

Impact of Christianity on the Tamang and Lepcha Tribal Cosmologies

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Abstract

The Tamang and Lepcha tribal perceptions of the world or cosmos can be found in their oral traditions which have been handed down through traditional myths, folklores and songs. Their traditional myths serve as entry points into their view of cosmology – their view about the world. One can gather the myths of creation and cosmology by peeping into the folk songs, folklores, folktales etc. The concept of space (totality of creation) finds a central place in the Tamang and Lepcha worldview. They seem to comprehend everything from the perspective of creation. One can observe harmony with space or totality of creation forming the starting point of their spirituality and their search for liberation.

Introduction

The application of the main line philosophical criteria to ascertain Tamang and Lepcha tribal cosmology would be a blunder. Tribal cosmology should be considered from the perspective of the tribals or tribal mind. They had such a cosmic vision which found the nature, human and deities in a deep spiritual bond existing as a whole. Their entire philosophy and even belief systems are related to their concrete living which is related to their culture as a whole. The original Tamang and Lepcha belief systems have been termed as *mun* religion and *bon* religion respectively. Accordingly, the terms *munism* (or *bongthigism*) and *bonism* have been used by the scholars to refer to their philosophies. Their philosophy was a living philosophy and the world or the universe formed an integral part of it. Here we are making an attempt to understand their view of the world or cosmos in relation to their

understanding of reality as a whole. The method followed is qualitative and philosophical. The objective of this article is twofold: to peep into the Tamang and Lepcha cosmologies with special emphasis on their myths of creation, and secondly to consider the impact of Christianity on them setting the limit within the boundaries of the Darjeeling district.

Approaches to Cosmology

Etymologically cosmology comes from two Greek words *kosmos* (κόσμος) and *logia* (-λογία) meaning study or science of the world (*kosmos* means world and *logia* means science or study). The term was first used by a German philosopher Christian Wolff in 1730 in his work *Cosmologia Generalis* (*Cosmology*, n.d.). Cosmology has been understood as the study of the material world in its most generic aspects. “The complex of finite beings in which matter is present is called the world (or physical nature), and is the object of cosmology” (Mascia, 1964, p. 499). For Aristotle, father of Greek philosophy, Cosmology was nothing but physics. Cosmology was in its rudimentary state during the time of Aristotle and his cosmology was based on the principal of the mover and the thing moved. Aristotelian cosmology was not free from philosophical dualism where we find the existence of matter and the first principle of being existing eternally (Mascia, 1964). As time passed by Cosmology developed as a significant philosophical treatise which studied not only the how but also the why of the universe. During the medieval period the Christian thinkers like Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Anselm and others began studying cosmology from a philosophical perspective of change which had a Christian touch. It corrected the Greek dualism by considering God as the creator of matter and considering creation *exnihilo*. The same Cosmology made its march with modifications and spread in the Christian circle. When Christianity entered the Darjeeling district it was sure to have a tremendous impact on the Tamang and Lepcha tribal view of the world, which we call cosmology today.

Cosmology developed differently in India than it did in the west. There was a the Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic traditions having their own worldviews and philosophies. Tribal philosophy falls under the non-sanskritic tradition. The Hindu cosmology, sanskritic tradition, was based on the *Vedas* and the *Puranas*. *Brahman* has been conceived as the

creator of the universe and the universe is cyclically created and destroyed in the time-span of 8.64 billion years. The concept of different *yugas* (*satya*, treat, *dwapara* and *kali*) forms a significant part. *Rig Veda* views cosmos as the one true divine principle projecting itself as the divine *vāk* (word). *Hiranyagarbha* (golden egg) has been considered as the beginning of creation as mentioned in a hymn called *Hiranyagarbha Sūkta* (*Rig Veda* 10.121). The Hindu cosmology has the concept of *Trimurti* (trinity) where *Brahman* is the God of creation, *Vishnu* is the God of preservation, and *Shiva* is the God of destruction. Brahma re-creates the world after Shiva destroys it (Hindu Cosmology, n.d.). Thus the concept of creation and destruction leading to reconstruction of the world finds a significant place in the Hindu cosmology. The tribals, who belonged to non-sanskritic tradition, had their own philosophies mostly preserved in their rich oral tradition which we will be discussing in this article.

The world or cosmos can be studied through various perspectives and the two principal approaches that have been developed are the philosophical approach and the scientific approach. We find scientific cosmology developing vis-à-vis philosophical cosmology. It will not be wise to dismiss the tribal view of the world as superstitious and unscientific on the basis of such scientific and philosophical developments. As we have already stated, we should be careful not to simply apply mainline philosophical and scientific criteria in studying the tribal view of the cosmos or world. Thus we prefer to study cosmos from the tribal perspective or by taking a tribal approach. According to Redfield (1960), tribal worldview involves an understanding and describing the tribal world as the tribal traditions look upon it, and then, conceptualizing and abstracting it (Redfield 1960). The Tamang and Lepcha tribal approach to reality is cosmotheandric. A great Christian philosopher and theologian, Raimond Pannikar, coined the term cosmotheandricism to highlight the intimate bond that existed among cosmos, andros and theos (world, man and God). Pannikar (1998) said, “I have called cosmotheandricism the experience of the equally irreducible character of the divine, the human and the cosmic (freedom, consciousness and matter), so that reality being one – cannot be reduced to a single principle” (p. 121).

The tribal perspective of the world or cosmos can be found preserved in their oral traditions which have been handed down through traditional myths, folklores and songs. Initially the tribals seemed to be more interested in 'what is that' and 'how is that' rather than 'why is that'. Their reflections were experience based which exhibit an early stage of cosmology and the realm of early science. That was the Tamang and Lepcha tribal cosmology in the rudimentary form. Their traditional myths serve as entry points into their view of cosmos. These myths have been preserved orally and today we find them being written down by the scholars. We can also gather the myths of creation and cosmology by peeping into the traditional tribal songs, folklores and recitation of the tribal historians and shamans. Nevertheless a difficulty in ascertaining the genuine version of the myths cannot be denied. The concept of space (totality of creation) finds a central place in the Tamang and Lepcha worldview. They seem to comprehend everything from the perspective of creation. We can observe harmony with space or totality of creation forming the starting point of their spirituality and their search for liberation. An awareness of being one with the whole of creation is, therefore, the spiritual foundation of the tribal people.

According to Elaide (1958) every myth is cosmogonic because every myth expresses the appearance of a new cosmic situation or primeval event which becomes a paradigm for all time to come. But instead of reducing myths to a prototype or classifying them and seeing their origin, it is wiser to study the structure and the part they play in the spiritual experience of primitive man. Myth is a precedent and an example not only for man's actions (sacred or profane) but also as regards the condition in which his nature places him. It is a precedent for the expression of reality as a whole. It discloses a level of reality quite beyond any empirical and rational understanding. It reveals a region of ontology inaccessible to superficial logical experience. All myths reveal two things: diametrical opposition of two divine figures sprung from one and the same principle and *coincidentia oppositorum* (coincidence of opposites) in the very nature of divinity (benevolent and terrible, creative and destructive, solar and serpentine, etc.) (Eliade, 1958). Before we enter into the Tamang and Lepcha myths of creation let us present a short background of Christianity in the Darjeeling district.

Advent of Christianity and Transition in the Tribal Thinking

Credit goes to a Moravian Christian missionary, Rev. William Start, for introducing Christianity officially in Darjeeling in 1841. He originally belonged to the Church of England but became an independent Baptist later (Perry, 1997 & Dewan, 1991). Roman Catholic missionaries arrived only in 1846, and the Catholic Church forms the major Christian Church in Darjeeling today. According to Henrichs (1943), the chronicle of Loreto Convent, Darjeeling, contained this account, “On October the 10th, 1846 the first batch of Loreto Nuns arrived in Darjeeling with their chaplain, Rev. Mr. John McGirr” (cited in Henrichs, 1943, p. 10). Thus, Loreto nuns and Fr. John McGirr were the first batch of Roman Catholics to have stepped officially into Darjeeling. The main objective of the Loreto nuns was to establish a school for the European girls and Fr. McGirr came as their chaplain who too had his own educational motives. They were followed by several other missionaries belonging to different denominations and congregations. When the missionaries arrived in Darjeeling they found three groups of people dwelling here: the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Nepalese. Lepchas are considered as one of the earliest inhabitants of Darjeeling and Sikkim, but they have been reduced to a minority in terms of numerical strength. Tamangs, counted as belonging to the Nepali community, is another tribe which is the strongest tribal community in terms of population.

Lepchas and Tamangs are two different ethnic tribal communities having different religions, traditions, cultures and philosophies. There are at least two meeting points between them. The first is Tibetan Buddhism (Lamaism) and the second is Christianity. The non-Christian Lepchas and Tamangs are united as one due to Lamaism and the Christian Lepchas and Tamangs are united as one due to Christianity though their cultures are different. The Christian missionaries found the Tamangs and the Lepchas following an admixture of bonism and Buddhism and admixture of munism and Buddhism respectively which was an impact of Tibetan Buddhism called Lamaism. The advent of Christianity brought about further a impact in several areas of tribal living. One such impact was the philosophical impact. This brought about a great change in the worldview of the Tamangs and the Lepchas. This, in turn, impacted their way of looking at the world. They even started considering their myths of creation in a Christian light. Here we

find a transition in the tribal worldview leading to a development in their view of the world. Let us consider their myths of creation first in order to ascertain their cosmology followed by the impact of Christianity.

Tamang Myths of Creation and Cosmology

We do not have a systematic Tamang cosmology so far. We can make an attempt to formulate Tamang cosmology from their traditional myths contained in Tamang whaees. *Whaee* means song in Tamang language. According to *Sachya Namchyala Whaee* (Song of Creation) there was a formless sky in the beginning before the world was created. *Dorjegyadem (Vajra)* of air took the concrete form and covered the entire universe. Fire appeared above *Dorje* and water appeared above fire. White foam gathered in water and mud appeared in it. The Sumeru Mountain appeared there. The four directions could be distinguished on the basis of this mountain. Human beings were born in all the four directions. The gods reigned in the sky, *nagrajas* reigned in the underworld and the hunter gods reigned in the space (Lama, 1957). The creation myth mentions space, air, fire, water and mud before humans were born. However, the myth does not give us a detailed account of how human beings were created. It just mentions that the humans were born in the four directions. Nor is there a detailed explanation of how the earth was formed.

Let us consider *Minjyang prachchi la rhama* (song to be sung by the tamba during *minjyang*): “After having taken birth in the lump of flesh, the body created out of dust turned into dust, water into water, fire into fire and the spirit of air turned into air” (Lama, 1965, p. 74). *Tamba* is a term for Tamang historian and the term *minjyang* means a death ritual. From the above quotation we can ascertain a fact that humans are composed of body and soul. The concept of soul was still understood more in its materialistic aspect and it may not be proper for us to judge it in the light of helemorphism. According to this myth body is created out of mud, water and fire whereas soul is made up of air and will eventually turn into air. The purpose of creation of humans has been stated in this way, “Five gods performed a sacrifice so that humans could be created in order to worship gods” (Lama, 1965, p. 69). Thus we find a polytheistic concept of God who existed before the creation of human beings.

According to another version of the myth of creation there was a formless sky in the beginning. Once there appeared a bright light in the formless sky. Earth appeared below that light and sky appeared above it. Water drops were seen in the middle of the sky and slowly they began to fall on earth. The water drops formed a lake on earth. Moss and foam appeared in the water. Sand particles could be seen in the moss. The sand particles developed further and gave rise to mud and stone. Mud and stone began to gain heights and as a result mountains and hills were formed. The four directions, seven big continents and eight sub-continents were made. Oceans were formed, seeds appeared. *Mü* (ether), *labā* or (wind), *mé* (fire), *safrā* (earth) and *kui* (water) were separated from one another. Various colours came into being. Gods remained in the *akasha* (sky), *nag* in *patal* (under-world), Hunters in *antariksha* (space) and eighteen *ruis* or *thars* (clan) of Tamangs were created on earth. Accordingly, *bapsa* (place of origin) of each *rui* (clan) and *Pholā* or *Kuldeviā* (god of the clan) also appeared (Tamang, 2006). Today Tamangs talk about 226 *ruis* or *thars* (Tamang, 2005).

Let us consider two more versions of creation myths: the lamaistic version and the bonistic version based on *bon dharma* of the Tamangs. According to the lamaistic version Dorjegyadem is the creator of the universe. Once he appointed Mahaguru Rimpoché to protect the world. There was no human on earth. So Dorjegyadem requested Mahaguru Rimpoché to create human beings. Mahaguru instead created three *vikshus*: *chegu*, *lungu* and *tulgu*. These three *vikshus* managed to create human bodies but could not instill life in them. So they turned to Mahaguru who in turn had recourse to Dorjegyadem. Mahaguru received a *vajra* to create humans. Mahaguru broke the *vajra* into three pieces and from these three pieces he created three women: Dashing Dolma, Dashing Tashi and Dashing Tuku. These three were kept at the service of the *vikshus*. The women were always disturbed by a monkey while going to fetch water for ceremonial rites. When the *vikshus* found it out and discovered that the monkey too was created by their *guru* they decided to bestow the three women to the monkey in marriage. So the monkey married the three women and had offsprings. According to this myth Tamangs are the descendents of the monkey and the three women (Tamang, 2006).

Santabir Lama (1965) also mentions this myth but in a slightly different way. There is no mention of three women but only one Dashing Dolma. She was often disturbed by a monkey. She complained to the four faced *Brahma* who had created both her and the monkey. *Brahma* asked her to bring the monkey in front on him. Dashing Dolma requested the monkey to report to the shed of *Brahman*. Then the two were married. They had a son named Phodup and a daughter called Modup. They got married and they had three sons Lhyamin, Jyolsum, and Dhundup. The eldest son Lhyamin went to heaven, the second son Jyolsum took re-birth as the spirit of birds and animals, whereas the youngest son Dhundup took re-birth in the spirit of holy cow (*kamdhenugai*). Lama says though there are differences in the presentation of this myth yet there is agreement as far as the birth of humans from Dashing Dolma and the monkey is concerned (Lama, 1965).

There are myths regarding a new creation after destruction. I would like to present two such myths. A Bonbo myth talks about a new-creation after a destruction. Once upon a time, oppression and injustice crossed all its limits in this world. So the gods and goddesses decided to create a new world. Nine *dini* (suns) and nine *lani* (moons) appeared together for nine days continuously. All the creatures were burnt to ash. However, *Nag* which lives in *patallok* (underworld) had secretly hidden a man and a woman. The man called *Phadong Chenpo* and the woman called *Mamwali Sangmo* appeared in the cave of Kailash after the great destruction. They got married and had nine sons and nine daughters. The nine sons and nine daughters got married among themselves and had offsprings, the Tamangs. So *Phadong Chenpo* and *Mamwali Sangmo* were the first parents of Tamangs (Tamang, 2006).

There is a Tamang song called *Dangbo la Whaee* which narrates the destruction and recreation. Perhaps it was sung to maintain people's faith in God:

At the end of the modern world
Seven suns and seven moons will shine in the sky
The entire forest will go dry
Stones and mud melt like wax
There will be deluge on earth
Then God will recreate the earth
Green grass (tuft) will sprout
Fern will flower (Lama, 1965, p. 35).

According to the *Bon dharma* of Tamangs, *dubo* (tuft) was the first thing to sprout on the earth. They believe that a human stamps on the grass from birth till death. So during the important ceremonies they make sure that a bundle of *dubo* (tuft) is there.

We need to peep into Tamang shamanism to get a deeper picture of Tamang cosmology. Women have been given a respectable place in Tamang cosmos. Role of women as bonbos and the relationship between a bonbo and *tсен* (female spirits) help us to consider this aspect in a better way. According to Holmberg (1983):

Like women who mediate in the occupy an intermediate place in the Tamang cosmos – the mid-space relations of particlans, *tсен* between earth and sky where they delight in the nectar of flowers that flourish in high altitude passes and in the pastures ad forests of mountain peaks (p. 45).

Beside earth and sky there seem to be an intermediate space. However, that space happens to be within earthly realm somewhere in the mountains. The Tamang word for the entire universe is *Jambuling*. This world is not the only world in *Jambuling*. They believe that there are six more worlds.

The Lepcha Myth of Creation and Cosmology

As in the case of the Tamangs we do not have a systematic Lepcha cosmology. Thus we need to lean on their traditional myths of creation. It is said that more than ten days and nights are required to narrate the Lepcha myth of creation. We encounter some difficulties as well as differences here. Various scholars have presented such a myth in different ways creating some confusion. The myths related to creation seem to be considering water and earth as already existing before the creation of human beings. Their concept of the creator is female. The created earth floats like a pot on a space of infinite water. A Lepcha myth titled *The flood and the serpent-king* opens up in this way,

In the beginning, the world was all water, and there were no living creatures. Then the creator made an earthenware pot that floated on the water, and this was land that floated on the sea. Like a human body that is made of flesh and bone the earth is

made of rock and soil. The creator planted *po* or bamboo in the lowlands. (Stocks, 1925, p. 358).

Similarly another myth titled *The first man and the first sacrifice* opens up in this way: “In the beginning there was only sea, and the Creator, Tashey-takbothing, made two kinds of fish, *ngo* was the common kind, while the *ngo-yang* had a serpent form” (Stocks, 1925, p. 355). It is followed by the mention of a tortoise which supports the world in which birds and animals were created. Then Tashey-takbo-thing created the humans. Creation of human takes place from various things of nature. Human form was made from earth and mud. Blood was made from water, bone was made from stone and veins were made from creepers of the jungle. Description of woman is rather pathetic and sudden. Tashey-takbo-thing entangles a woman in his snare while catching birds (Stocks, 1925).

The Lepcha myth of creation of human beings hold some points in common with Christian account of creation mentioned in the book of Genesis. According to the Lepcha myth of creation the *Poomthing* (the first ancestors or the first parents) were created by *It-mo* or *Itboo-Deboo* (the Creator) from the pure and virgin snow of the mountain Kanchanjunga’s pinnacle. Fadongthing and Nuzaongnyoo were the first male and female created by God. Fadongthing in Lepcha means ‘the most powerful’ and Nuzaongnyoo means ‘ever fortunate’. *Itboo-Deboo*, or God, created them with his own hands. They were considered as brother and sister because *Itboo-Deboo* had commanded them by saying “My children, you two are brother and sister, therefore, you two should hold on to the excellence of morals”. God also told them about impending disaster, untold misery and misfortune if they crossed the limit. God then sent Fadongthing to live at the top of Tungseng Nareng Chu and Nuzaongnyoo was put next to Naho-Nathar Da, a lake, at the base of the mountain. Thus they were made to live in separation. Time passed by and Nuzaongnyoo became a beautiful woman. She always longed to meet Fadongthing. However, she was aware of God’s command. But she yielded to her temptation and decided to meet Fadongthing.

The myth says that she climbed the peak of Tungseng Nareng Chu with the help of a golden ladder. The two met one another and committed sin and this is the reason why Tungseng Nareng Chu is

considered as the unfortunate mountain peak by the Lepchas. They had seven children who were thrown away to hide their sins from the Creator. All these deserted children took the form of evil spirits (*mungs*) Laso-Mung-Pano being the eldest of them. God got upset with their sin and they were sent down to the foothills of Mt. Kanchanjunga to live as hunsband and wife. They had offsprings and spread over the foothills of Kanchanjunga. That is why the Lepchas are also known as the ‘Children of Mount Kanchanjunga’. This land is known as *Māyel Lyāng* which seems to have been created already before the creation of the first parents. *Mā* means ‘hidden’, *yel* means eternal, and *lyāng* means ‘land’. So *Māyel Lyāng* means ‘the hidden eternal country’ (Tamsang, 2008). As there are 108 peaks in the Sikkim Himalayas, so also there are 108 Lepcha castes or clans in the Lepcha race each representing a particular snowy peak. The highest peak Kanchanjunga represents the Lepcha community as a whole (Tamsang, 1998). According to a different version of Lepcha myth, Tarbong-mu, another son of the Creator besides Bong-thing, was the first to arrive into this world. He got married to Narib-nom, a fairy from *rum-lyang* (abode of gods) who too had come down to earth (Stocks, 1927).

According to Stocks (1925), “The Lap-cha universe is remarkably small, and their geography is limited. It seems that they never dared leave their narrow valleys to view the outside world” (Stocks, 1925, p. 340). Nevertheless their mythical world, suggestive of actual regions, expands far beyond their actual universe. The Lepcha myths suggest two more worlds or rather regions. There is a world of fire under water. There is a world of wind beneath the world of fire in which the spirit of earthquake lives. Then there is *rumlyang* (abode of gods) above the sky and men and animals can fly upto there. There seems to be an intermediate country between earth and *rumlyang* known as *Tiamtan*, *Sari-rung-dong-chen* or *Siri-nong-dong-chen*. However, Stocks (1925) opines that this intermediary world may be referring to the country outside the land of the Lepchas (foreign land).

Today the Lepchas talk about hell as *munglyang* or *a-nok*. The term *a-nok* is found in a myth titled *The miraculous building of the palace by the twins* (Stocks, 1924, p. 395). The accounts may be mythical but we can see an effort of the tribal minds to explore various dimensions of reality. We need to understand Lepcha shamanism in order to have a

better view. Mun is a female and the most powerful shaman in the Lepcha world. She is a mediator between the spiritual world and the physical world whose main task is to conduct the souls of the dead people to *poomju* (abode of ancestral spirits). However, Lepcha *poomju* and even *rumlyang* (abode of gods) seem to be within the empirical realm (Kanchanjunga) and *munglyang* or *a-nok* under this world, but not beyond this world.

Impact of Christianity on the Tamang and Lepcha Myths of Creation and Cosmology

The various details in the myth of creation, though many of them may sound unscientific, cannot be dismissed outright. These myths are trying to explain a fact of creation that there is a creator of this cosmos who is not of this world but not totally cut off from this world as well. The human individual is a created being who resides temporarily in this world and has to leave this world one day. Though we do not find a satisfactory explanation of the other world, the myths tell us that the spirits of the dead people land in a place/realm which falls somewhere within this cosmos (universe). Their suggestion of the mountains and underworld, suggestive of heaven and hell, might be their pedagogical and religious strategy to explain the common people as we do today while teaching our students.

The Tamang and Lepchas minds were soon influenced by the Christian myth of creation (Genesis 1 & 2). It has been estimated that 50 per cent of the Lepchas have embraced Christianity though not very many Tamangs have become Christians. Christianity as a whole managed to impart such a concept of the Creator of this cosmos who was loving, caring and worthy of all respect. The tribal myths suggested a monotheistic, but at the same time, polytheistic concept of God. Christianity imparted a strictly monotheistic concept of God. Tribal myths suggested that god was just the creator, but Christianity preached that God not only created the world but also sustained it. The human beings had a duty to love God, praise Him and thank Him.

The tribal myths seemed to have taken for granted the pre-existence of matter, and are not thus free from dualism. The Lepcha myths of creation seem to be considering water and earth as already existing before the creation of human beings. Similarly the Tamang song of

creation, known as *Sachya Namchyal Whaee*, and other myths posit the pre-existence of formless sky in the beginning. However, Christianity introduced the concept of creation *ex-nihilo* where there was no room for dualism. Further, the tribal concept of creation was complemented by the concept of time. St. Augustine argued that the world was created by God out of nothing (*ex-nihilo*) through a free act of His will. A few species were created in the beginning and these multiplied by virtue of the intrinsic principles of reproduction (*rationes seminales*). Time was co-created with the world or matter and time is constituted of past, present and future (Mascia, 1964). St. Thomas Aquinas talked at length about creation *ex-nihilo* (out of nothing). Thomas Aquinas denied the Greek (Aristotelian) dualism according to which matter was uncreated and co-eternal with God. He agrees with St. Augustine that God has created the world *ex-nihilo* through a free act of His will (Mascia, 1964).

One may wonder whether the term 'formless sky' used in Tamang myth should be interpreted to mean 'nothing'? A difficulty is posed by the term 'sky' which is already 'something' in common understanding. We are also led to think that the early tribal thinkers might have struggled to explain the concept of nothingness in the beginning. Thus, they might have used the term 'formless sky'. As per the Tamang myth of creation there appeared a bright light in the formless sky. Earth appeared below that light and sky appeared above it. This is very close to one particular aspect of the Christian myth of creation. The most striking feature of the Old Testament world is the "firmament," a solid dome which separates "the waters from the waters" (Genesis 1:6).

Let us consider *Minjyang prachchi la rhama* (song to be sung by *tamba* during *minjyang*): "After having taken birth in the lump of flesh, the body created out of dust turned into dust, water into water, fire into fire and the spirit of air turned into air" (Lama, 1965, p. 74). This reminds us of the famous biblical statement "For dust you are and to dust you will return" (Genesis 3: 19). There are many cross references to this statement in the Bible. Example: "All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust" (Ecclesiasticus 3: 20).

We have seen that there are different versions of Tamang myths of creation and some of these myths show the influences of Buddhist and Hindu elements. According to the Tamang myth of creation, narrated by Santabir Lama, the four faced Brahma was the creator of Dashing Dolma

and a Monkey, who became the primogenitors of the Tamangs. This myth shows the impact of Hinduism on the Tamangs. *Brahma* is a Hindu deity and monkey has its own place in Hinduism. The Lamaistic version of the myth mentions three women (one of them Dashing Dolma) who get married to the monkey. The background and the names of women in the myth show proximity to Tibetan society and Tibetan Buddhism. The Bonbo version of the myth talks about re-creation after destruction in which a man called *Phadong Chenpo* and a woman called *Mamwali Sangmo* appeared in the cave of Kailash after the great destruction. It does not tell us much about the creation before destruction save that the world had become corrupt. This may sound close to the biblical account of the deluge where only Noah and his families survived. *Phadong Chenpo* and *Mamwali Sangmo* got married and the present generation of the Tamangs seems to be the descendents of these two parents. However, we do not know about the creation before the destruction from this myth.

The biblical account of creation in the Book of Genesis (Chapter 1 & 2) had many parallels with the Lepcha myth of creation which made them feel at home with Christianity. According to the Biblical account of creation, Adam and Eve were the primogenitors who were created in the image and likeness of God and they were placed in the Garden of Eden.

So God created human kind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them...then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed (Genesis 2: 7-8).

We can find striking similarities in the Lepcha myth of creation where the 'Poomthing' or the first parents were created by *It-mo* or *Itboo-Deboo* (the Creator) from the pure and virgin snow of the mountain Kanchanjunga's pinnacle. Fadongthing and Nuzaongnyoo were the first male and female (Adam and Eve) created by God. Further, God then sent Fadongthing to live at the top of Tungseng Nareng Chu and Nuzaongnyoo was put next to *Naho-Nathar Da*, a lake, at the base of the mountain. Thus they were made to live in separation. However, the

Christian account differs here. The purpose for the creation of Eve was to provide a companion to man. “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper as his partner’” (Genesis 2:15). And it was man who named his wife as Eve (Genesis 2:20).

And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die’ (Gen. 2: 16-17). But they disobeyed the command of God and ate from the tree of life. God became angry with them and Adam and Eve were removed from the garden of Eden. “He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen.3:24).

According to the Lepcha myth the woman climbed the peak of Tungseng Nareng Chu with the help of a golden ladder. The two met one another and committed a sin. Lyangsong Tamsang (2008) writes that God became angry with them and said, “You have committed a sin. I cannot allow you two to live in this sacred mountain any longer. As a punishment, both of you, now, must live at the foothills of Mt. Kanchanjunga as humans and suffer.” (p. 3). In the case of Adam and Eve it was Satan, in the form of a snake, who tempted Eve (Genesis 3: 1-13). In the case of Lepcha myth it was again woman who took the help of a golden ladder. So the golden ladder serves as a parallel for snake, both serving as a means towards the commitment of a sin. Adam and Eve were chased away from the Garden of Eden and they landed on earth just as the Lepcha primogenitors landed at the foot of Kanchenjunga. So it is not only the gentle and friendly nature of the Lepchas but many things which their traditions had in common with Christianity might have led them to embrace Christianity.

If we consider the mythical account of creation of the Tamangs and the Lepchas their concept of the creator is anthropomorphic. Moreover some myths narrate creation taking place in itself and by itself. For example: suddenly Dorjegyadem (or *vajra*) appeared and then the rest followed. Some accounts of creation show the act of creation by chance though reality does not appear cold as in the case of the Greeks. Lepchas

and Tamangs believed that Christianity gave them a better concept of God, the creator, who was both the creator and the sustainer of the world.

The Christian concept of the Creator God as male appears to be closer to the Tamang concept of God. Their creator God is a male. The Lepchas have a concept of a female creator *It-mo* or *Itboo-Deboo rum* which is unique. Whether the creator is male or female the purpose is to show that there is a creator of the world and the creation has a purpose. The purpose for the creation of humans has been stated in this way, “Five gods performed a sacrifice so that humans could be created in order to worship gods” (Lama, 1965, p. 69). This fits with the Christian concept as the purpose of creation is to worship and praise God according to Christianity.

Conclusion

The first formulation of Tamang and Lepcha cosmology, or even philosophy in general, began in the Christian circle in the Darjeeling district. Prior to that perhaps nobody had paid attention to these tribal cosmologies or philosophies though we cannot rule out the possibility of casual considerations. Tamang and Lepcha tribal cosmologies form an integral element of the tribal spirituality which consists in living in harmony with nature and the entire creation, and they experience liberation in it. If this spirituality is disturbed they are in bondage. There is no clear cut division between secular and the religious. That is why we find it difficult to distinguish between religion and non-religion in the case of these tribals. Even the Supreme Spirit or Creator God/Goddess is seen as a part of the entire creation. Everything that exists is considered existing as a whole in a harmonious living. Their very approach to reality is cosmotheandric which highlights the intimate bond that exists among *cosmos*, *andros* and *theos* (world, man and God). Thus their cosmic vision does not isolate world from human and God/Goddess. The Tamang and Lepcha myths of creation reveal similar spiritual bond. The very spirituality of the tribals is thus manifested through these myths where it is difficult to differentiate obviously between the secular and the religious. What is secular appears to be religious and what is religious appears to be secular. So the entire cosmos is sacred, holy because it has a deep bond with the divine. When the Tamangs and the Lepchas were touched by Christianity, and when some even embraced Christianity,

such a bond remained intact and got further strengthened. The horizon of their worldview broadened and they could think about the world and the universe in a new light. So Christianity had a very healthy and positive impact on the Tamang and Lepcha cosmologies.

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