

FOIM XI

CHRIST AMONG THE TRIBALS

EDITORS

F. HRANGKHUMA

&

JOY THOMAS

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Christ Among the Tribals.
Ed: F. Hrangkhuma and Joy Thomas

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INTRODUCTION

The Biannual Mission Studies' Research Seminar and General Body Meeting of the Fellowship of Indian Missiologists (FOIM) was held from April 26 to 29, 2006 at the South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS), Bangalore. The theme was Christ Among the Tribals in India. This book, the XI of the series of FOIM publication contains the papers presented in the Seminar, the records of the groups discussion and the Statement in regard to the Tribals in India.

FOIM is an ecumenical body comprising of members from various church denominational background – Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant groups. It has dealt with various missiological issues pertinent to Indian context. The present volume represents one of the contextual missiological issues discussed from various perspectives, covering various areas of history, concerns and contextual issues. It begins with an overview of Christianity among the tribals in India and ends with primal religions and Jesus Christ at the global level.

We divided the content into three major parts. The first part deals with the presence of Christianity and of Christ among the tribals of India. In the first chapter F. Hrangkhuma presents the beginning of Christianity among several tribes of India. He also discusses the causes of tribals' relative openness to Christianity; both the contributory factors of their responsiveness and the more immediate reasons for

their conversion. He also discusses the processes of their Christianization. Some tribes such as the Mizo and the Naga have become Christians en masse over a century and both the contextualization of theology and the inculturation of the churches characterize their present experience. Some tribes are moving toward total Christianization.

In the second chapter, Julian Saldanha, Selvester Ponnunmuthu and Joe Mattam trace the presence of Christ among the tribes in Maharashtra, Kerala and Gujarat respectively. Julian Saldanha concentrates on the Warlis who mostly inhabit the hilly tracts along the western coast of Maharashtra and Gujarat. He also discusses the strengths and the weaknesses of Christian missions among them. Joe Mattam describes the present conditions of the tribals in Gujarat and how they have been treated by the majority. Tracing the history of the presence of Christianity among the tribals in Gujarat, he discusses both the strengths and weaknesses of Christian missions to them. Christianity, instead of uniting them, seems to further the divides of the tribals among themselves. Selvester writes about the 48 tribal groups in Kerala, their economic and social situations, and the presence of Christianity among some of the tribes there. He says that the tribals in Kerala may be viewed as the most backward class in the state. The tribal Christians have advanced educationally. However they too need empowerment.

In the third chapter, Linus Kujur looks at the Tribal churches in India Today. He begins with definition of the term tribal, church in India, and focuses his evaluation of tribal-mission to Chotanagpur and Assam, and basically to the Roman Catholic mission. Agapit Tirkey concentrates his studies on the question of inculturation among the tribal churches. He explains inculturation as the process of presenting Christ and Christianity in a way fully understandable and acceptable to the people so that the Faith takes root into the culture, and the mind and thinking of the people. He limits his studies to the Central and Eastern India that spread from Jharkhand to Assam. He believes that the inculturation movements have been launched mostly by charismatic individuals and have not as yet taken the form of any far reaching movement. He, however, emphasizes that by accepting Christ tribals find a new identity in the community of men and women in the Church,

with saints and with God and concludes that the tribals are quite aware that their future is in the Church.

S. Vazhapally focuses on anthropological framework called worldview as an analytical and conceptual category and its usefulness in theologizing in tribal situations. He discusses the subject in three sections. In the first section he focuses on the nature and scope of Worldview. Here worldview is seen as the 'inside' view of a given culture, which is later, objectified as conceptual and analytical categories. In the second section, the author delineates some of the significant features of tribal worldview. This section focuses on 'orality' as a prior horizon which shapes and moulds tribal noetic economy in a significant manner. It also juxtaposes tribal tradition and non-tribal traditions within the framework of noetic mutations in terms of writing and print technologies. In the third section he delineates various implications of tribal noetic economy for theologizing.

We titled PART II comprising of three chapters as Case Studies because each of the chapters in this part discusses more particular subjects in particular geographical locations. Kuriakose deals with the issue of development as mission of the Church in the Northeastern region of India which includes the seven (now the eighth is included - Sikkim). After a brief summary of Christianity among the seven states, especially of the hills states of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur, Kuriakose attempts to correct two major misunderstanding namely, that for tribals it is incompatible to be Christian and that the tribals were Hindus from time immemorial. He also discusses the nature and characteristics of the churches in Northeast India as church of the *anawim*, of the people, and that they are self-propagating missionary churches. The next major responsibility of the Church in Northeast is to focus their ministry of peace-making, reconciliation and guidance to the various warring groups.

In Tribal Women of Orissa: Experiences and Concerns, Clare Purukary highlights concerns and experiences of tribal women in Orissa adopting a descriptive method of dealing with the facts, causes, and challenges. She deals with the common concerns and experiences of women of both northern and southern parts of Orissa. She describes the various suffering

of women in that part of the country and the responses of the Church to their suffering. She also suggests various ways in which the Church can respond more meaningfully so as to alleviate their manifold suffering.

Daniel Katapalli deals with the transformation of a tribe called Savaras in chapter 8. The Savara tribe live in Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh. The gospel reached them in 1903. Since then the missionaries of the Christian Reformed Mission, Christian Outreach Uplifting New Tribes (COUNT), and Navajeevana Sangham uncompromisingly carried out the mission of God in spite of all odds and oppositions. Culled from his doctoral dissertation with the title -The Savaras of Srikakulam District, Andhra Pradesh: A Study of the Impact of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, (1998), this chapter deals with the impact of the Gospel of Jesus Christ upon the Savaras in the district of Srikakulam of Andhra Pradesh.

In Part III there are four chapters dealing with both Indian and global scenes. In chapter 9, L. Stanislaus comprehensively discusses tribal movements in India, starting from the period of the British colonial government to the present time. He discusses concepts and issues of the movements, describes various tribal movements in India, and attempts to articulate what they are struggling for and struggling with, through these movements.

Patmury deals with the tribal spirituality. He attempts an explanation of the meaning of spirituality and conceptualize the origin of spirituality. Indian theologians, mostly coming from Brahmin background have not taken tribal spirituality as they attempt to theologize in the Indian context. Evangelizers and missionaries have not understand tribal spirituality well enough to employ them to make Christianity more understandable and meaningful to the tribals. He contends that since tribal spirituality represents ancient or primal spirituality, it should be preserved, not only in lifeless museum but in actual life.

In chapter 11 Joseph Puthenpurakal contends that Jesus is a tribal. He argues that Jesus the tribal represents the best qualities and characteristics of all tribal peoples of the world. While remaining a tribal Jesus goes beyond his tribal world and embraces the whole humanity to transform its every strata

solely with the power of his good news. In a world challenged by the forces of individualism, selfishness and corrupt practices – applicable to the tribal peoples of the world – Jesus becomes the inspiration to go beyond one’s tribal horizon. The realization that all of us are/were “tribal” allows Jesus to be the source of inspiration for the whole humanity.

In the final chapter, J. A. B. Jonganeel deals with the encounter of the gospel of Jesus Christ with primal religions around the world. Jonganeel’s study, while not attempting to focus on Christianity in general or on all the historical, geographical, and psychological peculiarities of these encounters, highlights the responses of primal societies to Jesus Christ as Lord of history and Saviour of humanity.

It is the prayer of the editors and the writers that the information and conceptual materials in this book will be helpful for a better understanding of the tribal situation in India as a whole, and the presence of Christ in the midst of tribals. It is our desires that the kingdom of God be extended among the tribals of India and around the world in this 21st century.

The Editors.

Part I

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST AMONG THE TRIBALS

1

CHRISTIANITY AMONG THE TRIBES OF INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

*By Dr. F. Hrangkhuma**

Today the total population of Tribals in India is 85-95 million and form about 9-10 per cent of India's total population and about 25 per cent of the total Christian population in India is Tribal Christian (Ponraj 1996:62,159). This means that the tribals are among the most responsive groups of people in India. In this paper attempt is made to briefly mention the presence of Christianity among the tribes of India. This includes a description of the entrance of Christianity into the tribes of India, a study on the reasons and processes of their conversion to Christianity, and the processes of christianization among the tribals.

ENTRANCE OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE TRIBES OF INDIA:

The first tribe that received Christianity was the Khasis. The first contacts with them were made by the Serampore Mission at Syhlet (now in Bangladesh) in 1813, Guwahati in 1829, and at

* Dr. F. Hrangkhuma is a retired General Secretary of the Baptist Church of Mizoram. He is at present the Principal of South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS), Bangalore.

Cherapunji in 1832. No substantial results have been recorded although few Khasis were baptized. A more substantial and lasting interaction took place beginning in 1841 with the coming of the missionaries of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission. The first church among the tribals of India was planted in Nongsawlia, Meghalaya in 1846. In 1866, 65 schools with 2,000 pupils were established in every *Shiemsip* except one. Normal (Teacher Training) School was established at Nongsawlia in 1867. The Khasi Christians were organized into Presbytery in 1887 and in the same year the Cherra Theological College was established¹. A dispensary was established by Dr. Griffith in Mawphlang in 1878. The turn of the century saw the Khasi Christians growing steadily. The 1905 revival among them excellerated the numerical growth tremendously (Puthenpurakal 1998:200-207). Recently a unique revival has been taking place mostly among the Presbyterian Church members which is still going on at the time of writing.

An independent and ecclesiastical Church of God was established in 1902 by Revs. Wolley M. Roy, J.J.M. Nichols-Roy, Mr. Jobin Roy Khain, Mr. Dhorum and others. It has become the third largest denominational church among the Khasis (Snaitang 1998:239). There are substantial Seventh Day Adventists and other smaller indigenous groups of Protestant Christians among the Khasis.

The Roman Catholics have introduced Christianity in some parts of North East India early. But only only in 1889 more substantial work in the North East India was done by the Roman Catholic when the Prefecture Apostolic of Assam, Bhutan and Manipur was created. The Roman Catholics entered the Khasi hills in 1892. The two World Wars have disrupted the Catholic works more than any others. However, after the Second World War, the Catholic missions picked up where it left off, and made many outstanding contributions in the areas of education and medical works. It has gained numerous adherents among the Khasis (Puthenpurakal 1998:207-213).

Substantial missions began among the Garos of Meghalaya through two Garos, Omed Watre Momin and Ramkhe Watre

1. The College is shifted to Shillong recently and the name has been changed to John Robert Theological College.

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Momin, who were baptized on 8 February, 1863 at Guwahati. The two returned to the Garo hills to evangelise their own people in 1864. Following them the American Baptist Mission established its station in Tura in 1877. The Garo Baptist Association was established in 1875. By the turn of the century there were about 10,000 members in the Garo Christian community. The Roman Catholic Missions (1931), the Church of England (1935) and the Seventh Day Adventists (1950) also entered into the fray. According to K. C. Marak, these three missions worked among the Garo Baptists and not among the non Christian Garos (Marak 1998:162).

Missionary work began in Nagaland by the American Baptists in the 1870s among the Aos. The earliest missionaries were Godhula Brown, an Assamese evangelist employed by the American Baptists, and the American Baptist missionary E. W. Clark. The first baptism in Naga soil took place on 23 December 1872. Due to the diversity of the Naga tribal groups in terms of languages and culture, progress of Christianity was slow in Nagaland in the first few decades. Except for members of the Ao tribe, large numbers of the Nagas did not turn to Christianity until the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century. An interesting element in the Christianization of Nagaland is that several Naga tribes such as the Konyak, the Sangtam, and the Chang were not administered by the British, and the Government did not allow missionary work among them. However, beginning in the 1930s, the evangelization among these un-administered tribes began and after the Indian Independence, they experienced fast growth. Now the Nagas claim a hundred percent Christianity, both in and around Nagaland (Longchar 1998:248251).

During the last decade of the 19th century missionary work began in Mizoram, first by J. H. Lorrain and F. W. Savidge of the Arthington Aborigin Mission (1894), replaced by D. E. Jones of the Welsh Presbyterians in 1897. In Manipur, mission was started in 1894 by William Pettigrew of the Arthington Aborigin Mission, who later joined the American Baptists. In 1903, the English Baptists (Baptist Missionary Society founded by William Carey) began work in the southern part of Mizoram, when the former pioneer missionaries Lorrain and Savidge made their station in Serkawn, near Lunglei. In 1907, R. A.

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Lorrain, the brother of J. H. Lorrain, established an independent mission agency called the Lakher Pioneer Mission and began work among the Maras of the southern part of Mizoram. Other denominational churches entered Mizoram – Salvation Army (1921), the Roman Catholics (1925), the Seventh Day Adventists (1941) and the United Pentecostal Church (1949). These worked mostly among the Presbyterian and the Baptist Christians (Hrangkhuma 1998:271-2).

In 1991, the three hills tribal states were dominantly Christian as follows – Meghalaya- 64.8% for the whole state; (Garo – 66.86% and Khasi – 60%), Mizoram 85.73% and Nagaland 87.47%. The non-Christians in Mizoram and Nagaland are mostly non-Mizo and non-Naga respectively. The percentage of Christians in Manipur in 1991 was 34.11. Most of the tribals in Manipur are Christians. According to K. C. Marak the Garo Christians now are 82.50% of the Garo population in Meghalaya (1998:168). According to Joseph Puthenpurakal, during the decade ending in 1995, the Presbyterian and the Roman Catholic added new Khasi converts averaging 6,000 and 12,000 respectively every year (1998:206). Besides this, there are a number of indigenous Christian groups in North East India (Snaitang 2000).

The Bodos of Assam received the Gospel in the middle of the 19th century. Apinta embraced Christianity in 1849 at Guwahati while studying in the Baptist Boarding School founded by Mr Barker, to become the first Bodo Christian. The Anglicans took over a small mission station at Tezapore in 1847/8. When Rev. Sydney Endle arrived in Assam in 1864, there had already been some Bodo converts at Tezapore (Borgoary 2005:3).

The Lutheran Mission began its work in Western Assam bordering West Bengal, based in a colony in Mornai where some Santhal migrants worked in a Tea Estate during the 1870s. L. O. Skefsrud and Hans Boerresen began to concentrate their work in the neighbouring areas and in the process one Teklo Bodo became Christian on the 7th of January, 1887. The outcome of this mission was the Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church with a membership of 25,000 with 180 congregations and 1,00,000 total Christian population in 2005 (N. Borgoary 2005:48). In 1927, the American Baptist Missionaries established a mission station at Tukhraj, which was taken over by the

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Australian Baptist Missionary Society (Borgoary 2005: 3-4). The Goalpara Bodo Baptist Christian Association has grown into a church with a membership of 10,000 baptized members (22,000 Christian community) in 155 congregations in 2005 (Basumatari 2005: 46). In the 1960s the Roman Catholic Church also began to work among the Bodos from a Mission station at Bengtol now in Chirang district. The Bodo Baptist Convention, originally formed as the Mongoldoi Baptist Christian Association in 1914, have 25,086 baptized membership in 268 congregations in 2005 (Pranay Daimary 2005:58). Most of the Protestant Bodo churches joined in the Bodo Baptist Board in 1955. The aim of the BCB is "Translation and revision of the Bodo Bible. Development of the Bodo Literatures, particularly Christian Literatures." (Moshahary 2005: 62).

The Karbi of Assam received the gospel in 1859 through the American Baptist missionaries. The growth of Christianity among them was extremely slow during the 19th century. The first church was organised in the eastern Karbi Anglong at Chekso in 1905. At present there are 8 associations under the Karbi Anglong Baptist Association. The KABA is under the constituent of the Council of Baptist Churches in North East India (CBCNEI) (Ingti 1998: 23-24). The Roman Catholics (1914) and the Presbyterians (1880) also worked among the Karbis (Ibid.).

The tribes in Tripura received the gospel mostly in the 20th century. The Mizos in Tripura were first evangelised by Mizo Christians from Mizoram. They in turn evangelised their related tribes of Darlong and other Halam groups of people. The New Zealand Baptists began work in Tripura mostly among the Garos and the Mizo groups in 1938. The Zoram Baptist Mission began work among the Tripuri groups such as Jamatia, Noatian, Debbarma and the Riang since 1970. Now several churches are working in Tripura, some in co-operation with the Tripura Baptist Christian Union, the major denominational church in Tripura.

Christianity began among the Rabhas of Assam in 1939 when Konoran Rabha was baptised. As a result of his witness 25 Rabhas became Christians. However, since they could not find any church to join, 23 of them reverted back to their Rabha religion. One was driven out from the society because

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he married a Garo, forbidden by the Rabhas. The last of them became a cook for the Australian Baptist missionaries. He requested them to extend their ministry to the Rabhas. They began work among them in 1954, and eventually Rev. Glasby came to Debitola and established a mission station there in 1957. The ABMS could not work there for long. In 1970 they requested the Baptist Church of Mizoram to take over their mission. The first Mizo Baptist missionaries, Rev. Rokhama and his wife were sent in the same year. Now the Rabha Baptist Union is becoming a self supporting, self governing and self propagating church, growing toward maturity (Hrangkhuma 1976: 86-89).

The Arunachalis of Arunachal Pradesh received Christianity in the 19th century, but sustained missionary work has been forbidden both by the British Colonial Government and the Union Republic of India. In spite of the present restriction, God has opened Arunachal Pradesh for Gospel communication within the last few decades. Several Christian groups from Mizoram and Nagaland have been evangelizing the Arunachalis, and substantial number of churches has been planted among the Adi, Nishi, Adi-galong, Apatani and other tribes within the last three decades. The Arunachalis are receptive to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Coming to the Central India we have several tribal groups among whom Christianity has been planted. They include the Munda, Oraon, Kharia, Santal, Ho, and more recently the Malto. The Gossner Mission Society (Ranchi 1845), The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and the Anglican Mission (1869), The Roman Catholic Mission (1869) are the historical missions that worked among the tribals of central India (Minz 1997: 19-22; 1998:22-38). Recently the Friends Missionary Prayer Band is working among the Malto tribes with encouraging results of church planting and transformation of the people (Edward, et.al. 2003; Edward 2003 and Edward 2004).

Christianity was brought to the Bhils, the largest tribe in India in 1892 by the Capuchin Order of the Roman Catholic Church. In 1841, the Irish Presbyterian Mission began work among the Dheds tribe of Gujarat. Another mission started work among the same tribe in 1846 and continued through 1872. The Church of North India Diocese of Bhopal is mostly composed of Bhil

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Christians from the United Church of North India (Minz 1997: 22-23; Jain 1995: 125 – 214; McGavran 1998: 49-55).

The Gonds, the second largest tribal group in India received Christianity from the Free Church of Scotland with Rev. T. Hislop as a key missionary toward the later half of the 19th century. Later the Swedish Lutheran Mission which worked in Chhindwara and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Madhya Pradesh has some Gonds in its membership. The Disciples Church of Christ brought the Gospel to the Gonds in 1882 in Damoh, Pendra Road and Kulpahar (Minz 1997: 23).

The Korkus in central India received the gospel during the last decade of the 19th century from the General Conference of the Mennonite Mission. Later the Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission of the USA took over the work. In the 1980s the Zoram Baptist Mission took over the work from them. And now the ZBM, the Baptist Church Association (Amravati) and the Indian Evangelical Mission are working together among the Korkus.

The Moravian Brethren Mission worked among the Kenauras. They worked from Kotgarh, Dehradun and Mussoorie in Himachal Pradesh and Utter Pradesh. A small Christian community exists in this tribe, now integrated into the CNI Diocese (Minz 1997: 23).

In the Western Ghats mountain ranges in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, and the Nilgiri hills, are several small tribes. There have been small conversions among some of the tribes as a result of the work by the Basel Mission, the Church Missionary Society, and the American Reformed Presbyterian Church (Minz 1997:24). The Malayarians of Kerala received the Gospel in the middle of the 19th century and the entire tribe became Christian over the years, belonging to the CSI (Oommen 1998: 148).

Minz writes about the tribes in the South Eastern Region:

“John Orissa Goadby was appointed the first missionary to the Konds by the British Baptist Missionary Society in 1862. Arthur Long and John Biswas also worked among the Konds from 1883. The first village priest, Malika Pori, and his family were baptized on Easter Day in 1914. In 1920, 30 more were baptized, and the church had taken root in the Kond tribe. Pan tribes also received baptism.

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Among the Kuvi-speaking tribes of Koraput district, the Jeyapur Evangelical Lutheran Church is working. This was begun by the North Elbian Missions Sentrum Icentre (NMZ) Mission society in Northern Germany” (Minz 1998: 24).

The Koyas of Northern Andhra Pradesh are the largest single tribe of this region. Baptist Missions of different origins (American and Canadian), Methodists of the British and American backgrounds, and the Lutherans from the USA are the main denominational church bodies that have been instrumental in bringing the gospel to tribes and castes of this region (Minz 1998: 25). By the 1980s, the Kui speaking Baptist churches in Orissa are found in about 100 churches scattered throughout the Khond hills. Over the next five years, the number of Kui churches nearly doubled. Then during the decade of the 1990s, they increased to more than 1,200 with another 1,000 emerging churches. By 2001, Orissa saw a new church start almost every 24 hours (Garrison 2004: 39-43).

The Savaras of Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh and Ganjam district (now in Orissa) received the gospel in 1903 with the coming of Rev. John McLaurin and Rev. A. V. Timpany of the Canadian Baptist Telugu Mission in South India. The gospel presentation to them have been continued by the Christian Reformed Mission since 1980, the Christian Outreach Uplifting New Tribes (COUNT) since 1981 and the Nava Jeevana since 1987 (Katapallil 1998).

The above summary information is not exhaustive due to the paucity of specific information for some tribes and the difficulty of access to some sources. In most cases Christianity among the tribes are divided into several denominational churches – the Roman Catholic, the many Protestant denominational churches and many more so-called sectarian as well as indigenous groups of Christians. It is sad to note that Christianity has been presented in fragments of rival Christian groups among the tribes of India. However, the fact still stands that in general the tribals are much more responsive to Christianity than any other groups of people in India. Many of the tribal churches, in spite of the division, have been growing to maturity and they in turn have begun their own missionary movements.

THE PROCESSES OF TRIBAL CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY:

It is clear from our study that the Tribals of India have been more responsive (along with the various groups of the Dalits), than most people. What makes the Tribals responsive to the gospel? Our study clearly shows that the factors that contributed to their responsiveness and conversions may be divided into two groups – the contributory factors and immediate reasons for conversion. The two groups are not contradictory, but supplementary. Some of the factors even overlap and it is superfluous to divide them. But for clarity sake we make some separate discussion for the two groups of factors and reasons. The first group, the more or less contributory factors are economic, social and political changes, the socio-cultural and worldview of the Tribals, and the personality of the Tribals, that includes their attitude to outsiders, their outlook, and their response to change. The contributory factors may also be called the factors that make the situation conducive to conversion (or for that matters for any socio-cultural change). This is what Paul E. Pierson of Fuller Theological Seminary calls as the contextual climactic condition. Something happens to make the situation more ready to accept new things and the people more readily open for innovation (Class Lectures 1985).

CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS

All the Tribal groups do not have the same situation and their

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2. Scholars identified three major racial and linguistic groups of the Tribes in India as follows:- The Austic, the Dravidian and the Tibeto-Burman Mongoloid groups. Their geographical locations are mostly divided into six different geographical areas such as – 1) The North East India. This includes Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura and Assam, and they are dominantly Mongoloids. 2) The North Central Regions. This includes Bihar, Jharkhand, W. Bengal, Northern Orissa, Eastern Madhya Pradesh. 3) The Western India Regions. This includes Rajasthan, Gujarat, Western Madhya Pradesh, and Northern Maharashtra. 4) The North Western regions. This includes Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir valley. 5) The South Eastern regions. This includes Southern Orissa, Northern Andhra Pradesh, Southern Madhya Pradesh, and Eastern Maharashtra, and 6) the Southern regions. This includes Western Ghats and the Nilgiri Hills in Kerala, Tamilnadu and Karnataka. (Ghurye 1963; Fuchs 1973; Singh 1972; Dube 1977; Minz 1997)

cultures; especially their languages are different². But there are many similarities in their culture, especially in their worldview, and their social situation of oppression and exploitation and poverty are similar. Therefore, the following generalization is made fully realising the fact that some of them will be accurate for some tribes whereas the same factors may be inaccurate for some. Generalization is risky in such a diverse contexts³.

First, there seems to be divine work among some tribal groups that in many ways prepare them psychologically to receive the gospel. Such is the case among the Mizo (Hrangkhuma 1989:213-214). In some cases, there is that lost book tradition (Richard 1981). Some years before the coming of the British soldiers, there was a Mizo name Darphawka, who had a dream of the coming of the light from the west, and he advised his relatives to accept the light (Hminga 1987).

Second, most of the tribes in which Christianity has substantial following, there took place some drastic cultural disorientation mostly due to the extension of the British conquest and subsequent administration. F. S. Downs, one of the leading authorities in the history of Christianity in North East India is convinced that, to understand the processes of the tribals' conversion to Christianity in that region it should be viewed from various angles such as political, ecclesiastical and sociological/anthropological perspectives, emphasising the acculturative role Christianity played in the midst of rapid socio-cultural changes as the major factors of conversions (Downs 1991:172). Even though this is not the immediate reason for the conversions of the tribals in North East India, it definitely contributed to their subsequent conversion to Christianity. This could be true of several other tribes in other parts of India. The political, economic and social crises as a result of tremendous cultural changes undergone by the tribes, mostly as a result of the British conquest and colonisation, and the oppression definitely contributed to the reasons for the tribals accepting Christianity as an alternative to their pathetic situation.

3. The findings are derived from Thomas and Taylor 1965:169-170; Kanjamala 1981:75-73; Raj 1986:92-96; Hrangkhuma 1989:188-220; Katapalli 1998; Edward 2001; Lalrinthanga 2006. I am following my summary in Hrangkhuma 1994:144-146 with some addition.

Thirdly, the combination of the poor living condition that led to land alienation, indebtedness and subsequent slavery to the landlords and the oppression and exploitation of the tribals definitely contributed to their favourable response to Christianity. Keshari N. Sahay writes, "...before the advent of Christian missionaries in Chotanagpur, the exploitation and oppression of the aboriginals were at their height. The aboriginals were utterly dejected and tired of the existing state of affairs, and all they wanted was some type of leader who could protect them, fight for their cause, and lead them away from their miseries. They were ready to follow anyone and do anything that would obtain relief. An atmosphere was already created and the ground was ripe for change when the Christian missionaries appeared on the scene." (1968:924). It was during this time the Gossner Evangelical Lutheran missionaries arrived in 1844. Then in 1855, the greatest of the Roman Catholic missionaries of the time, Father Constant Lievens arrived who became the champion of the tribals in that region. A. George Edward writes of the Maltos in the nineteen eighties, "they suffered great humiliation at the hands of their Bihari masters. In this pathetic condition, they wanted to get rid of those problems and wanted to have a new identity that would have made them wholesome human beings. This is one of the main reasons for them to voluntarily turn to Christianity in large numbers." (Edward 2001:118).

Fourthly, their social systems and customs are such that an introduction of new innovations and the acceptance of new things have been fairly easier than most people groups in India. (Hrangkhuma 1989:143-147). Downs writes, "Tribal societies with their closely interconnected social, economic, political and cultural elements are particularly vulnerable to change, even when it affects only one aspect of their life." (1980:188-9). In addition, in tribal societies, converts to Christianity have not been ostracised to the extent of expulsion entirely from their societies. They were allowed to continue, albeit with mild persecutions mostly of the nature of derision. This enabled the new converts to Christianity to continue to rub shoulders with their own people which eventually influenced their family members, kith and kin and neighbours to turn to Christianity. (Hrangkhuma 1989: 164-65). To this may be added

the personality of the tribals in general. The Baptist missionaries to the Mizo definitely believed that the personality of the Mizo characterized by adaptability, love of new things and change, among other traits of character, definitely contributed to their acceptance of Christianity as a whole. Lorrain writes in 1909, "The one characteristic of the Lushai (Mizo) which most affects missionary work in these hills is his love of change" (1909:2). His colleague Savidge writes that the Mizo is "a being always breathing the purest air, Physically strong, self-possessed, and independent in spirit..." (1907:206). George Edward in his study of the Malto people in recent years devoted chapter two of his dissertation to describe the personality of the Malto people as contributing to their rapid acceptance of Christianity. He writes, "The Maltos responded to the Christian message with immediacy, rapidity, unity and excitement. The personality of the people was one of the principal causes for such responsiveness." (2001:100).

Fifthly, in addition to the above, and may be even weightier, is the consideration of the pre-existent worldview of the tribals that is not dissimilar to the Christian worldview. This implies that there has been significant continuity from animistic worldview to the Biblical worldview that makes the transition to Christianity easier. This idea is strengthened by the fact that the tribes that were least sanskritized have most often been the tribals who have been accepting Christianity more easily than those who have been more sanskritized. This could be considered as contributing factors for the rapid conversion of the tribals to Christianity (Horton 1971:85-108).

IMMEDIATE FACTORS

Research on the fields has shown that the immediate causes of the tribals' conversion have most often been a mixture of social and spiritual. Many were converted due to power encounter – exorcism and healing, their fear of going to hell, and a desire to go to heaven, and many similar factors. Some became Christian because it seemed to provide much better socio-economic condition than any other religions (Lalrinthanga 2006; Hrangkhuma 1989). According to the findings of George Edward from 1098 individual converts from six villages of the Maltos, 326 or 29.69% of them have been converted to escape

fear of the evil spirits; 118 or 10.7% were gripped by the love of Jesus Christ; 87 or 7.9% were fed up with the old religion; 83 or 7.55% converted because their prayers were answered by Christian God; 79 or 7.19% were converted to escape oppression. Christ's protection, God's blessing, new identity, and change of life were other factors for conversion. (2001:186). Among the 85 Christian Apatanis, K. Lalrinthanga finds that 65 of them or 76.47% believe that the Apatani are responsive to the gospel due to healing ministry; 62 or 72.94% due to power encounter, especially of exorcism; 57 or 67.05% due to the love of Christians for one another; 30 or 35.29% due to the shortage of Apatani priests and their discrimination, favouring only the rich and well-to-do people, and 14 or 16.47% say that the Apatani are responsive to the gospel due to the absence of discrimination among the Christians (2006:274). The reply from the 38 non-Christian Apatani are as follows: 28 or 73.68% believe that the Apatani are responsive to the gospel because of healing ministry; 21 or 55.26% due to the high cost of sacrifice in their religion; 19 or 50% due to people being tired of old religion, and 14 or 36.84% believe that the Apatani are responsive due to their curiosity (2006:284). The major reasons for converting to Christianity, according to 22 educated Apatani Christians are – the healing power of Jesus (63.63%); Jesus gives peace and eternal life (81.81%); the supremacy of Jesus over evil spirits (59.09%); and out of curiosity (36.36%) (2006:287). In view of these findings of a group of tribals Christians under the leadership of M. M. Thomas and Richard W. Taylor sum up the reasons for the conversion of tribals into Christianity as:

1. The Tribals saw that Christianity would give them relief from economic and social oppression and a new security.
2. They felt that by becoming Christian they would be able to better their life and dignity as human beings.
3. In the Christian mission, they experienced a loving concern and care that they had not experienced from others.
4. They were delivered from the fear of evil spirits.
5. They were saved from heavy expenses on sacrifices and feasts.
6. They saw a similarity between Christian and tribal life and customs.

Christ Among the Tribals

7. They felt that they had no alternative if they wanted to improve themselves under the existing circumstances.
8. In the fulness of time Providence extended His mighty hand to deliver the poor and the oppressed (Thomas and Taylor 1965:169-170).

Thus a combination of social, economic, political oppression and exploitation of the tribals, the disruption of the traditional cultures of the tribals especially by the British imposition of rule and administration, the possibility of cultural continuity in Christianity albeit in modified ones, the appeal of the gospel, especially the power of healing, over evil spirits, promise of heaven and eternal life, peace and a change to better life, and the like together have made Christianity as the best option for the tribals for their betterment both here and hereafter.

Tribal movement towards Christianity has been described as mass movements. Mass movements, understood as a result of group decisions is rare among the tribes. It is mostly individual conversion. Among the Maltos, George Edward found from six selected villages that 71 of 1098, that is only 7.9%, decided to be Christians in groups. Among the Garos, K. C. Marak did not find any group decisions, but they came to Christianity one by one (1996:121, 1998:156). The same case applied to the Nagas and the Mizos (Hrangkhuma 1989)⁴. The converts, accepting Christianity one by one, mostly against the tide, most often (may be without significant exception) suffered persecution mostly in the forms of derision, expulsion from families and/or the villages, but never from the tribe as a whole. In few cases there has been an attempt to kill the new converts. But the persecutions of Christian in tribal areas were never very severe and prolonged. As a result, converts

4. Donald A. McGavran defines People Movement as “A people movement results from the joint decision of a number of individuals—whether five or five hundred—all from the same people, which enables them to become Christians without social dislocation, while remaining in full contact with their non-Christian relatives, thus enabling other groups of that people, across the years, after suitable instruction, to come to similar decisions and form Christian churches made up exclusively of members of that people.” (Understanding Church Growth Reprinted 1982:335). In a consultation of Rereading Mass Movement, this definition was modified as, “a movement of people belonging to the same culture toward Christianity in significant

continue to live with their own people, in most cases with their immediate families, and slowly as converts increase, influence their own kith and kin.

THE PROCESSES OF CHRISTIANIZATION AMONG THE TRIBALS ⁵

Although minor differences are there in the processes of Christianization of the tribals due to differences of situation and others, there are a number of similarities. In his excellent study of the impact of Christianity on the Oraon of the Chainpur in the present Jharkhand state, Keshari N. Sahay finds six stages of cultural processes ⁶. The cultural processes he enumerated is helpful. However, some of his points could be combined and modified. The first stage normally is a period oscillation. The tribal converts, for whatever reason, have most often experience difficulty in adjusting to the new situation. The temptation of the old, especially during times of festivals and feasts have lured several of them back to the old. They oscillate between the old and the new. It is not true of all, but a good number

numbers over a fairly short period of time, where the converts are allowed to remain in the group, but without drastically disturbing their former socio-cultural integration.” (Hrangkhuma 1998:xx). The second definition could include group and individual decision. The important thing to note is that converts, whether in group, family or individuals continue to rub solders with their people, and over time, their relatives, neighbours and friends were influenced, till all the members of the village and eventually tribes become Christians.

5. Christianization is used in the sense of the growth of Christianity in its establishment, stability, and overall maturity in it becoming the choice religion of the people. I do not use indigenization for obvious reason. The current usage of the two terms contextualization and inculturation is reserved for a narrower concern. My understanding of contextualization has to do mostly with theological contextualization whereas inculturation has to do more on the life and expression of the Church in its local socio-cultural context, although the two overlapped in certain concerns.
6. Such stages are – Cultural Oscillation (the period of the simultaneous observance by the converts of beliefs and practices having Christian and Sarna elements), Cultural Scrutinization (a period when they select some Sarna elements to eliminate and some to retain), Retention (the period of differentiating between religious elements and social elements in their culture, and rationalizing which to eliminate and which to retain), Cultural Combination (a stage where the mixing up or combination of the retained Sarna elements with newly introduced Christian elements), cultural

of them, have at one time or another, reverted back. Most of them however, came back to the new as converts increased and as they attained a better understanding.

The next stage normally is a careful scrutiny. In most cases, especially, during the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries, it was the western missionaries who decided which of their culture is part of their old religion and which were purely social. This was already at work right from the time of conversion when the missionaries strictly forbade the participation of converts in pagan festivals and feasts and several others connected with sacrifice to demons, etc. Now, the converts themselves began to scrutinize their cultural elements, beginning to make sense of their differences from their non-Christian counterparts. Some were eliminated while some were retained following the guidelines of the missionaries. This experience has been lessened among the people evangelized during the last few decades such as the Maltos where a better understanding of culture and more modern strategies are employed by the missionaries of the Friends Missionary Prayer Band. It is during this time that a more smooth combination of the new Christian elements and the retained old elements mostly took place.

This has often followed, in varying degree of rapidity, by a re-evaluation of discarded cultural elements, and there have been attempts to re-introduce them. In Mizoram, the spring festival called Chapchar Kut has been reintroduced with different meaning. The attempt to reintroduce old Mizo tune is yet to have acceptance from some church leaders. We may call this the period of theological contextualization and inculturation of the church.

Some theological contextualization has been attempted. The major weakness of such attempt has been that instead of the present context, the old context – such as the old tribal

indigenization (a stage when Sarna elements are replaced by Christian ones), and Cultural retroversion (a period of revaluation of previously eliminated Sarna elements and their re-adoption after necessary modifications to suit the changed needs and outlook of the converts) Although I believe this is a bit too detail, overlapping so much, it is a very helpful concept (Sahay 1968:927-939).

worldview and so on, which are no longer well known by the new generation have been emphasized (Longchar 1997).

CONCLUSION

It is clear that the tribals have been much more open to the gospel and Christianization has been, we might say, completed in such tribes as the Mizos and the Nagas where it is claimed that the entire tribes have become Christian. In such tribes, serious attempt begin to appear to contextualize Christian theology and inculturation of the church has been vigourously going on. In the older tribal churches such as among the Oraon, the Mundas and the Kharias in central India, and the Garos and Khasis in Meghalaya, where the entire members of such tribes have not embraced Christianity, the same progress in terms of contextualization of theology and inculturation of the church have been taking place. It seems to be a matter of a short time when the entire Garo tribe will become Christian. It may take more time for the Khasis to complete Christianization with the resurgence of traditional Khasi religion. It seems a matter of a few years for the Maltos to embrace Christianity. The Bodo Christians are active in working together to make unique contribution in the progress of their country, and the preservation of some of their valuable cultural elements. The Arunachalis are very responsive to the gospel lately, and a vigourous evangelistic ministry is going on. The Christians are concerned to preserve their beautiful culture and are working to Christianize their culture (Tarchoya 2004). It is hopeful that other tribes where Christianity has made inroad will continue to grow.

There are other tribes in which the gospel have not been presented meaningfully as yet. As I wrote in 1994, the hope of the tribes in India is Jesus Christ with his transforming gospel correctly presented to them (1994:151). They need more knowledgeable, committed champions, to awaken them to their need of spiritual, social and economic liberation. They need people to help them participate more fully in their own liberation and development, and search for identity.

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