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Indian Tribal Culture : A Rediscovery of Gospel Values

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In this paper we shall attempt to highlight some aspects of tribal culture, focusing on some tribes of North and Northeast India and their social and community organization which are egalitarian, democratic and eco-conscious. In doing so, it is our contention, that we may be miraculously rediscovering some of the gospel values for the larger humanity.

1. Some preliminary remarks :

The term 'tribe' has not been satisfactorily defined. In ordinary language the term is associated with people living in isolated surroundings from the rest of the population. The Shillong consultation of Tribals in 1962 defined tribe as "an indigenous, homogenous unit, speaking a common language, claiming a common ancestry living in a particular geographical area, backward in technology, pre-literate, loyally observing social and political customs based on kinship" (*Religion and Society* 9:80) In International Circles, by the UNO and ILO, the tribe is replaced with the term "Indigenous people." But the Indian Government has not so far accorded the status of "indigenous people" to the Indian tribals. (*Religion and Society* 38:18). Some Indian anthropologists and politicians fear that the term *adivasi* (indigenous or original people) would raise "claims of privilege among some people" that would harm "harmony of races and peoples" and thus endanger national integration. (G.S. Ghurye, p.29). They contemplate the "inevitable" or "desirable" disappearance of tribal identity within the major Indian culture and ensue state policies towards that end. This constitutes the tribal pathos, "the *adivasi vedana*" of the contemporary period which finds violent expressions, the latest example of which is the Jharkhand movement. (Khumbhandani p. 97). Relevant questions to be raised at this point will be: Do the tribals have to forsake their identity in order to be good citizens? Is it feasible

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or just to contemplate the assimilation of tribal or ethnic groupings into a major culture? Do the hierarchical and either -or approach to cultures solve the problem of national integration? These are important questions but beyond the scope of this paper; therefore we shall skip them over by pointing to a statement of Paul Wallace in another but similar context: "*The primordial groupings* may be more modern than *civil* group. Its *ascriptive* basis may incline it more to *nation-building* than secularists who in the name of ideology or national unity may occasion the fragmentation of the polity." (Paul Wallace, p.3). This observation and warning must be listened to by our anthropological and political scientists. Tribal culture represents the basic or primary human attitude to the world and it has a corrective value to the modern nature-conquering, hierarchical, competitive and consumerist cultures. "To label them as pre-logical, mystical, unreal is to libel them. Their mental mechanism is of the same order as our own." (T.C. Hudson in S.C. Roy, *Oraon Religion*, p. xii). Tribal culture reveals not a transitory stage in the evolution of human culture as classical evolutionists or diffusionists believe, but it is of a different social type with a corporate identity, personality and right to its own existence.

2. Tribal People in India— an overall view :

Indian anthropological studies began with the formation of the Asiatic Society of Bengal by William Jones in 1784. Foreign anthropologists and administrators in India like J.P. Mills, J.H. Hutton, Verrier Elwin and C.F. Haimendorf were the pioneers in tribal studies, Indian anthropologists like L.P. Vidyarthi, K.P. Chattopadhyay, S.C. Roy, T.C. Sharma, B.M. Das and others also have made substantial contribution to our understanding of tribal culture.

Since independence the Constitution of India provided several protective measures (Article 46,244) to promote the "educational and economic interests" of the scheduled tribes and grants from the Consolidated Fund of India for tribal welfare (Article 275). Further the Fifth Schedule under Article 244 (1) required from governors annual reports on tribal welfare and created Tribes Advisory Council in which Tribal MLAs have a three-fourth majority to advise the governor on tribal welfare. In spite of the constitutional guarantee and the Nehruvian "Panchsheel" that recognizes 'tribal rights in land and forest' at the "implementation level these principles have been generally neglected" (Khubchandani, p.8). The Scheduled Areas and

Scheduled Tribes Commission set up by the Government of India under Article 339 of the Constitution severely criticized the reluctance of state government to satisfy the tribal's demand for primary education in their own languages, as guaranteed by Article 350-A of the constitution (Haimendorf, p. 315). Only in the Northeastern region, where there are seven states with tribal majority, tribal languages, and culture have shown some revival, which suggests that tribal identity is safe only in similar arrangements. A policy of compulsory integration adopted in other parts of India, instead of improving their social dignity, has only denigrated them into the lower strata of a caste society. In the Northeastern states where tribals embraced Christianity, there happened an erosion of their cultural heritage which they now try to retrieve. Along with this political and religious maneuvering, the forced modernization through a net work of development projects disinherits the tribals of their land, leaving behind a wounded psyche as we find in the Sardar Sarovar project on river Narmada in M.P. where about two lakh tribal people will lose their traditional land, or in the tribal communities in Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat where thousands of them face eviction from their native homes due to state policies (Jagadish Bhatt and Kuldip Chauhan p. 2).

3. Present and Past :

There has been some inconsistencies in listing the tribes in India. By the constitution (Scheduled Tribes) order of 1950, 212 tribes were declared to be Scheduled Tribes; in 1956 it was modified and 414 tribes were listed as main tribes with several sub-tribes; 1976 Amendment included only 300 tribal groups. The 1951 census records 19.1 million, i.e., 5.6% of the total population; the 1981 census enumerates 53.8 million and 1991 census has 67.7 million i.e., 7.9% each under this category; many concerned tribal leaders question these figures on account of arbitrary inclusion and rejection of people categorising tribes as scheduled and non-scheduled. The tribals are classified as scheduled with an "outsider" view, of singling out people on the basis of physical characteristics, linguistic affiliation, culture contact, occupation and territorial distribution (Khubchandani, p.3). The 1981 census lists 74 tribal languages spoken by more than ten thousand people. Austric languages are spoken by 7.9 million people and Tibeto-Burman languages by 43 million. According to Grierson's classification Austric family includes the Mon-Khmer group of languages like Khasis in Meghalaya and Nicobarese in Nicobar

Islands, and the Munda group of languages like Santali, Ho, Munda and others in Jharkhand area. Tibeto-Burman family of tribal languages are spoken by eight groups such as Bodo, Naga Kuki-chin and so forth in the Northeast. Dravidian family of languages are spoken by three main groups: Toda and Kota in the South India; Gondi, Kui, Koya, Khond, Parji, Jatapu Konda in the central India; Kurukh (Oraon) and Kisan in North India. 4.6 million people belong to the Dravidian family. Two Indo-Aryan languages, Bhili and Halabi spoken in the centre-west region have five million people (Khubchandani, pp.35-7).

Eventhough the tribes of Northeast India are basically Mongoloid, they are different from Mongoloids of other parts of Asia since they show Austroloid (Veddoid) and callcasoid (Aryan) ethnic traits and linguistic features. In order to distinguish them from other Mongoloid people Anthropologists call them Indo-Mongoloids (S.S. Sarkar, pp. 17-32; B. M. Das pp.39-41). The Khasis and their subgroups who live in Meghalaya and Nowgong part of Bangladesh, although Mongoloid, have linguistic and cultural affinities to the Austric people of Malaya peninsula, Combodia, Nicobar and Australia and Mundari people of North India. (S.C Roy, p.9). In spite of the fact that Mundari and Mon-Khmer groups of people are racially different, there are peculiar hereditary Mongolian elements among the Austric Mundari people and Austroloid physical characteristics among the Mon-Khmer group (Mukherjea, pp. 49-50). S.C. Roy has argued that proto-Austroloid people originally living in Central or Western India has gradually moved to the South and Northeast and even to outside India establishing contacts with Dravidian and Mongoloid people (Roy, p. 13). Anthropologists have agreed that Australoid or Austric people formed the earliest substratum of the Indian population and their features are found "throughout the length and breadth of the Indian subcontinent." (B.M.Das, pp. 39-40; S.K. Chatterji, pp. 1-52). Archaeological investigations in the Garo hills of Meghalaya have shown that it was inhabited even during the Paleolithic age during which humankind went through the stages of *Homo erectus* to *Homo sapiens*. According to T.C. Sharma,

The fossil evidences recovered in the late pleistocene contexts in South China and Southeast Asia suggest that since the late Pleistocene epoch till the spread of the Mongoloid population from Northern China in the Neolithic period, the dominant population in the South China, Southeast Asia including the Eastern and Northeastern part of India was of the proto-Austroloid group, the modern representative of

whom are to be found in some isolated pockets of Southeast Asia and in India, mainly in the Chota-Nagpur plateau. The early Mongoloid immigrants into Northeast India might have mixed up with the original Proto-Australoid inhabitants of this area and thus acquired some of the physical characters of the latter (Sharma, pp. 9-10).

Evidences from the Rg Veda and archaeological researches show that Austroloids, Dravidians and Mongoloids were living in India when Aryans came (B. M. Das, p.1 ; Pathy, p. 18 ; B.R. Choudry, p. 15a ; P. Mukherji, pp.11-17). Obviously some kind of fusion occurred during the early periods of settlement among the Mongoloids, Austroloids and Dravidians (cf. Haimendorf, p. 314).

4. Tribals and Dalits :

In our study we conceive that the present day tribals are the original inhabitants of India along with the Dalits. Today, dalits form part of Hindu society, its lowest strata, just outside the periphery of the caste society. Archeological evidences from Mohenjodaro and Harappa point to a pre-Aryan people who developed Indus Valley civilisation ; Rg Veda refers to them as Dasa, Dasyu or Asura and Nisada and Kirata. Scholars identify Dasas to be the present dalits, Nisada to be the Austrics and Kirata to be Indo-Mongoloids (B.M. Das, pp. 39-40. Massey, pp. 33, 34, P. Mukherjee, pp. 16-17). The more powerful Aryans probably could have destroyed the Indus civilisation, enslaved some of them and pushed others to mountains and forests to live an isolated or segregated life (cf. Minz, p. 99). This corroborates with certain traditions of peoples like Santals who believe that their ancestors came from the land of seven rivers or Indus (C. Mukherjia, p.32). James Massey concludes that the dalits, who comprise 14.7% and the aboriginals who form 7.9% of Indian population and the nomadic tribes who escapes enumeration methods "have the same roots" (Massey, p. 72 ; Minz, p. 103). However, due to different "geo-political" situations of the tribals and dalits, there are remarkable differences among them. This is pointed out by Renty Kaitzer : "The tribals in the north-east India, especially the hill tribals should not be considered as a low caste people, ... not to be associated with the derogatory sense of a lower stratum of society" (Wati, p. 6). However, in their search for a common ideology, dalits and tribals find some commonality in respect of land, labour and language, which give them identity, the identity of an oppressed people (Minz, pp. 100-102). Since as the dalits lost their identification marks in

course of history, tribals also are in the process of being deprived of them on account of the onslaughts of the so-called advanced cultures.

5. Matrix of Tribal Communities. :

The distinctive factor that gives each tribe a sense of community is the endogamous unity of the tribe and the exogamous unity of the clans within each tribe, i.e., the principle of no marriage outside the tribe and no marriage within the clan. In most tribes class is decided on patrilineal grounds, i.e., lineage traced through the father. However certain tribes like Garos of Meghalaya determine clan through matrilineal connections. There are tribes like Khasis, also of Meghalaya, among whom marriage is forbidden with father's and mother's clans. Kachin type of asymmetrical cross cousin marriage with the mother's brother's daughter, but not with mother's sister's daughter, is found among Khasis and several other tribes of Northeast India on the ground that the mother's brother belongs to a different clan while mother's sister does not (Ratha, p.225). Breaking the marriage taboos is considered as the greatest crime inviting the extreme punishment of social ostracism, loss of property rights and even banishment from the village. A drastic form of punishment for having sexual relations with people outside the tribe (especially with the *diku*) is practised by the Santals, known as "bitlaha" which includes not only social ostracism and fine but also ritual defilement of the houses of the both partners (Archer, *Tribal Law*, pp. 574-588).

Clan in most tribes has the role of an extended family, where clan members are one's own brother and sisters. Clan members have the duty to take care of the weaker members of the clan. In the Garo system of *chaparighkipa*, which we shall detail later, the members of the clan can even claim food, work and shelter from other members. Generally saying, among the tribals clan or village, consisting of people of same clan usually, accept collective responsibility to ensure a minimum standard of living for all its members, including the sick, the widows and the orphans.

While clan relationship regulates social behaviour, the village administration is carried out by the village council which includes elders of all families and in some tribes like Zemi Nagas all adult male persons above thirty years of age belonging to all the clans in a village. Even though women generally enjoy equal status in home and in the clan groups, they have no role in village decision making bodies. This is true about even a matriarchal tribe like Khasi, who considers women as the base of home, clan as well

as inheritors of property, and priestess of the family. The peculiarities of the Khasi social structure made Roy Burman call it as a system of "counter hierarchies" (Burman, p. 20). "War and politics are for men, while property and children are for women" is a saying among Khasis (J. Sen, p. 26) and a general rule for all tribes. There were, however, exceptional occasions when women headed the Khasi state (*hima*) as its Syiem or chief (J. B. Bhattacharjee, p. 325). Naga tribes like Zemas and Angami also have priestesses who initiate sowing and announce taboo days for crops. Most tribal villages have a chief, whose role is mainly to preside over council meetings and execute its decisions; but there are tribes like Ao Nagas who have a republican form of government, where chieftaincy was not always hereditary, but elective, and chiefs can be controlled or even deposed by the council. It is the village council that always have judicial powers except in matriarchal tribes where clan retain that power, and have the prerogative to declare war on enemies. Tribal democracy has not been based on majority versus minority but worked on the principle of consensus, i.e., "no one may overrule anyone else" (Archer, *Hill of the Flutes*, p. 25). Even hereditary chieftains were not masters of the village with arbitrary powers, but servants of the village, as much commoner "as the humblest of the humble" (S.T. Das, p. 49).

Tribals consider land and water as public property; the chief is its nominal proprietor. Every villager can cultivate anywhere in the land as a matter of right, with approval of the village council. Among most Northeastern tribes all members work together in the common land where they follow a slash and burn method called Jhum cultivation which shifts periodically following a cyclic pattern. In matriarchal tribes ownership of land belongs to the clan and property of parent is inherited by the youngest daughter. Among Khasis and Santals there are several types of land holdings such as village lands, clan lands, public sacred groves for ancestors, ancestral lands which can be only inherited and cannot be transacted and private lands which can be bought and sold with the approval of the village council (Das Gupta, pp. 196-209; Archer, *Tribal Law*, pp. 25-30). The general principle in tribal community life is that interest of the community always gets priority to that of the individuals. Hunting is also common and the game meat is shared by all.

Tribals generally do not have any class system. Social status purely depends on the merit of the individuals. Those who gain more give occasional feasts of merit, by which they enhance their social status. It is an effective way of preventing accumulation

of wealth. The emphasis is not on accumulation but on distribution of wealth. By distributing wealth, through such acts as feasts of merit which is a mark of their enterprise, and heroic acts one not only raises one's prestige in this world but also ensures a better life after death. For lazy people life is not easy even after death.

6. Communitization :

In the absence of any formal education, socialisation and knowledge of traditional values, arts and crafts were made possible through institutions known as bachelor's dormitories, among many Mongoloid and Austroloid tribes. Among the Naga tribes like Konyak, Ao, Zemi, Angami, Lotha, Sema and Tangukhuls it was known as *Morung*, *Ariju*, *Kienga*, *Kichuki*, *Champo*, *Dika Chung* and *Longshim* respectively. Mizos call it *Zawlbuk*, Noctes *Paa*, Lalungs *Samadi* Muria *Ghotu* and Garos *Nokpantes*. Tribes in Jharkhand area like Mundas call it *Gitdora* and Oraons *Dhumkuria*. Dr. S. K. Chatterjee and B.R. Choudhury have observed that this common club house system which was widespread among north Indian tribals might have come from Austric predecessors (B. R. Choudhury, p. 159). Scholars point out that similar dormitory system existed in many tribes, in Nigeria, Congo, New Guinea, Bornea, Newze and other places till the twentieth century (Ruivah, p. 170).

The dormitories among various tribals have some common features like admission restricted to bachelors, common sleeping places, separate houses for boys and girls, strict exogamy, i.e. no permission to marry members of their own common house. Generally dormitories are intended to members of one clan with whom no marriage is allowed. In each village there can be one or more dormitories as required by the population or the clans. Boy's dormitories are strictly forbidden for women while girl's dormitories can be visited by boys; to the tribals chastity begins only with marriage. Juvenile chastity is not the rule (Raychaudhuri, p. 164), except in few tribes like Tangkul Nagas who strictly observe maiden chastity (Ruivah, p. 179); accordingly adultery of the married people was strictly punished and rape of married women was considered to be an offence more heinous than murder (S. T. Das, p. 47). The Garos do not have any dormitory for girls, being a matriarchal society their presence at home is very necessary; they do not have any special initiation ceremonies, no special code of conduct for inmates and no kind of teaching imparted as in other tribal dormitories; their *nokpante* is strictly

for sleeping during nights. Generally admission to dormitories are between the age of eleven to thirteen, as the tribals generally discourage teenagers sleeping together with their parents in their often one room houses. Elaborate initiation ceremonies have been there among Oraons of Jharkhand and Tangku Nagas who like the Mizos require a three year probation period.

The primary loyalty of a tribal boy is to his common house, which is the centre of all social and cultural activities of the village. Not only has it the duty to protect the village from enemies, but it also undertakes public works such as construction and repairs of village roads, water tanks, sowing, harvesting and hunting. It imparts traditional values of the tribe, training in arts and crafts, dancing and singing. The Mizos teach the youngsters their code of morals and virtues known as Tlawmngaihna in their Zawlbuk. Common houses generally maintain strict discipline among its members and inculcate in them a spirit of self-sacrifice for the community. It also serves as a charitable institution by helping the weak members in constructing their houses, nursing the sick and giving shelter to the travellers. Even criminals who seek protection are sheltered until their cases are judged by the village council. In short, the dormitories are not simply sleeping places to most tribes, but are responsible for the "welfare, security and development of village community." (Thanzauva, p. 104). It regulates the relations of every man and woman with the members of the community and forms the framework for the numerous mutual obligations between individuals and groups. It strengthens the sense of social unity and encourages healthy competition between members of different dormitories" (Raychaudhuri, p. 164).

Today the grand old bachelor's dormitory has almost become an anachronism. D.N. Majumdar notes three factors for its decay: Christianity, development of formal educational institutions and the replacement of shifting and joint jhum cultivation with permanent agriculture (D. N. Majumdar, p. 313). The spirit of dormitories with its emphasis on co-operation, discipline and sense of community, if revived and modernized, as is attempted in many tribes at present, can remedy many defects of modern individualistic societies. K. Thanzava, a Mizo theologian finds the relevance of dormitory spirit to Christian ecclesiology and theological education thus:

Though the institution of Zawlbuk physically disappeared, its spirit was resurrected in the form of Christian Church... ecclesiology in Mizoram should not be simply imported ecclesiology from the west; the authentic ecclesiology should

emerge out of the fusion of the concepts of the Zawlbuk and the Church... The institution of Zawlbuk is a necessity not only for security, training and fellowship, it is essential for understanding, reconciliation and unity. The continuing process of dialogue among the inmates reconciles differences in opinion and habits that bind them together... The Zawlbuk Model [of Theological Education] is nothing but integrated model in which various disciplines are integrated... The Zawlbuk model is aiming at integration of text and context ; religious and secular affairs, Christian faith and other faiths, theology and other discipline and the integration of various theological subjects (K. Thanzauva, pp. 104-107).

What is true for Mizo Zawlbuk may not be true for other tribes, since the emphasis on common houses varies from tribe to tribe. Nevertheless its role in the formation of individual and social personality is indisputable.

7. Mutual help and sense of social responsibility :

An institution of mutual help in which needy and weak persons find food and shelter in the home of some well-to-do members of the clan while in return the well-to-do people gets additional force to increase their production, is found among tribes like Garos and Santals. Among the Garos it is known as "Chaparikgipa" or "Mepalchagipa". Santals have two types of such arrangements known as "asul durac" and "si-tora" contracts. By "Chaparikgipa" arrangement a person in need can claim food and shelter from a clan member with the offer of his or her labour to the household, without being considered as a servant, but a member of the family. The indigent members of the clan like orphans, diseased or disabled of both sexes enjoy a ready access to the help and assistance of the consanguineal kin and can stay with them as accredited members of the concerned household as long as one desires" (Goswami and Kar, p. 210). The householders will enhance their social prestige as well as increase their earnings in some cases and the volunteer may get food and shelter without paying anything in return other than physical services. Sometimes when some householders suffer loss of work-force in their family, they may invite their relatives to help them with the same conditions. "They make no distinction between working for self and working for another kin-member" (Goswami and Kar, p. 211). These people may work for a period and leave when feel to do so. They may get opportunities to earn for themselves by working in the land provided by the house

holder, or by working for other people at the goodwill of the householder. Today this system has degenerated into almost a servant system in the urban areas. However, young people of school going age seek shelter in urban households as chaparikgipa for taking advantage of educational facilities (Goswami and Kar, p. 213).

In the Santal "asul durac" system, a helper in the household matter is engaged by Santals of their own tribe, for life long service and in return the householder provides the helper with shelter, food and clothes. No wages are given, but at the end of a ten year service the householder may allot a part of land for lifetime cultivation and for inheritance after his death, as per the initial agreement between the two parties and as ratified by the village meeting. The householder may sometime arrange the marriage of the boy or the girl or even marry them to his own children. "Wealth matters little and to such an extent riches are discounted that servants are often on a par with their masters" (Archer, *The Hill of the Flutes*, p. 24). In the "si-tora" type of contract when a boy has land of his own but unable to cultivate by himself, he may offer his services to a rich Santal for domestic work and in return the householder will cultivate the boy's land and give him the produce. When the boy becomes able enough to manage his own affairs he may return to his land with necessary agricultural equipments procured by him. (Archer, *Tribal Law*, pp. 104-5).

Another insight on social responsibility can be seen in the "Ghardi Jawaë" and "Ghar Jawaë" types of Santal marriages. Ghardi Jawaë is an arrangement by which a boy becomes a serving son-in-law for five or seven years in the father-in-law's house. As some youngsters find it difficult to procure enough money to give bride-price—dowry given by the girl's family to boy's parents is not the rule among tribals,—the boy may serve in the house of the bride, as Jacob served Laban for his two daughters, and return home after a period, with his wife and children, and also earning basic things to start a new home. This is also beneficial to parents with no sons so that they get help of a youth to do their cultivation.

On the other hand "Ghar Jawaë" is a permanent arrangement. The son-in-law will live in the house of the parents-in-law and look after them in their old age. The daughter now gets the status of a son and inherits the property at her father's death and the husband also gets benefitted. All these arrangements have to be approved by the village assembly (Archer, *Tribal Law*, pp. 183-223, *The Hill of Flutes*, pp. 350-1) In both these arrangements the boys retains his rights to his parent's property.

The Mikir tribe of Northeast India also have a similar marriage arrangement called “akmon” by which the husband stays in his in-law’s house and work one year or more for getting a wife without paying the bride’s price (S.T. Das, pp. 207-8).

8. Emergence of a New Identity Transcending Tribalism :

The old sense of narrow loyalties to one’s own clan, tribe and race is slowly disappearing and a new sense of common identity of tribals, a tribal consciousness or tribal corporate personality is emerging among Indian tribals, due to the impact of Christianity and modern education. S.K. Barpujari writes :

For centuries the Naga had been living in a world of their own leading a traditional life constantly warring against one another more often than not hunting human heads. After their conversion to the new religion, wanton killing was realised as a sin in the light of the teaching of Christ and hostility was replaced by love... A sense of solidarity among the diverse groups of the Naga or Nagaism emerged. (Barpujari, pp. 107,109).

Nagaism has the tendency of going beyond Naga unity even to include people outside the tribes. As Barpujari himself attests : “In other words, they have realised the necessity of peace, toleration and coexistence with their own men and neighbours in the plains” (Barpujari, p. 108). In the words of Asoso Yonuo, a Naga historian,

Broadly speaking, Nagaism is a system of life which characterises fraternity of all mankind or universal brotherhood without distinction as to race, language, religion and geographical divisions, and which emphasizes the relation between the man and material world or Nature as part of each other in one facet. On the other facet, in a narrow sense, it jealously guards the distinctiveness of their race, life and honour from external aggression and assimilation (Yonuo, p. xiv n-2).

The characteristic “resilience and openness” that redefine the “social boundary definition and boundary maintenance” is found among other tribals also. “ A communitarian self understanding transcending the segmental sociolinguistic identities” is noted by Khubchandani in several compact regions such as Jharkhand, Gondwana, Bhilbhoomi, Arunachal and Bodoland.

The Jharkhand movement represents a characteristic

articulation of syncretic identity, welding together the aspirations of tribal groups belonging to different ancestries (Austrian, Dravidian and Indo-Aryan)... and the Bodoland agitation, on the other, presents an alliance of different ethnic groups belonging to the Bodo group of Tibeto-Burman language family. (Khubchandani, p. 95).

Nirmal Minz also has pointed out an emerging tribal consciousness in relation to its tradition and history and in relation to outsiders. ("To be a Tribal")

The point to be noted is that the emerging tribal consciousness has two aspects: desire for self-identity and desire for transcending narrow loyalties. These are not conflicting ideologies. A desire for common humanity does not mean denying one's particular identity based on tradition. No group in the world has discarded willingly their traditional sense of identity. This does not necessarily obstruct developing a universal sense of community based on universal humanness. Tribal self-identity need not hinder national integration. Such a sense of openness was not altogether absent even in earlier periods. For example in the traditional matriarchal society of Khasis, their high priestess, Khyriem, who represented their common ancestress, was expected to marry a non-Khasi (Burman, p. 23) In the Mizo life, as Thanzauva notes, the idea of Zawlbuk, which in the past was exclusively meant for men and for particular clan or village, is showing signs of a "fellowship of openness" incorporating an idea of universality of the Christian church (Thanzauva, p. 105-6). National policies must be formulated taking tribal cultural identity as the base for national integration and all have to learn that only self-respect of communities will create a sensible national community. We create a new India, not by destroying dalit or tribal self-respect but by promoting tribal culture and language, the sources of their self-respect and self identity. A. G. Noorani's evaluations that Naga unrest is due to the "appeasement" policy of Article 371(A) lacks understanding of and sensitivity to minority cultures.

9. Conclusion :

In many ways the "primal" attitude of traditional tribal culture can contribute to resolving the tensions of modern culture arising out of extreme individualism, competition based on greed, and consumerism which views 'earth as a commodity' consumption as a token of gratification and status, and neo-colonialism based on the norm of "survival of the fittest". Tribal economy is "need

based rather than greed based" which works on the principle of "small is beautiful", tribal democracy is not based on the dominance of majority, but on the principle of consensus; tribal justice is not based on blind laws, but each case is executed in its context by the village community; status is not based on acquisition but on sharing and distribution of wealth i.e., one should not keep anything which one does not need: *asteya* principle of Gandhiji, society is not organized on any stratified system like caste but on the merit of the individual in relation to community. Tribals emphasis on mutual help, their sense of respect to nature, not as owners of it, but as caretakers, are lessons to be learned by the "modern advanced cultures". Tribal ideology precedes Gandhiji's *Sarvodaya* or John Ruskin's *Upto This Last*; it is socialism without its arbitrary and mechanical structure. In Tribal communities an individual person is defined in terms of community. Duty rather than right determines relation of individuals to the community; at the same time their institutions, social, political and religious are based on the principle of "made for human". Their ideology of community is not of an organization of functions and material necessity which deny any transcendent dimension of the self and consequently distorts personhood as well as community; it does not bind human beings to the object world but transcends it. Their sense of community is not the "mystic identity" of seeing "oneself in all things and all things in oneself" rather an "I-Thou" meeting, a community of mutuality, each respecting the otherness of the other. Their sociality is not "heirarchical" or "patriarchal" where individual rights are sacrificed in the name of social organization or family but egalitarian, with a sense of sharing solidarity and doing justice, providing the individual with "social space," necessary for the growth of independent personality, and at the same time not allowing the individuals to be a law to themselves without reference to social relations in responsible community living. If that is so, one may add that the gospel values manifested in Jesus Christ are already there in such a tribal culture of India; we need only to rediscover them.

True as any other culture, tribal culture has also many repulsive factors in it. However, the weight given to human beings over laws and rituals, concern for the well being of the lowest and the least, servanthood as the model of leadership, society being personal rather than individualistic, justice executed in accordance with each particular case, etc. as the governing principles of tribal culture constitute good news to the modern world. Through the conscience and culture of the tribal people

God in Jesus is speaking to the modern people, showing them the values of life and community.

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