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"LET KNOWLEDGE COME FROM ALL THE SIDES"

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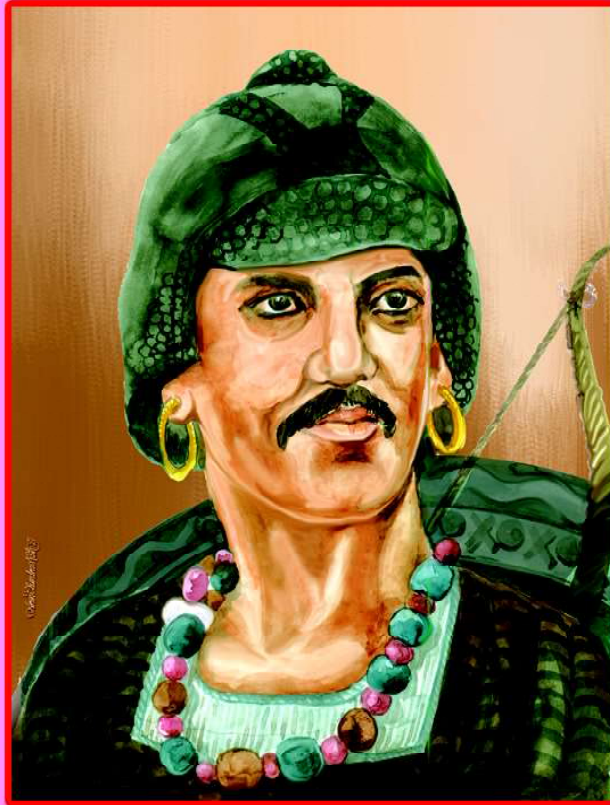


जनजाति धर्म संस्कृति सुरक्षा मंच
Janajati Leaders Conference
VOICE OF NORTH EAST

10, 11 & 12th September, 2021 • Venue: LNIPE, Tepesia, Sonapur, Guw



India's Unsung Heroes



Tirot Sing, also known as U Tirot Sing Syiem, was born in the year 1802. He was one of the chiefs of the Khasi people of early 19th century. He was Syiem (chief) of Nongkhlaw, part of the Khasi Hills. In the Anglo-Khasi War, the Khasis lacked firearms and had only swords, shields, bows and arrows. Therefore, they resorted to guerrilla activity, which dragged on for about four years. Tirot Sing was shot at by the British and had to hide in a cave. He was eventually captured by the British in January 1833 and deported to Dhaka. He died on 17 July 1835. His death is commemorated in Meghalaya as U Tirot Sing Day.

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Durga Puja in a Tribal way

Durga Puja, one of the most popular religious festival of Assam is here once again. The people of the state and the region, irrespective of caste, creed or language are eager to soak themselves in the festivity and bonhomie, which is the real purpose of festivals. There may not be any festivities in some Christianity dominated states, because they are opposed to the sanatan concepts of Hinduism which taught the world that god is one though named variously. Hindus have been taught from their childhood that all religions are equally sacred and should be respected. It is sad that this is not the case with other dominant religious groups of north eastern region. However, in spite of such difference in perception, we have succeeded in maintaining the brotherhood and amicable relationship with each other since time immemorial.

As we all know, the north eastern region is truly an example of unity in diversity. Here hills and plains decorate the horizon, small as well as big rivers rush towards their ultimate destination, animal life, plants and trees of different kind grow side by side. Here people speak in different languages and dialects, but continues to be one in spirit. Mizoram, Meghalay and Nagaland boasts of a large population of Christians, Manipur is proud of their Vaishnavite roots, Sikkim is the world heritage site of Buddhism and Tripura, historically a tribal state, but has upheld the tradition, culture and spiritual beliefs of the Hindus. The most remarkable aspect of the interstate relation between NE states is that in spite of the religious diversities there was never a confrontation between them on religious grounds. Rather there are examples of rare assimilation of religious beliefs amidst differing theosophical doctrines.

The example stated above, can be found in Nartiang Durga Temple, a 600-year-old Durga temple located in the West Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya, a state in North-Eastern India. This temple is one of the 51 Shakti Peethas and is one of

the holiest sites for the devotees of the Shaktism sect of Hinduism. The tribal Hindus in the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya believe that this temple is the permanent abode of Goddess Durga. The temple draws a large number of pilgrims from all over the country on the occasion of Durga Puja. The Shakti of Nartiang Devi shrine is worshipped as Jayanti and the Bhairava as Kamadishwar.

The rites at the temple are not performed the conventional way as in the plains, but in a unique way, a blend of Hindu and ancient Khasi traditions. The local chieftain or Syiem is considered the Chief Patron of the temple. Even today, during Durga Puja, the Syiem sacrifices goats first. Durga Puja is the most important festival of this temple. During Durga Puja, a banana plant is dressed up and worshipped as the Goddess. The banana plant worship is symbolic representation of nature worship universally followed by the tribal communities in India and abroad. The most interesting part of the rituals followed at Nartiang Durga Temple is purely guided by rituals normally followed by the non-Hindu tribals of Khashi and Jaintia Hills and the adjoining areas. At the end of the four-day festivities, the plant is ceremoniously immersed in the Myntdu River. A gun salute is also given to the Goddess on the occasion.

As we all know the impact and commercial influence of western ways have already impacted our way of observing worship of gods and goddesses. The glamour and show of opulence has to a great extent is now more visible than the devotion and sanctity. We must learn how to become true devotees in heart and mind. The Nartiang Devi Durga Temple and its sincere and ardent devotees can teach us a lesson or two in this regard. There is no glaze and glamour but the temple radiates a rare sense of joy and fulfillment for the devotees. Let us try to replicate the divinity in simplicity in our Puja pandals and temples.

Romen Chakraborty
Chief Editor

The Eternal Religion in perspective of Malsom Janajati of Tripura

Chandra Krishna Malsom
(continued from september issue)

3. The concept of Heaven :

Heaven is the abode of God where man's soul goes after death, waits for a suitable body. If the atma, the soul, has a balance of positive merits, it remains in heaven (swarga). Any Atma or the soul, which has a negative balance of merits is awarded hell, the Naraka, where it waits for the next manifestation to occur. Briefly, it can be stated that if we have the balance of positive merits from zero to plus hundred we shall be awarded the stage of Heaven (Swarga) after our "Atma, The soul Within" has left the mortal frame. However if the balance of merits is between zero and minus hundred our "Atma the soul within" shall be given a place in hell (Naraka).

Heaven (swarga) and Hell (naraka) are interim stages in the cosmic life cycle of our Atma the soul within. The moment this Atma, the soul within, gets matching parents on Mother Earth... it shall again manifest a body... the body can be that of a Human Being and also of an animal depending upon the balance of merits or demerits possessed by the Atma.

As stated clearly in the

Bhagavad Gita... the foremost of all sacred Scriptures (the doctrine dictated by Lord Krishna to King Arjuna in the battlefield of Mahabharata between Pandavas and Kauravas) no Atma, the soul within, can directly gain immortality from Heaven.

Lord Krishna is considered as an Avatar (an incarnation of God Himself) in Hinduism. He descended on Mother Earth roughly 5200 years ago. He was the foremost of all preachers who descended on Mother Earth to pass on to Humanity the cosmic wisdom of the ages... the doctrine of Lord Krishna which is available in Bhagavad Gita. It contains everything, knowing which every Human Being on its cosmic journey (the journey being undertaken by our Atma, the soul within) can gain enlightenment and finally salvation moksha! Every Atma has to finally take the form of a Human Being to gain immortality... in other words salvation (moksha in Hinduism). There is no other path available to our atman the soul within. The form of a Human Being is the highest manifestation in the cosmic Life cycle of our Atma, the soul within. Born as a Human Being is something, that even gods

desire.... And what are gods and goddesses..., those Atma (souls) in heaven that have almost reached the final stage in the cosmic life cycle. They are just waiting to manifest the body of a Human Being before achieving salvation (moksha).

4. Belief in the worship of deities :

People belonging to Malsom Janajati of Tripura believe in existence of many gods, goddesses and deities some of which are responsible for diseases, mishaps, accidents and other sufferings in human life. For instance, Pavengpa (harmful male spirit), Nupang-ngwi (a group of harmful female spirits, the witches), Inkil pathwn (Goddess of snakes, Monosadebi). Besides as already stated Arthwng-ngwi (Two male gods of computer of human fate, Gods of Holiness), Thingkung-ngwi (Two male gods of Trees, Gods of ecological balance and biodiversity), Awipuma-ngwi/Asen-ngwi (God of death), and many more are powerful deities. Their negative impact on human life can cause permanent disability, infirmness, insanity and loss of human life by way of premature death, if they cast evil-look. Generally human beings cannot

see them with their naked eyes but man can perceive their existence by dint of their intellectual power.

As a result, one who disrupts the way or inconveniences those deities while passing the jungle, path, river, streams, jhum cultivation field and so on to sustain his livelihood (due to ignorance of presence of these supernatural elements) will definitely fall into illness. To get rid of this critical situation, some kinds of robol (puja in traditional system) by way of sacrificing animals like chicken, duck, goat, pigeon, turtle etc. by an Ochai (priest) is performed. The manner and components of the robol varies according to intensity of diseases and essential pujas are determined by the Ochai after completion of Thikana-en (cross-examination) conducted by an Ochai. Also there are lots of problems centred around personal, conjugal and social life viz. controversy, quarrel, clashes, mishaps, poverty, infertility for reproduction of men and women, mismatch between husband & wife, many other bad habits that can harm human civilization are also believed to be the adverse impact of some of the aforesaid deities in human life. These types of malady can be overcome by offering various pujas to different deities responsible for such malafide affairs.

Besides, people offer pujas out of gratitude for the boundless

contribution of benevolent gods, goddesses, deities, spirits etc. For instances, a few may be quoted like people offering puja with variety of food stuff and drinks to the deities during Rwkai (Marriage), Baklak (seeking blessing of deities for good health and long lifespan), Parsen pai (seeking blessing of deities for good health and long lifespan of a child at a growing stage), Kumtul-thow (throwing yearly feast in a family in anticipation of acquiring property) and many other auspicious occasions in life out of joy and ecstasy followed by public merriment. Besides, at the time of having new yield like paddy, maize, pumpkins, melons, fruits, vegetables etc., before their consumption, people belonging to Malsoms and other janajati communities of Tripura State offer them to the Ninu-Thapa (Sun and Moon) by placing a little quantity of each and every item on a plaintain leaf near a stream, cherra, river in a very decorative manner with deep respect and awe to gods of sun, moon, air, fire etc. In such offerings, no animal is sacrificed. No Ochai is required in this case. Here the great contribution of powerful natural elements like sun, moon, water, air, fire etc. of this Mother Earth and universe is deeply acknowledged for rendering sincere service, enabling human beings to carry out food production to sustain life. This type of offerings of crops, vegetables, fruits etc. to natural elements out of gratitude

is popularly known as “Anthar-Buthar Bwrau” in Malsom language.

In fact, every natural element of this universe like sun (Suryadeb), moon (Chandradeb), air (Pawandeb), water (Ganga debi- the goddess of water), fire (Agni deb, god of fire) and so many are regarded as deb-debi (gods and goddesses) since time immemorial for generations. This notion is prevailing till today and such practices have become now parts and parcel of the age-old culture and tradition amongst the people of Malsom Dofa in Tripura. I think this type of similarities is the basic foundation among the various janajati communities behind all such worships, pujas, offerings etc. But this type of simple but important offerings with full of respects to the gods and goddesses are worthy for this present age to promote and widespread for the interest of our culture and tradition.

5. The concept of Ancestor Worship :

People of Malsom Dofa (Community) of Tripura worship their ancestral souls as gods, goddesses and deities since long past and it is prevailing till date. In the common hearsay, folktales, folklores and legendary stories of Malsom people some of their ancestors were unparalleled in their patience, sense of duty & moral values and achieved heroic deeds, with selflessness and patriotic zeal make them everlasting figure in

their society. They performed many heroic deeds to save mankind ignoring their own interest. They won successfully the mind of public of their period with the help of their supernatural power like gods, goddesses, deities etc. People never forget such men with god-like quality. In course of time, people thought that they might be the incarnation of some deities. Thus such ancestors with rare super human qualities are now regarded as ancestral gods, goddesses, deities etc. and thus worshipped by their own clans. Details of them could not be given in this tiny piece of work undertaken depicting their diverse achievements. According to Malsom folktales, Lord Sengrak, Rangchal & Pothir, Mwnoutangzai, Kowaitenthrai, Sakhi Darlongnu, Ngaminu and so many are revered for their great contribution for well being of mankind. Out of which only two ancestral souls which is now regarded as deities and regularly worshipped are (1) Sakhi Darlongnu and (2) Sengrak Pathwn.

6. The concept of the Rebirth of the Human Soul :

The soul, in some spiritual traditions and philosophies, is the incorporeal part of a living being, commonly held to be separate from the body. Many philosophical and religious systems teach that humans have souls; some attribute souls to all living things and even inanimate objects (such as rivers). The soul is often believed to exit

the body and live on after a person's death, and some religions believe that God creates souls.

The soul has often been deemed integral or essential to consciousness and personality, and may be synonymous with spirit, mind or self. Although the terms soul and spirit are sometimes used interchangeably, soul may denote a more worldly and less transcendent aspect of a person. According to psychologist James Hillman, soul has an affinity for negative thoughts and images, whereas spirit seeks to rise above the entanglements of life and death. The words soul and psyche can also be treated synonymously, although psyche has more physical connotations, whereas soul is connected more closely to spirituality.

Talking about reincarnation or rebirth is automatically talking about the life cycles of the human soul. Long time ago, our souls left their divine origin to gain some experiences in the material world. It was clear from the very beginning that the souls would eventually return back to their divine origin. Therefore all our souls have the strong desire to return back to where they originally came from, their original divine state.

A return to the divine origin will only be possible when the souls have reached a state of wholeness again similar to the above mentioned divine state. Concretely, this state is about personality traits, which are best

described with unconditional love, honesty, happiness, modesty, humility, etc. Alternatively, you can describe this divine state with respecting the basic rights of existence.

Through our living in this material world (during previous births), the above mentioned traits have been at least partially unlearned and replaced with striving for power and prestige, financial wealth and selfishness. After the death of a human being in the material world, the soul scrutinizes whether it has reached its divine state again. If all the above mentioned traits have not been acquired, then this stage has not (yet) been reached. Most likely, the soul will decide sooner or later to reincarnate (rebirth) on the Earth to continue its education. That is because those traits which have been unlearned in the material world (on the Earth) can also most efficiently be reigned in the material world.

Our living on Earth can therefore be described as a training camp to regain personality traits like unconditional love, self honesty, happiness, modesty and humbleness (see also our text about the development of human beings). Family, friends, acquaintances and "coincidental" encounters are our training partners for the souls on their way back to the divine origin.

(To be continued in November, 2021 issue)

Janajati Leaders Conference – a Report

A brief report on the proceedings of the “Voice of the North East” organised in the course of Janajati Leaders Conference held on 10th, 11th & 12th September, 2021 at LNIPE, Sonapur, Guwahati

Janajati Faith and Culture Protection Forum organized a 3-Day long Conference of the Janjati Leaders of the Northeast region titled “Voice of Northeast”

The event commenced with the wonderful *Samuhik Geet* (Chorus), followed by ceremonial welcome of the Chief Guest and other invited guests and dignitaries. All the guests were then individually introduced and felicitated with mementoes. The guests then lighted the ceremonial lamp amidst the prayer song offered by Mizo delegates to the conference and offered floral tributes to the pioneers of the eternal faith movement of the Northeast..

Sri Jaleswar Brahma, President, JFCPF welcomed the elite guests from North East and outside the state, all the delegates to the conference, the media persons and the special invitees from other like-minded organizations. He explained the purpose of the conference, the Janajati Dharma Sanskuriti Suraksha – the preservation and protection of the indigenous faiths and culture.

Keynote Address for the conference was delivered by Sri Tasom Tasung, Executive Member, JFCPF. While elaborating on the purpose of the conference Sri Tasom stated that indigenous Janjati faith and culture is at crossroads today and needs to be preserved and protected. He stressed on the need for reinventing the relevance as well as the importance of the age old indigenous faiths left behind by their wise ancestors, which alone can help them fight the external aggressors whose only agenda is to wipe out the indigenous faith and convert the tribal populace to their religion. .

The Hon’ble Chief Minister of Assam, Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, graced the inaugural ceremony of the conference on the theme “Voice of Northeast”. The Chief Minister welcomed all the

delegates representing different tribal communities of eight north eastern states. He stated that this conference has its own importance as all the participants have gathered here to discuss how to protect the indigenous faith and culture of the Janajati people of the Northeastern region. He spoke highly about the rich heritage and culture of the Janjati communities of North East. He stressed on the importance of protection and preservation of the Janjati faith and culture from the encroaching forces. He declared that his Government is determined to leave no stone unturned to take necessary initiatives for protection of the tribal communities and their culture. He informed that Assam Govt has established a special Department for the Protection and promotion of the Indigenous culture. Dr. Sarma further stated that the Assam government has allocated rupees one hundred crore for protection and promotion of the Janajati culture. He also said that his Govt plans to spend 500 crore rupees for this noble cause. He stressed that to protect the unique identity of the Janajati people, they must first protect their Dharma. The Janajati people are the carriers of our civilizational values and heritage. Some outside forces are trying to allure them free education and health care. Dr. Sarma asserted that it is the responsibility of the government to provide all these facilities and his government is exactly doing that. .

Sri Rinohmo Sungoh, Secretary – JFCPF, offered the vote of Thanks to the esteemed Guests and all the attendees of the inaugural function of the ‘Voice of Northeast’.

There were four sessions on the Second day of the conference. The delegates were divided into two group – the first one comprised of the delegates from Meghalaya, Assam, Tripura and Sikkim and the second group included Arunachal Pradesh,

Nagaland, Mizoram, and Manipur.

In the first session, Shri Paye Dawe, President of Nyishi Nyidung Mwingjang Rallung, spoke on “Spiritual and Philosophical Understanding of the Janajati Faiths, Tradition and Culture”. Janajatis are Nature worshippers and Nature is the sustaining force for the Janajati people. Nature is like mother for the people. With the advent of the Missionaries, Janajati Dharma is facing a threat. To protect the unique identity of Janajati people, the Janajatis must protect their Dharma.

Shri Ramesh Babu, All India Joint Organizational Secretary of Kalyan Ashram spoke on the importance of making the new generation people aware of their Janajati culture. The Janajati culture must be passed on to the new generation. The values of Janajati culture need to be inculcated in the new generation. Sri Babu said that Nature is the essence of Janajati faith. He stated that as per the spiritual belief of the indigenous religions, the God, or the Supreme Being is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscience. That is why we became the nature worshipper and that is why we see God in Nature.

Sri Sushil Pandya and Sri Abhijit Sarma, spoke on the use of “Rights to Information Act, 2005”. He also spoke on the technicalities involved in submitting an FIR (First Information Report) As explained the Section 154 of CrPc in details. He also discussed about the legal assistance one can get from the Institutions Like District Legal Service Authority. The respected speakers also explained the various terms related to registration of organizations.

Sri Lakshman Singh Markam, Member of Janajati Suraksha Mancha, spoke on issues involved in delisting of the tribal people who got converted to other non indigenous religion. He mentioned the criteria needed for listing a community as Scheduled Tribe. One such criteria, is ‘shyness and religious practices’. Now the question is - when a tribe stops worshipping their ancestors and leaves their cultural and linguistic identity after conversion, can we consider them a “Tribe”? A converted person starts thinking of himself to be superior to the rest of his tribe. Should we therefore consider such an individual to be part of an indigenous “Tribe?”

Mr Markam speaking about the “ten commandments” in the Holy Book of a particular religion stated that the commandments clearly mentioned that a person can’t worship anything that is created by God, he can worship only God. So, it is implied that the land, jungle, river, and mountains, ancestors can’t be worship since they are created by Gods. But are there any tribes who do not worship nature? So, there is a basic conflict between the tribal religion and the one book religion. It is fortunate that we, the Janajatis, were able to preserve the spiritual and religious identity that we have inherited from our ancestors. Those who left our ancestral Dharma should be delisted. Article 368 speaks about constitutional amendment; we must change Article 342 which defines scheduled cast. In Article 341 there is a clause that if any schedule cast converts to a religion that does not have its origin in India, he will no longer be treated as a scheduled caste. But unfortunately, due to the intervention of 3 leaders one of whom was a Jesuit from North-East India, one Shri Jaipal Munda, and another person who later became Prime Minister of India; a similar clause could not be incorporated in Article 342. Out of these three people, two were converted Christians. This is the cost of the mistake that we are paying till today. If this clause was incorporated in Article 342 as well, people would not have converted. Now the question is, can we not amend the Article 342? The answer is ‘Yes’, we can. With a small ordinance, it can be amended; we don’t even need a majority on that. We can add a clause in Article 342 saying that tribals are nature worshippers and those religions whose structures’ do not allow worshipping of nature, followers of such a religion should not get the benefit which our constitution provides to the tribal community.

Sri Rakesh Mittal, speaker of the first session of the third day, spoke on the Legal issues involving NGOs and other voluntary organizations. He spoke on various provisions of Income Tax, recent changes in income tax laws, concept of FCRA and its important amendments, recent changes in FCRA registration, and funding etc. He also spoke on the recent changes in CSR rules.

Sri Samudragupta Kashyap, a prominent journalist

from the Northeast, spoke on the role of media as the medium of communication. The Speaker also spoke on the need of unity of the people. In this context he mentioned that the famous song “Axom Amar Rupohi” is originally a song of the ‘Nyishi community’ as an example. He mentioned this to show the bond between the Nyishi and the Assamese culture. He put emphasis on the need of documentation of the customs and traditions and to preserve the customs. Otherwise, we will lose our identity.

After Sri Kashyap’s speech, there was an open discussion wherein the delegates of all the community organizations attending the conference took part. Participants of the session spoke about their faith and traditions with enthusiasm. Sri Biswajit Basumatary, Dean of LNIPE acted as the moderator of the session.

Shri Harsh Chouhan, Hon’ble Chairperson of National Commission for Scheduled Tribe, had been present at the Conference from Inaugural Session to Closing ceremony. Janajati leaders of the Conference discussed and submitted memorandum to the Chairperson on various issues regarding preservation of faith, culture, traditions and developmental scenario of their communities. He expressed the view that the good news of the participation of the Janajati people in the development of the country in parallel with the preservation of their own culture and this kind of adherence should be spread to all levels of their society.

The closing function was graced by Shri Arjun Munda, Hon’ble Cabinet Minister of Tribal Affairs, Government of India. Sri Munda spoke about the essence of the philosophy of the Janajati communities. Nature sustains life; Nature is revered by us all. Nature’s role on the Janajati people has been emphasized since time immemorial. Quoting Swami Vivekananda, Mundaji presented an all inclusive world view of the Janajati people. He spoke on the great cultural heritage of the Janajati People and the need to preserve it. Prior to Mundaji’s Speech a Declaration pertaining to Janajati faith and culture was read out by Pratibha Bramha, member of JF&CPF.

The Declaration of the Janajati Conference, to be known as “Sonapur Declaration” urges Government of India to immediately take the following steps:

i) The converted tribal persons be delisted from the ST list and the necessary constitutional amendments be made for this purpose.

ii) All traditional practices and spiritual and philosophical wisdom be documented in all the formats. If necessary, some new social and educational institutions be set up to impart traditional wisdom. Respective State Governments should come forward to support the process of documentation.

iii) Government should uphold the divinity and sanctity of the Heritage and Pilgrimage Sites, relics which have been affected by developmental projects such as construction of roads etc.

iv) Culture can be protected only when we perform the customary practices and rituals. Janajati culture, tradition, customary practices and ancestral rituals are the reflections of our faith and identity. The Government should derecognize the demonstration of indigenous tradition, culture and customary practices without customary sanctification of Faith

Sri Ramchandra Kharadi, President of Akhil Bharatiya Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram delivered the concluding speech of the conference. In his speech, Sri Kharadiji discussed about the history behind the strategic attack orchestrated by the foreign forces to weaken our age old Sanatan indigenous Dharma and culture. These (foreign) forces tried to weaken our cultural structure by vandalizing our literature. He put emphasis on the need to be united and protect our indigenous religion. He congratulated everyone on the successful completion of the conference.

The “Voice of Northeast” displayed wonderful Janajati colours and had fruitful intellectual discussions on Janajati faith, heritage and culture. The conference came to an end on a positive note. ❖

VOICE OF THE NORTH EAST

This article is an abridged version of the inaugural speech delivered by Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM Assam, in the course of Janjati Leaders Conference organized by Janajati Dharma Sanskriti Suraksha Manch on 10th of September, 2021.

Addressing the august gathering of the luminaries of the Janajati Dharma Suraksha Manch and the public in general, the Chief Minister of Assam thanked all the delegates and members of audience representing different communities of different States of North East for their gracious presence in the conference. The Chief Minister also extended his hearty welcome to everyone on behalf of the people of Assam. He stated that this conference has its own importance as all the participants have gathered here to discuss how to protect the indigenous faith and culture of the North Eastern region. It is important to understand from whom we need to protect our indigenous culture and tradition. Are we going to protect it from our brothers and sisters who have moved away from their original faith and culture and have accepted some other faith or should we unite against the forces that are trying to weaken our age old faith and culture? For the purpose, we have to understand first that, those people who have converted to other faith and culture did not move out of their own free will. They did it because of some compulsions. They were allured, misled or compelled by that aggressive forces on the belief that they will get a better life if they opted out of their ancestral faith.. This silent aggression is still in progress. To avert this crisis in our country it should be the responsibility of the government in power to give the Tribal communities the best health care, and the best education facilities, so that there would no scope for the outsiders to allure the economically backward tribal communities in the name of health care and education which our state and central governments are already providing them. If every government works in this way than the indigenous tribal communities will become immune to allurements and provocation which in turn will help

in protecting their faith and culture. The CM stated that a separate department called the Department of Indigenous Faith and Culture is under the process of creation in Assam to safeguard the identity of the tribal communities. He added that someone asked him whether the government will now work to protect the religion. CM answered to that if the government works for the protection of religion, then only, we will be able to protect our nation. Without protecting the religion of all the indigenous communities it will be impossible to protect a nation. Now we all must come together and work for the preservation of the indigenous faith and culture. He informed that he has proposed a budget of 100 core for this department for the current financial year. He hoped to spend more than 500 cores for this department in coming 5 years. We should uplift the culture and faith of our tribal brethren as much we can. There should be good facilities of health, education and medical services in tribal of the state. The business of religion in the name of help in health and education must be stopped/ He reiterated that this is his vision. The CM requested everybody to understand that we don't need to learn religion and culture from outsiders. We already have a very rich culture. Tribal people use to live in jungles. In jungles there are the wild animals, but our religion had so much power that even animals become friendly. Our religion still has that much power. There can be no competitor with the tribal food and the beautiful attire. We should be proud of this. In short, we must have to be proud of our Culture. Whenever some tourists come to Northeast they want to see the tribal culture. They want to see something different like Mising Bihu, Tiwa Bihu. But from where this culture come from? This is not imported from anywhere. The tribal culture has evolved on its own. He urged everybody to teach their future

generation that in our religion and culture lies our pride. If this message is conveyed to every household it is strongly believed that those who strayed from their ancestral faith will come back. In earlier times also we have faced threats to our religion but we faced them bravely. He expressed his hope that we will succeed this time too.

The CM hoped that the delegates who are scheduled to stay here at Guwahati for 3 days will find their accommodation at the picturesque LNIPE campus and enjoy their stay in Guwahati the capital city of Assam. He requested all the assembled delegates to pledge to work hard towards the goal of protection of Janajati Dharma. He said that he felt proud to be able to contribute his might to do something for the upliftment of the tribal people. It is the tribal culture that teaches us to live our life in unison with nature. He hoped to organize a very big conference for entire Northeast to demonstrate the culture of northeast, the food and cuisine of north east, the attires of North east where tribal faiths and beliefs of North east will also be a part. He regretted that some people ask why we try to mingle religion with culture? He asked them whether there any difference between religion and culture. For us religion and culture are like two sides of a coin. We don't differentiate between these two concepts. He cited the example of Bihu. On the first day of bihu we worship cattle that are our religion. And that is our culture as well. Our religion and culture are not different. For those who wish to teach us about religion and culture, he clarified that the effort to teach us about rocket science or aircraft engineering is tolerable but trying to educate us about religion is cannot be tolerated under any circumstances. He advised the dissenting people to learn about religion from our rich spiritual heritage. We don't need to learn anything when it comes to faith religion and culture. The CM bluntly stated that those who intend to teach us about religion or culture by financially bribing our people we should tell them to open their shops elsewhere. It is our religion that has protected us through the ages and will continue to protect us through time. We are

not asking to become the masters of the world; we wish to become the Guru of the world. We wish to teach everyone without expecting any return. We believe that if we teach our children to look after their parents and aged elders, they will receive the same treatment from their offspring when they are old. Why in our culture children think about taking care of their parents, because our religion, culture teaches us to do so. In tribal society the young listens to the old. The culture and religion teach them to do so.

The CM added that sometimes he thinks that if the outsiders learn about our religion and culture then they will never think of leaving it ever. Our faith also came from a tribal society and not from elsewhere. Our ancestors wrote Mahabharata and Ramayana that also have evolved from the tribal society. King Baan was a shiva worshipper. There were shiv Bhakts even earlier than him. We celebrate Shiv Ratri since time immemorial, the Bodo community observes Bathow Puja. These two Gods are same, there is no difference between them. We need to learn religion from the tribal communities and not try to teach religion to them. When we will have respect in the religion of tribal people then only our society will become culturally rich. He added that wherever he goes he tries to explain to the people that we don't have what the tribal people has. We don't have the colorful fabric that they have. We don't have their food practices. We don't have the rich religious faith and culture that they have. That is why we must walk on this path with pride. We must tell the world that the tribal culture and religion can only lead us through the path of salvation of human life. The tribal society does not have the societal evils. Simplicity is their character and the God favours the simple ones. The simple people keep away from committing any evil deed. We should work with enthusiasm to learn more about beliefs and faiths of the tribal communities. We should not have two opinions about this and must work together on this. Our nation will march ahead if we take the tribal tradition, culture and religion forward. ❖

Strengthening spiritual & philosophical understanding of the Janajati's of North East Bharat

(An abridged version of the summing up speech delivered by Paye Dawe, President of Nyishi Nyidung Mwingjang Rallung during the Janajati Leaders' conference held on 11th September, 2021 at Sonapur, Guwahati.)

We are blessed to be born in a country, where the Spiritual and philosophical knowledge and their values are considered as the supreme understanding of the journey of human life on earth. We are also fortunate to belong to such a society where every tradition, culture, rituals and tenets of the tribal people are the source of spiritual knowledge driven by the spiritual wisdom. Answers to following three points will perhaps throw some light on the issue of strengthening spiritual and philosophical understanding of the Janajati of North East region.

1. How the Janajati spiritual and philosophical understanding have been moulded by the deep rooted influence of indigenous faiths, tradition, culture and rituals.

2. Why and how these spiritual and philosophical knowledge is weakening.

3. How we can revive and strengthen them amongst our Janajati faith followers.

How the Janajati spiritual and philosophical understanding have been moulded by the deep rooted influence of indigenous faiths, tradition, culture and rituals

We the Indigenous tribal people are worshipers of nature and our spiritual and philosophical understanding of life are driven by nature. Our tradition, culture, rituals and tenets are all based on the philosophy of nature. We worship nature because it provides us our livelihood and teaches us the philosophy of inclusive characteristics. Like the forests accommodate every creatures and never resists any one from settling within its limits, it rather provides them with food and shelter needed by them.

This is the essence of *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (The whole world is one family). This Upanishadic phrase can be found in Sama Veda. We worship the rivers because it quenches our thirst and at the same time takes away all the dirt and debris carried by the small streams and merges with the great oceans, thereby cleaning and purifying the environment so that it can sustain life. The tribal community's love and respect for nature is also reflected in their rituals performed during festivals and while occupying a new house. The first thing the priest does is to plant a sapling (Dapo) and then prays to mother earth to be a witness and bless for the understanding between human and nature, which is the epitome of truth and permanence.

We the Tribal people absolutely believe in the philosophy of "*Ekam sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti*" - truth is one but we call it in various names. This sloka is from the *Rig Veda*. This is the reason why we consider every natural object as god and worship them as gods. There are many examples to substantiate it, like during harvesting we pray the spirit of the paddy. Bunch of paddies are left behind for last collection, wherein the priest chants and invites the spirit of those Rice which were left out may be due to wind, birds, animals and rain and guide them right to the granaries and ultimately to the house. So all our traditions and rituals have some deep rooted spiritual connotations.

Why and how these spiritual and philosophical knowledge is weakening.

Unfortunately, it is observed that the understanding of the great philosophy and spiritual content of our Indigenous traditions and cultures are

weakening slowly but steadily. The reason behind this downward trend may be attributed to the following reasons.

i) Lack of script and the practice of Documentation

- ii) Advancement in tune with the modern times
- iii) Ascendency and influence of Christianity.

i) Lack of Script and documentation:

Arunachal Pradesh has as many as 26 Major Tribes and 124 sub-tribes, except Buddhism none of the tribes have any script of their own and as such they failed to initiate proper documentation efforts for their tradition, culture and belief systems. Their traditional knowledge were being passed orally from generation to generation which resulted in misinterpretation and distortion down the line. None of these Tribes or Sub Tribes have any written document or record to authenticate the orally transmitted knowledge. It is therefore not possible to logically interpret the traditional wisdom of these communities. Perhaps this is one of the most important reason why the age old spiritual knowledge and philosophy governing our tradition, culture and belief system have failed to attract the Janajati faith followers.

ii) Advancement in tune with the modern times

Due to the influence of modern times most of the tribal youths have become more interested in building their carriers. They therefore move out to urban townships and cities to acquire higher education and skills and are reluctant to live in villages. Many of these youths finally settle far away from their homes. Consequently the youths got disconnected with their elders who were the treasure house of traditional knowledge of their tribes. In addition to the above, absence of scripts and inability to properly document the traditional knowledge have deprived the younger generation from learning about their traditional heritage. Most of the tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh failed to move ahead in tune with modern times and have thus helped

in decline of their ancient philosophical and spiritual wisdom,

ii) Ascendency and influence of Christianity:

The most important factor that weakened the great spiritual and philosophical heritage of the Janajati traditions, culture and faiths, is the continuous ascendency and influence of Christianity. Following are the exact dates on which the Christian Missionaries first struck their roots in North Eastern states and adopted all means to increase their area of influence.

- a) Assam- 26th Sept 1626- Cabral and Cacella at Hajo and Guwahati
- b) Tripura- 1683- Fr. Ignatius Gomes
- c) Meghalaya- 1830, Thomas Jones in Khasi Hills,
- d) Sikkim & Darjeeling area.-1843 by East India Company
- e) Nagaland –2nd March 1876- Mr. & Mrs Clark
- f) Mizoram 15th March 1891- Rev. Williams
- g) Arunachal Pradesh- 1920 at Eastern Part of Arunachal Pradesh by Duyon Lego and Tamik Dabi.

The Missionaries and evangelists started motivating the simple hearted tribal communities to denounce their indigenous faith and belief systems on the logic that the nature they are worshipping now was created by god so why to worship the creation, rather it is more appropriate to worship the God Himself and his son Jesus Christ. Because the simple hearted tribal communities were ignorant about the deep spiritual meaning of worshipping the nature, they succumbed to the persuasions and cajolement of the Jesuits. Their belief in the omnipresence of the god and His presence in every objects of nature were shaky. They could refute the missionaries and tell them that we don't distinguish creation with creator. This is the reason why we worship sun as by its rays it sustains every living being of this planet. Thus the innocent and ignorant tribal communities were successfully brain washed to denounce their own

belief system and adopt Christianity. With their money power and influence originating from Christian dominated colonial rulers the Christian preachers systematically annihilated the indigenous faith followers and weakened their faiths and beliefs.

How we can revive and strengthening them among our Janjati faith followers :-

We can revive and strengthen our spiritual knowledge and philosophy in following ways:-

- i) By instilling self belief and confidence.
- ii) By Sadhana, Seva and Sacrifice.
- iii) By scientific documentation and orientation

A brief description of the above points will perhaps be in order.

i) By instilling self belief and confidence:-

We need to believe in ourselves and our heritage. We must also acquire the self confidence to replicate the achievements obtained by our forefathers of past. There are several stories to substantiate that our ancestors were able to penetrate the darkness of ignorance and succeeded in realising deep significance of spirituality and philosophical basis of life. We should take pride in their achievements and be confident that we can too obtain the same level of success if we are confident and committed to the cause.

ii) By Sadhanas and Seva:-

To obtain and achieve the spiritual enlightenment and knowledge, we need to undertake Sadhana, be ready to offer Seva to the god's creation and sacrifice our ego and false pride. In past our ancestors could achieve the spiritual and philosophical realisation of truth and godhood because they lived a life of purity and gladly embraced the restrictions necessary for self control, concentration on the objective and maintaining unblemished purity in day to day life. Unfortunately, today our new generation has veered from the path prescribed by our forefathers and follows the path prescribed by the west in the name of modernity. This alien way of life is polluting our mind and is destroying our time tested heritage of

simple living and higher thinking.

Therefore we need to revert back to our old ways of spiritual contemplation, service to mankind and sacrifices our self centric desires, because superior spiritual knowledge and philosophical understanding of god's creation cannot be obtained through the materialistic life style of the west. We must relearn what our forefathers taught us and try to follow their wise and sage like counselling for a better tomorrow.

iii) By scientific documentation and orientation

Scientific documentation of the orally transmitted knowledge and the interpretation of the spiritual content of indigenous tradition, culture and faith is one important way to strengthen the spiritual and philosophical knowledge among our Janajati faith followers. With the documentation there has to be orientation programme couple with yoga and meditations for going deeper down the spiritual path. This way only we can strengthen the spiritual and philosophical understanding of the Janajati faith followers.

In this context the DPCCT had initiated a Gurukul system of education in the nomenclature of Nyubu Nyvgam Yerko at Seppa, East Kameng District of Arunachal Pradesh. The objectives of the Gurukul is to provide ancient village model of ambience with modern education; wherein the modern education shall be provided by Vivekananda Kendra. The idea is to produce human resources like IAS, IPS etc and equip them with the knowledge of constitution and indigenous customary laws, Doctors with scientific knowledge, practioners of the hymns and chantings of priests, Engineers endowed with technology knowledge and equipped with the knowledge of indigenous art and craft.

With such initiatives it is hoped that our people will start taking pride in their own tradition, culture and faith systems and shall never feel inferior of their own culture and tradition in comparison to the rest of the world. Only thing that must be ensured is prevention of conversion of our tribal brethren to other faiths. ❖

How Traditions, Customs and Rituals are preserved among the followers of Indigenous Faith Organisations

(An abridged version of the summing up speech delivered by Ramesh Babu, All India Joint Organizing Secretary, ABVKA during the Janajati Leaders' conference held on 11th September, 2021 at Sonapur, Guwahati)

Namaskar to everyone. Honorable Chairman of this session, our guest of honor Shri Techi Gubin Ji, honorable leaders of tribal indigenous religions from Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram, Honorable Officers of community faith organisations, and the members, I welcome all of you.

'Janajati Dharma Suraksha Manch' was created with a special purpose. There was a time when a feeling of insecurity stirred among the tribes of Northeast due to conversion; one after other states became the harvesting ground of Missionaries and rate of religious conversions to Christianity was mounting. In such a time some leaders like Bikram Bahadur Jamatiyaji, Gangumumei Kameiji, Nabam Atumji, N.C. Zeliangji, L. Khimunji of various tribal communities thought that this lenient approach towards proselytizing agencies will not work. We must protect our society together. For this purpose, all the organizations need to unite. Some of the organizations were already working in this field much earlier. For example, Seng-Khasi organization of Meghalaya, Zeliangrong Heraka Association of Nagaland, Tingkao Raguang Chapriak Phom of Manipur, Brahma and Bathou Religions of Bodos in Assam, Donyipolo Yelam Kebang of Arunachal Pradesh etc.

The leaders thought that a common platform must be created where problems faced by these organizations can be discussed with common consensus and some activities can be organized to check the proselytizing efforts. With this thought, this platform was created. It has been working in this field since 2002.

To know the North-East and to sensitize the people, the leaders of this platform travelled across the country. Interstate tour programmes were organized. There were seminars on customary laws. In 2006, a big youth conference was organized in Guwahati. Almost 4500 youth came to Guwahati to participate in this event. These youths of North-East rallied on the streets of Guwahati saying "Stop conversion" on the day of Christmas. After this event a new enthusiasm arose in entire Northeast. Many new indigenous faith organizations were formed in various tribal communities of northeast.

In 2010, a seminar was organized where the delegates from almost fifty organizations participated. In this seminar, spirituality and philosophy of tribes of North-East India were discussed. The delegates showcased the concept of their religions. The deliberations of this seminar were made into a book which is now available as a reference book in several universities.

People are trying to understand the religions of North-East. In 2014 or 2015 there was an effort of similar kind in Namsai, Arunachal Pradesh. A programme, somewhat like a spiritual retreat wherein the Vice president of Vivekananda Kendra Smt. Nivedita Bhide and Suresh Soni ji, Senior Pracharak and the then Sah Sarkaryavah of Rashtreeya Swayamsevak Sangh were present along with the leaders of the tribes of Northeast.

All these efforts were made to resolve that the ancestral religion that is received from our forefathers must be imparted to the next generation. It has been inherited to us so that we can extend it by passing it

on to the next generation. We must understand that the process must not be weakened owing to changing lifestyle of modernity. We must make it better and give it to our next generation.

There is a ceremony observed in several families of Tangsa tribe of Arunachal Pradesh where a father hands over the traditional items to his elder son. Traditional items which include things like Dao as well as other items required in performing pujas. Before handing over the Dao, the father makes necessary repairs; so that it would last long and look better. This ceremony is celebrated at their homes. They call their neighbors and in front of them father hands over the Dao to his son. The son receives the Dao with the understanding that he must use it during religious observation and is just a keeper of the dao which must be passed to his next generation. The father hands over the dao with the belief that he has been performing his religious duty and from now onwards his son will work instead of him.

Similarly, we must have to pass our ancestral religion, that we have inherited from our forefathers to our next generation, after making necessary amendments according to time and need, but without making any alternations to its fundamental values.

People attending this session are not mere spectators. They are workers of this field, who understand their responsibilities. We have a challenge in front of us. The challenge is bigger than the violence initiated by Christian Missionaries. We will face the challenge posed by missionaries. The Christian missionaries are nothing in front of us. If we become successful in handing over our traditional wisdom to the youngest of our society, no one can harm us.

People gave a lot of reason for conversions. People says the girls fall in love with Christian boys and they got converted, the man was poor that is why he has been converted, there are some more other reasons for why they are converted. The other day one of my friends was saying that his son became a doctor but unfortunately, he became a

victim of conversion. It shows that poverty is not the reason. Bangladeshi people, a lot poorer than the poor of our society are so devout to their religion that the Christian missionaries don't dare to enter the place where they live. I have seen people who are extremely poor but has not forgotten their own religion. They don't have a better roof over their head, but I know many such people who are firm on their religious conviction. Had they been ready to embrace Christianity they would have got a better house, but they have not given up their religion. If we say poverty is the reason of conversion then we are ignoring the commitments of these people on their original faith. They are the devout people who has not given up their faith. There are two main reasons of conversion. Once I had got the opportunity to meet Talom Rukbo ji in 1992 in our Guwahati office. He was about to leave for an all-India tour named "Arunodaya 92" with some 30 odd delegates from Arunachal Pradesh. He said, "there are two main reasons of conversion. The first is every society does not have an organized life and the second is lack of knowledge about traditional faith. We are not living an organized life in terms of religion and we don't have a regular social system for imparting our faith and culture to our young generation. Our system of oral tradition is broken as the children are away from the village for education. We are working to find out a solution to the problem". He left his job for this purpose and worked rest of his life to organize his people till his last breath. So, even now we must work on these two reasons. First, we must have to organize our society, secondly, we must impart the knowledge of traditional religion to the youngest of the society. The efforts should start at home level. If we don't do this, then we won't be able to stand in front of the Christians. Christianity is not a threat to us, if the unorganized state of the society and the reluctant approach of the younger generation towards religion can be eliminated. So, I request on behalf of Janajati Dharma Suraksha Manch that all the community organizations must think what we are doing today towards this direction. We must do this, because our indigenous Faith and culture are

going to be our chief identity in coming time. As per 342 of our constitution we have been scheduled and we are known as Scheduled Tribes (STs). While scheduling various communities, following points have been considered as main characteristics for inclusion of different tribal communities into list. The characteristics were 1) geographical isolation, 2) economic backwardness, 3) shyness to mingle with rest of the society 4) a separate linguistic group and 5) distinct cultural identity.

In today's time we don't want to keep the first three characteristics. We want to come out of it. If those three are vanished, then only development is possible. In present day due to increase in connectivity, the geographical isolation is no more existed, economic backwardness was also reduced to some extent and shyness is no more there to mingle with rest of the society. But the last two characteristics are the ones that we want to preserve. The language is a part of our identity. But we somewhat tend to neglect our mother tongue. But it cannot become main part of our identity since it can be learned and spoken by others as well. Our chief identity is our cultural identity. This is what we need to preserve because it is our real identity. We have been enlisted for our community way of living. But some of our brothers/sisters have left this traditional community living and embraced other faiths, they went after foreign religions. They argue that Religion and culture are two separate entity and by changing religion culture is not changed. But is it possible? this is not possible at all, because culture and faith are inseparable. These are just like two sides of a coin. If one side is not clearly visible that coin is valueless. Therefore, loss of indigenous faith is loss of culture. Therefore, we must preserve our indigenous faith to preserve our culture and thereby our identity. If anyone says with an alien religion our indigenous faith is protected it is the blatant lie of the time. My spiritual understanding is that the faith I have in my heart is everyone has God inside him/her. That is why I do Namaskar to all. The Namaskar is my Culture. Expression of belief is culture. That is why culture and religion cannot be separated. They are

always interlinked together. The tribal religion and the tribal culture are same and cannot be different, if someone says you can follow any religion and keep your culture same, there is no bigger lie than this. They are lying to our faces. It's simply not possible. Our behavior has its origin in our religion. Our livelihood is also related to our religion. In the life of a man, he must go through different stages, the observation in each stage is called customary practices. Rituals are related to customs. In present day atmosphere, how many of these rituals we follow and how many of our children can see us following them? In our village life we got many opportunities to perform rituals. We used to do worship before going to cultivate. Rituals were performed before harvesting as well. In this way there are many rituals that support religious practices. These rituals are part of our cultural identity.

Our religion is practiced from time immemorial in the form of oral tradition. It is in practice generations after generations. It is eternal. We don't know who has started it. Our Donyi Polo religion, the religion of Tingkao Ragwang, etc. are existed even before the nature came into existence. A single person has not started them. There are foot-paths towards jungles. Nobody knows who made them. Someone must have walked on them, then in time many followed and that is how they were created. Same way we have received our religions from our ancestors. They had lived accordingly. That is why these are eternal; they will not perish. Since it is eternal it has no beginning and no end. It was existed, it is existing, and it will exist. We must have to get everyone, especially the youth, to walk along with us on this path. Because we believe God Himself has created our eternal indigenous faith.

I have heard that, according to Adi religion, in the beginning of the universe, there was nothing except a sound 'keyunm.....'. At that time the universe was existed in the form of Nada Brahma. Later the Nada Brahma wished to take form, it wanted to get manifested into many. So, it got

transformed into this universe. That is why we believe that the Tingwang, the Donyi polo, the Borai Bathow, the Tingkao Ragwang, are various names given to Almighty which is present everywhere. It is omnipresent. Since It is omnipresent, It is omniscient also. When the One is Omnipresent and Omniscient, it must be omnipotent also. This belief is present in the faith of every tribe. That is the reason why we became the nature worshipper; we see God in Nature. That is why it is said that tribals are nature worshippers.

We see Donyi Polo as the Sun and the Moon but if we go to some learned person of that tribe, they will say that the real Donyipolo is invisible. You may find such enlightened souls in all tribal communities.

Rani Guidinliu saw that people belonging to her community believe in many semi gods. She reformed her community by worshipping only Tingwang. Tingwang is Almighty God. This concept is present in Tingkao Reguang in Manipur. The concept of God and the diversities present in nature does not indicate differences. This diversity is just the manifestation of God Himself, God thought I

am alone I want to become many, so He manifested into nature. We are created in different geographical locations we grow up in different culture the underlying unity is His presence in everything and everywhere. Or the right way of thinking is that the very One has become many with His divine will. Although different tribes have different philosophies of spirituality and how far they are developed, but behind every philosophy the guiding principle is this oneness. And that is why the spirit of “unity in diversity” leads us to believe that we all are one. We must move forward with this understanding. We may speak different languages, we may have different mode of worshipping, there may be differences in the things that are being used in worshipping, languages of mantra may be different, the names of the Gods may be different but the matter present inside everyone is the same. And if we see ourselves with those observations, we find ourselves as one.

The challenge is that our spiritual knowledge is not percolating downwards in the desired amount. The society has changed. Earlier we use to live in villages and cultivate. Our children use to grow up



playing around us and they had the opportunity to observe us. That way they use to learn several things without teaching. Knowledge use to transmit in this process. And the new generation becomes knowledgeable. But this was the system of learning in olden days, which is not possible at present. Now children are leaving villages for good education. We send them to different hostels in different cities. They grow up there. That is why the very knowledge of our traditional culture and religion are not properly imparted to them. How are these rituals celebrated in our villages and how much our young generations are getting the opportunity to take part in them? Our children should get the opportunity to know the religious faith. For the purpose there should be an organized system. For this purpose, a new social system should come up to bridge the gap. Are you ready to put forward this knowledge in front of young generation with pride? Does our young generation feel proud about our religious faith and culture? Do they have enough self-respect on their customary practices? One of the main reasons of conversion is not having respect for our own religion. The reason for not having respect is lack of knowledge. We are not making enough effort to distribute this knowledge. That is why we must have to follow an organized system to inculcate self-respect among every person. Many communities have started it. But it is found that there are certain communities who have not yet discussed anything apart from celebrating annual festivals. We have experienced it during reporting session yesterday. They don't have anything to share about the works done by them. I request that every community should have social gathering at least once in a week. We should pledge that in the name of our faith and culture we would gather once in a week, keeping everything else aside. The strictness with which this concept is followed in Christianity and Islam are their main strength.

I will share one story, I was roaming around in Raipur for making my Aadhaar Card, I approached

many shops. At last I found one young shopkeeper of about 32 years. I enquired him about making Aadhaar Card. He was ready to do it. I submitted my supportive documents and he started typing. After about half an hour of typing he said that I must wait for atleast 45 minute. I said you should have told me earlier, then I would have gone to a different shop. He said, yes, still you can go. Because if you leave, I will lose only Rupees 200 but if I don't go there, I will lose crores. I asked where he had to go. He answered that he was going to offer namaz. For them it is so important that they are ready to leave the money they were about to earn. But our society does not have that much of determination. If we had that much of determination we would have gathered once in week in our prayer centers like Nyedar Namlo Gangging, Kelumki, Kelumkai, Bathow mandir, Rangphra mandir etc. in the name of religion keeping everything else aside. When everybody in the society will think like this no one will ever stay away from their path. We can stop conversion totally if we are determined to do it. There are people who say I can go to prayer centres, but I cannot force others. It is their choice whether to go or not. But let me tell you one thing, if you want to protect yourself from the proselytizing agencies, you must preach the necessity of getting together and everyone should be brought under one roof. If you don't bring your neighbor, your acquaintances to the traditional temple of your religion then they will become victim of conversion and become a potential threat to you in future. Therefore, it is necessary to bring all around us to the place where we are gathering. Bringing forward our own people alone will help us to move forward. We don't want to move forward individually. We should grow as a community. Kalyan Ashram and Janjati Dharma Sanskruti Suraksha Manch want to see that the indigenous Faith and Culture of the Janjatis of Northeast are protected. It will strengthen the nation and will work like a protecting wall of northeastern frontier. ❖

Delisting converted Tribals from ST List

This article is based on the speech delivered by Sri Lakshman Singh Markam, Member of *Janajati Suraksha Mancha*, in the course of Janajati Leaders conference held on 10th, 11th and 12th September, 2021.

While greeting the dignitaries, the tribal leaders and the delegates present in the conference Sri Lakshman Singh Markam stated that the purpose of this conference is to serve a great cause aimed at protection and preservation of Janajati faith and culture.

In line with the titled of this conference, 4 points need to be elaborated and discussed. He stated that some time ago a book titled 'Bees Barsh Ki Kali Raat' was written by Baba Kartik Oraon in which he warned against the division amongst the tribal society. Today there is a serious problem of tribal conversion and to understand it we must go to the roots and evolve out a strategy to correct the situation.

This is the 75th year of Independence and as our honourable Prime Minister Modiji has recently stated that our history has not given due place of honour to the tribal freedom fighters of our country. They were systematically overlooked and bypassed by our historians. To right this wrong the central ministry has decided to build 9 freedom fighters museums across the country so that our glorious history of freedom struggle are not lost.

At the moment we are faced with a greater problem of treatment of the converted tribal individuals as indigenous community eligible for all the benefits admissible to indigenous tribal communities of our country. . To understand the issue we must understand how the listing is done. What are the criteria for listing of a tribe? There is no definition in the constitution. Although we are all tribes, and we have rights but we don't have a proper definition of scheduled tribes in the constitution. We have only some circular based definition. It was earlier decided that the Hon'ble President of India will declare certain rights and that

list will be formalized, who is to be included in the list and who is not. This list will be called as the list scheduled tribes. The first declaration of the honorable President was that all the tribes will be listed as schedule tribes based on the British census done in 1871. Even after the declaration of the President, there were many tribes left out of the list. A committee constituted by the government listed them afterwards. Again, there was a problem with this list. There were no criteria. To attend to this issue, one committee called Lokur Committee was constituted by the government headed by Justice Lokur. This committee gave one formula to evaluate if a community is tribal or not. The main parameter of the formula was geographical identification. Every tribe has got a geographical identity. So, the first criterion can be stated as that community that has the geographical identification are called tribes. The second criterion is that the community should have a distinct language, culture, and religious practices. The third criterion is the community should have subsistent farming techniques. The fourth criterion is they should have shyness to mingle with the rest of the society. These are the four main parameters of the criteria with which the formula is composed off. Subsequently, these criteria were accepted by the Supreme court of India as the benchmark for listing any tribe. Slowly state governments added scheduled tribes based on these criteria after the ramification of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes. Today more than 700 scheduled tribes are listed in the central list of scheduled tribes. Baba Kartik Orang also spoke of shyness and religious practices. But when a tribal person stops worshipping his ancestors and leaves their cultural and linguistic identity after conversion, they acquire a different sense of belonging. In addition to that a converted

person starts thinking himself as superior than the rest of his ancestral tribe. Then why should we consider such a person to be a “Tribal” since he doesn’t consider the place of his origin as his motherland, rather thinks that the community of his origin is inferior.

In one of the book of religions revered by the Christians, there are religious directives called the Ten Commandments. In those commandments it is clearly mentioned that a person can’t worship anything that is created by God, he can worship only God. So, it is implied that the land, jungle, river, and mountains, ancestors can’t be worshipped since they are created by Gods. But is there any tribe which do not worship nature? So, there is a basic conflict between the tribal religion and the one book religion. In this book of religion, it is stated that if a person worships anything other than the God, he deserves to be killed. So, we can ask if any tribal gets converted into any of these religions how can they still possess the right to be a tribal? Since they have left the basic identity of a tribal community, they don’t have any right to be called a tribal anymore. But the people involved in the process of conversion do not want so many people to lose their status and

benefits. That is why it allows them to practice their ancestral practices even after conversion. There is a huge business involved in this. When East India Company arrived in India the basic purpose was to supply natural resources but in 1857 the first Independence movement happened. The greatest number of casualties of British happened in forested tribal areas. Because all the tribal races were martial races. In central India, Chota Nagpur many tribal rebellions happened. Tilka Manjhi, Sidho Kanho fought bravely. Rebellions like Santhal Rebellion, Munda Rebellion, Gond Rebellion, Bheel Rebellion were started by our brave tribal brothers and sisters, despite knowing that they will be killed by the British army. They fought bravely because they knew that they were fighting for their dharma. The British understood that they can never defeat the tribals in hand-to-hand combat and they will always face resistance from the tribals, so the first thing they started is destroying the identity of the tribal people. Because identity was the first line of defense. If we look at the border area of North-East; we will see that our tribal brethren are protecting the borders of our motherland despite various odds. Whosoever attacked our country, they had to fight the tribals



first. That is why the British wanted to break our identity. Our identity was the people of the land. The British started to convert the people to their religion. They first converted the Nagas since they were afraid of them the most. After that, they started converting the Northeastern tribes one by one, so that they can rule this land and exploit its resources. Tibet was a tribal land of India, Nepal was a tribal land of India, they separated Bangladesh as well, they separated Bhutan too. The worst division was the division of Assam. If at that time the tribal population was considered, we would have had a bigger North-East. The Chakma tribe was wrongfully assigned to Bangladesh without considering that it would not be able to thrive in Bangladesh. Thousands of Chakma tribesman are stuck in Bangladesh. There are more instances of similar nature. This happened because they did not consider the tribals as Hindu or as followers of indigenous religion. The division was done solely based on the Hindu and Muslim populations. Because of this unethical partition, thousands of people were forced to leave India who still speaks tribal languages and is spread over 40 districts of Bangladesh. The British did this to achieve the term Crown colony. They almost succeeded but due to the efforts of Sardar Patel, this concept could not materialize fully. When Baba Saheb Ambedkar was drafting the Constitution special rights were allotted to these communities to protect their integrity.

While delisting we must understand that we are not at war with the local people, we are at war with the international conspiracy to break India. This is not only a matter of religious conversion but also a matter of the integrity of India. A person who has converted is acting as a tool to disintegrate India. So, if we are protecting our community, it means that we are protecting our motherland as well. If we read Article 371 which states that if somebody wants to go with the provisions of the community, govt of India can not change their religious identity. The book "Bees Barshki kali Raat" talks about identifying the problem in its genesis. It says that those who leave their communal identity, don't have any right to be called tribals. If this concept was made the boundary

practice the conversion rate would have been much lower after Independence.

It is fortunate that we were able to preserve the spiritual and religious identity that we have inherited from our ancestors. First, we must find out how to delist the tribals who are converted. We must look at Article 368 of the Constitution. It talks about Constitutional Amendments then we must change Article 342 which defines scheduled cast. In Article 341 there is a clause that if any schedule cast converts to a religion that does not have its origin in India will no longer be scheduled cast. But unfortunately, due to the intervention of 3 leaders one of whom was a Jesuit Father from North-East India, one Shri Jaipal Munda, and another person who later became Prime Minister of India; a similar clause could not be incorporated in Article 342. Out of these three people, two were converted Christians. This is the cost of the mistake we are paying till today. If this clause was incorporated in Article 342 as well people would not have converted. Now the question is can we amend Article 342? The answer is yes, we can. Through a simple ordinance, it can be amended, we don't even need a majority votes on that. We can add a clause in Article 342 saying that tribals are nature worshippers and those religions whose structures do not allow worshipping the nature; should not get the benefit of the tribal community. But this will be challenged in the Supreme court. If unfortunately, we lose this challenge it would be our biggest failure. So, is there any middle way?

There must be societal contributions starting with political reservations. Articles 330 to 334 talk about the political reservation and the good thing is that in political reservation the honorable court cannot interfere. The political representatives of tribals community not only represent a particular tribal community but also their culture. A converted person should not be allowed to do so. They should not even be allowed to put forward the candidature from a scheduled tribe reserve constituency. We should force the political parties to implement it as a rule.

If it cannot be achieved, we should unite as a

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Mirabai: A Woman Who Lived to Love God

Anuradha Dutta

Can love truly be divine? Can it make the beloved become one to their loved ones? When love becomes bhakti or is bhakti itself the purest form of love? A simple name 'Mirabai' is the answer to all these questions. She was a 16th-century Hindu mystic poet and devotee of Shri Krishna. She is a celebrated Bhakti saint, particularly in the North Indian Hindu tradition. She was venerated as Sant Mirabai.

Sant Mirabai was born in Samvat 1557 or 1499 A.D. in the village Kurkhi, near Merta, a small state in Marwar, Rajasthan. At that time Merta was ruled by the Ranthors, who were great devotees of Vishnu. Her father, Ratan Singh, was the second son of Rao Duda Ji, a descendent of Rao Jodhaji Rathor, the founder of Jodhpur. Mirabai was raised by her grandfather. As customary with royal families of Rajputana, her education included knowledge of scriptures, music, archery, fencing, horse riding and driving chariots. She was even trained to wield weapons. At a very young age of just four years, she manifested her deep devotion to Shri Krishna. Once she saw a marriage procession in front of the palace and spotted the well-dressed bridegroom. She asked her mother, who will be her bridegroom?

Mirabai's mother smiled, and half in jest and half in earnest, pointed towards the image of Sri Krishna and said, 'My dear Mira, Shri Krishna - this beautiful fellow - is going to be your bridegroom'.

Soon after, Mirabai's mother passed away. As Mirabai grew up, her desire to be one with her Shri Krishna grew intense and she believed that Shri Krishna would come to marry her. After some time, she became confident that Krishna was to be her husband. She began to love the idol of Shri Krishna very much. She worshipped the idol. She danced in front of the idol. She sang beautiful songs in front of the idol. She even used to talk to the idol. Time passed on and Mirabai reached her teenage years.

The tales of her beauty and piety spread far and wide. Rana Sangram Singh, also known as Rana Sangha, the powerful King of Mewar, approached Rao Duda Ji for Mirabai's hand in marriage to his son Bhojraj (also known as Rana Kumbha or Kumbha Rana). Bhojraj wanted to marry Mirabai for her pious nature and divine intent. Rao Duda Ji agreed to this union. Although, Mirabai could not bear the thought of marrying a human being when her heart was filled with thoughts of the creator himself, her Shri Krishna. Unable to defy her grandfather's decision, she finally consented to the marriage. Mirabai was married to Rana Kumbha in 1513 AD, before she turned 14. After her marriage, she left for Chittorgarh, Mewar with her husband.

Mirabai was a very dutiful wife. She obeyed her husband implicitly. After her household duties were over, she would go to the temple of Shri Krishna, worship, sing and dance there every day. Legends state that the image would get up, embrace her, play on the flute, and talk to her. Rana's mother and other ladies of the palace did not like the ways of Mirabai. A conspiracy began to defame the innocent queen. But she never deterred from her prembhakti. She was persecuted in various ways by the Rana himself and his relatives. But it is said that Sri Krishna always stood by the side of Mirabai. There are stories that tell of an incident when Rana sent a cobra in a basket to Mirabai with the message that it contained a garland of flowers. Mirabai was meditating at that time. After finishing her meditation, she opened the basket and found a lovely idol of Sri Krishna and a garland of flowers inside. Then the Rana sent her a cup of poison with the message that it was nectar. Mirabai offered it to Shri Krishna and took it as his prasada. It became real nectar for her. Then the Rana sent a bed of nails for Mirabai to sleep on. Mirabai finished her worship and slept on the bed of nails.

But the bed of nails transformed into a bed of roses.

When the torture and scandals continued, Mirabai sent a letter to Goswami Tulsidas and asked for his advice. She wrote, 'Simply because I am constantly tortured by my relatives, I cannot abandon my Krishna. I am unable to carry on with my devotional practices in the palace. I have made Giridhar Gopala my friend from my very childhood. I feel a total bondage with him. I cannot break that bond'.

Tulsidasji sent a reply: 'Abandon those who cannot understand you and who do not worship Rama or Syama, even though they are your dearest relatives. Prahlada abandoned his father; Vibhishana left his brother Ravana; Bharata deserted his stepmother; Bali forsook even his Guru; the Gopasthrees, the women of Vraja, disowned their husbands to get to their Krishna. Their lives were all the happier for having done so. The relation with God and the love of God are the only elements that are true and eternal; all other relationships are unreal and temporary'.

Her fame spread across the kingdoms. One legend state that once Akbar and his court musician Tansen came in disguise to Chitore to hear Mira's devotional songs. Both entered the temple and listened to Mira's soul-stirring songs to their heart's content. Akbar was really moved. Before he departed, he touched the holy feet of Mirabai and placed a necklace of emeralds in front of the idol as a present. Somehow the news reached the Rana that Akbar had entered the temple in disguise, touched the feet of Mirabai and even presented her a necklace. The Rana became furious. He told Mirabai, to drown herself in the river and never show her face to the world in future, for she has brought great disgrace on his family".

Mirabai obeyed her husband. She proceeded to the river to drown herself. The names of Shri Krishna "Govind, Giridhari, Gopal "were always on her lips. She sang and danced in ecstasy on her way to the river. When she was about to plunge into the river, someone grasped her from behind. She turned and saw her beloved Shri Krishna. She fainted. After a

few moments she opened her eyes. Shri Krishna smiled and spoke to her "My dear Mirabai, your life with this mortal husband is over now. You are free. Be cheerful. You are mine. Go to the bowers of Vraja and the avenues of Brindavan. Seek me there, my child. Be quick". He then disappeared.

Mirabai obeyed the divine call. She walked barefoot on the hot sandy soil of Rajasthan. On her way, she was received by many ladies, children, and devotees with great hospitality. She reached Brindavan. She went about Brindavan begging for her food and worshipped in the Govinda Mandir which has since become famous and is now a place of pilgrimage. Her devotees of Chitore came to Brindavan to see her. Even her husband Rana Kumbha came to meet her in the disguise of a mendicant, revealed himself and repented for his previous wrongs and cruel deeds. Mirabai at once prostrated before her husband but politely declined his request to return to Chitore and be the queen once again.

However, at his request, Mirabai returned to Mewar. Rana Kumbha agreed to her wish that she would reside in the temple of Shri Krishna but would not restrict her movements and wanderings. After some time, she returned to Brindavan, and then went to Dwaraka. Legend states, in 1547 AD on Shri Krishna's Janmashtami at the temple of Shri Krishna, Mirabai got dissolved into the idol of Sri Krishna.

We hear tales of many noble born princesses and queens, how is it that the queen of Chitore alone is still remembered with reverence? Is this on account of her beauty? Or for the fact that she was a very good poet?

It is on account of her renunciation, devotion to Lord Krishna and God-realisation. She had the beautiful cosmic vision. She saw Shri Krishna in in all beings, in everything. A saint, a philosopher, a poet, and a sage, she was a versatile genius and a pure soul. Despite being a princess and a queen, she chose a life of poverty, austerity, Tyaga, Titiksha and Vairagya. She lived a life of perfect renunciation and self-surrender. Though she was a delicate young lady,

she embarked the perilous journey on the spiritual path amidst various difficulties. Her songs infuse faith, courage, devotion, and love of God. She had Raganuga or Ragatmika Bhakti. Shri Krishna was her Prananath. She just immersed herself in the love of Giridhar Gopal.

Centuries passed. The air of Virndavan, the sandy soil of Rajasthan and the very hearts of the god seeking souls still swells with the humble and melodic hymns of Meerbai while seeking refuge at the lotus feet of Sri Krishna , the creator; the Supreme being. ❖

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Delisting converted Tribals from ST List

community and pledge that we would not vote for a person who has got converted. We would only vote for a person who is a follower of the indigenous faith. We might not succeed at first but with time we will get successful.

The second thing is that the impact of delisting will be on fundamental rights. Article 14 gives us the Right to Equality. Whereas Article 15 says that there are special rights to the backward communities. Based on Article 15, people get admissions to educational institutes. Article 15 states that within a community there may be divisions. So, we can define that those who have got converted are educationally superior to the rest of us and hence should not enjoy the benefits of reservation. There is another Article, Article 16 which states that Right to equal opportunity in public employment. We may consider amending this Article as well. Since the converted people are educationally superior to the rest of us, they should not get reservations in public employment. They may be granted the rights of backward communities but not the rights of scheduled tribes. If these three concepts can be materialized, then those who abandoned their ancestral faiths will come back. For one or two generations we may keep them away so that they understand that moving away from a community is a dangerous practice. It is for sure that they will come back and start following our indigenous faith.

There is also another approach to use Article 15. If we see the current scenario all the bureaucrats and administrators from tribal communities are converted, they are the ones who are policymakers,

and they will never allow such amendments to happen. That is why we must have to train and educate our children so that they can grab these jobs and finally work for the benefit of their own community. We must have to teach them it is not a mere war against conversion, it is a war to protect our existence and identity. Education is the key to our upliftment, infact it is the only way that we can protect our community. We should very seriously focus on education. Conversion will be stopped but before we must have to strengthen our society the next generation.

There are several other issues that require elaboration. One of them is how to strengthen our organizations? There is a constitutional provision by which we can start linguistic minority organizations. These institutions will get more funding from the central Government than the minority development organization. It will have more rights than any minority development institution. State Government can impose that all the local authorities would appoint persons from indigenous faith. The governor can instruct the state government to impose this rule as we must protect the language, culture, and rights of those communities.

The biggest challenge is that we must have to know our own identity, we must have to understand that Sanatan dharma originated in this land. In the Sanatan faith, we recognize people by vansh, like suryavanshi, chandravanshi, naagvanshi, etc and it directly points towards the worshipping of nature. We must understand and identify ourselves. We have a glorious past and we must preserve it. ❖



Some moments from
Voice Of North East
Janajati Leaders Conference



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