

Tribal and Adivasi Sunday
August 9, 2020

COVID-19 and
Reclaiming our
Indigenous Heritage



Additional Feature: Online Ecumenical Worship @ 5pm



National Council of Churches in India
Dalit and Tribal/ Adivasi Concerns

FOREWORD

Tribal/ Adivasi Sunday, an annual feature of the National Council of Churches in India is an occasion for the whole church to rejoice in the gifts that each Tribal community and Adivasi community is bestowed with and that which they bring to the edification and ministries of the church and ecumenical movement.

It is a matter of grave concern that the corporatisation and marketisation of the profit-oriented imperialist neo-liberal economic policies and businesses have not left this arena untouched, motivating and abetting intra and inter group rivalries to aid land grabbing and evicting groups and communities from their locales for profit. For long, people's movements, community based organisations, and such others have fought the menace. However, an undermining of cultures that are not in line with so-called dominant cultures and systematic cultural invasion through media controlled by the dominant and the business houses have resulted in blunting of whatever was done to salvage the uniqueness and sovereignty of different ethnic identities.

Sadly the institutionalised church has lived on both sides of the fence. It has been part of privilege bestowed by power of profit and politics while providing lip-service to promote indigenous identities. We cannot feign ignorance to even erasing histories and cultures or overwriting them with neo-colonial vestitures and expansionist visions. Corona has laid bare the avarice and greed that has ruled us, and that the return to basic communities and bare minimum makes life sweet and sustainable. Let us seize this opportunity to renew ourselves learning from the history and cultures of tribal and Adivasi communities to live simply and in uncomplicated ways.

COVID 19 and Reclaiming Our Indigenous Heritage is an attempt this year (2020) to lift up the many nuances in this – both a call to repentance for casting our lot with the oppressor (both actively and in connivance through remaining silent), and a conviction to affirm identities, histories, cultures of all peoples. As we pray together and ponder over our role in reclaiming *our* heritage, the heritage of the indigenous peoples and communities, may God open our eyes and hearts to the 'beauty of divine holiness' manifested in *sabbath*, **sustainability** and recognition of **shared heritage of all peoples, groups, communities and all of creation** (all existentialist core values of indigenous communities) vis-à-vis the sin of insatiable greed and delusions of grandeur.

In penitence and faith,

Rev. Asir Ebenezer
General Secretary
National Council of Churches in India

INTRODUCTION

The International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples was first pronounced by the General Assembly of the United Nations in December 1994. By resolution 49/214 of 23 December 1994, the United Nations General Assembly decided that the International Day of the World's Indigenous People shall be observed on 9 August every year. By following this UN day, on 17 September 2010, during the Annual General Body Meeting of National Council of Churches in India in Bangalore, for the first time announced observance of the NCCI-Tribal and Adivasi Sunday. NCCI, therefore, urges and requests constituent members to annually observe every Sunday closest to 9 August as **NCCI Tribal and Adivasi Sunday** and the date to be marked in the Church calendar and dairy.

During this COVID pandemic across the globe in order to have a better understanding of the life situation of the Tribal and Adivasi communities in India and to have a common form of worship for this special Sunday, NCCI therefore brings out this liturgy. Nevertheless, NCCI acknowledges that many churches do not follow a liturgical form of worship; still NCCI requests those churches to adopt the Liturgy suitable to their own tradition. At the same time, NCCI is also aware of the absence of Tribal and Adivasi communities in a few churches, yet NCCI requests all those churches to observe this special NCCI Tribal and Adivasi Sunday to show their solidarity to our fellow tribal and adivasi brothers and sisters who are oppressed and marginalised in various ways. NCCI hope that the observance of this special NCCI Tribal and Adivasi Sunday will be an enriching one in our faith affirmation and for widening the horizon of our ecumenical Journey. Since 2011, Tribal and Adivasi Sunday has been celebrated in many parts of our country in sensitizing the local congregation on Tribal and Adivasi Concerns. We would like to thank for the enormous support we have received from the churches, dioceses, parishes and institutions in celebrating this special Sunday.

The theme for this year's Tribal and Adivasi Sunday is **“COVID 19 and Reclaiming Our Indigenous Heritage”**. We take this opportunity to invite you to celebrate Tribal and Adivasi Sunday adhering to the Covid-19 protocols of restrictions on physical gathering on 9 August 2020 in your church/local parish/institution in a creative way. Herewith we are sending you a special order of worship for the day. You may take the freedom to use the entire worship order and translate it in your vernacular language or adapt parts of it.

Thanking you,

In Christ,

Pradip Bansrior

Executive Secretary

Dalit and Tribal/ Adivasi Concerns, NCCI

Note: As an additional feature we will also have “Ecumenical Worship” on Sunday, 9 August 2020 at 5 PM on Zoom platform. You are requested to encourage our fellow brothers and sisters to participate in the worship.

Zoom Link : <https://zoom.us/j/95967000943?pwd=R3NGOEIkZE9xMFFJN0djMUpleXRxZz09>

Meeting ID : 59 6700 0943

Password: 787647

ORDER OF WORSHIP

Theme: COVID 19 and Reclaiming our Indigenous Heritage

(Suggested texts: Revelation 7:9-10, Exodus 12:14, Psalm 33:5, Nahum 1:7, Hebrews 13:1-2, Romans 12:13)

PREPARATION

(As the world is faced with the pandemic, the nature of worship service may vary according to different contexts. The worship leader may adapt the content of the proposed liturgy and conduct the worship service in a manner that will suit the respective local situation. As a means of ushering the congregation into worship, some indigenous music can be played using relevant indigenous musical instruments. As many tribal and adivasi congregations have the practice of singing hymns before the worship begins, the music leader/cantor may choose appropriate hymns/songs in preparing the hearts of the worshippers.)

INVOCATION

Mandar Taal – (Link : <https://youtu.be/fnxdHaNBBdw>)

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: Trust in the Lord at all times, O people; God is a refuge for us.

All: God is our rock and our salvation; we shall not be shaken.

Leader: We worship a God who delights in the diversity of the created cosmos.

All: We sing of all God's wonderful creation! We give thanks and praise to the Lord!

Leader: Together as people whose God is the Lord, and who claims us each one as sisters and brothers with our Lord, we seek to celebrate and recognise the indigenous heritage of our Adivasi and Tribal communities.

All: In Christ's love there is no East, no West, no North and no South, but only one Spirit of hope, love and peace for all.

Leader: We may be from different places, speak different languages and sing different hymns and choruses. Our looks may differ; our gifts and talents may vary.

All: Yet, as we come together for worship today, we become one body, one family in Christ. We indeed join our sisters and brothers in worship and true communion with God. Come, let us worship God.

OPENING PRAYER

God of the present moment, we gather in your name to worship you as we observe this special Sunday for the Tribal and Adivasi communities. We come before you; people burdened and looking for comfort and peace in these times of uncertainty. We look to you, who stills the storm and calms the anxious heart. May the outpouring of the Holy Spirit refresh us and awaken us to the witness and service you require of us. Increase our faith in

your providential care and our desire to strengthen our relationship with you and with one another. May your discerning spirit dwell among us as we seek to contemplate upon the struggles and aspirations of our Adivasi and Tribal communities. May our worship, songs, prayers and meditations be acceptable unto your sight. We ask in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen**

HYMN / SONG

(This Santali traditional song describes the origin and the migration route of the Santals. Leader can also use suitable song/hymn appropriate to the context in his/her own language.)

Link: <https://youtu.be/FSArIZI8tak>

Santal Hopon jonom jaega Hihiri Pipiri	The first habitat/settlement of Santals
Santal Hopon jonom jaega Hihiri Pipiri	The first habitat/settlement of Santals was in a place called 'Hihiri Pipiri' (somewhere in Africa)
Khoj Kaman thairebon khojlena Ho !	We multiplied and initially settled in 'Khoj Kaman' (somewhere in Central Asia)
Harata Bururebon haralena boeha	We grew up in the Hills of 'Harata' (Mount Harat)
Sasañ Beđa tãndirebon jatlena Ho !	And found place in the vast fields of 'Sasañ Beđa', (where we were divided into twelve clans)

SCRIPTURE READING : REVELATION 7: 9-10

“After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

REFLECTION

A close reading of the verses opens our eyes to a great multitude representing every tribe, nation, people, language, colour, gender and so on standing before the throne. The multitude is so enormous that it cannot be numbered. Those for whom Christ shed his blood, whom he justifies, called by his grace make up such a number as no human can count. This shows how mighty is God's saving plan that we humans are not in control of who qualifies for that privilege. The multitude here comprising of not only one ethnic race, language, colour etc. But they have come from all corners of the earth making up the body that stood before the throne of God. The throng of people demonstrates unity; there is no stain of selfishness, discord or distinctions based on caste or class nor status. These people showed that they have

gotten the victory over those causes that destroyed Unity. All is harmonious amidst diversity, and all gave glory to God. Once strangers, but now they're fellow citizens of the household of God.

They all ascribed glory to God and the Lamb setting off a crescendo of praise in the heavens. Their praise was accompanied by acknowledgement that "salvation belonged to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb". They who worshipped were robed in white, holding palm branches, this means the righteous multitude have exchanged their filthy rags of selfishness and unrighteousness. They are freed from such guilt and now there's a feeling of joy. It means victory, triumph, joy of being free and most of all being healed. The joyous character of the praise and worship finds its fullest expression in their acknowledgement (vs 10). It also reminds us the joyous expressions of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate, who was there daily with a different intention. Upon receiving healing he began to walk, leap and started praising God, and eventually he was among the worshipping community inside the temple (Acts 3:1-11). Praise and adoration can be experienced on different circumstances; it can be post liberation, or preparation for healing, which can be related to the praise of Jonah from the fish's belly (Jonah 2:9). In fact it amazes us how in our weakness and helplessness God intervened out of his love to save and heal us (Rom. 5:6).

This is a poignant reminder how every created beings irrespective of class, caste, gender are precious to God. In fact in our Christian way we can affirm that no race, ethnicity, or background is exempt from his love (Gal. 3:28). This also teaches us how vulnerable we humans are; that is proven by the ongoing covid-19 pandemic. Lives of an adivasi and tribal will not be the same post Covid-19 pandemic. Challenges awaits, lurking behind the idea of segregation, unemployment, health and hygiene, education and so on.

Covid-19 has exposed our vulnerability and inadequacies. The vulnerability of humans is that: richness, power, authority none could save a person from being infected by the virus. In India's tribal and adivasi areas, basic health care facilities are extremely poor. Besides, a lack of key information and awareness to effectively deal with outbreaks further add fuel to the fire. During this pandemic the tribal and adivasi became more vulnerable because they lack access to effective monitoring and early warning systems.

In India the worst affected were the people whose economy depended on the movement. Most of the common people, especially the migrant community, their economy relies on movements. To curb the fast growing covid-19 pandemic the Prime Minister on 24th March 2020 declared a 21 day lockdown. The sudden announcement of lockdown brought our country to almost a standstill, which triggered massive movements of migration from cities to their towns and villages. For many, no movements no earning, the most affected ones are the daily labourers, workers in small scale private sectors, businesses etc. Our country has indeed witnessed tragic and deadly exodus of migrant workers. Let us also not forget that prior to this India was burning with massive violent uprisings in protest against the anti-minority Citizenship Amendment Act (CCA). The series of events has left the people in the margins wounded, hurt and marred with fear. Also, we cannot ignore the fact that caste hatred and poverty has threatened and marred the existence of the marginalised. Hence it is anticipated that these aided by the ongoing virus will valorise the very idea and practice of segregation. While the virus do not discriminate, nor differentiate between race, nationality or ethnicity, it is evident that stigma do. Cure may come for the viruses but the hurt caused by stigma stays on. More than the virus, people fear stigma, hunger, harassment etc. Another challenging aspect is food insecurity, economic, social and psychological crises. Such experiences during

the time of heightened anxiety and fear can take significant toll on their mental and spiritual health. What Christian community/ church can do is to become innovative by initiating recovery programs, emphasise on sustainability and engage with the people affected etc. Post Covid-19 would be so different that the churches should be prepared to play a crucial role in its service to the suffering people and community. In this the churches must serve as a beacon of hope and compassion, must redefine and reposition it's role in a changing context.

In such uncertain times, societal upheaval, threat of poverty, sickness and death all these naturally led to fear. In situation like these one of the best things we can do is remember just how great, strong and mighty, faithful and compassionate our God truly is. Corona must have affected many, yet in the midst of such troubles let our fortitude, faith and hope in God's unwavering assurance give us the encouragement to find a cause of glorifying God. The liberating message is that struggles and difficulties are part of our life; the present situation with covid-19, with many news reports around us may create anxiety and worry for the future and our well being. But it is important to remember and be assured that God who is seated at the throne, the one who created us and gave his Son for the salvation of the world, will not leave us and he cares about our challenges and struggles. With that faith and hope let us journey together as one united in Christ.

STORIES

To critique the dominant discourse by reclaiming our tribal heritage/ identity during this COVID pandemic a few stories from our friends of NCCI member churches has been shared. (Please refer to APPENDIX I for stories)

HYMN/ SONG/ CHORUS

(This Kharia song is composed by Rev. Bivaw Kerketta. He is a priest of Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church, Simdega, Jharkhand. It says "Our Lord is the hope of life during the time of trials, sufferings, sorrows and troubles". Leader can also use suitable song/chorus appropriate to the context in his/her own language.)

Link: <https://ncci1914.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/gospal-song.mp3>

Jingi Ashra Prabhu Aam Heke	Lord you are the hope of life
<i>Chorus:</i> Jingi Ashra Prabhu Aam Heke	<i>Chorus:</i> Lord you are the hope of life
1. Pariksha se Prabhu Ashra Heke 2. Dukhon mei he Prabhu Ashra Heke 3. Bipad se he Prabhu Ashra Heke 4. Sankat se he Prabhu Ashra Heke	1. In trial, Lord you are the hope 2. In suffering, Lord you are the hope 3. In sorrow, Lord you are the hope 4. In trouble, Lord you are the hope

CONFESSION

Leader: *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all the unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:8-9). Therefore, let us all confess our sins before our merciful God.*

All: We confess that too often we have failed to acknowledge your presence amongst us. We have failed to realise that in loving your creation we see your will is being done. We say we are your people and yet, unable to witness to it. We say we are your children and yet, fail to live in peace. We confess that we have chosen our own convenience over our convictions as we remain undisturbed by the injustice and violence that prevails. For all the times we have remained silent in the face of discrimination and inequality; for our neglect of human need and suffering and our indifference to injustice and cruelty meted out to communities we failed to accept as our own; for all the times we have been deaf to your call to serve as Christ served us. We have grieved your Holy Spirit. Have mercy on us, Lord.

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Leader: “No one who conceals transgressions will prosper, but one who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy” (Proverbs 28:13) In the name of Jesus there is forgiveness of sin and new life for all who genuinely repent and believe. The peace of the Lord be always with you.

All: And also with you.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Leader : We believe in God,

Women : Whose power and strength goes beyond human weakness,

Men : Whose breath gives energy for the struggle of and for reclaiming the heritage of the Adivasi and Tribal communities.

Leader : We believe in Jesus Christ,

Women : Whose solidarity with the poor and oppressed inspires us to walk with our Adivasi and Tribal sisters and brothers who are suffering and denied of their rights.

Men : Who in his divine and human nature taught us that all are equal in the sight of God.

Leader : We believe in the Holy Spirit,

Women : Who liberates us from powerlessness and all kinds of subjugations.

Men : Who guides us in doing God’s will; comforter in times of distress and helplessness.

Leader : We believe in God the Holy Trinity,

All : Whose grace upholds our being, whose unity calls us to be the church and to live out the hope of the kin-dom.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

Leader: The word of God says, "The fervent prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (James 5:16) Let us join our hearts in intercessory prayer.

Leader: Amidst uncertainties and dangers, we come to you O God, source of our being. We entrust to your tender care all those who have been infected by the coronavirus pandemic and those who have been exposed and are vulnerable; comfort and heal them, and restore them to health and strength. For those reeling with fear and grief over the loss of their loved ones; be their consolation and light in the darkness. Those who have lost their jobs, those pushed to extreme poverty, those deprived of social security, especially remembering the hundreds of thousands of people in India who are migrating to their homelands. We pray for those at the frontlines of the Covid19 battle, for those who find themselves at work in conditions where they are vulnerable. Grant them resilience, discernment, compassion and the resources to do the work before them.

All: Sisirjãuić Isor, koejoñ añjomtaleme (Santali) / Creator God, hear our prayers

Leader: God our provider, while every person has been affected by the coronavirus pandemic and the ensuing lockdown, at this time we pray for the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in India who are not able to access basic healthcare that is critical to their survival because of social distancing norms. Their food security has been doubly affected having poor access to the Public Distribution System (PDS) due to the lockdown and high social distancing directives. We pray for accessible healthcare system and supplies to reach our sisters and brothers.

All: Siamtu Pathian, kan dilna ngaithla ang che (Mizo) / Creator God, hear our prayers

Leader: The nationwide lockdown has affected the economy of India's tribal and Adivasi communities living in and around the forests of India, as they depend highly on their forests for food, shelter, medicines and financial income. While the tradition and cultures of the Adivasi and Tribal people consider nature as the very centre of all existence, today in the name of development they are deprived of their inheritance and displaced from their native places, and sole natural resources of their livelihood are exploited and taken away from them. They have been denied inherent rights and dignity by a mainstream society that refuses to hear their pleas. The current lockdown situation aggravates their inability to influence government workers and protest against the exploiters making them less visible and more vulnerable. O God, may you be the protector, continuous help in times of trouble, and their daily companion and guide for all those involved in their struggles and fights for justice.

All: Teyanglur Tsungrem, ozu sarasadem angang (Ao Naga) / Creator God, hear our prayers

Leader: Our sisters and brothers of Northeast India living in various cities and towns across the country are facing the added problem of racial discrimination based on their mongoloid features. People from the northeast tribes of India go through mental, emotional and physical breakdown as they face heightened racist slurs and racial discrimination amidst the coronavirus lockdown. In their trying and challenging times may they find refuge, strength and courage in Jesus our rock, our fortress, and our deliverer. We also pray for the

perpetrators of such discrimination in various pockets of our country, that your divine intervention may transform their conscience and understanding of our identity in you.

All: Ghad nar Iswar, humari dua hamlo (Bhili) / Creator God, hear our prayers

Leader: Amidst this pandemic thousands of people have lost their jobs resulting in reverse migration of Tribal and Adivasi people to their native places while thousands have been stranded without home and food in different cities and towns. We pray for everyone dealing with the loss of work and financial impacts of this pandemic; grant them comfort, wisdom, and financial provision. Almighty God, grant them the wisdom and understanding and open ways for the returning migrants to take this as an opportunity to create self-sustaining and long-term livelihood options wherever they may be.

All: Sirju Dharme, emhai bintin menna (Oraon) / Creator God, hear our prayers

Leader: We pray for the NCCI and its ministry in solidarity with the Tribal and Adivasi communities and other marginalised sections of our society. We ask that your Spirit would continually disturb us in the face of injustices and discriminations and inspire us to strive for clearer vision and creative and personal engagements with the plight of such communities. Embolden us as we renew our commitment to share in the struggles and lived experiences of our Adivasi and Tribal sisters and brothers. We also pray for all the churches and their staff; grant them discernment and creativity to lead and minister to your people in these unprecedented circumstances. May your Holy Spirit inspire them to be channels in representing your church as a wellspring of innovation.

All: Hey Ponomosor, ella gorjing te ondore (Kharia) / Creator God, hear our prayers

All: A Prayer for Healing

Mother, sing me a song
That will ease my pain,
Mend broken bones,
Bring wholeness again.
Catch my babies
When they are born,
Sing my death song,
Teach me how to mourn.
Show me the Medicine
Of the healing herbs,
The value of spirit,
The way I can serve.

Mother, heal my heart
So that I can see
The gifts of yours
That can live through me.

CLOSING HYMN

(This Mizo song is composed by Elder V. Thangzama, Presbyterian Church of India, Mizoram encourages younger generations to be the stronghold of the Mizo society in any crisis situation; be it calamities, Covid 19 or any other crisis situation. One can also choose to sing any bhajan or traditional hymn that corresponds to the liturgy)

Link: <https://youtu.be/GYMfeYAkctE>

Raultin Khumtu	The Valiant
<p>1. Hmanah pi pu zaleng rual, Sa leh ral thuam anga do; A chhing zo tur zaleng rual, Awm thei reng hian ka ring lo. Hranghlui leng zamual an liam, Ami'n tuai tharte an cho; Raultin khum zaleng insiam, 'Y.M.A.' sakhming an ko.</p> <p>Refrain: Ka lenrual lungduh te u, Phang lote'n i pen ang u; Ram riantge hi kan kurpui, Hmatiang sawnna kan tulpui. Ram kalsiam tluang a zau ve, Pheikhai then reng a zang e; Kan luah ngei dawn e, pen r'u, Raltiang kai i rel ang u.</p> <p>2. Ânpai lengin an hrilfak, Kan Zotlang tluana tlawm mak; Khuavel zawng hian an hai lo, Nghilh thei reng hian an mawi lo. Zawmthawt khua tlai a awm lo, Lungrualte'n hma an hlen fo, Khuangruah sur hal a awm lo, Turni hrang a pawl lem lo.</p> <p>3. Ami'n sel lo u hmingtha, Lo hlan ve u chanai tha; Hleite'n dang lo a thang ri, Khua tin mawitu a lo ni. Chanhai riangaite puitu, Thlafam lusunte hnemtu; Kristian eng chu an lo chhi, Duhaisam chu hei ngei hi.</p> <p>4. Lanu leng leh kan val rual, Zoram par chu nangni hi; In par tin vul a mawi zual,</p>	<p>1. I am proud of our oldies, Founder of this petty land. It was their concerted effort, That completed their long search. In course of generations, Younger ones formed a Union; To excel in every way, Desired end of their movement.</p> <p>Refrain: Folks of mine, women and men, Come and join to win our race; Overcome all the hurdles, Overtake runners afore. Our burden's getting lighter, And our steps getting nearer, Winners' flag is afloat, Victory! Hallelujah!</p> <p>2. Fellow mates of the Union, Lend a hand to a new world; Watch the changes taking place, What's emerging tomorrow; Learn today more a lesson, All creations a changing, Build a strong nation at last, Where a joyful peace will reign.</p> <p>3. Denizens of our dear land, Do not seek where we have failed; Instead help to rectify, Whate'er wrongs we may have done. Search the poor and disabled, Sufferers of injustices, They are victims left behind, They need care and salvation.</p> <p>4. Boys and girls of the Unions, You're exposed throughout the world; Work out loud your freedom</p>

<p>In par zu lah a thlum si. Hnam tin dawnpui ka nuam e, Khuai an lawiin lo leng se; Dawnin an ma bil lo'ng e, Kir zai reng an rel lo'ng e.</p>	<p>From bondage of poverty. You'll be welknown far and wide, Crowds will come, taste your goodness, Hope for more and more blessings, And no more returning home.</p>
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BENEDICTION:

Loving God, we give you thanks for hearing our prayers, for feeding us with your word, and encouraging us in our daily pursuit to live and work in the way of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Now, may the love of God be the passion in our hearts to take the side of justice and equality; May the joy of God be our strength when times are hard and may the peace of God that surpasses all understanding rule our thoughts and action now and forevermore. **Amen**

APPENDIX I : STORIES

Story # 1 : MALAI-ARAYAN TRIBE, KERALA

“Reclaiming our Indigenous Heritage”: Retrospecting the transformation of the Malai-Arayan Tribe.

Our country is third highest in global Covid19 cases and is still on the rise. This has now affected throughout the states and its major cities in the Country. Though the state of Kerala was initially under control, it is alarming that the situation is deteriorating each day forward. Right from the initial days of the lockdown period, the people, especially the working class and those who are socially and economically backward communities were the most affected.

The Tribal community, which makes up merely 1.2% of the total population of Kerala often, goes unnoticed and the present situation makes this worse. The Malai-Aarayan Community makes up about 7.9% of the total tribal population of Kerala and spread across Idukki, Kottayam and Pathanamthitta districts of the state. Among them 43% are adherents of Christianity, evangelized by the anglican missionaries, notably Rev Henry Baker Jr, in the 19th century, are concentrated in the Melukavu area of the district of Kottayam and the latter in the tribal settlements of Kottayam and Idukki districts. The Malai-Arayan Community is observed to be in a better position among others in terms of socio-economical and educational aspects. G. Keralavarman Thirumulpadu in his vernacular work Malabar Laws of Inheritance (1875) characterizes the Malai-Arayans as 'hill cultivators'. Earlier the Malai-Arayans had been nomadic agriculturists. Later they became settled peasants. As attested by Mateer (1883), they never killed the ant, testifying their environmental consciousness. Though there are many mythical arguments about the origin, a wide spread change within the community was observed, after evangelization; organizing, elevating and enlightening

themselves in every aspects of life. Following the footsteps of Henry Baker many English Protestant Missionaries continued their work among the Malai-Arayans. Preachers and teachers emerged from among the Malai-Arayans. They abandoned most of their social mores, joined schools, attended the Sunday schools in the Church, prohibition movement was launched, toddy palms were cut down, hooch manufacture was stopped, drinking was practically given up and many other social reforms took place. No aspect of the life of the Christian Malai-Arayans was left untouched by the Church. The missionaries sought to ensure social stability and financial security of the Community, still holding high social and cultural values. Agriculture and farming methods can be an evident example to this.

The present situation is challenging as the community lack enough jobs due to the lockdown regulations, lack of medical aids and treatments, unavailability of transportation facilities for those living in very remote locations, study materials for the school children etc. are some of the major concerns. Though government seems to address the issues when raised, there is an evident oppression over the tribal and adivasi communities. The rights of the tribal and adivasi communities have to be addressed in way that we could strengthen our capacity to manage resources sustainably. Amidst these struggle, let there be a divine comfort from above. May God the Creator help everyone who fights this pandemic in the frontline. Let us unite and join together in prayer.

Story # 2 : KHARIA TRIBE, JHARKHAND

“Reclaiming our Indigenous Heritage” – Recollecting memory to re-member identity: A Kharia Perspective

Heritage is a God given gift. It is not a construction. The indigenous communities particularly the Adivasi communities of Jharkhand are blessed by many such gifts. These heritages are seen in their languages, worldviews, cultures, traditions, stories, songs, dance, festivals, etc. These elements form their indigenous identity in a unique way. Their cultural heritage contain values of life which is based on holistic worldview. They do not have a hierarchical-dualistic-anthropocentric-androcentric worldview rather an integrated worldview. Their practical life (ethics) is one of best life in the world. For example, once the Adivasi people lived as half-naked centuries back, but, among them no immorality, no rape cases were found. They lived in darkness (without electricity), but, they did not do the things which are known as ‘darkness/evil things’. They always ready to help and love each other. They live a practical life rather than theoretical life. Since their heritage (life-sustaining values) are based on orality, the dominant/colonial society (mind-set) which have written tradition neglects the Adivasi heritage/tradition. But, a person who wants to know or to reach out the hearts of the Adivasi people, must know their stories which are oral. Today, in the formulation of contextual theologies, the oral traditions are considered as prime sources for theological construction. These sources are becoming something like a code(password) to enter into the reality of Adivasi life.

The popular stories among the Adivasi people in Chotanagpur are mainly the stories of their settling down in different parts of Jharkhand (greater Jharkhand). Among the three tribes (Munda, Oraon, Kharia), the Mundas were the first ones to leave their second stage of habitat and they entered the plateau of Chotanagpur about 600 BCE, the Oraons and the Kharias

followed them later. It is said that the Mundas settled down in Murma, with 21,000 people representing 21 Kilis (clan).

The Kharias entered India from the north-east; they wandered about in the North Indian plains and settled down first in Rohtasgarh-Patna area. According to their folksongs and legends, they crossed the Ganges with the help of 'Baisali Gai' (Baisali cow) and 'Baisali Orej' (Baisali ox) and came to Pa:topur (Patna). They stayed there for some years, then they came to Ro:da (Rohtasgarh) which was once ruled by the Kharias. According to Anthony Doongdoong, during that time a fight between the ancestral Kharia and one of powerful foe was taken place. As result, a small group of Kharias which was later called the Hill Kharias traveled to Mayurbhanj district of Odisha and settled there. The last king of the Kharias tribe was called Moreng who had two sons. He was defeated by the Aryans, but he was succeeded in escaping out with his elder son and his people, leaving behind the younger baby son and his mother. However, he left behind some of his own people to protect and care for the younger son and his mother. The legend further tells us that the defeated king Moreng died on the way during the journey; only his elder son and his people reached Chotanagpur. Here they settle permanently because the area was covered with dense forest and far away from the reach of invaders.

Later when the second son of the king grew up as young man he led his people and his mother to reach Chotanagpur along the same route, which his father and elder brother had followed. He met his elder brother and his people and observed that the latter were mingling with non-Kharia local tribes. He did not like this mingling and in order to maintain the purity of his blood and of his people he separated from his elder brother and his people. Later the group led by the younger brother was called as Dudh Kharias while the group led by the elder brother was called as Dhelki Kharias. Thus, primarily, there are three groups of Kharias: Dudh, Dhelki, Hill. The Dudh Kharias occupied the areas under Simdega district and southeast of Gumla district and Biru Pargana, and pushed out the Dhelki Kharias towards Gaibira, Sundergarh, Sambalpur and Gangpur of Odisha state, and Jashpur and Raigarh of Chhattisgarh state.

Re-telling Kharia stories is collecting a past memory. The aspect of memory invites community to engage in passing story from generation to generation. It creates a space for social consciousness. In the context of COVID-19 crisis, the telling stories can encourage people to face the problem together. Because for them, such kind of epidemic or disaster is not a new thing. Right from their ancestors, they faced such kind of horror thing and they are still survived. When people are in their homes due to lockdown situation of COVID-19 crisis, telling stories can help to make people aware of the critical situation and make some prime strategies for their survival. Jesus applied this method to teach people in order to help them to be more sensible and responsible person for any emerging the situation to be faced.

Story # 3 : KORKU TRIBE, MAHARASHTRA

I am **Premdaya Shankar Kasdekar** and belong to Korku Tribe. I am from Tarubanda Village, Taluka-chikhaldara, District Amravati, Maharashtra. It is Located at Melghat Tiger Reserve of Maharashtra. I have completed my Masters in Sustainable Livelihood Natural Resources and Governances Tuljapur, Deemed University, Mumbai.

The Korkus are an adivasi ethnic group predominantly found in the Khandwa, Burhanpur, Betul and Chhindwara districts of Madhya Pradesh and adjoining areas near the Melghat

Tiger Reserve in Amravati district of Maharashtra. Korku's have been classified as a schedule tribe by the Indian government and the total population of the Korku tribe is 9,95,399. The name 'Korku' is originated from two terms 'Koro' and 'Ku' whereas 'Koro' means person and 'Ku' means alive. Combinely, the two words 'Koro and Ku' are defined as the alive member. The Korkus are a member of Munda tribe and live near a Dravidian-speaking tribe — the Gonds. The Korku people are initially believed to be a hunter-gatherer community who dwelt in the forests of the Satpura Range on both sides of the Tapti River.

The Korku community is the home to an unique and distinct culture, possesses a rich heritage of age old tradition systems more pertinently in terms of indigenous knowledge, beliefs, customs and social system. It is also known as "Dwellers to the non-tribal community". Korku tribe accepts the non-tribal group and live with peace and harmony with the community. Traditional pattern are still followed in the villages and small hamlets. Traditional representative body of the society known as 'Korku Panchayat' is found in many villages headed by a chief known as Patels and other members in the panchayat includes Padihar (priest), Kotwar (chaukidar) and ten to twelve older male members of the community known as Panch. It plays a decisive role during traditional occasions mainly in festivals, marriages and intra and inter-village conflicts resolutions.

Arrivals of missionaries among the Korku tribe are one of the turning points towards the community. Melghat Tiger Reserves is also known for the core issue of malnutrition. Many of the Korku tribals were/are suffering with the Tuberculosis (T.B) disease. Almost twent eight years ago, my grandfather (from Tarubanda village) was suffering from tuberculosis (T.B) disease for a long period of time. He had gone through lots of treatment from the nearby local and district hospitals even tried getting help from the local bhagats, bhumka babas, tantriks but didn't get cure. Finally, a missionary from IEM took my grandfather to Umri Christian Hospital for the treatment. After sometime, by God's grace, my grandfather got healed because of the treatment along with the prayers of missionaries of the hospital. My grandfather witnessed the miracle in his life through the christian missionary. This incident was the turning point for the Korku tribals in our village to accept Jesus Christ as a personal Savior. Today in Melghat Tiger Reserve nearly there are 9 churches and many families have accepted Jesus as their personal saviour. We have the Baptist Christian Association Church for fellowship.

As we Korku tribals are mostly the forest dwellers, our livelihood depends on forest and river for food/vegetables. Non timber forest product is one of the major livelihood sources for food and daily wages. Our main occupation is farming in which the fields are fragmented into the family members while fishing and rearing goats and cattle are the secondary occupation. We are known for poverty, hunger, malnutrition, mass-scale exploitation by moneylenders and traders, our community confronts with numerous socio-economic challenges in the day-to-day life partly due to the poor natural resource bases. Agriculture though the primary source of livelihoods for most of the community members, many of them earn their livelihoods seasonally employed as agricultural labourers. The Korku tribe mostly migrates after the kharif crop harvest and return back at the time of Holi festival. Due to lack of education and livelihood options, migration is high among Korkus. During this covid-19 pandemic, migrant worker families are the most affected. It has become one of the toughest situations to live without wages as the korku belt is isolated and the government schemes are delayed to our villages due to lack of proper roads, connectivity and the lack of digital platform which plays the major role in making people aware of these schemes. As we observe this special Sunday as Tribal and Adivasi Sunday, please remember and pray for Korku tribe.

Story # 4. MIZO TRIBE, MIZORAM

COVID-19 Pandemic and Tribal Communitarian Spirit

In meeting the challenges of COVID-19 pandemic the different tribes and communities in Mizoram display a noble and selfless communitarian spirit which is unique to tribal community.

Local Task Force in each locality in towns and cities and Village Task Force in each village was formed at the initiative of the State Govt. The members of each Local Task Force comprise representatives of the local/village council, churches, NGOs like Young Mizo Association (YMA)¹ and women organization. In their respective localities the Task Force monitor the movement of people, they provide food and other daily needs to the community people during lockdown, they give special attention to the needs of the poor and they look after the quarantine centers within their local area. In villages which are close to the border the local task force and YMA members volunteered to guard the border. The Task Force members continue to take up these responsibilities voluntarily till now without any payment and many of them have to give up their family responsibilities for this task. Three of the volunteers at the border area, including one young lady, had already lost their lives due to the harsh condition in the jungle. The community acknowledged their sacrifices and they were given the highest tribal traditional honor during their funerals.

However, it is not only the Local Task Force who display the noble community spirit. The different denominational churches opened their premises to function as quarantine centers. The public in general obey the disciplinary measures laid down by the Task Force. The YMA members in towns and cities visited those who had volunteered to guard the border to show their solidarity and to give them financial and other help they need.

The State Govt. provided financial aids to the local task force, to the volunteers who are guarding the border and food to those who are being quarantined from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund contributed by churches, govt. employees and the general public. However, this is not adequate to meet the different needs which arise subsequently. The different churches, the local community and individuals continue to support the Task Force in cash and in kinds till now.

Mizoram does not have high economic status, it has very little facilities to combat deadly viruses like COVID-19, it has a long international border with Myanmar and Bangladesh and with other Indian states like Manipur, Assam and Tripura which can easily facilitate inter-border transmission of the virus. However, till today there is no COVID-19 related death in Mizoram, the numbers of infected people are not so high and there is no community transmission so far. This is possible only because of the mutual support and cooperation between the different functionaries of the State Govt. and the community members which constitutes a communitarian spirit and which is already present among the different tribes and communities in Mizoram. It is this communitarian spirit that protects and uphold small and vulnerable tribes against dangerous forces like COVID-19.

¹ Young Mizo Association is the biggest and most influential NGO among the Mizo tribe which protects and uphold Mizo tribal culture and practices. Other tribes have their own NGO of this type which functions in the same manner like the YMA.

Story # 5 : BHIL TRIBE, RAJASTHAN

My name is Anurag Dodiya and I am from Macha Village of Banswada district in the state of Rajasthan. I belong to Bhil tribe and I am a member of Church of North India. By profession I am a teacher in a private school and I also serve my church as a youth leader and conduct Bible studies/ quiz at times.

We the Bhil or Bheels are one of the largest tribes in India. Our tribe is largely inhabited in the West of Madhya Pradesh, East of Gujarat, North of Maharashtra and South of Rajasthan. The division was precisely made by authority at the time of independence as a result the group disintegrated, which led to weakening of the tribe according to every aspect of life may it be social , political, economical or educational.

Illiteracy prevail among the Bhils, as education has always been a core issue, due to this people of our tribe were forced to work as migrant labourers. In the current scenario the worldwide pandemic COVID-19 had adverse effects on Bhils. People who migrated to the cities to work as laborers were compelled by the situation to return to their villages. They travelled from distant places on foot as the transportation was not operational due to complete lockdown and government had no effective plans as to how respond to the situation. Return of labourers to their villages was a forced step as people were starving in the cities as a result of losing jobs, no salaries/payments, and lack of basic facilities which were to be arranged by the authorities. With much difficulties once they reach to their villages the situations for laborers did not change as the community was not ready to accept them, they were suspected as a carrier of Covid-19. Government aid was not reaching to them as these labourers were not in their villages for a long time and they had no proper identity, residence proof and ration card which were necessary for the government aid.

Even though the government aid didn't reach to them but the adaptive nature of the Bhils in the adverse situation helped them to survive, some self help groups also came forward for help but it was not sufficient. Eventually our people are left by their own. During this global pandemic, we bhils are seeking for an established solution as division and rejection by the upper cast people has already made our people vulnerable. Although being so deprived our people still found a way to survive as they have always been close to nature, the lockdown has compelled us to think that truly the nature is enough to supply our basic needs and the distance that we grew from it has harmed us.

As of now the need of the hour is that our people and specially the migrant workers from our village need assurance from Church leaders/ priests for their spiritual support, they want acceptance in the society as an emotional support and above all they need provision from God that may God comfort them with his peace that he gives through his son Jesus Christ.

Story # 6 : SANTAL TRIBE, SANTAL PARGANA, JHARKHAND

Santals in India: Practicing values of caring and sharing

Santals are one among the largest homogenous tribes of India after the Bhils and the Gonds. Santals spread across the country in the States namely Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Assam, Mizoram & Tripura numbering close to around 10 million and a good number of them residing in Bangladesh and Nepal.

Being the first settlers and Indigenous to the land, the Santals do have their own territory officially known as the Santal Parganas (Land of the Santals) in the present day State of Jharkhand which was formed after the suppression of the 'Santal Rebellion' in the year 1855.

The Santal Parganas falls under the Fifth Schedule under Article 244 (1) of the Constitution of India and is protected under the Santal Parganas Tenancy Act 1949 which clearly prohibits the transfer of land ownership from the Santals to the non Santals.

However, being a Santal one can experience the politics of being an Adivasi/Santal in India. We have a community based egalitarian life despite the infiltration of non Adivasis in our villages in the present day scenario.

The present day humanitarian crisis COVID-19 has affected the Indigenous/ Adivasi population the most, as most of our brethren are working in different parts of the country as manual labourers. The recent reverse migration of our people to our home states is an excellent example I can vouch on the community feeling of the Santals/Adivasis in particular. The present day Chief Minister of Jharkhand Sri Hemant Soren displayed an excellent example of the value system the Santals/Adivasis practice. As a Santal/Adivasi Chief Minister, he explored all possibilities and utilised all machineries and resources to bring back our people from far flung areas in these difficult times.

The people in the villages have shown tremendous support in cooperating with the people who have come back from different places. The village level 'Majhi Pargana System' (traditional self governing system) is playing an active role in persuading the youth to stay back in their villages and support each other for getting them work in their own land or in nearby places. The leaders of the MPS are exploring opportunities to begin income generation work for their own people and also striving to revive the village economy by encouraging the youth to open small businesses like tea stalls etc. The role of the traditional self governance system leaders is of great importance and unique in upholding the community spirit of the Santals especially during these difficult and uncertain times of despair.

The Civil Society Organisations, Churches in Jharkhand is determined to support the program to revive the rural economy which will encourage the labour force to stay back in their villages and live a dignified life.

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A Prayer for Healing : (<https://www.praywithme.com/native-american-prayers.html>)

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