

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN TRIBAL THEOLOGY

Marianmai Maisuangdibou

ABSTRACT

Tribal theology/ies without proper methodology could not produce a well-qualified knowledge for the tribal Christians. It is methodologies or the methods that are critical for developing relevant and dynamic theology. Thus, this paper attempts to evaluate the existing methods in tribal faith expression. Not only that, but the researcher also proposes a communitarian approach as a viable methodology in tribal theology.

KEYWORDS

Tribal theology, communitarianism, God-world-human continuum, liberation, land,

INTRODUCTION

Methodology¹ is an integral part of every academic investigation, including Christian theology. Depending on the contexts, theologians employ diverse methods in constructing theologies.² As every faith articulation is a contextual endeavour formulated out of particular context and time, applying specific models or approaches, each theological articulation follows certain principles or guidelines to make it systematic and coherent. Within this framework, the significance of methodology in tribal theology/ies depends on the necessity of the methods relevant in the tribal context. It is essential to point out that tribal Christians construct their faith experiences in the light of their living realities. For that reason, tribal theology is for tribal churches, formulated by tribal scholars and should be relevant to the tribal people. Here some pertinent questions arise, and they are: What are the working principles for constructing tribal theology? How does one go about in formulating tribal faith experiences? In simple, what is the methodological presupposition in this theological discourse? Thereby this paper attempts to problematize methodological categories in tribal theology. It also proposes a viable methodology/s that will be more inclusive in the broader enterprise of tribal theology.

¹Method and methodology are interchangeably employed in this paper. Method and methodology are closely intertwined, yet they serve different roles and purposes in the research process. A method is simply a tool/s used in research. It is the devices/tools or the means used for collecting data, such as interviews, surveys, focus groups, contextual inquiry, and observation. Commonly researchers employ one or more methods. On the other hand, a methodology is a rationale for the research approach and the lens through which the whole study will take place. It is the justification for using a particular research method/approach, for instance, phenomenology, ethnography, postmodernism, feminism.

²M. Maisuangdibou, *Liangmai and Christianity: Faith in Search of Understanding and Transformation in Indigenous/Tribal Context* (Tamei: Witinglung Publication, 2015), 93-94.

1. DIFFERENT MODELS OF CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

Tribal/Indigenous people are diverse, and they have different contexts. At the same time, one also finds similarities and connections in different tribal/indigenous lived experiences and conditions. Tribal people's experiences and social realities are the basis for their critical reflection on their Christian faith.³ Here, tribal theology/ies is not monotonous, as diverse realities of different tribal/indigenous groups demand multiple tribal theologies. Moreover, various models of contextual theology are applied in tribal contexts. Utilizing the works of Stephen B. Bevans⁴ as his starting point, Thanzauva has identified and appraised different models that are prevalent in indigenous/tribal theology in Northeast India. These models are transplantation, fulfilment, translation, dialogical, synthesis, and praxis.⁵ These contextual models are often intertwined or overlapped over each other in many ways.

Firstly, 'transplantation model', also commonly known as a missionary method, regards Western culture as the only valid expression of Christianity and condemns other cultures as demonic, non-Christian, and uncultivated. The point here is that unless one becomes westernized and modernized, one is not a true Christian.⁶ Because of such teaching, especially in colonized countries, the colonial people are internalized to think that their culture, tradition, and history are inferior in comparison to their western counterparts. Under such a method, Thanzauva argues that "the issue of contextualization does not arise." There is no space for the contextualization of theology. The theology that was formulated in the West has simply transplanted in foreign lands without critical evaluation.⁷ Therefore, such a model has no place in tribal theology because the context of the tribal is not considered; at the same time, it neglects others' cultures, worldviews, and values.

Secondly, 'fulfilment model' maintains that Christianity is above all other cultures. In this case, Jesus Christ is perceived as the fulfilment of all human aspirations. One has to inherit Christianity without any contextualization. However, if this model is not reinterpreted in the context of the people, it cannot be accepted. In one sense, Christ is the fulfilment of one's aspiration and longing; nevertheless, one should not interpret only from a single perspective. Christ is beyond Christianity. Christianity is a social construct, whereas Christ is God. The fundamental prerequisite is that Christ has to be separated from culture and especially from the clutches of western domination. Equally, one's culture may be a *praeparatio evangelii*, yet, that is not the end of one's culture. It continues to work as the

³Yangkahao Vashum, "Tribal/Indigenous Theology and its Methodology: A Review and Proposal," in *Journal of Tribal Studies*, XIII/1 (Jan.-Jun., 2008), 36.

⁴For reference Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*.

⁵For further reading Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Mary Knoll: Orbis Books, 1994). K. Thanzauva, *Theology of Community: Tribal Theology in Making* (Bangalore: ATC, 2004), 84-103. Cited by Yangkahao Vashum, "Indigenous Theology as Postcolonial Theology: A Methodological Consideration," in *Tribal Christian Theology: Methods and Sources for Constructing a Relevant Theology for the Indigenous People of North East India*, Tribal Study Series, no. 15, eds. by Razouselie Lasetso and Yangkahao Vashum (Jorhat: ETC Programme Coordination, 2007), 17.

⁶Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 84-85. See also A. Wati Longchar, *An Emerging Asian Theology – Tribal Theology: Issues, Method and Perspectives* (Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre, 2000), 32.

⁷Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 85.

source of faith articulation.⁸ Often in a theological discussion, the Old Testament and the native's culture are considered as *praeparatio evangelii* for the coming of Christ. Thus the incarnation of Jesus Christ is interpreted as the fulfilment of Abrahamic law and other religious traditions; nevertheless, the reality is that the Old Testament continues to maintain vital importance in Christian life to this day. Therefore, Christ fulfilment of other's traditions is not the end of cultures but the transformation they undergo.

The third model is the 'translation model'. There are two ways of translation technique: (1) literal translation, word-for-word translation, and (2) living or functional translation, in which one looks for equivalent meanings. This second type of work is dynamic because the Gospel is contextualized in one's social situation.⁹ For example, the Old Testament understanding of the sacrifice of a lamb can best be understood in the tribal context of Northeast India as the sacrifice of a rooster. Jesus, the Lamb of God, is Jesus, the rooster of God. It is a rooster/cock that was commonly used in the traditional tribal society for sacrifice. Accordingly, the sacrifice of the rooster can replace the sacrifice of the lamb in tribal theology so that it will be more meaningful and relevant. Here, one does not attempt to universalize tribal worldviews. Instead, it is a conscious effort to construct theology contextually.

Fourthly, 'dialogical model' is the primary contribution of Asian theologians in general and Indian theologians in particular. In the Indian pluralistic context, Christians are dissatisfied with the traditional missiological approach, which condemned other religions and eventually disputed the harmony of the community. Under this dialogical method, there is a general sympathetic and open attitude towards other religions. Such openness to other faiths with the willingness to learn from others and allow ourselves to be changed, if necessary, is fundamental to its methodology.¹⁰ Vashum claims that dialogical model is good as far as it goes in promoting harmonious and peaceful co-existence, however, it falls short in the least two ways; firstly, it fails to challenge the existing social and economic inequalities in the society, and secondly, it shies from addressing the core issues of the respective beliefs.¹¹ Moreover, for the Northeast Indian tribals, this model is not liberative as religious pluralism is more or less absent; therefore, despite the importance of this model, it is not necessarily imperative in North-east tribal theological formulation.

Fifthly, 'synthetic model' is a vital method in constructing tribal theology because it gives importance to the context of the people. "Synthesis" simply means mix(ing). This model views that every culture or context has elements that are unique and valuable.¹² This method points out that there can be a cordial relationship between Christian teaching and the tribal world. In other words, as God revealed Himself in the world, there is no need to bring

⁸Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 85-86.

⁹Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 87.

¹⁰S.J. Samartha, *The Hindu Response to Unbound Christ* (Madras: CLS, 1974), 12; Raymond Panikker, *The Inter-Religious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), xiv-xix. Cited by Thanzauva, "Methodological Issues: Subaltern Perspectives," 20-21.

¹¹Vashum, "Indigenous Theology as Postcolonial Theology: A Methodological Consideration," 18.

¹²Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 83.

God from outside as God is already present in every culture in some way or the other.¹³ This method, therefore, seriously takes the culture and tradition of the people and synthesis with Christian heritages. Because of a critical interaction between the tribal culture-tradition and Christian tradition, thus the fusion leads to contextual theology.

Lastly, the 'praxis model' – the word "praxis" simply means action-reflection. In other words, 'action' with a transforming vision must lead to a critical reflection of faith. This model focuses on the transformation or liberation of individuals as well as society.¹⁴ The Praxis approach will help theology to liberate the community from all forms of bondage. Applying the praxis method in theology means the message of that theology is liberation. This liberation is not only a spiritual liberation but liberation in totality. It means freedom from all forms of bondage and justice for all. In such a case, the context of the people is taken seriously in delivering the people through praxis. Praxis method seeks justice, equality, and identity of the people. In the context of the tribals, it is crucial to take this model seriously, because the tribals are in bondage spiritually, socially, politically, and economically.¹⁵ Therefore, tribal theology has to articulate theology from such a praxis model so that barriers and oppressive structures can be broken, and people can be liberated in the light of the Kingdom of God.

2. DIMENSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES IN TRIBAL THEOLOGY/IES

In India, the tribal population is 104,545,716, which constitutes 8.6% of the total population of India, according to the 2011 Census conducted by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.¹⁶ They are one of the indigenous peoples of the world. The Government of India describes them as the "Schedule Tribes" in the Indian Constitution, and they are given special privileges and development packages. However, even after more than 70 years of Indian independence, the tribals continue to remain at the bottom of the Indian social structure. Thanzauva describes the situation of the tribals as "culturally alienated, socially stigmatised, economically exploited, poor and politically powerless."¹⁷ Remarkably, about 50% of the Christians in India come from the tribal background – about 30% from North East India, 10% from Central India, and 10% from other parts of India. Thus, the tribals are a very significant community in India. However, the tribals are always treated by the mainland Indians as low caste people who are poor, illiterate, simple people, and impure. In such an Indian context, because of the caste-ridden society, the tribals suffer the stigma of being untouchable, marginalized, and oppressed.¹⁸

¹³Stephen B. Bevans, "Models of Contextual Theology," *Missiology: International Review*, XIII/2 (April 1985), 185-202.

¹⁴Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 98.

¹⁵Maisuangdibou, *Liangmai and Christianity*, 116-117.

¹⁶"2010 Census Data," http://censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/India_at_glance/scst.aspx. Accessed on 19th Nov. 2013.

¹⁷Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 23.

¹⁸A. Wati Longchar, "Tribal Theology – Issues, Method and Perspective," in *In Search of Identity and Tribal Theology: A Tribute to Dr. Renthly Keitzar*, Tribal Study Series. No. 9.ed. by A. Wati Longchar (Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre, 2001), 45-46.

Again, in the history of the tribals in India, they experienced oppression, discrimination, exploitation, and alienation under the hands of the Aryans, Muslims, and British, and they continue to experience marginalization under the present Indian socio-economic-cultural and political scenario. They had been alienated from their land and the Indian socio-cultural realities. Colonial and dominant powers did not recognise the tribal rights to land and the right to live as human beings in freedom. Regarding this, Thanzauva laments that even today, this attitude has not changed. For this reason, the concern for the development and legal protection of the tribals has become a crucial issue. Still, it is evident from the tribal living conditions and the increasing atrocities against them that the policy of suppression continues and is even rampant.¹⁹ In such a situation, tribal theology cannot neglect the status of the tribal people in formulating theology. The issue is to deconstruct erroneous attitudes and mindsets and to free the tribals from all forms of bondage.

Another subject-matter in tribal theology is that tribal people in India are assimilated to the mainstreams, culturally, religiously, and physically. In the process of integrating India, tribals were absorbed as low caste Hindus. It is a process of social, cultural, and religious change whereby low-status people in India adopt the Sanskrit terminology and ritual procedures embodied with Brahmanism. Thus this process tends to weaken tribal religious-culture until it is finally absorbed in Hinduism.²⁰ The fundamental problem of Sanskritization among the tribals was the segregation of a tribal community into different castes and the subsequent subjugation of the tribals, most of whom were adopted into the low caste. In such a case, tribals not only lose their identity, but they are forced to become a part of Hindu culture.²¹ The point here is that as Hinduism is a religion that is based on caste-culture, it is a must for any Hindu to follow Hindu culture. Due to such circumstances, it is difficult to retain one's distinct culture in the context of Hinduism. On the other hand, Christianity is simply a religion based on a personal relationship with God and not based on any culture. That is why Christians, in general, need to retain his or her distinct culture. Tribal theology should delineate the distinction between religion and culture; at the same time, it should bring out their correlations, so that tribal theology will be more constructive and liberating in its approach.

In formulating tribal theology, one cannot forget the issue of modernization because the present world is engulfed with such modernization, globalization, and excessive development.²² Modernization in the tribal land in India has been contributed by the works of the British administration, Christian missionaries, and the Government of India. The involvement of the British administration towards the process of modernization in tribal areas was mainly limited to the setup of a unified political arrangement, maintenance of law and order, construction of link roads, introduction of the monetary system, and the

¹⁹Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 26.

²⁰H.K. Bhat, "Hinduization of Tribals: Critique and Perspective," in *Tribal Thought and Culture*, ed. by Baidyanath Saraswati (New Delhi: Concept Publishing House, 1991), 223. Cited by Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 26-27.

²¹Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 28.

²²M. Maisuangdibou, *Tribal Theological Hermeneutics: Methodological Issues in Interpretation* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2014), 12-14.

implementation of taxation.²³ Such radical changes brought about first by the British are certainly one of the primary factors responsible for modernization. Again, due to the British occupation, it opened the way for missionaries to Christianize the tribal people. The missionaries helped in modernizing the tribals through education, health, and social reforms.

After the independence of India, the government of India implemented different programmes to develop the tribal areas. Through such projects, one can see the picture of modernization on a broader scale in the tribal areas.²⁴ Despite many positive impacts of modernization, one can also disseminate the negative consequences as well: Firstly, numerous tribes lost their traditions, cultures, histories, and heritages. Secondly, it created a wide gap between the 'haves' and the 'have not'. Thirdly, urbanization generated a massive difference between the rural and the urban areas. Fourthly, development has an irrevocable impact on the ecosystem.²⁵ In such circumstances, tribal theology needs to criticize any form of modernization that is not tribal/indigenous friendly, and that hampered the environment.

Regarding the perspective in theology, 'humanity' is always the point of reference and the norm in the dominant Christian theology. It views 'space' from humanity's viewpoint.²⁶ In this case, the primary source of doing theology is humanity and their liberation. However, tribal theology cannot follow the perspectives of classical theology. Somehow tribal theology has been constructed in the context of the living realities of the tribals in India. It overtly takes the inter-relatedness of everything and the inter-dependence of life on one another. In such a case, indigenous/tribal theology is to liberate life, of creatures, human beings, natures, cosmos, and even God and other supernatural phenomena.

Moreover, as the tribals are marginalized, oppressed, subjugated even in the present stage, tribal theology has to construct from the perspective of liberation – liberation from all forms of bondage. Here liberation in tribal theology is similar to the framework of Latin American theology. As for the Latin American Liberation theology, liberation is realized from the Marxist point of view; whereas, the tribal theology understands 'liberation' from the traditional worldview of God-creation-human interrelationship. In other words, liberation is human-centred in Latin American theology. On the other hand, liberation in tribal theology is God-world-world centred. This continuum needs to be considered honestly in tribal theology. This point means that the perspective of tribal theology is understood in terms of liberation holistically.

Harnessing from the tribal worldview, the liberation of the world/nature in tribal Christian theology is the liberation of humans and God. Likewise, the liberation of humans is the emancipation of God and the world. If human beings and the world/nature are in bondage, God, too, is considered in bondage. With such an interrelational cosmivision, God is

²³Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 28. Also see Vashum, "Tribal/Indigenous Theology and its Methodology: A Review and Proposal," 38.

²⁴Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 35-36.

²⁵Maisuangdibou, *Tribal Theological Hermeneutics*, 14-16.

²⁶George Tinker, "Spirituality and Native American Personhood: Sovereignty & Solidarity," in *Spirituality of the Third World*, eds. by K.C. Abraham and Barnedatte Mbuy (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), 128. Cited by Longchar, *Tribal Theology – Issues, Method and Perspective*, 62.

integrally part of the world. The point is that the suffering of God's world is also the suffering of God. If the pain and suffering of the world are the pain and suffering of God, then there is a notion that God is a suffering God, and he too is in bondage. Then only by liberating God's creations, He also will experience true liberation. Until and unless the world is wholly liberated, God cannot be liberated fully. On account of this, God is the source, the means as well as the recipient of liberation. Thus looking from the communitarian experienced or integrity of God-world-human, it is crucial to note that God, humans, and nature can be differentiated, but they cannot be separated.²⁷ In tribal Christian understanding, this interconnectedness should be the basis while delving with the Trinity, Christology, ecclesiology, soteriology, creation, justice, peace, and the Kingdom of God.

3. KEITZAR'S METHOD OF INDIGENIZATION AND CONTEXTUALIZATION (NAGANIZATION)

Renthy Keitzar propounded a method of contextualization of the Gospel in the tribal context of Northeast India. The main concern in this method is to make the gospel message relevant to the tribal people. It evolves a new theology based on sound biblical teaching and, at the same time, a message that can penetrate the core of tribal mentality.²⁸ He writes, "The tribal thought forms, ideas, theological terms, life situations, and so on, can be adopted with adaptations in interpreting Christian ideas so that the gospel truth can be applicable to whom it is proclaimed."²⁹ Keitzar also argues that the indigenous-tribal way of thinking has some affinity with Hebrew tradition. As such, the biblical ideas can easily be translated (or trans-communicated) to the tribal languages.

Keitzar proposes an approach utilizing the term 'indigenization' as a viable method for the tribals in their construction of theology. Here indigenization is an act or process 'of being indigenous' or of making something regional or native, which means to make culturally conditioned or natural to a region. However, in such an indigenized process, there is a danger of integrating the non-Christian religious worldviews into Christian theology.³⁰ Therefore, he prefers contextualization over indigenization, but both terms for him "... have terminological ambiguities and practical problems in their specific application."³¹ To him, the "appropriate term" should be "Naganization of Christian Gospel and theology: that means, making the Gospel message and Christian theology relevant to Naga cultural way of life."³²

²⁷Maisuangdibou, *Tribal Theological Hermeneutics*, 162.

²⁸Renthy Keitzar, *In Search of a Relevant Gospel Message: Introducing a Contextual Christian Theology for North East India* (Guwahati: Christian Literature Centre, 1995), 1.

²⁹Keitzar, *In Search of a Relevant Gospel Message*, 1.

³⁰Keitzar, *In Search of a Relevant Gospel Message*, 17; Keitzar, "The Indigenization of Naga Christian Theology," 34-51. Cited by Humtsoe, "Contextual-Theological Evaluation of Renthy Keitzar's Bible Translation Approach," in *Journal of Tribal Studies*, XIII/2 (Jul.-Dec. 2008), 70. For Keitzar, "contextualization" is more viable than "indigenization". Here, "contextualization" means the formulation of Christian theology in the context of or in relevance to one's own culture.

³¹Renthy Keitzar, "The Indigenization of Naga Christian Theology," in *In Search of Praxis Theology for the Nagas* (New Delhi: Regency Publication for Council of Naga Baptist Churches, 2003), 34-51. Cited by Humtsoe, "Contextual-Theological Evaluation of Renthy Keitzar's Bible Translation Approach," 71-72.

³²Keitzar, "The Indigenization of Naga Christian Theology," 36. Cited by Humtsoe, "Contextual-Theological Evaluation of Renthy Keitzar's Bible Translation Approach," 72.

For Keitzar, theological ideas in the land of the tribals have come through western cultures, and “a legacy of the nineteenth century evangelical American Christianity” is still predominant in the church. The theological articulations, which often have different worldviews and cultural backgrounds, but, unfortunately, tribals tend to view that these alone are authentic Christians. One forgets the fact that these ideas that have come to the tribals are reinterpretations of western people in the context of their cultural ideas wholesale, without appropriating the raw materials into tribal religious practices.³³ In the context of Christianity in the land of the Nagas where Christianity is not yet fully adapted to Naga culture, he delineates:

Christianity is not indigenous to Nagaland because it was not born or produced in this place, it was brought from America with an American (or western) form of culture. It has to be indigenized if this message is to be locally or regionally relevant to the Nagas. The Christian Nagas must translate the gospel message in terms of Naga way of life and thought patterns that may effect [affect] an indigenization of Christian theology and that can be called as Naga Christian theology.³⁴

For this reason, Keitzar views tribal theology in the context of the Nagas of Northeast India as *Naganization* of Christian gospel and theology.³⁵ He means that the gospel message and Christian theology should be relevant to Naga’s cultural way of life. He also points out that there has already been unconscious indigenization in Naga society. For example, a sociological adaptation of the Christians Naga in the same line with the non-Christian Nagas – following the same social customs in dress, food, housing, language, and so on, except for religious faith.³⁶ Here one can see that Nagas Christian continued to follow traditional ways in many aspects; nevertheless, their religious attitude is very western. Their understanding of the Christ of faith is not entirely Jesus the Man, the Son of God, Saviour, and Lord. Keitzar asserts, “He (Jesus Christ) is not fully reincarnated as a Naga among Nagas and dwell among us; so that we Nagas will see his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father (cf. John 1: 14). That is what I call *Naganization* of the Gospel and Christian theology.”³⁷ Therefore, Keitzar advocates the process of *Naganization* as an indispensable method of making the gospel message and theology relevant to the Naga people.

In the background of the commonality of different Naga communities in socio-religious and cultural aspects and because of the Naga political consciousness and of closer ties in Christ, the gospel message must be reinterpreted so that it may be significant and relevant to the Nagas. Thus the reinterpretation of the Gospel in the context of Naga’s cultural and thought patterns is *Naganization* of Christian theology. Then Christianity can be

³³Keitzar, *In Search of a Relevant Gospel Message*, 17; Keitzar, “The Indigenization of Naga Christian Theology,” 34-51. Cited by Humtsoe, “Contextual-Theological Evaluation of Renty Keitzar’s Bible Translation Approach,” 70-72.

³⁴Keitzar, *In Search of a Relevant Gospel Message*, 17.

³⁵Keitzar, *In Search of a Relevant Gospel Message*, 18.

³⁶Renty Keitzar, “Tribal Theology in the Making,” in *Tribal Theology: A Reader*, Tribal Study Series No. 12, ed. by Shimreingam Shimray (Jorhat: TSC, 2003), 217-218.

³⁷Keitzar, *In Search of a Relevant Gospel Message*, 18-19; Keitzar, “The Indigenization of Naga Christian Theology,” 34-51.

fully adapted to and rooted in the lives of the Nagas, and it will become integrally part of their lives. And only when it is being done, then can there be a Naga Christian theology in the real sense of the term.³⁸ At the same time, Keitzar is cautious of *Naganization* as not a mere ‘back to the fount’ – a recognition of our cultural heritage. But it should be an existential reality of theological interpretation of Christian truth in terms of Naga culture and their past, the present and the future. It means that Christianity should be presented in the total life of the Nagas. In other words, as Nagas are Christianized, and so also Christianity must be *naganized*, and that is indigenization in its truest sense.³⁹ This method of *Naganization* is a missiological task as well as a process of the Naga Christians to make Christianity relevant to Naga realities in totality.

3.1. CRITICISM OF KEITZAR’S METHODOLOGY

While appreciating the works of Keitzar, Eyingbeni Humtsoe comments:

Today, his theological contributions remain as significant pointers towards greater responsibility in contextualizing Christianity among the Nagas, which he maintains as “our common task.” Moreover, he did not leave behind any thick volume to show us his theological profundity, but he leaves no doubt in the mind of the readers to grasp his passion of a contextual Naga theology.⁴⁰

Keitzar’s contribution to tribal theological methodology is outstanding. Not only does he introduced indigenization, but he also coined the term *Naganization* thus making use of local terminology. The notion of offering local vocabulary is a fundamental part of a theologizing process. Regardless of the critical input made by Keitzar, there is room for criticism on his indigenized methodology. First and foremost, the method of indigenization (or contextualization) is the first-step for tribal-indigenous faith articulation. Nevertheless, it is not the end nor the aggregate approach in the theological endeavour. Secondly, indigenization does not resolutely appropriate socio-environmental issues. Thereby what is after indigenization is a paramount question. Hence the notions of liberation, justice, and freedom amid rampant injustice, neo-colonialism, alienation, and oppression in the tribal situation cannot be neglected.

Indigenization does not copiously situate the Gospel in the total context of the people. It is a way of making something foreign – native to the native/indigenous people. This process of making Christian theology natives could lack critical interaction between the Gospel and the native’s culture. The Gospel should not only incarnate, but it should also resurrect in the tribal milieu. The relevance of the Gospel has to be reinforced by living out the Gospel in Christian life. Accordingly, Keitzar’s *Naganization* does not incisively carry the Gospel message in the tribal churches. Moreover, *Naganization*, as mentioned, some time may simply lead to uncritical re-transmission of western theology or the gospel message in the Naga society.

³⁸Keitzar, *In Search of a Relevant Gospel Message*, 19.

³⁹Keitzar, *In Search of a Relevant Gospel Message*, 19.

⁴⁰Humtsoe, “Contextual-Theological Evaluation of Renty Keitzar’s Bible Translation Approach,” 70.

Keitzar himself has cautioned that indigenization seems inadequate, or misunderstood because it leads to compromise with non-Christian faith, or it risks the danger of integrating the non-Christian religious ideas into Christian theology. He writes, “Sometimes it is mixed up with a revival of old religious traditions and practices leading to religious syncretism: a theologian is not free from such risks in his (sic) attempt of indigenizing the gospel.”⁴¹ Therefore to avoid such a hazardous course of a compromising posture, Keitzar opines that it is safer to use the concept contextualization rather than indigenization.⁴² This notion clarifies that contextualization is more inclusive as it is the process of constructing theology in the total comprehensive terms of the native people.

4. THANZAUVA’S METHOD OF SYNTHESIS-PRAXIS

K. Thanzauva is one of the pioneers of tribal Christian theology. His contribution to tribal theology ranges from the tribal understanding of community, ecclesiology, social ethics, tribal anthropology, spirituality, and many more. He elaborately tries to bring out a methodological presupposition for the construction of tribal theology. Among the many methods employed by contextual theologies such as translation method, dialogical method, synthesis method, praxis method, and so on, he advocates the ‘synthesis-praxis method’ as the theological method for the construction of tribal theology. With such a presupposition, he articulates tribal theology; and his investigation focused on the transformation of tribal society and the church.

Tribal theology is motivated by the vision of liberation from all forms of oppressive structure and alienation of tribals from their lands and cultures. Thanzauva brings out some of the pertinent issues which confront the tribal people are such as modernization, which came to tribal lands along with Christianity. While most of the tribals appreciate the change that occurred but it also witnesses the erosion of tribal culture, which has created a crisis in tribal identity, which eventually confused tribals and made Christianity superficial. Secondly, it is globalization, which leads to rampant corruption, increase economic dependence, a wide gap between the rich and the poor, HIV/AIDS and drug culture, poverty, media culture, and so on. Thirdly, in the context of the ecological crisis, tribal Christians have to respond quickly, safe-guard the ecology from destruction. Here, it is seen that there is a massive responsibility on the part of the tribals in rebuilding the world.⁴³ The question that confronts the tribal Christians of North East India is; how adequately they define the purpose/goal of tribal theology, which they intended to construct. Thanzauva answers that “realizing of the Kingdom of God here and now is the goal of theology.”⁴⁴ It concerns the transformation of social and individual lives towards the fuller realization of the Kingdom of God. This

⁴¹ Keitzar, *In Search of a Relevant Gospel Message*, 17.

⁴²Keitzar, *In Search of a Relevant Gospel Message*, 17.

⁴³K. Thanzauva, “Methodology of Tribal Theology toward a Synthetic-Praxis,” in *Tribal Christian Theology: Methods and Sources for Constructing a Relevant Theology of the Indigenous People of North East India*, Tribal Study Series No. 15, ed. by Razouselie Lasetso and Yangkahao Vashum (Jorhat: ETC Programme Coordination, 2007), 35.

⁴⁴Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 73.

dimension means building a just, free, participatory, progressive, harmonious, and sustainable society.⁴⁵ He declares;

Vision determines our perception of theology itself. For Anslem theology is “faith seeking understanding”. For John Macquarrie, it is a coherent, systematic articulation of faith experience. For Gillespie and many western theologians, theology is a “critical reflections on the classic Christian faith.”⁴⁶ All these have the vision of accurate knowledge of the subject called theology, whereas a tribal Christian who struggling for the transformation of his (sic) own society, theology means “faith seeking transformation of society, church, individual and creation.” It is not just knowing, understanding and expressing theological truth accurately, although understanding and accurate expression are certainly important, we have to move beyond this to engage ourselves in the struggle for transformation to reflect on that action which be followed by articulation.⁴⁷

With such an understanding, Thanzauva defines tribal theology as “an articulation of our understanding of God derived from the correlation of the text and the context to answer the questions raised from the tribal context with the awareness of what is happening in the global context.”⁴⁸

For theologizing, Thanzauva proposes a “method of synthesis praxis.”⁴⁹ For him, ‘synthesis’ means the process of synthesising or fusion on various levels. The synthesis may be between the Bible together with Christian traditions on the one side and several other issues from the context on the other side. He opines, “The Bible with Christian traditions/inherited theology will always remain as a permanent counterpart of the synthetic process.”⁵⁰ Synthesis of the Gospel and culture in a particular context is imperative for preserving the cultural identity of the people, and Christ may be confessed in the way they understand him.

On the other hand, praxis is used as ‘action-reflection’ to reject a purely academic theoretical exercise without action. Thanzauva stretches the method of praxis as it is certainly one form of pragmatism; at the same time, it is different as it is how one discovers and articulates the truth for further action. Praxis also means a dynamic process of theological construction in an ever-changing context. It concerns how to present the unchanging Christ in a changing world. It also searches for the transformation of society towards the realization of the Kingdom of God. It also concerns how to answer the changing questions from the unchanging truth of the Bible.⁵¹ Praxis, thereby, means discovering the truth by acting and

⁴⁵Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 73-74.

⁴⁶Thomas w. Gillespie and Haugh T. Kerr, “Editorial – A Conversion,” in *Theology Today*, 41/1 (April 1984). Cited by Thanzauva, *Methodology of Tribal Theology toward a Synthetic-Praxis*, 31.

⁴⁷Thanzauva, “Methodology of Tribal Theology toward a Synthetic-Praxis,” 31-32.

⁴⁸Thanzauva, “Methodology of Tribal Theology toward a Synthetic-Praxis,” 43.

⁴⁹Thanzauva, “Methodology of Tribal Theology toward a Synthetic-Praxis,” 42. Also see, K. Thanzauva, “Issues in Tribal Theology,” in *Tribal Theology: A Reader*, ed. by Shimrengam Shimray (Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre, 2003), 20-23.

⁵⁰Thanzauva, “Methodology of Tribal Theology toward a Synthetic-Praxis,” 42.

⁵¹Thanzauva, “Methodology of Tribal Theology toward a Synthetic-Praxis,” 43; K. Thanzauva, “Methodological Issues: Subaltern Perspectives,” Seminar Paper delivered during DTh Methodological Course, SATHRI, Serampore, May 2013, 32. Also see, Yangkahao Vashum, Book-Review of K. Thanzauva,

involving, and the task of synthesizing has to be done by involvement to produce authentic theoretical articulation.⁵²

The Kingdom of God is seen as the goal of praxis. Here, Thanzauva explains the 'Kingdom of God' by relating to the Lord's Prayer as a kingdom where God's name is truly hallowed, his will is done on earth, humans will have everything in abundance, all sin will be forgiven, and all evil will be overcome. It will be a kingdom where all the poor will have abundance, the sick will be healed, the oppressed will be set free, and even the suffering and death will be overcome and will have an end. Thus, the Kingdom of God should be the top priority in tribal theology. In other words, tribal theology has to be kingdom centric theology and other aspects such as mission, church, polity, economy, and so on should follow.⁵³

Thanzauva points out that social analysis is an integral part of the praxis method as social investigation serves as a tool that permits one to grasp the reality which one is dealing with it. The social analysis explores reality in a variety of dimensions. The social system has to be analyzed both in terms of – history and space – functional and structural examination. In all the exercises of analysis, one is not neutral; one is committed to Kingdom values, then with that vision, one moves on to see the situation, judge, act, and reflect. In other words, social analysis is a very integral part of the method of praxis in the construction of theology.

In addition to the above method of synthesis-praxis, Thanzauva proposes a communitarian model. He understands tribal theology precisely from a liberation perspective, and the basis of this liberation is the communitarian aspect of God-human-world relationship.⁵⁴ Here, tribal theology takes the Trinitarian dimension of God seriously, and through this structure, tribal society looks for liberation. Thanzauva's 'community model' is an appropriate model to express the tribal concept of God-human-world relationships. Because God is in all, and all are in God.⁵⁵ He adds that in the tribal understanding of God-human-world relationship, "God is never perceived as wholly other but as the one who became human and participated in the life of the world".⁵⁶ One believes that Thanzauva makes a significant argument in the relationship between God-human-creations. This community model is dynamic in the present situation as the world requires a better relationship between God, humans, and creations more than before because in the context of ecological crises, if there is no appropriate perspective to tackle contemporary issues to bring liberation, then the future is lethal. In this case, the community model is the proper approach in constructing tribal Christian theology. On the other hand, Thanzauva's argument about the absence of God as 'wholly the other' in the tribal understanding in the context of God-world-human relationship is debatable because one can argue that the idea of God as transcendence

Transforming Theology: A Theological Basis for Social Transformation in *Journal of Tribal Studies*, XIII/1. (Jan.-Jun., 2008), 80.

⁵²Thanzauva, "Methodology of Tribal Theology toward a Synthetic-Praxis," 43.

⁵³Thanzauva, "Methodology of Tribal Theology toward a Synthetic-Praxis," 43-44.

⁵⁴K. Thanzauva, "Meaning and Task of Theology" in *Towards a Tribal Theology: The Mizo Perspective*, ed. by K. Thanzauva (Jorhat: Mizo Theological Conference, 1989), 22.

⁵⁵Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 195.

⁵⁶Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 195.

and immanence are common understandings in tribal worldview. Thus transcendence and immanence are organically linked in tribal worldview.

4.1. CRITICISM OF THANZAUVA'S SYNTHESIS-PRAXIS

Thanzauva offers a substantial contribution to the formulation of tribal theology. His articulation marks a watershed in the history of tribal theology. Even though the ideas and perspectives of tribal theology were already there before he entered the arena, however, he was the first to put tribal theology systematically and coherently. Due to his active participation in articulating tribal theology, it develops into a wide area and eventually recognized by the tribal world. Secondly, while dealing with the method he employs in construction tribal theology as mentioned, he proposes the synthesis-praxis method, which is considered as decisive because it can relate the gospel truth to the context of the tribal people. Moreover, such an approach is action-oriented.

Thirdly, in the context of oppression, subjugation, marginalization, and alienation, faith expression has to go beyond the four walls, it has to provoke action and transformation of the society in the light of the kingdom of God. Fourthly, Thanzauva's theology focuses on the transformation of tribal communities. He insists on transformation in the light of the Kingdom of God, and it is the foundation and the goal of tribal theology. Such a conception is requisite in the contemporary tribal milieu as tribals are facing various forms of discrimination. Fifthly, Thanzauva strives to bring out the 'community model' as the theological basis for God-world-human relationship. One locates that this model is a thought-provoking paradigm as it is decisive to tackle the predicament in tribal society.

The problem with the synthesis-praxis method is that methodologically speaking, it is not an indigenous model that is born out of the tribal realities. Even though the dialectic and action-oriented strategies are part of tribal life, they are never systematized philosophically. Instead, one notices the influence of western philosophy (for instance, Socrates, Marx, and Hegel's dialecticism) and liberation theology in this synthesis-praxis model. Likewise, Yangkahao Vashum divulges both the strengths and weaknesses of this model. He maintains that this 'synthesis-praxis method' is viable in the indigenous/tribal theology. First, it takes the people's cultures and their distinctive socio-economic, political contexts seriously. Second, it allows for critical interaction between Christian traditions and the indigenous/tribal people's ways of life and values that result in a new form of Christian expression of faith and theology. Thirdly, it requires reclaiming past cultural traditions and values.⁵⁷ On the other hand, the shortcomings or weaknesses in the synthesis-praxis method are: firstly, it assumes that Indigenous/Tribal cultures are essentially identical, as it fails to recognize the diversity that exists among Indigenous communities. Secondly, this method fails to recognize the 'differentiated complexity' which is the consequence of the hybridity that is contemporary Indigenous people's reality.⁵⁸

⁵⁷Vashum, "Tribal/Indigenous Theology and its Methodology: A Review and Proposal," 49-50.

⁵⁸Vashum, "Tribal/Indigenous Theology and its Methodology: A Review and Proposal," 50.

While dealing with tribal methodology, the importance of God, the world, nature, land, and ecology, and their inter-relatedness needs special consideration. Secondly, the tribal reality/ies of experiencing alienation, oppression, and marginalization should be addressed. Tribal theology also needs to take into account the diversity, pluriformity, and fluidity of tribal communities. The plurality of tribal society should be appropriated in their theological methodology for the better end product. Furthermore, one believes that the method that Thanzauva formulated for tribal theology is excessively anthropocentric. As tribal life is integrally related to their land, nature, creations, God, and other beings such as supernatural entities and objects, it is imperative to consider such things to develop an inclusive theology. In light of the above criticism brought forth by Vashum, another drawback in the synthesis-praxis method is that it does not make seriously apposite the heterogeneous nature of tribal communities. Remarkably, tribal peoples consist of diverse identities, groups, sexes, genders, communities, cultures, experiences, and the like; therefore, it is essential to relate these subject-matters in tribal theological discourse. Acknowledging the diversity and plurality of tribal world is the ground of tribal theology/ies.

Finally, Thanzauva's contribution to tribal theology is extensive. He is considered as one of the authorities as well as the custodians of tribal theology. Due to his contribution to tribal theology in terms of methods, community-based theology, and transformation as the vision in the light of God's kingdom, tribal theology has reached another level. Thanzauva's theological input is not only wide-ranging; it is also indispensable as it deliberates new insights with meaningful articulation in response to contemporary issues in the tribal milieu.

5. LONGCHAR'S LAND-CENTRED METHOD

As tribal/indigenous theology is a people's theology born out of the experiences of various forms of injustice and exploitation in the context of their assertion for right and identity. A. Wati Longchar affirms, "It is a theology that attempts to express Christian faith in socio-cultural, traditional and liturgical thought patterns of the people. Tribal/indigenous theology is a resistance theology – resistance to affirm justice, identity, dignity and wholeness of land and all its inhabitants."⁵⁹ It is the basis of life. Here, poverty, war, oppression, ethnic conflict, and identity problems cannot be understood or solved without relating to the integrity of creation/land.⁶⁰ The land and its inhabitants are two features of one reality. Therefore, human liberation will be void and empty without the liberation of the land and affirming the integrity of the goodness of the land and its resources. In such a case, for Longchar taking the position in line with George Tinker, an American Indian theologian, he affirms that the land and its resources that sustain and nourish all beings and give them an identity and selfhood is not merely a justice issue to be set alongside other justice concerns. Instead, it is the foundation

⁵⁹A. Wati Longchar, "An Assessment of the Tribal Theology: Trends and Challenges for Future," in *Tribal Theology on the Move*, Tribal Study Series No. 14. Eds. by Shimreingam Shimray and Limatula Longkumer (Jorhat: TSC, 2006), 8.

⁶⁰Wati Longchar, "Tribal Theology: Development, Issues and Challenges," in *Journal of Tribal Studies*, XVII/1 (Jan.-Jun., 2012), 16.

of history, existence, and identity.⁶¹ Thus, doing justice to land is the starting point of tribal/indigenous theology.

Longchar contends that for tribal theology, the point of departure from other dominant theologies is the tribals seek for liberation from the perspective of 'land' or 'space' or 'the creation'. He observes, "Space is the point of reference and the key to understand human selfhood, God, and spirit."⁶² For him, having the right relationship with space/land or whole of creation is vital as it sustains and nourishes people and gives them an identity. This aspect is due to the tribal understanding that without the land, space, and creation, God ceases to be God; God becomes inactive without nature and humans can attain redemption only with the rest of creation.⁶³ This tribal worldview is unique because of the affirmation of the centrality of space/land in understanding all realities.⁶⁴ This distinctiveness of tribal traditional worldview lies in affirming land/space or creation as the foundation for understanding the tribal people's culture, identity, personhood, and religious ethos.⁶⁵ For Longchar, the concept of the land, or creation or space is mysterious as it is the work of God, and it cannot be understood as mere object or thing. He adds that the creation, land, and space points to the same reality beyond time, and it also goes beyond human rationality. In such a case, the experience of time and history is an integral part of the creation.⁶⁶

This tribal/indigenous vision of creation calls for a methodological shift in doing theology. It begins with space/land – its possession, its sustenance, and its relationship with the human and all creation. Therefore, it calls all the people of this world to seek its liberation from exploitation. In other words, liberation without the liberation of land is not liberation, as it will lead to destruction.⁶⁷ Thus, there is no possibility of talking about the liberation of the indigenous/tribal people without taking into account the aspects of other creation and the land. They are one whole. Therefore, in the indigenous/tribal context, human redemption or liberation can be understood only as an integral part of the liberation of the whole creations.⁶⁸

⁶¹Longchar, "An Assessment of the Tribal Theology: Trends and Challenges for Future," 9.

⁶²Longchar, "Tribal Theology – Issues, Method and Perspective," 62; Bendang Longkumar, "Theology of Creation in the Thought of Wati Longchar," in *Journal of Tribal Studies*, 1/2 (Jul.-Dec., 2007), 44.

⁶³Longchar, "Tribal Theology – Issues, Method and Perspective," 63.

⁶⁴Longchar, *An Emerging Asian Theology – Tribal Theology*, 1. Cited by K.P. Aleaz, "A Tribal Christian Theology from India," in *Journal of Tribal Studies*, VII/2 (Jun.-Dec., 2003), 291; Longchar, "An Assessment of the Tribal Theology: Trends and Challenges for Future," 9.

⁶⁵Longchar, *An Emerging Asian Theology – Tribal Theology*, 6-10. Cited by K.P. Aleaz, "A Tribal Christian Theology from India," 291.

⁶⁶A. Wati Longchar, "Jesus Christ in Tribal Theology: A Critique," in *Journal of Tribal Studies*, VII/2 (Jun.-Dec., 2003), 266-267. According to Longchar, the term "the creation" points to the very primordial time of creation; it points to the very beginning of time. It is a comprehensive reality which includes everything, including human beings. Creation (without an article "the") refers to non-human segments of creation, including living objects, air, water, living beings, etc. the land or land is used interchangeably to refer to the "place" which gives identity to people, and sometimes referred to as soil and earth. It also means survival and, "It is our life." The space is sometimes referred to cosmic order, and sometimes referred to "place" which gives people an identity.

⁶⁷A. Wati Longchar, "Indigenous People's Theology in Asia: Issues, Methods and Perspectives," in *Methodological Issues in Theological Research: An Exploration*, ed. by H. Vanlalauva (Serampore: Department of Research/SATHRI, 2013), 69.

⁶⁸A. Wati Longchar, "The Need for Doing Tribal Theology," in *Tribal Theology: A Reader*, Tribal study Series No. 12, ed. by Shimreingam Shimray (Jorhat: TSC, 2003), 12.

According to Longchar, 'space' does not merely mean natural objects outside of human beings. It means a place, a sacred place that gives tribals an identity and sustenance.⁶⁹ In the tribals search for liberation, the issue of space/land is central and crucial in the construction of tribal theology. Here the uniqueness of tribal worldview is that the tribal people's culture, religion, and spirituality cannot be conceived without creation/land or space. Tribals always understand themselves as an integral part of creation/land and not apart from it. Longchar writes, "Therefore, the issue of "space" is not merely a justice issue to be set alongside other justice concerns. But it is the foundational theology of self-understanding out of which liberation, justice, and then peace will flow naturally and necessarily."⁷⁰ Here, along with Tinker, he maintains that "the dimension of creation or space is absent in the Christian tradition. Nor is it to argue the sense of time is absent in indigenous tradition. The question here is of priority."⁷¹ Thus, the argument is that every contextualization has its methodological priority.⁷² The priority in tribal/indigenous theology is, therefore, space/land/creation. Space is thus the point of reference.

In world situations such as poverty, war, oppression, ethnic conflict, and identity issues cannot be understood without creation/land. Justice to space and creations/land is the key to the liberation of the whole world. That is why peace and harmony of nature/land is the starting point of the tribal people's spirituality and their search for liberation. Similarly, taking in line with Tinker, Longchar holds that commitment and dedication to the harmony of space spring forth in love, nurture, care, and acceptance. In other words, the first act to the liberation of all is to do justice to creations/space⁷³, and only by liberating the land/creations, true justice will be experienced by all.

Moreover, Longchar opines that tribals cannot do theology without relating to the issue of space. It is the space that is the ground or the beginning of tribal theology. He continues to argue that theology that addresses humanity alone and leaves the rest of the cosmos unaddressed is incomplete.⁷⁴ The question of identity, culture, and religion of the tribals are inseparably related to space. Thus the survival crisis of the poor, the weak, and the differently-able people and also nature is an integral part of the ecological crisis in the world today. The tribals always feel that without restoring justice to space, they and other oppressed communities cannot attain liberation.⁷⁵ He remarks this methodological priority of justice to land is essential not only because of the tribal 'earth-centred' worldview and tradition but because of the contemporary ecological crisis, the misuse of natural resources, and the

⁶⁹A. Wati Longchar, "Tribal Theology: Nature and Methods and Perspective," in *Journal of Tribal Studies: A Theological Reflection on the Culture and Social Life of Tribals in India*, V/1 (Jan.-Jun., 2001), 1.

⁷⁰Longchar, "Tribal Theology: Nature and Methods and Perspective," 1-2.

⁷¹George Tinker, "American Indian and the Arts of the Land: Spatial Metaphors and Contemporary Existence," in *Voice from the Third World*, XIV/2 (Dec., 1991), 171. Cited by Longchar, "Jesus Christ in Tribal Theology: A Critique," 276.

⁷²Longchar, "Jesus Christ in Tribal Theology: A Critique," 276.

⁷³Longchar, "Tribal Theology: Nature and Methods and Perspective," 2.

⁷⁴Longchar, "Tribal Theology: Nature and Methods and Perspective," 3.

⁷⁵Longchar, "Tribal Theology: Nature and Methods and Perspective," 4.

survival crisis of countless people.⁷⁶ Hence, the issue is not about rejecting or accepting different methods, but it is about priority as well as people's orientation.

5.1. CRITICISM OF LONGCHAR'S LAND-CENTRED METHODOLOGY

Nungshitula Jamir while discussing on the significant rediscoveries that Longchar made in the tribal traditions for making the Gospel message relevant and rooted in the tribal land, she points out that, for the tribals, every creature is an active participant in the divine, they inter-related, and has a measure of sensitivity and enjoys a certain degree of autonomy, spontaneity, and freedom.⁷⁷ Similarly, Vashum opines that "While, land and space theology brings in the necessary corrective to the one sided approach of the traditional Christian theology, not enough has been done in relating tribal theology with creation in the image of God."⁷⁸ He adds;

It seems to me that tribal theology has simply assumed and thus overlooked the significance of creation in the image of God. This is too important a thing to be overlooked; tribal theology must reclaim the centrality of this truth in its attempt to come up with a holistic theology of the people. Land and space together with our believing that we are all created in the image of God must be taken as the starting point of tribal/indigenous theology.⁷⁹

For Vashum, the image of God is significant in the tribal/indigenous context because of their history of colonization and missionization, which they experienced in the past and the enduring impacts these dimensions made upon them. Such experiences have negative consequences, especially at the psychological level. The primary task of tribal theology is to help tribal Christians overcome such psychological feelings of inferiority and self-debasement, which have been the consequences of a long history of colonization and missionization.⁸⁰ To overcome the inferiority complex and low self-esteem, the affirmation of the theology of *Imago Dei* becomes significant. Being created in the image of God means that all are created, and they belong to God. Thus, being fashioned in God's image means, as tribals/indigenous, they all share the glory of God's creation.⁸¹ Here Vashum tries to bring the tribal theological discussion back to the necessary foundation, i.e., the importance of 'image of God' in any faith articulation. This concept of the 'image of God' becomes more critical in the tribal life in their search for true identity and the right representation.

⁷⁶Longchar, "An Assessment of the Tribal Theology: Trends and Challenges for Future," 9.

⁷⁷Nungshitula Jamir, "The Emergence of Tribal Theology: Its Relevance," in *Journal of Tribal Studies*, VII/2 (Jun.-Dec., 2003), 310-311.

⁷⁸Vashum, "Tribal/Indigenous Theology and its Methodology: A Review and Proposal," 37; Yangkahao Vashum, "Space, Creation and Land: An Indigenous/Tribal Eco-Theology of the Northeast India," in *Journal of Tribal Studies*, XVII/1 (Jan.-Jun., 2012), 40-44.

⁷⁹Vashum, "Tribal/Indigenous Theology and its Methodology: A Review and Proposal," 37.

⁸⁰Vashum, "Tribal/Indigenous Theology and its Methodology: A Review and Proposal," 37-41; Yangkahao Vashum, "Tribal Theology: A Search for Relevant Theology and Ministry in Tribal Context," in *Tribal Theology: A Search for Quality Theological Education & Relevant Ministry*, Tribal Study Series No. 17, ed. by Yangkahao Vashum (Jorhat: TSC, 2009), 20.

⁸¹Vashum, "Tribal Theology: A Search for Relevant Theology and Ministry in Tribal Context," 20. Yangkahao Vashum, "Introducing Tribal Theology: A Case for Contextual Theology," in *Journal of Tribal Studies*, XVI/2 (Jul.-Dec., 2011), 6-7.

One understands that the perspective set forth by Longchar is noteworthy in the contemporary tribal theological scenario. That means one cannot neglect the importance of space/land/creation in tribal theological articulation. At the same time, some issues that can be discussed further in the light of Longchar's theological method are: Firstly, Longchar's space/land centred theology is local, yet it is 'logocentric'. The point is that land/space is pivotal in tribal worldview; however, it is not exclusive to take as the point of reference (logocentrism). The land/space is integrally part of the whole reality/ies. It is within the communitarian setup; therefore, it cannot be prioritized. Hence tribal theology cannot absolutize land at the expense of other entities such as humans, God, culture, and lived-experiences.⁸² Secondly, the diversity of tribals, as well as their cultures and worldviews, are not clearly indicated in his theological articulation. Here, the seriousness of making misrepresentation and generalization of the whole tribals can be identified. Thirdly, Longchar does not delve into the lived-experiences of those tribal people settling in the urban areas and their connection with the land/space. The issue is how does tribal theology reconnects those tribal or people who are unattachment from the land. Then, how does the theology of land and space continue to make an impact on their lives?

As noticed, the earth is invaded and destroyed by humans; there is always a need to be in solidarity with it. Besides, it needs to be liberated, preserved, and saved from the clutches of humans. Moreover, tribals claim land to their identity needs to be seriously questioned because in the context of plurality in the contemporary world, land/space in any way is no more exclusive; it is for all – both for humanity and all creations. Therefore right to land for nature such as plants and animals is imperative. Land should not be a bone of contention among different countries, communities, and people. But the irony is that for the sake of the land/territory, wars continue to wage; fighting and bloodsheds persist, and whole creations are suffering and dying. There is a point to reinterpret the concept of space/land, as humans still have misunderstood the idea of land/space as only in terms of property. The necessity for reflection on the concept of land is consequently to make it more land-friendly, meaningful in life. With such an effort, the world and its communities can respect one another and live in justice, harmony, and peace both for land and for all creations.

6. VASHUM'S POSTCOLONIAL METHOD

Another overriding method that is applicable in the construction of indigenous/tribal theology is postcolonial methodology. Among the tribal theologians, Yangkahao Vashum is one of the theologians who advocated an indigenous/tribal theology from a postcolonial perspective. According to him, "indigenous theology is a form of postcolonial theology in that it emerges out of a people's struggle against the force of marginalization and oppression."⁸³ It is to dismantle all forms of every colonial power – the hidden aspects of those institutional and cultural forces that had maintained the colonial and neo-colonial powers and that remain even

⁸²M. Maisuangdibou, "Re-envisioning Tribal Christian Theology: Postmodern Perspectives," <https://www.academia.edu/>, accessed 14th July 2020.

⁸³Vashum, "Tribal/Indigenous Theology and its Methodology: A Review and Proposal," 50.

after the natives achieve political independence.⁸⁴ The main focus in this method is, therefore, to decolonize and demissionize the colonial systems,⁸⁵ in all levels of life.

While situating indigenous/tribal theology, one can witness postcolonial situation which is generally characterized by ‘in-between spaces’ as opposed to binary oppositions. Likewise, postcolonial identity can be recognized by its hybridized identity. This hybridized identity and character is historically a natural by-product of colonialism and western missionization. In general, the ethos of postcolonial theology, according to Mark L. Taylor, is defined by the combination of the discourse of different and the discourse of liberating struggle, what he calls it ‘differentiated liberating struggle’.⁸⁶ Here, it is ‘differentiated’ because of the fluid and hybrid nature of the postcolonial situation, and a ‘liberative struggle’ because of its commitment to liberation from colonial powers and agents.⁸⁷

Vashum points out that a fruitful indigenous theology will undertake three main functions as “it seeks to expose and emasculate the body of global forces which undermine the very existence of its peoples and their cultures.”⁸⁸ Firstly, one of the main concerns of indigenous/tribal theology is “liberating struggle”; struggle for liberation from socio-political-economic and cultural bondage. Here, he brings the importance of the praxis method by which one has to address the existing conditions or situations of the people to ensure a better and healthier future. Secondly, the essential function of indigenous/tribal theology is to take the history, memories, and experiences of the people seriously. Here, the need to remember the past is critical to serve as both affirmation and expectation for building and shaping the future and dreams of the people. Thirdly, the primary concern of indigenous/tribal theology is that it has to be equipped to recognize the ‘differentiated complexities’ that go beyond the simplistic binary of colonizer/colonized, ruler/ruled, or powerful/powerless. Vashum delineates, “An indigenous theology that is influenced by postcolonial thinking and discourse must be amenable to the fluidity and hybridity which characterise tribal existence.” In other sense, it must reject the Western worldview, which is structuralized according to ‘discreet and mutually exclusive categories’,⁸⁹ such as the same/other, subject/object, spirit/matter, civilized/primitive, pure/impure, and rational/irrational and so on.⁹⁰ Vashum argues:

Modern history is replete with evidence of how such binary thought pattern were manifested in the ways that the colonizer work continuously to delineate and reinforce a clear differentiation

⁸⁴Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004, Indian Reprint), 63.

⁸⁵Yangkahao Vashum, “Colonialism, Missionaries, and Indigenous: A Critical Appraisal,” in *Journal of Tribal Studies*, XII/2 (Jul.-Dec., 2007), 22.

⁸⁶Mark L. Taylor, “Spirit and Liberation: Achieving Postcolonial Theology in the United State,” in Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera, eds., *Postcolonial Theologies: Diversity and Empire*, 46. Cited by Vashum, “Tribal/Indigenous Theology and its Methodology: A Review and Proposal,” 50.

⁸⁷Vashum, “Tribal/Indigenous Theology and its Methodology: A Review and Proposal,” 50.

⁸⁸Vashum, “Tribal/Indigenous Theology and its Methodology: A Review and Proposal,” 35.

⁸⁹Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner and Mayra Rivera, “Introduction,” in Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera, eds., *Postcolonial Theologies: Diversity and Empire* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 46. Cited by Vashum, “Tribal/Indigenous Theology and its Methodology: A Review and Proposal,” 52.

⁹⁰Vashum, “Tribal/Indigenous Theology and its Methodology: A Review and Proposal,” 51-52.

between himself and the colonized. Fortunately for projects such as Indigenous theology postcolonial theory recognizes that things are never organized in such inclusive, rigid, and hierarchical terms. Indeed, there are nuances, in-between spaces, intersections, and psychological manipulations at work in relationships.⁹¹

Another important aspect is that indigenous theology is postcolonial theology in nature because the natives had achieved independence from foreign ruled, and it is because this model also takes the force of relativity or inter-dependence between God-human-creations sincerely. When one examines this model, even though after different nations are liberated from foreign rulers, there remains the colour of hybridity; the values and ways of thinking of colonialism are apparent to these days. Thus postcolonial identity can be recognized by its hybridized identity. Vashum further states that historically this hybridized identity is by nature a by-product of colonialism.⁹² Some of the common metaphors to depict this identity are like borderlands, crossroads, and frontiers and which are indicative of the ‘interstitial’ nature of identity.⁹³ In this world of hybridity, however, people continue to influence one another consciously or unconsciously. This hybrid nature of identity can be defined as ‘undifferentiated identity’, meaning pure as one but multiplicity of identity in one. Such helps the people to appreciate the differences they belong to rather than one broad identity. As diversity is God’s creation, under such diversified identities, people are integral in the life of the community at the same time they influence each other.⁹⁴

Indigenous postcolonial methodology must take into account the plurality of identities and ‘coalescing of cultures’ within the broad spectrum of tribal/indigenous peoples. Instead of “resorting to painting all the indigenous peoples with one broad stroke,” indigenous/tribal theology should be able to accommodate and affirm the diverse and variable identities that exist within the indigenous people themselves.⁹⁵ This issue of plurality of identity is significant in the present tribal/indigenous theological construction as in the recent past, and this aspect was not taken seriously in the theological circle. In this sense, taking into consideration the plurality and respecting this pluralistic socio-religious-cultural identity is vital, and it needs a more comprehensive investigation.

6.1. CRITICISM OF VASHUM’S PSOTCOLONIAL METHOD

Postcolonial method is a crucial model in tribal theology because it takes into account three things: firstly, the impact of colonialism on tribal society is a location for postcolonial studies. Secondly, indigenous culture is not homogenous, but it is multifaceted and stratified.⁹⁶ Finally, it is a technique of resistance against colonialism, and it also delves into the psychological and social impressions of colonialism on the natives’ life.

⁹¹Vashum, “Tribal/Indigenous Theology and its Methodology: A Review and Proposal,” 52.

⁹²Vashum, “Indigenous Theology as Postcolonial Theology,” 9-17.

⁹³Homi Bhabha calls such perception of identity as an “interstitial perspective” which challenges the conventional understanding of identity. Vashum, “Tribal/Indigenous Theology and its Methodology: A Review and Proposal,” 52.

⁹⁴Vashum, *Models for Contextual Theology*, 14 July 2008.

⁹⁵Vashum, “Tribal/Indigenous Theology and its Methodology: A Review and Proposal,” 53.

⁹⁶Vashum, “Tribal/Indigenous Theology and its Methodology: A Review and Proposal,” 53.

Postcolonial method in tribal/indigenous theology is therefore critical as there is a need to decolonize the colonial imprints, which affect the smooth development and progress of the contemporary tribal/indigenous life. It is essential to deconstruct the systems and terms that uphold binary opposites, and those establish a relation of the dominance of colonizer over the colonized. Regarding the question of identity and dignity, the ‘image of God’ is a necessary framework that indigenous/tribals need to reassert their humanity. As Vashum states, “Being created in the image of God means that we all belong to God, and we are all children of God. Being created in God’s image means, as tribals, we also share the glory of God’s creation.”⁹⁷ It is in this sense that postcolonial methodology helps tribals to reaffirm their identity and dignity in God.

Despite the importance of postcolonial methodology, there are also limitations in it as the model itself is entirely foreign to the tribal/indigenous people despite colonialism and postcolonialism are integrally part of their life. That means tribal themselves have to come up with their postcolonial methodology. It need not rejects the present method; instead, it is to move beyond the existing model to make it more contextual and relevant to the tribal people. Secondly, concerning the issue of identity, hybridity, which refers to the creation of new transcultural forms in colonial life, is not neutral, and one cannot overlook the monopolization of Western/dominant culture over the other native’s culture in such ‘hybridization’. Thirdly, postcolonialism is human-centred approach. It has no space for issues like an ecological crisis, climate change, postmodernity, and the contemporary media-related lifestyle. Fourthly, postcolonial method does not accommodate the tribal worldview of God-creation-human interrelatedness in its scheme of things. Hence there are severe drawbacks for tribal theology to apply postcolonial method. Thus this strategy alone cannot suffice the aspiration of tribal theology. Therefore, tribal scholars have to accommodate both the local and nonlocal approaches to construct an inclusive tribal/indigenous theology.

7. TRIBAL FEMINIST/WOMANIST THEOLOGICAL METHOD

To club tribal feminist/womanist approaches under one heading is not appropriate. Their contributions cannot be denied or unrepresented. They have participated immensely in the development of tribal theology and feminist theology in particular. However, the domain is more recent; the writer has combined their approaches. This aspect does not, in any way, tries to demean their works and their scholarships.

Feminist/womanist scholars have questioned the immensity of tribal culture and worldview. They pointed out the ambiguities in tribal culture and tradition, thus claiming that tribal culture is one-sided, monotonous, male-centred, patriarchal, and parochial. Even though the tribal community is a communitarian community, however, it is never an egalitarian one.⁹⁸ Patriarchy is at the root of the community’s worldview, culture, and social

⁹⁷Vashum, “Tribal/Indigenous Theology and its Methodology: A Review and Proposal,” 41-42.

⁹⁸Some scholars argue that tribal society is an egalitarian society as there are no class and caste system. However, numerous women scholars and others have highlighted that tribal society is not an egalitarian society as there is deep-seated patriarchy that oppressed the women throughout the history. Therefore the researcher prefers to call the tribal society as communitarian rather than an egalitarian one.

setup. In this setting, tribal feminist/womanist thinkers are deeply concerned with the representation of women in tribal society, culture, polity, theology, literature, and other discourses that they try to free themselves and the social order from patriarchy and any forms of oppression.⁹⁹

R.L. Hnuni, one of the pioneers of tribal feminist theology, expounds that feminist theology develops out of the experiences of women, which is holistic as it rejects dualism and seeks liberation for all humanity.¹⁰⁰ She maintains that the fullness of life of women should be the norm for doing feminist Christian theology.¹⁰¹ In the same manner, Limatula Longkumer advocates feminist theology – a reading of the Bible from women’s perspective. She proposes few hermeneutical tools: (1) an interpretation that resists any form of oppression, (2) reading the Bible from the context of the readers, (3) a critique of both the Bible and the tribal culture that are oppressive to humanity, (4) a contextual reading that is praxis-oriented in approach, (5) justice as the theme of feminist reading, (6) a synthesis of biblical and oral sources, (7) finally, storytelling as a method of reading the Bible.¹⁰² She further indicates that women’s concern in “biblical interpretation is that the Bible should be used as a tool to transform and liberate the people but not to use as a tool to suppress or oppress any section of humanity.”¹⁰³

According to Eyingbeni Lotha, “community of togetherness” is the aspiration of tribal feminism. She asserts, “Tribal feminism... is not aimed at polarizing women and men. It does not seek a power race with men, who have dominated the society since head hunting times.”¹⁰⁴ To achieve feminist aspirations, the focus on reinterpretation and rereading of the Bible with the objectives of liberation and transformation is vigorously highlighted in numerous tribal scholars.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Lovely Awomi James writes, “They (women scholars) are now able to critically analyze the destructive and dehumanizing elements within their own given cultural context.”¹⁰⁶ She calls for a new definition and interpretation of womanhood in the tribal setting, which is thoroughly grounded in their being as women and in their own feminine experiences.¹⁰⁷ For her, “Womanist theology is [a] critical reflection

⁹⁹M. Maisuangdibou, “An Interpretation of the Traditional Myths of the Liangmai Community: Towards a Liangmai Theological Hermeneutics” (D.Th. Thesis, FFRRC, Kottayam, 2019): 117.

¹⁰⁰R.L. Hnuni, “Feminist Theology: Meaning and Concern,” in *Contextual Theology*, BCS Study Material: Theology, compiled by Wati Longchar (Kolkata: SCEPTRE, 2013), 202-203.

¹⁰¹R.L. Hnuni, “Feminist Theology: Methodology,” in *Contextual Theology*, BCS Study Material: Theology, compiled by Wati Longchar (Kolkata: SCEPTRE, 2013), 213.

¹⁰²Limatula Longkumer, “Tribal Feminist Reading of the Bible,” in *Tribal Theology and the Bible: A Search for Contextual Relevance*, ed. by Yangkahao Vashum, TSS No. 19. (Jorhat: TSC, 2011), 145-149.

¹⁰³Longkumer, “Tribal Feminist Reading of the Bible,” 139.

¹⁰⁴Eyingbeni Lotha, “Community of Togetherness: Perspective in Doing Tribal Women Theology,” in *Tribal Theology: A Reader*, ed. by Shimreingam Shimray (Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre, 2003), 178.

¹⁰⁵Eyingbeni Humtsoe, “Tribal Theology and the Bible: A Review,” in *Tribal Theology and the Bible: A Search for Contextual Relevance*, ed. by Yangkahao Vashum, TSS No. 19. (Jorhat: TSC, 2011), 65.

¹⁰⁶Lovely Awomi James, “Reconceptualizing ‘Womanhood’ in Contemporary Naga Tribal Context: A Naga Woman’s Theological Perspectives,” *Journal of Tribal Studies* XV/2 (July-Dec., 2010): 15.

¹⁰⁷Awomi James, “Reconceptualizing ‘Womanhood’ in Contemporary Naga Tribal Context: A Naga Woman’s Theological Perspectives,” 16.

upon Naga/tribal women's place in the world that God has created by taking seriously Naga/tribal women's experience as human beings who are made in God's image."¹⁰⁸

8. CRITICISM OF FEMINIST/WOMENIST METHODS

Tribal feminist/womanist scholars have subverted the patriarchy. Their works dissected the whole male stereotyped and gender bias in tribal society. Their methodology is developed in response to the limits of traditional methods that do not capture the experiences of women and others who have been marginalized in the academic world as well as in society. The point of reference for women's approach is the rejection of patriarchy and its culture. Women's theologians have pointed out the constrains in the tribal cultures that are detrimental to the half of tribal population. They argue that tribal society is far from egalitarianism.¹⁰⁹ Women experienced oppression in numerous ways. Therefore, the theological context one conceived cannot neglect the lived experiences of women and other oppressed groups. To bring justice in society and academia, tribal women scholars insist on women's recognition, acceptance, and equality for women in all areas of life. They assert for dismantling of patriarchy and the rereading or reinterpretation of the Bible as well as the culture.

The contention one finds in feminist/womanist methodology is how does one 'reread' or 'reinterpret' the texts? What is/are the method/s of this rereading and reinterpretation? Is this rereading all about applying any theory justly? Otherwise, are all these theories, such as traditional approaches, reader-response theory, postcolonial study, decolonization, deconstruction, eco-criticism, dialogical tools, new criticism, feminist criticism, or any other innovative models part of rereading? The point is that tribal feminist theology also needs to overcome methodological shortage and predicament if it is to have a concrete tribal theological epistemology of its own. It has to re-examine women's experiences, both past, and present seriously, to construct a substantial methodology.

9. COMMUNITARIAN METHODOLOGY: A PROPOSAL

No single method is adequate and perfect, and it cannot comprehend the totality of tribal quest of total liberation and transformation. Methodology in its entirety is an area where tribal Christian theology has been grappling since tribal theology was introduced in an academic world. There is no such a single methodology that can suffice the whole aspirations of the tribals. Tribals are not homogenous, and such demands multiplicity of methods in any tribal theological study. Brightstar Jones Syiemlieh delineates, "..., it can be said that the prospects of tribal Christian theology depend much on its methodology."¹¹⁰ He, for instance, also suggests that "... tribal Christian theology needs to take into account the theoretical

¹⁰⁸Lovely James, "A Naga Women Perspective on the Headhunting Culture of the Nagas: A Factor that Reinforces the Culture Myth of Male Superiority and Female Inferiority," *Journal of Tribal Studies*, X/1 (Jan.-June 2006): 10.

¹⁰⁹Maisuangdibou, *Liangmai and Christianity*, 143.

¹¹⁰Brightstar Jones Syiemlieh, "The Future of Tribal Christian Theology in Northeast India: Possible Directions," in *Tribal Theology on the Move*, Tribal Study Series No. 14. Eds. by Shimreingam Shimray and Limatula Longkumer (Jorhat: TSC, 2006), 42.

insights of postmodernity where the watchword is ‘integration of methodologies’.¹¹¹ Various approaches, to name a few postmodernism, feminism/womenism, cultural studies, subaltern studies, critical theories, Marxism, psychoanalysis, ethnography, are viable methodologies in the tribal theological discourses. By way of illustration, postmodernism involves a rejection of the modern worldview but launched under the conditions of modernity.¹¹² Underlying everything is the belief that all human knowledge is limited and culturally conditioned.¹¹³ Here, tribal theology needs to engage and dialogue with modern sciences and other social-cultural theories. It requires special attention in moving together with modern scientific ideas to meet the challenges of modern tribal societies. This dimension should also serve both as a critique as well as a partner in the construction of human knowledge.

Tribal/indigenous communitarian philosophy of God-world-human (*Ting-kadih-maina*)¹¹⁴ interrelatedness which theologians like Thanzauva, Longchar, Vashum, and others uphold in the construction of tribal/indigenous theology is a critical component. However, the researchers discovered that tribal theologians had not comprehensively deliberated on the communitarian model. They also did not make use of this communitarian model as an explicit and authoritative approach in their tribal theological articulation. However, this tribal communitarianism is the most striking element in the tribal world that can be offered to the body of knowledge. To incorporate the integral relationship of communitarian interrelationship – God-human-world – in theological methodology is the need of the hour to re-balance the dominant space-centred and the liberation-praxis models in tribal theology. This dimension will also help to equally respect and provide space for God, the world (including all creations), and human beings.¹¹⁵ Anyhow, the tribal viewpoint of communitarian life is broad, open, and ambiguous. Yet, the generality and extensiveness of theology and other subjects demand to focus on the whole aspects of life.

The tribal worldview of communitarian interconnectedness is inclusive. It is embedded in all tribal communities of the world and especially in the tribal life of Northeast India. It is a communitarian model of reality that involved God, nature/creations, and humans in integral nature. In other words, the whole reality/ies exists because of the communitarian nature of God-nature-human. Longchar disseminates that nature or the world is a central theme in tribal tradition, which is opposite to dominant Christian thinking of humans

¹¹¹Syiemlieh, “The Future of Tribal Christian Theology in Northeast India: Possible Directions,” 42.

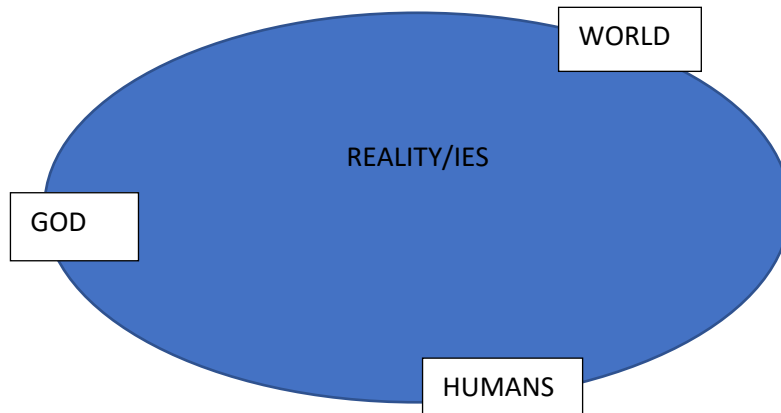
¹¹²Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 2.

¹¹³Kevin “O” Donnell, *Postmodernism* (Oxford: Lion Publishing Plc, 2003), 6.

¹¹⁴God-world-human, or God-cosmos-human, or God-creation-human are interchangeably used in this paper and these terms point to the same reality or the meaning. The researcher will like to use a transliterate term *Ting-kadi-maina* in Liangmai language. The term *Ting-kadih-maina* is derived from the words *Ting* from *Tingwang* (God), *kadi* from the word *kadi* (means the world/land including all other creations) and *maina* from *chamaina* (human being). In Greek it is derivatively used as *Theo-cosmo-anthropic* inter-relationship or *Theo-cosmic-anthropos* which is a combination of three Greek words *Theos* (God), *cosmos* (World/universe) and *anthropos* (hu-man); it denotes the relationship of God-cosmos-human and it also points to the relation of all the realities. Refer Maisuangdibou, *Liangmai and Christianity*, 147-150.

¹¹⁵Maisuangdibou, *Tribal Theological Hermeneutics*, 160, 163.

(*anthropos*) as the primary point of reference and norm.¹¹⁶ As a result, nature is equally important as God and human beings in theology and faith articulation. They are integrally part of the whole reality. The notion of communitarianism is cyclical – God-world-human:



The figure above depicts that the three entities are in an integral relationship. They are connected and interrelated as the whole reality/ies. The Supreme Being, the creator, and sustainer is integrally part of the reality/ies. The world/nature serves as the mediator between God and humans, and vice versa. This correlation of God-world-human (*Theos-cosmic-anthropos* in Greek) should thus be the point of reference in tribal theology. This concept of *Ting-kadih-maina* is not unfamiliar to various communities/religions/philosophies of the world. The point of departure for tribals from others is the overt emphasis given to this communitarian relationship. This communitarianism is the whole philosophy and worldview of the tribal communities. For tribal-indigenous people, nature/creation is not merely to satisfy God or humans, but it is an equal partner in the continuum.

At the same time, this communitarian model may have its weaknesses, and it cannot be absolutized whatsoever. But for tribal theology and tribal knowledge at large, this interconnectedness serves an explicit purpose as it is the decisive point of reference that is different from the dominant theological methodology. In short, the relational understanding of *Ting-kadih-maina* is to enrich the tribal Christian idea of God and the importance of nature and all creations. At the same time, the world/creation is the point of interface, and it is the medium where all realities interact. Such theological articulation is also to counter radical dualism in the Christian understanding of faith, and it is also to bridge the horizons of tribal Christian life and their living contexts. The process is a total contextualization of Christianity in the living realities of the tribal/indigenous people. Moreover, it helps to rebuild the oneness of life in totality.

10. CRITICISM OF COMMUNITARIAN METHODOLOGY

Applying the communitarian method is pivotal in tribal theology and other disciplines. Tribal knowledge has to interpret and analyse anything from the perspective of the community. This

¹¹⁶Longchar, *The Traditional Ao-Naga Worldview and Its Contribution Towards a Christian Understanding of Creation*, 331. Longchar argues that while the doctrine of creation is a subordinate category in the main line Christian traditions, “creation” is the centre and key to understand all realities in the traditional tribal worldview.

communitarian perspective is the basis of tribal dissemination of knowledge. For instance, any text such as ecology, anthropology, sociology, economics, philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, psychology, literature, and other domains has to be examined from this communitarian point of view. It accommodates the concepts of land, ecology, justice, self, mind, peace, relationship, rights, and equality. Anyhow, this communitarian method is not free from shortcomings. The problems identified in this approach are: (1) the tribal worldview of communitarianism is vanishing in the contemporary tribal society. (2) it is a traditional worldview; therefore, it is limited in its perspective. (3) it does not deliberate several issues, such as women's experience and technological questions. (4) the communitarian approach is a broad or macro strategy; thus, it could neglect micro themes like health, emotion, wellbeing, creativity, imagination, and more.

As indicated, communitarianism could be enhanced by contemporary methodologies. As a case in point, the distinctiveness of postmodernism is its rejection of the modern belief of totalization, universalization, and meta-narrative. At the same time, it deconstructs the binary structure and 'logocentrism'. The significant dimension in postmodernism is that it critically accommodates small, less, unknown, unpopular narratives, stories, instead of one grand-narrative. In other words, it celebrates the elements of diversity and decentering; it also upholds such as multilayered, and reality is inferred as more significant than what one thinks and defines. In such a case, native's myths, worldviews, cultures are equally essential and integrally part of the diverse epistemologies. For postmodern thinkers, the Bible itself is a collection of small narratives. There is a similarity between the tribal understanding and postmodern perception of realities. One needs to dissociate from any model that claimed for universality. Nevertheless, to use any model is to apply to specific cases appropriately.

CONCLUSION

As noticed, a methodology is the underpinning device of knowledge. Every context has various issues; therefore, diverse academia or theologies apply different methods. It is the methodology that defines the perspective of the study. If the approach is not appropriate, then the knowledge generated will be faulty or inappropriate. The perspectives and the outcome of theologies are diverse as their emphases are different. As noted, tribal theology seeks liberation and transformation of the cosmos from the tribal communitarian point of view. From this perspective, one can sum up that tribal theology is formulated out of tribal context to recapture their heritage, history, and tradition, and it is for the total liberation and transformation of the world.

Moreover, tribal theology views that emancipation and cosmic justice as critical elements to experience true humanity and cosmonity. For such purpose, the struggle for justice in the context of the tribals is cosmical — the worldview of the tribal people that is the interrelatedness God-world-humans is the starting point. This paper thus highlighted the various methodologies applied in tribal faith articulation and not only that a communitarian method is proposed as a more inclusive approach to the tribal experiences and their world.

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