

Theological Vision of Tribals in Chhotanagpur

Agapit Tirkey, S.J.

In this article, the author recounts the various tribal myths on creation accessible in the plateau of Chhotanagpur. He illustrates the salient features of the myth on creation as found in the Kurukh, Santal, Munda, Kharia, and Ho accounts. Though there are striking similarities in the narratives, there are remarkable differences. On the basis of the accounts, the author points out that there is a clear idea of the Supreme Being as the creator of the world and its creatures. In this article, Agapit Tirkey highlights certain perennial thrusts of tribal theology as eco-friendly, pro-life, life of communion, etc. He concludes his article by drawing the attention of the readers to the closeness of the theological vision of the tribals of Chhotanagpur and the biblical theological vision in the book of Genesis.

Introduction

The plateau of Chhotanagpur includes (a) Chhotanagpur region of Jharkhand; (b) districts of Jashpur, Surguja and Raigarh in Chhattisgarh; (c) districts of Sambalpur, Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj in Orissa; (d) districts of Purulia, Bankur, and Midinapur in West Bengal. This region provides three major cultural streams of India: (i) the Austro-Asiatic, represented by the Mundari-Santali groups, (ii) the Dravidian, represented by the Kurukh and Malto groups, (iii) the Aryan, represented by the Sadaan groups. The first and the second together form the tribal and the third non-tribal groups. The history of tribal movements in this region is a history of resistance to the attempt at conquest and assimilation of the hills people and their culture by the invading plains people and their culture.

Since each tribal group is unique and different from other tribal groups, it is not possible to discuss their various theological visions in this paper. However, the Mundas, Kurukhs (Uraons), Kharias, Santals and Hos are the major tribes in Chhotanagpur, and therefore, it is hoped that they represent the theological vision of the tribals of the region in a satisfactory manner. Though a good number of them have embraced Christianity, it has not contradicted their relationship with the Supreme Being and their experience of Him through generation after generation. In fact, Christianity has revealed and enriched this experience to continue and to grow at a much deeper level. Benefiting from modern education they have entered into different public as well as private service sectors in urban and rural areas of various states in the country. In the last 150 years or so, many of the tribal groups of the above

region have migrated to Assam and North Bengal in big number initially as labour force in tea gardens and settled there. Similarly, they have also gone to the Andaman and Nicobar islands and have become the inhabitants of those islands. In the process of these forms of social mobility, they have carried their culture and religion along with them wherever they are. A major part of their theological vision is best expressed in their various creation accounts as discussed below.

a. Kurukh Account

According to one of the Kurukh creation accounts, there was *water* everywhere in the beginning with sea creatures. *Dharmes* (God) wanted to make the *earth*. So, he sent the *kilkila* (king fisher) to the world of the earthworms beyond the sixteen seas to fetch a tiny *seed* of the earth. The bird went down the sea and brought the seed from the earthworms and gave it to *Dharmes*. He churned the sea till it got muddy and dropped the seed there which multiplied and took the present form of the earth as *saat-pati-raaji* (kingdom with seven corners).

After making the earth, *Dharmes* began to form human beings in a mould like tiles and dry them in the sun but *Hansraj*' horse thought, 'If the human beings fill the whole earth, they will kill me by constantly riding on me,' and, therefore, it trampled them underfoot. Seeing this, *Dharmes* made male and female *dogs* of clay and put them to dry in a corner of the fireplace. That is why even today the dog likes to sleep near the fireplace. When they were dry He baked them, put blood in them and they became alive and ferocious to drive away the *Hansraj* horse.

Dharmes now began to make human beings with clay, dried and baked them, put *jiya* (life principle) and blood into them. They became alive and filled the earth. Similarly, He made other creatures of the earth and the sky. He fed them personally, lovingly and faithfully everyday till they were able to find food for themselves. Human beings multiplied in great number and filled the whole face of the earth. One day, He went hunting quails and partridges with the help of His *besra* (hawk). On His way, however, He could not put His feet anywhere on the earth because the human beings had dirtied its surface everywhere with their excreta! This was a great offence against *Dharmes*. He regretted to have made the human beings. Offended by their mean act, He sent *chicch-chep* (rain of fire) on them for seven days and seven nights. All the human beings perished except the *bhaiya-bahin* (brother-sister). The beloved of *Dharmes* had hidden this pair of male and female children in her *khopa* (bun of hair) and thus saved them from perishing. Afterwards she hid them in the hole of a *crab* covered with the *ganga* thicket (Job's tear) of the *sira-sita-naal* (low-land) in the *saat-pati-raaji*.

With destruction of the human beings, food supply to *Dharmes* by way of offering sacrifice to Him ceased. He was thus hungry. His beloved told Him that His happiness could return only with the finding of human beings. He asked her where to find them. She told Him to go to the *sira-sita-naal* where

He could find them. So He went there and found the *bhaiya-bahin* and brought them to His abode with great joy. He kept them with Him, fed them and looked after them lovingly with fatherly care. He called them *grand children*² and they in return called Him *grand father*.³

When the *bhaiya-bahin* grew up, He gave them *field* to cultivate, *oxen* to plough and *seeds* to sow and reap. When their *crops* were growing, some insects and pests attacked them and thus they were getting destroyed. The *bhaiya-bahin* then went up to *Dharmes* to tell Him their problem. After listening to them, He taught them the ritual of *danda-katta*.⁴ The *bhaiya-bahin* used to sleep separately by putting a log of the *simbali* (silk cotton) tree. One night they drank *hanria* (rice beer) and lay drunk. *Dharmes* and His beloved removed the log between them and they slept together as husband and wife. *Dharmes* said that it was all right because they were born from different parents. Thus, He revealed to them the secret of procreation and human beings multiplied and filled the whole *saat-pati-raaji*.

Dharmes divided human beings into various *gotars* (clans), such as, *Bara, Barwa, Baxla, Beck, Ekka, Kerketta, Kindo, Kispotta, Kujur, Lakra, Minj, Panna, Tigga, Tirkey, Toppo, Xalxo, Xaxa, Xess*, etc., in order to enter into marriage relationships outside one's own clan. These *totems* belong to animals, birds, fish, plants and minerals. Thus, through marriage, the creative activity of *Dharmes* among human beings continues even to this day.

In another version of creation account, there was darkness all over the earth. There was *water* everywhere and many *creatures* were living there. *Dharmes* was interested in making other creatures on the earth but how would he keep them without dry land? Therefore, he sent the *crab* below the water to fetch the clay in order to make the earth. The crab was pleased and went down swimming to fetch the clay. It dug it up and holding it in its claws returned. However, during its return journey, the clay got washed away. *Dharmes* asked the crab where the clay was. The crab replied that while it was swimming back the clay in its claws got washed away. *Dharmes* was displeased with the crab and cursed it, saying: "You seem to be quite straightforward but you are crooked and from today you will walk the same way." From that day the crab walks in a crooked manner and looks at others from the corner of its eyes!

Dharmes now began to reflect whom to send to fetch the clay. The *tortoise* came to Him merrily and beating its chest said: "*Dharme*, I shall go to fetch the clay." *Dharmes* said: "Go." It immediately dived into the water and collected the clay on its back and came up to Him. However, while swimming back all the clay was washed away from its back. *Dharmes* asked it: "Where is the clay?" The tortoise replied: "*Dharme*, I was carrying the clay on my back but it got washed away when I was swimming back." Feeling shy it hid its head, mouth and eyes. From that day on if it sees anyone, it hides its head.

Dharmes now did not know what to do. He began to reflect and at the end the *earthworm* came up and said: "I shall go, *Dharme*, to fetch the clay. If I fail to do your work, pardon me." *Dharmes* asked it, "How will you fetch the clay? The crab had its claws to hold it and the tortoise had its back to carry it. In spite of these they failed to fetch it. How will you do it?" At this the earthworm went down to the bottom of the sea and filled its belly with clay as much as it could and came up to the surface of the sea. *Dharmes* said: "Let us see whether you have brought the clay or not." The earthworm replied: "I have brought it, *Dharme Aba* (father)," and it began to throw out the clay on his palm and it kept spreading out and drying up to become the present earth. After this, *Dharmes* made all the *creatures* of the earth and the *birds* of the air.

Next, *Dharmes* made a pair of *male* and *female* human beings out of clay and kept them out to dry. After they were dry he would bake them in fire and put life into them but the *pankha-hansa*⁵ horse became angry after seeing the human beings. It thought that after they were many they would use it to do their work. Therefore, it trampled the human beings of clay into dust. *Dharmes* made human beings of clay a couple of times more and kept them out to dry. The horse came to destroy them. Now a *dog* was there to chase it away. *Dharmes* made the dog in order to protect the human beings. Seeing the behaviour of the horse he put life into the human beings of clay that were not baked. That is why the human beings have to die in this world. In the beginning the human beings were a couple like a pair of eggs of a dove. From this couple afterwards, the earth was filled with human beings.

*Dandakatta*⁶ Ritual

Symbolically, this ritual expresses protection of *Dharmes* against evil. As life is experienced in a paradoxical existence of good and evil, life and death, the twofold end of this ritual is first, to obtain blessing, *viz.*, happiness and prosperity of life in terms of sound health and increase in *progeny*, *cattle* and abundant yield from *crops* and, secondly, to ward off evil.

The ritual is known by various names, *viz.*, *danda-katta* (stick-splitting), *palkansna* (tooth-breaking), *bhelwan-phari* (*bhelwan* twig splitting), *bhaakh-khandna* (destroying curse). No priest is required for the ritual. Any *Kurukh* male acquainted with the ritual may perform it. He recites the account of traditional creation myth, recalling (a) how *Dharmes* made the earth from a little bit of clay, (b) a universal burning of fire during which the *bhaiya-bahin* hid themselves in a crab hole, (c) how *Dharmes* found them and taught them the art of agriculture, created day and night for them, initiated them into the secret of procreation and confided to them the mysterious ritual of *danda-katta* with which to avert the attacks of beasts and pests on their crops and to destroy the effect of the *evil eye* and *evil mouth* of enemies.

The whole proceeding begins with drawing of the mystic diagram of the universe with its seven corners in the form of three concentric circles and seven arcs on the outer circle. The circles and arcs starting from the centre are formed in the order of *white*, *red* and *black* colours representing the *rainbow*. These colours are of powdered *bichch*⁷ or rice flour, red clay powder from the

hearth and black charcoal dust. A handful of pearl rice is placed at the centre and an egg is stood upright on it and the split end of a *keero*⁸ twig (wild cashew) rests on the egg.

The significance of these articles is explained as follows: The rainbow being the greatest bow in creation, is the most potent weapon of *Dharmes* against the *evil eye* and the *evil mouth*. The egg is a pure source of life. It is a *nirmuhi* (faceless) sacrifice to faceless God. It is broken in order to symbolise and also effect together with the split *keero* twig the bursting of the *evil eye* and the splitting of the *evil mouth* of witches and sorcerers and thus destroy the evil doings of the spirits let loose by them. It is hoped through the ritual that no harm would be caused to the *crops, cattle and children* of those on whose behalf the ritual is performed. The oil of the *keero* nut is poisonous and a drop of it in the eyes is sure to cause permanent blindness. Hence, there is the use of the *keero* twig over the sacrificial egg in order to impart its dreaded effect on the evil doers. The pearl rice is the symbol of life. This ritual is always performed with or without the full recital of the creation myth at all important events, such as, on the name giving ceremony of a child, during a wedding, after a funeral ceremony, while going for the ritual hunt, before paddy transplantation, at the beginning of threshing, while occupying a new house, etc.

Belief in *Dharmes* as the source of all good and in the *najar* (evil eye) and *bai-bhaakh* (evil curse) as the causes of all evil is held by the *Kurukhs* to form the most primitive tenet of their religious tradition. They neither make any statue of God nor any temple for Him. The cult of the deities and spirits was instituted later when they came in contact with other tribal and non-tribal groups.

b. Santal Account

In the beginning there was only *water* and the earth was under water. *Thakur Jiu* (God) created the *crab, crocodile, alligator, raghop boarfish, sole prawn, earthworm, tortoise* and others. Then He made two human beings of clay. The *Sing Sadom* (day-horse) came down from above and trampled them to pieces and left the place.

Afterwards *Thakur* made *hans* and *hansil* (male-female swans) with the matter from his breast. They were beautiful. He breathed in them and they became alive and flew upwards. Since there was no place to alight, they used to alight on *Thakur's* hand. The *Sing Sadom* came down to drink water and spilt some froth of his mouth and left. It floated and foam was formed on water. The two birds alighted on the froth and moved about over the whole sea. The birds asked for food from *Thakur*. He called the *alligator* and asked it to bring up the earth. It tried to bring it on his back but the earth got dissolved in the sea. Next, *Thakur* called the *prawn* and sent it to fetch the earth. It tried to bring it between its claws but it got washed away in the water. *Thakur* then called the *raghop boarfish* for the same purpose. The fish bit the earth in its mouth and put some of it on its back, but it got dissolved in the sea. Since that time the boarfish has no scales on its body. Following it, *Thakur* called the *stone-crab* for the same work. It tried to bring the earth in his claws but it got

washed away in the water. Finally, *Thakur* called the *earthworm* for the same work. It agreed to fetch the earth provided that the *tortoise* kept floating on the sea.

The tortoise agreed and *Thakur* chained its four legs in four directions. The earthworm put its tail on the back of the tortoise and with its mouth down below, ate the earth at the bottom of the sea and took it out on the back of the tortoise. The earth got spread out like a hard film and the present earth got formed. *Thakur* harrowed the earth when some of it got heaped up becoming mountains. The foam that was floating on the sea stuck to the earth. *Thakur* sowed *sirom* seed on the foam and its plant sprang up first, after this *dhubi* grass, *karam* tree, *sarjom* (sal), *kahua* (arjun), *matkom* (*mahua*), after this all kinds of trees and plants grew up.

The twobirds mentioned above made a nest in the *sirom* plants and laid two eggs. They hatched the eggs and two human beings were born, one boy and one girl. *Thakur* gave some cotton to the birds and told them to press the juice of whatever they ate into the cotton and put it into the mouths of the children to suck. When the children grew up, the birds flew towards the setting sun taking the children along with them and put them in *Hihir+i Pipr+ i*.

The names of these two human beings were: (1) *Haam* or *Pilchu Haram*, (2) *Ayo* or *Pilchu Burhi*. They ate the grain of *sumtu bukue* grass, and ears of the *sama* grass and lived in great peace. One day *Lita* or *Maran Buru* (great mountain) came to them and asked: "Where are your *grand children*? Do brew *beer*, it has a very sweet taste." The three of them went to the forest. *Lita* showed them the roots. *Pilchu Haram* and *Pilchu Burhi* dug them and brought them along and made them into the fermenting stuff and made rice beer by putting this stuff into the boiled grains of *sumtu bukue* and *sama* ears.

Fermentation was complete in five days. They filled three leaf cups with beer and poured the content of one of them on the ground in the name of *Maran Buru* and drank the remaining two cups and went to sleep together. *Lita* was pleased with their behaviour. They gave birth to seven boys and seven girls. They went to *khoj kaman* (different countries). There they became like he-buffaloes and she-buffaloes. They did not respect one another.

Thakur got offended with their behaviour. He sent *Pilchu Haram* and *Pilchu Bur +hi* to the cave in the *Harata* mountain and sent fire-rain (sky rain) for seven days and seven nights and destroyed mankind and animals. Only the two in the *Harata* mountain cave were saved. They gave birth to twelve sons and twelve daughters and mankind descended from them. They were divided into twelve groups.

The Beginning of Things

The misdeeds of human beings made *Thakur Baba* very angry and so he decided to destroy them all. *Thakur Baba* is *Sing Chando* (the Sun) and the Moon is his wife. At first there were as many stars by day as there are by

night. They were the children of the Sun and the Moon. They had divided them between the two of them. *Sing Chando* blazed with fierce heat till the human beings and beasts died. The Moon took pity on their suffering and prayed to *Sing Chando* not to destroy them. So, *Sing Chando* chose out a young man and a young woman and told them to go into a cave in the hillside and close the mouth of the cave with a raw hide. When they were safely inside, he rained fire from heaven and killed all other living beings on the earth. The rain continued for five days and five nights.

The two human beings came out of the cave to raise up a new human race. *Nida Chando* (the Moon) feared that the Sun would again get angry and destroy the human beings. So she made a plan to trick him. She covered up all her children with a large basket and smeared her mouth and lips and going to *Sing Chando* told him that she had eaten up every one of her children and proposed that he should also now eat up his children. Listening to her he devoured all of them. At night *Nida Chando* let out her children from under the basket. Seeing them, *Sing Chando* flew to *Nida Chando* in a passion and the children scattered in all directions. That is why the stars are now spread all over the sky. *Sing Chando* could not restrain his wrath and cut *Nida Chando* into two. That is the reason why the Moon waxes and wanes. In the beginning she was always full like the Sun.

Chando and his Wife

Chando went to the hills to fashion a plough out of a log of wood and took a long time to come back. His wife was left at home alone and grew impatient. She made some *mosquitoes* and sent them to trouble him and drive him home. But *Chando* made some *dragon flies* and they ate up the mosquitoes and he went on with his work. His wife made various other animals and sent them out to him but he destroyed them all. At last she made a *tiger* and sent it to frighten him but *Chando* took up a handful of chips from the log and threw them at the tiger and they turned into *wild dogs* and chased the tiger away. Ever since that time no tiger would be able to face the wild dogs.

c. Munda Account

Separation of Land and Sea

The sky was empty of stars and the earth was covered with *water*. The 'Old One' (Supreme Being) had made only the creatures that live in water. He ordered the *crab* to bring some earth from under the sea to make dry land. The crab brought it between its claws but it got washed away in the sea. He then ordered the *turtle* to fetch a bit of earth. It brought it on its back but it got washed away in the sea. Finally, he tried the *earthworm* for bringing the earth from under the sea. The earthworm went down to the bottom, filled its mouth with the earth and came out and gave it out in the hand of the 'Old One'. He multiplied it and made the dry land whereon he made all kinds of herbs, plants and trees and created all kinds of animals.

Origin of Man

Having made a clay figure, the 'Old One' gave a soul (principle of life) to this figure. Before life was put into the figure, a *horse* kicked it to pieces. Having

made another figure, he put life into it. The *horse* tried to kick this second figure, but a *tiger* chased the horse away. The 'Old One' cursed the horse because it had kicked the first figure into pieces. The curse was, (a) men would put iron into the mouth of the horse, (b) they would break wind on its back, and (c) they would scourge it at the hind quarters. Pleased with the tiger, he gave it tremendous strength and power. After making the dry land, the 'Old One' created animals on it. A large Indian stork laid two eggs on the land. A *boy* and a *girl* were formed in those eggs and the bird brought them up safe and sound.

Making of the First Plough

The 'Old One' started to make a plough for the man he had made. Taking a large tree he carved out of it the plough with its shaft, grip and handle; all in one piece. He took a long time to finish this work. His wife sent a mosquito to call him back home. The mosquito buzzed around his ears but he was not disturbed. Next, she sent a *tiger* who rustled the leaves around him. Taking a chip, the 'Old One', threw it at the tiger. At once the chip became a *wild dog* which chased the tiger away. That is why even to this day the tigers are afraid of wild dogs.

After making the plough, he took it home. Looking at the plough his wife said: "What a poor kind of plough you have made? In making such ploughs, the children of men will lose much of their time. They will not find trees big enough for making such ploughs. Such a plough will not last long. Come let us see, throw the plough on the ground!" The 'Old One' threw it on the ground and lo it broke off into pieces! She told him, "I shall make another kind of plough." And so, she made a plough, its shaft, handle and grip in separate pieces and joined them together in a short time. When the plough was ready, she told the 'Old One' to throw it on the ground and they saw that nothing was broken. The 'Old One' then said, "You have beaten me in making the plough. So, from today I free all women from the hardship of making ploughs. They will not even touch them!" That is why to this day the women are forbidden to touch the plough.

Division of Time into Day and Night

Before the moon was made, the Sun was alone in the sky and it did not set. One day the 'Old One' went to see the man making fields and asked him some questions: "When did you make this field?" "Now" was the answer. "When did you make that field?" "Now." "When did you make the yonder fields?" "Just now." "When did you eat from these fresh leaves?" "Now." "When did you eat from those dry leaves?" "Now." "When do you rest and when do you work?" "I rest *now* and work *now*." The 'Old One' said: "You will not live on with such work and eating without regular times." So, the 'Old One' made the Sun to set and rise - thus *day* and *night* were made to work and to rest. He also made the moon to shine during the night.

The Rain of Fire

When the world was filled with human beings, *Singbonga* (God) rained fire and all died. Only two persons - a *sister* and a *brother* - escaped. The *Naqeer*

(water spirit) hid these two in the cool water of a hollow made by a *crab*. *Singbonga* asked for those two human beings by giving an egg and turmeric to *Nageera*. *Singbonga* made a house for them and let them live therein. But while sleeping they placed a husking-pole between themselves. One day *Singbonga* taught them how to prepare rice beer. When it was ready they drank it and went to sleep. At night *Singbonga* removed the husking-pole and the boy and girl slept together. Next morning they told *Singbonga* what had happened during the night. Listening to them He said: "You did well grandchildren."

Afterwards a child was born and *Singbonga* sent a sickness to that child. The parents told *Singbonga* about the sickness. He told them to offer a sacrifice of a *white fowl* to *Singbonga*. He also told them how everything had to be done. After the sacrifice they went home but forgot their sacrificial knife behind. Therefore, the boy returned to bring back the knife. On reaching the spot, behold, he found *Singbonga* licking off the leaf plate, that is, the remains of the sacrificial meat. The boy said: "Hello, *grandfather*, when we invited you refused and now you tried to eat the left over!" From that moment *Singbonga* disappeared and after that they never saw him again. From these two human beings, all others were born afterwards.

d. Kharia Account

In the beginning there was only *water*. A *crab* raised a pillar of clay from the bottom of the sea above the surface of the water and began to enjoy sunshine everyday lying down on top of the pillar. One day a man came from somewhere and began to play with the clay of the pillar. He is also known as *Ponomosor* (God). Seeing this the crab extended its pillar into a huge island. Thus, the earth came into existence.

The primordial man used to make two clay figures everyday and leave them there to dry. A *horse* used to come flying and kick the clay figures to pieces. Getting tired of this, he cut off its wings and asked his two *dogs* to guard the clay figures. Once they were dry the Man-God put them inside the hollow of a banian tree. The milk of the tree dripped into their mouths and they became alive. There were thus two human beings created – a male and a female. They increased so much that fruits and vegetables were insufficient for them. So, God made different kinds of *birds* for them to kill and eat.

Destruction of Human Beings

The human beings increased and became more and more demanding on their creator. They became proud and arrogant. All this displeased God. He sent flood to destroy them but the clever ones climbed the top of the mountain covering themselves with *gungus* (leaf-coats). Their behaviour did not change. So, he sent *rain of fire*. All died except the *brother* and *sister* whom king *Sembhu* and queen *Dakai* pulled inside the marsh and hid.

Human Beings After the Rain Fire

God felt very lonely and so he brought the *brother* and *sister* back to the earth. He asked them to clear the forest and make fields. He gave them the seed of

a gourd and asked them to plant it. The creeper bore three fruits. They made an offering of the head of the fruit to God. As soon as they did this, they found the fruit full of *gondli* (millet) grains. They roasted them, made powder and ate it. They did the same with the second fruit and found *gora* (upland paddy) grains in the fruit. They made flat rice from it and ate. They did the same with the third fruit and lo, the fruit was full of the lowland *paddy grains*. They prepared rice from them, cooked and ate. Thus, agriculture became their prime occupation.

While sleeping they kept a big wooden log between them. God taught them how to make *rice beer*. They prepared and drank it and got drunk and the boy crossed the log and slept with the girl. Thereafter, children were born from them. They had nine sons and nine daughters. The sons went hunting everyday. Once they killed a deer. But they were very thirsty. So, the eldest son went to a pool of water to drink and saw a snakelike fish swimming in the pool. The second one saw a tortoise crawling in the pool. Similarly, all the brothers met one creature or the other, for example, a big flat rock, a tiger, some salt, a Kerketta bird, a Tete bird, a To'opo bird and paddy grains. Thus, they and their descendants were known by the names of those creatures that they had seen, namely, (1) *Dungdung*, (2) *Kullu*, (3) *Kerketta*, (4) *Tete*, (5) *Kiro*, (6) *Soreng*, (7) *Baa*, (8) *Bilung*, and (9) *Toopo*.

e. Ho Account

There was only *water* all around. *Singbonga* (God) wanted to make land in its place. So, he made a *tortoise* and let it into water to bring out the clay from the bottom of the sea. It brought it and placed it on the surface of the sea but the water washed it away. Then *Singbonga* made a *crab*. It entered into the water and clawed out the clay from the bottom and brought it up to the surface but it was washed away as before. Next, *Singbonga* rubbed some dirt out from his thigh and made two *earthworms*, one male and the other female. They slipped into the water and began to raise and heap up mud inside the water by eating and disgorging it. Those two earthworms multiplied and worked together. Land rose above the water. In some places it became mountains and in other places hard *land*.

Next, *Singbonga* made '*Surmi-Durmis*' with hands and feet. They began to level the mountains and fill the ravines with their hands. *Singbonga* sent *tigers* and *bears*, *bisons*, *deer* and *elephants* to help them. The *Surmi-Durmis* yoked the animals and leveled the land with levelling planks. They planted *trees* and *grass* in those fields. When the land had been made and the trees and grass had grown there, it looked very beautiful. *Singbonga* became very happy and made a figure like a human being in the shape of *Surmi-Durmis*. He breathed *jibon* (life) into him. He became a *Ho* (man) and was named '*Luku*' by *Singbonga*. However, *Luku* used to stay away from all other living beings. So, *Singbonga* put the man to sleep and took out one of his ribs and made a figure of a *woman* in the image of *Luku*. He gave life to that figure and placed it close to *Luku*. When *Luku* got up from his sleep, he asked *Singbonga*: "Who is this?" *Singbonga* said: "This is your companion. Her name is '*Lukumi*'. The two of you will live together."

Thus, *Singbonga* made two human beings, a *male* and a *female*. They walked around happily in the land of trees and grass. They lived on the fruits and flowers of the trees. *Singbonga* had let them eat the fruits and flowers of all the trees except the *tamarind* fruits. However, seeing that fruit daily they were overcome by the desire of that fruit. So, they ate it and immediately experienced a ticklish sensation and shame. They hid themselves behind the leafy shrubs. *Singbonga* called them out. They came to him covering themselves with leaves. He realized that his *grand children* had disobeyed him. So, he banished them from that place.

They provided themselves with food from the earth. There were other living beings also who increased but the human beings remained only two. They used to keep a husking pole in between them while sleeping during the night. One day *Singbonga* told them to ferment *diyang* (rice beer) and drink it. He taught them how to make it. After preparing it they drank it and crossed the husking pole and from that time they lived as husband and wife. Numerous children were born who began to walk on evil path. Seeing this, *Singbonga* was displeased and destroyed them with *rain of fire*. However, *Nage er-a* saved a pair of human beings and pairs of all other living beings. Through this pair of human beings, humankind increased again. Likewise, other creatures also multiplied.

Theological Vision

From the above accounts it is quite clear that each tribal group in Chhotanagpur has a very clear idea of the Supreme Being as its creator and of the world and its creatures. He is known by different names by different tribes. None of the tribes mentioned above has made any *image* of their Creator in the past and present though they share in common His imagery as a benign old man with white long hair and flowing beard on the dazzling white clouds. They have not made any temple for Him because they experience His presence wherever they are.

Except in the Kharia and Ho accounts, there is a female counterpart mentioned with the Creator in the other accounts. However, none of the tribal religious traditions in Chhotanagpur has any practice of worshipping any female deity at the level of the Supreme Being the Creator. The *beloved* of the Supreme Being in the above accounts, therefore, refers back to His own wisdom as we find in the Bible (Wisdom 7: 26).

In His works of creation the Supreme Being takes the help of His own creatures, especially the sea creatures, such as, crab, prawn, fish, tortoise, etc. who fail in their mission of bringing the earth from the bottom of the sea for the Supreme Being for making this world except the *crab* in the Kharia account. However, the *earthworm* in every account succeeds in cooperating with the Supreme Being in His work of creation. This is something unique. In the Munda and Santal accounts, human beings take their origin from the *eggs* of birds whereas the Supreme Being makes them out of clay in the Kurukh and Kharia accounts. All of these point out clearly that tribals cherish and support the *eco-friendly* world of their Creator. Interestingly, the Ho

account mentions that the first woman was made from the rib of the first man.

Except the Ho account, all other accounts speak of a *horse* which tries to destroy the work of the Supreme Being thus not cooperating with Him. It points out to the *anti-life* force at work already at the time of creation to oppose the *pro-life* work of the creator. In this way, the 'horse' is a symbol of *evil* which existed already at the time of creation. However, it does not have its origin in the Creator and it is well under His control. He cuts off the wings of this destructive horse (Kharia).

In every creation account above, there is a mention of the *first creation* in which human beings offended their Creator seriously by their *evil ways* and lost His favour upon them. Their radical turning away from Him led them to their own destruction because they did not deserve to live by going against the plan of their Creator. Some of their concrete evil ways were, (a) they *did not respect* one another in their social behaviour (Santal), (b) they became *proud and arrogant* before their Creator by their destructive ways of life (Kharia), and (c) they polluted the earth which was a beautiful creation of their Creator, with their own *excreta* (Kurukh). The last comment is a strong symbolic way of saying that the human beings had committed such a serious offence against their Creator that it had to be condemned outright.

In the *second creation*, the Creator renewed His relationship with the surviving human beings as their *grand father* who is very fond of His *grand children*, ever loving and forgiving. In this personal relationship with Him there is no fear which is very liberating. The Creator Himself instituted *marriage* that has been so beautifully told in the accounts mentioning the drinking of *rice beer* by the first human beings and beginning their life as *husband* and *wife* to beget children to fill the earth. This is His *new creation* and all men and women are stewards of this creation by not destroying and polluting it. His creative activity in this world thus continues to this day through the cooperation of human beings with Him.

The tribals believe that increase of their *crop, cattle* and *children* is a clear sign of the Creator's abundant blessing upon them. These are His gifts to them and their whole life revolves around them. That is why they thank Him for these gifts and pray to Him to shower upon them these gifts by offering sacrifices to Him and worshipping Him. They depend on Him for their life and existence. Since He is the Supreme Being, they pray to Him to protect them against all evil through *danda katta* ritual as Jesus taught us to pray to the Father for our daily needs and to protect us from all evil (Mt 6: 9-13; Lk 11: 1-4).]

The goal of life as eternal happiness rests in the belief of the tribals that after this life they will join the community of their *ancestors* in the next world free from all forms of suffering and death. This is the *ultimate aim* of their life in this world. It is in the *ancestral community* that all their legitimate aspirations

will be fulfilled. This community enjoys its eternal happiness under the divine care and protection of God. The *value*¹⁰ idea held by people about ethical behaviour or appropriate behaviour, what is right or wrong, desirable or despicable (Marshall 1998: 689).

Conclusion

Religious behaviour of the tribals of Chhotanagpur opens a wide range of their theological vision which is very fascinating. In fact it is quite close to the Biblical theological vision in the book of Genesis, chapters 1 to 10 with the accounts of (a) creation of man, (b) descendants of Adam, (c) Noah making the ark, (d) the flood, and (e) covenant of the rainbow. It might not be their total theological vision and yet it provides satisfactory answers to some of the otherwise insoluble questions. It fills gaps in human knowledge and experience and so diminishes areas of doubt and uncertainty. Thus it may give confidence in the face of dangers which would otherwise be overwhelming. It provides institutionalised means of coping with such dangers, and even if these means are generally scientifically ineffective, they are morally and emotionally satisfying.

Endnotes

- ¹ A winged horse of Dharmes in the Kurukh mythology.
- ² There is a fond relationship between grand parents and grand children which is free from fear.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ritual destroying the effect of evil.
- ⁵ Winged horse of dharmes.
- ⁶ Literally, it means 'stick splitting' symbolically to destroy the effect of evil.
- ⁷ White yeast balls used for fermenting rice beer.
- ⁸ *Semicarpus anacardium*
- ⁹ Winged horse of Dharmes They are not seen by people. They dig ponds during the night and get a living source of water. People point to such ponds on the mountains that never dry even during the hot summer.
- ¹⁰ Idea held by people about ethical behaviour or appropriate behaviour, what is right or wrong, desirable or despicable (Marshall 1998: 689).

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