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The Impact of Colonialism on the Church in Chotanagpur

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"Shall we go on conferring our Civilization upon the peoples that sit in darkness, or shall we give those poor things a rest?" Mark Twain

Colonialism is defined in *The Reader's Digest Complete Wordfinder* as "a policy of acquiring or maintaining colonies", a policy which is "regarded as the economic exploitation of weak or backward people by a larger power."¹ David J.B., in the *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, describes colonialism as "the domination by one society or one people of another and the relationship, processes, and effects that domination sets in motion."² Balandier, in the *International Encyclopedia of Social Science*, defines colonialism as "domination of an alien minority" and "an assertion of racial and cultural superiority, over a materially inferior native majority."³ According to *The World Book of Encyclopaedia*, "Colonialism is a term that usually refers to the rule of a group of people by a foreign power. The people and their land make up a colony. Most colonies are separated by an ocean from the ruling nation. The foreign power sends people to live in the colony, to govern it and to use it as a source of wealth. The rulers and the ruled of most colonies belong to different racial groups. The rulers have a more complex civilization and ad-

vanced technology than do the people of most colonies."⁴ Imperialism, which refers to a rule and policy of acquiring dependent territories or extending a country's influence through trade, diplomacy, etc., is often synonymous with colonialism.

All the definitions above have one thing in common: in colonialism there is a relationship of domination and a relationship of subservience. The first results in conquest, sovereignty and exploitation by the rich and the powerful of the poor, the weak and the backward. The second entails subjection, passive resistance and the inferiority complex of the native majority. The first camp has the upper hand in the exploitation of the natural resources, control of know-how, etc.; as a result, they emerge as far superior to their counterparts who have a backward economy, slow rhythm of life and poor self image as they are subjugated by the external alien forces and vested interests who mercilessly suppress any revolt. One of the main purposes of colonies was to make economic gains in terms of land and such valuable products as gold and spices. Another aim was to expand industry and

trade by capturing sources of raw materials, markets for goods that could be exported to other countries, and opportunities for investment. In addition, colonialism was practised by nations to establish a rapport with other nations, to gain military advantages and to spread their 'superior' religion.

The Church of Chotanagpur is basically constituted by Adivasis who fit into the second category, i.e., the inferior and the dominated, the impoverished and the alienated. They are the native inhabitants of the land. But down the centuries there has been an influx of many groups of strangers into the region with their supposedly superior race and power.

The British imperialists came to Chotanagpur in the 18th century. Since then their style of functioning and attitude have affected the tribal way of life too. Missionaries, both Lutheran and Catholic, from the colonial countries had a field day in Chotanagpur from the 19th century onwards and, consequently, they too had a big impact on the socio-cultural and politico-economic life of the tribals. Oppression, exploitation, and imposition of an alien culture, religion, language and values, having a far-reaching impact, are some of the hallmarks of colonialism. The ideology behind the whole process is the false conviction of ethnic superiority over other groups with supposedly inferior and undeveloped culture and values. Chotanagpur, the traditional habitat of the *Proto-Australoids*⁵ and *Austro-Asiatic*⁶ stocks of the Adivasi groups, namely the Uraon, the Ho, the Munda, the Kharia, the Santal, etc., for the past

the question is valid as to whether there is any unique and typical influence of colonialism on the tribal Church or whether it is the same as the impact of westernization, industrialization, modernization, etc.?

The present paper attempts to objectively investigate the dynamics and consequences of colonialism during and after British imperial rule. An effort is also made to reread the signs of those times in order to bring out the voice of the voiceless and politically colonized Adivasis of Chotanagpur. Hence, it is imperative to identify the characteristic features, policies and effects of the much hated term 'colonialism' from a post-colonial perspective in the context of the Church in Chotanagpur. In the first section, the topic is introduced and the objectives clarified. The second section gives a background of tribal Chotanagpur and the confusion that prevailed due to the influx of the colonizers as well as the circumstances which led to the beginning of Christianity in the tribal region. The third part of the paper deals with the socio-cultural, religious, political, developmental and psychological impact of colonization in Chotanagpur in the context of the Church. The final section attempts to set a vision for the third millennium.

1. Background of the Study

1.1 Tribal Bihar: Tribal Bihar is so called because a high percentage of India's tribal population live there. The Southern part of the state of Bihar and Santal Pargans, some portions of Orissa and also Madhya Pradesh comprise Chotanagpur. The Chotanagpur plateau

is full of big and small hills, of a height ranging from 1000 to 3000 ft. above the sea level. Till recently these had a very thick forest cover of valuable trees with varieties of animal species. The Chotanagpur region is rich in mineral and natural resources. It comprises 79,476 square kilometres of land yielding 48% of India's coal, 4% of iron-ore, 48% of bauxite, 45% of mica, 100% of kyanite, 90% of apatite, 100% of copper and 33% of fireclay. The region has also other minerals like china-clay, manganese, limestone, chromite, asbestos, uranium, silica, dolomite, etc.⁸ Thus Chotanagpur occupies a key position in the national economy.

According to the 1961 Census, 29 Scheduled Tribes were listed in this area. Father Lievens, the pioneering Jesuit missionary, as well as other early missionaries, mainly worked among the Uraonis, Mundas, Kharias, Santals and Hos, and today the tribal Church is primarily composed of these tribes. These tribes were the original settlers of the land, and studies show that they migrated to this region at an early period, moving in from the Ganges valley and Sone river through Palamau. The non-tribals, who were basically invaders or traders, infiltrated into Chotanagpur only after the 16th century. The Santals are the largest of the Scheduled Tribes of Bihar constituting 36.7% of the total tribal population. Their concentration is mainly in Dumka district where they constitute about 73% of the total population. Mundas are the second largest tribe constituting 15.67% of the total tribal population and are concentrated mainly in the Khunti region. The Hos constitute 10.8% of the

tribal population of Bihar and some 99.8% of them are concentrated in Singhbhum district. The Uraons constitute about 17.5% of the tribal population of Bihar and are mainly concentrated in Ranchi, Lohardaga, Gumla and Palamau Districts of Bihar. The Kharias comprise less than half per cent of the total population of Bihar and are chiefly found in Ranchi, Singhbhum and Gumla Districts.

1.2. British Rule and the Dikuization of the Tribal Chotanagpur: According to Mahto, Chotanagpur came in contact with the Europeans for the first time in 1769 when Captain Camac, a military administrator, touched the north-eastern fringe of Khadgadli, the north-western part of Chatra, and then Ramgarh, establishing some sort of political suzerainty over the local *Rajas* (or Chiefs who did not receive the honours of kingship or special property rights) and *Zamindars* (landlords). In 1765, Shah Alam III granted the *Diwani* (revenue paying district) of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the East India Company. Chotanagpur, as part of the *Diwani* of Bihar, thus came under British rule. To get a permanent fixed sum of money, the British granted the Zamindars permanent settlement of the land from which they could collect revenues. This gave rise to the landlord system. These *Zamindars* came to be known as *Dikas* and their domination, *dikuization*. The *Rajas* and the landlords were asked to establish police stations and appoint police officers. This system proved to be very expensive, and most of these police officers were from outside Chotanagpur and naturally sided with the landlords to extract ex-

system, political, social, economic or religious, that would give them self-identity and an assurance for their existence and a peaceful life.

1.4 The Genesis of Christianity in Chotanagpur: The circumstances in which Christianity came to Chotanagpur are interesting. According to Mahto, by the year 1780, a military garrison at Ramgarh was established. The Indian and European regiments were kept in Ramgarh, Doranda and Hazaribagh. It was in view of satisfying the spiritual needs of the soldiers that Catholic priests visited them from time to time. Thus, the first tribal contacts with Christianity in Chotanagpur may date from 1835. The Anglican Bishop Metropolitan of Calcutta was reported to be contemplating as early as 1840 to provide for the spiritual sustenance of the tribals. Two years later, a Church was built in Hazaribagh for the soldiers. We find no other references to missionary activities in the region until the German Missionaries came to Ranchi in the year 1845. The missionaries who came and worked in Chotanagpur between 1845 to 1947 were classified according to the following categories by Mahto: (i) the Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Mission from Berlin; (ii) the Chotanagpur Mission working under the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign parts from London; (iii) the Roman Catholic Mission from Belgium; (iv) the Scottish Free Church Mission from Scotland, and (v) the Dublin University Mission from Ireland.¹¹ Here we will limit ourselves to the Catholic Mission, though most of the findings of our investigation are applicable to the other

Churches as well. The Catholic Church came to Chotanagpur in 1869. But it spread faster with the arrival of Fr. Constant Lievens in 1885. In that year there were only 2,000 converts; but in 1893 the figure jumped to 100,000. In 1930 the figure rose to 148,000 in the old Ranchi District alone; and in 1961, the Catholic population was 236,073 which shot up to 505,285 in the year 1967. At present there are more than nine lakh Christians in Chotanagpur.

1.5 The Cross-cultural Inadequacy of the Colonizers: The colonizers were not able to accept the natives within their own socio-cultural milieu. Their world-view was totally different from that of their counterparts in Chotanagpur, and they were unable to go beyond their own understanding of civilization. The system from within which the colonizers functioned despised the Indian situation. That is why people like William Wilberforce and James Mill described Indian civilization in contemptuous language. Wilberforce termed the condition of the people of India as 'wretched' and 'sunk in deep ignorance'.¹² James Mill disdainfully wrote that "the inhabitants of Hindustan rank much lower in the scale of civilization than the nations of Europe". In his opinion "in truth, the Hindu, like the eunuch, excels in the quality of a slave"; he is "dissembling, treacherous, mendacious to an excess which surpasses even the usual measure of uncultivated society"; is "cowardly and unfeeling"; and "in the physical sense, disgustingly unclean in person and house". Thus Indian culture, from the colonizer's point of view, was "infantile and childish, similar to the Whites' descriptions of

blacks in America or Africa or indigenous people in South America".¹³ The attitude to the Adivasis of Chotanagpur was no different.

1.6 Colonialism in Chotanagpur: Kraft opines that a naive monocultural myopic perspective looks at reality from one point of view only. The British came with such a myopic vision. They took only their world-view into account. Hence, their approach was biased and conditioned by the indoctrination they had received all through their life in their country. The very fact that they were monocultural made them *naively ethnocentric*. They judged native cultural values from their own perspective. Their ethnocentric attitude prevented them from appreciating and understanding the point of view of the locals. Their *absolutistic* tendency was more dangerous than anything else. They regarded the point of view of their own culture and society as absolute and invincible. They believed that their perspectives were the only right ones, and that all the other world-views were either defective or relative. In their perspective of *naive realism*, the colonizers equated their perceptions of reality with reality itself. They perceived their way of life, their culture, their religion, etc., as superior to all others. Hence, others had to be civilized and *domesticated*. They had no respect for other peoples' ways and looked down upon other languages, perspectives, customs, etc., as unrefined and crude. This condemnation of other cultures stemmed from their limited cultural perspectives. In their view, there was nothing wrong with this. Their use of *pejorative terms* was another example of their *Eurocentrism*. The

natives were described in value-loaded and biased terms such as '*savans*', meaning *pagans*, *heathens*, *superstitions*, etc. Local customs and cultural practices were dismissed as *primitive*, *pre-scientific* and *pre-logical* in relation to their own *advanced*, *scientific* and *rational* civilization. The monoculturalism of the colonizers was characterized by arrogance, with a view to making the latter adopt European customs as superior to their own. It is rather obvious that many Westerners held the *One-World-Culture Position* "that the world is all moving in one direction and it is just a matter of time before everyone will be westernized, speaking English and thinking in western ways".¹⁴

2. Impact of Colonialism on the Tribal Church: A True Story

2.1 The Colonizer-Missionary

Interaction:

2.1.1 No Nexus between Colonizers and Missionaries: Missionaries have often been branded as agents of colonialism. In the early stages of colonization, political powers depended on the travelogues and reports of the missionaries who offered first hand information about the natives. And though the reports of the missionaries were subjective and very often biased, they were useful for furthering the cause of the empire. Sardar Panikkar in his *Asia and Western Dominance* wrote about the "mental and spiritual conquest as supplementing the political authority already enjoyed by Europe."¹⁵ On the other hand, the Chotanagpur missionaries may not have been in league with the British Government.

One of the reasons for this was due to the fact that the British imperialists, who patronised the Church of England in India, preferred consolidating Protestantism to Catholicism.¹⁶ It is true that missionaries came as exporters of Christianity, yet their involvement in the social justice issues won them the hearts of the locals.

2.1.2 Colonizers versus Missionaries: Unlike Goa where 'gun and the Gospel' were carried on the same ship¹⁷, the situation in Chotanagpur was totally different. The tribals of the region were illiterate, simple, innocent of the crooked ways of the world. According to Fernandes and Chaudhury, the British colonial attitude toward Indian tribes ranged from seeing them as wild or criminal to the realization that they needed special protection. Thus colonial justification took two main forms: one, to present India as uncivilized country, and two, to present India as a country divided among castes, tribes, linguistic, racial and religious groups constantly at war with each other; peace and unity could only be established by an external force.¹⁸ The prime aim of the East India Company was to make money, so they continued the Moghul system of revenue (tribute) collection from the territories. Over and above, the Indian *Jagirdars* (lease holders), landlords, etc., who were supported by the colonial machinery, proved to be worse than their British counterparts. The revenue collectors (*Zamindars*) now came to be regarded as landlords. The aboriginals continued to lose their land. The missionaries fought tooth and nail against all these forms of injustices. The Lutheran mission had shown the way,

and the Catholics took it up as long as Lievens was active. Cases were fought in court, and the missionaries tried their best to get back the lost lands of the tribals, and in many cases they succeeded in their efforts. Thus the period of British rule in Chotanagpur was a time of internal disturbance and unrest.¹⁹ Till 1858, the East India Company was the paramount power. In order to protect its interests it had to maintain a military force. In mid-November 1889, the *Zamindars* accused the Catholic missionaries of inciting the people to revolt. Father Lievens was asked by the government to justify himself and his workers before Mr. Grimley, the Commissioner of Chotanagpur.

2.2 Socio-Cultural Impact:

2.2.1 Structural Disintegration: The colonizers' insensitivity to the local customs, laws and practices is very obvious in the following areas:

(a) Notion of Private Property: The British were responsible for the introduction of the notion of private property into the tribal heartland, where the Mundas, Uraons, Hos, Santals and Kharias previously had no idea of individual or private ownership of land. The system the British were familiar with had two protagonists – the landlord who owned the land though he did not cultivate it, and the cultivator who did not own the land but cultivated it. Then the British introduced the *Maharaja* to whom they gave the status of an European king as regards land. *Jagirdars* were the subordinate tenure holders under the *Maharaja*. They were regarded as landlords. When the *Mundas*

(Mahatos) and the Mankis (headmen of the village) resisted the new system, the British assumed that they were the original holders of the land which had been granted to them in the past by the Raja. They thus concluded that the common people were mere tenants under the Mundas and Mankis. Again, according to the new system, legal documents were required to prove the ownership of the land. The tribals did not have any legal documents. The only proof that they had of their land holdings was the stone-tablets in the villages signifying that they were *khuntkattidars* (sons of the family of original founder). Finally, on specific issues the British relied on the version of the landlords. The colonial administration did not understand the language of the illiterate tribals who were ignorant of the law. As a result, the rulers depended on the interpretations and reports of the landlords themselves, which the latter manipulated for their own benefit.

(b) *Total Collapse of the Traditional Parha System:* The Parha (confederation of villages) system was common among the Oraons. The traditional socio-political organization was based on a system of village *Panchayats* which, for all practical purposes, took care of law and order in the village. For issues involving more than one village, the *Panchayats* were confederated into a number of *Parhas*, consisting of five to twenty villages. Each *Parha* was headed by *Parha belas* (*Parha* king) or *Parha* Chief. He was chosen from among the *Mahitos* (village headmen) of the con-

federating villages. The Mundas also had a similar socio-political system of administration called the *Manki* system. With the imposition of the alien British system of administration, the tribal system of administration collapsed completely. The various changes in the administrative set up did not in any way help the Mundas and the Oraons. The police were from outside who did not know the local language and customs of the people and sided with the *Jagir-dars* in all their confrontations. The main grievance of the natives was the dispossession of their land by foreigners, Muslims, Sikhs and others. If the people went to court they did not fare any better. Roy writes: "With foreigners from Bengal and Bihar, unacquainted with the customs, the land tenures, and the language of the people in all subordinate Government posts, and with the alien landlord lording it over in the villages, the Munda had indeed a very trying time of it."²⁰

(c) *Migration of the Tribals:* The introduction of the new system compelled the tribals to migrate to the tea gardens of Assam, the indigo plantations of Champaran or take up forest-clearing in Andaman islands and road-construction in the Northeast, and to labour in the brick-kilns of the neighbouring states. There are more than twenty five thousand tribals in Delhi alone from Chotanagpur. More than fifteen thousand girls work there as domestic staff. Tribals were exploited as cheap labour since their own agricultural lands could not take the pressure of the increasing population any more. The establishment of heavy factories in the tribal region as well as mining operations led to the displacement of the locals. Hence, the original owners of the

land became paupers and strangers in their own territory.

(d) *Tribal Reaction to Colonization:* The British did not interfere with the internal administration of the area till 1834. But they later acknowledged that had they actively participated in the administration and police system, things would have been a little better. This indicates that there was a conducive atmosphere for colonial agents to thrive, and they were ultimately responsible for the plight of the natives. As a result, only those villages whose headmen were strong managed to stick together while others were totally dispossessed by aliens. Thus there was a transformation of the communal ownership of tribal villages into individual ownership. There was a lot of resistance to the new system which flared up in the form of Agrarian Adivasi uprisings. These uprisings against the landlords in 1789, 1797, 1807, 1812, and 1820 were suppressed with the help of the British. Before the rising of 1832, a fresh cause of discontent developed. The *thikadars* (contractors) obtained from the young *Maharaja* temporary leases of the villages as payment for their goods. They took the land from the Adivasis and levied rents and other services. *Bethbegari* (forced labour) was yet another form of oppression of poor tribals.

Many Christians did not follow the advice of the missionaries and lost their lands. Hence, they grew suspicious that these were hand-in-glove with the colonizers. The *Sardar Movement*²¹ in 1867 made use of the discontent among the people and sent petitions to the government. But, since many of the *Sardars*

were Christians, the government suspected the mission, and the Christians themselves grew suspicious of the missionaries being in league with the government since the petitions of the *Sardars* had failed.

The attitude of the landlords to the Catholic missionaries was the same as that towards the Lutheran. They opposed their work. They persecuted the converts, threatened to kill the missionary De Smet, and even sent forty armed men to do so, though the threat was not carried out. The attitude of the colonial government in Chotanagpur was that of wait and see. According to De Sa, they "did not interfere with the apostolate of the mission groups, as long as peace was preserved." It was obvious that "they were not directly interested in religion or in the conversion movement, provided the missionaries and the converts did not interfere in the land question. Their main interest was to ensure that peace was preserved". Lievens knew all this and wished to have the government officers on his side. He avoided anything that might have antagonized the officials. Yet, "in his mission policy he adopted certain procedures which were risky and could give rise to suspicion."²² Though Lievens was very cautious, at times he was forced to defend himself before the government. The government was watching his activities closely, for fear of a recurrence of disturbances among the Christians. That is precisely why, in 1887, Lievens received a letter from the Commissioner of Chotanagpur asking him to justify himself against serious accusations that he had encouraged the earlier sedition by reaffirming the claims of the Mundas and assisting

them in the re-establishment of their *raj* (kingdom). Lievens replied to the Commissioner who was satisfied with the reply. Discontent built up and burst out again in the *Birsa Rising*²³ of August 1895. For the first time the people even attacked the houses and persons of the missionaries, whom they had long regarded as their friends and protectors.

2.2.3 Colonialism and Cultural Deprivation: A significant fallout of the process of colonialism was the *cultural colonization* characterised by the imposition of an alien culture on the natives under the pretext of its superiority and refinement. Colonialism and deculturation are inseparable. Deculturation can truly be called the handmaid of colonialism. With western cultural values being transmitted in heavy doses, the natives had very little option left. All this came under the garb of 'social justice' and 'true religion'. The colonialists imposed their own values as 'superior' and native religious practices were described as "worship of the devil".

2.2.4 From Colonialism to Detribalization: The motivation of the colonizers was such that, on the one hand, some of them were more tribalized than the Adivasis themselves, and on the other, the impact of colonialism was so great that some educated tribals were more westernized than the westerners themselves. The fusion of the western and tribal cultures resulted in a process of detribalization whereby the natives started losing their identity as Adivasis. Critiquing the monumental work of the missionaries, Minz says that though the contribution of foreign

and western missionaries is accepted and gratefully acknowledged by many, their attitude to tribal religion and culture in general had an adverse effect on tribal society. In some sense, the Aryan attitude to the tribals was carried over by the white missionaries.²⁴ The colonial policy of sucking the wealth of the region continues even to this day in various forms of exploitation. The plight of the Adivasis, due to unthoughtful uranium mining in Sighbhum, for instance, results not only in the dispossession of ancestral land and cultural heritage but also in the victimization of Adivasis to various dreaded diseases due to radiation. Displacement is correlated with detribalization as it affects social tradition, social institutions like *Panchayat*, kinship, clan, family, village-community, social structure, religious structure, etc. Singh offers an analysis of the change in social structure, cultural values and institutions in India and assesses their implication for contemporary problems.²⁵ The same principles of structural change are applied to Adivasi society as well, because the changes in rural India, which constitute the dominant sector of our society, are bringing about a process of social restructuring.

2.3 Religious Impact

2.3.1 Colonization of the Church: About a hundred and twenty five years of Christianity in Chotanagpur has definitely contributed to education, justice, health and hygiene, medical facilities, socio-economic developmental programmes, etc., but at the same time it has also nurtured a culture that alienated the converts from their own roots

by inculcating in them new habits, new customs and even new symbols and languages. An alien Church liturgy has now become so much part of the tribal Christian community that any attempt to introduce tribal festivals like *Karam*, *Sarhul*, etc., in the Church are often resisted. Gothic buildings, imported paintings and religious art and music alien to the tribals were brought in. Christians were earlier forbidden to go to the *sarna* grove, forbidden to invoke their protector spirits, forbidden to participate in any of the religious ceremonies of their *sarna* brethren. There was a time when traditional tribal instruments were not allowed in the Church.

2.3.2 Colonization of Tribal Theology: Colonial theology was elaborated by European thought and culture. The cultural needs of the colonized were neglected, only their "spiritual" needs were catered to. The concern of the Church seemed to be more in terms of correct behaviour, the will of God, right doctrine, etc., rather than a genuine effort for integral liberation that not only took into account the individual but also the entire tribal society. There was a process of promoting faith without justice in the theological teachings of the local church even though Lievens had given a social-justice orientation to the missionary enterprise. Though there is now a genuine attempt in some quarters of the Church to make theological studies contextual, it remains by and large capitalistic, western and colonial in approach. Colonial theology did not take into account the struggle of the people. But theology has to be formed in a historical, social and cultural situation. The starting of the Kanke Regional

Theological Centre (RTC) at Boreya, Ranchi, was a positive step in this direction. However, the resistance it faced initially is indicative of the deep-rooted process of enslavement to the West which compels one to think only in terms of European categories even if the context is tribal. The West, thus, becomes a reference point. There is still a sign of hope. Thanks to the late Bishop Dr. Philip Ekka, S.J., who revolutionized and reinterpreted the concept of inculturation in the context of the Chotanagpur Church, and Fathers Albert Van Exem, John Lakra, and Paulus Kullu, and Bishop Dr. Nirmal Minz, pioneers of tribal theology in Chotanagpur, a whole new direction has been given to tribal theological reflection.

2.4 Political Impact

2.4.1 The Great Divide: One of the policies of the British was to 'divide and rule'. When the missionaries came to Chotanagpur their only aim seemed to have been: 'give me souls' come what may. The Lutheran missionaries were the first to enter the Adivasi belt, soon followed by the Anglicans and the Jesuits. As a matter of fact, whenever new missions arrived, the converts started switching sides. The first Lutheran converts, for instance, disillusioned by their missionaries, joined the Anglicans. Again, with the coming of the Jesuits, the former Lutherans and the Anglicans became Roman Catholics. Thus, there was an unfortunate cut-throat competition among various missionary groups. It was so bad that in some parts of Chotanagpur there is still animosity between Christians of different denomi-

nations. The missionaries still try to woo people from each other's groups. Thus it is often Lutherans versus Roman Catholics.

The missionary enterprise in Chotanagpur is also responsible for triggering off divisions in the Adivasi community. Earlier the people were one though they had their own separate ethnic identities. But after some of them converted to Christianity there was a division between Christian Adivasis and the rest. The Christian feeling of superiority over the non-Christian Adivasis was mainly due to better schooling facilities. The height of all this was in the 1960's when the late Member of Parliament, Mr. Kartik Uraon, proposed a bill in the Parliament that Christian converts should not enjoy the constitutional privileges meant for the Scheduled Tribes on the ground that they were not Adivasis at all. The impact of colonization on the locals was so strong that cultural forms in traditional societies were reconstructed and transformed by colonial technologies of conquest and rule, creating new categories and oppositions between the colonizers and the colonized - European and Asian, modern and traditional, Christians and non-Christians, tribals and non-tribals, even male and female.

2.4.2 The Tribal Church and Political Consciousness: Father Brenton T. Bradly, one of the earliest missionaries, is quoted by Dharmaraj as having written in 1920, "The three-greatest factors contributing to India's progress are the Bible, the English language and modern education. England has been at

the back of all three, and these have struck at what has always been typical of the old, undemocratic India. England has built democracy in India's thinking"²⁶. The above observations are definitely biased. The missionary enterprise in Chotanagpur, too, had a similar bias about Adivasis. In the political field, there were strong reservations and suspicions about the Jharkhand Movement for a separate state. The reasons for this attitude were not totally unjustified. There was fear of the Government, and fundamentalists accused the missions of encouraging secessionist movements.

There was a time when a 'missionary hand' was suspected in every so-called 'anti-national' activity. It was due to the influence of the Church that Christian Adivasis were subdued. Their political consciousness and Adivasi sensitivity became dormant. There were many incidents of dehumanization and human rights violations, but there was passive resistance most of the time. What was encouraged by Church leadership were a few demonstrations, *dharms*, memoranda to the Prime Minister and President, and that was all. History is a mute witness to the tribal agitations and uprisings against exploitation being reduced to pilgrimages, prayer services and mild demonstrations. Another crucial issue that antagonizes the locals is the fact that there is a lot of hue and cry among the clergy whenever there is a murder of a priest or a nun or when the institutional Church is the target of attack, but when the common tribal people are murdered, and their women raped, this barely causes a ripple.

2.5 Psychological Left-overs of Colonialism:

2.5.1 The Tribal Crisis of Identity: The impact of colonialism was so great that its leftovers can still be seen in the tribal Church. As we have said above, the colonizers were a product of their cultural times which determined their outlook and personality. Their task was not easy as they not only faced opposition and physical attacks but also high risks of casualties due to suffering and sickness. But they always came to the natives with a feeling of superiority, political, military, cultural and religious. Hence, the locals were 'heathens', 'pagans', 'not worthy', etc. The locals acquired the psychology of the 'discovered'. Their inferiority feelings were accompanied by fear. There was an experience of 'outside' help in the face of oppression by the landlords. They deeply realized that their 'liberation' from the clutches of the Zamindars was not possible as long as they continued in their old religion. And hence, they themselves went to the missions and requested to be incorporated into the Church. A feeling of subjection to the foreign religion became necessary as their own religion did not seem powerful enough to solve their problems. In Chotanagpur the perception of the colonized got so distorted that they accepted reality the way the colonizers defined it. The people are still under psychological stress, strain, a sense of insecurity, lack of self-esteem.

2.5.2 Intellectual Colonization: Western Education was a hegemonic imposition, and had an adverse impact on the locals. A sense of subservience

to the western intellectual came with colonial education. A lack of self-confidence and an inferiority complex were experienced by the tribals in various fields. Some of the greatest missionary educators thought that the tribal mind had no capacity to grasp science. The tribal sense of inferiority made the transition from foreign to the local leadership difficult, as there was no manifest expression of confidence in local vocations. Intellectual enslavement has taken such a deep root that the faithful always compare the tribal priests with the foreigners and praise the latter for their doles - the charity work, free rations, oil, clothes, etc. Thus 'white' skin became the reference point at the time of transition when tribal missionaries had to take over the mantle of administration of the Church and other institutions affiliated to them.

2.6 Neo-Colonialism and the Response of the Tribal Church: Some of the features of the 'colonial situation' are domination by an alien minority, assertion of racial and cultural superiority, contact between a machine-oriented civilization, a powerful economy and a rapid rhythm of life in contrast to a non-Christian civilization that lacked machines and was marked by a backward economy and a slow rhythm of life. Since the colonialists were highly motivated by economic gains, all their policies, too, were determined by them. All this was done because they considered the people's culture inferior to their own. Thus, the economic and political policies of the colonizers were always in view of their own material benefits come what may. Indeed colonialism still exists in the

form of economic, political, or social oppression of one disadvantaged group by another advantaged group. However, this view is not contested. *The Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology* defines Neo-colonialism as "the use of economic, political or other pressures to control or influence other countries, especially former dependencies". Here the use of the term *neo-colonialism* indicates the *indirect control exercised by developed nations over developing nations*. According to this view, many developing nations are dependent on investment capital from developed nations. In the process the developed nations take undue and unjustified advantage of their counterparts. In either case, the Adivasis of Chotanagpur are the ultimate victims with developmental projects like hydro-electric project, Natarhat field-firing range, mining, etc. It should be noted that there are over fifty large and medium scale, and above two hundred and fifty small scale industries in Jamshedpur, Bokaro, Ranchi, Rourkela, Muri, Dhanbad, Palamau, Sindri, Hazaribagh, and so on. The tribal lands are being grabbed by the aliens; their forests are being depleted by the government-sponsored industries; and their women are being raped every other day. And yet, the Adivasis maintain a culture of silence because of the Gospel message of love, peace, joy, forgiveness and harmony. "*Christianity has made the Adivasis impotent*" say some lay people. In the Northeast about ninety per cent are Christians, and yet there is so much violence! The Jharkhand Movement is more than fifty years now and yet the destination seems to be quite

elusive. The modernization in India which began with a colonial heritage continued after independence resulting in the emergence of new structural situations leading to stresses and challenges unforeseen in the former days.

3. Beyond Neo-Colonialism: A Vision for the Third Millennium

Can there be a genuinely vibrant Adivasi Church in Chotanagpur in the 21st Century? Is there any hope of integral liberation for the Adivasi Church when criminals of the Karondabera Priests' massacre go scot free, thanks to the biased government machinery? It should be noted that on September 1, 1994, two diocesan priests and a Seminarian were attacked and killed by the religious fundamentalists. But justice has eluded the victims even to this day. I have a dream for the tribal Church of Chotanagpur which is to be de-colonized and also de-neo-colonized. The present study, understanding the past, has set a futuristic vision of a total liberation for the tribal Church of Chotanagpur that takes into account not only the socio-cultural and religious needs of the people but also the economic. This implies political consciousness as well. The Tribal Church of Chotanagpur cannot be genuinely vibrant unless the larger tribal community also flourishes. In order to make this dream come true, one has to do now what Fr. Lievens did for his time. In order to operationalize this vision I have the following suggestions, which, I must confess, are not entirely new.

3.1 Inter-Cultural Dialogue: Can there be a true inter-cultural dialogue

between the Adivasi Church in Chotanagpur and the adherents of the *Sarna* Religion who are suspicious of the former because the Christian Adivasis do not maintain the laws of the tribe, i.e., clan exogamy, tribe endogamy, no working day on a Thursday, celebrating Karam festival in the Church instead of *akhira* (dancing yard), etc. These are some of the grievances expressed by the non-Christian Adivasis of the Lohardaga district. In the early nineties when Paulus Kullu wrote an article in a Hindi monthly, named *Nishikalanka*, "Inter-caste Marriage: A Sin Against God", there was a large hue and cry. Many organizations including the Women's, protested against the stand of Kullu arguing that it was unfortunately divisive at a time when they were trying to bring unity among different ethnic groups. The problem is still unresolved. Now the resistance to the liberalised understanding of the Church is from the non-Christian Adivasis. Where are the protesters gone? Are they even aware of the need of a serious dialogue? What could be the meeting point? These are definitely some subtle issues which affect the very core of the Adivasi institutions and therefore are non-negotiable from their point of view.

3.2 Socio-Political Unity: There is a need to identify the subtle neo-colonial elements which try to erode the tribal cultural values and thus further alienate them. The role of the Voluntary Organizations is also crucial to make sincere efforts for the all-round progress of the tribals in general. There is a need of honest and sincere officers in the Government who can selflessly

work for the welfare of the tribals. A socio-political unity for asserting the fundamental rights in the face of various atrocities is impractical and unthinkable as long as there are differences in the perception of social institutions. With all this, the agony of the Adivasis continue. A Church-sponsored ethnic-political movement by bringing different groups together will be a daring step towards the achievement of a separate autonomous state. The concept of Jharkhand flows from the vision of a state that has peace, harmony, happiness and equality, the values so much cherished by the tribal society.

3.3 Fall back to the Roots—Symbiosis with Nature: On the economic front, the Adivasis have developed cultural traditions, an economy, social control mechanisms, religious myths and techniques of production geared to retaining the links with environment. Can something be done to maintain their symbiotic relationship with nature? Given the rampant deforestation, there is need for a new forest policy that finds a balance between the industrial, environmental and forest dwellers' needs, giving importance to the local economy. Hence, there is need to change the present policies. Fernandes suggests that the 'People's Forest Bill' works on the principle of a partnership of equals between the Forest Department and the local communities and combines people's livelihood with conservation of biodiversity.²⁷ The dispossession of Adivasi land and their social, economic, and cultural, psychological displacement sadly continues. Who, under the present circumstances, can

play a prophetic role like Father Lievens to restore those lands, to bring back lost self-esteem and identity? Unless the injustices inflicted on Adivasis are removed there is no question of liberation in the 21st century. Only a vibrant Tribal Church can lead people's agitation for the restoration of self rule, human rights and human dignity.

3.4 A Holistic Approach: Can the dedicated priests and nuns, both locals and those from outside the region, give them a ray of hope? Can the committed social workers and people of good will get them their lands back, which will give them their true identity? Are the missionaries ready to take the Adivasis along with them or do they also impose

their 'Indian' culture and civilization on them trying to bring them to the 'main-stream' which is but a myth? Going beyond neo-colonialism is difficult but not impossible. The 'kingdom' of God can be a reality here on earth for the Adivasis. A new earth and new heaven can be established here and now only when there is a genuine effort to go to the roots of the Adivasis which can be found in their culture. That means any effort of liberating them, conscientizing them, etc., will not succeed unless their culture is taken into account. A local vibrant Church has to evolve and emerge in the tribal context so that each of them can genuinely and proudly say "Ours is the Church of the Adivasis, by the Adivasis, and for the Adivasis".

Notes

1. Sara Tulloch (ed.), *The Reader's Digest Oxford Complete Wordfinder*, Reader's Digest Association Limited, 1994.
2. David J. Banks, "Colonialism" in *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 1, Levinson and Ember (ed.), New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996, p. 215.
3. Balandier, "Colonialism" in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Science*, Vol. 3, Silis David, L. (ed.), The Macmillan Company & The Free Press, 1951, p. 75.
4. *The World Book Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4. World Book. Inc., A Scott Company, 1986.
5. According to Guha's classification of the racial types of the Indian Adivasi population, the Proto-Australoid stock are characterized by dark skin colour, sunken nose and lower forehead. Tribes of middle India belong to this stock.
6. Fuchs opines that the Munda, the Ito and the Santal belong to Austro-Asiatic group, speaking a Mundarian language, whereas Proto-Australoids speak a Dravidian tongue.
7. Foreigners or outsiders, referring to the lease-holders, Zamindars and other exploiters of the Mundas and Uraons.
8. F. Ivern, *Chotanagpur Survey*, New Delhi, Indian Social Institute, 1962.
9. S. Mahto, *Hundred Years of Christian Missions in Chotanagpur since 1845*, Ranchi, The Chotanagpur Christian Publishing House, 1971, p. 1.
10. J.C. Jha, *The Kol Insurrection of Chotanagpur*, Calcutta, 1964, p. 240.
11. S. Mahto, *Hundred Years of Christian Missions in Chotanagpur since 1845*, Ranchi, The Chotanagpur Christian Publishing House, 1971, pp. 1-2.
12. C and L. Alvares, Norma, "The Christian and the Wild" in *Discoveries, Missionary Expansion and Asian Cultures* edited by Teotonio De Souza, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 1994, p. 28.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

14. Charles H. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, New York, Orbis Books, 1996, p. 70.

15. Gregory Naik, "Forward" in *Discoveries, Missionary Expansion and Asian Cultures*, Teotonio De Souza (ed.), New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 1994, p. 5.

16. J.D. Bhattacharjee, "Predicaments of the Catholic Mission in Colonial India" in *Indian Missiological Review*, September-December, Vol. 12, No. 3&4, 1990, p. 81.

17. Teotonio De Souza (ed.), *Discoveries, Missionary Expansion and Asian Cultures*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 1994.

18. Fernandes and Chaudhury, "Search for a Tribal Identity: The Dominant and the Sub-altern" in *The Indigenous Question: Search for an Identity*, New Delhi, Indian Social Institute, 1993, pp. 9-12.

19. Fidelis De Sa, *Crisis in Chotanagpur*, Bangalore, A Redemptorist Publication, 1975, p. 41.

20. S.C. Roy, *The Mundas and Their country*, Calcutta, 1912.

21. Consisted in making collections among the people to send memorials to the government about their traditional rights. It was regarded as political agitation by the British Government.

22. Fidelis De Sa, *Crisis in Chotanagpur*, Bangalore, A Redemptorist Publication, 1975.

23. From 1896 to 1900, The movement refers to a messianic movement started by Birsu Munda to free tribals from injustices and the British Rule. It was a socio-religious and political movement in which spiritual reform and political unity were emphasised. It was, in tribal history, a peak moment of registering discontent against not only the British rulers but also the greedy outsiders (non-Tribal Indians) who unscrupulously exploited the tribals of Chotanagpur.

24. Nirmal, Minz, "Identity of Tribals in India" in *The Indigenous Question: Search for an Identity*, Walter Fernandes (ed.), New Delhi, Indian Social Institute, 1993, p. 29.

25. Yogendra Singh, *Social Change in India: Crisis and Resilience*, Delhi, Har-Anand Publications, 1993.

26. Jacob S. Dharmaraj, *Colonialism and Christian Mission: Post Colonial Reflections*, Delhi, ISPCK, 1993, p. 127.

27. Walter, Fernandes (ed.), "A Forest Bill By the Forest Dwellers and Social Activists", in *Drafting a People's Forest Bill*, New Delhi, Indian Social Institute, 1996, p. 31.