

## **PART – IV**

### **CHAPTER IX: CONCLUDING REMARKS**

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## **Concluding Remarks**

It is time to bring together the various strands of our study, presented in the foregoing pages. The materials presented in Part II and III running into 314 pages are eventually 'raw', untreated ones. Nevertheless, they are speaking materials. The indigenous tribal religion has volumes to convey to the listeners. Eventually revealing that every religion experience in itself a primitive state of imagination and concept about nature and supernatural, divinity and spiritual, ethics and morality. It seems that only in primitive religions the whole of mankind meets unconsciously (Sema 1980: 69).

Though differing from one another in form and ritual all tribal religions share a common belief that Nature is animated by spirits. This is a world-wide tribal belief. It is popularly characterized as animism.

The indigenous religion of the Kukis was believed in soul, spirits, etc. Beliefs in soul, ghost, spirits, which accompanied sacrifices of animals, have all been replaced by belief in one True God, Jesus. Belief in soul continues among the Kukis for soul is the immortal, incorporeal which lives within our body. The soul leaves the body after death depending upon one's deeds during his/her lifetime. The souls were categorized into good and bad. They now believe that the soul goes only to the abode of the dead i.e. Heaven or Hell. Reincarnation is no more believed since the Christian philosophy does not believe in it. Ghosts were believed to be the spirits of those who had an unnatural death. But due to Christianity and also because of modern western education they have realized now that ghosts are just perception of the mind.

Spirits were believed to be the cause of ill health, death, or anything bad which happened to them. To overcome this they took help of the village *thiempu* who had the dual role of a priest and a medicine man. But in the present society his role has been replaced by the Church pastor and the modern medicine doctors. So no one consults the

thiempu. They did not have any specified spot which was believed to be sacred and related to any God. Now, the church and the synagogue are the only sacred places of the Kukis. Ancestors are no more worshipped to keep them in good temper which was done rather for their blessings.

Charms are no more used to protect from evil spirits for they no longer believe in any evil spirits and are considered to be irrational. They do not have any restrictions or taboo for childhood, during menstruation, menopause, pregnancy, etc. The absence of the concept of pollution and purity in their society makes the tribal lead a free style of life.

They now pray to Jesus for anything and everything. They attend the church service regularly and make offerings to Jesus only. Every able person offers tithe to the Church. Feasting among the Kukis is an excuse for gathering and meeting friends and relatives. Feasting is frequent during the festivals of Christmas and Kut. Fear and curiosity to know the future has been and seem to be there in human mind. So even now the village elders are approached to predict about natural calamities with their wisdom and experience. Ordeals are in practice even now in some villages. This may be because of its instant judgment without incurring any expenditure. Dreams are also believed and taken quite seriously among the Kukis till date.

The modern medical doctors only render treatment to the people now. They no more perform any kind of ritual for economic activities. They now only ask for the blessings of Jesus in any undertakings of the believers. Abortion was and still considers to be a disgrace to the family. Other than the restrictions on food of the pregnant woman, there are no other restrictions for her. Cross-cousin marriage is the most preferred form of marriage among the Kukis. Bride-price is still continuing and majority of the respondents also prefer to continue this custom. Divorce has become a rare case even now.

Incestuous relationship is looked down and considered a repulsive act. Natural and unnatural death are treated normally and buried in the cemetery with proper rituals.

The Kuki society is kinship based and family has a strong bond. The descent is patrilineal. The chief of the village has the authority to allot land for settlement and for cultivation. The youth dormitory of the boys has vanished after the coming of modern Western education.

Among the Kuki and the non-Manipuri societies the priest was only the male while among the Meitie both male and female priests were present. The role of the Kuki and the non-Manipuri women were not much as compared to that of the Meitie women. The status of the Kuki women has been uplifted after the coming of Christianity. The Meitie women still enjoy a high status in the society and the non-Manipuri women do not have sound status as compared with their Meitie and Kuki counterparts.

Christianity among the Kukis has come in the form of a blessing. 96.11% of the Kuki respondents are Christian believers. The effect of Christianity and the modern Western education it has brought is manifold. The tribal way of life has been changed-spiritually, economically, socially, and culturally. Buddhism could not have impact among the hill and the valley people of the state. The Kukis are also of the opinion that the development of their society is very slow. Acculturation among the three communities is very insignificant. The Kukis do not prefer to accept anything related to religion from the Meitie Hindus, though they participate in the festivals of each other.

Eventhough, the Kukis have inhabited even before the coming of the British but they have not adopted any traits of Hinduism from the Meities who have adopted the religion from Bengali preachers. Philosophically, spiritually they may be having faith in the True God, but practically the reasons for converting to Christianity may be because they do not have to make sacrifices of their livestock. They also got the benefit

of the modern medicines which the missionaries brought to them instead of the traditional medicine of the thiempu. As Misra has put forward that there is a conscious and deliberate process of opting for an organized religion. Because of ignorance about the basic tenets of Islam, the choice is limited between two alternatives-Hinduism and Christianity. In return for his allegiance to Hinduism, the tribal convert may be enlisted in a low caste that does not ensure the upward social mobility and progress. The sacrifice of the security provided by a larger tribal identity, in return for an organized religious experience within the narrow confines of a low caste is considered to be a bad bargain (1980: 94). The tribal belief has had to be modified by theological touch. Christianity in the tribal world is, therefore, a new form assuming the old name (Sema 1980:74).

We are often opposed to the tribal religions for their inconsistencies and contradictions. But controversy is equally rich in all other religions. One may not have the slightest support that there is an act of God in the smallest variation of an animal species, but still one may be a sincere Christian. Why then do we parade about primitive inconsistency? Jesus says: "Sell all thou hast, give to the poor and follow me". This injunction is an impossible challenge for Christians today. The poverty-stricken people followed Christ as their savior, and because they were tired of serving and propitiating lower deities in the form of releasing healthier fowls, pigs, dogs and so on as cursed animals to the wild jungles. Now Christianity in transition has made Christ the most expensive God. Poor man's fowls, pigs, dogs, money, paddy and all that were served for propitiation to the demons are now demanded in the form of offering to the church. It may, however, be interesting to note that tribal Christians, however, poor they may be, are affected by what Sema had called *hope mania* studying Christian feelings, it is difficult to distinguish the poor from the rich. All are equally under the spell of "hope". They are prepared to sacrifice a part of their material possessions for the good cause of spirituality

and for the extensions of the kingdom of God (on earth), keeping mission fields and evangelization work alive (Sema 1980: 74-75).

Sema in his article, "A critical Assessment of Christian Acculturation of India" felt that without having the advantage of script and scripture and established dogmas to its credit would not have come up to the expected mark so as to complete as a system with the doctrinaire religion. Historically, any primitive society which remains untouched by Western civilization and its religion in some respects tended to remain still primitive. Tribal faith assumes to be monotheistic, but the only God seems helpless against the evil influence that menacing and exacting demons and other lower deities have over man. When Christianity informs tribal people that God is all powerful and supreme over other spirits and demons, the poverty-stricken section readily accepted Christianity happily. At first the chiefs were allergic to the faces of Christian preacher but later on they too were carried away by the common waves or simply gave up their struggle in their most well-known tribal way of democratic spirits (1980:72).

Since the tribal religion seems to share a common substance of all religions, it may be improper to say that tribal religion is already destroyed by foreign elements. The tribal religion in North-East India is forced to remain incognito in the foreign element asserted Sema (1980:74). They are enjoying from both the side. They have retained whatever financially beneficial customs from the old tradition and adopted the economical security and development aspect from Christianity. At the same time they have retained their clan identity intact. None of the Kuki converts have taken Christian names.

However, the tribals living in hilly areas in isolation are facing several problems such as of illiteracy, backwardness, exploitation, etc. The cultural changes which have crept into tribal society have given new dimensions to tribal culture.

The tribals have several other general problems and the roots of these problems are in politics. The catalogue of problem would be ever complete, for the problems are multiple. Future researchers should look into these problems areas like-regional autonomy, distillation of country liquor, maintaining tribal ethnicity, education, health, etc.

And we conclude with the statements made by Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru in his Foreward to Verrier Elwin's book, "A Philosophy for NEFA"-

"I had no superiority over them (tribals). My ideas were not clear at all. But I felt that we should avoid two extreme courses: one was to treat them as anthropological specimens for study and the other was to allow them to be engulfed by the masses of Indian humanity."

In the second edition of Elwin's book, he laid down five fundamental principles also known as '*Panchseel*' given in 1985 for tribal development.

It is clear that we do not want to improve a non-tribal way of life on the tribals. They should develop in accordance with their own traditions. However, we can talk about the integration of tribals, i.e. the change of tribals from their primordial way of life to a secular way of life; we have to draw the tribal people into the mainstream of national life (Doshi 2002:380).



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