

**TRADITIONS AND CULTURES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE:  
CONTINUITY OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN ASIA  
by Wati Longchar**

What are the distinctiveness of indigenous people's traditions and cultures? What measures have to be taken to preserve their traditions and value system to enable them to continue as dignified communities in globalized context? What do they have to share to the world for building communities of peace for all?

**Indigenous people and their context**

I am told that I was born in football ground during the military operation in Nagaland. My mother told me that I was not been able to take home for 3 months. She still wonders how I was survived without medicine, sufficient food and clothing. In Myanmar, I am also told that tribal languages are not allowed to be taught in schools. Children are denied of learning their own mother language in the name of national integration. Some years ago, the Japanese Primer declared that Japan is one homogeneous country denying the existence of many indigenous communities. The Kingdom of Nepal asserts that it is the only “Hindu Kingdom” denying the existence of more than 30 tribes. In Thailand, tribal people who have been living since immemorial are struggling to obtain Thai citizenship. In Tawian, indigenous people's right for land is scrapped in the name of development and sanctuary.

There is no universally accepted definition of ‘indigenous people’. They are identified as tribals, *adivasi*, ethnic minorities, native, aborigines or ‘Indians’. In many countries they are the ‘first peoples’ in the land, but always a minority group. Socially, they are the most exploited and divided people in the world. Their history is a history of defeat, suffering, and oppression. They have suffered discrimination, genocide, exploitation and alienation in different stages of their history. Till today they suffer from the policy of “Divide and Rule” in their respective countries. As a result of many years of slavery and subjugation, the indigenous people have lost their self-esteem and confidence that developed into a feeling of inferiority that prevails even today. I have come across many instances where tribal people do not want to identify themselves as “tribals” when they encounter other because of the fear of discrimination. Many young people want to change their names, do not want to speak mother tongue or wear traditional attire because of the fear of discrimination. In the eyes of the dominant communities, indigenous people are looked down upon as backward, primitive and uncivilized people living in the hills and forests. The term ‘tribal’, ‘indigenous’, etc., then itself carries a very strong pejorative, negative and derogatory meaning. Further, in a caste-dominated society, such as India, the indigenous people such as myself, suffer the stigma of being untouchables.

Politically, they are the most powerless people. Within nation-states, indigenous people are not only economically marginalized, but also politically disenfranchised. Political oppression, militarization and all forms of ethnocidal attack take place everyday. Violence, conflict and killing become an everyday affairs and realities. Inter and intra-communities clashes are on the increased with the active support of the state. Everywhere we hear indigenous peoples reclaiming and reasserting their right to self-determination including : (1) The right to the ownership of their lands as the territorial base for the existence of their populations; (2) the right to use, manage and dispose of all natural resources found within their ancestral lands; (3) the right to control their own economies, and the right to economic prosperity; (4) the right to restore, manage, develop and practice their culture, language, traditions and way of life in accordance with their worldview, and to educate their children to them; (5) the right to determine the form of self-government, and to uphold indigenous political systems; (6) the right to engage in foreign relations and trade if they so desire; (7) the right to form alliances and federations with other indigenous peoples for the attainment of common goals; and (8) the right to a life of peace and security.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, a peculiar form of alienation, injustice and humiliation is being enforced with fast emerging globalization. With the accelerating deterioration of the global economic and political situation, the indigenous people face further marginalization and graver threats of continuity and sustainability.

---

<sup>1</sup> Colin Nicholas, ‘A Common Struggle: Regaining Control’ in C Nicholas and R Singh (eds.), *Indigenous Peoples of Asia – Many People, One Struggle* (Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, 1996), p. 9.

Indigenous people all over the world suffer many forms of injustice. Two examples may be cited here in displacement and suppression. In different parts of the world, indigenous people have become the victims of big reservoirs, mega projects, wildlife sanctuaries, mines, industries, etc. They are forcefully evicted from their ancestral land and the abode of the various spirits they worship using repressive measures and often without proper compensation. They are simply ignored, silenced and despised, all in the name of development, so that the indigenous people's right and their existence are completely ignored and the indigenous people who are already powerless and exploited are further reduced to powerlessness and bondage. Being thus improvised and disposed, people flee in large numbers to the cities to eke out their existence around slums and shanties in abject poverty and misery. Since the dominant societies do not listen to their cries and do not recognize them with human rights and dignity, some indigenous people have gone taken up armed struggle. Governments, instead of recognizing this movement as a justice issue, try to suppress the movement by military power. In the process, many villages were burnt down to ashes, not only once, but three to four times and many innocent people have been killed. Churches were used sacrilegiously as concentration camps. Worshippers were beaten up or tortured to death and to add to this, women were raped even on the pulpit of worship. Such human right violations go on and on in many places in Asia and elsewhere. Many people continue to live in tears, pain, fear and suffering. All that people can do is to weep silently within their hearts. Indigenous people continue to experience such misery, pain and humiliation all over the world. We hear cries of indigenous people in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Japan, Myanmar, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Fiji and many other places. Therefore it is in this context that we are talking about the continuity of indigenous communities in Asia.

#### A Common Heritage: Space<sup>2</sup> - A Foundation of Indigenous People's Spirituality

As other communities, the indigenous people also uphold a very distinctive cultural value system. The indigenous worldviews differ from one community to another; however, I would like to highlight the indigenous people's view of the land or space and see the relevance of it for building community of peace for all.

##### The Naga sayings about the land

*"The land is the Supreme Being's land"*

*"One cannot become rich by selling land"*

*"Do not be greedy for the land, if you want to live long"*

*"Land is life"*

*"The one who does not have land always cheats others or cannot become a good citizen"*

*"The land cries in the hands of greedy people"*

*"The land never lies; do not lie to the land"*

*"Anyone who takes another's land by giving false witness will not live long"*

*"The land is like a bird, it flies away soon in the hands of greedy people"*

*"You can sell other things, but not land"*

*"You are a stranger without land"*

##### A Maori poem goes like this:

*Woman alone gives birth to mankind.*

*Land alone gives man his sustenance*

*No man will lightly accept the loss of his beloved wife*

*Nor that of his sacred land. It is said truly that*

*Man's destroying passions are the love of his wife*

*and the love of his land.<sup>3</sup>*

##### An Australian aborigine, Galarrwuy Yunupingu, maintains the community's relationship to land, thus:

*Land gives us value, and our spirituality is in the land. The goodness that is in the land – in the trees, in the water, in the rocks, in the beauty of the landscape and nature itself – enable us to breathe, live and enjoy.<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> When we say 'space', 'creation' or 'land' it should not be narrowly understood as mere natural objects outside of us. It means a place, a sacred place which gives us an identity and sustenance. It includes all beings, including humans.

<sup>3</sup> Alison O'Grady, ed. *Inheritors of the Earth* (Hong Kong: URM, Christian Conference of Asia, 1981), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Galarrwuy Yunupingu, "Concepts of Land and Spirituality" in *Aboriginal Spirituality – Past, Present, Future*, ed. by Anne Pattel-Gray (Victoria: HarperCollins Religious, 2000 reprint), p. 7.

They all expressed the spiritual relationship between the land and people. The land is very complex spiritual component and occupies a very central place in the indigenous people's worldview. The land is not only sacred but also the co-creator with the Creator. (The Genesis account also speaks of the earth as the co-creator of God. "Let the earth bring forth ...." Gen. 1:24). It is the land that owns people and gives them an identity. It is also a temple in and through which people becomes one not only with the Sacred Power, but also with their ancestors, the spirits and other living creatures. Political, economic and social justice can be attained only in relation to land.

The indigenous people's myths and rhetoric speak of the land as belonging to the Creator. Like the Hebrews, ["the Earth is the Lord's and fullness thereof" (Ps.24:1)], the indigenous people also affirm that the land belongs to the Creator. The village, clans and individuals may own the land, but within the wider understanding that the land belongs to the Creator. The Creator alone is the ultimate owner of the land. Thus, the land equally belongs to all with equal rights and freedom to live in it, and no one can claim it exclusively for himself/herself nor can one sell it as though it is one's own exclusive property. In the true sense, human's ownership is only temporary. The whole land is the home of the spirits and humans are only members in it. Hence, the ownership of land by village, clans and individuals has to be understood within the greater recognition that the land belongs to the Creator.

Even the Sacred Being is understood in relation to land/space. For example, the Aos and Sangtams of Nagaland (India) call their Supreme Being, *Lijaba*. *Li* means 'land' and *jaba* means 'real'. It means the Supreme Being is 'the real soil'. Sometimes people call the Supreme Being *Lizaba*. *Li* means 'soil' and *zaba* means 'enter', meaning 'the one who enters or indwells into the soil'. People believed that the Supreme Being enters into the soil with the seeds and rises again along with the crops. Thus, the blooming flower, bearing of fruits and rice signifies the presence of the Creator. The whole creation becomes the manifestation of the Creator. This understanding reminds us of the Prophet Isaiah's vision. The Prophet heard God's messengers announcing that "the whole earth is full of God's glory" (Isa. 6:1-3). For indigenous people, there is no concept of the Creator without the land; the land and the Creator are inseparably related. The Creator indwells not only in human persons, but also indwells in the soil.

The land is also understood as the symbol of unity of all living creatures, the spirit(s) and the Creator. The land is the basis that enables them to co-exist with other living beings, their ancestors and the Creator. The land is the foundation of unity.

Many indigenous communities further perceive the land as mother. Their myths speak of their foreparents emerging from stones or emerging from a big hole of the earth. All these myths symbolically tell that the land is the mother; we are born out of the earth. It upholds and sustains life. It owns people. Thus they compare the land as mother. The land not only sustains the individuals, village, clans and tribe, but it also unites the Creator, spirits, ancestors and living beings as one family.

Since the land is the sustaining power, it is also an integral part of people's identity; it is not a mere space, but it is a place that gives an identity to the community. Without the land, there is no personhood and identity. If the land is lost, the family, clan and village and the tribe's identity too will be lost. A person who is not deeply rooted in the land cannot become a good citizen. He/she is like a stranger without an identity and a home. Since people's identity is closely attached to the land, it is usual for the indigenous people to identify themselves with their village or tribe; a stranger rather than giving his/her name, gives the name of his/her village or tribe. The individual person's identity becomes subordinate to the community identity. Thus, the land is an integral part of people's identity.

The experience of time and history is also related to land. According to the indigenous people's concept, it is the land that creates time and history. People intimately move along with the soil cycle and surrounding environment. All the festivals and religious activities of the people are centred on the soil cycle. When the land and surrounding environment are destroyed, people experience a vacuum; the rhythm of life is seriously jeopardised. The whole universe is also perceived as a religious universe. Rocks and boulders, trees and rivers are not just empty objects, but religious objects; the voices and songs of animals speak of a religious language; the eclipse of the sun and of the moon are not simply a silent phenomenon of nature, it speaks to the community that observes it, often warning of an impending danger and misfortune. It is in this milieu that people experience history and time. Thus, the concept of history and time is inseparably interlinked and rooted in the soil.

Unlike other great religions of the world, the indigenous religion does not have any founder(s) or reformer(s) or guide(s) nor do people dance and sing adoring a divine historical person(s). They too have traditions of divine births and manifestations, but they are not worshipped. They have priests, officiating elders, diviners and other famous men and women in the body of beliefs, and mythologies which are respected and which form an integral part of their religious milieu, but they are neither worshipped nor adored as divine representatives. Instead, people dance and sing along with the cycle of land. A peculiar

feature of the indigenous religion is that the whole religious systems, ceremonies, rituals, festivals and dances are all centred and deeply rooted on the land itself.

Therefore, the concept of land is quite complex. “It is a heavily loaded term and combines together economics, politics, history, sociology, ethnicity, tradition, identity and spirituality.”<sup>5</sup> In short, the land means survival. It is the life. It is their identity and spirituality. This understanding of the land is the common heritage of the tribal/indigenous people all over the world. To make a random comparison between the indigenous and the dominant Christian views of reality:

Traditional Western ‘Christian’ View	Traditional Indigenous View
Humanity is the ontological basis of all realities. Perceives everything from anthropocentric perspectives	The land is the basis of all realities – human selfhood and identity. Perceives all realities from creation perspectives
Realities are perceived dualistically. A sharp distinction is maintained in understanding life. Dichotomic in thinking.	No sharp dualism. There is no clear cut distinction between sacred and secular, religion and non-religion, etc. Holistic in thinking.
God’s self is seen in history, especially in human history.	The self of the Supreme Being is seen in creation and an inseparably relationship is maintained
Jesus Christ is the focal point of reference of all religious activities.	No historical person in which their religion is centered. The earth is the focal point of reference and all religious activities are centered on the soil.
There are written creeds, scripture, etc. Scripture is sacred and central for faith.	Though oldest religion, there is no scripture or creed. The earth is sacred and central for life.
Nature is something detached or outside of God.	We cannot perceive the Supreme Being apart from creation. God is in creation
Task orientation. A person is measured by what he or she performs. The task is the focal point. Very much achievement focus and competition oriented. Saving over giving.	Person orientation. Relationship between individuals in society is more important than the simple performance of tasks. Cooperation is valued more. Giving over saving.
Manipulation of environment. There is no sacred in God’s world. Exploit as much as possible to extract profit.	Adaptation to environment. The world is sacred. It is our mother. How can we sell and exploit our mother!
Highly individualistic.	Highly group-oriented.

Such view of life is not primitive and uncivilized. It is just a difference of emphasis and priority. The indigenous people give more priority to community and preservation of land/space. These values are also not mere abstracts concepts, but part of people’s life and existence. In spite of the process of Christianization and modernization, such value systems continue to liberate, sustain and nourish life. Those cultural resources by creatively co-relating with Gospel can empower, transform people in their historical struggle for social, political, economic justice and identity. Honestly speaking, the indigenous scholars have not given sufficient attention to cultural values in our efforts to just-peace in our society. This neglect has been one of the most serious obstacles for the interfaith communities in their attempt to be truly rooted in land and people. Our peace effort will still remain a stranger among the indigenous people without integrating those liberative traditions. The challenge is great for us. How do we recover such value for transformation of our world?

#### The Neglect of Indigenous People’s Spirituality

To find solution, we must find the problem. There are many factors that have contributed to neglect or in some cases disappearance of indigenous people’s spirituality. First, missionaries brought the Bible to us as the revealed authoritative word of God to our people and they condemned our living traditions and cultures as devilish, our religion and culture as inferior, “heathens”, a religion without any system of

<sup>5</sup> S. Tuwere, “Indigenous People’s Struggle for Land and Identity” in *Pacific Journal of Theology, Series II, Issue 25, 2001*, p. 39.

thought, devoid of morality and spirituality. The core beliefs of our people were rejected as devilish, our songs, dances, folklores and myths as paganistic. They looked down on our indigenous people's worldviews as backward and inferior and promoted western culture and Christianity as superior. The missionaries presented us the Bible and taught us to abandon the old religion and its practices. Christians who participated in traditional festivals were excommunicated from the church. Drums, traditional songs, dances and value systems were condemned as evils and prohibited among the believers. They taught us what to do, and what to think. Hence, Christianity contributed towards alienation of indigenous people from their culture.

Until recently the interpreters of the indigenous people's resources were outsiders. The outsiders came, extract and claim ownership of the indigenous people's ways of knowing through their little research in the surface level condemn and rejected utterly our people as incapable to be the creators of our cultures and communities. Most of the outsiders doing research on indigenous people and culture ignored everything we own- our indigenous people like and dislike, our hopes and fears, our struggle and aspiration, our intellects, our values, tradition, etc- but at the same time assumed to know everything possible about the indigenous people, on the basis of their brief and casual encounters with some of the indigenous people.

Most of the outside researchers, came to indigenous people with an attitude of western scientific method as 'serving good for humankind', or with 'saving them', and 'rescuing them' attitude. However, in such works one see how outside researchers look at the research problems through the eyes of the invaders. This is so because whether it is travelers' tales or other academic research, all have contributed as much to the West's knowledge of itself as has the systematic gathering of scientific data, without having even an iota of how damaging their research and records are for our indigenous people's dignity and history.<sup>6</sup>

From outsiders' view, one of the supposed characteristics of our indigenous people was that 'the indigenous people could not use their minds or intellects', 'the indigenous people could not invent things', 'the indigenous people could not create institutions or history', 'the indigenous people could not imagine' - in short, we could not and cannot produce anything of value and therefore nothing worth can be learned from us. In other words, for outsiders, the indigenous people did not practice the arts of civilization. Since human is measured from such biased worldview and standards, and by lacking such virtues, our people disqualified themselves in terms of our indigenous people's values, standards, beliefs, language and worldviews, etc. In short, we were told and we too believed that we were not 'fully human'.<sup>7</sup> In this regards, indigenous people's religion was called "Animism", "Primitive religion". This type of popular western value judgment places the indigenous people's tradition and culture at the bottom of the supposed line of religious evolution and creates inferiority of indigenous people's culture and tradition as underdeveloped and primitive.<sup>8</sup>

We may further list the following factors that contributed to alienation of indigenous people from their own tradition and culture:

(a) The colonial power and Christian missionaries affected all areas of life in indigenous people's society. The colonizer with introduction of a unified nation-state political system, brought a wider nation-state political dimension. This contributed to the erosion of traditional customary laws and customs. The customary laws and practices which were very much geared towards the protection and care of nature as well as community as a whole were replaced by the new laws developed either in the west or in other urban context. Consequently the indigenous people were slowly alienated from the land and community centred laws and customs.

(b) The indigenous people lived and worked with the soil. It was the soil that gave them not only identity and culture but also sustenance. However, through the introduction of money economy, people were forced to opt for the non-traditional avenues of work, that is work unrelated to the soil, and to work for money in all sorts of employment. This new economy introduced the concept of time as a commodity to be sold and bought; it also involved earning and spending money with all the inherent dangers, temptations, difficulties and risks that go with it. Through this new money economy system, the indigenous people gradually alienated themselves from their soil and community centred way of life, tradition and culture.

(c) The indigenous people's contact with outsiders and western people brought new tools and materials. Gradually, people began to acquire factory made goods and things for improving amenities for living and for personal security. People slowly discarded those traditional things and goods. This material changes contributed to neglect of their tradition and culture.

---

<sup>6</sup> L. Imsutoshi Jamir, "Developing Tribal Face in Tribal Cultural Studies: Few Footnotes" in *JTCA*, No.. 6, 2007. p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> A. Wati Longchar, *The tribal Religious Traditions*, 6.

d) The converts were asked to adopt new social attitude and values. They were not allowed to wear ornaments or dressed that were associated with the traditional practices.

e) The introduction of modern schools phased out the youth dormitory institution, an institution common to many indigenous communities. It was a training institute where young boys and girls were enrolled and underwent training in different aspects of life until they got married. It was here that young people learnt traditions and cultures under the supervision of elders. When young people became Christians they were asked to give up going to the dormitory and the customs associated with these institutions. The loss of this institution is considered as the root cause of the disintegration of indigenous people's culture.

The root cause of ethnic conflict, tension between different religious communities, fight for control of resources are all related to violation of human rights and earth resources. Consider some of the problems in the world today. If we consider the indigenous people's unrest and ethnic tension in Myanmar, India, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, etc and fighting in different parts of the world especially in Middle East, we will discover that the issue of 'space' and resources of the earth dominates all other issues; the core of human suffering is inseparably connected to violation of space: First, our selfishness, greed and exploitative attitude towards our mother earth brings poverty, oppression, ethnic conflict and many other forms of injustice. The moment we cut ourselves off from reverential relationships with the land, we are uprooted from the world of mystery and we live a life of indecency to many. Never ending exploitation of a limited earth's resources ends up with a few economic affluent individuals making majority of the poor to struggle with a life of misery and hunger. This disparity makes everyone turn against each other; everyone becomes a threat to the other's peaceful existence. This happens state wise, nationally and even locally. Suspicion, doubt and selfishness take precedence to trust, love, care and acceptance. Our rootlessness in the land makes life without meaning and purpose.<sup>9</sup>

With the neglect of indigenous view of life, we are encountered with three major problems that require immediate intervention by all religious persuasion.

(a) *Environment Degradation*

The greed for capital leads to control and manipulation of strategic economic locations like Iraq, Palestine and so on. The uncontrolled and one-sided exploitative economic development projects have brought with them various ecological crises. The rape of Mother Earth manifests in uncontrolled logging, indiscriminate use of chemicals in agriculture, inconsiderate disposal of non-biodegradable waste, and human beings' many other 'ecocidal' acts due to negligence, ignorance or greed destroy the ecosystem. The indigenous communities who depended on earth's resources are the most affected people.

(b) *Loss of Spirituality*

With the increasing influence and impact of materialism, secularism, and liberalism in the postcolonial era, the indigenous people continue to experience challenges and stagnation in spirituality. These include loss of focus in discipleship and spiritual formation, loss of indigenous wisdom, character and values, and infiltration of western culture and ideology through the neo-Pentecostal and new religious movements influences. The information technology and military power contribute to the decline of the indigenous cultures and discrimination against minorities.

(c) *Identity and Power Struggle*

Most communities in Asian countries have experienced and continue to experience identity crises through history. In the process, some develop a 'meeting-place' identity in which post-colonial nation-state and economic policies have denied justice for many indigenous communities leading them to armed resistance. Ethical problems such as corruption, abuse of power, and prostitution, communal problems such as ethnic conflicts, racial tensions and breakdown of family structures and continued marginalization of indigenous people continue to rise in such a 'meeting place' identity.

## Continuity of Indigenous Communities

a) *Self-consciousness*

In the light of the above discussion, it becomes imperative to consciously acknowledge and study how research on the indigenous people has been done in the past and see how the outsider frames indigenous people's culture and experiences. Thus, having the consciousness of how indigenous people's history and culture has been researched and written by outsiders with superior mindset itself is the beginning of doing preserving indigenous people's cultural values. It is crucial to re-read, re-right, and to re-write, i.e. to set

---

<sup>9</sup>Paulachan P. Kochappilly, *Celebrative Ethics: Ecological Issues in the Light of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1999), p. pp. 348 ff.

right the indigenous people's history, resources from the position of indigenous people. The indigenous scholars must write their own versions of history, interpret resources in their own ways, for their own purposes. It is natural that sense of history and interpretation of their own resources will not be the same as done by the outsiders.

b) Self-confidence

We need to create and instill self-confidence and help them to live a dignified life and express the potential of creative power. Today the struggle of indigenous people is quest for preservation of identity and dignity. If people of various ethnic identities claim to be a separate race/nation with their unique history, culture and custom, it is for the sake of claiming equal status and treatment like any other people in the world. It is an attempt to re-define their identity in the changing socio-political scene. An inherent right of every humanity is self-respect and dignity. Every person must be treated with worth and respect. Restoration of self-confidence is the basis for self-hood of a particular community.

c. Restore justice

The indigenous people's movements are all cries for justice; they speak aloud of the demand for the right to land and resources. In the name of development, progress and tourism, the inalienable rights of the indigenous peoples over land and resources have been forcibly taken away. Repressive laws have resulted in massive displacement. People have been uprooted, dislocated and evicted from their ancestral homes. Land, mountains and rivers are being polluted and forests lay waste. People's sacred areas have been destroyed and have resulted disconnection with their culture and spirituality. Moreover, the indigenous communities are increasingly vulnerable to all kinds of exploitations such as sexual violence, child labour, forced labour, trafficking of children, drugs and substance abuse, armed conflict, violence, state terrorism. All these are justice issue. However, it is to be recognized that there is no social justice without ecological justice. They are inseparably interrelated. This is because the poor people depend heavily upon the labour of their bodies, and the shelter, and sustenance provided by the eco-system for their survival. The marginalized indigenous communities quest for a community where justice is expressed in equality and sharing, and affirms a community economic system with reciprocal sharing and hospitality. It involves personal, communal and social commitment.

d) Promote spirituality of action

In indigenous people's tradition is grounded in concrete, both personal and social experience of the people. As affirmed earlier, many indigenous communities in Asia see the land as an extension of their physical, spiritual and emotional form, and as the essence of their life-force, to the point that all of life and creation are revered and valued.<sup>10</sup> Land gives value and their spirituality is rooted in the land. That is why people sing about land, dance about land, and tell stories about land. Land is their identity. To deny or uproot the people from the land is a serious violation of human rights; it is denial of their spirituality. It cuts into the very blood line of life and the spirit of a person. Therefore, recognition of land ownership, economic justice, political rights and basic human rights cannot be separated in our struggle for continuity of indigenous people in Asia.

e) Building a just-peace community

The indigenous people's societies are highly community-oriented. They know very clearly that the growth and freedom of human beings is always in relation to other members of the human community. Spiritual responsibility can only be fulfilled in community. Social and economic survival can only be achieved in community. Some of the common sayings of the indigenous people illustrate this spirituality:

*"I am because you are, you are because I am"*

*"The Individual does not exit alone except in being in relation to the other"*

*"A person because of other people"*

*"Community welfare first, then comes individuals"*

*"No Individual existence apart from the community"*

Community signifies the sense of belonging, interconnectedness and interrelationship. It is a dynamic relationship that binds people together. Community life is the basis of human dignity. Human togetherness, belonging to each other, living for each other are the values that lead to well-being of the whole. It is on this basis that indigenous people search for a society that responds to sensitivity, to the needs of the community

---

<sup>10</sup> Anne Pattel-Gray, *op.cit.* p. xi

and build bridges between communities based on faith and hope. A just community is possible only when we recognize that God is present in all communities and cultures, both to enlighten and judge and by becoming servant of the community. To enable the weakest and most excluded to take the rightful place and to make their contribution to the community as a whole is an integral part of our resistance.

#### Conclusion

One should not assume that some of the issues and perspectives discussed in this paper is the only paradigm. The attempt of this paper is to show that the indigenous people hold a very high nature-centred tradition, an ethics of responsibility and respect for all creation. The land is seen as an integral part of the web of life, physical and spiritual, but not inert, empty and passive. This dynamic and living understanding of land has sophisticated ecological and social implications. The strong sense of community rooted in indigenous culture and land is also a wonderful asset to be protected and shared with postmodern in a westernized, individualized world of people who have lost a sense of corporate identity and life. This indigenous view of life, when interpreted properly, it would help the world communities in safeguarding the world from destruction and exploitation.