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### **Values and ethos of the eighth-century prophets: A mizo perspective**

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**VALUES AND ETHOS OF THE EIGHTH-CENTURY PROPHETS:  
A MIZO PERSPECTIVE**

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**A thesis submitted in candidature of the degree of  
*Philosophiae Doctor***

**School of Theology and Religious Studies  
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## ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to illuminate the values and ethos of the eighth-century prophets – Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah – from the perspective of the Mizo people in Mizoram, India. The thesis is divided into seven chapters.

The first chapter is an introductory chapter that deals with the survey of previous research, introduces the main objectives and the approach adopted which put this study in perspective and sharpens its focus. Chapter two is set apart to deal with the values and ethos of the tribal peoples in Northeast India with special reference to the Mizo tribe. This illuminates the fundamental tribal values and ethos and draws attention to issues which challenge their socio-cultural lives in the present context. In light of the discussion in chapter two, the values and ethos of the Hebrew tribes in the Old Testament are discussed in chapter three. Hebrew values were originally dominated by the rural communitarianism, minority peoples' worldviews and experiences of oppression and poverty. However, these traditional values were undermined by the elitist values in the period of the monarchy, which caused tension and conflict that largely formed the background of the ministry of the eighth-century prophets.

In chapter four, the prophets' concepts of *משפט* and *צדקה* in Isaiah 1:21-26 and Amos 5:21-27 are examined in light of the Mizo socio-ethical principle known as *tlawmngaihna*. In chapter five, the prophets' values concerning wealth and poverty are discussed, based on Hosea 2:2-5 and Amos 6:1-7, in light of the Mizo concept of honour and shame concerning rich and poor. In chapter six, the values defended by the prophets in the context of latifundialisation as found in Isaiah 5:8-10 and Micah 2:1-3 are analysed from the point of view of the dispossessed tribal peoples who are uprooted from their ancestral lands in India.

In the concluding chapter, the main findings of the investigation are highlighted showing that the tribal perspective can illuminate the values and ethos of the prophets in new and different ways. We also briefly discuss the significance of the findings for the Christian community in the present global context.

*This dissertation is dedicated to  
my brother K. Lalpianthanga  
who lived the values we  
discuss in this thesis,  
but left for his  
eternal home  
on  
24.9.2005*



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## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible (Commentary series)
<i>ABD</i>	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by David Noel Freedman et al. New York: Doubleday, 1992. Electronic Version (CD-ROM).
ANE	Ancient Near East
<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by J. B. Pritchard; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
AV	Authorised Version
AWA	Ancient West Asia
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
<i>BDB</i>	Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (CD-ROM).
B.H.S.	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
<i>BTF</i>	<i>Bangalore Theological Forum</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CD-ROM	Compact Disc Read-Only Memory
<i>Exp Tim</i>	<i>The Expository Time</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IDB</i>	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ITC	International Theological Commentary
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>

JSOTSup	Journal for the study of the Old Testament, Supplementary Series
<i>LXX</i>	<i>Septuagint</i> (Greek Bible)
Ms(s)	Manuscript(s)
MT	Masoretic Text
n.d.	No date
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestinian Exploration Quarterly</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SPCK	The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SCM	Student Christian Movement
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>SVT</i>	<i>Supplements to Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum, Supplements
WB	World Bank
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

## INTRODUCTION

This study represents an attempt to illuminate the values and ethos of the eighth-century prophets – Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah – in the light of the cultural values and socio-economic and political realities of the tribal peoples in Northeast India with special reference to the Mizo tribe in Mizoram.<sup>1</sup> Having this focus in mind, the hypothetical questions constructed in response to the existing tribal realities and their traditional socio-cultural values will be raised and tested as we examine the prophetic texts. Six passages have been selected for analysis, namely Amos 5:21-27; 6:1-7, Hosea 2:2-5, Isaiah 1:21-26; 5:8-10, and Micah 2:1-3. Translation of the text is made from the Hebrew Bible<sup>2</sup> though the enumeration and wording of NRSV are followed as far as possible. Other than the selected passages the Bible verses quoted are taken directly from the NRSV. The Hebrew words in this work reproduce only the consonants of the Masoretic Text, except when the differentiation of two or three words is required.

The lead terms of the title, such as “values” and “ethos,” deserve further clarification. The term “values” is taken in this research as the fundamental principles, ideals, beliefs, convictions, priorities, and customs that guide and drive a person, a group of people, or a community. This term can also be regarded as the desired standards or qualities of behaviour and the principles that should govern people’s behaviour. The term “ethos” is defined as the distinguishing spirit, culture, sentiment, and character of a person or a group of people. It is not possible to draw a clear distinguishing line between the meanings of these two terms. However, when the term “values” is used in this study emphasis is placed on the principles,

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<sup>1</sup> Mizoram is one of the seven states in Northeast India where the Mizo are the dominant population. The values and ethos of the tribes in Northeast India with special reference to the Mizo tribe are discussed in chapter two.

<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew Bible used is K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1990).

ideals and priorities, whereas “ethos” will stress more the distinctive spirit and sentiment of an individual or a community. These two terms will often be used side by side as they complement each other.

This chapter will be divided into two main sections. Firstly, we will present a survey of previous research. This survey will place the present study in proper perspective and will enable us to see certain aspects of knowledge and approaches that need to be added or reconsidered in the area of our research. Secondly, we will introduce the methodological approach of our investigation. Here the focus will be on the basic principles and assumptions of the research, which will introduce the main goal of this study and some theoretical frameworks shaping the approach of our investigation. Then, an attempt will be made to explain the meaning of the phrase “a Mizo Perspective,” the main perspective adopted for this study. This will sharpen our idea about the hermeneutical principles and focus of this study.

### **1.1. Survey of Previous Research**

In this survey, we will focus on scholarly works using historical-critical and social-scientific approaches in order to see the main views of scholars concerning the values and ethos of the eighth-century prophets. We limit our survey to these two umbrella approaches as most of the scholarly works on the eighth-century prophets have been done within the methodological framework of these approaches. Our purpose in doing this survey is neither to gear towards any particular conclusion nor to uphold the ideas of a certain group of scholars, but to expose the different views of scholars who have raised different critical questions from their diverse social locations and perspectives as they examined the ethical values of the prophets. This survey will enable us to see the importance of the social location of readers in determining the kind of questions they asked as they analysed biblical texts, which will in turn help us see the significance of the approach we are going to use as we are looking at the values and ethos of the prophets from the social location of the Mizo tribe in Northeast India. This survey is in no way exhaustive; it is intended to overview briefly some important representatives of the critical approach which may be pertinent to our concern in this investigation.



### 1.1.1. *The Historical-Critical Approach*

It has long been recognised that the eighth-century prophets had a common ethos as they expressed their values and visions for the Israelite and Judahite societies. The high moral values contained in the oracles of the prophets can be easily detected even with a cursory reading. The period of these classical prophets was generally regarded as a time of significant change in the moral and theological teachings of Israelite religion. Traditionally, the values and ethos of these prophets were held to be rooted in the older Mosaic laws, which were specially revealed to Moses by God for the common interest and benefit of the covenanted people. However, this traditional understanding of the prophets as preachers of the law promulgated by Moses had been abandoned in biblical scholarship by the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The opinion of two German scholars, namely J. Wellhausen and B. Duhm, revolutionised the whole understanding of the eighth-century prophets. Wellhausen convincingly argued that the law was subsequent to the prophets, and he regarded the early classical prophets as originators or innovators of the law rather than preachers of the law.<sup>3</sup> Duhm also put forward the idea that these early prophets were reformers who really set the relationship between God and people on a purely moral basis.<sup>4</sup> This revolutionary thesis demanded a new and radical rethinking about the whole background and function of the earlier canonical prophets. The chronological priority of classical prophecy to the law was the significant point of their arguments. This idea gave rise to an emphasis on the creative contribution and individual capacity of the prophets to receive the word of God as they proclaimed high ethical standards and radical religious teaching.

The Wellhausen-Duhm's thesis had a significant impact on the study of the Old Testament in general and on Old Testament prophecy in particular. Broadly speaking, their radical views provoked the critical minds of scholars in two different ways. Firstly, certain scholars received the thesis positively and they attempted to

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<sup>3</sup> J. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (trans. J. S. Black and A. Menzies; Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1885) pp. 392-395. See also his *Israelitische und Judische Geschichte* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1958) pp. 122-132.

<sup>4</sup> B. Duhm, *Die Theologie der Propheten als Grundlage für die innere Entwicklungsgeschichte der Israelitischen Religion* (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1875). W. Zimmerli discussed in detail the contribution of these scholars in his *The Law and Prophets: A Study of the Meaning of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965) pp. 17-30. A. Kuenen was also the contemporary of Wellhausen and Duhm who came from the same school of thought and held more or less the same opinion. See his *The Prophets and Prophecy in Israel* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1877).

pursue further the individual experiences of the prophets. These scholars moved forward by investigating the psychological and ecstatic experiences of the individual prophets. Gustav Hölscher, for example, examined the psychological aspects of prophetic experience. He claimed that all prophets including the classical prophets were ecstatic, and emphasised the primacy of ecstasy in prophetic experiences.<sup>5</sup> Following Wellhausen and Duhm, he believed that “Israelite classical prophets refined the cultic religion into one of morality, that of nature into one of history.”<sup>6</sup> Johannes Lindblom made another significant contribution to this line of thought.<sup>7</sup> He assumed that prophecy was a universal phenomenon as he compared Israelite prophets with extra-biblical ecstatic persons like intermediaries, the possessed, visionaries, etc., of various traditions and cultures. He concluded that a prophet is a person who is conscious of having received a special call from his god, who has had revelatory experiences, and who proclaims to the people the message received through revelation. The values and principles of the prophets, according to this line of research, were generally considered to be the outcomes of the ecstatic or mystical experiences of individual prophets.

The second view is a reaction against Wellhausen’s dictum. Scholars who hold this view vigorously oppose and reject the idea that the law came after the prophets. In order to counter this theory several attempts have been made to show the importance of legal tradition and various other older traditions upon which the prophets might have based their messages. Albrecht Alt laid an important foundation for developing the notion of the priority of law by putting forward the idea of the existence of older oral sources of Israelite law using form-critical analysis. As he traced the origins of the laws contained in the Pentateuch, he identified two important different legal traditions, namely apodictic laws and casuistic laws. He differentiated the laws that are presented in the imperative form - or apodictically formulated laws - from more common casuistically formulated ones. Alt saw these apodictic laws as uniquely Israelite in origin and they represented the pre-settlement religious law of Israel, whereas casuistic laws were

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<sup>5</sup> Gustav Hölscher, *Die Profeten. Untersuchungen zur Religionsgeschichte Israels*. (Leipzig, 1914) pp. 189 ff.

<sup>6</sup> Hölscher, *Die Profeten*, pp. 187f. See also Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, p. 7. For detailed discussion of this line of thought, see R. R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

<sup>7</sup> Johannes Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962).

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mostly related to the secular realm of life and could be taken as a common heritage shared with the Canaanites and other ancient West Asian peoples.<sup>8</sup> The important point here is the recognition that the roots of certain laws could be traced back to the pre-literary stage of Israelite history. Certain points of Alt's argument have been challenged by some scholars in the light of new results of investigations into the literary forms of ancient West Asian treaties such as the Hittite vassal treaties.<sup>9</sup> However, Wellhausen's position was shaken to its foundation as Alt had convincingly demonstrated that each collection of law was rooted in the sources which were much older than their present literary composition. This new understanding of the chronological position of law meant that scholars had to reassess the basis of the values and ethos that had been held by the early classical prophets. In the light of this theory, the law is seen again as having provided the source and background of the prophet's moral instruction. Therefore, the eighth-century prophets were no longer to be regarded as the persons who first introduced ethical monotheism or as innovators of socio-religious norms; rather, they were widely regarded again as people who were indebted to the rich accumulated legal traditions of antiquity. Zimmerli comments, "The divine will revealed in the prophet's historical announcements is not a creation of the moment, but is in reality the divine will of the ancient law given to Israel by God."<sup>10</sup> But this new understanding was not to be taken as a return to the pre-critical views about the prophets as preachers of the law given by Moses, because the idea about the complex nature of the origins of different collections of law in the Old Testament that had been put forward by Alt and his followers was quite different from the traditional simple understanding of Moses as the lawgiver.

By abandoning Wellhausen-Duhm's thesis, scholars renewed their attempts to find older traditions, in addition to the legal tradition, that might have contributed to the

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<sup>8</sup>Albrecht Alt, "The Origins of Israelite Law" in *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (trans. R. A. Wilson; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966) pp. 81-132. See also Samuel Greengus, "Biblical and ANE Law" in *ABD* (CD-ROM). Also Zimmerli, *The Law and the Prophets*, pp. 38-43. The term ancient West Asia (AWA) is used in stead of ancient Near East (ANE) as far as possible except in the direct quotations and titles of the books or articles. This is due to the fact that the latter reflects the Euro-centric worldview.

<sup>9</sup>D. J. McCarthy noted that second person imperative statements could be found outside apodictic laws. See his *Treaty and Covenant*. (Analectica Biblica 21; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978) pp. 60-62, 82-83. See also S. M. Paul, *Studies in the Book of Covenant in the Light of Cuneiform and Biblical Law* (VTSup 18 Leiden, 1970) pp.112-24. Also *ANET*, pp. 207-210, 334-345.

<sup>10</sup>W. Zimmerli, "The Prophets Down to the Eighth Century," in *The Law and the Prophets*, p. 67.

formation of the theological-ethical presuppositions, thought-patterns and speech-forms of the prophets. One important tradition that had been suggested by scholars as the foundation of prophetic critique was the covenant tradition. Some scholars were not convinced by Wellhausen's view of the covenant concept as a later creation in Israelite history.<sup>11</sup> They rather considered the covenant as a concept of antiquity that expressed a strong relationship between Israel and their God. The growth and development of this concept was also closely related to the early historical experiences of the Israelite people in the salvific acts of their God in their struggle to survive in various circumstances. Clements states, "The presupposition of all that the prophets have to say to Israel is the fact of Yahweh's gracious calling of the people out of servitude into the freedom of his service."<sup>12</sup> The notion of the early date of covenant was strengthened by Mendenhall's work that demonstrated the close similarities of form between the Sinai covenant tradition and the suzerainty treaties of the ancient West Asia, especially as they appeared in Hittite vassal treaties of the Late Bronze Age.<sup>13</sup> Mendenhall suggested that Moses used the form of this popular Hittite suzerainty treaty to communicate the nature of the relation between Yahweh and Israel. This new discovery of Mendenhall was very significant for those who argued for the antiquity of the covenant concept, laying as it did a foundation for their arguments. For them, the prophets were rooted in the covenant tradition and they used the values and principles of the covenant as the basis of their critique. In short, covenant was regarded as the basic source and background of the values and ethos of the eighth-century prophets.

Some scholars criticised the claim that the prophets were in favour of a moral and spiritual religion by discarding the traditional cultic and ritualistic religion. They demonstrated that the prophets in their oracles employed much cultic material, and

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<sup>11</sup> Covenant tradition was dated not earlier than the seventh century BCE by Wellhausen. See his *Prolegomena*, pp. 417ff. Regarding the discussion on the influence of covenant upon the message of the prophets, see R. E. Clements, *Prophecy and Covenant* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1965) pp. 69ff.; see also N. W. Porteous, "The Basis of the Ethical Teaching of the Prophets", in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy Presented to Professor Theodore H. Robinson* (ed. H. H. Rowley; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, reprint 1957) pp. 143-156; E. Hammershaimb, "On the Ethics of the Old Testament Prophets", *VTSup* 7 (1959), pp. 75-101.

<sup>12</sup> Clements, *Prophecy and Covenant*, p. 69.

<sup>13</sup> G. E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition", *BA* 17 (1954) pp. 50ff. Mendenhall's thesis was challenged by D. J. McCarthy as he has shown that some important elements in the Suzerainty treaties like "blessing and curse formula" were lacking in Ex. 19-24. See his *Treaty and Covenant*, pp. 152-155.

some scholars even concluded that most of the canonical prophets including the classical prophets had cultic religious experiences.<sup>14</sup> H. J. Kraus and S. Mowinckel suggested that there was an office of “Law Preacher” in the cult.<sup>15</sup> R. E. Clements believed that the part taken by the prophets in shaping the development of Israel’s cultic liturgy, and in inculcating a right understanding of the nature and demands of Yahweh was very important. He comments, “In any case during the period of the monarchy it is certain that prophets were accorded an official position in the Israelite cult.”<sup>16</sup> However, he did not regard all the canonical prophets as cultic functionaries.

Another important tradition, which is believed to be an important source for much of the prophetic material, was the wisdom tradition. Various scholarly works have dealt with the presence of the vocabulary, literary styles, ideas, and thought-patterns of the wisdom literature in prophetic books like Amos and Isaiah. It was previously believed that the wisdom movement came later than the prophetic movement in Israelite history, and it was generally accepted that the former inherited the latter traditions. But the form-critical approach to the wisdom literature and new investigations into ancient West Asian literature in the first half of the twentieth century significantly turned this earlier notion the other way round.<sup>17</sup> It was increasingly accepted that the wisdom tradition preceded the prophets, and its influence upon the key figures of the classical prophets like Amos and Isaiah was shown in a very convincing manner. Crenshaw comments, “The first to argue that a particular prophet employed wisdom traditions was J. Fichtner, who thought of Isaiah as a one-time member of the Sages.”<sup>18</sup> J. W. Whedbee developed further this idea and argued that the usage of the parable and the proverbial saying in Isaiah’s

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<sup>14</sup> The first to perceive the existence of cultic prophecy was S. Mowinckel, who argued that there is an indication of the existence of cultic prophets as there are “prophetic oracles” in some of the psalms which have cultic settings. See his *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship* (trans. D R Ap- Thomas; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962) pp. 53-73; see also his *Prophecy and Tradition: The Prophetic Books in the Light of the Study of the Growth and History of the Tradition* (Oslo: I Kommissjon hos J. Dybwad, 1946). This cultic emphasis was taken up and advanced in a series of articles by S. H. Hooke, A. R. Johnson, A. Haldar and I. Engnell. See Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, pp. 8-9. See also J. D. W. Watts, *Vision and Prophecy in Amos* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1958); Hening Graf Reventlow, *Das Amt des Propheten bei Amos* (FRLANT 80; Gottingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1962).

<sup>15</sup> Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Clements, *Prophecy and Covenant*. pp. 31-32.

<sup>17</sup> Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics*. pp. 29ff.

<sup>18</sup> Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*. p. 12. Davies also discusses scholarly debates concerning Isaiah’s relation to the wisdom tradition. See his *Prophecy and Ethics*, p. 29.

oracles confirmed the direct influence of wisdom upon the prophet.<sup>19</sup> Hans Walter Wolff also strongly argued that Amos was profoundly influenced by tribal wisdom.<sup>20</sup> His argument was basically against those scholars who perceived the prophets as cultic personalities. Samuel Terrian also demonstrated some specific points of affinity between Amos and the wisdom literature in terms of forms of speech, theological outlook, vocabulary, and stylistic features. He concluded that various groups, such as priests, prophets, and wise men lived in a common and mutually interacting environment, and these groups might have been influencing each other.<sup>21</sup> In the light of the findings of scholars, it is now obvious that the characteristic speech forms, languages, ideas, and thought patterns of the prophets have many things in common with the wisdom tradition as well as with cultic and other traditions. The prophets and their traditions could no longer be treated as something independent or isolated that did not have any connection with the other socio-cultural and religious traditions of the Old Testament. They were rather inseparably interwoven with other traditions. But it may be better to take these common characteristics of different traditions as the outcomes of the common socio-religious setting of various traditions instead of considering them as a one-way influence of one tradition on another.

The question of the relationship between the prophets and older traditions returns in various ways. Gerhard von Rad, for example, argued that the message of the prophets could be largely taken as the re-interpretation of older traditions in new situations.<sup>22</sup> He believed that each of the eighth-century prophets spoke mainly within the framework of older traditions, such as the Exodus, David or Zion traditions. For von Rad, these older traditions were reinterpreted and adapted by the prophets in new circumstances in order to suit the needs of different situations. He was of the opinion that the prophet's place of origin greatly determined the

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<sup>19</sup> J. W. Whedbee, *Isaiah and Wisdom* (Nashville; NY: Abingdon Press, 1971).

<sup>20</sup> H. W. Wolff, *Amos the Prophet. The Man and his Background* (trans. F. R. McCurley; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973). See also his *Joel and Amos* (trans. W. Janzen, S. Dean McBride, Jr., and C. A. Muenchow; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977). Wolff's thesis was challenged by James L. Crenshaw in his "The Influence of the Wise upon Amos." *ZAW* 78 (1967), pp. 42-52.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel Terrain, "Amos and Wisdom" in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (eds. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson; London: SCM Press Ltd., 1962) pp. 108-115.

<sup>22</sup> See his *Old Testament Theology II* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965). Fohrer strongly opposes von Rad's argument. See G. Fohrer, "Remarks on Modern Interpretation of the Prophets" *JBL*, 80 (1961) pp. 309-319.

particular tradition he used. For example, Isaiah was from Jerusalem and he spoke mainly on the basis of the Zion and Davidic traditions, whereas Hosea used the Exodus tradition extensively as he was from the Northern Kingdom.<sup>23</sup> However, he argued that the regional differences of the prophet's place did not make the prophets completely ignorant of the traditions that prevailed in the kingdom that was not their own. He rather accepted that the sacral traditions of the early Israelite federation were the common ground of all the traditions that had been employed by the eighth-century prophets.

### 1.1.2. *The Social-Scientific Approach*

Some scholars interpret the prophetic protest in the eighth century BCE from a social-scientific point of view. This approach, to a great extent, went hand-in-hand with the historical-critical approach in so far as it was used for reconstructing the historical conditions of ancient Israel. However, the ways it tackled the historical queries were quite different from the historical critical approach. It could be considered as a new way of looking at old questions.

Max Weber had laid a significant foundation for sociological theories to explain the values and ethos of the Old Testament prophets.<sup>24</sup> However, his main interest was not in the prophets themselves, but in his own theory about the origin of western capitalism. He correlated the emergence of western capitalism with the rise of the Protestant Calvinistic faith, which stressed the ethical dimension of Christian values. To test this hypothetical idea, he investigated the value-systems of several non-European societies and concluded that no capitalism in the form of European capitalism was to be found in any of those societies, as the requisite value-systems were not present.<sup>25</sup> He examined in detail the socio-economic, religious and political systems of ancient Israel as part of his investigation of different non-

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<sup>23</sup> R. R. Wilson also argued that the Ephraimite prophetic tradition of the North differed from the Judean tradition of the South. See his *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (1980).

<sup>24</sup> He was not the first person who applied social theories to the study of the Old Testament, but his contribution regarding the study of the prophets was undoubtedly foundational. Frank S. Frick points out that Max Weber was preceded by W. Robertson Smith and Louis Wallis. See his "Response: Reconstructing Ancient Israel's Social World" *Semeia*, 12 (1987) pp. 233-254.

<sup>25</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930); see also his *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947).

European societies.<sup>26</sup> He depended on the popular scholarly idea of his day that early Israel was a combination of semi-nomadic and settled peasants having their unifying principle in the religious ideal of the covenant.<sup>27</sup> For him, the religious values and social principles found in the concept of covenant were vital for the early tribes as they provided socio-ethical principles of solidarity and equality. Regarding the political system of early Israel, he believed that there was no permanent system that governed all tribes throughout the land. They were rather led in times of need by “charismatic” leaders known as “sophetim”, people who were regarded as having been endowed with special inspiration by the supernatural power of God. This simple and flexible form of government began to change with the emergence of the monarchy, when a system inspired by the Canaanites gradually replaced the traditional political system.<sup>28</sup>

Weber was convinced that a crisis in the socioeconomic development in the monarchic period of Israel resulted in the prophetic protests, which further turned the traditional religion into a more developed ethical religion. However, he did not regard the prophets as the innovators of ethical monotheism in Israel as Wellhausen did. Rather, the gradual destruction of the older social system of the simple nomadic people under the influence of the Canaanite settled agricultural system in the monarchic period was, for Weber, the main factor behind the prophetic protests in the eighth century BCE. Hahn interpreted Weber as saying that “the religiously motivated social organisation of the old confederacy retained its significance as an ideal, but it practically disappeared from actual existence as the rise of new economic conditions broke down the old feeling of solidarity between the various groups within Israel.”<sup>29</sup>

Weber’s theories on early Judaism had significant influence upon Old Testament studies as certain scholars quickly followed his lead. Adolphe Lods, for example,

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<sup>26</sup> Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (trans. H. H. Gerth and D. Martindale; Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1952).

<sup>27</sup> This was the idea that had been developed in a systematic manner by Albrecht Alt, and further popularised by Martin Noth.

<sup>28</sup> Robert R. Wilson, *Sociological Approaches to the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) pp.15-16.

<sup>29</sup> Herbert F. Hahn, *Old Testament in Modern Research* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1954) p. 163. A detailed discussion on Max Weber’s contribution to the sociology of Old Testament religion can be found on pp. 159-165.



rewrote the history of Israel on the basis of sociological theories by amplifying Weber's thesis.<sup>30</sup> He further developed the "Canaanite versus Nomadic" approach and presented the history of Israel as an arena in which there was a constant social conflict between the people who wanted to preserve the "nomadic ideal" and those who desired to maintain the settled agricultural way of life. This conflict could also be seen as a tension between the traditionalists who wished to keep old ways of life and those people who had a tendency to follow new ways of life from the settled Canaanites. He saw the older nomadic socio-economic system as being supplanted by the urban system of Canaanite agricultural society. In this situation, the role of the prophets was to fight against the disruptive influence of the Canaanites, which gradually submerged the nomadic social principles of equality and solidarity. The prophets were to restore the former tribal principle of brotherhood and the traditional socio-economic system that was being shattered by the new philosophy of life derived from the stratified society of urban civilization. Lods regarded the prophets the protectors of the nomadic ideal against the invasion of foreign ways of life.

Antonin Causse's contribution to this line of thought is also noteworthy.<sup>31</sup> Causse's thesis was that Israel was originally an ethnic pastoral nomadic community, gradually losing its social values and the old principle of brotherly relationship in the context of the pressure and attraction of Canaanite civilization. In this situation, the spirit of individualism grew while the principle of collective responsibility tended to be forgotten as religious and social obligations in the old system, which previously controlled and fastened together individuals, were collapsing. While the rich and the dominant peoples welcomed this new civilization, the anti-civilization movement was also being developed among the lower class people who were the victims of the emerging new development. In response, prophets arose to challenge this crisis from the critical perspective based on the old principles of solidarity.

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<sup>30</sup> Adolphe Lods, *Israel from its Beginnings to the Middle of the Eight Century* (trans. S. H. Cooke, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932). See also *The Prophets of Israel* (trans. S. H. Cooke, New York: E. P. Dutton and Co. Inc., 1937).

<sup>31</sup> Antonin Causse, *Du Groupe ethnique à communauté religieuse: le problème sociologique de la religion d'Israël* (Études d'histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses 33; Paris: Alcan 1937). See also S. T. Kimbrough, Jr., *Israelite Religion in Sociological Perspective: The Work of Antonin Causse* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrasowitz, 1978).

Causse regarded the prophets as the spokesmen of this anti-civilization movement.<sup>32</sup> However, Causse opposed romantic notions of Bedouin life, emphasizing simply that Israelite peasants retained the old norms and practices of social solidarity.

Bernhard Lang, however, challenged Weber and his followers by using a Marxist approach.<sup>33</sup> He discarded Weber's idea of an egalitarian Israel versus Canaanite classes, and regarded the notion of an egalitarian society as wishful thinking rather than a true characteristic of earliest Israel. He basically tried to explain the background of the prophetic protest in the eighth century BCE, especially giving attention to the oracles of Amos, in terms of a class struggle between the poor peasants and the propertied merchant elites who were living together side by side. Israelite society during this period was presented as consisting of poor peasants - who solely depended upon a subsistence economy - and an urban propertied class who skimmed off the largest possible portion of the agricultural produce as a regular income or "rent" claimed on the basis of liabilities or full urban ownership of land. For Lang, this kind of society was characteristic of ancient West Asia: "In the Near East, this last arrangement between peasantry and elite which may be christened the *mercantile system* has found a particular expression in what is called *rent capitalism*."<sup>34</sup> In this situation, the poor peasants were quite vulnerable as they were solely depending upon the crops of the land that were determined by factors outside their control. The climatically conditioned crop failures, illnesses and payment of dowries etc. were considered common factors that compelled them to make use of credit from the urban landlords or creditors, which in turn brought them into the status of bonded labourers. He argues, "Peasants overburdened with debts have to sell themselves into bondage to work off their liabilities. The bondsmen become serfs liable to tax or they are even sold and thus become real and permanent slaves."<sup>35</sup> According to Lang, the prophetic protest in the eighth century BCE was fundamentally a protest against the system of *rent capitalism*, which was basically designed and controlled by the rich landlords to support their own

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<sup>32</sup> Hahn, *Old Testament in Modern Research*, pp. 167-169.

<sup>33</sup> Bernhard Lang, "The Social Organization of Peasant Poverty in Biblical Israel," in *Anthropological Approaches to the Old Testament* (ed. Bernhard Lang; Philadelphia/London: Fortress Press/SPCK, 1985) pp. 83ff., or his *Monotheism and the Prophetic Minority* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983) pp. 114-127.

<sup>34</sup> Lang, "The Social Organization," p. 86.

<sup>35</sup> Lang, "The Social Organization," pp. 93-94.

economic interest and socio-political power, and which enormously impoverished the small peasants of Israelite society.

The “Canaanite versus nomadic approach” of Weber’s school no longer commends itself as a viable option for biblical scholars. Though the notion of a clear opposition between ‘Canaanites’ and ‘Israelites’ is fundamental to much of the biblical literature, and basic to most scholarly biblical histories, it is now increasingly realised that this kind of picture has been largely overshadowed by the propagandistic agenda of the biblical writers as well as the ideological interests of modern historians.<sup>36</sup> Scholars who employ ideological criticism and postcolonial approaches can convincingly demonstrate that various polemical attitudes towards Canaanites in the Old Testament are coloured by the ideological reconstruction of the history of Israel by later biblical writers or editors as a vehicle to promote their ideology. By reading against the grain, certain scholars can demonstrate that much of the biblical literature is a biased ideological presentation of the authors, which has often been used to support the values and interests of the interpreters or sometimes colonizers.<sup>37</sup> For example, the dark side of the Exodus story or the conquest story in the Deuteronomistic history, which provides “the theological underpinning for the gift of the land and the conquest of Canaan, and the commanded slaughter of the Canaanites,”<sup>38</sup> is considered to be written from the viewpoint of the victorious colonizers, which cannot be simply justified if we read from the indigenous Canaanite perspective.<sup>39</sup> Since the approach adopted by Weber

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<sup>36</sup> Uriah Y. Kim, “Postcolonial Criticism: Who is the Other in the Book of Judges?” in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (ed. Gale A. Yee; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2007) pp. 161-182. He mentions that “biblical scholars, wittingly or unwittingly, inscribed Western experiences, aspirations, and destinies into the history of ancient Israel.”

<sup>37</sup> Uriah Y. Kim points out that “the colonizers used the Bible to justify their claim to the land, the destruction of native peoples and cultures, and the colonization of the mind and soul of the colonized. The Bible was an integral part of colonial discourse, which facilitated the exploitation and management of the colonized.” See his “Postcolonial Criticism,” p. 167.

<sup>38</sup> John J. Collins, *The Bible after Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005) p. 70.

<sup>39</sup> Those who have experienced the same kind of oppression and destruction suffered by the indigenous Canaanites increasingly employ a reading from the Canaanite perspective. See Naim S. Ateek, “A Palestinian Perspective: Biblical Perspectives on the Land,” also Robert Allen Warrior, “A Native American Perspective: Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians,” in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah; London: Orbis/SPCK, 1997) pp. 267-275, 277-286. For a history of this perspective, see Collins, *The Bible After Babel*, pp. 64-69.

and his followers was largely based on this polemical attitude of the biblical writers, it can be questioned whether the conflict between nomadic Israelites and settled Canaanites was the real issue in the history of Israel.

It is also vital to raise questions concerning whose interests are being served by a particular historiography adopted by modern historians. As indicated above, it is common that modern historians deliberately take over a biased biblical history to support their own ideological interests.<sup>40</sup> Keith W. Whitelam argues against the tendency of modern scholars to identify with the viewpoint of the biblical master narrative, and he accuses the dominant discourse of biblical studies of silencing and excluding Palestinian history, or even Canaanite history for the interests of the histories of ancient Israel and Judah. For him, “Palestinian history, particularly for the thirteenth century BCE to the second century CE, has not existed except as the backdrop to the histories of Israel and Judah or of second Temple Judaism.”<sup>41</sup> By following biblical narrative, modern historians often portray Canaanites as an inferior human race to be wiped out by the elected superior Israelites, and the dichotomy between superior Israelites and inferior Canaanites is a normal way of presenting ancient Israelite history. Davies observes that outside the biblical literature the ‘Canaanites’ refuse the same neat definition, and there is no non-biblical evidence of an ethnic distinction: the people living where biblical Israel is located did not come from outside, and were not ethnically distinct, nor is there evidence of their having a different culture from other occupants of Palestine.<sup>42</sup> Scholarly research concerning the origins of the Israelite people increasingly accepts that a large majority of Israelites were originally the indigenous peoples in the land of Canaan.<sup>43</sup> In the light of these new insights, Weber’s school of thought in relation to this issue is highly questionable.

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*Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah; London: Orbis/SPCK, 1997) pp. 267-275, 277-286. For a history of this perspective, see Collins, *The Bible After Babel*, pp. 64-69.

<sup>40</sup> A good example of this kind of history would be W. F. Albright, *From Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process* (New York: Doubleday, 1957). See a critical analysis of Albright’s historiography by Keith W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London/New York: Routledge, 1996) pp. 79ff.

<sup>41</sup> Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel*, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Philip R. Davies, *In Search of ‘Ancient Israel’* (JSOTSup 148; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992) p.55.

<sup>43</sup> Niels Peter Lemche, *Early Israel: Anthropological and Historical Studies in the Israelite Society Before Monarchy* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), Costa W. Ahlstrom, *Who were the Israelites?* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1986).

Another scholar who has made an enormous contribution to the development of the social-scientific approach to the Old Testament prophets is Norman K. Gottwald. Though his main interest is the sociological-historical reconstruction of the formation of Israelite tribes in the pre-monarchic period, his monumental work *The Tribes of Yahweh*<sup>44</sup> has a strong connection with his primary interest in the study of the prophetic literature. At this juncture, it may be pertinent to point out that the motivating factor behind Gottwald's commitment to a sociological reconstruction of the history of early Israel was basically his critical queries concerning the source of the perspectives and principles of the early classical prophets. It is quite interesting to read his statement regarding this:

The big step on the way to *Tribes* came when I began to ask, from what source did the prophets derive this impassioned political perspective? If, contra Weber, they were not 'lone wolf' intellectuals or mystics, what communal or corporate traditions and memories informed them? I was pushed back to the early history of Israel, where I discovered entirely implausible scholarly explanations of Israelite origins. There were huge problems with the patriarchal and Exodus traditions as straightforward history. The prevailing notions of an Israelite conquest from without, either by conquering or gradually infiltrating nomads, were unconvincing. So I asked, where do I go in the social sciences to get some fix on origin accounts of this sort? That was the point at which I started reading social theory voraciously and also moving into anthropology where I discovered a trove of information about societies more or less comparable to ancient Israel in certain regards, namely primarily oral stateless societies.<sup>45</sup>

In his conclusion to the volume, Gottwald remarked that the egalitarian tradition surviving from the time of Israel's beginnings was able to produce the Israelite prophetic movement.<sup>46</sup> The link between the prophetic movement and the pre-monarchic tribes in Gottwald's thinking may have been, to some extent, due to the influence of Weber.<sup>47</sup> However, Gottwald held a different view regarding the nature of Israelite tribalism. He rejected the popular idea of nomadic or semi-nomadic kinship origins of the Israelite tribes upon which Weber had developed his whole

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<sup>44</sup> The full title is *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979). Hereafter it will be cited as *Tribes*.

<sup>45</sup> Norman K. Gottwald, interviewed by Roland Boer, "Political Activism and Biblical Scholarship: An Interview" in *Tracking The Tribes of Yahweh* (ed. Roland Boer; JSOTSup 351; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) pp. 162-163.

<sup>46</sup> *Tribes*. p. 699.

<sup>47</sup> Gottwald makes extensive use of Weber and Durkheim, though his basic theoretical position is Marxist. See Roland Boer, "Introduction: On Re-Reading the Tribes of Yahweh" in *Tracking the Tribes of Yahweh*. pp. 1-9.

thesis of the ‘Canaanites versus nomadic Israelites’. According to Gottwald, Israel was not basically a nomadic or pastoral society but an agricultural society based in towns. But he still accepted pastoral nomadism as a minor socio-economic component in what became Israelite tribalism. He also saw the conflict as one between urban life and rural town life (which he termed “anti-morphemes”) instead of Weber’s “nomadic versus Canaanite” agricultural life. Here, there is a shift in focus from the mode of production (nomadism and agriculture) to the social organisation (urban statism and rural tribalism).<sup>48</sup> He also discarded Martin Noth’s amphictyonic theory of a twelve tribes league or a sacral tribal federation, which was developed on the basis of the amphictyonies of Greece. Noth proposed that this tribal federation’s unifying principle was worship at a central shrine. Pre-monarchic Israel was regarded by Gottwald not as an amphictyony but as a complex confederacy of tribes and sub-tribes, and the unifying principle of this confederacy was not only its religious, but its military, legal and kinship systems.<sup>49</sup> Gottwald took a radical position as he argued that early Israel was an eclectic formation of various Canaanite lower groups of people.<sup>50</sup> He also argued that pre-monarchic Israel’s social structure was a deliberate and highly conscious “retribalization” process rather than an unreflective unilinear carry-over from pastoral nomadic tribalism.<sup>51</sup> He saw Israel’s tribalisation as a politically conscious power play:

In my assessment we should view Israelite tribalism as a form chosen by people who consciously rejected Canaanite centralization of power and deliberately aimed to defend their own uncentralized system against the effort of Canaanite society to crush their movement. Israel’s tribalism was an autonomous project which tried to roll back the zone of political centralization in Canaan, to claim territories and peoples for an egalitarian mode of agricultural and pastoral life.<sup>52</sup>

The consciously chosen “uncentralized system” of the early Israelites may be equated with his concept of “egalitarianism”. He explains that egalitarianism does

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Frederic R. Brandfon, “Norman Gottwald on the Tribes of Yahweh” *JSOT* 21 (1981) p. 103.

<sup>49</sup> Brandfon, “Norman Gottwald on the Tribes of Yahweh,” p. 102. See also, *Tribes*, pp. 376-386.

<sup>37</sup> These lower class people comprise “feudalized” peasants (*hupshu*), ‘*apiru* mercenaries and adventurers, transhumant pastoralists, tribally organized farmers and pastoral nomads (*shosu*), and probably also itinerant craftsmen and disaffected priests. See his *Tribes* p. xxiii. His detailed discussion may be found on pp. 389-484.

<sup>51</sup> *Tribes*, p. xxiii.

<sup>52</sup> As quoted by J. Maxwell Miller, “The Israelite Occupation of Canaan” in *Israelite and Judaeon History* (eds. John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller; London/Philadelphia: SCM Press/Trinity Press International, 1990) p. 278. See also Gottwald, “Domain Assumptions and Societal Models in the Study of Pre-monarchical Israel” *SVT* 28 (1975), p. 97.

not refer to modern legally established rights of individuals but rather indicates a “social-organisational arrangement lacking ranking and stratification” and without “differences in rights of access to the basic resources.”<sup>53</sup> His entire sociological reconstruction of early Israel was based on his idea of the sharp dichotomy between rural egalitarianism and stratified urban social structure. It is evident that Gottwald saw the link between early Israel and the prophets in terms of their ideological stands. He states:

Insofar as the historical paradigms continued to have power, it was because the older social base of tribalism did survive under the monarchy in various accommodations to and struggles against the new hierarchic order. In these accommodations and struggles, the later prophetic movement was born.<sup>54</sup>

Dearman comments, “The prophets become for him ‘the logical development’ from this foundational period.”<sup>55</sup> However, Gottwald did not elaborate upon this issue as it was beyond the purview of his study in *Tribes*. In his early book on Old Testament prophecy, he did not mention explicitly the connecting link between these two.<sup>56</sup> In his recent works, however, he has extensively made use of the Marxist approach, which was his main tool in *Tribes* - to analyse certain ideologies relating to socio-economic and political issues in the historical narratives, prophetic speech and parable.<sup>57</sup> It is quite evident that he accepted the eighth-century prophets as revolutionary figures who were products of the logical development of the revolutionary origins of Israelite society. Gottwald’s Marxist analysis has had

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<sup>53</sup> As quoted by Carol Meyers, “Tribes and Tribulations: Rethorizing Earliest ‘Israel’” in *Tracking the Tribes of Yahweh*, p. 36.

<sup>54</sup> *Tribes*, p. 698.

<sup>55</sup> John Andrew Dearman, *Property Rights in the Eighth-Century Prophets: The Conflict and its Background* (SBL Dissertation Series 106; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) p. 11.

<sup>56</sup> The title of this book is *All the Kingdoms of the Earth: Israelite Prophecy and International Relations in Ancient Near East* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1964). From the methodological point of view, it was probably because he was at that stage more interested in the literary-historical critical approach than the sociological approach, which he extensively developed and applied in his writings in the later period. Moreover, as he was concentrating exclusively on prophecy and its relation to the international politics in the ancient West Asia in his book *All the Kingdoms of the Earth*, he might have deliberately ignored the discussion of the link between the pre-state tribes and prophets, as this domestic issue did not have much to do with his main concern of international politics.

<sup>57</sup> Norman K. Gottwald, “Social Class as an Analytic and Hermeneutical Category in Biblical Studies” *JBL* 112/1 (1993), pp. 3-22. See also “Ideology and Ideologies in Israelite Prophecy” in *Prophets and Paradigms: Essays in Honor of Gene M. Tucker*. (ed. S. B. Reid; JSOTSup 229; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) pp. 136-149; also “The Biblical Prophetic Critique of Political Economy: Its Ground and Import” in *The Hebrew Bible in its Social world and in ours*. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993) pp. 349-364.

lasting importance in Old Testament studies, especially with regard to the study of the eighth-century prophets.

Marvin Chaney has also made a significant contribution to the social scientific approach to the prophets. His main focus was on issues of political economy in the eighth century BCE.<sup>58</sup> For him, agricultural intensification during this period was the main factor behind the social crisis encountered by the prophets. Peace and prosperity during the lengthy reigns of Jeroboam II of Israel (*ca.* 781-745 BCE) and Uzziah of Judah (*ca.* 781-747 BCE) was the fertile ground for Israelite and Judahite elites to participate actively in international trade. According to him, luxury goods, military material, and the wherewithal of monumental architecture were imported into Israel and Judah, whereas wheat, olive oil, and wine were exported to pay for these imports. While imports benefited the elite few, their cost in exported foodstuffs cut deeply into the sustenance of the peasant majority.<sup>59</sup> As there was increasing demand for wine, wheat and olive oil, the rich people during this period were more and more engaged in a regional specialisation of agriculture, which in turn heavily pressurised smallholders in the hill country. He used extensive archaeological evidence to support his argument.<sup>60</sup> For him, the consequences of agricultural intensification can be seen in the forms of the decline of subsistence farming, separation of agricultural labour and land ownership, absentee landlordism, and increasing socio-economic stratifications, which gave more power to the affluent that in turn led them to pervert the legal administration and political power for their own benefits, but to the disadvantage of the poor peasants. Against these, the eighth-century prophets appeal to YHWH's divine law court in the sky.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Marvin L. Chaney, "Whose Sour Grapes? The Addressees of Isaiah 5:1-7 in light of Political Economy" *Semeia* 5 (1987) pp. 105-122; see also his "Bitter Bounty: The Dynamics of Political Economy Critiqued by the Eighth-Century Prophets" in *Reformed Faith and Economics* (ed. Robert L. Stivers; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989) pp. 15-30; also his "Micah – Models Matter: Political Economy and Micah 6:9-15" in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in its Social Context* (ed. Philip F. Esler; London: SCM Press, 2005) pp. 145-160.

<sup>59</sup> Chaney, "Micah – Models Matter," p. 147.

<sup>60</sup> He mentions that "the לַמֶּלֶךְ (*lmlk*, "for the king") seal impressions from Judah point to a system of royal vineyards in the uplands, while the Samaria ostraca document the flow of oil and wine to officials of the northern royal court from both private and royal vineyards and orchards." See his "Micah – Models Matter," p. 147.

<sup>61</sup> Chaney's idea of regional specialization and intensification of agriculture in the eighth century BCE has been applied to the study of Hosea and elaborated by Alice A. Keefe, *Woman's Body and the Social Body in Hosea* (JSOTSup 338; London: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 2001). See also Gale A. Yee, "'She is not my wife and I am not her husband': A Materialist Analysis of Hosea 1-2" *BibInt* 9.4 (2001), pp.345-383.



D. N. Premnath also developed the same kind of argument, but from a different angle.<sup>62</sup> Using insights from comparative anthropology, archaeology, and historical-critical exegesis, he argues that the fundamental issue behind the whole prophetic protest in the eighth century BCE was ‘latifundialization’ - generally defined as the process of land accumulation (large estates, hence latifundia) - in the hands of a few wealthy landowners to the deprivation of the peasantry.<sup>63</sup> He discusses this process of land accumulation in the context of the transition from the tribal subsistence economy to a market economy by concentrating on the changes in the systems of production and distribution after the emergence of monarchy in Israel. For him, a small elite benefited from the shift from a simple subsistence economy to the capitalistic market economy, which was accelerated by the system of monarchy, whereas this process of transition dispossessed the majority of the population. The unjust structure of the emerging capitalism forced the poor peasants to go into deeper debt in various ways. As a result of this, the peasants were living with heavy debt that subsequently brought them to foreclosures of their lands, thereby becoming an effective way of land accumulation for the rich landlords.<sup>64</sup> The main task of the prophets in this situation was to fight against the unjust socio-economic and political structures that generated the increasing impoverishment of the majority of poor peasants for the benefit of the elite. The prophets were, therefore, regarded as champions of the poor who rendered their services to combat the primitive form of capitalism for the liberation of the marginalized peoples.

George V. Pixley takes up Gottwald’s thesis of the revolutionary origins of Israel and he tries to explain the anti-rich or anti-oppressors oracles of the eighth-century prophets, especially Micah, on the basis of the older tribal revolutionary attitudes towards the dominant groups of people.<sup>65</sup> He sees the strong connection between the early revolting Israelites and the eighth-century prophets who boldly fought

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<sup>62</sup> D. N. Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets: A Social Analysis* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2003); see also his “Latifundialization and Isaiah 5:8-10” in *Social-Scientific Old Testament Criticism: A Sheffield Reader* (ed. David J. Chalcraft; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd, 1997) pp. 301-312; also his “Comparative and Historical Sociology in Old Testament Research. A Study of Isaiah 3:12-15” *BTF* 17.4 (1985) pp. 39-54.

<sup>63</sup> Premnath, “Latifundialization,” p. 301.

<sup>64</sup> Premnath, “Comparative and Historical Sociology,” p. 31.

<sup>65</sup> George V. Pixley, “Micah – A Revolutionary” in *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Norman K. Gottwald on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (eds. David Jobling, Peggy L. Day and Gerald T. Sheppard; Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1991) pp. 53-60.

against the wealthy dominant group of people for the cause of the oppressed. Pixley accepts Gottwald as the one who confirmed the suspicion that Israel was more than a primitive people gifted with religious genius. He also recognizes Gottwald as the one who initiated a revolutionary understanding of Israel's origin which opens the way to pursue the aftereffects of this early revolution on the life of the nation Israel. He feels that it is especially significant to look for signs of the survival of the revolutionary doctrines and practice in the prophets of Israel who claimed to speak for Yahweh, the God who brought Israel out of bondage in Egypt.<sup>66</sup>

Though Pixley concentrates on Micah, he also mentions that the other eighth-century prophets like Amos and Isaiah were generally considered to have had revolutionary attitudes. At the same time, he also reads Micah as a revolutionary, and he mentions that this reading of Micah does not preclude the possibility that other prophets may also have been revolutionaries. He argues against the general assumption about the invading Assyrian forces were the instrument of Yahweh's judgment in Micah's oracles of future doom, and he points out that nowhere does Micah himself support this assumption. He strongly suggests an alternative explanation:

Why do our interpreters not suggest the alternative proposal that the prophet is calling on the peasants to stage a revolution to destroy the cities? Surely, in the light of the experience of the tribes of Israel in the late second millennium (if we have been right in our interpretation of that experience), a Judahite prophet could well see the hand of Yahweh's judgment in a popular uprising to destroy oppressive cities, just as surely as in an Assyrian invasion.<sup>67</sup>

He continues to argue that the basic ethos of the eighth-century prophets would have been grounded in the past memories of the revolutionary movements of the lower-class people against their oppressors. He believes that the liberation struggles in the Exodus event and the victory over various invading forces during the time of Judges would have been still alive in the memories of the peoples, especially among villagers for whom the past stories were less assimilated with the vision of national unity under the kings, which was the standard urban vision. Moreover, he also contends that the political condition and the unstable administrative situation in the

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<sup>66</sup> Pixley, "Micah – A Revolutionary," p. 53.

<sup>67</sup> Pixley, "Micah – A Revolutionary," p. 57.

northern and southern kingdoms in the eighth century BCE would have provided the context for peasant unrest. In these circumstances, the prophets were revolutionary figures who spoke for the interests and benefit of the weak and oppressed. Their socio-economic and political values and revolutionary attitudes against the rich landlords and dominant groups were also regarded as deeply rooted in the revolutionary movement of early lower-class peoples which gave rise to the subsequent formation of the Israelite.

### 1.1.3. *Critical Evaluation*

Scholars who employ the historical-critical approach have been successful, to some extent, in establishing the background of the theological and ethical teachings of the prophets. They have illuminated the law, the covenant, and also the spiritual, psychological, historical, and literary aspects of Old Testament prophecy in a convincing manner. One thing that can be detected from their discussions is that their theoretical questions and ideological concerns largely reflect the interests of intellectual circles after the Enlightenment period in western society. For example, Wellhausen-Duhm's thesis basically provoked the historical-scientific questions about the chronological priority of prophecy to the law in the Old Testament. While this kind of subject can be a very interesting topic in a rationalistic and scholarly debate among intellectual circles, it does not have much value and significance for people who do not have such intellectual capacity and interest. It has now been recognised that theology and exegesis done by experts tends to reflect mainly the concerns and questions of such experts. The questions and concerns important to peoples at the bottom of society are usually ignored or overlooked.<sup>68</sup>

In the light of the works of scholars who raised historical-critical queries about the relation of the prophets to tradition we can now see that the prophets had strong links with older traditions; their ethical values and theological perspectives were, at least in some ways, shaped and conditioned by the traditions that preceded them. However, this line of investigation has never paid serious attention to the question concerning the factors behind the radical preaching of the prophets in the eighth

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. Anthony R. Ceresco, *The Old Testament: A Liberation Perspective* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993) p. 15.

century BCE. It is possible that the prophets based their theological and moral teachings on certain older traditions, but the questions that still remain unanswered are: Why did they choose such a radical view as they reinterpreted the older traditions? What could have been the factors behind the vehement criticism of the prophets against the rich and their deep concern for the poor? Why did they take seriously the socio-economic, political, and cultural issues during this period? While scholars could explain convincingly the background of the prophets and the sources of their ethical values, they often overlook what the prophets really wanted to communicate to their audience. What exactly were the values and principles advocated by the eighth-century prophets? Why did they choose and support certain values while strongly rejecting others?

The social-scientific questions that have been raised in connection with the eighth-century prophets can also be largely regarded as reflecting the development of sociology and anthropology in the western context. However, the socio-economic backgrounds of the prophetic protest in the eighth century BCE, which we see in the light of Weber's school of thought, show important aspects of Old Testament prophecy. It is especially interesting to see the link between the old nomadic people and the eighth-century prophets in terms of their value-systems and socio-ethical principles. However, to regard the Old Testament prophetic movement simply as an anti-civilization movement is not convincing. Moreover, to consider the prophets merely as conservatives, who wanted to go back to the past in order to maintain the old-fashioned lifestyle of certain primitive people, seems an inadequate explanation of their critique. It would have been much more convincing if the prophets were presented as the representatives of the majority whose values and interests were being undermined and suppressed by a select elite in the new socio-political system. In addition, the prophets may also be seen as the people who had a vision - alternative values and principles for organizing their society - in a context where a few dominant elite ruined the lives of many people in their society.

The "Canaanite versus Israelite systems" approach was discarded by certain scholars as it never explained how the exploiting system actually worked in the

eighth century BCE.<sup>69</sup> This argument is understandable in the light of the results of subsequent research concerning the origin of Israelite tribes.<sup>70</sup> Weber's school of thought is also often criticised for basing too much on an idealisation of the past, which tended to romanticise the old nomadic system. It is true that the pre-monarchic period was not the golden age for the tribes as reflected in the biblical and extra-biblical sources. Rather, this period was evidently coloured by poverty, famines, hardships, inter-tribal raids and ethnic conflicts.<sup>71</sup> However, the communitarian ways of life and the values and ethos of the early tribes that Weber and his followers proposed should not simply be considered wishful thinking, as suggested by some scholars.<sup>72</sup> There can be values and traditions that dominate the lives and activities of people in traditional communitarian societies which seem to be unrealistic for modern individualistic societies. The values and ethos of the existing traditional tribal communities may be able to illuminate this aspect of life of the early tribes in the Old Testament.

Gottwald and other scholars who employ elements of Marxist social analysis for examining the eighth-century prophets have clearly demonstrated the socio-economic background of the prophetic social critique. In the light of their analysis, it is now increasingly recognised that the values and ethos of the eighth-century prophets were shaped not only by the religious traditions and beliefs of antiquity, but also by the socio-economic realities in Israelite and Judahite society. However, there are also certain weaknesses and limitations in this socio-economic approach that cannot be overlooked. For example, most of the scholars who reviewed Gottwald's *Tribes* point out that the fundamental reason for the inadequacy of his approach is that he has brought too many anachronistic assumptions to bear on a non-western, pre-industrial society.<sup>73</sup> For example, Gerhard Lenski objected to Gottwald's unqualified description of Israel as "an egalitarian society in the midst

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<sup>69</sup> Lang, "The Social Organization," pp. 84-85.

<sup>70</sup> Gottwald's thesis of early Israel as an eclectic formation of various Canaanite lower groups of people is increasingly accepted by scholars.

<sup>71</sup> This issue is discussed in details in chapter three.

<sup>72</sup> Lang, "The Social Organization," pp. 84f.

<sup>73</sup> Dearman, *Property Rights in the Eight-Century Prophets*, p. 11. See also Robert P. Carroll, "Review of *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel 1250-1050 BCE* By Norman K. Gottwald" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 35 (1982) pp. 175-178; Frederic R. Brandfon, "Norman Gottwald on *The Tribes of Yahweh*." *JSOT* 21 (1981) pp.101-110; Duane L. Christensen, "Review of *The Tribes of Yahweh*" *JSOT* 18 (1980) pp.113-120; Carol Meyers, "Review of Norman K. Gottwald *The Tribes of Yahweh*" *CBQ* 43 (1981) pp. 104-109.

of a stratified society. Lenski claimed that “egalitarian” was a twentieth-century term signifying the logical antonym of “stratified” and that it needed to be nuanced for a pre-modern peasant society.<sup>74</sup> Another important question that has been raised concerning Gottwald’s concept of Israelite egalitarianism is “whether Israel’s alleged egalitarian ideology was not itself rooted in its experience of oppression/anti-statism, but in its very structure.”<sup>75</sup> The egalitarian ideology need not be a consciously chosen or intentional creation of poor peasants who opposed statism; rather, it can be rooted in the socio-economic structure of peoples who basically depended upon their subsistence economy. In fact, most of the societies that are essentially subsistence level tend to be relatively communitarian.

Scholars who employ the Marxist approach seem to have overemphasised the economic class distinction between the rich and the poor regarding the issues challenging the prophets of the eighth century BCE. While socio-economic issues cannot be ignored in dealing with the teachings of the prophets, it is also important to pay attention to the other issues they tackled. Issues relating to culture, identity, land, and socio-ethical values also appear to be largely associated with the challenges confronted by the prophets. It is also quite interesting to see the sociological-historical reconstruction of the socio-economic backgrounds of the prophetic ministry of the eighth-century prophets on the basis of Marx’s dialectic materialism. Marxist scholars presuppose the existence of ancient capitalism as a cause of class tensions in the eighth century BCE, which gave rise to the prophetic protests. The analysis of this aspect of the historical development emphasizes the importance of the socio-economic and political issues in understanding the radical approaches of the prophets. However, we have to be very cautious that the sociological reconstruction of the ancient past should not merely be “an educated guess” or “scholarly imagination”<sup>76</sup> of the modern period which goes far beyond the information available in the biblical sources. Another concern that needs to be reconsidered may be the revolutionary attitudes of the prophets. There is no doubt

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<sup>74</sup> Carol Meyers, “Tribes and Tribulations: Rethorizing Earliest Israel” in *Tracking the Tribes of Yahweh*, p. 36. Lenski’s idea is shared by most of the reviewers of *Tribes*.

<sup>75</sup> Charles E. Carter, “Powerful Ideologies, Challenging Models and Lasting Changes: Continuing the Journey of *Tribes*” in *Tracking the Tribes of Yahweh*, p. 55.

<sup>76</sup> These are the phrases of B. Lang. He admits that his reconstruction represents no more than an educated guess that goes beyond the information given in the biblical sources. But he also accepts scholarly imagination as something indispensable. See his “The Social Organization” pp. 84, 96.

that the prophets had a kind of revolutionary attitude as they opposed the oppressive dominant elite for the cause of the poor. However, the assumption that such an attitude was purely inherited from the ancient past is not very convincing. Revolutionary movements can happen any time and anywhere if the situation demands without necessarily copying from past memories. This kind of understanding necessitates a deeper reconsideration of the socio-economic, political, religious and cultural issues relating to their messages.

What is evident from our survey is that various perspectives adopted by scholars to interpret the prophets are shaped and conditioned by their social locations.<sup>77</sup> While they have successfully illuminated certain aspects of the values and ethos of the prophets from various angles, there are still areas that are beyond their reach. This is not because of their intellectual incapability or personal inadequacy, but due to the fact that they are bound by their own social location, which is beyond their control. Their theoretical assumptions, presuppositions, worldviews, ideological frameworks, and intellectual thought-patterns are conditioned by their social locations. As a result, there is still room for other perspectives from different social locations to throw more light on the values and ethos of the eighth-century prophets.

## 1.2. Methodology of the Present Study

The uniqueness of the methodological approach of this investigation lies not on the method of analysis, but on the perspective. The kind of questions we ask and presuppositions we have as we examine the biblical texts are the outcomes of the socio-economic, political and cultural realities of the Mizo people. This is an attempt to examine the values and ethos of the eighth-century prophets from the Mizo tribal viewpoint. In other words, this is an endeavour to illuminate the world of the eighth-century prophets by drawing parallels from the Mizo culture.

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<sup>77</sup> Here location does not necessarily mean geographical location. Rather, it could be taken as the social, economic, political, religious, and cultural environments; at the same time it could be the intellectual, ideological, doctrinal, or ecclesiastical backgrounds as well. It also entails customs, beliefs, system of signs, thought patterns and the realities of class, race, gender, problems, experiences and the whole structural framework of the society that is inhabited. Understanding and perception of any individual have been at least in one way or the other influenced and conditioned by his/her own location. See Archie C. C. Lee, "The Plurality of Asian Religio-Cultural Traditions and its Implications for Asian Biblical Studies" in *Doing Theology with Tribal Resources* (eds. A. Wati Longchar and Larry E. Davis; Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre, 1999) p. 31.

The Mizo perspectival or contextual reading of the Bible may be taken as part of a fundamental and radical shift in the biblical interpretation that has been witnessed in the last few decades, which resulted and allowed for incredible diversity in models of biblical interpretation.<sup>78</sup> Contemporary methodological issues in biblical studies show the reality that several factors have aroused peoples from various corners of the world to read the Bible with their own perspectives irrespective of their backgrounds and social locations. A Mizo perspective, the main perspective adopted for this particular research, should also be considered as one of the outcomes of the current trend of the biblical interpretation. Some basic principles and assumptions underlying this approach will be brought out, and then the main characteristics of the perspective will be highlighted.

### 1.2.1. Basic Principles and Assumptions

The main purpose of this study is to illuminate the values and ethos of the eighth-century prophets in the light of the values and ethos of the Mizo tribe. Our basic assumption is that insights derived from the cultural values and the socio-economic and political realities of the Mizo tribe can shed light on some important aspects of the values and ethos of the eighth-century prophets. The foregoing survey of previous research shows that different scholars examine the ethical values of the prophets in response to the development of historiography, philosophy, psychology, social science, anthropology, etc., and they can bring out significant results. Scholars also often employ extra-biblical materials such as archaeological findings, ancient West Asian literatures, traditions, customs, and beliefs to widen the understanding different aspects of biblical literature. Moreover, models based on various cultures other than Israel's are frequently used to reconstruct the socio-cultural life of the people of the Old Testament. For example, Albrecht Alt's nomadic Bedouin model for pre-monarchic tribes, Martin Noth's Greek amphictyonic model for pre-monarchic tribal social organisation, Mendanhall's Hittite suzerainty vassal treaty model for Mosaic covenant, Gottwald's Marxist class struggle model for the emergence of Israelite tribes, etc. In the same way, the

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<sup>78</sup> There are several models of interpretation that have emerged in the last two decades. See Fernando F. Segovia, "And They Began to Speak in Other Tongues: Competing Modes of Discourse in Contemporary Biblical Criticism" in *Reading from this Place* Vol. I (eds. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) pp. 1-32.



Mizo tribal socio-ethical values, cultural ethos and experiences of a small minority people in the Indian context can also be instrumental for widening our understanding of the values and ethos of the prophets. It will be argued that the tribal communitarian values, ideas, and concepts are comparable in various ways with the values and ethos of the prophets. One important question is – whose story, worldview, value-system, culture, ideas, and concepts are we encountering as we interpret the prophets? It is very unlikely that we are encountering the values and ethos of the people in the advanced industrial society. Rather, it appears that we are dealing with the values and ethos of the simple people whose lifestyle, worldview and culture are quite different from modern rationalistic society. If the modern historical, literary, and scientific theories can contribute so much to illuminate the ancient tribal ethos and culture, it is quite reasonable to assume that certain ideas, values, and worldviews found in the oracles of the prophets might be explained effectively in the light of tribal culture as well.

Another important assumption of this approach is that every context needs contextual reading in order to fully appreciate the meaning and significance of the message of the Bible. The survey of the research has revealed that scholars have brought different historical-critical questions and socio-economic and political queries from their own social locations and sought answers from the Bible; but no question has been raised so far from the Mizo context in Northeast India. This means that the questions and issues that matter for the Mizo people have never been directly addressed in scholarly discussion. It is vital to ask questions from this perspective if we want to illuminate further the messages of the prophets. The questions and concerns raised in one's social location may not be so important for people in other locations. In fact, there is no universal approach that can explicate all areas of concern for peoples living in different contexts. At the same time, every approach can be useful in its own context. This could be the reason why scholars have used different approaches to dig out various aspects of truth contained in the biblical texts. The current competing models of interpretation should not be seen as excluding one another, rather they mutually complement each other and should be treated as subject to creative interaction.<sup>79</sup> The increasing variety and flexibility in

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<sup>79</sup> Segovia, "And They Began to Speak in Other Tongues" pp. 1ff.

methods of interpretation has undoubtedly added richness to our understanding of the Bible and the relevance of the Bible for peoples of diverse backgrounds and concerns. A reading of the prophets through the eyes of the Mizo tribal people will also shed more light on the Bible in general, and it will surely open their eyes to see the values of the prophets contextually. Thanzauva argues that unless the tribals are allowed to be different in their interpretation of the Bible, the Bible will not only lose its significance from them, but Christianity will remain superficial without really taking root in the tribal culture.<sup>80</sup>

This study also assumes that there is no such thing as a purely objective understanding of the Bible. By joining the current reader-oriented and cultural approaches to the Bible, this study recognises the importance of the social location and cultural background of the reader as a determining factor for the creation of the meaning of the text. We are not committed to a value free and impartial objective understanding of the text; rather we take seriously the socio-economic, political, religious, and cultural realities of the “flesh-and-blood reader.”<sup>81</sup> Premnath observes, “It is ironic that so many biblical scholars who argue eloquently for the historical conditionedness of the text fail to acknowledge their own historically conditioned hermeneutic.”<sup>82</sup> Segovia contends that a critical analysis of the location of the reader and their readings become as important and necessary as a critical analysis of the ancient texts themselves, since these two critical foci are ultimately interdependent and interrelated.<sup>83</sup> This is to say that the social location that moulds the mind and thought of the interpreter is an integral part of the meaning in any interpretation of the text. At the same time, it also implies that the dialogical interaction of the reader and the text is perceived as the source of new meaning. Grant rightly points out:

The interpretation of any written record of human thought is the exposition of its author’s meaning in terms of our thought forms. Though we may try to think his thought after him, ultimately our own mind must determine the

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<sup>80</sup> K. Thanzauva, *Theology of Community: Tribal Theology in the Making* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1997) p. 95.

<sup>81</sup> Here “flesh-and-blood reader” is used as opposed to “implied reader” in narrative criticism. It refers to the real reader of the text.

<sup>82</sup> Premnath, “Comparative and Historical Sociology in Old Testament Research: A Study of Isaiah 3:12-15.” p. 22.

<sup>83</sup> Fernando F. Segovia, “Cultural Studies and Contemporary Biblical Criticism: Ideological Criticism as Mode of Discourse” in *Reading from this Place* Vol. II (eds. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) p. 7.

way in which we express his meaning. Interpretation is always subjective as well as objective.<sup>84</sup>

Every interpretation is part of the presupposition and prejudice<sup>85</sup> of the interpreter, and any presupposition of an individual is, at least in one way or another, influenced and conditioned by his or her own social location. In other words, there is no interpretation without presupposition and no presupposition is completely free from social location. The understanding and perception of an individual is very much part of one's presupposition, which is conditioned by his or her surrounding environment. Waetjen convincingly comments:

Understanding, therefore, is subject to the boundedness and limitations of 'being – there.' The neutrality of scientific objectivity is unattainable. A Cartesian purification of the mind is impossible! The preconceptions and prejudices of the preunderstanding cannot be bracketed or removed, in actuality they facilitate understanding.<sup>86</sup>

It is vital to recognize that our ideas, values, belief-systems, presuppositions, and theological convictions – in short, our horizons – are, to a great extent, the products of our location, and these in turn produce a particular sense of the meaning of the text.

At the same time, we should also recognise that the biblical text also has its own horizon. The Bible has something to say for us that cannot be undermined. Pyper convincingly argues that the text's ability to maintain its identity through change and to persuade its readers to copying the text is the factor behind the success of the Bible as the most widely disseminated of all texts.<sup>87</sup> It is not our intention to move back to a pre-critical era and to use typological or allegorical or proof-text methods

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<sup>84</sup> Robert M. Grant with David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (London: SCM Press, 1984) p. 4.

<sup>85</sup> The term 'prejudice' is often used in a disparaging sense. But this need not be so. Gadamer's discussion on this point is illuminating. In his words: "Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world... we are possessed by something and precisely by means of it we are opened up for the new, the different and the true...." See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1975) p. 240.

<sup>86</sup> Herman C. Maetjen, "Social Location and the Hermeneutical Mode of Integration" in *Reading from this place*, Vol. I (eds. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) p. 76.

<sup>87</sup> Hugh S. Pyper, *An Unsuitable Book: The Bible as Scandalous text* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005). See especially chapter two: "Selfish Texts: The Bible and Survival."

of interpretation, which did not pay any attention to the historical aspects of the text; nor is it our intention to impose our preconceived ideas on the text. It is important to acknowledge that the Bible is the product of an ancient people who had many differences from us, and the biblical materials were developed out of the experiences of those people. Moreover, stories, historical narratives and different types of oracles and poems in the Bible are not merely objective accounts or factual reports, but they are largely conditioned by the interests and purpose of the authors or editors in certain historical periods. We are less than just if we ignore the historical dimensions of the text. The contribution of historical criticism in reconstructing the ancient world of the people of the Old Testament and in finding out the social location of the authors and editors of the texts is quite significant. We do not reject the important contribution of approaches like the historical-critical method, the sociological approach, the anthropological approach or any other approaches, which can bring out the meaning and significance of the historical contexts of the text. Rather, they should be employed for analytical tools to discover the meaning of the ancient texts. However, our concern should not merely be to understand the ancient text objectively, but to rediscover the meaning of the text through its interaction with the present context. Segovia observes, “Meaning emerges, therefore, as the result of an encounter between a socially and historically conditioned text and a socially and historically conditioned reader.”<sup>88</sup> Gadamer speaks of understanding as “a fusion of horizons.” He interprets the event of understanding, with reference to the study of texts, as the formation of a comprehensive horizon in which the horizon of the texts and that of the interpreter are fused into common view of the subject matter – namely meaning.<sup>89</sup> Following these theoretical principles and basic assumptions, we endeavour to bring out new meaning and understanding of the values and ethos of the eighth-century prophets from a Mizo perspective.

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<sup>88</sup> Segovia, “Cultural Studies and Contemporary Biblical Criticism,” p. 8.

<sup>89</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 235ff. See also Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1980), especially pp.293-319 where he discusses Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. Also his *Thiselton on Hermeneutics: The Collected Works and New Essays of Anthony Thiselton* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006).

### 1.2.2. The Main Characteristics of a Mizo Perspective

A Mizo perspective, the main perspective adopted for this research, is a new approach to the Bible. This approach can be taken as one among many new ways of contextually reading the biblical text in the present day. This is a new way of looking at the Bible from the point of view of a particular group of people. As the Mizo tribe is part of the larger tribal communities in Northeast India, we may interchangeably use ‘Mizo perspective’ and ‘tribal perspective’ in this study. The term ‘tribal perspective’ will be used especially in the context when we discuss the shared values and common perspective of the different tribal communities in Northeast India. However, we have to be very careful when we use the term ‘tribal perspective’ as there are many tribes living in various parts of the world who have divergent origins, cultures, identities, problems, concerns, and worldviews. It is impossible to find a single perspective for all these peoples, and there could be several tribal perspectives corresponding to their contextual differences. Even in India, there are several tribes in different parts of the country. Though various tribes in India have commonalities, their socio-economic, political and cultural backgrounds are so many and diverse that it is beyond the scope of this thesis to cover them in full. Therefore, “tribal perspective” in this research will mainly refer to the perspective of the Mongoloid stock of hill-dwelling tribes in Northeast India,<sup>90</sup> and the illustrative materials and applications will be mainly taken from the socio-cultural resources of the Mizo tribe.<sup>91</sup> However, the term can also be used to refer to different tribal communities in India, particularly in the context when we discuss the common issues and problems faced by the different tribes.

A Mizo perspective is a combination of contextual, liberation and cultural-anthropological approaches of interpretation.<sup>92</sup> As indicated above, this perspective

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<sup>90</sup> The geographical, historical and demographic backgrounds of the tribes in Northeast India and their socio-cultural values and ethos are discussed in detail in the following chapter.

<sup>91</sup> Mizo is the generic name of one of the tribes in Northeast India who live in the state of Mizoram to which community the present researcher belongs. We are mainly depending on the Mizo and Naga socio-cultural resources due to the fact that the written materials available for the researcher are mainly from these two tribes. However, most of the issues discussed in this research are common to the different tribes.

<sup>92</sup> Contextual approach is here taken as a reading of the Bible from a particular social location of the reader. Liberation approach can also be simply defined as a hermeneutical privilege for the poor and oppressed. Cultural-anthropological approach is also a reading of the Bible in the light of the cultural values and socio-anthropological background of the reader. These three approaches can be regarded as the foundation for the current development of various models of interpretation. According to

takes first and foremost a contextual approach to the Bible. It raises questions and concerns from the Mizo tribal socio-cultural, political and economic contexts. In other words, the theoretical questions that are brought to the Bible are formulated in response to the Mizo socio-economic, political and cultural realities. This approach is meant to illuminate the values and ethos of the prophets in a new way that may contribute to widening our horizons in understanding the prophets. It is argued that the contextual approach to the Bible is an affirmation of the fact that socio-cultural diversity is so intrinsic to humanity and therefore diversity of interpretation and understanding of the Bible is inevitable.

We may not fully grasp the meaning of the perspective of this study without knowing something about the larger contextual realities of the tribal population in India. The various tribal communities in India are largely impoverished and endangered by cultural assimilation and various forms of alienation. They are regarded as the lowest social strata in caste-ridden Indian society, though they themselves do not have such a hierarchical caste-system in their own society. Wati Longchar, one of the tribal theologians, highlights the historical experiences of the Indian “tribals,”<sup>93</sup> and concludes that the history of the tribals in India is a defeated history. According to him, “tribal people have been experiencing such humiliations all through their history. Their history is full of defeat, subjugation, genocide, exploitation, discrimination and alienation.”<sup>94</sup> Thanzauva also contends that the tribals in India are diverse in culture, language and origin, their only commonality being the poverty, exploitation and alienation they have suffered, from time immemorial.<sup>95</sup> This view may represent, to a great extent, the views and feelings of the majority of the tribal population in India.<sup>96</sup> The issues encountered by many

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Segovia, the current diversity in models of interpretation and a thoroughgoing reformulation of the role of culture and experience in biblical criticism is the consequence of a radical shift of interpretative paradigms in the last few years. See detailed discussion on this issue in his “And They Began to Speak in Other Tongues,” p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> The adjective form “tribal” is often used as a noun, and sometimes as a plural noun “tribals” in Indian English. We will also use it as a noun interchangeably with the term tribe(s) in this research.

<sup>94</sup> A. Wati Longchar, *Tribal Theology: Issue, Method and Perspective* (Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre, Eastern Theological College, 2000) pp. 7-24.

<sup>95</sup> Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, p. 11.

<sup>96</sup> This feeling may also be shared by many tribals in different parts of the world. It is very likely in the case of the tribals in Africa, North America particularly with the Amerindian tribes, Australian aborigines and in most of the Asian countries. See John Hookey, “Settlement and Sovereignty,” in *Aborigines and the Law, Essays in memory of Elizabeth Eggleston* (Peter Hanks and Bryan Keon Cohen (eds.); Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1984) p. 1.

tribal communities in the Indian context are worse than economic exploitation and political oppression. They are often the victims of racial abuse, discrimination, bullying, and different kinds of alienation. The term “tribal” is understood among the general public in India to connote backward, primitive, untouchable or ritually unclean people whose habitats are forests, caves and mountains.<sup>97</sup> For this reason, certain scholars from the tribal communities are very critical of the usage and application of this term, and some people completely reject it and refuse to identify themselves as “tribals”. Lalsangkima Pachuau argues:

The very use of the term reveals the intent to dominate and oppress the people to whom the nomenclature is imposed.... I contend that the creation of tribalism is artificial; it is done for the convenience of the administrative system that is thoroughly influenced by the caste stratification mindset, and politically and culturally controlled by the caste Hindu society.<sup>98</sup>

The feeling and argument of those who reject this term is understandable as this pejorative term has been imposed by the dominant people who hold socio-economic and political power in the country. However, we intentionally use this term since it clearly conveys the existing realities of the tribal peoples. Whether they like it or not they are called “tribals,” which has derogatory and various negative senses. The imposition of this nomenclature explains the miserable condition and the plight of these ethnic minorities in the Indian context. When we use “a Mizo perspective” or “tribal perspective” in this research, we mean to say that it is the perspective of the voiceless minority, who struggle to survive in the context of assimilation, humiliation, oppression, and alienation. It is not the perspective of the comfortable dominant people; rather, it is the perspective of the poor and the oppressed.

The liberation approach based on “the hermeneutical privilege of the poor” has laid a strong foundation to read the Bible from the perspective of the poor or the weaker

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<sup>97</sup> Nirmal Minz, “Mission in the context of diversity – Mission in Tribal context” *Religion in Society* 36 (1989) p. 7. Minz testifies that “the tribal person is a strange animal to many in our country [India] even today. Our youngest daughter went through a traumatic experience .... Her college and hostel mates were surprised to find that she belonged to a tribal community and begun to dissociate (themselves) from her. However, they are willing to associate themselves with her on condition that she did not declare herself as a Tribal.”

<sup>98</sup> Lalsangkima Pachuau, “‘Tribal’ Identity and Ethnic Conflicts in North East India: A ‘Tribal’ Christian Response,” *Bangalore Theological Forum* 30 (1990) pp. 157-167.

section in the society.<sup>99</sup> As the Bible is read from this particular perspective, it is now increasingly realised that the Bible itself suggests that the viewpoint of those at the bottom of society should be the perspective to read the Bible. Ceresco's statement in this regard is illuminating:

Thus the scriptures themselves seem to suggest that the angle from which we should read the Bible and its history is "from the bottom," through the eyes of the powerless and the poor, from the point of view of the oppressed. The story that stands at the origins of the biblical tradition, then, is the experience of a group of non-persons miraculously liberated from slavery who journeyed into a new land that offered new opportunities for hope and for freedom. The God whom they encountered in that experience they described as the One who made that liberation possible, who freed them, and who led them to that land, and who gave them new reasons for hope.<sup>100</sup>

A Mizo perspective should also be regarded as part of the liberation approach in so far as it is profoundly based on the common principle of the liberation hermeneutics that the interpretation of the Bible should contribute towards liberation of the poor and oppressed. However, the main concern of this hermeneutics is not only to reveal the liberative elements of the biblical texts for socio-economic liberation (unlike the Latin American liberation), but also for liberation from racial discrimination, socio-cultural assimilation and various forms of alienation.

A Mizo perspective has also certain characteristics of the cultural-anthropological approach of study. This is partly an approach to illuminate the Bible by drawing parallels from the socio-ethical and cultural values of the tribal people, which are largely derived from the Mizo socio-cultural resources. Though the term "tribe" or "tribal", which is inseparably attached to the Mizo people, has been commonly taken as derogatory, and peoples known as tribals are often labeled with negative pictures, there are positive elements that are integrally woven in the tribal culture and ways of life that can be instrumental for enlightening certain aspects of truth in the Bible. It may be that peoples who are associated with the term tribes are not up to the mark if we measure their cultural values and practices by using the scale of other cultures. The same thing could happen *vice versa*. Michael convincingly

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<sup>99</sup> See Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (London: SCM, 1988); see also Gerald O. West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995).

<sup>100</sup> Ceresco, *The Old Testament: A Liberation Perspective*, p. 14.



argues that the values of any culture are to be understood and evaluated according to the view of life or mental outlook of the people belonging to that particular culture. Scientifically speaking one culture cannot be graded better or worse by members of another culture because no absolute standard by which to judge can be established.<sup>101</sup> This is not to say that there is no evil in tribal society, nor is it an attempt to romanticise tribal culture, but just to point out the positive elements inherent in it. We cannot deny the fact that there are negative aspects in tribal society – as in all other societies - but this does not minimise the value and significance of the positive things they have.

The term “tribal”, therefore, means not only primitive, uncivilized, barbaric, backward or ignorant, but also loving, generous, caring, innocent, simple, traditional, original, communitarian-oriented people who are less spoiled by modern scientific technology and its philosophy of individualism. This term affirms the uniqueness of the tribal traditions and cultures, which deserve to be protected in order to maintain their distinctiveness, as they are one of the most vulnerable communities in the modern world. As we employ this term, the particular sense we take is not only that of the negative one, but also the positive sense which would give a balanced portrayal of the picture of these traditional peoples. Therefore, the phrase “tribal perspective” in this study would also refer to the perspective that upholds the significance of the tribal communitarian ways of life, cultural values and ethos, and their socio-ethical principles.

Another important dimension of this perspective is that it is a perspective within the Mizo society. As we shall see in the following chapters, the tribal peoples in general and the Mizo tribe in particular are drifting apart as they are being encroached by the process of sankritisation and modernization.<sup>102</sup> Certain peoples within their society who have been influenced by external socio-economic and cultural ideologies may not share the values inherent in this perspective. However, this perspective represents the values and aspirations of the majority of people in rural

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<sup>101</sup> S. M. Michael, S.V.D. “Christianity and Culture Authentic in Dialogue: Beyond Relativism and Ethnocentrism” in [http://www.sedos.org/English/Michael\\_2.htm](http://www.sedos.org/English/Michael_2.htm) p. 10.

<sup>102</sup> The socio-cultural crisis within the tribal society as a result of the infiltration of the external socio-economic and cultural forces is discussed in the following chapter. See the explanation of the term sanskritisation in chapter 2, f.n. 2.

and urban areas. When we use the term “a Mizo perspective” in this study, it mainly points to the perspective of the majority of the Mizo population within their society, who share the values, worldview, vision, and aspirations of the socially neglected, economically disadvantaged, politically dominated and culturally community-oriented peoples.

## TRIBAL VALUES AND ETHOS

This chapter is an attempt to present the socio-cultural issues challenging the Mizo tribe as part of the other tribal communities in Northeast India. As the Mizo tribe is associated with the larger tribal society in Northeast India, many of their socio-cultural problems cannot be discussed in isolation since they are closely related with the problems of their neighbouring tribes. However, the whole analysis of tribal socio-cultural issues in this chapter is going to be dominated by the Mizo perspective as the illustrative materials and examples will be mainly drawn from the Mizo socio-cultural resources. The primary task of this chapter is to demonstrate the traditional ethos and values of the different tribes in Northeast India and to identify certain issues and challenges they are now encountering together as the minority communities in the Indian context. The geographical, historical and demographic backgrounds thereof will first be examined in order to locate and identify them as distinctive communities in the midst of the several diverse groups of peoples in India. Then the traditional values and ethos of the people will be discussed concentrating on what is distinctive and common to the different tribes and on what continues to have meaning and significance in present tribal ways of life and value-systems. Attention will be given first to the significance of the traditional social background of the people for the formation of their common values and interests. Here, it will be shown how the community-oriented lifestyle of the tribal people forms and conditions their core value - namely honour - which is the end-goal and aim of all their other values. An attempt will also be made to emphasise the function of the basic socio-ethical value called *tlawmngaihna*<sup>1</sup> as the unifying principle of the traditional social organisation. Then, we will move on to discuss traditional tribal values and ethos specifically in relation to four important concepts, namely poverty, wealth, power, and land. We limit our focus here on these four particular

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<sup>1</sup> The meaning and significance of this Mizo term *tlawmngaihna* is fully discussed in section 2.3.2 below.

issues as they can be considered key elements in establishing a coherent idea of the tribal worldview and value-system; they relate to their socio-economic, political and cultural lives. We will also look at the impact of the two major socio-economic, political and cultural forces - known as sanskritisation<sup>2</sup> and modernisation - on the traditional values and ethos of the tribal people in order to understand their present condition.

## 2.1. Geographical and Historical Backgrounds

As the great Himalayan range dividing South and Central Asia runs down to the east, it takes a southward curve and splits into lower hill ranges. These lower hills are punctuated by valleys and formed by the rivers that drain into the Bay of Bengal. These hills and valleys, which bridge South, South East, and Central Asia, have been the home of different tribal communities for thousands of years. This part of the Himalayan range is located between 88 and 97 degrees of longitude and 22 and 29 degrees of latitude. The larger part of these mountains and valleys is now within the geo-political map of the Republic of India, but the inhabitants of this region are socially, culturally and racially very close to the peoples of South East Asia. This strategic geographical region is now generally known as Northeast India, which comprises seven states<sup>3</sup> – Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura. These seven states are also known as ‘seven sister states’ as they are geographically and culturally closer to each other than to the rest of India. About three quarters of the region is covered by hilly terrain, one quarter is made up of the four plain areas of Assam’s Brahmaputra, and Barak valleys, the Tripura plains, and the Manipur plateau.

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<sup>2</sup> “Sanskritisation” is a term propounded by an Indian sociologist M. N. Srinivas that refers to the process of assimilation of tribal and other indigenous peoples into Hindu society, and defined as a process of social, cultural and religious change whereby low status people in India adopt the Sanskrit terminology and ritual procedures embodied in Brahmanism. This process tends to weaken tribal religious and cultural life until it is finally absorbed into Hinduism. See K. Thanzauva, *Theology of Community* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1997) p. 15; cf. H. K. Bhat, “Hinduisation of Tribes: Critique and Perspective” in *Tribal Thought and Culture* (ed. Bardyanath Saraswati; New Delhi: Concept Publishing House, 1991) p. 223.

<sup>3</sup> Sikkim is also now officially included in the Northeast region, but we will continue to refer to the traditional seven states by using the name “Northeast India” due to the specific concern we have in this research.

Northeast India is linked with the mainland of India by a narrow corridor of land in North Bengal, popularly known as 'the chicken's neck of India', the average width of which is about 30 km, between China, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Nepal along the Himalayan ranges. It has an international boundary of about 5,000 km bordering Myanmar, China, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. Geographically, this region has a closer attachment with these neighbouring countries than with the mainland of India.

The entire region of Northeast India came to be politically associated with India only after the British period of the early 19th century.<sup>4</sup> Before this period, the larger part of the region consisted of petty kingdoms and several tribal chiefdoms that had no political union among themselves and no link with any major political power in mainland India or other parts of the world. However, some parts of Assam, Tripura, and Manipur seem to have had religio-cultural contact with the Aryan-Hindu culture of India for a considerable period of time before the nineteenth century CE. Earlier, Assam was part of Kamarupa, a state that had its capital at Pragjyotishapura (modern Guwahati). Ancient Kamarupa included roughly the Brahmaputra valley, Bhutan, the Rangpur region (now in Bangladesh), and Koch Bihar, in West Bengal.<sup>5</sup> The Mahabharata<sup>6</sup> mentioned Assam as Pragjyotisha, and a reference to Kamrupa-Pragjyotisha is also found in the Kalika Purana and the Yogini Tantra.<sup>7</sup> This evidence shows that certain parts of Assam, especially people living in the Brahmaputra valley and its surrounding plain areas, had a long history of contact with the Hindu culture. However, the ancient inhabitants of the Assam valleys were invaded and dominated by the Mongoloid stock of tribes from Myanmar known as *Ahoms*<sup>8</sup> from the thirteenth century CE. These Ahom people themselves became

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<sup>4</sup> The British annexed the Northeast at different points of time: Assam plains (1826), Cachar plains (1830), Khasi hills (1833), Jaintia plains (1835), Karbi Anglong or Mikir Hills (1838), North Cachar hills (1854), Naga hills (1866-1904), Garo hills (1872-73), and Mizo hills (1890).

<sup>5</sup> "Assam, History" *Encyclopaedia Britannica 2001*, Deluxe Edition CD-ROM Copyright © 1994-2001 Britannica.com Inc.

<sup>6</sup> King Narakasura and his son Bhagadatta were famous rulers of Kamarupa in the Mahabharata period. In scholarly estimation, this great Hindu epic poem 'Mahabharata' reached its final form no later than 200 CE., See Lalsangkima Pachuau, " 'Tribal' Identity and Ethnic Conflicts in North East India: A 'Tribal' Christian Response," *BTF* 30 (1990) p. 160. See also Thomas J. Hopkins, *The Hindu Religious Traditions* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1971) p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Pachuau, " 'Tribal' Identity and Ethnic Conflicts," p. 160. In the orthodox classification of Hindu religious literature, *Tantra* refers to a class of post-Vedic Sanskrit treatises similar to the Puranas (medieval encyclopaedic collections of myths, legends, and other topics). See also Bangovinda Parampanthi, "Aryanisation and Assimilation of Assam" in *Nation-Building and Development in North East India* (ed. Udayon Misra; Guwahati: Purbanchal Prakash, 1991) p. 106.

<sup>8</sup> The Ahoms are presently known as the Assamese.

fully “sanskritised” though they originally had a tribal background. Certain groups of people in the plain areas of Tripura and Manipur also appeared to have followed some forms of Hinduism in the early period.<sup>9</sup> But the hilly areas where the majority of the tribes live in Northeast India were without any connection with mainland India in early times. The British East India Company broke this barrier. The British, whose interests elsewhere were threatened by Burmese (Myanmarese) expansion into today’s Manipur and Assam, came to check it. They ultimately drove out the Myanmarese invaders and, after the Treaty of Yandaboo was signed with Myanmar in 1826, Assam became a part of British India. From this time onwards, the British continued to influence the political affairs of the region and they brought the Northeast region completely under their control by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

After the British left Asia by the middle of the twentieth century, the new Asiatic powers fought over the issue of who should get how much of this part of the Himalayan range. India and Burma (Myanmar) fought over the Kabow valley, East Pakistan (Bangladesh) and India over the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and India and China over the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), now called Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>10</sup> The result of the compromises made between these new Asiatic powers was the permanent division of the tribal peoples who had enjoyed political freedom and practised their common cultures and traditions for a long time.<sup>11</sup> For instance, the Mizo tribe - who speak one common language and have a common culture and tradition - are now separated by the international boundaries of India, Bangladesh and Myanmar and the state boundaries of Mizoram, Assam, Tripura, and Manipur. The same case could be seen with other tribes such as the Nagas, Garos, etc., who live in different parts of the region. Many of the tribal peoples maintain that their international and internal political divisions were made without any consultation with the people directly involved and immediately affected by these divisions. The Indian share of the British colonial cake in this region constitutes the present “Seven Sisters” states of the Northeast.<sup>12</sup> This is the geographical location of the

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<sup>9</sup> Pachuau, “ ‘Tribal’ Identity and Ethnic Conflicts,” p. 160.

<sup>10</sup> “Armed Forces Special Powers Act: A Study in National Security Tyranny” in <[http://www.hrhc.net/sahrhc/resources/armed\\_forces.htm](http://www.hrhc.net/sahrhc/resources/armed_forces.htm)> 7/6/2007, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Some tribes had already been divided by the British policy of ‘divide and rule’, which was applied to the other parts of their colonies too. The new Asiatic independent countries worsened this division after the colonial period.

<sup>12</sup> “Armed Forces Special Powers Act” p. 3.

tribal peoples whose worldviews greatly shape the perspective employed in this research.

## 2.2. Demographic Background

India has one of the largest tribal populations in the world. According to the 1991 census, 67,758,000 persons were identified as tribal constituting 8.08% of the total population of India.<sup>13</sup> The total number of tribal communities in India as identified by the Anthropological Survey of India is 461, of which about 172 are segments.<sup>14</sup> These diverse tribal communities can be broadly divided into four racial stocks, the Negrito (the Great Andamaneses, the Onges and the Jatawas), Proto-Austroloid (the Munda, the Oraon and the God), the Caucasoid (the Toda, the Rabari and the Gujar), and the Mongoloid (tribes of Northeast India).<sup>15</sup>

There has been a large concentration of tribal populations in Northeast India. Many tribes and ethnic groups with different languages and dialects live together in this region; indeed, Longchar notes that “some tribes speak three to four dialects and among certain tribes each village speaks a different dialect.”<sup>16</sup> However, these different tribal groups can be broadly divided into two groups based on their geographical location, namely, the hill tribes and the plain tribes. The hill tribes consist of the Mizo-Kuki-Chin family living in Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura and the Cachar Hills of Assam; the Nagas in Nagaland, Manipur and Assam, the Khasi and Garo in Meghalaya and Assam, and the Arunachalis in Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>17</sup> These hill tribes may generally be taken as the Mongoloid race, though they may be subdivided again from a cultural and linguistic point of view.<sup>18</sup> The plain tribes include

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<sup>13</sup> This is excluding the tribal population of Jammu and Kashmir where a census was not undertaken due to disturbance. An unofficial figure puts it at about 20% of India's population. *Census Report of 1991 (Schedule Castes and Tribes)* Government of India, p. 11. See also A. Wati Longchar, *Tribal Theology: Issue, Method & Perspective* (Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre, Eastern Theological College, 2000) p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> K. S. Singh, *The Scheduled Tribes: People of India, National Series* Vol. III (Delhi: Anthropological Survey of India, 1994), p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Longchar, *Tribal Theology*, p. 14. This is especially true as to the different Naga tribes, certain tribes like Mizo speak one common language though each clan has traditionally its own dialect.

<sup>17</sup> Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> Some tribes like Boro-Bodo speak Sino-Tibetan whereas some peoples like Mizo-Kuki-Chin and many other tribes speak Tibeto-Burman. Some tribes could also be identified as Siamese and Thai groups of Mongoloid race.

those indigenous tribal groups known as Tipras, Cachari, Bodos, and other small groups who have been living in the plain area of Tripura, the Brahmaputra valley, and the Barak valley from time immemorial. Some North Indian tribes like the Gond, Oraons, Santalis, Hos, Mundaris and others may also be included in the plain tribes though they are racially different from the indigenous plain tribes. This latter group of peoples from mainland India were the peoples who had been brought to Assam by the British tea planters as labourers in the tea estates, and those who migrated into Assam between 1840 and 1961 from Orissa, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh.<sup>19</sup> The tribes in the plain areas had been largely assimilated by Aryan-Hindu culture, unlike the tribes living in the hilly areas. Many of them are now living as bonded labourers and are becoming voiceless minority communities in the midst of the dominant Hindu and Muslim populations. Because of this, many of them can no longer maintain their cultural heritage and unique tribal identity, and they can no longer be considered distinct tribal communities. The present miserable condition of these assimilated tribes is a clear indication of the danger of assimilation even for the tribes who live in the hilly areas.

### **2.3. The Traditional Values and Ethos of the People**

The tribes in Northeast India are peoples segmented by languages and practices. Each tribe has its own unique traditions and distinctive characteristics that deserve to be recognised. However, emphasising the distinctiveness of each tribe can be undesirable, since this only tends to enhance the exclusive elements in tribalism. Moreover, emphasising their differences rather than their commonalities may obscure the common distinctive feature of the people that will be a key to understanding the unique tribal perspective. It is argued that there are features in tribalism which distinguish these groups from other forms of human society and which are common, in principle at least, to all the different tribal groups. The cultural values and ethos of the people may well be the most important common aspect of the different tribes and may constitute the core ingredient in their shared identity in the midst of their diversity.

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<sup>19</sup> Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, p. 13.



### 2.3.1. *The Community-Oriented Value-System*

It can be argued that the community orientation of the people is the most fundamental basis of the common tribal values and ethos in Northeast India. There is no doubt that social background greatly determines the value-system of any group of people in human society. Anthropological research acknowledges that kinship ties in general dominate and characterise the basic social system of many tribal peoples living in different parts of the world.<sup>20</sup> The traditional bonds of family, kinship or community are generally very strong in the tribal social structure. Like many other communities, rural kinship ties or village-based communitarian ways of life largely characterise the traditional social system of the different tribes in Northeast India.

Ferdinand Tonnies distinguished between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* which are sometimes translated as “community” and “society”.<sup>21</sup> This distinction may be helpful in analysing the different social backgrounds of rural tribal people and urban industrialised people who have quite different thought-patterns and value-systems:

In the rural, peasant societies that typify the *Gemeinschaft*, personal relationships are defined and regulated on the basis of traditional social rules. People have simple and direct face-to-face relations with each other that are determined by *Wesenwille* (natural will)--i.e., natural and spontaneously arising emotions and expressions of sentiment. They work with people they know well and are accustomed to relationships of great intimacy and small scale. The *Gesellschaft*, in contrast, is the creation of *Kürwille* (rational will) and is typified by modern, cosmopolitan societies with their government bureaucracies and large industrial organisations. In the *Gesellschaft* rational self-interest and calculating conduct act to weaken the traditional bonds of family, kinship, and religion that permeate the *Gemeinschaft's* structure. In the *Gesellschaft* human relations are more impersonal and indirect, being rationally constructed to serve efficiency or other economic and political considerations. *Gesellschaft* is typically associated with modern industry, where people are employees who perform specific, goal-oriented functions in a rational and efficient, as opposed to a traditional and organic, manner.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Social groupings based on blood relationship or kinship, real or fictive, are perhaps the most important social units in the tribal social organisation. Such groups are family, lineage, clan, tribe, etc. See R. K. Kar, “Tribal Social Organisation” in *The Anthropology of North-east India* (eds. T. B. Subba and G. C. Ghosh; New Delhi: Orient Longman Private Limited, 2003) p. 221.

<sup>21</sup> Ferdinand Tonnies, *Community and Society (Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft)*, (trans. and ed. Charles P. Loomis; East Lansing: Michigan University Press (1887) 1963).

<sup>22</sup> Tonnies, *Community and Society*, p. 231. See also “Rural Society” and “Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2001 Deluxe Edition CD-ROM.

Generally, the tribal communities in Northeast India conform to Tonnies' *Gemeinschaft* model. They are similar to many other tribal peoples living in other parts of the world in terms of their group-oriented lifestyle. However, they differ in still holding a communitarian way of life. They are predominantly community-oriented peoples, and this is the fundamental common feature of the different tribes. For them, 'community' is the first group beyond the family to which personal loyalty is attached,<sup>23</sup> and in the value-system of which 'honour' and its antonym 'shame' play significant roles. 'Honour' is the core value commonly shared by most of the tribal groups in Northeast India; it is the end-goal and the centre of all of their other values.<sup>24</sup> While honour is regarded as the highest value in the tribal society, public humiliation or shame is a fate that can be worse than death. Thanzauva comments that "the tribals in their judgment would say 'it is shameful' rather than saying, 'it is wrong'. Doing anything that the society does not accept, whether wrong or right, is shameful."<sup>25</sup> Unlike the legally bound mindset of the urban civilized peoples who judge everything in terms of right or wrong, the tribal mindset is largely dominated by what is honourable or shameful.

Lyn M. Bechtel brings out the difference between the forces that influence the mentality and attitudes of peoples - group-orientation and grid- or individual-orientation - in a very interesting way:

In group-orientation, people's main source of identity comes from belonging to the strongly bonded group; consequently, the group is capable of exerting great pressure on people, in order to control their behaviour. In grid-orientation (I call it 'individual-orientation) people's main source of identity comes from within the self. There is great value in individuality, and in order to control behaviour the internalised grid of society (in the form of the conscience) is capable of exerting great pressure on people.... Since shame relies heavily on external pressure from the group, it works most efficiently on a predominantly group-oriented society.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Laltluangliana Kiangte, "Mizo Thil Ngaihhlut" in *Zo Kalsiam* (eds. Lalhangfala Sailo et.al.; Aizawl: Mizo Academy of Letters, 1997) p. 250.

<sup>24</sup> Laltluangliana Kiangte contends that 'honour' is the highest value for the Mizo people, and he mentions that they considered honour much higher than wealth and any other valuable things. See his "Mizo Thil Ngaihhlut", p. 258.

<sup>25</sup> Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, p. 122.

<sup>26</sup> Lyn M. Bechtel, "Shame as a sanction of Social control in Biblical Israel: Judicial, Political and Social Shaming" in *Social-Scientific Old Testament Criticism: A Sheffield Reader* (ed. David J. Chalcraft; Sheffield: Academic Press, 1997) pp. 232-258.

The group-oriented value-system is the main impetus of morality for the tribal peoples in Northeast India. Every member of the tribal community is committed to following socially accepted, honourable ways of life, and everybody is supposed to avoid socially considered shameful ways and practices. In a tribal community, a person is not necessarily honoured or respected because of his/her wealth, efficiency, or power, but because of his or her service for the welfare of the community. The social standing of a person is mainly based on his/her contribution to the welfare of the community. The more energy, time and service a person renders for the well-being of the community, without expecting any material benefit, the higher he or she will be placed in the community.

The common interest of the community is given priority over individual interests in the tribal community, as individuals have no existence apart from the community. However, this does not mean that individual freedom is not safeguarded in the tribal society; rather it means that everyone participates as part of the whole. The well-being of the community is the primary goal of tribal social values, because human dignity lies primarily not in the individual, but in the community. If the community is shattered or humiliated, every individual member automatically loses his or her dignity and identity. There is a strong sense of oneness and solidarity among the members of the tribal community. The traditional tribal religion could also be regarded as a community religion. Longchar observes, “To be truly human for the tribal is to belong to the whole community or to be part of the community and to do so involves the active participation in the beliefs, practices, rituals and festivals of the community.”<sup>27</sup>

### ***2.3.2. Tlawmngaihna as the Basis of Tribal Communitarian way of life***

The traditional tribal communitarian way of life was sustained and perpetuated by the socio-ethical principle known as *tlawmngaihna*. This Mizo term refers to the basic philosophy of tribal social life. The same kind of principle is called *Sobaliba* in Ao Naga terms. Bits of this ideal are to be found in every tribe of Northeast India

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Longchar, *The Traditional Tribal Worldview*, p. 6.

to varying degrees.<sup>28</sup> Thanzauva observes, “*tlawmngaihna* is a message of Jesus Christ hidden in the tribal culture.”<sup>29</sup> Vanlallawma maintains that the literal meaning of this term is “an unwillingness to be defeated by anything or be surrendered to any circumstances including enemies, animals, hardships, difficulties, sorrow.”<sup>30</sup> Some English writers have made efforts to get to the core of the concept, suggesting translations such as “altruism” or “chivalry”.<sup>31</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma contends that the terms “altruism” and “chivalry” taken together may convey almost all the inert and dynamic aspects of *tlawmngaihna*.<sup>32</sup> In fact, *tlawmngaihna* is not an abstract concept or philosophy though there is a passive dimension in it. Its practical or operative dimension is more emphasized in the traditional understanding. It can refer to selfless service to others, courage, daring, obedience, determination, toughness, perseverance, kindness, humility, honesty, fairness, generosity, helpfulness, hospitality, etc. The adjectival noun form of *tlawmngaihna* or the one who practises this principle is called *tlawmngai*.<sup>33</sup> M. Kipgen describes the *tlawmngai* person as:

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<sup>28</sup> *Tlawmngaihna* is often claimed as the exclusive socio-cultural value of the Mizo tribe. However, bits of its ideals can be attributed to different tribes. For example, while the Mizo people are known for their sacrificial life in the service of others in times of death and other calamities, most of the Naga tribes are known for their generosity and courage and the Khasis are known for their hospitality. This principle is variously called by different writers- for example, it is called “code of morals” by N. E. Parry, *A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies* (Shillong: Government Press, 1928) p. 19; “wonderful philosophy of life” by N. Chatterji, *Zawlbuk as a Social Institution in the Mizo Society* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1975) p. 15; “highly prized virtue” by J. Meirion Lloyd, *History of the Church in Mizoram* (Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, Gospel Centenary Series No. 1, 1991) p. 4; “Socio-ethical principle” by Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, p. 121.

<sup>29</sup> Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, p. 128.

<sup>30</sup> C. Vanlallawma, “Mizo *Tlawmngaihna*” in *Hringlang Tlang* (ed. C. Vanlallawma; Aizawl: MCL Publication, 1998) pp. 1-2. For him, the Mizo term *tlawm* means being defeated, cowardly, humiliated, despised, and *ngai* means unwillingness. Therefore, *tlawmngaihna* means unwillingness to be defeated, humiliated, despised, etc.

<sup>31</sup> Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1997) p. 64.

<sup>32</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity and Subaltern Culture: Revival Movement as a Cultural Response to Westernisation in Mizoram* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2006) p. 57.

<sup>33</sup> J. H. Lorrain tried to give the meanings of *tlawmngai* as : “(1) to be self-sacrificing, unselfish, self-denying, persevering, stoical, stouthearted, plucky, brave, firm, independent (refusing help); to be loth to lose one’s good reputation, prestige, etc; to be too proud or self-respecting to give in etc. (2) to persevere, to endure patiently, to make light of personal injuries, to dislike making a fuss about anything. (3) to put one’s own inclination on one side and do a thing which one would rather not do, with the object either of keeping one’s prestige, etc, or of helping or pleasing another, or of not disappointing another etc. (4) to do whatever the occasion demands no matter how distasteful or inconvenient it may be to oneself or to one’s own inclinations. (5) to refuse to give in, give way, or be conquered. (6) to not like to refuse a request; to do a thing because one does not like to refuse, or because one wishes to please others. (7) to act pluckily or show a brave front.” See James Herbert Lorrain, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language* (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1940; reprinted by Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, Mizoram, 1988) p. 513.

the one who must be obedient and respectful to the elders; courteous in dealing with the weak and the lowly; generous and hospitable to the poor, the needy and the strangers; self-denying and self-sacrificing at the opportune moments in favour of others; ready to help those in distress; compassionate to a companion who falls sick while on their journey or becomes victim of a wild beast in the hunt by never abandoning him to his fate; heroic and resolute at war and in hunting; stoical in suffering and in facing hardship under trying circumstances; and persevering in any worthwhile undertaking however hard and daunting that might prove to be. A *tlawmngai* person will do whatever the occasion demands no matter how distasteful or inconvenient that might be to oneself or to one's own inclinations; vie with others in excelling in sports or any other corporate labour; and try to surpass others in hospitality and doing his ordinary task independently and efficiently.<sup>34</sup>

A *tlawmngai* person is greatly honoured by the community. Honour is one of the main motivating factors behind the practice of *tlawmngaihna*. Vanlallawma comments, "*Tlawmngaihna* is a competitive life to achieve the highest award of honour from the community by rendering selfless service for the welfare and interests of the community without committing any socially considered shameful acts."<sup>35</sup> However, "no reward for an act of *tlawmngaihna* was ever promised nor was it ever asked for."<sup>36</sup> The code of *tlawmngaihna* dominates the ethical values and interests of every individual in the Mizo tribal community. However, while *tlawmngaihna* could be taken as the moral principle of an individual life, it also has significant social dimensions. The principle of *tlawmngaihna* endorses social equality, harmonious life, charity, love, peace, and well-being, whereas it strongly opposes greed, corruption, unfairness, pride, cruelty, oppression, exploitation, and discrimination. Certain social problems (such as poverty, misfortune, death, and sickness) in the community evoke a collective response based on the principle of *tlawmngaihna*. For example, the villagers will build a widow's house from scratch without expecting any material benefit. All villagers attend the field of a sick person. The whole village goes into mourning, consoling and supporting the bereaved family in times of death.<sup>37</sup> Everyone in the community, whether strong or weak, has been taken care of by the practice of *tlawmngaihna*.<sup>38</sup> Under this socio-

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<sup>34</sup> Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*. p. 65.

<sup>35</sup> Vanlallawma, "Mizo Tlawmngaihna" p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity and Subaltern Culture*, p. 58.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Vumson, *Zo History*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>38</sup> B. Lalthangliana, *India, Burma leh Bangladesh-a Mizo Chanchin* (Aizawl: Remkungi, 2001) pp. 390-391.

ethical principle, every member enjoys equal freedom. Even the poorest or the weakest member has security in the community, as the community is responsible for taking care of those people who are in need of help and special care. The principle of *tlawmngaihna* is a strong social force that protects the weak, helpless and poor, maintaining social harmony and equality in the tribal community. Thus the principle of *tlawmngaihna* is strongly community-oriented and profoundly egalitarian in ethos.

Every social institution of the tribal society has to preserve and promote this basic philosophy of community life. The family is the first institution where children begin to learn how to live in accordance with the principle of *tlawmngaihna*. The main purpose of education in a tribal family is to guide children to become good members of their community, and there is no way to do so without following the principle of *tlawmngaihna*. It is the obligation of parents to teach their children what to do and what not to do, based on this principle. For example, Mizo parents will teach their children to say “Sorry, I don’t like it” or “I don’t feel like eating” when someone offers them something to eat, or “I am alright” even when they are seriously sick or injured. This is not to teach them how to pretend to be what they are not, but to inculcate in their minds how to be selfless or self-denying, which is one of the fundamental virtues of *tlawmngaihna*. Children learn certain basic socio-cultural values in their family from the earliest stage of their development.

Children also learn basic technical practices and customs by observing and imitating their role models in the community. An important extra-familial source of learning social values was *Zawlbuk*. *Zawlbuk* is a Mizo term referring to a bachelors’ dormitory.<sup>39</sup> This was a community centre where the people promoted the virtues of *tlawmngaihna*. The primary function of *Zawlbuk* was to ensure village security in the context of inter-tribal feuds, the frequent attacks of wild animals upon their domesticated animals or human beings, and any other catastrophic

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<sup>39</sup> Most of the tribes in Northeast India used to have this type of dormitory though different tribes give it different names: It is called *Kichu* for Angamis, *Ariju* for Aos, *Dikha Chang* for Semas, *Longshim* for Tangkhuls, *Champo* for Lothas, *Smadi* for Lalungs, *Nokpante* for Garos etc. Some tribes had separate dormitories for ladies and bachelors. The Mizo dormitory was exclusively designed for men. Such dormitories can be found even in many other tribal communities in different parts of the world. See Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, p. 134; see also B. Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin*, p. 391.

events. It was also used as a training centre for children and young men to learn the arts of wrestling, techniques of war, singing, dancing, manners and all other tribal social values and traditions. Young boys were responsible for supplying the firewood for the *Zawlbuk* every day, and no one between nine years of age and puberty was exempted from this duty if they were physically and mentally sound. Certain young men were appointed by the community to supervise children in their responsibilities, and to teach the tribal values and ways of life in accordance with the principle of *tlawmngaihna*. Anti-social young people were rigidly disciplined and guided to follow the socially acceptable ways of life. At the same time, the *Zawlbuk* was a place where the community awarded a *tlawmngai* person with *No pui*<sup>40</sup> in honour of his contribution to and sacrifice for the community.

In the *Zawlbuk*, village elders used to narrate stories and legends to the children and young men about tribal heroes and heroines who had set significant examples for the community. Children heard stories of those who bravely sacrificed their lives to defend their community and protect the poor, widowed and other weaker sections in society. Tribal values were profoundly inculcated and developed in the minds of the younger generation through these means. Most of the tribal myths, legends and stories contained certain values and ideals of the people, and oral traditions of this sort were an important means of communicating the traditional tribal social ethos and cultural values to the younger generation.

### 2.3.3. *Tribal Values Concerning the Poor and Weak*

Tribal peoples in Northeast India have a common experience of struggling to survive in various difficult situations of scarcity of food and lack of necessities. They have learnt many lessons from their historical experiences to ensure their survival, and they have developed certain traditions and practices to deal with poverty and other social crises collectively in order to survive as a group. Their values and ethos concerning the poor and weak are also strongly connected with their socio-economic realities and historical experiences. Since poverty and suffering are part of their history, they never despise those who are weak and poor;

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<sup>40</sup> “*No pui*” literally means “a big cup.” It refers to a big cup of rice beer that was instituted to be presented to the *tlawmngai* persons on an occasion of community gathering. A person who received *No pui* was highly admired by the members of the community.

rather, they take this kind of problem as a social concern and fight together as a community in order to overcome it. Co-operation is a very fundamental tactic of the tribal people in dealing with poverty and other social problems, and it is one of the basic elements of their social organisation.<sup>41</sup>

A tribal community is like a big family where all members, rich or poor, are interdependent and interlinked. Every member is regarded as a valuable part of the community and no one is discriminated against because of his or her socio-economic position. Members of the community uphold each other in times of difficulty and suffering.<sup>42</sup> They never let down their unfortunate brothers and sisters who are weak and troubled by poverty and other problems. Rather, they are the focus of attention of the members of the community, and especially those who have a personal surplus will normally feel shame or be considered greedy if that surplus is not shared with less fortunate members of the community. The most admirable people in the tribal community are those who share their possessions with the poor and risk their lives for the helpless and vulnerable in the society. Members of the community have a spirit of competition in upholding the vulnerable people like orphans, widows, poor, and victims of diseases and calamities in the community. At the same time, even the poorest family in the tribal community would not try to exploit the good will of the members of the community, as such a dependency mentality is socially considered to be “shameful.”<sup>43</sup> Every family makes its best effort to manage by itself without depending on others as long as it can. The motive is not only an effort to be independent but also to be self-denying, which is one of the highest virtues in the tribal value-system.

In the tribal communitarian ethos, everybody wants to be helpful towards others; at the same time everybody intends not to need help from others. People have very close relationships as they share their food, energy, wealth, and any other resources they have. While sharing is part of the tribal communitarian way of life, begging is

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<sup>41</sup> Catherine A. Key and Leslie C. Aiello explore the evolution of co-operation in humans starting from its primate roots. They demonstrate that co-operation is a fundamental characteristic of human social life. See their “The Evolution of Social Organization” in *The Evolution of Culture* (eds. Robin Dunbar et al.; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) pp. 15-33.

<sup>42</sup> Darchhawna, “Mizo Culture awmzia leh a lo danglam zel dan” in *Zo Kalsiam*, p. 184.

<sup>43</sup> Even today, beggars are hardly to be found among the members of the tribal community in Northeast India.



regarded as a shameful act. They are willing to share their resources with others, but they find it difficult to beg resources of others for their own benefit.<sup>44</sup> Since they have this kind of attitude, no one, rich or poor, weak or strong, would easily approach his/her neighbour to beg financial or any other kind of help unless and until there was no other resort. If a person requests help from his or her neighbour, that means he or she is genuinely in a desperate condition and may not have any other alternative. It could be a matter of life and death.<sup>45</sup> Each neighbour is supposed to be vigilant to know the needs of families who are in desperate situations and to help without being asked. Taking advantage of the miserable condition of a fellow community member is something directly contrary to the tribal social values and ethos. Instead, tribal socio-cultural values demand that every member of the community should be a source of help for the helpless poor. In a close-knit tribal society, the weakness and poverty of fellow members of the community are considered matters of serious social concern and the community takes collective responsibility to help liberate people in need.

#### 2.3.4. *Values and Ethos Concerning Wealth*

The traditional economic system of the tribes in Northeast India was, and still is, predominantly based on agriculture. Shifting cultivation known locally as *jhuming*<sup>46</sup> is the predominant form of agriculture in the hill areas of Northeast India. This traditional “shifting” or “slash-and-burn” cultivation may be more appropriately called horticulture in a strict sense rather than agriculture.<sup>47</sup> Shifting cultivation is

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<sup>44</sup> K. C. Lalvunga, “Tunlai Zonun Siamtu” in *Zo Kalsiam*, p. 217.

<sup>45</sup> The typical tribal man would prefer starving than begging. However, one important Mizo practice that seems to be contrasted with the other aspects of tribal values is that in a situation when a wife and children are starving to the point of death without any resort, a father who does not have the courage to steal grain or any foodstuffs from his neighbour is regarded as an irresponsible father. This kind of stealing is not considered theft, but it is taken as an act of humanitarian concern, which is acceptable to the society. See Dengchhuana, “Mizote leh Rinawmna” in *Zo Kalsiam*, p. 232.

<sup>46</sup> In Northeast India it is known as *Jhum* or *Jum*; in Orissa as *Poddu*, *Dabi*, *Koman*, or *Bringa*; in Bastar as *Deppa*, *Kumari* in Western Ghats, *Watra* in S. E. Rajasthan; the Maria call it *Penda*; *Bewar* or *Dahia* in Madhya Pradesh. See P. K. Bhowmik, “Shifting Cultivation: A Plea for New Strategies” in *Shifting Cultivation in North East India*. (ed. B. Datta Ray; Shillong: North East India Council for Social Science Research, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1980) p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Primitive agriculture is called horticulture by anthropologists rather than agriculture because it is carried out like simple gardening, supplementary to hunting and gathering. It differs from farming also in its relatively primitive technology. It is typically practiced in forests, where the loose soil is easily broken up with a simple stick, rather than on grassy plains with heavy sod. Nor do horticulturalists use fertilizer intensively or crop rotation, terracing, or irrigation. Horticulture is therefore much less productive than agriculture. Forest horticulturalists use fallowing techniques

undertaken in the hilly and undulating land that is mostly covered with bamboos and other secondary growth. This form of cultivation was once a complete economic system with several subsidiary occupations as its adjuncts. They had subsidiary sources of food from hunting, fishing and gathering from nature's stock.<sup>48</sup> Each village was, more or less, self-sufficient in respect of food, clothes and shelter. However, their traditional form of cultivation and other subsidiary sources provided them with nothing more than the basic needs of bare subsistence. The traditional economies of different tribes in Northeast India were "subsistence" or "need-based" economy rather than "profit-oriented" economies. Most of them would have been below the poverty line according to modern standards of living.

The traditional household property of the tribals was also very limited as it was impossible to amass immovable possessions as they were constantly shifting their villages. Each household possessed a few domesticated animals like pigs, gayals (mithuns), cows, goats, dogs, and poultry birds. Besides these, one or two gongs and a few necklaces, a few heirlooms, cooking pots; a few agricultural implements like hoes, axes, daos; and hunting weapons such as knives, spears and guns would have been some of the permanent household properties.<sup>49</sup> The rich were those who had a huge surplus of agricultural products and certain domesticated animals like gayals/mithuns. They were highly admired by society, as their riches were purely the fruits of their hard work and determination.<sup>50</sup> They also gave security and comfort to the community as they shared their possessions with the needy in times of famine and difficulty. Moreover, they brought joy and happiness to the community as they threw public feasts that were vital for strengthening social solidarity and community cohesion.

The tribal value-system and social ethos concerning wealth seem to have been strongly connected with the simple lifestyle adopted in their subsistence economies in which people shared their possessions and agricultural products with each other

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variously called "slash-and-burn," "shifting cultivation," and "swidden cultivation" (a northern English term now widely used by anthropologists).

<sup>48</sup> Niranjan Saha, "Levels of Production and Income under Shifting Cultivation in North-East India" in *Shifting Cultivation In North East India*, p. 20.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, p. 76.

<sup>50</sup> Khiangte, "Mizo Thil Ngaihhlut" pp. 257ff.

for common survival. The simple foundation of their economics is based on the tribal philosophy of “*Sem sem dam dam, ei bil thi thi*,”<sup>51</sup> i.e. a philosophy that encourages sharing their wealth with other members of the community, and discourages greed and selfishness. Literally, this Mizo saying could be taken to wish ‘long life’ to those who share their food and possessions with others, and as a death curse upon selfish people who used their wealth exclusively for themselves. In other words, there is no room for selfish and greedy people in the tribal community - they wish them death while they reserve the highest honour and wishes of long life for those who generously and kindly sacrifice their wealth for the well-being of the community. They never practised selling and buying in the traditional community; rather every household was maintained simply and by sharing whatever they obtained.<sup>52</sup> Their simple lifestyle totally rejected greed, selfishness and unfairness.

In their traditional society, the tribal people did not measure the wealth of a person in terms of the amount of accumulated surplus or material savings one acquired, but in terms of the amount of his or her contribution to the welfare of the other members of the community.<sup>53</sup> However, the rich did not extravagantly waste their wealth to satisfy their own selfish desires, but generously and wisely utilised their resources and possessions for the well-being of the whole community, for there was no greater virtue than so doing, even at great cost.<sup>54</sup> For example, the traditional Mizo community accorded *thangchhuah*<sup>55</sup> as the highest honour and respect among the community members. There are two ways to become *thangchhuah*. Firstly, one could become *thangchhuah* by giving a series of public feasts in a prescribed order

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<sup>51</sup> J. H. Lorrain translates this saying as “Sharing you live, greedily eating you die” see his *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, p.413. It could also be translated as “Let the one who shares live, and the one who selfishly eats die.” This is the traditional Mizo philosophy of life commonly shared by most of the tribes in Northeast India.

<sup>52</sup> J. V. Hluna, “Mizo Culture leh Khawpui Nun” in *Zo Kalsiam*, p. 202

<sup>53</sup> Thangchungnunga, “Mizoram Sumdawna – tun hma leh tunlai” in *Kristiante Rahbi Thar* (ed. Lalchhuanliana; Aizawl: Synod Social Front Committee, 1991) p. 41.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, p. 124.

<sup>55</sup> *Thangchhuah* is a title of honour given to those people who spend their wealth and energy at the maximum level, according to the expectation of the tribal people, for the benefit of the community. This is a Mizo term meaning “the one who fulfils the honourable way.” It could be used both as a title (noun) and as an adjectival noun.

for the whole community.<sup>56</sup> This type of *thangchhuah* is known as “*In lama thangchhuah*.”<sup>57</sup> Zairema describes it thus:

The whole village would spend three or four days in drinking and feasting at his expense in every ceremony. In one of such ceremonies, the man and his wife who performed the feast would be carried on a platform along the streets with their valuable possessions. They would throw out these valuable things to the crowd to scramble for them. One of the most valuable possessions was the gun; even this would be given away. When the ceremony was over, a fairly large portion of his wealth would be gone.<sup>58</sup>

Another way to achieve *thangchhuah* was to kill eight or nine specific wild animals. This kind of *thangchhuah* is called “*Ram lama thangchhuah*.”<sup>59</sup> The people honour these two types of *thangchhuah* equally.

At face value, the qualifications for *in lama thangchhuah* appear to have been designed as a means of disposing of agricultural surplus, as there was no other alternative where there were no storage facilities for its preservation. However, a closer look at the whole values and ethos of the tribal community may not support this view. Darchhawna mentions that the practice of *thangchhuah* was connected with the traditional tribal religious values and beliefs.<sup>60</sup> Kipgen also argues that the act of sharing carried out by means of *thangchhuah* feasts was the core value of

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<sup>56</sup> Each feast was given a different name and they were in a prescribed order as follows – *Chawng, Sechhun (or Sedawi), Mitthirawplam*, again *Sechhun (or Sedawi), Khuangchawi*. See Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, p. 121, also Khiangte, “Mizo Thil Ngaihhlut” p. 252. For a detailed discussion on how they were performed see Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin*, pp. 333-349. Various clans had their own ways of practice, see K. Zawla, *Mizo Pi Pute leh an Thlahte Chanchin* (Aizawl: Author, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1976) pp. 22ff.

<sup>57</sup> This phrase means “*thangchhuah* in the domestic affairs.” This type of *thangchhuah* could be achieved by sharing the agricultural products and the meat of domesticated animals with the community by means of public feasts. It would have originated after the tribal people started practising some forms of agriculture and domestication of animals. For details, see, K. Zawla, *Mizo Pi Pute*, pp. 26-36.

<sup>58</sup> Zairema, “The Mizos and Their Religion” in *Towards a Tribal Theology: The Mizo Perspective*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>59</sup> This phrase means “*thangchhuah* in the jungle affairs.” Unlike “*in lama thangchhuah*” the requirement to achieve this type of *thangchhuah* was to kill one each of the following species of animal – barking deer, sambhur, bear, wild boar, wild mithun, and elephant. Though these were considered sufficient, one would gain greater honour if one also killed a large poisonous snake called *Rulngan*, a flying lemur (*Vahluk*), and a species of eagle (*Muvanlai*). See Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, pp. 120-121. See also, Zawla, *Mizo Pi Pute*, pp. 36-42.

<sup>60</sup> Darchhawna, “Mizo Culture Awmzia leh A lo danglam zel dan” in *Zo Kalsiam*, p. 183. See also, Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin*, pp. 332ff. Those who could achieve *thangchhuah* were believed to have a special place called *Pialral* even in life after death. *Pialral* is believed to be a place where the *thangchhuah* people will perpetually enjoy ready meals of rice and meat. For detailed discussion of the tribal concept of life after death, see, Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, pp. 118-120.

tribal religion.<sup>61</sup> In a society where sharing is regarded as one of the most honourable practices, providing community feasts to become *thangchhuah* was an important means to distribute and share their possessions with the poor. It was not only the surplus possession that was shared; the precious goods that were highly valued would also be given away to the poor people. Moreover, it was not only the rich people who shared their wealth with others, but even the poor people, who could not afford to give a public feast for the whole community, at least tried to do their best by sharing their food with neighbours or strangers to prove their generosity and hospitality. For them, food sharing was an act of offering peace, trust, brotherhood, and forgiveness.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, sharing was carried out not only in terms of providing food or in terms of distributing material goods to others, but also in terms of sacrificing their physical strength and valuable time for the benefit of those in need without expecting any material benefit. Even an economically poor person who does not have any surplus of material goods can do great things even for the well-to-do family in times of need.

The elevation of another type of *thangchhuah* who kills different specific wild animals may also appear to be exclusively an act of hero worship for those who are not familiar with the tribal value-system. But the person elevated is to be understood as the one who receives his reward for his great service to the community. In the tribal community, a person who kills a wild animal has to share at least a small piece of meat with his neighbours.<sup>63</sup> In order to kill different specific animals, a person has to spend a large amount of time and energy hunting, and he may have killed many other animals in the course of his attempts to kill the specific ones. Such a person was the one who shared a large amount of meat with his neighbours and who made a great contribution to the community. It was not merely his bravery or his hunting skill that was recognised by the community, but also his service and contribution to the welfare of the community that reached every household in the village. The value of his service may be clearer if we see his contribution against the background of the peoples who rarely had a chance to eat meat throughout the year.

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<sup>61</sup>Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, pp. 123-124.

<sup>62</sup> Takatemjen, "Theology of Reconciliation : A Naga Perspective" in *Doing Theology with Tribal Resources*, pp. 106-111.

<sup>63</sup> Hluna, "Mizo Culture leh Khawpui nun" p. 202.

### 2.3.5. *Values and Ethos Concerning Power*

The traditional tribal society in Northeast India may not be an egalitarian society in a strict sense, but most of the communities are without sharp class distinctions, and they are free from the hierarchical caste system that is very much prevalent in their neighbouring Hindu society. We can say that most of them have a relatively egalitarian social system, that is to say that they are less hierarchical in character. The majority of them in their traditional society followed a gerontocratic form of government in which each clan elected its representative to be the member of the council of their village.<sup>64</sup> The pattern of administration was very democratic under this system. However, insofar as traditional authority was based on a system of hereditary chieftainship in the political system of some of the tribes, it is possible to speak of higher and lower classes within certain tribal groups. Nevertheless, the institution of tribal chieftaincy was essentially democratic in operation.<sup>65</sup> In fact, the institution of chieftaincy grew out of the collective needs of group life which basically characterized tribal living.<sup>66</sup> The main function of the chief was to promote and safeguard the interests and values of the community, as he exercised his power within the framework of the tribal communitarian social system. The tribal worldview, preoccupied by communitarian values largely controlled and directed the function and role of the chief. The chief's position in the village was like that of a benevolent father in a big family who looked after all those who lived in the village as his own children. However, some chiefs abused their power. Kipgen mentions, "The cruelty of the infamous chief Sibuta, whose memorial stone, known as *Sibuta lung*, still stands, is well known to all Mizos. But such cruel chiefs

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<sup>64</sup> Certain tribes in Northeast India like the Mizo, Khasi, Konyak, Semas, etc., had a system of hereditary chieftainship whereas the majority of them were segmentary tribal communities which followed a gerontocratic form of government. See A. Wati Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions in North East India: An Introduction* (Jorhat: Eastern Theological College, 2000) pp. 104-105

<sup>65</sup> Tribal chiefs in most of the communities had a council of elders who were called *Khawnbawl Upa*. Though the *Khawnbawl Upa* were not the elected representatives of the people unlike the system of democracy, yet they were, in many cases, the ones who represented ordinary people as they helped the chief in the decision-making. See Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>66</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin* (Aizawl: L.T.L. Publications, 1938 reprinted 2002) pp. 64-65. He mentions that the earliest tribal chiefs were those who had physical strength and charismatic leadership invited to be the leaders of the villages by the community in the context of inter-tribal war. See also N. Chatterji, *The Mizo Chief and His Administration* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1975) p.1, also Darchhawna, "Mizo Culture Awmzia" p. 186.

were the exception rather than rule.”<sup>67</sup> Chatterji notes that “the Chief was not an autocrat, and in fact, could not afford to be so if he desired to retain his chiefship as they would leave him and take shelter in another village if they found him tyrannical or indifferent to their needs and conveniences.”<sup>68</sup>

As noted above, the position of *thangchhuah* was regarded as the highest status and the most admirable lifetime achievement to which one could aspire in the tribal society; the chiefs and the rich also strove to achieve this glorious goal,<sup>69</sup> which meant that the most powerful people in the tribal communities, politically and economically, were strongly determined to use their possessions and power for the maximal well-being of the community. This clearly suggests that public interest and communitarian values largely controlled the power of the rich and powerful in the tribal community, so much so that, to some extent, power was actually in the hands of the people. In fact, the chief would lose his influence if he constantly moved against the values and interests of the community. For the tribals, socio-economic and political powers were meant for the common good of the community.

Another important and influential social figure was the *pasaltha*.<sup>70</sup> Lorrain defines *pasaltha* as “a person who is brave and manly; a hero; a famous or notable warrior or hunter.”<sup>71</sup> In the context of inter-tribal war, the *pasaltha* was a head hunter or a great warrior who sacrificed his strength, skill, and even his life in defending his community and village land.<sup>72</sup> In the situation of hunting wild animals, the *pasaltha*

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<sup>67</sup> Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, p. 59. For detailed discussion on Sibuta’s story, see Z. T. Sangkhuma, “Sibuta” in *Mizo Lal Ropuite* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1996) pp. 37-61. See also Zawla, *Mizo Pi Pute leh an Thlahte Chanchin*, pp. 169-178.

<sup>68</sup> Chatterji, *The Mizo Chief and His Administration*, p. 3. People had the right to leave their village if they were discontented with the system of the village.

<sup>69</sup> Khiangte, “Mizote Thil Ngaihhlut,” p. 252.

<sup>70</sup> *Pasaltha* literally means “the one who is good for husband.” This indicates that he is the star of the community who is reliable and competent enough to protect his family and community. *Pasaltha* is another title of honour given to a person by the community who has an outstanding record in bravery in times of inter-tribal war and hunting wild animals. He is the one who surpasses others by sacrificing his physical strength, skills and even his life for the benefit of his community. This term is used as a noun (as a title) as well as an adjectival noun.

<sup>71</sup> Lorrain, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, p. 352.

<sup>72</sup> Certain tribes in Northeast India were previously known as head hunters as they used to cut the heads of their enemies. However, head hunting was not the primary motive behind inter-tribal war or inter-village raids; rather it was practised as evidence to show the number of enemies they killed in the war. Many times, tribal feuds were triggered by conflicts over land issues. They used to sacrifice their lives defending their land from the people who encroached on their village. See Dengchhuana,

was a brave hunter who had an outstanding performance in killing animals and showing courage and manly character before ferocious animals; he never retreated from ferocious animals or enemies due to fear. The first two important qualifications of a *pasaltha* are bravery and selflessness. In the domestic affairs of the community, he was the champion of the weaker section of people as he stood for their causes and concerns.<sup>73</sup> He was regarded as the defender of the poor and protector of the vulnerable.<sup>74</sup> He was a kind of charismatic leader who gained leadership among the youth by his charisma and by setting good examples of life in practising *tlawmngaihna*. The people admired and respected him because of his unmatched selfless services for the goodness of the community. When he functioned as the leader of the youth, he was called *Val upa*.<sup>75</sup> Nobody could claim this title because of his economic or political influence since the community spontaneously awarded it to those who had extraordinary qualities of *pasaltha* and outstanding performances in practising *tlawmngaihna*. Even a person from the poorest family could become *Val upa* if he deserved it. *Val upa* was a charismatic leader whose words and instructions were listened to and obeyed in the contexts of war, hunting and any significant social event. The chief never made important decisions concerning certain social issues that affected the lives of ordinary people without consulting *Val upa*;<sup>76</sup> practically, the chief could not exercise his power without the support of *Val upa* as he was the leader of the youth who were the real strength and power of the community. The power or authority of *Val upa*, however, was not permanent, as it was dependent upon his personal charisma and character, and it was spontaneously bestowed upon him by the community because of his outstanding services for the well-being of the community. If he failed to live up to the expectations of the community or abused his position, he would automatically lose his power and influence.

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“Mizote leh Rinawmna” p. 238. Also, J. Shakespear, *The Lushai Kuki Clans* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988) pp. 59-60; see also Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin*, pp. 387-388.

<sup>73</sup> *Pasaltha* like Vana Pa and Taitesena were known as the defenders of vulnerable people like orphans, widows, children and helpless poor in the community. See V. Lunghnema, *Mizo Chanchin* (Shillong: H.Liandawla, Pee Cee Villa, 1993) pp. 259-269. For the detailed discussion on the various well-known Mizo *Pasaltha*, see Zawla, *Mizo Pi Pute leh an Thlahte Chanchin*, pp. 203-248.

<sup>74</sup> Khiangte, “Mizote thil ngaihhlut” pp. 253-256.

<sup>75</sup> *Val upa* literally means “old bachelor”. But, this title of honour could not be gained simply by becoming old, but by rendering outstanding service to the community. This is an honourable designation for a person who maintains the quality of *pasaltha* and develops leadership quality by setting an example to the youth on the basis of *tlawmngaihna* principle. This term can be used as a noun, as an adjective, and as an adjectival noun.

<sup>76</sup> Khiangte, “Mizo Thil Ngaihhlut” p. 255.



It is obvious that tribal power and authority were strongly communitarian. Power, for them, was ultimately the people's power and it was meant for safeguarding the interests of the community, particularly the powerless and voiceless people in the community. Oppressive power that ignored the well-being of the community and undermined the causes and concerns of the weaker members of the community was directly opposed to the tribal concept of power.

### 2.3.6. *Values and Ethos Concerning Land*

Land occupies a very central place in the tribal mode of thinking and ways of life. Longchar proposes a land-centred perspective as the point of departure of the tribal perspective from the dominant theologies.<sup>77</sup> This proposal is based on the recognition of the centrality of land in the tribal worldview. The peculiarity of the tribal worldview is that culture, religion, spirituality and identity cannot be conceived without land.

For the tribal people, land is a living entity endowed with spirits; outsiders know them as animists. But for them this is the recognition of the value, power and vitality of the land. Land is sacred, a temple in which they worship God, their ancestors and spirits. Their traditional festivals, worship, religious rites, folk songs and dances are very much part of their attachment to the land.<sup>78</sup> They used to perform several ceremonies relating to land, including the purification of the forest at the beginning of jungle clearing for cultivation, the purification of soil after burning of the *jhum*, the dedication of seed just before sowing, the dedication of fields to god after sowing seeds, the rededication of paddy fields, and the thanksgiving or harvest festival.<sup>79</sup> Certain tribes identified the tribal High God as an integral part of the land. Longchar states:

The Aos and Sangtams of Nagaland call their Supreme Being, *Lijaba*. *Li* means 'earth' and *jaba* means 'real'. It means the Supreme Being is 'the real earth.' Sometimes people call him *Lizaba*. *Li* means 'soil' and *zaba* means 'enter,' meaning the one who enters or indwells into the soil. *Lijaba* is

<sup>77</sup> Longchar, *Tribal Theology*, p. 25.

<sup>78</sup> A. Wati Longchar, "Dancing with the Land: Significance of Land for Doing Tribal Theology" in *Doing Theology with Tribal Resources: Context and Perspective*, (eds. A. Wati Longchar and Larry E. Davis; Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre, ETC, 1999) pp. 117-126.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Thanzauva, *Theology of the Community*, p. 177. See also Longchar, *Tribal Theology*, pp. 75-80.

believed to enter the soil just as a vital seed gets buried beneath the soil and germinates as the life of the plant. Therefore, for the tribals, the land and the whole of creation are manifestations of the Supreme Being. In other words, the Supreme Being is an integral part of the land.<sup>80</sup>

Accordingly, land is more than just the source of economic resources and the area of agricultural activities. It is the foundation of their religion, spirituality and ethics. Certain tribes view land as sacred and as a co-creator with God. They used to invoke the land by saying:

O Earth, wherever it may be my people dig, be kind to them. Be fertile when they give the little seeds to your keeping. Let there be rich harvest and until the paddy seeds are reaped, let no epidemics visit the village. Whatever seeds we sow in the field, let the crops be healthy as it could be.<sup>81</sup>

Oh, God, the Creator, you come out from the soil. Oh, God, the owner of all rice fields, give us a bountiful harvest. Oh, God, the giver of all blessing, we bring to you this *zu* (rice beer). You drink first and accept our offerings.<sup>82</sup>

“No one is allowed to spit on or poke the holy ground with a pointed metal or object during certain festivals and religious observances.”<sup>83</sup> Land, for them, is not a lifeless object, but the living ground that nurtures and sustains all living creatures including human beings, a view which many tribes shared. For example, the myths of some Naga tribes, Mizo and Garo claim that their ancestors originally emerged from a big hole in a rock or the earth, or from the bowels of the earth.<sup>84</sup> These myths symbolically express the belief that the earth is the mother of human beings and that it has delivered them and produced life in this world. The tribal people accepted themselves as originating from the earth and they regarded land as part of their lives. They believed that they were profoundly connected with the land and not detachable from it as they considered land to be the source of life. For them, commercialisation of land is an act that disregards its sanctity and sacredness. They strongly discourage treating land as a commodity and selfishly exploiting it. The tribal rhetoric states, “one cannot become rich by selling the land,” “do not be greedy for the land, if you want to live long,” “if anyone should take another’s land by giving false witness that person will die soon,” “the land cries in the hand of

<sup>80</sup> Longchar, “Dancing with the Land”, p. 119.

<sup>81</sup> L. Imti Aier, *Ao Naga and Customary Genealogy* (Mokokchung: Author, 1969) p.26, as cited by Thanzauva, *Theology of the Community*, p. 177.

<sup>82</sup> Longchar, *Tribal Theology*, p. 76.

<sup>83</sup> Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions in Northeast India*, p. 107.

<sup>84</sup> Longchar, “Dancing with the Land”, p. 123.

greedy people,” “the earth is truth, do not lie to the earth,” “the land is like a bird, it will fly away soon in the hands of greedy people.”<sup>85</sup> According to the tribal understanding, a human being is not the owner of land; rather the land owns human beings and all other creatures.

Land also gives identity to the tribal community. A tribal man will introduce himself to a stranger by telling the name of his village instead of his personal name. This clearly indicates that individuals perceive their identity as part of their land and their community. It also suggests that community identity is more important than individual identity in tribal perception. Individuals express their pride, dignity and define who they are in relation to their village land. In traditional societies, people regarded their land as a connection to their ancestors, who gave them roots and dignity. Land was the channel that provided a link to the souls of their ancestors, which connections were to be kept intact since their ancestors were regarded the roots and foundation of their community.<sup>86</sup> To protect their land thus meant to safeguard their roots, identity, dignity, and human rights. Unlike the modern concept of human rights as individual freedoms, human rights are understood in terms of land rights or community rights in the tribal context. Thanzauva states, “Alienation of tribal land means alienation of their culture, personhood and sense of space.”<sup>87</sup> It is the duty of members of the community to take care of, defend, and protect the village land, to preserve their heritage and maintain their distinctive identity and community life. Since land holds family, clan and tribe together, it is the foundation of tribal community. There is no genuine community without land, and without community, there is no identity for an individual. A person finds his/her root in the land. If the land is lost, an individual automatically loses his/her pride, dignity and identity. A tribal proverb runs, “You are a stranger without

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<sup>85</sup> Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions in North East India*, p. 108.

<sup>86</sup> It is common to every tribal community to give respect and honour to their ancestors as they regarded them as the foundation of their community. They never completely isolated themselves from their ancestors. Rather, they strongly believed that it was worthwhile to keep alive and respect the wisdom of their ancestors, as they strictly observed the Dos and Don'ts of their ancestors known as *Upate Thurochhiah*. Their ethical values and perception of right and wrong in their everyday life were also largely dominated by the wisdom and traditions of their ancestors. No one wished to challenge the authority and validity of the wisdom of their ancestors though some of them were incorporated with superstitious beliefs.

<sup>87</sup> Thanzauva, *Theology of the Community*, p. 186.

land:”<sup>88</sup> a rootless person without any identity and dignity. In short, the tribal understanding of identity, human rights and dignity cannot be isolated from their concept of land.

Another important aspect of the tribal concept of land is that it is to be shared. As we have seen, sharing is very central in tribal social life, and this is particularly true with their traditional land system. Though different tribes developed divergent traditions and practices, land usually belonged to the community. After analysing different traditional land systems of various tribes in Northeast India, Thanzauva concludes, “despite the differences in the detailed land system, the fundamental principle is communal ownership.”<sup>89</sup> Even some tribes who were under the system of chieftaincy practically followed community ownership under the stewardship of the chief, as all the members had equal rights to cultivate, hunt, and live in the village land as long as they belonged to the village community. “The chief of the village or the clan might be the theoretical owner of the land. Some plots or fields might be owned individually, but practically and fundamentally the land is owned by the community.”<sup>90</sup> The right of ownership of land was acquired only by becoming a member of the community. However, ownership only granted the privilege of use, and no one could sell land without the consent of the community. Every member of the community had the right to use land in such a way that the fruits of the land would benefit all of them. In the traditional Mizo shifting cultivation, for example, the chief with the help of the *ramhual*<sup>91</sup> and village elders or village council selected a part of the village land for cultivation every year, and a plot of cultivable land was distributed to every household by means of lot.<sup>92</sup> Every household had its own share in the village land, though the shares of different households might vary according to the size of the families. It was the birthright of every member of the community to utilise the village land as the source of food and other basic needs. At the same time, it was the duty and responsibility of every

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<sup>88</sup> Longchar, *Tribal Theology*, p. 76.

<sup>89</sup> Thanzauva, *Theology of the Community*, p. 182. For the detailed land systems of different tribes in Northeast India, see pp. 181-182. See also S. B. Chakrabarti, “Agrarian Relations in the Tribal Milieu” in *The Anthropology of North-East India*, pp. 242-257.

<sup>90</sup> Thanzauva, *Theology of the Community*, p. 182.

<sup>91</sup> *Ramhual* was an expert who knew suitable site of land for successful cultivation.

<sup>92</sup> The chief had the primary right to select the best plot for his own *jhuming*, and after him *ramhuals* were allotted *jhuming* sites and after they had their share other villagers were considered. See Chatterji, *The Mizo Chief and his Administration*, p. 10.

member to respect the sanctity of the land and to protect it from abuse and exploitation. Any claim to the absolute ownership of land motivated by greed would have been a clear negation of the traditional tribal concept of communal land sharing.

#### **2.4. Forces challenging the tribal socio-cultural values and ethnic identity**

Different tribal communities in India have common experiences of struggling to survive in the context of alienation brought about by the movement and activities of the dominant peoples. F. S. Downs observes that “the struggle of tribes in India is mainly for liberation from any form of alienation in order to preserve their unique identity.”<sup>93</sup> Protection and preservation of their identity is an important issue, as various strong forces have always challenged the cultural values and ethnic identity of the tribal people all through their history. Of the various socio-economic, political, cultural and religious forces that continually undermine their values and identity, sanskritisation and modernisation are the two major external forces that really have a significant impact on the lives of the tribal people. Though the impact of these two forces are not always detrimental to the tribal people, it cannot be denied that they have caused confusion, conflict, alienation, and even the extinction of many tribal groups in India.

##### **2.4.1. Sanskritisation and Tribal People**

As noted above, sanskritisation is a term propounded by the Indian sociologist M.N. Srinivas to explain the method and process of Aryan invasion, occupation and domination of India that caused a huge change in the lives of the different indigenous tribal groups in Indian society.<sup>94</sup> This is a process of social, cultural and religious change whereby indigenous and tribal peoples and other non-Hindu ethnic minorities in India have been assimilated by making them adopt the Sanskrit terminology and ritual procedures embodied in Brahmanism. Fictitious myths expressing the relationship between tribal groups and the mythical heroes of

<sup>93</sup> As quoted by Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*. pp. 95-96.

<sup>94</sup> Anthropologist N. K. Bose calls this process, “*Hindu mode of absorption*”, while the historian D. D. Kosambi describes it as “*the Brahminical model*.” See R. K. Nayak, “Identity, Development and Politics of Tribal and Indigenous Peoples of Eastern India: Some Reflections” (Paper submitted at Indigenous Rights in the Commonwealth Project South and South East Asia Regional Expert Meeting, New Delhi: 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> March 2002) p. 1.

Hinduism are the effective means of communication that brings tribal peoples into mainstream Hinduism.<sup>95</sup> This process tends to weaken the culture and religion of ethnic minorities in Indian society until they are finally absorbed into Hinduism. This is an age-old socio-cultural and religious force encountered by most of the tribal communities in India even today. The assimilation through this process is mainly religious, cultural and physical. Many tribal and indigenous groups of people in India have been assimilated to the Hindu low caste by means of this process.<sup>96</sup>

Even for the tribes in Northeast India, sanskritisation is one of the strongest forces that has ever threatened their socio-cultural and religious lives. For example, the various tribes of the Bodo group of Tibeto Burman family - namely, the Boro, Kachari, Chutiyas, Dimasas, Karbi, Lalungs, Mechs, Mishings, Tipperas (Tripuris), Garo, Kochs, Hajongs, Dalus, etc. - who once spoke their own dialects and maintained their distinct socio-cultural and territorial identity, have now been uprooted from their original cultural heritages by this process.<sup>97</sup> Most of them have lost their languages and tribal identities and forgotten their own cultural values and religious beliefs and practices and are now identified as low caste Hindus. The same kind of assimilation process can be seen among the different tribal groups in the plain areas of Assam, Manipur and Tripura. This process is less effective among the hill tribes in Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh, as they are geographically isolated from the larger Hindu population. The conversion of Meiteis in Manipur and Tripuris in Tripura to Hinduism was *en masse*, and it introduced a certain form of caste system, though all of them were not reduced to the status of low caste.<sup>98</sup> In some cases, the force of sanskritisation was accompanied by population pressure in assimilating tribal people. For instance, a constant influx of Hindus emigrating from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) and other parts of India into Tripura and Assam by the beginning of the twentieth century had greatly accelerated the assimilation process of the tribal people in Northeast India.

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<sup>95</sup> S. T. Das, *Tribal Life of North Eastern India* (New Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1986) p. 3.

<sup>96</sup> See H. K. Bhat, "Hinduization of Tribes: Critique and Perspective" pp. 223ff. Also Bangovinda Parampanthi, "Aryanisation and Assimilation of Assam" pp. 106ff.

<sup>97</sup> D. N. Majumdar, "A Study of Tribe-Caste Continuum and the Process of Sanskritisation among the Bodo speaking tribes of the Garo hills," in *The Tribal Situation in India* (ed. K. Suresh Singh; Delhi: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1972) p. 267.

<sup>98</sup> Thanzauva, *Theology of the Community*, p. 16.

The tribal people, who formed the majority population and ruled Tripura with their own *Rajas* before Indian independence in 1947, are today reduced to a small minority. The population increase in Tripura between 1901 and 1951 was 137.80%, and in Assam 273.41% against the national average of 51.50% in the same period.<sup>99</sup> Because of these historical experiences, many tribal communities who can still maintain their unique identity have an extremely suspicious attitude towards the movement of the larger Hindu population in India. Even the government policy of national integration in modern India is regarded by most of the tribals as the modern version of the old assimilation policy.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, the dramatic ascendance of *Hindutva* ideology in the last two decades and a movement by the *Sangh Parivar* to reconvert tribal Christians to Hinduism today is a real religio-cultural and political threat for the tribal communities.<sup>101</sup>

The fundamental problem that sanskritisation brings to the tribal people in Northeast India seems to be the conflicting ideological values concerning human society. For example, while the tribal people believe in communitarian values embodied by casteless, non-hierarchical and egalitarian values, sanskritisation operates within the caste-system by following a dichotomous policy of integration and segregation, while simultaneously preserving a structure of hierarchy based on cultural monism.<sup>102</sup> Sanskritisation tends to segregate a tribal community into different castes and subsequently relegates them to the low-caste Hindus. Thanzauva observes, “Conversion to Hinduism for most of the tribals meant not only loss of identity but becoming a servile class of Hindu society.”<sup>103</sup> This strong force of sanskritisation that greatly damages the socio-cultural and religious identity of many tribal groups is one of the main features behind the identity crisis of the tribal people and their alienation from their traditional socio-cultural values. It causes tension and conflict not only between the tribals and the Hindus, but also

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<sup>99</sup>Thanzauva, *Theology of the Community*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>100</sup> Thanzauva, *Theology of the Community*, p. 18.

<sup>101</sup> *Hindutva* is a Hindu nationalist majoritarian movement that tries to achieve a ‘pure’ Hindu nation in India. *Sangh Parivar* is the group of organisations under the *Hindutva* movement with a distinctive ideology that claims India is a Hindu nation and that minorities in it may live in India only if they acknowledge these claims. See M. N. Panini, “*Hindutva Discourse and Sanskritisation Syndrome: Understanding the Implications of Globalisation in India*” (Unpublished paper, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 2004).

<sup>102</sup> R. K. Nayak, “Identity, Development” p. 4.

<sup>103</sup> Thanzauva, *Theology of the Community*, p. 17.

between different tribal groups themselves. The symptoms of the confusion and identity crisis brought about by this process can be seen in the form of insurgency movements, ethnic conflicts, underground violence and many other socio-cultural problems.<sup>104</sup>

#### 2.4.2. *Modernisation and Tribal People*

The process of modernisation is a global phenomenon that affects every society. Some of the components of modernity are science and technology, urbanisation, industrialisation, rapid means of communication, new education, new political processes, economic systems, etc.<sup>105</sup> This process promotes western democratic values, such as capitalism, individualism, rationalism, and enlightened ideology for social transformation.

The tribal people in Northeast India began to encounter the process of modernisation after the annexation of their territories by the British in 1826. Although the British adopted a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of the people, the introduction of a unified political system, new administrative structure, a monetary economy, new system of education, law and order, taxation etc. pushed the tribal people towards modernisation and detribalisation. These new systems in the socio-economic and political structures of the people started eroding the traditional systems that safeguarded their socio-cultural values and ethos, and eventually caused great damage to the age-old tribal cultural practices and traditions. Moreover, the British occupation paved the way for Christian missionaries to come to the tribal areas, which significantly accelerated the process of modernisation.

From the middle of the nineteenth century western missionaries were introducing Christianity among the tribal people, and the majority of the hill tribes in Northeast

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<sup>104</sup> There are more than 20 groups of freedom fighters actively working in Northeast India. See Longchar, *Tribal Theology*, p. 20. For a detailed discussion of the armed struggle movements in Northeast India, N. Bora, "Insurgency in the North East: Causes of its Rise and the Nature of the Uprising" in *Political Development of the North East Vol. II* (ed. B. C. Bhuyan; New Delhi: Omsons Publications, 1992) pp. 1-11; also, P. S. Dutta, "Roots of Insurgency" in *Political Development of the North East Vol. II*, pp. 12-19. John V. Hluna, *Church and Political Upheaval in Mizoram* (Aizawl: Mizo History Association, 1985).

<sup>105</sup> As cited by Longchar, *The Tribal Religious traditions in North East India*, p. 150 from Felix Wilfred, *Sunset in the East?* (Madras: University of Madras, 1991) p. 24.



India have now become Christians. Longchar observes, “The Christian missionaries brought about the greatest revolution in the tribal society.”<sup>106</sup> Rosiama believes that this great revolution was possible since many of the Gospel values were already familiar to the tribal people in different forms even before they heard anything about Christianity.<sup>107</sup> Thanzauva remarks: “If love is the essence of the Gospel teaching, *tlawmngaihna* is the hidden gospel written in the hearts of the tribal people even before they embraced Christianity.”<sup>108</sup> But there is no doubt that Christian values and beliefs such as love, peace, equality, justice, honesty etc. not only matched the traditional values of the people, but also upgraded and refined them in very meaningful and significant ways. After carefully analysing the interaction between Christianity and the tribal traditions, Khuanga concluded that Christianity was the fulfiller of the tribal traditions.<sup>109</sup> The Gospel not only fulfilled the tribal values and principles, but also liberated the people from the domination of superstitious beliefs, the unnecessary fear of evil spirits and the practices of head-hunting and inter-tribal or village wars.

The Gospel made many other positive contributions to the lives of the tribal people. However, Christianity, along with western culture and modern social values, has also had a negative impact on their traditional values. For instance, the tribal Christian converts were the first ones among the tribal people to abandon their traditional songs, dances, festivals, dresses, and practices that had a strong connection with their traditional values and ways of life. They began to view western religion and culture as superior to their own. This change has given the people a negative attitude towards their traditional customs and practices.<sup>110</sup> People also have conflicting opinions about their culture, as to whether or not they should completely leave behind their traditional practices and beliefs. Even today many tribal Christians hold the view that the traditional tribal culture and value-system is

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<sup>106</sup> Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions in North East India*, p. 141.

<sup>107</sup> C. Rosiama, “Mizo Sakhua” in *Hranghluite Sulhnu* (ed. B. Lalthangliana; Aizawl: R.T.M. Press, 1996) pp. 92-97.

<sup>108</sup> Thanzauva, *Theology of the Community*, p. 128.

<sup>109</sup> Khuanga, “The Role of Christianity in the Socio-Economic Praxis of Mizoram” in *Towards a Tribal Theology: The Mizo Perspective* (ed. K. Thanzauva; Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1989) p. 8.

<sup>110</sup> Darchhawna considers the western form of Christianity as the main factor that gives this kind of negative attitude towards tribal culture and practices. See Darchhawna, “Mizo Culture awmzia leh a lo danglam zel dan” p. 186.

something outdated and old-fashioned, sometimes opposed to Christian values and beliefs, and which should therefore be abandoned altogether.<sup>111</sup> In this way, Christianity has also contributed to the alienation of the tribals from their cultural roots and traditional values. In this situation, it is imperative to re-examine the biblical values and teachings that gave rise to Christian values and beliefs in order to investigate their original meanings and messages.

Even after the British occupation was over and western missionaries left the region, the process of modernisation continued to be a strong force that unceasingly and relentlessly challenged the tribal culture and traditions in various ways. This process continued mainly through the economic development programme of the government of India. After achieving political independence, the government of India adopted a “catch up” model to gear up its industrial development in order to compete with western countries.<sup>112</sup> This model did nothing but accelerated modernisation and westernisation, and was based upon an evolutionary understanding of social change, advocating the idea that human society is on the road to perfection and that modern western industrialised society is the goal to be reached and the example to be followed by backward peoples.<sup>113</sup> This model of development was applied to modernise the most backward communities like tribals and Dalits in India without seriously considering its adverse effects on the culture and traditions of the peoples. As a result of this development policy, new opportunities of employment and other occupations increased, which in turn sped up the urbanisation process in the tribal areas. For example, in the 1971 census, the urban population in Mizoram was only 37,754 whereas in the 1991 census it had risen to 317,024, which was 46.20% of the total population of Mizoram. There were only two urban towns in 1971 while there were 22 urban cities and towns in 1991.<sup>114</sup> While the urbanisation process economically benefits certain groups of

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<sup>111</sup> The debate over this issue is still going on even today. See C. Vanlallawma, “Eng Hla nge kan sak ang?” in *Vanglaini Daily Newspaper*, (<http://vanglaini.net/article.html>, downloaded on 19/09/2005).

<sup>112</sup> Thanzauva, *Theology of the Community*, p. 35. Also Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions*, pp. 155ff.

<sup>113</sup> Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions*, p. 155. The “catch up” model goes along the line of Rostow’s idea of stages of growth based on evolutionary theory to be followed by all societies. See his *The Stages of Economic Growth: the Non-Communist Manifesto* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1960) pp. 1-4.

<sup>114</sup> Hluna, “Mizo Culture leh Khawpui Nun” p. 205.

people in the tribal communities, it causes chaos to the lives of the majority of the people. The emerging urban society breaks up the traditional tribal solidarity and wipes out the tribal social fabrics and cultural values eventually resulting in different kinds of social problems, namely, economic disparity between the rich and the poor, conflict and tension between urban and rural peoples, anti-social activities like alcoholism, drug addiction, theft, financial corruption, etc.

After the government of India launched the New Economic Policy (NEP) in July 1991 because of the pressure exerted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the process of modernisation began to take the form of globalisation.<sup>115</sup> Under this New Economic Policy, India had to open up its boundaries to the global market in which Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) and other foreign companies could have full access to the Indian market for their investments. It is a debatable issue for the Indian economists whether or not this new policy would benefit the national economy in the long run. What is certain from the tribal situation, however, is that globalisation speeds up the detribalisation process as it emphasises incentives and integration by undermining the local culture, traditions, moral values, and wisdom.<sup>116</sup> The process of cultural invasion is more prevalent with the rise of multinational corporations and their power to manipulate consumers through their alluring advertisements on TV, the internet, cinemas, on radios and via other emerging information technologies.<sup>117</sup> The ideology of globalisation perpetuates the view that humans are solely valued in terms of economic criteria. The tribals and other subaltern communities in India must be the ones who paid the highest price to make way for globalisation, but they have benefited least from this process.<sup>118</sup> In many parts of India, tribals have been

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<sup>115</sup> Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions*, p. 157.

<sup>116</sup> J. Felix Raj SJ, "Globalisation and Plight of Tribals" in <http://www.goethals.org/globalisation.htm> downloaded on 05/07/2004. pp. 1-10.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions*, p. 164.

<sup>118</sup> See the list of gainers and losers of globalisation in Raj, "Globalisation and Plight of Tribals" p. 2. He points out that while globalisation benefited rich countries - like Japan, Europe, and the USA - and rich people - people with high skills, creditors, and large firms - it worsened the condition of many developing countries, and particularly for their poor - tribals, people with low skills, debtors, small firms, etc.

forcefully evicted from their ancestral land in the name of development.<sup>119</sup> Felix Raj observes,

A common feature shared by most of the tribal people is their remoteness and marginal quality of territorial resources. In the past, exploitation of such poor regions was found both difficult and uneconomic. But the recent rapid technological advancement and unrivalled economic and political strength of world capitalism, and the rising power of neo-colonialism through the G-8 directly and the IMF, WB, IBRD, etc., as agencies, have created favourable conditions for the evasion and extraction of natural resources from the ecologically fragile territories of tribal people. Thus, forced evictions of tribals to make way for mammoth capital-intensive development projects have become a distressing routine and ever-increasing phenomenon.<sup>120</sup>

Globalisation has brought rapid social change and has increasingly introduced new values and ideas that ignore tribal culture and value-systems. This has created much tension and conflict in the tribal communities. One of the striking contradictions to be seen in Indian society today is the astonishing difference between tribal value-systems and the value-systems associated with modernisation/globalisation. This is clearly visible in the burning issue of tribal land. Enormous problems of the alienation of tribal land and conflicts over the land have developed in different parts of the country, which are fundamentally due to the different concepts of land between tribals and modernisers. While the tribals regard land as part of their lives, modernisers see it as a resource and material to be exploited. For the tribals, the land is an integral part of their identity, and the basis of their lives and unity. The

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<sup>119</sup> There is no reliable and complete information on the number of tribals displaced in the country since independence. The estimates range between 5 and 7 million – mostly by the dams, followed by mines and industries – or approximately one in every ten tribals, who have been displaced by development projects. See Raj, “Globalisation and Plight of Tribals” p. 5. It is estimated that 100,000 people are going to be displaced by the Sardar Savoar Project in Gujarat, 60-70% of whom are tribals. And around 130,000 are expected to be displaced by the Narmada Sagar Project in Madhya Pradesh of whom 65-70% are tribals. See John Desrochers *et al.* (eds.) *Social Movements: Towards a Perspective* (Bangalore: Centre for Social Action, 1991) p. 87. Even in Northeast India, the government of India has a big plan to construct massive hydro-electrical dams. Fernandes observes, “In answer to a question in the Rajya Sabha on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2002, the Union Minister for Power outlined plans to build 11 massive hydro-electrical dams in the North East India, because it has 58,971 KW of hydel potential or 38% of the country’s total (*The Assam Tribune*, 15<sup>th</sup> March 2002). The power they produce is not necessarily for the consumption of the North East people, and not for employment generation in the region but for export outside it through the national grid (*The North East Times*, February 11, 2002). See Walter Fernandes, “The Impact of Globalisation on the Northeast” (Unpublished paper presented in the Seminar on “The Indigenous people’s Quest for Justice” in Guwahati on 7 April, 2003) p. 1.

<sup>120</sup> Raj, “Globalisation and Plight of Tribals” pp. 4 -5. For the detailed discussion on the impact of globalisation on the tribes in Northeast India, see Fernandes, “The Impact of Globalisation on the Northeast”.

land is not a mere space to be exploited, but - as we saw earlier – it is a place that gives identity, dignity and pride to the tribal community. The attachment that the tribals have to their land is very strong and close as every household is directly dependent upon the products of the land. Unfortunately, the basic concept of modern development undertaken by the government is exactly the opposite to the tribal concept of land. In this situation, tribals are always the victims of modern developments, as they are socially voiceless, economically vulnerable and politically powerless. Their fundamental rights and existence as human beings are largely denied and seriously violated by the process of globalisation.

Now this conflicting concept of land is not only to be seen as an issue between tribals and non-tribals, but also between tribals themselves. Many tribal peoples are now confused by the new values that encroach upon their own, and this confusion further brings a severe identity crisis. Tribal people - especially those who live in the urban areas - are more and more fascinated and influenced by the modern values and ideas that are incorporated into the government's programme of development and globalisation process. This has caused division and disintegration among the tribal communities, which frequently turn into ethnic conflicts and communal disharmonies in the tribal society.

In the new socio-political structure under the government of India, there was a shift of ownership of land from community to the government, and this led further to the introduction of the privatisation of land. Now the land that traditionally belonged to the community and which gave identity to the people is at the disposal of individuals. Selling and buying land, which was previously against the tribal principles, is now very common even among the tribals themselves. This new practice has brought an opportunity for a few rich people to accumulate the lands of the poor people, which in turn has caused social and economic disparities among the tribal communitarian society. Moreover, this new system of land based on values and ideas alien to the tribals has brought further alienation: the tribal people are now experiencing an identity crisis as they are being alienated in various ways by modern values and principles.

## 2.5. Conclusion

The above discussion reveals that the tribes in Northeast India fundamentally believe in egalitarian values as opposed to a hierarchical caste-system or economic classism, collectivism as opposed to individualism, tribal communism as opposed to capitalism, democratic principles (people's power) as opposed to totalitarianism, and a creation-centred as opposed to an anthropocentric value-system. Their values and interests are obviously conditioned by their community-oriented lifestyle, as they give priority to community well-being, co-operation, sharing, and interdependence rather than individual interests. However, their social systems and cultural values and principles are being gradually wiped out by external forces like sanskritisation and modernisation, which are beyond their control. In this situation, they are being uprooted and alienated from their cultural heritage, which increasingly creates confusion, tension, conflict, alienation, restlessness, and identity crises in the different tribes. Many of them are now culturally rootless and socially and politically vulnerable. Identity crisis is one of the fundamental problems of most of the tribes in Northeast India today. The present realities of the tribal people can serve to illuminate the situation of the oppressed people defended by the eighth-century prophets in Israel and Judah who seemed to have gone through a socio-economic, cultural and identity crisis as a result of the enormous pressures of various strong forces which were beyond their control.

## 3

## THE VALUES AND ETHOS OF THE HEBREW TRIBES

This chapter traces the socio-cultural values and ethos of the Hebrew tribes in the light of the tribal values and ethos discussed in the preceding chapter. The conflicting values and ethos between the prophets and the ruling class in the eighth century BCE can be understood better in relation to the socio-cultural developments leading up to that point. We will first try to establish some important formative factors in the fundamental values of the Hebrew tribes which continue to have meaning and significance in the value-system of the eighth-century prophets. Then an attempt will be made to reveal the impact of royal values and interests on tradition following the establishment of the monarchic form of government in Israel. The main objective of this chapter is to provide the socio-cultural background of the conflict between the prophets and the upper classes, who seemingly have quite different worldviews in eighth-century Israel and Judah.

Before dealing with the values and ethos of the Hebrew tribes, the basic assumption of this investigation regarding the original identity of the Hebrew tribes and the sources of information about them will be briefly discussed. ‘Who were the Hebrew tribes?’ is an important question that various scholars have attempted to answer from different perspectives.<sup>1</sup> Though no consensus has been reached so far concerning scholarly reconstruction of the early tribes, most modern critical scholars have now abandoned the traditional single ethnic theory or biblical twelve tribes theory regarding the original identity of the Hebrew tribes. It is now generally accepted that a large majority of them were originally indigenous peoples in the land of Canaan.<sup>2</sup> They were often presented as an eclectic formation of various

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<sup>1</sup> John H. Hayes has made a survey on the different approaches applied by scholars who attempted to answer this question. See John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller (eds.), *Israelite & Judaeon History* (London/Philadelphia: SCM Press/Trinity Press International, 1990) pp.1-64.

<sup>2</sup> Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel 125—1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979); Niels Peter Lemche, *Early Israel:*

Canaanite lower groups of people and other bottom classes from different parts of ancient West Asia.<sup>3</sup> In the light of these new insights, it is assumed that the early tribes who later came to be known as Israelites were originally different ethnic groups of people consisting of various indigenous Canaanites and other lower classes from different parts of ancient West Asia who, however, had certain commonalities in terms of worldview and experiences of suffering under economic poverty, oppression and exploitation. It is argued that these commonalities were not only a unifying factor for these peoples, but also a significant contributing factor shaping their religious values and cultural ethos. These diverse communities who had common interests and concerns could come together at certain times to worship one of the tribal deities namely, YHWH.<sup>4</sup> This assumption would imply that the traditional understanding of the Hebrew people as an idyllic pure Yahwistic people who invaded the land of 'pagan' Canaanites from outside to begin a process of ethnic cleansing has been abandoned. Rather, they were originally peoples from various ethnic and religious backgrounds and a large majority of them were vulnerable sections of indigenous people in the land of Canaan who had to struggle for their own survival in the context of oppression and alienation.

It was traditionally thought that the book of Judges in the Old Testament contained historical information about the formative period of the Israelite tribes, and the period covered by this book was generally regarded as the tribal period. However, it has been increasingly realized that the final form of the book of Judges cannot be taken purely as an historical account of pre-monarchic Israel. Rather, modern critical scholars can now detect that this book is largely characterized by the

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*Anthropological and Historical Studies in the Israelite Society Before Monarchy* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), Costa W. Ahlstrom, *Who were the Israelites?* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> Gottwald, *The Tribes*, p. xxiii.

<sup>4</sup> Yahweh appeared to be originally one of the deities in the land of Canaan. See Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). "The biblical tradition mentions that Yahweh came from Seir, Paran, and Teman, which are all biblical names for Edomite territories (Deut 33:2; Judg 5:4; Hab 3:3) The association of Yahweh with the South in these three independent traditions strongly suggests this is a genuine association." See Ahlstrom, *Who Were the Israelites?* p. 7. The whole process of how peoples from different religious and ethnic backgrounds came together to worship Yahweh appears to be a very long process and complex issue. Tracing such process is beyond the purview of this thesis.



Deuteronomistic writer's ideological presentation of Israelite history.<sup>5</sup> Gale A. Yee recently applied ideological criticism to the book of Judges and convincingly demonstrated that there is a strategically repeated editorial comment in Judges 17-21: "In those days, there was no king in Israel" which is twice accompanied by an ironic note: "every man did what was right in his own eyes."<sup>6</sup> The editor's propaganda is obviously to propagate the idea that there was chaos without the office of king in the tribal period. This kind of editor's ideological comment clearly endorses royal propaganda of glorifying the role of kings in society that may not necessarily represent the real life situation of the people. In the light of these new insights, it is assumed that the tribal stories described in the book of Judges may not always portray the true picture of the early tribes though they may have contained some important information about their socio-economic and political situation. When we talk about the pre-monarchic Hebrew tribes and their formative period, we will not necessarily refer to the tribes and the historical period described in the book of Judges. Rather, this period could refer to any time before the emergence of the fully-fledged Israelite monarchy. The book of Judges is not considered in this study as the only evidence we have for life of Israel in pre-monarchic times, but as one among many other important sources of information for the reconstruction of pre-monarchic tribes. At the same time, various Pentateuchal traditions such as the patriarchal traditions, the wilderness tradition, the exodus traditions etc. can be equally treated as significant sources of information for the reconstruction of the pre-monarchic tribes since they also seem to have reflected different aspects of their socio-economic, political and cultural situation.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Scholars usually regard the Deuteronomist's edition of the Deuteronomistic history as propaganda for Josiah's reform policies. Josiah was depicted as the ideal by which all the other kings were judged.

<sup>6</sup> Gale A. Yee, "Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21 and the Dismembered Body" in *Judges & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Gale A. Yee ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2007) pp. 138-160.

<sup>7</sup> On the basis of literary analysis, there are certain scholars who argue that the patriarchal traditions and other traditions in the Pentateuch are purely the literary creation of the exilic writer known as Yahwist and that their proposal was to establish the corporate identity of Israel for the despairing community in the exilic period. For example, see John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975). However, there are many old customs, values, traditions, and ways of life in the pentateuchal traditions, connected with the pre-literary tribes, which cannot simply be explicated on the basis of a literary analysis of the texts alone. There are scholars who convincingly demonstrate the connection between these traditions and the older tribal socio-cultural lives. See Joseph Henninger, "Zum frühsemitischen Nomadentum," in *Viehwirtschaft und Hirtenkultur, Ethnographische Studien* (ed. L. Földes; Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1969) pp. 33-68. See also Roland de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978).

### 3.1. Factors Shaping the Values and Ethos of the Hebrew Tribes

#### 3.1.1. *The Tribal Communitarian Social System*

As has been shown in the preceding chapter, the values and ethos of the tribes in Northeast India can be largely considered products of their communitarian social system. We have shown that the tribal core value of honour - and other values such as generosity, bravery, selflessness, loyalty, etc. - is integrally related to their communitarian lifestyle. Moreover, the fundamental tribal socio-ethical principle known as *tlawmngaihna* is strongly community-oriented and profoundly egalitarian in ethos. In fact, the tribal value-system are greatly shaped and conditioned by the communitarian structure of their social organisation.

In the tribal system encountered in the Old Testament, too, rural communitarianism appears to be one of the most significant common formative factors of their fundamental values and ethos. Henry Schaeffer observes, “Under tribal rule, society in general is dominated by a communal conception of religion and of social ethics. Tribal modes of thought concern themselves with the family group, the clanship, and the tribal group rather than with the individual as such.”<sup>8</sup> The people of the Old Testament often express their social values in terms of divine will and purpose. In fact, the religious beliefs and theological perspective of any group of people are generally connected with their social organisation. If we look at the different patriarchal traditions of the Pentateuch, it is conceivable that their cultural values and religious beliefs were very much in tune with the rural tribal socio-cultural setting.<sup>9</sup> Albrecht Alt showed how the religion of the ancestors (patriarchs) was distinct from the religion of the Israelite monarchy, thus challenging Wellhausen’s theory that patriarchal traditions were later retrojections produced during the monarchic period.<sup>10</sup> Recently, Augustine Pagolu has convincingly argued in favour of the distinctiveness of the ancestors’ religions in the book of Genesis from other

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<sup>8</sup> Henry Schaeffer, *Hebrew Tribal Economy and the Jubilee as Illustrated in Semitic and Indo-European Village Communities* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1922) p. iii.

<sup>9</sup> Here, the term ‘tribal’ does not only refer to the biblical twelve tribes of Israel or the scholarly reconstructed ‘nomadic’ or ‘semi-nomadic’ hill dwelling tribes based on the biblical traditions, but it also refers to other close-knit rural people and several other indigenous peoples in the land of Canaan who solely depended upon the tribal subsistence economy and whose socio-cultural system was dominated by kinship ties and communitarian relationship.

<sup>10</sup> Albrecht Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (trans. R. A. Wilson; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966).

ancient West Asian religions and even from the state religion of Israel, particularly in terms of religious worship and practices, such as altars, pillars, tithes, vows, and ritual purity. For him, the religion of the Israelite ancestors was basically family oriented, clan based and compatible with the semi-nomadic lifestyle of the early tribes.<sup>11</sup> It is plausible that the national God of Israel, Yahweh, was also originally one of the tribal deities who identified himself with the tribal people whose worldview and value-system were profoundly shaped by their rural communitarian environments.<sup>12</sup> In other words, Yahweh was the God who revealed his will and purpose to the tribal people, and his revelation was regarded as having been originally received in the tribal socio-cultural context and expressed and articulated in the form of tribal ways of thinking and expression. Alt argued that Yahweh was from the beginning closely associated with nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples of ancient West Asia. According to him, the history of the cult of the deity Yahweh could be traced back to the time prior to the emergence of the united tribal peoples in the period of the Judges in the Old Testament.<sup>13</sup> In fact, the core values of the Israelite religion were inseparable from the tribal communitarian cultural ethos.<sup>14</sup> For example, the Ten Commandments, which are regarded as the kernel of the ethical values of the Hebrew religion, can be seen as epitomising tribal communitarian values. Following Gerstenberger's suggestion of the *Sitz im Leben* of the Decalogue among the circle of the wise and the extended family, Baker

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<sup>11</sup> Augustine Pagolu, "Patriarchal Religion as Portrayed in Genesis 12-50" *Tyndale Bulletin*, 47. 2 (1996) pp. 375-378.

<sup>12</sup> Some scholars advocate the urban background of Yahwism. For example, Niels Peter Lemche argues in favour of the urban upper class people as the particular social context out of which ethical Yahwism originally appeared. See his *Early Israel: Anthropological and Historical Studies on the Israelite society before Monarchy* (trans. Frederick H. Cryer; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985) p. 434. Mark S. Smith also suggests that early Israelite religion was based on the model of an Ugaritic pantheon similar to Ugarit's royal family. See his *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*. As indicated above, it is quite possible that Yahweh was one of the deities of the indigenous peoples in the land of Canaan. However, the urban and royal background of Yahweh is very unlikely considering the original worshipers of this deity. In fact, these scholars do not represent the majority view; instead, the views of scholars such as Albrecht Alt and Norman K. Gottwald are still significant regarding the original context of Yahwism. See Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, and Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979). Gottwald establishes the tribal socio-political background of Yahwism in a particular context where the underprivileged tribal people were fighting for the alternative socio-political system of tribalism over against the oppressive city-state political structures.

<sup>13</sup> Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Von Waldow locates the origins of the apodictic prohibitions of the Old Testament and the ordinances protecting the *personae miserabiles* in the period when the living together of the early tribes was determined by the order of the families, clans, and tribes. See his "Social Responsibility and Social Structure in Early Israel" *CBQ*, 32 (1970) pp. 184-185.

recently argued that “the Decalogue may well have played a significant role as guidelines for social conduct within the extended family.”<sup>15</sup> Moreover, he also suggests that the Decalogue had a formative influence on the message of the prophets. The commandments - especially the fifth to the tenth - can largely be seen to reflect the family values and communitarian ethos of the rural tribal social setting. Baker rightly points out:

Honouring the divine name and one’s parents, together with refraining from murder, adultery, stealing, false witness and coveting, would be primarily matters of individual behaviour, but the community would be responsible for ensuring conformity because the effects of misbehaviour would affect the people as a whole.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, many other concerns expressed in the form of covenant stipulations in the earliest collection of laws known as the Book of Covenant (Ex. 20:21-23:19) are concerned with neighbourly care and concerns, and social relationship in the rural tribal community.<sup>17</sup> According to von Waldow, the covenant stipulations in the style of apodictic prohibitions, which very simply and emphatically state what is prohibited in the second person singular (such as Ex. 22:21,22; 23:3,6; Dt. 24:17) and in the apodictic-casuistic mixed style (Ex. 22:25, 26, etc.), are the oldest ordinances in the Old Testament, which were originally connected with the tribal unwritten ethical rule.<sup>18</sup> The core values of covenant can be largely regarded as communitarian in orientation and tribal in ethos.

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<sup>15</sup> David L. Baker, “The Finger of God and the Forming of a Nation: The Origin and Purpose of the Decalogue” *Tyndale Bulletin* 56.1 (2005) pp. 10-11 (pp. 1-24). He has shown the different views of scholars regarding the origin of the Decalogue and there is clearly no consensus. He joins many scholars who believe the Decalogue to be early and he specifically mentions that Moses was the one responsible for imparting the Decalogue to the people he led, at least in its original form. See also Erherd S. Gerstenberger, “Covenant and Commandment”, *JBL* 84 (1965) pp. 38-51.

<sup>16</sup> Baker, “The Finger of God” p. 17. Elsewhere he mentions that “the Ten Commandments themselves are not primarily law, but basic moral and ethical principles that deal with issues which remained central to Israel’s national life throughout her history.” See his “Written in Stone? The Ten Commandments Then and Now”, *Whitefield Briefing* 9. 3 (2004) pp. 1-4.

<sup>17</sup> John Van Seters recently argued that those laws in the covenant code that are similar to Deuteronomy and the Holiness Code are in fact later than both of these, and therefore cannot be taken as the foundation of the Hebrew law. See his *A Law Book for the Diaspora: Revision in the Study of the Covenant Code* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). However, his argument is not convincing for certain scholars. See B. S. Jackson, “Revolution in Biblical Law: Some Reflections on the Role of Theory in Methodology,” *JSS* 50 (2005), pp. 83-115. See also Bernard Levinson, “Is the Covenant Code an Exilic Composition? A Response to John Van Seters,” in *In Search of Pre-exilic Israel* (ed. J. Day; JSOTSup 406; London: T & T Clark, 2004), pp. 272-325.

<sup>18</sup> See Von Waldow, “Social Responsibility” pp. 184-185. See also Robert Davidson, “Covenant Ideology in Ancient Israel” in *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and*

Other important components of the Hebrew value-system were their values of honour and shame. Scholars have detected a strong link between the Hebrew community-oriented lifestyle and their values of honour and shame. For example, Bechtel argues that shaming was effective in Israelite society because people were socially conditioned by the society to find their identity in group belonging, to be concerned about the opinion of others, and to 'pride' themselves on the social and religious ideals of the community.<sup>19</sup> For her, the values of honour and shame are the basic characteristics of a predominantly group-oriented society where people's standing in the community or status is so important. Pilch and Malina also mention that "honour and shame" are core values of the group-oriented people in the Mediterranean world in contrast to the core value of efficiency in the Western world.<sup>20</sup> They have shown the contrasting features of these two different value-systems, observing that Western society is characterised by basic belief in individualist realism, whereas in Mediterranean society the basic belief is group realism. While in the west the individual is believed to be the primary reality, with society as a second order, artificial or derived construct, in the Mediterranean region society is believed to be the primary reality, while the individual is a second order, artificial construct.<sup>21</sup> For them, certain values like generosity, selflessness, loyalty etc. are means values that facilitate the realization of honour, which is the Mediterranean goal or end cultural value.<sup>22</sup> Plevnik also accepts honour and shame as the core values of the Israelite community in the Bible.<sup>23</sup> For him, honour is primarily a group value, which is associated with a value cluster that includes:

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*Political Perspectives* (ed. R. E. Clements; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) pp. 323-347.

<sup>19</sup> Lyn M. Bechtel, "Shame as a Sanction of Social Control in Biblical Israel: Judicial, Political, and Social Shaming" in *Social-Scientific Old Testament Criticism: A Sheffield Reader* (ed. David J. Chalcraft; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 1997) pp. 239-240.

<sup>20</sup> John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina (eds), *Handbook of Biblical Social Values* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1998) p. xix. They divide various values into different categories. For example, values that are expected in all human interactions are core or primary values, and values that are specific to given interactions are peripheral or secondary values. Values that facilitate the realization of core value and secondary values are "means values." The U.S. values, according to them, seem to be a system that represents the western individualism while Mediterranean values may be taken as an Asiatic group-oriented value-system.

<sup>21</sup> For detailed comparisons, see Pilch and Malina, *Social Values*, pp. xxxii-xxxix.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Plevnik, "Honour/Shame" in *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*, pp. 106-115.

strength, courage, daring, and generosity, while weakness, selfishness, cowardice and lack of generosity indicate shame, and hence are despised.<sup>24</sup>

The prevalence of the idea of a collective sense of responsibility in the Old Testament also suggests that Hebrew values were greatly conditioned by their tribal communitarian structure. H. Wheeler Robinson used the term “corporate personality” to refer to the strong collective sense of responsibility in the Old Testament.<sup>25</sup> He understands the connection between the tribal group-oriented mentality and the Old Testament concept of corporate personality on the basis of the modern anthropological understanding of primitive psychology. For him, there is a strong sense of oneness and group solidarity in the Hebrew mentality:

The whole group, including its past, present, and future members, might function as a single individual through any one of those members conceived as representative of it. Because it was not confined to the living, but included the dead and the unborn, the group could be conceived as living forever.<sup>26</sup>

Kaminsky strongly argues that corporate ideas are prevalent, central and persistent in the Old Testament.<sup>27</sup> He challenges the persistent tendency to denigrate various corporate ideas found in the Old Testament, which, he believes, stems from an Enlightenment bias that places greater value upon moral systems that emphasise the individual over against those that value the community. He is of the opinion that “the corporate ideas contained in the Hebrew Bible may provide certain key elements to new theological constructs that would take greater account of the importance of the way in which the individual has communal responsibilities.”<sup>28</sup>

In the Old Testament we often come across the idea that corporate punishment was inflicted upon a group of people either because an individual or several individuals

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<sup>24</sup> Plevnik, “Honour/Shame”, p. 107.

<sup>25</sup> H. W. Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Man* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1911).

<sup>26</sup> Robinson, “The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality” pp. 25-26. This view clearly reflects E. Durkheim’s notion of ‘primitive mindset’ in his *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (trans. J. Swain; New York: The Free Press, 1915) p. 157. See also Aubrey R. Johnson, *The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press Board, 1961).

<sup>27</sup> Joel S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 196; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

<sup>28</sup> Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility*, p. 189.

or earlier leaders or ancestors erred or committed sin.<sup>29</sup> From the perspective of modern individualism, it may be considered unfair to inflict corporate punishment upon a group of people or the whole clan as a result of the mistake made by an individual within that group. However, from the group-oriented people's perspective, there is nothing unfair or strange about this notion. According to the community-oriented mentality, every individual is seen as an inseparable part of the community, unlike the individualistic predisposition to view individuals as autonomous entities who only relate to their society when they freely choose to do so. The action or behaviour of an individual is also considered as an integral part of the community. No individual can commit a crime without affecting members of the community, just as the pain of any part of the human body affects the whole body. The sin committed by an individual is not regarded as one's own, but is considered the fault of the community. Members of the community took collective responsibility,<sup>30</sup> both negatively and positively, so that the success of an individual was accepted as the achievement of the community and was corporately celebrated as such. In the Old Testament, it is not only punishment that is corporate, but salvation as well is community-wide.<sup>31</sup> The concept of corporate personality is basically rooted in the community-oriented mentality of the tribal people. In this way, the Hebrew understanding of corporate personality, which is one of the dominant features of Old Testament faith, strongly indicates that communitarian social structure plays an important role in shaping the values and worldview of the Hebrew tribes.

### 3.1.2. *Minority Peoples' Worldview*

It was observed in the previous chapter that the development of Northeast Indian tribal values has been significantly dominated by their historical experiences as a minority. The history of the tribal people can be described as the history of minority peoples' struggle to survive under the constant pressure of the dominant population. Many tribal groups have been culturally assimilated and some of them have now

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<sup>29</sup> See Josh. 7; 2 Kgs 5:7; Num. 16; 1 Sam. 2:31; 2 Sam. 24; 2 Kgs 21:11; Gen. 9:20-27 etc. Cf. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility*, p. 31.

<sup>30</sup> The tribal conflicts and wars were also frequently triggered by the mistakes or offences made by an individual.

<sup>31</sup> The concept of individual salvation as we have in the New Testament is rarely to be seen in the Old Testament. The exodus tradition is one of the most important traditions supporting the idea of corporate salvation.

been reduced to minority population in their own lands. For them, the questions concerning the issues of survival, identity, dignity, culture, and land are always crucial. The hopes and aspirations of the tribal people as a community are also greatly shaped by their socio-economic, political and cultural life being endangered by the pressure of the larger populations that surround them.

When we look at the Hebrew tribes in the Old Testament, a minority people's worldview can be identified as a significant formative factor in their values and ethos. The patriarchal narratives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and his children in Genesis are clearly the stories of a small kinship group of people who moved from one place to another outside the normal socio-economic setting of the civilised city-states of that period. Anthony R. Ceresco observes:

They [Israelite ancestors] seem to have no great stake or part in the larger conflicts between the peoples and nations among whom they live, even though these larger conflicts touch and affect their daily lives. They are stories of small kinship groups who live at the margins, outside the centers of civilization and culture. The importance and centrality given to these stories and memories, the fact that these kinds of people are singled out as Israel's mothers and fathers, give us a clue as to how Israel understood itself, its origins, and its identity. They were a people who had their roots outside the centers where the "important" people lived and effective decision-making presumably took place.<sup>32</sup>

It can be assumed that the early tribes formulated and developed their religio-cultural values and theological vision as a minority people in a context where they had often been denied their fundamental rights and dignity as a community and were excluded from the privileges and benefits enjoyed by the dominant population. One of the most important memories repeatedly mentioned in the Old Testament was that the Israelite ancestors were originally a small minority people who lived in the midst of stronger peoples, a people who received special care and protection from Yahweh. They are often reminded of their humble origins: "It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the LORD set his heart on you and chose you - for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors,..." (Deut.7:7-8). The

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<sup>32</sup> Anthony R. Ceresco, *The Old Testament: A Liberation Perspective* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993) p. 14.



central theological perspective of the Old Testament can be considered a theology of a minority people who had been denied their fundamental rights and freedoms as human beings in the context of various pressures and threats. Many aspirations and hopes that occupy the heart of their religion are obviously the outcomes of such historical experiences. For example, Yahweh is frequently portrayed as the God who promises to make them a great nation. This hope of becoming a great nation was the dominant theme in the faith of the early tribes, which obviously implies that they were not originally a great nation in terms of population and power. They were looking forward to the time when they would have power and influence among the peoples with whom they lived.

Another important theme of the faith of the Hebrew tribes was the hope for the Promised Land. This hope also indicates that they were the peripheral ethnic minority who had been denied their land rights and excluded from the arable fertile lands. In fact, the miserable experience of landlessness was inseparable from the history of their ancestors in the Israelites' memory. One of the clearest expressions that represents the memory commonly shared by the different tribes of Israel about the realities of their ancestors is found in Deuteronomy 26:5b-9:

A wandering Aramean was my ancestor;  
and he went down to Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number;  
and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous.  
When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard  
labour on us, we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors, the LORD  
heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression.  
The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched  
arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders;  
and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with  
milk and honey.

Gerhard von Rad considers this passage, which he calls the 'historical credo', the earliest ancient confession of faith originating from the early period of Judges. For him this short credo, along with some other passages, was basically meant for liturgical purposes rather than factual summaries of events, and he accepts them as confessions of faith to be proclaimed.<sup>33</sup> He believes that the whole Hexateuch is an

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<sup>33</sup> Gerhard von Rad, "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch," *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (trans. Rev. E. W. Trueman Dicken; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966) pp. 1-78.

expansion of this little confession of faith, and considers Old Testament theology as salvation-history. For him, the historical involvement of Yahweh in the life and struggle of this minority people is fundamental and central to Yahwistic faith. However, some scholars have cast considerable doubt on von Rad's argument for the antiquity of the historical credos, and on his view that they form a creed. For example, Vriezen argues that the form of confession singled out by von Rad was neither used by pre-Deuteronomistic writers nor followed by later prophets, and he concludes that they are specifically Deuteronomistic.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, it can be argued that the date of the literary composition of this written credo, as we now have it in the Old Testament, might be somewhere in the exilic period, and the literary form of this confession might also be connected with the peculiar style of the Deuteronomist. But the important historical themes contained in this passage seem to be very much in tune with other traditions that reflect the conditions of the early tribes. The sources of these themes could be much older than their present literary form, and their roots may be traced back to an early stage of Israelite history. It can be argued further that these historical themes reflecting the situation of the early tribes of Israel were not merely the literary creation or fiction of the later biblical writers.<sup>35</sup> Instead, they could be connected with the painful social realities of the

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Among the prime examples of the historical credo he singled out Deut. 26:5b-9; 6:20-24; Joshua 24:2b-13; and he further noted the free adaptation of such credos in the cult lyrics in I Sam. 12:8; Psalm 136; Exod. 15; Psalm 135. See Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 88.

<sup>34</sup> T. C. Vriezen, "The Credo in the Old Testament" *Studies on the Psalms: Papers Read at 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Die O.T. Werkgemeenskap in Suid-Afrika* (Potchefstroom, 1963), pp. 5-17. He points out that von Rad was not the first person who had this credo-theory; rather it was Jirku who had already published his *Die älteste Geschichte Israëls im Rahmen lehrhafter Darstellungen* (1917), in which the credo-theory was put forward. L. Rost also assigns the credos to the age of the framework of Deuteronomy and the biography of Jeremiah, possibly as an expression of the historically rooted reform of Josiah. L. Rost, "Das kleine geschichtliche Credo," *Das Kleine Credo und andere Studien zum Alten Testament* (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1965) pp. 11-25. Norbert F. Lohfink also believes that a Deuteronomist hand shaped this credo, and the pattern which the Deuteronomist author used for his new credo was to be found in the ancient documents. He accepts Num. 20:14-21 as the oldest historical summary that had been used by the Deuteronomist. See his *Option for the Poor: The Basic Principle of Liberation Theology in the Light of the Bible* (California: BIBAL Press, 1987) pp. 34-35.

<sup>35</sup> There are certain scholars who consider the patriarchal traditions and other Pentateuchal traditions about the ancestors of the Israelites as exilic or post-exilic literary fiction. J. Van Seters, for example, holds the view that the whole process of tradition was a literary one, and he maintains that the Abraham tradition of the Pentateuch was a literary fiction written by the Yahwist in the Exilic period. See his "The Yahwist as Theologian? A Response" *JSOT* 3 (1977) pp. 15-19; also his *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992); "The Religion of the Patriarchs in Genesis" *Biblica* 61 (1980) pp. 220-233. Niels Peter Lemche has also the same kind of view as he comments, "We know that the OT scarcely contains historical sources about Israel's past. We also know that the OT contains extensive materials which purport to tell us something about Israel's past, and we are forced to recognize that materials are stuff of saga and legend. ... To illustrate with a fictive example: in its present Deuteronomistic

historical homelessness and alienation of the tribes who later came to be known as Israelites.

The condition of the wandering Israelite ancestors has been variously presented in biblical traditions. One of the ways in which the Israelites depicted their ancestors was as *gerim*, meaning “sojourners” or “aliens,” as clearly reflected in the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. According to Brueggemann, “Sojourner is a technical word usually described as ‘resident alien’. It means to be in a place, perhaps for an extended time, to live there and take some roots, but always to be an outsider, never belonging, always without rights, title, or voice in decisions that matter.”<sup>36</sup> Spina also comments, “The *ger* was of another tribe, city, district or country who was without customary social protection or privilege and of necessity had to place himself under the jurisdiction of someone else.”<sup>37</sup> This kind of people must have depended on the good will of others as they did not enjoy the full rights of citizens and remained on the fringe of society. They did not have secure and stable lives, as they were a minority people who could be displaced and alienated from the land in which they settled at any time. A desire for full rights to access the land must have been the main thing that occupied the minds of this kind of people in order to have freedom and security and to protect their human dignity. The historical realities of the Israelites’ ancestors had a very significant contribution in shaping the fundamental values of the Hebrew tribes.

It is widely accepted among scholars that the term ‘Hebrew’, which is often used to refer to the early tribes in the Old Testament is in some way related to the various

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framework the Ehud narrative is a heroic legend similar to the heroic legends of other peoples, such as the Danish saga of Rolf Kraka or the Greek Theseus narratives. No one would today dream of utilizing the two last-mentioned bodies of material as historical sources...” See his *Early Israel*, pp. 414-415. However, these scholars do not represent the majority view. Some scholars strongly oppose them. See D. M. Gunn, “Narrative Patterns and Oral Tradition in Judges and Samuel” *VT* 24 (1974) pp. 286-317; see also his “On Oral Tradition: A Response to John Van Seters” *Semeia* 5 (1976) pp. 155-161. R. C. Culley also argues that legends can contain historical recollections. See his “An Approach to the Problem of Oral Tradition” *VT*, 13 (1963) pp. 113-125; also his “Oral Tradition and the OT: Some Recent Discussion” *Semeia* 5 (1976) pp. 1-33.

<sup>36</sup> Brueggemann, *The Land*, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> F. A. Spina, “Israel as Gerim. Sojourners in Social and Historical Context,” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essay in Honour of David Noel Freedman* (eds. C. L. Meyers and M. O’Connor; Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983) p. 324. See also Christiana van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law* (JSOTSup 107; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991).

forms of *'apiru*<sup>38</sup> found in the Amarna letters and other ancient West Asian documents.<sup>39</sup> It is now apparent that the term has a social rather than an ethnic meaning. The one trait that best comprehends the majority of the *'apiru* appears to be that of *outsider status*.<sup>40</sup> Lemche notes that in the Nuzi documents the *'apiru* were not citizens of Nuzi but foreigners without any juridical rights at Nuzi. Even in Alalakh they are normally mentioned in administrative documents listing persons of foreign origin.<sup>41</sup> This term was widely and loosely used with pejorative meanings in different ancient West Asian texts, such as, “outlaws,” “traitors,” “conspirators,” “enemies,” “brigands,” “murderers,” “robbers,” “slaves,” “landless,” and “hired labourers.”<sup>42</sup> These pejorative connotations of the term appear to have reflected how others saw and projected them as minority groups of people rather than how they saw and understood themselves. It is obvious that they were the ones who had been despised and looked down upon by the dominant people. Gottwald mentions that in many cases this term was used derogatorily by the authorities to designate certain lower class peoples who were perceived to threaten the social order.<sup>43</sup> Lemche also points out that some aspects of the social meaning of *'apiru* have survived almost everywhere in the Old Testament where the term ‘Hebrew’ is used to refer to Israelites:<sup>44</sup>

Thus in the story of Joseph and in Exodus, the word “Hebrew” is always used to refer to the Israelite refugees in Egypt, in contradistinction to the local population or authorities, and in 1 Samuel only the Philistines speak about Hebrews, normally in a derogatory sense, to indicate runaway slaves or renegades.

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<sup>38</sup> Lemche mentions that in Akkadian cuneiform writing the consonant ‘h’ represents at least three different western Semitic gutturals. It is still uncertain whether the second consonant called Semitic labials should be rendered as ‘p’ or ‘b’. This term could be rendered as either *habiru* or *hapiru* or *'apiru* or *'abiru*. See Niels Peter Lemche, “Habiru, Hapiru” *ABD* (CD-ROM). We will take the rendering of *'apiru* for the sake of consistency.

<sup>39</sup> *'apiru* were not confined to the land of Canaan, but they were to be found in numerous texts widely distributed over the ancient world in the period 2000 to 1200 BCE. See Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 401.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 401.

<sup>41</sup> Lemche, “Habiru, Hapiru” *ABD* (CD-ROM).

<sup>42</sup> For a detailed discussions see Lemche, “Habiru, Hapiru” *ABD* (CD-ROM). Also Gottwald, *Tribes*, pp. 401-409. *'apiru* were also sometimes described as skilled labourers like vintners, stone cutters and haulers, temple servants, charioteers, mercenaries etc.

<sup>43</sup> See Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 404. He mentions that any person or group perceived as threatening the stability or vital interests of a person in authority could easily be viewed as “acting the part of an ‘outlaw,’” as indeed an *'apiru*, rather analogous to the pejorative and hysterical use of the epithet “Communist” for any person threatening capitalist societies.

<sup>44</sup> Lemche, “Hebrew” *ABD* (CD-ROM).

In the light of all this evidence, the idea that there are some links between the ancestors of Israel and certain groups of *'apiru* people cannot be discarded altogether. It is reasonable to assume that at least some groups of early tribes who later became part of the Israelite people were originally related to certain groups of *'apiru*. Lemche observes that the discussion about the connection between Hebrews and *'apiru* is fundamental for understanding the ethnic term "Hebrew" in the Old Testament, and he believes that the rise of the Israelite nation cannot be separated from the social upheavals during the Late Bronze Age, of which the *'apiru* movement is evidence.<sup>45</sup> The biblical and extra-biblical evidence of the social realities of the early tribes of the Old Testament tend to indicate that the ancestors of the Israelite people were generally connected with the lower class minority people who had been discriminated against, excluded and denied their rights, dignity and privileges as groups of people.

### 3.1.3. *Poverty and Oppression*

Poverty and oppression are common experiences of the tribal population in India. Most of the tribal peoples in different parts of India have been, and still are, the victims of oppression, exploitation, violence, discrimination and alienation. Their values and ethos are undoubtedly shaped by their struggles in the context of oppression and poverty. For example, the Mizo tribal values of co-operation and solidarity were survival tactics in the context of poverty and other difficult circumstances where people struggled together to survive as a community. Moreover, their admiration of brave warriors, hunters and defenders of the community - who had shown their bravery and selfless love for the protection of the helpless members in the community - was also inseparable from their constantly being threatened by various dominant forces. Most of the traditional values of the tribal people were born and developed in the context of poverty and oppression.

Hebrew values and religious beliefs also undoubtedly shared these roots. The patriarchal and wilderness traditions in the Pentateuch strongly indicate that the ancestors of the Israelites were economically poor, politically powerless and socially neglected. They could be identified as the lowest class - a marginalised

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<sup>45</sup> Lemche, "Hebrew" *ABD* (CD-ROM). Gottwald also accepts *'apiru* mercenaries and adventurers as part of the early components of Israelite tribes.

group of people - who were often the hardest hit when faced with famine, drought, plague, and other calamities. They were the people who moved from one place to another in search of pasturage and food outside the civilization enjoyed by certain dominant peoples in their times. It is conceivable that each of them had gone through the experience of wilderness in his or her own way. The details of the wilderness tradition in the Pentateuch may not be taken as historical in light of modern research. However, this tradition at least points to the fact that the Israelite ancestors were the underprivileged people who had gone through various hardships and difficulties outside the circle of the normal socio-economic and political set-up.

The exodus tradition contains the clearest picture of the condition of poverty and oppression undergone by the Hebrew tribes in the early period. Like other narratives in the Pentateuch, the historicity of the details of this tradition is highly questionable. However, it cannot be denied that this tradition reflects certain memories about the socio-economic realities of the Israelite ancestors commonly shared by different tribes of Israel. We do not know whether all early tribes suffered the same kind of oppression and poverty that had been experienced by certain slaves who escaped from Egyptian bondage. But we do know that the reality of oppression and liberation was commonly accepted as part of the historical experiences of their ancestors by the different tribes in Israel. Gottwald comments that “the exodus may be understood as an event, or a series of events, or it may be understood as a process – as a complex of events exhibiting certain recognizable features.”<sup>46</sup> Here, we will take it as a series of events, since various groups of the early tribes appear to have gone through such bitter experiences in their respective places before they were united as the people of Yahweh. The centrality of this theme in the religious faith of the people of the Old Testament implies that they must have been generally poor with common interests and experiences. The exodus tradition emphasises that Israel’s ancestors were not only a minority people, but they were the poor people who had gone through serious traumatic experiences as they suffered socio-economic oppression and physical violence from the people who dominated them. Their suffering was not merely an accident, but it was the result of deliberate violence and systematic oppression carried out by those who

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<sup>46</sup> Gottwald, “The Exodus as Event and Process: A Test Case in the Biblical Grounding of Liberation Theology” in *The Hebrew Bible and its Social World and in Ours*, pp. 271-272.

held power. They were the people who had been marginalised, discriminated against - the victims of genocide. Moreover, they were people whose basic human rights had been violated, their existence as a community denied, their human dignity ignored, and their cultural values and self-respect destroyed by their oppressors. The painful experience of oppression and discrimination was the common memory of the early tribes, handed down from one generation to another. The mentality and psychology of this kind of people, who had been constantly threatened by forces beyond their control, cannot be similar to those who are comfortable and secure. According to biblical tradition, the Israelite faith was born and developed in and through the experiences of these helpless and vulnerable people.

The theme of the liberation of the oppressed in the Old Testament could be the product of the painful experiences of such people. There cannot be a theologically neutral perspective for those kinds of people. Rather, the basic theological values of the Old Testament were from the beginning closely tied with the aspirations and hopes of the poor and oppressed, which fundamentally opposed the dominant oppressors' worldview and value-system. In fact, the whole story of the exodus is dominated by how Yahweh encounters the rigid structure of a monarchy that enslaves people who are at the periphery. This tradition apparently conveys the message that the basic values and principles of Israelite religion were fundamentally different from the values and interests of the dominant class in the monarchy. Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler note that "Israel's faith was formed in the crucible of slavery in Egypt, in the experience of crying out to God.... This public processing of pain, together with the critique of the dominant ideology, became an essential element in the faith of Israel as each generation discovered its identity."<sup>47</sup> The initial self-revelation of Yahweh to Moses is portrayed in the context of the Hebrew people being exploited and severely oppressed by the regime of Egypt. The picture we have is not merely about the conflict between two equal parties or two different tribal groups. It is between the landless poor people who solely depended upon their subsistence economy and those who had absolute control of power over a vast territory of land and accumulated a huge amount of wealth. It is between the well-organised powerful military regime and the defenceless tribal people. Moreover, it

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<sup>47</sup> Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for life* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999) p. 8.

is between the powerful force of enslavement and the powerless slaves. Here, Yahweh is depicted as the One who challenges the absolute sovereignty of Pharaoh for the liberation of the people. This kind of divine picture could not have originated and developed among royal circles or urban elites; rather it must have been rooted in the painful feelings and bitter experiences of those who had been dejected and discriminated against. These Hebrew slaves developed their own identity, which did not belong to Pharaoh's world and was not subject to the dominant ideology.<sup>48</sup> The clear message of the exodus tradition is that Yahweh was not originally the God of the dominant group of people, but the God of the poor people who had been the victims of exploitation and injustice. The central theological perspective that dominated the Yahwistic faith in its early stage was the perspective of the socially and politically powerless people who struggled to survive in the context of hardships and sufferings under various socio-economic oppressions and exploitations. In other words, a theology of the oppressed subaltern people was the fundamental doctrine of Yahwism before the emergence of monarchy.

### 3.2. Conflicting Values and Ethos

#### 3.2.1. *Conflict in Northeast India*

Conflict is not something new in Northeast India. Since India attained political independence in 1947, Northeast India has not seen even a single decade of political calm. Instead, resistance movements break out which cover all the seven states in the region.<sup>49</sup> This clearly indicates that all is not well in this part of the country. It is obvious that there is no single factor responsible for such outbreaks among the tribal movements, as it is a complex issue.<sup>50</sup> However, one important issue which

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Kinsler and Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee*, p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> See the discussion on this issue by Lalsangkima Pachuau, "'Tribal' Identity and Ethnic Conflicts in Northeast India: A 'Tribal' Christian Response" *BTF*, 30 (1990) pp. 160-161. He cites Nibaran Bora's words: "Insurgency took roots in Nagaland and Manipur in the early fifties, immediately after the establishment of the Republic [of India], those in Mizoram in the sixties, in Tripura in the seventies, while in the case of Assam it arrived in the eighties. Meghalaya and Arunachal [Pradesh] are just menacingly militant, not yet insurgent though, Karbi Anglong [a district of Assam] too is equally poised." See N. Bora, "Insurgency in the North East: Causes of its Rise and Nature of the Uprising" in B. C. Bhunyan (ed.) *Political Development of the North-East Vol.II* (New Delhi: Omsons Publications, 1992) pp. 1-11.

<sup>50</sup> Scholars have different opinions regarding the major factors for the outbreak of the movements. The immediate factors seem to have varied from one place to another. A vast collection of articles written by scholars from different perspectives regarding this issue can be seen in B. C. Bhunyan



cannot be ignored is that the peoples who are involved in the different resistance movements are mostly comprised of tribals, i.e. not the dominant Aryanic Hindu population. This may suggest that the socio-cultural issue could be one of the major contributing factors that lead to the outbreak of such movements. P. S. Dutta argues that the Indian government's unethical policy of national integration is greatly responsible for the outbreak of the tribal movements. For him, people who are being "integrated" are aware that "integration" in such a situation does not guarantee equality but compels them to give up their own cultural values and accept the cultural assumptions of the dominant group(s), i.e., to submit to the chauvinism of the dominant and to accept the unequal colonial relationship as natural.<sup>51</sup> Thanzauva contends that the main cause of tribal revolt in Northeast India lies in the policy of the dominant groups throughout the history.<sup>52</sup> Lalsangkima Pachuau also argues that "the Indian national majority's failure to recognise the otherness of the 'tribals' and its attempt to erase the difference has been a major factor in the political turmoil of NEI [Northeast India]."<sup>53</sup> Our discussion in the preceding chapter demonstrated that the tribal people in Northeast India are heavily pressured by cultural homogeneity through sanskritisation and modernisation. The process of sanskritisation is the gradual assimilating force that constantly threatens the survival of the tribal people as distinctive groups of people. As a result of this process, a number of tribal groups have been assimilated and others are on the brink of cultural extinction as they are more and more absorbed by the dominant Hindu culture. In this context, the tribal people have become increasingly uncomfortable with being part of Indian society; they are small minorities who are culturally vulnerable and politically powerless to protect themselves from the constant pressure of the majority Hindu population. For them, to take a passive stand in this

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(ed.), *Political Development of the North-East* Vol. II. See especially N. Bora, "Insurgency in the North East: Causes of its Rise and the Nature of the Uprising", P. S. Dutta, "Roots of Insurgency", G. Upadhaya, "Problems of Nationalism in the North East: An Observation", H. N. Sarma Bordoloi, "Nationalism and Sub-nationalism in the North East: A Socio- Anthropological Approach", A.K. Barua, "Problems of Integration in India: Some Conceptual Issues", T. K. Bhattacharjee, "Integration in the North East: A Left View", Abhijit Chowdhury, "National Mainstream Syndrome and the North East: A Note", P. K. Bhunyan, "Economic Integration and Prospect of Development in North East Region". K. Thanzuava has shown a number of explanations proposed by different scholars in his *Theology of the Community* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference) pp. 28-29.

<sup>51</sup> P. S. Dutta, "Roots of Insurgency" in *Political Development of the North-East* Vol. II, pp. 15-17 (pp. 12-19).

<sup>52</sup> Thanzauva, *Theology of the Community*, p. 29.

<sup>53</sup> Lalsangkima Pachuau, "In search of a context for a contextual theology: The socio-political realities of Tribal Christians in Northeast India" *Journal of Tribal Studies* Vol.1.1 (1997) p. 22.

context would mean to lose their cultural identity and to submit to the chauvinism of the dominant Hindu population. M. N. Srinivas and R. D. Sanwal observe, “Many amongst the regional segment of the national majority not only want the tribal people in NEHA [North-Eastern Hill Areas] to be culturally assimilated into Hinduism but also want it to occur on the majority’s terms, that is, at the lowest level of the socio-ritual hierarchy.”<sup>54</sup> The tribal people, who fundamentally believe in communitarian values and egalitarian principles, cannot simply accept this rigid hierarchy which automatically reduces them to the bottom rung on the caste-ridden social ladder of Indian society. In fact, they are compelled to choose violence to defend their cultural identity and human dignity since they have no better option in their context, where they are under relentless pressure and their concerns are constantly ignored.<sup>55</sup> The tribal resistance movements are the clear expressions of their deep feeling of insecurity and desperation. In fact, the fundamental interest of the people has to do with a quest for survival, recognition, acceptance, justice, and equality. It is important to consider the root causes of their hostile attitudes and violent movements. James H. Cone rightly says, “no one can be non-violent in an unjust society.”<sup>56</sup> The tension of the tribal people due to religio-cultural pressure has been intensified by socio-economic discrimination and political oppression that often turn anxiety into violent struggle. Most of the tribal movements in Northeast India exemplify this desperation in the face of majority dominance<sup>57</sup> and the clear message of their struggle is that they want to be recognised as a distinctive community, like any other group of human beings, and to protect their human dignity, pride, identity and cultural values as such.

The process of modernisation, which spreads the dominant western value-system, has worsened the socio-cultural problem of the tribal people as it has further

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<sup>54</sup> As quoted by Pachuau in his “In search of a context”, pp.23-24 from M. N. Srinivas and R. D. Sanwal, “Some Aspects of Political Development in the North-Eastern Hill Areas of India” in *Tribal Situation in India*, p. 121.

<sup>55</sup> A. Wati Longchar argues that the fundamental reason for the outbreak of the Naga resistance movement was that the leaders of the Indian government turned a deaf ear to the concerns of the Naga people. See his *An Emerging Asian Theology: Tribal Theology – Issue, Method and Perspective* (Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre, 2000) p. 19.

<sup>56</sup> James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: Orbis Books, New Revised Edition, 1997) p. 201. He elaborates, “Concretely, ours is a situation in which the only option we have is that of deciding whose violence we will support – that of the oppressors or the oppressed.”

<sup>57</sup> Thanzauva points out that the only commonalities of the tribals in India are the poverty, exploitation and alienation they have suffered from time immemorial. See his *Theology of Community*, p. 11.

alienated them from their traditional ways of life and value-systems. As has been pointed out, the tribal people believe in the principle of a simple communitarian way of life. They highly value communitarian values: honour and shame, generosity, sharing, hospitality, solidarity, community well-being, selflessness, simplicity, and humility. These shared values form the common cultural identity of the tribal people. However, traditional tribal values are being wiped out by the foreign values of materialism, consumerism, economic classism, individualism, and capitalism. The symptoms of this problem can be seen in the forms of financial corruption and other unfair practices which are increasingly prevalent even among the tribal people themselves.<sup>58</sup> The recent tribal underground movements in Northeast India are not only committed to fighting for the liberation of the tribal people from the political, economic and cultural domination of the dominant population, but also to check the emerging value-systems and corrupt lifestyles in their own society that seriously damage their traditional values and communitarian ways of life. Thus, the tribal people are fundamentally fighting to preserve their cultural values and distinctive identity from the increasing pressure of the various forms of cultural imperialism. The tribal movements in Northeast India may be best described as the movement of the desperate minority people who did not have any choice but to fight for their very survival in the context where the combined forces of sanskritization and modernization constantly push them to the edge of their limit. The tribal context in Northeast India may be able to illuminate the socio-cultural development in the Israelite monarchy leading to the serious conflict in the eighth century BCE.

### 3.2.2. *Conflicting Values and Ethos in the Israelite Monarchy*

There was a significant change in the understanding and interpretation of Hebrew religion after the establishment of the monarchy in Israel. One of the significant changes that could be seen clearly was that royal values and interests, which did not have any root in the tribal religious values and principles, were increasingly incorporated into the Yahwistic faith. For example, the establishment of the monarchy in Israel was described as the will and purpose of Yahweh. In fact, the

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<sup>58</sup> Vanlalluaia Hranleh, "Financial Corruption in Mizoram Political Life: Ethical Issues and Their Implications for the Mizoram Presbyterian Church" (Unpublished B.D. Thesis, United Theological College, Bangalore, India, 1991).

intention to establish a monarchic form of government in the tribal communitarian social setting appeared to be a very controversial issue in its early stages. Even before the anointment of Saul to be the first king of Israel, the Gideon and Abimelech stories suggest that there was already a tendency to introduce a kind of monarchy among certain groups of early tribes (Judges 8:22-28; 9).<sup>59</sup> Gideon's reply to those who wanted to make him king over them must have represented the traditional view about kingship: "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; Yahweh will rule over you" (Judges 8:22). This is a clear expression of the rejection of any form of absolute authority other than Yahweh for the Israelite tribes. The stronger expression can be found in 1 Samuel 8:7, when Yahweh himself is portrayed as responding to the prayer of Samuel regarding the demand from certain groups of people to introduce monarchy in Israel. Yahweh is represented as having said to Samuel, "for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them." To appoint a king was here equated with rejection of Yahweh's rule. This can be taken as a theological expression of the contradictory nature of the system of monarchy on the one hand and the tribal communitarian system on the other. In sociological terms, to introduce monarchy would be to violate the tribal communitarian principles, which were the central value of Yahwism. The tribal communitarian social system and the rigid hierarchical system of monarchy are naturally two opposite and mutually exclusive systems. The warning of the negative socio-economic implications of the oppressive system of monarchy in 1 Samuel 8:10-18 clearly shows the difference between the tribal social system and the system of monarchy. The tribal deity Yahweh is presented in this context as the one who strongly opposes the oppressive hierarchical system of monarchy.

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<sup>59</sup> It is not the purpose of the present study to offer an historical reconstruction of Israel's evolution from tribal organisation to full state, but merely to show certain aspects of the conflicting principles of the ruling elite and the traditional tribal people in the process of political development. There are many sociological and anthropological studies that prove useful for understanding the development of the Israelite state. See E. R. Service, *Origins of the State and Civilization* (New York: Norton, 1975); R. Cohen and E. R. Service, *Origins of the State* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978); M. H. Fried, *The Evolution of Political Society* (New York: Random House, 1967); H. J. M. Claessen and P. Skalnik, "The Early State: Theories and Hypotheses" in *The Early State* (eds. H. J. M. Claessen and P. Skalnik; The Hague: Mouton, 1978) pp. 3-29; James W. Flanagan, "Chiefs in Israel" in *Social-Scientific Old Testament Criticism: A Sheffield Reader* (ed. David J. Chalcraft; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) pp. 136-161.

But in 1 Samuel 9:15-17, Yahweh is described as the one who instructs Samuel to anoint Saul to be the first king of Israel. It is very surprising to see the God who considered the demand to introduce monarchy as an act of rejection of his rule now becoming the one who commands Samuel to anoint the first king of Israel. The anti-monarchic Yahweh has now been transformed into the pro-monarchic Yahweh. This is a clear indication of the existence of two contradictory versions about Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible – tribal and royal versions of Yahweh.<sup>60</sup> Here we see the royal account of Yahweh that encourages and accepts the royal propaganda of establishing the monarchy. Coote argues that literature from David's court formed the germ of what became the Hebrew Scriptures, and he convincingly demonstrates how royal propaganda had been promoted and justified by using the literature of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>61</sup>

In many ways, the tribal version of Yahwism had been suppressed by the royal version in the monarchic period. According to the royal interpretation, it was not only the establishment of the monarchy in Israel that had been authorised and approved by Yahweh, but also David's usurpation of Saul's rule and even the execution of members of the house of Saul was theologically justified (2 Sam. 21:1-9). David's successful attempt to be king was attributed solely to the will of Yahweh, and his whole action to achieve power was presented as fulfilling divine

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<sup>60</sup> Traditionally, these two different traditions are known as the pro-monarchic and anti-monarchic traditions. The narratives of the pro-monarchic traditions (1Sam 9:1-19:16; 11:1-11, 15; 13-14) are regarded as the early and authentic ones whereas the anti-monarchic traditions (1Sam 7:3-17; 8; 10:17-27; 11:12-14) are taken as relatively late, exilic and fictional as a result of Wellhausen's classic source-critical treatment of 1Sam. 7-12. See Keith W. Whitelam, "Israelite Kingship: The Royal Ideology and its Opponents" in *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives* (ed. R. E. Clements; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p.122. See also his "King and Kingship" in *ABD* (CD-ROM). But there is no strong textual and historical evidence to support this view other than mere speculation. Rather, these two different ideas about monarchy must have already existed even before the establishment of the monarchy in Israel, because this was an issue in the time of the Judges as we see in Judges 8:22-28; 9, and in Jotham's parable (Judges 9:7-15). It can be argued that the anti-monarchic idea was as old as the pro-monarchic tendency as the ancestors of Israelite tribes were the people who were at the peripheries of their society and who fought against the people at the centre fortified by the hierarchical structure of monarchy. Cf. F. Crüsemann, *Der Widerstand gegen des Königtum* (Neukirchen – Vluyn, 1978). Crüsemann sees the opposition to the establishment of monarchy as contemporary with the inauguration of monarchy rather than as a late Deuteronomic redaction. See also Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1960) pp. 164-165. Noth accepted Wellhausen's literary analysis, but nevertheless believed that the anti-monarchic sentiments probably reflected an attitude that was current at the time of the inauguration of the monarchy. For further discussion on this issue see I. Mendelsohn, "Samuel's Denunciation of Kingship in the Light of Akkadian Documents from Ugarit" *BASOR*, 143 (1956) pp. 17-32; B. Halpern., *The Constitution of Monarchy* (Chico: Scholars press, 1981).

<sup>61</sup> Coote and Coote, *Power, Politics*, pp. 28ff.

command (Ps. 89:3-4, 19-24).<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the Davidic dynasty was legitimised as a divinely ordained institution, and his capital city Jerusalem, the stronghold of royal oppressive power, was also theologically confirmed as the appointed city of Yahweh (2 Sam. 7:1-17; Ps. 89:19-37). In fact, David tried to keep Yahwism fully under royal control as he intended to build the temple in Jerusalem, but his plan was rejected by Yahweh through the mouth of his prophet Nathan (2 Sam. 7:5-8). De Vaux comments, "The refusal is categorical and lasting: Yahweh does not wish a temple."<sup>63</sup> This may suggest that there was a strong hostile opinion to the construction of the temple in Jerusalem from the very beginning. But Yahweh, who is represented as rejecting David's plan to build the temple, is again portrayed as the one who authorises Solomon to build the same (2 Sam. 7:12-13; 1 Kings 5:2-6). This can be another indication of the existence of the two contradictory accounts about the will and purpose of Yahweh. The tribal Yahweh categorically rejects the building of the temple in Jerusalem whereas the royal Yahweh gives permission to do so. Despite opposition and rejection, Solomon forcefully got through his plan to build the temple in Jerusalem, as he wanted to monopolise religion to endorse the royal ideology of control and dominion. Religion in the ancient context was very important for consolidating the establishment of monarchy.<sup>64</sup> After the construction of the Jerusalem temple by Solomon, the Israelite religion came fully under the control of the state and the temple became a stronghold for promoting and legitimising royal values and interests, which were often destructive to the values and principles of tribal Yahwism. Coote shows how Yahwism turned out to be an urban elites' religion after the building of the temple. For him, the Jerusalem temple was indistinguishable from the cults of the other urban deities throughout the eastern Mediterranean in terms of architecture, equipment, procedure and ideology. It was a sanctuary, treasury, court and archive for the Davidic dynasty, and as it was

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. Coote and Coote, *Power, Politics*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>63</sup> Roland de Vaux, *Jerusalem and the Prophets* (Cincinnati: The Hebrew Union College Press, 1965) p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> Keith W. Whitlam convincingly demonstrates how the ancient monarchs used symbols to maintain control and legitimise their propaganda. See his "The Symbols of Power: Aspects of Royal Propaganda in the United Monarchy" *Biblical Archaeologist* 49 (1986) pp. 166-173. He mentions that "the temple provides a location for ritual central to the legitimacy of the dynasty. It defines the sacred relationship of the center, thereby providing symbolic legitimacy to the royal elite. The immense investment of resources involved in producing and maintaining such monumental religious structures clearly indicates their social and political significance as symbols of legitimacy in agrarian states." See also his "King, Kingship" *ABD* (CD-ROM). Other scholars have also examined how the temple and its rites formed an essential element of the political ideology of the royal state. See C. Meyers, "Jachim and Boaz in Religious and Political Perspective" *CBQ* 45 (1983) pp. 167-178.

dedicated to dynastic succession it became one of the most important inheritances of the royal family.<sup>65</sup>

The tribal Yahwism that fundamentally advocated simple communitarian values and principles had now been largely dominated by the royal Yahwism that was very rich in ritual and sacrificial practices that conformed with the expensive lifestyle of the throne and the wealthy aristocratic value-system.<sup>66</sup> Yahwism, controlled and manipulated by the ruling elite, was no longer within the reach of the bottom class people; rather, it was monopolised and dictated by the royal circle to elevate elitist values and ideology. Coote mentions, “Solomon enshrined the tribal battle ark in the temple’s innermost sanctuary, never to be seen again by the ordinary.”<sup>67</sup> The ark was a symbol of Yahweh’s presence in the midst of his people and it was the centre of the common worship which was the only effective bond between the tribes during all the period of Judges. De Vaux observes, “In receiving the ark Jerusalem had become the heir of all this past, and she must preserve it intact. The building of a temple in a manner of a royal sanctuary of the Canaanites could appear as a rupture of tradition which would put this heritage in danger.”<sup>68</sup> The enshrinement of the tribal ark in the Jerusalem temple was very much in tune with the way in which the elements of tribal religious values had been captured and modified by the ruling elite to support the royal ideology of control and dominion. Scott states:

The ceremonial worship of Yahweh in Solomon’s temple was patterned on the long-standing and widespread cult of monarchies in the contemporary world, the myth and ritual of the god as creator and king, and of the human king as the divine son and the symbol of the people’s life.”<sup>69</sup>

In the royal psalms and other literatures produced in favour of the crown, the king was often portrayed as the great liberator and protector of the oppressed people,<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Coote and Coote, *Power, Politics*, p. 34.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. N. K. Gottwald, “The Biblical Prophetic Critique of Political Economy: Its Ground and Import” in *The Hebrew Bible in its Social world and in ours* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993) p. 254.

<sup>67</sup> Coote and Coote, *Power, Politics*, p. 36.

<sup>68</sup> De Vaux, *Jerusalem and the Prophets*, p. 7.

<sup>69</sup> R. B. Y. Scott, *The Relevance of the Prophets* (New York: The Macmillan Company, revised edition, 1968) p. 33.

<sup>70</sup> See Psalms 72 and 89. The royal Psalms (Psalms 2; 45; 72; 101; 110), which were identified by H. Gunkel, provide the clearest evidence for the Davidic royal ideology. See his *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction* (trans. Thomas M. Horner; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), also *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (Macon: Mercer, 1998). S. Mowinckel extended this group of psalms (Psalms, 28; 44; 60; 61; 63; 64; 66; 68; 80; 83; 118; and

but certain kings did not live up to this ideal. Instead, the royal image in the Israelite monarchy could not be separated from forced labour and other oppressive systems that drained off the economic surplus of the poor peasants and impoverished the majority of the ordinary people.

A huge amount of the wealth accumulated in the hands of Solomon, which he gained largely through the exploitation and deprivation of the ordinary people, was interpreted and legitimised as the fruit of the wisdom that he received from Yahweh (1 Kings 4:22-34). The wisdom tradition was an important literary instrument for the throne, which was frequently used to legitimise the royal accumulation of wealth at the expense of the ordinary population. Habel says, "Wisdom is the means, not the end, of Solomon's golden age, and David Jobling also puts it as the means to "gain other goods as a natural surplus."<sup>71</sup> David Pleins strongly argues that the values and practices advocated in the wisdom tradition are in accord with the political and economic leanings of the ruling classes.<sup>72</sup> Covenant and election traditions had also been given new meaning and significance to support the royal ideology and the establishment of the monarchy. For example, the Davidic dynasty and even the royal stronghold, the city of Jerusalem, are often portrayed as chosen and covenanted by Yahweh (2 Sam. 7:1-17; Ps. 89:19-37). In this way, the older traditions in the Yahwistic faith were modified and reinterpreted to support royal ideology in the written literatures of the monarchic period in order to promote and glorify the royal values and interests that undermined the traditional tribal values.

However, we should not imagine that tribal communitarian values and social norms had been completely replaced overnight by the new value-system introduced by the ruling elite in the monarchy. Rather, it is conceivable that the tribal communitarian principle was still alive and the social system of tribalism continued to be the system followed by peripheral people, though it was different from the monarchic

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1Sam 2:1-10). See his *The Psalms in Israel worship*, vol. 1 and 2. (trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas; New York and Nashville: Abingdon, 1962).

<sup>71</sup> Norman C. Habel, *The Land is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) p. 18.

<sup>72</sup> J. David Pleins, "Poverty in the Social World of the Wise" in *Social-Scientific Old Testament Criticism: A Sheffield Reader*, pp. 283-300.



value-system in many ways.<sup>73</sup> The unfortunate thing was that these peripheral people's stories were not told during the monarchic period, or in the Old Testament as a whole except for bits and pieces of reference made as part of the royal presentation. It is undeniable that biblical literature does not accurately reflect the historical reality of the Israelite people in the monarchic period; in particular, the voices of the lower classes were not well represented as the literatures of this period mainly served the royal circle. Despite all these facts, however, there are certain indications that there was serious friction between the values of the dominant elite and the traditional values of the tribes during the monarchic period.

Nathan's resistance to David's plan to build the temple, and his direct confrontation of David over the issue of the murder of Uriah could be considered important indications of the conflict between these two value-systems (2 Sam. 7:7-17; 12:1-15). The incident concerning Uriah may have been typical of the general situation as to how the ordinary people had been denied and trampled down by the powerful and affluent. This incident was not merely an issue of adultery or murder; rather it was an issue of how the unlimited greed and endless love of pleasure endorsed by the dominant values encroached and violated the fundamental rights of the ordinary citizens. It is obvious from Nathan's parable that the major issue of this incident was that the one who had everything took away the only treasured possession of one who had next to nothing. The selfishness and lustful desire of the king, which led him deliberately to violate the fundamental rights of his poor fellow human being, was the most serious crime for Nathan. The parable further emphasises that the rich man took and prepared for his guest the poor man's only lamb instead of taking one from his own flock. This kind of absolute unfairness and tyranny promoted by the elite's value-system deprived voiceless people and was in fundamental contradiction with the ethical principles and theological conviction of the prophet.

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<sup>73</sup> N. K. Gottwald argues that "the communitarian spirit and practice of the people did not disappear overnight, but now it was dominated and threatened by Israelite state power". See his "The Biblical Prophetic Critique of Political Economy", p. 354. Elsewhere, he also mentions that "many facets of Israel's monarchy can only be properly understood if we posit a process of conflict and accommodation between state and tribe". See his "The Rise of the Israelite Monarchy – A Sociological Perspectives" in N. K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible in its Social World and in Ours*, p. 135. Richard H. Lowery is of the opinion that "Israel's economic was essentially unchanged through the entire Old Testament period. The society was mostly rural, with a few poorly developed urban areas that served primarily as royal administrative and religious centers." See his *Sabbath and Jubilee* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2000) pp. 1-2.

In light of this incident, Weir argues that “the biblical understanding of the poor is that they are not merely those who are lacking in material goods but those who are without the means to protect themselves from the oppression of the influential and powerful.”<sup>74</sup>

The outbreak of the revolt against the Davidic dynasty, which eventually brought the division of the kingdom after the death of Solomon, might also be one of the indications of the profound rift between the two different value-systems. While the throne considered the ordinary citizens merely as the source of economic power to be exploited in order to generate the royal accumulation of wealth, the ordinary people could no longer tolerate this kind of oppression. The traditional tribal communitarian values that we see in the covenant stipulations regarded every community member as brother and sister who deserved to be given special attention in times of need. Scott maintains, “For with Solomon the free, kinship society came under a royal despotism, which was at the same time an oppressive form of monopoly state capitalism.”<sup>75</sup> The violation of the traditional tribal communitarian system by means of forced labour and the imposition of heavy tax was the immediate factor which caused the outbreak of the revolt. The revolt under the leadership of Jeroboam, assisted by the prophet Ahijah, appeared to be originally intended to encourage the re-establishment of the tribal communitarian system in Israelite society as an alternative to Davidic oppressive rule (cf. 1 Kings 12:1-20). However, it was not long before Jeroboam’s court too became a centre of ostentatious wealth and power.<sup>76</sup>

Another significant indication of the clash between the tribal and royal values may be found in the conflict between the prophet Elijah and the house of Ahab in the ninth century BCE (cf. 1 Kings 16:19-34; 18; 19). The text presents the struggle between the two as one between Yahweh and Baal. The influx of foreign religious practices and cultural values, which were combined with royal values in the time of the Omride dynasty, had further pressurised the cultural and religious life of the Israelite people, and this may have formed the background of this conflict. Yahweh

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<sup>74</sup> J. Emmette Weir, “The Poor are Powerless: A Response to R. J. Coggins” *Exp Tim* 100 (1988) p. 13.

<sup>75</sup> Scott, *The Relevance of the Prophets*, p. 30.

<sup>76</sup> Scott, *The Relevance of the Prophets*, p. 31.

in this context was depicted as the God of the grassroots and marginalised people who were committed to defending the traditional tribal faith even in the face of opposition, drought and scarcity of food, whereas Baalism, the Tyrian fertility cult introduced by Jezebel, Ahab's queen, was the religion of the throne and the elites who enjoyed the cream of the crop. In other words, Yahweh represented the traditional tribal communitarian ideology, whereas the Tyrian fertility god Baal represented the hybrid form of elitist values in this narrative. This conflict could be taken as an ideological battle between those who supported the simple tribal way of life and those who maintained the aristocratic lifestyle, influenced as it was by foreign value-systems and the unjust political structure of monarchy. Here we see how the lower class people fought against the systematic alienation of tribal religious ideology and cultural values by the hybrid culture of the royal circle. Even at the point of death, the people who still believed in the tribal God Yahweh, represented by Elijah, did not give up defending their traditional values. This view is clearly illustrated by the Naboth story (1 Kings 21). In this tragic incident, the contradictory nature of the tribal value-system and the royal value-system concerning the understanding of land is clearly presented. Ahab and his Phoenician queen, Jezebel, held the dominant view of land whereas Naboth, a small landowner, maintained the traditional tribal view of land. According to the royal understanding, land could be purchased, sold, traded, bargained for, and even seized or grabbed as long as it served the interests and desires of the royal family. But for Naboth, land was not a commodity but his inheritance and his identity which gave him roots to his family in the past and linked him to his fellow community members in the present. Brueggemann observes, "No amount of power or royal authority can negate those historical roots and connections."<sup>77</sup> But Naboth was murdered by unfair judicial means, paying a high price for his objection to the royal interest, and his inherited land was finally at the disposal of the royal family. In this context, the prophet Elijah directly confronted Ahab and Jezebel defending the cause of Naboth who was faithful to the tribal value unto his death. "For the throne," Brueggemann observes, "the process of transmitting property is one over which powerful human persons and agents have full power and freedom. The royal establishment lives by

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. Walther Brueggemann, *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel's Communal Life* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994) p. 279.

such procedures, and surely the urban mentality authorises such a view.”<sup>78</sup> This incident gives us the idea that everyone who stood in the way of the throne was brushed aside by force to give way to the royal values and interests at all costs. Those who believed in the traditional tribal values and principles were the losers in the ideological battle of this period not necessarily because they were wrong, but simply because they were powerless politically and economically. They were systematically marginalised by the tyrannical power of the throne. Religious ideology, political authority, economic power and violence were inseparably combined to form a strong force to promote the aristocratic value-system and lavish lifestyle, which suppressed the traditional values and ways of life.

### 3.3. Conclusion

In the light of the formative factors of the values and ethos of the tribals in Northeast India, we have argued that tribal communitarian social structure, minority people’s feelings and their bitter experiences of extreme poverty and socio-economic oppression jointly shaped the original religio-cultural ethos and socio-economic and political values of the Hebrew tribes. Therefore, the Hebrew values and ethos were originally community-oriented, minority-centred and pro-poor and oppressed. However, after the establishment of the monarchy in Israel, the values and interests of the people in the royal circle increasingly alienated the traditional values and ethos. As a result of this, there was always conflict and clash of interests, which can be connected with several incidents in Israel and Judah. This kind of conflict between tribal and elitist socio-cultural values seems to have provided the background of the protest of the prophets in the eighth century BCE. The issues that challenged the eighth-century prophets are not fundamentally different from the socio-cultural issues that we see in the preceding centuries. The oracles of the prophets clearly suggest that they continue to fight against the dominant values and ways of life that alienate the traditional tribal values and ethos. The economic growth during the reigns of Jeroboam II and Uzziah must have intensified the tension between the two contradictory value-systems in Israelite and Judahite

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

society in various ways. Premnath suggests the shift from the tribal mixed subsistence economy to a market economy in ancient Israel as the background of the prophetic protest in the eighth century BCE.<sup>79</sup> He identifies land accumulation, the growth of urban centres, militarisation, the extraction of surpluses through a careful system of taxation, and the growth of trade and commerce as the major issues that challenged the prophets.<sup>80</sup> Dearman also recognises that the prophetic protests reflect years of socio-economic, political and religious tensions as a result of internal development in Israelite society. At the same time, he also sees the external influence upon the internal economic and political developments in Judah and Israel.<sup>81</sup> He emphasises the influence of Neo-Assyrians, who dominated international politics from the second half of the eighth century BCE, upon the values and administrative practices of the ruling elite in Judah and Israel. He connects the practices of land grant, land alienation, and taxation privileges in Judah and Israel with the other cultural practices in ancient West Asia.<sup>82</sup> In the light of this view, it is quite reasonable to suggest that the dominant values and principles that had encroached upon the Israelite traditional tribal values and ethos were largely associated with the imperialistic movements of the Neo-Assyrians and Egyptians in the eighth century BCE. The prophetic protests in this period should be seen as part of the ordinary people's struggle to survive in the context when they were being alienated from their traditional values and ways of life by the combined forces of the emerging elitist culture of monarchic period and the process of foreign cultural imperialism that came along with the political expansion of the neighbouring states.

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<sup>79</sup> D. N. Premnath, "Comparative and Historical Sociology in Old Testament Research: A Study of Isaiah 3: 12-15" *BTF*, 17, No.4 (1985) pp. 30-32.

<sup>80</sup> Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets*, pp. 20ff.

<sup>81</sup> John Andrew Dearman, *Property Rights in the Eighth Century Prophets* (Atlanta: Scholars press, 1988) pp. 133ff.

<sup>82</sup> Dearman, *Property Rights*, p. 142.

## 4

## צדקה AND משפט

This chapter is devoted to examining the oracles of the eighth-century prophets, with particular reference to the terms משפט and צדקה. The prophets persistently demand משפט and צדקה in their oracles as they challenge different kinds of social evils in their society, such as oppression of the poor, perversion of the judicial system, land grabbing, religious apostasy, lavish cultic expenditure, misuse of power, unfair practices at the market, etc. This certainly indicates that משפט and צדקה are related to the different dimensions of the prophetic concern of social life and that they are very fundamental and central to the teaching of the prophets. For this reason, they can be regarded as the core value of the eighth-century prophets. It is usually recognised that the eighth-century prophets are the champions of social justice, and they are generally considered as preachers of משפט and צדקה in relation to their concern for social justice. However, the current understanding of the prophets' concepts of משפט and צדקה, dominated by the interpretations of those who value the modern concept of social justice and the judicial understanding of justice, is not the only way to understand these concepts.<sup>1</sup> The traditional tribal way of maintaining order and the fundamental principle of their communitarianism known as *tlawmngaihna*<sup>2</sup> may also significantly illuminate certain aspects of the prophets' concepts of משפט and צדקה. Two different passages, namely Isaiah 1: 21-26 and Amos 5:21-27 have been selected for analysis. The main objective of this investigation is to show what exactly the prophets want to promote as they demand

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<sup>1</sup> Modern exegetes are generally preoccupied by the significance of the system of the court of law and judicial process. The prophets' concept of משפט and צדקה is also often connected with the judicial concept of justice and modern understanding of social justice. For example, see James Luther Mays, *Amos: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1969) pp. 46, 108, etc. Also his "Justice: Perspectives from the Prophetic Tradition" *Interpretation* 37 (1983) pp. 5-17; Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12: A Commentary* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM Press Ltd. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1983) pp. 42-43; Heinz-Horst Schrey, Hans Hermann Walt and W. A. Whitehouse, *The Biblical Doctrine of Justice and Law* (London: SCM Press, 1955); H. W. Wolff, *Amos the Prophet* (trans. F. R. McCurley; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) pp. 59-67; See also B. Johnson "משפט" *TDOT* Vol. 9 (1998) p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> The detailed discussion on the meaning and function of *tlawmngaihna* can be found in Chapter two, section 2.3.2.

משפט and צדקה. What are the values and ethos of the prophets in their efforts to establish משפט and צדקה in society? An attempt will be made to answer this question in light of the Mizo socio-ethical principle known as *tlawmngaihna*. Through this analysis, significant aspects of the fundamental values of the prophets can be explained and illuminated by the Mizo perspective.

#### 4.1. The terms משפט and צדקה, צדק

In the following discussion, the terms משפט and צדקה or צדק will be taken as synonymous, since no neat and consistent distinctions can be drawn between them, and they often appear in tandem or in parallel.<sup>3</sup> They will not be translated into English as there are no English words that can represent the exact meanings of these terms; they are multidimensional in usage and multifarious in meaning in the various ancient West Asian texts in which they occur, and in the Old Testament.<sup>4</sup> משפט and צדקה are usually taken as the equivalents of the English terms ‘justice’ and ‘righteousness’. However, the terms ‘justice’ and ‘righteousness’ are not comprehensive and apt enough to translate these Hebrew terms. For example, Goldingay rightly points out that both “justice” and “righteousness” are abstract nouns; but משפט and צדקה are not. He then strongly argues that whatever משפט

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Jepsen distinguishes צדק and צדקה: For him, צדק denotes “proper order, good arrangement, or correctness or rightness” whereas צדקה refers to “right behaviour or right relationship”. See his “צדק und צדקה im Alten Testament” in *Gottes Wort und Gottes Land* (ed. Henning Graf Reventlow; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1965) pp. 79-80. But there is no convincing evidence to support this theory. Rather, there is sufficient evidence to prove that these terms are used interchangeably in the Old Testament (e.g. Hos. 2:19-20 [21-22]; 10:12; Mic. 6:5,8; Ezek. 3:16-21; Pss. 40:10-11[9-10]; 89:15-17[14-16] etc.). Regarding משפט and צדק or צדקה, some scholars cannot take these two terms as synonymous. For example, Hemchand Gossai argues that there is a clear distinction between the use of these concepts, and they are not intended to be synonymous. For him, צדק is the source of משפט, and he emphasises the relationship between the two. See his *Justice, Righteousness and the Social Critique of the Eighth-century Prophets* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1993) pp. 210-219. Jepsen also proposes to differentiate these terms as he says, “Geht משפט zunächst auf die Rechtsprechung im besonderen, so צדקה auf ein Verhalten, das auf צדק im allgemeinen, auf Richtigkeit, Ordnung ausgerichtet ist.” See his “צדק und צדקה im Alten Testament”, p. 80. However, if we carefully examine the usage of these terms especially in the books of the prophets and the book of Psalms, they are frequently used as poetic parallels or synonyms bearing one and the same meaning, and it is very difficult to draw a line to distinguish them (e.g. Deut. 16:18; Isa. 1:27; 5:7,16; 9:6[7]; 28:17; 32:16,17; 33:5; Amos 5:7; 6:12; Ezek. 18:5,19,22,27; 33:14, 16, 19; 45:9; Pss. 33:5; 72:1; 99:4; 106:3; Job 29:14; 8:3 etc.). See Bruce C. Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991) pp.153ff. See also Sidney Rooy, “Righteousness and Justice” *Evangelical Review of Theology* Vol.6 (1982) pp. 261-263.

<sup>4</sup> Gossai traces the occurrences and usages of these terms in Ugaritic/Akkadian, Phoenician, Arabic and the Old Testament literatures. See his *Justice, Righteousness*, pp. 11-120. See also J. J. Scullion, ‘Righteousness (OT)’ *ABD* (CD-ROM).

וְצִדְקָה means, it is not “justice and righteousness”.<sup>5</sup> Frey also notes that the Hebrew words which are most often assumed to be equivalents of “justice”, namely צִדְקָה, צֶדֶק and מִשְׁפָּט (or even Greek δικαιοσύνη) are not, in a strictly semantic sense, compatible with definitions of justice; rather, their meanings tend in other directions.<sup>6</sup> Gossai discusses the ideas of several scholars regarding these terms, by whom a wide range of meanings have been discerned, including: norm, relationship, ethical principle, judicial concept of justice, right, custom, socio-economic order, political rule or authority, or religious values.<sup>7</sup> Due to the multifarious meaning of מִשְׁפָּט, Mafico feels that it is important to pay close attention to every context in which it is used in the Old Testament in order to arrive at the best meaning of the term.<sup>8</sup> The word צִדְקָה is similar, as Scullion has shown that various words bearing different meanings derived from the root צֶדֶק occur 523 times in the Old Testament.<sup>9</sup> It is apparent that a single definition cannot be imposed on these terms and one theory will not do justice to the rich meaning of this concept. Rather, there is room for different theories and perspectives to illuminate better and wider understandings of the different aspects of this concept. The following exegesis examines the eighth-century prophets’ concepts of מִשְׁפָּט and צִדְקָה in the light of the Mizo tribal concept of *tlawmngaihna* in order to illuminate further certain important aspects of this concept.

#### 4.2. Isaiah 1:21-26

This passage will be examined particularly focusing on how Isaiah perceives מִשְׁפָּט and צִדְקָה in the light of the role and function of the concept of *tlawmngaihna* in the tribal context. Chapter two put forward the argument that *tlawmngaihna* is the

<sup>5</sup> John Goldingay, “Justice and Salvation for Israel and Canaan” in *Reading the Hebrew Bible for a New Millennium: Form, Concept and Theological Perspective* (eds. Wonil Kim et al.; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000) p. 174.

<sup>6</sup> Christofer Frey, “The Impact of the Biblical idea of Justice on present discussions on Social Justice” in *Justice and Righteousness: Biblical and their Influence* (eds. Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman; JSOTSup 137; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992) p. 95.

<sup>7</sup> Gossai, *Justice, Righteousness*, pp. 48-89, 129-140.

<sup>8</sup> Temba L. J. Mafico, “Just, Justice” *ABD* (CD-ROM).

<sup>9</sup> Scullion, “Righteousness” p. 725. He mentions that scholars discern a wide range of meanings, emphases and directions in biblical *sedeq* – *sedaqa*: health of soul; links in covenant, loyal activity (Pedersen), community loyalty (Koch and Fahlgren); order, fitting into order, salvific order (Procksh); Yahweh’s acts, his loyalty to the covenant, relationship; justice (A. Dunner); order put into effect of Yahweh, Yahweh’s saving action that puts his order into effect (Reventlow). See also William Wilson, *New Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1987) p. 357.



basic underlying principle of the tribal communitarian way of life and that it can be seen in various forms among different tribal groups in Northeast India. It is an unwritten socio-ethical principle that provides the basis for a communitarian society to exist and function effectively.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the traditional tribal social order has been controlled and maintained by this principle independently of any modern legal system. *Tlawmngaihna* is the tribal communitarian principle that encourages selfless service for the well-being of the community, neighbourly love and care, sharing, mutual aid and support; whereas it discourages greed, pride, selfishness, and any kind of anti-communitarian values and ways of life.

As the tribal people in general and the Mizo tribe in particular are increasingly infiltrated by different values through the process of sanskritisation and modernisation, the foundation of their traditional communitarian way of life, *tlawmngaihna*, is now at stake.<sup>11</sup> External socio-cultural forces are eroding *tlawmngaihna*.<sup>12</sup> Though this traditional socio-ethical principle is still valued and practised by many people, especially in the rural areas, it is increasingly pushed aside by those who have been influenced by modern values and urban culture, dominated by individualism and materialism. As a result of this, the socio-cultural fabric of tribal society is being wiped out, and many communities can no longer maintain their traditional social order, communitarian ways of life and tribal solidarity. The deteriorating aspects of *tlawmngaihna* in the present context as a result of the influences of alien values may be comparable in various ways with how Isaiah perceives *משפט* and *צדק* in the eighth century BCE.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. K. Thanzauva, *Theology of the Community: Tribal Theology in the Making* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1997) p. 120. P. L. Lianzuala considers that *tlawmngaihna* has been the cultural distinctive treasure of the Mizo people which when practised in the true sense of the term, kept the community together in times of war and peace. See his "Towards a Theology of Mizo Tlawmngaihna" in *Towards a Tribal Theology: The Mizo Perspective* (ed. K. Thanzauva; Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1989) p. 56.

<sup>11</sup> The rigid hierarchical caste-system, which is the fundamental ideology of Hinduism, directly challenges *tlawmngaihna* which upholds the tribal communitarian ethos and egalitarian values. *Tlawmngaihna* also fundamentally clashes with the principles of modernisation which consist of materialism, consumerism, capitalism, individualism, economic classism etc. See chapter two, sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2 for detailed discussion on this issue.

<sup>12</sup> A Mizo poet Zirsangzela expresses his deep feeling of concern as he sees *tlawmngaihna* being carried away: "Zo nun, aw nun mawi, tap tapin ka au ding zo si lo. Zo nun, aw nun mawi, liam lovin la cham rih hram rawh aw." It may be translated as follows: "O, wonderful life (i.e. *tlawmngaihna*) of Zo tribe, I can't stop you moving away even with crying. O, beautiful life, please remain with us without vanishing." Many writers share the idea of *tlawmngaihna* being carried away or eroded by alien values. See K. C. Lalvunga, "Tun lai Zonun siamtu" in *Zo Kalsiam*, pp. 213-230; Dengchhuana, "Mizote leh Rinawmna" in *Zo Kalsiam*, pp. 231-246.

4.2.1. *Translation of Isaiah 1:21-26*

- 21 How the faithful city has become a harlot,  
 She that was full of משפט; צדק lodged in her;  
 but now murderers.
- 22 Your silver has become dross;  
 Your wine diluted with water.
- 23 Your officials are rebels  
 and companions of thieves  
 Every one loves a bribe  
 and follows after presents.  
 They do not defend the orphan,  
 and they don't have any concern for the plight of the widow.
- 24 Therefore, says Yahweh, the Lord of Hosts, the Strong one of Israel:  
 "Ah, I will pour out my wrath on my foes,  
 and take vengeance upon my enemies.
- 25 I will turn my hands against you  
 and will purify your dross as with lye  
 and remove all your alloy.
- 26 And I will restore your judges as at the first,  
 and your counsellors as at the beginning.  
 Then you shall be called the city of צדק,  
 the faithful city.

#### 4.2.2. *Critical Analysis of the Text*

Most scholars consider this oracle authentic to Isaiah<sup>13</sup> and there is general agreement that this passage comprises a unit.<sup>14</sup> The opening word **איכה** (how) indicates that the form is a funeral dirge which expresses deep concern for the disappearance of **משפט** and **צדק** in the Israelite community (vv. 21-23) followed by a threat to those who are responsible for the removal of **משפט** and **צדק** (vv. 24-25), and concluding with a promise to re-establish the faithful community by making radical change (v. 26). The main concern of the prophet in this oracle appears to be the deterioration of the quality of social relationships in his community as a result of the emergence of the new value-system in the context of socio-cultural changes in the monarchy. Isaiah compares the past and the present communities in terms of quality of social life, and he sees a sharp contrast between the two.

In the opening verse of the oracle (v. 21), the prophet straightaway expresses his deep concern about the hopeless condition of his present community by contrasting it with the fine qualities of the past community: “How the faithful city has become a harlot! She that was full of **משפט**, **צדק**, lodged in her – but now murderers.” This expression suggests that at one time Judahite society had **משפט** and **צדק**, but now they are gone.<sup>15</sup> **משפט** and **צדק** are here considered as something that can be transformed, brushed aside and adulterated. The same idea is expressed in Amos 5:7: “Ah, you that turn **משפט** to wormwood and bring **צדק** to the ground” (cf. 6:12). In the eyes of Isaiah, there is a huge difference between the past and the present conditions of Judahite society. A faithful city has been transformed into a harlot, and murderers now occupy a city previously full of **משפט** and **צדק**. Most commentators take Isaiah’s phrase “faithful city” or “a city full of **משפט** and **צדק**”

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<sup>13</sup> Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12* (trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) p. 63; R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39* (New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1980) p. 35; John H. Hayes and Stuart Irvine, *Isaiah The Eighth Century Prophet: His Time and His Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987) pp. 80-81; Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (The Old Testament Library; Westminster, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 2001) p.20; A. S. Herbert, *Isaiah 1-39* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973) p. 30.

<sup>14</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, p. 30.

<sup>15</sup>The modern abstract ideas of justice and righteousness are not meant here when we discuss **משפט** and **צדק**. It is argued that these terms can be largely taken as *tlawmngaihna*, which is not simply an abstract idea but the principle to be practised.

to refer to Jerusalem.<sup>16</sup> The identification of Jerusalem with the past faithful city might be supported by the addition of the name “Zion” in the LXX in v. 21.<sup>17</sup> However, it can be argued that no part of the history of Jerusalem matches this picture of the faithful city described by the prophet. Kaiser rightly mentions that the historian might find it hard to verify this kind of idealised picture of Jerusalem’s past although he himself accepts Jerusalem as Isaiah’s “faithful city”.<sup>18</sup> Zimmerli observes: “It may be that behind the possible memory of the prosperous time of David there still echoes the pre-Israelite memory of a divinity ‘Sedeq,’ whose name is preserved in the names of the pre-Israelite kings Melchizedek and Adonizek.”<sup>19</sup> In fact, there is no convincing textual evidence to support the view that the term “faithful city” refers to the actual city Jerusalem and there is no compelling reason to take the literal meaning of the term “city” in this particular context. Rather, it is much more likely that the “city” in this context is a poetic metaphor to refer to the past community of Israelite tribes just as the other figurative terms ‘silver’ and ‘wine’ are employed to refer to the same people (v. 22).<sup>20</sup> The qualification of the noun “city” by the adjective “faithful” suggests that the city is here personified or used figuratively to refer to simple communitarian life in the past. Moreover, the metaphor “faithful city” is employed here in connection with another metaphor “harlot”. If the term “harlot” can be regarded in this context as figurative language, its opposite parallel “faithful city” should be treated similarly.<sup>21</sup> It is quite reasonable to assume that Isaiah’s mind is struck by the behaviour and activities of the ruling elite in Jerusalem and other urban centres when he thinks about the

<sup>16</sup> For example, Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 35; Childs, *Isaiah*, p. 20; A. S. Herbert, *Isaiah 1-39* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973) p. 30; John Mauchline, *Isaiah 1-39: Introduction and Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1962) p. 55.

<sup>17</sup> R. E. Clements argues that the LXX adds ‘Zion’, thereby establishing the city’s identification beyond dispute in line with v. 27, but this was certainly not necessary to the original prophecy. See his *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 35. Hans Wildberger also mentions that the MT is best left as it is. “Zion” somehow got into the text of the LXX from v. 27; see his *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 60.

<sup>18</sup> Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 42.

<sup>19</sup> Walther Zimmerli, “The ‘Land’ in the Pre-exilic and Early Post-exilic Prophets,” in *Understanding the Word* (eds. James T. Butler *et al.*; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985) p. 249.

<sup>20</sup> Peter D. Miscall, *Isaiah* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993). He considers that Isaiah’s poetry is marked by constant and intense use of all manner of figurative language. Seldom is anything said or described in what can be called ordinary prose or everyday language. The people are not just the people, they are children, a wounded body, a city, a woman, a whore... (p. 25).

<sup>21</sup> Wildberger notes that Isaiah was not the one who actually created the imagery of the “harlot”, for Hosea had already made much use of the term (1:2; 2:7; 3:3; 4:12-15; 9:1). See his *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 64. In fact, Hosea uses this sexual imagery to show the shameful condition of the unfaithfulness of the Israelite people who fell away from Yahweh by going to the foreign deities. Of course, Isaiah does not accuse the Israelite community of “whoring” in this sense, but he certainly points to the people by using this metaphor whose values and ways of life had been completely changed.

present situation, but he must have kept in mind traditional ways of life untouched by the urban value-system when he looked back on the history of the people.<sup>22</sup> The same idea of this transformation is clearly expressed by another metaphor in the “Song of the Vineyard” in Isaiah 5:1-7.

The basic qualities that characterise the past community in Isaiah’s thought are **משפט** and **צדק**. Here, it is interesting to note that the prophet equates the undiluted form of **משפט** and **צדק** with the faithfulness of the past community. Wildberger states that “faithfulness” cannot be separated from the way it is preserved by acting according to **משפט** and **צדק**.<sup>23</sup> The Hebrew adjective **נאמנה** (faithful) is derived from the verb **אמן** (support, confirm, nourish, trust, believe)<sup>24</sup> which is a synonym for **כוון** (firmly established). This term “faithful city” could refer to the simple tribal social order of the past community where people maintained mutual trust, cared, loved, supported and nourished each other as parts of one body in the community.<sup>25</sup> In light of this, it is possible to suggest that **משפט** and **צדק** could also refer to an action of goodness for the welfare of the members of the community. Isaiah’s concept of **משפט** and **צדק** appears to be more than the legal concept of fairness or correctness in this context. Elsewhere he says: “Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek **משפט**, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow” (1:17). **משפט** is here equated with goodness and deep concern for others and especially with actions of love and kindness for the benefit of the weak and vulnerable. Amos

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<sup>22</sup>Isaiah’s ‘faithful city’ metaphor appears to have represented the simple harmonious communitarian social life of the past. However, if we read against the grain of the text, the metaphor ‘city’ could give us a completely different picture as it can also be identified with the greedy and selfish city-dwellers who were primarily responsible for the impoverishment of the poor people. Reading against the grain is a new way of interpreting biblical texts which is increasingly applied by ideological critics and feminist scholars. For example, see David J. A. Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (JSOT Sup 205; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 1995).

<sup>23</sup> Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 64.

<sup>24</sup> *BDB* (CD-ROM).

<sup>25</sup> This interpretation should not be taken as romanticizing the tribal period as the golden age of Israel where peace and justice were prevalent in every aspect of life. Rather, the pre-monarchic situation was coloured by different kinds of hardships, sufferings and inter-tribal conflicts as reflected in the book of Judges and various patriarchal traditions in the Pentateuch. However, in such a difficult situation, people could maintain a simple communitarian lifestyle and neighbourly love and care in their own community as indicated in the Hebrew values and ethos discussed in the preceding chapter. This assumption is strongly supported by a sharp contrast between the rural tribal communitarian way of life and the emerging urban material-centred lifestyle that can be clearly seen in the present context of Mizoram.

and Micah also express the same idea (Amos 5:15; Micah 6:8). Falk notes that “the idea of *good* beside the *just* corresponds with the modern concepts of welfare, security or stability, which sometimes function as alternatives to justice.”<sup>26</sup>

Isaiah does not define the meaning of **משפט** and **צדק**, but he specifically contrasts them with the metaphors “harlot” and “murderers”.<sup>27</sup> As shown above, there is a sharp contrast between the high quality of social life in the past and the present chaotic condition of Judahite society. The prophet describes the contrasting features of the past and the present conditions by using two opposite words. He sets **משפט** and **צדק** directly opposite to **זונה** (harlot) and **מרצחים** (murderers). This parallel gives us an idea about the sense he takes regarding the meanings of **משפט** and **צדק**. It is obvious that he considers that the community filled with **משפט** and **צדק** has been completely transformed into a community directly opposite to its original character. It will be possible to see the prophet’s concept of **משפט** and **צדק** more clearly by examining them against the opposite values endorsed by the characters of the harlot and the murderer.

We will first look at the metaphor ‘harlot’. The Hebrew noun **זונה** (harlot) is derived from the verb **זנה** which means “commit fornication” or “be a harlot.”<sup>28</sup> The root **זנה** refers to illicit sex, but only for females.<sup>29</sup> This sexual term is often used as a prophetic metaphor to express the shameful condition of the Israelites’ unfaithfulness to Yahweh and improper intercourse with foreign nations, or for the religious apostasy of the Israelite people (Hos.3:1; 4:12ff; 5:4; 9:1; Jer. 2:20ff; 3:1ff; 6, 8; Ezek. 16:15ff). However, for Isaiah this term does not refer to religious apostasy or idolatry, as suggested by some scholars,<sup>30</sup> but rather to the Israelites’ unfaithfulness to their traditional religio-cultural values and principles. For him, the

<sup>26</sup> Ze’ev W. Falk, “Law and Ethics in the Hebrew Bible” in *Justice and Righteousness*, p. 83.

<sup>27</sup> Here the term **מרצחים** (murderers), the parallel of the term ‘harlot’, is also taken as a metaphor. The literal meaning would imply that the city is full of murderers, which is very unlikely.

<sup>28</sup> *BDB* (CD-ROM).

<sup>29</sup> Elaine Adler Goodfriend, “Prostitution (Old Testament)” *ABD* (CD-ROM). The feminine **קדשה** always appears as a synonym of **זונה**. The word **נאף** refers to illicit sexual activity by both sexes.

<sup>30</sup> See Mauchline, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 55. Mauchline takes harlotry as a description of religious apostasy and unfaithfulness in the light of the oracles of Hosea and Jeremiah. See also Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 42. But, the main concerns expressed by Isaiah are not particularly related to the issue of religious apostasy.

spirit that drives a harlot seems to be similar to the value that dominates the minds and thoughts of the people who have removed **משפט** and **צדק** from his community.

The metaphor 'harlot' in the Old Testament often describes the disgusting aspects of life (Isa. 23:15-18; Jer. 2:20,28; Nah. 3:4-7; Prov. 2:16-19; 5:7-14 etc). These negative images must be derived from the general Israelite understanding of the behaviour and character of a harlot: Israelite society's attitude toward harlotry is undoubtedly negative.<sup>31</sup> The label **זונה** is normally used for the professional prostitute who accepts payment for her services.<sup>32</sup> The use of the prostitute's earnings for sacrificial purpose was prohibited (Deut. 23:19). Proverbs 29:3 suggests that keeping company with prostitutes leads to poverty, implying that prostitution is regarded as a dirty business that could potentially ruin a client's economic well-being.<sup>33</sup> A harlot is seen to seek easy money by selling herself and her dignity with the aim of extorting money from her sexual partners even to the extent of ruining them. It is obvious that this kind of person does not regard fellow human beings as potential life-long partners, but as sources of material benefit and pleasure.<sup>34</sup> Respect, trust, care and love have no important place in the value-system of a harlot. They put the value of material benefit and pleasure above love, loyalty, relationship and fellowship. There is no commitment to maintaining a faithful relationship with her sexual partners if there is nothing to gain materially.

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<sup>31</sup> Although there seem to be some kind of tolerance toward harlotry in the cases of Tamar (Gen. 38), Rahab (Josh. 2: 3-6), and Samson (Judg. 16:1), the majority of the references of this term in the Old Testament convey the negative attitudes of the people. See Gen. 34:31; 38:23; Lev. 19:29; 21:7,9,14; Deut. 23:18,19; 1 Kgs. 22:38; Amos 7:17; Prov. 2:16-19; 5:7-14; 6:24-36; 7:6-27 etc.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Goodfriend, "Prostitution" *ABD* (CD-ROM). Sometimes, this term can also be applied to a woman who had pre-marital sex.

<sup>33</sup> In Nahum 3:4-7, Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, is depicted as a whore who charms nations and leads them to their downfall. In Isa. 23:15-18, Tyre, the great commercial centre, is described as a harlot and her commercial profits as a harlot's hire is called **ארתג**. This strongly suggests that harlotry is considered as a dirty business.

<sup>34</sup> Isaiah's 'harlot' metaphor undoubtedly represents the negative aspect of his society as he portrays the picture of a harlot from the perspective of men in the patriarchal society. However, this picture could be completely different if he looked from the harlot's point of view. Harlots sometimes can represent people who are dispossessed, oppressed and abused since they are often the ones who are compelled to choose their miserable way of life by the oppressive structure of patriarchal society. Scholars who deploy feminist perspectives and ideological criticism can throw significant light on the different aspects of truth in the metaphors, ideologies, and propaganda expressed by biblical writers and modern interpreters. For example, to see a completely different picture of the 'harlot' metaphor, see Yvonne Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet* (JSOTSup 211; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 1996). However, feminist perspective or ideological criticism is not applied in this particular study.

Goodfriend mentions that זנה implies a multiplicity of partners, and that illicit activity is habitual or iterative.<sup>35</sup> Trustworthiness and faithfulness have no significant place in the value-system of a harlot. Rather, the individual's lustful desire and greed subordinate loyalty to others and the well-being of fellow human beings. They measure the importance of their fellow human beings economically and money and pleasure determine everything. Berquist argues that prostitutes and adulterous women are “transgressive of social boundaries, and yet they live and succeed. They are to be feared because their contradictions of the basic assumptions of the society are so embodied.”<sup>36</sup>

Another term that Isaiah contrasts with משפט and צדק is מרצחים (murderers). The original foundation of the Israelite community, משפט and צדק, have been removed and replaced by מרצחים. The Hebrew term מרצחים is derived from the verb רצח which refers to a killing that is “inimical to community” or to “malicious manslaughter”<sup>37</sup> or “murder with premeditation”.<sup>38</sup> Murderers often use wilful violence to kill their fellow human beings with the aim of gaining material benefit or power (Prov.1:11-16; 2 Sam.11:14-21). They lose respect for life and deny others' fundamental right to life. They give more importance to their selfish interests than anything else, even much more than the precious life of their fellow human beings. There are certain characteristics shared by harlots and murderers: both are driven by selfish ambition and greed. But their approaches are fundamentally different, as a harlot tries to attract whereas a murderer attacks to fulfil his or her selfish desire. For murderers, violence is the best means of achieving their aims and they do not mind harming to reach their goal. The defencelessness and weakness of their victims are not matters of concern for them. Rather, they abuse their power to exploit the weakness and powerlessness of others as much as they can (1 Kgs. 21:1-14). The weaker their victims, the easier their job.

<sup>35</sup> Goodfriend, “Prostitution” (CD-ROM).

<sup>36</sup> Jon L. Berquist, *Controlling Corporeality: The Body and Household of Ancient Israel* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002) p. 149.

<sup>37</sup> Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 65.

<sup>38</sup> BDB (CD-ROM). רצח is a primitive root which literally means “to dash in pieces” i.e. to kill, murder. See *Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries* (CD-ROM). See also F. L. Hossfeld, “רצח” *TDOT* Vol.13 (2004) p. 632. He mentions that רצח is never used for killing in battle or for killing in self-defense. Neither it is used for suicide, but once it is used to denote execution of the death penalty (Num. 35:30).



The only thing that matters for them is to get what they want by any means or at any cost. Isaiah's present community is apparently characterised by bloodshed and violence which are directly opposite to the expectations of Yahweh, "He [Yahweh] expected **משפט** but saw bloodshed; **צדקה** but heard a cry" (5:7b; cf. 1:15).<sup>39</sup> A community dominated by people who have this kind of mentality would have spared no space for the voiceless and powerless people.

Isaiah's faithful city, on the other hand, was founded on values and principles directly opposite to the values advocated by harlots and murderers. If Isaiah's **משפט** and **צדק** are taken as opposite to the values and characters of harlots and murderers, they can be certainly regarded as the principles of goodness, love, care, respect, sharing, trust, loyalty, selfless service for the protection of the poor and weak, and a community where material values are subordinated by the value of human relationship and fellowship. In other words, **משפט** and **צדק** are socio-ethical principles that reject selfishness, greed, discrimination, violence, oppression, and injustice. It appears that Isaiah primarily understands **משפט** and **צדק** in the sense of communal relationship.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the prophet longs for a community filled with **משפט** and **צדק** in which members of the community render selfless service and mutual aid for the benefit of others especially for the weak and vulnerable in his community. The **משפט** and **צדק** of the faithful community are to be seen in people's commitment to uphold each other and to maintain their relationships as members of the community. It is conceivable that the prophet looks back to the simple social life in the traditional community where people shared, helped, trusted, cared and supported each other without expecting material benefit as opposed to his present context where the powerful and affluent abuse their power and authority to exploit and oppress their fellows in order to satisfy their individual lustful desires and greed.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Mic. 3:1-3, 10; 7:2-3; Hos. 4: 1-2.

<sup>40</sup> After having examined the different usages of these terms in the Old Testament, Gossai concludes that both of these terms are based fundamentally within the confines of "relationship". See his *Justice and Righteousness*, p. 310. He states, "It can be concluded from this study that **צדק** and **משפט** are not only primarily terms of relationship but that they are so used by the eighth century prophets in the latter's preaching against the many expressions of social injustice" (p. 311).

To display the excellent qualities of the faithful community of the past, the prophet employs other metaphors, namely 'silver' and 'wine', which have become dross or diluted (v. 22). The fine quality of social relationship in the past community has now been damaged as it is mixed up with inferior components. Here, the term **מדהול** (dilute) suggests that the value-system or ideology that adulterates **משפט** and **צדק** is not originally part of the Judahite community according to the prophet, since the diluting substance is generally different from the substance it dilutes.<sup>41</sup> Rather it appears to be something alien to the faithful community.

For Isaiah, the adulteration of **משפט** and **צדק** can be seen in terms of the ruling elite's failure to defend the most vulnerable members of the community, namely the orphan and widow (v. 23). When he criticises the rulers who fail to defend the helpless people in the community, he singles out the officials in the monarchy known as **שרים**. According to Knierim, **שרים** are the lifelong professional officials installed by the monarchy who are responsible for judicial, military and other administrative duties.<sup>42</sup> Davies also accepts **שרים** as royally-appointed officials connected with the judicial reorganisation instituted by Jehosaphat (2 Chron. 19:5) that existed alongside the ancient local jurisdiction of the elders.<sup>43</sup> Dearman mentions that **שרים** are usually of royal blood or appointment.<sup>44</sup> What is certain is that the institution of **שרים** was an integral part of the system of monarchy; its creation itself was undoubtedly part of a measure taken to relieve the responsibilities of the king. **שרים** are the royal officials who represent the king in judicial, military and other administrative responsibilities in different parts of the

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<sup>41</sup> According to *BDB* (CD-ROM), the verb **מדהל** means "to circumcise, weaken" which may be similar with a less commonly used form of **מול** (circumcise). The second meaning of this term can be "dilute, weaken, or adulterate." If **מדהל** is read in relation with **כל־בדיליך** (all your alloy in v. 25) it certainly refers to "an inferior substance mixed with a precious one". See the connection between these two terms in the comments on Isa. 1:25 by John D. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, Word Biblical Commentary vol. 24 (Dallas: Word books, publishers, 1985 CD-ROM).

<sup>42</sup> R. Knierim, "Exodus 18 und die Neuordnung der mosaischen Gerichtsbarkeit" *ZAW* 73 (1961) p. 169. He notes, "Repräsentanten dieses auf militärischer Basis vollzogenen Staatsausbaues waren in den Städten der **שר העיר** (1 Kgs. 22:26; 2 Kgs. 23:8) oder auch die **שרי העיר** (2 Kgs. 10:1.5) der Stadtkommandant, und auf dem Lande die **שרי המדינות** (1 Kgs. 20:14ff), die "Landvögte"."

<sup>43</sup> Eryl W. Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics: Isaiah and the Ethical Tradition of Israel*, (JSOTSup 16; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981) pp. 96-97.

<sup>44</sup> Dearman, *Property Rights*, p. 82.

kingdom.<sup>45</sup> They must have been the most important promoters of royal interests in the kingdom, since they were at the frontline dealing with ordinary people. There is no doubt that they were appointed with royal blessing and freely exercised power and authority over the ordinary people. Dearman observes that there is little evidence of a check or balance on the authority of these royal officials.<sup>46</sup> According to Isaiah, these officials abuse their power and position to satisfy their selfish ambition and greed by ignoring the miserable condition of the socially and politically powerless members of the community.<sup>47</sup> He accuses them of being agents chiefly responsible for the dilution of **משפט** and **צדק**. They adulterate **משפט** and **צדק** because they fail to defend the needy as they give priority to their own economic gain (v. 23).

Most commentators take the failure of the **שרים** in this context as the abuse of their judicial power.<sup>48</sup> It can be argued, however, that the main concern of the prophet in this context is not necessarily about the failure of the **שרים** in terms of their handling of judicial administration, but about their failure to act responsibly for their community.<sup>49</sup> Here the Hebrew verb **שפט** is usually taken as “to judge” or “to defend legally”. However, this term can also refer to physical protection and deliverance.<sup>50</sup> Weinfeld contends that the original meaning of **שפט** is to save the oppressed from the hands of the oppressor, or the enslaved from his enslaver.<sup>51</sup> Isaiah’s concern in this context cannot be legal protection alone, because the widow and the orphan are the most vulnerable members in the community who need not

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<sup>45</sup> **שרים** are installed not only in Jerusalem, but also in other cities in the kingdom (cf. Deut. 16:18-20; 19:16-18; 2 Chron. 19:4-11). Knierim says, “Wir dürfen darum annehmen, daß die königlichen Beamten vorwiegend zur Oberschicht der jüdischen Städte gehörten.” See his “Exodus 18 und die Neuordnung” p. 159.

<sup>46</sup> Dearman, *Property Rights*, p. 102.

<sup>47</sup> “The two verbs **אהב** (love) and **רדף** (chase after) disclose the greed with which the pieces of money are snatched up.” See Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 66.

<sup>48</sup> For example, see Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*; Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*; Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, etc.

<sup>49</sup> This is not to deny the fact that the misuse of judicial power was part of the force of oppression in the eighth century BCE. There are certain passages which explicitly refer to the abuse of judicial power (e.g. Isa. 10:1-3, etc.) that shall be discussed in chapter seven.

<sup>50</sup> This term is not confined to the forensic meaning alone. **שפט** can be variously translated – “judge”, “rule”, “govern”, “vindicate”, “deliver” “rescue” etc. See Mafico, “Judge, judging” in *ABD* (CD-ROM).

<sup>51</sup> Moshe Weinfeld, “‘Justice and Righteousness’ – **משפט וצדקה** – The Expression and its Meaning” in *Justice and Righteousness*, (1992) p. 241 (pp. 228-246).

only legal protection but also physical, social, and economic support.<sup>52</sup> The state's officials are here identified as rebels and companions of thieves. The identification of these officials as "rebels" could refer to their hostile attitude and violent activities to achieve their selfish ambition, and the phrase "companions of thieves" clearly suggests that they are offensive, deceitful and unfair in pursuing their own economic interests. They must have influenced the value-system and mentality of the general public of their society as the prophet mentions, "everyone loves bribes and runs after gifts." People not only accept bribes and gifts but also eagerly seek after them. Financial corruption, unfair practices and materialism appear to have dominated the value-system of the people in those days. Gossai argues that "שחָד (bribe) in this context does not have a forensic overtone, for it does not refer to a bribe taken by a judicial functionary."<sup>53</sup> שָׂרִים are the ones who are in a position to give legal as well as social, economic and physical support and protection to the helpless members of the community, but they prefer to live for themselves and to pursue their own economic gain. They deliberately ignore the plight of the poor and the outcry of those who are badly in need of their help. Moreover, they lead people astray by setting bad examples. According to Isaiah, these royal officials are driven by the same spirits as harlots and murderers as they are obsessed with materialism and they resort to violence and other unfair means to meet their lust for wealth without concern for their fellow human beings.

This oracle can also be taken to indicate a clash between the prophet and the ruling elite regarding the understanding of the role and function of the leaders *vis-a-vis* the less fortunate members of the community. The dominant people of Isaiah's time seem to have no sense of moral responsibility towards the plight of their fellow members of the community. However, the prophet obviously believes that those who hold the positions of influence have a social obligation to take care of their

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<sup>52</sup> For example, the widow and orphan are often the victims of physical torture, verbal abuse, and socio-economic exploitation in agrarian society. In the Mizo tribal community, it is the role of a *tlawmngai* person known as *Val upa* or *Pasaltha* to protect these weaker members of the community. David H. Engelhard says, "Widows, orphans and sojourners were or could easily become disenfranchised members of society in the Ancient Near East. Without protection of husband, father or free citizen, these three classes of society would have had no means of livelihood or juridical protection." See his "The Lord's Motivated Concern for the Underprivileged" *Calvin Theological Journal* Vol.15 (1980) p. 5. See also Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics*, pp. 102-106, for a detailed analysis of the condition of the widow and orphan.

<sup>53</sup> Gossai, *Justice, Righteousness*, p. 294.

unfortunate brothers and sisters. The dominant officials seem to see nothing wrong in running after wealth and material possessions, feeding their own stomachs as much as they can even at the expense of the underprivileged people, but this is completely unacceptable for the prophet, and definitely against his fundamental values. Those greedy officials who deliberately ignore the suffering of the poor and weak are not only the ones who lack **משפט** and **צדק**, but they are identified as the culprits who are chiefly responsible for the adulteration of the fundamental values of Israel. He believes that **משפט** and **צדק** should be expressed in terms of love and care for fellow members of the community. For him, **משפט** and **צדק** cannot be established in the community while it is dominated by those who give priority to their individual interests and lustful desire for economic gain.

These irresponsible rulers have prompted the verdict of Yahweh (v. 24). Wildberger notes that the utterance **נאם** is not simply followed, as is typical in most cases, by **יהוה** (Yahweh) in the genitive relationship, but by an extensive list of titles **האדרון** **יהוה צבאות אכיר ישראל** (The Lord, Yahweh of Hosts, the Strong one of Israel).<sup>54</sup> The divine name **יהוה צבאות** (Yahweh Sebaoth) is the ancient name of the deity, which had its root in Shiloh and was associated with the tribal ark of the pre-monarchic period.<sup>55</sup> Another title **אכיר ישראל** (the mighty one of Israel) is also a very ancient name for Yahweh (Gen. 49:24). Clements mentions that “it was a pre-Mosaic in its origin, being associated with the patriarch Israel-Jacob, and emphasising the divine power and strength under the simile of a bull.”<sup>56</sup> The prophet must have intentionally employed this extensive list of the ancient names of God to emphasise the power and strength of Yahweh, the God of the ancestors, not Yahweh as perceived by the royal circle in the monarchy, who cannot accept the corrupt and irresponsible lifestyle of **שרים**. This ancient Yahweh is the one who considers the greedy royal officials as his adversaries and who swears to remove them in order to purify the community. This is a clear indication of the rejection of the ideology inherent in the lifestyles of the royally-appointed officials in Judahite society. Yahweh promises a radical change, the restoration of the judges, as the

<sup>54</sup> Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 67.

<sup>55</sup> Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 68. See also Mauchline, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 53.

<sup>56</sup> Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 36.

people had at the first.<sup>57</sup> Here, the term **כבראשונה** (as at the first or earliest time), which corresponds to the **כבתחלה** (as at the beginning) in the second colon, is normally taken as referring to the time of David and Solomon.<sup>58</sup> However, there is no convincing evidence to prove that the prophet points to that particular period. Rather, it is likely that this phrase refers to either the pre-monarchic tribal period, as Jeremiah 2:2 and Amos 5:25 also indicate this period as an ideal epoch in the past.<sup>59</sup> In the pre-monarchic Israelite tribal community, the **שפטים** (judges or deliverers) were the human guardians of **משפט**, who rendered their services for the physical as well as legal protection of the oppressed people. In fact, the terms **שפטים** and **משפט** are both derived from the same root **שפט**.<sup>60</sup> The pre-monarchic **שפטים** are the ones who achieve the status of leadership by virtue of military valour and selfless service for the benefit of the oppressed people. Modern scholars call them “charismatic leaders,” as the Deuteronomistic tradition records that they are inspired by Yahweh to deliver the Israelite tribes in times of need (Judg 6:34; 14:6,19). They are the ones who selflessly use their physical strength and ability for the protection and liberation of their people. Their title **שפטים** clearly indicates that they are regarded as the embodiment of **משפט** and they are known for carrying out the values and principles of **משפט** since they are the ones who sacrifice their lives and physical strength for the protection and liberation of their people in the context

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<sup>57</sup> Here, **כבתחלה** (your counselors as at the beginning) is used as a poetic synonym to **כבראשונה** (your judges as at the first). These synonymous terms may refer to the leaders in the pre-monarchic community. The first official ‘counselor’ mentioned is Ahithophel, David’s adviser. See L. Ruppert, “יעיץ” in *TDOT*, Vol. VI, p. 162 (pp. 156-185). However, the importance of the role of counselor or adviser had been recognised very early and it goes back to the pre-monarchic Mosaic period, e.g. Exod 18:19, “Without Jethro’s counsel Moses’ task was too heavy” (cf. Num 24:14; Deut 32:28). See P. A. H. de Boer, “The Counselor” in *Wisdom in Israel and in The Ancient Near East Presented to Professor Harold Henry Rowley* (eds. M. Noth and D. Winton Thomas; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955) pp. 42-71.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, p.70, Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 36.

<sup>59</sup> As mentioned in chapter 3, the pre-monarchic tribal period here does not necessarily refer to the Deuteronomistic writer’s ideological presentation of tribal stories in the book of Judges, though this book is accepted as one of the important sources of information for the reconstruction of the early tribes.

<sup>60</sup> Mafico points out that the participle form of **שפט** is uniformly and erroneously translated “judge” in the English versions of the Bible. He feels that this universal rendering of **שפט** is very unfortunate because it conceals other meanings which elucidate the appointment and function of the **שפט** in Israel. He suggests that the translation of **שפט** to mean “undifferentiated executive” is comprehensive and more apt than “judge”. See Mafico, “Judge, judging” *ABD* (CD-ROM).

of oppression and exploitation.<sup>61</sup> Though legal administration cannot be ruled out from the office of שפטים in the pre-monarchic period, their main role, as recorded in the book of Judges, was to provide physical protection and liberation for the community when their enemies oppressed and captivated them.<sup>62</sup> They often acted as arbitrators, i.e., restorers of the harmonious relations (Shalom) that prevailed before the onset of strife or hostilities (Gen. 16:5; 19:9; Judg 11: 27).<sup>63</sup> The roles and functions of the pre-monarchic שפטים, who were the promoters and guardians of משפט in the early tribal community, suggest that משפט was not primarily understood as a judicial concept or an act of legal judgment in the early period. Rather it was more often perceived as a philosophy of life that encouraged selfless service for the benefit of the oppressed and vulnerable in the community. The socio-political picture of the different tribes in the book of Judges indicates that the judicial understanding of justice and righteousness may not have been prevalent in the pre-monarchic tribal society as there were inter-tribal wars, raids, oppression, captivation and violence. However, the leaders of tribal communities were obviously indicated as the ones who sacrificed themselves for the protection and liberation of their peoples in such a chaotic context.

In light of the main reason for Yahweh's verdict on the royal officials in v. 24, it is plausible to suggest that the prophet wanted to emphasise the contrast between the value and significance of selfless service in the pre-monarchic judges and the self-centred lifestyle of the שרים in the eighth century BCE. Only when the communitarian values are put into practice by the people, especially by those who are in positions of influence, will there be restoration of משפט and צדק. When the

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<sup>61</sup> The one who practises *tlawmngaihna* in the tribal community is called *tlawmngai*, just as the one who champions משפט is known as שפט in the Hebrew Bible. The roles and functions of the שפטים in the OT and a *tlawmngai* person popularly known as *Pasaltha* or *Val Upa* in the tribal community are very similar. See the discussion on the roles and functions of *Pasaltha* and *Val Upa* in chapter two section 2.3.5.

<sup>62</sup> The pre-monarchic שפטים rarely made legal decision except Deborah in Judg 4:5. A large proportion of the stories of the שפטים in the book of Judges is dominated by their involvement in the protection and liberation of their people in the context of tribal feuds. Even outside the book of Judges, most of the disputes which related to the שפטים were those which concerned the welfare of the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger (Ps. 82; Jer. 5:28-29; 22:15; Deut. 1:16-17). Cf. Mafico, "Judge, judging" *ABD* (CD-ROM).

<sup>63</sup> Mafico, "Judge, judging" *ABD* (CD-ROM).

Judahite community keep these values and principles at the heart of their social relationships, they will again be called the city of צדק, the faithful community.

#### 4.3. Amos 5:21-27

Amos' understanding of משפט and צדקה in relation to his cultic criticism in this passage will be discussed in the light of the conflict between the Mizo communitarian principle *tlawmngaihna* and the Hindu caste system<sup>64</sup> in Indian society. As the tribals are victims of religio-cultural assimilation through sanskritisation, the religious practices and rituals of the dominant people cannot be seen simply as pure elements of worship from the Mizo perspective. Rather, they are largely suspected of being something profoundly interwoven with the dominant people's ideology of control and dominion. This is because many rituals and cultic practices of Hinduism, the religion of the dominant population in India, are integral parts of the Brahmanical Hindu ideology<sup>65</sup> of the caste-system, which support the concept of high caste supremacy. As the pressure of sanskritisation upon the tribal people is on the increase, the conflict between the *tlawmngaihna* and the Hindu caste system has become more and more acute. In fact, the two principles are fundamentally different, and naturally oppose each other. While the Mizo *tlawmngaihna* strongly supports social equality in the community, the caste system upholds the rigid hierarchy. From the tribal perspective, the Hindu caste system is nothing but the religious ideology of the dominant group, which legitimises their assumptions of social supremacy. It is a theological or religious approval of the idea

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<sup>64</sup> The word caste (from the Portuguese and Spanish "casta," meaning "race," "breed," or "lineage") was first applied to Indian society by Portuguese travelers in the sixteenth century. The word used in most Indian languages is "jati" (meaning "race," or any group sharing generic characteristics), which is the smallest endogamous social unit, usually a regional population. There are about 3,000 castes and more than 25,000 sub-castes in India, some with several hundred members and others with millions.

In the traditional law books, and in popular usage, India's 3,000 jatis, or castes, are grouped loosely into four "varnas" (from the Sanskrit, "colour"), or classes. At the top of the hierarchy are the Brahmins (priests and scholars), then the Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers), the Vaisyas (merchants, traders and farmers), and lastly the Sudras (artisans, labourers, servants, and slaves). The members of each class are considered to be ritually polluted to varying degrees as a result of the defilements brought about by their occupations, dietary habits, and customs. Those who have the most defiling jobs are ranked beneath the Sudras and are called "untouchables" (now known as Dalits, and in some circles Harijans, or "Children of God," the name given them by Mohandas K. Gandhi).

<sup>65</sup> This ideology strongly supports the supremacy of the Brahmins and justifies the concept of social inequality based on the caste system which imposes different social categories to different groups of people by placing Brahmins at the top and the so-called untouchables like Dalits and Tribals at the bottom of the socio-religious hierarchy.



of human inequality based on race, colour, and occupation. This religious ideology inherent in the religious beliefs and practices of the dominant group of people in India is in serious conflict with the Mizo tribal communitarian principle. In the light of these issues, the religio-cultural issues that challenge Amos and his contemporary prophets' concept of *משפט* and *צדקה* will be analysed.

#### 4.3.1. *Translation of Amos 5:21-27*

- 21 I hate, I despise your festivals,  
And I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
- 22 Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,  
I will not accept them;  
And the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals  
I will not look upon.
- 23 Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
- 24 But let *משפט* roll down like waters,  
And *צדקה* like a strong river.
- 25 Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings the forty years in the  
wilderness, O house of Israel?
- 26 You shall take up *Sikkuth* your king, and *Kiyyun* your images, your star  
god, which you made for yourselves;
- 27 Therefore I will take you into exile beyond Damascus, says Yahweh,  
whose name is the God of hosts.

#### 4.3.2. *Critical Analysis of the Text*

The literary style of this unit is different from the preceding unit (5:18-20) as there is a shift from the second person plural to first-person divine speech. This passage is a self-contained unit, which is generally regarded as the authentic oracle of Amos. However, some scholars consider vv. 25-27 to be a post-exilic gloss.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos* (trans. Waldemar Janzan, S. Dean MacBrid Jr. and Charles A. Muenchow; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977) p. 260. Following W. H. Schmidt, "Die deuteronomistische Redaktion des Amos-buches: Zu den theologischen Unterschieden zwischen dem prophetenwort und seinem Sammler" *ZAW* 77 (1965) pp. 163-193, Wolff concludes that it is

Nevertheless, from the thematic point of view, there is no substantial reason to isolate these verses from the preceding verses (vv. 21-24), as criticism of the cult - the main theme of the text - continues to dominate this part of the oracle. Moreover, the first person speech of Yahweh runs through the whole passage and there is no convincing evidence to separate the last three verses even from the form-critical point of view.

In this passage, we have Yahweh's critical evaluation of the excessive religious practices and worship through the mouth of his prophet Amos and a strong demand for the establishment of **משפט** and **צדקה** in the community. In other words, Amos, the mouthpiece of Yahweh, considers the religious worship and rituals of his days to be directly against Yahweh's will and he calls for the establishment of **משפט** and **צדקה** in this situation. Yahweh, represented by Amos, unambiguously criticises the rich forms of cultic worship and sacrifices at the royal sanctuaries. This is a clear indication of the conflict between the religious values of Amos and his contemporary ruling elites. In other words, Amos' Yahweh is fundamentally different from the Yahweh worshipped at the royal sanctuaries. It is obvious that Amos' view is not shared by the dominant people, as sophisticated rituals and sacrifices were at the heart of the royal sanctuaries in those days. But Amos does not stand alone in holding this view. Rather, the eighth-century prophets are all critical of the cultic practices of their time. The polemic against the rich forms of rituals and sacrifices is one of the basic commonalities maintained by the prophets of this period (e.g. Hosea 6:5-6; 8:11-13 Isaiah 1:10-17; Micah 6:6-8). Though each of them has a distinctive emphasis in his response to this issue, yet there are common elements in their oracles which are fundamental to their critique. It may be better to discuss Amos' oracle in connection with the oracles of the other eighth-century prophets as they illumine each other.

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the work of the post-exilic Deuteronomistic redactor. He notes, "Recalling the history of salvation, the Deuteronomistic redactor confronts his generation with a fundamental question regarding the cult. The notion that sacrifices were not offered at any early period in Israel's history is otherwise found only in the Deuteronomistic editing of the book of Jeremiah (7:21-23)... It is only in the language of the sixth century that the "slaughtered sacrifice" and the "vegetable offerings" together come to designate the totality of all cultic offerings." However, many scholars cannot agree with him. See Shalom M. Paul, *Amos* (ed. Frank Moore Cross; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) pp. 194-195; John H. Hayes, *Amos: The Eighth-Century Prophet* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988) p. 170; John D. W. Watts, *Studying the Book of Amos* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1966) pp. 54-55; James M. Ward, *Amos and Isaiah* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1969) p. 138.

Scholars generally hold the view that the prophets' cultic criticism was based on the principle found in 1 Samuel 15:22 that 'obedience is better than sacrifice.'<sup>67</sup> In other words, the classical prophets are normally considered ethicists or moralists who oppose rituals and sacrifices that have no meaning and relevance to their ethical teachings. Kaiser points out that the 'obedience is better than sacrifice' principle can be found in Egyptian wisdom from the end of the third millennium BCE in the so-called "Teaching for Merikare" and he argues that the criticism of the cult is by no means to be attributed to a genuinely prophetic impulse.<sup>68</sup> It is also usually assumed that the prophets objected to cultic worship mainly because the rituals and sacrifices failed to meet the moral demands of Yahweh who wished to be worshipped with the whole of Israel's life and not simply by the formal cult.<sup>69</sup> Following this kind of assumption, most commentators dichotomise morality and sacrifice or ethics and cult as two fundamental opposite ideas that mutually reject each other. For example, Gossai is of the opinion that "the participants in the sacrificial rites follow the rules laid down for cultic celebrations, but they do not follow the rules laid down by Yahweh for moral and social behaviour."<sup>70</sup> Alongside this issue, for a long time scholarly discussion on this subject was dominated by the question of whether or not the prophets wanted to abolish the cultic sacrifices altogether.<sup>71</sup> Most of the scholars involved in this debate focus on Amos 5:25, Isaiah 1: 11-17, and Jeremiah 7:22. Broadly speaking, there are two different important views on this issue. One group of scholars maintains that the prophets desired the entire abolition of the sacrificial system.<sup>72</sup> These scholars even assert that it is not only idolatry or abuse of the cult the prophets want to attack, but also the legitimate cult of Yahweh itself.<sup>73</sup> Williams contends that "sacrifices are completely invalid now, whether they are offered by morally blameless hand or

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<sup>67</sup> Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 31; William L Holladay, *Jeremiah I* (ed. Paul D. Hanson; Philadelphia: Fortress press, 1986) p. 261.

<sup>68</sup> Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 31.

<sup>69</sup> Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 32. See also J. Philip Hyatt, "The Prophetic Criticism of Israel Worship" in *Interpreting the Prophetic Tradition* (ed. Harry M. Orlinsky; Cincinnati: The Hebrew Union College Press, 1969) p. 217.

<sup>70</sup> Gossai, *Justice, Righteousness* p. 265.

<sup>71</sup> For a survey of scholarly discussion on this issue, see Richard S. Cripps, *A Critical & Exegetical Commentary on the book of Amos* (London: S.P.C.K., 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1955) pp. xxviii-xxxiii. See also Excursus III. Animal sacrifice (1) pp. 338-342.

<sup>72</sup> These scholars include A. Weiser, W.A.L. Elmslie, James G. Williams, J. Lindlom etc. See Cripps, *Amos*, pp. xxviii-xxxiii.

<sup>73</sup> As cited by Cripps, *Amos*. p. xxix.

not.”<sup>74</sup> Another group of scholars holds the view that the prophets want to retain the cult, preaching the cleansing of the cult rather than its abolition.<sup>75</sup>

Though this kind of discussion is not completely irrelevant, it is, however, important to discuss the cultic critique of the prophets in relation to the entire religio-cultural context of the eighth century BCE. If we look at the socio-cultural context of the prophets, as highlighted in the preceding chapter, it is clear that religion plays a crucial role in the ideological battle between the royal circle and those who were at the periphery of the Israelite monarchy. In fact, the eighth-century prophets' entire criticism of cults should not be separated from the situation where religion was used and manipulated by the dominant class to justify their oppressive lifestyle and elevate their ideological values. Moreover, the radical messages of the prophets against cultic worship seem to have a direct link with the situation where the dominant people developed excessive rituals and cultic practices to support their assumption of social supremacy and to consolidate their wasteful lifestyles by undermining the traditional values and interests of the ordinary people in their society.<sup>76</sup> As we have argued, the state religion was the instrument not only for promoting the elitists' values and ways of life in the Israelite monarchy, but it was also a means of suppressing traditional communitarian principles. Coggins is of the opinion that Amos' cultic criticism in this context is the condemnation of the religious rites of a specific group of people to whom the text was addressed rather than a more general rejection of religious rites.<sup>77</sup> His suggestion is based on the fact that in MT the second person suffix כֶּם (your) is attached to four of the words describing the various religious ceremonies such as חַגֵּיכֶם (festivals), עֲצֵרֹתֵיכֶם (solemn assemblies), מִנְחֹתֵיכֶם (grain offerings), and מְרִיאֵיכֶם (offerings of well-being of fatted animals).<sup>78</sup> Although there is no explicit evidence to prove that the suffix כֶּם refers to the ruling elite in this context, it is highly probable that they are

<sup>74</sup> James G. Williams, “The Alas-Oracles of the Eighth Century Prophets,” *HUCA* 38 (1967) p. 160 (pp. 153-165).

<sup>75</sup> Scholars who take this view include Adam C. Welch, Wheeler Robinson, H. H. Rowley, B. D. Erdmans, William Rainer Harper, R. E. Clements, Ivan Engnell. See Cripps, *Amos*, pp. xxx-xxxii.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Carol L. Meyers, “Jachin and Boaz in Religious and Political Perspective” *CBQ* 45 (1983) p. 169 (pp. 167-178).

<sup>77</sup> Richard James Coggins, *New Century Bible Commentary: Joel and Amos* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) p. 130.

<sup>78</sup> However, the term עֲלֹת (burnt offerings) does not have any suffix.

addressed by Amos as most of his oracles are directed against this kind of people, as is evidenced by the fact that Amos' concerns about cultic worship are mainly connected with the royal sanctuaries at Bethel, Gilgal and Samaria (3:13-15; 4:4-5; 5:4-5; 7:7-12; 8:14) as opposed to general cultic practices. In light of this evidence, it is reasonable to assume that the prophet specifically addresses the ruling elites rather than making a general demand about rituals and sacrifices.

It is also important to note that the sacrificial system is not the only religious practice the eighth-century prophets opposed; rather it was one of many concerns. Ward points out "the entire liturgical acts comes under their attack."<sup>79</sup> For example, Amos mentions festivals, assemblies, songs, instrumental music, and even tithes in addition to different kinds of sacrifices (cf. 4:4-5). Isaiah even points to prayers, incense, the new moon, and the Sabbath, including all the concerns spoken about by Amos (1:11-17). Micah's concerns are more or less similar to Amos and Isaiah's (6:6-7). Hosea's criticism is largely dominated by his polemic against Baal or baalim, though he also raises his voice against cultic practices (2:11[9]; 6:6). However, Hosea's negative attitude towards the cults of Baal in Israel should not be treated as something isolated from the cultic criticism of the other prophets, as they are all interrelated.<sup>80</sup> It is evident that the prophets opposed the monarchy-driven religious system, which may have been responsible for the deterioration of social relationships in the community. It is, therefore, inappropriate to single out the question of whether the prophets wanted to abolish sacrifice completely in this context.

The prophets do not merely criticise the general cultic practices of their times. They express emphatic concern about the excessiveness and extravagance of rituals and sacrifices, which were presumably the reserve of the affluent eighth-century elite. Micah laments with a rhetorical question, "Will Yahweh be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil?" (Mic. 6:7). The expected answer is definitely "no". Isaiah also begins his criticism by asking, "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?" (Isa. 1:11). The answer must be "nothing". He

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<sup>79</sup> James M. Ward, *Amos, Hosea* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981) p. 29.

<sup>80</sup> The connection between Hosea's concern of religious apostasy and the cultic concerns of the other prophets will be discussed in details in the following section, and in the following chapter.

continues, “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beast. Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them” (vv. 11,14). God is portrayed as the one who is “fed up”, weary and disgusted by this tedious ordeal.<sup>81</sup> This expression clearly applies to the too numerous religious rituals and their luxurious cultic consumption at the royal sanctuary. The same tone of expression is found in Amos’ critique as he says, “I hate, I despise your festivals” (5:21). Coggins rightly comments, “Hate and despise are both very strong verbs, leaving no doubt as to the depth of the rejection.”<sup>82</sup> This explicit denunciation suggests that the prophets cannot tolerate the excessive religious rituals and heavy cultic practices that go hand in hand with the wasteful consumerist lifestyle of the affluent. Certain religious rites seem to have been developed and elaborated to suit the values and interests of the ruling elite that do not have meaning and significance for the poor and ordinary people in society. Hosea sees the link between affluence and increasing cultic rites: “Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. The more his fruit increased the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars” (Hos. 10:1). Morris Silver mentions that there is some evidence that the size of the altar in the Temple was increased during the reign of Ahaz (ca. 735-716) to cope with the increasing numbers of sacrificial victims commonly offered on the altar in Jerusalem.<sup>83</sup> It can be assumed that the religious values and practices during this period were no longer compatible with the everyday needs of the ordinary people who are increasingly alienated and impoverished by the economic and political developments in Judah and Israel.<sup>84</sup> There is no doubt that many ordinary people

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<sup>81</sup> Cf. B. S. Childs, *Isaiah*, p. 25

<sup>82</sup> Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, p. 130. Helen Schüngel – Straumann translates this sentence “Ich hasse eure Feste und kann nicht riechen eure Feiern” (I hate your festivals and cannot smell your celebrations) and she comments, “Damit gebraucht Amos die denkbar schärfste Ausdrucksweise, um den Opferkult abzulehnen.” For her, the expression “kann nicht riechen” (cannot smell) is derived from the old sacrificial practice (Gen. 8:21). See her *Gottesbild und Kultkritik vorexilischer Propheten* (Stuttgart: KBW Verlag, 1972) p. 33.

<sup>83</sup> Morris Silver, *Prophets and Markets: The Political Economy of Ancient Israel* (Boston, The Hague, London: Kluwer-Nijhoff Publishing, 1983) p. 102.

<sup>84</sup> Premnath demonstrates the strong connection between the extraction of economic surplus by the dominant people and the increasing impoverishment of the ordinary people in the eighth century BCE. For him, the elite were the beneficiaries of the growth and prosperity of Judah and Israel during this period, and this growth and prosperity were achieved mainly at the expense of the rural poor peasants. See his *Eighth Century Prophets: A Social Analysis*, pp. 78-89. Silver also sees the link between the impoverishment of the ordinary people and luxurious cultic consumption. He comments, “2 Chronicles 29:31-36, which deals with the cleansing and rededication of the temple by King Hezekiah near the end of the eighth century BCE states that those members of the congregation ‘with generous spirits brought burnt offerings. The number of burnt offerings which the

were denied and excluded by the sacrificial system at the royal sanctuaries as they just could not afford the requirements of rituals and sacrifices which were primarily designed to serve the interests of the affluent people. Whitelam observes that the state cult required a heavy investment of labour and resources, and drew vast resources to the royal court and cult as tribute, taxation and sacrificial inputs.<sup>85</sup> Religion, which was the fundamental unifying principle of the Israelite tribes in the pre-monarchic period, had now become a potentially destructive force that may have accelerated the widening gap between the rich and the poor. Meyers suggests that the cultic ceremonies and sacred structures of Israel must be seen as part of the political ideology of the realm.<sup>86</sup> It is plausible that Yahwism, as practised at the royal sanctuaries, had now become an important instrument of the state in legitimising the power and authority of the ruling elite and supporting their assumption of social supremacy, thereby greatly alienating traditional tribal communitarian values.<sup>87</sup> The sanctuaries at Bethel and Gilgal in the north and at Jerusalem in the south were religious strongholds where the rich showed off their wealth and extravagance through assemblies, festivals, rituals, and sacrifices that certainly promoted the ideology of materialism, consumerism and elitism. Instead of maintaining and preserving the traditional tribal religious values of neighbourly love and community-oriented social relationship, certain religious sanctuaries had now become centres for promoting the ideology of oppression and dominion which must have accelerated social inequality and disharmony in Israelite society.

In this context, Amos called for the establishment of **משפט** and **צדקה** in his community: “But let **משפט** roll down like waters, and **צדקה** like a strong river.” Here **משפט** and **צדקה** are demanded immediately after a strong rejection of religious practices at the royal sanctuaries. This implicitly suggests that **משפט** and **צדקה** are regarded as the alternative values and principles that are expected to replace the values and ideology inherent in the religious practices at the royal sanctuaries. Moreover, it is obvious that **משפט** and **צדקה** are fundamentally

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congregation brought was as follows: seventy bulls, a hundred rams, and two hundred lambs” (Silver, *Prophets and Markets*, p. 102).

<sup>85</sup> Whitelam, “King, Kingship” *ABD* (CD-ROM).

<sup>86</sup> Meyers “Jachin and Boaz in Religious and Political Perspective” p. 169.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Jorge Pixley and Clodovis Boff, *The Bible, the Church and the Poor* (trans. Paul Burns; Maryknoll, NY: Burns and Oates Ltd., 1989) p. 43.

opposed to the monarchy's ideology. The forensic meanings of these terms seem to have no sense at all in this context since the excessive cultic worship, which is the main concern of the prophet, has nothing to do with judicial administration. The passage has its parallel in Isaiah 1:16f. and Micah 6:8 where the prophets, after powerful utterances against the rich forms of cultic worship, end by demanding **משפט**.<sup>88</sup> As pointed out above, Isaiah (1:16) here equates seeking **משפט** with ceasing to do evil or doing good by means of rendering practical help for the benefit of the most vulnerable ones in the community, namely the oppressed, the orphans and widows. Micah also expresses the same sort of view as he proclaims, "O Mortal, what is good; and what does Yahweh require of you but to do **משפט** and to love **חסד**, and to walk humbly with your God?" This equation of doing **משפט** and loving **חסד** (kindness) is clearly a demand for simplicity, humility and the extension of kindness, compassion, and loyalty to others.<sup>89</sup> What is meant by **חסד** can be paraphrased by the expression "do good."<sup>90</sup> The rabbinic commentator Rashi comments that Micah's phrase "walking humbly with your God" is also a description of doing justice and extending mercy to one's neighbour.<sup>91</sup> The demand is made of every member of the prophet's community, not the judicial authorities, implying that the demands are general and moral in nature, rather than concerned with the proper execution of justice.<sup>92</sup> In a similar way, Amos' demand for **משפט** and **צדקה** can also be taken as a demand for deeds of goodness and love among the members of his community for the well-being of the whole community. The phrase **כנחל איתן** (like a strong river) in v. 24 along with **יגל** (jussive form of **גלל** 'roll down') may have expressed the strength and power of **משפט** and **צדקה** to

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Erling Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary* (trans. John Sturdy; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970) p. 90.

<sup>89</sup> **חסד** in Mic. 6:8 is variously translated: mercy (KJV), compassion, kindness (RSV), or loyalty (NEB, REB).

<sup>90</sup> Cf. H. -J. Zobel, "חסד" in *TDOT*, Vol. V (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986) p. 47. **חסד** is often used to denote an action of love and care for others. For example, it denotes Abimelek's action toward Abraham (Gen. 21:23), the Egyptian's jailer's action toward Joseph (Gen. 39:21-23), Rahab's action toward the spies (Josh. 2:12), Ruth's action toward Naomi (Ruth 3:10 – also Boaz's action toward the two widows), the action of the Kenites toward Israel in her wilderness journey (1 Sam. 15:6), the action of the men of Jabesh Gilead toward Saul and his sons (2 Sam. 2:5), David's action toward the son of Jonathan (2 Sam. 9:1-7), and the reputed action of Israelite kings to their conquered enemies (1 Kgs. 20:31) etc. See John H. Stek, "Salvation, Justice and Liberation" p. 156.

<sup>91</sup> As cited by William McKane, *The Book of Micah* (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1998) p. 190.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Weinfield, "Justice and Righteousness" p. 238.



replace the oppressive ideology inherent in the religious practices of the dominant people.<sup>93</sup>

If the rhetorical question of Amos in v. 25 is read in connection with the preceding verses (vv. 21-24), this question implicitly suggests that *משפט* and *צדקה* are regarded as the core religio-cultural principles of the tribes in the wilderness period. Yahweh raises a very radical question: “Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?”<sup>94</sup> This rhetorical question is meant to be answered in the negative.<sup>95</sup> This implies that the prophet considers the elaborate rituals and sacrificial system, which form the fundamental elements of worship at the royal sanctuaries, as a later development. Moreover, the prophet’s perception of Yahwism and the religious practices associated with Yahwism at the royal sanctuaries fundamentally contradict each other. However, this rhetorical question should not be taken out of its context and used to tackle an issue not originally addressed by the prophet.<sup>96</sup> If this verse is interpreted in relation

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<sup>93</sup> The phrase *לְהֵיבֹהֵב נָחַל* is usually translated as “ever-flowing river” that expresses its permanence or reliability in contrast to the streams (wadi) which flow only in the rainy season. See Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, p. 132. But, *אִיתָן* can also be translated as “strong” “hard” “mighty” or “rough”. See *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionary*, (CD-ROM). In support of this translation, reference can be made to the Hebrew of Sirach 40:13. See Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>94</sup> Hans Walter Wolff argues that Amos 5:25-26 is a later addition made by the Deuteronomistic redactor in the sixth century. See his *Joel and Amos*, pp. 260, 264. However, there is no special characteristic to be attributed to the Deuteronomistic writer from this text to support this view. Many commentators do not agree with Wolff. E.g., see Shalom M. Paul, *Amos*, pp. 193-198; James M. Ward, *Amos and Isaiah*, (New York: Abingdon press, 1969) p. 139. The interpretations of this verse (v. 25) and Jeremiah 7:21-23 are dominated by the question whether or not the prophets completely reject cultic sacrifices. But Coggins (*Joel and Amos*, p. 131) observes that this kind of question was originated from a study of the prophets undertaken by those with a specific religious interest to maintain, so that the possibility that God does not approve of religious practice is an extremely destabilizing one. What is certain, however, is that the prophet emphasises here the importance of the simple religious values and practices in the past community over against the excessive sacrifices and rituals of his day.

<sup>95</sup> Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos*, p. 91. Helen Schüngel – Straumann notes, “Amos erwartet als Antwort sicher ein glattes Nein, und der Sinn der Antwort ist dann, daß das Volk in der Wüste Gott zwar keine Opfer dargebracht habe, trotzdem aber Gott damals wohlgefälliger gewesen sei als heute.” See her *Gottesbild und Kultkritik*, p. 33.

<sup>96</sup> The interpretation of this rhetorical question has always been directed by the question whether the prophet wants to abolish sacrifices altogether or not. See Cripps, *Amos*, pp. xxviii – xxxiii; also H.H. Rowley, “The Prophets and Sacrifice”, *Exp Tim* 58 (1946/7) pp. 305-307. Some scholars attempt to answer the question whether the prophet completely rejects the sacrificial practices in the Mosaic period and priestly laws described in the Pentateuch. See Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos*, pp. 91-92; Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, p. 132. Though this kind of question can be discussed in relation to this verse, yet it seems to be beyond the main concern of the prophet considering the theme of the oracle. The focus of the prophet in this oracle is on the rituals and sacrifices at the sanctuaries of Bethel, Gilgal and Samaria, which are dominated by the rich rulers of the Northern kingdom, rather than general cultic practices. James L. Mays comments, “Amos does not speak to any general and

to the preceding verses (vv. 21-23), it is clear that the primary concern of the prophet is the excessive rituals and sacrifices at the royal sanctuaries rather than the general cultic sacrificial system. Amos certainly considers this kind of religious practices to be alien to the traditional tribal religion. In v. 26, he describes a religious procession in which the people are carrying the effigies of two foreign deities: “You shall take up *Sikkuth* (סכּוּת) your king, and *Kaiwan* כּיּוּן your star god, your images, which you made for yourselves.” Hammershaimb mentions that these two names of deities occur together along with the names of other stars in an Assyrian text.<sup>97</sup> Paul also contends that סכּוּת, is a Hebrew transliteration of SAG.KUD, an ancestral deity known from Mesopotamian sources, and also found in a list of gods from Ugarit, and כּיּוּן is the Hebrew equivalent of the Akkadian *kajamanu* (literally, “the steady one”), the appellation of the star god, Saturn.<sup>98</sup> What is obvious here is that the prophet sees a link between the lavish royal practices and the worship of Assyrian deities. Though there are certain scholars who suspect the authenticity of this verse and who propose to emend the MT,<sup>99</sup> yet it is arguable that the MT can be retained as it is considering the main emphasis of the prophet in this oracle. Some scholars want to remove this verse based on the argument that Amos makes no explicit issue of the worship of foreign gods.<sup>100</sup> However, the prophet might not have thought it necessary to deal with this issue separately as he persistently challenges the lavish rituals and sacrifices practised by the royal cults; they themselves are inextricably linked with the worship of foreign gods. His younger contemporary Hosea clearly sees the extravagance of religious festivals, new moons, Sabbaths and the appointed feasts, which disgusted and irritated the God of Amos, as parts of the syncretistic worship prevalent during his

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theoretical question such as: Should Israel’s religion be cultic or non-cultic? His attacks are directed against the specific worship carried on by these Israelites in their shrines.” See his *Amos*, p. 109.

<sup>97</sup> Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos*, p. 93.

<sup>98</sup> Paul, *Amos*, pp. 195-196.

<sup>99</sup> Mays believes that this verse (v. 26) reflects the situation in Israel’s territory after the Assyrian conquest and the introduction of a variety of cults into the North. See his *Amos*, p. 112. Some scholars suggest emending סכּוּת to סכּת (“hut, booth”) and מלכּכּם (“your king”) to מלך (“Moloch”) or מלכּם (“Milcom”), following LXX and Vulgate. Also כּיּוּן is revocalised to כּוּן, that is, a “kamatu-cake,” associated with the cult of the queen of heaven, Ishtar. See Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos*, pp. 92-93; Paul, *Amos*, p. 195; also C. D. Issbell, “Another look at Amos,” *JBL* 97 (1978) pp. 97-99. Paul strongly argues, “These tortuous ways of resolving the assumed difficulties inherent in the verse, as attractive as they may be, are completely unnecessary and superfluous.”

<sup>100</sup> For example Mays, *Amos*, p. 112.

time (Hos. 2:11[9]).<sup>101</sup> It is quite possible that the influence of stronger nations' religious values upon the religious practices and ideology of the ruling elite in Israel and Judah was the main issue behind the cultic critique of Amos and the other eighth-century prophets. Hanks sees the link between oppression of the poor and the practice of idolatry, similarly asserting that the eighth-century prophets repeatedly denounce the oppression and idolatry of Israel's rulers.<sup>102</sup> In fact, cultic development in Israel and Judah cannot be isolated from the economic and foreign policies of the rulers. From the time of Solomon onwards, we have seen that the diplomatic foreign policy of the rulers was greatly responsible for the influx of the neighbouring religious cults into the land of Israel which in turn had great impact on the royal values and ways of life manifested in their domestic policies (1 Kgs. 11:1-8). Even in the divided kingdom, Jeroboam I played a key role in developing a new syncretistic form of religious practice in Northern Israel (1 Kgs. 12:25-33). The foreign policy of the Omride dynasty also certainly opened the floodgates for the fertility cults of Baal, which flowed into the Northern kingdom and profoundly influenced the values and worldview of the royal circle (1 Kgs. 16:31-33; 18). This resulted in a famous confrontation between the prophets of Yahweh and the royal circle in the time of Ahab. It is obvious that the ruling elites first embraced the pagan religious cults and that they were mainly responsible for introducing and incorporating alien religious practices and ideology in the Israelite and Judahite cults. Scholars have detected the influence of foreign religions even upon the structure, decoration, equipment, and priesthood in Solomon's temple.<sup>103</sup> The

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<sup>101</sup> It is argued in chapter 5 that Hosea's Baal/baalim can also be connected with the colonial power of Assyria and Egypt that dominated and dictated the rulers of Israel and Judah in the eighth century BCE.

<sup>102</sup> Thomas D. Hanks, *God so loved the Third World: The Bible, the Reformation, and Liberation Theologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 1983) pp. 35-36.

<sup>103</sup> Meyers, "Jachin and Boaz in Religious and Political Perspective" pp. 167-178. Bas Wielenga, *It's a Long Road to Freedom* (Madurai: Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 1998) pp. 200-201. Coote states, "In architecture, equipment, procedure, and ideology, the temple's cult was indistinguishable from the cults of Baal and other urban deities throughout the eastern Mediterranean. The temple was dedicated to the dynastic succession, the inheritance of the rule within the house of David.... The temple was sanctuary, treasury, court, and archive. It became the center of the nation's life under the rule of the house of David, even though for all its grandeur it was the king's private chapel, whose closest precincts were barred to all but the most wealthy and influential. Its cult of priestly meat-eating along with generous prebendal support freed its priesthood to pursue their duties as butchers, cult petitioners, taboo specialists, vocal and instrumental artists, scribes, lawyers, judges, counselors, prophets, and warriors. The temple became a widely hated institution that possessed, however, a deep reservoir of potential for purification, reform, and popular loyalty, depending on the political position of the ruler of the day." See Coote and Coote, *Power, Politics, and the Making of the Bible*, p. 34.

syncretistic royal cult is seen by many as further evidence that kingship was alien to Israel.<sup>104</sup> In fact, the Israelite royal value-system and the whole system of monarchy can be considered as greatly shaped and influenced by the political ideology and royal value-system of the neighbouring states. Amos' concern in this context appears to be not merely about the indigenous cultic development in Israel, but the hybrid cultic system that emerges under the influence of Assyrian religious values and practices which certainly endorse the colonial value-system and ideology that are in many ways contradicted by the traditional religious values and cultural ethos of the Israelite people. It is arguable that Assyrian imperialistic religious ideology and the elitist Israelite value-system are the combined forces that challenged the tribal religio-cultural values in this context.<sup>105</sup>

The rhetorical question in v. 25 not only rejects the rituals and sacrificial system found in the royal sanctuaries, but also indirectly stresses the importance of the principle followed by the early tribes in the wilderness period: it implies that the prophet considers the simple religious practice in the wilderness period to be far superior to the lavish cultic practices of the royal sanctuaries. Scholars often take the wilderness period as a time of God's favour or the honeymoon period of Israel in terms of her relationship with Yahweh.<sup>106</sup> However, Amos does not seem to refer to this idealised aspect of the wilderness period, as he mentions nothing about God's special concern for Israel. Rather, he wants to emphasise the importance of the simple religious life of the early tribes - the anti-greed, anti-pride values inherent in their religious worship - when considering his polemic against the excessive and lavish religious practices at the royal sanctuaries. Modern scholars generally agree that the detailed narratives of the wilderness tradition in the Pentateuch cannot be taken as historical data. However, one cannot deny the fact that this tradition at least reflects the memory of the poverty, famine, drought, opposition, and homelessness undergone by the Israelites' ancestors. At the same time, this tradition also reflects the simple ways of life of the early tribes who maintained kinship relationships and a tribal subsistence economy in the context of scarcity of everything. The simple traditional value-system and tribal

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. Whitelam, "King, Kingship" *ABD* (CD-ROM); G. E. Mendenhall, "The Monarchy" *Interpretation* 29 (1975) pp. 155-170.

<sup>105</sup> This issue will be discussed in a more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>106</sup> Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos*, p. 92. See also Cripps, *Amos*, p. 27.

communitarian ethos must have shaped and conditioned the cultural and religious values of the community in this period.<sup>107</sup> It is very likely that Amos longs for this kind of simplicity. Therefore, the prophet's understanding of *משפט* and *צדקה* in this context can be understood as the basis of simple tribal communitarianism encouraging simplicity, humility, generosity, selflessness, and classless social relationships.

#### 4.4. Conclusion

The analysis of Isaiah 1:21-26 in light of the role and function of the tribal *tlawmngaihna* has shown that *משפט* and *צדקה* are more than abstract ideas of justice and righteousness or the legal concepts of fairness and correctness. Rather, they are principles of action and relationship in the community that fundamentally oppose the values and interests of the ruling elites, who greedily run after their own economic gain by ignoring the plight of the poor and marginalised people. The demand for *משפט* and *צדקה* in this context was more or less similar to the demand for generosity, kindness, goodness, loyalty, deep concern for others, love, and selfless service. They are also communitarian principles that strongly negate arrogance, greed, selfishness, violence, oppression and any other egoistic interests which can potentially threaten social cohesion and communal harmony.

Our examination of Amos 5:21-27 in light of *tlawmngaihna* and the Hindu caste system in India has also confirmed the idea that there were two fundamentally different understandings and interpretations of Yahwism within Israelite and Judahite society. The God of Amos was angered and disgusted by wasteful rituals and religious practices associated with worship at the royal sanctuaries. The prophet demands *משפט* and *צדקה* by opposing such expensive religious rituals and excessive sacrifices and his vision of the establishment of *משפט* and *צדקה* is tribal and communitarian encouraging social equality, communitarian lifestyle, simplicity, humility, generosity, sharing, and neighbourly love and concern.

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<sup>107</sup> This idea is the thesis of von Waldow as indicated in the preceding chapter. See his "Social Responsibility and Social Structure in Early Israel" *CBQ*, 32 (1970) pp. 184-185.

## WEALTH AND POVERTY

The issue of wealth and poverty was one of the major concerns of the eighth-century prophets in Israel and Judah and their ideas concerning this issue are vital for understanding their fundamental values and ethos. It is generally recognised that these four prophets – Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah - have anti-rich and pro-poor attitudes in their oracles. Even a cursory reading of the oracles of the prophets can easily give us the idea that they are very critical of the affluent whereas they have a deep concern for the poor. It is very interesting to see the prophets take this view, since wealth and prosperity are normally considered positively and poverty is often viewed negatively in the other parts of the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> The question is: Why did they have such a negative attitude towards the rich and deep concern for the poor? What motivated them to be so critical of the rich and to commit themselves to fight for the cause of the poor? What values were they upholding in so doing?

Scholars usually approach the subject of wealth and poverty in the Old Testament via studies of the Hebrew terms for “poor,” and are less interested in the vocabulary of wealth.<sup>2</sup> Some scholars try to understand the Old Testament concern for the underprivileged in relation with other ancient West Asian peoples’ values and ethos,

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in some places in the Old Testament we come across the idea that wealth is regarded as the blessing of God, the fruit of righteousness and the outcome of obedience and wisdom (Deut.28:1-6; 1 Kings 3:12-13; Job 1:1-5, etc). At the same time, poverty is also often considered as the consequence of unrighteousness, laziness, disobedience, and foolishness (Prov. 10:4; 12:11; 19:15 20:4 etc.). However, the eighth-century prophets did not share this kind of view, rather they hold completely different views in this regard. For them, a huge accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few rich and the stark reality of the poverty of the lower class people were the two opposite outcomes of social injustice.

<sup>2</sup> C. U. Wolf, “Poor,” *IDB* 3 (1962) pp. 832-844; “Poverty” *IDB* 3 (1962), pp. 853-854; J. David Pleins, “Poor, Poverty” *ABD* (CD-ROM); see also his “Poverty in the Social World of the Wise” in *Social – Scientific Old Testament Criticism: A Sheffield Reader* (ed. David J. Chalcraft; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) pp. 283-300; A. Kuschke, “Arm und Reich im Alten Testament mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der nachexilischen Zeit” *ZAW* 57 (1939) pp. 31-57; E. Bammel, “The Poor in the Old Testament,” *TDNT* 6 (1968) pp. 888-894; Mignon R. Jacobs, “Toward an Old Testament Theology of Concern for the Underprivileged” in *Reading the Hebrew Bible for a New Millennium: Form, Concept and Theological Perspective* (eds. Wonil Kim et al.; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000) pp. 205-229.

and they normally conclude that concern for the poor is not unique to Israel.<sup>3</sup> In addition, there are certain scholars who attempt to reconstruct the socio-economic structure of ancient Israel and Judah in light of modern sociological, anthropological and archaeological insights in order to throw more light on the background of the prophetic protests in the eighth century BCE.<sup>4</sup> Though these kinds of approaches add knowledge about wealth and poverty in the Old Testament in general and about the concept of the prophets in particular, they do not enable us to understand why the prophets are so negative towards the affluent and so committed to the destitute. This chapter is an attempt to look at the prophets' attitude towards the rich and the poor from a different angle, i.e. from the angle of the Mizo values of honour and shame. The desired conclusion is that these values can further illuminate some important aspects of the values and ethos of the prophets concerning wealth and poverty. Two passages that may well represent the fundamental view of the prophets on these issues are selected for analysis, namely, Amos 6:1-7 and Hosea 2: 2-5.

The prevalence of honour and shame vocabularies in prophetic literature and the importance of the subject of wealth and poverty in the teachings of the eighth-century prophets have been detected separately by scholars.<sup>5</sup> However, a systematic investigation has never been carried out to show the relationship between the values of honour and shame and the issues of wealth and poverty in the oracles of the prophets. Even those who see the connection between these two concepts in the Old Testament normally accept that wealth and prosperity bring honour and respect to the rich people whereas economic poverty is often tied with dishonour and shame.<sup>6</sup> Stiebert notes that the idea of honour represented by status or wealth, which is depicted as a social value to be striven and competed for, is rooted in the

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<sup>3</sup> F. Charles Fensham, "Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature" *JNES* 21 (1962) pp. 129-139; Norman W. Porteous, "The Care of the Poor in the Old Testament" in *Living the Mystery*, (Collected Essays by N. Porteous; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967) pp. 143-155; David H. Engelhard, "The Lord's Motivated Concern for the Underprivileged" *Calvin Theological Journal* 15 (1980) pp. 5-26.

<sup>4</sup> Scholars who apply this approach and their ideas are discussed in detail in the following analysis of Amos 6:1-7 in this chapter.

<sup>5</sup> Different vocabularies of honour and shame employed by the prophets are discussed in the following section.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Gary Stansell, "Wealth: How Abraham Became Rich" in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in its Social Context* (ed. Philip F. Esler; London: SCM Press, 2005) pp. 92-110. Stansell sees the wealth and possessions gained by Abraham, David and Solomon as a means of enhancing their honour and social status.

Mediterranean social anthropological understanding of honour and shame.<sup>7</sup> However, this generally accepted assumption is rarely to be found in the oracles of the eighth-century prophets, where we get several points of contact between the values of honour and shame and the issues of wealth and poverty. As indicated above, the eighth-century prophets deny honour and respect to the affluent people and firmly support the honour and dignity of the poor and destitute. The question is – if wealth and prosperity enhance honour and respect for the wealthy people, why do the eighth-century prophets sharply criticise them instead of showing them respect and honour? At the same time, if economic poverty is associated with dishonour and shame, why should the prophets treat the poor and the weak as their precious fellow human beings who deserve honour and dignity? These questions have never been adequately answered in discussions on the subject of honour and shame or in discussions of the prophetic concepts of wealth and poverty. This chapter aims to explore the significance of these concepts through the socio-economic and cultural lens of the Mizo people in Northeast India to illuminate the eighth-century prophets' concept of wealth and poverty.

We will first briefly look at the values of honour and shame in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament. After this, we will highlight some important features of the Mizo honour and shame in relation to concepts of wealth and poverty, and the impact of modernisation/globalisation on their traditional values and ethos. Then we will concentrate on the selected passages of the prophets in order to demonstrate how their values of honour and shame function in shaping their messages concerning the issue of wealth and poverty.

### 5.1. The Values of Honour and Shame in Prophetic Literature

As indicated above, the concept of honour and shame is not alien to the Old Testament. Klopfenstein notes that the idea of shame penetrates almost every aspect

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<sup>7</sup> See Johanna Stiebert, *The Construction of Shame in the Hebrew Bible: The Prophetic Contribution* (JSOTSup 346; London: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 2002) p. 95. She points out that in the teachings of the prophets honour, represented by status (הדר, כבוד) or pride in one's claim to honour (גאון), is not depicted as a social value to be striven and competed for but as a quality to be humbly conceded to Yhwh. In First Isaiah, wealth, sometimes regarded as an outward correlative of honour, is condemned or devalued.



of the life of the people of the Old Testament.<sup>8</sup> For a group-oriented society like the Hebrew people, honour and shame are vital for social control. The community uses honour to encourage socially acceptable behaviour and to maintain commonly accepted standards of conduct whereas shaming is used to sanction socially unacceptable behaviour and lifestyles. McIlroy observes, “Honour and shame are expressions of social judgments on the conduct of others which have the capacity to inform people’s behaviour because respect and status matter to people and confer a sense of self-worth.”<sup>9</sup> According to Matthews, “shaming speech is a social control mechanism. It is designed, through reasoning or by employing a sort of ‘vocabulary of embarrassment’, to make the prodigal or the enemy rethink their plans or suppress their unacceptable speech”.<sup>10</sup>

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that the prophets of the Old Testament are not alien to the values of honour and shame.<sup>11</sup> As they play significant roles in the social control of the group-oriented Israelite society, the prophets extensively make use of the language and metaphors of honour and shame to inform their audience about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. The different Hebrew words for honour namely, כבוד which means “honour”, “glory”, “heaviness” ((from the root כבד “to be heavy”), גאון/גארה meaning “majesty”, “exaltation”, “excellence” (from גאה “to exalt”), הדר meaning “honour”, “countenance” (from הדר “to swell” “to adorn”), צבר meaning “great quantity” “heaping up” (from the verb צבר “to heap up”) and תפארה meaning “splendour”, “beauty”, “honour”, (from

<sup>8</sup> M. A. Klopfenstein, *Scham und Schande nach dem Alten Testament: Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu den hebräischen Wurzeln* בוש, כלם, חפר ((Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1972) p. 208. He comments, “Der Begriffskomplex ‘Scham/Schande’ umspannt somit das ganze Spektrum psychischer, sozialer, politisch-militärischer, rechtlicher, kultischer, religiöser (und als Randerscheinung sogar kosmischer) Lebensminderung, ja Lebensohnmacht.”

<sup>9</sup> David McIlroy, “Honour and Shame” *Cambridge Papers* 14.2 (2005) p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Victor H. Matthews, “Honor and Shame in Gender-Related Legal Situations in the Hebrew Bible” in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (eds. Victor H. Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson and Tikva Frymer-Kensky; JSOTSup 262; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) p. 99. He differentiates shaming speech from insults and taunts, which are components of aggressive behaviour and may or may not be rationally based.

<sup>11</sup> See scholarly discussions on the prophets and the values of honour and shame in Stiebert, *The Construction of Shame*. Also her “Shame and Prophecy: Approaches Past and Present,” *BibInt* 8/3 (2000) pp. 255-275. R. Simkins, “Return of Yahweh”: Honor and Shame in Joel’ *Semeia* 68: 41-54. M. S. Odell, “The Inversion of Shame and Forgiveness in Ezekiel 16:59-63”, *JSOT* 56 (1992) pp. 101-112. Gale A. Yee, “Hosea” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary* (eds. C.A. Newsom and S.H. Ringe; London: SPCK, 1992) pp. 195-202.

the root פאר) are largely employed in the oracles of the prophets.<sup>12</sup> Klopfenstein has shown that the most common Hebrew words for shame derived from the root בוש occur 167 times in the Old Testament of which 99 occurrences are in the Prophets and 42 in Psalms leaving the remaining 26 in the other books. Another word-group derived from the root כלם which means “to humiliate, reproach” occurs 69 times out of which 39 occurrences are in the books of the prophets and 13 occurrences in the Psalms while other books contain 17 occurrences.<sup>13</sup> In addition, prophets employ some other word-groups for shame derived from the other Hebrew roots, namely קלה or קלל (to be lightly esteemed or dishonoured), שפל (be or become low, abased, humiliated), מכך (be low/humiliated), and שרף (to reproach/verbally shame). There are also some nouns common to the prophetic oracles חרפה (disgrace, reproach, shame), and נבלות (immodesty, shamelessness, lewdness).<sup>14</sup> Despite the enormous linguistic evidence, however, the majority of scholars who apply the honour and shame rubric to the texts of the Old Testament have never paid serious attention to the prophetic literature. Most of them are interested in the Patriarchal narratives, Deuteronomy, Deuteronomistic History and other books in the Writings, and their approaches are mainly dominated by philological, psychological, social-anthropological and feminist perspectives.<sup>15</sup>

Stiebert argues that the paucity of honour-shame studies with regard to the prophets is mainly because “honour pertaining to humans, or men in particular, a commodity to be competed for with challenge-ripostes, as depicted in the anthropological studies, is not well attested in the major Prophets and seldom contrasted with

<sup>12</sup> For references especially in the eighth-century prophets, see Isa. 2:10,19,21; 3:8; 4:2,5; 5:14; 6:3; 8:7; 10:3,12,16,18; 11:10; 13:19; 14:18; 16:14; 17:3,4; 20:5; 21:16; 22:18,23,24; 23:9; 24:15,16,23; 26:15; 28:5; 35:2; Hos. 4:7; 9:11; 10:5; Mic. 1:15. Amos 6:8.

<sup>13</sup> Klopfenstein, *Scham und Schande*, p. 29.

<sup>14</sup> See references for the eighth-century prophets – Isa. 1:29; 4:1;20:4;22:18; 23:4,9; 26:11; 29:22; 30:3,5; 33:9; Hos. 2:10; 4:7,18,19; 9:10; 10:6; Mic. 1:11; 2:6; 3:7; 7:10.

<sup>15</sup> Ken Stone, *Sex, Honor, and Power in the Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup 234; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); also his “Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19: Subject-Honor, Object-Shame?” *JSOT* 67 (1995) pp. 87-107; G. Stansell, “Honor and Shame in the David Narratives”, *Semeia* 68 (1996) pp. 55-79; T. S. Laniak, *Shame and Honor in the Book of Esther* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998); Victor H. Matthews, “Honor and Shame in Gender-Related Legal Situations in the Hebrew Bible”, pp. 99ff.; D. Bergant, ““My Beloved Is Mine and I am His” (Song 2:16): The Song of Songs and Honor and Shame”, *Semeia* 68 (1996) pp. 23-40; S. M. Olyan, “Honor, Shame, and Covenant Relations in Ancient Israel and its Environment”, *JBL* 115.2 (1996) pp. 201-218; T. R. Hobbs, “Reflections on Honor, Shame, and Covenant Relations”, *JBL* 116.3 (1997) pp. 501-503.

shame.”<sup>16</sup> According to her, the Mediterranean social anthropological model, which regards honour and shame as an inseparable pair of contrasting words referring to the positive and negative aspects of human values, is not appropriate for analysing the prophets’ concept of honour and shame, and she believes that this may be the reason why scholars usually avoid the prophetic literature. She argues that where the words for honour from the roots **כבוד**, **גאה** and **הדר** are alluded to in what might be regarded as a context of shame in the prophetic literatures, they are normally tied to human shortcomings contrasting with Yahweh’s honour. For her, these qualities rightfully belong to Yahweh alone.<sup>17</sup> Her argument that reveals the limitation of the honour/shame model of Mediterranean anthropology is a significant contribution. However, her perception of honour isolated from shame in the prophets’ mode of thinking and her argument that honour is something exclusively belonging to Yahweh and detached from humans is far from convincing.<sup>18</sup> For instance, if we read Isaiah 4:2,5; 11:10; 22:23; or 35:2, the words for honour are attributed positively to humans. In addition, if we look at Hosea 4:7, the word **כבוד** (honour) is clearly contrasted with **קלון** (shame). If we analyse her view even from a theological perspective, it is not simply unconvincing, but untenable. For example, if the quality of Yahweh, the ultimate truth and ideal of his worshippers, is completely different from the core value of the people, it would imply that the nature of Yahweh is fundamentally different to or perhaps contradicted by the ethical standards of his worshippers, which is very improbable. If honour is identified as the inherent quality of Yahweh, that surely indicates that honour is the core value of his adherents which they must strive for, though they may have different notions as to how to strive and compete for it. Nevertheless, Stiebert should be applauded for demonstrating the contrasting senses or connotations of the Hebrew terms for honour (**כבוד**, **גאה** and **הדר**) when they qualify Yahweh and pertain to people or nations in some contexts. This does not, however, mean that honour is not the binary opposite of shame in the prophets. Rather, this simply reflects the fact that the prophets have a peculiar perception of

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<sup>16</sup> Stiebert’s main argument is dominated by a critique of the honour-shame rubric borrowed by biblical scholars from Mediterranean social anthropology. See her “Shame and Prophecy”, p. 264, and also *The Construction of Shame*, p. 87.

<sup>17</sup> Stiebert, *The Construction of Shame*, p. 88.

<sup>18</sup> She mentions that in First and Deutero-Isaiah, humans’ **כבוד**, **גאון** and **הדר** are regarded negatively. These qualities are described as belonging rightfully to Yahweh alone. See *The Construction of Shame*, p. 89.

honour that differs from the existing knowledge of honour and shame in Mediterranean social anthropology, and which needs to be illuminated further. The honour/shame model of Mediterranean anthropology may be complemented or at least supplemented by the Mizo tribal concept of honour and shame in Northeast India in order to illuminate the meaning and significance of the prophets' values concerning wealth and poverty.

## 5.2. The Mizo values of honour and shame in relation to wealth and poverty

As discussed in chapter two, 'honour' and its binary opposite 'shame' play significant roles in shaping the value-system of the tribes in Northeast India. Indeed, 'honour' can be regarded as the core value commonly shared by the different tribal groups in Northeast India. We have pointed out in the earlier discussion that while the Mizo tribe considers community honour as the highest reputation, public humiliation or shame is regarded as the worst devastation. Unlike the legal mindset of the individual-oriented society, where everything is judged in terms of right or wrong, the community-oriented Mizo tribal mindset is largely dominated by what is honourable or shameful. In the Mizo mentality, the highest honour is reserved for one who selflessly sacrifices his or her wealth, strength, time and ability for the common good of the members of the community. For this reason, generosity, bravery, loyalty, and selflessness occupy a very important place in the value-system of the people. For example, *thangchhuah*,<sup>19</sup> the most honourable title given by the Mizo tribal community, was given to a rich couple who generously shared their wealth with the community by means of giving community feasts and distributing their possessions to the poor. In order to achieve this title, one had to be economically well off with huge livestock and agricultural surpluses. However, wealthy people have never been automatically offered this title on account of their wealth unless they shared a significant amount of their possessions with the members of their community. In fact, an individual or a family in the Mizo community could not claim any title of honour, as this kind of egotism was considered shameful. The community used to award public honour by consensus to

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<sup>19</sup> *Thangchhuah* literally means "the one who fulfils the honourable ways". A detailed discussion of the meaning, role and social position of *thangchhuah* in the tribal community can be found in chapter 2, section 2.3.4.

the most deserving person.<sup>20</sup> Though every member of the community admired *thangchhuah*, the only one who could really earn this title was a rich person or a great hunter who generously shared a large amount of meat with his neighbours.<sup>21</sup> The whole practice of *thangchhuah* was dominated by the philosophy that riches and material resources should be shared with the members of the community.

The Mizo people fundamentally believe in the principle of sharing. In fact, the clearest and simplest way of describing the essence of the Mizo socio-economic culture may be 'the culture of sharing'. They share with each other not only their valuable materials and possessions, but also all the resources they have including agricultural tools, hunting weapons, agricultural products, land, food, power, service and time. The Mizo people even share sorrow and joy with each other. In the traditional Mizo society, wealth was not measured in terms of how much one saved material possessions, but in terms of how much one shared or spent one's possessions for the well-being of the community. There was a competitive spirit among the well-to-do families to share their wealth with other members of the community. In the Mizo ethos, people would feel ashamed if they found out that their neighbours were starving without their knowledge when they had plenty to eat. Though all members of the community take collective responsibility in helping out the needy and helpless, yet the well-to-do families have key roles to play in times of emergency and in certain difficult circumstances. A family which is in a position to share its wealth for the benefit of others is highly admired and respected. Every family strives to be the one who is dependable for others rather than the one who

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<sup>20</sup> For example, the best young man in terms of practicing *tlawmngaihna* (see chapter 2, section 2.3.2) was awarded public honour in the community gathering. He was honoured by offering the biggest cup of rice beer called *No pui*, and he was supposed to be the first person to sip the beer in the community drink. The recipient of such an honour usually tries to avoid public ceremony as he humbly considers himself unworthy of receiving such a great honour, and sometimes he hides away from the eyes of the people. However, members of the community search him until they find him, and they compel him to receive the community honour which they think he deserves. This clearly shows that the title of honour is not to be claimed by an individual or a family; rather, it is purely at the disposal of the community in the value-system of the tribal people. See C. Vanlallawma, "Mizo Tlawmngaihna" in *Hringlang Tlang* (ed. C. Vanlallawma; Aizawl: MCL Publication, 1998) pp. 1ff.

<sup>21</sup> As we have seen in chapter 2, section 2.3.4, there are two kinds of *Thangchhuah*. One is called *In lama Thangchhuah* (Thangchhuah in domestic affairs) and the other is called *Ram lama Thangchhuah* (Thangchhuah in jungle affairs). In order to achieve the *Thangchhuah* title in domestic affairs, one has to give different public feasts to all members of the community, whereas to acquire *Thangchhuah* title in the jungle affairs, one needs to be a wealthy great hunter who can spare lots of time for hunting to kill the required specific animals. Great hunters are highly admired, as they are the ones who provide meat to the members of the community.

depends on others. At the same time, a family who never shares its wealth with neighbours and uses its resources exclusively for its own benefit and interest is regarded as selfish and mean and its attitude is considered shameful. A person is valued and honoured on the basis of what he or she contributes to the community rather than what he or she has or accumulates. While the Mizo people give honour and respect to the generous rich person, they look down upon the mean and greedy ones. As we saw in chapter two, the traditional Mizo economic value was dominated by the philosophy “*Sem sem dam dam, ei bil thi thi*” - which can be translated as “sharing you live, greedily eating you die” or “let the one who shares live, and the one greedily eating die”. In the traditional Mizo community, an act of voracity that impoverished their fellow members and undermined the needs of their poor neighbour was considered utterly shameful and absolutely unacceptable. Those who maintained persistently anti-social behaviour or anti-communitarian lifestyles were punished by means of *en san*.<sup>22</sup> This was the most shameful and humiliating punishment in the Mizo community as every member of the community turns away and refuses to help or co-operate with such a family even in times of death and other difficult circumstances.

Honour therefore creates incentives for adhering to commonly accepted standards of conduct whereas public shame is used as a sanction against socially unacceptable behaviour. The most important thing for the Mizo people was to maintain healthy social relationships and to keep solidarity and harmony in the community. The *thangchhuah* feast given by the rich people was vital for strengthening community solidarity, and this practice ensured that every member of the community, irrespective of rich and poor, had a share in the riches of the well-to-do family. The wealthy families were the most valuable assets of the traditional Mizo community as their contributions had great positive impact on the solidarity of the community. They gave comfort, strength and security to the poor and weak. Thus, material resources were perceived to be fundamentally meant for safeguarding communal

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<sup>22</sup> *En-san* literally means “to turn blind eyes” “to turn away” or “to forsake”, which means to cease to care for or to refrain from helping. The whole community turns away or refrains from co-operating with the family who are being *en-san* for a considerable period of time even in times of joy, death and other difficult situations. This kind of punishment was intended to pressurize those who broke the community norms or standards of conduct/behaviour, and in order to sanction against anti-communitarian values and lifestyle. A public shaming of this kind was regarded as the most humiliating and devastating punishment which every family wished to avoid.

harmony. They put the importance of healthy social relationships and community welfare above the value of material goods and individual wealth.

Though the practice of *thangchhuah* was the pre-Christian Mizo tradition the values and ethos inherent in this tradition have continued to dominate their values even after they became Christians. For example, the community feast of *thangchhuah* has been transformed into a Christian community feast called *Pathian hnena lawmthu sawi*.<sup>23</sup> Even today, the people who possess wealth and sufficient agricultural surplus in the Mizo Christian community are still determined to sponsor a public feast for the whole community in the name of '*Pathian hnena lawmthu sawi*' especially in rural contexts. However, as the tribal people in Northeast India are increasingly penetrated by the process of modernisation which now takes the form of globalisation,<sup>24</sup> their traditions, customs, value-systems, and social ethos are seriously damaged. The traditional values are now being brushed aside by materialism and wealth, as moneymaking is the main driving force of globalisation. The common charge against globalisation is that it is an extension of western capitalism, empowered by a free market economy that perpetuates neo-colonialism. Under its sway, the preservation of cultures and identities becomes impossible, especially for vulnerable people like the tribes in Northeast India. This pressure results in the alienation of identities on the one hand and, on the other, in cultural chaos.<sup>25</sup> Robert J. Samuelson comments, "Globalisation is a double-edged sword. It's a controversial process that assaults national sovereignty, erodes local culture and tradition and threatens economic and social stability."<sup>26</sup> Globalisation promotes

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<sup>23</sup> *Pathian hnena lawmthu sawi* simply means "thanksgiving to God". But it is not to be confused with the harvest festival or any other thanksgiving service derived from the western form of worship. Rather, it is the indigenous tribal Christian practice in Northeast India whereby the rich and those who consider themselves to be the recipients of the blessings of God express their joy and gratitude to God in terms of sharing their wealth and possessions among the whole members of the community by providing a public feast.

<sup>24</sup> "Globalisation means different things to different people. In the business world, globalisation refers mainly to specific strategies in companies designed to overcome the constraints of national boundaries through the mechanism of globalised production and marketing networks. In the field of economics it is considered synonymous with economic inter-dependence between countries covering increased trade, technology, labour and international capital flows. In the political debate, globalisation refers to the integrative forces drawing national societies into a global community covering the spread of ideas, norms and values. In the social field, the tidal wave of global culture is sweeping the indigenous cultures all over the world." See J. Felix Raj, "Globalisation and Plight of Tribals" p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Kailash C. Baral, "Globalisation and Tribes of Northeast India" *Indian Folklife*, 22 (2006) p. 3 (3-5).

<sup>26</sup> As cited by Raj, "Globalisation and the Plight of Tribals" p. 3.

the idea that you are what you eat, wear, and possess rather than what you do and sacrifice for the well-being of the community. Money, possessions, appearance, and fame are the fundamental values advocated by globalisation. This new value-system fuelled by a profit-oriented market economy and consumerist lifestyle has promoted unhealthy competition for the accumulation of wealth among the tribal people, which in turn brings division in their community, as there are gainers and losers in this process.<sup>27</sup> While a few tribal people have benefited from globalisation, a large majority of them are still living in extreme poverty. However, the division brought about by this process among the tribes in Northeast India is much more than an economic class distinction. They are now profoundly drifting apart in terms of values and interests. What is painful for the people who still stand for the traditional values and principles is that the *nouveaux riches* who uphold the ideology of wealth and luxury now dominate their society without respecting their traditional values and ethos. A society where the strong and wealthy families shared their wealth and power for the benefit of the poor and weak is now being transformed into a society where the rich and influential oppress and exploit fellow members of their community in order to generate more wealth. The people whose actions were previously determined by what is honourable are now largely driven by what is profitable. What was previously regarded as the most shameful way of life has now become part of the lifestyle of the urban affluent people. Further, the rich people who were traditionally honoured and respected have now often become the objects of criticism and sometimes violence undertaken by underground movements.<sup>28</sup> In fact, the lavish lifestyles and self-centred value-systems of the rich that ignore the plight of their poor neighbours are seen as shameful, disgusting and offensive by those who want to protect their traditional values. In this situation, the tribal people are deeply divided and they are facing social conflicts, clashes of values and interests, identity crises, and misunderstandings. The insights derived from the present tribal situation in Northeast India may be able to provide scope for the illumination of the values and ethos of the prophets who opposed the affluent upper class in the eighth century BCE.

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<sup>27</sup> While the rich, professionals, creditors, large firms and global elites gain from this global economic force; the poor people with low skills, small firms, and people depending on subsistence economies like the majority of the tribal population in India lose out. See Raj, "Globalisation and the Plight of Tribals" p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> In Manipur and Nagaland, corrupt government officials and the rich people who are involved in dirty business are often targeted by underground nationalists.



### 5.3. Hosea 2:2-5<sup>29</sup>

This passage has been selected mainly because it is one of Hosea's most important oracles in which he makes use of honour and shame in responding to the colonial religio-cultural and ideological values encroaching on Israelite society. At face value, the content of this passage seems to have nothing to do with the subject of wealth and poverty. However, the following analysis of the text will reveal that Hosea's concern in this oracle is the invasion of the Israelite people by the religio-cultural values and economic ideologies of the stronger neighbouring states, namely Assyria and Egypt, which are inseparable from the whole socio-economic issue witnessed by the eighth-century prophets. It is argued that the main concern of the prophet in this text can be largely regarded as the root cause of the increasingly widening gap between rich and poor in the eighth century BCE.

As has been shown above, the unacceptable values and shameful lifestyles of the emerging urban affluent people in the present tribal society in Northeast India in general and in the Mizo society in particular can be largely associated with the infringement of external cultural values and economic ideology through modernisation and globalisation. The emergence of new ideology in the form of economic globalisation causes inequality, social conflict, identity crisis, clashes of interests and erosion of cultural values, which are visible in various forms. In this situation, the economic ideology of the multinational corporations and big companies and those people within the tribal community who embrace such ideology of mammon and greed are equally regarded as disgusting and shameful. Though there are various differences between the contexts of the tribal people in Northeast India and the prophet in the eighth century BCE, there seem to be several parallels to be drawn from these two social locations that may enlighten our understanding of the ancient texts in a more meaningful way.

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<sup>29</sup> In the MT, these verses are Hosea 2:4-7, as the last two verses of chapter 1 are added to chapter 2; hence the numbering of the verses in chapter 2 (English versions) is two behind that of MT. Here, we are following the enumeration of the NRSV.

### 5.3.1. *Translation of Hosea 2:2-5*

2. Remonstrate, remonstrate with your mother,  
for she is not my wife,  
and I am not her husband –  
let her put away her whoring from her face,  
and her adultery from between her breasts
3. or I will strip her naked  
and expose her as in the day she was born,  
and make her like a wilderness,  
and turn her into parched land,  
and kill her with thirst.
4. Upon her children also I will have no pity,  
because they are children of whoredom.
5. For their mother has played the whore;  
she who conceived them has acted shamefully.  
For she said, “I will go after my lovers,  
they give me my bread and my water,  
my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.”

### 5.3.2. *Critical Analysis of the Text*

This passage is part of the larger unit of Hosea 2:2-13 [2:4-15] which is generally regarded as the ‘kerygmatic sermon’ of Hosea.<sup>30</sup> Though this passage is not a separate unit, it can be taken as a self-contained sub-unit.<sup>31</sup> This passage is dominated by Yahweh’s accusations against his adulterous wife and his threat of punishment, which may well represent the main concern of the prophet in the whole unit. There is no serious question about the authenticity of this passage. It represents Hosea’s typical use of sexual imagery in prophetic speech, which is used effectively

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<sup>30</sup> H. W. Wolff, *Hosea* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974). Wolff coins the term ‘kerygmatic sermon’ which is followed by other commentators. See A. A. Macintosh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea* (The International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997) p. 40.

<sup>31</sup> While most of the commentators accept 2:4-15 [Eng. 2::2-13] as an unbreakable unit, W.D. Whitt raises doubts about the authenticity of vv. 8-11 and 15, but accepts 2:4-7, 12-14 [Eng. 2:2-5, 10-12] as authentic to Hosea. This suggests that vv. 4-7 [Eng. 2-5] can be treated as a self-contained subunit. See his “The Divorce of Yahweh and Asherah in Hos 2, 4-7.12ff.,” *SJOT* 6 (1992) pp.33-34. W. R. Harper also challenges the authenticity of 2:8-9 [Eng. 2:6-7]. See his *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1905) pp. 236-238.

here to expose the shameful condition of the people of Israel. Even a casual reading of this passage quickly gives us the idea that shame is the vital rhetorical weapon of the prophet in denouncing the values and lifestyles of those who have been addressed.

Hosea is one of the earliest Old Testament prophets who extensively uses the vocabularies and metaphors of shame in his prophetic speeches. The Hebrew verbs derived from the root בוש (to shame), and its noun forms בושה, בשת or בשנה occur four times, and another noun קלן (derived from the *niph'al* verb קלה or perhaps a by-form of קלל “to be light”) which means “to be lightly esteemed or dishonoured/ashamed” occurs once. Moreover, the noun נבליה that is normally rendered as “shamelessness” also occurs once.<sup>32</sup> In addition to the use of these shame vocabularies, the metaphors of the adulterous wife and the children of whoredom, who could be socially considered the most shameful individuals in Hebrew culture, dominate his prophetic speeches.

The selected passage (2:2-5) is also dominated by the metaphor of a promiscuous wife whose character and lifestyle obviously represents the shameful behaviour of Hosea’s audience. It opens with the words of Yahweh, the furious husband, addressing his children to plead against their mother who is accused of having committed adultery. The husband can no longer accept his children’s mother as his wife, and neither does he want himself to be regarded as her husband any longer. He urges her to give up her habit of promiscuity or else he will strip her and leave her naked publicly. He will have no pity even upon her children as he considers them illegitimate, i.e. the children of whoredom. The main culprit, however, is their mother who has acted shamefully by following her sexual desire to have extra-marital sex with foreigners. The main driving force of her habit of promiscuity seems to have been a desire to gain material wealth (v. 5).

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Hos. 2:5,10; 4:7; 4:19; 9:10; 10:6. In Isaiah, we find the verb בוש and its derivatives six times (Isa. 1:29; 23:4; 26:11; 29:22; 30:3; 30:5) and in Micah three times (Mic. 1:11; 3:7; 7:10). The verb קלה and its noun קלן occur thrice in Isaiah (Isa. 16:14; 22:18; 23:9); and the verb חפר meaning “to be ashamed, blush” and the noun חרפה derived from the root שרף which means “to reproach or verbally shame” also occur once each in Isaiah (Isa. 4:1; 33:9). Even in Micah, the noun בלמה meaning “humiliation/shame” derived from כלם is found once (Mic. 2:6).

This metaphor clearly conveys the message that the present state of the people who are being condemned is absolutely unacceptable for the God of Hosea. The behaviour and activities of these people are not merely wrong, but are metaphorically described as shameful, irritating and disgusting. Hosea's metaphors of a promiscuous woman and her children of whoredom must have conveyed various messages in the patriarchal society of ancient Israel in which he proclaimed his oracles. It certainly expresses the shameful, seriousness, sensitivity, and unacceptability of the wrongdoings of those who are accused. There is no certainty about the identity of the people represented by the metaphors 'mother' and 'children' from this passage. Traditionally, the 'mother' is identified as the present generation and the 'children' are those who are to succeed.<sup>33</sup> However, considering Hosea's targets of critique in other oracles, it is quite reasonable to argue that the metaphor "mother" might have pointed to the ruling elite, and the "children of whoredom" might also refer to those who had been influenced by the values of the royal circle.<sup>34</sup> Gale A. Yee suggests that "Hosea's accusations are targeted primarily at a male audience: the king and his political and cultic elite."<sup>35</sup> For Yee, by reducing the male ruling hierarchy into a promiscuous wife, Hosea strikes a heavy blow against their exalted male honour and prestige. In the patriarchal society, "masculinity" is generally associated with superiority and honour whereas "femininity" is defined as inferiority, and so describing the male ruling class as a woman would have had a very negative and degrading effect.<sup>36</sup> Here, they are not simply reduced to being a woman, but to being a sexually promiscuous wife who brings the greatest dishonour to her husband. In a male-dominated society, the worst deed a married woman could do to her husband and relatives was to commit adultery. An adulterous woman strips her husband of his honour, and spoils the

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<sup>33</sup> Rabbinic commentators, namely Rashi and Ibn Ezra, interpret in this way. Another rabbinic commentator, Kimchi, suggests a slightly variant view: the mother stands for the people of Israel as a whole, the children for its individual citizens who are urged to bring their neighbours back to rectitude. See Macintosh, *Hosea*, p. 40.

<sup>34</sup> The king, priests, prophets and royal officials, in short, people in the royal circle, are mainly targeted by Hosea (cf. 4:4; 5:1; 7:3, 5-7; 8:4-6; 9:7-9; 10:7; 13:10,11).

<sup>35</sup> Gale A Yee, "She is not my wife and I am not her husband": A Materialist Analysis of Hosea 1-2' *BibInt* Vol. 9 No.4 (2001) p. 368.

<sup>36</sup> In male-dominated Mizo society, telling or speaking to a man "You are like a woman" or "Put on a skirt" would be the most humiliating and shameful comment conveying the message that "you are useless, cowardly, hopeless and unfit for manly jobs."

moral integrity and honour of all people who are close to her.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, the rulers are those who cheaply sold the honour and dignity of the nation by their own shameful behaviour. The expression “let her put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts” can be taken as a demand to put away her unashamed and unrepentant face.<sup>38</sup> Yee takes these expressions as referring to the cosmetics and jewelry used to make the wife attractive to her lovers.<sup>39</sup> Jeremiah expresses the same idea in 3:3, “you have the forehead of a whore, you refuse to be ashamed.” Instead of showing their feeling of shame, the people who commit such shameful deeds proudly continue to maintain their oppressive values and arrogant lifestyles. In the mentality of a male-dominated society, the metaphor of a shameless adulterous woman would have been an expression of the most offensive and disgusting behaviour. This kind of shameless behaviour of the ruling elites certainly provokes the anger of Yahweh as he is prompted to say: “I will strip her naked and expose her as in the day she was born” (v. 3) and in v.10, “I will uncover her shame in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand.” The ones who strip the honour of Yahweh will be humiliated. As an angry husband who has been robbed of his authority, humiliated, ashamed and devastated by the unfaithfulness of his wife, Yahweh will take action in anger by stripping her naked and uncovering even her genitals (נבלתה)<sup>40</sup> before those who sleep with her. In the shame culture, this kind of punishment could be worse than capital punishment. The languages and metaphors of Hosea clearly express that the dominant elites have committed the most serious crime against Yahweh and they deserve the worst of consequences.

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<sup>37</sup> J. K. Campbell, *Honour, Family and Patronage* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964) p. 271. In the Mediterranean people’s mentality, a woman’s honour has to do primarily with sexual purity. If unmarried, her honour and that of her family depends on her virginity. A woman who wants to maintain her honour should maintain timidity, chastity, passivity, and restraint in her sexual life. While the unmarried women are expected to be virgins, the married ones must be virginal in thought and mentality. See p. 170. See also J. Schneider, “Of Vigilance and virgins: honour, shame and access to resources in Mediterranean societies” *Ethnology*, 9:1-24 (1971) p. 21. Even in the value-system of the people of Israel, the importance of sexual chastity can be seen in the story of the rape of Dinah (Gen. 34:2ff). Sexual intercourse between a married woman and a man other than her husband was prohibited and punishable by death (Lev 18:20; 20:20; Deut. 22:22).

<sup>38</sup> The face and breasts associated with the abstract nouns זנוניות and נאפוניה denoting promiscuous behaviour, indicate a brazen lack of shame. See Macintosh, *Hosea*, p. 39.

<sup>39</sup> Yee, “She is not my wife,” p. 375.

<sup>40</sup> This Hebrew word can be connected with the part of the body with which the lewd folly was committed. See the different opinions of scholars in Macintosh, *Hosea*, pp. 59-60.

There is no doubt that Hosea has chosen the most sensitive language and metaphors to publicly shame the values and behaviour of the influential people who cause serious damage to the traditional customs, beliefs and ethos of Israelite society. But the question is – what exactly is he trying to expose by using this marriage metaphor? In other words, what does he really mean by this metaphor? Commentators traditionally take the promiscuous wife's shameful acts of whoring as primarily referring to the idolatrous fertility cults of the Northern Kingdom, and her lovers as Baals.<sup>41</sup> The issue that dominated scholarly debate for a long time was the question of whether the prophet encounters the wholesale and unequivocal worship of Baal or the syncretistic worship of Yahweh as Baal by the Israelite people.<sup>42</sup> Within this idolatrous religious cult theory, Hosea is generally regarded as the champion of the covenant God Yahweh, who fights against Israel's participation in the worship of Baal or in the syncretistic fertility cults represented by an adulterous woman in his metaphor. However, this kind of interpretation has been challenged by feminist scholars who take quite a different view regarding the interpretation of Hosea's metaphors. Instead of endorsing Hosea's combat against the idolatrous fertility cults of Baal as a theological accomplishment, they have critically pointed out the role of Hosea's sexual metaphors in promoting the patriarchal and male-chauvinistic character of western religious traditions.<sup>43</sup> For them, Hosea's sexual metaphor lays a strong foundation for the construction of a religious tradition that has profoundly conditioned the ways Western culture has thought about gender, sexuality, materiality, and the meaning of the sacred.

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<sup>41</sup> Macintosh, *Hosea*, p. 49; Ebehard Bons, *Das Buch Hosea* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk GmbH, 1996) p. 40; Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea* (AB 24; New York: Doubleday, 1980) p. 230; James L. Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969) p.39; Wolff, *Hosea*, p. 35. Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (WBC, 31; Waco: Word Books, 1987).

<sup>42</sup> The former thesis is supported by Wolff and his followers whereas the latter is supported by Harper and Rudolph. See Macintosh, *Hosea*, p. 49.

<sup>43</sup> Yvonne Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet: Hosea's Marriage in Literary-Theoretical Perspective* (JSOTSup 212; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); also her "Boxing Gomer: Controlling the Deviant Woman in Hosea 1-2" in *A Feminist Companion of the Latter Prophets* (ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) pp. 101-125; T. Drorah Setel, "Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea" in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Letty Russell; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985) pp. 86-95; Rut Törnkvist, *The Use and Abuse of Female Sexual Imagery in the Book of Hosea: A Feminist Critical Approach to Hos 1-3* (Uppsala: Academia Ubsaliensis, 1998); Cheryl Exum, "Prophetic Pornography" in *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press) pp. 101-128.

It is very clear that the social locations and perspectives of readers can bring out quite different meanings from the same text. Within their own frameworks of interpretation, both traditional and feminist scholars have provided significant insights for understanding the metaphors of Hosea. If we analyse the same text from the Mizo tribal perspective, we may be able to illuminate further some other aspects of Hosea's infidelity metaphor. As we have seen in the above discussion, the crucial concern for the Mizo tribe is the question concerning their socio-economic and cultural life in a context where they are being ruined by the cultural and economic ideologies of the stronger nations through economic globalisation. Hosea's main concern described in his sexual metaphor can be connected with the socio-economic and cultural issues of the Israelite people who had been penetrated by the stronger nations.

One important issue that needs special consideration in Hosea's oracles is that Baals are often identified as the "lovers" of the promiscuous wife in his metaphor (Hos. 2:13, 17 [2:15, 19]). There is no certainty about what exactly Hosea means when he uses the term Baal or baalim.<sup>44</sup> Traditionally, Baal or baalim are identified as the fertility deity/deities within the polytheistic religion of the Canaanites, which was considered to be completely different from the monotheistic or monolatrous religion of Yahwism. Within this theory, Hosea's concern regarding Baal/baalim has often been interpreted as a reference to the infringement of Yahwism by Canaanite polytheistic religion in terms of the increasing practices of fertility cults, idolatry and cultic prostitution.<sup>45</sup> However, this traditional interpretation can be challenged in the light of new insights brought about by more recent theories. Scholars are now increasingly convinced by the results of new research which suggests that Israelite

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<sup>44</sup> The singular term Baal occurs four times (2:8[10],16[18]; 9:10; 13:1) and the plural baalim three times (2:13[15], 17[19]; 11:2). Some scholars simply take the name Baal as an alternative title for Yahweh. Some take it as specifically referring to an idol, a Yahwistic bull icon, whereas others consider it as the deity of Peor – Baal Peor (Hos. 9:10; 13:1). Regarding the explanations of the singular form Baal and the plural form baalim in Hosea's oracles, there is no consensus among scholars and we will take them as referring to one and the same thing. See Keefe, *Woman's Body*, pp. 122-124.

<sup>45</sup> This kind of view may be represented by W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: An Historical Analysis of Two Conflicting Faiths* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel from its Beginning to the Babylonian Exile* (trans. M. Greenberg; London: Allen & Unwin, 1961). For a review of the different opinions of scholars who discussed Hosea's metaphor within the framework of the idolatrous religious cult theory, see H. H. Rowley, "The Marriage of Hosea" in *Men of God. Studies in Old Testament History of Prophecy* (London: Nelson, 1963). Also Robert Gordis, "Hosea's Marriage and Message: A New Approach" *HUCA* 25 (1954) pp. 9-35.

God Yahweh was closely related to indigenous Canaanite deities, and a strict monotheism was a later development in the exilic and post-exilic period.<sup>46</sup> Current analyses of traditional histories of Israelite religion show that they simply reflected the biases of the biblical writers and editors – especially of the Deuteronomistic and Priestly schools – toward orthodox, monotheistic Yahwism, and these biases represent almost exclusively the views of a late, elite minority, i.e., an ideal rather than a portrait of religious reality during the monarchy.<sup>47</sup> However, despite the fact that the Deuteronomistic history largely reflects the editor's theological theory and serves his homiletic purpose, certain scholars have detected some indications even from the canonical texts that there was an inclusive attitude towards indigenous deities of Canaan from the pre-monarchic period. For example, Morton Smith persuasively argues that various polytheistic religious traditions associated with the indigenous Canaanites were not alien to early tribes of the Old Testament even in the book of Judges. For him, this evidence can be seen from the identification of Canaanite gods, shrines, festivals and other religious traditions with Yahweh, and Israelite names compounded with Canaanite deities – El, Baal, Gad, Anath, Am Yam, Zedek, Shalem, Asher and Tsur.<sup>48</sup> Bernhard Lang also argues that during the period of the monarchy “the dominant religion is polytheistic and undifferentiated from that of its neighbours.”<sup>49</sup> In the light of evidence from Ugaritic texts and other extra biblical materials, it has been revealed more clearly that Yahweh was one of the deities within the Canaanite polytheistic traditions just like other indigenous deities of the land.<sup>50</sup> By taking this new evidence into consideration, it is highly

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<sup>46</sup> See Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of Israel: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K. : William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002).

<sup>47</sup> William G. Dever, “ ‘Will the Real Israel Please Stand Up?’ Part II: Archaeology and the Religions of Ancient Israel” *BASOR* 298 (1995), pp. 37-58.

<sup>48</sup> Morton Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1987) pp. 11-17.

<sup>49</sup> Bernhard Lang, *Monotheism and the Prophetic Minority: An Essay in Biblical History and Sociology* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983) p. 20.

<sup>50</sup>“The study of Canaanite deities in connection with Yahweh was inspired largely by the discovery of numerous ancient texts in the Levant, especially the many Ugaritic tablets discovered since 1929 at Ras Shamra on the coast of Syria.” See Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God*, pp. 1-2. See also Dever, “ ‘Will the Real Israel Please Stand Up?’ ” pp. 37-58. Also his “Iron Age Epigraphic Material from the Area of Khirbet el-Kom,” *HUCA* 40-41 (1969-1970) pp. 139-204. For him, in addition to inscription from Kuntillet Ajrud (northeastern Sinai, ca. 70 km. Southwest of Kadesh-barnea) and a tomb inscription from Khirbet el-Qom (12 km. West of Hebron and approximately 10 km. Southeast of Lachish) that contain the name of Yahweh together with Asherah in the context of blessing, there are many other archaeological evidence such as, hundreds of terra cotta nude female figurines of the Iron Age, certainly Asherah figurines; the remarkable representation of the “Lion Lady,” again surely Asherah, which support the “Yahweh-Asherah husband and wife theory”.



questionable whether Hosea was really opposing the polytheistic Canaanite religious cults and practices for the sake of protecting monotheistic Yahwism.

Max Weber and his followers who used the “Canaanite versus nomadic approach” to study the history of Israel held the view that the worship of the Canaanite Baal was rooted in settled urban society and the economic structures of patrician landlordism.<sup>51</sup> Hosea’s critique of Baal is also seen as part of the protest against the gradual destruction of the older social system of the simple nomadic people under the influence of the Canaanite settled agricultural system in the Israelite monarchy. Thus, Canaanisation and baalisation are taken as identical processes that erode the nomadic ways of life. Wallis also considers the Baal/baalim against which Hosea protested as the sacral foundation of the Canaanite economic system that guarantees and legitimates the commercial and mercantile interests of the affluent landowning elite, which conflicted with the socio-economic system rooted in nomadic egalitarianism.<sup>52</sup> However, the “Canaanite versus nomadic approach” can no longer be maintained due to certain factors. Though the notion of a clear opposition between ‘Canaanites’ and ‘Israelites’ is fundamental to much of the biblical literature, and basic to most scholarly reconstructed histories of Israel, it is now realised that this kind of picture has been largely overshadowed by the propagandistic agenda of the biblical writers as well as by the ideological interests of modern historians.<sup>53</sup> Davies observes that outside the biblical literature the ‘Canaanites’ refuse the same neat definition, and there is no non-biblical evidence of an ethnic distinction: the people living where biblical Israel is located did not come from outside, and were not ethnically distinct, nor is there evidence of their

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However, there are some scholars who regard “Asherah” at el-Qom and Ajrud as a “mere symbol” rather than the name of goddess, which refer to a wooden cult object, either a carved object or a stylized tree. See John J. Collins, *The Bible after Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005) pp. 105ff.

<sup>51</sup> Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (trans. Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale; Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1952) p.154. See also Adolphe Lods, *Israel from its Beginnings to the Middle of the Eighth Century* (trans. S. H. Cooke; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932); also his *The Prophets of Israel* (trans. S. H. Cooke; New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1937).

<sup>52</sup> Louis Wallis, *God and the Social Process* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935) p. 10.

<sup>53</sup> A detailed discussion on this issue can be found in the introductory chapter under the sub-heading “social-scientific approach”. Uriah Y. Kim mentions that “biblical scholars, wittingly or unwittingly, inscribed Western experiences, aspirations, and destinies into the history of ancient Israel.” See his “Postcolonial Criticism: Who is the Other in the Book of Judges?” in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (ed. Gale A. Yee; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2007) pp. 161-182.

having a different culture from other occupants of Palestine.<sup>54</sup> Scholarly research concerning the origins of the Israelite people increasingly accepts that a large majority of Israelites were originally the indigenous peoples in the land of Canaan.<sup>55</sup> Ideological critics and Postcolonial scholars also convincingly demonstrate that various polemical attitudes towards Canaanites in the Old Testament are coloured by the ideological reconstruction of the history of Israel by later biblical writers or editors as a vehicle to promote their ideology rather than to reflect historical realities. By reading against the grain, certain scholars can demonstrate that much of the biblical literature is a biased ideological presentation of the authors, which has often been used to support the values and interests of the interpreters or colonizers.<sup>56</sup> For example, the conquest story in the Deuteronomistic history, which provides “the theological underpinning for the gift of the land and the conquest of Canaan, and the commanded slaughter of the Canaanites,”<sup>57</sup> is considered to be written from the perspective of the victorious colonizers, which cannot be simply justified if we read from the indigenous Canaanite perspective.<sup>58</sup> Since the approach adopted by Weber and his followers was largely based on this polemical attitude of the biblical writers, it can be questioned whether the conflict between nomadic Israelites and settled Canaanites was the real issue that provided the background of Hosea’s opposition against Baal/baalim.

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<sup>54</sup> Philip R. Davies, *In Search of ‘Ancient Israel’* (JSOTSup 148; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992) p.55.

<sup>55</sup> Niels Peter Lemche, *Early Israel: Anthropological and Historical Studies in the Israelite Society Before Monarchy* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), Costa W. Ahlstrom, *Who were the Israelites?* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1986).

<sup>56</sup> Uriah Y. Kim points out that “the colonizers used the Bible to justify their claim to the land, the destruction of native peoples and cultures, and the colonization of the mind and soul of the colonized. The Bible was an integral part of colonial discourse, which facilitated the exploitation and management of the colonized.” See his “Postcolonial Criticism,” p. 167. For a wider application of this approach, see David J. A. Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 205; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995). Michael Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). Eryl W. Davies, *The Dissenting Reader: Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003) pp. 55ff.

<sup>57</sup> Collins, *The Bible after Babel*, p. 70.

<sup>58</sup> Those who have experienced the same kind of oppression and destruction suffered by the indigenous Canaanites increasingly employ a reading from the Canaanite perspective. See Naim S. Ateek, “A Palestinian Perspective: Biblical Perspectives on the Land,” also Robert Allen Warrior, “A Native American Perspective: Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians,” in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah; London: Orbis/SPCK, 1997) pp. 267-275, 277-286. For a history of this perspective, see Collins, *The Bible After Babel*, pp. 64-69.

There are certain scholars who connect Hosea's opposition to Baal/baalim with the "Yahweh-alone movement" which was started somewhere in the time of the prophet Elijah in the ninth century BCE.<sup>59</sup> According to this line of argument, Hosea was part of a group of minority religious exclusivists who demanded that all Israel worship Yahweh alone and opposed any religious cults other than Yahweh's. There is no doubt that Hosea was the worshipper of Yahweh and the words he proclaimed must also have been inspired by the values and principles inherent in the worship of Yahweh. It was quite possible that the Yahweh-alone movement was current in some circles in the ancient Israel. However, to consider Hosea merely as a religious fanatic and his criticism of Baal/baalim as part of his involvement in the Yahweh-alone movement is nothing more than speculation, which does not have strong support in the evidence available. Most of the scholars who seriously engage in analysing the situation of the eighth century BCE would agree that religious issues were not paramount during this period. This may be true especially in connection with the indigenous Canaanite religious cults since no other eighth-century prophet was bothered by this issue. Considering the large number of socio-economic concerns expressed by Hosea's contemporary prophets, and the socio-economic and cultural condition reconstructed by various modern scholars with the help of extra-biblical evidence, it is conceivable that the eighth-century prophets were primarily concerned with socio-economic and cultural issues rather than religious ones. Hosea's main concern in his critique of Baal/baalim also appears to be more than religious fanaticism.

Yee argues that the "lovers" of Yahweh's promiscuous wife, which scholars traditionally interpret as the Baals, should be taken as "the nations", because Hosea's only clear identification of the "lovers" is in 8:9-10, where the lovers are "the nations" with whom Ephraim is foolishly allied (cf. Jer. 22:20-22; Lam.1:2; Ezek. 23:5-21).<sup>60</sup> Keefe also suggests that the lovers of Yahweh's wife may be

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<sup>59</sup> Smith, *Palestinian Parties*, pp. 17ff. According to Smith, the first signs of this movement appear two generations later in the reign of the Judaeen king Asa, who is said to have put down ritual copulation, destroyed the idols his ancestors made, and deposed his mother from her position of queen mother because of her devotion to Asherah. Bernhard Lang takes up this Yahweh-alone movement theory and elaborates further in his *Monotheism and the Prophetic Minority*, pp. 13ff.

<sup>60</sup> Yee, "She is not my wife" p. 376. See also Alice A. Keefe, *Woman's Body and the Social Body in Hosea* (JSOTSup 338; London: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 2001) pp. 195-196. Keefe argues that "a religio-political reading of these lovers in Hosea as allied nations and foreign gods fits well in the

interpreted as Israel's foreign allies and trading partners.<sup>61</sup> What is obvious from the oracles of Hosea is that he has two serious major concerns, which appear to be completely separate issues but can be tied together, namely, the Israelites' association with Baal/baalim and Israel's alliance with Assyria and Egypt. Just as with his critique of Baal/baalim, the prophet often makes negative comments on the relationship between Israel and the two political and economic superpowers in ancient West Asia, namely Assyria and Egypt (5:13; 7:11; 8:9-10; 9:3; 11:11; 12:1; 14:3). As has been discussed in the preceding chapter, Hosea's contemporary Amos also speaks out against the Assyrians' influence upon the ruling elite in the Israelite monarchy. Scholars have recognised for a long time how these two powerful nations were driven by their economic and political interests and how they made significant impact on different states in this part of the world.<sup>62</sup> In fact, the geographical location of Israel and Judah was an important bridge between these two superpowers in ancient West Asia. Ekholm and Friedman observe that Mesopotamia and Egypt were the early trade centres where an ancient form of capitalism was developed in the early period.<sup>63</sup> That means that the people of Israel and Judah occupied a strategic transit point on the north-south international trade route. In order to exploit the profit potential of the geographical location of their territories, the rulers had to develop strategic alliances with these two powerful nations. There is a strong evidence to suggest that Israel was interested in making alliance with these two superpowers – Egypt and Assyria - in the words of Hosea: "Ephraim has become like a dove, silly and without sense; they call upon Egypt, they go to Assyria" (7:11). Traditionally, this verse has often been interpreted as referring to Pekah, the king of Israel, who appealed to Egypt for military help, and

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context of ancient Near Eastern theopolitics, where a singular national god and his cult undergirded the meaning and power of that state."

<sup>61</sup> Keefe, *Woman's Body*, p. 195.

<sup>62</sup> John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2000) p. 270. P. A. H. de Boer, "Egypt in the Old Testament," in *Selected Studies in Old Testament Exegesis* (ed. C. Van Dunn; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991) pp. 152-167. Cogan's thesis is that alliance with Assyria demanded vassals unwavering loyalty in political and economic matters, and any trespass of loyalty oaths incurred immediate punishment. But there is no record of the imposition of Assyrian cults upon vassal states. See Morton Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.E.* (Missoula, Montana: Society of Biblical Literature and Scholars Press, 1974).

<sup>63</sup> K. Ekholm and J. Friedman, "Capital" Imperialism and exploitation in Ancient World Systems' in *Mesopotamia Vol.7 - Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires* (ed. Mogen Trolle Larsen; Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlog, 1979) pp. 46-49. Their main argument is that "there exists a form of "capitalism" in ancient world, that there are "world economies" and that many properties of the dynamics of such systems are common to our own world economy."

nine years later another king of Israel, namely, Hoshea did the same thing to Assyria (2 Kgs. 17:4).<sup>64</sup> However, there is no explicit reference to these events and nothing specific is said about the names of these two Israelite rulers in Hosea's text, and there is no compelling reason to take it as referring to a military alliance. Rather, this alliance could be political as well as economic; for this was very much in keeping with the eighth century situation, which can be perfectly tied with the royal policy of growth and development. There can be little doubt that the rulers of Israel approached these two ancient capitalistic states to make economic alliances. If this assumption is correct, it would imply that the two economic superpowers in the ancient West Asia of Hosea's time had a chance to dictate or at least to influence the socio-economic and cultural values of the ruling elite of Israel. In addition, the people of Tyre, who were known for their commercial and mercantile activities in ancient West Asia, also appeared to have close ties with Jeroboam's Israel, as political alignments were integral to elite strategies of profiteering.<sup>65</sup>

What is obvious from Hosea's marriage metaphor is that third-party's interference into the intimate relationship between husband and wife has brought a clash of interests and conflicting values between the couple. The involvement of the outsiders in the most sensitive area of marital affairs is the main factor behind the breakout of the whole issue encountered by the prophet. Aberbach sees the connection between Assyrian imperialism and the prostitution of Israel in the metaphor of Hosea.<sup>66</sup> The wife has been carried away by the lure provided by her lovers. In v. 5, the adulterous wife says, "I will go after my lovers; they give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink." Keefe observes, "The grain, wine and oil were the 'commodities of choice' within a burgeoning market economy based on international trade."<sup>67</sup> Here the desire for these 'commodities of trade' becomes a signifier for the nation's promiscuity. This suggests that a market-oriented economic value-system is the main attractive lure that encourages the Israelite dominant elite to go after the stronger nations, which was very much congruent with their desire to accelerate economic growth.

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<sup>64</sup> See Macintosh, *Hosea*, pp. 274-275.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Keefe, *Woman's Body*, p. 196.

<sup>66</sup> David Aberbach, *Imperialism and Biblical Prophecy 750-500 BCE* (London/New York: Routledge, 1993) pp. 23-26.

<sup>67</sup> Keefe, *Woman's Body*, p. 197.

Elsewhere the prophet says, “Ephraim seeks companionship with the wind, chases the east wind all day long; lies and destruction they multiply; they make an agreement with Assyria, and carry oil to Egypt” (12:1 [12:2]). This seems to suggest that the Israelite leaders were driven around by commercial and economic values in making an alliance with the giant nations.

Most of the scholars who read the texts of the eighth-century prophets from a social-scientific perspective can easily detect that the ruling class heavily imposed an increased demand for cash crops like wine, oil and grain for commercial purposes during this period.<sup>68</sup> The intensification of the production of cash crops motivated by the profit-oriented economic activities of the dominant elite would have seriously damaged the traditional rural subsistence economy along with traditional customs and ways of life of the ordinary and lower class indigenous peoples in the land of Canaan.<sup>69</sup> The increasing tension as a result of the widening gap between the rich and the poor witnessed by Hosea and his contemporary prophets are undoubtedly part and parcel of this development. In Hosea’s metaphor, the husband has been robbed, ruined and humiliated as his beloved wife is taken away by the lure provided by her lovers. This could refer to the damage done to the traditional socio-economic system and the erosion of the religio-cultural values and ethos of the indigenous peoples as a result of the infiltration of the economic and cultural values of the imperial nations that had been welcomed and supported by the state. The angry reaction of Yahweh, the husband, apparently represents the feelings of the victims who have been hurt, humiliated and ruined by the greed-based economic policy adopted by the leaders of Israelite society. This largely explains the reason why the prophets in the eighth century BCE had voiced strong language and sharp criticism against the affluent and dominant elite, presumably the collaborators of the colonialists, and expressed deep concerns for the poor and the weak, the hardest hit and the most helpless victims of the new economic system.

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<sup>68</sup> Morris Silver, *Prophets and Markets: The Political Economy of Ancient Israel* (The Hague: Kluwer-Nijhoff, 1983); D.N. Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets: A Social Analysis* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003); also his “Latifudialization and Isaiah 5:8-10” in *Social-Scientific Old Testament Criticism: A Sheffield Reader* (ed. David J. Chalcraft; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) pp. 301-312; Marvin Chaney, “Bitter Bounty: The Dynamics of Political Economy critiqued by the Eighth-Century Prophets” in *Reformed Faith and Economics* (ed. Robert L. Stivers; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989) pp. 15-30.

<sup>69</sup> This issue is discussed in a more details in the next chapter.

It is arguable, that Hosea's main concern in his protest against Baal/baalim was not so much the indigenous Canaanite culture and religion as the colonial power and ideology of Assyrians and Egyptians upholding elitist cultural values and oppressive lifestyles, which increasingly ruined and impoverished the indigenous subaltern peoples in the land of Canaan. Moreover, it can be assumed that the prophet stood up not only for the cause of the poor sections within his own community, but also for all other indigenous lower class peoples in the land of Canaan who must have been the worst victims of the process of economic and political imperialism.<sup>70</sup> Hosea's Baal/baalim was apparently more than the traditional indigenous Canaanite fertility cult. The Hebrew verb *בַּעַל* means "rule over, be lord, marry, be husband or master" from which the noun "owner", "husband", "lord" or "master" is derived. From the ninth century BCE, the name of the deity Baal was strongly connected with the colonial power of the royal circles, which had the majority of control over political and economic factors. A century before Hosea, the prophet Elijah encountered king Ahab and queen Jezebel's worship of the Tyrian god Baal, which seemed to have accelerated the process of latifundialization for the intensification of cash crops, and which in turn had a devastating impact on the traditional economy, cultural values and customs of ordinary people like the small landholder, Naboth (1 Kgs.17, 21). Thus, the name Baal/baalim, which was inseparable from royal power and its oppressive commercial policy long before the time of Hosea, had undoubtedly gained a negative connotation at least among the subaltern peoples of the land. In fact, it was not only royal Baalism that the eighth-century prophets criticized, but also royal Yahwism.<sup>71</sup> Anything associated with colonial power and its oppressive ideologies was opposed by the prophet. If this assumption is correct, it is quite possible that Hosea used the name Baal/baalim figuratively to refer to the oppressive values and beliefs of the masters and landlords in his own society and their foreign allies who controlled colonial power in ancient West Asia during the eighth century BCE. In fact, Hosea's prophetic expression was largely a combination of metaphors, similes,

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<sup>70</sup> The poor sections of the Israelite community as well as various other indigenous peoples including Jebusites, Hivites, etc, whose common characteristic was the condition of poverty and who came under pressure and were the subject of exploitation in the context of colonial expansion, were the ones defended by the prophet.

<sup>71</sup> This issue is discussed in details in the preceding chapter section 4.3.2 and also in the following section of this chapter.

and wordplays.<sup>72</sup> Albertz argues that “Hosea uses Ba’al as a polemic term for anything that he declares to be ‘alien religion’.”<sup>73</sup> The ancient Phoenician deity Baal was the god of the storm and rain, and therefore the lord of the crops, land and agriculture.<sup>74</sup> Thus, Hosea’s Baal could be identified with the royal policy of intensification of agriculture, which ensured increased agricultural and farming products for large-scale commercial activities.<sup>75</sup> Coote and Coote consider “Hosea’s Baal as the ‘god of commerce’, whose cult was tied to the latifundial structures of land ownership which had come to dominate the hills of Ephraim in Hosea’s time”.<sup>76</sup> It is reasonable to argue that Hosea has specifically chosen the term Baal/baalim to express figuratively the oppressive economic dimension of the values and interests of powerful nations like the Assyrians and Egyptians that had driven the economic policy of the rulers of Israelite society. Hosea’s Baal/baalim can, therefore, be largely regarded as the cultural and economic ideologies of the imperial power of Assyria and Egypt, which was manifested in the form of the economic and religious activities of the Israelite ruling elite that sanctioned agricultural intensification for commercial purposes. These ideological forces increasingly pushed aside the values and interests of various indigenous peoples in the land of Canaan.

The first people infected by these new values and ideologies are the upper class who are at the centre of the state. Hosea singles out the king (5:1; 7:3,5,7; 8:4,10; 10:7,15; 13:10-11), priests (4:4-10; 5:1; 6:7-10; 7:1-7), prophets (4:5; 6:5) and royal

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<sup>72</sup> Seong-Hyuk Hong, *The Metaphor of Illness and Healing in Hosea and Its Significance in the Socio-Economic Context of Eighth-Century Israel and Judah* (SBL 95; New York: Peter Lang, 2006) pp. 131-132. He points out that Hosea uses the names, such as Jezreel, Ephraim and Canaanite to refer to different things in addition to many other metaphors and similes. In this context, it is quite possible that the term baal was also used to refer to different objects other than the Canaanite fertility god. J. L. Mays also observes, “Metaphors pour out from his mouth. There is hardly an oracle which does not contain at least one, and often they are multiplied within a simple saying as Hosea throws up one image after another to heighten the impact of his speech.” See his *Hosea: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969) p. 7.

<sup>73</sup> Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*. Vol. I (trans. John Bowden; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994) p. 332, n. 115.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Keefe, *Woman’s Body*, p. 130.

<sup>75</sup> The fertility of land was important even for the poor farmers, and Yahweh was also often portrayed as the God of harvest within the tribal subsistence economy. Christopher J. H. Wright argues that “the guiding ethos of OT economics could be said to be summed up in the tenth commandment: ‘You shall not covet’. He puts the fundamental values of the OT economics as *sufficiency and praise* in contrast to *surplus and pride*. See his *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004) pp. 162-163.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Keefe, *Woman’s Body*, p. 132; Robert B. Coote and Mary P. Coote, *Power, Politics and the Making of the Bible: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) pp. 49-50.



officials (7:3,5,16; 8:4,10; 9:15). Yee argues that Hosea's adulterous wife metaphor can be connected with the complex social, economic and political relations among the king, priest, and prophet, both at home and abroad in eighth-century Israel.<sup>77</sup> In the eyes of the prophet, these upper class people are the ones who have been carried away by the cultural values and economic ideologies of stronger nations. They are considered to be puppets controlled by external forces (5:11; 7:11; 8:8;10:1). The spirit of whoredom leads them astray as they are mainly driven by the values of money and material possessions. Hosea proclaims:

The more they increased,  
 the more they sinned against me;  
 they changed their glory into shame.  
 They feed on the sin of my people;  
 they are greedy for their iniquity.  
 And it shall be like people, like priest;  
 I will punish them for their ways,  
 and repay them for their deeds.  
 They shall eat, but not be satisfied;  
 they shall play the whore, but not multiply;  
 because they have forsaken the LORD  
 to devote themselves to whoredom (Hos. 4:7-10).

Here, the increasing accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few dominant rich people is seen as something unacceptable, and it is considered to be the factor that transforms their כבוד (honour, glory) into קלן (shame, dishonour). It is certain that the accumulation of wealth is not regarded as an element that enhances honour; rather it is linked with shame. The greed-based economy of the upper classes is equated here with an act of whoredom for which they will surely be punished. They may have plenty to eat, but they will never be satisfied; they may apply all kinds of dubious methods to gain profits, but they will never really multiply. There seems to have been no difference in the Southern kingdom considering Micah's words:

Hear this, you rulers of the house of Jacob  
 and chiefs of the house of Israel,  
 who abhor justice and pervert all equity,  
 who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong!  
 Its rulers give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for a price,  
 its prophets give oracles for money (Mic. 3:9-11).

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<sup>77</sup> Yee, "She is not my wife" pp. 257-258.

What is obvious from this passage is that the dominant elite value everything materially. The moneymaking value-system penetrated the judicial offices, religious sanctuaries and even the prophetic preaching. Moreover, it is linked with the abandonment of **משפט**, perversion of equity, violence against the poor and corruption. It is obvious that Hosea's protest against Baal/baalim and his contemporary prophets' critique of the socio-economic disparities between the rich and the poor cannot be separated. In fact, it cannot be denied that the religious ideology that glorifies a profit-oriented economy and justifies greed is the root cause of social inequality, economic exploitation and political oppression in eighth-century Israel and Judah.

From the above discussion, it is evident that the infiltration of new economic and cultural ideologies had a great impact on the economic life of the people of Israel. However, the issues that challenged the people in the time of Hosea were much more than economic. If we look closely at the fundamental concerns of Hosea, it is apparent that he considers Baal as the assimilating force that causes religio-cultural confusion, identity crisis and conflicting socio-economic values among the people of Israel. He considers the assimilated people to be children of whoredom or the ones led astray by the spirit of whoredom (4:12). Hosea's concern is obviously about identity and the survival of the indigenous people in the context of cultural and ideological assimilation:

Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples,  
 Ephraim is a cake not turned.  
 Foreigners devour his strength, but he does not know it;  
 grey hairs are sprinkled upon him, but he does not know it.  
 Israel's pride is humbled; yet they do not return to Yahweh their God,  
 or seek him, for all this (7:8-10).

Israel is swallowed up;  
 now they are among the nations as a useless vessel (8:8).

In the eyes of the prophet, the people of Israel are being assimilated, weakened, defeated and gradually engulfed by colonial power, culture and ways of life without noticing. For him, the driving force of this cultural imperialism that gradually rends

the social fabric of Israelite society is Baalism.<sup>78</sup> In 2:16 [18], Hosea declares, “On that day, says Yahweh, you will call me, “my husband” (אִישׁי) and no longer will you call me, “my Baal” (בַּעַלִּי). This implies that the Israelite people confuse Yahweh with Baal. People confuse the values and principles of the indigenous religion of Yahweh with the colonial values and ideology promoted by the cults of Baal/baalim. It is a case of identity crisis: they confuse Yahweh, the foundation of their traditional values and beliefs, with Baal, the cultural and economic ideology of the imperialists. In other words, the communitarian values and covenant ideals of the Israelites, which they developed through their historical experiences as the people of Yahweh, have been confused with the imperialists’ cultural and economic ideology of Baalism. Here, בַּעַלִּי (“my lord/owner”) refers to the religio-cultural values based on hierarchical domination and exploitative relationships whereas אִישׁי (‘my husband’) represents an alternative ideology derived from an intimate communitarian relationship which was grounded on the principles of צְדָקָה (equity), מִשְׁפָּט (justice/selflessness), חֶסֶד (steadfast love), רַחֲמִים (mercy) and אֱמוּנָה (faithfulness) (2:21[19]).<sup>79</sup> When traditional customs, values, beliefs, and ways of life were being wiped out by new ideology, Hosea strongly defended the traditional communitarian values and ways of life grounded in the traditional religion. He considers the profit-oriented economic ideology advocated by the urban dominant elite as alien and shameful, as it was strongly connected with the imperialists’ policy of expansion and dominion that ruined the values and traditions inherent in the traditional subsistence economy practised by the rural poor and ordinary people.

#### 5.4. Amos 6:1-7

We shall now turn to see the internal conflicts and misunderstandings between the privileged and underprivileged within Israelite society, which were fuelled by ideological differences. Special attention will be given to the values and ethos of Amos as he responds to the excessive accumulation of wealth and wasteful

<sup>78</sup> In this context Baalism is identified with the imperial powers namely, Assyria and Egypt, rather than the traditional polytheistic religion of Canaanites as discussed above.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Keefe, *Woman’s Body*, p. 133. Douglas Stuart comments that אִישׁי refers to husband as “man” in the sense of marriage partner, and בַּעַלִּי connotes more the lordship, ownership, and legal right of the husband in relation to a wife (“master”). See his *Hosea – Jonah : Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 31 (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1987, CD-ROM).

luxurious lifestyles of the affluent. It is argued that the community-oriented values of honour and shame greatly shaped and conditioned Amos' message to the affluent and luxury-loving culture of the upper classes.

As has been highlighted above, for the Mizo people material wealth and resources are primarily meant for sharing with other members of the community in order to strengthen cohesion and solidarity in their traditional community. In the Mizo value-system, an act of sharing enhances honour and respect whereas an act of greed leads to shame and disgrace. We have seen that the socio-economic value of the traditional Mizo society was dominated by the philosophy "*Sem sem dam dam, eibil thi thi*": "sharing you live, greedily eating you will die". This philosophy affirms the significance of sharing and rejects the act of greed. It encourages generosity and discourages selfishness. The Mizo people follow this simple philosophy as a group of people in their traditional communitarian way of life. However, as they are being penetrated by the market-oriented economic values and modern consumerist lifestyles, this philosophy of life is increasingly abandoned especially by the emerging affluent in the urban areas. Certain values and behaviour, which must have been traditionally regarded as shameful and unacceptable, are now the ways of life of many wealthy people. As a result of this, there are various conflicts and clashes in terms of values and interests among the people. The current socio-economic realities of the Mizo tribe may shed important light on this passage.

#### 5.4.1. *Translation of Amos 6:1-7*

1. Woe to those who are at ease in Zion,  
and those who feel secure on Mount Samaria,  
the notables of the first of the nations,  
to whom the house of Israel resorts!
2. Cross over Calneh, and see;  
from there go to Hamath the great;  
then go down to Gath of the Philistines.  
Are you better than these kingdoms?  
Or is your territory greater than their territory,

3. O you that put far away the evil day,  
and bring near a reign of violence?
4. Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory,  
and lounge on their couches,  
and eat lambs from the flock,  
and calves from the stall;
5. who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp,  
and like David improvise on instruments of music;
6. who drink wine from bowls,  
and anoint themselves with the finest oils,  
but are not concerned about the ruin of Joseph!
7. Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile,  
and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away.

#### 5.4.2. *Critical Analysis of the Text*

This passage is one of Amos's most famous oracles of doom on the northern kingdom of Israel. Scholars generally consider this passage to be authentic to Amos and the eighth-century dating of this unit is not disputed.<sup>80</sup> This oracle is predominantly in a 'woe-cry' style and it is similar to 5:18-27 in construction. It opens with 'woe' to the ruling class who are comfortable and secure in the capital cities of Israel and Judah (vv. 1-3), and then declaring that they should be ashamed of their self-indulgence and lavish lifestyle (vv. 4-6a). Following this with a lamenting cry over their lack of concern for the ruin of Joseph (v. 6b), it concludes with the announcement of punishment (v. 7).

Scholars have attempted to explain the internal socio-economic issues of Israel and Judah as reflected in the prophets' critique of the wealthy class in the eighth century BCE, from various viewpoints. Current discussion of this issue is dominated by scholarly attempts to reconstruct the pre-exilic socio-economic structure of Israel

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<sup>80</sup> Samuel R. Driver, *The Book of Joel and Amos* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1915) p.119; James L. Mays, *Amos: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1969) p.113; James M. Ward, *Amos and Isaiah: Prophets of the Word of God* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969) p.82; E. Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary* (trans. John Sturdy; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970) p.95; Hans W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977) p.107; Robert B. Coote, *Amos among the Prophets: Composition and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) pp.14, 37-39; Shalom Paul, *Amos* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1991) p.200.

and Judah. One generally accepted assumption regarding the background of the prophets' critique of the affluent is that in eighth-century Israel and Judah, the rich got richer and the poor got poorer.<sup>81</sup> The widening gap between rich and poor during this period is generally accepted as the background of the prophets' vehement criticism of the wealthy. It is often assumed that the rich are mainly responsible for the increasing impoverishment of the poor and the weak during this period. By following this kind of assumption, Lorezt suggests that 'rent-capitalism,' which by means of moneylenders ultimately reduced the helpless peasants into bonded labourers, is the factor behind the increasing gulf between the rich and the poor, which the prophets fundamentally opposed.<sup>82</sup> Lang takes up this approach and elaborates it further by describing Israel as a "peasant society" based on the insights derived from social anthropology.<sup>83</sup> For him, peasant societies consist of two different social classes of people, namely, the peasants - who solely commit themselves to maintaining their households based on a subsistence economy - and a propertied, educated and merchant elite who live in towns and always monopolise the control of public affairs. The subsistence economy of the poor peasants was often interrupted by climatically conditioned crop failures, which ultimately compelled them to make use of the credit system controlled by the urban creditors. Lang's reconstruction of the system of rent-capitalism during the eighth century BCE is mainly based on his interpretation of Amos 2:6 and 8:6.

D. N. Premnath applies the same kind of approach as he concentrates on the process of latifundialisation during the eighth century BCE.<sup>84</sup> In addition to the credit system proposed by Lang, Premnath suggests that the growth of urban centres, militarisation, the system of taxation, the luxurious lifestyle of the upper class, trade and commerce being controlled by the ruling elite, and the role of the judicial courts are the combined forces that accelerated the impoverishment of the poor peasants.

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<sup>81</sup> Mays, *Amos*, p. 114; Merlene Fendler, "Zur Sozialkritik des Amos" *Evangelische Theologie* 33 (1973) pp. 32-53; Svend Holm-Nielsen, "Die Sozialkritik der Propheten" in *Denkender Glaube: Festschrift Carl Heinz Ratschow* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1976) pp. 7-23.

<sup>82</sup> O. Lorezt, "Die prophetische Kritik des Rentenkapitalismus" *UF* 7 (1975) pp. 271-278. For him, the geographer H. Bobek's theory of *Rentenkapitalismus* best represents the economic system opposed by the prophets.

<sup>83</sup> Lang, "The Social Organization of Peasant poverty in Biblical Israel" in *Anthropological Approaches to the Old Testament* (Philadelphia/London: Fortress Press/SPCK, 1985) pp. 83ff.

<sup>84</sup> Premnath, "Latifundialization and Isaiah 5:8-10" pp. 301-312. See also his *Eighth Century Prophets: A Social Analysis* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2003).

Dearman, however, strongly argues that the propensity to describe the Israelite economy as “capitalistic” is misguided and inaccurate. For him, there is little evidence of a large private market in Israel and Judah, which is indispensable for a capitalistic economy.<sup>85</sup> Instead, he suggests that the land grant and patronage systems, which he calls the *redistribution system*,<sup>86</sup> were behind the widening economic gap during this period.

Though one cannot completely reject the element of truth contained in the contributions of scholars who have attempted to reconstruct the social and economic structure behind the texts of the prophets in the eighth century BCE by applying modern sociological and anthropological insights, many of their suggestions and assumptions are based on contemporary theories that are divorced from the ancient socio-economic ways of life. It is highly questionable whether the prophets are really interested in the issues discussed by these scholars. For example, rent-capitalism could possibly be the system that gave rise to the issue between rich and poor during this period, but nowhere have we seen the prophets directly criticising rent-capitalism as such. Moreover, the production and distribution of wealth, militarisation, the growth of urban centres, and population pressure could be the contributing factors behind the outbreak of the socio-economic crisis witnessed by the prophets. But we do not have sufficient evidence to prove that this kind of scholarly reconstruction really represents the socio-economic realities of the people of Israel and Judah, nor do we even have any certainty as to whether this aligns with the prophets’ perceptions. Carroll raises critical questions – “how viable are these constructs in light of the data available, and how these data themselves handled? What sort of distinction and clarifications are necessary to assess the value of a theory for developing a ‘prophetic model’ for today?”<sup>87</sup> He points out that Lang’s reconstruction of debt-bondage and the selling of slaves is based on two verses (8:6;

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<sup>85</sup> John Andrew Dearman, *Property Rights in the Eighth-Century Prophets: The Conflict and its Background* (SBL Dissertation Series 106; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) pp. 133ff.

<sup>86</sup> He says, “The term redistribution system is, in fact, the phrase used by some analysts to describe a common form of economy in antiquity developed under monarchy. While virtually all economies redistribute goods and services, this description is used particularly to identify an economy in antiquity which had a monarch or strong, central leader who developed trading relations with other nations and who required loyal servants for assistance in co-ordinating redistributing mechanisms” (Dearman, *Property Rights*, p. 134).

<sup>87</sup> Mark Daniel Carroll R., *Contexts for Amos: Prophetic Poetics in Latin American Perspective* (JSOTSup 132; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992) pp. 31-32.

2:6) and depends on a particular interpretation of the preposition *beth* (ב), about which there exists no consensus.<sup>88</sup> This clearly shows that scholarly theories try to say much more than what the text really indicates. Furthermore, certain theories and reconstructive models can be very controversial. For instance, Clines has even raised doubts about the widely accepted assumption that in eighth-century Israel, the rich got richer and the poor got poorer.<sup>89</sup> He questions, “If it is true that the rich got richer, can we be sure that the poor got poorer? The gap between rich and poor can widen even while everyone’s standard of living is improving.”<sup>90</sup> Moreover, the prophets are often portrayed as the radicals who are critical of the structural injustice that increases the economic gap.<sup>91</sup> However, it is very hard to find texts where the oracles of the prophets are directed against the unjust social and economic structures as such. Most of their concerns are rather with the values, ideologies, lifestyles, and behaviour of the dominant elite. Whatever may be the socio-economic structure behind the prophetic protests, the important thing is what values and principles the prophets support in this situation.

The prophetic protests could largely be taken as symptoms of the conflicting values and ideologies between the poor people who are at the periphery and the dominant upper classes who are at the centre in the Israelite monarchy. The concerns expressed in Amos 6:1-7 clearly represent a particular viewpoint that diverges from the values and worldview of those who are comfortable and secure in Jerusalem and Samaria. At the same time, the values and lifestyles of the affluent reflected in the oracles of the prophet suggest that the views of the dominant elites are completely contrasted with those of Amos. Coggins comments, “The actions described in this section are not wrong in themselves... But all these inherently neutral actions are described in hostile terms, so that everything done by those of whom the poet

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<sup>88</sup> Carroll R., *Contexts for Amos*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>89</sup> David J. A. Clines, “Metacommenting Amos” in *Of Prophets’ Visions and the Wisdom of Sagas*, (JSOTSup 162; eds. Heather A. McKay and David J.A. Clines; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) p. 148 (pp. 142-160).

<sup>90</sup> Clines, “Metacommenting Amos” p. 148.

<sup>91</sup> J. David Pleins, “Poverty in the Social World of the Wise” in *Social – Scientific Old Testament Criticism: A Sheffield Reader* (ed. David J. Chalcraft; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 1997) pp. 283-300.



disapproves is regarded with displeasure.”<sup>92</sup> Clines also raises a series of critical questions from this passage in his ‘Metacommenting Amos’:

There is undoubtedly a great deal of anger in this passage against the rich in Samaria, and its spirit of denunciation against idleness and luxury strikes a chord with democratically minded and hard-working readers. But a reader who has not yet opened a commentary pauses, at least long enough to ask, What exactly is the crime of these Samaritans for which they are being threatened with exile? Is there some sin in having expensive ivory inlays on your bed frame? (Amos, we presume, is not worried about the fate of elephants.) No doubt meat of any kind was something of a delicacy in ancient Israel, and these people are eating the meat of choice animals prepared for the table; but is that wrong? (Again we can suppose that Amos is not vegetarian and that the text has no fault to find with the farming methods.) And as for singing idle songs, who among the readers of Amos can cast a stone? Has karaoke suddenly become a sin, as well as a social disease? Drinking wine out of bowls instead of cups does admittedly sound greedy, and anointing yourself with the finest (and presumably most expensive) oil rather than bargain basement value-for-money oil is certainly self-indulgent. But how serious is self-indulgence? Is it a crime? Is it a sin that deserves a sentence of deportation? Does being wealthy and conspicuously consuming renewable natural resources (wine, oil, mutton and elephant tusks) put you in line for exile by any reasonable standards? What are the rich supposed to have been doing? If expensive oil is on sale in the market and you have the money in your pocket to buy it, where is the sin?<sup>93</sup>

Clines’ critical questions are apparently conditioned by his preconceived idea about what is right or wrong. Moreover, the ideology he tries to defend in this article undoubtedly represents the ideology that is fundamentally contrary to Amos’ values. His series of questions clearly shows that there are contradicting values and ideologies not only in the biblical text, but among its readers. Moreover, he also demonstrates the contradiction between the actual values of certain commentators and the values they support in interpreting the prophet. Furthermore, Clines’ approach also reveals that there cannot be neutrality in reading the texts of the prophets, as the prophets themselves have expressed their views from a particular standpoint completely different from the view of the wealthy class. There are two clear choices for the readers: whether one wants to take the side of the prophet or the ones he opposes, the side of the poor or the rich, the oppressed or the oppressors. As we are reading from the perspective of the poor minority tribal

<sup>92</sup> Richard James Coggins, *Joel and Amos* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 2000) p. 135.

<sup>93</sup> Clines, “Metacommenting Amos” pp. 144-146.

people who struggle to survive in the context of oppression and assimilation, we have no other option but to take the side of the prophet, who represents the weaker section of people in society. Therefore, our reading in this study is not against the ideology and values supported by the prophet, but in favour of them.

It may be that no action of the rich pointed out in this oracle is wrong or evil for the people who can share the values and lifestyles of those people criticised by the prophet. Moreover, the lavish lifestyles of the affluent people Amos denounces in this context are not illegal by Old Testament standards. No law in the Old Testament prohibits lying on an ivory bed, lounging on the couch, eating fattened lambs and calves, singing songs and playing music, drinking wine from bowls, and anointing with the finest oil. However, there is no question that in this context these actions are completely unacceptable for the prophet. This suggests that the prophet may not have based his judgment on a legal understanding of right or wrong. Furthermore, there is nothing wrong with economic prosperity in the Old Testament. In fact, material wealth is never regarded as something negative or evil. Rather, economic prosperity is normally accepted as the blessing of God or reward of God to the obedient (Deut. 28:1-14). This may also suggest that wealth itself is not primarily what the prophet opposes. However, it is absolutely clear that Amos is very critical of the way in which the wealthy class use their wealth and resources. For him, the actions and lifestyles of the affluent people are not simply unacceptable; they are irritating and shameful, and they are the reason why he believes the rich should be the first to go into exile (6:7; cf. 4:3). This shows that he has a solid ideological basis and a firm position for what he says and believes. But the question is: What could be the basis on which Amos makes his argument against the values and lifestyles of the rich people? What value-system and principle does he try to promote in denouncing the luxurious lifestyle of the upper class?

It is arguable that Amos' attitude toward the wealthy is largely conditioned by his perception of honour and shame rather than by legal concepts of right or wrong. The way Amos expresses his concerns in 6:1-7 strongly supports this view. It is undeniably clear that he wants to disclose how shameful the actions of the rich people are, rather than how illegal they are. Amos is the only eighth-century prophet who does not use shame vocabulary in his oracles, but rather uses sarcastic

expressions and oracles of הוֹי. The introductory particle הוֹי is an interjection which is usually used to express dissatisfaction, pain, lamentation, mourning, denunciation, and is often preparatory to a declaration of judgment.<sup>94</sup> It is normally translated “Woe” or “Alas” or “Ah,” which Lang considers as the archaic translation.<sup>95</sup> He suggests translating it “shame on you”. Lang’s suggestion is quite appropriate considering the multidimensional aspects of this interjection.<sup>96</sup> In fact, a prophetic הוֹי is an expression of a mixture of feelings of grief, shame and outrage at sinful actions that are strongly disapproved of.<sup>97</sup>

Amos begins his oracle by using הוֹי to communicate his intense anger against the wealthy in Israel and Judah, conveying a note of shame and disgust at their behaviour and lifestyles (vv.1-3). This indicates that the comfortable life of the rich is certainly shameful and unacceptable for the prophet. But the question is: What is wrong with being comfortable and secure? There seems to be nothing to be ashamed of in this. However, if we see the situation of the comfortable life of the affluent in relation to the miserable condition of the poor and unsecured in their midst, we may be able to share the view of the prophet. His concern is not simply about whether a comfortable lifestyle is right or wrong. Rather, it is something to do with the question: Is it honourable or acceptable to maintain lavish lifestyles when people are starving in our midst? Is it not shameful or even disgusting to see people who have plenty do nothing but enjoy the luxuries of life when their neighbours are struggling for their daily bread? The oracles of Amos and his contemporary prophets clearly reflect that their society was overshadowed by extreme poverty

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<sup>94</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968) pp. 222-223.

<sup>95</sup> Lang, “The Social Organization of peasant poverty in Biblical Israel” p. 91.

<sup>96</sup> Scholars have different opinions regarding the origins of the literary-form of the prophetic woe-oracles. Some consider it as an adaptation from the cultic curse formula (Deut. 27:15-26). See S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel Worship*, vol.2 (trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas; New York & Nashville: Abingdon, 1962) p. 50; C. Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (trans. Hugh Clayton White; London: Lutterworth, 1967) pp. 190-198. Some take it as a development from the funerary lamentation (e.g. Jer. 22:18); see R. J. Clifford, “The Use of *hoy* in the Prophets” *CBQ* 28 (1966) pp. 458-464; W. Janzen, *Mourning Cry and Woe Oracle* (BZAW 125; Berlin: DeGruyter, 1972). Some regard it as borrowed from the wisdom tradition. See Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, pp. 244-245; also Eryl W. Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics: Isaiah and the Ethical Tradition of Israel* (JSOTSup 16; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981) pp. 83-85.

<sup>97</sup> Ronald E. Clements, “Woe” *ABD* (CD-ROM). For him, the particle הוֹי is closely related to the less frequently occurring הוֹיָא as well as הוֹיָא expressing a sharp outburst of feeling, sometimes of anger, sometimes of grief and sometimes of alarm.

while the elite enjoyed all kinds of luxuries (Am. 8: 4-6; Isa. 3:12-15; Mic. 3:1-3 etc). In fact, the eighth-century prophets repeatedly contrast these aspects: the affluence of the rich and the relative deprivation of the peasantry.<sup>98</sup> Vulnerable people like the poor, orphans, widows, and the weak are undoubtedly pushed out of their comfort zones as they are increasingly pressured and socially and economically threatened by the activities of the dominant elite (Amos 2:6-7; Isa.1:17,23; 5:8; Mic.2:2,8-9). The rhetorical questions in Amos 6:2 imply that the comfortable life of the rich people is a combination of luxury, pride and arrogance. Here, these qualities are fundamentally contradicted by the prophet's idea of honourable ways of life. It is obvious that the pride of the affluent is utterly shameful for the prophet. For Amos, these wealthy people are the ones who put far away the evil day and bring nearer a reign of violence (v. 3). In other words, they are the ones who dig their own graves causing the imminent downfall of their society.

In v. 4 we can see more clearly the reasons why the prophet considers such comfortable affluence to be shameful. He continues his 'shame on you' charge, attacking not merely the wealth of the dominant elite, but the extravagance that perpetuates the pain and suffering of their poor neighbours. Mays rightly says, "Every item represents a luxurious sophistication that had been possible in earlier times only for royalty, and remained a world apart from the life in the villages."<sup>99</sup> Premnath sees the link between the poverty of the ordinary people and the lavish ways of life of the rich: "the more extravagant and affluent the lifestyle of the rich was, the more desperate the life of the peasantry became."<sup>100</sup> Amos obviously wants to expose how shameful the excessive luxury and affluence of the dominant people are. For example, the beds of ivory certainly represent the extravagance of the upper classes. In fact, ivory was an expensive imported item, probably coming from Africa, Asia or Syria.<sup>101</sup> In Amos 3:15, the prophet mentions houses of ivory,

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets*, p. 140.

<sup>99</sup> James Luther Mays, *Amos: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1969) p. 116.

<sup>100</sup> Premnath, *Eighth-century Prophets*, p. 140.

<sup>101</sup> Philip J. King mentions that the most significant collections of ivories have been recovered at Megiddo and Samaria in ancient Israel. At Megiddo, over 300 ivory fragments have been found from the palace's treasury room, and Samaria yielded over 500 ivory fragments, dating from the ninth or eighth century BCE. See his Philip J. King, "The Marzeah Amos Denounces – Using Archaeology to Interpret a Biblical Text" *Biblical Archaeology Review* Jul/Aug 1988.

<http://www.basarchive.org/bswbBrowse.asp?> downloaded on 20/08/2006. See also Eleanor Ferris

the winter and summer houses of the rich people. This indicates that the affluent people of Israel can afford the most expensive goods and materials available in those days and they spend their wealth purchasing such kind of non-productive luxurious items while the underprivileged are starving. Moreover, the way in which the prophet describes the kind of meat the rich people consume, the songs and music they enjoy, the way they drink wine and the kind of oil they anoint themselves with certainly emphasises the negative aspects of wealthy values. It is obvious that he fundamentally opposes the refined banqueting, drinking, partying, and feasting culture of the ruling elite when underprivileged people were struggling to survive with basic economic necessities.

In the light of the archaeological data that have been excavated in different parts of ancient West Asia, some scholars attempt to explain the luxurious banquet of the wealthy people Amos denounces in this context as a *marzeah* feast.<sup>102</sup> The Hebrew term מרזח in v. 7, which is generally rendered as “revelry” in the English translations, provides the ground for this argument.<sup>103</sup> This word occurs only in Amos 6:7 and Jeremiah 16:5 in the Old Testament. The *marzeah* feast was a kind of funerary banquet or an occasion to comfort a bereaved family by offering food and drink. It was a celebration held in honour of both the dead and the celebrating group. The members of this group consist of upper-class individuals.<sup>104</sup> King mentions that the *marzeah* was a pagan ritual associated with banquets or memorial meals that lasted several days and were accompanied by excessive drinking. The five components of revelry denounced by Amos, such as reclining or relaxing, eating a meat meal, singing or other musical accompaniment, drinking wine and anointing oneself with oil are part and parcel of this practice. Wealth and affluence

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Beach, “The Samaria Ivories, Marzeah and Biblical Texts” *Biblical Archaeologist*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (1992) pp. 130-139; also, Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets*, p. 140.

<sup>102</sup> Robert B. Coote, *Amos among the prophets: Composition and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981) pp. 36-39; H. M. Barstad, *The Religious Polemics of Amos: Studies in the Preaching of Am. 2, 7B-8; 4,1-13; 5,1-27; 6,4-7; 8,14.* (VTSup 34; Leiden: Brill, 1984) pp. 127-142; Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets*, pp. 91-93, 139-141. These scholars are heavily indebted to the archaeological data provided by M. H. Pope, “A Divine Banquet at Ugarit” in *The Use of the Old Testament in the New and Other Essays: Studies in Honor of William Franklin Stinespring*, (ed. J. M. Efrid; Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1972) pp. 170-203; Philip J. King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah: An Archaeological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988).

<sup>103</sup> The RSV and NRSV render מרזח as ‘revelry’. Hammershaimb takes it as “loud cry”, sometimes a cry of mourning, sometimes a cry of joy. See his *The Book of Amos: A Commentary*, p. 102.

<sup>104</sup> Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets*, p. 91.

were prerequisites for participation.<sup>105</sup> For King, “the *marzeah* had an extremely long history, extending at least from the 14<sup>th</sup> century B.C. [BCE] through the Roman period.”<sup>106</sup> A large part of the archaeological data connected with the fourteenth century BCE was prominently associated with the ancient Canaanite city of Ugarit (modern Ras Shamra), whereas the data related to the Roman period was largely associated with Palmyra, on the northern edge of the Syrian Desert.<sup>107</sup> This evidence shows that the practice of *marzeah* was originally an integral part of the foreign religious rituals and practices that may have been adopted by the Israelite ruling elite. As argued in the preceding chapter, many other foreign religious rituals and practices were incorporated in the royal sanctuaries of Israel and Judah which formed the sacral foundation for promoting the royal ideology of control and dominion. It is quite possible that the *marzeah* feast was also one of those pagan practices borrowed by the dominant elite to consolidate their social position and to strengthen their religious ideology of oppression. However, the main concern of Amos in this context appears to be not merely the pagan form of worship or syncretistic religious practice as such; rather, his concern is more about the oppressive values and lavish ways of life of the rich and ruling class, which might have been justified by hybrid religious rituals and practices like the *marzeah*. We can see that Amos opposes not only the banquet and partying practices of the wealthy people, but also the winter and summer houses, ivory houses and beds that do not have any connection with the practice of *marzeah*.

Although Amos points out different aspects of the unacceptable luxurious lifestyles of the upper class in Israelite society, yet this catalogue of luxury is not itself the accusation. The main accusation is what follows – “but they are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph”. Here, the concern of the prophet is that the pleasure-loving wealthy people do not have any concern for the ‘ruin of Joseph’. The verb נחלה is the *niph'al* form of the root חלה which literally means “to be sick, grieved over, worried, concerned about”.<sup>108</sup> It is an expression that the rich people are not at all

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<sup>105</sup> Philip J. King, “The Marzeah Amos denounces – Using Archaeology to Interpret a Biblical Text” p. 3.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Paul, *Amos*, p. 209. Hammershaimb, *Amos*, p. 101. The Hebrew root חלה means weak, sick, become ill, lame, be sick unto dying, imperfect for sacrifice etc. See *DAVAR: Hebrew Dictionary*

troubled or sickened by the “ruin of Joseph.” The phrase “ruin of Joseph” (שבר יוסף) is variously interpreted by commentators.<sup>109</sup> Some take it as referring to the miserable state that the people had gradually fallen into as a result of the moral corruption of the upper classes.<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless, the majority of scholars take it as the impending danger which threatened the future survival of the Israelite nation,<sup>111</sup> namely the future foreign invasion or deportation of the Israelite people frequently mentioned by Amos (4:3; 5:27; 6:7; etc.). However, this assumption is far from convincing, considering the focus of the prophet in the preceding verses. It seems quite improbable that people will be deported because they are not grieving over the future exile. Is there anything wrong about not grieving over the future deportation? If they are worried about future deportation, should they be self-indulgent?<sup>112</sup> Will it make any difference to their oppression, which Amos opposes? This cannot be the main point of accusation, as it does not have any link with the words of vehement criticism in the preceding verses. In fact, the Hebrew passive verb נחלני is not necessarily to be taken as the future tense. In addition, there is no explicit evidence to suggest that the phrase שבר יוסף refers to future exile or the foreign invasion, though the prophet often makes use of this kind of threat to warn of the punishment that will befall the people.

Considering the main theme of the oracle, it can be argued that the prophet’s accusation is that the affluent people lack concern for the poor, and care nothing for the damage done to the traditional Israelite tribal communitarian values of brotherly love and care in the community. It is conceivable that the prophet considers the self-indulgence of the upper classes as the clear expression of their indifference towards the plight of their poor neighbours. Mays rightly comments, “The sufferings of the

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(CD-ROM). It can also be taken as property to be rubbed or worn, be weak, afflicted, to grieve etc., see *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries* (CD-ROM).

<sup>109</sup> שבר means a fracture, breach, bruise, crashing or destruction. See *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries* (CD-ROM).

<sup>110</sup> Mays, *Amos*, p. 117.

<sup>111</sup> Wolff specifically points out that “the ‘ruin of Joseph’ alludes to Israel’s condition which, between 738 and 733, became more precarious as the state came under the deepening shadow of the vast Assyrian empire, till at the end of the period it had lost most of its territorial possessions”. See his *Joel and Amos*, pp. 110, 277. Paul, however, argues that there is no reason to refer the phrase ‘ruin of Joseph’ to the period between 738 and 733 BCE, though he also accepts that this phrase refers to the brink of the impending danger Israel had to face. See his *Amos*, p. 209. See also Hammershaimb, *Amos*, p. 101.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Clines, “Metacommenting Amos” p. 146.

oppressed and wronged in the nation do not touch them. They neither see nor hear their covenant brothers.”<sup>113</sup> It can be assumed that Amos’s values and principles concerning this issue are rooted in the traditional tribal communitarian ethos where the well-to-do families shared their riches and resources with the unfortunate members of the community. There is certain evidence from the customs and traditions of the Israelites’ ancestors which suggest that the well-to-do families used to share their wealth and resources with their brothers who were in need. For example, Abraham shares his wealth and resources with Lot (Gen.13:5-13). Jacob also shares a large proportion of his wealth with his brother Esau (Gen.33:8-11). The older laws that certainly reflect the rural tribal social setting require the rich people not to charge interest to fellow Israelites (Ex 22:25-27 [MT 22:24-26]; Lev 25: 35-37; Deut 23:19-20). In addition, harvesters were to leave sections of the fields for reaping by their poor neighbours (Lev 19:9-10; Deut 24:19-22). The value of sharing dominated the tribal distribution of land in the book of Joshua as the phrase “according to their clans” (למשפחתם) is repeatedly used in the context of the allotment of land (cf. Josh 13:15; Num 33:54 etc). All these social customs and traditions clearly indicate that sharing was highly valued in the traditional community of the Israelite tribes.

Amos’ concern about “the ruin of Joseph” can be connected with the traditional communitarian values and ethos expressed in the story of Joseph in the Pentateuch. It can be assumed that the oral traditions of the Joseph story and other ancestors’ narratives in the Pentateuch might have been important vehicles to promote traditional values in pre-literate Israelite society.<sup>114</sup> Though current discussion of the Joseph story is dominated by the views of those who link this story with the exilic or post-exilic situation,<sup>115</sup> it cannot be denied that the story may have existed,

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<sup>113</sup> Mays, *Amos*, p. 117.

<sup>114</sup> Oral traditions - in the forms of legend or story - are generally important vehicles for pre-literate peoples to pass on their socio-cultural values from one generation to another. For example, stories of individual legendary figures, namely Vana pa, Taitesena, Chawngbawla, Khuangchera, Neuva, etc., who were known for their bravery, generosity, selfless love, or in short, for their practice of *tlawmngaihna*, were largely used by the Mizo tribe in Northeast India to promote and inculcate tribal values and ethos to younger generations in their traditional society. Village elders used to narrate stories of outstanding figures to the youth in *Zawlbuk*. These oral traditions could be fictitious as well as historical, but what is important is the value-system they uphold.

<sup>115</sup> John Van Seters, for example, argues that the Joseph story was an independent story of northern provenance in the late monarchy, which was taken up by the exilic Yahwist in his larger historiography of the Patriarchs and used as a bridge to the Exodus. See his “The Joseph Story –



at least in oral and some shorter forms, in the pre-monarchic period. It can be argued that this story might have preceded Amos and it was not purely a literary fiction of the exilic writer, since the name Joseph was already a familiar name in the eighth century BCE representing people of Northern Israel in the oracles of Amos (5:6; 5:15; 6:6).<sup>116</sup> It may not be possible to find out whether Joseph was a fictitious or historical figure, but it is undeniable that the values advocated by this story were similar to the principles defended by Amos. The clearest and the most elaborate articulation of the value of sharing of wealth and resources between the fortunate and less fortunate brothers in the Pentateuch can be found in the Joseph story. One cannot deny the fact that the climax of the whole story is about brotherly love, support, help and care in the context of drought and famine (Gen. 45:1-28). The contrasting features of wealth and poverty are clearly portrayed in this last quarter of the story. While Joseph's brothers are the victims of famine who struggle to survive in the context of hunger and scarcity of food, Joseph is a man with plenty who has power and huge wealth under his control in the great kingdom of Egypt. Here the hero of the story, the wealthy and powerful Joseph, is the one who breaks down in tears in front of his poor brothers, and opens his arms to support them in the very hour they were badly in need of help. In fact, Joseph has every right to enjoy a luxurious life and to use his wealth and power exclusively for himself by ignoring the sufferings and pain of his hungry brothers. It would be quite understandable even if he took revenge against his brothers, who had caused him so much trouble and misery for such a long period. However, instead of taking revenge, he used his power and wealth to protect, support and help his brothers who had once attempted to hurt him. What is very interesting to note is Joseph's response to his fearful brothers, who obviously realise their guilt and shame for what they did to their brother: "It was not you but God who sent me before you to

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Some Basic Observations" in *Egypt, Israel, and the Ancient Mediterranean World: Studies in Honor of Donald B. Redford* (eds. Gary N. Knoppers and Antoine Hirsch; Leiden/Boston: Koninklijke Brill, 2004) pp.361-388. Also see Donald B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph* (VTSup 20; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970) pp.100ff. He plays down the use of the Patriarchal names of Jacob, Reuben, Joseph as simply the equivalent of "father," "elder brother," and "youngest brother" to argue for its novella quality as fictional and timeless. Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives; the Quest for the Historical Abraham* (BZAW 133; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1974).

<sup>116</sup> G. von Rad argued that the Joseph story was an independent novella, written as a didactic tale of early court wisdom, and he associated its literary quality and characteristics closely with the Court History of David (2 Sam 6 – 1 Kings 2) as part of a corpus of literature that he felt belonged to the era of the "Solomonic enlightenment". See his *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965) pp.292-300.

preserve life". The same statement is repeated three times in this speech (Gen. 45:5, 7, 8). The narrator obviously wants to emphasise this statement to sum up the whole story of Joseph.<sup>117</sup> While this statement can be taken as a description of the importance of God's guidance of destinies which can totally transform human plans,<sup>118</sup> it can also be taken as a statement that emphasises the importance of sharing wealth and power for the preservation of life, especially the lives of the most vulnerable. Joseph apparently believes that wealth and power are fundamentally meant for the preservation of life. He uses the power and wealth at his disposal not only to provide food for the hungry people by means of a charitable act, but also to give a new foundation or fresh start to the helpless poor who are afflicted by a natural calamity. He arranges for his father, brothers and their families along with their flocks to come down from Canaan to Egypt in order that they may benefit from his position of influence and share the grain in Egypt, which had accumulated under his supervision. In the memory of the Israelites, it is obvious that the name Joseph represents not only the son of Jacob's favourite wife Rachel, or a man of wisdom and integrity, but also a man of possessions who shares his wealth with his unfortunate brothers and uses his power for the preservation of life. He was a role model for all generations of the Northern tribes. There is no question that Joseph's story is about forgiveness and reconciliation among brothers; at the same time, it is also very much about sharing food and resources between the fortunate and less fortunate members of the community. This story obviously promotes the idea that the rich and powerful people have vital roles to play for the betterment of the poor and the destitute. The oral tradition of this story must have played a very important role for promoting the values and ethos of brotherly love and care among the members of the Israelite tribal community.

As indicated above, the name 'Joseph' is the preferred term for Amos to call the people of the northern kingdom, unlike his younger contemporary prophet Hosea who frequently employs 'Ephraim' to refer to the same people. Though there is no certainty about the reason why Amos chooses this particular name to represent the northern tribes, it is conceivable that he uses it deliberately. The accusation against

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<sup>117</sup> Cf. Claus Westermann, *Joseph: Studies of the Joseph Stories in Genesis* (trans. Omar Kaste; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996) p. 96.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

the affluent that they are not grieved over the “ruin of Joseph” is a short but very serious accusation. Since the prophet does not elaborate or explain the phrase, it is very likely that his accusation is quite clear and understandable for his audience. In light of the values and ethos contained in the story of Joseph, discussed above, it is quite reasonable to suggest that the phrase “ruin of Joseph” here means the damage done to the traditional social values and cultural ethos inherent in the life and activities of the hero of the northern tribes, as a result of the emergence of the new values and ideology among the upper classes. Instead of giving priority to the preservation of life and brotherly love and care, values championed by Joseph, the wealthy classes in the eighth century BCE used their wealth and power for their own interests and benefit. They undermine the plight of their fellow poor, who are badly in need of their help and support. In this context, the term Joseph is not simply the name of the northern tribes; rather it represents the traditional tribal values and ethos that we see in the action and attitude of Joseph towards his poor brothers. In other words, the name Joseph in this context can be taken as the embodiment of the Israelite tribal values of sharing, co-operation, support and help extended by the fortunate to the less fortunate members of the community. Moreover, this name can also refer to generous rich people, as represented by Joseph, who share their wealth and power for the protection and preservation of life in the traditional tribal community. What is shameful for Amos is the value-system manifested in the lavish lifestyles of the affluent, which completely ignores the traditional values and ethos inherent in the life of Joseph. The wealthy people are not only unconcerned for the ruin of the traditional values and ethos, but they are the main culprits behind the increasing erosion of the traditional social fabric of Israelite society. This is clearly manifested in the catalogue of luxury that is strongly rejected by the prophet in vv. 4-6. Prosperity itself is not opposed by the prophet in this context, but rather the accumulation of affluence that is not shared, excessive wealth that is wasted for extravagant banquets, parties and luxuries that obviously do not benefit the whole community.

Amos’s values and ethos are apparently dominated by the idea that riches should be shared among members of the community. For him, the senselessly wasted affluence of the dominant elite is disgusting. When Amos criticises the greedy rich people who do not have concern for the poor, he does not simply try to point out

that they are wrong or illegal, but he is trying to shame or humiliate them. As has been argued, shaming is an effective way of discouraging socially unacceptable behaviour in the ethos of the group-oriented people. Elsewhere, the prophet speaks out against the wealthy women in Samaria, probably the wives of the big landlords, rich merchants or court officials:<sup>119</sup>

Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria,  
 who oppress the poor, who crush the needy,  
 who say to their husbands, "Bring something to drink!"  
 The Lord God has sworn by his holiness:  
 the time is surely coming upon you,  
 when they shall take you away with butcher's hooks,  
 even the last of you with fish hooks.  
 Through breaches in the wall you shall leave,  
 each one straight ahead;  
 and you shall be flung out into Harmon, says the Lord (4:1-3).

The way the prophet expresses himself clearly indicates that he wants to show how shameful the lifestyle of these women is, who contribute so much to the deprivation of the poor and crush the needy. He calls them "cows of Bashan" which is certainly not the language of respect and honour<sup>120</sup> referring as it does to fat cows in Bashan, metaphorically likened with the wives of the wealthy elite in Samaria. In fact, the Transjordan region of Bashan was known for the size of its cattle (Deut. 32:14; Ezek 39:18; Ps 22:12) and its pasturage (Mic. 7:14; Jer. 50:19).<sup>121</sup> It is obvious that Amos wants to shame the overweight women in Samaria who may have gained their weight as a result of overeating and drinking in the midst of others starving and struggling for their daily bread. According to Amos, these women are primarily responsible for the impoverishment of the poor, as they live a comfortable and luxurious life and make inconsiderate and heavy demands on their husbands. He proclaims that they will be taken into captivity in the most humiliating way. The Hebrew word צַנֹּנֹת can be translated "butcher's hooks,"<sup>122</sup> corresponding to the

<sup>119</sup> Hans W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977) p. 205.

<sup>120</sup> Coggins argues that 'cows of Bashan' may be an at least partly admiring reference to the well-formed bodies of the women. He further mentions that slimness was not regarded as a desirable characteristic, as far as we can judge, either by women themselves or by the men who no doubt sought shape their self-perception. See his *Joel and Amos*, p. 116. However, this argument is not convincing at all considering the main concern of the prophet. Most of the commentators cannot agree with this view. See Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah: Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 31* (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher 1987, CD-ROM); Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos*, p. 65; Carroll R., *Contexts for Amos*, pp. 201-202.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (CD-ROM).

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Premnath, *Social Analysis*, p. 142.

cow metaphor. The people who enjoy all kinds of luxury will one day be taken away from their comfortable houses in the most shameful way, just as butchers take the fattened cows for slaughter. It is obvious that Amos wants to publicly shame the shameless wealthy people for ignoring the plight of their neighbours, rather than charging them from the legal point of view.

### 5.5. Conclusion

Analysing Hosea 2:2-5 from a Mizo perspective reveals that the issues concerning wealth and poverty in eighth-century Israel are largely connected with the infiltration of foreign religio-cultural values and economic ideology. We have seen that the Baal/baalim encountered by the prophet are not merely fertility cults or idolatrous forms of worship, but the cultural and economic ideologies of foreign imperialists in the time of Hosea. The main targets of Hosea's critique are the king, royal officials, priests and prophets who are singled out as collaborators and supporters of colonial economic values and ideology. As these influential people are infected by the values and ideology of the colonialists, Israelite society as a whole has been spoiled and confused, and people are facing an identity crisis. For Hosea, the upper classes are the main culprits who are responsible for spreading the ideology of greed in Israelite society, which destroyed the traditional tribal subsistence economy and related values. The prophet employs the most insulting language and metaphors to express his deep sense of anger and shame towards the rulers and their foreign allies. He identifies them as a shameless adulterous wife, and her children the result of whoredom, representing the most shameful individuals in the ancient male-dominated society. Hosea deliberately chose these metaphors to expose the shameful and unacceptable behaviour of the dominant elite. It is obvious that shaming is the fundamental rhetorical weapon of the prophet in condemning those who violate the traditional norms and value-systems of Israelite society. In his eyes the nation is being ruined, defeated, and gradually engulfed by the imperial cultural values and the hardest hit are the indigenous poor and other vulnerable citizens in the land of Canaan who depend upon the tribal subsistence economy, maintaining the traditional values and simple communitarian ways of life.

The internal socio-economic issues of Israel are clearly reflected in Amos 6:1-7 where the prophet strongly criticises the affluent people who are responsible for the increasing impoverishment of the poor and the erosion of the traditional social fabric of Israelite society. We have argued that Amos' concerns are more about the values, ideology, and attitudes of the affluent people rather than the socio-economic structure, though we do not rule out the possibility that the injustice of the social system could be responsible for the issues of wealth and poverty during this period. Amos' critique of the wealthy people can be connected with the ideological conflict between central and peripheral people during the Israelite monarchy. It is apparent that the partying, banqueting, and feasting culture of the upper classes are shameful and unacceptable for the prophet. However, his main accusation against them is that they are negligent and unconcerned for the "ruin of Joseph". Moving away from the traditional interpretation, the phrase "ruin of Joseph" is here taken to refer to the damage done to the traditional communitarian values of brotherly love and neighbourly concern, as reflected in the behaviour of Joseph towards his brothers in the narrative of the Pentateuch. Unlike Joseph, who shares his wealth and power for the benefit of his brothers, the wealthy dominant elites in Amos' time completely ignore the plight of their poor neighbours as they pursue luxury and their own selfish desires. For Amos, the excessive accumulation of wealth that is not shared is shameful and disgusting; he wants to publicly shame the rich by exposing their wasteful ways of life and arrogant behaviour. This judgement is couched in terms of the shameful and honourable, rather than the legally right or wrong. He forcefully represents the victims of social change whose ways of life have been ruined by the oppression of the urban elite, and it is for this reason that Amos and his contemporaries are so critical of the wealthy, and so deeply committed to the helpless poor.

## 6

## LAND

This chapter aims to explicate the values and ethos of the prophets concerning land from the tribal perspective.<sup>1</sup> It is generally recognised that the land issue was of fundamental concern to the eighth-century prophets. However, an adequate explanation has never been given of the values and ethos of the prophets as reflected in their critique of the people responsible for the dispossession of the properties of the smallholders. This discussion is dominated by questions relating to land tenure, land rights or land ownership patterns.<sup>2</sup> Scholars usually connect the issue of land ownership during the eighth century BCE with the economic issue of the widening gap between the rich and the poor.<sup>3</sup> The commitment of the prophets to fight against land grabbing and the growth of large estates is also largely believed to have been motivated by their concern for the protection of the increasingly impoverished peasants. Though we cannot deny that the economic issue is profoundly associated with the issue of land the concerns of the prophets appear to be much more than economic.

### 6.1. Isaiah 5:8-10 and Micah 2:1-3

Isaiah 5:8-10 and Micah 2:1-3 are selected for analysis since they undoubtedly represent the clearest expression of the ideas of the eighth-century prophets

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<sup>1</sup> As we are dealing with the common issues challenging tribal peoples in India, we will frequently use the phrase 'tribal perspective' instead of 'Mizo perspective' in this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> John Andrew Dearman, *Property Rights in the Eighth-Century Prophets: The Conflict and its Background* (SBL Dissertation Series 106; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988); K. H. Henry, "Land Tenure in the Old Testament" *PEQ* lxxxvi (1954) pp. 5-15; Eryl W. Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics: Isaiah and the Ethical Tradition of Israel* (JSOTSup 16; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981) pp. 65-89; D. N. Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets: A Social Analysis* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2003); Christopher J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990) pp. 119-141.

<sup>3</sup> Morris Silver, *Prophets and Markets: The Political Economy of Ancient Israel* (Boston, The Hague, London: Kluwer-Nijhoff Publishing, 1983); D. N. Premnath, "Latifundialization and Isaiah 5:8-10" in *Social-Scientific Old Testament Criticism: A Sheffield Reader* (ed. David J. Chalcraft; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) pp. 301-313; also his *Eighth-Century Prophets*, pp. 43-98.

regarding the issue of land during this period. Unlike the previous chapters, where the selected passages are dealt with separately, these two passages will be discussed together as they mutually complement each other. In this study, we will pay attention to the socio-cultural issues involved in the prophets' responses to the process of land accumulation as a result of the deprivation of the smallholders. In light of the experiences of the tribal people in India, whose socio-cultural values, traditions and customs have been and are being destroyed in the context of alienation and displacement from their lands,<sup>4</sup> some fundamental questions concerning issues encountered by the victims of land acquisition in the eighth century BCE will be raised. First, we will look at the factors causing the smallholders to give up their lands. Our discussion in this section will be directed by the question: What pressure or force, which was fundamentally unacceptable to the prophets, pushed the smallholders to abandon their lands? Second, attention will be given to the values supported and endorsed by the prophets. Here, an answer is sought for the question: What exactly were the values and principles defended and endorsed by the prophets as they were involved in the struggle of the people who had been alienated from their lands?

#### 6.1.1. *Translation of the texts:*

##### **Isaiah 5:8-10**

- 8 Woe to you, who accumulate house to house,  
and field to field,  
until there is room for no one but you,  
and you are left to live alone  
in the midst of the land!
- 9 The Lord of hosts has sworn in my hearing:  
Surely the large estates shall be desolate,  
large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant.
- 10 For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one *bath*,  
and a homer of seed shall yield a mere *ephah*.

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<sup>4</sup> See discussion on this issue in chapter two, section 2.4.2.



**Micah 2:1-3**

- 1 Woe to those who devise wickedness  
and evil deeds on their beds!  
When the morning dawns, they perform it,  
because it is in their power.
- 2 They covet fields, and seize them;  
houses, and take them away;  
they oppress householder and house,  
people and their inheritance.
- 3 Therefore thus says Yahweh:  
Now, I am devising against this family an evil  
from which you cannot remove your necks;  
and you shall not walk haughtily  
for it will be an evil time.

**6.1.2. Critical Analysis of the Texts**

These two passages are generally accepted as the authentic words of the eighth-century prophets Isaiah and Micah respectively.<sup>5</sup> Scholars generally maintain that the content of these two oracles reflects one and the same situation: the impoverishment and dispossession of poor farmers during the eighth century BCE.<sup>6</sup> The prophets' vehement criticisms in these oracles indicate that the confiscation of smallholders' lands was a very serious issue that could not simply be tolerated by those who witnessed the real situation of the victims. It is conceivable that this kind of issue was not simply the outcome of a few isolated incidents, as Amos and Hosea also express the same kind of concern over this issue in the Northern kingdom

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<sup>5</sup> For Isaiah, see R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 61; W. Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1998) p. 63; H. Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 197; O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 65. For Micah see Delbert R. Hillers, *Micah* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) p. 31; Rainer Kessler, *Micha* (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 1999) p. 113; Hans Walter Wolff, *Micah: A Commentary* (trans. Gary Stansell; Augsburg: Augsburg Fortress, 1990) pp. 74-75; also his *Micah the Prophet* (trans. Ralph D. Gehrke; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981) p. 45; J. L. Mays, *Micah: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1976) p. 61; Charles S. Shaw, *The Speeches of Micah: A Rhetorical-Historical Analysis* (JSOTSup 145; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) pp. 71-75; Premnath, *Eighth-Century Prophets*, p. 105. Dearman, *Property Rights*, p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> Georg Fohrer, *Jesaja 1-23* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1991) p. 79; Mays, *Micah: A Commentary*, p. 62; Premnath, *Eighth-Century Prophets*, p. 105; Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics*, p. 76; Dearman, *Property Rights*, p. 115; Rudolf Kilian, *Jesaja* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1986) p. 42.

(Amos 3:15; 5:10-13; Hos. 5:10). There can be little doubt that the seizure of the lands of smallholders during the eighth century BCE had ruined a large number of peasant farmers. Isaiah's words of accusation in v. 8, "Woe to you who join house to house, and field to field" seem to indicate large-scale accumulation of lands in the hands of a certain group of people that had extensively deprived the common populace. According to Clements, "The joining together of houses and fields evidently refers to the formation of large cultivated estates by absorbing neighbouring property."<sup>7</sup> Brueggemann also takes Isaiah's protest against the combination of "houses-fields" as a warning against general economic policy whereby big landowners buy up and crowd out small farmers in what we might now term agribusiness.<sup>8</sup> Here, the key term *בית*, which is usually translated as "house", can also refer to a field or land. Moran's analysis of the use of Akkadian *bitu* reveals that in Ugaritic documents property was referred to as "house" (*betu/bitu*) or as "field" (*eqlu*) meaning either "house," or "house and land" or even just land. He mentions that "the two terms are joined and then, apart from a few possible exceptions, always in the same order: house-field."<sup>9</sup> Chaney also contends that the *בית* of one's neighbour in the tenth Commandment originally referred to a plot of arable land.<sup>10</sup> *בית* could therefore be taken as referring to property or estate in certain contexts. In the light of this, it can be suggested that Isaiah's phrase "house to house, and field to field" may have been an expression of the expansiveness of the large estate acquired by the affluent people. Premnath argues that another phrase of Isaiah in v. 8 *בתים רבים* (large houses), which also occurs in Amos 3:15, should similarly be taken as referring to large landholdings.<sup>11</sup> In addition to this evidence, there are certain scholars who maintain that there are several other oracles of the eighth-century prophets that can be connected with the issue of the accumulation of land.<sup>12</sup> This strongly indicates that the land issue was a serious problem during this

<sup>7</sup> Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 62.

<sup>8</sup> Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 51.

<sup>9</sup> William Moran, "The Conclusion of the Decalogue (Ex 20:17-Dt 5:21)" *CBQ* 29 (1967) p. 549. He comments that "the properties specified are usually vineyards, oliveyards, orchards, buildings (towers, storehouses) etc." p. 550.

<sup>10</sup> Marvin L. Chaney, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house." *Pacific Theological Review* 15 (1973) p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Premnath, "Latifundialization" p. 307; also his *Eighth Century Prophets*, p. 101.

<sup>12</sup> Marvin L. Chaney, "Micah – Models Matter: Political Economy and Micah 6:9-15" in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in its Social Context* (ed. Philip F. Esler; London: SCM Press, 2005) pp. 145-160; also his "Whose Sour Grapes? The Addressees of Isaiah 5:1-7 in light of Political

period. In light of all of these factors, it is quite reasonable to assume that Isaiah and his contemporary prophets were challenged by the large-scale accumulation of lands as a result of the enormous dispossession of the small landholdings of the peasant population. But the question is: How and why did that happen? As we seek to answer this question, we will first examine issues concerning the dispossession of land in India in order to throw light to see possible factors behind the deprivation of smallholders in eighth century BCE.

## 6.2. Factors Causing Dispossession of Lands

### 6.2.1. *The Indian context*

Displacement or alienation from the ancestral land is a common issue that challenges tribal communities and other underprivileged people in different parts of India today. Thousands of tribal people in India are compelled to abandon their ancestral lands against their own will by various powerful forces<sup>13</sup> usually socio-economic, political and judicial powers controlled by influential people, and which are often associated with corruption, violence and cruelty.<sup>14</sup> The Chipko movement in the 1970s, the Narmada Bachao movement in the 1980s, and the current large-scale displacements of the tribal people as a result of the construction of dams and other industrial projects in different parts of India can be seen as the consequences of these forces.<sup>15</sup> Some of the tribal communities in Northeast India have been

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Economy" *Semeia* 5 (1987) pp. 105-122. Regarding Hosea's concern for latifundism, see Keefe, *Woman's Body and the Social Body in Hosea*, pp. 200-204; Premnath, "Comparative and Historical Sociology in Old Testament Research: A Study of Isaiah 3:12-15" *BTF* 17.4 (1985) pp. 39-54.

<sup>13</sup> See footnote no. 119 of chapter two.

<sup>14</sup> George Koonthanam, "Yahweh the Defender of the Dalits: A Reflection on Isaiah 3:12-15" *Jeevadhara* 22 (1992) pp. 120-123. On 26 January 2006, the police gunned down 12 tribal protesters including one 13 years old boy and three women in Kalinga Nagar, Orissa, who opposed the construction of a boundary wall for the proposed steel plant of Tata Steel, the giant company based in India. See Profulla Das, "Resistance and Tragedy" in *Frontline* at <http://www.flonnet.com/fl2301/stories/20060127002404100.htm> downloaded on 20.1.2007.

<sup>15</sup> The Chipko movement was sparked off by the government's decision to allot a plot of land of forest area in the Alaknanda valley to a sports goods company. The tribal women of the area went into the forest and formed a circle around the trees preventing industrialists from cutting them down. See Sundarlal Bahuguna, "Chipko Movement" in [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/chipko\\_movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/chipko_movement) downloaded on 4/6/2007. "Narbada Bachao Andolan (Save Narmada Movement) is a movement that mobilised tribal people, adivasis farmers, environmentalists and human rights activists against the Sardar Sarovar Dam being built across the Narmada river, Gujarat, India. Large number of poor and underprivileged communities (mostly tribals and dalits) are being dispossessed of their lands, livelihood and even their ways of living to make ways for dams being on the basis of incredibly dubious claims of common benefit and "national interests". See <http://www.narmada.org/introduction.html> downloaded on 4/6/2007.

forcefully evacuated from their village lands. In fact, military power has been the main instrument of the Indian government to counter the resistance movements in Northeast India. As part of their military campaign against underground movements, the Indian army burnt down a large number of tribal villages and their fields, and thousands of innocent people were displaced from their village lands with empty hands. In the case of the Mizo tribe, the resistance movement was triggered by desperation and anger against the deaf ear of the Indian government, when the Mizo people were devastated by a severe famine locally known as 'Mautam'.<sup>16</sup> The government's response to the outcry of these desperate people - who were deeply troubled by famine and who struggled for life with empty stomachs - was to send a military force that ultimately uprooted many of them from their ancestral lands. Another force of tribal displacement in Northeast India is population pressure. As noted in chapter two, by the beginning of the twentieth century a constant influx of outsiders from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) and other parts of India into Tripura and Assam had greatly displaced the tribal people from their lands. For example, the indigenous people, who formed the majority and ruled Tripura with their own *Rajas* before Indian independence in 1947, are today reduced to a small minority in their own land.<sup>17</sup> A large proportion of their fertile arable land is now controlled and owned by the infiltrators, whereas the majority of the original inhabitants have been pushed out to the less fertile hilly areas. Population pressure continues to be a constant threat for many other tribes in

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Smitu Kothari mentions, "Since independence (1947), development projects under India's Five Years plans have displaced 500,000 each year evicted from their lands by direct administrative actions of government." See more discussion in her "Development Displacement: Whose nation is it?" at <http://www.pcdf.org/1995/77kothari.htm> downloaded on 4/6/2007.

<sup>16</sup> "A Mizo term *Mautam* is the name given to the cyclic ecological phenomenon that occurs every 48 years, in the Northeast Indian state of Mizoram, which is thirty percent covered by wild bamboo forests. During this period, *Melocanna baccitera*, a species of bamboo in the state flowers, which is invariably followed by a subsequent plague of *bandicoot* rats, whose actions cause devastating famine. The negligence of the Indian government to help the victims of famine in 1958-1959 led to the foundation of the Mizo National Famine Front, set up to provide relief to the far-flung areas, the front later became the Mizo National Front, which fought for Mizoram independence for twenty years from 1966 to 1986." See "Mautam" at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mautam> downloaded on 7/6/2007. In response to this resistance movement, the Indian government used military force, and even jet fighters, to attack its own civilian population who were desperately in need of help and support. Many Mizo villages had been burnt down and innocent people were raped, killed, and displaced with empty stomachs. See "Armed Forces Special Powers Act: A Study in National Security Tyranny" *South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre* at [http://www.hrdc.net/sahrdc/resources/armed\\_forces.htm](http://www.hrdc.net/sahrdc/resources/armed_forces.htm) downloaded on 7/6/2007. This kind of military violation of basic human rights is still happening in Northeast India. See Syed Zahir Hussain, "Women Rage Against 'Rape' in Northeast India" *OneWorld.net*, July 19, 2004 at <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines04/0719-03.htm> downloaded on 7/6/2007.

<sup>17</sup> See Chapter two section 2.4.1.

Northeast India and it is largely one of the contributing factors behind the current underground movements of the Khasis in Meghalaya, and different ethnic minorities in Assam, Tripura and Manipur.<sup>18</sup>

As indicated above, another powerful force of displacement encountered by the tribal and other underprivileged people in the present Indian context is the increasing development of industrial projects. Industrial development accelerated by the process of economic globalisation can be considered the most powerful force of displacement that tribal people have ever encountered.<sup>19</sup> The worst affected are the tribal and Dalit population in mainland India, though the hill tribes in Northeast India have also begun to experience a foretaste of it.<sup>20</sup> This force is usually a combination of the economic power of the rich industrial companies and multinational corporations, the political and administrative power of the government and the judicial power of the legal administration. In other words, money-driven, affluent companies supported and sanctioned by the administrative authorities and the government's policy - legitimated and justified by the judicial administration - are the force that compels tribal people to leave their ancestral lands. Most tribal people are powerless. The government of India itself can thus be seen - from the tribal perspective, at least - as part of the force against them. Instead of protecting the most vulnerable people who need special protection and care, the economic policy of the government of India is unfortunately directed and dictated by the rich and powerful to serve their economic interests. In this situation, the voiceless people are simply brushed aside from their ancestral lands to make way for the accumulation of the wealthy's surpluses. One thing is very clear from the experiences of the tribal people in India: that it is not their choice to abandon their

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<sup>18</sup> "The Indigenous people of the North east of India: An ethnic genocide" at <<http://www.cwis.org/fwdp/Eurasia/tribals.txt>> downloaded on 20.1.2007. N. Bora, "Insurgency in the North East: Causes of Its Rise and the Nature of the Uprising" in *Political Development of the North-East* Vol. II.

<sup>19</sup> "Estimates from the Indian Planning Commission reveal that 21.3 million people were displaced by development projects between 1951-1990. Researchers suggest the actual figure could be over 40 million. Only 2.1 million are reported to have been rehabilitated." See Surajit Talukdar, "Proposed Dam in Northeast India to destroy lives, lands" at <http://southasia.oneworld.net/article/view/89074/1/> downloaded on 25/5/2007.

<sup>20</sup> The tribals account for 40 to 50 % of the displaced, although they are only 8 % of the population. See Leena Pendarkar, "Dam being built on Backs of poor" in *News Center* (January 17, 2002) at <http://commondreams.org/headlines02/0117-01.htm> downloaded on 15.3.2007.

lands but they are compelled to do so. The forces that push them out of their lands are powers beyond their control.

### 6.2.2. *The Contexts of Eighth-Century Israel and Judah*

Scholars usually speculate that the eighth-century land issue in Israel and Judah was directly connected with economic exploitation in terms of the imposition of debt servitude and usury.<sup>21</sup> Most of the reconstructions of the socio-economic background of the dispossessed peasants during this period promote the impression that they were partly responsible for their own miserable condition, although it is presumably not the intention of the scholars to give this kind of impression. For example, Lang's thesis is based on the assumption that the poor peasants, who were often disturbed by the climatically conditioned crop failures, had to seek financial loans from the urban creditors. According to him, under the particular system known as 'rent capitalism' the peasant classes are dependent on urban moneylenders and merchants and through exploitation, the ownership of land and labour are separated. The poor peasants are devastated by the 'high interest loans'<sup>22</sup> of their creditors and are so overburdened with debts they have to sell their cattle, land, and ultimately themselves into bondage to work off their liabilities. The bondsmen become serfs liable to tax or they are even sold and thus become permanent slaves.<sup>23</sup> For him, the prophet reproaches his contemporaries for "selling the innocent because of silver [i.e., debts of money] and the poor because of a pair of sandals [a debt agreement as found in Ruth 4:7]."<sup>24</sup>

This kind of reconstruction may reveal certain elements of truth about the socio-economic background of these prophetic protests. However, it is highly questionable whether the majority of the displaced people in Israel and Judah at that time were in extreme economic poverty. As demonstrated above, they were often

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<sup>21</sup>B. Lang, "The Social Organization of Peasant poverty in Biblical Israel" in *Anthropological Approaches to the Old Testament*, (Philadelphia/London: Fortress Press/SPCK, 1985) pp. 83ff., Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 51; Premnath, "Comparative and Historical Sociology" pp. 39-54, also his "Latifundialization" pp. 301-313; Mays, *Micah: A Commentary*, p.64. Hillers, *Micah*, p. 33.

<sup>22</sup> Lang mentions that according to documents from the fifth century BCE, the Jews of Elephantine in Egypt were expected to pay 5% per month, unpaid interest being added to the capital, which equals at least an annual interest rate of 60%. See his "The Social Organization" p. 86. However, nowhere in the Old Testament is there any mention of the rate of interest which was charged in Israel. See Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics*, p. 68.

<sup>23</sup> Lang, "The Social Organization" pp. 93-94.

<sup>24</sup> Lang, "The Social Organization" p. 93.

presented as the victims of bad years, misfortune, debts, and other calamities, people who had no alternative but to borrow money or grain from rich landlords, though they were unable to repay their debts. Though the urban moneylenders and rich merchants were usually depicted as the ones who unfairly exploited the plight of the rural peasants, blame could also be put on the poor farmers if they failed to fulfil their obligation as debtors. If the poor farmers knowingly borrowed ‘high interest loans’ from the creditors and were unable to repay their debts, there would be nothing wrong in the creditors confiscating the lands and any other valuable assets of the debtors. The defaulting debtor can rather be seen as a criminal who deserves some kind of punishment. However, there is no evidence to suggest that the victims of land grabbing in the eighth century BCE were such poor debtors who committed crime against their creditors. It is quite possible that a large majority of them may have depended on a traditional subsistence economy that provided them with nothing more than basic economic necessities. This does not mean, however, that they were all badly in need of loans from the urban rich people. Gottwald describes the traditional Israelite social unit called *משפחה* as the “protective association of extended family,” in which members of the community helped and protected each other in times of financial bankruptcy and other difficult circumstances.<sup>25</sup> A family within *משפחה* did not exist in isolation, but survived in mutual interdependence with other residential units within its locality.<sup>26</sup> In this kind of community, it is very unlikely that people were heavily dependent upon the urban moneylenders who intended to exploit them through “high interest loans”. It should not be assumed that the dispossessed people were all extremely poor and foolishly indebted. Some of them may have had economic surpluses and been financially stable, though generally classified as lower class socially and politically. Wolff strongly argues that “Micah never speaks of those who have been harmfully treated as ‘poor’ and ‘needy’. He has in mind the ‘*man*’ capable of military service (גִּבּוֹר), the ‘*citizen*’ who possesses full legal rights and obligations (אִישׁ), whose rights and freedoms have been violated.”<sup>27</sup> The story of Naboth in 1 Kings 21 indicates that people who had been deprived of their lands need not necessarily be

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<sup>25</sup> Gottwald, *Tribes*, pp. 301ff. *משפחה* and other social units in the traditional Israelite social structure is discussed in detail below under the sub-heading “values and ethos concerning identity”.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Keefe, *Women’s Body and the Social Body in Hosea*, p. 115.

<sup>27</sup> Wolff, *Micah: A Commentary*, p. 78.

economically poor: Naboth was not, in fact, a poor man. Rather, he was obviously a landholder who was economically self-sufficient and content with his economic condition.<sup>28</sup> He did not seek any financial help from Ahab. Rather he was approached by the royal family as his vineyard was coveted by the king. His vineyard was located in the Jezreel valley which was one of the most fertile lands in Palestine,<sup>29</sup> and this is probably the reason why king Ahab wanted to exchange Naboth's land with his own. In the whole process of the confiscation of his land by the royal family, nothing is mentioned about his economic poverty. This story strongly suggests that land loss was not necessarily due to the economic poverty of the victims, though of course poverty could be one of the significant contributing factors in certain cases. There must be other major factors behind the large-scale dispossession of those days.

Another related question is whether usury was a common practice during this period, since loans at interest to fellow Israelites were forbidden by Israelite law (Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:36-37; Deut. 23:19-20). There are some indications in the Old Testament that the custom of usury was practised in certain circles (Ps. 15:5; Prov. 28:8; Ezek.18:8), yet it is very unlikely that usury was a major factor responsible for the large-scale dispossession of the poor in Israelite and Judahite society. Scholars who advocate the idea that usury was the main force of impoverishment during this period normally base their arguments on extra-biblical sources which are not directly related to Israelite society.<sup>30</sup> Davies points out that the eighth-century prophets never seem to refer to exorbitant interest rates as one of the underlying causes of the grievances suffered by the weaker members of the community.<sup>31</sup> He, therefore, argues that the creditors applied methods other than charging interest, which, nonetheless, would have provided them with an incentive

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<sup>28</sup> Peter Welten, "Naboths Weinberg (1. Könige 21)" *Evangelische Theologie* 33 (1973) pp. 22-23.

<sup>29</sup> Jezreel means 'God sows', which is a good name for rich farmlands, and Keefe describes it as "the most abundant breadbasket of Israel." She has discussed how Jezreel could also have served as a vehicle of protest in the prophet Hosea's time against similar policies of monarchical land grabbing during the reign of Ahab. See her *Women's Body and the Social Body in Hosea*, pp. 200-204.

<sup>30</sup> For example, Silver, *Prophets and Markets*, pp. 65ff. He points out that "the existence of such loans in the ancient Near East (for example, Babylon, Eshnunna, Anatolia, Assyria) can be traced back to the Old Babylonian period (ca. 2000-1600 BCE) and even earlier." See also Lang, "The Social Organization" p. 86.

<sup>31</sup> Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics*, p. 68. He also comments that "nowhere in the Old Testament is there any reference either to the rate of interest which was charged in Israel or to the period over which interest was to be paid."



to lend money to the poor without resorting to the prohibited practice of usury. This method involved taking some kind of security deposit in the form of a pledge from the borrower. According to Davies, “the pledge may have served not merely as a guarantee of repayment, but also as a mode of satisfaction for the creditor who was able to utilise the pledge in order to recover his capital outlay.”<sup>32</sup> In this way, the wealthy lenders acquired the lands of poor farmers who were usually not in a position to redeem their patrimony as they were in extreme economic poverty. Premnath also observes that “foreclosure through debt instruments became an effective way of land accumulation by the rich landowners.”<sup>33</sup>

Within the debt slavery theory, creditors appear to have played a major role in the process of the dispossession of the lands of the smallholders. However, it is questionable whether the creditors were the main culprits to be blamed for the large-scale dispossession of the rural peasant community. It may be that a few poor farmers were ruined by urban moneylenders since the existence of a profit-oriented credit-system cannot be ruled out (cf. Neh. 5:1-8). From the words of the prophets, we can see a clear criticism of those who deprived their neighbours of their lands, but not explicitly directed against the creditors in connection with the land issue.<sup>34</sup> Even if they were partly responsible for the impoverishment of the rural farmers, they may not have played a major role. Despite their unhealthy motivation, the contribution of the creditors should rather be appreciated at least to some extent since they risked their capital for people in need. This could be the reason why Elisha did not raise his voice to defend the widow whose two children had been seized by the creditor as a result of her unpaid debts. Instead of criticising the creditor, the prophet provided a means for the widow to redeem her children from his hands (2 Kgs. 4:1-7).

The force that pushed a number of smallholders out from their lands appears to be more powerful and devastating than the creditors. The strong words and expressions

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<sup>32</sup> Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics*, p. 68.

<sup>33</sup> Premnath, “Comparative and Historical Sociology” p. 32.

<sup>34</sup> There are some scholars who translate Isa. 3:12a as “My people: moneylenders extort them, and creditors rule them,” instead of the MT reading “My people – children are their oppressors and women rule over them.” This translation is made possible by hugely emending the Hebrew nouns נַגְשִׁי (children) and נְשִׂיָּם (women). See Premnath, “Comparative and Historical Sociology”, pp. 28-30.

of the prophets against the culprits indicate that all was not well during this period. The question is: Why have the prophets been provoked into anger to such an extent by those who acquired lands from their neighbours? We can see clearly from Isaiah 5:8 and Micah 3:1-2 that the prophets were not at all happy with the actions of those who accumulated lands. Both Isaiah and Micah begin their oracles with *הרי* expressing a deep sense of anger, shame, lamentation, and disgust.<sup>35</sup> Mays notes that “in prophetic use it (*הרי*) confronted the audience with the charge that their feet were already in the path that leads to the grave.”<sup>36</sup> Janzen also mentions, “the mood is frequently one of scorn and bitterness even to the point where *hoy*-word takes on all the characteristics of a curse.”<sup>37</sup> This suggests that something very offensive and irritating must have been going on behind the scenes of the acquisition of smallholders’ lands; there must be something fundamentally unacceptable for the prophets behind the process of the accumulation of lands in the hands of certain rich people. The words of Micah suggest that the action of those who seized lands from their neighbours was not simply accidental, but pre-meditated and deliberate: “Woe to those who devise wickedness and evil deeds on their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in their power” (v. 1). Hillers comments: “They lie awake and scheme, and eagerly carry out their plots when morning breaks. They do this because they can; they are conscious of their power and use it.”<sup>38</sup> Though the identity of the people being condemned is far from clear, yet they can be generally identified as having some power in society, as is implied by Micah’s words - “because it is in their power”. Scholars usually identify them as the powerful rich nobles of Jerusalem.<sup>39</sup> However, there is no explicit reference to Jerusalem’s upper class in particular, though it is very likely that they are at least part of the audience addressed here. Shaw argues that “one can only conclude that those whom Micah condemns are a powerful, clearly defined group within Israelite society.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> See footnote no. 96 in chapter 5 for discussion on the meaning of this term.

<sup>36</sup> Mays, *Micah: A commentary*, p. 62.

<sup>37</sup> Walder Janzen, *Mourning Cry and Woe Oracle* (BZAW 125; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972) p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Hillers, *Micah*, p. 33.

<sup>39</sup> For example, Mays, *Micah: A Commentary*, p. 62.

<sup>40</sup> Shaw, *The Speeches of Micah*, p. 79.

The dispossession and impoverishment of the common populace in eighth-century Israel and Judah were undoubtedly connected with the deliberate abuse of power by a certain group of people. But what kind of power was misused and in what way was it responsible for stripping off the lands of the peasant population? In the monarchic form of government, we may immediately point our finger to the political power of the state. There can be little doubt that the power of the monarch was involved at least in some ways in the process of land accumulation. We have sufficient evidence to suggest that the kings of Israel and Judah possessed large estates (cf. 2 Sam. 12:8; 1 Chron. 27:25-31; 2 Chron. 26:9-10). There seem to be several ways a king acquires property. One obvious possibility is that a new king takes over the former king's property.<sup>41</sup> This is a natural process of accumulation that may not have any direct negative impact on the peasant population. Sometimes, certain kings were involved in buying lands. David purchased the threshing floor of Araunah and Omri bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer (2 Sam. 24:24; 1 Kgs. 16:24). Ahab also offered money or land to get Naboth's vineyard (1 Kgs. 21:2). However, selling and buying land is rarely seen within the Israelite community. Wright observes that the Old Testament provides not a single case of an Israelite voluntarily selling land outside his family group, though there is abundant evidence of such transactions from surrounding societies.<sup>42</sup> Another possibility is that an abandoned property automatically goes to the king. The case of the Shunamite woman in 2 Kings 8:1-6 implies that a king has the right to acquire abandoned land. After spending seven years away from home in the land of the Philistines, a Shunamite woman came back to the land of Israel and asked for her deserted property back from the king. This indicates that her land was already in the hands of the king in her absence. The king seemed to have the legal right to retain this kind of property though he had shown sympathetic concern in the case of the Shunamite woman as he restored the property to her. Another way the king acquires lands from the hands of ordinary people is that "the property of criminals reverted to the crown upon conviction of certain crimes."<sup>43</sup> After Naboth was convicted, his property went straight to the king.

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics*, p. 78.

<sup>42</sup> Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, p. 56.

<sup>43</sup> Dearman, *Property Rights*, p. 113.

Dearman argues that “the arbitrary confiscation of land by the king himself is neither attested nor likely, much less for his servants who were dependent upon his authority for their positions.”<sup>44</sup> However, this view can be challenged: the king or his officials acting on his behalf could misuse his rights and privileges to arbitrarily confiscate the lands of innocent people. The different ways through which the king accumulated lands pointed out above appear to be within his legal rights and privileges. When the king and his wealthy associates were heavily engaged in various commercial activities that increasingly demanded land for agricultural intensification,<sup>45</sup> the rights and privileges of the king could undoubtedly be misused to grab the lands of innocent people in various ways. For example, the king’s right to confiscate the land of convicted criminals could be abused easily to rob and ruin the innocent as was the case in Naboth’s incident in 1 Kings 21. After Naboth refused to sell his patrimonial inheritance to king Ahab, the next step that quickly emerged in the mind of queen Jezebel was to take legal action against Naboth. By manipulating royal power, she arranged everything fraudulently to charge Naboth with the offence of blasphemy that would certainly result in capital punishment so that his vineyard would automatically go to the king.<sup>46</sup> Habel argues that Jezebel “is not necessarily endorsing a distinct Canaanite concept of monarchy, as many interpreters would contend. She is reminding Ahab that he ‘rules’ the land and, according to the principles of royal Israelite ideology, can appropriate land.”<sup>47</sup> The whole process of legal action against Naboth appeared to be normal for those who did not see the internal conflict, and the confiscation of his property was within the rights of the king. But in reality, the whole legal action was a corrupt conspiracy that utilised false witnesses and violence to destroy an innocent man. If the royal exercise of power was motivated by conspiracy and greed, it could be quite detrimental for the ordinary and lower class people who had no voice and power to defend themselves. Wright believes that Naboth’s fate became typical of what

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<sup>44</sup> Dearman, *Property Rights*, p. 114.

<sup>45</sup> See the discussion on this issue in the preceding chapter, section 5.3.2.

<sup>46</sup> Welten, “Naboths Weinberg” pp. 23-24. He mentions, “Dieses „in Besitz nehmen“ stellt selbst einen Rechtsakt dar, der darin besteht, daß der neue Besitzer -sicherlich vor Zeugen -den neuen Besitz abschreitet. Vorausgesetzt ist in unserem Beispiel, daß der Landbesitz hingerichteter Bürger an die Krone fällt.”

<sup>47</sup> Habel, *The Land is Mine*, p. 30. Habel’s view is strongly supported by the rights and privileges of the Israelite king described in 1 Sam 8:11-18.

happened to large numbers of the ordinary populace in the following century.<sup>48</sup> It is quite reasonable to assume that this was not an isolated incident in ancient Israel and Judah: it could be the tip of the iceberg. As the anti-monarchic tradition in 1 Samuel 8:14 clearly shows this kind of action was the right and privilege of the king. Habel contends that this incident simply reflects the royal ideology of Israel, which gives the monarch the right to appropriate land.<sup>49</sup>

The king's right to acquire the abandoned land could also be misused in a situation where the monarch exercised absolute power and authority over his subjects. There is sufficient evidence to indicate that the political and economic history of the people of the Old Testament was coloured by war, drought and famine, which often caused chaos in society. The worst affected by these calamities were usually the grassroots and poor farmers who depended upon a traditional subsistence economy. In the context of war and famine, it is natural that many people were compelled by difficult circumstances to abandon their lands to look for food and refuge in other places. If the king was not morally prevented from exploiting the miserable condition of such people, he may have been within his own right to acquire the abandoned properties of the refugees of war and famine. In fact, we cannot rule out the possibility of this kind of exploitation in ancient Israel and Judah, because the Shunamite woman and her family, whose house and land had been seized by the king, were also in fact economic refugees who had left their land due to famine (cf. 1 Kgs. 8:1). Moreover, the kings themselves could be the driving force that pushed people out of their lands and took advantage of the situation, imposing forced labour that engaged people for long-term building projects and other royal projects like farming and commercial activities (2 Sam. 20:23 1 Kgs. 5:13-18; 9:15ff.; 15:22; 1 Chron. 22:1ff.; 2 Chron. 8:1-6; 26:10 etc.).<sup>50</sup> This kind of long-term engagement for the service of the state might have required people to give up their lands. It is quite possible that there were unscrupulous kings who did not care that they were exploiting the vulnerable situation of people who faithfully gave their

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<sup>48</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, p. 90.

<sup>49</sup> Habel, *The Land is Mine*, p. 30.

<sup>50</sup> I. Mendelsohn, "On Corvée Labour in Ancient Canaan and Israel" 167 *BASOR* (1962) pp. 31-35; also his "Slavery in the OT" *IDB*, vol. iv, pp. 383-391. Muhammad A. Dandamayev, "Slavery (Old Testament)" *ABD* (CD-ROM).

services for the state (cf. 2 Sam. 11:1ff). The misuse of royal power in these ways could be the major cause of such large-scale dispossession.

Although there can be no doubt that the power of the monarch was the major force behind the dispossession of the ordinary populace, scholars, however, have drawn attention to the fact that the eighth-century prophets seldom addressed their indictments directly to the king.<sup>51</sup> Most of their oracles were directed against the affluent people and the officials of the state who had close connections with the crown. In fact, it has been recognised for a long time that the state officials, military leaders and other servants of the king directly benefited from the royal accumulation of land through the redistribution system known as land granting.<sup>52</sup> The land grant system was prevalent not only under the Israelite monarchy, but in other parts of ancient West Asia as well.<sup>53</sup> Under this system, some portions of the crown-estates were granted to royal servants or certain officials in order that those recipients would render loyal service to the monarch and give back a certain amount of the yield of their lands to the royal family in return. Since the recipients of land grants directly benefited from the royal accumulation of wealth, they could in turn become the driving force of the continuing process of latifundialisation and they must be the ones who were really responsible for the removal of the lands of the poor people. As argued in chapter four, the officials in the Israelite and Judahite monarchy were royally appointed and were close allies of the royal family. Thus, these royally appointed officials and big landlords, the recipients of the royal land grant, must have been the instruments of the crown to carry out the royal policy and interests. They were at the forefront, acting on behalf of the monarch in dealing with the ordinary people. There can be little doubt that these people were fully supported by the establishment and put various pressures on the smallholders so that they would ultimately surrender their lands to the crown.

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics*, p. 80.

<sup>52</sup> Detailed discussion on the issue of land grant can be found in Dearman's *Property Rights*, pp. 113ff. For him, "the clearest example or reference to the practice of land grants is found in the discussions of Saul to the Benjaminites in 1 Sam. 22:7: "Will the son of Jesse give each of you fields and vineyards, will he appoint you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds?" See also Mendelsohn, "On Corvée Labour" p. 34.

<sup>53</sup> A. F. Raney, "The System of Land Grants at Ugarit in its Wider Near East Setting" in *Fourth World Congress of Studies* (Jerusalem: World Congress of Jewish Studies, 1967) pp. 187-191.

The practice of land granting must have been largely responsible for the emergence of the upper class in the monarchic period, who were greatly responsible for the oppression and exploitation of the smallholders. From the oracles of the prophets, it is conceivable that in eighth-century Israel and Judah there was a kind of aristocratic association where power was concentrated in the hands of a few. This powerful association consisted of the king, princes, military leaders and royal officials (Amos 6:1-3; Hos. 5:1; Isa. 1:10,23; 3:12-14; Mic. 3:1), judges and lawmakers (Amos 5:7,10,12; Isa. 10:1-3; Mic. 3:1), rich merchants, big landlords, moneylenders (Amos 8:4-6; Hos. 12:7; Isa. 5:8; Mic. 2:1-2), priests and religious leaders (Amos 7:10; Hos. 4:4-6; Mic.3: 9,11). These powerful upper classes not only controlled political and economic power, but judicial and religious power as well. Thus, they had everything under their control to squeeze ordinary people, who had very little power to defend themselves, out of their lands.

Alienation from the land and increasing economic growth are two opposite aspects of the socio-economic reality of Israel and Judah in the eighth century BCE. Scholars generally maintain that this was a period of tremendous political power and economic growth.<sup>54</sup> As argued in the preceding chapter, the rulers and the affluent people of Israel and Judah were deeply influenced by the ideological values of the profit-oriented economy which was elsewhere prevalent in those days. Scholars who employ modern sociological insights to examine the socio-economic conditions of this period have widely accepted that the wealthy landlords including the monarch were heavily engaged in agricultural intensification for commercial purposes.<sup>55</sup> Premnath believes that fundamental to understanding this kind of intensification of agriculture in ancient societies is the shift from a subsistence economy to a market economy.<sup>56</sup> Unlike the traditional subsistence economy where people produced for their own household consumption, agricultural production in the market economy was for unknown consumers and the driving force of this kind of economy was to gain maximum economic profit and advantage. The wealthy people invested their capital more and more for the production of cash crops like grapes and olives. As a result of this development, there was obviously an

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<sup>54</sup> Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets*, p. 43.

<sup>55</sup> Keefe, *Woman's Body*, pp. 27-29, 190-195; Chaney, "Whose Sour Grapes?" pp. 105-122. Silver, *Prophets and Markets*, pp. 15-19; Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets*, pp. 25-98.

<sup>56</sup> Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets*, p. 56.

increasing demand for land among the dominant elite for the cultivation of cash crops. In order to succeed in market-oriented farming, two basic requirements had to be met in the ancient economic system where there was no mechanised farming. The first was the possession of a vast area of fertile land which would provide grounds for the large scale production of cash crops, and the second was cheap and abundant labour, in order to maximise the profitability of the production. These two huge demands could have been obtained at one and the same time by squeezing out the smallholders from their lands. In fact, it would be very difficult to get a sufficient labour force for the large-scale agricultural industry in the context where most of the households were engaged all through the year in their own subsistence farming. However, if the smallholders were evicted from their lands, there must have been a huge chance to tap out manpower as well as agricultural lands for the agribusiness of the rich. There was no alternative for the landless people in the ancient economic system except working for the landlords as slaves or tenant farmers or landless labourers, and the dispossessed people must have been compelled by their condition to work as tenants or landless agricultural labourers. Alfaro points out that in such a society, landless persons at times could do no better than to sell themselves and their families as slaves in order to survive.<sup>57</sup> Thus, the alienation of the farmers' lands served two vital purposes for the agribusiness of the rich people as it provided them with a cheap labour market and lands for the increasing intensification of agriculture.

It is apparent that the affluent had enough incentives to go for the arbitrary acquisition of the lands of the smallholders, and it is quite reasonable to assume that they must have tried everything in their power to push the rural farmers out from their lands. There must be several ways the voiceless people were pressurised to give up their lands by those who controlled power. One serious concern Isaiah raises is the distortion of judicial power in favour of the dominant elite and the wealthy citizens. The prophet expresses his strong opposition against those people responsible for the distortion of judicial decrees in 10:1-2:

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<sup>57</sup> Juan I. Alfaro, *Micah: Justice and Loyalty* (ITC; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989) p. 22.



Woe to those who decree unjust decrees,  
 and the writers who keep writing oppression  
 that they may turn aside the needy from justice  
 and rob the poor of my people of their **משפט**,  
 making widows their spoil and plundering the orphans.

What is obvious from this passage is that judicial power in the time of Isaiah was on the side of the upper classes and intentionally used against those who badly needed legal protection. Fohrer argues that political and legal activities were monopolised by the big landowners as they enjoyed full free citizenship.<sup>58</sup> Most of the commentators see the connection between the process of latifundialisation and the decrees issued by these judicial officials.<sup>59</sup> Davies observes that the root word **חָק** (statute), from which derived Isaiah's phrase **חֲקֵי־אֹן** referring to the statutes or decrees in v. 1, was taken originally from the procedure involving disputes concerning property, where the judge was asked to fix the boundary between neighbours.<sup>60</sup> It is conceivable that the administrators of law played an integral part in the accumulation of lands at the expense of the voiceless ordinary people. In this situation, there could be no fair trial for the powerless. Here, the accusation is not simply about the unjust legal decisions of the judges, but the fact that the legal statutes or decrees on the basis of which the judges made their decision were written by the lawmakers in favour of the powerful so that they could continue to exploit the powerless. As Wildberger notes, "whoever has complete power can at any particular time proclaim such regulations at will."<sup>61</sup> There can be little doubt that those who wrote the legal statutes were fully endorsed by the monarch. Dearman mentions that the references to evil statutes and oppressive writings in Isaiah 10:1 points to harsh conditions imposed on segments of the population which would require at least the tolerance and probably the support of the state for authority.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Fohrer, *Jesaja 1-23*, pp. 79-80. He mentions, "Die Großgrundbesitzer werden die einzigen Vollbürger im Lande und dürfen allein alle politischen und rechtlichen Tätigkeiten ausüben. Denn im alten israelitischen Staat ist nur derjenige ein freier Vollbürger, der einen Anteil am gemeinsamen Grund und Boden besitzt." See also Kilian, *Jesaja*, p. 42.

<sup>59</sup> H. Wildberger puts Isaiah 10:1-4 as a continuation of Isaiah 5:8-24 in his *Isaiah 1-12*, pp. 188-190, 213. Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics*, p. 82; Dearman, *Property Rights*, pp. 42-44, 78-104.

<sup>60</sup> Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics*, p. 82.

<sup>61</sup> Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 213.

<sup>62</sup> Dearman, *Property Rights*, p. 80.

The Hebrew expression *מכתבים עמל כתבו* (the writers who keep writing oppression) in v. 1b obviously refers to the legitimisation of the system of oppression and exploitation. In other words, the corrupt practice of the upper classes that stripped the underprivileged of their property was legitimised or given legal foundation. Thus, the judicial power of the judges was enhanced to justify the unfair activities of the powerful, whereas the just claims of the needy were turned down and the powerless people including the poor, widows and orphans were plundered and devastated (v. 2). There is substantial evidence to suggest that the misuse of judicial, economic and political power was often associated with violence. For example, Micah's accusation of the leaders and judges in Micah 3:1-3 clearly indicates that violence was an integral part of oppression and injustice in those days:

And I said: Listen, you heads of Jacob and judges of the house of Israel!  
Should you not know Justice?  
You who hate the good and love evil,  
who tear the skin of my people, and the flesh off their bones;  
who eat the flesh of my people, flay their skin off them,  
break their bones in pieces, and chop them up like meat in a kettle,  
like flesh in a caldron.

Most scholars agree that the “heads” and “judges” (Mic. 3:1,9, and 11) in this passage are the men responsible for administering justice in the community.<sup>63</sup> They are accused of hating good (*טוב*) and loving evil (*רע*) (cf. Amos 5:16; Isa. 1:16, 17, 23). According to Hillers, “The association of Hebrew ‘hate’ and ‘love’ in legal contexts, provide the progression of the term ‘rob’.”<sup>64</sup> The description of the leaders and judges as the figures of cannibalism may not be taken literally. Schibler takes it as “economic cannibalism,” expressing the moral harshness and greed of the judges.<sup>65</sup> This language undeniably conveys the feeling of the prophet that the greed

<sup>63</sup> For example Hillers, *Micah*, p. 42.

<sup>64</sup> Hillers, *Micah*, p. 43.

<sup>65</sup> Daniel Schibler, *Der Prophet Micha* (Wuppertal und Zürich: R. Brockhaus Verlag, 1991) p. 62. He comments: “Heutzutage würde man von Blutsaugern oder von Ausbeutern reden, die, wie man es nennen könnte, einen den Umständen entsprechenden wirtschaftlichen »Kannibalismus« betreibend Ein

and cruelty of the judges were great, and that violence was part and parcel of their unjust judgments, which served to rob the voiceless people. They can be regarded as the bloodsuckers. Shaw argues that the taking of land, which Micah condemns, is achieved mostly through acts of violence and harassment.<sup>66</sup> For him, the occurrence of גזל (to rob by violence)<sup>67</sup> in Mic.2:2 indicates that land is seized through military force rather than economic exploitation or abuse of the debt laws of the country.<sup>68</sup> Wolff also suggests that the people who coveted and seized the land of the village farmers were military officials and other senior officials stationed in the garrison cities.<sup>69</sup> However, economic exploitation cannot be completely ruled out though violence and force must have been heavily used to drive out the defenceless farmers from their lands. There is no doubt that violence was an integral part of the accumulation of wealth and it was very common in eighth-century Israel and Judah. Micah accuses the rulers and princes of “building Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong” (3:10). Isaiah also criticises presumably the same group of people by saying, “your hands are full of blood” (1:15c), “what do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?” (3:15), “he (Yahweh) expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness but heard a cry!” (5:7b). Even in the Northern kingdom, it was no different as Hosea proclaims: “Swearing, lying and murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed” (4:2), “Gilead is a city of evildoers, tracked with blood... they murder on the road of Shechem, they commit a monstrous crime” (6:8,9), “Ephraim herds the wind, and pursues the east wind all day long; they multiply falsehood and violence” (12:1). Amos also voices the same concern: “They do not know how to do right, says the Lord, those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds” (3:10), “They hate the one who reproves in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks the truth. Therefore

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Ausdruck moralischer Rauheit und Habsucht kennzeichnet jedes dieser Bilder, die die Amtsträger als Liebhaber des Bösen darstellen (v. 2a).”

<sup>66</sup> Shaw, *The Speeches of Micah*, p. 82.

<sup>67</sup> גזל means to pluck off, to rob or take away by force or violence. See *Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries* (CD-ROM).

<sup>68</sup> Shaw, *The Speeches of Micah*, p. 81. His argument is based on the fact that in Judg 9:55 and 21:23 the verb גזל clearly indicates the use of military means to achieve a particular goal. Therefore, he believes that the verb גזל in Mic. 2:2a also refers to some sort of expropriation through military force.

<sup>69</sup> Wolff, *Micah the Prophet*, p. 48. He mentions that Micah's village Moresheth was surrounded by five military garrison cities within a radius of only six miles, namely Adullam, Sochoh, Mareshah, Lachish, and Azekah (cf. 2 Chron. 11:6ff). He also points out that many senior officials and officers from Jerusalem were stationed in these cities.

because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them.” (5:10; cf. 8:4). All the prophets of this period agreed that the confiscation of lands through unjust legal action was daylight robbery, absolute falsehood accompanied by violence and cruelty. Naboth’s case strongly indicates that unjust legal administration and violence could be closely linked in the Israelite judicial system since capital punishment was easily imposed on the innocent man even on the basis of false accusation and witnesses.

Knierim contends that the unjust legal system must have a sacral foundation as the unfair judges and rulers are linked in Mic. 3:9-12 with priests and prophets.<sup>70</sup> There can be no doubt that the religious leaders and the rich landlords and rulers were close allies or partners who had shared a common economic interest, ideology and worldview.<sup>71</sup> As we have argued in chapter four, the entire structure of religious values, practices and traditions in the royal sanctuaries were fundamentally meant to support and justify the luxurious lifestyle and oppressive value-system of the wealthy dominant people. Moreover, as discussed in the preceding chapter, the agricultural intensification or agribusiness of the ruling class during this period was also largely based on colonial power and its religious ideology. It is apparent that the function of the state religion was part and parcel of the force of dispossession that robbed the powerless people who had been deprived of their ancestral lands: it provided sacral foundation for the economic activities of the affluent people.

There must be several other factors that contributed to the forceful evacuation of the rural farmers from their lands.<sup>72</sup> One certainty, however, is that they had been deprived of their ancestral lands against their own will by a force beyond their control. All the powers available in those days were moving against them, since power was at the disposal of the upper classes who abused it for their own

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<sup>70</sup> Rolf Knierim, “Exodus 18 und die Neuordnung der mosaischen Gerichtsbarkeit,” *ZAW* 73 (1961) pp. 158-159.

<sup>71</sup> Svend Holm-Nielsen comments: “Mit dem Königshaus und der Priesterschaft an der Spitze hatte sich eine finanzstarke Oberklasse von Gutsbesitzern und Handelsfürsten gebildet. Auf der anderen Seite kann man vermutlich von einer gewissen Proletarisierung der breiten Bevölkerung auf dem Lande wie auch in der Stadt reden.” See his “Die Sozialkritik der Propheten” in *Denkender Glaube: Festschrift Carl Heinz Ratschow* (ed. Otto Kaiser; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1976) p. 10.

<sup>72</sup> Premnath has discussed some other possible factors of impoverishment such as increasing tax, forced labour, colonisation, militarisation etc., in his *Eighth Century Prophets*, pp. 43ff.

advantages. The force that compelled the rural peasants to abandon their ancestral lands was a combination of the economic power of the affluent, the political power of the rulers and state officials, the religious power of the priests and prophets in the royal sanctuaries, the judicial powers of the judges and judicial administrators, and military power. This combined force often manifested itself in the form of violence and falsehood. This oppressive dispossession of the powerless farmers from their ancestral lands must have been fundamentally unacceptable to the prophets, and the oppressors' greed and cruelty must be the reason why the prophets were profoundly irritated by the growth of large estates.

### **6.3. Values and Ethos Inherent in the Prophets' Critique of Latifundialisation**

In this section, we will focus on the values and principles endorsed and defended by the prophets in the context of the alienation and displacement of the disadvantaged Israelite people in the light of the tribal situation in the Indian context. As discussed above, the alienation of the tribal land in India has been largely connected with the increasing cultural and identity crisis among the tribal people, which can be seen in various forms. In fact, tribal culture and identity cannot be separated from their lands: the traditional land-based culture of the tribes stretches back thousands of years. Unfortunately, the hunger for land in today's industrial world has deliberately ignored tribal attitudes toward their lands and they are often forcefully displaced without any consideration of their profound attachment to their lands. As they are increasingly uprooted from their ancestral lands, they are not only cut off from their economic resources, but also from their ways of life, culture, identity, and various traditions and customs. The tribal situation in India clearly reveals that the loss of land could be quite detrimental and devastating for those who have deep socio-economic, cultural, religious, and psychological attachment to their lands. If we look at the values and ethos of the eighth-century prophets - who committed themselves to be the voice of the dispossessed - from the tribal perspective, it can be maintained that certain values they endorsed are similar to the values and traditions which are being destroyed in India today.

### 6.3.1. *Values and ethos concerning identity*

As discussed in chapter two, land is the foundation of the tribal communities in Northeast India, and contributes to their religio-cultural, socio-economic and political identity: it is their only source of food, the ground of their existence as a community, and their place of worship. Since land holds family, clan and tribe together, it is the foundation of the tribal community. According to the traditional tribal concept, land is a channel that provides a connection to other members of the community and even their ancestors who give them roots and dignity. They want to preserve their link with their ancestors since they consider them as the root and foundation of their community. To protect their land means to safeguard their roots, identity, dignity, and pride.

Land and identity cannot be separated even in the minds and thoughts of the people of the Old Testament. One of the worst memories the Israelites could not forget was the miserable condition of landlessness.<sup>73</sup> At the same time, one of the fondest memories that was always fresh in the minds of the people of Yahweh was the promise and possession of land. Landlessness was associated with rootlessness, instability, insecurity, alienation, oppression, poverty, and lack of dignity and pride. On the other hand, possession of land gave them a foundation, dignity, pride, freedom, security, and self-confidence. They had experienced the big difference between life with and without land and they knew that they disliked being without it. This could be the reason why the people of the Old Testament had developed a very rich tradition and practice to distribute the land and its resources fairly within their community.

The most serious accusation Micah proclaims against those who intentionally seize the properties of their neighbours is in 2:2b – “They do violence on a man and his house, a man and his inheritance.” Shaw comments: “The deeds condemned by Micah are seizing land and driving away the inhabitants.”<sup>74</sup> Alt takes the phrase “a man and his house, a man and his inheritance” as a reference to the early Israelite

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<sup>73</sup> The biblical tradition that describes the miserable condition of the landless twelve tribes in the land of Egypt could be taken as the common experience of the early tribes who later came to be known as Israelites. We have discussed the condition of landlessness of the early tribes by taking into account both biblical and extra-biblical evidence in chapter three, section 3.1.2.

<sup>74</sup> Shaw, *The Speeches of Micah*, p. 79.

social ideal.<sup>75</sup> Early Israel was a society of herders and farmers who were closely attached to the soil as they depended solely and directly upon the products of the land. The land grabbers are charged here for doing violence against the relationship between landholder and his land and a man and his family or community.<sup>76</sup> The verb עִשָּׂק is a primitive root which means “to press,” i.e. violate, oppress, defraud, deceive or do violence.<sup>77</sup> Here, the traditional strong bond between the landholders and their lands and community, which was the foundation of their traditional socio-economic, cultural and religious identity, had been violated by the greedy economic activities of the dominant elite. From the perspective of Micah, the intolerable crime of those who deliberately seized the lands of the rural farmers seemed to be the destruction of people’s identity.

One of the most devastating impacts of being alienated from the land was undoubtedly economic in nature, because land was the foundation of the economic activities of every household. The landed people who once had economic status and social dignity had been reduced to being landless and rootless. However, its impact on the socio-cultural identity of the victims may not be less significant. For every household, holding a portion of land was clear proof of a link with the other members of their community. There are three major social units in the Israelite tribal social structure, namely the father’s house (בֵּית אָב), the clan or kin-group (מִשְׁפָּחָה), and the tribe (שִׁבְט). An individual in the Israelite community was known or defined in relation to these social units.<sup>78</sup> This suggests that there was no real identity for an individual without connecting with other members of the tribe and land was the visible link between an individual household and the larger social

<sup>75</sup> Albrecht Alt, “Der Anteil des Konigtum an der sozialen Entwicklung in den Reichen Israel und Juda” *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israels, Band III* (München: C.H. Beck’she Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1959) p. 349.

<sup>76</sup> Wolff argues, “Whereas the word “houses,” which occurs together with “fields” in v. 2a, certainly refers to buildings (cf. also v. 9a), the singular “house” in v. 2b must surely also mean family.” See his *Micah: A Commentary*, p. 78.

<sup>77</sup> *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, (CD-ROM) (ref. H6231).

<sup>78</sup> These three major social units are used to describe the identity of the guilty person responsible for Israel’s defeat at Ai. They narrow down from “tribe” שִׁבְט to “clan” מִשְׁפָּחָה to “family” בֵּית אָב and finally to the individual, Achan. These three major social units are then repeated in reverse order when his full name is given: “Achan son of Karmi [patronymic, his own father’s name], son of Zabdi [grandfather and head of his בֵּית אָב], son of Zerah [name of his מִשְׁפָּחָה], of the tribe of Judah” (Josh. 7:16–18). The same three levels of kinship are to be found in many other texts where names are used or selected, e.g., the selection of Saul (1 Sam. 10:20f.), and the self-deprecating formulas of Saul (1 Sam. 9:21) and Gideon (Judg. 6:15) See C. J. H. Wright, “Family (OT)” *ABD* (CD-ROM).

units. The primary social and territorial organisation in Israel was **שבט** bearing the names of the different twelve tribes. However, Wright points out that “an individual’s tribal identity was important, but in terms of practical social impact on ordinary life, the tribe (**שבט**) was the least significant of the circles of kinship within which one stood.”<sup>79</sup> The second and third subdivisions of the social structure, namely **משפחה** and **בית אב**, were more important and socially relevant to the issue of socio-cultural identity. The term **משפחה** is often translated as “family” in the English versions (e.g., in the RSV) and sometimes rendered as “clan” and “phratry,” referring to the subunit of the tribe. In fact, **משפחה** cannot be rendered as “family” since it could comprise quite a large number of families.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, the English terms “clan” and “phratry” also do not fully convey its real meaning. Wright mentions that in common anthropological and sociological terminology, these words (clan and phratry) usually designate exogamous kinship divisions, whereas the Israelite **משפחה** was normally endogamous, in order to preserve Israel’s system of land tenure (cf. Num 36:1-12).<sup>81</sup> It seems that there is no English equivalent for this term that can fully bring out its true meaning.

**משפחה** appears to have certain similarities with the Mizo social and territorial subunit known as *Khua*. The term *Khua* literally means “village”. But *Khua* is far wider in meaning than the English “village”. In terms of government and territorial organisation, a *Khua* has an independent unit with its own government and an area of land which covers about 15-30 sq. kms. The area of each *Khua*’s land varies in size from one another. Traditionally, all of the *Khua* land was owned by the community under the leadership of the village chief. However, every household was entitled to live, cultivate, and hunt under the stewardship of the chief. Practically, the land belonged to the community and every member of the community was responsible for the maintenance of it. However, no member had permanent, heritable or transferable rights. In terms of social organisation, *Khua* are normally comprised of some close and distant blood related families or kinship groups, but are endogamous in nature. Though the people in the community were generally

<sup>79</sup> Wright, “Family OT” (CD-ROM). He notes that “in wartime the military levy was on a tribal basis.”

<sup>80</sup> Wright, “Family OT” (CD-ROM).

<sup>81</sup> Wright, “Family OT” (CD-ROM).



related by blood, the actual unity of the members of *Khua* was largely dependent upon the land. There can be no *Khua* without land. An individual person will introduce himself/herself to strangers by using the name of his or her *Khua* rather than a personal name. This clearly shows that an individual wants to be known as part of his or her community and identifies with the village land. In fact, the tribal concept of dignity, pride and confidence is largely determined by the community and land to which he or she belongs. *Khua* is also the religious identity of the members of the community as this term also has religious connotations. The English term religion is translated as *Sakhua* in Mizo. The term *Sakhua* is a combination of two different names of the traditional Mizo deities namely *Sa*, which was the deity worshipped by a family or clan, and *Khua*, the deity worshipped by the whole village.<sup>82</sup> Kipgen points out, “If the worship of *Sa* was exclusively for the family and clan, the worship of *Khua* was a public affair for the whole village.”<sup>83</sup> In terms of religion, *Khua* refers to an inclusive deity or religious worship embracing the entire village. *Khua*, therefore, can be taken as a collective religious identity.

*Khua* and משפחה appear to have several common characteristics. משפחה is also “a group of several family units into a largely self-sufficient and self-protective organism” which Wright calls a “kin group”<sup>84</sup> whereas Habel describes it as an “ancestral family cluster”.<sup>85</sup> All the households (בית אב)<sup>86</sup> within the “kin group” (משפחה) were bound together by the land as they all had a share in the same portion

<sup>82</sup> F. Lianhmingthanga and B. Lalthangliana, *Mizo Nun Hlui (Part II)* (Aizawl: Mizoram Board of School Education, 1992) p. 150. Mangkhosat Kipgen mentions that *Sa* being worshipped while the pig (Vawkpa sut nghak) was sacrificed, and *Khua* being worshipped with the sacrifice of a mithun. See his *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, pp. 112-113; see also Zairema, “The Mizos and Their Religion” p. 35.

<sup>83</sup> Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, pp. 112-113.

<sup>84</sup> Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>85</sup> Habel, *The Land is Mine*, p. 99. As noted above, Gottwald also describes it as a “protective association of extended families”; see his *Tribes*, pp. 301-305. “The tribal and sub-tribal lists of Numbers 26 would yield a total of about 60 clans (משפחה) in Israel. But it seems certain that there were many more than that, since the numerical size of each would have been very large if limited to 60 clans (משפחה). In the narratives, some clan names occur which are not recorded in the census lists, and there were probably many more: Saul, for example, was from the Matrite clan (1 Sam 10:21), and David was from the Ephrathite clan (1 Sam. 17:12), but neither of these names are found among the clans of Benjamin or Judah in Numbers 26.” See Wright, “Family (OT)” (CD-ROM).

<sup>86</sup> “The “father’s house” was an extended family, comprising all the descendants of a single living ancestor (the head, *rō š-bēt-’āb*) in a single lineage, excluding married daughters (who entered their husbands’ *bēt-’āb* along with their families), male and female slaves and their families, resident laborers, and sometimes resident Levites.” See Wright, “Family (OT)” (CD-ROM).

of land (נחלה). Land was the centre of unity that gave them a sense of oneness and solidarity within משפחה and the spirit of mutual help and support in times of difficult circumstances.<sup>87</sup>

It is conceivable that משפחה was the first social unit beyond בית אב to which personal loyalty was attached. The confiscation of land from any constituent household of משפחה by outsiders in this kind of socio-cultural context would mean shaking the very foundation of the socio-cultural identity of every member of the community. In fact, in the Israelite conception an individual has no separate identity detached from this basic social structure. Micah's accusation "They do violence against a man and his house (בית), a man and his inheritance (נחלה)" is apparently a serious concern for the damage done to the victims of latifundialisation. Keefe mentions that the family's control of its נחלה was the basis for an ongoing relationship between the living and the dead as the land did not belong to the present generation alone, but to the dead ancestors and unborn descendants to follow.<sup>88</sup> Allen also notes that a strong sense of tribal and clan solidarity was now showing evidence of breaking down.<sup>89</sup> To be driven away from the land was to have relationships broken, and expulsion from the community was absolutely devastating for an individual or household in tribal societies. The encroachment and seizure of the rural lands in the Israelite society was not simply economic oppression, but also the destruction of the socio-cultural fabric, the violation of the ways of life, customs and traditions of a close-knit community who had a strong sense of oneness and common identity. Being alienated from land cut constituent households off from their "kin-group" (משפחה), causing community disintegration and identity crisis. Micah saw that the damage was done not simply upon the existing generation, but

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<sup>87</sup> Members of משפחה support each other in times of trouble. A kinsman-redeemer called גאל was supposed to avenge the murder of a kinsman (Numbers 35), to raise a male heir for a deceased relative (Deut. 25:5–10), and to maintain or redeem the person or dependents of a kinsman in debt (Lev. 25:35–55). Moreover, land within the משפחה had to be redeemed (Lev. 25:23–28). The duties also included providing interest-free loans (vv. 35ff.), complete maintenance within one's own work force (vv. 39ff.), and redemption from bondage if the poor brother or his dependents had sold themselves to an outsider (i.e., outside משפחה not necessarily to an ethnic foreigner, vv. 47ff.). See detailed discussion in Wright, "Family (OT)" (CD-ROM).

<sup>88</sup> Keefe, *Woman's Body*, p. 115. She further mentions that the presence of the ancestor's bones in the soil bound the בית אב to its land and legally marked the family's perpetual claim to the land. This idea is taken from Herbert Chanan Brichto, "Kin, Cult, Land and the Afterlife – A Biblical Complex" *HUCA* 64 (1973) pp. 1-54.

<sup>89</sup> Leslie C. Allen, "Micah's Social Concern" *Vox Evangelica* 8 (1973) p. 23.

even upon a future generation (3:9). The children of the dispossessed people had been deprived of their future, which would mean they were completely wiped out.<sup>90</sup>

The displacement of the smallholders affected their religious identity as well. Fohrer argues that whoever loses field and house also loses his religious freedom and independence.<sup>91</sup> The Israelite people fundamentally believed that their God, Yahweh, was the ultimate owner of the land, and that their land was a gift of God who liberated them from miserable oppression and landlessness. The portion of land each household possessed was regarded as visible evidence of its membership in the faith community and its share of the gift of God. Davies considers land as “a visible sign of the abiding relationship which existed between Yahweh and his people.”<sup>92</sup> The Israelite people believed that the land ownership pattern within the *משפחה* was designed and endorsed by Yahweh for the Israelite community. Naboth’s response to Ahab clearly reflects the religious as well as socio-cultural concepts of land in Israelite society: “Yahweh forbids that I should give you my ancestral inheritance” (1 Kings 21:3). Land is seen here not only as the ancestral inheritance that gives an individual roots and dignity, but also as his/her link with Yahweh who ultimately has ownership. Failure to keep one’s land would mean a broken relationship with Yahweh and with the faith community, which would certainly isolate a person and destroy one’s religious as well as socio-cultural identity.

### 6.3.2. *The communitarian value of sharing*

For the tribal people of Northeast India, land is fundamentally meant for sharing. Sharing dominates tribal communitarian ways of life, and nowhere is this more true than in their management of community land. Traditionally, every member household of the community had the right to live, cultivate and hunt, and everyone was entitled to benefit from and utilise the resources and products of the community

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. Alfaro, *Micah*, p. 25.

<sup>91</sup> Fohrer, *Jesaja 1-23*, p. 80. He states, “Gott ist der eigentliche Grundherr Palästinas, der Bauer aber sein Lehensmann, der dem göttlichen Eigentümer den Zehnten bezahlen muß. Verliert er seinen Besitz an den menschlichen Großgrundbesitzer, so tritt er zugleich aus seiner bisherigen Heiligtums- und Gottesdienstgemeinschaft des Gottes Israels aus und geht in die religiöse Gemeinschaft seines neuen Herrn als Unfreier über. Wer Acker und Haus verliert, büßt dadurch auch seine religiöse Freiheit und Selbständigkeit ein. So machen die Großgrundbesitzer die jüdischen Bauern religiös von sich abhängig.”

<sup>92</sup> Eryl W. Davies, “Land: its Rights and Privileges” in *The World Of Ancient Israel* (ed. R. E. Clements; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p. 349.

land, while no household had the right to sell or transfer. Most of the tribes in Northeast India held to principles of communal ownership of land, though they had divergent traditions and practices in relation to its management. For them, the land and its resources were a gift from the deity and were fundamentally meant for the sustenance of all members of the community. Land was a common resource for the subsistence living of the entire community and no one could claim absolute ownership and authority over it. Rather, they shared rivers, forest, soil, fruits, animals and any valuable resources the land offered for the nourishment of life.

Sharing is one of the fundamental values defended by the eighth-century prophets in the context of the alienation of smallholders from their land. Isaiah's main accusation against the people "who join house to house and field to field" is that they did not spare any room for their fellow brothers and sisters. Instead, they continually absorbed their neighbours' properties until they were the only people left in the land. Wildberger points out that the Hebrew word "לבד" means more than our word "alone". The Arabic *badda* means "divide" and the Hebrew בדר means "all alone, be all by oneself."<sup>93</sup> The self-centredness and greed that drove these acquirers to possess more and more resulted in a division in the community which ultimately left certain sections of the people in complete isolation from the others. It is arguable that Isaiah's condemnation is an expression of a deep concern for the ruin of the communitarian value of sharing as a result of such selfishness. The prophet cannot tolerate the egotistic values of the greedy, affluent people, who completely ignore the needs of other members of the community. Social cohesion in the time of Isaiah was broken down, as a few elites in the society controlled most of the fertile arable lands and enjoyed their fruits and benefits while the majority were left without any resources.

If we look at the traditions in the Pentateuch that reflect the socio-cultural life of the early tribes, it is clear that they lived in a society where they did not have land rights and access to fertile arable land. Their whole life as a community was profoundly affected by the condition of landlessness. As resident aliens who had been denied their land rights, they looked forward to the time when they would occupy the land

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<sup>93</sup> Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 198.

‘flowing with milk and honey,’ which they believed was promised by God to their ancestors. Fertile land was the focal point of their hope and vision as a wandering community. This implies that they were very much aware of the unhealthy land system that denied them possession of property and they must have looked forward to the time when they would be able to have an alternative system where every household would have a share in the land. Gottwald’s thesis regarding the emergence of Israelite tribes is based on the assumption that the hierarchical structure of Canaanite city-states - where the landowning kings and nobles exploited the majority of the people who worked as taxpaying tenant farmers - was challenged by the intertribal alliance aiming at creating an alternative society of independent farmers, pastoral nomads, artisans, and priestly “intellectuals” who were free from the political domination and interference of the hierarchic states.<sup>94</sup> The system of land tenure in the Canaanite city-states was one of the basic structures to be transformed in creating a new order in the society. The question concerning whether the Israelite land ownership pattern during the pre-monarchic period was originally communal or private is a debatable issue.<sup>95</sup> However, what is evident from the underlying value reflected in the territorial division of land in Joshua 13-19 is that land was fundamentally understood to be shared among the members of the community.<sup>96</sup> The repetition of the phrase “according to their clans” (למשפחתם; cf. Josh 13:15; Num 33:54 etc) in the context of the allotment of land shows the intention that the land should be distributed throughout the whole kinship system as widely as possible.

As noted above, the primary meaning of משפחה in the Old Testament is a recognisable close-knit kinship group. In some cases, the names of משפחה and village names are interchangeably used (Mic. 5:2; 1 Chron. 2:5ff.; 4:5). This suggests that משפחה is not only about the unit of a group of people, but also the territorial unit of the sub-tribal groups. In fact, land in Israel was primarily divided

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<sup>94</sup> Gottwald, *Tribes*, pp. 293-341, 474-497, 584-587. See also his “Two Models for the Origins of Ancient Israel: Social Revolution or Frontier Development” in *The Hebrew Bible in its Social World and in Ours* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993) p. 39.

<sup>95</sup> Wright discusses in details the different opinions of scholars regarding this issue. See his *God’s People in God’s Land*, pp. 66-70.

<sup>96</sup> Alt mentions, “jeder freie Mann in diesem ganz auf die Agrarwirtschaft eingestellten Volke sollte genug Ackerland zur Verfügung haben, um sich und seine Familie davon zu ernähren.” See his “Der Anteil des Königtums” p. 349. Cf. Davies, “Land: Its rights and privileges” p. 358.

and owned on the basis of *משפחה*. In other words, like the Mizo *Khua*, *משפחה* can be considered a separate territorial sub-unit which has its own area of land. According to Johnstone, *משפחה* is the primary social unit as far as territorial holding is concerned, and it is a technical term in hereditary land tenure.<sup>97</sup> The portion of land received by each *משפחה* is called *נחלה*, which is generally translated as “inheritance”. Habel argues that *נחלה*, “in its primary meaning, is not something simply handed down from generation to generation, but the entitlement or rightful property of a party that is legitimated by a recognised social custom, legal process, or divine character.”<sup>98</sup> However, there are certain contexts in the Old Testament which demand “inheritance” rather than “entitlement” as the translation of this term (e.g. Gen. 31:14; Judg 11:2; Ruth 4:5-6; etc). In terms of the territorial lands of *משפחה*, the term *נחלה* can refer to inheritance as well as rightful property or entitlement. It could originally have been a portion of land obtained by each *משפחה* from the larger tribal territorial land, but it was inherited from one generation to the next as time went by. From this portion of land, each household ( *בית אב* ) had its patrimonial share ( *נחלה* ) to live, cultivate and utilise for herding and farming. Though the share of land received by each *בית אב* can be seen as the private property of each household, yet it is still largely regarded as part of the community land of the *משפחה*. Alt points out that the land is not the property of the household in the full sense.<sup>99</sup> This idea is clearly reflected in the principles of the levirate marriage and redemption law (Lev. 25:25; Deut. 25:5; Ruth 4:1-6).

In the rural peasant society where there was no source of food without land, the best way to distribute food fairly was to make sure that every household had a share of land for cultivation. “For any peasant culture, dependence on the land is

<sup>97</sup> As cited by Wright in his *God's People in God's land*, p. 50 from W. Johnstone, “Old Testament Technical Expressions in Property Holding: Contributions from Ugarit” *Ugaritica* 6 (1969) p. 313.

<sup>98</sup> Norman C. Habel, *The Land is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) p. 35. In fact, Habel also does not deny the fact that in certain contexts, *נחלה* has the connotation of “inheritance”. He discusses in detail the opinions of several scholars and the various usages of this term in the different contexts of the Old Testament in the ‘Excursus’ of his book (pp. 33-35).

<sup>99</sup> Alt, “Der Anteil des Königtums” p. 349. He points out, “Um Eigentum im vollen Sinne handelt es sich dabei aber nicht; der Inhaber darf das ihm zustehende Stück Landes nicht beliebig veräußern, verschenken, vertauschen oder verkaufen, sondern nur vererben und kann sich demgemäß für die Zeit, in der ihm die Bearbeitung obliegt, nur als den verantwortlichen Nutznießer betrachten.”

fundamental for food, survival, security, and present and future well-being.”<sup>100</sup> In fact, there could be no proper distribution of food if land was not shared among the members of the community, which was the only means of production in the ancient rural community. In Israelite society, **בית אב** was the basic unit of the system of land tenure, each having its own share of land (**נחלה**) from the land of **משפחה**, and therewith intended to be economically self-sufficient. Each household’s land was made inalienable and remained within the **משפחה** unless and until there was no other way not to retain it. The Jubilee law in Leviticus 25:23-28 basically upholds the value of land sharing and intends to protect the inalienable right of each **בית אב**. Wright has detected that Leviticus 25:23-28 is a combination of general *redemption* laws and *Jubilee* provisions, which have somewhat different aims and functions.<sup>101</sup> He argues that redemption had the main aim of preserving the land of the “kin group” (**משפחה**), whereas the Jubilee was concerned with the restoration of the land of individual households (**בית אב**). However, it is questionable whether it is really possible to differentiate the aims of the redemption law and the Jubilee provisions. Preservation of land within the “kin group” and restoration of the property of the impoverished household should not be regarded as two different things. The land will certainly remain within the “kin-group” if it is restored to the one who loses it. In fact, these two laws are fundamentally meant for the alleviation of the plight of the unfortunate kinsman who has lost his land due to extreme poverty. It can be argued that the main purpose of redemption law is not only to retain the land within the “kin group”, but also to help out the miserable condition of the one who is compelled to sell his property due to difficult circumstances. The retention of land within the “kin group” alone would not help the plight of the unfortunate brother unless his lost property was restored to him. What is important for such a helpless person is the ability to have a fresh start so that he can stand up for himself again. If we carefully examine Leviticus 25:23-28, it is evident that the central message of this passage is to make sure that no household within the “kin group” should permanently lose its patrimonial share of land. This passage must have originally addressed the constituent members of a “kin group” (**משפחה**) in the rural tribal community rather than Israelite society as a whole in the monarchic

<sup>100</sup> Kinsler and Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee*, p. 15.

<sup>101</sup> Wright, *God’s People in God’s Land*, pp. 120-121.

state.<sup>102</sup> Schaeffer challenges the views of the Wellhausen school, which regards the Jubilee as the product of the post-exilic priestly writers by proposing that the provisions of Leviticus 25:8ff. go back to very ancient times.<sup>103</sup> J. R. Porter also suggests that the principles of Jubilee go back to the days when property was held in common by the large family groups.<sup>104</sup> In fact, these laws cannot be taken as legislation in a strict sense, as they are more about the values and principles of a close-knit community where kinship ties were very strong.<sup>105</sup> They may not be applicable outside the structure of the *משפחה* where people's social relationships were not based on kinship. The text itself indicates that the Jubilee laws cannot be applied to properties in the walled cities, which clearly reflects a consequence of social development (Lev 25:29).<sup>106</sup> Von Waldow argues that many laws and ordinances protecting the underprivileged were rooted in the ethics of the ancient Semitic kinship associations before they established a state, a period when their living together was ordered by the unwritten laws transmitted and enforced by the *pater-familias*.<sup>107</sup>

Scholarly discussion of the redemption of land is usually focussed on the question of whether the 'redeemer' kept the property he had redeemed for himself or immediately restored it to the impoverished brother for whom he had redeemed

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<sup>102</sup> This is not to deny the idea that the fundamental values and principles of the original Jubilee concept had been re-read, developed and elaborated further in different historical contexts to suit the needs of the various contexts. This idea is clearly discussed by Jeffrey A. Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee* (JSOTSup 150; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993). Regarding the literary development of Leviticus 25, see pp. 123-125.

<sup>103</sup> Henry Schaeffer, *Hebrew Tribal Economy and the Jubilee as Illustrated in Semitic and Indo-European Village Communities* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1922) pp. 1ff.

<sup>104</sup> J. R. Porter, *Leviticus* (The Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) p. 201. He further comments that "with the development of property in the more advanced economic circumstances of the monarchy, it came to be recognized that ancestral land could be sold, but there always remained the right to 'redeem' it, that is, to buy it back."

<sup>105</sup> Fager's approach tends to see the law more in terms of a manifesto, a claim about God's agenda, than the product of case law. See, Fager, *Land Tenure*, pp. 112-118. See also the observation of Philip J. Budd, *Leviticus* (The New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996) p. 342.

<sup>106</sup> Moshe Weinfeld observes, "In large cities in which the tribal-patriarchal differences became indistinct on account of the burgeoning of professional circles which were no longer connected to the land and to tribal ancestry, it was not possible to fulfill the law of Jubilee and therefore the legislator was compelled to compromise with reality." See his "Sabbatical Year and Jubilee in Pentateuchal Laws and their ancient Near Eastern Background" in *The Law in the Bible and in its Environment* (ed. Timo Veijola; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1990) p. 60.

<sup>107</sup> H. Eberhard von Waldow, "Social Responsibility and Social Structure in Early Israel" *CBQ* 32 (1970) pp. 184-186.



it.<sup>108</sup> Even regarding the Jubilee, scholars often try to answer the question: “were the Jubilee regulations “real” legislation – that is, practicable and effective – or were they academic and utopian?”<sup>109</sup> If we treat these laws and regulations as if they were modern judicial laws or legislations, this kind of discussion is unavoidable. However, if they are regarded as enforcing the values and principles of the rural tribal community, these kinds of questions are actually uncontextual. As argued above, the basic original principles of the Jubilee and redemption can be taken to reflect the unwritten ethical values of a small close-knit rural community. If there were households who could not support themselves economically in the community, it could affect the whole of community life, as they were all connected with each other. As soon as any constituent household of משפחה was not able to hold or maintain its share of land for any reason, it was the responsibility of the “kinsman-redeemer (גאול) or members of the community”<sup>110</sup> to extend their helping hands so that the unfortunate brother would be liberated. The assumption of many scholars that the redeemer kept the redeemed property for himself until the year of Jubilee is very unlikely considering the ethos of the tribal community.<sup>111</sup> To leave a kinsman without any economic means of production for about half a century is unimaginable in a community where there was no chance of survival without land. It should not be assumed that kinship members of משפחה were like people in the cities who valued property and material benefits more than social relationships and community well-being. In the tribal subsistence economy, no household needed more land than they could maintain, as their production was basically meant for family consumption. What was important was to preserve social solidarity and harmony so that they could protect themselves and maintain a healthy community life, which would be impossible if some constituent households were without land.

<sup>108</sup> Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, pp. 120,122.

<sup>109</sup> Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, p. 125. See the detailed discussion in Fager's excursus in his *Land Tenure*, pp. 34-36. See also Robert North, *The Biblical Jubilee* (Analecta Biblica 145; Roma: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2000) pp. 11-13.

<sup>110</sup> Kinsman-redeemer known as גאול could be either a brother, uncle, cousin or any blood relative [lit. “of the flesh of” which may be taken as members of the community]. In the tribal community, the first people who are expected to come forward to offer help and support in time of trouble are close relatives. But if the trouble of a household is more than the close relatives can handle, it is the responsibility of the whole community to offer help and support.

<sup>111</sup> Wright, for example, explicitly mentions that “the ‘redeemer’ kept the property he had redeemed (until the Jubilee) rather than having restored it to the brother.” He further argues, “This is especially so if it was a matter of preemption, for to buy some land from a kinsman and then return the land to him forthwith would have amounted, in effect, to nothing more than a simple gift of money.” See his *God's People in God's Land*, p. 122.

The redemption values demand members of the “kin group” to solve the problem faced by their unfortunate brothers as quickly as possible. The most important thing for them is the principle: “keep him alive with you” which means “keep him able to own and work his farm.”<sup>112</sup> In cases where there was absolutely no way to help the impoverished person, his property remained in the hands of the buyer until the year of Jubilee. However, this kind of case must have been very rare in the rural community of *משפחה*, where people exchanged mutual support and help in times of difficulty. This could be the reason why we never see law of Jubilee enforced in the Old Testament.<sup>113</sup> The values of Jubilee must have fundamentally envisaged the situation “just in case” rather than “ought to”. The principle of the Jubilee could have been the last resort to make sure that there was no way to permanently lose the land of the household. Traditionally, no kin group would ever allow part of the community land to be owned by outsiders. This kind of encroachment by outsiders must have been a threat not only for the individual household, but also for the whole community within the *משפחה*.

This view may be considered unrealistic or utopian from the modern urban worldview. However, it was very much possible to live this kind of life in the ancient community. There are certain tribal communities who still preserve such values and traditions even today.<sup>114</sup> Many rural villages of the Mizo tribe in Northeast India still maintain the tradition that when any family in the village is not in a position to look after its field due to sickness or any other trouble, members of the community will come forward to help with any work needed in the field of the unfortunate household without expecting any reward. The unfortunate family receives such help from the community until it can manage again without external

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<sup>112</sup> This is the argument made by Robert North in his discussion on loans in Lev 25:35-38; see his *The Biblical Jubilee*, pp. 51-53. He states, “The stress is chiefly on the positive obligation of “keeping alive with you (saving from inability to work his farm) a brother ... out of respect for the God who had equally saved both out of Egypt.”

<sup>113</sup> It is now widely accepted that the releases of land in the Jubilee type were a reality throughout Ancient West Asia to prevent and resolve major social and economic crises. See Budd, *Leviticus*, p. 342, Fager, *Land Tenure*, pp. 24-36, R. Westbrook, “Jubilee Laws”, *Property and the Family in Biblical Law* (JSOTSup 113; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991) pp. 38-52, and Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, pp. 125-127. However, it can be assumed that even if it was practised in the Israelite society, it must have been a very rare event since there is complete silence in the Old Testament regarding the enforcement of this law.

<sup>114</sup> Schaeffer demonstrated that this kind of ethos was prevalent in the past even in village communities of the different parts of Europe and India. See his *Hebrew Tribal Economy*, pp. 132-176.

support. The main purpose of this kind of service is to make sure that every household can continue life without irreparable damage. They support and uphold each other in times of death, calamities, and any other difficult situation that can permanently paralyse a household. Scholars can detect that the Hebrew tribes also maintain more or less similar principles in their community. For example, Gottwald states:

The *mišpāhāh* stands out as a protective association of families which operated to preserve the minimal conditions for the integrity of each of its member families by extending mutual help as needed to supply male heirs, to keep land, to rescue members from debt slavery, and to avenge murder. These functions were all restorative in that they were emergency means to restore the normal autonomous basis of a member family, and they were all actions that devolved upon the *mišpāhāh* only when *bēth-āy* was unable to act on its own behalf.<sup>115</sup>

It is obvious that the values and ethos of the Hebrew tribes within משפחה also concerned not only land issues, but also issues relating to debt, family relationships, enslavement, and poverty relief.<sup>116</sup>

The issue encountered by Isaiah and Micah was undoubtedly the violation of the tribal principle of land sharing within משפחה. While the traditional tribal values were meant to preserve the principle of the inalienability of each household's share of land so that it could continue to be self-sufficient and self-supporting, the urban affluent people violated this principle by encroaching on and seizing the lands of smallholders. The issue of land during this period was not simply economic, but a conflict between two different ideological values regarding how to manage and use land. The dominant elite advocated the idea of land as the source of wealth, power and luxury for those who could exploit its resources, whereas the prophets considered land the source of well-being, harmony and solidarity within the community. For the prophets land should be shared by every household in the community as widely as possible, but for the affluent people it should be monopolised and controlled by a few so that its resources could be extracted at the

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<sup>115</sup> Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 267.

<sup>116</sup> "The range of responsibilities that could fall on the shoulders of a kinsman or member of the community as a lag was wide and varied. See detailed discussion on the roles of lag in Wright, "Family (OT)" (CD-ROM).

maximum level for the national wealth. Though the state may have imposed its ideology in the name of the national interest, the actual beneficiaries were only a few rich and powerful people, while many poor people were left landless and rootless. In fact, the provisions of the Jubilee did not anticipate the miserable condition of the victims of the arbitrary confiscation of lands. If our suggestion regarding the arbitrary confiscation of lands by the powerful is correct, there would be no chance for the victims to have their lives as independent households and members of a harmonious group restored to them. This could be the reason why the prophets were profoundly irritated by the activities of the ruling elites and the greedy affluent people.

### 6.3.3. *Respect and care for the land*

As indicated in chapter two, some tribes in Northeast India have the idea that land is the source of life that owns human beings and all other living creatures. We have seen that the myths of some Naga tribes, Mizo and Garo say that their ancestors originally emerged from a big hole in a rock, or from the bowel of the earth.<sup>117</sup> These myths symbolically express the idea that the earth is the mother of human beings, who delivered them and produced life in this world. The tribal people accepted themselves as originating from the earth and they regarded land as part of their lives. They believed that they were profoundly connected with the land and not detachable from it as the source of life. Land is not a lifeless object for them, but a living ground that nurtures and sustains different creatures including human beings. They have a deep spiritual respect for the land and there are certain tribes who consider land as a sacred and integral part of the High God.<sup>118</sup> Their religious practices, spirituality, festivals, customs, and traditions are closely related to their conception of land as sacred and as the extension of the deity. Treating land as a commodity or greedily exploiting it strongly contradicts the tribal concept of the sanctity of land.

One of the fundamental values of the prophet inherent in their protest against latifundialisation, which commentators often fail to notice, is their spiritual respect and care for the land. There is substantial evidence to suggest that the prophets did

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<sup>117</sup> Longchar, "Dancing with the Land" p. 123.

<sup>118</sup> See detailed discussion in Chapter two, section 2.3.6.

not see land as a lifeless object or merely an economic resource to be exploited, but a living entity that can react or respond to human greed, exploitative deeds and unjust activities. Isaiah's words of judgment reflect this idea: "The Lord of hosts has sworn in my hearing: Surely the large estates shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one *bath*, and a homer of seed shall yield a mere *ephah*" (5:9-10). Here, the accusation in v. 8 is followed by the words of judgment in vv. 9-10 calling for a total desolation of the large estates of the affluent landlords. The prophet proclaims that the large estates, which were accumulated as a result of the forceful acquisition of the properties of the smallholders, will be without inhabitants and there will be no one to possess them. This desolation will not be caused by the action of their enemies or any other human agents, but by the productive power of the land. The land will reduce its fertility in response to the unfair oppression of the smallholders and the greedy exploitation of the affluent. Land is here regarded as the living entity that can carry out the will and purpose of Yahweh just as human agents function as his instruments to punish the sinful.

Scholars generally hold the view that a widespread ancient West Asian concept of a divine "Mother Earth" or earth goddess related to a female consort to a sky god or other male deity is not to be found in the Old Testament.<sup>119</sup> However, it cannot be denied altogether that there are some allusions to the Mother Earth motif in certain passages of the Old Testament, and there is sufficient evidence to suggest that human beings originally issued from the earth in Hebrew tradition, though the earth is never divinised. One of the most important passages is the older creation story of the J-source in the book of Genesis. In Genesis 2:7, we read, "the LORD God formed man from the soil of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being." Westermann observes that this tradition is encountered frequently in the creation narratives of primitive cultures and the writer of this story "has preserved in his account a very old and widespread ancestral tradition that he considers worthy of respect, a tradition that also appears elsewhere

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<sup>119</sup> W. Janzen, "Earth" *ABD* (CD-ROM).

in the Old Testament.”<sup>120</sup> This story affirms that human beings are formed from the soil of the earth. This is undoubtedly the recognition of land as the source of life and the ground of human existence. At the same time, a human being is regarded as part of land and rooted in the land. The fundamental value underlying this creation story can be seen as a call for respect and care for the land as part of the human body. The name אָדָם is given to the human creature derived from the ground (אֲדָמָה). Janzen believes that the close affinity of these two words could be more than the word play of the writers or editors, as the etymological connection between אָדָם and אֲדָמָה cannot be ruled out. He mentions that the Akkadian *adamātu* “dark red earth” (used as a dye), suggests that the Hebrew אֲדָמָה could also be derived from the root אָדָם “to be red” from which is derived the noun אָדָם (human).<sup>121</sup> There can be little doubt that there is a close relationship between God, human beings and land in Hebrew thought.

An important allusion to the Mother Earth motif is found in Job’s words: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there” (Job 1:21). Humans issue from the womb of a mother and return to their place of origin at death. Here Job certainly does not expect to return to his mother’s womb at death. Where would he expect to go then? Clines has shown two exegetical moves that are usually suggested.<sup>122</sup> One line of study considers the Hebrew term אֲשָׁר (thither/there) in this context as a euphemism for the underworld or Sheol.<sup>123</sup> Another line of thought takes the word אֲשָׁר to refer to the womb of the Mother Earth. The latter interpretation is much more convincing considering some supporting textual evidence found elsewhere in the Old Testament (cf. Ps. 139:13,15). Clines rightly

<sup>120</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary* (trans. David E. Green; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987) p. 18. He connects this tradition with Job 10:8: “Thy hands fashioned and made me...” cf. Job 4:19; Ps. 90:3; 103:14; 104:29; 146:4; Isa. 29:16.

<sup>121</sup> Janzen, “Earth” *ABD* (CD-ROM). See also Mark G. Brett, “Earthing the Human in Genesis 1-3” in *The Earth Story in Genesis* (eds. Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) p. 80; Brett comments that “beyond the wordplay lies the potentially subversive claim that the human is derived from the soil.”

<sup>122</sup> David J. A. Clines, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 17: Job 1-20* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1998) (CD-ROM).

<sup>123</sup> Scholars who support this view base their arguments on the fact that there is an Egyptian phrase “those who are there” for the dead, and Greek *ēkēi* “there” is paralleled as a term referring to the underworld. See a brief summary of different scholars in Clines, *Job 1-20* (CD-ROM).

points out that “Sheol is not the mother’s womb”<sup>124</sup> and nowhere in the Old Testament is Sheol described in terms of a mother’s womb. As we have seen above, the older creation story in Genesis, which may represent the traditional Hebrew conception regarding the origin of human beings, clearly suggests that the human body was formed out of the earth. This could be another way of saying that humanity issued from the womb of Mother Earth. Westermann comments, “The fact that the man is made of ‘dust’ already intimates that he will one day return to dust.”<sup>125</sup> Job’s words in 1:21 also appear to express the idea that humans, delivered into the world in naked by Mother Earth, will return to the same mother’s womb in the same form at death. G. R. Driver refers to the Arabic *’ummu* “mother” as meaning also “abode, habitation, tomb,” and cites the Arabic phrase *buṭūnu-llarā* “wombs of the earth” for “graves”.<sup>126</sup> The same kind of idea is expressed in Gen. 3:19: “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are soil and to soil you shall return”. This verse clearly states that human beings are taken out of the soil and will return to the soil at death. Even in Ps. 139:13,15 (MT. Ps. 139:15, 17), we read, “For it was you who formed my inward parts, you knit me together in my mother’s womb... my frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.” Here v. 13 can be taken as speaking of the creation of an individual in the mother’s womb, whereas v. 15 implies the same individual’s creation in the depths of the earth. However, this kind of interpretation would simply convey the message that the Psalmist has two contradictory views regarding the origin of humanity. Clines strongly opposes this view and states, “the images surrounding the origin of humankind and that of the individual are fused, and it would be a wooden exegete who would find the metaphors self-contradictory.”<sup>127</sup> He argues further that even in Job 1:21, “the imagery of the individual’s birth is silently fused with the imagery of humankind’s creation, so that “thither” is indeed the earth, not as a technical term or a euphemism for it, nor because it is precisely identified as ‘Mother Earth’.”<sup>128</sup> It can be perceived that the Hebrew understanding of land in the Old Testament was not free from the “Mother Earth” concept, and this

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<sup>124</sup> Clines, *Job 1-20* (CD-ROM).

<sup>125</sup> Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary*, p. 18.

<sup>126</sup> As cited by Clines, *Job 1-20* (CD-ROM).

<sup>127</sup> Clines, *Job 1-20* (CD-ROM).

<sup>128</sup> Clines, *Job 1-20* (CD-ROM).

concept could be the source of Hebrew people's attitudes towards the land as not simply a material resource that provides economic necessities for its inhabitants, but the source of life and ground of human existence. A human being is not the owner of land; rather land owns human beings and nurtures them as a mother nurtures and cares for her children. This kind of understanding establishes a strong bond between human and land and it encourages respect and care for the Mother Earth.

The sabbatical law in Exodus 23:10f. and Leviticus 25:2-7 contains the idea that the land should be respected and cared for just as fellow human beings. This law requires the land to be left fallow every seventh year while it allows six years of normal agriculture. Wright observes, "this is the earliest of the OT laws concerning the seventh year and may well reflect very ancient and pre-Israelite custom."<sup>129</sup> In the Book of the Covenant, this law is placed alongside the law prescribing weekly rest for the slave and domestic animals which states, "so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in your household, and the resident alien as well, may be refreshed" (Exod. 23:12). Here, the key words regarding the practice of the Sabbath are resting or refreshing. Animals and labourers who are made to work very hard for six days deserve rest on the seventh day. The recharging of lost and weakened energy seems to be the central and original idea of sabbatical rest. There are certain scholars who believe that the Sabbath was rooted in the 'special days' or 'rest days' of primitive agriculturists.<sup>130</sup> It is conceivable that the original purpose of the practice of the fallow year was also sabbatical rest though the humanitarian and social concerns are quite explicit. Anthony Philips argues that if fallow land was for the sustenance of the poor there would need to be some land left fallow every year.<sup>131</sup> Anderson mentions that "keeping the land without cultivating in the Sabbath year signifies that the earth can gain its lost energies and liberate the

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<sup>129</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, "Sabbatical Year" *ABD* (CD-ROM).

<sup>130</sup> Kinsler and Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee*, pp. 9-12. They contend that the sabbatical law is really concerned primarily about rest and the de-absolutisation of work – that is, with breaking the cycle of work on a regular, weekly basis so that all, people and animals, including slaves and aliens, might rest.

<sup>131</sup> Anthony Philips, *Ancient Israel's Criminal Law* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970) p. 75. It is questionable "whether a fallow year once in seven years would be of much real benefit to the poor. What did they eat in the other six years? For this reason, some scholars reckon that this earliest form of the law was not prescribing a universal fallow over the whole land of Israel in a single sabbatical year for all." See the discussion in Wright, "Sabbatical Year" *ABD* (CD-ROM).



productive power of the earth.”<sup>132</sup> What is important for our concern here is that land is seen and treated as a living being that can be exhausted, tired and worn out. This kind of attitude towards land is a clear indication of respect and care and obviously reflects the ethos of intimacy with the land.

Land is often described as a living entity that can have emotional responses to human activities. Human acts of violence, greed, defilement, and exploitation often provoke the anger of the land. For example, after Cain killed his brother Abel, Yahweh said to Cain, “What have you done? Listen, your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground! And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth” (Gen. 4:10-13). There is no way to get the full picture of the socio-economic background of the conflict between these two brothers.<sup>133</sup> It can be assumed, however, that this story reflects the situation in a farming community where the stronger and dominant people destroy the lives of their fellow innocent Israelites out of jealousy or greed.<sup>134</sup> Land must have been the centre of conflict between these two brothers who engage in two different types of farming, and it is against the powerful, violent and cruel brother that the land will take action by reducing its fertility, ultimately driving him out from his land. Violence and cruelty against the innocent here provokes the anger of the land out of which the blood of the victim cries to Yahweh. Gunkel notes that “the idea could be expressed as though the land that Cain polluted with his brother’s blood spewed him out.”<sup>135</sup> As a result of shedding the blood of his brother, Cain is banished from the cultivated land (אֲדָמָה) since the land reduces its productive strength for him, which

<sup>132</sup> Niels – Erik A. Anderson, *The Old Testament Sabbath* (SBL Dissertation series 7, Missoula: University of Montana, 1972) p. 214.

<sup>133</sup> The traditional interpretation has been dominated by the theological question – “Why Cain’s offering should have been rejected while Abel’s was accepted?” This has occasioned much perplexity. At least five different types of explanation have been offered. See the discussion in Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary Volume 1 (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1987) (CD-ROM).

<sup>134</sup> Brueggemann opines that “in some stage of the story, it dealt with the conflict and relation between farmers and shepherds, including their relation to God.” See his *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982) p. 56.

<sup>135</sup> Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997) p. 45. He mentions, “Cain cultivated the field, offered the fruits of the field, gave the field his brother’s blood to drink. But the blood cried out against him from the field, therefore the field refuses him its fruit and he is banned from it.”

eventually reduces him to landless wanderer without root and identity.<sup>136</sup> This narrative conveys the idea that the land knows those who have innocent blood on their hands and bans its fruits and resources for such people cutting them off from the benefits of its fertility. The pollution and defilement of land often bring disasters and desolation for the culprits. Fejo argues that the violation of the earth by human beings is the reason for the flood in Genesis 9.<sup>137</sup> In Leviticus, the Israelites are warned not to follow the footsteps of the Canaanites; otherwise the land will vomit them out for defiling it, as it vomited out the nation before them (18:28). This clearly indicates a Hebrew belief that land has the power and ability to throw out its inhabitants who are immoral, arrogant, exploitative, and oppressive. Land is seen as the silent observer that can cause a devastating impact on the lives of those who break the rules of God.

Jeremiah frequently proclaims that the land suffers and mourns as a result of human evils and the anger of God. The prophet cries out, “How long will the land mourn, and the grass of every field wither? For the wickedness of those who live in it the animals and the birds are swept away, and because people said, ‘He is blind to our ways’” (Jer.12:4). “The constant cry is that God’s plentiful land has become an uninhabited ‘desolation’ (Jer.6:8), a silent wasteland (7:34), and a lifeless ‘wilderness’ (9:10).”<sup>138</sup> What is obvious is that land is considered the living partner of Yahweh and sometimes as his extension which can suffer, mourn and be angry because of the evildoers. At the same time, land can also be the source of peace, prosperity and justice (Ps. 72:3). It is true that the actual divinising of the earthly realm is rejected in the Old Testament, but land is never isolated from Yahweh. Rather, it is regarded as a living entity closely associated with Yahweh, which often functions as the source of blessings from Yahweh and sometimes as the instrument of his punishment. The Israelite people never worship land, but they regard it as the

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<sup>136</sup>“ Rashi translates, “you are more cursed than the land.” Most modern commentators suggest that it means you are cursed *away from* the land, i.e., you are banished from the cultivated area (אדמה).” See Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (CD-ROM).

<sup>137</sup> Wali Fejo, “The voice of the Earth: An indigenous Reading of Genesis 9” in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, p. 142 (pp. 140-146).

<sup>138</sup> Habel, *The Land is Mine*, p. 86. According to Habel, the idea of the suffering land is part of the prophetic ideology of land, and he discusses in detail about this ideology found especially in the prophecy of Jeremiah in his book, pp. 75-96.

sacred source of life and the precious gift of Yahweh, which often embodies his will and purpose for his people.

If we look at the situation in eighth-century Israel and Judah, it is apparent that a counter-cultural ideology of land was moving against the traditional understanding of land. According to this ideology, land is mainly seen as the material source of wealth. According to Habel, “basic to this royal land ideology are the concepts of the land as the source of wealth, the divine right of the monarch to appropriate that wealth, and the entitlement of the monarch as God’s representative to have dominion over the whole earth as empire.”<sup>139</sup> Within this ideological framework, land is largely considered a lifeless commodity that is to be bought, sold, traded and bargained, and even grabbed or captured to serve the economic interests of the ruling class.<sup>140</sup> Moreover, land is treated as a material resource to be exploited. This ideology must have been the driving force of the dominant people, who caused enormous dispossession of smallholders’ properties in the eighth century BCE. In fighting against this kind of commercial and material understanding of land and its devastating impact on the smallholders, Isaiah offers an alternative land ideology as he proclaims, “The Lord of hosts has sworn in my hearing: Surely the large estates shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one *bath*, and a homer of seed shall yield a mere *ephah*” (5:9-10). This clearly shows that the prophet completely disagrees with the ideology of the people who accumulate lands for commercial agricultural intensification. Moreover, this is a clear and firm proclamation that land, not human beings, is in absolute control of its fertility and produce. The large estates and big mansions of the rich will be completely desolate. In response to the large-scale accumulation of land in the hands of a few big landlords who unfairly dispossess the underprivileged people, the land will reduce its fertility to produce far less than what is expected. There is a sense of retributive justice in Isaiah’s judgment. Here, Yahweh will use nothing but the productive power of the land to punish the people who grab the properties of their neighbours and greedily exploit the fertility of the land exclusively for their selfish benefit. In other judgments, Yahweh is often portrayed as using human agents to carry out his punishment against the evildoers (e.g., Isa.

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<sup>139</sup> Habel, *The Land is Mine*, p. 17.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Brueggemann, *A Social Reading of the Old Testament*, p. 279.

3:25; 5:26-30; Amos 4:2-3; 6:7 etc). But, upon the criminals who commit crimes against the land and poor farmers, he is believed to bring misfortune by failing the harvest of the land. Land is a living entity that can fulfil the will and purpose of Yahweh just as his human agents can.

The same idea is expressed by Amos, “you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine” (5:11). The rich people may have robbed the properties of the poor farmers, built great houses and planted choice crops in their large estates to fuel their greed-based economy, but good harvests and prosperity are beyond their control. The accumulation of wealth at the expense of ravaging the earth and those who solely depend on it is not at all justifiable for the prophet. Hosea also proclaims, “Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed. Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing” (4:2-3). Bloodshed in the land, human falsehood, cruelty, robbery, greed, and harmful acts cause the earth to mourn.<sup>141</sup> As argued above, this kind of cruelty, violence and unfairness could be part of the economic activities of the affluent people who impoverished their neighbours. Its consequence will not only be poor harvest, but the suffering and anguish of all kinds of animals as well. It is certain that modern scientific knowledge of eco-systems was beyond the reach of the prophet, but there can be no doubt that the ancient Hebrew tribal wisdom upon which Hosea based his oracle recognised that all things are connected and that whatever befalls the earth befalls the children of the earth. Mother Earth is ready to give herself alike to all her children. But as she is seized, stripped of her freedom, fenced and exploited by a few greedy people for their selfish economic advantage, her anger is so great that its effect is devastating. For the prophets, land is the living entity that should not be exploited and raped with greed, violence and unfairness, but should be given respect and care as a sacred source of life and a precious gift from God.

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<sup>141</sup> Katherine M. Hayes, “*The Earth Mourns*”: *Prophetic Metaphor and Oral Aesthetic* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002) pp. 41ff.

#### 6.4. Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined some of the major forces that caused the eighth-century smallholders to be dispossessed of their land in light of the miserable situation of tribal people in India who have been and are being forcefully removed from their ancestral lands by many forces - rich multinational companies, government authorities, judicial administrators, and influential people - and we have come to the conclusion that the eighth-century smallholders were also compelled to give up their lands by a powerful force beyond their control. We have detected that the displacement was strongly connected with the misuse of power by the political power of the monarch and the state officials, the socio-economic power of the affluent people, the judicial power of people in the legal administration, and the religious power of the priests and prophets in the royal sanctuaries. This combined force - often in conjunction with violence and corruption - moved to the disadvantage of the powerless people. This was completely unacceptable for the prophets. In this situation, there was no way for powerless rural farmers to hold their lands. The prophets boldly challenged this oppressive and powerful force of impoverishment on behalf of the helpless victims.

In the second section, an answer is sought to the question: What exactly were the values and principles defended and endorsed by the prophets in the context of the dispossession of the rural farmers? Our investigation from the tribal perspective reveals that there are three major areas of concern expressed by the prophets. Firstly, the prophets tried to defend the socio-cultural and religious identity of the rural close-knit community affected by the acquisition of land. Secondly, the communitarian value of land sharing was strongly defended and endorsed by the prophets. For them, the fertility and produce of the land should be meant for the well-being of every member of the community. Thirdly, the prophets were committed to preserve the understanding of land as a source of life and the ground of human existence, which deserved respect and care. It is apparent that the prophets did not see land merely as a commodity or material resource to be exploited, but as a sacred and a living entity closely associated with Yahweh.

## CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter we shall indicate the advantages of the hermeneutical approach of this investigation by discussing the main findings of the research in connection with two important areas of concern. Firstly, we will highlight how the reading from a Mizo perspective illuminates the oracles of the prophets in their original contexts. Secondly, the implications of the findings for the development of global Christian values in the present context will be brought out.

### 7.1. Biblical Truth is Revealed in New Ways

This study has been carried out with the basic assumption that the Bible has different layers of truth to be uncovered by different approaches of study. Any one approach has its own weaknesses and strengths and no single approach is adequate to dig out all layers of truth from the Bible. There is no such thing as a universal method of interpretation, which can be applied to explicate all areas of concern, and is fully adequate to comprehend the biblical texts in all their richness. It should be admitted that the approach of this investigation also has its own limitations. At the same time, it cannot be denied that the foregoing analysis of the selected texts from a Mizo perspective has illuminated certain elements of truth about the values and ethos of the eighth-century prophets in new and different ways. For example, the examination of Isaiah 1:21-26 in light of the role and function of the concept of *tlawmngaihna* in the tribal community has revealed that Isaiah's understanding of **משפט** and **צדקה** was in various ways similar to the tribal communitarian socio-ethical values. We have shown that **משפט** and **צדקה** are not necessarily to be regarded as the same as the legal concept of fairness or exactly parallel to the modern abstract concepts of justice and righteousness; rather they can be largely considered socio-ethical values fundamentally opposed to the lifestyles of the

dominant class, who greedily run after their own economic gain while ignoring the plight of the poor. The prophetic demand for **משפט** and **צדקה** in the eighth-century context can be equated with the demand for acts of love, generosity, respect, trust, care, and selfless service for the benefits of the weak and the poor. They can also be considered as the foundational principles of community, where material values are subordinated by the value of human relationship. In other words, **משפט** and **צדקה** are socio-ethical principles that reject selfishness, greed, discrimination, violence, and oppression that can potentially threaten social cohesion and harmony. It is obvious that Isaiah primarily understood **משפט** and **צדקה** in the sense of communal relationship.

The examination of Amos 5:21-27 in light of the conflict between the Mizo *tlawmngaihna* and the Hindu caste system has also confirmed the idea that there were at least two fundamentally contradictory versions of Yahwism within Israelite society. It has been demonstrated that the Yahweh of the royal sanctuaries was an embodiment of hierarchy, luxury and monarchical structure whereas the Yahweh of the prophets was communitarian, simple and poor-sided by nature. The God of Amos was disgusted by the excessive rituals and practices associated with the worship of Yahweh at the royal sanctuaries. Such elaborate religious cults condoning social inequality and glorifying the consumerist lifestyles of the affluent were completely unacceptable to the prophet. As part of his critique against extravagant religious worship, Amos demanded **משפט** and **צדקה**, which were clearly opposite to the ideologies of materialism, consumerism and elitism that had been elevated and legitimated by the royal sanctuaries. It is clear that the values of humility and generosity are basic to the prophet's concept of **משפט** and **צדקה**. The values of the prophet in demanding **משפט** and **צדקה** in this context can be nothing but simplicity, humility, compassion, selflessness and classless social relationships over against arrogance, luxury, extravagance, supremacy, and hierarchical relationships endorsed by the royal sanctuaries.

The Mizo tribal perspective also enables us to see that the principle of sharing was central in the teachings of the prophets concerning the relationship between rich and poor. The analysis of Amos 6:1-7 in light of the tribal concept of honour and shame

unveils that when wealth is not shared with poor neighbours but wasted for self-indulgence by the affluent, this is considered the most shameful behaviour. The prophet's criticism of the luxurious lifestyles of the rich was integrally related to the situation in which the traditional value of sharing was being undermined. The partying, banqueting and feasting culture of the wealthy people was for the prophet a clear manifestation of their negligence of the principle of sharing in society. The oracles of Amos and his contemporary prophets clearly reflected that there were many underprivileged people who suffered hunger and extreme poverty while a few rich people enjoyed all kinds of luxuries. It is apparent that the resources of the land were not equally distributed among the population of Israel and Judah during this period. The most serious crime of the affluent, according to Amos, was their lack of concern for the "ruin of Joseph." The phrase "ruin of Joseph" in Amos 6:6c is taken to refer to the damage done to the value of sharing of wealth and other resources between the fortunate and less fortunate members of community, a value which was inherent in the story of Joseph and his brothers in Genesis. Unlike Joseph, who generously shared his wealth with his unfortunate brothers, the wealthy people in the time of Amos selfishly enjoyed all kinds of luxuries by ignoring the plight of their poor neighbours. The lavish lifestyles and excessive accumulation of wealth were not simply unacceptable for the prophets, but shameful and disgusting.

Isaiah's oracle concerning the process of latifundialisation in 5:8 can also be taken as a clear indication of the deterioration of the traditional value of land sharing whereby every household had a share of land for cultivation. We have shown that one of the most important values defended by the prophet as he opposed latifundialisation was the principle of communitarian land sharing. The analysis of Hosea 2:2-5 also suggests that the ideology of the profit-oriented economy encouraging intensification of agriculture and promoting excessive accumulation of wealth was completely unacceptable for Hosea. The prophet obviously saw the link between the encroachment of the foreign ideology of materialism on Israelite society and the erosion of the traditional socio-cultural values of sharing and communitarian relationship. The dominant class, who welcomed colonial economic ideology and cultural values, were metaphorically described as a promiscuous wife who sold herself cheaply to strangers for bread and drink by surrendering her innermost dignity and damaging the honour and pride of her husband. This



metaphor obviously described the shameful and unacceptability of the values and lifestyles of the ruling elites, who embraced imperial economic ideology of mammon and luxury that seriously destroyed the traditional communitarian principle of sharing.

This investigation also reveals that the main concerns of the prophets were more than economic. One of the most significant motifs behind the involvement of the eighth-century prophets in opposing latifundialisation was a commitment to preserving the socio-cultural identity of the dispossessed. We have demonstrated that losing land was profoundly related to losing identity, dignity, pride, and ways of life for those who have a close attachment to their lands. The prophets boldly challenged powerful oppressors who grabbed the lands of the rural poor, since those land grabbers not only ruined the economic well-being of their victims, but destroyed their socio-cultural and religious identities as well. The dispossession of the poor in those days can be seen as a clear indication of cultural invasion, since such greed and cruelty towards neighbours was so alien to traditional Israelite communitarian principles. The prophets considered it worth involving themselves in the struggle of the deprived people to protect their socio-cultural identities. We have shown that Hosea also took seriously this issue as he vehemently criticised Baalism, which was inseparably woven into the imperial cultural values and economic ideology supported by the ruling class in his society, and which caused confusion and identity crises among the people of Israel.

Another significant value defended by the prophets concerning the issue of land, which can be demonstrated from the tribal perspective, was spiritual respect and care for the land. We have detected that the prophets were committed to preserve the concept of land as a source of life and a ground of human existence. They did not see land merely as a commodity or lifeless commercial resource to be selfishly exploited, but as a sacred and living entity closely associated with God. For them, land should not be ravaged by greed, violence and unfairness, but should be given due respect and care as a sacred source of life and a precious gift from God. Though they never endorsed the divinisation of land, they certainly believed that land was an extension of Yahweh, and that it often functioned as the source of blessings as well as curses from Yahweh.

## 7.2. Tribal Voice for Reshaping Christian Values Today

The hermeneutical advantage of the Mizo perspective can also be seen in terms of its role in raising the voice of the voiceless tribals in the world of biblical scholarship as well as in the global Christian community. As indicated earlier, the term “tribal” has a strong derogatory sense and peoples known as “tribals” are often considered simple, uncivilised, primitive, barbaric, and even savages, who have nothing good to offer others. However, we have now seen that this is not all the case. Rather, they have many positive things to share with their fellow Christians and fellow human beings. The findings of the present investigation prove that the tribal peoples have something significant to contribute to illuminating the truth in the Bible, which may be useful for reshaping Christian values today. One of the significant principles of the prophets that can be clearly seen from the Mizo tribal perspective is that they give more importance to the value of human relationships than material gain. We can see that the prophets were propelled by people-oriented value-systems as they challenged greedy oppressors who ignored such values and beliefs. They were fighting for the well-being of the whole of their society in a context where a few materially driven rich people ruined the lives of their fellow Israelites. The first priority of the prophets was to maintain healthy social relationships and to keep solidarity in society, while emphasising that material resources were meant for safeguarding the well-being of Israelite society. This fundamental principle of the prophets can have significant implications in the present global context where economic materialism dominates the minds and thoughts of many peoples. The value and significance of almost everything is now measured materially. We live in a world where people in extreme poverty are often denied their fundamental rights, while the affluent are given honour, respect and all kinds of privileges. Money and material possessions greatly determine our concept of good or bad, right or wrong, etc. Christian value is also increasingly dominated by economic materialism. The churches may still claim that they do not encourage the love of mammon, but this claim is no longer reflected in the lifestyles of many Christians. Hallman convincingly points out that people can articulate what they

believe to be their value-systems but their behaviour may show that they actually subscribe to a different set of values. He criticises western society:

The values that we profess are not the values by which we live. We may talk about justice, peace and ecological sustainability, but our individual lifestyles and the economic realities of our Western societies seem to be based on a quite different set of values: consumerism, economic globalization, violence.<sup>1</sup>

As economic globalisation progresses the hunger for wealth drives the global economy at full speed. While a few rich nations can exploit this opportunity at the maximum level, the poor peoples in developing countries do not have much to gain; rather, many of them are being oppressed and increasingly afflicted by homelessness, bankruptcy, and alienation. We are now witnessing economic and social polarisation beyond any previous period in human history. Globalisation promotes the idea that you are what you eat, wear, and possess rather than what you do and sacrifice for the well-being of fellow human beings. The accumulation of financial assets is now the absolute, immutable yardstick for all economic, social, and political decisions, whereas social service and the economic well-being of the global community are largely neglected. People tend to treat one another as commodities, and those who lack money and possessions are often treated as people without any value or importance. The money-driven value-system emerges triumphant in the present global community. In this situation, what alternative values should we promote as Christians? It is important to cultivate a people-oriented value-system instead of a material-oriented one, an others-centred worldview rather than one which is self-centred. The values of human relationships, social service, and solidarity with fellow human beings - especially for the weak and neglected ones - should be strongly held and propagated by the Church in the present global context. We have seen that the prophets boldly challenged the greedy people who valued wealth and possessions more than their fellow human beings, as they wanted to offer people-oriented values, such as selfless service, generosity, hospitality, communitarian relationships and love for others.

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<sup>1</sup> David G. Hallman, *Spiritual Values for Earth Community* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2000) pp. 7, 18.

Another fundamental value of the prophets that may be relevant for the current global socio-economic realities is the value of sharing. Since wealth accumulation is an essential base for consumerism, there is a fertile ground for the consumerist culture to grow in the present global context. The culture of getting, spending and enjoying is spreading at an alarming rate. Peoples in the first world countries are setting examples for poorer countries as they become addicted to ever-greater consumption and accumulation of wealth. Indeed, the addictive habits of consumerism seemingly dictate the foreign policies of the rich countries. Peoples in different parts of the world are now striving for “more” – more income, more assets, more pleasure – seemingly without limit. Patterns of consumption and pleasure seeking have been continuous ever since, with each generation outdoing its predecessor. The urge to spend is sanctioned, reinforced and exaggerated by the media and advertising industries. Children from early ages are increasingly targeted by the advertising industries to inculcate the values of consumerism. Kids’ markets are enormous and there are many products and foods geared towards children. As a result of this, many children are brought up in the situation where they can easily learn how to consume a variety of resources and products. The ideology of consumerism has now been strongly established and it has become one of the strongest driving forces of economic activities even in developing countries. A huge amount of the world’s resources is being wasted to keep up consumerist lifestyles. The worrying thing is that the present global economic system is designed and functions mainly for the interests of the consumers, rather than serving the interests of the poor. This means that a huge amount of the world’s resources will continue to be wasted for the luxuries of the rich instead of saving the lives of the weak and the poor. Kinsler and Kinsler mention that “the richest 20% of the world’s population enjoys 82.7% of the world’s annual income, which is more than four times the total income of the 80% of the world’s population.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, “the wealthiest 20% of the world’s population was actually receiving annually 150 times as much as the poorest 20%.”<sup>3</sup> The truth is that while a few rich people can senselessly consume a hugely excessive amount of the world’s resources to support their extravagant lifestyles, the large majority of the world’s population are dependent on the small

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<sup>2</sup> Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999) p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Kinsler and Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee*, p. 3.

remainder of resources for their survival. The issue is not merely that the rich nations enjoy their own wealth without caring for the plight of poorer nations, but rather that they maintain their luxurious lifestyles by draining capital and resources from the poorer countries.<sup>4</sup> This has not happened accidentally; it is a systematic exploitation. Those who gain benefits from the existing socio-economic system will probably do everything they can to protect their advantages even if it means employing violence. This issue exists not only between the rich nations and the poor nations, but even between the rich and poor within most countries. The rich often employ violence and power to protect their interests even to the detriment of the helpless poor.<sup>5</sup>

In this situation, what role should the global Christian community play? It is vital to raise our voice loudly and express our values and concerns clearly. Is it fair to have this kind of unhealthy socio-economic system, especially considering the miserable condition of the victims of its injustice? Is it sensible to maintain lavish lifestyles in the context when a large number of people are starving and struggling for their daily bread? Is it not shameful to waste senselessly the world's resources when many people are dying due to lack of resources? What values should we uphold in this context as Christians? Is it not time to promote the value of sharing advocated by the eighth-century prophets that can be clearly seen from the tribal perspective? What was completely unacceptable for the prophets was the self-indulgence of the affluent while many people were starving in their midst. They raised their voices against the culprits to defend the victims by emphasising the importance of sharing

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<sup>4</sup> "The free flow of loans to Third World countries has created an enormous debt crisis that now ensures a massive flow of capital from the poor countries of the south to the rich countries of the north. Because of their absolute dependence on funding from the north, especially through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, these poor countries must submit to the economic policies dictated by these international monetary organizations. These organizations are ruled by the wealthy countries, whose overall concern is to continue extracting profits through interest payments.... Between 1982 and 1988 the poor countries paid the rich countries \$236.2 billion net, but the debtor nations still owed \$1,500 billion.... The United Nations estimates that the total transfer, south to north, due to debts plus unfavourable trade arrangements, comes closer to \$500 billion per year in what has been called "reverse development" or subsidies for the rich nations by the poor peoples of the world." See Kinsler and Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee*, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> For example, twelve tribal people of Kalinga Nagar, Orissa state in India were gunned down as they opposed the encroachment of their land by the construction of a boundary wall for the proposed steel plant of Tata steel, the giant steel company in India. The police force, government authority and the economic power of Tata were combined to confront the helpless tribals who wanted to protect their land as they have nothing but their land. See the picture and report in Prafulla Das, "Resistance and Tragedy" *Frontline*, 23.1. (2006) <<http://flonnet.com/fl2301/stories/200601270024.htm>> downloaded on 25.7.2007.

resources between the fortunate and less fortunate peoples so that there would be well-being in society. It is vital to think seriously about how to distribute fairly all the world's resources. Unless and until the value of equal sharing is profoundly incorporated and strictly observed in international trade and the global socio-economic system, it is quite difficult to foresee a bright future for the majority of the poor. However, if our planet's wealth is shared equitably and used responsibly for the sake of the larger global community, it might be possible to maintain the well-being and dignity of peoples all over the world. This is not simply a concern for the poor, but a concern for the affluent as well. The symptoms of the negative impact of the unequal distribution of wealth can be seen even in the rich countries in the forms of obesity, diabetes and other over-eating and drinking related diseases, and various social and psychological problems, while a large number of peoples are being killed by hunger, malnutrition, contaminated water, and various treatable diseases in the poorer countries. It is a concern for the well-being of those who have too little as well as those who have too much.

The prophets' values of simple lifestyles and spiritual respect and care for the land can also be applied to the current issue of global warming. There has been debate for a long time over the question as to whether global warming is a natural process or man-made disaster; and there has been speculation that the wasteful lifestyle of consumerist societies is responsible for the present ecological crisis. Recently, it has been categorically confirmed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that climate change is "unequivocal", and humankind's emissions of greenhouse gases are more than 90% likely to be the main cause.<sup>6</sup> The UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon clearly stated as he officially launched the text of the IPCC in Valencia: "Climate change is real, and we humans are its chief cause. Yet even now, few people fully understand the gravity of the threat, or its immediacy. Now I believe we are on the verge of a catastrophe if we do not act."<sup>7</sup> It is now clear that this issue is urgent, and it is no longer deniable that an energy-hungry lifestyle is not sustainable as it makes a large contribution to the emission of

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<sup>6</sup> "Experts warn of 'abrupt' warming" *BBC News*, November 17, 2007  
<<http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/70989>> downloaded on 17.11.2007.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* See also "Valencia, Spain, 17 November 2007 – Secretary-General's Address to the IPCC upon the release of the Fourth Assessment Synthesis Report" *Latest Statements*, 17 November 2007  
<<http://www.un.org/apps/sg/sgstats.asp?nid=2869>> downloaded on 23.11.2007.

greenhouse gases that cause global warming and ecological crisis. It is worrying to see that the most populated countries, namely China and India, are now awoken to run for global industrial competition in order to attain the kind of power and comfortable luxurious lifestyles that have been enjoyed for a long time by the industrial nations. They are now already included among the world's greatest polluters. In addition, many other smaller developing countries in Asia and other continents are also doing everything they can to move forward with their industrial developments. It appears that no one wants to use their reverse gears. If the climate change accelerates, according to the IPCC report, it may bring "abrupt and irreversible"<sup>8</sup> impacts on the environments, on society, and on individuals. The IPCC estimates that the poorest peoples in Africa, Asia and other parts of the southern hemisphere, who have contributed comparatively little to greenhouse gases, are going to be the first victims and the hardest hit of global warming, whereas the rich countries in the north that have contributed most will not be hit hard in the initial stage. Poor peoples in the coastal areas and small islands have already suffered the consequences of climate change.<sup>9</sup> They are more and more pressurised to pay the high price of what they are not asking for, as they are being forced out from their ancestral lands by the rising of sea levels and floods. Ecological refugees are increasing day by day.<sup>10</sup> As they are uprooted from their lands, their ways of life, and the customs, values and ethos attached to their lands are being wiped out. Many of them have become unwelcome guests in foreign lands, and they are in very helpless situations, as they have nowhere else to go. It is now obvious that the wasteful consumerist lifestyle of the rich is wreaking destruction in the lives of the poorer people in different parts of the world.

It is high time to engage seriously in the current ecological issue as a global Christian community. What we can do may be very little, but we must assume responsibility and commit ourselves to do our part. The argument that Christian values derived from the Bible are the roots of the present ecological crisis may not

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<sup>8</sup> These are the adjectives used by the IPCC in connection with the impacts of climate change.

<sup>9</sup> Alex Kirby, "West warned on climate refugees" *BBC News* (24.1.2000)

<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/613075.stm>> downloaded on 21.10.2006.

<sup>10</sup> "IPCC Fourth Assessment Report – Working Group II Report "Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability"" *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, <<http://www.ipcc.ch/ipccreports/ar4-wg2.htm>> downloaded on 20.11.2007.

be so convincing for some,<sup>11</sup> but we cannot deny the fact that Christian-dominated states are among the worst polluters in terms of emission of greenhouse gases. If we are part of the problem, we should also be part of the solution. If the present consumerist way of life is unsustainable, the question that needs an urgent answer is whether it can be stopped. Is there any alternative way of organising our society? As we read the values and ethos of the prophets from the tribal perspective, we can reveal that the prophets were fighting for alternative principles to organise their society by opposing the oppressive values and arrogant lifestyles of the people who dominated their society. In a context where the religious institutions, political systems and economic ideology had been monopolised by their rulers to justify their pursuit of unending luxury and wanton accumulation of wealth by exploiting the poor and raping their lands, the prophets boldly challenged their rulers and informed them that such actions were against God. At the same time, they emphasised the values of simple lifestyles and spiritual respect and care for the land. For the prophets, land is a living entity that should not be exploited and raped with greed, violence and unfairness, but should be given respect and care as a sacred source of life and a precious gift from God. Today, we need to learn a new lesson from the wisdom of simplicity - the nature-friendly lifestyle - which was strongly endorsed by the prophets. It is important to set limits to our lifestyle personally and collectively at every level. The simple life should no longer be considered as inferiority or ignorance, rather it should be seen as highly elevated, contributing to the common survival of all human beings and the global community. The greed-based economy by which an individual can accumulate unlimited wealth and excessive economic surplus at the expense of his or her fellow human beings and natural environment should rather be seen as great ignorance, the dangerous opium of modern culture. It is time to listen to the voice of the prophets through the ears of the tribals, and to see their values and ethos from the tribal perspective.

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<sup>11</sup> Many modern environmentalists have been convinced by Lynn White's article that Christianity is primarily responsible for the attitudes and beliefs which have resulted in the environmental crisis. According to White, Christianity is the most anthropo-centric religion the world has seen... it has insisted that it is God's will that humans exploit nature for their proper ends. See his "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967) pp. 1203-1207.



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