practice of *Aksu* to include women and children.

Yet despite the undeniable progress initiated and achieved, women continue to experience exploitation, discrimination, and inequality in all areas. Women’s experiences of victimization and marginalization remain unchallenged in many communities. Women’s contributions, talents, and abilities remain unrecognized and untapped. Nevertheless, even if the traditional and patriarchal society of the Indigenous Peoples have restricted women’s role, women continue to participate and involve in peacemaking efforts as they see life more important than power. Women have been promoters of peace at home, in society, and in conflict situations.³

It is important that we reaffirm the potential of women in bringing just-peace. However, lasting peace can prevail only when we uphold the sanctity of the land and its resources. True just-peace will prevail only when we respect fellow humans including respecting equally the rights of women. God became human in Jesus Christ in the human form not to abolish our traditional cultural values, but to abolish unjust cultural system such as patriarchy and ritualism that deny justice. As Dr. Lasetso mentioned in his lecture, St. Paul, the first cross-cultural missionary, never saw culture as devilish that we must abandon. Rather, we must transform such stifling culture for the promotion of justice, peace, and

3“Witnessing to Christ in Northeast India,” in *Regnum Centenary Series*, Vol. 31, ed., Marina Ngursangzeli and Michael Biehl (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2016) [Database online]. Available in http://www.ocms.ac.uk/regnum/downloads/Witnessing_to_Christ_in_North-East%20India-wm.pdf

harmony. It is important that we transform our cultural heritage in light of the teaching of Jesus Christ for the promotion of just-peace in today's world. 🕊️ 🕊️ 🕊️

Mobilizing Collective People's Solidarity Movement for Just-Peace in North East India: A Peace Action Initiative

Garrol Lotha

“Peace Channel - A Model for Peace Action Initiative”

The Peace Channel is a youth peace movement of the third millennium. It is a new model for peacebuilding. It aims at transforming the culture of violence into a culture of peace. This noble work of peacebuilding goes beyond the boundaries of religion, caste, culture, language, and colour. This is a part of the global movement of education for peace. Children, parents, and teachers as individuals and groups will play an active role in understanding one another and building good relationships with others; across communities and regions. They will do so by taking action to create space for more just and peaceful schools, homes, communities, and societies. War originates in the mind of people and we must sow peace in the hearts of people.

The Peace Channel draws inspiration from various traditions, civil society practices, religions, and philosophies that engender a more just and harmonious society. It has trained over forty thousand (40000) youth, elders, and teachers in and around North East India. Dr. Fr. C.P. Anto, a Catholic missionary priest of the diocese of Kohima conceived this movement in the local context. Peace Education by Peace Channel (A Youth Peace Movement) is one of the tools of structural conflict prevention and sustainable peacebuilding. It aims at enhancing the values of non-violent conflict management, resolution, and transformation of conflict in the minds of the children, youth, and adults. These children, youth, and adults are part of the process of building and striving for sustainable peace in the troubled region of North East India, and in the world. These things they can do by inculcating the seven principles and the seven values of the movement to augment tolerance and respect for diversity in the seven institutions. With these principles, we develop the right relationship with the three ultimate entities - God, People, and Nature – to create Universal Peace.

The goal of the Movement to Achieve Sustainable Peace

The movement chooses the children and the youth with the goal of “forming youth to face life by adopting the principles of non-violence, religion and cultural tolerance; thus transforming them to be instruments of peace in their own milieu and outside.”

The motto of the movement is “Be a Channel of Peace.” Thus, it visualizes every member of the movement to become “Channels of Peace,” and work to “create a world where peace and justice reign in the hearts and people experience boundless love and freedom.”

The mission of the movement is “to promote a culture of non-violence, justice, and compassion by reaching out to the youth in every village, town, district, and the state of India and eventually other countries; thus eradicating the culture of violence through a multi-dimensional approach.”

The Movement’s Theories of Peace

Peacemakers select methods, approaches, and tactics for building peace rooted in a range of “theories” of how peace is achieved. In many cases according to Peter Woodrow, theories are not necessarily conscious, rather they embed in the skills and approaches that the actors learned from the organization, be they conscious or unconscious. The organization called Peace Channel has been involved in the peacebuilding process for the past fourteen years. Out of its involvements, it has come out with many theories. These theories emerged from the experiences and studies on the present situation of Nagaland.

The Individual Transformation Theory

The individual’s inner transformation theory tells us that if enough people undergo inner transformation then commitment to a peaceful resolution of conflicts will arise. A transformative experience through information, formation, and transformation can fundamentally alter an

individual's understanding of oneself. Thus, a society achieves peace when more individuals undergo this inner transformation. Peace is the result of a transformative change in an individual's life through awareness, reflection, and judgment.

The Right Relationships Theory

The right relationship theory tells us that Peace emerges out of a process of breaking down isolation, polarization, division, prejudice, and stereotypes between and among groups. If the key actors from and among the belligerent groups have the opportunity to interact with each other, they will better understand and appreciate one another. Then, they would prefer to resolve conflicts peacefully. Building relationships among the groups through cultural exchange programs, inter-group dialogue, and networking breed peace.

The Reduction of Violent Conflict Theory

The Reduction of Violent Conflict Theory expounds that peace will result when we reduce the levels of violence perpetrated by combatants or their representatives. If we can establish space and mechanisms for stopping violent conflicts, they can gradually stop the violence and negotiate peace. It can also result in ceasefires, the creation of zones or villages of peace.

The Peace Institutional Development Theory

The Peace Institutional Development Theory says that peace will prevail when the state establishes stable, reliable social institutions that guarantee democracy, equity, justice, and fair allocation of resources. When there are enough institutions that promote peace and prevent violence, conflicting parties will seek peaceful methods of conflict resolution. They will resist the mobilization of resources towards the support of violence. We need to establish new constitutional and governance arrangements, peace, and human rights education, promotion of anti-corruption movements. Peace Channel has been promoting the institutionalization of peace advocacy activities.

The Community Mobilization Theory

The Community Mobilization Theory says that, “when the people lead, the leaders will follow.” When people’s attitudes change, then they will prefer that key actors seek peaceful solutions to conflicts. If communities or groups have the opportunity to mobilize and interact, then they will better understand one another and will prefer to resolve the conflicts peacefully.

Mobilizing groups to oppose war and to advocate for peace, using media, nonviolent direct-action campaigns, organizing advocacy groups, and dramatic and musical events to raise consciousness are some of the strategies to promote peace. In this context, the Peace Channel has been actively involved in community-based peacebuilding.

The Objectives for Peace Action Initiative

Having introduced the peace theories that guide the Peace Movement (Peace Channel) and the 14 years of experience in the field, I would like to cite some solutions for a way forward towards a peaceful region. The following objectives may lead to the possible ways of mobilizing the available resources in the community, thereby enhancing the peace action initiative for Just-Peace in North East India:

- Bring people together, especially the youth under the banner of “Peace,” to work individually and collectively for peace and harmony in their environment and strive towards universal peace, justice, equality, and global family.
- Mould the youth to gain life-skills in a multi-cultural tribal and religious context and adopting the principles of non-violence, religion, and cultural tolerance, thus, transforming them to become instruments of peace.
- Explore strategies of building peace and development by working together with like-minded organizations and institutions on socio-economic, cultural, educational, environmental, and other inclusive issues.
- Bring out and develop the potentials within individuals to

make them responsible, transparent, honest, and diligent citizens and leaders.

- Empower people to live in perfect harmony with Self, God, Community, and Nature.
- Build and promote relationships, dialogue, mediation, and facilitation with confidential parties to promote sustainable peace and developmental activities.
- Facilitate collaboration and networking with all peacebuilding agents, gather and disseminate resources towards universal peace education and peace promotion activities.

Peace Action Initiative

To meet the objectives, some of the possible Peace Action Initiative that can be implemented in the North East Region are:

1. Formation of Peace Clubs in the Education Institutions and Communities, and capacitating the leaders and teachers with skills as change-agents. Then they can promote peacebuilding, reconciliation, dialogue, and non-violent conflict resolution among its members.
2. Conduct capacity-building programs on different peace-related topics, provide avenues to every individual for sharing their experiences, and encourage promotion and sustainability of the peacebuilding process.
3. Encourage advocacy and lobbying with the government and non-government entities in promoting peace education, nonviolent communication, and establishing peace commissions in departments.
4. Promote activities like peace rallies, peace campaigns, peace celebrations among peace clubs, cultural exchange programs among different communities and religions.
5. Publish materials, manuals, inspirational materials, and motivating success stories on peace. Sharing of peace-related information through the website, Facebook, and Twitter will strengthen the networks at both local and global levels.
6. Organize research on various peace-related issues and publish them annually.

7. Organize national, regional, and local level peace seminars, conferences, and workshops to learn and exchange ideas on peace-related issues.
8. Promote peacebuilders in the region by giving Peace Awards to individuals who contribute to the promotion of peacebuilding in the region.
9. Formation of Peace Bands and promote peace through various arts consisting of artists from different religions, and communities.
10. Conduct interreligious and ecumenical meetings to actively promote religious harmony, and to prevent future conflicts.
11. Establish educational institutions like Peace Music, Peace Museum, and Peace Centre in the region to educate and capacitate peace activists on peace and conflict transformations studies, youth, and community development.

Strategic Approaches and Methodology

1. Information: Provide necessary, sufficient, and relevant information to the youth to create awareness about the need for peace in our society and the importance of solving the conflict in a non-violent manner. Creating awareness is the first step in bringing changes.
2. Formation: Shaping and moulding of one's personality begin moving from awareness to reflection. Provide avenues for reflection on the values of non-violence and traditional values that promotes peace. Reflection helps one become a peacemaker in thoughts, words, and actions. This will change the pattern of conflict and violence. The minds of the youth need redirecting towards thinking, acting, and expressing the culture of non-violence.
3. Transformation: We believe in action and the transformation of persons to be channels of peace is the result of awareness and reflection of life situation.
4. Evaluation: The evaluation is a systematic assessment of individual transformation and the movement's activity based on certain principles.

Seven Actions of Peace Leading to Sustainable Peace

Dreaming for Peace. We are certain that peace is possible. The dream is to transform the world from a culture of violence to a culture of peace, which begins with actions for a peace-filled world. A dream is a door towards action. This dream is the door to our endeavours for peace.

a) Thinking for Peace. To make the dream of achieving the reality of peace we need to think about it constantly. We need to think about and strategize our actions. We must always centre our thoughts on how to build a peace-filled society. The more we engage our thoughts with our dream, the more we get to what we speak and do to build peace.

b) Speaking for Peace. It is the responsibility of every individual to spread awareness of the need for peace. Everyone must talk of peace with whomever one meets. Speaking for peace also involves communicating with others in a nonviolent manner. We should not hurt people through our words. It is through setting examples in nonviolent communication that we become agents of peace. Speaking against discrimination, oppression, violence, and corruption also make individuals agents of change for peace.

c) Sharing for Peace. Sharing builds camaraderie and love. One must be an example of peacebuilding through the sharing of resources with others. We do not hold back the knowledge and abilities or make a differentiation between the fortunate and the less fortunate. We can share what we have, as a move towards equality, justice, and peace.

d) Praying for Peace. Believing in the Supreme Being and looking up to God in our troubles. While praying for personal and family needs, we do also pray for peace in the world. God is the Supreme Being and a God of peace. Therefore, when we pray for peace, God will not leave these prayers unanswered. God's grace has brought us thus far, and grace will take us forward. Our prayers will be for the wars and hostilities between nations to end. The enmity and quarrels between families and individuals, the misunderstanding and unrest in the

households, and hatred between our near and dear ones must end.

e) Working for Peace. Our actions speak of what we are. We need to give our time and energy to organizing people for peace-oriented actions. We meditate when there are misunderstandings and quarrels. We should work to help people who are victims of violence, to bring broken families together, bring peace in troubled communities due to discrimination and oppression. When we start doing something for a particular cause, we will be able to gain support from others and inspire them towards working for the same cause.

f) Living for Peace. By dreaming, thinking, speaking, sharing, praying, and working for peace, we shall be living for peace. We will be inspiring tens of thousands of people towards building peace. We all should live an exemplary life for the people to see. We should be the peacebuilders so that when people look at us they will see the spark, which would light the fire in them. Our dreams will become a reality when a legion stands along with us for peace in the world.

Conclusion

Having learned and observed several conflicting issues in the region, the Peace Channel will implement peace action initiatives by using certain approaches to bring Just-Peace in the region through peaceful. This will eventually lead to sustainable peace.

The Peace Channel Approach - A Model to Prevent Conflicts in the Institutions and Communities

The Northeastern region is home to a remarkably diverse cultures, religions, languages, and tribes. Therefore, acceptance, tolerance, and respect for differences, and relationship building are central to conflict prevention.

The first approach to peace that we can execute towards peacebuilding is gathering information on the listening level. This will help individuals to get the correct information, gain knowledge, skills, and build rapport to enhance the relationship at all levels. In that sense, one can give or

share inputs that are contextual and true to the situation. In this stage, the individuals will see the realities and think about how to work for peace. The orientation of the mindset and the attitude of individuals to be pro-active, pro-peace, and pro-life happen in this stage.

Learning by doing or formation through practice is the key in this second phase. We emphasize cultivating a set of the seven principles of spirituality, responsibility, self-realization, relationship, dialogue, reconciliation, and nonviolence. We equally emphasize the movement's seven values of fearlessness, trustworthiness, acceptance, respect, justice or fairness, integrity, and caring. These principles and values help the individuals to strengthen relationships to live in peace and harmony with all beings in the community. The experiential sharing helps the individuals to develop acceptance and understanding among themselves. In a society that is multicultural and complex like the Naga society, there exists a strong sense of tribal identity. Thus, coming together and interacting with each other builds up trust and acceptance among the youth from different tribes. It will result in the youth forming themselves into a cohesive entity and a force to reckon with.

The transformation starts taking shape through the initiatives and the efforts of an individual. The capacitated individual youth takes up the challenge of reaching out to communities, groups, and organizations. They carry with their mandate of preventing conflict and building peace. They will do networking with the community-based peace activists. Organizationally, this body consists of seven actors. These actors come from different sectors - men, women, youth, tribal, and minority communities, - from the religious groups, community-based organizations, non-government organizations, business groups, the professionals, the police and army officials, members of recognized, unrecognized marginalized groups, government officials and politicians. These actors become agents and instruments of peace in their family, the circle of friends, and in their social milieu.

The Peace Channel model starts with the individual self at the centre, and spreads out to the peripheries, reaching out to all sections of the

society. It is an inclusive approach in building peace, to prevent future conflicts, and bring sustainable development. Thus, through these processes of peacebuilding, the members experience transformation from the individual to the family, institution, group, and community at national and international levels.

This model is also workable among adults and professionals by forming them into the People's Forum for Peace (PFP) where people from different walks of life, professions, religions, and communities come together to form the forum. It will create a positive and healthy deliberation among the members that help in building understanding and cooperation among the people. Thus, Peace Education by Peace Channel strives to foster a positive attitude that is essential for the institutionalization of a culture of peace by replacing the culture of violence.

Impact of peace initiative:

The envisioned impact of the above approach will be on the following levels:

Individual Level:

1. Capacity building of an individual to tackle conflicting issues
2. Self-realization and assertiveness
3. Confidence building
4. Developing attitudes, skills, and behaviour to live in harmony

Community Level:

1. Good rapport (networking) with different NGOs, CBOs & Media Personals
2. A better understanding of different religions and denominations
3. Increase in peace initiative taken by the people in resolving conflict (PFP, Volunteers, staff, Peace club members, Peer Mediators) 🕊️🕊️🕊️

Mobilizing Collective People's Solidarity Movements for Just-Peace in North East India: Churches' Initiative

T. Karang Maram

Introduction

I feel great and honored to have this privilege of sharing my perspective on Justice and Peace in our Society today. I am writing from the perspective of the Christian churches, and I will share about the different areas where we have been working actively for Just-Peace in our State.

Context of the Church in Manipur

One of the strongest forces in the lives of Manipur Tribal is the Church.¹ Christianity first came to Manipur in the late nineteen century. By the end of twentieth century, the tribal people in Manipur converted to Christianity. Nearly 90 % of the Tribals in Manipur state of North East, India are Christians. The Church is a strong presence in their daily life. Its influence runs deep in all community organization, be it the local youth Club, the Women's Society, or even the Council of Elders in any village. The Church and community overlap in civic and social life among the tribal people of Manipur.

However, given the importance of the Church in all aspects of community life, it is not surprising to see how careful it has been when it comes to making steps towards peace work. In most villages, the so-called underground movement were and still are often in direct contact with the church. Many of the boys who joined the underground movement belong to the local communities in different places. When they visit their home villages, they often take part in Church prayers and other activities. During ceasefires, when the young men are billeted in particular villages they may do so as well. The church plays an important role in the village and community life. This means that

¹Editor's Note: It is important here to distinguish the church as the institution and a place of worship, and the Church as the believers, the people as the body of Christ.

church officials can ensure that those who belong to the underground groups will not harm the women and children. If ever there are cases of love relationship that arise between the underground cadres and some members of the village, the church is there to give counsel or advice, or perform the marriage ceremony when needed. There are even views that for the underground movement to collect taxes, or stay in the mainstream groups, it should at least see to it that it includes the church in the negotiation and in forging agreements. In a way, the relationship is, in many ways a reciprocal one.

The church in Manipur still remains tribalized, and some villages or towns that have two different tribal communities will have two different churches. The other way of church initiative in maintaining peace or peacebuilding is ‘Pulpit Exchange’ organized for an exchange of church Pastor, e.g. a Kuki. The Pastor addressed a Naga congregation and the Naga Pastor addressed the Kuki congregation and both preached peace. In some villages, this went to a considerable way towards helping to maintain peace or at least to support it. This is an area where much more could be done. The pulpit exchange program is not something that relates only to one church in one place. It was operational over the years in a number of towns and neighbouring villages. Whenever mixed tribal population exist, the church provides the facility of pulpit exchange on a regular basis to ensure that peace becomes something that people invest at all times, and not only when they are facing the threat of violence. Thus, it is important to recognize that the role of the church, a powerful and established institution in Manipur is extremely positive at times, but there have also been times when the church has not used its strengths so well to work for peace.²

The Manipur Baptist Convention and its Peace Initiative

Ever Since the outbreak of the Naga-Kuki tribal conflict in Manipur 1992 – 1997, the Manipur Baptist Convention (MBC) had been actively working for harmonious and peaceful co-existence between all communities in Manipur State and beyond. Some of the activities

2 B. Urvashi, *Interrogating Peace: The Naga-Kuki Conflict in Manipur* (New Delhi: Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst e.V. (EED), 2008).

initiated by MBC in peacebuilding are the following:

1. The late Rev. S.K. Hokey, former General Secretary of Manipur Baptist Convention was the recipient of first Tribal Peace and Harmony award in 2013 from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India and Government of Manipur. The government gave this award for his tireless efforts in mobilizing people to bring the ethnic conflict between the Nagas and the Kukis to a harmonious and peaceful co-existence, even though we are still in a situation of Negative Peace.
2. On March 3, 2001, when the Kuki National Front (KNF- MC) kidnapped the four Naga villagers of Yaikongpao (Thangal Naga the MBC extended all possible means and help for the safe release of the said persons.
3. When the same group (KNF-MC) kidnapped Paul Leo, then President of United Naga Council (UNC) on April 17, 2001, it created many tensions between the two communities. The MBC took the role of a mediator to facilitate the safe release of Leo on April 20, 2001.
4. The MBC also organized a peace meeting on October 4, 2001 at Kangpokpi Mission Compound. The United Naga Council, Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM),³ local churches, and civil society participated in the meeting. The second peace meeting took place at the mission compound and the participants adopted a declaration toward peaceful co-existence.
5. On October 24, 2001, the church organized a reconciliation program for Naga-Kuki communities that reside along the Imphal–Tamenlong Road, in Manipur with the theme “Reconciliation in Christ.” Around one thousand people both from the Kuki and Naga communities attended the meeting. There was an exchange of traditional shawls as a symbol of

³ Inpi means “government.”

reconciliation. The attendees adopted a peace declaration. It is heartening to note that after this meeting, the Imphal-Tamenlong Road became open for bus services and since then both communities are happily travelling together up to the present.

6. The MBC launched the program of taking the journey of understanding for All Naga Students Association Manipur (ANSAM) and Kuki Students Organization (KSO) for the promotion of peace and harmony.
7. The MBC also organized several peace meetings and seminars in collaboration with National and Regional Organizations. An example is the Peace Conference that MBC organized with the CBCNEI, NCCI, and CASA⁴ from the October 12 – 14, 2001 at the MBC Centre Church, Imphal. Another is the North East India Joint Peace Committee meetings. MBC also participated in various peace meetings organized by different organizations.⁵

In March 2003, the Kuki Liberation Army kidnapped and detained a peace trainer and German national, Dr. Wolfgang Heinrich for eighteen days. The MBC again took an important role in the negotiation for his safe release.⁶

MBC actively involved and intervened whenever required for bringing communal harmony and peaceful co-existence among the tribes. For instance when the United Kuki Liberation Front and National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) in 2004 abducted Shri Themkeshwor Singh, Indian Administrative Service Officer and Deputy Commissioner of Chandel District, Manipur, then Chief Minister of Manipur Shri Okram Ibobi Singh and his Cabinet Ministers requested the religious leaders of Manipur. The MBC Cabinet Secretaries led by

4 CBCNEI stands for the Convention of Baptist Churches in North East India; NCCI stands for National Council of Churches in India and CASA stands for Church Auxiliary for Social Action a development and humanitarian organization that focuses on Care, Awareness, Service and Action.

5 Vumthang Sitlou, *Peace Report* (Imphal: Manipur Baptist Convention, 2001).

6 Vumthang Sitlou, *Peace Report* (Imphal: Manipur Baptist Convention, 2003).

Rev. Vumthang Sitlou, went to negotiate. The militants released Shri Themkeshwor Singh safe and sound.⁷

On June 30, 2015, the MBC, in collaboration with NBCC, offered to broker for an amicable solution between the Maoist NSCN and the Southern Angami People's Organization in Dzuku Valley dispute. However, it was turn down by the Southern Angami People's Organization. After that attempt, the church could not go any further step towards an amicable solution. However, the MBC appealed to the conflicting communities to refrain from any form of violence, as the civil society, specifically the Tenyimi People's Organization (TPO)⁸ had handled the case.

Building Local Capacity for Peace

Since 2015, the Manipur Baptist Convention (MBC) had set up a full-fledged department known as Peace and Development. Thereafter, it had been actively executing the work of peacebuilding with the financial support from CEDAR Fund, HongKong. The MBC had been conducting series of peace workshops, training of trainers for peacebuilding, and Peace Conferences.

On November 9-13, 2015, MBC organized a whole-week State-level peace workshop for the church leaders, in collaboration with Evangelical Fellowship of India-Commission on Relief (EFICOR-New Delhi) at the MBC Headquarters in Imphal.⁹ In 2017, the MBC saw the need to mobilize more church leaders for conflict prevention. It organized six peace workshops for Tribal church leaders in different location of Manipur State. The details of the conducted peace workshops are the following:

1. In collaboration with EFICOR-New Delhi, the MBC conducted at the first district level, a peace workshop on the theme "Healing the

⁷ Vumthang Sitlou, *Peace Report* (Imphal: Manipur Baptist Convention, 2004).

⁸ T. Karang, *Peace and Development Annual Report 2015* (Imphal: Manipur Baptist Convention, 2016).

⁹ Ibid.

Wound of Ethnic Conflict,” at Moyon Naga Baptist Association (MYNBA) Office, Penaching on May 30 – 31, 2017 in Chandel District, Manipur. Mr. Green Thomas, Training Manager, EFICOR, Ms. Ruth, a volunteer worker in the war zone in Rwanda, Africa and Rev. T. Karang, Director of MBC’s Peace and Development facilitated the peace workshop for the Chandel District Baptist Church leaders. Thirty-two (32) participants from eight (8) different Associations of Chandel District, namely: the Aimol Baptist Association, Anal Naga Baptist Association, Chothe Baptist Association, Lamkang Naga Baptist Association, Maring Naga Baptist Association, Monsang Naga Baptist Association, Moyon Naga Baptist Association and Tarao Baptist Association, participated in the two-day peace workshop.

2. The second district-level peace workshop on the same theme materialized at Gangte Baptist Centre Church (GBA) Cheingkonpang and Churachandpur in Manipur on June 1-2, 2017. Green Thomas, EFICOR training manager, Rev. T. Karang facilitated the Peace workshop for the Churachandpur District Baptist Church leaders. Thirty-six (36) participants from Chin Baptist Association, Simte Baptist Churches Association and Gante Baptist Association participated during the two-day peace workshop.
3. The third district-level peace workshop on the same theme took place at Mao Baptist Churches Association (MBCA) on July 18-18, 2017 in Senapati District, Manipur. Green Thomas of EFICOR and Rev. T. Karang of MBC facilitated the workshop for the Senapati District Baptist Church leaders. Forty-one (41) participants from Mao Baptist Churches Association, Maram Naga Baptist Association, Poumai Naga Baptist Association and Thangal Naga Baptist Association attended the two-day peace workshop.
4. The fourth district-level peace workshop happened in Tangkhul Baptist Churches Association (TBCA), Mission Compound on July 20-21, 2017 in Ukhrul District, Manipur. Green Thomas and Rev.

T. Karang were the facilitators. Forty-eight (48) participants joined the two-day workshop.

5. The fifth district-level peace workshop took place in Tamenglong District, Manipur on August 8-9, 2017 with Green Thomas and Rev. T. Karang facilitating. Forty-eight (48) church leaders participated in the two-day peace workshop.
6. Finally, the sixth two-day district-level peace workshop focused on Conflict Transformation. The MBC and CBCNEI jointly organized it in Moreh Town on August 30-31, 2017. Rev. T. Karang, along with James Ginmithang Haokip, and Malthys D. Sangma of CBCNEI's Peace and Justice Department facilitated the two-day peace workshop. Forty church leaders participated during the workshop.

The MBC also organized the Manipur Peace Fest 2017 on the theme of 'Live Peaceably with all Men' [*sic*] (Rom 12:18) at the MBC Mission Headquarters in Imphal on November 16-18, 2017. Guests like Shri Thiso Kriina of Senapati, Eno.Gaidon Kamei, President UNC, and Dr. Tara Manchin, Chairperson, Women Affairs, KIM came to grace the peace festival. There were competitions on various categories such as song, poetry, painting and quotes based on the theme. Gifts and cash prizes were at stake for these competitions. Members of the churches, leaders and pastors in the area of Manipur Peace Fest attended the festival.¹⁰

On May 28-June 2, 2018, the MBC organized a six-day Peacebuilding training of trainers for women and youth secretaries of MBC at the Royal Ambassador Academy, Leimakhong. Thirteen women and fourteen men turn up for the six-day and received certificates to encourage them to work for peace in their respective places. Overall, the MBD has conducted a total of twenty-five peace workshops and ten peace events for children in Manipur state in 2018. Then in

10 T. Karang, *Peace and Development Annual Report 2017* (Imphal: Manipur Baptist Convention, 2018).

2019, it was able to hold twenty-nine workshops and five peace events for children. Altogether, three hundred eighty-seven church leaders across Manipur state participated in the peace conference held on November 27-28, 2019 at the MBC Mission Headquarters.¹¹

MBC Environment & Climate Policy

Human-made disasters and natural calamities do not spare the church and the Christians. Many a time the Christians and people in the rural areas are not prepared for any disasters. At the same time, they were not aware and could not distinguish which one is natural calamity and which one is human-made or a result of human activity. The environment and climate policy of the Manipur Baptist Convention is an outcome of the consecutive workshops, seminars, consultations and orientations on the climate change. The Manipur Baptist Convention, in its 176th Executive Council action No. 176/EC/2012/02 (7), resolved to adopt an Environment and Climate Policy in order to sustain a holistic and prophetic ministry, to prevent the dangerous effect of global warming, and to take necessary steps immediately.

The 1,417 local churches and fellowship under the MBC observes every first Sunday of June as Green Sunday. On the World Environment Day on June 5, 2019, MBC collaborated with the Directorate of Environment to distribute 15,000 *Parkia* (*Parkia biglobosa*) saplings to 1417 local and fellowship churches. The MBC also collaborated with the Forest Department on World Forest Day in 2019 to plant 60,000 saplings in all twenty-nine Association's reserved forest. MBC projected that from 2020-2023, the churches will plant six species of wild fruits such as *Prunus Nepalensis* (Black Cherry) *Myrica esculenta* (box myrtle), *Docynia paniculata* (wild apple), *Embica officinalis* (Goose Berry) *Elaeocarpus flooribundus* (wild Olive), *Choerospondias axillaris* (Nepali hog plum or lapsi). MBC looks forward to planting 154,000 saplings of these varieties of wild fruits on the 140 hectares of land under the Public-Private Partnership mode of the National Mission on Himalayan Studies.

11 T. Karang, *Peace and Development Report 2018* (Imphal: Manipur Baptist Convention, 2019).

Justice, Peace and Livelihood: Improving Quality of Life; Reducing Vulnerability of Excluded Communities

Since 2018, MBC forged partnership with CASA to implement the said project under the four themes in 20 Rural Villages of Senapati District, namely:

1. Formation and Strengthening of Community Based Organizations
2. Advocacy and Networking for livelihood
3. Gender Mainstreaming, and
4. Local capacity for Peace Building.

MBC and Anti Human Trafficking

The US State Department said recently in its “Trafficking in Persons Report 2013”¹² that North East India has emerged as a high source area of trafficking of women and children. Authorities have rescued girls from Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram from various trafficking rackets in Goa, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Manipur, being one of the poor and undeveloped states in terms of its governance and economy, has become one of the most vulnerable states to human trafficking in India. Manipur also serves as the most important strategic point geographically as a source, transition, as well as destination point of trafficking. Lack of commitment and intervention of the state government and its law enforcement agencies had escalated the present situation and to its worse. Failure of the education system in Manipur and political instability in the region has complicated the situation. Moreover, North East girls are in demand in the flesh market, as they are fair and they generally speak English.

12 US State Department, “Trafficking in Persons Report 2013” [Database online]. Available in <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2013//index.htm>

In Manipur District, the reported incidences of trafficking from 2008 - June 2016 are as follows:

| SL. No | District | No of Incidents | Percentage |
|--------|---------------|-----------------|------------|
| 1 | Imphal West | 6 | 9.09 |
| 2 | Imphal East | 6 | 9.09 |
| 3 | Thoubal | 2 | 3.03 |
| 4 | Bishnupur | 8 | 12.12 |
| 5 | Tamenglong | 8 | 12.12 |
| 6 | Ukhrul | 13 | 19.69 |
| 7 | Churachandpur | 9 | 13.63 |
| 8 | Chandel | 8 | 12.12 |
| 9 | Senapati | 6 | 9.09 |
| | Total | 66 | 100 |

The Manipur Baptist Convention (MBC), composed of 29 Associations across Manipur state, has been taking serious concern on Human Trafficking. On this matter, it collaborates with the Convention of Baptist Churches in Northeast India CBCNEI, in organizing Anti-Human Trafficking awareness programs since 2018. MBC holds that churches should be prepared and willing to fight against human trafficking in Manipur State and beyond.¹³

Conclusion

I would like to quote Dr. Barnes' statement that says, "There are more conflicts in the world than the grain of sands on the earth." This is very true. When we classified the conflict into Latent and Expressed, we only see the Expressed conflict. We ignore the Latent conflict. Today we are living in a conflict-driven society and the peace process is never finished. As a church, how are we going to respond to it? 🙏🙏🙏

¹³ Karang, Peace and Development Report 2018.

Mobilizing Collective People's Solidarity Movement for Just-Peace in North East India: Interfaith Initiative

Amrit Kumar Goldsmith

Since the beginning, sociologically, we have observed that humans have found ways to organize in social groups to live together as a community or as a society. The word solidarity is meaningless if it is not happening even between two people.

God created human beings in the image of the Godself. God, then, has ingrained the divine characteristics in the human being. Satisfied, God put the human being as caretaker of creation (Genesis 1:26-31).

What is Solidarity?

The meaning of people's solidarity comes alive when we find the following qualities in the community and relationships: accord, harmony, agreement, cohesion, unity. Solidarity may be the essence of the structures like the clan, Mahari, or clan organization among the Garo tribe, and village councils, in Kebang or village council in Adi tribe. Solidarity is emerging also at the social level.

In principle, solidarity is a common value that guides the practice of the people in the following groups and spaces:

- churches
- Namghar -Assamese word for prayer house for congregational worship,
- Temples
- Masjid
- Budh Bihars and Gurdwaras
- North East India Christian Council (NEICC)
- North East India Regional Bishops' Council (NEIRBC)
- Satras - institutional centers of Hindu Vaishnavism, in the state of Assam and neighboring regions
- Sankardev Sangha – a socio-religious organization in Assam, and
- Other religious groups and institutions.

The Civil Society must also forge solidarity on its various levels, such as in more organized bodies like the –

- North East Student Organization (NESO)
- United Christian Forum of North East India (UCFNEI)
- North East Voluntary Action Network (NEVAN)
- Joint Peace Mission Team (JPMT)
- United Christian Prayer for India (UCPI), and
- Axom Nagarik Samaj (ANS), among others.

On the political level, solidarity should also be the goal among the - Panchayats, District Councils, Territorial Councils, Autonomous Council, Village Development Boards, North Eastern Council (NEC). All these arrangements have to reckon the role of human beings as God has commissioned them.

What is Just Peace?

According to the dictionary, the word “just” means right, fair, equitable, ethical, honest, lawful, neutral, and upright.

Again, from the dictionary, peace means friendliness, alliance, ceasefire, treaty, and tranquility.

The Present Situation

The Preamble of the Constitution of India declares:

WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to
constitute India
into a SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC
REPUBLIC
and to secure to all its citizens:

JUSTICE, social, economic, and political; LIBERTY of thought,
expression,
belief, faith, and worship;

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity;

and to promote among them all FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation;

IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949, do HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.¹

The constituents should put up a resistance when political parties or dominant groups attempt to ignore the provisions under the Preamble. Otherwise, the common people will go into the agitation path in protests, demonstrations, rallies, strikes, and bandhs.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is leading the present government with an absolute majority in Lok Sabha (Lower House of Indian Parliament). They have proven what the majority in the Lok Sabha can do. An example is on the issue regarding the repeal of Article 370 on Jammu and Kashmir, the construction of the Ram Janambhumi Temple that becomes the center of the controversial decades-old Hindu-Muslim dispute in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh state, the Education Policy, Uniform Civil Code, and Citizens Amendment Act (CAA) 2019 and so on. Therefore, in India, we have witnessed protests worldwide – either peaceful or violent - because of the disruptions of the age-old socio-political arrangements.

North East India is boiling. The people resisted the Citizens Amendment Act (CAA) because it is anti-democratic and it is against the Indian Constitution. The Bodo Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) had become Bodo Territorial Region (BTR). The Center has divided Assam based

1 *Constitution of India* [database online]. Available in https://www.constitutionofindia.net/constitution_of_india/preamble

on linguistic and ethnic lines. It has amended Article 125 to facilitate this change. The non-Bodo people living in the BTR are protesting. The new solidarity among people in the region emerges because people must live together to share and contribute the common resources – market, transport, roads, education, and other services. The Bodo Regional Council supported by all factions of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and Assam Bodo Students Union (ABSU) is a beginning of new solidarity.

The CAA implementation met massive protests (shaheen bagh). The protests found unprecedented support from people of all ages and sections. They went into the streets with slogans of disapproval and resistance against the CAA. Then, 154 European Union Lawmakers drafted stunning anti-CAA resolutions. These lawmakers belong to the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats. (put a citation on this please?)

The proposed resolution did not only describes the CAA as “discriminatory and dangerously divisive” but also a violation of India’s “international obligations” under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and other Human Rights treaties to which New Delhi is a signatory. The Artists Group in Assam has also joined hands with other groups and is joining the protests against CAA. These new developments of solidarity are noteworthy.

The Apparent Changes in the Social Order

The upsurge of Hindutva ideology connected with Indian Nationalism has brought whole new dynamics in the age-old Social Order. Change is inevitable but the way changes are occurring and the speed is beyond people’s expectations and catching everyone by surprise.

The All Assam Students Union (AASU) spearheaded the Assam Movement and brought about the famous Assam Accord in the 1980s. Subsequently, the Assam Gana Parishad (AGP), the student-led political party emerged and ruled Assam for nearly 10 years. The movement aimed to solve the Foreigners Issue in Assam and protect the culture, language, and land of greater Assam. Yet, the same AGP has now joined hands with BJP recently and they are doing things that are against the

interest of Assamese people.

The issue of the Nagalim framework is also emerging to solve the Naga homeland issue but it is inconclusive. New formations and the relationship between ethnic communities are bound to happen. What is that new relationship to emerge is anybody's guess.

Model to uphold

There is confusion among the churches and the Christian Groups as to what should be the proper response. There are expectations of the church participation in the protests along with other groups against the CAA and the anti-constitutional measures of the central government. The church has never faced such issues of this dimension. The church now faces the challenge has no space for indecisiveness anymore. The ordinary Christian people are now looking up to the church leadership for guidance. The church must adopt a strategy based on the Christian principle of love and nonviolence. The church may not opt to join the march in the streets. However, in what way should it get involved? The church must answer this question.

Cooperation

In the recent past, the BJP-RSS had taken initiative to divide the church in its age-old formations, especially in Assam. The formation of the National Christian Council of North East India (NCCNEI -Ishai Mahasabha) is coming from that initiative. How to deal with the initiative is a big question.

There is the lure of money and resources around it. The new leadership is raising their heads with this new initiative and opportunity. What should be the strategy of the church who feels threatened by these new developments? The higher bodies of the churches and ecumenical bodies need to dispassionately analyze the situation and take corrective measures at the right time. These bodies must show the right path at this crossroad that the people are facing.

Islam and Christianity

On July 30, 2019, the St. Clement College in Bhakatgaon, Nagaon in

Assam hosted a consultation on the theme, “Understanding religions and their adherents for onward journey.”

“Islam is a Way of Life and the outlook, ‘peace be with you’ gives hope of future harmony and solidarity with the people of different faiths,” says Maulana Fazlal Karim Quasimi. Building relationships, respecting, and understanding each other’s way of life will go a long way.

Satradhikar Gajen Nath of Pachim Boragaon Satra said that the Assamese social-religious reformer, Mahapurush Sankardeva’s () message is, “Equality of all human beings and its duty is love and peace of all living beings of the creation – every living being has right to life and to live a dignified life, without fear of intimidation and death.”

Strategically it is time to strengthen the ecumenical bodies like the National Christian Council of India (NCCI), NEICC, Council of Baptist Churches in North East India (CBCNEI), Presbyterian Church of India (PCI), Church of North India (CNI), ELCHITHS (Lutheran), NERBC (Catholic), Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI), and the United Christian Forum of India (UCFI), the UCFNEI, and other church bodies. Also, it is equally important to liaise with like-minded civil society bodies like Axom Nagarik Samaj, NESO, and other NGOs.

The Eastern Theological College, being a premier institution of 8000 + churches, has the advantage of taking the lead and provides the platform of convergence of all religions to share and exchange views, and build solidarity based on common values – working for peace and prosperity of the region. The question of building solidarity comes with the challenge to consolidate the human and other resources, and emerge as a dependable platform for the people to follow toward solidarity, security, and prosperity. 🌿 🌿 🌿

Women's Participation in Armed Conflict and the Prevalence of Violence against Women in North East India¹

Anjuman Ara Begum

Introduction

In situations of armed conflict, approximately 50% of the displaced populations are women and girls whose lives and personal freedom is continuously threatened. Stripped of the protection of their homes, their government and often the family structure, the females are often particularly vulnerable.² Women in any conflict situation suffer as victims and the impact of the conflict is devastating. Apart from the direct impact of the violent conflicts like the loss of property, trauma, the patriarchal control of women seemed to have increased. Even the state that was supposed to guard their lives and rights has become a threat to them. In the ensuing displacement of communities, women were the worst affected. In situations of armed conflicts, women need protection through certain mechanisms. It is important to examine the extent of the implementation of an international mechanism such as the UN Security Council Resolution 1325³ of 2000 that the Indian state had ratified and promulgated. This resolution acknowledges the role of women in peace security issues. In the context of the armed conflicts in India, the question is whether the women are accounted in peace and security matters by the government and the actors in the conflict. It will be right to say that, "[I]n official histories of peoples and nations women have often been invisible - they have been hidden and their stories and

1 The Author thanks the Women in Governance Network for information and other support for this paper.

2 Charu Walikhanna, *Women Silent Victims of Armed Conflict: An Area Study of Jammu and Kashmir, India* (Michigan: Serials Publication, 2004), 55.

3 During the subsequent decade, the UNSC has reaffirmed its commitment to the protection and empowerment of women in conflict with resolutions 1674 (2006), 1820 (2008), 1882 (2009), 1888 (2009) and 1889 (2009). The United Nations has also enhanced its architecture for women, peace and security by appointing Special Representatives and Special Envoys, and establishing the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).

activities left untold.”⁴

Women in armed conflict become a part of the conflict in different adverse ways. Former UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali once opined that more women today are suffering from the effects of war and conflict than ever before. The available data suggests that women constitute a major portion of the reported 85 per cent civilian victims of present day conflicts. Conflicts have also led women to refugee camps where basic facilities are non-existent, prostitution, loss of lives of their dear ones, and loss of their livelihoods. During the conflict situation, the gender roles change but not the gender relation. The situation push women to fend for their families during conflict situation, but at same time they also abide by the gender relations to maintain the equilibrium. A study commissioned by the National Commission for Women (NCW), New Delhi noted that the violence afflicting women in armed conflict-ridden Northeast India was different from the violence in “normal” or situation where there is no armed conflict.

Sudha Ramachandran in her article titled “Dying to be Equal: Women Militants and Organisational Decision-making” writes that –

‘women bear the major burden of the violence in conflict areas. However, to regard them just as passive victims would be obscuring their role as agents of change. Whether through passive resistance or protest, active combat or peace –building, women in conflict areas are slowly emerging from the sidelines. Yet, the fact that they have to function in a highly militarised environment is impeding the pace and extent to which they can determine the direction in which politics and social change will move.’⁵

4 3. Emiko Noma, “Women Cannot Cry Anymore: Global Voices Transforming Violent Conflict,” in *Critical Half: Bi-Annual Journal of Women for Women International*, Volume 5, Number 2, Washington D.C. (Fall 2007), 8-13.

5 Sudha Ramachandran, “Dying to be Equal: Women Militants and Organisational Decision-Making,” in *Women, Security, South Asia: A Clearing in the Thicket* edited by Farah Faizal and Swarna Rajagopalan (California: SAGE Publications Pvt. Ltd., 2005).

It is apt to say that women act in different ways in armed conflicts. Heterogeneity in women's role in any conflict situation is a natural process. Often, armed conflict increases women's participation in the economy and hence, increases their mobility. During the post-conflict situations, civil society and government have much to do to empower women who have lived through them. It means giving them the access not only to decision-making but also to the land resources, health care and rewarding employment. In a conflict situation, gender roles change but not gender relations.

Status of women in conflict situation

Several studies have categorized women's role in armed conflicts. Some categories that suit the situation in Assam are as follows:

- Women as victims and survivors: Most of the victims and survivors are women and children. Women bear the major burden of the violence in conflict-affected areas.
- Women as combatants: In any armed conflict, the female combatants have been a constant presence, although there is no systematic documentation of their voices, or their male counterparts' roles have overshadowed their roles as female combatants.
- Women as peace activists/ negotiators: Several women turned into activists or peace negotiators in order to address the gender and human rights issues. We can say that today we see the proliferation of women's local grassroots movements, coherently organized on the national and international levels, more inclusive and representative of the interests and needs of diverse communities of women. During the armed conflict and social collapse, women play an indispensable role in preserving a semblance of decency and order. They hold the community together by stepping out of socially ascribed roles and transform the gender stereotypes, and open opportunities for empowerment.
- Women as household heads: The situation of the killing of men, or of men leaving their homes to join the insurgency movement

has resulted in growth or increase of female-headed households in areas where armed conflict happened. As an example, the report by National Commission on Women (NCW) on “Violence against women in Northeast India: An Enquiry,” notes that the conflict in Northeast region of India has resulted in an increase in female-headed households.⁶

- Women in employment opportunities: Gendered labour division impacts women in employment and most of the time women are forced to take up meagerly paid jobs, or are compelled to take up micro-credits schemes, etc. Besides, Trafficking become obvious as women are in search of better opportunities and thus become exploited. Therefore, gender sensitivity in programming can be a catalytic component in the complex task of building sustainable peace and conflict resolution, and provides concrete examples of how to draw on women’s untapped potential.

Violence against women in conflict situation in North East India

It is relevant here to quote from a study on women in armed conflict situation. A recent study conducted by Guwahati-based organization Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research (C-NES) aptly remarked that

the Government armed forces were also involved in excesses in Kokrajhar district and the Research Team interviewed a number of victims of extra-judicial killings and rape incidents. Some of these incidents took place during Operation All Clear along the India-Bhutan border by the army and paramilitary forces. The women who were victims of such excesses are presently living in remote villages along the border, and have received no support or relief in the form of compensation or justice from the government. These victims regard the armed forces’ presence with enormous fear and apprehension.⁷

6 *The Financial Express*, “NE conflict led to rise in female-headed households,” New Delhi, Jan 28, 2005. Available at <http://www.financialexpress.com/news/ne-conflict-led-to-rise-in-femaleheaded-households/125198> as of November 28, 2012

7 Heinrich Böll Stiftung and C-nes, *Bearing Witness: The Impact of Conflict on Women in Nagaland and Assam*” (database online). Available at <http://www.c-nes.org/> 198

The legal mechanism and social stigma often prevent women from seeking redressal. According to Burgess and Holmstrom, “going to the court, for the victim, is as much of a crisis as the actual rape itself.”⁸ On the one hand, rape wounds the victim’s dignity, curbs her individuality, and destroys her sense of security besides the severe physical injuries that the perpetrator inflicted upon her. On the other hand, the trial of rape forces the victim to relive through the traumatic experience in public, in the glare of publicity in a very alien atmosphere, with the whole apparatus and paraphernalia of the criminal justice system focused upon her.⁹ This prevents the women from reporting the instance of sexual violence committed on them. When a victim reports to police, she goes through the motion of complex and lengthy process involving legal system and its technicalities,¹⁰ which contributes nothing in coping up of the ordeal of rape or of the trauma. It is like exposing the deep wound in a mechanical way while entering legalities in courts. The most private and personal life of the victim becomes a public affair. For many women, bearing this kind of situation many a times have increased the trauma of the victim and justice becomes blurred in many instances. One important fact is that women hesitate to go to court as to get justice is expensive even though they are aware of their rights and social stigma. For many women, especially the younger and unmarried, to be raped or sexually violated have deep consequences in a conservative and traditional society. For no fault of theirs, they have to face stigmatization in the society.

The Impact of Conflict on Women in North East India

It is difficult to measure the impact of conflict particularly on women. The design of the report on the impact follows a framework to represent the diverse sexual violence that women experienced in conflict zones and its implications. Hence, the study applied the

wp-content/uploads/2011/09/The-final-report-of-HBF.pdf (October 13, 2011)

⁸ Ann Wolbert Burgess and Lynda Lytle Holmstrom, *Rape: Victims of Crisis* (Bowie, MD: R.J. Brady Company, 1974), 197. Cf. Vandana, *Sexual Violence against Women: Penal Law and Human Rights Perspectives* (Pune, India: LexisNexis, 2008), 145.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

empirical method to assess and to analyze the data gathered from the field to give a true picture in its content. It also applied the case study approach as a narrative literature because women's narratives add a new dimension to the hitherto existing 'layer' of someone describing their experiences. These narratives assert the first steps for the women to claim their subjectivity to talk about grave sexual violence that they have experienced. It also gives the women their voices to speak about how their 'private' domesticity and dignity were suddenly shattered by the events taking place in 'public' where they exercised little or no influence.

In conflict-affected Northeast India, where violence ranging in different frequencies, often leave serious implications to the acts committed by both state and non-state actors. However, sexual offences committed by the armed forces of the state during their counter-insurgency operations especially against women are of serious concern. This caused immense tensions and the people see the state forces the people with worries, fear especially in areas where counter-insurgency takes place. In most cases of sexual violence, the investigation went very slow and the survivor or her family does not get in formation as to the outcome of the case. In few cases, there were judicial and political interventions. The researchers had no clue about the number of unreported cases, yet they know the reasons why some victims committed suicide.

The cases resolved by the judiciary are rare. Most of the cases the people brought to the open to make a public outcry caught the attention of the politicians who intervened for the resolution of the case. However, in most of the cases remained unreported by the victims to avoid social stigma. Several case studies carried out during this research depict the above trend. The different trends as evident in cases studied by Women in Governance Network are the following:

1. Police refusing to accept to process the First Information Report (FIR)
2. Increased domestic violence as a consequences of rape
3. Justice denied as the accused could not be identified

4. Negligence of police duty and denial of proper investigation
5. Monetary compensation is not enough for sexual violence
6. Armed forces interfering in judicial process of investigation
7. Raise awareness on the consequences of Sexual Violence on Women.

Women are generally frightened to report that they were raped, fearing ostracism from their homes and communities. They are also afraid of reprisal from the perpetrator for daring to speak up. There is also a lack of awareness on the part of the victims and the families of the possibilities for help. It is seriously important to note that Gender-based violence has far-reaching effects, including health, psychological, security, and legal implications. Elucidating the impacts and liabilities of gender-based violence, it is a crucial matter to mention the impacts mentioned above.

- **Health impact:** The health impact of gender-based violence is, perhaps, the easiest to comprehend. The consequences of sexual violence over women take a toll on women's health. This ranges from unwanted pregnancies, miscarriages caused by the abuse, illness, or death from illegal abortion, damaged vaginas resulting from rape or knives or gunshots, and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV-AIDs.
- **Psychological Impact:** Sexual violence has deep psychological consequences for the women. Women experience insomnia, depression, and other symptoms, and may become suicidal, experiencing post-traumatic stress syndrome. Most of the women victims often continue to live in the environment in which they experience abuse, and are often terrified to perform their necessary daily tasks, such as working in the fields or gathering wood in the forests for cooking, because that is where the violence occurred. They may also feel so stigmatized that they are unable to leave their homes.
- **Security Implications:** The women whose families and communities rejected them experience further victimization due to absence of stable economic support. They often fear

leaving their houses to work in the fields or to sell goods at the local market due to social stigma and humiliation. If their rape resulted in a pregnancy, then the child also become vulnerable to ostracization. The mothers themselves may reject their children resulting from rape. Deep insecurity from within, besides financial and social insecurity renders the victim to be more vulnerable and women are compelled to lead a life sans dignity.

- **Legal implications:** The Indian Constitution and established legal system does not guarantee impunity for the perpetrators of sexual violence. However, legal complexities block the road to justice for women in cases of sexual violence. Sexual violence requires legal attention with a broader lens to see it as an exclusive crime. The law must take into account the nature of the crime and the social stigma that the victim faces. The legal procedures must go beyond the myopic sense of justice as ‘punishment’ or ‘compensation.’

However, the impact of sexual assault is beyond any scale, rape and other crimes of sexual violence during armed conflict situations have received little attention in international law. Until recently, “the failure of humanitarian law instruments to adequately incorporate, characterize, or even mention rape and sexual assault has downplayed crimes against women as the unfortunate but inevitable byproduct of war.”¹¹ The Beijing Platform for Action continues to focus on the violation of Women’s Human Rights in times of war, and condemns rape. Yet, there is still much that people and governments can do at the ground level. The UN Security Council has affirmed the need for the international community to assist and protect women affected by armed conflict. Moreover, it has expressed its willingness to respond to such situations. The civil society and women’s organizations need to build momentum to work against rape and other sexual assaults that cause bodily as well

11 David S. Mitchell, “The Prohibition of Rape in International Humanitarian Law as a Norm of Jus Cogens: Clarifying the Doctrine,” in *Duke Journal of Comparative & International Law* Volume 15, Number 2, Spring/Summer (2005): 219-258.

as mental harm to women.

Recommendations

The government and all various sectors of society must take Sexual violence committed to women in armed-conflict situation in Assam and Northeast India. This includes the people in general, civil society bodies, human rights groups, women's group of human rights defenders, and women's organizations. The police, the armed forces, the paramilitary and other state forces, especially the security personnel who are there to guard and protect the nation and its people must take their jobs seriously too. It is unfortunate that the names of elements of the police and military appear most as the culprit who committed the sexual crimes against women. As the repercussions of the inhumanely acts that destroy life, family and the community, all concerned authorities need to take stringent steps so that these heinous crimes are not committed repeatedly. Some of the recommendations that we can derive from various studies done by the Women in Governance are as follows:

1. Steps for quick response must push for early completion of proceedings/trial on the pending cases/allegations of sexual violence by armed forces. The government should not transfer the accused officials to other posts until the case is disposed of.
2. Repeal and dismantle the culture of impunity that the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA, 1958) created and other special security Acts as recommended by different national and international bodies.
3. Install effective and adopt measures such as creating women's desks in police stations, assigning trials of sexual crimes to the court of female judges wherever possible, among others, to promote women's protection from violence.
4. Ensure regulations of counter insurgency operations by security forces in Assam and Northeast India. The regulations must see to it that the security forces adhere to the protocols of Dos and Don'ts spelled out by the judiciary.
5. Implement the UNSCR 1325 and other relevant international

resolutions to ensure holistic measures for protection of women's rights.

6. Civil society and NGOs should engage more in documentation and advocacy for justice in cases of sexual violence.
7. Conduct awareness campaigns aimed to reduce the burden of social stigma on rape victims, and increase the protection of the dignity of the survivor of sexual violence. The community should not reiterate the victimization of the survivors and victims. 🦋🦋🦋

Transcendence by Transgression

John 4:7-15, Matthew 5:9

Shyam Basumatary

I would like to thank the organizers of the Consultation of *Interfaith Cooperation Forum*, Hong Kong and *Tribal Study Centre*, Eastern Theological College on the theme Just-Peace in a Globalized Context: North East India Focus, for the privilege that you have given me to share God's word this morning. I would like to share few thoughts from the passages Matthew 5:9 and John 4:7-14.

Recently, on January 27, a peace accord was signed among the four factions of the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB), All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), Central Government of India and State Government of Assam with the nomenclature Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), where Bodo organizations and civil societies came together and accepted the Memorandum of Settlement (MOS). The groups, who spearheaded the movement for a separate state of Boroland, opined by saying, "Although we could not get what we wanted (that is a separate state) we want peace and development in the region." The main reason of the acceptance of MOS was that people want peace. Mr. Promod Boro, the President of All Bodo Students' Union said, "Peace is Priceless." Another leader from one of the NDFB factions, Mr. B. Ferenga said, "We want to listen to the call of the time." Mainly three things surfaced in this MOS across all sections of the society that is "peace", "inclusiveness" and "development." The accord is not only for the Bodos but for all sections of the society.

The passages that I read for us are very familiar to all of us, as we all come from theological community. I am sure many of us have spoken from these passages. There may not be close connection between the two passages. But I think we can bring them together in conversation. I am not going to dwell too much on Matthew 5:9 but treat it as a spring board. Nor am I going to discuss, "What is peace, the types of peace and how we can achieve peace."

The passage John 4:7-15 talks about Jesus' *encounter* and *conversation*

with a Samaritan woman. Some New Testament scholars term the main thought of this passage as a *paradigm of engaging with the truth*. The encounter, engagement and conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman began with Jesus' asking for water, a very mundane need. However, the engagement and conversation led to a deep spiritual discourse that is "water of life." Therefore, the conversation also can be called "water of life discourse."

Among other things, through this engagement and conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, a very contentious issue surfaced that is "location/place" of worship. The Jews and Samaritans had common ancestry. The Samaritans claimed that they are the descendants of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, the two sons of Joseph. The Samaritans believed Mount Gerizim to be the original holy place of Israel from the time Joshua conquered Canaan. On the other hand, Jews believed the temple in Mount Mariah in Jerusalem is the true place of worship. They claimed that is the right and holy place of worship. Both Jews and Samaritans reduced Yahweh to a petty localized deity, within a particular location. The cause of disagreement between Jews and Samaritan was the place of worship. There was claim and counter claim on the place of worship, on holy ground. This cause of disagreement remained for centuries that led to conflict and animosity between the Jews and Samaritans.

The contestation and conflict led to socio-cultural antagonism. It drew them apart to the extent that Jews would not pass through Samaria. The Jews, to go to Judaea from Galilee, would rather cross the river Jordan twice than pass through Samaria. As siblings, they were so close, and yet so far from each other.

The conflict created the feelings of "we" vs. "they" and "us" vs. "them." There was no social interaction, exchange and engagement between them. The religious and socio-cultural divide based on the location of worship drove them apart. The social barrier between them was such, forget about drinking water from a woman, even drinking water from a Samaritan man was unthinkable.

However, Jesus transcended all these barriers by transgression. According to dictionary meaning, “Transcendence is the act of rising above something to superior state.” On the contrary, transgression means an “act that goes against a law, rule or code of conduct, an offence.” In the economy of God’s dealing with human being, Jesus had to transgress by challenging popular religiosity of the time, by breaking the well-established and conventional norms and social practices. In many ways, it is an unlawful activity. From legal point of view, the one who transgresses the law is considered criminal. Here, we see Jesus’ paradoxical act of *transcendence by transgression*.

On the religious front, he declared the truth that the true worshippers will neither worship in Jerusalem nor in Mount Gerizim, but in truth and spirit, transcending particular place or location. The Jews and Samaritans were living in their ethnological islands. By asking water from a Samaritan woman, he transcended socio-cultural norms and ethos of the time. Jesus transcended all cultural barriers. He broke the wall between Jews and Gentiles, between men and women. It was a border-crossing act. Jesus’ move to communicate the truth was not incidental, but intentional and purposeful. To bring out the truth through encounter, engagement and conversation, Jesus took deliberate step to reconcile the opposing views and claims of the Jews and Samaritans. By transgressing the common and conventional belief system of both sides, Jesus revealed the truth. By revealing the truth, Jesus delivered justice to both parties. By delivering justice to both parties, Jesus opened door for “peace.” Justice and peace are two sides of the same coin. There cannot be peace without justice. To talk about peace without justice is rather nauseating. We demand justice based on our history or existential realities. Sometime we need to weigh these two realities and find out a common ground to reconcile these two realities. In doing so, sometime we need to transcend our claims and counterclaims, even sometime by transgressing and breaking our conventional social and political norms and practices. Peace does not happen on its own. We have to make it happen. This is what Jesus did. Jesus’ paradigm of engaging with truth and reality, transcending all barriers by transgressing, perhaps should be the path for the churches in Northeast India, to usher justice and peace in the region. 🕊️🕊️🕊️

The Greatest Commandment (Mark 12:28-31): Towards Creating a Peaceful Community

Zhodi Angami

Nagaland:

Sugar factories without sugar

Paper mills without paper

Officers who do not attend office

School teachers who do not teach

Many churches and few real Christians

Once great warriors, now as timid as mice

India:

Politicians who are vultures

Police who are crooks

Leaders who the people despise

News Channels that spread hatred and fake news

Full temples with godless devotees

A secular country, running on Hindutva ideology.

Introduction

India is falling apart. With the rise of Hindu supremacists, some people are counted as more Indian than others are. The Hindu political leaders label dissenters as anti-Indian or agents of Pakistan. Minority communities like the Christians, the Muslims, and the Sikhs live in fear but those who are exercising dictatorial power insist that the minorities are perfectly all right. Instead of promoting fundamental human rights, protecting life, and supporting the poor and the voiceless, our political leaders turn soldiers and police personnel into dogs of war and unleash them upon helpless common people—shooting, killing, beating, arresting, and terrorizing all who dare to disagree with their policies. Think of the violent crackdown against anti-Citizenship Amendment Act [CAA] and National Register of Citizens [NRC] protesters.

We cannot point fingers at others and ignore our faults. Here in North East India, we have insurgent groups fighting for their land and their identity. In the process, they discredit other communities and deny the democratic rights of others to assert their identity and enjoy their life. Our freedom fighters have become tyrants. We also have many churches. Christians are the majority in Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Nagaland. Have the churches contributed towards the welfare and development of the region? We have magnificent church buildings but there are no proper roads to reach them. There is no electrical power to turn on their crystal chandeliers. With no clear vision and mission, no plan and goals, and no theological backbone, the narrative of the churches of the region is lost within the social and political struggles confronting us. While dealing with the critical issue of the demand of Naga nationalist groups for self-determination, the government invites Naga church leaders for talks along with heads of militant groups, representatives of civil society organizations, heads of tribal bodies, officeholders of students' federation, and leaders of mothers' association.

Is it correct for the churches to project an image at par with other existing social organizations in the state? If we accept the Baptist concept of the separation of church and state, the church and state are separate entities, each of which is independent of the authority of the other. In other words, the government cannot interfere in our right to express and practice our faith. This implies also that if the church has the vision to bring peace through a political solution to the contentious "Naga freedom movement," the church must do so as an independent body exercising the God-given authority to minister to all people. The church must not be just a bystander or a mere cog in the machine of the government. Even the chief minister of the state is a member of his church and he must regard his pastor as his spiritual superior.

The Text

With this context in view, let us read Mark 12:28-31.

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one

another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Three Lessons

There are three lessons we can draw from this text.

The Lord is One

The scribe who appears in this text is different from the other scribes mentioned in the Gospel of Mark. He did not come to find fault with Jesus. He did not come to trap Jesus. He came to ask a genuine question because he saw how well Jesus answered people. His important question was, “Which commandment is the first of all?” He was not asking which commandment comes first in the long list of commandments but which commandment is the most important. Is there a commandment that supersedes all other commandments?

Jesus replies with the words of the Shema, which means “to hear:” Shema Yisrael, YHWH eloheinu, YHWH eḥad, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” This follows the Hebrew conventions of using Adonai in place of YHWH to avoid using God’s name. The Shema, found in Deut. 6:4-5 and recited in the daily morning and evening prayer services, traditionally with the hands placed over the eyes, is considered the most important of all Jewish prayers. Jesus is going to the heart of the Torah to establish the basis of his teaching. The opening word “hear” or “listen” means to allow the words to sink in.

Here, we need to absorb the assertion that there is one God before we move on to the next point. Some people use the phrase “one God” to claim that their god is the only God and all other gods are false. Indeed, the Shema served to protect the Ancient Israelites against the polytheistic cultures that surrounded them. The Shema buttressed the

concept that the Jews and only the Jews are the chosen people of God (Deut. 7:6-8). Yet God's ultimate purpose was not simply to love and prosper Israel; God's plan was one of blessing for all nations on earth (Gen. 22:15-18). Israel's duty was to be a light to the Gentiles so that God's salvation may reach the ends of the earth (Isa. 49:6; cf. Deut. 4:5-8).

In the story of Jonah's mission to Nineveh, the writer reminded the Jewish readers that God has concern also for the non-Jews. Nineveh was not only a Gentile city. It was the capital of the formidable Assyrian Empire, the staunch enemy of Israel and Judah. The writer presented Jonah to the readers as a caricature of a self-centred Israel with a narrow mentality that sees God's blessings as available only to the Jews. This satirical piece uses humour and ridicule to launch a blistering attack on the ethnocentrism of Israel that thrived on hatred for other nations.

In several other instances, we see God reaching out to the Gentiles. An angel of God found Hagar, the Gentile slave purchased in Egypt to serve Sarah, beside a spring in the desert and she named God as "the God who sees me." She marvelled and said, "Have I now seen the One who sees me?" Through God's intervention in history, there are Gentiles that the Israelite community accepted and recognized as movers and shapers of the history of Israel. Among them were Ruth, a Moabite, Rahab, a Canaanite, and Tamar who was most likely a Canaanite.

The statement "the Lord is one" means that God is unique and there is nothing else that can be compared with God. It also expresses the universality of God. Although the impression is that the text is supporting monotheism, the context is not a debate about monotheism against polytheism. Different religions do not need to fight amongst themselves about God. When we understand that there is one God, it leads us to the unstated fact that there is one humanity.

Love the Lord Your God with Everything

Deuteronomy 6:5 enjoins the Jews to love God with their heart, soul, and strength. The Jews believed that the "heart" is the organ

for thoughts as well as feelings. Aristotle also identified the heart as the center of the human body, the seat of intelligence, motion, and sensation. The Jews regarded the “soul” as the source of life. “Strength” could mean all that which gives us power, such as physical or moral strength or strength of the will. Mark added “mind” perhaps for the sake of those readers who may not see the mind as part of the heart.

To love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength is to love God with all of ourselves. This is not achieved fully even when we commit our lives to become a pastor, a priest, a missionary, or an evangelist. Loving God with our whole being implies putting God first in everything we think, feel, and do. Loving God is about a love that is life-encompassing, unequivocal, transforming, and exclusive commitment to God. Such dedication to God prepares us for the next commandment, which is to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Love Your Neighbour as Yourself

Unstinting love for God leads to the practical expression of love for neighbour. Notice that the commands to love God and to love one’s neighbour are two different commandments, but they are inseparable. The linkage between these two great commandments is also conveyed in 1 John 4:20-21: “Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.” (The Greek reads “brothers” but the translators added “sisters” because the passage refers to both men and women). Jesus also said, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

Loving your neighbour as yourself is not as easy as it sounds. We can become immune to the plight of beggars, the pain of victims of violence, and the suffering of people affected by natural or human-induced disasters. And we find it so easy to hate others—people who

support a different political party, people of other races, and people of other faiths.

A lawyer asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:29). Jesus showed the lawyer that the important question is not “who is my neighbour?” It is, “Who am I?” Am I the one who will be the good neighbour to anyone who needs my help? Will I make myself available to love and help strangers, including people from other ethnic groups and people of other faiths? The parable of the Good Samaritan broadens our understanding of neighbour to include those who do not subscribe to the same religious ideas we have. With Jesus, we should be able to admit that people outside our religious traditions are also people of God. Here, I am not saying Christians should believe all religions lead to salvation. Many Christians are hostile to interfaith dialogue because they see it as requiring a denial of their belief that Jesus is the only Saviour of the world. The fact is, there are many questions about people of other faith that only God can answer. As for us, we must be true to our faith and we should not assert ideas that the Holy Scriptures do not articulate. Christians can contribute to the world not by discarding the basic tenets of their faith but by discovering the inclusive teachings found in the Bible. The point here is that love for our neighbour includes respect for our neighbour’s belief system. When we love God, we cannot belittle other humans whom God created and loved. The true and abiding mission we must engage in is to bear witness continually to the love of God by loving our neighbours.

On November 9, 2019, the Supreme Court of India led by a Chief Justice of India whose career was tainted by a charge for sexual harassment and who is known for passing several critical verdicts in favor of the government, gave the final judgment in the Ayodhya dispute. The Babri Masjid (“Babur’s Mosque”), built in 1528 on the orders of Babur the first Mughal emperor of India as people believed, was destroyed by Hindu karsevaks (religious volunteers) on December 6, 1992. The Hindus believe that the Babri Masjid stood on Lord Ram’s birthplace. The Supreme Court ordered the entire disputed land of 2.77 acres to be set aside for the construction of the Ram Janmabhoomi or

the Birthplace of Ram temple. The court allocated an alternative piece of land of 5 acres for the construction of a mosque at a suitable place within Ayodhya. Although Ayodhya was a highly volatile communal issue, there was very little opposition to the verdict. The context where Hindu fundamentalists are holding power and are sowing lies led to the vitiated political atmosphere.

Besides, the government had institutionalized violence. It clamps down on any form of opposition and stifles voices of dissent. In this situation, the prudent thing to do was to be silent. Moreover, the digital army of the ruling party controls the country's online narrative and most India's TV channels support it. Thus, when the *National Herald* published two articles criticizing the verdict, the government compelled them to issue an apology and withdraw the articles. Depending on one's perspective, the verdict may be right or wrong. But one may ask, who is the winner? Will God dwell in a place built upon the foundation of blood and mayhem?

Let me remind you of the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman beside the well of Jacob (John 4:21-24):

Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

During the time of Jesus, the Jews and Samaritans despised each other. Yet, in the gospel account, we find both Jesus and the Samaritan breaking their social and religious barriers to have a meaningful conversation at the local watering hole. Many Bible commentators remark that Jesus broke racial and gender barriers to speaking with a Samaritan woman, but they fail to see that the Samaritan woman also

overcame her prejudices to engage in a conversation with a Jewish man. Because of this conversation, we learn that we should not fight over inconsequential things such as the proper place of worship. The location and ways of worship do not determine the true worshippers. The true worshippers are all those who worship God in spirit and truth.

Jesus did not see people by their religious affiliation. It did not bother Jesus that the Canaanite woman in Matt.15:21-28 did not believe in the Torah and that she worshipped other gods. It only mattered to him that she placed her trust in him. Therefore, he praises her, saying, “Great is your faith!” Similarly, Jesus acknowledged the faith of a centurion in Capernaum in Matt. 8: 5-11. The centurion was doubtless a gentile, an officer of the hated Roman power. Yet his faith amazed Jesus and declared to his followers, “in no one in Israel have I found such faith.” In these instances, Jesus saw people by their affinity to the heart of God and that is an attitude we should emulate.

Conclusion

Let us not talk about God if we harbour hatred in our hearts. If we despise those who are different from us, let us not pretend to be lovers of God. If we look down on people who are not as rich as we are, or not as smart as us, let us know that we have no place in the heavenly realms. If we are not practicing neighbourliness towards people of other religious or ideological persuasions, we are not good disciples of Jesus. Religious faith is not about finding a way to get to heaven or doing good deeds to avoid hell in the next life. A living faith is one that articulates in practical terms the meaning of loving God and loving one’s neighbours, even if those neighbours are our traditional enemies.

In these days of increasing intolerance brought about by the Hindutva ideology, the ensuing Islamophobia, and persecution of Christians, we need to do a lot more to combat the polarizing of people and promote acceptance of others, understanding, love, and mutual respect. Ignorance, fear, and hatred are the enemies of a peaceful community. The belief in one God, unique and universal, who loves the whole world and who calls upon humans to be good neighbours to each other is

key for promoting a more peaceful community in India and across the world. 🕊️🕊️🕊️

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Joseph “Joy” Pallikunnel is the Parish Priest and Principal of St Paul’s High School in Majuli, Assam. While he hails from the southern state of Kerala, most of his ministerial responsibilities are concentrated in the Northeast states of Manipur, Assam and Nagaland. As a parish priest, he has been working and overseeing several parishes in the region. He has also helped in opening a number of schools in the regions. Joy’s leadership is recognized regionally and nationally. He has been actively involved in organizing Diocesan priests’ Association for North East India and has served as the president of the Diocesan Fraternity of North East India (DFNEI) for a number of times. He has served as the Regional Secretary for the North East Commission on Ecumenism and Inter-religious Dialogue and has helped to form a strong ecumenical linkage with other churches and inter-religious groups. His other leadership responsibility includes serving as the Director of North East Diocesan Social Forum, Guwahati and as Vicar General of the Diocese of Dibrugarh.

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Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro is a feminist theologian, a teacher, a learner, and a gardener. She was a church youth worker. Then she worked with NGOs for 12 years before joining the academe. She served as the first female Dean of Silliman University Divinity School and was an adjunct professor in a Roman Catholic seminary. She gained a wider understanding of theological education in Asia when she served as secretary of the Executive Committee of the Association of Theological Association of Southeast Asia (ATESEA) for almost 6 years. While serving as Coordinator of Silliman's Justice and Peace

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Paresh Malakar is the co-founder of Anwasha, a non-profit organization, based in Guwahati, which promotes reading habits among children and publishes quality books. Malakar is a well-read person. He has co-authored three books so far. He writes regularly in Assamese and English on issues related to education and other public concerns. He has contributed articles to leading newspapers, magazines and journals such as Frontline, EPW, Assam Tribune and host of other Assamese magazines and newspapers. He also served two terms as a member of Board of Secondary Education, Assam. He designed a course on book editing for Gauhati University and recently taught a term there as a guest faculty. Presently he writes a monthly column for Dainik Asam and a fortnightly column for the Northeast Now. He is the General Secretary of Axom Nagarik Samaj, a leading Guwahati based civil society organization. He is also a member of the Ethics Committee, GNRC Hospital. Malakar holds M.A. in philosophy from Gauhati University and is involved in a number of social and literary activities as editor and organizer of book fairs. As a peace activist, he is actively involved in the formation of All Assam Democratic Citizens' Association that mobilizes public opinion against all kinds of violence and for social peace and democracy. Malakar has worked with National Book Trust, India as an editor for Assamese language and Scholastic India as Regional Director, North.

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This book is the outcome of the consultation. It is the collection of the revised papers presented and read in the consultation by various resource persons. The book consists of three parts structured under three related subjects on just-peace. The first part focuses on, “Analysis of Global and National Unjust Structures.” Under this, the contributors addressed various related sub-themes raising a number of issues critical to world peace, interfaith dialogue for peace and harmonious co-existence. Besides, the contributors as well deliberated on the vexed agenda and policy of the existing Government of India, “One nation, One language and One religion,” looking from various religious as well as people’s perspectives. The section also addressed indigenous people’s struggle for liberation, and the burning issue of Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and its implications on indigenous communities in North East India.

The second part focuses on examining the “Religio-Cultural Structures and Peace Initiative Processes.” The essays under this cover the following topics: Patriarchy and Marginalization of Women; Achievement of World Peace through Inter-religious Harmony; People’s Movements for Justice in various North East States including Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura. Keeping in mind, the seriousness of the unjust structures which are behind the problems confronting us in every spheres of our society including the Northeast region, the contributors argue for a serious engagement in addressing the core issues of the problems and to holistically approach for bringing about just-peace.

The third part of the book examines on the theme of “Mobilizing Just-Peace Resources.” Various contributors examined this theme from different perspectives thereby bringing rich and diverse contribution to the ongoing discussion of the given subject. They include Civil Society for Peace; Religious Resources for Just-Peace; and Mobilizing Collective People’s Solidarity Movement for Just Peace in NEI. The contributors representing various religious and ideological traditions, as well as activists associated with various people’s movements in the region engaged in tapping into resources for just-peace and for forging united efforts to work together for the same cause in the society.

This book calls for joint efforts to combat against any forms of exploitation, oppression, and discrimination based on caste, tribe, gender, religion and community. It also helps in the analysis of the contemporary reality and of forces that perpetuate violence and discrimination. Moreover, this book may shed some light in the efforts to explore ways for building peace and harmonious society.



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