UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

PROPHETIC CRITIQUE OF LAND OWNERSHIP ABUSE IN MICAH 2:1-2 AND

ISAIAH 5:8-10: A NORTHEAST INDIAN TRIBAL PERSPECTIVE

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BY

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Contents

ABBREVIATIONS

ABD — David Noel Freedman (ed.), The *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992)

ANET — James B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969)

BA — *Biblical Archaeologist*

BASOR — *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*

BDB — Brown-Driver-Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*

Bib Int — *Biblical Interpretation*

BHS — *Biblia Hebraica Strutgartensia*

BTF — *Bangalore Theological Forum*

CBQ — *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

FOLT — *Forms of the Old Testament Literature*

ICC — *International Critical Commentary*

IEJ — *Israel Exploration Journal*

ICC — *International Critical Commentary*

IBT — *Interpreting Bible Texts*

ITS — *Indian Theological Studies,*

JBL — *Journal of Biblical Literature*

JNES — *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*

JSOT — *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*

JSOTSup — *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* Supplement Series

LTJ — *Lutheran Theological Journal*

MT	*Masoretic Text*
MTJ	*Mizoram Theological Journal*
NEA	*Near Eastern Archaeology*
NCBC	*The New Century Bible Commentary*
NICOT	*The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*
NRSV	*New Revised Standard Version*
OTG	*Old Testament Guides*
OTL	*Old Testament Library*
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
RSV	*Revised Standard Version*
SBL	*Society of Biblical Literature*
SBLDS	SBL *Dissertation Series*
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
SSN	*Studia Semitica Neerlandica*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	*Vetus Testamentum* Supplements
WA	*World Archaeology*
WBC	*Word Biblical Commentary*

Acknowledgments

Abstract

Within biblical studies it is often assumed that the prophetic texts of Micah 2:1-2 and Isaiah 5:8-10 point to significant landownership abuse, coupled with one generic group oppressing another generic group by taking their land. Faced with a lack of deeds of land ownership in ancient Israel, many scholars have turned to social science for contextual clues and found them helpful. As an alternative to a social scientific approach, however, this research provides a new perspective on land ownership that draws on the Northeast Indian tribal experience. This new interpretation combines contextual post colonial, liberation and cultural approaches to interpretation. It is a reading from the point of view of an oppressed group of people in Northeast India, the community of which the researcher is a part.

This perspective provides a useful model for interpreting the socio-economic contexts behind the prophetic critique of land ownership abuse. Rather than focussing on the economic and political dimensions of land ownership, it looks at land ownership from the perspective of religio-cultural identity. This emphasises a link between land, God, ancestors, family and community, both in ancient Israelite society and in Northeast Indian society. From this new perspective, it is possible to discern an ethos and set of values which the eighth-century prophets, especially Micah and Isaiah tried to defend and uphold. These revolved around the socio-political and religio-cultural identity of the close-knit rural family and community, communitarian values of land sharing, and the interconnectedness of God, humans and land. Thus, new insights can be gained into land ownership abuse through the use of the Northeast India tribal perspective which provides a fresh interpretation to biblical studies. Furthermore, this perspective offers valuable insights into prophetic protest against injustice, not only in ancient Israel, but also in modern societies.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A. Aim and Scope

Land is a vital and recurring theme in the Hebrew Bible and the land with its associated 'rights and privileges' was a factor of immense 'historical and theological significance' in the life and faith of the people of Israel.[1] It occupied a pivotal role in the life of Israel because it gave identity and security which met the economical and sociological needs of the people. Land was also infused with a deep theological significance, for it was 'a visible sign of the relationship' that existed between Yahweh and the people of Israel.[2] Moreover, land was a visible link between an individual household and larger social units.[3] It is very likely that patrimonial land (נחלה) serves as a sacred symbol in ancient Israel society, holding the soil, the community and ancestors together.[4] However, the biblical literature seems to indicate that, with the emergence of monarchy, the conceptual basis of land tenure changed drastically resulting in land confiscation on the one hand, and prophetic protest against such abuses on the other.

The fundamental aim of this work is to examine the issues of landownership abuse, with a particular focus on land issues in Micah 2:1-2 and Isaiah 5:8-10 and in particular to

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[1] E.W. Davies, 'Land: Its Rights and Privileges', in R.E.Clements (ed.), *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 349.

[2] Davies, 'Land', 349.

[3] Carol Meyers, 'Household Religion', in Frencesca Stavrakopoulou and John Barton (eds.), *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah* (London / New York: T & T Clark, 2010): 119.

[4] Saul M. Olyan, 'Family Religion in Israel and the Wider Levant of the First Millennium BCE', in John Bodel and Saul M. Olyan (eds.), *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008): 115-119.

investigate these texts through the eyes of the Northeast India tribal peoples.[5] Although the concerns of the subject matter may seem to be covered by the wider tradition of liberation theology, the perspective in this work is more than a liberation approach alone. The methodology which I will employ in this research is the Northeast India tribal perspective,[6] with a combination of cultural, liberation and postcolonial approaches. Details of my approach will be discussed in chapter two.

The core question which I will address in this work is: What are the values and ethos which the eighth-century prophets particularly Micah and Isaiah tried to defend in the midst of the socio-economic and religio-cultural conflict? Or to put it differently, what are the main factors behind the prophetic protest against land ownership abuse in the eighth century BCE? In this present work I will attempt to explore some potential factors which had previously neglected behind ancient landownership abuse through the experience of Northeast Indian tribal peoples. I shall argue in this work that the Northeast Indian tribal perspective could offer a distinctive perspective as it will engage with the cultural and religious dimension of the society whilst still engaging with historical-critical and social scientific approaches. This

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[5] The term 'tribal' or 'tribe' suggests primitive people inhabiting the hills and forests, original but not highly developed dwellers. Etymologically it is rooted in the Latin term 'tribus' which refers to the three basic divisions of the Roman citizens without any pejorative connotation. The citizens of equal status were divided into three tribes, viz, Tintienses, Ramnenses and Luceres. This division was made for the purpose of taxation, military conscription and census taking.For details see, 'Tribe' in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Micropedia, Vol X (1979): 115.

[6] The so-called tribal theology/perspective in its heterogeneous expressions emerged in the 1980s. At the initial stage, the intention seemed to be to develop a theology in relevance to each particular tribe in Northeast India, such as the Mizo, Naga, and Khasi, acknowledging the heterogeneity in spite of certain degree of homogeneity. Later on, the phrase Tribal Theology/Perspective came to be used as an umbrella phrase to cover contextual theologies in Northeast India. K.Thanzauva (ed.), *Towards Tribal Theology: The Mizo Perspective* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1989) was the first publication of Tribal theology in Northeast India and the first to use the phrase 'Tribal Theology/Perspective' in a published work. But the real development of tribal theology was due to the effort of the Tribal Study Centre inaugurated at Eastern Theological College, Jorhat in 1995, from where substantial and popularising work on tribal theology has been carried on since

in turn could contribute a substantial amount to understanding ancient Israelite and Judean society.

In Northeast India, where the researcher lives, tribal theology, which takes seriously the concerns and culture of the tribal peoples of the region, is in the making. Its relevance for theological studies and liturgy is being increasingly recognized. A Mizo tribal theologian Thanzauva conducted his doctoral research from a tribal perspective and later published his dissertation entitled 'Theology of Community: Tribal Theology in the Making';[7] this has made a solid contribution to tribal theology. An outstanding tribal theologian Wati Longchar has made a substantial contribution in books and articles on tribal religious traditions and culture.[8] More recently, theologians like Lalhmachhuana[9] and Lalpekhlua[10] reaffirm the significance of tribal values and attempt to develop the Mizo tribal concept of Pasaltha (brave/ knight) to interpret the person and work of Christ. Other recent works like 'Ground Works For Tribal Theology in the Mizo Context',[11] edited by Rosiamliana Tochhawng, K.Lalrinmawia and L.H.Rawsea and 'Theologizing Tribal Heritage: A Critical Re-Look',[12] edited by Hrangthan Chhungi and R.Zolawma's book, 'Tribal Ecclesiology: A Critical

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[7] K.Thanzauva, *Theology of Community: Tribal Theology in the Making* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conmference, 1997). Some of his other works includes 'Tribal Theological Trends in North East India', in Renthy Keitzer (ed.), *Good News for North East India: A Theological Reader* (Guwahati: CLS,1995):12-27; *Transforming Theology: A Theological Basis for Social Transformation* (Bangalore :Asian Trading Corporation, 2002).

[8] Some of his works includes *The Traditional Tribal Worldview and Modernity* (Jorhat: Eastern Theological College, 1995); *Encounter Between Gospel and Tribal Culture*, Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre,1999); 'Dancing with the Land: Significance of Land for Doing Tribal Theology', in A.Wati Longchar and Larry E.Davis (eds.), *Doing Theology with Tribal Resources: Context and Perspective,* (Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre, Eastern Theological College, 1999); *The Tribal Religious Traditions in North East India: A Introduction* (Jorhat: Eastern Theological College, 2000); *Returning to Mother Earth: Theology, Christian Witness and Theological Education and Indigenous Perspective* (Kolkotta: PTCA, 2012).

[9] Lalhmachhuana, 'Christ as Pasaltha: Towards a Mizo Christology', (M.Th Thesis, Senate of Serampore College, 2005); 'Pasaltha Theology', in *Mizoram Theological Journa*l, 6/2 (July-December, 2006): 22-32.

[10] L.H.Lalpekhlua, *Contextual Christology: A Tribal Perspective* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2007).

[11] *Reading in Mizo Christianity Series I : Ground Works For Tribal Theology in Mizo Context* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007).

[12] *Theologizing Tribal Heritage: A Critical Re-Look* (Delhi: CWM/ISET-ECC/PCI/ISPCK, 2008).

Synthesis of Select Early Christian Traditions and Tribal Cultural Traditions of Northeast India',[13] are also worth mentioning as these works contain useful resources for understanding Mizo Christianity, particularly in relation to Mizo traditional cultural values, practices and religion. All these attempts to interpret biblical texts using tribal values and traditional categories are encouraging and they certainly help the community to understand the biblical messages better.

But there are significant limitations or problems in this kind of hermeneutical process. As the tribal handed down their tradition orally, the written material is recent. Therefore the written sources of tribal history, worldview and vision are fragmentary in nature. There is a danger of becoming 'eclectic,' a tendency to be selective from the Bible and culture, which would hardly be successful. There is also a danger of romanticizing the tribal worldview in an attempt to rediscover liberative motifs in tribal culture. For example, the existence of the golden age in the tribal myths cannot be historically proved. Against the above world-view there are other observations that the Supreme/High God in tribal religion is rather distant from day to day life; it was the spirits who were very close to people. Thus, 'there is a danger of romanticizing the tribal worldview as well as absolutizing one, despite its complexity'. [14] Finally, it is not clear how far liberative motifs in tribal religion and culture can be rediscovered due to the fact that 'Modernity has affected the whole social fabric of tribal life'. It would be 'unreasonable to expect the modernised tribals to go back to their traditional way of life. Modernity has already come home and many people would not like to

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[13] R. Zolawma, *Tribal Ecclesiology: A Critical Synthesis of Select Early Christian Traditions and Tribal Cultural Traditions of Northeast India* (New Delhi: World Christian Imprints, 2016).
[14] Rosiamliana Tochhawng, 'Methodological Reflection on Theologizing Tribal Heritage in North East India', in Hrangthan Chhungi (ed.), *Theologizing Tribal Heritage: A Critical Re-Look* (Delhi: CWM/ISET-ECC/PCI/ISPCK, 2008): 26-27.

abandon it'.[15] This makes the task of attempting to revive traditional culture and rediscover liberative motifs in tribal culture much more difficult. Moreover, most of the research works done on Northeast Indian tribal peoples are theological rather than biblical.

In the midst of increasing tribal theologies in Northeast India, there appear to have been only two research projects done from a tribal or a Mizo perspective within Biblical studies. These are the theses entitled 'A Theology of Land: Mizo Perspective', by Lalchawiliana Varte,[16] and 'Values and Ethos of Eighth- Century Prophets: A Mizo Perspective', by Lallawmzuala Khiangte'.[17] The former is valuable as it gives us insights into Mizo cultural values particularly relating to the land. However, Lalchawiliana's studies are not focussed on particular biblical texts and are therefore too general to contribute a creative interpretation to biblical studies. Lallawmzuala devotes one chapter to land issues and makes a valuable contribution to biblical studies from a tribal perspective with a particular regard to the values and ethos of tribal people in both Israelite and Mizo cultures. I have incorporated some of the insights from his research into this study. But the present research moves beyond the concerns of previous research providing a more comprehensive perspective that focuses primarily on landownership. Moreover, while to a large extent I share the concerns and insights that Lallawmzuala has brought to biblical studies, my approach departs from his in a number of areas. For example, while Lallawmzuala used the concepts of משפחה (mišpāḥāh) and *Khua* (village) as the starting point for the landownership issue, I contend that the starting point should be father's house בית אב (bêt 'āb) and *Chhungkua* (family) as the basic structure

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[15] Longchar, *Traditional Tribal Worldview*, 153, 169.

[16] Lalchawiliana Varte, 'Theology of Land: A Mizo Perspective', (BD Thesis, Aizawl Theological College, 2006).

[17] Lallawmzuala Khiangte, 'Values and Ethos of Eighth-Century Prophets: A Mizo Perspective', (PhD Dissertation, School of Theology and Religious Studies, Bangor University, UK, 2009).

for the land ownership issue. Lallawmzuala fails to acknowledge the significant role of the basic unit called family/father household both in the life of ancient Israel and Northeast Indian tribal people within which the individual found identity and status. The importance of father's house בית אב (bêt 'āb) family in terms of land ownership should not be ignored and is integral in this research. In this I shall argue that in Micah 2:2 the prophet condemned the seizure of family estates rather than the kin-group or clan משפחה (mišpāḥāh).[18] Rogerson's argument seems plausible when he states that משפחה (mišpāḥāh) did not itself own land, but it had a responsibility to ensure that land remained the property of the smaller units.[19] In similar vein, Wright states משפחה 'did not own land collectively, nor did it apparently have any coercive power over its family units'.[20] Moreover, in Lallawmzuala's analysis, the significance of agriculture related festivals and, the symbiotic union between God-human-land has been ignored. Given the importance of these within both Israelite and Mizo cultures, this study will discuss them in detail.

A long-standing scholarly tradition interprets the land ownership abuse recorded in Micah 2: 1-2 and Isaiah 5:8-10 in the context of socio-economic conflict alone. This dominant reading of the prophetic critique of land ownership abuse in Micah and Isaiah needs

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[18] Raymond Westbrook, *Property and the Family in Biblical Law*, (JSOTSup, 113; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 13.

[19] John Rogerson, *Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics,* (JSOTSup, 405; New York/London: T& T Clark International, 2004), 125.

[20] Christopher J.H. Wright. *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, And Property in the Old Testament.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 53. משפחה was a major constituent in Israelite system of land tenure and its primary function was economic. It existed to protect and preserve the viability of its own extended families through such mechanisms as redemption of both land and persons that were in danger of passing-or had already passed-out of the hands of kinship group (eg.Lev.25). Meyers also argues that the farm lands themselves were not held by the kinship group as a whole but rather, it seems, by the constituent family groups. For details, see Carol Meyers, 'The Family in Early Israel', in Leo G.Perdue, et al (eds.), *Families in Ancient Israel* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997):1-47.

a closer examination. There is, of course, a political-economic dimension to the conflict. However, this thesis will argue that a reading from a tribal perspective suggests that tensions around land ownership abuse should be seen within the context of conflicts over religio-cultural systems which provided identity and meaning to the people of Judah. Throughout this work, I will attempt to develop this argument by prioritising cultural, liberationist hermeneutical approaches and contextual postcolonial as analytical tools appropriate to uncovering these aspects of the tribal perspective, whilst also trying to remain engaged with social scientific and 'historical-critical' methods.

According to the biblical account, the situation of conflict and crisis during the eighth century was precipitated by the economic and political policies of Israelite and Judaean kings. During this period, Judah and Israel had actively participated in interregional trade which brought much profit to the royal house and people in the upper elite. However, this regional trade had transformed the socio-economic order in ways that contravened traditional values. Here there are clear parallels with the experience of Northeast Indian tribal peoples in modern times. The tribal example suggests that the expansion of commercial agriculture and large estates in the highland occurred at the cost of disrupting of the communal relationship through which the Judean rural people derived meaning and significance. Under the pressure of a market-driven economy, land came to be treated more and more as a commodity, human relations were driven by profit motives and eventually the solidarity of the society and the structure of the family disintegrated. The tribal reading suggests that commoditization of land and other processes of production would result in the disruption of the sacred fabric of life for the rural, Judean peasant population. In this work I shall explore the plausible reasons behind such a prophetic critique of land ownership abuse in Judean society. Moreover, I shall examine the relationship of בית אב (bêt 'āb) to their נחלה

(naḫᵃlāh) to generate the sense of community and identity and the disruption of this relationship through land confiscation. All these issues deserve a closer examination and I shall investigate them with a new perspective of Northeast Indian experience in a comprehensive manner.

B. Outline of Thesis

This first chapter will provide a brief general introduction to the aims and scope of this investigation. It addresses the potential factors behind the prophetic critique of or protest against land ownership abuse in the eighth century. It also lays out arguments for the significance and structure of this research.

The second chapter will set out the context and methodology of this study. In the first part, I will provide an overview of recent work on the prophets focusing on methodology with particular attention to historical-critical, psychological and social-scientific approaches. A brief critique of some of this work will be offered, although, in the main part, I will draw on historical work that seems to be useful for providing evidence for land ownership abuse in eighth century BCE. In the second part of the chapter, I introduce the tribal perspective as a basic methodological or hermeneutical key to illuminating ancient texts and exploring their relevance to modern social issues. I will explore the basic assumptions and characteristics and implication of the Northeast Indian tribal perspective as applied to the Bible. This is the distinctive methodology that the study will employ, drawing together both literature reviews and the author's extensive personal experiences.

Having introduced the nature of prophecy which could reflect the context of eighth century in the second chapter, in the third chapter I will examine recent research on the socio-economic context of eighth- century prophecy particularly in relation to land ownership

abuse. I will also deal with the implications of archaeological evidence which will reflect the socio-economic context of eighth century. It is, indeed, one of the pertinent problems that there is little evidence from the biblical account pertaining to the social context of the eighth century. I attempt to reconstruct a socio-economic context of the eighth century from prophetic texts and historical books, any information available in the biblical record and other clues outside biblical accounts. Also, I attempt to investigate the circumstances that are believed to have led to loss of land, home, and inheritance of the eighth century Judah and Israel. There is little doubt that political, social and economic forces were at work in Ancient Israel and Judah. I will argue that the situation of conflict during the eighth century was precipitated by the policies of the kings of Israelite and Judaean with inter regional trade which brought much profits to the country. As we will see, however, these profits went mainly to the few upper class people to the detriment of majority of the peasants. The chapter will also deal with the prophetic critique against elite strategies of land accumulation and royal ideology or coordinated power politics which had destroyed the nexus of relationships between the people and the land.

Having introduced the Northeast India context in chapter two, using the Northeast India Tribal Perspective as a working model, the fourth chapter will go on to explore the Northeast India Tribal situation with special reference to Mizoram. In the first section, I will analyse the Northeast Indian tribal situation in general and Mizoram in particular including the effects of geographical and socio-cultural isolation and the traditional administrative system in relation to the land, the tribal concept of land, traditional land tenure and the structure of the Mizo family. I will also examine the traditional concept of land and how

various factors such as the forces of sanskritization,[21] modernization and globalization adversely affected the structure of the family and wider society in the Northeast India region with a postcolonial reading. I also attempt to make the outline of the new problems affecting tribal economic development including government policies, Land Use Policy, the present land tenure system and the alienation of land from tribal peoples. All these factors will be explored as they impact on the Northeast Indian tribal people's search for self-identity in the midst of a struggle for traditional land. Given this background, I shall argue that the Northeast India situation has suggestive parallels to that of the people of Judah in eighth century BCE. Despite the huge historical gaps between these two contexts, the parallels between them will be shown to be useful for understanding the complex predicament that the prophets were addressing.

In the fifth chapter, I will turn to the specific texts of Micah 2:1-2 and Isaiah 5:8-10 that address the problem of land ownership abuse in Israel and Judah during the eighth century BCE. In the first section, I shall give a brief survey of various commentaries and scholars' comments with critical assessments on them. This will show that most scholars have followed a dominant reading which views the texts from political and economic perspectives. In the second section of this chapter, I attempt to look at land ownership abuse in Micah 2:1-2 and Isaiah 5:8-10 from the new perspective of Northeast India tribal experience. Here the distinctive interpretation of these texts that can be derived from the

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[21] Sanskritization is a term propounded by the Indian sociologist M.N.Srinivas. He used the term in preference to Brahminization. Sanskritization is a 'process by which tribal people were drawn into Hindu society and culture rooted in ancient philosophies and culture and religious expression'. It is 'a process of imposition of Sanskrit oriented language, literature, [culture] and as well as of religious conversion to Brahmanic Hinduism'. See the details, Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 30. His other work 'A Note on Sanskritization and Westernization', *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, 15/ 4 (Aug, 1956): 481-496; See also Vanlalchhuanawma, 'Keynote Address', in Hrangthan Chhungi (ed.), *Theologizing Tribal Heritage: A Critical Re-Look* (Delhi: CWM/ISET-ECC/PCI/ISPCK, 2008):1-12.

Northeast Indian tribal perspective will be drawn out. The aim here is to explore the issues behind the prophetic protest against eighth century land accumulation in the light of Northeast Indian tribal perspective. This provides insights into the cultural and religious dimension of the situation that the prophets are addressing. The study finds that a Northeast Indian tribal perspective reveals various potential factors behind the prophets' protest against eighth century land ownership abuse. These factors include peasants' sense of meaning and identity of peasants, the organic unity between God, humans and land, and the community value of land sharing

Building on all this, the final chapter will conclude by summarising the main findings of the study and offering suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Through its history the Christian Church has wrestled with how to use the Bible properly to speak out relevantly and effectively in society. The hermeneutics applied to the text and the historical-critical and socio-political models that have been used to analyse both the ancient context and modern situation have been many and varied. Furthermore, within the same historical contexts different approaches have competed for biblical justification and ecclesiastical allegiance. In more recent times, interest has grown in reading the Bible through the eyes of oppressed groups of people so as to illuminate the relevance of these ancient texts to issues of justice in ancient and contemporary societies.[22] In particular, the denunciation of various socio-economic and religio-cultural practices in the prophetic books has been the focus of much of this work. In the first section of this chapter, a brief survey of the previous research on the nature of eighth century prophecy will be undertaken, giving particular attention to the historical-critical, psychological, and social scientific research used by scholars for their interpretative analysis. The second section will outline the methodology which will be employed in this dissertation. This research attempts to use what might be termed a tribal perspective as the basic methodological or hermeneutical key to illuminate the

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[22] For example, Mark Daniel Carroll R. *Contexts for Amos : Prophetic Poetics in Latin America Perspective* (JS OTSup, 132; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); George Koonthnam, 'Yahweh the Defender of Dalits: A Reflection on Isaiah 3: 12-15', *Jeevadhara* 22/128 (1992):112-123; A. Maria Arul Raja, 'Towards a Dalit Reading of the Bible: Some Hermeneutical Reflection', *Jeevadhera* 25/151 (1996): 29-34; George Kanairkath, 'A Dalit Reading of the Prophetic Writing', in Augustine Thottakara (ed.), *Indian Interpretation of the Bible* (Bangalore:Dharmaram, 2000): 231-251; K.Jesuratnam, 'Towards a Dalit Liberative Hermeneutics: Re-reading the Psalms of Lament', *Bangalore Theological Forum,* 34/1(June, 2002):1-34; Lallawmzuala Khiangte, 'Values and Ethos of Eighth-Century Prophets: A Mizo Perspective', (PhD Dissertation, School of Theology and Religious Studies, Bangor University, UK, 2009).

ancient texts and their application to modern social issues. In Northeast India, where the researcher lives, tribal theology, which takes seriously the concerns and culture of the tribal peoples of the region, is in the making and its relevance for theological studies and liturgy is being increasingly recognized as well. There are some scholarly works written from the tribal perspective in Christian theology. However, works which make use of tribal resources are conspicuous by their absence in biblical studies. Therefore, the present research aims to make use of the tribal perspective as a hermeneutical key for biblical texts, particularly Micah 2:1-2 and Isaiah 5:8-10. This will make a contribution both interpreting to biblical studies and to the wider reflection on the tribal experience in the Church.

A. Brief Review of the Previous Research

In this section, I will try to explore the nature of eighth- century prophecy in the socio-economic and religio-cultural context in which their prophecies were written. Although very little is known about the authors and redactors of the Hebrew prophetic texts that are generally attributed to the eighth -century BCE, it is clear that these prophetic writings are the products of the societal conditions in which these authors and redactors lived. As Paula McNutt argues, 'whether they contain accurate historical information or not, the biblical narratives must be understood first and foremost as representing notions, beliefs, and myths constructed to serve some purpose in the social and historical contexts in which they were written, edited, and arrange in their present form'.[23] A brief survey of approaches to prophetic

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[23] McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 4.

studies in general during the past century demonstrates how the nature and function of the ancient Israelite prophets has taken a significance place in scholarly research.

1. Modern Critical Approaches to Prophecy

One of the most significant achievements of biblical scholarship in the nineteenth century was the rediscovery of prophecy as a distinctive religious category.[24] Numerous studies have been made of the nature and function of the ancient Israelite prophets stemming from the pioneering work of Wellhausen. It is beyond the scope of this survey to make a detailed evaluation of all the previous research on the prophets. Rather, the focus will be a selection of the most important recent works which are concerned with the socio-economic context in the eighth century.

Critical scholarship in the nineteenth century arrived at the conclusion that the bulk of legal material in the Old Testament dated from the end rather than the beginning of the history of Israel. Immediately following Wellhausen's *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (1869), the tendency of critics was to explore the prophets through source-critical tools. Wellhausen argued that 'the prophets antedate the law codes and they were true progenitors of Israel's ethical, monotheistic religion'.[25] He believed that it was the ethical and spiritual religion of the prophets which made the law code possible. As Wellhausen puts it: 'Their creed is not to be found in any book... It is a vain imagination to suppose that the prophets expounded and applied the law'.[26] Subsequently, Wellhausen's thesis had a significant

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[24] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *History of Prophecy in Israel* (London: SPCK, 1984), 27.
[25] J. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Edinburgh: Adam &Charles Black, 1885), 399.
[26] Wellhausen, *Prolegomena,* 399.

impact on the study of the Old Testament in general and Old Testament prophecy in particular and evoked many varied reactions.

Following Wellhausen a new perspective on prophecy emerged which can be traced back to *Die Theologie der Propheten* which Bernhard Duhm published in 1875 at the age of twenty.[27] According to Duhm, it was the prophets who replaced cultic practices with a religion of moral and ethical idealism (*sittlichen Idealimus*). All the great prophets from Amos to Deutero-Isaiah with the exception of Ezekiel could be said to have contributed towards a new religion or moral value.[28] In this light, the prophets could be seen as creative innovators in the realm of religious ideas, who were breaking away from traditional belief.[29] Robert R.Wilson has aptly summarized Duhm's view of the contribution of prophets towards a new religion:

> Like Ewald, Duhm saw the major significance of the prophets in their theology, which raised the level of Israelite religion to new moral and ethical heights. The prophets broke sharply with the ancient religious traditions, particularly those of the patriarchal period, and were powerful forces in shaping a religion free of superstitious cultic and magical practices.[30]

Duhm thus believed that the prophets functioned as agents of social change, although their main contributions were moral, ethical and theological.[31] His commentary on Isaiah (1892) skilfully applied his exegetical method and was the first genuinely modern

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[27] R.E.Clements, *A Century of Old Testament Study* (Guildford and London: Lutterworth Press, 1976), 52.

[28] Duhm, *Die Theologie der Propheten als Gundlage für die innere Entwicklungsgeschichte der israelitischen Religion* (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1875), 126, 259. See also Clements, *A Century of Old Testament Study*, 52. Concerning the book of Ezekiel, Duhm states, 'Denn in Wahrheit weist das ganze grosse Buch dieses Mannes nicht einen einzigen weiteren Gedanken auf, der rein religiösen und sittlichen Werth hätte'. Duhm, *Die Theologie*', 259.

[29] Duhm, *Die Theologie,* 1-34.

[30] Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 3.

[31] Duhm, *Die Theologie*, 4, 19-24. See also his later treatment in *Israels Propheten* (Tübingen: J.C.B.Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1922), 1-12.

commentary on a prophetic book.[32] Duhm recognized the importance of the psychological aspect of the prophets for understanding the nature of the prophetic books.[33] His work was undoubtedly accepted and followed by many scholars as a great step forward in research, while equally arousing strong criticism from conservative theological circles.

The subsequent development of scholarship on prophetic studies has been summarised by House who suggests that the influential International Critical Commentary is the most representative example of early source criticism in English. The goal of this work was 'to apply historical-critical methods to the entire Bible'.[34] In the International Critical Commentary, textual, historical and stylistic concerns are covered, and exegetical comments are made with a great emphasis on 'authentic' and 'spurious' oracles.[35]

Another group of scholars who reacted to source criticism was the early form critics. These scholars basically accepted the tenets and conclusions of Wellhausen and his followers, but felt the importance of recognising the form of the original prophetic utterances. For example, Hermann Gunkel believed that the prophetic books were collections of sermons, teachings and sayings of the prophets and that the prophets produced their oracles while in a state of ecstasy.[36] Several scholars accepted Gunkel's position and argued that the prophets composed their oracle immediately or soon after their ecstatic experience.[37] Clements rightly notes that Gunkel also saw the connecting link between the 'ecstatic side of

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[32] Blenkinsopp, *History of Prophecy in Israel*, 28. According to Blenkinsopp, Duhm's basic arguments for separating the different sections of the book of Isaiah, especially the distinctness of the major collections in chapters 1-39, 40-55 and 56-66, have become a most important landmark in the criticism of the book.
[33] Clements, *A Century of Old Testament Study*, 54.
[34] Paul R.House, *The Unity of the Twelve* (JSOTSup, 97; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990), 12.
[35] House, *The Unity of the Twelve,* 12.
[36] Hermann Gunkel, *Die Propheten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1917), 1-31. See also his other work, *Einleitung in Die Psalmen* (Gôttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1932), 1-20.
[37] Wilson, *Prophecy,* 7.

the prophecy, and the purely oracular and predictive features' and the 'prophetic ideas of God and his moral government of the world'. As a result, when the former was on the wane, the latter came to the fore.[38]

It seems that one of Gunkel's main goals was 'to use the form of an oracle to discover the life situation (*Sitz im leben*)'[39] that generated individual messages. A more comprehensive application of this can be found in the writings of Sigmund Mowinckel. He used form criticism to tie the prophets to the temple cult of Israel believing that the so called-prophetic psalms were originally delivered in the context of the cult and subsequently adapted by the compilers of the prophetic books for their own purposes. According to Mowinckel, cultic prophets are found throughout the history of Israel and prophets such as Joel, Habakkuk, Isaiah and Micah were cultic prophets with cultic functions.[40] His work brought the question of the problem of social location of prophecy to the attention of biblical scholars.

According to House, form criticism and rhetorical analyses at first offer great hope to anyone exploring the possible unity of a prophetic book because both methods assume the importance of the written text. Both can 'help provide data from short passages that will lead to perception of unity in a larger prophetic sections'.[41] However, their 'emphasis on exhaustive treatments of individual units keeps' scholars 'from noting the overall shape of the books'.[42]

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[38] Clements, *A Century of Old Testament Study*, 62.
[39] House, *The Unity of the Twelve,* 14.
[40] Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (trans. D.R. Ap-Thomas; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm.B. Eerdman Publishing Co, 2004), 53-73.
[41] House, *The Unity of the Twelve,* 24.
[42] House, *The Unity of the Twelve,* 24.

A more recent and very useful book on Micah from the perspective of Rhetorical-Historical Analysis is Shaw's book entitled *The Speeches of Micah*.[43] In this study, Shaw attempts to determine the literary units in the book, and to analyse these in terms of rhetorical-critical considerations so as to discover the possible historical setting presupposed by each unit.[44] He notes that 'prophetic discourse responds to the situation by showing the consequence of their present course of action'.[45] What is important for the present study is the recognition that prophetic discourse arose primarily as a response to events, persons and objects firmly rooted in history. Therefore his book is helpful for understanding the world of eighth century Judah and Israel.

Gerhard von Rad became the most influential proponent of a different approach to prophecy during the middle of 20th century. It was his opinion that the canonical prophetic writing reflects a long history of received traditions. Therefore, his method was called tradition or tradition-historical criticism. He argued that the message of the prophets could be largely taken as the re-interpretation of older traditions in a new situation.[46] He believed that each of the eighth-century prophets spoke mainly within the framework of older traditions, such as the Exodus, David or Zion tradition.[47] 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 believed that though the prophet's place of origin and the regional

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[43] Charles S.Shaw, *The Speeches of Micah: A Rhetorical-Critical Analysis* (JSOTSup, 145; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).
[44] Shaw, *The Speeches of Micah*, 19.
[45] Shaw, *The Speeches of Micah*, 22.
[46] Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* II. *The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Tradition* (trans.D.M.G. Stalker; New York: Harper & Row, 1965).
[47] von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 176ff; See also Eryl W.Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics: Isaiah and the Ethical Tradition of Israel* (JSOTSup, 16; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), 19-20.

difference determined to some extent, the eighth -century prophets had all employed the

sacral traditions of the early Israelite federation as the common ground of all traditions.[48]

Rather than viewing the prophets as innovative pioneers of a new religion, as

Wellhausen and others had done, von Rad observed the long history of Israelite faith and

claimed that the prophets' oracles were shaped to reflect their hearers' understanding of that

history. No single definitive tradition affected all the prophets, but careful study of each book

offers clues to the main traditions reshaped by individual prophets. Von Rad observes:

> What is the common factor in the message of these prophets? The first
> characteristic is that they have their roots in the basic sacral traditions of the
> early period. Certainly, there are very great differences in the way in which the
> individual prophets draw upon the old traditions. One has only to compare the
> extremely different, though contemporary prophets Hosea and Isaiah, the
> former of whom takes his stand on the old Israel-Covenant tradition, while the
> latter does not even seem to have had the knowledge of this, and appeals
> exclusively to the Zion-David tradition.[49]

What is significant about tradition criticism is that it 'acknowledges the validity of the

religious faith before the prophets. Rather than innovators, the prophets stand in a long line of

ethical, monotheistic belief'.[50] Alongside this very distinctive tradition-historical approach to

prophecy by G.von Rad, there is the significant work of his successor H.W. Wolff, professor

of Old Testament at the University of Heidelberg. Wolff's analysis of minor prophets

assumed that 'the schools or circle of prophetic disciples also collected, arranged, composed

and added later prophetic oracles to the message of Micah either to make the material

applicable to later situation or to give the material a liturgical function'.[51] However, while

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[48] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 18.
[49] von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets* (trans. D.M.G.Stalker; New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 11.
[50] House, *The Unity of the Twelve*, 16.
[51] Wolff, *Micah-A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990), 17.

both von Rad and Wolff made a substantial contribution to studies of prophecy, they did not explore cultural and religious factors behind land ownership abuse.

1.1   Critical Comments on Historical-Critical Method

It is undeniable that the contribution made by the scholars who adopted the historical-critical method in establishing and investigating the nature and background of the prophets in Israel is significant. The historical-critical approach to hermeneutics is greatly influenced by the search for the contextual meaning of the Bible. It has performed an indispensable service for biblical studies by bringing to light the many problematic features of the text. The method developed a sense of 'historicality' and has contributed to biblical studies to make theology better aware of the life setting of the biblical world.[52] Through various attempts at interpretation, it sought to address questions like: Who wrote the text? When and where were the texts formed? Why and for whom were the texts formed? In fact, the historical approach as a method makes it possible to read trends across time found in the composition and revision of literary works. It may be true as the advocates of this method assert that it is possible to 'achieve the most accurate interpretation of a literary piece by clarifying the intention of the author within the historical context'.[53] They have shown the intricate relationship between the law, the covenant and the spiritual, psychological and historical and literary aspect of Old Testament prophecy.[54] Many scholars investigate the

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[52] Lucien, Legrand, 'New Horizons in Biblical Exegesis,' *Indian Theological Studies,* 21 (September-December, 1984): 206.

[53] Micah Eun-Kyu Kim,'A New Approach to Biblical Criticism: Spiritual Interpretation', *Asia Journal of Theology*, 23[2000]: 245.

[54] Kim, 'A New Approach ', 245.

nature of prophecy by the historical-critical method and the results of their works have contributed substantial material to illuminate prophecy in its eighth century context.

However, the main weakness of such studies, within the context of our interest in the prophetic response to minority groups, is their failure to adequately explain the social factors that lay behind the radical preaching of the prophets in the eighth-century BCE. What could have been the stimulus behind the vehement protest of the prophets against the rich and their passionate concern for the poor? What prompted the prophets to take seriously socio-economic, political, and cultural issues during this period? While the scholars could explain the background of the prophets and their sources of ethical values, they often overlook what the prophets really wanted to communicate to their audience. The approach fails to address the question: What exactly were the values and principles defended and safeguarded by the eight century prophets?[55] This is an important probing question which the historical-critical method left unanswered.

In addition, a major difficulty in applying historical criticism as a method to a biblical text is that neither 'the author nor the time period, which are critical elements in the historical-critical method are easily identified '.[56] In actuality, it is most difficult, if not impossible, to identify the original author or the time period in which they were written as many of the books in the Bible show evidence of having developed their texts through an extremely complicated process. Admittedly,Wellhausen and Duhm's thesis first provoked historical questions about the priority of prophecy over law in the Old Testament. But it has now been recognised that their work tends to reflect mainly the concerns and questions of

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[55] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos ', 21-22.
[56] Kim, 'A New Approach ', 245.

biblical experts. Legrand rightly remarks, 'Deeply marked by its academic origin, it tended easily to be technical, elitist and easily pedantic...As an academic product, exegesis tended also to remain individualistic'.[57] In similar vein, Ceresko observes that from the perspective of liberation, the historical-critical approach did not address the contextual issue. The questions and concerns important to the people at the bottom of the socio-economic scale are usually ignored or overlooked.[58] Furthermore, a 'doctrinaire application of historical criticism...[raises] a series of wrong questions', and thereby 'effectively blocks true insight' into the material it is studying.[59] Asian biblical scholar Kwok Pui Lan is suspicious of the historical critical method, arguing that it was an essentially modernist project, 'embedded in the episteme of the nineteenth century and decisively influenced by the colonial and empire-building impulses of Europe.'[60] It could also be argued that the contemporary social, religious and political scene has been largely left untouched by the results of biblical scholarship and the scientific-historical approach has often merely been confined to the academic interest of biblical scholars.

Undoubtedly the source critics made significant contribution to the prophetic studies. A better grasp of the 'historical milieu' of the prophets can only aid interpretation. However, the problem with the source-critical approach is that it fails to take into account the issues involved in treating the prophetic books as a collection of 'unified works'.[61]

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[57] Legrand, 'New Horizons ', 207.
[58] Anthony R.Ceresco, *The Old Testament: A Liberation Perspective* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 15.
[59] B.Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 455.
[60] Kwok, 'Jesus/Native: Biblical Studies from a Postcolonial Perspective', in Segovia and Tolbert (eds.), *Teaching the Bible: The Discourse and Politics of Biblical Pedagogy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998): 80. See also R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 18.
[61] Kim, 'A New Approach', 245.

Form criticism makes a substantial contribution to prophetic studies when it focuses on the style of written prophecy. However, it could be argued that while form-critical scholars offer some analytical methods, their emphasis on pre-textual matter does not help to illuminate the written prophecy including the socio-economic context of the prophecy.[62] Wilson observes rightly that even form-critical studies, which have sought to locate the prophets in their societies by identifying underlying traditions, have proven inadequate.[63] These attempts have often confused the possible original setting of language with its actual use and have not dealt with the socio-economic issues and tensions so prominent in that language. Moreover, one may observe that it prevents one from looking at the overall picture of the book due to the emphasis on individual and unconnected speeches in the prophetic book. Obviously a sense of unity must arise from another method of analysis. This helps to show that historical-critical methods of interpretation have reached their limit and new methodologies must arise to give a new interpretation to the Bible.

2. Psychological Approaches

Psychological studies of prophecy have brought new insight to studies of prophecy by concentrating on the psychology aspect of prophetic experience which other approaches did not delve into. Scholars like Gustav Hölscher moved criticism from the social function of prophecy to the psychology of prophetic experience.[64]

Hölscher argued that all prophets including those in Israel shared the same ecstasy and visionary experience. He undertook comparative studies between Israelite prophecy and

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[62] Kim, 'A New Approach', 245.
[63] Wilson, *Prophecy*, 3-12.
[64] Gustav Hölscher, *Die Profeten. Untersuchungen zur Religiongeschiste Israels* (Leipzip: J.C. Hinrichs, 1914).

other Ancient Eastern parallels and concluded that ecstatic experience was a core element of prophetic preaching. The prophets were thereby seen as individuals who participated in a widespread phenomenon that spanned the Near East.[65] Clements aptly summarises Hölscher's method when he writes:

> Hölscher examined the various phenomena associated with ecstatic and visionary experiences: a sense of heightened awareness, loss of bodily feeling, concentration of thought, uncontrolled bodily actions, dreams, hallucinations, hypnotic visions, and experiences of dumbness, amnesia and paralysis. All of these he related to specific actions design to induce such ecstatic experience through music, dancing and various cultic and mantic rites.[66]

Of great importance to Hölscher's thesis, Clements argues, was an attempt to show that a 'historical and genetic connection held together the whole prophetic movement'. [67] Hölscher maintained that the origin for Israel's ecstatic prophecy through historical and racial features can be traced back to Israel's settlement in Canaan.[68] He also observed that even the classical prophets were also ecstatic like the earlier prophets whose ecstasy was largely induced through music and dancing.[69] His work marked a turning point in the study of prophecy by focussing on ecstatic behaviour for understanding prophets and set an end to attempts at interpreting the prophets solely in terms of their distinctive religious ideas.

Hölscher's concern with the nature of prophetic activity has been shared by a number of scholars, all of whom focused on the ecstatic character of prophecy. A more recent advocate of the psychological approach to prophecy is Johannes Lindblom. Like Hölscher,

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[65] Hölscher, *Die Profeten*, 143-147. See also House, *The Unity of the Twelve,* 12.
[66] Clements, *A Century of Old Testament Study*, 57.
[67] Clements, *A Century of Old Testament Study*, 57.
[68] Hölscher, *Die Profeten,* 143.
[69] Hölscher, *Die Profeten,* 144.

Lindblom believes prophetic utterance initially happened when the inspired prophets were

totally under the influence of a divine power. He states:

> In religious ecstasy, consciousness is entirely filled with the presence of God,
> with ideas and feelings belonging to the divine sphere. The soul is lifted up
> into the exalted region of divine revelation, and the lower world with its
> sensations momentarily disappears.[70]

Lindblom went on to argue that the prophetic phenomena are not peculiar to

particular races, peoples, countries and religions. Such phenomena are found everywhere in

the religious world and at every stage of religious development. It could arise independently

without one people borrowing from another.[71] Without doubt psychological studies made a

significant contribution to the study of prophecy because they recognised the ecstatic

character of prophecy in a comprehensive sense. Their attempt to prove that Israelite prophets

had the same kinds of experience as those in other Ancient Eastern regions, and that ecstatic

experience was central to the prophetic preaching, brought important questions about the

nature of the prophets to the attention of biblical scholars.

However, several criticisms of psychological analysis can be offered. This approach

used 'the text as a way of getting back to the situation of the prophet', but as a 'subjective

discipline' lost 'the uniqueness of the prophetic office'.[72] Furthermore, Otto Kaiser

comments:

> There is a limit to the possibilities of psychological analysis imposed by the
> nature of the sources. For the prophets were concerned not to describe their
> extraordinary situations and experiences, but to carry out the commission
> given to them. For this reason any psychological inquiry is dependent largely

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[70] Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), 5.
[71] Lindblom, *Prophecy,* 32.
[72] House, *The Unity of the Twelve,* 23.

on analogical deductions and circumstantial evidence, in which the comparative material must be taken from our own period.[73]

It is clear then that while the psychological approach helps us to understand the psychological nature of prophecy and the prophets themselves, it does not adequately address questions about the socio-economic context in which prophets prophesied.

3. Social-Scientific Method

It is said that the quest for the social world of the Bible has been one of the major goals of biblical scholarship since the early nineteenth century. But it was not until the twentieth century that such studies began to emerge in the forms recognisable today. It has been suggested that, as Norman K.Gottwald puts it, 'the rise of this new awareness is due, in part, to the perception among the biblical critics that the religious and historical-critical schemes of biblical interpretation reached their limits on their own ''turf'' and that new methodologies are required to clarify some aspects of the Hebrew Bible that excite curiosity and imagination'.[74]

Those who use social-scientific criticism in biblical studies see the significance of the societal contexts in which biblical texts were formed, and subsequently reshaped, in order to better understand the intentions and meaning behind the writings. They use sociological patterns and the social context as a starting point for understanding the ancient texts. For example, biblical scholars and social scientists such as Max Weber, Gerhard Lenski, Norman

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[73] Otto Kaiser, *Introduction to the Old Testament: A Presentation of Its Results and Problems* (trans. J Sturdy; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), 210.

[74] Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible-A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) 21.

Gottwald and Thomas Overholt, have either directly or indirectly used sociological patterns as a means of interpreting the texts of the Hebrew Bible.

It was Max Weber who made the first significant contribution to explicating the nature of Old Testament prophecy from a sociological approach, though his main interest lies not in the prophets themselves, but rather in analysing the origins of western capitalism.[75] Weber investigated the socio-economic, religious and political systems of ancient Israel as part of his research into different non-European societies. According to Lallawmzuala Weber concluded that Israel was a combination of 'semi-nomadic and settled peasant' communities united by the religious ideal of the covenant while 'a crisis in the socio-economic development in the monarchic period of Israel resulted in the prophetic protests, which further turned the traditional religion into a more developed ethical religion'.[76]

Another significant contribution of Weber towards the study of ancient Israelite prophecy is found in his book entitled *Ancient Judaism*[77] which is a detailed reconstruction of Jewish history. According to Weber, from the earlier ecstatic prophets of the tribal confederacy there developed various kinds of prophets due to the socio-political shift to monarchy and the subsequent 'demilitarization of the peasant class'.[78] A professional *nebiim* group, who were the preachers of good fortune, soon emerged and attached themselves to the monarchy. But there was also a group of free *nebiim* who were to evolve into 'classical prophets', 'the intellectual leaders of the opposition' against the royal house. Both the professional *nebiim* and the free *nebiim* groups viewed themselves as 'guardians of the pure

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[75] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Son, 1930).
[76] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 10.
[77] Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (trans. H.H. Gerth and D.Martindale; Glencoe: The Free Press, 1952), 3-5.
[78] Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, 96.

Yahwe [h] tradition'.[79] However, these free prophets moved on to deliver passionate ethical

messages in response to changes brought by the monarchy. These free speakers championed a

set of Israelite values and tried to direct the conscience of the nation. They were political

ideologues on the periphery criticizing the central authority.[80] The chief factor behind the

eighth-century prophets' vehement attacks was the gradual destruction of the older social

system of nomadic people under the influence of the stratified Canaanite settled agricultural

system during the monarchy period.

The Marxist approach of Weber and his followers has been vigorously challenged by

some scholars. Bernhard Lang, for example, did not subscribe to Weber's idea of an

egalitarian Israel versus a Canaanite society divided into classes and regarded the notion of an

egalitarian society as merely wishful thinking rather than a true characteristic of earliest

Israel. Lang tried to explicate the background of the prophetic protest in the eighth-century,

giving particular attention to the oracles of Amos, in terms of class struggle between the poor

peasant and the propertied elite in Israelite society. He argued that in the ancient Near East,

the relationship between the peasantry and ruling elite, was exploitative, and found particular

expression in what Bobek called 'rent capitalism'.[81] For Lang, the prophetic protest in the

eighth-century was fundamentally a prophetic critique of the system of rent capitalism. This

system, he argued was designed and controlled by the rich landowners to support their own

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[79] Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, 96-109.
[80] Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, 96-109.
[81] Lang, 'The Social Organisation of Peasant Poverty in Biblical Israel,'*JSOT* 24 (1982): 48-49. As he quoted from H. Bobek, 'Zum Konzept des Rentenkapitalismus', *Tidschrift voor economsche en sociale geografie* 65(1974), 73-77. See also Gregory C.Chirichigno, *Debt -Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 52. He further states that the rise of debt-slavery and the alienation of land in Ancient Near East city states can be attributed to insolvency among free citizens by various interrelated socio-economic factors, including taxation, the monopoly of resources and services among the state and private elite (i.e rent capitalism), high-interest loans and the economic and political collapse of higher kinship groups. Debt-slavery became a serious problem as early as the UR III period (ca 2050-1955BCE) and continued to be a major problem throughout the history of the ancient Near East.

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

Weber and his followers' hypothesis of the 'Canaanites versus Israelite system' never explained how the exploitive system actually worked in the eighth century. In one example of a contrary position, Guillaume argues that:

> David's purchase of a threshing floor from Araunah (2 Sam. 24.24) challenges the notion of an Israelite land law distinct from its Canaanite counterpart and exegetes spent treasures of ingenuity in exonerating David from his Canaanite behaviour. The Islamic tenure system shows that inalienable tenure and alienable freehold property can coexist within one system and that the Canaanite versus Israelite opposition reflects the ideology of prophetic texts rather than ancient reality. [82]

As indicated earlier, Weber's attention to the socio-economic background of the prophetic protest in the eighth century reveals an important aspect of Old Testament prophecy. It is especially intriguing to note the link he makes between the earlier nomadic people and the eighth-century prophets in terms of their value-system and socio-ethical principles. However, to regard the Old Testament prophetic movement simply as a counter to civilisation is unconvincing , nor can we consider the prophets merely as conservatives, people who want to cling to 'the old-fashioned lifestyle of certain primitive people'.[83] Weber's thesis is that the prophets were fighting against a change in the nation's way of life. He suggests that, 'through all prophecy sounded the echoes of the ''nomadic ideal'' as the tradition of literati idealized the kingless past'[84] as a sort of generalisation of the prophets' message and the essence of their activity. In his evaluation of this sociologist's work, Carroll

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[82] Philippe Guillaume, *Land, Credit and Crisis*: *Agrarian Finance in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2012), 67.
[83] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 22.
[84] Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, 285.

approvingly quotes Bernhard Lang who states, 'Because Weber accepts the exegetical opinion of a particular contemporary theologian, his description must remain unsatisfactory; in many points it is out of date to the same extent as the literature used by him is obsolete'.[85]

Among the sociologists, Gerhard and Jean Lenski contributed substantially to the understanding of agrarian societies in the ancient world. Many biblical scholars[86] picked up their findings which claimed that in most simple agrarian societies of the ancient world, newly emerging or expanding social and cultural differences created internal divisions within the society, and sometimes conflict as well. In Lenski's term, eighth- century Judah and Israel society was an 'advanced agrarian society'.[87]

In advanced agrarian societies, politics and economics are inextricably interlinked and therefore the people who dominate the political system also dominate the economic sphere. Those who are in power are officeholders in government and the chief landholders as well. In these societies, important basic issues, such as how resources should be used, what should be produced and in what quantities, and how those products should be distributed, are

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[85] Carroll R. *Contexts for Amos*, 33.

[86] Scholars like Gottwald, Lang, Chaney, Premnath, Thomas, and Coomber utilised sociological findings of Gerhard Lenski in various ways. For details, see Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel* 1250-1050BCE (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979). See also his most recent article, *The Hebrew Bible in Its Social World and In Ours* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993); 'Early Israel as Anti-Imperial Community' in Richard A.Horsley (ed.), *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as A History of faithful Resistance* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press,2008):17-23. Bernhard Lang, 'The Social Organisation of Peasant Poverty in Biblical Israel,'*JSOT* 24 (1982): 48-49. Marvin Chaney, 'Systemic Study of the Israelite Monarchy', *Semeia* 37 (1986): 53- 76; His other works include 'Bitter Bounty: The Dynamics of Political Economy Critiqued by the Eighth-Century Prophets', in Norman K.Gottwald and Richard A.Horsley (eds.), *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1993):250-263. DN Premnath, 'Comparative and Historical Sociology in Old Testament: A Study of Isaiah 3:12-15', Bangalore Theological Forum, 17/4 (Oct-Dec 1985):20-31; 'Latifundialization and Isaiah 5:8-10', *JSOT* 40, (1988): 49-63; *Eighth Century Prophets: A Social Analysis* (St Louis Chalice: 2003). Thomas, *Jeroboam II The King and Amos The Prophets: A Social-Scientific Study on The Israelite Society During the Eighth Century BCE* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2003). Mathew J.M.Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets Through Corporate Globalisation: A Cultural-Evolutionary Approach to Economic Injustice in the Hebrew Bible* (Biblical Intersection, 4; Piscataway, NJ: Geogias Press, 2010).

[87] Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1996), 190-296.

largely determined by 'arbitrary decisions of the political elite' rather than by 'the forces of supply and demand' .[88] In most advanced agrarian societies, the governing elite including the religious leaders owned a disproportionate share of the land.[89] Although there are no precise figures for earlier times, the traditional pattern could still be seen recently in many parts of Latin America, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. According to Gerhard and Jean Lenski:

> A minority of 1to 3 percent of the population has owned from one-third to two-thirds of the arable land in these societies. Not only did the governing class usually own most of the land, but it often owned most of the peasants who worked it. Slavery and serfdom were common in agrarian societies, with large landholdings and large numbers of slaves or serfs normally going hand in hand.[90]

In the line of their investigation, the main problem for the peasants in advanced agrarian societies is the occurrence of famine and drought. Such bad situation often necessitates peasants resorting to high interest loans from big landowners in order to continue their farming.[91] Elsewhere Gerhard Lenski states, 'ruling elites employ a wide range of strategies to seize their subjects' land, from driving farmers into debt through taxation or loans to using threats of physical violence'.[92] As the land becomes consolidated into large holdings, it is conceivable that ruling elites tend to use a system of favouritism and grant the land to their loyal members, thereby furthering the interests of the elite.[93] While Lensky's concept of the agrarian society seems broad enough to encompass the reality reflected in biblical texts, Guillaume notes that 'its very broadness reduces its heuristic value since it applies to the economy of most human groups from the rise of agriculture to the Industrial

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[88] Gerhard Lenski, Jean Lenski and Patrict Nolan, *An Introduction to Macrosociology*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc, Sixth Edition, 1991), 166.
[89] Lenski, Lenski and Nolan, *An Introduction* , 166.
[90] Lenski, Lenski and Nolan, *An Introduction* , 177.
[91] Lenski, Lenski and Nolan, *An Introduction*, 178.
[92] Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 220.
[93] Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 220.

revolution'.[94] Moreover, taking a cue from Western differentiation, Lenski was apparently making a distinction between political and religious roles for his model. But such a distinction between priestly and other aristocrats or rulers does not seem appropriate for agrarian societies in general and ancient Judea in particular.[95] Despite such criticisms, the contribution of Gerhard and Jean Lenski's attempt to reveal the socio- economic situation in ancient agrarian societies is highly significant; they shed light on some important aspects of ancient Israel society.

Norman Gottwald is known in the scholarly community for his book *The Tribes of Yahweh*[96] which provides another useful illustration of how social science assumptions can sometimes play a decisive role in shaping reconstructions of the past. Gottwald's thesis is that Israel emerged as a revolutionary social movement from the 'matrix'of Canaanite culture at the end of the Late Bronze Age.[97] What distinguished the Israelite system from its neighbours was its choice of a mode of socio-economic organisation. Gottwald viewed Israelite society as a unified, egalitarian community under one God. [98]

In this extensive re-examination of the nature of pre-monarchic Israel, Gottwald introduces a wealth of social science material presented against the backdrop of the macro-sociological theories of Durkheim, Weber and Marx. He took seriously the importance of the social dimension in ancient Israel particularly the relationship between Israelite religion and

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[94] Guillaume, *Land,* 152.

[95] Richard A.Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries and the Politics of Second Temple Judea* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 60.

[96] Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel* 1250-1050BCE (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979). See also his most recent article, 'Early Israel as Anti-Imperial Community' in Richard A.Horsley (ed.), *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as A History of faithful Resistance* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press,2008):17-23.

[97] P.Kyle McCarter, 'Gottwald's Socio-literary Approach to the Bible', in Harvey Minkoff (ed.), *Approaches to the Bible: The Best of the Bible Review,* vol 2 (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1995): 106.

[98] Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh,* 646.

society.[99] In terms of social class and social stratification, Gottwald follows the Marxist analysis of social class. He argues, 'the Marxian framework is comprehensive and incisive enough to make room for valuable elements from other perspectives while offering more fruitful explanations of social dynamics and social change'.[100] For Gottwald, Marxian analysis provides the most coherent theory for developing research strategies in social sciences.[101]

In assessing Gottwald's hypothesis of social class, we can note that some scholars have suggested that Gottwald's work itself has contradictions with the form while the content is loaded with passion. According to Boer:

> The content of Gottwald's work is replete with all political passion missing from the form-commitment to social transformation and revolution. Marxist critical theory (itself conflictual), a desire for democratic socialism rather than capitalism, a recovery and re-tooling of Hebrew prophecy (like Marx) in order to critique capitalism, and, perhaps most well-known of all, a reconstruction of Israelite origins in terms of social revolution as a mechanism for transition from one mode of production to another.[102]

As indicated earlier, Gottwald has focussed on social class as both 'an element in ancient Israelite society' and as a 'hermeneutical category'.[103] For Gottwald, it is inconceivable that within the Marxist traditional class analysis a society can exist without conflict and violence because a 'class is defined by being in opposition with another' and class conflict is a 'primary motor of history'.[104] Thus he builds up a hypothesis concerning class and class conflict in ancient Israel and argues for its indispensable hermeneutical status

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[99] Gary A. Herion, 'The Impact of Modern and Social Science Assumptions on the Reconstruction of Israelite History', *JSOT* 34 (1986): 14.
[100] Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible in Its Social World and In Ours* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 140.
[101] McCarter, 'Gottwald's Socio-literary Approach to the Bible', 107.
[102] Roland Boer, 'Western Marxism ', *JSOT* 78 (1998): 8.
[103] Boer, 'Western Marxism', 8.
[104] Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible*, 130-164.

in biblical interpretation. As Gottwald puts it, 'class for its formation is ideology, which justifies the violence and the exploitation of ruling classes and reinforces the insurrectionary mood of those exploited'.[105] It may be that it is in Gottwald's work that that social class in ancient Israel is first properly theorised in relation to mode of production.

It is evidently clear that mode of production is the 'sine qua non of Gottwald's analytical strategy'.[106] Boer sums up Gottwald's theory of Israelite origins in relation to the mode of production when he argues that:

> ....emergent Israel overthrew the dominant tributary (or Asiatic) mode of production and established in the Judean hills a communitarian mode of production with its attendant social, cultural, political and ideological features. The socio-economic history of Israel in the ancient Near East is set out in terms of communitarian, native tributary and slave-based modes of production in various stages of tension, conflict and transition.[107]

Boer aptly summarises the work of Gottwald when he writes, 'mode of production provides the most comprehensive category for understanding contradiction, and that violent conflict is thus the prime location of these elements in Gottwald's theoretical framework'.[108]

Elsewhere, Gottwald argued that Israel developed its own form of 'tributary' economy, in which a minority of people at the top lived off the labour of the majority of people. When Israel became a state with a growing class structure, a deep conflict developed between tributary and communitarian beliefs and practices. The Israelite prophets brought a powerful critique of the tributary political economy of their day, drawing on communitarian

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[105] Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible*, 148.
[106] Boer, 'Western Marxism ', 8.
[107] Boer, 'Western Marxism ', 8-9.
[108] Boer, 'Western Marxism ', 10.

criteria and practices.[109] Gottwald clearly provides a new set of perspectives to biblical studies regarding significant elements of the social organisation of ancient Israel in a comprehensive way. However, his work has been reacted against by some scholars.

As a result of Gottwald and other scholars who employ elements of Marxist social 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'.[110] But the problem in Gottwald's work is that he brought many anachronistic assumptions to bear on a non-western, pre-industrial society.[111] Some scholars doubt that the egalitarian society Gottwald reconstructs in pre-monarchical Israel ever existed. As indicated earlier, in his book *The Tribes of Yahweh*, Gottwald describes Israel as 'an egalitarian society in the midst of stratified society'.[112] Gerhard Lenski, for example, rejected Gottwald's description of Israel and 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'.[113] In a similar vein, Carter also questioned Gottwald's concept of the egalitarian ideology of Israel society, arguing that 'Israel's alleged egalitarian ideology was not itself rooted in its experience of oppression/anti-statism, but in its very structure'.[114] Mendenhall strongly criticised Gottwald in polemical terms, suggesting that the concepts Gottwald uses to describe the process of

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[109] Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible*, 349.
[110] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos,' 23.
[111] John Andrew Dearman, *Property Rights in Eighth Century Prophets: The Conflicts and its Background,* (Atlanta: Scholar Press, 1988), 11.
[112] Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh.* 693.
[113] Carol Meyers, 'Tribes and Tribulation: Retheorizing Earliest 'Israel'', in Roland Boer (ed.), *Tracking The Tribes of Yahweh: On the Trail of A Classic,* (JSOTSup, 351; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002): 36.
[114] Charles E.Carter, 'Powerful Ideologies, Challenging Models and Lasting Changes: Continuing the Journey of Tribes', in Roland Boer (ed.), *Tracking The Tribes of Yahweh: On the Trail of A Classic,* (JSOTSup, 351; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002): 55.

peasant revolt, like 'retribalization' and 'egalitarian', are 'absurdit[ies]' and his work as 'total lack of historical perspective'.[115]

In reaction to this, scholars such as Marvin Chaney and D.N.Premnath have employed the concept of cultural evolutionary theory in the interpretation of prophetic protests against Judean land seizure. This involves, reading the prophetic accounts alongside extra-biblical evidence of the massive societal developments that took place in eighth-century Judah and Israel. Both have attempted to construct a picture of what life may have been like in eighth-century Judah. This provides greater insight into the socio-economic context that lay behind the passages such as Isa.5:8-10 and Mic.2:1-4.

In his *Systemic Study of the Israelite Monarchy* Chaney develops a socio-economic sketch of the rise of Israel.This emphasizes Israel's initially stateless peasant economy and subsequent adoption of monarchy, having profited from the weakened Canaanite political system. According to Chaney:

> Israel adopted monarchy in response to the two-fold threat of a Philistine bid to dominate Israelite economy from without and the move of prospering agrarian elite to dominate Israelite economy from within. The full-blown monarchy from the Solomonic reign down to the ninth and eighth-century put severe pressure on peasants when a subsistence economy [transformed] into a market economy to serve the lifestyle of the local elite and export to other neighbouring countries as well. Peasants were forced into debt slavery when natural disaster like famine and drought struck them. The unfortunate situation was followed by the process of foreclosure and land acquisition which was accelerated by a corrupted court system, and ultimately led to the process of latifundialisation.[116]

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[115] George E. Mendenhall, 'Ancient Israel's Hyphenated History', in David Noel Freedman and David Frank Graf(eds.), *Palestine in Transition: The Emergence of Ancient Israel*, (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983): 92-93; See also Benhard W.Anderson, 'Mendenhall Disavows Paternity of Gottwald's Marxist Theory', in Harvey Minkoff (ed*.), Approaches to the Bible: The Best of the Bible Review,* vol 2 (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1995) : 117.

[116] Chaney, 'Systemic Study of the Israelite Monarchy', *Semeia* 37 (1986): 72.

In his other works, Bitter Bounty: The Dynamics of Political Economy Critiqued by

the Eighth -Century Prophets[117] and Whose Sour Grapes?[118] Chaney discusses the issues of

political economy in the eighth century BCE. He argues that the agriculture intensification

which occurred during the reigns of Jeroboam II and Uzziah, increasing their participation in

international trade, was the main factor behind the social crisis encountered by the

prophets.[119] Chaney maintains that the working political economy rendered the vast majority

of peasants helpless; land consolidation resulted in more and more arable land falling into

fewer hands.[120] Such land consolidation, Chaney suggests, had historical roots in the

emergence of Israel monarchy. The lowland of Israel and Judah had, for the most part,

probably been organised into large estates long before the eighth-century. Many cultivators

there would have been landless tenants, most vulnerable to the dynamics of 'rent capitalism'.

The intensified system helped wealthy moneylenders to become wealthier while many

tenants have fallen into debt for survival reasons, thereby becoming debt-slaves.[121]

D.N. Premnath takes a somewhat similar stance to Chaney's but looks at the issues

from a different angle, making particular use of comparative anthropology, archaeology, and

historical approaches. Premnath appears to pattern his work after Chaney's, describing his

own approach as combining the ecologically-based evolutionary approaches by Gerhard and

Jean Lenski, the Marx and Malthus-based cultural materialist ideas of Marvin Harris, and the

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[117] Chaney, 'Bitter Bounty: The Dynamics of Political Economy Critiqued by the Eighth-Century Prophets', in Norman K.Gottwald and Richard A.Horsley (eds.), *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1993): 250-263.

[118] Chaney 'Whose Sour Grapes? The Addressees of Isaiah 5:1-7 in the Light of Political Economy', *Semeia* 87 (1999):105-112.

[119] Chaney, 'Bitter Bounty', 252.

[120] Chaney 'Whose Sour Grapes?', 109. Also see his recent article 'Micah-Models Matter: Political Economy and Micah 6:9-15', in Philip F.Esler (ed.), *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in its Social Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 146-149.

[121] Chaney, 'Bitter Bounty', 250-263.

functionalist philosophy of Talcott Persons.[122] He argues that the fundamental issue behind

the prophetic critique in the eighth century was land accumulation or 'latifundialization'.

According to him, Isaiah 5:8-10 reflects the growth of large estates, or 'latifundialization'

which is 'the process of land accumulation (large estates, hence latifundia) in the hands of a

few wealthy landowners to the deprivation of a peasantry'.[123] He argues that in the context of

ancient Israel there was a basic shift from a subsistence economy to a market economy in

response to market pressure. The move from a mixed subsistence economy to a single cash

crop adversely affected the production of staple crops. With the change in the system of land

tenure in a market economy, the factors of production became saleable commodities.[124] In

this drastic change, the peasants are the hardest hit. The peasant will have to pay the rent or

resort to borrowing, probably at a high rate of interest. This unfortunate situation makes the

peasant liable to go progressively deeper into debt until foreclosure on their land is

inevitable.[125]

According to Coomber, both Chaney and Premnath use elements of the structural

and ecological schools in their interpretation of the prophetic critique of economic injustice.

Through the lens of these recurring cultural-evolutionary patterns, biblical texts like Isa. 5:8-

10 and Mic.2:1-2 have goaded both Chaney and Premnath 'to offer alternative contextual

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[122] Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets: A Social Analysis* (St Louis Chalice: 2003), 2.
[123] Premnath, 'Latifundialization and Isaiah 5:8-10', *JSOT* 40, (1988): 55.
[124] Premnath, 'Latifundialization', 55-56.
[125] Premanth, 'Comparative and Historical Sociology in Old Testament: A Study of Isaiah 3:12-15', *Bangalore Theological Forum,* 17/4(Oct-Dec 1985): 31; Premnath, 'Latifundialization ', 54.

interpretations and to breathe new life into the conversation on discussion of economic

injustice in the Hebrew Bible'.[126] Coomber further states:

> Chaney and Premnath have each found good reason to argue that the prophetic authors were not simply addressing the greed of a corrupt few, but rather the consequences of a fundamental evolutionary leap in Judean political and economic practice that has been brought by population growth and increased trade as the Neo-Assyrian Empire expanded into the Southern Levant.[127]

But neither truly substantiates the theory by considering the period to which the

prophetic critiques of land ownership abuse are attributed. However, if their assumptions are

correct, they may shed light on the socio-economic condition of eighth century Judah and

Israel.

It is nonetheless arguable that Chaney and Premnath's hypothesis on the growth of

large estates due to involuntary action on the part of peasants is similarly too biased if not

altogether flawed. Scholars like Guillaume do not subscribe to the hypothesis of Chaney and

Premnath that large estates were formed as a part of an involuntary process, stating that

estates did at times grow from the consolidation of small farms. In this case, however, the

process was voluntary. Under certain conditions, according to Guillaume, 'small farmers

offered their land to bigger landlords in a process known as *talji'a* in Islamic sources and

patrocinium fundorum in the Byzantine Empire. Small free-holders chose to become tenants

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[126] Mathew J.M.Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets Through Corporate Globalisation: A Cultural-Evolutionary Approach to Economic Injustice in the Hebrew Bible* (Biblical Intersection, 4; Piscataway, NJ: Geogias Press, 2010), 268.
[127] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 268.

and sharecroppers on large estates to gain protection against tax-farmers, marauders and bandits'.[128] Under these conditions,

> The formation of large estates was one strategy among others to improve the lot of small farmers. In every case, the very existence of agricultural estates presupposes the presence of a surplus of manpower nearby, a surplus to which the estate offered fresh avenues of employment. Because they were fragile economic entities, estates had to function in symbiotic rather than in parasitic relation with their social surrounding. [129]

Chaney states that 'the vast majority were the victims of a process they hated ... the workings of political economy rendered them helpless'.[130] Criticizing Chaney, Guillaume states that what he called 'the syndrome of the hapless farmer' has struck again. Small farmers are depicted as the ones who were hardest hit.[131] Crop failures led all farmers into debts since there is no evidence that owners of large estates manipulated rainfall and produced surpluses when small farmers did not. He claims:

> Crop failures and debts affected large estates as much as small farms. The greater the sown surface, the greater the risk involved and the greater the loss in case of crop failure. Size never guarantees profit. .. In Roman and later in European agriculture, small family holdings were more productive than large estates. Foreclosures, when they occurred, did not lead to land accumulation since loans were not extended in order to gain more land.[132]

From the foregoing discussion, it seems that the development of large estates could happen not only due to involuntary action but also due to voluntary processes on the part of peasants.

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[128] Guillaume, *Land*, 93.
[129] Guillaume, *Land*, 93.
[130] Chaney 'Whose Sour Grapes?', 109.
[131] Guillaume, *Land*, 98.
[132] Guillaume, *Land*, 98.

P.P.Thomas, an Indian biblical scholar, who has published his research in *Jeroboam II The King and Amos The Prophet* [133] offers another significant study of eighth century Israelite society from a Social-Scientific perspective. Building primarily on the works of Kautsky, Lenski, Gottwald, Chaney, Hanson and Oakman, Thomas analysed the literary, inscriptional, and archaeological data relevant to the eighth century, especially the period of Jeroboam II. He also utilised archaeological discoveries to cast fresh light on Israel's life and culture. He states that the sociological method which he employed relied upon 'archaeology to break loose from solely historically-framed' questions and 'to become an instrument for recovering the total material [conditions] of the ancient Israelite'. The principal theoretical frameworks Thomas employed were 'macro-sociology, which focuses upon the major types of the societies in terms of their primary modes of subsistence [and] systems sociology and cultural anthropology, which focus upon values and institutions'.[134] As Thomas explains, he adopted the conflict model to explain the Israelite society during eighth century:

> Conflict Models presuppose that all units of social organisation, i.e., persons and groups in the society are continuously changing unless some force intervenes to thwart the change. From this perspective, and in terms of this sort of model, a good way to understand biblical texts is to find out what elements or factors interfere with the normal process of change... This approach is identified closely with materialist traditions, mindful that adaptive and economic pressures have shaped social relations.[135]

Thomas proposes that the monarchy in Israel during the eighth century, especially the monarchy of Jeroboam II provides an example of an 'aristocratic empire'.[136] According to him, the conflict model and the analysis of social class helps us to understand the power

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[133] Thomas, *Jeroboam II The King and Amos The Prophet: A Social-Scientific Study on The Israelite Society During the Eighth Century BCE* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2003).
[134] Thomas, *Jeroboam II The King*, 17-18.
[135] Thomas, *Jeroboam II The King*, 18-19.
[136] This term has been used by John Kautsky in his book *The Politics of Aristocratic Empire* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 64.

relations by which one group seeks to dominate, control, manipulate, or subdue the others for its own advantage. Such characteristic features are exhibited in Israelite society during eighth century.[137] His analysis of Israelite society of the eighth century is helpful for understanding the socio-economic condition including the land tenure system. However, it fails to analyse the cultural context of Israelite society.

Recently Mathew Coomber has conducted research the similar line of Chaney and Premnath on *Re-Reading the Prophets Through Corporate Globalisation*.[138] His approach involves drawing on cultural-evolutionary theory in order to provide contextual clues to the socio-economic context of Judah. According to Coomber:

> The societal changes that appear to have taken place in the late eighth and the seventh centuries BCE provide a foundation to Chaney's and Premnath's cultural-evolutionary approach to understanding prophetic complaints against economic injustice... Whether or not passages like Isa.5:8-10 and Mic.2:1-2 actually originated in the eighth-century or were referenced from a later period of significant development, such as the Persian or even the Hellenistic periods, the recurring patterns of cultural-evolutionary theory offer a new way of looking at these texts and have provided a new interpretative approach for biblical scholars who have had to work with a very limited body of evidence.[139]

Coomber also follows cultural-evolutionary theorists like Gerhard Lenski and Timothy Earl who claim that recurring patterns of exploitation have emerged throughout history around the world as agrarian societies experience rapid development. According to Coomber, these patterns include: 1) the abandonment of subsistence strategies for the specialised cultivation of revenue-producing crops; 2) the consolidation of land into large

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[137] Thomas, *Jeroboam II The King*, 245.
[138] Mathew J.M.Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets Through Corporate Globalisation : A Cultural-Evolutionary Approach to Economic Injustice in the Hebrew Bible* (Biblical Intersection, 4; Piscataway, NJ: Geogias Press, 2010).
[139] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 270.

estates, or latifundia, to secure greater productive control; 3) a hoarding of benefits from these developments amongst an elite class and their supporters.[140]

According to Coomber, the cultural-evolution model provides valuable insights for interpreting the socio-economic contexts behind prophetic complaints attributed to eighth-century Judah. The fact that the region underwent significant societal development as it was absorbed into the Neo-Assyrian world system.[141] Drawing on the case study of Tunisia, he goes on to argue that new insights into ancient contexts can be gained through the in-depth study of the complex nature of these patterns in modern agrarian societies affected by corporate globalisation. Moreover, the inter-disciplinary approach of his research has demonstrated that the negative effects of corporate globalization can offer valuable insights into the prophetic protest against economic injustice in eighth century Judah. He claims:

> Although the use of modern-day abuses alongside cultural-evolutionary theory cannot provide a definitive picture as to the socio-economic contexts to which these prophetic authors wrote, it can help scholars to read these ambiguous texts in a new light, offer new interpretations, and better assess other scholars' works.[142]

The detailed study presented in this research on prophetic texts appears to offer a fresh approach to biblical interpretation. However, Coomber's analysis does not go sufficiently beyond the works of Chaney and Premnath and fails to analyse the religio-cultural factors that the prophets protest against.

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[140] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 270.
[141] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 276.
[142] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 276.

3.1 Critical Comments on Social-Scientific Method

From the foregoing investigation, it is clear that the social-scientific approach makes a substantial contribution to biblical studies, particularly with regard to Old Testament prophecy. Such an approach helps us understand the socio-political context of Israelite society the message of the prophets addressed. Not only can this enlarge our understanding of the past, it also serves to make us conscious of our own locations and interest. In this sense, it can strengthen the links between past and present. However, the social-scientific questions that have been raised in connection with the eighth- century prophets may be seen to be heavily influenced by the assumptions of western sociology and anthropology in the western context; they appear to largely ignore the oriental context in which the prophets operated. The main practitioners of this method such as Gottwald, Chaney, Premnath, Thomas and Coomber all depend heavily upon the macro-sociological theories of Durkheim, Weber and Marx. As such, their theories may be seen as by-products of the Industrial revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century.

As indicated earlier, Guillaume challenged the social-scientist exegetes stating that the whole debate about the 'hapless farmer' is based not on biblical evidence, but on different models of economic and political analysis. It may also have rather different results if these readings are taken as any way shaping contemporary responses to current political situations. Guillaume is less sympathetic to any idea of depriving small farmers by their landlords as he believed that such is the ideology of social scientist scholars but not the reality in ancient Palestine.[143]

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[143] Guillaume, *Land*, 50-68.

It is evident from our investigation that there is no agreement among the social scientists and Guillaume over the debate about the actual situation of ancient Israelite society particularly the issue of land ownership abuse. It is also evident that the various perspectives employed by scholars to interpret the prophets are shaped by their social locations. Their theoretical assumptions, presuppositions, ideological frameworks and intellectual patterns are conditioned by their social condition.[144] While previous studies have illuminated certain issues regarding the nature and activities of the prophets, there remains a need for studies from other perspectives and from different locations. The next section describes the methodgy that this study will employ to explore more of the ethos and values of the eighth century prophets and the socio-economic context in Israelite society.

B. METHODOLOGY: A TRIBAL PERSPECTIVE

Usually the choice of method depends on the vision of a particular biblical scholar, and the situation in which the biblical text is going to be used. A choice of methodological principle is helpful and necessary because every interpretation is guided by certain principles. In this research, an attempt is made to use a tribal perspective as a methodological principle to read the land ownership abuse in Judah and Israel based on the texts of Isaiah 5:8-10 and Micah 2:1-2.

Tribal perspective in this study is one form of a subaltern perspective, reading the Bible from the point of view of an oppressed group of people. The Tribal perspective or Mizo perspective, as employed in this particular research is a new approach to the Bible, though some subaltern perspectives like an Aboriginal perspective in Australia and Dalit perspective

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[144] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 25.

in India have shared some of these concerns.[145] Despite common features, the tribal people in Northeast India have their own origins, identities, problems and concerns which differentiate them from other oppressed groups of people in different parts of the world. Therefore the adoption of this perspective should be considered as one of the outcomes of current trends in biblical interpretation.[146]

However, caution must be exercised when we use the term 'tribal perspective' as there are many tribes in various part of the world whose origins, cultures, identities, problems, concerns, and worldviews are different from one another. It is difficult, if not impossible, to find a single perspective for all these people. Indeed, there could be several tribal perspectives corresponding to their contextual differences. Even in India, there are several tribes in different parts of the country who have varied structural and cultural characteristics, diverse socio-economic, political and cultural backgrounds. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to cover them all.

This study reads the eighth century prophets from the point of a particular group of people, the Mizo. As the Mizo tribe is part of the larger tribal communities in Northeast India, the terms 'Mizo perspective' and Tribal perspective' are used interchangeably in this study. The Tribal perspective in this research is particularly that of Mongoloid[147] stock of hill

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[145] For instance, Josephine Flood, *The Original Australian: Story of the Original People* (Allen &Unwin: Australia, 2007); James Massey, *Towards Dalit Hermeneutics: Re-reading the text, the History and the Literature* (Delhi: ISPCK,1994); A. Maria Arul Raja, 'Towards a Dalit Reading of the Bible: Some Hermeneutical Reflection', *Jeevadhera* 25/151 (1996): 29-34; George Kanairkath, 'A Dalit Reading of the Prophetic Writing', in Augustine Thottakara (ed.), *Indian Interpretation of the Bible* (Bangalore:Dharmaram, 2000): 231-251; K.Jesuratnam, 'Towards a Dalit Liberative Hermeneutics: Re-reading the Psalms of Lament', *Bangalore Theological Forum,* 34/1(June, 2002):1-34.

[146] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 31.

[147] According to Oxford Dictionary of English, 'Mongoloid is relating to the broad division of humankind including the indigenous peoples of East Asia, SE Asia and Arctic region of North India. The term Mongoloid, Negroid, Caucasoid and Australoid were introduced by 19th- century anthropologists such as Blumenbauch

dwelling tribes in Northeast India. In exploring this, the study draws on and combines a variety of contextual postcolonial, liberation and cultural-anthropological approaches. An attempt to theologize tribal heritage has been dubbed 'tribal theology'. This is one of the fastest developing contextual theologies in India today and is moving towards a fuller and more comprehensive articulation.[148]

Such a tribal perspective should be considered as part of a liberation approach in so far as it is based on the principle that the interpretation of the Bible should contribute towards the liberation of the powerless people. The impact of the Latin American way of reading the Bible in the context of the struggle for human dignity and freedom is well-known; indeed this has been one of the most significant theological developments of recent decades.[149] However, the main concern of this study is not only to reveal the liberative elements of the biblical texts for socio-economic liberation. Unlike much Latin American Liberation theology, this study also encompasses a concern for liberation from racial discrimination, socio-cultural assimilation and various other forms of alienation.[150] This is based on a subaltern reading of the Bible and looking at its history 'from the bottom' through the eyes of the powerless and the poor.[151] Such an approach is postcolonial as well as socially and politically liberative.

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attempting to classify human racial types, but today they are recognized as having limited validity as scientific categories. Although occasionally used when making broad generalizations about the world populations, in most modern contexts they are potentially offensive, especially when used of individuals'. For instance, Mongoloid refers to a person with Down's syndrome. See the details in Oxford Dictionary of English (Second Edition, Revised; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006),1133. Despite its negative connotations, I used the term Mongoloid for lack of other broad term to cover Southeast Asian tribes including the hill dwelling tribes in Northeast India.

[148] Rosiamliana, 'Methodological Reflection', 19.
[149] Carroll R. *Contexts for Amos*, 1-20.
[150] Lallawmzuala 'Values and Ethos ', 34.
[151] Ceresco, *Old Testament*, 14.

This approach also shares certain characteristics with cultural-anthropological approaches. It attempts to illuminate the Bible text by drawing parallels between the text and the values and culture of tribal people, largely from Mizo socio-cultural resources. Though the term 'tribe' or 'tribal' has derogatory and negative connotations, there are positive elements inherent in tribal culture and values that could serve as to produce a distinctive interpretation to the Bible. Tribal could mean primitive, uncivilized, backward in technology and resistant to modern development; however, it could also mean loving, sharing, generous, hospitable, simple, innocent, community-oriented people, less affected by modernity and individualism.[152] Thus, within the context of the great heritage of the tribal people in Northeast India, the term 'tribal' is redeemable.[153] This study is not an attempt to romanticise the tribal culture and resources but to affirm the positive elements inherent in tribal values and culture so as to produce a meaningful interpretation of the Bible.

As much as this study draws on a liberationist perspective, it also has a contextual postcolonial dimension. Sugirtharajah believes that postcolonialism and liberation hermeneutics are good partners because they share similar goals and commitments. He categorically states, 'Liberation hermeneutics and postcolonialism share mutual agendas and goals, and hope for and work towards an alternative to the present arrangement'.[154] However, while they share some common concerns and goals, there are also marked differences between them. While the liberation theology has been largely focussed on 'socio-economic' issues, 'postcolonial theology is concerned with all instances of oppression, whether political,

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[152] Longchar, *Tribal Religious Traditions*, 150-165.
[153] See the details in K.Thanzauva, 'Is Tribal a Redeemable Term?' in Wati Longchar (ed.), *In Search of Identity and Tribal Theology: A Tribute to Dr Renty Keitzar* (Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre,2000):1-12.
[154] R.S.Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 122.

economic, cultural, sexual or otherwise.'[155] According to Sugirtharajah postcolonialism 'sees

the Bible as both problem and solution, and its message of liberation is seen as far more

indeterminate and complicated.'[156] As Stephen Moore suggests, the 'contextual

hermeneutics' of postcolonialism seeks to:

> relinquish the central (frequently Marxist-driven) focus on economics and the universal plight of the poor typical of classical liberation theology for a focus on the local, the indigenous, the ethnic, and the culturally contingent, with the aim of recovering, reasserting, and reinscribing identities, cultures, and traditions that colonial Christianity had marginalized, erased, suppressed, or pronounced ''idolatrous''.[157]

Postcolonialism is not simply anti colonialism but a discourse of resistance and a

framework of response to 'every imperialism, every supremacism',[158] and to all kinds of

oppressions.This study could be seen as reflecting the concerns of contextual postcolonial

studies in that it aims to assert, and indeed to recover, the Northeast Indian tribal traditional

values and cultures which colonial Christianity and modernization have marginalized and

suppressed. It also attempts to use all available tools and methods, but with a postcolonial

attitude and stance.

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[155] Michael J Stanford, 'Jesus and the Poor, Western Biblical Scholarship, Structural Violence and Postcolonialism,' (PhD Dissertation, Department of Biblical Studies, University of Sheffield, 2012), 12. See also R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 122; *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: History, Method, Practice* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 45. Sugirtharaja suggests that Liberation Hermeneutics has locked itself into a narrow economic agenda at the expense of overlooking the diverse religious and cultural traditions of the people. Hugh Pyper, *The Unchained Bible: Cultural Appropriations of Biblical Text* (New York/London: T& T Clark, 2012), 20-70.

[156] Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism*, 117.

[157] Stephen D.Moore and Fernando F. Segovia, 'Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Beginnings, Trajectories, Intersections', in Stephen D.Moore and Fernando F. Segovia (eds.), *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, (London/New York: T & T Clark International, 2005): 6; Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 16.

[158] Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera, 'Introduction: Alien/Nation, Liberation, and the Postcolonial Underground', *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* (St Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2004): xi-xiii.

This perspective addresses a current crisis in the Northeast Indian tribal society. The tribal people of Northeast India in general and the Mizo tribe in particular, have experienced the invading processes of sanskritization,[159] modernization and globalization. Further details will be discussed in chapter four. In summary, however, certain sections of the people in Northeast India have been influenced by global values associated with these phenomena; this is manifesting itself in ruthless greed, acquisitiveness and other characteristics not intrinsic to tribal culture. The situation in Northeast India presents an identity crisis connected with economic dependency, tribalism and social injustice. To respond to this situation one must opt for a theology which is contextual in nature. This perspective reflects the values, aspiration and world-view of the people in rural areas in Northeast India, particularly in Mizoram. Therefore, when we use a 'tribal perspective' it represents the perspective of the Northeast India people within their respective society who share their values, aspiration and world-view as a socially marginalised, economically disadvantaged, politically oppressed and culturally exploited community.

To adopt a tribal perspective in this research is not to suggest that all other approaches are irrelevant for the Northeast India context. No single method is completely adequate for the interpretation, understanding and contextualisation of the biblical text.[160] The tribal perspective provides a working model that does not exclude the other approaches. While it brings certain presuppositions to the interpretation of biblical texts, these are informed by the socio-economic, political and cultural realities of Northeast India in general

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[159] Sanskritization is 'a process of imposition of Sanskrit oriented language, literature, [culture] and as well as of religious conversion to Brahmanic Hinduism'. See the details, Vanlalchhuanawma, 'Keynote Address', in Hrangthan Chhungi (ed.), *Theologizing Tribal Heritage: A Critical Re-Look* (Delhi: CWM/ISET-ECC/PCI/ISPCK, 2008):1-12.

[160] Thanzauva, 'Theologizing in the North Eastern Contexts: Methodological Issues', in J.Puthenpurakal (ed.), *Impact of Christianity in North East India* (Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, 1996): 94.

and the Mizo people in particular. In this sense, this study represents an attempt to illuminate the context of the eighth century prophets by exploring the parallels with tribal culture and resources.

1. Tribal Identity in Question

The use of the term tribal and the nature of that identity is itself part of the complex and conflicted history of what is now Northeast India. To clarify the tribal identity in the Indian social and political setting, it is necessary to examine it in the context of the Indian social stratification system.[161] Indian society has been stratified by the caste system for four thousand years. Within this caste framework, Indian society has been divided into three categories. The first category is the caste community, which consists of the four castes that are hierarchically ordered- Brahmin (priest), Ksatriyas (rulers and warriors), Vaishyas (business persons) and Sudras (the labourers).

Second, there exists 'outcaste community' related to, but outside of, these four segments. This constitutes around 6 percent of the Indian population. Ramsay McDonald had proposed in 1932 the phrase 'scheduled caste'. This was rejected at the time but later adopted by Independent India in 1950, excluding the Christians of Scheduled Caste origin.[162] Nowadays, the term 'Dalit has become an expression of self representation, chosen by them' [outcaste] a community who have been 'ejected from the contours of Hindu society' and 'thought of as sub-or non- human, living outside the gate of the society...'[163] It is important to

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[161] Rosiamliana 'Methodological Reflection', 20.
[162] When the outcaste converted to other religions, particularly Christianity they therefore automatically lost their scheduled Caste provisions and privileges.
[163] Rosiamliana 'Methodological Reflection', 20.

note that while they were the outcastes of the Hindu caste system, they remained nevertheless part of that religion.

Third, there exists unconnected to the caste system but marginalized by it, the various groups known as Tribals. Sometimes called the forest tribes, primitive tribes or backward tribes, their constitutional identity has been defined as 'scheduled tribes.' In fact, they are a casteless society but their identity has been constructed in accordance with the caste stratification mindset.[164]

As indicated earlier, the very term 'tribal' in the Indian context has derogatory and negative connotations. The appropriateness of the term 'tribal' has therefore undergone serious questioning. Some scholars from Northeast India tribal communities are critical of the usage and application of the term. Lalsangkima Pachuau, for example, argues:

> 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.[165]

According to Lalsangkima, the tribal identity is artificially constructed for the convenience of an administrative system that is thoroughly influenced by the caste stratification mindset. At the same time, the term 'tribal' shows their condition and provides their context. It denotes that they are alienated and marginalised.[166] As Lalsangkima observes:

> The very choice of the term indicates the marginal existence of the people so-called 'tribal' and the oppressiveness of the structure that imposed identity to

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[164] Lalsangkima Pachuau, 'Tribal Identity and Ethnic Conflicts in Northeast India: A Tribal Christian Response', *Bangalore Theological Forum* 31/1(July, 1999): 161.
[165] Lalsangkima, 'Tribal Identity', 161.
[166] Lalsangkima, 'Tribal Identity ', 161.

them. The very use of the term reveals the intent to dominate and oppress to whom the nomenclature is imposed.[167]

As indicated earlier, the very term 'tribal' may be seen to carry pejorative connotation of primitiveness and inferiority; it reduces the people to whom the nomenclature is applied, they are reduced to the lowest level of the social hierarchy of the Hindu caste system along with the outcaste. This categorization is in serious conflict with their self-understanding. This has led to a sense of alienation, identity crisis, turmoil (social, economic and political) and psychological trauma. At times they resorted to armed struggles, though this has been unsuccessful. Thus, they are, according to Wati Longchar, 'a defeated community in India'.[168] The tribal struggle will be covered in more detail in chapter four.

Despite these objections, there are reasons to suggest that the term 'tribal' is redeemable. Vanlalnghaka, a tribal biblical scholar, argues that the imposed name 'tribal' has value as a basic hermeneutic because of its parallels with the term 'Christian'. 'Christian' was originally an imposed term given to the early believers by non-believers in Antioch. It was accepted as a term of self-designation in the late first and early second century and has continued to be used as such throughout the history of the Church into the present time. These parallels with the experience of Christian community may enable 'tribal' people, a community described by an imposed term with derogatory connotations, to look at the Bible with fresh eyes.[169] The term tribal thus became a basic hermeneutical key and an invaluable heritage for tribal Christians. The story of the Israelites in eighth century and the story of the

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[167] Lalsangkima, 'Tribal Identity ', 161.

[168] Longchar (ed.), *An Exploration of Tribal Theology* (Jorhat: Eastern Theological College, Tribal Study Centre, 1997), 2.

[169] Vanlalnghaka Ralte, 'Critical Re-Look at Tribal Heritage: A New Testament Perspective', in (ed. Hrangthan Chhungi (ed.), *Theologizing Tribal Heritage: A Critical Re-look*, Delhi: CWM/ISET-ECC/ISPCK, 2009): 268.

early Christians can become the story of tribals. By drawing on new insights and parallels from the tribal values of Northeast India, this in turn can provide new insights for biblical studies.

2. Some Methodological Presuppositions and Assumptions

This present study's methodology is rooted in some basic presuppositions that will now be described. First, it is proposed that insights derived from cultural values and heritage and socio-economic and political realities in Northeast India in general and the Mizo tribe in particular can shed light on some important aspects of the values and ethos of the eighth century prophets. One can presume that the context we are searching for is not like modern industrialist society; rather Israel in the eighth century was an advanced agrarian society. In fact, their values, vision and worldview would be different from contemporary advanced societies. Therefore, it may be that the communitarian values, vision and worldview of the tribal people may better reflect the values and ethos of the prophets who seemed to defend and uphold the socio-economic and religio-cultural identity of the rural people of Israel who were affected by the highhandedness of upper class people. What Pablo Richard remarks about the indigenous people of Latin America is true of other marginalized peoples including Northeast India tribals:

> The indigenous peoples, with their millennial history, with their cultural and religious tradition, and recently, with their own native method of evangelization and their native theology, are much better prepared to read and interpret the Bible than the Western European Christian who had a millennial

istory of violence and conquest, impregnated with erudite, liberal and modern spirit.[170]

One tribal biblical scholar, Lallawmzuala goes even further and comments:

> 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 worldview found in the oracles of the prophets might be explained effectively in the light of tribal culture as well.[171]

In fact the values, ethos and worldview of the tribal in Northeast India are likely to have more affinity with Ancient Western societies than well-developed western counterparts.

The second important assumption guiding the present investigation is that every context needs a contextual reading in order to fully appreciate the meaning and significance of the message of the Bible. As investigated earlier, historical-critical and social scientific studies have different historical and social questions from their own social locations and sought answers from the Bible. It is assumed that there is no universal approach to explicate the concerns of people who lived in different times. It seems highly likely that, as Pyper puts it, 'community and text are bound together in the struggle for survival' and the Bible has its ability to adapt a new community in a different context.[172] Thus it is also assumed that the creative interaction between community and text would produce a new meaning. As indicated earlier, this approach is to raise issues, problems and questions from the existential reality of the Northeast Indian people in order to illuminate the message of the prophets. This is not to

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[170] Pablo Richard, 'Indigenous Biblical Hermeneutics: God's Revelation in Native Religions and the Bible (After 500 Tears of Domination)', in D. Smith Christopher (ed.), *Text and Experience: Towards a Cultural Exegesis of the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995): 271.
[171] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 26.
[172] Hugh S.Pyper, *An Unsuitable Book: The Bible as Scandalous Text*, *The Bible in Modern World,* 7 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), 33.

exclude other models of interpretation; rather they mutually complement each other within a creative interaction.

Additionally, what we need to recognise is dynamics of the interconnectedness between the contexts of the then and the now. As indicated earlier, since we are determined by our own context, we need to exercise cautious so as to ensure that we do not simply allow our own historical context to determine what we see in the texts. Rather we need to allow the text to speak in our own context. Segundo expresses this dialectic succinctly:

> It is the continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present day reality, both individual and social.[173]

This process in the hermeneutical circle allows us to see the appropriateness of a given biblical text to Northeast Indian tribals' struggles and liberation.

The third assumption of this study is that there is no value-free, ideological neutral objectivity in the study of the Bible and other disciplines.[174] The neutrality of scientific objectivity is unattainable. As Legrand puts it:

> No reading of the Bible can escape a bias since it cannot be done from a given standpoint. The so-called ''purely spiritual'' reading of the scriptures is itself heavily loaded with apert idealistic presuppositions and covert sociological pulls.[175]

In fact, interpretation is always subjective as well as objective. As Whitelam observes, 'The power of the discourse of biblical studies which has projected an aura of objective scholarship when it is quite clear that subjective and unconscious elements have

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[173]J.L. Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* (trans. By John Drury; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), 8.
[174]Premnath, 'Comparative and Historical Sociology in Old Testament Research: A Study of Isaiah 3:12-15', *Bangalore Theological Forum,* vol.XVII, No.4 (Oct-Dec 1985): 20.
[175] Legrand, 'New Horizons', 221.

played a key role in constructions of the imagined past of ancient Israel'.[176] Every

interpretation reflects the presuppositions and prejudice of the interpreter; in fact, 'there is no

interpretation without presupposition' which is 'completely free from social location'.[177] Any

interpretation of the text that creates meaning is conditioned by the social location of the

interpreter. Thus 'this implies that the dialogical interaction of the reader and the text is

perceived as the source of new meaning'.[178] As Robert. M Grant observes:

> 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 way
> in which we express his meaning. Interpretation is always subjective as well as
> objective.[179]

Every interpretation involves presupposition and prejudices on the part of the

interpreters. Such preconceptions and pre-understandings cannot be avoided and are indeed

necessary for interpretation. The interpreter's values and belief-systems are part of his or her

own social location; these in turn produce a particular sense of the meaning of the text.[180] A

new form of meaning can emerge when the so called 'fusion of horizons'[181] occurs as a result

of the synthesis of two traditions, in this case Hebrew tradition in the Old Testament and

Northeast Indian tribal cultural traditions and practices.

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[176] K.W.Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London: Routledge, 1996), 120.

[177] McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, 4. Lallawmzuala 'Values and Ethos', 26.

[178] Lallawmzuala 'Values and Ethos', 28.

[179] Robert M.Grant and David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (London: SCM Press, revised and enlarge, 1984), 4.

[180] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 28. See also Leif E.Vaage, 'Introduction', in Leif E.Vaage (ed.) *Subversive Scriptures: Revolutionary Readings of the Christian Bible in Latin America* (Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1997): 10.

[181] For Gadamer, interpreting a text involves a fusion of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*) where the scholar finds the ways that the text's history articulates with their own background. See the details Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1975), 235-240. See also Thanzauva, 'Theologizing in the North Eastern Contexts', 100.

The fourth assumption is that as a part of the contextual reading of the Bible, the approach in this research needs to be not only political but also liberative and postcolonial in nature. It is contextual by nature and aims to address the liberation of the tribal people not only from a socio-economic but also from a psychological, religio-cultural exploitation. This involves a theological and biblical reflection on the vision, world-view, aspiration and struggle of the Northeast Indian tribal peoples. Tribal reading of a biblical text, primarily engaged tribal readers who are the victims of all kinds of physical and psychological oppression, reads the text with pain and pathos of their experience. It seeks to find its consonant with the life struggles of tribal people with biblical texts.

In the midst of several works done on eighth century prophetic literature in general and land ownership issues in particular from different approaches, this research attempts to offer a meaningful and distinctive interpretative framework to biblical studies. That said, it attempts to investigate factors behind prophetic critique of land ownership abuse particularly focussing on Isaiah 5:8-10 and Micah 2:1-2 from the perspective of Northeast Indian experiences with fresh eyes.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF EIGHTH CENTURY PROPHECY

A. Introductory Problems

When looking at the historical background of ancient Israel, one of the pertinent problems is that there is little evidence from the biblical account surrounding the socio-economic context of eighth century BCE. While Old Testament prophetic books that are generally attributed to eighth century BCE such as Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah certainly offer material that addresses various forms of exploitation, oppression and injustice, there remains ambiguity concerning the socio-economic context of prophecy. The historical books give us no clear information about the socio-economic context of eighth century prophecy either. As a result, some biblical scholars have reconstructed a socio-economic context of the eighth century based on the limited information available in the biblical record; others have looked for clues outside the field of biblical studies.

Despite this paucity of evidence pertaining to the socio-economic context behind prophetic protests, several biblical scholars have attempted to investigate the circumstances that are believed to have led to loss of ancestral land in eighth century Judah and Israel. In this regard, the aforementioned works of Chaney,[182] Premnath,[183] Dearman,[184] Chirichigno,[185]

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[182] Marvin L Chaney, 'You Shall not Covet Your Neighbour's House', *Pacific Theological Review* 15 (1982): 3-12; 'Systemic Study of the Israelite Monarchy', *Semeia* 37 (1986):53-76; 'Whose Sour Grapes? The Addressees of Isaiah 5:1-7 in the Light of Political Economy', *Semeia* 87 (1999): 105-112; 'Bounty: The Dynamics of Political Economy Critiqued by the Eighth-Century Prophets', in Norman K.Gottwald and Richard A.Horsley (eds.), *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutic* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1993): 250-263.

Finskelstein,[186] Na'aman,[187] Lallawmzuala,[188] Coomber[189] and Guillaume[190] provide valuable

insights for the consideration of prophetic complaints against land misuse in ancient Israel

and Judah. In this chapter, an attempt is made to investigate the socio-economic context of

the eighth century BCE. More specifically, the chapter seek to identify the possible reasons

for the accumulation of land. This will draw on both biblical material and other clues outside

the biblical record.

1. A Search for the Socio-Economic Context

As noted earlier, attempts to explore the socio-economic context of eighth- century

Judah and Israel (as it relates to land ownership) have been limited by the lack of biblical and

extra-biblical evidence. Commenting on the lack of evidence relating to land conveyance,

Baruch Levine notes that the biblical records do not provide 'any actual documents of land

conveyance or deeds establishing ownership of land in Israel. Nor do we possess court

records, official correspondence or royal edicts from the kingdoms of northern Israel or

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[183] D.N. Premnath, 'Latifundialization and Isaiah 5:8-10', *JSOT* 40, (1988): 49-63; 'Comparative and Historical Sociology in Old Testament: A Study of Isaiah 3:12-15', *Bangalore Theological Forum,* 17/4 (Oct-Dec 1985): 20- 31; *Eighth Century Prophets: A Social Analysis* (St Louis Chalice: 2003).

[184] John Andrew Dearman, *Property Rights in the Eighth-Century Prophets: The Conflicts and its Background,* (SBL Dissertation Series 106; Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1988).

[185] Gregory C.Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

[186] Israel Finkelstein, 'State Formation in Israel and Judah', *NEA* 62/1 (1999): 35-52; Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, 'Temple and Dynasty: Hezekiah, the Remaking of Judah and the Rise of the Pan-Israelite Ideology', *JSOT* 30/ 3(2006): 250-265; 'Stages in the Territorial Expansion of the Northern Kingdom', *VT,* 61/2 (2011): 227-242.

[187] Nadav Na'aman, 'When and How did Jerusalem Become a Great City? The Rise of Jerusalem as Judah's Premier City in the Eighth-Seventh Centuries B.C.E', *BASOR* No 348 (2006): 20-32; 'Naboath's Vineyard and the Foundation of Jezreel', *VT* 33/2 (2008):197-218.

[188] Lallawmzuala Khiangte, 'Values and Ethos of Eighth-Century Prophets: A Mizo Perspective' (PhD Dissertation, School of Theology and Religious Studies, Bangor University, UK, 2009).

[189] Mathew J.M.Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets Through Corporate Globalisation: A Cultural-Evolutionary Approach to Economic Injustice in the Hebrew Bible* (Biblical Intersection, 4; Piscataway, NJ: Geogias Press, 2010).

[190] Philippe Guillaume, *Land, Credit and Crisis: Agrarian Finance in Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield/Oakville: Equinox, 2012).

Judah'.[191] Coomber forcefully argues it is unlikely that the effects of economic and societal

change in eighth century Judah and Israel will ever be known with certainty. Perhaps 'the

only clues that are available to those who would attempt to decipher the socio-economic

context behind landownership abuse in eighth century Judah [and Israel] are the remains of

significant urban and rural building projects, which indicate a period of increased activity'.[192]

Since Aharoni's survey of Upper Galilee in the 1950s, various archaeological

surveys of the highlands of Canaan have shown that there was a great increase in the number

of new village settlements during the Early Iron Age (ca. 1200-1000BCE).[193] To date, several

settlements have been discovered mainly in the hill country. Scholars are divided as to how

the Iron Age settlers, possibly Israelites, settled in Canaan. Various models have been

proposed for the origin and manner of settlement by the Israelites,[194] but it is beyond the

scope of this thesis to consider these fully. While the origin of the Israelites remains a moot

point, it is likely that Israel eventually developed into a national state, or at least 'early

state',[195] under the leadership of Saul, David and Solomon. However, Whitelam argues that

the evidence for such national state is virtually non-existent and the more recent

reconstructions of Davidic Empire are under the sway of the dominant paradigm.[196] He

further argues, 'the mirage of the Davidic ''empire,'' the retrojection of the modern state into

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[191] Baruch A. Levine, 'Farewell to the Ancient Near East: Evaluating Biblical Reference to Ownership of Land in Comparative Perspective,' in Michael Hudson and Baruch A. Levine (eds.), *Privitization in the Ancient Near East and Classical World,* (Harvard University: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, 1996): 224.
[192] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 2.
[193] Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 102.
[194] Scholars suggest various models for the manner of settlement of Israelites such as 'conquest model', 'nomadic infiltration model', 'peaceful penetration model', and 'revolt model'.
[195] Finkelstein, 'State Formation ', 48.
[196] Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel*, 156. See also Uriah Y.Kim, *Decolonizing Josiah: Toward a Post Colonizing Reading of the Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), 126-143.

the Iron Age, has completely distorted the representation of the history of the region'.[197] Similarly, according to Kim, 'the Davidic Empire will remain far more considerable in size and power than what evidence allows'.[198] However, several scholars believe that biblical material such as I Sam 14, 17; 2 Sam 8 offers evidence to suggest that the Israelites repelled the threat of Philistines in the highlands, and that this allowed them to settle in the lowlands of Canaan.[199] Presumably the formation of an Israelite state, similar to those in the rest of the ancient Near East, brought significant improvements to the lives of Israelites; the process of centralization weakened tribal authority and increased social stratification.

Chaney suggests that immediately prior to Israel's formation as an independent society at the beginning of Iron Age, the people's relationship to their land was characterised by a combination of patrimonial and prebendal domains typical of agrarian societies. He also claims:

> The field which they and their king or warlord were able to conquer and hold by force of arms they let out to peasant producers, who regularly paid half or more of their production to the landlord in the form of various taxes and rents in return for access to the land. The elite had sufficient means to extract the largest possible surplus from the peasant majority, leaving it only the barest subsistence necessary to remain productive. Such was the socioeconomic system in the alluvial plains of Canaan when Israel emerged as [a] separate society in the adjacent hill country.[200]

However, scholars like Guillaume criticise Chaney's presumption that peasants would have to pay half or more of their production to the landlords and the latter siphon off the largest possible surplus from peasants. Guillaume is less sympathetic to any idea of depriving small farmers by their landlords as he believed that such is the ideology of social

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[197] Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel*, 120.
[198] Kim, *Decolonizing Josiah*, 129.
[199] For example, Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 109.
[200] Chaney, 'Systemic Study ', 60-61.

scientist scholars but not the reality in ancient Palestine.[201] Small farmers are depicted as

'caught in the vortex of a vast conspiracy to despoil them'.[202] Nonetheless the biblical

materials offer evidence to suggest that though the introduction of monarchy brought

significant changes in the lives of the people, the ownership of patrimonial land (נחלה)

remained an important institution of the private sector during the monarchic and later periods

(cf.2 Sam. 14; 1 Kgs 21:1-19 ; Ruth). There are also biblical references to private

landownership during the early period of Israelite monarchy, at least in the upper strata of

society. For example, Kish, father of King Saul, was a landowner (I Sam 9); likewise, a

certain Nabal owned much land and had 3,000 sheep (I Sam. 25). This evidence might

suggest that a symbiosis of private and royal economies developed during the period of David

and Solomon.[203]

2. Factors Contributing Towards Land Consolidation

2.1 Royal Land Grants

Whatever the size of David's 'domain', it represents for many scholars the first 'full

blown' state in Palestine.[204] Finkelstein maintains the possibility that David's kingdom could

have been an expanding 'early state' rather than a full-blown state.[205] According to biblical

accounts, parts of Canaan were added to the crown properties by conquest and bestowal of

gifts (2 Sam. 8:1-6; 1 Kgs 9:16). However, there is little evidence with which to assess the

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[201] Guillaume, *Land*, 50-68.
[202] Guillaume, *Land,* 98.
[203] Michael Heltzer, 'The Symbiosis of Public and Private Sectors in Ugarit, Phoenicia, and Palestine', in Michael Hudson and Baruch A.Levine (eds.), *Privitization in the Ancient Near East and Classical World*, (Harvard University: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, 1996): 183-184.
[204] Kim, *Decolonizing Josiah,* 129. However, scholars such as Philip R.Davies, Whitelam, Millers and Hayes are highly suspicious of such reconstruction of David's empire. See also Davies, Philip R., *In Search of Ancient Israel* (JSOT Sup, 148; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).
[205] Finkelstein, 'State Formation ', 48.

extent of the monarchs' property in the united and divided kingdoms of Israel. The biblical

account records instances of monarchs purchasing land for themselves, for example when

David bought the threshing floor of Arauna in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 24), and Omri bought the

hill of Samaria (I Kgs 16:24). Interestingly enough, the land was granted in exchange for

military duties such as those David performed for Akish (I Sam. 27:6-12). Moreover, David

owned various properties including vineyards and olive groves; cattle, camels, donkeys and

sheep; and storehouses and overseers in charge of the workers who tilled the soil (1 Chro.

27:25-31). Solomon also added to the crown properties by conquest and through gifts (cf. 1

Kgs 9:16), some of these are described in Eccl. 2:4-7. With the passage of time, it is very

likely that royal ownership of land increased, even within Israelite territory itself. The story

of Naboth's vineyard[206] casts considerable light on these issues, suggesting that the king may

have assumed the right of intervening in the possession rights of others. However, as

Ahlström warns, the Naboth story cannot be taken as evidence of a monarchic programme of

land expropriation.[207] Besides, further legal cases, of which we have no knowledge, may have

brought changes in the old land law of Israel.[208] Robert Coote suggests that during the

monarchical period, ca.1000-600BCE, the prevailing form of domain shifted from

patrimonial to prebendal. According to Coote:

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[206] Siegfried Herrmann, *A History of Israel in Old Testament Times,* revised and enlarged edition (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1981), 236. See also Niels Peter Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), 151-152. According to Lemche, Naboth refuses to accede to the royal request for the reason that the land in question is the property of his lineage; he cannot sell it, no matter what the king should happen to offer for it. However, the notorious queen Jezebel arraigned him on a false charge which led to his condemnation and execution, allowing the state to confiscate the vineyard. See also Volkmar Fritz, *The City In Ancient Israel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) 167-168.

[207] Gosta W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine from Palaeolithic Period to Alexander' Conquest* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 587.

[208] Herrmann, *A History of Israel*, 236.

> Patrimonial domain is exercised by persons who inherit ownership or control as member of kinship groups. In Israel ownership usually passed from father to son. Whatever its origin, the primary understanding of domain in Israel is patrimonial. Families or clans held domain over estates granted to them by Yahweh, to whom land ultimately belonged, and in the long run this domain was inalienable. Clan lands were called ''grants'' (*nachlah*, usually translated ''inheritance'') because they were granted by Yahweh and held by patrimonial.[209]

However, it could also be argued that Coote's claim that the patrimonial domain was inalienable is highly questionable. As Dearman put it, 'there is no strict prohibition *per se* against land alienation in the Hebrew Bible',[210] perhaps with the exception of Ezekiel 46:16-18. Similarly, Guillaume argues that it is doubtful that a serious case for the inalienability of the נחלה can be built from the Bible. The stress should rather be shifted from the נחלה itself to its paternal aspect. Commenting on the story of Naboth's vineyard, Guillaume claims that the 'vineyard was a paternal inheritance נחלה indicates that Naboth's abhorrence in giving up his vineyard was rooted in filial devotion, not in Torah observance'.[211]

According to Coote, the other domain which became gradually prominent after the emergence of monarchy is the prebendal domain. He states:

> Prebendal domain is exercised by officials of a state by virtue of grants from a sovereign who holds ultimate ownership of the land. The officials therefore control not the land, which is owned by the sovereign, but the income from the land. These grants of income are known as prebends, and the officials who hold them as prebendal lords….The permanence of prebendal domain might

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[209] Robert Coote, *Amos Among the Prophets*: *Composition and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 27. See also Chaney, 'Systemic Study', 60-61.

[210] Dearman, *Property Rights*, 68. It seems likely that Ezek.46:16-18 presents the only clear prohibition relative to naḥalah but what it opposes is its being taken away, violent dispossession and expulsion, not the regular sale or exchange like the case of Naboth.

[211] Guillaume, *Land*, 72. Guillaume argues that concept having shifted away from the early monarchic to the Persian era, the point of departure for the Naboth story plot is slowly shifting to second Temple exegesis of the Torah. On the basis of analogies found in Nehemiah, following some scholars like Rofe, Knauf and Cronauer he puts the date of the vineyard story between the sixth and the fourth centuries BCE.

be determined by custom, the will of sovereign, and the political stability of the times.[212]

This argument has been supported by several scholars to date. It is very likely that only patrimonial, redistributional ownership applies to the lands which were in Israel's possession prior to the monarchy. As indicated earlier, the formation of an Israelite state brought significant improvements to the lives of Israelites. [213] However, some social differences began to become evident even prior to the establishment of the monarchy. The appearance of a marginal class was first noted in the period of Judges when Jephthah was evicted from the family's estate, Jephthah gathered around him people who were described as *anashim reikim* (have-nots) living on the edge of society (Judg.11.3). [214] But during the process of centralization, it seems likely that tribal authority was greatly weakened and social stratification increased significantly. With the increase in centralization, however, debt slavery and the alienation of land increased (cf. 2Kgs 4:1-7; Neh.5:1-13; Isa.5:8; Jer.34:8-16; Mic.2:1-2; Amos 8:5). Several scholars assume that with the passage of time tenant farming became an increasingly common practice in agricultural operations in Israel and Judah.[215]

In spite of this, some scholars, for instance Dearman,[216] suggest that since tenant farming is not clearly referred to elsewhere in the Old Testament, it was probably not a common practice in Israel. Chirichigno further argues that there is no evidence that the king gave significant amounts of prebendal land to officials. In particular, he suggests it is unlikely

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[212] Coote, *Amos,* 27. See also Lang, 'The Social Organisation', 48-49. Thomas, *Jeroboam II the King*, 182.
[213] Ziony Zevit, *The Religion of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London/New York: Continuum, 2001), 639.
[214] Frank M. Loewenberg, *From Charity to Social Justice* (New Brunswick/London: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 53.
[215] For example, Robert Coote, *Amos*, 20-27; Lang, 'The Social Organisation', 48-49; Chaney, 'Systemic Study', 53-76; Thomas, *Jeroboam II the King*, 180-242.
[216] Dearman, *Property Rights*, 28-31.

that the king had the judicial power to secure private land for his own use. Nevertheless, Chirichigno admits it is possible that tenants worked on the lands obtained by officials.[217] The position of Coote,[218] Chaney[219] and others[220] who argue that in Israel, as in other ancient Near East societies, the king distributed domain over lands he did not require for his own immediate use to high officials, retainers and other courtiers in return for political, bureaucratic, and other military services, is tenable and even plausible. The king could, of course, retain a share of the prebendal income he granted to another. Baruch A. Levine believes that biblical literature provides suggestive evidence of royal land grants, indicating that at least some privately owned land or family owned land was generated in this way. A significant allusion to such grants is found in I Samuel 8: 14, 22: 7-8.[221] Scholars like Dearman, Fritz and Levine note that Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, was given a land grant from David, thus making him a patron or client of the royal court (cf. 2 Sam.9:1-13).[222] This practice is similar to that found in Egypt, Ugarit, Alalakh and Assyria, where clients of the king were given property or other concessions in exchange for service.[223] Further details of royal land grants will be discussed below.

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[217] Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 126. He even assume that there were Crown properties of David and Solomon through the conquered lowlands of Canaan, through buying of other properties (cf. 2 Sam.24:24) and through bestowal of gifts (cf. I Kings 9:16). However, it is not clear what type of labour was used to maintain Crown properties. He suggests that there are four possible sources of labour: (1) conscripts/slaves; (2) tenants who rent royal land; (3) semi-free citizens; and (4) clients who are given royal land in exchange for service. See also Dearman, *Property Rights*, 113. He suggests that agricultural workers who worked the Crown properties were conscripted Israelite labour, based upon I Sam.8:12, in which Samuel tells the people that the future king will appoint people to plough and reap his harvest, and make war materials such as weapons and equipment for his chariots.

[218] Coote, *Amos*, 24-32.

[219] Chaney, 'Systemic Study', 53-76.

[220] For example, Levine, 'Farewell', 224-233.

[221] Levine, 'Farewell', 229-231.

[222] Dearman, *Property Rights*, 117-123; Fritz, *The City in Ancient Israel*, 167; Levine, 'Farewell', 230.

[223] Dearman, *Property Rights*, 120.

As noted earlier, the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East literature provide suggestive evidence of royal land grants. Another significant example of allusion to such grants is found in the questions that Saul put to the Benjaminites in I Samuel 22: 7-8.[224] Having been informed that some of his fellow Benjaminites had defected to his adversary David. Then, Saul said to his courtiers: 'Hear me, sons of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse indeed grant all of you fields and vineyards; will he appoint all of you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds that you all conspired against me?' Taken at face value, the text is seemingly about Saul taunting David in relation to granting lands to his followers. However, it seems that these questions are not rhetorical but assume that David, who commanded a band of debtors (1 Sam.22:2) could grant fields and vineyards to the leading warriors of Israel. According to Levine, the text is suggestive of the emergence of large land ownership through royal grants.[225]

Some scholars agree that there is also evidence of royal land grants in a series of narratives in 2 Samuel 9, 16 and 19. [226] Evidently David appropriated Saul's property, but, for the sake of Jonathan, granted part of the property back to Mephibosheth, who was the surviving son of Jonathan, saying: 'I shall restore to you all of the fields of Saul, your ancestor' (2 Sam.9: 9). Later, in 2 Sam. 16, when Absalom's rebellion broke out, David fled from his rebellious son. Hearing of Mephibosheth's betrayal, David revoked his earlier grant and transferred the fields to Ziba, saying: 'Behold, everything that is Mephibosheth's belongs to you'. On learning later that the steward Ziba had also deceived him, David eventually

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[224] Levine, 'Farewell ', 229. Dearman, *Property Rights*, 113-115.
[225] Levine, 'Farewell ', 229.
[226] Levine, 'Farewell ', 230. Dearman, *Property Rights*, 114-115.

decided to divide the fields between them (2 Sam.19:30).[227] According to Whitelam, 'The importance of this episode is as evidence for the nature and composition of the royal estates'.[228] Commenting on such royal estates, Chirichigno observes, 'It is possible, therefore, that the Israelite kings employed a group of clients who were given lands in order to supply the palace with commodities... that the king was generally able to seize private land and distribute it to his supporters (cf. 1 Sam 8:14)'.[229]

Another text to be considered is 2 Sam.14:30 where Absalom tells his followers that he and Joab have fields. This is a likely reference to royal lands granted to them for support. Moreover, another allusion to royal land grants is found in I Samuel 8 among a list of what may be construed as royal prerogatives. Scholars have generally assumed this text was part of a later source, concluding that it was '[an] antimonarchical source reflecting exilic disillusionment with human kingship'.[230] However, some scholars take the view that Samuel's warning is not anachronistic but exaggerates the actual circumstances in Syria/ Palestine from the second millennium. Evidence of such practices among Canaanite kingship is also abundantly available from the tablets of Ugarit and Alalakh. Although there is no evidence that this was ever practised during the monarchical period, it may be that the text is reflecting an exaggeration of some actual practice of the Israelite monarchy.[231] Whitelam notes this text indicates that 'the king had the power to seize private property and distribute it

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[227] Loewenberg, *From Charity to Social Justice*, 27. Loewenberg states the royal court itself contributed to the process of pauperization by expropriating the fields of 'traitors' and awarding to their own loyal followers. In this way the palace facilitated the creation of new class of the landless poor.

[228] Keith W.Whitelam, *The Just King: Monarchical Judicial Authority in Ancient Israel* (JSOTSup, 12; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1979), 146.

[229] Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 119.

[230] Dearman, *Property Rights*, 109. Source analysis by Wellhausen and later Martin Noth assigned the passages to a later source. These views have generally prevailed among scholars.

[231] Dearman, *Property Right*, 111.

to his supporters' as seen in the case of Mephibosheth.[232] Therefore Guillaume's argument

that land grants did not contribute to land consolidation[233] appears unconvincing. It is not

surprising to find that the kings of Israel and Judah had large estates (2 Sam.14:30; 2

Chro.26:6ff). It therefore appears that the king possessed sufficient land to be able to grant

some not only to members of his family, but also to his high officials (2 Sam.14:30).

In Ezekiel 46:16-18, we also find that land grants are assumed to be a royal

prerogative. Guillaume suggests 'Ezekiel 46: 16-18 presents the only clear prohibition

relative to naḫalah'.[234] The passage is generally accepted as a late text which has similarities

to I Sam.8:14. The text portrays the prince of the restored nation making grants to his sons

and servants. However, it is likely that reforms were made to prohibit the prince from taking

the land from the people for himself. Dearman observes that 'this post-exilic (?) text is a

bitter commentary on what was perceived or reported to have been pre-exilic practice, and

while accepting the practice wishes to reform its nature and effects for the projected new

community'.[235] Elsewhere in the visionary section of Ezekiel (45:9) the prince is commanded

to 'stop your evictions'.

In looking at eighth century Israel and Judah it is apparent that an alternative royal

model of landholding was a dominant ideology and that this was in conflict with traditional

understandings of land. Within this royal ideology, land was seen mainly as a source of

material wealth.[236] It was considered a commodity that could be bought, sold, traded and

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[232] Whitelam, *The Just King*, 173.
[233] Guillaume, *Land*, 75-80. According to him, land grant was merely a fiscal rather than agricultural transaction. Neither agricultural nor fiscal land grants affected the status of farmer who cultivated the granted land .
[234] Guillaume, *Land*, 72.
[235] Dearman, *Property Rights*, 115.
[236] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 229.

bargained, even grabbed or captured to serve the economic interests of the ruling class.[237] As Habel remarks: 'basic to this royal land ideology is the concept 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 earth as empire'.[238] It is very likely that prophets like Micah and Isaiah were protesting against this dominant ideology associated with its royal land grants (Mic.2:1-2; Isa. 5:8-10).

2.2   King and Officials Nexus?

Another question that relates to this issue is that of how far the king was involved in the accumulation of land in Israel and Judah. The prophets rarely addressed their indictments directly to the kings. Instead their accusations or indictments were mainly directed to the wealthy and influential circles responsible for the gradual accumulation of property in the hands of the few. From the prophecy of Amos, Isaiah and Micah, it could be assumed that there are certain sections of people who are responsible for the displacement of the defenceless people in Israelite and Judaean society. It is very likely that the king also must be involved in certain ways in the accumulation of land.

According to the biblical account, as indicated earlier, socio-economic changes were taking place even during the time of David. However, the changes become more dramatic after Solomon came into power. There is little doubt that the king had large land holdings. In fact, we have certain evidence that the kings of Judah and Israel had large estates (2 Sam.

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[237] Walter Bruggemann, *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel's Communal life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 279.

[238] Habel, *The Land is Mine*, 17. For Israelite royal ideology, see also Antti Laato, *History and Ideology in the Old Testament Prophetic Literature: A Semiotic Approach to the Recontruction of the Proclamation of the Historical Prophets* (CB Coniectanea Biblica, Old Testament Series 41; Stockhom: Almqwist & Wiksell International, 1996), 261-267.

12:8; I Chro.27: 25-31; 2 Chro. 26:9-10). As noted earlier, David's purchase of the threshing

floor of Arauna and Omri's acquisition of the hill of Samaria from Shemer (2 Sam. 24:24; I

Kgs 16:24) indicate that some kings were involved in buying land. Dearman suggests that the

royal estate is probably also the source of land that was granted to the king's servants or

officials.[239]

It appears that the king had several ways of acquiring property that may have

affected some citizens. But how did the kings of Israel and Judah come to acquire large-scale

estates? One possibility, according to Davies, is that 'dynastic changes contributed to the

enlargement of the royal estate'.[240] It appears that the new king took over the former king's

property, as can be seen in the case of David (cf. 2 Sam. 9:7; 12:8) [241] and consequently

'much land may have been accumulated in this way'[242]. As Dearman, commenting on the

acquiring of property by the king, puts it 'Perhaps the most pernicious [way] would be

through foreclosure, whereby a debtor would transfer title to his property in return for the

amortizing of debt'. [243] Nehemiah 5:4 is a later example that records the anguish of those who

pledged fields and family members to pay a king's tax.

Another possible way of the king acquiring property involved land which had been

abandoned by its owner for a prolonged period. For example, the idea that the king has the

right to acquire abandoned property is implied by the case of the Shunamite woman in 2

Kgs.8:1-6. It also appears that the king has the right to acquire the property of criminals or

condemned persons as can be seen in the case of Naboth (I Kgs. 21). The text may imply that

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[239] Dearman, *Property Rights*, 113.
[240] Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics*, 77.
[241] Whitelam, *The Just King*, 147.
[242] Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics*, 78.
[243] Dearman, *Property Rights*, 113.

the property of any criminal or condemned person reverted automatically to the crown.[244] After Naboth refused to alienate his ancestral land, even to the king, he was falsely condemned to death for blasphemy and sedition, and the king then simply expropriated the field.[245]

There can be no doubt that the monarch was responsible for the displacement of the peasants. However, it is not unreasonable to assume that there were also powerful groups of people behind this. In fact, the prophets seldom indicted the king, but rather accused officials who had close associations with the crown. As indicated earlier, these officials benefited from the royal accumulation of land through the redistribution known as land granting. Under this system, part of the crown land was given to the official or servant of the king and the recipient would give back part of the produce to the royal family in return. Therefore, it is very likely that the officials were effective instruments to carry out the royal policy and were more directly responsible for the displacement and dispossession of small landowners. From the oracles of the eighth-century prophets, it is conceivable that there were powerful associations where power was concentrated in the hands of a few people. These included the king, princes, military leader 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 and 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 sections of society controlled the socio-economic and politico-religious sphere. There can also be little doubt that they were

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[244] Davies, *Prophecy and ethics*, 79. See also the article of Judith A. Todd, 'Pre-Deuteronomistic Elijah Cycle', in Robert B.Coote (ed.), *Elijah and Elisha in Socioliterary Perspective* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1992): 1-36.

[245] Lemche, *Ancient Israel*, 15-152.

supported by 'the establishment to carry out the royal policy and put pressure on the small

landholder so that they would ultimately surrender their lands to the crown'.[246] It is very

likely that the prophets thus vehemently opposed the royal ideology coupled with the elite

strategy of land confiscation or co-ordinated politics to monopolise the arable land. Albertz

observes:

> The object of the attack is the unbridled economic expansion of the great
> landowners, who put estate alongside estate until they are the sole property-
> owners in the land (Isa.5:8); their greed for more and more land, which forces
> out the small farmers and their families from their ancestral properties (Amos
> 8:4; Mic. 2:9f) and disregards the principle of ancient Israelite property law: 'a
> man and his house, a man and his inheritance' (Mic. 2:1f).[247]

2.3   Increased Economic Activities and Their Effects

As noted earlier, the biblical materials offer considerable evidence to suggest that

some socio-economic and politico-religious changes occurred in Israelite society during the

times of David and Solomon despite the fact that the historical authenticity of the biblical

account could be debated.[248] As it stands, it is likely that it was not until the reign of Solomon

that a full-fledged agrarian national state emerged.[249] The success of Solomon's rule lay in

his exploitation of the economic potential of his empire (I Kgs 4). The commercial activities

of Solomon brought wealth into the state (I Kgs 5:10; 9:26-28; 10:15-28). However, the

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[246] Premnath, 'Comparative and Historical Sociology', 32. See also Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 200-201.
[247] Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament: From the Beginnings to the End of the Exile,* vol 1 (London: SCM Press, Ltd, 1994), 165.
[248] Among others, see A.R. Millard, 'Texts and Archaeology: Weighing the Evidence, the Case for King Solomon', *PEQ* 123(1991): 19-27; J.M.Miller, 'Solomon: International Potentate or Local King?', *PEQ* 123 (1991): 19-27; Garry N.Knoppers, 'The Vanishing Solomon: The Disappearance of the United Monarchy from the Recent Histories of Ancient Israel', *JBL*, 116/1(1997): 19-44; Ernst Axel Knauf, 'Solomon at Megiddo?', in J. Andrew Dearman and Patrick Graham (eds.), *The Land that I Will Show Show You: Essay on the History and Archaeology of the Ancient Near East in Honour of J.Maxwell Miller* (JSOTSup, 343; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001): 117-134.
[249] Lemche, *Ancient Israel,* 139-141. Lemche states that under Solomon Israel were transformed into a state and the undermining of the tribal society had taken on definite shape. The king was the only authority in the country and the population were reduced to the status of his slaves.

expenditure of the state outweighed its income due to the ambitious temple building project, the maintenance of the army and other huge building projects (I Kgs 9:15-20), the maintenance of the royal harem (I Kgs 11:1-3) and the increasing royal court establishment. All this took a large toll on the agrarian economy. The taxation and conscription policies of Solomon were certainly viewed by Israelites as oppressive and consequently became a major factor in the division of the kingdom under Rehoboam (1 Kgs 12:1-20).

These dynamics were operative again during the rule of the Omrides in the north and Jehoshaphat in the south in the ninth century BCE as well as during the reign of Uzziah in the South and Jeroboam II in the north during the eighth century BCE.[250] During the eighth century, particularly during the reigns of Jeroboam and Uzziah, Israel and Judah's territorial expansion led to enormous increases in political and military power (2 Kgs 14:23-29; 2 Chro 26:6-15). By the beginning of the eighth century BCE, Israel and Judah had experienced a 'dramatic reversal of fortune' with new 'heights of power and prosperity' as Bright aptly puts it.[251] Both Israel and Judah had been secured from external and military threat; this relative security offered a great opportunity for territorial expansion, building projects and internal economic and administrative reform.[252] Archaeological remains prove that the eighth century was materially a rich one with monumental public buildings constructed of ashlars.[253] It is not unreasonable to assume that the building projects that were launched during the ninth and eighth century required a large-scale work force. To achieve this, the king conscripted labour (corvées) and the main burden fell on the peasant population. Commenting on the impact on

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[250] Finkelstein, 'State Formation', 48. He claims that Israel was a full blown state in the first half of ninth century BCE, while Judah emerged about a century and a half later, in the second half of eighth century BCE.
[251] Bright, *A History of Israel*, 252.
[252] Chaney, 'Bitter Bounty', 252.
[253] Thomas, *Jeroboam II the King*, 171.

the household, Holladay writes '... labor [sic] taken from the village would have had a significant impact upon productivity, and indeed, upon the viability of individual communities'.[254] It is likely that building projects which demanded a large work force would have adverse affects on the local economy and family life. Writing about the reigns of Jeroboam II of Israel and Uzziah of Judah, Chirichigno states, 'The prophets Amos and Hosea make it clear that during this period the small farmers of Israel and Judah were particularly vulnerable to the wealthy private and state sector landowners who made them debt-slaves and obtained their property'.[255]

One should also note that the emergence of monarchy in Israel also brought some significant changes in the socio-economic system including the system of land tenure. As Thomas puts it 'the new pattern of distribution and administration of land became an overlay on the old system of land tenure'.[256] The institution of the monarchy and the subsequent Israelite expansion destroyed the older system by which the peasant freeholders worked their ancestral lands. As a result, a few wealthy families came to have had a monopoly on the productive land. It is likely that the prebendal domain was extended to more and more areas formerly held by patrimonial domain.[257] In summarising the effect of the period of economic prosperity on the stratification of society, Wolff suggests that 'early capitalism quickly led to the expropriation of the small holdings of the smaller landowners'.[258] In a similar vein, Carroll also argues that in eighth-century Israel the ethos associated with this kind of society

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[254] John S. Holladay, 'The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah: Political and Economic Centralization in Iron II A-B (ca 1000-750 BCE)', *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (Fact on File, 1995):382.

[255] Chirichigno*, Debt-Slavery in Israel,* 125. He cited biblical references in support of his argument such as Amos 2:6-8; 5:8-12; Hos.4:2; 5:10; 12:7-8 [Hebrew vv.8-9).

[256] Thomas, *Jeroboam II the King,* 182.

[257] Thomas, *Jeroboam II the King*, 182. See also Dearman, *Property Rights*, 113.

[258] Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 90.

was reflected in the self-indulgent lifestyle of the rich town people. The oppression of the poor is evident in the treatment of indebted peasants (cf. Amos 2:6-8; 8:4-7).[259] However, Walter Houston suggests that the victims of the social injustices mentioned in prophetic accusations resided mostly in Samaria and Jerusalem, and that they were not peasants.[260] For some scholars, Houston's suggestion is a welcome move away from the standard portrait of the victimized farmer. However, his suggestion is not convincing and is at best only partially true; the victims would have included the poorest of the urban and rural poor, peasant farmers and small landowners.[261]

It is generally believed, however, that patterns of social stratification typical of agrarian monarchies manifested themselves in Israel and Judah. It is likely that the peasants' principal source of subsistence was the tillage of fields or farming. Perhaps constituting a majority of the population, peasant farmers thus provided the monarchies in Israel and Judah with their primary economic base. As Chaney puts it, 'The system of land tenure, which controlled the cost, terms and security of the peasants' access to arable land, went far towards determining not only the conditions of life for the peasant majority, but also the distribution of power and privilege in the rest of society'.[262]

It is highly likely that consolidation of land and increasing economic growth were part of the socio-economic reality of Israel and Judah in the eighth century BCE.[263] Scholars generally agree that the eighth century was a period of economic growth and political power.

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[259] Carroll R., *Context for Amos*, 31.
[260] Walter J.Hauston, 'Exit the Oppressed Peasant? Rethinking the Background of Social Criticism in the Prophets', in J. Day (ed.), *Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel,*(London: T&T Clark, 2009): 41
[261] Caroll R, *Contexts for Amos*, 233.
[262] Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 189-296.
[263] Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 140. See also Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 201.

It is conceivable that during this period certain sections of the people, particularly the king and elites, were deeply influenced by 'the ideological values of the profit-oriented economy'.[264] With the rise of a more advanced political economy in Israel and Judah, traditional means of production became obsolete and there was a shift to more specialised agricultural operation. Premnath also believes that the shift from a subsistence economy to a market-driven economy may have been one of the significant changes that occurred in ancient Israel.[265] Similarly, commenting on economic and international trade in eighth century Israel and Judah, Coomber argues:

> as opportunities to profit from interregional trade increased, Judah's ruling elite made olive and grape cultivation a priority rather than a means to supplement subsistence needs. Such a shift in prioritization would have had far-reaching consequences for Judah's farming communities. As opposed to subsistence strategies, which work to ensure the wellbeing of farmers and their families, an increase in the cultivation of goods for export tends to have the reverse effect: creating an environment in which farmers do not receive a proportionate amount of benefit in return for their labor.[266]

Increased wine and olive oil production in eighth century Palestine also led to an enormous increase in Samaria ostraca, presses (and advances in press technology). Free-standing vats and jars and enlarged tax receipts were a further consequence. In this context, Premnath argues that demand for more specialised cultivation of grapes and olives would be expected in eighth century Judah and Israel.[267] He states further:

> Commercial crops require extensive plantations and thus have to occupy large expanses of land in response to market pressure; growing cash crops for export and local consumption adversely affects the production of staple crops. Here again the peasants are the hardest hit. The need to buy their own staple foods

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[264] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 201.
[265] Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets*, 56.
[266] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 24.
[267] Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets*, 58-66.

forces them into an unfamiliar market system where they can be cheated by false measures and rigged scales.[268]

Along similar lines, Chaney described Israel's economy in the eighth century as follows:

> .....Most free holding peasants in Israel and Judah were located in the highlands. Even the peasants who survived such times frequently lost their land by foreclosure…. As many small, subsistence plots in the hill country were foreclosed upon and joined together to form the large estates, a change in the method of tillage also took place. Upland fields previously intercropped to provide a mixed subsistence for peasant families were combined into large and ''efficient'' vineyards and olive orchards producing a single crop for market.
>
> But the efficiency of these cash crops came at a brutal cost to the sufficiency of the livelihood which they afforded the peasants who actually produced them...., In the market place, the meagre and irregular wages of field hands bought even less sustenance than they should have because the vulnerable peasants were cheated with adulterated grain and dishonest weights and measures. Finally, the processes of foreclosure and expropriation which initiated these dynamics were accelerated by a wholesale suborning of the courts. Instead of stopping foreclosures based upon the illegal forms of interest, these corrupted courts sanctioned the proceedings.[269]

It seems likely that these plantations or 'latifundia' provide marketable commodities for lucrative commerce, but left the peasant still further impoverished. The formation of latifundia or plantations allowed the ruling elite to market valuable crops such as wine and olives, rather than the less valuable crops that were vital to the existence of Israelite

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[268] Premnath, 'Latifundialization ', 54. Here Guillaume argues against Premnath that his point can be turned on its head. 'The opulence of the rich is maintained if not achieved at the benefit of the poor... The destiny of the rich is tied to that of the poor. The rich must feed the poor as much as they exploit them. Keeping the poor alive is indeed a form of exploitation that perpetuates poverty rather than eradicates it. The rich need the poor as much as the poor need the rich and that the relation between them is a two-way process. The rich cannot be the only exploitative party. Societies collapse when the poor are unable to exploit the rich to the benefit of both rich and poor'. For details, see Guillaume, *Land,* 67-107.

[269] Chaney, 'Systemic Study', 72-73. See also his other article 'Bitter Bounty', 251-252. According to Chaney, 'the increased production of wine and oil resulting from the formation of these plantations or latifundia played at least two roles in the new schemes of things. On the one hand, wine and oil were central to the increasingly consumptive life style of local elite, epitomised in a sodality called the *marzeah.* On the other, since wine and oil were more valuable than most agricultural commodities per unit of weight or volume, they made ideal exports to exchange for the luxury and strategic imports coveted by members of the ruling classes'.

agricultural households.[270] However, as Gottwald[271] suggests, this process of

latifundialization probably began during the reign of Solomon, when valuable crops were in

demand at the palace or for export (cf. Prov.22:7). In looking at the socio-economic context

of the eighth century, Lang identifies three different models at work within peasant-landlord

relationships: patronage, partnership and exploitation. According to him, the exploitation

model is based on the 'landlord's or creditor's interest in profit making which excludes any

personal loyalty or reciprocity with the tenant or debtor'.[272] When the market is able to

provide luxury goods and gives rise to corresponding urban life-style, then exploitation may

be the consequence.[273] We can readily understand this from sociological evaluation of the

agrarian societies, where less than two-percent of the population, the aristocrats or ruling elite

control the land grant system. As Chaney categorically states:

> Once the monarchic state and its ruling elite began to extract ''surpluses'' to
> pay the luxury and strategic items, however, the peasant's margin grew
> slimmer... Usurious interest rates insured frequent foreclosures, debt
> instruments thus serving to transfer land from peasant freehold to large estate
> and to reduce previously free and independent farmers to landless day-
> labourers and debt-slaves.[274]

Both Chaney's and Premnath's assessment of the socio-economic events of the

eighth century are likely to cause one to think that inefficient strategies of Judah and Israel's

subsistence farmers were unable to the produce sufficient cash crops for export. Therefore it

needs to be replaced to facilitate an increase in specialised cultivation. This enabled the elite

to produce the revenue required to import luxury items, military goods, and architectural

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[270] Chaney, 'Systemic Study ', 73.
[271] Norman K.Gottwald, 'The Participation of Free Agrarians in the Introduction of Monarchy to the Ancient Israel: An Application of H.A. Landsberger's Framework for the Analysis of Peasant Movements', *Semeia* 37 (1986): 86-87.
[272] Lang, *The Social Organisation*, 50.
[273] Lang, *The Social Organisation*, 51.
[274] Chaney, 'Systemic Study ', 68.

supplies all at the expense of farming communities.[275]At the same time, Coomber asserts 'as the desire for the efficient production of export goods intensified, the elite-based policy of latifundialisation brought Judean farms under the control of a few powerful landlords.'[276]

Equally significant was the import and export trade which impacted on the peasant majority in Israel and Judah. As indicated earlier, and attested by literary, epigraphic and artifactual evidence, the king and the ruling elites opted for the production of goods such as oil, wine and wheat to serve the interest of trading partners. The trade between Israel and Tyre can now be documented archaeologically as well as from written records. [277] While Israel and Judah exported oil, wine and wheat, they received luxury goods and military material. In Chro 26:10, the Hebrew Bible also records that Uzziah undertook horticulture intensification. *Lmlk* seal impressions from Judah witness a system of royal vineyards towards the end of the eighth century BCE. These will be discussed in more detail later.

It appears that some factors discussed above combined to consolidate more and more arable land into fewer and fewer hands. For various reasons, the lowland of Israel and Judah had probably been organised into large estates long before the eighth century. As indicated earlier, the market-driven economy replaced the subsistence economy, resulting in the concentration of land in fewer hands. This undoubtedly led to the intensification of cash crop specialisation. Eventually the whole system of land tenure was changed.[278] It is conceivable that many small farmers would have become landless tenants due to the system of rent capitalism. The chief reasons for the prophets' attacks are speculation in land and extortion,

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[275] Chaney, 'Whose Sour Grapes?', 107.
[276] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 30.
[277] Chaney, 'Bitter Bounty', 253. Alice A.Keefe, *Woman's Body and the Social Body in Hosea* (JSOTSup, 338; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 29.
[278] Thomas, *Jeroboam II the King*, 175-176.

not to mention the luxury and extravagance indulged in by those who could manipulate the

system (cf. Amos 2:6ff.,4:1). In short, the original agriculture system, which was essentially

one of small holdings, was overlaid by a growing pattern of estates and large-scale

agriculture which was developed, perhaps with royal support.[279] In commenting on the

characteristics of socio-economic and political development in the eighth century, Rainer

Albertz has aptly stated that:

> The creation of large estates, from the crown downwards, had made holes in
> the old Israelite order and had forced aside the egalitarian ideal of the period
> before the state (Mic. 2:1f). A prosperous stratum of large landowners,
> officials, military and merchants had set themselves above the traditional
> small farmers intent only on self-sufficiency (Mic. 3:1-9; Isa.1:23; 3: 12, 14),
> and far outstripped them with market-oriented surplus production. This
> creeping social development became critical in the eighth century when many
> small farmers- perhaps because of population growth and the ongoing division
> of their businesses as they were handed down from generation to generation-
> were forced to the brink by the tougher economic conditions.[280]

Coomber argues that both Chaney and Premnath's hypotheses that farmers became

vulnerable to crop failure due to the shift away from subsistence agriculture is plausible. This

is partly because Palestinian farmers were forced to struggle with highly 'unfavourable

meteorological' conditions.[281] Coomber further argues:

> Because of Palestine's geographical location at a crossroads between
> subtropical and temperate atmospheric patterns, the highlands experience two
> distinct seasons: a winter rainy season and a summer dry season. It is in the
> balance between these varying times of precipitation that Israelite and Judean
> farmers had to calculate their farming strategies. A factor that made such
> strategizing particularly difficult was that the winter season does not follow a
> uniform pattern of precipitation, but can rather play itself out in a variety of
> different patterns, each of which demand different planting and harvesting
> strategies. In the end, farmers can expect total crop failure in three out of ten

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[279] Herrmann, *A History of Israel*, 237-239.
[280] Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion*, 159-160.
[281] *Coomber, Re-Reading of the Prophets*, 20.

years due to insufficient rainfall if risk-reducing measures are not employed to hedge bets.[282]

However, Coomber fails to adequately substantiate his somewhat presumption that crop failure could be expected in three years out of ten. Nevertheless it is likely that when a crop failure occurred, rulers and creditors were ready to offer high interest survival loans that destitute farmers would have little choice but to accept.[283] A crop failure of this kind caused the small farmers to enter into debt in ever-increasing numbers. As interest accrued and these debts became unsustainable, indebted farmers would lose their ancestral land and homes to foreclosure.[284] Albertz strikingly remarks on the deplorable condition of these small farmers:

> They were less and less in a position to cope with normal risks of agricultural production from their own resources, and it became increasingly difficult for them to bear the usual burdens of state taxation and forced labour; they were compelled more and more frequently to resort to loans in order to get by. This put large parts of the farming population under direct pressure from the economically expanding upper class that on such wider front they were driven to dependence upon it and became permanently impoverished.[285]

In the light of early Muslim land tenure, however, scholars like Guillaume reject a model of 'urban landlord versus peasant', asserting that estates did at times grow from the consolidation of small farms. That said, the process was voluntary here. Drawing from such traditions, he further argues that under certain conditions, 'small farmers offered their land to bigger landlords in a process known as *talji'a* in Islamic sources and *patrocinium fundorum* in the Byzantine Empire'.[286] What often happened under such conditions was that small free-holders chose to become tenants and sharecroppers on large estates in order to gain protection

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[282] Coomber, *Re-Reading of the Prophets*, 20-21.
[283] Premnath, *Eighth -Century Prophets*, 95-96.
[284] Chaney, 'Whose Sour Grape?', 107.
[285] Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion*, 160.
[286] Guillaume, *Land*, 93.

against tax-farmers, marauders and bandits. In this account, the decisive factor was not the greed of landlords. The estates of big landlords suffered from the same problems as the small landowner but, being larger, they were in a better position to resist them.[287] Under these conditions, he again states:

> the formation of large estates was one strategy among others to improve the lot of small farmers. In every case, the very existence of agricultural estates presupposes the presence of a surplus of manpower nearby, a surplus to which the estate offered fresh avenues of employment. Because they were fragile economic entities, estates had to function in symbiotic rather than in parasitic relation with their social surrounding. [288]

In many respects, Guillaume's suggested reasons for the formation of big estates seem compelling. However, we must note that an involuntary process also took place and, as evidenced in other ancient Near East regions,[289] the peasants suffered harmful effects of land confiscation. In the light of experiences within ancient Near East regions, it could also be argued that the formation of large estates may hardly, as Guillaume assumed, improve the position of the small farmers but rather impoverish them.

2.4   The practice of Usury

Another significant issue related to the formation of estates concerns the practice of usury. Taking interest on loans was a common practice in the ancient world.[290] Within so-

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[287] Guillaume, *Land*, 93.
[288] Guillaume, *Land*, 93.
[289] During the time of Ptah-Hotep (third millennium) and Amen-em-ope, whose teachings are attributed to prosperous Nineteenth Dynasty, between 1250 and 1000BCE, addressed land tenure abuse and the issue of land seizure –see Victor Matthews and Don Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels : Laws and Stories from Ancient Near East* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press,1997), 268-277. It is also apparent that not only Egyptians suffer from these problems; harmful effects of land seizures are evidenced from the Sumerian text.
[290] Loewenberg, *From Charity to Social Justice*, 110. He states, the Code of Hammurabi limited annual interest on grain loans to 33 1/3 percent and on money loans to 20 percent. In Assyria the normal interest rate was 25 percent for money and as high as 50 percent for grain. In Ptolemian Egypt the legal maximum was 24 percent

called 'the debt slavery theory',[291] creditors appear to have played a major role in the process of the dispossession of the lands of smallholders. However, some scholars have questioned whether usury was the major factor responsible for the accumulation of land to the detriment of poor people in Israelite and Judean society.[292] For example, scholars like Guillaume are highly doubtful of the suggestion that creditors were responsible for the alleged large-scale dispossession and impoverishment of the rural peasant community. [293] It is true that there is no explicit prophetic accusation directed against creditors in connection with the land. However, the eighth century prophets seem to refer to exorbitant interest rates as one of the underlying causes of grievances suffered by the weaker members of the community (Amos 8: 4; Mic.2: 9). It may be that certain 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). In some cases poor people were forced to sell or surrender dependents into debt-slavery (2 Kgs 4:1; Jer. 34:8-16). While it is unclear what exact role they played in the impoverishment of rural farmers, it is highly likely that money lenders played at least some part in it.

Usury was a common practice in early Israelite society but to lend at interest to fellow-Israelites was forbidden by the Israelite law (Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:36-37; Deut. 23:19-20). Presumably the taking of interest was forbidden because it was regarded 'as a method of profiting from another's man adversity, for the loans in question would usually have been for the relief of the poverty brought about by misfortune or debt'.[294] However, the prohibition

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but actual interest rates of 50 percent and even higher were recorded in papyrus documents from the fifth century BCE.

[291] Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 140.

[292] Guillaume, *Land*, 111-148. According to him, the notion that the rich made fortunes on the backs of the poor through usury is devoid of economic foundations.

[293] Guillaume, *Land*, 121-124.

[294] Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics*, 67.

against usury does not necessarily mean that the law was always observed.[295] Indeed, there is

evidence to indicate that money-lending at interest did take place in Israel (cf. Ps. 15:5; Prov.

28:8; Ezek.18:8). During the time of Nehemiah, many poor peasants needed to borrow money

on payment of interest in order to pay the very high royal taxes (Neh.5:2).

Other evidence outside biblical texts that the interest prohibition was not always

observed comes from two Egyptian papyri. Loewenberg notes that Elephantine papyri, one

written in 423/22BCE and another from 402/1BCE, record loans given at 40-60 and 100

percent annual interest rate respectively. Lender, borrower and witnesses were Jews.[296] These

documents therefore suggest that at least some sections of Judean Jewry in the fifth century

BCE did not observe the prohibition on interest.

Commentaries on the eighth century prophets readily locate their oracles in the

context of socio-economic transformations and conflicts. It is likely that the reality of

indebtedness and resulting slavery were among the prophets' major concerns. Moreover, it

was clearly evident that prophets such as Isaiah and Micah were indignant over the formation

of big estates that contributed to the deprivation of certain other sections of the people (Isa.

5:8-10; Mic. 2:1-2). As Chirichigno observes:

> The biblical accounts of the Monarchic period attest to the existence of both
> debt slaves and alienation of land in Israel, particularly during the eighth-
> century BCE and later. The existence of debt slaves and landless people may
> be attributed on the one hand to the burden of taxation, and on the other to the
> growing monopoly the rich landowning elite held over resources. Once this
> dependency is established the small landowners were often forced into
> procuring loans which involved high interest rates. While there are biblical
> laws which prohibit Israelites from exacting interest from one another (Exod.

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[295] Loewenberg, *From Charity to Social Justice*, 112.
[296] For the detail discussion of evidence of interest prohibition, see Loewenberg, *From Charity to Social Justice,* 111-112.

22:25; Deut. 23:19-20), it is likely that these provisions were ignored by many money-lenders during the eighth-century and later.[297]

Seen against the background of ancient Near East regions, it appears that it would have been common practice for the small landowner to borrow from the wealthy during drought and famine. The poor could not pay for grain bought for consumption or sowing, and slowly but steadily ran into debt. Interest on that debt then piled up, eventually leading to slave-like bondage characteristic of rent capitalism.[298] In addition, the poor mortgaged their patrimony in those times of extreme poverty. The law permits the creditor to take from the borrower some form of security in the form of a pledge. Davies may be right when he states:

> The retaining of such a pledge would therefore have been quite legal, and may indeed have proved profitable if it consisted of the land of the debtor or a member of his family. Although the creditor could never realise the value of the pledge by sale or exchange for the purpose of satisfying his claim, there is nothing to suggest that he could not use it to his own advantage. Thus, under this system, 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.[299]

It is likely that elites acquired land when poor peasants were not in a position to redeem their pledge. This resulted in their mortgaged land falling into the hands of the money lender. Premnath succinctly remarks that 'foreclosure through debt instruments became an effective way of land accumulation by the rich landowners'.[300] In the same vein, Dearman,

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[297] Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 140-141.

[298] Lang, 'The Social Organisation', 57. Lemche, *Ancient Israel*, 150. According to Lemche, in ancient Israel in the event of poor harvests the peasant had to borrow his seed for planting from those who were better situated than himself. He then had to pay his debt back, plus interest, in the form of portions of his grain production. If the harvest failed for two years running the peasant was in serious trouble, for he would be unable to pay off his creditors. In many cases he would have been forced to sell his lands to his creditor, sometimes remaining on the land under contract to his creditors as a copyholder.

[299] Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics*, 68. In contrast to this idea, Guillaume argues that normal practice of the pledges would not significantly affect the economic condition of either lender or borrower. The forfeiture of the pledges would not make the lender much rich. See, Guillaume, *Land*, 121-125.

[300] D.N. Premnath, 'Comparative and Historical Sociology', 32.

commenting on Mic. 2:1-2, argues, 'The context of the accusations and the terminology employed by the prophet suggest strongly that the confiscation resulted from foreclosure because of insolvency'.[301] It is evidently clear that ancestral property could be alienated from a family due to indebtedness in Israelite and Judahite society, even though there must have been some community pressure to prevent it. In most recent times, Coomber, Lallawmzuala and Thomas Vadackumkara reassert the role of usury as an effective instrument for displacement of the small landowner.[302] Therefore, there are strong reasons to believe that debt slavery and usury played a substantial role in the accumulation of land at the expense of the poor peasants in Judah and Israel.

2.5   Heavy Taxation and Economic Effects of Wars

It is also not unreasonable to assume that there was a heavy taxation burden on poor families because of the enormous cost associated with building projects, chariot forces and military equipment. Beginning with the Assyrian campaign in the west in the mid-eighth-century, the rulers in both kingdoms also had to pay huge indemnities to the foreign aggressors. This, of course, had to be squeezed out of land-owning peasants (2 Kgs. 15:19-20; 18:14-15; 23:33-35). Gottwald notes:

> Military adventurism and conspicuous consumption among the well-to-do had
> laid heavier conscription and tax burdens on the people. Debt foreclosures had

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[301] Dearman, *Property Rights*, 74.

[302] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 20-23. Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 134-140. Thomas Vadackumkara, *Socio-Critical Sayings of Amos: Moral Vision for Socio-Ethical Options Today* (Bangalaru: Theological Publications in India, 2015), 146. Vadackumara finds credit system as part of every agriculture society, which was prevalent from the beginning of the 8th century BCE in Israel and Judah. He believes that this phenomenon of unjust lending system led to the debt slavery of the poor and weak in society.

concentrated land in the hands of profiteers. Once-productive land lay in neglect or had been devastated by war.[303]

According to an Assyrian monolith inscription of Shalmanesher III (ca.858-824BCE), Ahab contributed 2,000 chariots and 10,000 infantry to the Israelite-Syrian allied forces that defeated Assyria at Karkar (or Qarkar) in 853.[304] Ahab's conflict with Damascus demanded much from the peasants as it required them to be absent from their farms for a long period. This resulted in the destruction of crops and payment of tribute (I Kgs 20: 30). The position of the small landowner probably deteriorated in the face of creditors (cf. 2 Kgs 4:1) and drought that occurred during Ahab's reign, thereby forcing many small landowners to lose their land (cf. I Kgs 17).[305] When he writes about the effects of war on peasants during the reign of Omri and Ahab, Chaney observes, 'one can conclude with reasonable certainty that the plight of the peasants in Omri and [Ahab's] Israel was at least as desperate as under Solomon, probably more so'.[306] Chirichigno suggests that both the Omride building programme, which involved corvées, and the military campaign of Ahab put extreme economic pressure on the citizens of Israel; such development 'tended to favour the position of big landowners' enabling them to increase 'their landholdings through the acquisition of property lost on account of debt'.[307] The situation of peasants in eighth-century Israel and Judah seems to have been as bad as during the ninth century.

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[303] Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible*, 360.
[304] Morris Silver, *Prophets and Markets: The Political Economy of Ancient Israel* (Boston/The Hague/London: Kluwer- Nijhoff Publishing, 1983), 6.
[305] Bright, *A History of Israel*, 244-245. See also Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 123.
[306] Chaney, 'Systemic Study ', 72.
[307] Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 123-124.

It is likely that there had been severe tax exaction during the eighth-century.[308]

Additional evidence for this is provided by Amos 5:11a, which reads: 'Therefore, because

you levy a tax on the poor, and take from them levies of grain/grain tax'. The situation

depicted in verse 11a would be another specific instance of the type of indebtedness

described more fully in Amos 2:6b-8. This is demonstrated by the example of public dues.

These seemed to burden the poor with excessive levies of natural produce that threatened

their very existence.[309] It is most likely that Amos 5:11a refers to a system of taxation that

was used by local state officials to increase their wealth and acquire land from poor

citizens.[310] Chirichigno goes on to state that forced tribute ultimately became debt slavery:

> While excessive taxation is one of the possible causes of debt slavery and alienation of land, it is also most likely that the control of resources and lending by the ruling elite, which included both state and officials and private land owners, caused many small farmers to sell their dependents and themselves into debt-slavery and eventually to sell their land.[311]

However, it may be suggested that scholars like Premnath do not sufficiently take

into account the economic effects of wars, especially on the status of agricultural land in the

country that went to war. It was not only crop failure that caused small farmers to fall into

debt but also the economic effects of wars. In ancient Israel, as elsewhere, the calling up of

militias in times of war brought many hardships to the people back home. The extended

absence of many able-bodied men from their farms and vineyards, and from their flocks and

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[308] Cf. Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 613-614.
[309] Thomas, *Jeroboam II the King*, 201.
[310] Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 126. See also Philip R.Davies, 'Why do we know about Amos?' in Diana V.Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi(eds.), *The Production of Prophecy:Constructing Prophecy and Prophets inYehud* (London/ Oakville: Equinox,2009): 65-66.
[311] Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 127.

herds, often brought failure to their farming, and was bound to produce hardship (I Sam.

17:18; 2Sam 24; also Deut. 20:5-7).[312]

The peasant's plight was exacerbated by the Assyrian threat during the eighth

century. As we have already seen, in relation to the economic effects of war on the people, it

is likely that the ruling elite regularly responded to international pressure by leaning on

peasants' sole source of livelihood. Whether to gain alliance with neighbouring states against

Assyria, to raise tribute to pay directly to Assyria, or to buy or make armaments for wars

against Assyria, the result was the same -increased efforts to draw off ever larger portions of

peasants' production.[313] Michel Hudson also notes that war proved to be the great 'financial

catalyst in the Bronze Age' and 'classical antiquity with the main financial victims' being

individual debtors, particularly cultivators unable to pay public fees or otherwise make ends

meet. The upshot of this was more polarisation and further land accumulation in a fewer

hands.[314]

It is reasonable to conclude therefore that heavy taxation, along with the demand of

military service and forced labour, contributed to the rise in land accumulation in eighth

century.

B. Late Eighth and Early Seventh Centuries BCE-The Situation of Judah

It seems that the situation of Judah in the late eighth and early seventh centuries

shared many similarities with that of Israel in the eighth century, particularly with regard to

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[312]Levine, 'Farewell', 229-231.

[313] Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible*, 360.

[314] Michael Hudson, 'The Dynamics of Privatization, From the Bronze Age to the Present', in Michael Hudson and Baruch A.Levine (eds.), *Privitization in the Ancient Near East and Classical World,* (Harvard University: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, 1996): 39-40.

the effects of transformative economic change, inter regional trade and significant

demographic growth. As much as Israel experienced profound societal changes in the eighth

century for the aforementioned reasons, so too did Judah in the late eighth and early seventh

centuries.

1. Demographic growth

One of the significant developments that took place in the late eighth century was

that the city of Jerusalem grew demographically and geographically at an unprecedented

pace. One indication of this is its significant increase of population density. Yigal Shiloh

describes the tremendous expansion of Jerusalem during the time of Hezekiah, suggesting

that its population grew fifteen-fold from 1,000 in the tenth century to 15,000 in eighth; the

settled area of Jerusalem also increased from approximately six hectare to forty six hectares.

[315] Morris Silver suggests a population of about 25,000[316] lived in Jerusalem during

Hezekiah's reign, whereas Finkelstein and Silberman estimate a population of 10,000-12,000

inhabitants.[317] Again, both Finkelstein and Silberman assert that as a result of Assyrian

domination of Palestine in the late eighth century, Judah experienced significant

development. They describe:

> The growth of Jerusalem into a major urban centre, the dramatic expansion of
> the Judahite population, and the establishment of a centralised bureaucracy
> which require extensive literacy and scribal activity. None of this is apparent
> before the late eighth century BCE.[318]

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[315] Yigal Shiloh, *Excavations at the City of David* (Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1984), 3. See also, Philip J.King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah: An Archaeological Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), 41-44.
[316] Silver, *Prophets and Markets*, 14-15.
[317] Finkelstein and   Silberman, 'Temple and Dynasty', 265.
[318] Finkelstein and   Silberman, 'Temple and Dynasty', 277.

In the southern hill country, it appears that the number of settlements and the 'total built-up area'[319] grew dramatically. This could be 'indicated by well-planned countryside towns, such as Beer-Sheba II and Tell Beit Mirsim A, which represent a highly organised state.'[320] According to Finskelstein and Siberman, the cause of Judah's population growth, particularly in Jerusalem, was the wave of refugees that followed the destruction of the Northern kingdom in the 720s.[321] Similarly, Gowan notes, 'Archaeological surveys of Jerusalem show that its population increased greatly during the latter part of the eighth century BCE., and it has been suggested that was in part the result of an influx of refugees from the north'.[322] However, it is very likely that settlement on the Western Hill began before this in the first half of the eighth century, and accelerated both before and after Senacherib's campaign of 701BCE.[323] Na'aman has attributed the growth of Jerusalem to several factors:

> The emerging picture is of a long, gradual process involving many factors, such as natural increase, the developing economy and commerce, internal immigration to the kingdom's principal urban centre offering economic potentialities, and finally, the immigration of many refugees seeking shelter within the fortified city following the Assyrian campaign to Judah in 701BCE.[324]

In the late eighth and early seventh centuries, it seems likely that population increase, coupled with Assyrian influence over Judah, ushered in a period of economic activity. Evidence of economic development during this period includes 'the first sign of mass-produced pottery in Judah, centralised olive oil in the Shephelah, and the introduction

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[319] Finkelstein and Silberman, 'Temple and Dynasty', 264.
[320] Finkelstein and Silberman, 'Temple and Dynasty', 264.
[321] Finkelstein and Silberman, 'Temple and Dynasty', 243.
[322] Donald E. Gowan, *Theology of the Prophetic Books: The Death & Resurrection of Israel* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 51.
[323] Nadav Na'aman, 'When and How did Jerusalem Become a Great City? The Rise of Jerusalem as Judah's Premier City in the Eighth-Seventh Centuries B.C.E', *BASOR* 348 (2006): 26.
[324] Na'aman, 'When and How did Jerusalem a Great City?', 26.

of standardized weights'.[325] All these indicate the development of political economy and suggest that 'much of Judah had surrendered subsistence agriculture as its central economic strategy in favour of export-oriented specialised farming'.[326]

2. Increased Economic Activities and Their Effects

It is generally accepted that since the Early Bronze Age, interregional trade led to the exchange of both goods and cultural ideas throughout Palestine and the ancient Near East. As a result, administrating officials and rural producers alike experienced the beneficial and harmful consequences of trade.[327] Evidence for such developments in ancient Palestine can be found in archaeological and extra-biblical literary remains dating back to the Bronze Age period. One may note that the influence that neighbouring empires had over agrarian life and economic strategy in Bronze Age Palestine continued on into the Iron Age.[328] It is reasonable to assume that trade expansion with subsistence-dominated economic activity would continue into Iron Age II and that interregional trade brought wider societal change to the people of Palestine.[329]

Scholars such as Andrew Sheratt and Susan Sheratt attributed the tremendous growth of trade to the imperial expansion in the Levant in the eighth century. Within their account, the imperial and economic expansion eventually led to state formation in the

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[325] Finkelstein and Silberman, 'Temple and Dynasty', 265.
[326] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 116.
[327] Michael A.Hudson, 'The Dynamics of Privatisation', 43-46.
[328] An important indicator of land seizure in the Bronze Age, and its potential negative impacts on society, is found in admonitions against the practice. Two prominent Egyptian figures, for example, wrote on the importance of respecting the land rights of the others. Amen-em-ope, whose teachings are attributed to the Nineteenth Dynasty, between 1250-1000 BCE addressed the issue of land-tenure abuse. See Matthew and Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1997), 268-277.
[329] Coomber, *Re-Reading the* Prophets, 116.

Aegean.[330] It is very likely that due to this expansion of interregional trade and the development of new trading partners, Palestine experienced 'profound societal change as a rising Neo- Assyrian Empire destroyed kingdoms and accumulated vassals in the eighth and early seventh centuries'.[331]

As in the Bronze Age, Judah continued to be engaged with neighbouring empires in urban-based economic activity in Iron Age II. Unlike in the Bronze Age cycles, however, 'the rise of the Neo- Assyrian empire in the eighth century produced a more direct and transformative relationship' between themselves.[332] It is very likely that 'with the fall of Samaria to the North and Judah's entrance into vassalage under the Assyrians, economic activities, such as settlement along trade routes to benefit from trade opportunities, were not simply a matter of choice; Judah was merely a vassal state and was expected to bow to Assyrian's will'.[333] Blakely and Hardin even claim that 'incorporation into the greater Assyrian Empire meant the development of a system of roads, way-stations, and fortresses that were under the control of the Assyrian rulers'.[334]As Na'aman categorically asserts:

> Since Assyrian was an empire and operated in a very large scale, making enormous changes in the external and internal conditions in the region and opening new markets for the local products, some kingdoms were able to use the new situation for their own interests. Moreover, the flourishing and economic success of its vassal states was Assyrian's interest. Since rich countries were able to pay heavier tributes...the prosperity of certain vassal

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[330] Andrew Sheratt and Susan Sherratt, 'The Growth of Mediterranean Economy in the Early First Millennium BC', *World Archaeology* 24/.3(1993): 369.
[331] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 98.
[332] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 111.
[333] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 111. See also Jeffrey A. Blakely and James W. Hardin, 'South Western Judah in the Late Eighth Century B.C.E', *BASOR* 326(2002): 42-43.
[334] Blakely and Hardin, 'South Western Judah', 44.

states arose from the stability by the *pax Assyriaca* and from the new
economic opportunities created by the empire.[335]

It appears that Judah's entrance into the Assyrian Empire, and the growing world

system to which it was connected, probably occurred in the 730s. This coincided with the

reign of Assyrian King Tiglath-Pileser III and the King of Judah. The Assyrian campaign in

the Southern Levant in 734 BCE, during which period Judah became a vassal and settlements

along Assyria's trade routes expanded increased prosperity. These events shaped the history

of Judah in the late eighth century. Both Finkelstein and Silberman argue that the

incorporation of the kingdom into the Assyrian global economy was crucial for the

development of Judah state.[336] Moreover, Judah's participation in the Assyrian trade was the

main reason for prosperity in the Beer-Sheba Valley, which in turn benefited the Assyrian

empire. Coomber states that 'unlike the developmental cycles of the Bronze Age,

archaeological evidence suggests that the changes that took place under Assyrian vassalage

were more transformative'.[337]

Due to the rapid development of political and economic structures, the inhabitants of

Judah witnessed major societal developments that had not been seen prior to the late eighth

century. Coomber states 'As Assyrian influence grew throughout Palestine, Judah appears to

have been transformed from a land of scattered agrarian communities into a state, with urban-

based economic activity'.[338] While evidence of an advanced economy of export items, such

as olive oil and wine, is absent from early eighth century Judah, the late eighth century is a

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[335] Nadar Na'aman, 'Ekron under the Assyrian and Egyptian Empires', *BASOR*, 332(2003): 87. However, he
suggests that the economic growth of vassal states occurred due to the outcome of their activities rather than the
result of deliberate imperial policy of economic development of these states. In fact, Assyrian acted to advance
its own interest.
[336] Finkelstein and Silberman, 'Temple and Dynasty,' 265.
[337] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 113.
[338] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 114.

very different picture with increased economic activity.[339] So, the late eighth century ushered

in a period of heightened economic activity in Judah with advances in production.

The excavation of Tel Migre (ancient Ekron) revealed that Ekron as a whole

underwent considerable growth in the latter half of eighth and the early seventh centuries

BCE. This was particularly associated with the development of an economy based mainly on

the olive oil industry.[340] Considering the developments that took place in Ekron and Askelon

during the eighth and seventh centuries,[341] the Judean countryside probably also experienced

significant changes in its economic activities. As Coomber states:

> The appearance of Judean engagement in state-controlled olive-oil production
> in the eighth and seventh centuries would have changed the way Judean
> farmers managed, if not controlled, their land. Increased levels of economic
> organisation are evidence for such societal changes in rural Judah... Economic
> goals shifting from beyond the family unit to centralised organisation is a key
> development in the evolution of agrarian societies and often brings with it
> elite-based policies like latifundialization.[342]

While investigating agricultural activities during the late eighth century Judah,

Avraham Faust states that we see a great deal of organisation in the processing of agriculture

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[339] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 114.

[340] Na'aman, 'When and How did Jerusalem a Great City?', 26. The excavation of the city revealed that in the seventh century the city grew tremendously, covering approximately 50 acres including residential quarters and numerous industrial premises. This has been attributed to the close cooperation between its rulers and the Assyrian Empire.The written sources confirm that Ekron become an important centre as early as the later half of the eighth century and was probably fortified with a wall in the final quarter of the century.

[341] King Tiglath-Pileser III seized Ashkelon and made the city a major trade centre and placed the port city under control. The size of Ekron's operation also attested to the existence of a trade centre and production centre during Assyrian expansion. The wine and olive production of the southern Levant allowed Ashkelon to become an important way station in the trading cycle ultimately driven by larger international demands. It is very likely that Ashkelon was heavily invested in the Mediterranean economy of the Phoenicians. The Archaeological record at Ashkelon reveals that Phoenicians were highly involved in Ashkelon's seventh-century economy. Ashkelon imported two major types of vessels such as store-jars and fine ware bowls and platters that highlight the nature of the Phoenician economy. Phoenicians traders also received goods and distributed them throughout their networks to the west, to Cyprus, Carthage and even Spain. Phoenicians transported and sold the olive oil of Ekron and the wine of Ashkelon throughout the entire Mediterranean. See Daniel M.Master, 'Trade and Politics: Ashkelon's Balancing Act in the Seventh Century BCE', *BASOR* 330 (2003): 47-64.

[342] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 118-119.

products within agriculture installations and industrial zones in the rural regions of eighth century Judah.[343] This suggests the existence of high levels of organisation beyond the bounds of the family that eventually contributed a shift from subsistence economy to market economy.[344]

As indicated earlier, Samaria had adopted a highly organised administrative and bureaucratic system by the early eighth century BCE. Indications of this include the Samaria ostraca and the Megiddo horse-breeding and training industry. However, the evidence of centralised administration in Judah prior to the late eighth century is limited and it appears that Judah lagged behind in state development and administration. This is suggested by the Judahite Deuteromomistic Historian's acceptance of Samarian superiority over Judah in the story of King Amaziah of Judah and King Joash (2 Kgs 14:9-10). As noted earlier, Jerusalem was limited to six hectares prior to the late eighth century and, only limited urban development took place in the Beersheba valley.[345]

During the late eighth century, however, urban projects and construction of fortresses occurred throughout Judah-Jerusalem with significant increases in both population and size. Another impressive urban project that took place in Jerusalem in the late eighth century was the construction of the Siloam Tunnel. Such developments attest to the extent of social organisation and building construction that was available in late eighth century Jerusalem.[346] Even though the population in Palestine appears to have experienced a slow and

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[343] Avraham Faust, 'Rural Economy in Ancient Israel During Iron Age II', *BASOR* 317 (2002): 23.

[344] Avraham Faust, 'Rural Economy ', 23.

[345] Finkelstein and Silberman, 'Temple and Dynasty', 277.

[346] Among others, see Kathleen Kenyon, *Digging up Jerusalem* (London/Townbridge: Ernest Benn Limited, 1974), 152-160; John H.Hayes and J.Maxwell Miller,(eds.), *Israelite and Judean History* (London: SCM Press Ltd,1977), 447; J.Alberto Soggin, *A History of Israel:From the Beginnings to the Bar Kochba Revolt, AD 135* (London:SCM Press Ltd, 1984), 236; Fritz, *The City in Ancient Israel,* 159. Monumental evidence for the

steady growth at the beginning of Iron II, the late eighth century ushered in a period of

accelerated growth in the countryside. It is also probable that Judah was able to take

advantage of maritime trade. However, scholars like Daniel Master suggest it is unlikely that

Judah had direct trade relations with Ashkelon, with Judean agricultural goods probably

passing through the port via intermediary sites in the Shephelah.[347] He further argues that the

Phoenicians transported and sold the wine and olive oil from southern Levant including

Judah to the entire Mediterranean world.[348] Both Finkelstein and Silberman argue that after

the destruction of Ashdod and the rise of Ekron in the days of Sargon II, Judahite olive oil

and wine must have been traded to Assyria and other clients, possibly through Ekron.[349] In a

similar vein, Edelman states that Judah supplied the olives for the massive oil processing

operation housed inside the lower city of Ekron in the late eighth century and early seventh

century.[350]

Along broadly similar lines to Finskelstein and Siberman, Na'aman commenting on

interregional trade during the late eighth and early seventh centuries, suggests 'Ekron is likely

to have served as such an intermediary, Judean olives would have been processed there

before being transported to Ashkelon'.[351] Coomber may be right when he writes:

> Increased shipments of oil leaving from Ashkelon's port demanded greater
> volumes of oil from Ekron... Evidence of a vibrant seafood trade in Jerusalem

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digging of Hezekiah's tunnel has been preserved in the 'Siloam Inscription'. See the details in J.B. Pritchard,
ANET, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 321.

[347] Master, 'Trade and Politics ', 60.

[348] Master, 'Trade and Politics ', 60.

[349] Finkelstein and Silberman, 'Temple and Dynasty', 265.

[350] Diana Edelman, 'Hezekiah's Alleged Cultic Centralization', *VT*, 32/4(2008): 400.

[351] Na'aman, 'Ekron under the Assyrian and Egyptian Empires', 81.

and Greek pottery throughout highlands further indicate Judah's ability to have taken greater advantage of maritime trade.[352]

Inland and maritime trade therefore both indicate that Judah underwent significant development by participating in the powerful world trade network in the late eighth and seventh centuries. From the late eighth century, Judah enjoyed relative prosperity. This is testified by 'the archaeology of Lachish III, Tell Beit Mirsim A(2), Tell Halif VIB, Tel Beersheba III and Tell el-Hesi VIII, which existed as cities, towns, and villages before the Assyrian campaign in 701BCE'.[353] Such great development would have had a profound effect on the lives of Judean people. As a result, people experienced new opportunities to shift from subsistence-centred farming to specialised cultivation for trade based on economic activity. This was accompanied by the establishment and strengthening of a hierarchical system which led to land ownership abuse (Isa.5:8-10; Mic.2:1-2). From the foregoing investigation it is evident that the various dynamics at work in late eighth and early seventh centuries Judean society, coupled with new patterns of interregional trade and specialised cultivation which tended to favour the position of few landowners, resulted in increasing accumulation of land in fewer and fewer hands. This contributed to the dispossession and impoverishment of increasing numbers of highland families, and eventually, invited vehement prophetic denouncements.

C. A Search for Archaeological and Literary Evidence

Historical knowledge supported by archeological evidence and sociological research, however small and deficient, are very significant for the study of the Bible and

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[352] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 126.
[353] Blakely and Hardin, 'South Western Judah', 56.

reconstruction of ancient Israel history. However, it is to be noted that 'archeological finds, being mute witnesses of the past, have to be interpretated and evaluated in a professional and objective manner' and in fact without 'ideological preconceptions and political compulsions'.[354] While archeological finds is very helpful for reconstruction of ancient Israel history, one must also accept that the relative nature of archaeological evidence when used in reconstructing the background to a biblical text.

It is generally believed among scholars that the political and territorial expansion of Israel and Judah in the eighth century occurred particularly during the long reigns of Jeroboam II and Uzziah in Israel and Judah respectively.[355]Archaeological evidence shows that in the first half of the eighth century the Northern Kingdom re-conquered Hazor and took over Dan. It seems likely that at that time Israel reached its maximal territorial range, including the entire northern part of the Jordan valley and possibly beyond.[356] However, some scholars express scepticism about the eighth century Israelite domination of Hamath and Damascus recorded in 2 Kgs 14:28.[357] As stated earlier, both Israel and Judah had been secure from immediate, external, military threat. This relative security, coupled with the lengthy tenure in office of both the allied kings, offered a great opportunity for royal administrations to rearrange their domestic administration, including that of their economies.

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[354] Vadackumara, *Socio-Critical Sayings of Amos*, 107-108. See also Keith W.Whitelam's article 'Prophetic Conflict in Israelite History: Taking Sides with William G.Dever', *JSOT* 72 (1996): 25-44.
[355] King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah,* 30. Miller and Hayes, (eds.), *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 307.
[356] Israel Finkeltein, 'Stages in the Territorial Expansion of the Northern Kingdom', *VT,* 61/2 (2011): 241.
[357] Jeffrey K.Kuan, 'šamši-lu and the Realpolitik of Israel and Aram-Damascus in the Eighth Century BCE', in J. Andrew Dearman and M.Patrick Graham (eds.), *The Land that I will Show You: Essay on the History and Archaeology of the Ancient Near East in Honour of J.Maxwell Miller* (JSOTSup, 343; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001): 144-145. Looking at the military strength of Zakkur who reigned over Hamath during eighth century BCE, he argues that it was not likely that Israel would have been able to dominate Hamath during this period. Even less likely was Israel's ability to subjugate Damascus.

Scholars like Irvine testify that the western campaigns of Adad-ninari III greatly reduced the power of Syria and Damascus, paving the way for the resurgence of Israel during the reign of Joash and Jeroboam II.[358] However, during the early half of the eighth century there were revolt and succession problems in Assyria and these eventually led to a period of Assyrian weakness.[359] Additionally, internal problems and the expansion of Urartu (which comprised part of northern Syria) weakened Assyria considerably.[360] The accession of Tiglath Pileser III to the Assyrian throne in 745 B.C.E. may have conveniently served to symbolise the closing of that window of opportunity. That Jeroboam II and Uzziah had an incentive, as well as opportunity, to effect change in the economies of their nations is suggested by evidence of their active participation in international trade.[361]Archaeological evidence shows that in the early eighth century Judah was living in the shadow of the great Northern kingdom, which at that time was its height in terms of economic prosperity, territorial expansion and diplomatic dominance.[362]

Israel's participation in international trade during the ninth and eighth centuries was manifested by Samaria ostraca and other written records. As indicated earlier, the trade between Israel and Tyre can now be documented archaeologically as well as from written records.[363] Both indicate that Phoenicia imported agricultural products from Israel and

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[358] Stuart Arvine, 'The Southern Boarder of Syria Reconsider,' *CBQ* 56 (1994): 24.

[359] Almost all scholars attest this fact. For example refer to: David F.Hinson, *History of Israel,* Old Testament Introduction I, revised edition (London: SPCK,1990), 126; King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah*, 30; Yohonan Aharoni, *The Archaeology of the land of Israel from Prehistoric Beginnings to the End of First Temple Period* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 251.

[360] Ahlstrom, *The History of Ancient Palestine*, 612.

[361] Chaney, 'Bitter Bounty', 252.

[362] Finkelstein and Silberman, 'Temple and Dynasty', 262. The economic prosperity is manifested by the Samaria ostraca which attest to a highly organised, bureaucratic economy, the Samaria ivories, the Megiddo horse-breeding and training industry as well as Hazor and Megiddo water system.

[363] Shulamit Geva, 'Archaeological Evidence for the Trade between Israel and Tyre', *BASOR,* 248 (1982): 69-72.

exported luxury goods to it. The exports included, among other items, fine pottery vase, metal products and ivory ornaments. Some of these goods have been found in the relevant strata in various sites; best known among these are a metal bowl from Megiddo and ivory fragments from Samaria. [364]

The excavations at Samaria, the capital city, proved that during Jeroboam's time Samaria was well equipped, a fortified acropolis enclosing the palatial residence and administrative building of the king. Moreover, materials uncovered from Samaria and regional administrative centres like Shechem demonstrate how strongly the political administration was centred on the king and his court. The most important archaeological finding declares that Megiddo was a garrison city, with well- maintained stables and training spaces for horses.[365] The great cities of Samaria and Megiddo allow us to get some glimpse of royal and official luxury.[366] In short, all excavated sites of the northern kingdom point to the fact that Jeroboam II's Israel was powerful enough to achieve territorial expansion and participate in international trade.[367]

It appears that in the history of Judah, the socio-economic character of the Southern Kingdom was totally 'revolutionized'[368] during the second half of the eighth century BCE. Jerusalem also tremendously increased in size and population. As indicated earlier, Yigal Shiloh notes that from the tenth to the eighth centuries BCE, the settled area of Jerusalem, not including the Temple Mount, was about sixty dunams, or six hectares. Shiloh further states

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[364] Geva, 'Archaeological Evidence', 69-72.

[365] Kathleen M.Kenyon, *Archaeology in the Holy Land* (London: Metheun &Co Ltd, 1979), 266-267. According to Kenyon, the pottery evidence shows that the large-scale public buildings in Megiddo belong to the second half of the 9th century BCE, either late in the reign of Ahab or in that of Jeroboam II. See also King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah,* 70-80; Fritz, *The City in Ancient Israel,* 1587-95; Thomas, *Jeroboam II the King*, 166-168.

[366] Kenyon, *Archaeology in the Holy Land*, 282.

[367] Thomas, *Jeroboam II the King*, 168.

[368] Finkelstein and Silberman, 'Temple and Dynasty', 265.

that with the addition of the inclusion of the western hill, the fortified area of the city

increased by about four hundred sixty dunams or forty six hectares in the days of

Hezekiah.[369] It was believed that the population of Jerusalem grew fifteen-fold from one

thousand to fifteen thousand. [370] According to Finkelstein and Silberman, 'The city was

surrounded by a system of massive fortification with an advanced water supply system by the

Siloam Tunnel. Elaborate rock-cut tombs began to be hewn around the city, testifying to the

existence of affluent elite'.[371] Furthermore, notable developments such as monumental

inscriptions in the Siloam tunnel and on the facades of the Siloam tombs appeared at that time

and the numbers of seals, impressions and ostraca grew dramatically.[372]

The high level of organisation of the Judean state at that time is indicated by

additional archaeological phenomena. In the southern hill country, the number of settlements

and the 'total built-up area'[373] grew dramatically. The existence of well-planned countryside

towns, such as Beer-Sheba II and Tell Beit Mirsim A, appoints to the development of a

highly organised state. Further evidence of the Judean state's high degree of organisation

includes well-built storehouses and an elaborate water system at Beersheba, and a massive

extension of stables and the podium of the fortress at Lachish.[374] As noted earlier, both

Blakely and Hardin also argue that from the mid-eighth century Judah had relatively enjoyed

prosperity; this could be substantiated by the archaeology of Lachish III, Tell Beit Mirsim

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[369] Yigal Shiloh, *Excavations at the City of David* (Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1984), 3. See also, King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah*, 41-44.
[370] Shiloh, *Excavations at the City of David*, 3.
[371] Finkelstein and Silberman, 'Temple and Dynasty', 265. The details of Siloam Tunnel is dealt in Fritz, *The City in Ancient Israel*, 151-160.
[372] Finkelstein and Silberman, 'Temple and Dynasty', 265.
[373] Finkelstein and Silberman, 'Temple and Dynasty', 264.
[374] Finkelstein and Silberman, 'Temple and Dynasty', 264. See also Fritz, *The City in Ancient Israel*, 151-160. Fritz is of opinion that Lachish was the most important city in Judah after Jerusalem during eighth century BCE. It is the only city in Judah and Israel that is depicted in Assyrian reliefs.

A(2), Tell Halif VIB, Tel Beersheba III and Tell el-Hesi VIII, before the Assyrian campaign in 701BCE.[375] It appears that notable economic development occurred during this period.

Evidence of the development of political economy includes the first sign of mass-produced pottery in Judah, centralised olive oil in the Shephelah, and the introduction of standardized weights. According to Finkelstein and Silberman:

> The *lmlk* jars, and seal impression of officials found on some of the jars, also attest to an advanced bureaucratic apparatus... It seems due, rather to the considerable growth and increasing complexity of the economy of Judah, for the first time pottery is mass-produced. Judah engaged a large scale, state control olive oil production in Shephelah at Tell Beit Mirsim and Beth-Shemesh... Standardized weights also appear for the first time.[376]

In many respects, the reconstruction of the socio-economic context in eighth century BCE could be dismissed as hypothetical. However, Herrmann argues that the sixty-three ostraca found in Samaria, which in all probability come from the time of Jehu's dynasty, does serve to confirm the practices which had become prevalent. The ostraca were delivery notes for wine and oil which was evidently sent from the royal estates.[377] Elsewhere, the ostraca bore tax receipts which could make it possible that clans and villages were sending commodities to appointed collectors. Perhaps they are evidence for the tithes of I Sam 8:15 which went to royal officials.[378] Although the Samaria ostraca can illuminate a small area of the economic practice and provisioning at the time of the monarchy, we know nothing comparable from the Old Testament. It is, however, easy to see how members of an administrative class who gained power and status during the long duration of the Jehu

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[375] Blakely and Hardin, 'South Western Judah ', 56. See also Kenyon, *Digging up Jerusalem,* 160. She also notes that the late eighth and seventh centuries (BCE) was a period of reasonable material prosperity in Jerusalem.
[376] Finkelstein and Silberman, 'Temple and Dynasty', 262.
[377] Herrmann, *A History of Israel*, 237-239.
[378] Dearman, *Property Rights*, 119.

dynasty, were able to enrich themselves unscrupulously, not only in natural produce but also in land and in everything else which fell within the scope of administration. According to Hermann, 'It would be very easy for an Israelite peasant who fell behind with his payments to become dependent on royal officials and finally to have his land annexed to the royal estate'.[379]

It seems that the general purpose of ostraca was to record the shipments of commodities to a royal storehouse in Samaria. It could be presumed that they are associated with commodities from the royal estate and officials in the capital city. This assumption has extra-biblical evidence from the literature in Egypt, Ugarit, Alalakh and Assyria. For example, in the Ugaritic documents, people could assign a village, a field or vineyard, or several fields within a district. These parallels provided 'land grants from royal estate to a recipient in return for fulfilment of obligations'[380] and detailed list of property and privilege to the aristocratic class by the king. With a view to parallel practices in Ugarit, Rainey is of the opinion that 'the ostraca from Samaria constitutes ''receipts'' for deliveries from the property of high officials', and the l-men were important officials who received the commodity from lands given to them by the king.[381] It is apparent that in Israel 'a person is entitled to the land and its produce as a means of support including possible exemptions from

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[379] Herrmann, *A History of Israel*, 237-239.

[380] Dearman, *Property Rights,* 120; Fritz, *The City in Ancient Israel*, 170.

[381] A.F.Rainey, 'Administration in Ugarit and the Samaria Ostraca', *IEJ* 12(1962):62-63. Also 'The Samaria Ostraca in the Light of Fresh Evidence', *PEQ* 99 (1967): 32-41. According to Thomas, There are eleven named l-men (whose names are preceded by the preposition *lamed*) in the Samria Ostraca.Its range of meanings, ''to'', ''belonging to'', ''for'' or even ''to be credited to'', are explained in three ways: 1) the l-men were tax officials to whom tax in kind was delivered. 2) the l-men were owners or important officials who sent the commodity to the royal city(Samaria) as tax in kind. 3) the l- men were important officials who received the commodity from lands given to them by the king, they being resident in Samaria ''eating at the king's table,'' but providing their own subsistence from their land. For details see, Thomas, *Jeroboam II the King,* 68-77; Rainey, 'Administration in Ugarit and the Samaria Ostraca', *IEJ* 12(1962): 62-63.

such duties as taxation, conscription, etc.'[382] In the post-exilic period, in Nehemiah's administration there is mention of officials (*seganim*) involved with the collection of taxes and tithes and of problems associated with the distribution of produce to intended recipients (Neh. 12:44-45; 13:10-13). It is likely that the officials who collected the taxes and tithes received the royal support in terms of land grant. [383] This interpretation is convincing because it has the general support of cultural parallels.

In agrarian societies the aristocrats lived primarily in the cities and large towns and lived off the peasant surplus. The urban settlers expanded their estates by confiscating the poor peasants' small free holdings for their latifundialisation. They lived in the urban centres off the income from their latifundias as well as from taxation. The Samaria Ostraca vividly describes this situation. According to Thomas, 'The *l*-men mentioned in the ostraca were owners of latifundias, from which the commodities were brought to royal storehouse. The regional geography mentioned in the ostraca refers to the palaces situated in the proximity of the capital city. The commodities recorded in the ostraca -old wine and fine oil -were not basic provisions; they were high-level quality products [intended] either for export or for the consumption of the elite. The presence of these in the subsistence economy reveals the existence of economic disparity and exploitation'.[384]

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[382] Dearman, *Property Rights*, 120; Fritz, *The City in Ancient Israel*, 171.
[383] Dearman, *Property Rights*, 122.
[384] Thomas, *Jeroboam II the King*, 244-245. According to Thomas, 'There are eleven named *l*-men (whose names are preceded by the preposition *lamed*) in the Samria Ostraca.Its range of meanings, ''to'', ''belonging to'',''for'' or even ''to be credited to'', are explained in three ways: 1) the *l*-men were tax officials to whom tax in kind was delivered. 2) the *l*-men were owners or important officials who sent the commodity to the royal city(Samaria) as tax in kind. 3) the *l*- men were important officials who received the commodity from lands given to them by the king, they being resident in Samaria ''eating at the king's table,'' but providing their own subsistence from their land'. For details see, Thomas, *Jeroboam II the King,* 68-77.

The discovery of one thousand jar handles with the label *lmlk* in Palestine has provided additional information on the social structure of eighth century Israel and Judah. The discovery within the ancient Judean territories and their dating to the eighth or seventh century could lead to them being associated with Judah's royal administration in the pre-exilic period.[385] Some scholars try to fit the- *lmlk* stamps to Hezekiah's reign because stamped jars containing military supplies may have been common in fortified cities. This it may be argued, is supported by the biblical record of Hezekiah's building project, its specific references to storehouses (2 Kgs 20:13; 2 Chro 32:27-29).[386] According to Dearman, 'The *lmlk* stamps, are good contemporary evidence for the distribution of royally designated supplies...The stamps are also indirect evidence for the existence of royal estates and taxes, both of which would be necessary for supplying the commodities for distribution.'[387]

After investigating the archaeological research carried out in the region of Samaria and some other important cities of the Northern Kingdom, Thomas draws the following conclusion:

> The study proves that by the end of the ninth century the cities in the region of Samaria had seen hitherto unseen developments in the construction of palaces, fortifications, public administrative, subterranean water systems, stables etc. The archaeological evidence of the domestic buildings proves that there were very clear social contrasts between the dwellings of different types. For example, the well-to-do four room houses of high officials, or rich families or landlords sprang up in the royal cities. Artefacts, such as ivory spoons and furniture, demonstrate the material luxury of these people. Installations like threshing floors, oil presses and winepresses demonstrate the development and changes that confronted the dominant branches of agriculture.[388]

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[385] Dearman, *Property Rights*, 122.
[386] Dearman, *Property Rights*, 124.
[387] Dearman, *Property Rights*, 125.
[388] Thomas, *Jeroboam II the King*, 138.

The foregoing investigation of artefacts and other finds including extensive private dwellings reveals the growing affluence of a section of society within eighth century Israel and Judah. The archaeological evidences of luxury items such as ivory, wine bowls, wine presses and well-built rock oil presses (discovered from Samaria and Megiddo) show that there were considerable economic advances and luxurious life-styles among eighth century elites. Likewise, in the late eighth and early seventh century Judah experienced profound societal changes due to economic growth and inter regional trade. This was manifested in the unprecedented expansion of Jerusalem, Beersheba and Lachish. The dramatic change that both these states experienced during this period resulted in a more stratified society. This, it is likely, eventually led to a few people becoming richer and the majority of peasants becoming poorer. Linked to this, land became consolidated in the hands of fewer and fewer people (Isaiah 5:8; Mic 2:12).

D. Conclusion

From the foregoing investigation one can note that many significant developments occurred in Judah and Israel from the tenth to eighth century BCE. These included the emergence of monarchy, a land tenure system, the practice of usury and excessive taxation, increased population density, and the expansion of trade and commerce both inland and maritime. Moreover, the effects of economic wars that happened in the ninth and eighth centuries had a profound effect on the daily lives of the people. All these factors contributed to pronounced polarisation and social stratification between the ruling elite and the powerless people, particularly the peasants. In addition, natural disasters, conscription for military service and royal taxes forced small landowners to hire labourers in their own land holdings. Israel and Judah also experienced significant trade development, participating in the

international trade network by exporting oil and wines in exchange for food grains in eighth and early seventh centuries. The ruling elite class exploited the poor and defenceless (peasant farmer) by monopolizing the productive land through voluntary and involuntary processes. These eventually led the poor peasant free holders to debt and finally to debt-slavery (Amos 2:6-8; 5:10-12; Isa. 5:8-10 and Mic. 2:1-2). Against this background, eighth- century prophets like Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah severely criticise the highhandedness and rapacious lifestyle of powerful people. We will consider some of possible underlying reasons, drawing particularly on the experience of North East Indian tribal people. This is what we will go on to discuss in chapter five.

CHAPTER 4

IN SEARCH OF TRIBAL IDENTITY
ANALYSIS OF TRIBAL SITUATION IN NORTHEAST INDIA

A. Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore the tribal situation in Northeast India with special reference to the context of Mizoram and an attempt will be made to analyse the tribal issues and problems which affect the Mizo community. The decision to focus on the Mizo community has been made in order to avoid the pitfall of an analysis of the economics of land tenure of the whole Northeast India that is too general, and in order to identify and focus on concrete issues affecting people in Mizoram of which the researcher knows best.

In the first section I will analyse the tribal situation in general and in Mizoram in particular. This will include the effects of geographical and socio-cultural isolation and the traditional administrative system, tribal concept of land, traditional land tenure and the Mizo family structure.

In the second section, I will employ postcolonial reading to examine the impact on the Mizo society of colonial Christianity and modernization on the one hand, and the neo-colonial forces of sankritization, and globalization on the other. An attempt will be made to outline new problems affecting tribal economic development including government policies, New Land Use Policy and the present land tenure system. I need to discuss all these factors as they are intimately related within Northeast Indian tribal peoples' search for self-identity in the midst of struggle for traditional land. My argument will be that the situation of the tribal peoples in Northeast India and that of the majority of peasants in the eighth century BCE'

Israel and Judah are comparable in some important respects. These comparisons aid our understanding of both the ancient and the modern world in terms of the development and consequences of changing models of land tenure.

B. Section One

1. Location and Demographic background

In accordance with general contemporary usage, Northeast India designates that portion of the country which lies to the north and east of Bangladesh, between approximately latitude N.20' to 29' and longitude 90' to 98'E. It now consists of the contiguous seven sister states of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh together with the Himalayan state of Sikkim. Though the largest portion of the area is hilly or mountainous, the majority of the people inhabiting the region live in four plain areas: the Brahmaputra and Barak (Surma) valleys of Assam, the Tripura plain and the Manipur Plateau.[389] It has a long international boundary bordering Myanmar, Bangladesh, China, and Bhutan, approximately 5,000 kilometres long .[390] Geographically and racially Northeast India is sharply different from mainland India. As a result, it also has strong attachment to its neighbouring countries.

The whole of Northeast India is geographically isolated from the rest of the country. It is linked to mainland India through a narrow corridor of land, approximately thirty

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[389] Frederick S.Down, *History of Christianity in India: North East India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Bangalore: The Church History Association of India, 1992), 1.
[390]Wati Longchar, *An Emerging Asian Theology: Issue, Method and Perspective* (Jorhat: Eastern Theological College, 1999), 16.

kilometres wide, in North Bengal popularly known as the 'chicken neck'.[391] What is now

known as Northeast India came to be politically associated with India only after the British

annexed the region in the early nineteenth century. It appears that the geographical and racial

isolation from mainland India has caused socio-cultural and political problems for the tribal

people in Northeast India. Even though some people in the plain areas of Manipur and

Tripura seem to have followed certain forms of Hinduism, most of the region has not felt the

impact of mainland India religiously and politically. Lalsangkima, a leading tribal

missiologist-theologian, rightly observes that the region is situated geographically and

racially between the two great traditions of 'Indic Asia' and 'Mongoloid Asia'. As a result,

'the tribal people are exposed to confusion in regard to their identity; whereas they are

politically Indian, they are racially and culturally Mongoloid '.[392] It is very likely that

geographical and racial isolation makes the tribal people in India Northeast India feel

alienated from mainstream India, thereby creating confusion and identity crisis.

The ethnic composition of the population is extremely complex. Though it is

difficult to determine precise percentages, the great majority of the more than twenty six

million inhabitants of the region are of Mongolian racial stock.[393] According to Wati

Longchar, there are about 400 tribes lived in Northeast India, speaking hundreds of different

languages and dialects.[394] Although the Northeast Indian tribal peoples do not have a single

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[391] Lalpekhlua, *Contextual Christology*, 45-46.
[392] Lalsangkima, 'Tribal Identity ', 3.
[393] Historians like Downs believed that they have migrated into the region during the last three or four thousand years. Some others believed that most of the tribes have come to their present locations only in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and there is no agreement among the scholars concerning the precise origin of various groups. See also B.Lalthangliana, *India, Burma & Bangladesh-a Mizo Chanchin,* (Aizawl: RTM Press, 2001), 75-153.
[394] Longchar, *An Emerging Asian Theology*, 14.

tradition[395] and differ among themselves in many ways linguistically, ethnically and culturally, they also have many structural and cultural characteristics in common.[396]

The tribal peoples of the Northeast India can be broadly classified into two groups based on geographical location: the hill tribes and the plain tribes. The hill tribes include the Mizo-Chin-Kuki group living in Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura and the North Cachar Hills of Assam; the Naga group in Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh; Khasi and Jaintias in Meghalaya; Garos in Meghalaya and Assam; Arunachalis in Arunachal Pradesh and Lepcha in Sikkim. [397] Racially they all belong to Mongoloid stock and have similar physical features. The plains tribals, on the other hand, are scattered in the river valleys of the Brahmaputra and the Barak valley in Assam, and in the plains of Tripura. They are indigenous people who formerly had been the owners of the land with their own kingdoms, but today are suffering from landlessness, displacement and assimilation.[398]

2. Traditional Administrative System

In this section an attempt will be made to investigate the tribal village administrative system in relation to the land, and the tribal concept of land. The relation between the land and the human is intimate and foundational as the land provides humans with space, identity, food and other basic resources to meet their needs. This is especially true in the case of tribal people. The structure of the land system varies from tribe to tribe but there is some

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[395] Walter Fernandes, 'Demography and Historiography of the Tribal People in India with Special Reference to North East India', in Hrangthan Chhungi (ed.), *Theologizing Tribal Heritage: A Critical Re-Look* (Bangalore: CWM/ISET-ECC/PCI/ISPCK,2008): 31.
[396] Sebastian Karotemprel, 'The Impact of Christianity on the Tribes of North East India', in J.Puthenpurakal (ed.), *Impact of Christianity on North East India* (Shillong: Vendrame Istitute Publications, 1996): 17.
[397] Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 17.
[398] Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 12.

commonality since all the tribes are communitarian in nature. As the land tenure system is related to villages, we will now go on to describe the main characteristics of the tribal system of village administration.

a) Chieftainship System: Several tribes of Northeast India such as the Konyaks, Semas, Khasis, and Mizos used to practice the chieftainship system.[399] The chief controlled some villages as his territory and was the supreme head of the community, vested with judicial and political powers in order to maintain law and order.[400] As a guardian of his villages he was responsible for keeping his territories peaceful and self- sufficient. The chief also looked after the poor and the needy in the village. In Mizoram, there was a fairly 'well organised polity at the village level under a council of elders presided over by the Lal or chief, with well-established customary law and practices which were efficiently enforced'.[401] Later the British administrators used these traditional institutions as a basis for their own government of the Mizos. Only minimal modifications were made.

Any disputes over the land and other matters within his territory were settled in the chief's court. Within the village, the land was distributed to each family for their cultivation. Each village had vast areas of land and every inhabitant of the village was entitled to live, cultivate and hunt on that land. Each village had boundaries separating one village jurisdiction from another; these were normally based on natural boundaries like rivers or hills. The area of a village's land varied from one to another sometimes depending on the size

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[399] Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions*, 104.
[400] Lalhmingliani Ralte, 'The Mizo Chief and His Administration Before 1890', in Sangkima (ed.), *A Modern History of Mizoram* (Guwahati/Delhi: Spectrum Publications, 2004): 3.
[401] Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture: The Encounter between Christianity and Zo Culture in Mizoram* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1997), 57-58.

of population.[402] In the event of a dispute with other villages, the chief took responsibility within his own jurisdiction. If an inheritor was absent or if a person decided to leave the village, the chief inherited the property and the land. In a chieftainship society, the chief played a pivotal role in the affairs of the community including the use of land within his territory. However, although in principle the chief was the owner of all land in the village, there were different kinds of checks on his power. Practically communitarian ownership of land under the stewardship of the chief was the standard practice. The ultimate power of the use of land was in the hands of the community as a whole.[403]

b) Non-Chieftainship System: In contrast, the majority of tribal peoples followed a 'gerontocratic' form of administration. Unlike the chieftainship system, in this form of government each village functioned as a sovereign independent state. The administration was based on clanship. Each clan chose its representatives on the basis of age, wealth, moral standards, leadership ability and record of service. The pattern of administration was democratic and ultimate power rested in the hands of people in this society. Matters of law, justice and political affairs of the villages were settled in the village court which was the highest authority. They also decided the area for cultivation every year.[404]

Despite the difference between the two systems of administration, there are certain characteristics that are common to both: The system of land tenure among tribal people has traditionally been communitarian in nature and every member of the community has had a

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[402] Lalrinawmi Ralte, 'A feminist Critique of Land Holding Patterns in Mizoram', in Hrangthan Chhungi (ed.), *Theologizing Tribal Heritage: A Critical Re-Look* (Delhi: CWM/ISET-ECC/PCI/ISPCK, 2008): 223.
[403] Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions*, 105.
[404] Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions*, 105.

right to live, use and share in the land. More details about tribal people's relation with land will be provided and discussed below.

3. Tribal concept of Land

The relationship between tribal people and their land is difficult for contemporary people (who look at the land from a utilitarian perspective and treat land as an object to be explored and exploited) to understand. We will now go on to explore this further.

It is not surprising that Northeast Indian tribal Christian utilise the Bible and their cultural values for liberative strands. As Sugirtharajah points out, in colonial contexts, colonised people tend to mine their literary and cultural traditions in 'an attempt to retrieve cultural memory from the amnesia caused by colonialism', often through 'reinterpretation of stories, myths, and legends'.[405] From time immemorial, the tribal myths speak of land as belonging to the Supreme Being. Just as Hebrew scripture states, 'the Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof ' (Ps 24:1), tribal people affirm that the land belongs to the Supreme Being. According to Wati Longchar:

> The village, clan and individual own land, but within the wider understanding that land belongs to the Supreme Being. The Supreme Being is the ultimate owner of the land. Thus, land equally belongs to all with equal rights and freedom to live in it, and no one can claim it exclusively for himself/herself nor can one sell it as though it is one's exclusive property. A human's ownership is only temporary. The whole land is the home of the Supreme Being and humans are only members in it. Hence, the ownership of land by village, clan and individual has to be understood within the greater recognition that the land belonged to Supreme Being.[406]

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[405] Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism*, 55.
[406] Longchar, 'Dancing with the Land', 118-119.

For tribal peoples, land is an integral part of Supreme Being and is not external to God. For example, the Aos and the Sangtams of Nagaland call their Supreme Being, *Lijaba*. *Li* means 'earth' and *jaba* means 'real', meaning 'the Supreme Being is real earth'. These people also call him *Lizaba*. *Li* means 'earth' and *zaba* means 'enter', giving the meaning, 'the one who enters or indwells the soil or earth'. [407] According to these people, *Lijaba* enters 'the soil just as the vital seeds get buried beneath the soil and germinates as the life of a plant'.[408] In the tribal view, land and Supreme Being are inseparably related. The land, therefore, is a symbol that provides an inseparable relationship between creatures and the creator.

Tribal peoples view land as sacred. Perceiving it as an entity indwelt by spirits, they look upon the land as a living being and treat it with great respect.[409] Their religion does not centre on a temple or church or particular shrine as the whole earth is holy and animated by the spirits where they worship the Supreme Being.[410] In short, the tribal religion is centred on the soil itself. Most tribal people in Northeast India perform purification rites for the soil at the beginning of jungle clearing for the jhum,[411] dedication of seed and fields to the Supreme Being before and after sowing seeds, dedication of paddy during weeding, rededication of paddy, fruit testing and thanksgiving of harvest festivals.[412] All their festivals revolve around the jhum and have close connections with these agricultural operations.[413] For tribal peoples,

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[407] Longchar, 'Dancing with the Land,' 119.
[408] Longchar, 'Dancing with the Land,' 119.
[409] Lalpekhlua, *Contextual Christology*, 175.
[410] Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 23.
[411] Jhum is a clearing in the forest used for agricultural purposes especially for the growing of rice, etc; a farm; a cultivated field.
[412] Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 120-121.
[413] Lalchawiliana, 'Theology of Land', 52.

land and the whole creation is the manifestation of Supreme Being, the place where activities of worship takes place. Land is therefore sacred, the dwelling place of God.

The tribal myths do not make a distinction between the land, history and time. Being soil- centred communities, the tribal peoples' concept of history and time is closely connected with the soil. For example, if one asks a tribal when she/he was born, the answer may be 'I was born when my parents were cultivating that particular field, during that season, the time when the people were going to/ coming from the field'. They also count the time according to their activities to the soil. Contrary to western concepts of time and history as 'linear', the tribal people experience time and history as 'cyclical' and 'rhythmic'.[414] It is also through the land that the tribal people read and discern God and the Spirits and know their will. In an analogy to the psalmist's proclamation that, 'the Heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork' (Psalm 19:1), the tribal people read about the Supreme Being through the land.[415] Every movement of the earth, the sun and the moon are perceived to be communicating important messages to the people.

According to tribal myths, the earth is a mother from which human beings came forth. Most of the tribes in Northeast India have myths which say that they were born out of the earth. The Mizo, the Nagas and the Garos traced their origin to a particular stone from which, according to their myths, their ancestors came out. They believed that their ancestors emerged from a big hole of the earth or the bowels of the earth.[416] Therefore, for tribal

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[414] Longchar, 'Dancing with the Land ', 122.
[415] Longchar, 'Dancing with the Land ', 122.
[416] Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 178.

people, the land is the mother who has given birth to them. Their folk tales describe relationship of tribal people with their land as a mother-child relationship.[417]

The very existence of the tribal people depends on the land because they are an agricultural community. Land for them is a source of life and people live on the fertility and fruit of the land. Therefore, the land and everything that grows from it are not inanimate objects, but have life and power in themselves.[418] The land is the source and sustainer of life. For tribal people, 'the land holds not only the clan, village and tribes as one, but it also unites the Supreme Being, spirits, ancestors and creation as one family'.[419] In fact, land is not only a source of life and unity, but it also a symbol of unity. Individual and community are inseparably related to and deeply rooted in land. Therefore land is an integral part of the tribal people's identity. Concerning the community ownership of land, Lalpekhlua observes that:

> Community ownership of land implied that, for the tribals, land is the maker of their identity. Without land, tribal people could not envisage the existence of genuine community. If the land was lost, the tribe's identity was lost. In the tribals' context, it was the land that held the people together as a community.[420]

This attitude towards the land is by no means unique to the tribal people of Northeast India. Similar attitudes are expressed by Native American Chief Seattle's letter to

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[417] For instance, one Mizo folk tale, called the story of Mauruangi exemplified the relationship of tribals with the land as a mother-child relationship. As the story runs, her mother drowned in a river, and her father later married another woman who treated her badly with the result that she became very thin and pale. In utmost misery, she went to the river where her mother had drowned, seeing that her mother had turned into a big fish. When the mother-fish saw her poor little girl, she fed her with fish. When her step-mother discovered the fish in feeding Mauruangi, they caught and killed it. One of the bones of the fish Mauruangi's mother turned into a *Phunchawng* tree. Whenever she went to the tree, the tree bent down and Mauruangi sucked the juice from *Phunchawng* flowers. When the step-mother discovered that the Phunchawng tree was feeding Mauruangi, she hired people to cut the tree down. When the tree was at the point of falling, little Mauruangi, who stood besides the tree, addressed the tree: 'Mummy, my sweet *Phunchawng Darhniangi*, hold on'. And the tree was restored again and would not fall. At last the people took Mauruangi away and only then could they cut the tree down.
[418] Longchar, 'Dancing with the Land', 123.
[419] Longchar, 'Dancing with the Land ', 123.
[420] Lalpekhlua, *Contextual Christology*, 178.

President Franklin Pierce, which states 'We do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water... Every part of this Earth is sacred to my people'.[421] Similarly, Tuwere from the Pacific tribal context, asserts that 'One does not own the land; the land [rather] owns him'.[422] The tribal relationship with the land was also well expressed by a team from the World Council of Churches who visited the Australian Aborigines in 1981. They stated:

> Land is their spiritual heritage. It is a part of their being as people. Land was the basis of all relationships with Aboriginal human and physical environment. Land defined clan, its culture, its way of life, its fundamental rights, its religious and cultural ceremonies, its pattern of survival and above all, its identity. Land was synonymous with Aboriginal existence. It could not be defiled, desecrated or cheapened. The exploitation, erosion, plundering, misuse or spoil amounts to the destruction of the Aborigines' cultural and spiritual heritage; in contemporary understanding, it amounts to cultural genocide.[423]

Thus, land provided identity and unity to tribal peoples. They measure their time according to their activities related to the soil. For them, land is the basis of relationship with Creator and other creatures, giving meaning and significance to their existence. For tribal people, alienation from the land therefore leads to identity crisis.

4. The Traditional Mizo Land Tenure

In the traditional Mizo community, an individual never owned the land. Under the stewardship of Lal, a village chief, communal ownership of land was the standard practice. Everyone in a village community was entitled to use, hunt or live in a particular area so long

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[421] This statement is part of a letter of the Chief Seattle who allegedly wrote a letter to the President Franklin Pierce in 1855.http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1985/spring/chief-seattle.html. http, accessed on 23 March 2011.
[422] Longchar, 'Dancing with the Land ', 123.
[423] Australian Council of Churches, *Justice for Aborigines Australians: Report of the World Council of Churches team visits to the Aborigines,* June 15 to July 3, 1981 (Sydney: Australian Council of Churches, 1981), 14.

as they belonged to the village community that owned the area. Every year, the chief in consultation with his elders selected a particular area for jhum cultivation for the entire village community. The land was then allowed to remain fallow for about eight to twelve years. Every family had to give 'fathang' (paddy) to the chief in recognition of the chieftainship. In addition to the traditional 'fathang', each family had to pay a land tax of two rupees.[424] There were also advisors known as *Ramhual* concerning land to be cultivated. They were experts in agriculture, and for the service they rendered to the community they were given the privilege, next only to the chief, of choosing the choice plots to cultivate themselves. In return, they also had to pay a heavier tax than other people, this was called *Fathang.* After *Ramhual,* other village officials such as *Upa* (Council of elders), *Thirdeng* (blacksmith), *Puithiam* (priest), *Tlangau* (*v*illage crier) selected their plots followed by the commoners/common people, all of whom had to pay their tax to the chief.[425]

After the British occupied the land, they recognised the chieftainship and established limits to the boundary of the village. The British allowed the Mizo chiefs to retain control over forest resources, including the right to practice jhum cultivation. After some time, however, and for the purpose of increasing state revenue, successive policies to curb jhum were introduced. A form of land settlement popularly known as the circle system was introduced in 1901. This effectively divided Mizoram into eighteen circles, each administered by local chiefs. This regulation limited jhum cultivation by forbidding the practice of it outside of these circles. At the same time, and in a break with the traditional ownership of

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[424] Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 181.
[425] Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 60-61.

land, 'new cash crops such as coffee, cotton, potatoes, and oranges were introduced under private ownership'.[426] In the traditional land system there were four types of land:[427]

a) House site, which was inheritable but not saleable;

b) A safety reserve belt, about a mile in radius, that circled the village to keep it safe from spreading jhum fire;

c) A supply reserve zone, usually lying just outside the safety ring, and;

d) Jhum land, the outermost ring of a vast expanse of land. This extended to the boundary line of the next village and constituted the common village jhum land.

5. The Structure of theTraditional Mizo family

In this section I will discuss the structure of the traditional Mizo family as this was intimately linked with the use and management of land. The traditional pre-Christian Mizo family structure was different from that found in the present day. In the traditional tribal society, the family was the nucleus of both individual and corporate existence. The structure of the family was patriarchal in nature; the father or other oldest male members dominated the whole life of the family and the lineage was traced through the male descendants. As the head of the family, the father represented the family in all public functions. It was also the responsibility of the head to maintain and to direct all family affairs. In the traditional Mizo family as a rule, the father must portion out his lands (if any) and distribute property to his

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[426] Shanaz Kimi Leblhuber & H.Vanlalhruaia, 'Jhum Cultivation Versus the New Land Use Policy: Agrarian Change and Transformation In Mizoram', in Ursula Munster et.al (eds.), *Fields and Forests- Ethnographic Perspectives on Environmental Globalization* (Rachel Carson Centre Perspectives, 2012): 86.

[427] Vanlalnunmawia, 'Commercial Teak Plantation in Zawlnuam Area: An Ecological Response', (BD Thesis, United Theological College, Bangalore, 1997), 54; S. Rolianthanga, 'Land Reforms Tulna', *Seminar on Land Reform* (Aizawl: Mizoram Presbyterian Church, Social Front, 2006): 6.

male children in the form of a will. Duties connected with sacrificial ceremonies were also in the hands of the family head. At the time of the morning meal, the father used to distribute the work among the family members. This was a good time for parents to instruct younger members in social rules and norms.[428]

The joint family system has been practiced by the Mizos from time immemorial and still prevails today among rural people, though it is dying out in urban areas. The Mizo family therefore consists of father, mother, unmarried and married children, especially boys with their wives and children, and grandparents, if alive. It is somewhat like the ancient Israelite father's household (בית אב). A family may include other members like sisters, brothers and even cousins of the head of the family. Sons after marriage do not usually separate themselves from their parents but continue to stay on with them under the same roof, eating together, working together and holding property in common. Although the properties are kept in common, the father or the head of the family is the real owner of the properties until distributed to his sons at the point of death.[429] The Mizo family structure is what anthropologists call a 'patriarchal extended family'.[430]

In the traditional Mizo family, a couple stay with their parents until they have several children of their own who could help establish a new family. According to custom and practice, they move out from their father's house to establish their own home only when their children reach marriageable age. This is called 'In dang' which means to start a separate family. The new home would usually be built jointly by all the members of the family. Even

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[428] Malsawma, *Sociology of the Mizos*, 52.
[429] Malsawma, *Sociology of the Mizos*, 53.
[430] Lalrinawma, *Mizo Ethos*, 31.

after sons and daughters move out of the immediate household, the relationship remains very strong.

The family was the smallest social unit. It was the smallest centre of justice and peace for the members. Each family member had a deep sense of duty towards other members of their family.[431] The family served as an economic unit as well. Each able-bodied member engaged in jhuming cultivation to make the family self-sufficient. The family worked together as a group and dealt with outsiders as a single unit. Every family was entitled to cultivate a portion of land for agricultural operation, and had the right to live and hunt in their village areas. Before formal schools were available, the family was the centre of vocational education for children because such education was linked with the activities of the family. Family was also the centre for religious training of the children who were taught religious values, social customs and taboos by their parents. Each family and clan performed worship of 'Sa' in which a pig was sacrificed to *Sa*.[432] This was a family or clan act of worship to which only the nearest relations were admitted as participants. The worship of *Sa* was the first act of any new established family.[433] For tribal people, family was thus the vital place where each member found their identity and meaning; it was the centre of religious values and the primary locus of economic production.

C. Section Two

In this second section, I will employ postcolonial reading to analyse the impact of colonial Christianity and modernisation, sanskritization, and globalisation on the Mizo

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[431] Lalkima, *Social Welfare Administration in Tribal State*, 5.
[432] Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 112.
[433] Zairema, 'The Mizo and Their Religion', in K.Thanzauva (ed.), *Towards A Tribal Theology: The Mizo Perspective (*Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1989): 35.

society in their search for identity and meaning. I will also examine the problems of

traditional agricultural systems and the New Land Use Policy, as well as the effects of

changes in family structure and problems of the present land tenure system.

1. Postcolonial Reading

As indicated earlier, the methodology I employ in this research is a Northeast Indian

Tribal perspective with a combination of cultural-anthropological, liberationist and contextual

postcolonialism approaches. Although the concerns of the subject matter may seem to be

covered by the wider tradition of liberation theology, the perspective in this work is more

than a liberation approach alone. The Northeast India Tribal Perspective shares similar

concerns with contextual postcolonialism; therefore, I will attempt to make use of

postcolonial perspectives in my research. The Northeast Indian tribal tradition had been

shaped by the period in which the people lived under colonial British hegemony and the

subsequent post-colonial period.[434] The land and the people had been subjugated by the

British with the result that cultural values changed and identity crisis emerged. For the

Northeast Indian tribal, the post-colonial period also become a part of neo- colonialism as

tribal people encountered new challenges such as sanskritization and economic globalization.

In summary then, a search for identity and struggle for liberation takes place in tribal society

as result of a colonial Christianity and modernization on the one hand, and sanskritization and

economic globalization on the other. The victims of the old imperialism are now the victims

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[434] In this context, I have followed Sugirtharajah who states 'When it used with a hyphen,' post-colonial', the term is seen as indicating the historical period aftermath of colonialism. Without the hyphen, 'postcolonial', as synifying a reactive resistance discourse of the colonised who critically interrogate dominant knowledge systems in order to recover the past from the Western slander and misinformation of colonial period, and who also continue to interrogate neo-colonizing tendencies after the declaration of Independence'. See Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism,* 12-13.

of the economic globalization and sanskritization. In response, Northeast India tribal people

have tried to mine their literary and cultural traditions in 'an attempt to retrieve cultural

memory from the amnesia caused by colonialism', often through 'reinterpretation of stories,

myths, and legends' [435] as a form of narrative resistance. They have sought to reassert and

indeed rediscover tribal identities, culture and tradition that colonial Christianity and post

colonial forces (such as sanskritization and economic globalization) have erased,

marginalised and suppressed.[436]

2. Impact of Christianity and Modernization on Mizo society

The most important political event in the Northeast hill areas tribal region was the

coming of the British who brought with them Christianity in the nineteenth century. Over the

course of one hundred years, the British brought the entire region under their control. During

this period, church mission grew rapidly in Mizoram. Significant factors contributed to

Christianity's success in this region include, 'revival' movements,[437] the ethical and moral

principle of Mizo *Tlawmngaihna*[438] and the socio-cultural practices of *Hnatlang* (joint work,

social work).[439] The change brought about in the hill areas through British administration and

Christianity was radical, forming a serious threat to the traditional way of life. It seems that

no area of tribal life was left untouched by the wind of change. For example, even *Zawlbuk*,

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[435] Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism*, 55.

[436] Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse Postcolonialism*, 16.

[437] Lalsawma, *Four Decades of Revivals: The Mizo Way* (Aizawl: Mission Vengthlang, 1994), 5.

[438] P.L. Lianzuala, 'Towards a Theology of Mizo Tlawmngaihna', in K. Thanzauva (ed.), *Towards a Tribal Theology: The Mizo Perspective* (Mizoram: Mizo Theological Conference, 1989): 60. Tlawmngaihna has no equivalent word in English but it is self-evident word representing many qualities and virtues of life. Tlawmngaihna is to be self-sacrificing, unselfish, self-denying, brave, persevering, courteous, industrious, trustworthy, and self-respecting to give in and ready to help others even at considerable inconvenience to oneself etc. It is hidden Christian gospel in the Mizo tradition.

[439] Zaichhawna Hlawndo, *Hnatlang Theology: Cultural Factors in Christian Missions in India* (Aizawl: Christian Research Centre, 2012), 47-48.

the bachelor dormitory which had been the centre of Mizo socio-cultural life, and, which served as defence, information, recreational and education centre of the village, was not spared. [440] As a result the institution of Zawlbuk was almost abolished in the early twentieth century. As Downs notes, 'the introduction of centralized governing structure by replacing the autonomy of village political structures, the introduction of Christianity and increasing contacts with the plains peoples formed part of the threat to the traditional way of life'. [441]

It appears that the British had made some efforts to isolate the hill tribes and alienate them from their plains neighbours, [442] but 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 modernization and detribalization. These new socio-economic and political structures started eroding the traditional systems that safeguarded their socio-cultural values and ethos, eventually causing great damage to the age-old tribal cultural practices and traditions. [443] Moreover, the British occupation paved the way for Christian missionaries to come to the tribal areas; this significantly accelerated the process of modernization.

Undoubtedly, one of the most significant developments that affected tribal people was the experience of modernization. The process of modernization is a global phenomenon that affects every society. India and other post-colonial developing countries experienced it when they began to industrialise themselves, adopting modern technology and adapting their

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[440] Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 175-182. While the contribution of Zawlbuk towards the inculcation of the values of Mizo society was undoubtedly great, the people gradually also understood the defects of Zawlbuk system which promoted unhealthy gossip, rumours and encouragement of clandestine love affairs.
[441] Downs, *History of Christianity*, 12-13.
[442] Downs, *History of Christianity*, 18-19.
[443] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 66.

social, political and economic systems to the changing tune of the time. [444] As is well known, modernization is almost invariably accompanied by westernization; indeed the two processes are often seen as synonymous with each other.[445] Most theorists also assumed that the post-colonial countries would undergo the same stages of economic growth as the western states had undergone earlier.

When the British colonialists started the process of colonising the Indian heartland, the political system was feudal in nature. But the same is not true in the case of the hill areas in Northeast India, including Mizoram. As we have seen, this was a tribal and egalitarian society. Commenting on these features of Northeast Indian society, R.N.Prasad observes:

> Although, the internal organisation of the Mizo society in particular and of most of the tribes men's[sic] societies in the north-east region contained certain strong elements of an emerging land-self relationship, yet the practice of shifting/jhuming continued to generate some degree of egalitarianism in the socio-political arrangement of the Mizo people and of the hill masses of the region by ensuring a sort of check on the extent of inequality which was in toto absent in broader Indian milieu, which was decidedly developed in feudal mould.[446]

As indicated earlier, the British policy in the Northeast hill areas was one of leaving the tribals alone. This was based on the expectation that the tribals by themselves would adopt the categories of modern life. It was presumed that the Christian missionaries with their intense activities through the region would act as a modernising influence on tribal society. As Christianity is considered as one of the effective instruments of modernization, thus the spread of Christianity marked the spread of modernization and westernization. However, not

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[444] Prasad, 'Modernisation of the Mizo Society: Strategic Problems and Futuristic Introspection', in R.N.Prasad and A.K.Agarwal (eds.), *Modernisation of the Mizo Society* (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2003): 151. Modernization as a result of the Industrial Revolution (1760-1830) started first of all in England and in France as a result of Revolution (1798-1794).
[445] Prasad, 'Modernisation ', 151.
[446] Prasad, 'Modernisation ', 165.

every modernising influence on tribal society is a by-product of Christianity. According to

the tribal economist Lianzela, 'the official policy of the government and the policy of the

missionaries together had the same effect of detribalisation... the old customs were being

given up'. [447] In fact, British occupation and Christianity went hand in hand in Northeast

India and Christianity has been called the primary agent of change among the hill tribes.

Undoubtedly tribal society in Northeast India has undergone immense changes in its

psychology, world-view, languages, cultures, social habits, and economic activity as a result

of its interaction with Christianity. Every area of tribal life has been influenced by the spread

of Christianity in Northeast India.[448] It could be argued that Christianity has brought a new

worldview to the tribal people not only by exposing them to mainstream India but also to the

international community. Sebastian Karotemprel argues:

> Exposure to a new world with its culture or cultures, with its economic
> systems and structures, its political philosophies and forms of government, its
> educational and social infrastructures in general totally different from those of
> tribal living in isolated geographical and cultural pockets was bound to alter
> the ''world-view'' of the tribal people. And this I would say was the first
> major impact of Christianity for better or worse, on the tribal people.[449]

While Christianity opened the door to the international community, Christianity also

helped tribal people in preserving their specific tribal identity. This was accomplished by

reducing the various tribal languages into written form, giving written grammatical and

literary forms and structures of language, and developing the literature, vocabulary and

modes of expressions. This is in addition to providing schools, boarding houses, ecclesiastical

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[447] Lianzela, *Economic Development of Mizoram* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1994), 17.
[448] Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions*, 141.
[449] Karotemprel, 'The Impact of Christianity ', 18-19.

organisation and faith.[450] It is true that the production of the first literature in the tribal

languages made important contribution to the development of tribal identity. [451] Many

scholars such as Downs believe that, although many factors like kinship, language, and the

newly introduced British administrative structure contributed to the creation and development

of tribal identities, it was Christianity that was the dominant force in this process. As Downs

puts it:

> The only factor contributing to a sense of tribal unity was the belief in
> common origin and, hence, kinship. Again, this was non-functional for the
> most part. It has been well-established that what was true of these tribes was
> generally true for all. Even language, which should have been a unifying
> factor, did not serve the purpose in the pre-British period because of
> dialectical difference. .. It was Christianity, rather than British administration,
> that was the primary factor in creating a sense of tribal identity, in fact they
> did so.[452]

No doubt Christianity created 'a sense of a tribal identity for the first time at a level

higher than that of a village or relatively small cluster of villages'.[453] Although other factors

in maintaining the distinctive tribal identities should not be downplayed, it is clear

Christianity played a pivotal role. As indicated earlier, it can be seen that Christianity

provided a means of preserving tribal identities and promoting their interests, particularly in

the face of the perceived threat of assimilation into the Hindu societies of the plains. Not only

did Christianity enrich tribal values and principles, it also liberated the people from

domination by superstitious beliefs, fears of evil spirits, and inter- tribal or intra- tribal wars;

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[450] Philomath Passah, 'The Contribution of Christianity to Socio-Economic Development of North East India',
in J.Puthenpurakal (ed.), *Impact of Christianity in North East India* (Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications,
1996): 442-447.
[451] Downs, *History of Christianity*, 192.
[452] Downs, 'Tribal Ecumenism in North East India: The Christian Role and Solidarity Movements', *Indian
Church History Review* 23 (1989): 25.
[453] Downs, *History of Christianity*, 209.

it even brought about an improvement in women's status.[454] Certainly Christianity played a very significant role in the eradication of social evils such as the slavery system,[455] and in the improvement of hygienic living conditions among the hill peoples.

The Christian mission also played a very important role in the introduction and expansion of education in Northeast India. Many people, particularly new converts wanted to read the Bible and the hymn books prepared by the missionaries, thus helping them to embrace the new found religion and contributing to the expansion of Christianity itself. Today, the literacy rate in some Northeast Indian States is fairly high, particularly in the state of Mizoram where levels of literacy are among the highest in the whole India;[456] this is no doubt the contribution of Christianity. Summarising the role of Christianity in Northeast India in the field of education, the tribal historians J.V.Hluna comments:

> In fact there is no greater contribution of Christianity to the people of this region than that in the field of education which helped them to adjust and find themselves following the imposition of British administration. In the hill areas, particularly in the southern hills, the Christian educational activities had a greater impact than in the plains due to the fact that the government gave the Christian missions a virtual monopoly on education until Independence. Education, therefore, is considered the most powerful instrument of social change. Such change was more rapid in the hill areas than in the plains.[457]

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[454] Khuanga, 'The Role of Christianity in the Socio-Economic Praxis of Mizoram', in K.Thanzauva (ed.), *Towards A Tribal Theology: The Mizo Perspective* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1989): 90-98.

[455] It was over the question of Slavery that confrontation between Christian missionaries and the government took place in Mizoram. The *bawi* system might be described as a benevolent form of slavery in which persons convicted of certain types of crimes, or who sought refuge in time of war or who had become destitute, became the servant in the chiefs' households. The chiefs had absolute rights over those persons and their children. The government was unwilling to interfere with the system and there was a difference of opinion as to whether it could really be called slavery. Dr. Peter Fraser, a medical missionary regarded the system as slavery pure and simple and had even gone so far as to have the issue raised in the British Parliament. This caused him to be expelled from Mizoram. But his effort against the *bawi* system had influence upon the British who gradually began to put an end to the system.

[456] In 2001 and 2011 Censuses, Mizoram ranked 2nd and 3rd position among Indian states and Union Territories respectively.

[457] Hluna, *Education and Missionaries in Mizoram* (Guwahati/Delhi: Spectrum Publications, 1992), 22.

It is evident that the coming of Christianity and education brought a great change in tribal society. As Downs rightly puts it, 'In the minds of many hill people, Christianity and education came to be regarded as synonymous'.[458] For better or worse, education brought the chieftainship, the tribal traditional institution, to an end.[459] Education not only brought a sense of oneness in individual tribes, but also promoted inter-tribal relationships.

However, it could also be seen that Christianity, along with western culture and modernization, had serious negative impacts on traditional values. Christianity also produced a new generation of elites who abandoned their traditional song, dresses, festivals and other religious rites. Instead they wore western dress and received a small salary either from the mission or the government. Even more significant was their change in mental outlook. They began to look with disgust at traditional values and to view western culture as superior.[460] In this way Christianity could be seen as a contributing factor to the alienation of tribal people from their traditional values and practices.

The cultural loss suffered by the tribal people including the Mizo is immense. As Sangkhuma observes the folk compositions with poetical words which spoke of beautiful hills and valleys, and love songs between boys and girls have given place to short modern rhymes and tunes with no poetical word and philosophy in them.[461] Traditional music tunes were also discarded with the result that most hymns used in church services are now translated from western compositions; and even those with native origins have a western

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[458] Downs, *History of Christianity*, 55.
[459] Hluna, *Education and Missionaries in Mizoram*, 226-227. The chiefs, however, remained as the nominal heads of their respective villages till 1954 when the Government of Assam abolished the institution of chieftainship, an Act passed in the Assam Legislative Assembly.
[460] Z.T.Sangkhuma, *Missionary-te Hnuhma* (Aizawl: Lengchhawn Press, 1995), 135-164.
[461] Sangkhuma, *Missionary-te Hnuhma*, 149-161.

bias.[462] Moreover, the traditional Mizo clothes woven for festive occasions now have almost no place in important occasions. The social solidarity of the body politics of the village was badly affected and the tribal and the village bonds were loosened[463] perhaps like the situation of rural peasants in Israel and Judah in eighth-century BCE.

The kind of Christianity that is being practiced in Northeast India today is the legacy of nineteenth century evangelical Christianity. Furthermore, Christianity has still not yet properly adapted to Northeast Indian Tribal culture. When Christianity came to Mizoram it was dressed in western garb. The early Mizo Christian was not in a position to differentiate 'substance' from 'form' and therefore simply 'adopted Christianity in the western form'. [464] Anything that was perceived to be associated with old culture and hence old religion was rejected. Recognizing the lack of inculturation in the Mizo church, Lalsawma, a Mizo theologian, has declared that the gospel is not inculturated in Mizoram and this has shaken Mizo society.[465] Thanzauva rightly observes that a self- theologizing process has not taken place in Northeast India. He states, 'Jesus Christ... is yet to theologically incarnate in the tribal culture'.[466] In this respect, Sugirtharajah's understanding of heritagist readings may have a liberative function in a colonial context. As Sugirtharajah states:

> Heritagist reading offered potentially a positive space for overcoming the
> trauma of colonialism and for regaining the lost indigenous cultural
> consciousness. Delving into their heritage not only helped the colonized to

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[462] Malsawma, *Sociology of the Mizos*, 180.
[463] Malsawma, *Sociology of the Mizos*, 179.
[464] Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 316.
[465] Lalsawma, 'Shaking the Foundations of Mizo Society,'in Rosiamliana Tochhawng, K.Lalrinmawia and L.H.Rawsea (eds.), *Ground Works For Tribal Theology in the Mizo Context* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007): 61-67.
[466] Thanzauva, 'Tribal Theological Trends', 106.

cope with colonialism and missionary onslaught on their religious traditions, but it helped them to nurture cultural pride.[467]

In line with Sugirtharaja's heritagist reading, this thesis attempts to invoke the liberative potential of, the cultural traditions of tribal people in Northeast India which modernization and colonial Christianity had suppressed.

It could be argued that the western philosophy of history has directly or indirectly played a role in western mission and theology; one may also have to question the underlying assumptions of western mission strategy in its approach to traditional tribal societies. Those who hold the 'philosophy of historical progress' expected to transform the whole world into modern industrialised countries moulded in the western model. They viewed traditional subsistence tribal societies as obsolete and doomed to perish, as being 'primitive', 'backward', 'barbaric', or 'under-developed'.[468] Bastiaan Wielenga may be right when he states:

> ... most of the western missions shared this perspective, though their preoccupation might have been with the tribal animistic world outlook, which in their eyes is ''pagan'' and had to be eradicated. In the process, in any case, they mightily contributed to the westernisation process through their schools and colleges and their inclination to a monetised economy. Theologically, they may have looked at the westernisation process as a tool of God's providence using the light of modern civilisation to overcome traditions which they tended to see as ''pagan''.[469]

After embracing Christianity, part of the problem among the modern Mizo identity could be the impact of dominant reading of the Bible. These resulted in the perception that

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[467] Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism*, 61.
[468] Bastiaan, 'Bible and Social Transformation', in A.Wati Longchar and Larry E. Davis (eds.), *Doing Theology with Tribal Resources: Context and Perspective* (Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre, Eastern Theological College, 1999): 17. See also Gaikaolung Dangmei, 'Gospel and Tribal Culture: Complementary or incompatible?' *Master's Journal of Theology,* vol 3/1 (June 2013): 16.
[469] Bastiaan, 'Bible and Social Transformation', 17.

humanity is the crown of creation and therefore has the right to dominion over other creatures (Gen.1) which is contradictory to tribal world-view. As indicated earlier, Christianity has affected the identity of Mizo somewhat contrary to traditional Mizo values and culture. This new identity is in cultural opposition to the traditional perception of organic union between God, human, and land.[470] Kim critiques the West's embraces of interpretations of the Bible that supports its tendency to universalize its claims, values, and views. He argues 'What the West saw in the Bible is not the only picture the Bible portrays and what the West sees in the Bible is influenced by its development as an imperial power'.[471]

As noted earlier, contemporary Northeast India has witnessed drastic changes in land tenure system. When the British arrived, a subsistence economy was prevalent within most hill areas in the Northeast region, including Mizoram. A market economy alien to their way of life encountered the tribal economy. Following Independence, the tensions between these two economic models became even more pronounced. The result was that the egalitarian social values of Mizo society gradually gave way to a stratified structure where land emerged as the most precious possession. As a result, there developed the hitherto unknown process of land alienation on the one hand and land concentration on the other.

Though legislation was framed, and enacted by the government debarring non-tribal people from acquiring land in tribal areas, several non-tribals got land and property in their spouses' name when they married tribal girls. Moreover, no law was enacted to prevent the concentration of land in the hands of the emerging local elite. This aggravated rural poverty by pushing an increasingly large section of the small and marginal farmers into the status of

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[470] Lalchawiliana, 'Theology of Land', 62-63.
[471] Kim, *Decolonizing Josiah*, 102.

landless peasant and landless agricultural labourers. Thus privatization of land led to

alienation of land, uneven distribution of resources among individual households,

encroachment of community land, and the perpetuation of existing disparities of wealth.[472]

Prasad describes such a perception of the situation when he writes:

> This process of privatization, not a dominant trend in such a traditional society until recently, has now taken firm root in every domain of economic life. The Mizo people that were able to maintain their original egalitarian ethos in their socio-economic structure where inequality and exploitation were unknown and village solidarity provided strong ties of harmony, are now differentiated not only in terms of power and prestige but also in terms of wealth and income. Thus, the bad effects of capitalist money economy are pronouncedly evident in different spheres on Mizoram today which has helped a concentration of wealth at the top (a few sections of the society and poverty at the bottom of social hierarchy) large segment of the society.[473]

The process of modernization in Northeast India, or indeed, any other part of India

cannot be treated independently of the country's national modernization strategy. This is

based on the capitalist path of modernization within a market economy framework. The

nature of this modernization strategy sets, as Prasad put it, 'parameters for the modernising

effort in any federating unit or part of the country, including Mizoram'.[474] Thus

modernization along capitalist lines and the market economy created a new class of elite who

could control economic and political power, as well as an accelerating polarisation between

the emerging rich and an increasingly poor rural population.

As noted earlier, the tribal people in the Northeast India are also a close-knit

homogenous society with no class stratification. The tribal people have a moral code which

guides their thought and actions at all times. For example, the Mizo word *Tlawmngaihna*

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[472] Prasad, 'Modernisation ', 167.
[473] Prasad, 'Modernisation ', 167-168.
[474] Prasad, 'Modernisation ', 164.

represents the Mizo's code of morals and characters, implying that every Mizo should be

hospitable, kind, unselfish and helpful to others. As *Tlawmngaihna* is the life of Mizos, every

Mizo tries to show the finest character in terms of activities and actions.[475]A Mizo tries his

best to be undefeated in the discharge of any social duty and demand. As Thanzauva rightly

comments, 'If love is the essence of the Gospel teaching, *Tlawmngaihna* is the hidden gospel

written in the hearts of the tribal Christian values even before they embraced Christianity'.[476]

Present Mizo society, however, reveals the decay of *Tlawmngaihna* and the loosening of

social bonds due to modernization and money economy. This manifests itself, for example, in

the practice of lending money at high rates of interest and various sorts of corruptions and

exploitations. As Lalrinawma observes:

> The emergence of capitalist money-oriented economy with class distinctions,
> social injustice and other social evils undermines the wholesomeness of the
> individual and social character and inter-personal relationship in society as
> well as in religious life. It has brought decline in the tribal communitarianism.
> Growing economic disparities have destroyed much of the once
> communitarian Mizo society and brought about a spirit of individualism. This
> has created the gulf between the rich and the poor.[477]

It could also be argued that modern education introduced into tribal areas including

Mizoram has tended to divorce the people from traditional society, causing great damage to

the dignity of labour. In fact, the 'dignity of labour which is a trait of the Mizo society, has

been gradually weaning away from tradition needed for sustainable development mainly

owing to the feudal oriented changing outlook of the local people'.[478]A noted tribal columnist

and freelance writer, Patricia Mukhim comments thus:

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[475] Malsawma, *Sociology of the Mizos*, 63.
[476] Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 128.
[477] Lalrinawma, *Mizo Ethos*, 338.
[478] Prasad, 'Modernisation of the Mizo Society', 170.

Today more than ever before the North East is a complex and confused situation. Tribal society is itself passing through a period of transition and a cataclysmic upheaval. From a primitive society that used to subsist on shifting cultivation, the North East has been catapulted to accept and grapple with modern ideas, technologies and ways of life...The rapid westernization that is taking place threatens to destroy time-tested values and there is a move by a more conservative class to sensitize the younger generation that they are slowly but surely losing their roots and their claim to be an indigenous tribe.[479]

Tribal theologian Ahoa Vashum observes, 'we have accepted that the process of modernization and detribalization is irreversible in the hill regions of Northeast India, for which the British administration, Christianity and the process of modernization are identified as the primary cause'.[480] Commenting on westernization as destructive to tribal culture, the well-known Mizo theologian Lalsawma succinctly remarks, 'the problem is [so] serious that it shakes the foundation of the tribal society as it alienates tribals from their culture'.[481] In this context, the contextual hermeneutics of postcolonialism has the potential to help tribal people in Northeast India respond to colonialism by 'recovering, reasserting, and reincribing identities, cultures, and traditions that colonial Christianity had marginalized, erased, suppressed, or pronounced 'idolatrous'.[482]

From the foregoing discussion it is evident that the impact of modernization, and particularly Christianity, has been great and extensive; indeed Christianity has become dominant in the political, economic and cultural life of the people. However, it has been suggested that Christianity serves as an agent for alienating tribals from their traditional values and practices. Due to the influence of modernization coupled with Christianity and

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[479] Mukhim, 'Christian Impact on North East India and National Integration', in J.Puthenpurakal (ed.), *Impact of Christianity on North East India* (Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, 1996): 61.

[480] Ahao Vashum, 'Emerging Vision of Indigenous/Tribal Theology', in James Massey (ed.), *Dalit/Tribal Interface: Current Trends in Subaltern Theologies* (New Delhi: Centre for Subaltern Studies, Sah-Shakti Sadan, 2007): 22.

[481] Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 50.

[482] Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse Postcolonialism*, 16.

modern education, the Mizo lost faith in their own culture and traditional values. This created

a vacuum in Mizo society leading to a mad rush for the imitation of western life and a

deepening identity crisis. In a colonial context, reaffirming of a tribal culture and identity of

colonised people is therefore vitally important as a framework of resistance.[483]

3. Dominant attitude towards Tribal People and Impact of Sanskritization

In this section I will discuss dominant attitudes toward tribal peoples and issues

related to sankritization. I will also discuss the tribal response to these issues and problems in

the form of revolutionary movements. As noted earlier, India has a large tribal population.

The tribal people in India are diverse not only in terms of culture, language and ethnicity but

also in terms of socio-economic development. The tribal population in India constitutes 8. 6

percent of the whole population in India and is considered to be the largest such grouping in

the world.[484]

During colonial rule, the term 'tribal' underwent certain changes in connotation.

Imperialist anthropologists drew a distinction between tribal societies and modernity which

characterised tribal societies in terms of 'primitiveness', backwardness', ' inferiority',[485] lack

of civilization and illiteracy.[486] This term, which had been used by European imperialists, was

then adopted by the Indian Government and mainstream Indian society and imposed upon

these communities. As such, there is a heavy burden of alienation, loss of self-esteem and

confidence for the people living under the 'umbrella' of this term; this is in spite of the fact

that the Government has safeguarded their interest and existence by providing them special

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[483] Standford, *Jesus and the Poor*, 215-216.
[484] *Adivasi* en.wikepedia.org/wki/Adivasi, accessed on 20 August 2011.
[485] Vanlalchhuanawma, 'Keynote Address', 12.
[486] Vanlalnghaka, 'Critical Re-Look at Tribal Heritage', 261.

protections and provisions.[487] Wati Longchar, in protest against such imperial hegemony remarks:

> Thus, even in the realm of religion and culture, the tribal religion and culture are looked down upon. Anything that does not conform to the western worldview is ''devilish,'' ''irrational,'' ''inferior,'' ''backward,'' ''primitive,'' and so forth.[488]

Colonial attitudes have been maintained by dominant people in modern India and this perpetuates discrimination against the tribals. Thus, the dominant attitude towards tribal people in India has been overwhelmingly negative. As discussed in the second chapter, tribals are classified at the bottom of social structure in the caste system of the Indian society. They have been called by various contemptuous names, such as *Vanyajati* (caste of the forest), *Vanvasi* (inhabitant of the forest), *Adivasi* (first settlers), *Pahari* (hill dwellers), *Adimjati* (primitive people), *Janjati* (folk people) and *Anusuchit* (scheduled tribes). [489] In the eyes of the dominant communities of India, tribals are outcaste and alienated people. They are looked down upon and treated as aliens and foreigners in their own country.

The pejorative term 'tribal' carries a denotation of primitiveness and inferiority for the people to whom the name is applied. As noted before, the Constitution of India also categorically equates them with the Scheduled Castes. Lalsangkima thus remarks:

> Consciously or unconsciously, the "tribals" are reduced to the lowest level of the socio-ritual hierarchy of the Indic cultural system. For the simple reason that they are non-Indic and remain outside the traditional Hindu Varna, they

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[487] Vanlalnghaka, 'Critical Re-Look at Tribal Heritage', 261.
[488] Longchar, *The Traditional Tribal Worldview*, 9.
[489] Thanzauva, (ed.), 'Introduction', *Towards A Tribal Theology: The Mizo Perspective* (Aizawl: Mizoram Theological Conference, 1989), 1.

are placed alongside the "outcastes" of the Hindu caste system. Such a detrimental categorization is not acceptable to the proud Northeast "tribes".[490]

Though the hill tribes of Northeast India have always been quite different in many ways from their counterparts in the plains of Central India, this attitude is also acutely felt in the case of the tribal people in Northeast India.

In addition, there has been a tendency towards the 'sanskritization' of tribal people present in the tribal areas of India. This is a term propounded by the Indian sociologist M.N.Srinivas.[491] Sanskritization is a 'process by which tribal people were drawn into Hindu society and culture rooted in ancient philosophies and culture and religious expression'.[492] To put it differently, it is 'a process of imposition of Sanskrit oriented language, literature, and [culture] as well as of religious conversion to Brahmanic Hinduism'.[493] Ironically, it breeds the notion of conceiving Hindus with their caste- system as the only authentic Indian citizens. The tribal people in India have been sanskritized both religiously and culturally by the dominant culture [494] and the tribals were drawn to absorb them uncritically. Even for Northeast India, sanskritization has become a potential threat to the socio-cultural and religious lives of the people. Most tribal people in the plain areas in Northeast India who used to have their own distinct identities, culture and language have now been sanskritized. Thanzauva rightly observes:

> At some time in history, the various tribes of Bodo group Tibeto Burman family, such as Boro, Kachari, Chutyas, Dimasa, Karbi, Lalungs, Mechs,

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[490] Lalsangkima, 'Tribal Identity ', 8.
[491] Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 30. His other work 'A Note on Sanskritization and Westernization', *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, 15/ 4 (Aug., 1956): 481-496. He used the term in preference to Brahminization.
[492] Karotemprel, 'The Impact of Christianity ', 20.
[493] Vanlalchhuanawma, ' Keynote Address', 8.
[494] Lalpekhlua, *Contextual Christology*, 48.

Misings, Tippera (Tripuris), Garo, Kochs, Hajongs, Dalus, Rabbas and others in the plains of Assam, all spoke their own dialects, and maintained their own independent cultural and territorial identity. They practised tribal religions, which are vaguely and perhaps superficially called animism. Today the sanskritized tribals in the plain area have, in some cases forgotten their own cultures and languages. The process of sanskritization was carried out in Assam, Manipur and Tripura under royal patronage. Later on, in the plains of Assam, Hindu priests and immigrants mostly did it.[495]

As a consequence of sanskritization, several groups of tribal people in Northeast India lost their identity and culture and also adopted the Hindu caste system. As a result, they were reduced to lower social conditions, though a few people may climb the social ladder higher than their unconverted fellow tribals after embracing Hinduism. Some claim that this process of 'sanskritization' is less pronounced among the hills tribes in Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh due to their being geographically isolated from the larger Hindu population[496] and the rapid Christianisation of some tribes- like the Mizos, the Khasi-Garo, and the Nagas.[497] Downs believed that the plains people's fear of the fierce tribes, as well as the remoteness of their villages, had prevented significant penetration of sanskritic culture into the hill area of the tribal people.[498] However, the reality is that until recently the process of sanskritization continued in the hill areas of Northeast India using a very subtle approach that included establishing schools and hospitals.[499]

The tribal historian Vanlalchhuanawma observes that imperial rule of both British India and 'indic' Indians had earlier perverted the entire selfhood of the tribals in India. He asserts:

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[495] Thanzuava, *Theology of Community*, 14.
[496] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 64.
[497] Karotemprel, 'The Impact of Christianity ', 20.
[498] Downs, *History of Christianity*, 3.
[499] See the details inV.S. Lalrinawma, *The Work of Ramakrishna Mission in Meghalaya* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2012).

One could perceive that Northeast Indian tribals most probably suffered the greatest blow of such perversion of selfhood. A post Independence era witnessed the reversal of self-consciousness which resulted in frustration, displeasure and superior consciousness. A new sense of selfhood led to struggles for liberation and even for sovereignty even to the extent of taking violence and armed struggle.[500]

The fundamental problem that sanskritization brings to the tribal community to be the creation of conflicting ideological values and a hierarchical structure- it tends to segregate the tribal community into different castes and subsequently relegates them to the low-caste Hindus. It is highly likely that Sanskritization did much to distort the identity, land holdings and geographical boundaries of tribal people in Northeast India, undermining their aspiration and thereby creating a sense of insecurity, confusion and identity crisis. As a result, the tribal people responded by armed revolt.

In the post-independence period, there have been two significant major incidents in Northeast India that deserve special mention. One was famine and the other was an armed insurgency. It could be argued that armed revolt erupted largely due to the government failure to address tribal peoples' problems and aspirations. The tribal people were discontented and they developed a sense of mistrust and suspicion towards the dominant communities and their government.[501] This was compounded by the effort to bring the hills people within the main stream of national life, stirring up fears and, in some cases, hostility.[502] Tribal people also had some apprehension of losing their land and identity; this factor also contributed to their taking up arms in a struggle for sovereignty. The first movement of this kind in Northeast India started with the formation of the Naga National Council (NNC) in the early 1950's in

[500] Vanlalchhuanawma, 'Keynote Address', 8.
[501] Lalpekhlua, *Contextual Christology*, 59.
[502] Downs, *History of Christianity*, 26-27.

Nagaland. This was followed by the formation of the Mizo National Front (MNF) in Mizoram in 1961.[503] More recently, violent separatist movements have appeared among other states including Manipur and Assam.

In response to armed revolt, the army unleashed irresponsible action towards ordinary people.[504] This led to untold sufferings among innocent civilians coupled with gross violations of human rights and civil liberties across the district for over twenty years. Another repressive measure or counter-insurgency strategy adopted by the army in the Mizo and Naga Hills was the forceful grouping of villages.[505] Many villages would be forcibly grouped into one new settlement. These new settlements were no longer economically viable as the

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[503] A large number of movements erupted. To mention a few, these included: The Tribal National Volunteer (TNV), Tripura National Liberation Front (TNLF), All Tripura Tribal Forces (ATTF), and Tripura National Army(TNA) in Tripura; United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and Boro Security Force (BrSF) in Assam; the People's Liberation Army (PLA), People's Liberation Army of Kanglai Pak (PLAKP) and Kuki National Army in Manipur. In the case of Mizoram, it was economic deprivation and government failure to respond to the problems that led to the revolutionary movement. The government of Assam did not pay sufficient attention to the famine problem of Mizoram in 1959, the then one of the districts of Assam with a result that a new organisation called the Mizo Cultural Society was formed in the same year, but it could not effectively help the famine-stricken people. As result, the Mizo National Famine Front was formed to organise the famine relief work among the people and took the credit for fighting the famine and helping the suffering people.
During this period the Mizo Union leaders, the first political party in Mizoram, became increasingly unhappy with the government of Assam. They realised that the government neither paid as much attention nor attached as much importance to the District council as they had hoped. In the meantime, the Mizo National Famine Front was converted into Mizo National Front (MNF) on 22 October 1961 under the leadership of Laldenga with the objectives of attaining independence and sovereignty for greater Mizoram. The MNF party emphasized not only the separate identity of the Mizo and the alleged suppression of Christianity by the Indian state, but also the sufferings of the Mizo people during the famine. On 1 March 1966 the Mizo National Front (MNF) declared independence, overran the treasury office and the Assam rifle camp. In response, on 2 March 1966, the Assam Government declared the Mizo Hill District a 'disturbed Area' under the Assam Disturbed Area Act 1955 and the Armed Forces were granted Special Powers Act 1958. The Special Power Act was later to be identified as the 'Draconian Laws' of the Northeast India. Many properties including houses and granaries were burnt down, church buildings were occupied by the armed forces and many women were raped. Several ordinary people on suspicion suffered all kinds of tortures, and many lost their lives. The people in Mizoram felt deprived and became victims of fear and prone to psychosis. See the details in J.V.Hluna, *Church & Political Upheaval in Mizoram: A Study of Impact of Christianity on the Political Development in Mizoram* (Aizawl: Mizo History Association, 1985). Lalsangkima Pachuau, *Ethnic Identity and Christianity* (New York/ Oxford: Peter Lang, 1998).
[504] Lalrinawma, *Mizo Ethos*, 335.
[505] Lalrinawma, *Mizo Ethos*, 335.

existing limited land could no longer sustain the villagers. The economic hardship was so great that near famine was a common phenomenon in grouping centres. [506]

Disrupting the economic pattern in this way had far reaching consequences and shook the very basis of Mizo society. Coupled with sanskritization, dominant attitudes led to a profound crisis of Mizo identity that manifested itself in armed revolt.

4. Impact of Globalization on Tribal People.

A new and serious problem in tribal economic and cultural development is the adverse effect of globalization. Globalization is not a recent phenomenon. Even though the historical process of globalization can be traced back to colonisation, the current manifestation of this process is found in corporate globalization. The pace of globalization has accelerated in the past three decades so much that even the most remote parts of the globe, Northeast India included, have felt its impact sharply. Globalization may be defined as 'the integration of all the countries into a single economic entity through modern technology and international communication system'.[507]

In this rapidly changing scenario, India reviewed its economic policy which had socialism at its core and decided to change it in tune with other Asian countries. The new economic policy was introduced in 1991 and become effective from 1994.[508] The thrust of the new economic policy has been around liberalisation and privatisation; these were deemed necessary in order to create a more competitive environment to improve economic

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[506] Lalrinawma, *Mizo Ethos*, 335.
[507] Thanzauva, *Transforming Theology*, 111.
[508] Thanzauva, *Transforming Theology*, 113.

productivity and efficiency of the system. Many public services have been privatised so as to accelerate the economic growth.

Among the various sections of Indian society, tribal people are among the most un-prepared group for globalization. Globalization requires free movement of capital and labour and there is no protection from the intervention of powerful corporations. Therefore, the tribal people have become the most vulnerable people. The present form of globalization has had an unprecedented impact on the lives of tribal people in Northeast India; this has been particularly marked by the shaking of the traditional cultural values.[509] As Thanzauva observes:

> Most of the tribals who are outside the ''global free market'' do not even know the claims of the proponents and the defenders of globalization. They do not [seem] aware of what is happening in the global and Indian economies. But they have been suffering from displacement, alienation, drug addiction, exploitation, oppression, and the problem of consumerism as a result of globalization. Most of them will not be conscious that these are, to a certain degree, the result of globalization.[510]

The promise that the 'global free market' will lead to the trickling down of wealth and resources to poorer people has not occurred so far. Rather, it has divided tribal society more sharply than ever before. Even in Northeast India the richest twenty percent of entire population possess eighty percent of the resources while the remaining eighty percent of the population possess only twenty percent of the resources. Virtually all the development fund from Central government goes to the cities and towns, while the rural areas are largely

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[509] Vanlalnghaka Ralte, 'Impact of Globalization on Culture in North East India', *Mizoram Theological Journal*, VI/1(Jan-June 2006): 8.
[510] Thanzauva, *Transforming Theology*, 114.

unreached. Political and economic policies have been virtually dictated by small elite who have much to gain from globalization.[511]

The problem of consumerism is not confined to tribal people alone but is a common problem associated with globalization all over the world.[512] Over the last century, the hill tribes in Northeast India have been experiencing tremendous change in the socio-economic and religio-cultural sphere. The change in the last century was radical; in the new century people are facing globalization. It may be that the 'free market economy' is too much for tribal people to cope with. A consumerist culture has been created by the powerful forces of advertisement through mass media and new brands of foreign goods from transnational companies are available in plenty in Northeast Indian cities like Guwahati, Aizawl, Imphal, Dimapur, Shillong and Agartala and sold them at high prices.[513] A consumerist life style is becoming a way of life and affecting tribal people with low income adversely.

It is evident that the leading ideologies of globalization are no longer providing a solution. Indeed, the reverse is true to a great extent for tribal people in Northeast India and they are facing mass-poverty and socio-cultural disintegration. Industrialisation and globalization processes in Northeast India manifested itself in rapid deforestation. As globalization cannot be limited to economics alone, it would certainly entail effects on culture, politics and social life. It could be argued that the spread of drug addiction and AIDS is also linked with globalization as these problems were not known to the tribal society three

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[511] Lalfakzuala, 'Reinforcing Human Right in North East India', in K.C Lalmalsawmzauva and Lalmalsawma Khiangte (eds.), *Human Security in North East India: Problems Responses and Strategies* (Guwahati: DVS Publishers, 2010): 88.

[512] The devastating effects of globalization could be seen in several countries such as Tunisia, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Haiti, Brazil, and other Latin America. See more detailed study in Mathew J.M.Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets Through Corporate Globalization: A Cultural-Evolutionary Approach to Economic Injustice in the Hebrew Bible* (Biblical Intersection, 4; Piscataway, NJ: Geogias Press, 2010).

[513] Vanlalnghaka, 'Impact of Globalization', 89.

to four decades ago. With the free market economy, many barriers and hurdles in the industrial and marketing sector have been removed. This has led to a problems associated with abusive substances, which arrived along with the import of other foreign goods mainly from Myanmar (Burma). Alongside globalization of the economy, the tribal society is increasingly exposed to Western values; as such it is becoming increasingly permissive. Coupled with a lack of public consciousness on social problems, this has created fertile ground for the spread of both abusive substances as well as HIV/AIDS.[514] The pandemic of HIV/AIDS has affected Northeast States seriously.

The impact of globalization has changed the spirit of Mizo moral code *Tlawmngaihna* and the principle of *Sem Sem Dam Dam, Ei Bil Thi Thi* (Share and live, eat greedily and die) in a drastic way. The real spirit is diminishing because the forces of globalization are guided by the principle of economic profit which contradicts the tribal communitarian philosophy of *tlawmngaihna*. As a result, tribal people are struggling to cope with the forces of globalization. This is creating an identity crisis that is shaking the very foundation of tribal community. In this context, the contextual hermeneutics of postcolonialism has the potential to help tribal people in Northeast India respond to neo-colonialism like Sanskritization and globalization by reasserting and reaffirming of tribal culture and identity as a framework of resistance.

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[514] The number of persons living with HIV/AIDS is increasingly alarming in Northeast India. In Mizoram alone, the numbers of persons living with HIV/AIDS is more than ten thousands by 2015. The states of Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur are the highest three prevalent states among the Indian states. See, Vanglaini, Mizo Daily News, (July 8, 2015):3. See also Thanzauva, *Transforming Theology*, 118.

5. Economic Problems and New Land Use Policy in Mizoram

In this section I will discuss and evaluate the various government policies relating to economic development because these are intimately linked with the land tenure system in Mizoram. The economic vulnerability maybe rightly identified as one of the primary reasons of the tribal problems in India. In looking at tribal history, economic deprivation appears to have been a major contributing factor to tribal movements, particularly armed revolt. Or to put it differently, economic deprivation has fuelled insurgency in the Northeast India tribal areas.

The traditional agricultural system's failure to meet the increasing needs for food stuffs among the people is the primary reason for the economic dependency. Jhuming or shifting cultivation is the traditional agricultural system practised by most of the hill areas in Northeast India. It has been 'the backbone of the tribal economy throughout their histories, songs and dance, time and religion are related to their jhum'.[515] Every year each family selects a plot to cultivate, moving on in the next year to another area of the jungle. It could be argued that the productivity of land in tribal areas in Northeast India is deteriorating as a result of the cycle of jhuming. Lianzela, one of the tribal economists, claims: 'Shifting cultivation with all its attendant evils,[is] gradually destroying the forest cover and consequently the biomass in the ecosystem bringing an ecological imbalance. All this has affected the land fertility and life support system adversely'.[516] Meanwhile, the tribal theologian Wati Longchar[517] argues that industrialisation and the commercialisation of forestry have been more harmful than shifting cultivation. While shifting cultivation still

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[515] Thanzauva, *Transforming Theology*, 108.
[516] Lianzela, *Economic Development of Mizoram* , 112.
[517] Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions*, 165-170.

persists as a dominant method of cultivation in Mizoram, the number of families depending on jhuming has reduced in recent years. Approximately seventy percent of the population depended on jhuming in 1986 but by 2011 this figure had been reduced to sixty percent.[518]

As indicated before, the economic condition of Mizoram is far from satisfactory, with insufficient improvement in agricultural productivity levels. It is often considered that the traditional Mizo method of cultivation is not an environmental-friendly approach as large areas of forest areas are destroyed every year; this renders them barren and infertile, and even prone to landslide. It is also an unproductive method with the farmer barely eking out a livelihood, daily eating from hand to mouth.[519] In view of insufficient food productivity and the poor condition of rural people, government policy has considered the traditional method of cultivation as wasteful and in need of improvement, if not replacement by the scientific methods of cultivation.

The government of Mizoram has had to set out some measures on self sufficiency in food stuffs in its state plan. As tribal economist Thangchungnunga observes, 'Initially, under the ministry of People's Conference Party (i.e. 1979-1984), the scheme or policy went by the name of ''Garden Colony'' with the objective of colonizing selected families in suitable farm lands for permanent agricultural occupation'. [520] But before this scheme had time to take any definite shape, a new administration under the Congress Party came into power from the beginning of 1984. The new government incorporated the Integrated Rural Development

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[518] His Excellency Governor of Mizoram Lt. General (Rtd) M.M. Lakhera Speech to the Seventh Session of the Sixth Assembly of Mizoram on 22nd March 2011, http://dipr.mizoram.gov.in/ assessed on 25 August, 2011.
[519] K.Zalawma, 'New Land Use Policy and Its Impact: A Theological Response', (BD Thesis, Senate of Serampore College, 2005), 15-16.
[520] Thangchungnunga, 'The Problem of Land Utilization and the Place of Land Resources in the Economic Life of the Mizo Society', (PhD Dissertation, Guwahati University, 1993), 49.

Programme into a comprehensive New Land Use Policy. This NLUP was introduced to do away with the traditional Mizo method of shifting cultivation. Under this programme, 6,086 families were assisted to raise plantations of teak, orange, rubber and other species on 11,410.3 hectares of land. The achievements of this short- lived programme were limited due to 'randomness in selection of beneficiaries, a lack of specific guidelines, and weak follow-up action in implementation'.[521]

In 1987 a new party, the Mizo National Front took over the ministry from the Congress. This government replaced the old NLUP with the centrally sponsored Jhum Control Project. The main objective of this project was 'to ensure rapid socio-economic development in harmony with ecological balance and improve the economic well-being and quality of life of the jhum cultivators'.[522] Under this project, 1936 families were assisted from 16 villages but the National Development Council decided to discontinue the Special Area Development Programme in eight states; the Jhum Control Project in Mizoram was one such discontinued project.

In 1989, the Congress came to power again and the NLUP was revived with major improvement over both the first attempt at farmed forestry as well as the Jhum Control Project. The main aim of this policy was 'to put an end to the unproductive and destructive traditional practice of shifting cultivation by providing alternative land-based permanent occupation and stable income for jhummia families in rural areas and thereby raise their

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[521] Lianzela, 'Implementation of New Land Policy in Mizoram', in R.N.Prasad and A.K.Agarwal (eds.), *Modernisation of Mizo Society* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2003): 145.
[522] Zalawma, 'New Land Use Policy', 19.

standard of living'.[523] Since the basic aim and objective of NLUP was to wind up shifting cultivation, the administration found it necessary to impose a ban on jhumming in the selected areas or blocks. It was thus attempting to provide alternative land-based permanent occupation for jhummia families in various trades.[524] However, the New Land Use Policy was not particularly successful, and fewer tangible results were achieved than expected. [525] Indeed, the policy had adverse impacts on the socio-economic, cultural and environment of the state in various ways.

Privatization of the communal land is the socio-economic impact of New Land Use Policy. After the introduction of the New Land Use Policy, the communal land ownership in the Mizo traditional society was automatically abolished with the distribution of common land to the beneficiary family for the purpose of permanent land-based occupation. In this way, communal land fell into the hands of individual families as their private possession. As Luaia Hranleh rightly observes, 'the more land that families hold for permanent cultivation under this scheme the more community land reduced'.[526] Many poor people could not

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[523] Government of Mizoram Project Report on New Land Use Policy (Aizawl: Department of Rural Development, 1993), 3. The followings were the aims and objective of the New Land Use Policy: 1) To put an end the practice of hill-side shifting cultivation. 2) To induce each jhummia family to take up an alternative permanent means of livelihood under either Agriculture or Industries or Animal Husbandry sector on land allotted for the purpose. 3) To take up wet rice cultivation in all the potential flat lands in order to promote self-sufficiency in food production. 4) To protect and afforestate the remaining land within the Block area other than those earmarked for NLUP programme. 5) To provide marketing outlet for producers from the NLUP programme.

[524] Thangchungnunga, 'The Problem of Land Utilization', 168-169.

[525] Zalawma, 'New Land Use Policy', 60. Among many others factors such as supply of sub-standard planting materials or seedlings of below standard size and quality, irrigation problem, supply of poor quality under the industrial sector, prevalence of diseases among the animals under Animal Husbandry and Veterinary sector, lack of technical knowledge and proper training /instructions their own trade, misuse of money on the part of beneficiaries and government agency. Due to inconsistence of financial assistance, many were compelled to fall back to their jhum land. Moreover, the poor performance in publicity, involvement of party politics in selection of blocks coverage, improper planning for the guidelines, inadequate project staff and so on and so forth were also responsible for the failure of the policy in the implementation.

[526] V.L Luaia Hranleh, 'An Ethical Appraisal of Economic Change in Mizoram 1972-1992', (M.Th Thesis, Senate of Serampore College, 1994), 71.

continue to implement the scheme when the assistance from government stopped. Consequently, poor people sold their lands to rich people at cheap rates, thus rendering themselves landless people. After the introduction of the New Land Use Policy, there was also an increase in number of landless labourers. This further widened the gap between the rich and the poor in Mizo society. The NLUP programmes of financial assistance transformed the Mizo community into a dependent community.[527] Additionally, it resulted in greater urbanisation and with this came further socio-economic ills.[528]

The NLUP has also affected the socio-cultural life of Mizo society. The New Land Use Policy made a huge amount of money available through government assistance; in making people depend on government, this has undermined the dignity of labour and the Mizo society's traditional emphasis on self-sufficiency. As Vanlalnunmawia rightly states:

> the culture of sharing and caring in the society is replaced by individualistic greed and growth oriented culture. Some of the dominant capitalists' principles have replaced the aged-old communitarian culture such as sharing and caring in Mizo community. Instead of common sharing and caring, individualism, acquisitiveness and personal gains have crept in.[529]

Moreover, it has been reported that some government employees have received the NLUP assistance. Besides, many families have misused the money by diverting it to purposes other than those for which it was given. It could therefore be argued that NLUP financial assistance has increased moral corruption among government personnel and beneficiary families.[530]

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[527]Vanlalnunmawia, 'Commercial Teak Plantation', 75. See also Zalawma, 'New Land Use Policy', 65.
[528] Zalawma, 'New Land Use Policy', 66.
[529] Vanlalnunmawia, 'Commercial Teak Plantation', 75.
[530] Zalawma, 'New Land Use Policy', 69-70. There were certain imbalances in the total amount of money sanctioned for the policy and the total amount of money received by beneficiaries. In Thingsultliah block the total amount sanctioned to all trades was calculated Rs.12,27,25,161/- but the total actual amount received by

As the New Land Use Policy was not successful, various people vehemently criticised the scheme. In 1998 the Mizo National Front returned to power and the New Land Use Policy was abandoned in 2001-2002. Instead, they tried to create sustainable development by harnessing local resources, generating income and employment among the rural poor. A task force was formed to study the causes of rural poverty and a scheme called 'Mizoram Intodelh Project' (Mizoram Self-Sufficiency Project) was prepared. This was started from 2002-2003, covering all 22 Rural Development Blocks but only in selected villages.[531] The scheme and its implementation were carried out along similar lines to the NLUP but with certain modifications. However this scheme ended with failure.[532]

The Congress Party came to power again in 2008 and reintroduced the NLUP for a period of ten years. The Indian Central Government set aside 2,416 crores (435 million US dollars) for the project. In the first five years of the project, the NLUP aims to support 120,000 families.[533] The scheme started in 2010 and is still ongoing. It is being implemented in line with the previous NLUP but with certain modifications. If the current NLUP were to fail, the economic condition of the state and the management of land would move from bad to worse.

Development policies which go against the tribal tradition continue to be pursued in Northeast India.[534] The introduction of New Land Use Policy in Mizoram on the basis of individualisation of communal land with a view to controlling shifting cultivation is a case in

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the beneficiaries was found Rs. 9,41,58,384/- only with the difference Rs. 2,85,66,777/-. And where the balance money was utilized was unknown.
[531] Zalawma, 'New Land Use Policy', 70.
[532] Zalawma, 'New Land Use Policy', 70.
[533] Kimi Leblhuber & Vanlalhruaia, 'Jhum Cultivation versus the New Land Use Policy', 86-87.
[534] Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions*, 162.

point.The introduction of an alien system of development, based on the ideology of modernization, is one of the factors responsible for the present identity crisis. It leads to privatization of communal land. This approach to development suits the emerging 'haves' of the tribal society at the cost of emerging 'have-nots'. It would appear that only contextually sensitive development methods that reflect mindset of the people may have potential to bring real change to the society.

6. Structure of the Traditional Mizo Family

Our final point in this survey of the tribal situation in Northeast India, and of Mizoram in particular, is the structure of the traditional tribal family and traditional land tenure system. Here we consider how the process of modernizing has affected the Mizo family and society, and the present land tenure system.

6.1 Changes in the Family structure

Having discussed the structure of traditional Mizo family in the first section, we will now examine how the structure of the Mizo family and family life have been changed by Christianity and modernization.

Even though the patriarchal system was retained with some rigidity the occupational pattern has been affected. Children of working age were sent into school and female education was also introduced after the arrival of the missionaries, causing drastic changes in Mizo families. People migrated from rural to urban areas for higher education and employment to improve their living conditions, creating enormous pressure on existing

amenities available in urban areas.[535] The authority and respect which parents enjoyed were also challenged by younger people and this affected family solidarity.

With the onset of modernization, women are also seen as more or less equal with men and are now taking an active part in the political and social life of Mizoram. In Northeast Indian society such as the Khasi, the viability of the matrilineal system in which lineage was traced through female descendants, has recently been challenged by males, particularly the youth, from within the community in terms of question of authority in a family. Even within the patriarchal structure, the role of the father as the head of the family has been confounded at times; in many cases the mother turns out to be the bread winner and key decision-maker.[536] In the wider secular sphere, there are already quite a good number of leading women officials who have become heads of departments and institutions. There are also some women who hold leaderships in politics and in voluntary organisations; this shows that changes are taking place, both within the family circle and at a wider societal level.[537]

As noted earlier, in the traditional Mizo family, the young people were working hard in jhum and every family tried their best to be self-sufficient. But modern education has tended to divorce education from traditional society; this has profoundly affected the family and village economy with almost all school-age children now sent to schools and colleges. As a result, many young people are now frowning upon the prospect of working in the field; the dignity of labour, which is a trait of Mizo society, has gradually become looked down

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[535] A.K.Agarwal, 'Development in Mizoram-Issues and Perspective,'in R.N.Prasad and A.K.Agarwal (eds.), *Modernisation of the Mizo Society* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2003): 104.
[536] Vanlalnghaka, 'Critical Re-Look at the Tribal Heritage', 263.
[537] Vanlalnghaka, 'Critical Re-Look at the Tribal Heritage', 263.

upon.[538] The result is that the once economically self-sufficient people have had to seek help from outside for the supply of essential commodities. Since the family is no longer self-sufficient, the entire society also suffers.

Every Mizo family was very close to the rest of the community in the traditional Mizo society and still remains so. Each family was viewed as part of the whole community and the family was a part of sub-system of the larger social system. All the members of different families worked together, united together for the welfare of the community. They helped each other in building the house and in the jhumming operation as well.[539]

The relationship between family and whole village is evident in the sacrificial system. As *Sa* was worshipped by family and clan, the worship of *Khua* was a public affair for the whole village. A mithun was sacrificed and the entire community took part in the fellowship.[540] Each family was entitled to participate in the worship of *Khua*. In traditional tribal society, people worked together in fields, celebrated festivals together, and sang and danced together in the open as a community. They faced life with song and dance in times of joy and sorrow. A person's existence was possible only in relation his/her community.[541] However, as already indicated, due to modernization, the social solidarity of the body politics of the village has been badly affected. Family, clan and villages bonds have been loosened significantly. Social control which was the main principle for regulating the village's life is now less effective; people are tending to become more individualistic and self-centred.

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[538] Malsawma, *Sociology of the Mizo*, 179-180; Lalrinawma, *Mizo Ethos*, 315-323.
[539] Lalrinawmi, 'A Feminist Critique of Land', 227.
[540] Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 113.
[541] Lalrinawmi, 'A Feminist Critique of Land', 227.

7. Land Tenure System in the Present Day

As indicated in the foregoing discussion, even during the time of the village chiefs, village building, distribution of land, and selection of land for the community were all planned carefully. The pattern of cultivation, selection and distribution of land were all planned in an orderly manner and every family enjoyed equal rights in using the community land. Even after the British occupation, authority over the land was not divested but some sort of break from traditional ownership of land was introduced. However, after the independence of India, in 1954 under 'The Assam Lushai Hills District (acquisition of Chief's Rights) Act, 1954 (Assam Act XXI of 1954), the authority of the chief was abolished, and the land came under the authority of the District Council.[542] The District Council introduced a Land Patta System or Land settlement Certificate (LSC) which have given rise to buying and selling on a large scale in urban areas.[543] Under the District Council, Agricultural Land Patta was also introduced even in the village areas. Land which belonged to the community under the stewardship of the chief has now become private property, causing many portions of arable land to fall into the hands of a few private individuals. When Mizoram became a Union Territory in 1972, and finally a state in 1987, land came under the authority of state. The state

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[542] Under the paragraph of the Sixth Scheduled to the Constitution, District Council has power to make laws with respect to allotment, occupation or use or setting apart of land for the purpose of agriculture, grazing, residence or other non- agricultural matters. In exercise of this power both the Mizo District Council and Pawi-Lakher Regional Council passed a number of legislations in respect of land, such as: 1) The Mizo District (House Sites) Act, 1953; 2) The Mizo District (Revenue Assessment) Regulation 1953; 3) Lushai Hills District (Jhuming) Regulation, 1954; 4) Mizoram (Forest) Act, 1955; 5) The Mizo District (Land and Revenue) Act 1956; 6) Mizo District (Agriculture Land) Act 1963; 7)The Mizo District (Transfer of Land) Act 1963; 8)Mizo District (Agriculture Land) Rules 1971; 9) Mizo Urban Areas Rent Control Acts, 1974; 10) Mizoram (Taxes on land, Building and Assessment of Revenue) Act, 2004; 11) Mizoram (Taxes on Land, Building and Assessment of Revenue) Act 2005. See more details in Zoparliani Khiangte, *Mizoram Land Laws* (Aizawl: Lois Bet, 2009); It seems that due to lack of concern on implementation; many rules are not effective as it ought to be. It is also possible that these rules are too alien among the Mizos who had practised traditional common ownership of land and hence could not be applied in their original form.
[543] Rolianthanga, 'Land Reforms Tulna', 16.

authority turned out to be an effective instrument for the accumulation of land in the hands of private individuals and land marketing considerably increased.[544]

With the coming of modern development, the traditional land tenure system could not remain as it was; rather the interconnectedness between land and people has been affected adversely. Due to the increasing market for teak, coffee, oranges and other fruits and vegetables, the emerging new elite class has begun to acquire the best plots of land within the city area of Aizawl as well as in the villages' areas. Moreover, the government acquires land every year and spends a huge sum of money on compensation. This has led to speculative land holding. Many of the private lands are neither used as sources of production nor are they looked after properly. This tendency is a hindrance to those who want to till the land; it is therefore unproductive and untenable. Moreover, land has become commercialized as a commodity to be sold and brought, exploited and misused; this has caused a widening gap between the rich and the poor.[545]As reported by Upadhyaya and Jha in 1996, there is now no community ownership of land in Mizoram. The land now belongs to the government which has instituted four new sorts of tenancy: Land Settlement Certificate, Periodical Land Pass, Land Lease and Revenue Pass. [546]

1) Permanent Settlement Certificates are issued to individuals for wet rice cultivation or horticulture. The area of allotment is restricted to 4 hectares to the individual.

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[544] R.Lalbiakmawia, 'Land Reforms Kalpui Dan tur', *Seminar on Land Reforms* (Aizawl: Mizoram Presbyterian Church, Synod Social Front, 2006): 28.
[545] Lalchawiliana, 'Theology of Land', 15.
[546] Agarwal, 'Development in Mizoram: Issues and Perspective', 104-105.

2) Periodical Land Pass is issued to individuals for the purpose of gardening and other forms of cultivations for a period of five years at a time which can be renewed if the land has been utilised for the purpose applied for.

3) Land lease Pass is issued to government departments, organisations or corporate bodies. It is temporary in nature and for specific purposes only.

4) Revenue Pass is issued to individuals for a temporary house site and is valid for two years. If the government is satisfied that it is put to the use applied for, it may be converted into Land Settlement Certificates.

It may be noted here that the task of allotment of village land, which is treated as community land for cultivation purpose only, is administered by the Village Councils of the respective villages.[547]

It can be seen that the alienation of tribal land is an almost universal phenomenon. Enormous problems associated with the alienation of tribal land and the land conflicts have developed in many countries.[548] This is fundamentally due to the different concepts of land between tribals and non-tribals. While tribals regard land as part of their lives, non-tribals treated land as a property to be used and judge its value from utility.[549] Unfortunately the utilitarian concept has become dominant so the tribal is bound to become the victim of land alienation. The hill tribes in Northeast India including the Mizo community are facing the huge problem of alienation of simple villagers from their traditional land as a result of the

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[547] Agarwal, 'Development in Mizoram', 105.
[548] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets,* 179-226.
[549] Lalchawiliana, 'Theology of Land', 62-63.

process of privatisation of land.[550] The land which was owned by the community and was

entitled to be used by all the members of the community is now in the hands of rich and

powerful people. The land which was never sold or bought has now been commercialized and

treated as a commodity. R.N.Prasad is right when he observes:

> A number of land legislations and other protective land regulations
> enacted/framed by the state government debar the non-tribesmen from owning
> landed property in the state, no doubt, but these have also generated a process
> of progressive concentration of landed property in the hands of the emerging
> local middle class or a small group of well-off-natives and tended to aggravate
> the situation of rural poverty by pushing an increasingly larger section of the
> small and marginal farmers to the status of landless peasants, landless
> agricultural labourers and share croppers. Thus the privatization of land and
> changing property relations lead to the growth of unknown phenomenon like
> land alienation by the well-off-natives, uneven distribution of land among the
> individual households, absentee-landlordism, intermediary rights, realisation
> of rent from the land, money- lending, encroachment of community land,
> exploitive groups based on antagonistic relationships of production, land
> mortgage, and perpetuation of the existing disparities of wealth.[551]

In a similar vein, tribal economist Thangchungnunga also notes the problem of

increasing land concentration in the hands of rich people in Mizoram. He then asserts:

> The emergence of part-time farming among the salaried people and the
> businessmen has led to extensive land speculation. Most of the fertile and the
> flat lands have been either bought or possessed by the elite class, who have
> better access to government. Villages within the easy reach of the urban elites
> now faced a serious land shortage because of the rapid encroachment of
> private holdings...This changing pattern of land-ownership has deprived the
> rural community from their only productive resources in some parts of the
> state. If this trend is allowed to continue unabated, the land resources will be
> owned by the few and peasants may be reduced to tenancy or marginal
> cultivators. A good deal of them may be forced to give up their tie to the soil
> as they are bound to lose opportunity of free access to cultivable land.[552]

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[550] Rolianthanga, 'Land Reforms Tulna', 16. Lalbiakmawia, 'Land Reforms kalpui dan tur', 34.
[551] Prasad, 'Modernisation of the Mizo Society', 167.
[552] Thangchungnunga, 'Agrarian Change and Social Transformation among the Mizos', in R.N.Prasad and A.K.Agarwal (eds.), *Modernisation of the Mizo Society: Imperative and Perspective* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2003): 142.

As indicated earlier the problem of Northeast Indian tribal society is the shift from community to individual ownership which deprives the poor of their land rights. The poor and marginalised people have been alienated from their traditional land due to an escalation in the privatization of land over the last three to four decades. Unless this process is checked, many people could be reduced to landless labourers as in other parts of India.[553]

D. Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion it is evident that forces of modernization, westernization and globalization, coupled with dominant attitudes associated with sanskritization have touched every part of Mizo family and society. Christianity, while being one of the agents of modernization, has also provided a means of preserving tribal identities and promoting their interests in the event of perceived threats from outside. However, due to the influence of westernization coupled with Christianity and modern education, the Mizo have lost faith in their own culture, and this has created a vacuum in Mizo society. In this way, Christianity could be seen as a contributing factor to tribal people's alienation from their traditional values and practices.

It is also apparent that a land owning class has come into being in the state with the onset of modernization. The process of privatization and commercialisation of land, previously unknown in traditional tribal society has now taken firm root in every domain of economic life. The Mizo people, previously characterised by egalitarian values, village

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[553] The fundamental problem is that there is no proper Land Ceiling Act in Mizoram till the present day. Meanwhile rich people are also interested in acquiring land for speculative land holding. In the midst of all problems it was proposed to introduce a Land Ceiling Act in order to stop accumulation of land at the hands of few rich people. The Church particularly the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram knowing the urgency and imperative of introducing land reform in Mizo society has put forwarded the issue of land reform to the government.

solidarity and the virtual absence of inequality and exploitation are now differentiated between the haves and the haves-not. Many poor people have been alienated from the traditional land. As the traditional Mizo community land holding pattern was destroyed and replaced by a permanent 'patta system', vast areas of rural lands have been accumulated by a few elite people. Land has been commercialised and privatised to the deprivation of the majority of rural people. As we will go on to see in chapter five, this may be comparable to the peasants' situation in Israel and Judah during eighth century BCE (Mic. 2:1-2; Isa.5:8-10). A rediscovery of the traditional tribal concept of land, synthesized with the biblical concept of land, will throw a new light to the post-colonial world. This, it is hoped, will enlighten people to evaluate and critically analyse existing patterns of land usage in tribal areas.

CHAPTER 5

LAND OWNERSHIP ABUSE IN MICAH 2:1-2 AND ISAIAH 5:8-10
A NEW PERSPECTIVE

A. Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapter, we will now turn to the passages Micah 2:1-2 and Isaiah 5:8-10 that address the problem of land ownership abuse in Israel and Judah during the eighth century BCE. In the first section we shall give a brief survey of various commentators' views on the given passages. In the second section, an attempt will be made to look at land ownership abuse in Micah 2:1-2 and Isaiah 5:8-10 from a new perspective in the light of Northeast India tribal experience.

There is no extra-biblical evidence to explain the prophetic protest of Micah 2:1-2 and Isaiah 5:8-10 in which the authors accuse a group of offenders of taking land from another unidentified group of peoples. These passages offer little evidence from which a biblical scholar might reconstruct the socio-economic conditions of the eighth century BCE. Scholars are generally agreed that Micah 2:1-2 and Isaiah 5:8-10 highlight a moral offence, although assumptions about the precise nature of that offence vary slightly. It seems that 'these passages only provide a vague account of a perceived crime,' failing to identify the perpetrators, victims, motivation, or social outcomes, and represent the perspective of but a single segment of literate elites within Judean society, they do 'offer a set of clues upon which biblical scholars have worked to reconstruct a socio-economic context for eighth-

century Judah'.[554] Referring to land ownership abuse in eighth century BCE, Bruce Vawter

has asserted that, along with Micah, Isaiah explicitly singles out for note 'the monopoly on

the land that had borne such evil fruit' in Judah.[555] It is very likely that Micah and Isaiah are

the first prophets to refer to latifundialisation, perhaps in their time a new characteristic of

Palestinian society, which had previously been resisted by the Israelite tradition of

smallholding.

1. Dating and Transmission of the Prophetic Texts

Several scholars believe that these two passages under study are the authentic words

of the eighth century prophets Micah and Isaiah respectively.[556] They also maintain that the

contents of these two oracles reflect the same situation, particularly the impoverishment and

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[554] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 4-5.

[555] Bruce Vawter CM, *The Conscience of Israel: Pre Exilic Prophets and Prophecy* (London: Sheed and Ward Ltd, 1961), 175.

[556] Among many others, for Isaiah see Vawter CM, *The Conscience of Israel*, 175; R.E.Clements, *The New Century Bible Commentary Isaiah* 1-39 (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing/ London: Marshall, Morgan & Scot Publication, Ltd, 1980), 61; Eryl W. Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics*, 65; Klaus Koch, *The Prophets: The Assyrian Period vol 1*(trans. Margaret Kohl; London: SCM Press Ltd, 1982), 113-116. John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapter* 1-39 (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 23-26; Yehoshua Gitay, *Isaiah and his Audience: The Structure and Meaning of Isaiah* 1-12(SSN; Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1991), 10-11; W.Bruggemann, *Isaiah* 1-39 (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1998), 63. Marvin A.Sweeney, *The Prophetic Literature* (IBT; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 46, 56-58; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Opening the Sealed Book: Interpretations of the Book of Isaiah in Late Antiquity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK: William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 31; H.G.M. Williamson, *Isaiah* 1-27 (ICC, vol 1; London/New York:T & T Clark, 2006), 346; David M.Carr & Colleen. M. Conway, *An Introduction to The Bible: Sacred Texts and Imperial Contexts* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 106-114. For Micah see J.L. Mays, *Micah : A Commentary* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1976), 61; Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi,* (WBC 32; Waco, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1984), 9; Delbert R.Hillers, *Micah* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 33; Hans Walter Wolff, *Micah: A Commentary* (trans. Gary Stansell; Augsburg: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 74-75; Charles S.Shaw, *The Speeches of Micah*, 71-72; Donald E. Gowan, *Theology of the Prophetic Books: The Death & Resurrection of Israel* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998),50-52. William McKane, *The Book of Micah: Introduction and Commentary* (Edinburgh: T& T Clark, 1998), 7. DN. Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets*, 105; Marvin A.Sweeney, *The Prophetic Literature* (IBT; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 193; David M.Carr & Colleen. M. Conway, *An Introduction to The Bible: Sacred Texts and Imperial Contexts* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 107-108.

dispossession of poor farmers during the eighth century BCE.[557] It is conceivable that this kind of issue was not simply the outcome of a few isolated incidents. Amos and Hosea express similar concerns over this issue in the Northern Kingdom (Amos 3:15; 5:10-13; Hos.5:10).[558]

However, it is very likely that the two books had a long process of transmission and the sayings were expanded over several centuries. In their present form, the books of Micah and Isaiah could be post-exilic work. While there is little doubt that the passages under study could have been the authentic words of the prophets Micah and Isaiah from the eighth century BCE, equally 'there can be no doubt that there have been additions to those words from different hands and from different times in the course of its transmission' with respect of the received form of books.[559] With regard to the history of composition of the so-called eighth century prophets, some scholars believe the received form of the book to be the products of the Persian period. For example, scholars like Wolff, Ben Zvi and Troxel believe that the book of Micah has a complex history of redaction which passes through many stages. For example, Wolff regards Micah 1:6, 7b-13a; 14-16; 2: 1-4, 6-11; and 3:1-12 as a core coming from Micah and the rest are coming from the post-exilic period.[560] Following the

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[557] For example, Vawter, *The Conscience of Israel*, 175; Georg Fohrer, *Das Buch Jesaja* 1-23 (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1966); 80; Mays, *Micah,* 62. Clements, *The New Century Bible Commentary Isaiah*, 62; Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics*, 76; Koch, *The Prophets,* 115-116; Smith, *Micah- Malachi,* (WBC 32; Waco, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1984), 24. Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets,* 105*;* Gitay, *Isaiah and his Audience,* 100-101;

[558] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 187-188.

[559] R. Mason, *Micah, Nahum, Obadiah* (OTG; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 43.

[560] Hans Walter Wolff, *Micah the Prophet* (trans. Ralph D. Gehrke; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 17. Other scholars like Mays find Micah's words only in 1:3-5a, 8-15; 2:1-5, 6-11; 3:1-4, 5-8 and 9-12. Even in these passages there have been editorial revisions and additions. For details, see Mays, *Micah,* 24-25. McKane believes only Micah 1-3 (except 2:12-13) is to be assigned to the eighth century prophet Micah. See details McKane, *The Book of Micah,* 7. Sweeny believes that Mic 1-3 seems to be the authentic oracles of Micah and could fit into late eighth century BCE. However, the reference to the Babylonian exile in Mic 4:10 and the intertextual references to Isa 2:2-4; 14:24-27; and 2:6-21 in Mic 4:1-5 and 5:4,9-14 indicate the book was edited

majority of redaction-critical studies of the book of Micah, Ben Zvi maintains that significant

sections of the book that refer to the exile (for example 4:1; 2:4,10; 2:12-13; 7:12; 4:10;7:11-

13) point to a post-monarchic setting.[561] Indeed, he suggests that the earliest possible setting

for the book in its present form cannot be placed before the end of the monarchic period and

its immediate aftermath. He eloquently argues that 'the early Persian period is the most likely

setting for the development of the prototype of what a prophetic book should be and of the

corpora of prophetic books as we know them'.[562] Thus for Ben Zvi 'the study of the setting

described in the book cannot be taken as a reliable source for understanding the history of

monarchic Judah from Jotham to Hezekiah'; rather, the book was written 'long after the

monarchic prophet of old Micah by a community of literati in the Persian period'.[563] In his

most recent book, *Prophetic Literature: From Oracle to Books* Troxel argues that the

complex variety of motifs presented in the book of Micah clearly reflect 'a complex

compositional process' and that scribes have united these motifs with several additions from

much later period.[564]

Scholars who follow the redaction method came to similar conclusions with the

book of Isaiah. For example, Otto Kaiser believes the so-called Proto-Isaiah collection

reflects a long history of redactions. Kaiser regards Isaiah 1-39 has nothing to do with the

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during the early Second Temple period when the question of Judah's relationship with the Persian Empire was in question. For details, see Marvin A.Sweeney, *The Prophetic Literature* (IBT; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 191-195.

[561] Ehud Ben Zvi, *Micah*, (FOTL, Vol XXIB; Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 9. See also Diana Edelman, 'From Prophets to Prophetic Books: The Fixing of the Divine Word' in Diana V.Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi (eds.), *The Production of Prophecy: Constructing Prophecy and Prophets in Yehud* (London/Oakville: Equinox, 2009), 41-43.

[562] Ehud Ben Zvi, 'The Concept of Prophetic Books and Its Historical Setting,' in Diana V.Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi (eds.), *The Production of Prophecy: Constructing Prophecy and Prophets in Yehud* (London/Oakville: Equinox, 2009), 83.

[563] Ben Zvi, *Micah*, 10-11.

[564] Ronald L. Troxel, *Prophetic Literature: From Oracle to Books* (Willey Blackwell, 2012), 54-55.

historical prophet and the time of exile.[565] The levitical groups, Kaiser suggests, 'transmitted the book of Isaiah from one generation to another, and each generation, when its hour came, gave a new emphasis and added new forms to the words which [were] being handed down.'[566] The prophetic sayings went through modifications, continual reshaping and reinterpretation as history went on. The process of rewriting comes to an end sometimes around the fourth century.[567] Kaiser thus claims that Isaiah ben Amoz is essentially a legendary figure. Levitical circles of the Deuteronomistics movement have reworked the book so thoroughly that it is imposible to trace any material back to the prophet. Similarly, Troxel argues that while many scholars assume Isaiah 1-39 point to events and people in the eighth century BCE there are strong 'indications that scribal editors shaped and reshaped Isaiah's words'[568] long after the prophet's era. He believes that the so-called Isaiah's memoir chapters (6:1-8:18) had originated from the core of the book's first large section (chapters 1-12). However, those chapters also underwent a lengthy process of editing, with further layers of expansion added long after the eighth century. It is striking that there are some 'indications of editing by someone aware of the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of its prominent citizens in 587BCE.'[569]

Whether passages like Micah 2:1-2 and Isaiah 5:8-10 originate from the eighth century or reflect a later period of significant development (particularly the Persian period) is debatable. Philip Guillaume argues that the concentration of land ownership in the hands of the elite arose when some of the leading members of Israel returned home during the Persian

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[565] Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah* 1-12 (OTL; trans. John Bowden; London: SCM Press, Ltd, 1981), 1-3.
[566] Kaiser, *Isaiah* 1-12, 8.
[567] Kaiser, *Isaiah* 1-12, 9.
[568] Troxel, *Prophetic Literature*, 177.
[569] Troxel, *Prophetic Literature*, 182.

period; the returnees re-established themselves as large landowners at the expense of those who were already in the country as recounted in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.[570] However, he does not discuss whether these two prophetic oracles fit well with the Persian period. The possibility that these passages could originate from or in reference to either just prior the exilic period or the Persian period or even the Hellenistic period cannot be completely ruled out. However, considering the various factors involved, in view of suggestive parallels with Northeast Indian tribal experience considered in the previous chapter, I find the arguments for an eighth century BCE setting most persuasive and compelling. In his recent article, *Micah-Models Matter,* Marvin Chaney maintains that though the received form of the books of Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah may be the product of the Persian period, the levels of composition of these books may reflect the language and interest of Deuteronomic History.[571] Although the stages of composition may point beyond the exile, the concerns and emphases of those books fit well with 'what is known about the socioeconomic dynamics of eighth-century Israel and Judah'.[572] As I have indicated earlier, it is reasonable to assume that the significant changes that occurred in the eighth century BCE in Judean society (including enormous population growth and changes in the land tenure system) provide the most likely setting for prophetic protest against the misuse of land.

We shall examine first the oracle of Micah in more depth, exploring some commentators' views on this given passage. In the midst of the ever-increasing number of commentaries and books relating to Micah and Isaiah, we need to be selective. We shall

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[570] Guillaume, *Land*, 14.

[571] Marvin L Chaney, 'Micah-Models Matter: Political Economy and Micah 6:9-15', in Philip F. Esler (ed.), *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in Its Social Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006): 145-146.

[572] Chaney, 'Micah-Models Matter', 145-146; See also Williamson, *Isaiah* 1-27, 352.

concentrate on selected works that help to expose the socio-economic conditions of Judean

society in the eighth century BCE.

2. Hebrew Texts of Micah 2:1-2

1 הֹוי חֹשְׁבֵי־אָוֶן וּפֹעֲלֵי רָע עַל־מִשְׁכְּבוֹתָם בְּאוֹר
הַבֹּקֶר יַעֲשֹׂוּהָ כִּי יֶשׁ־לְאֵל יָדָם:

2 וְחָמְדוּ שָׂדוֹת וְגָזָלוּ וּבָתִּים וְנָשָׂאוּ
וְעָשְׁקוּ גֶּבֶר וּבֵיתוֹ וְאִישׁ וְנַחֲלָתוֹ: פ

Translation

1. Woe to those who plan[573] iniquity

And deeds of evil upon their beds,

In the light of the morning[574] they carry it out;

For there is power/god in their hand.[575]

2. And they covet fields and seize them[576]

And houses and take them.

They oppress[577] a man and his household

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[573] The Hebrew word חֹשְׁבֵי means 'planning, calculating, hatching something out '. See Shaw, *The Speeches of Micah*, 52.

[574] בְּאוֹר הַבֹּקֶר may have the sense 'as soon as it is light' indicating they waste no time and rise early to implement their plans. The Septuagint renders this 'as soon as day breaks'.

[575] כִּי יֶשׁ־לְאֵל יָדָם could be translated in various ways. Wolff translates 'Because they have the power to do it' (47), Anderson and Freedman render 'for their hand belongs to El(God). Mays translates 'because it lies in their power'. Dearman renders as 'because it is within their power to do so'. Shaw translates 'because it lies in the power of their hand'. The rendering in the Targum 'because there is power in their hands' has been largely followed including by the Revised Standard Version and I also followed the same translation.

[576] Vulgate translates 'They covet fields and seized them with violence'. RSV and Shaw renders 'And they covet fields and seized them'.

And a man and his inheritance.

2.1   Commentaries on Micah 2:1-2

As the text stands, Micah 2:1-2 offers one of the most scathing accusations against those who oppressed their fellow citizens in Judean society through the violent seizure of property. This pericope in the book of Micah is classified as a woe oracle, combined with an announcement of judgement which will consist in a reversal of fortunes for the wrong-doers. Although contextual matters such as the identities of the perpetrators and victims of the crimes outlined here may have been apparent to the first audience, as in the case of Isaiah 5:8, the conditions behind the prophetic accusation remain ambiguous for the modern reader.[578] This is because Micah 2:1-2 does not offer the reader any clear information about the socio-economic context behind the land acquisition which he was protesting against. Even though there remains ambiguity surrounding the socio-economic context, however, it is not unreasonable to believe that the prophet accuses 'one generic group of oppressing another generic group by coveting and seizing their land'.[579] Among scholars, there are various views as to which groups were the targets of the prophetic protest against land ownership abuse. George Adam Smith believes that the rich Judean land owners were seizing the land of the poor through their economic powers.[580] Similarly, scholars like James Mays and Ralph Smith consider that economic factors created friction between groups within the community. Both

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[577] עָשַׁק many scholars such as Mays, Ben Zvi, Dearman, Shaw etc including RSV translated this as 'to oppress'. Some scholars, e.g. Anderson and Freedman render 'to defraud'. I find that 'to oppress' is the better rendering.

[578] Wolff, *Micah the Prophet*, 45.

[579] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 8.

[580] Smith, *The Book of Twelve Prophets commonly called the Minor* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928), 363.

point to powerful businessmen as being responsible for the deprivation of the majority of farmers in Judean society. Mays in particular argues that 'the plight of the weaker citizens in Israel and Judah, referred to so often by the eighth century prophets, was the result of an economic development which, supported by the policies of the royal court, perhaps had reached its climax in the eighth century'.[581]

In a similar vein, Ralph L. Smith, in his Word Biblical commentary on Micah-Malachi, argues that in this pericope the prophet makes a specific charge against business people. According to Smith:

> The chief offenders were a relatively small group of greedy, powerful businessmen who spent their nights devising schemes to get possession of the land of the small farmers. The next day they carried out their schemes because they had sufficient economic, political and judicial power to accomplish their goals even when this deprived a man and his household of their inheritance which was a part of covenant rights.... The sin here is the covetousness which produced the violent disregard for justice. By adding field to field (cf. Isa 5:8) these land monopolizers controlled all the instruments of production in that agricultural society.[582]

Both Mays and Smith's interpretations of Micah 2:1-2 appear to be based on the assumption of a long-established policy toward land tenure that corruptible judges and greedy businessmen could pervert.[583] However, according to Coomber, 'recent interpretations of the archaeological record suggest that there is a lack of evidence to support the existence of such an administrative body that could uphold such a uniform pan-Judean code under a YHWHist ideology prior to late eighth-century'.[584]

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[581] Mays, *Micah*, 64.
[582] Ralph L. Smith, *Micah- Malachi,* (WBC 32; Waco, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1984), 24.
[583] Wolff also holds the same ideas, see Wolff, *Micah the Prophet*, 137
[584] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 9.

Scholars such as Werner H. Schmidt state that Micah is in agreement with Amos and especially Isaiah (Isaiah 5:8ff) on essential points of social criticism. Micah criticises the economy which is based on large estates and the greed of the upper classes for houses and property; he also laments the oppressive actions of the upper classes in society.[585] Ludwig Koehler regards the warning at the beginning of Mic 2:1: בְּאוֹר הַבֹּקֶר יַעֲשׂוּהָ כִּי יֶשׁ-לְאֵל יָדָם הוֹי חֹשְׁבֵי-אָוֶן וּפֹעֲלֵי רָע עַל-מִשְׁכְּבוֹתָם as an indication that the land seizures in Mic 2:2 were not carried out on a whim; rather, they were a result of careful forethought and planning.[586] Anderson and Freedman have the same opinion as Koehler, stating that the crimes that they have committed were 'premeditated and carefully planned and even rehearsed in bed '.[587]

However, other commentators like Ben Zvi,[588] Dearman[589] and McKane[590] indicate that the injustices were committed by people with political rather than economic power. Both Ben Zvi and Dearman observe that the phrase: כִּי יֶשׁ-לְאֵל יָדָם supports the idea that land seizure was carried out by those who used their influence to take land from their subordinates. In his exegesis of Micah 2:1-2, Dearman argues that the phrase: כִּי יֶשׁ-לְאֵל יָדָם 'For there is god/power in their hand', seems to have legal connotations; this implies a right or prerogative and thus is compatible with the social setting of a legal procedure at the village gate. However, he further argues that 'the context of the accusations and the terminology employed by the prophet suggest strongly that confiscation resulted from foreclosure because of

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[585] Schmidt, *Old Testament Introduction* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990), 223. See also Delbert R.Hillers, *Micah* (Philadelphia:Fortress Press, 1984), 33

[586] Koehler, *Hebrew Man* (trans. Ackroyd; London: SCM Press, 1956), 151.

[587] Francis I. Anderson and David Noel Freedman, *Micah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, The Anchor Bible* (New York: The Anchor Bible, Doubleday, 2000), 265. See also Wolff, *Micah the Prophets*, 52.

[588] Ben Zvi, *Micah*, 43.

[589] Dearmann, *Property Rights*, 46.

[590] McKane, *The Book of Micah*, 63.

insolvency'.[591] Ben Zvi states that the land seizures referred to in Mic 2:2 were associated with worldly power.[592] He observes:

> The socioeconomic processes that are in the background of the description of evildoing in Mic 2:2 are certainly not unusual in agrarian societies. They reflect the concentration of property through land foreclosure, which may be accompanied by eviction and similar actions. It appears that these wrong actions on the part of those who are in power are also a common and recurrent feature in agrarian societies and a common literary and theological topos in the ancient Near East and beyond.[593]

Whether this power was political or economic in nature, the power could have been rooted in a merchant's ability to bribe judges. According to Coomber, both Dearman and Ben Zvi find 'Mic 2:2 addresses a tension between power and subjugation rather than simply one of wealth and poverty'.[594] Similarly, McKane believes כִּי יֶשׁ-לְאֵל יָדָם. certainly indicates that defaulters had the political power to implement their plans.[595] From a different perspective, Shaw believes that the taking of land is achieved through the use of military force rather than economic exploitation; this, he suggests, is because the verb גָּזַל (v.2a) has a connotation of physical violence. [596]

From the foregoing investigation, one can conclude that, although there is ongoing debate about the political, economical and physical factors involved, Micah 2:1-2 provides strong indications that one particular group in the society (perhaps the big landowners) were oppressing another generic group (perhaps marginal farmers) by carrying out land

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[591] Dearmann, *Property Rights*, 46, 74.
[592] Ben Zvi, *Micah*, 43.
[593] Ben Zvi, *Micah*, 44.
[594] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 12.
[595] McKane, *The book of Micah*, 60.
[596] Shaw, *The Speeches of Micah,* 81.

confiscation during the eighth century BCE. This was the practice against which the prophet was protesting.

We shall now move on to the oracle of Isaiah.

3. Hebrew Text of Isaiah 5:8-10

8 הֹוי מַגִּיעֵי בַ֫יִת֙ בְּבַ֔יִת שָׂדֶ֥ה בְשָׂדֶ֖ה יַקְרִ֑יבוּ
עַ֚ד אֶ֣פֶס מָק֔וֹם וְהֽוּשַׁבְתֶּ֥ם לְבַדְּכֶ֖ם בְּקֶ֥רֶב הָאָֽרֶץ׃

9 בְּאָזְנָ֖י יְהוָ֣ה צְבָא֑וֹת אִם־לֹ֞א בָּתִּ֤ים רַבִּים֙
לְשַׁמָּ֣ה יִֽהְי֔וּ גְּדֹלִ֥ים וְטוֹבִ֖ים מֵאֵ֥ין יוֹשֵֽׁב׃

10 כִּ֗י עֲשֶׂ֙רֶת֙ צִמְדֵּי־כֶ֔רֶם יַעֲשׂ֖וּ
בַּ֣ת אֶחָ֑ת וְזֶ֥רַע חֹ֖מֶר יַעֲשֶׂ֥ה אֵיפָֽה׃

Translation

8. Woe to those who join house to house

And add field to field

Until there is no further place; [597]

And you are made to dwell alone[598]

in the midst of the land

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[597] עַד אֶפֶס מָקוֹם –Edward J.Young and Dearman translate as 'Until there is no further place'. RSV, Hans Wildberger   and Otto Kaiser translate 'until there is no more room ', and Williamson renders this in almost the same words:'Until there is no room' . Olof Backersten renders the phrase as 'Until there is no space'. However, Premnath suggests 'Until there is no small landholding'. I have followed Young and Dearman's translation because to translate מָקוֹם as a place rather than space, room or smallholding make a better sense as it gives a sense of belonging and identity.

[598] וְהוּשַׁבְתֶּם לְבַדְּכֶם בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ.- Premnath renders 'And you have become possessors of land'and Wildberger renders 'You alone are settled in as full citizens in the midst of land'. RVS translated this as 'you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land '. Williamson followed RSV, which seems to me a better rendering.

9. The Lord of Hosts has sworn in my hearing

Indeed large estates[599] shall become desolate,

Great and good ones-without inhabitants.

10. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath,

And a homer of seed shall yield but one ephah.

3.1   Commentaries on Isaiah 5:8-10

Many commentators agree that Isaiah 5:8-10 reflects the growth of large estates

through 'latifundialization' but differ from one another on the question of who exploited

whom, and in what ways. Commentators like Edward J.Kissane, [600] Elmer A.Leslie,[601]

Edmund J.Young [602]A.S.Herbert[603] Otto Kaiser,[604] and Hans Wildberger[605] have each argued

that Isaiah 5:8-10 reflects a time in which rapacious wealthy individuals exploited

defenceless people, denying their rights in order to accumulate more land. For instance,

Kissane suggests a context in which wealthy Judeans employed an extensive scheme to

displace neighbours in the region.[606] In his commentary on Isaiah, Otto Kaiser states that the

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[599] גְּדֹלִים - Many commentaries and versions including RSV and Williamson translate as 'many houses.' The translation by Premnath 'large estate' seems to me preferable, because it underlines the magnitude of their landed possessions.

[600] Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah: Translated from A Critically Revised Hebrew Text with Commentary,* vol.1 (Dublin: Browne and Nolan Limited, 1941).

[601] Leslie, *Isaiah* (New York/Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1963), 32-33.

[602] Young, *The Book of Isaiah: The English Text, With Introduction, and Notes,* vol.1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 206-207.

[603] Herbert, *Isaiah* 1-39 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 53.

[604] Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah* 1-12, OTL; London: SCM Press, Ltd, 1983), 100.

[605] Wildberger, *Isaiah* 1-12 (trans. Thomas H.Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

[606] Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah*, 54-59.

very first woe (v.8) envisages 'the practice of increasing one's own house and, by exploiting one's economic strength, taking advantage of the distress of small farmers and craftsmen which may have been caused by sickness, crop-failure, inflation or excessive taxation'.[607] He further argues that, in such critical situations, 'such people would be offered a loan; if they were unable to pay it back at a later date, their moveable possessions would be pawned, their children would be taken in payment and thus made slaves, and finally their house and land would be seized (cf. Neh.5:11ff., and II Kings 4:1ff) '.[608]

For Hans Wildberger, some people in Judean society were so driven to get more and more land that the rights of simple farmers were taken away. Eventually the greed of these few people also affected community solidarity because ancient standards of justice had been distorted. It is very likely this is why Isaiah does not make the accusation that 'a sacred order has been destroyed, but that justice and freedom have been taken away from fellow citizens'.[609] The prophet draws attention to covenant violations as the inevitable consequences of landowners' avaricious greed.

From an economic angle, Fohrer argues that an increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of few traders and merchants in the capital city was one of the consequences of the transition from a barter economy to a market driven economy. These traders and merchants would attempt to use their business profits to buy more farm land; they were successful in doing so because small landowners were powerless to resist these new developments.[610]

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[607] Kaiser, *Isaiah* 1-12, 100.
[608] Kaiser, *Isaiah* 1-12, 100.
[609] Wildberger, *Isaiah* 1-12, 198.
[610] Fohrer, *Das Buch Jeseja* 1-23, 80. Fohrer states, 'Es gehört zu den Folgen damaligen Übergangs von der Natural –oder Tauschwirtschaft zur Gerwirthchalf, daß sich größerer Geldbesitz in den Händen von Verhälnismäßig wenigen Händlern und Kaufleuten in der Hauptstadt ansammelt. Sie suchen mit den

Similarly, Brueggemann believes that the prophetic critique of the combination of house-fields is a warning against a general economic policy whereby big landowners buy up arable land, pushing small farmers to the periphery in what might be termed 'agribusiness'.[611] Commenting on this passage, Blenkinsopp in turn argues that the indictment in Isaiah 5:8 was directed at the Judean political establishment, rather than wealthy individuals.[612] He further argues that during the eighth century BCE 'the system of patrimonial domain was being undermined both by the emerging state apparatus' and by 'members of powerful families, a process evaluating in vast social changes including the formation of latifundia and the prevalence of rent capitalism'.[613] He concludes that Isaiah 10:1-4a leads on into 5:8-10, which addresses the manipulation of the legal system in order to confiscate house and land.[614] R.E. Clements argues that the indictment here was directed against the leading citizens of Jerusalem. He further argues:

> the joining together of houses and fields evidently refers to the formation of large cultivated estates by absorbing of neighbouring property. The means by which this was done can only be guessed at, but analogies would suggest that it was achieved by the taking over common land and by the buying up of neighbouring properties. This process could well have been facilitated by the manipulation of the processes of law already condemned in [Isaiah] 10:1. As a consequence of such activities, a very powerful class of rich landowners had grown up in Jerusalem, which not only contrasted with the abject poverty of other citizens, but had actually been the cause of dispossessing these latter of their properties and legal rights.[615]

Geschäfsgewinnen wieder wertbeständigen Anckerboden zu erwerben und sind darin um so erfolgreicher, als der Bauer der Entwincklung hilflos gegenübertsteht.'

[611] Brueggemann, *Isaiah* 1-39, 51.

[612] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah* 1-39: *A New Translation and Commentary, The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 211.

[613] Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah* 1-39, 213.

[614] Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah* 1-39, 211

[615] Clements, *Isaiah* 1-39, 62-63

Having investigated the work of several scholars, Olof Backersten aptly sums up the traditional line of interpretations on Isaiah 5:8-10 as follows: (a) the houses and the fields had been acquired through unjust manipulations of the legal system, or through immoral transactions; (b) Isaiah accuses the elite of making the underprivileged homeless and destitute; (c) Isaiah condemns their sheer greed in wanting an abundance of property; (d) those involved violate the ancient Israelite *Rechtsordnung*, according to which a family's ancestral heritage was inalienable; and (e) Isaiah is at odds with a tragic development within Israelite society, where ancient tribal solidarity has been substituted for debt slavery and economic oppression.[616]

B. Chaney and Premnath's Interpretative Analysis of the Text

As indicated earlier, both Chaney and Premnath devote significant attention to Micah 2:1-2 and Isaiah 5:8-10. As I investigated the interpretation of Chaney and Premnath, I came to agree with Coomber[617] who states that their interpretations of land ownership abuses in Micah 2:1-2 and Isaiah 5:8-10 are not completely divorced from the consensus view of many traditional commentators. However, Coomber goes on to point out that Chaney and Premnath's interpretations are rooted in 'the radical societal changes that appear to have taken place in Judah during the late eighth century BCE, including unprecedented levels of economic development and population growth'.[618] Unlike other scholars such as Mays,

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[616] Olof Backersten, *Isaiah's Political Message: An Appraisal of His Alleged Social Critique* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 51-52. However, he showed that these suggestions rests on disputable assumptions namely (1) that the subject matter is the acquisition of the property whereby (2) less fortunate members of society are dispossessed of their houses and fields and that (3) the activity is therefore morally offensive. See also H.G.M. Williamson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 1-27* (in three volumes, volume 1; London/New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 351.
[617] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 18.
[618] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 18.

Kissane and Herbert, Chaney and Premnath do not consider the land seizure in Isaiah 5:8-10 and Micah 2:1-2 to be the work of a few wealthy individuals who broke from the norms of Judean society; they see it instead as a part of a much wider transformative process in the eighth century that significantly reshaped previous approaches to land management.[619] Assessing land confiscation in Isaiah and Micah, Chaney distinguishes his interpretation from traditional commentaries. He claims:

> ...many modern readers of the prophetic books assume that these texts excoriate a few venal individuals who deviated from norms otherwise observed in what was a healthy and just economic system... little could be farther from the realities of ancient Israel and Judah. As a careful reading of the oracles concerning economic dynamics makes clear, the prophets critique certain changes in the political economy as an integrated whole.[620]

By looking at the socio-economic context behind the passage, Chaney claims that an evolutionary transformation of the socio-economic system occurred in the eight century and that this fundamentally changed the regional approach to land ownership. Thus it is inconceivable that it was only a few rapacious merchants and wealthy landowners who subverted the system of land tenure in eighth century Israel and Judah. A major component of this transformation, according to Chaney and Premnath, was the policy of latifundialization which placed Judah's arable land under the control of wealthy landlords.[621] It also needs to acknowledge that in the latter part of eighth century BCE Judah and Israel entered under the hegemony of Imperial Assyrian and began to engage in inter-regional trade. These

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[619] Chaney, 'Bitter Bounty', 250. Premnath, *Eighth-Century Prophets*, 40-56.
[620] Chaney, 'Bitter Bounty,' 251.
[621] Chaney, 'Coveting Your Neighbour's House in Social Context', *The Ten Commandments: The Reciprocity of Faithfulness* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 308; Premnath, 'Latifundialization,' 55-56.

developments significantly alter Israel and Judah's socio-economic context and form part of the backdrop for the developments described above.

On the basis of their analysis of the texts, both Chaney and Premnath present an eighth century context in which a Judean political elite worked to centralize agrarian production through the process of the consolidation of land into large elite controlled estates. As the system moved from a subsistence economy to the specialised farming of exportable crops like grapes and olives; it is likely that small farmers became increasingly left prone to crop failure and debt. Then as debt mounted, struggling farmers were forced into foreclosure, leading Judean elites to gain control of their land and to maximize the production of exportable commodities like wine and olive oil.[622] The consequence was the loss of the traditional livelihood and inheritance rights of Judah's subsistence farmers.

Drawing on evidence that Judah experienced large-scale development in the late eighth century, Chaney and Premnath suggest that the ruling elites were the targets of the prophetic accusations found in Isaiah 5:8-10 and Micah 2:1-2. Both believe that the particular Hebrew words used support this interpretation, pointing to a socio-economic context shaped by an overhaul of Judah's land management system in the eighth century.[623] For example, for Premnath the word בַיִת needs some explanation. The meaning cannot be restricted to 'house', even though many commentators have rendered it thus. Premnath has followed W. Moran who has studied extensively the use of the Akkadian בתו in Ugaritic documents from the second millennium that deal with the transfer of immovable property. On the basis of his

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[622] Chaney, 'Systematic Study ', 72-7; Premnath, 'Latifundialization,' 53- 54; Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 20. Cf. Fohrer, *Das Buch Jesaja*, 80.
[623] Coomber, *Re-Reading the Prophets*, 22.

analysis, he concludes that 'property in these texts was referred to as house and field'.[624]

Building on Moran's treatment, Premnath in his discussion of latifundialization and Isaiah 5:8-10 has argued that the term בתּוּ was used in variety of ways to refer to house, house and land or just land. Consequently, it seems quite likely that Isaiah is using בָּתִּים רַבִּים to mean 'large landholdings'.[625] In a similar vein, Marvin Chaney has also argued that 'the בַיִת of one's neighbour originally referred to a plot of land held in redistributional domain by an Israelite extended family which, as a unit of both production and consumption as well as residence, farmed the plot in mixed, subsistence agriculture'.[626]

In v.8 the word מָקוֹם has has been translated by W. Johnson and Premnath as 'small landholding' in the light of Ugaritic texts. According to Johnson, מָקוֹם refers specifically to 'estate or property' in addition to its general meaning of 'locality, place or spot'.[627] Another significant term in v. 8 is הוּשַׁבְתֶּם which is usually translated as land owner. The semantic field of יוֹשֵׁב includes the ownership of land. Gottwald argues:

> *Yoseb/yosebe* ... are not simply those who actually live on the land, but the leaders in the imperial feudal statist system of social organisation, with primary reference to every king but embracing other functionaries in the statist system. As Israel developed a statist socio-political organisation of its own, the term was increasingly applied to Israelite functionaries in the state apparatus and, on occasion, referred to persons of power in the upper socio-economic strata irrespective of their holding political office.[628]

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[624] W. Moran, 'The Conclusion of Decalogue (Ex.20.17=Dt.5.21)', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 29, (1967): 549-552.

[625] Premnath, 'Latifundialization ', 55.

[626] Chaney, 'You Shall not Covet Your Neighbour's House,' *Pacific Theological Review* 15 (1982): 6

[627] W. Johnson, 'Old Testament Expression in Property Holding', *Ugaritica* 6 (1969): 314

[628] Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh*, 532.

Building upon the treatment of Gottwald, Premnath states that 'it is these members of the ruling class who owned the large estates and in Isaiah 5:8, 9 the verbal and nominal form of יוֹשֵׁב should be seen in the context of the process of land accumulation'.[629]

Premnath further argues that the accusation in Isaiah 5: 8 is followed by judgement in vv.9 and 10, which calls for:

> A total reversal of the present situation that is a total desolation of the large estates of the upper class. The use of גְּדֹלִים and בָּתִּים רַבִּים underlines the magnitude of their landed possessions. It is significant that the judgement in v.9 ends with a reference to יוֹשֵׁב. The prophet predicted that there will be no one to possess the land, that is the rich landowners will be bereft of their large landholdings. [630]

Premnath suggests the act of accumulating large estates by joining together small plots which were the inheritance of peasants was, a 'violation of the sacred ordinance, the principle of distribution of land under Yahweh's ultimate ownership'.[631] Moreover, Yahweh would respond by ensuring a total failure of the harvest because the cultivation of cash crops had become the avaricious means by which the landed elite sought to gain maximum economic advantage. [632] It is noteworthy that v. 10 lists two of the major items of export from ancient Israel in this period namely wine and grain. There is evidence that these two items were exported in exchange for luxury and military items. The primary producers in no way benefited from the fruits of the labour. Thus the judgement speaks of depriving the rich of the very things of which they had deprived the peasants.[633]

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[629] Premnath, 'Latifundialization ', 56.
[630] Premnath, 'Latifundialization ', 56.
[631] Premnath, 'Latifundialization ', 56.
[632] Premnath, 'Latifundialization ', 56.
[633] Premnath, 'Latifundialization ', 56.

Summing up, both Chaney and Premnath present an eighth century context in which a Judean political elite worked to centralize agrarian production in Judah through the process of latifundialisation or the consolidation of land into large elite controlled estates. The economy moved from subsistence economy to market-driven economy, and this eventually caused many peasants the loss of their traditional livelihood and inheritance rights.

1. Critique of the Chaney and Premnath Hypotheses

Undoubtedly, some scholars have not agreed with Chaney and Premnath's interpretation of these passages. These include Olof Backersten[634], who argues that the passages need a political reading and Phillipe Guillaume[635], who argues from the so-called new perspective in the light of discoveries about the Islamic and Ottoman tenure system. Guillaume strongly opposes Premnath, arguing that the concept of the helpless peasant is a myth; he also suggests that the prophets who made the accusation against injustice resided mostly in Samaria and Jerusalem and were not peasants themselves. Contrary to the views of Premnath and Chaney, he also observes that from time to time large estates did arise from the consolidation of small farms that improved the lot of small farmers (rather than leading to the deprivation of the peasantry).[636] Even if foreclosures occurred, this did not lead to land accumulation because loans were extended in order to gain more land. He further argues against the emphasis of Premnath and others on soured relations between rich and poor,

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[634] Olof Backersten, *Isaiah's Political Message*, 51-52. He showed that the assessments made by Chaney and Premnath rest on disputable assumptions namely (1) that the subject matter is the acquisition of the property whereby (2) less fortunate members of society are dispossessed of their houses and fields and that (3) the activity is therefore morally offensive.
[635] Guillaume, *Land*, 90-107.
[636] Guillaume, *Land*, 93.

suggesting a mutually beneficial relationship between the two. In his critique of Premnath, Guillaume asserts that:

> The opulence of the rich is maintained if not achieved at the benefit of the poor. The reputation and at times the salvation of the rich is tied to their ability to maintain the poor alive, either directly as patron or indirectly as providers of funds for the various consumption -smoothing devices that exist in every society. The destiny of the rich is tied to that of the poor. The rich must feed the poor as much as they exploit them. Keeping the poor alive is indeed a form of exploitation that perpetuates poverty rather than eradicates it. This is another matter. What must be emphasized here is that the rich need the poor as much as the poor need the rich and that the relation between them is a two-way process. The rich cannot be the only exploitative party. Societies collapse when the poor are unable to exploit the rich to the benefit of both rich and poor.[637]

For some, Guillaume's argument may appear a welcome departure from the approach of other scholars such as Premnath and Chaney. However, Guillaume does not seem to take into account the unprecedented economic dynamics and population growth that took place in the eighth century BCE. These, it is very likely, significantly changed Judah's land management system and threatened the traditional livelihood and inheritance rights of Judah's marginal farmer.

In the light of contemporary examples of landowner- tenant relation in various part of India and the Zamindari system [638] in particular, Guillaume's hypothesis that the formation of large estates was voluntary in nature seems to rest on disputable assumptions. In case of the Zamindari system, for example, the formation of large estates always took place

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[637] Guillaume, *Land*, 102.

[638] Zamindars were landlord in pre colonial, colonial and even post colonial India. Though in most states the zamindari system was mostly abolished after Indian independence, but still practised in some states in different form. Zamindari system was way of ensuring taxes were collected from peasants. They are taking land from the poor peasants and was considered a lord and the poor peasant worked under them. See the details, K.C. Alexander, *Agrarian Tension in Thanjavur* (Hyderabad: National Institute of Community Development, 1975). 12-30.

involuntarily rather than voluntarily. In such landowner-tenant relations, scholars like Walter C. Neale,[639] M.A. Oommen,[640] K.C.Alexander[641] and others believe that there is no doubt that small landholders and peasants suffered at the hands of money lenders and were always subjected to exploitation by big landowners.[642] In fact, the landowners by tradition enjoyed the right to evict the tenants at will, to bargain for higher rents, or to allot land to persons of their choice. Since the landowners generally belonged to a higher caste and were economically of a higher status, the power aspect of landowner-tenant relationship was essentially favourable to the former.[643] Socially and economically, therefore, the tenants were dependent upon the landowners. The tensions between big land owners and peasants in some Indian states led to peasant uprisings which eventually resulted in the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency experience until very recently.[644] Such situations hardly support an argument that the peasants consented to and profited from the dispossession of their land.

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[639] Neale, *Economic Change in Rural India: Land Tenure and Reform in Uttar Pradesh*, 1800-1955 (New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, 1962), 215.

[640] Oommen, *A Study of Land Reforms in Kerela* (New Delhi: Oxford & IBH Publishing Co, 1975).

[641] Alexander, *Agrarian Tension in Thanjavur* (Hyderabad: National Institute of Community Development, 1975).

[642] Neale, *Economic Change,* 215. See also Robert Eric Frykenberg (ed.), *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History* (Madison/London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); H.C.L.Merillat, *Land and Constitution in India* (New York/London: Columbia University Press, 1970); F. Tomasson Jannuzi, *Agrarian Crisis in India: The Case of Bihar* (New Delhi: Sangam Books, 1974); Oommen, *A Study of Land Reforms in Kerela* (New Delhi: Oxford & IBH Publishing Co, 1975). J. Lawrence, *An Ethical Critique of Land Reform: With Special Reference to Kerela Land Reform (Amendment) Act,* 1969 (Delhi: CISRS and ISPCK, 1998).

[643] Alexander, *Agrarian Tension*, 15.

[644] Naxalites claim to be supported by the poorest rural populations, especially Adivasi. They are fighting for improved land rights and more jobs for neglected agricultural labourers and the poor. The Naxalite insurgency affected many states, namely Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Andra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal.

C. Land ownership Abuse: A New Perspective from a Northeast India Tribal Perspective

In the previous discussion we looked at how various commentators have attempted to explain land ownership abuse in Micah 2:1-2 and Isaiah 5:8-10. In the following section, we shall look at the land ownership abuse in the given passages with a new perspective from the Northeast India tribal experience. This section will examine the intrinsic relationship between tribal culture and identity with the land providing a possible model of how the land had been accumulated at the expense of Judean peasants in eighth century BCE. It will also provide possible factors behind the prophetic protest against land misuse in Judean society. From the tribal perspective of Northeast India, we shall also look at the values and ethos of Israel which prophets such as Micah and Isaiah tried to defend and safeguard.

1. Land as a giver of Identity

The centrality of land is something that both ancient Israel and Northeast Indian tribal people have in common. As noted in chapter four, land is the foundation of the tribal community in Northeast India and indeed creates socio-economic and religio-cultural identity. In reality, the cultural formation of tribal community identity is strongly intertwined with the land. It is not only the basis of life, but a fundamental key for understanding their worldview. Lands hold family, clan and tribe together. The tribal people understand their personhood in relation to land. Thanzauva observes that land for the tribals does not imply only a space; it is a 'place' that gives the community its identity. Land owns the tribal community and gives them identity.[645] In a similar vein, an outstanding tribal theologian,

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[645]Thanzauva, *Theology of Community,* 173. See also Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions*, 118-119. Zulunungsang Lemtur, 'Juxtaposing Land, People and the Creator for Developing a Tribal Theology of Land,'

Wati Longchar categorically asserts, 'For tribals, the land is life...It is not a mere space, it is a

place which gives identity to the community. The land owns people. If there is no land, there

is no personhood and identity'.[646] In this context, I would follow Brueggemann who states

'Space means an arena of freedom, without coercion or accountability, free of pressures and

void of authority, freedom from constraint and absence of responsibility. Place by contrast,

connotes home and is bound up with a sense of belonging, a story which conveys an identity,

a basis for participating in history'.[647]

As noted in chapter four, the tribal identity and their concept of history is also

closely associated with the soil. For example, if one asks a tribal when he/she was born, the

answer may be, 'I was born when my parents were cultivating that particular field, during

that season, at the time when people were going to/coming from the field'.[648] The tribals

understand their personhood and identity only in relation to the land. According to the

traditional tribal concept, land is a vital vehicle that provides a connection to other members

of the community and even to their ancestors; it thereby provides as their roots, dignity and

identity. Another tribal theologian, Yangkahao Vashum, commenting on the centrality of land

for the tribals, states that the land reflects 'the exploitation, alienation, struggle and cry of the

tribals for their land. Without land, tribals are nothing. The land is everything for the tribals.

It is their backbone. Landlessness is equal to rootlessness'.[649] In a similar vein, tribal feminist

biblical scholar Rosy Zoramthangi asserts that land, for tribal people, cannot be diverged

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in Takatemjen (ed.), *Challenges of Land Development in Nagaland: Selected Papers, Essays and Columns* (Mokokchung: Clark Centre for Peace Research and Action, 2015): 42-44.

[646] Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions*, 107.

[647] Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 5.

[648] Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions*, *119.*

[649] Vashum, 'Theology of Land: A Naga Perspective', in A. Wati Longchar and Yangkahao Vashum (eds.), *Tribal Worldview and Ecology,* (Jorhat: The Tribal Study Centre, 1998): 73.

from the existence and identity of the people. 'Landlessness is equivalent to being deprived of livelihood and a sense of belonging.'[650] Therefore one may state that the land holds family, clan and tribe together. If the land is lost, the clan's identity too will be lost.

Tribal people look at the Bible including prophetic texts as a powerful and potential liberative resource to address their problems, aspirations and sufferings in a concrete situation. A Dalit scholar, Jesurathnam, observes that 'the prophet of ancient Israel who underwent struggles and justice as a result of total involvement for the cause of justice and righteousness is a perfect paradigm for a Dalit and [Tribal Christians] in a contemporary Indian situation who in less term suffer injustice by all kinds of oppressive and dominant castes and class structures'.[651] Tribal reading of a biblical text, primarily engaged tribal readers who are the victims of all kind of physical and psychological oppression, reads the text with pain and pathos of their experience.[652] Reading from psychological perspective, both the tribal and biblical worlds will benefit from one another because God, people and prophets like Micah and Isaiah struggle with the issues and problems of oppressions, disobedience, resistance, deprivation, disillusionment, aspiration, hope and other related problems and concerns. Tribal hermeneutics seek to find its relevance with the life struggles of tribal people as it engaged with biblical texts. In this sense, 'it seeks the meaning in front of the text, whatever that the biblical text reflects in consonance with [the life situation of

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[650] Rosy Zoramthangi Ralte, 'Positioning the Psalms of Communal Lament and the Lived Experience of NE Tribals,' in Lalramliana Pachuau, P.Mohan Larbeer and Wati Longchar (eds.), *Cantours of Tribal Theology: Issues and Perspectives* (Bangalore: BTESSC, 2015): 129.

[651] Kondasingu Jesurathnam, *Exploring Dalit Liberative Hermeneutics in India& the World: Based on an Ancient Hebrew Prophet, Jeremiah of Anathoth* (New Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2015), 19.

[652] Jesurathnam, *Exploring Dalit Liberative Hermeneutics in India& the World*, 12. See also K. Lallawmzuala, 'Issues in Biblical Interpretation: Towards a Tribal Biblical Hermeneutics,' in Takatemjen (ed.), *Bible readings From Northeast India Context* (Mokokchung: Northeast India Society for Biblical Studies, 2014): 12.

tribal people], their aspirations and hope for liberation for their struggles'.[653] As indicated earlier, land, for tribal people, provides not only economical needs but also sociological and psychological needs of the people. It provides not only life-support system but also a sense of belonging and spirituality. Tribal people locate their aspirations, hope, spirituality and psychological orientation in and around land because land gives an identity, security and meaning to them.

In a similar way, one could argue that land and identity are inseparably linked in the mind and thought of the people of the Old Testament. In the Pentateuch and prophetic literature, the importance of the land for the lasting identity of the people was acknowledged. As Norman Habel observes, 'The traditions of the patriarchs and the exodus events witness that the Israelites knew their permanent identity was assured only when the land bore the name of the people'.[654] In similar vein, Carol Meyers states that family members in ancient Israel were inextricably connected with landholdings and land provided a corporate family identity.[655] Dearman may be right when he states, 'the expansion of the tenth commandment in Exod. 20:17 is evidence that a house or any property included possessions' and perhaps 'reflects the understanding that without them one loses the identity and the privileges of citizenship as well '.[656] It is very likely that it was not until the people of Israel occupied the land of Canaan that they became a nation, a people with an identity of their own. It may not be a wrong assumption that it was the land that gave them their national identity as Israelites. Later on, when they were taken captives in a foreign land, they become rootless, and their

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[653] Jesurathnam, *Exploring Dalit Liberative Hermeneutics in India& the World*, 16.

[654] Norman Habel, 'The Suffering Land: Ideology in Jeremiah', *Lutheran Theological Journal*, Vol XXVI (May 1992): 14.

[655] Meyers, 'The Family in Early Israel', in Leo G.Perdue, et al (eds.), *Families in Ancient Israel* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997): 21.

[656] Dearmann, *Property Rights*, 46-47.

identity as a nation was destroyed. It appears that many passages in the prophetic writings are

replete with an awareness of the significance of the land for Israel and arising from its status

as a gift from Yahweh. At the same time the threat of devastation of the land is predicted in

prophetic books as well (Amos 7:17, 3:11; Hos.2:14ff; Isa.5:8-10; Mic.2:1-5).

It is apparent that the most serious accusation Micah proclaims against those who

intentionally seize the properties of their neighbours is in 2:2:- 'They oppress a man and his

house, a man and his inheritance'. As Hillers categorically asserts, 'This attack is on a [man]

and man's property. Their actions constitute something more reprehensible than mere greed,

for they are an assault on the basic structure of the people of God'.[657] Referring to this text,

Shaw succinctly comments: 'The deeds condemned by Micah are seizing land and driving

away the inhabitants as they depended solely and directly upon the products of the land '.[658]

According to Alt, the land grabbers are charged here with doing violence against the

relationship between a landholder and his land and a man and his family or community.[659] It

is highly likely that here 'the traditional strong bond between the landholders, their land and

community' had been 'violated by the greedy economic activities of the dominant elite'. For

Micah, 'the intolerable crime of those who deliberately seized the land of the rural farmers

seemed to be the destruction of the people's identity'.[660] As Mays notes:

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[657] Delbert R.Hillers, *Micah* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 33.

[658] Shaw, *The Speeches of Micah*, 79.

[659] Albrecht Alt, 'Der Anteil des Königtums an der sozialen Entwicklung in den Reichen Israel und Juda' in *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, Band III (Munchen: C.H.Beck'she Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1959): 349; According to Alt, the ancient Israelite social and economic order was threatened during eighth-century BCE can be stated most consisely with the keywords that Micah had once used to summarise it: Ein Mann - ein Haus – ein Erbanteil and Grund und Boden. See also Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos ,' 209.

[660] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 209. See also his other article 'Latifundialization: A Biblical-Tribal Perspective', in Takatemjen (ed.), *Challenges of Land Development in Nagaland: Selected Papers, Essays and Columns* (Mokokchung: Clark Centre for Peace Research and Action, 2015): 15.

The powerful are expropriating the property of small landowners through oppression... For those who lost their property, the result involved more than simple economic impoverishment. In Israel's social order a man's identity and status in the community rested on his household or family, dwelling place and the land. His inheritance in his father's family was his 'portion' in the family (Gen.31:14). Lost it, he lost all the rights which were based on possession; he had no 'place' in the community and had left only the life of a wage-labourer or slave.[661]

In the eighth century BCE, the situation seems to have been that the rich and the ruling classes were accumulating estates by skilfully managed loans and corrupt courts (Mic.3:1-9). As a result, 'the old family properties around the village were being broken up and the clan system pressed out existence'.[662] Jon L.Dyddahl holds a similar view to Mays, observing that during the time of Micah fields and houses were coveted and then taken by land grabbers. It is important to note that what was taken was not 'just houses but fields as well... those ancestral agriculture lands which are the very life-support and social/cultural symbol of meaning and identity to the villager'.[663] These land grabbers 'oppress' a man, the peasant. Here the root 'shq' is used, which, in the contexts where it occurs, commonly means to take away something from another through an advantage of position or power.[664] According to Dybdahl, 'Loss of land led to family breakup and weakening of social ties... All sense of place in community was lost, along with a means of livelihood'.[665]

The task of ascertaining the relationship of the family to the land necessitates a study of social structure in early Israel. It is very likely that for every household in early Israelite society, holding a portion of land was a clear proof of a link with other members of their

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[661] Mays, *Micah*, 63-64.
[662] Mays, *Micah*, 64.
[663] Dybdahl, *Israelite Village Land Tenure: Settlement to Exile* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1981), 128.
[664] Dybdahl, *Israelite Village Land Tenure*, 128.
[665] Dybdahl, *Israelite Village Land Tenure*, 128-129.

community. There were three major social units in the Israelite tribal social structure, namely

father's house (בית אב), the clan or kin group (משפחה) and the tribe (שבט). In ancient Israel,

the family household was the basic social unit. This is usually translated as 'father's house'.

According to Gottwald, בית אב is 'extended family' or 'household' which is 'a primarily

residential and productive socio-economic unit of the two or more generations'; it included

'wives, sons, and unmarried daughters of some or all male descendants of the family head'.[666]

Meyers prefers to render בית אב as 'family household' which more clearly highlights its

significance of an 'extended or compound family', that included elder parents, their children,

married sons and daughters-in-law, and their children, servants, animals and property.[667] It

was the primary group within which the individual Israelite found identity and status.[668] The

next social unit is משפחה. Keefe translates as 'kinship group' or 'clans'.[669] Gottwald translates

משפחה as 'protective association', and defines it as 'a cluster of extended families living in the

same or nearby villages....providing socio-economic mutual aid for its constituent families,

contributing troop quotas to the tribal levy, and indirectly serving alone or in concert to

provide a local jural community'.[670] Beyond this, there was the broader sphere of social

organisation of the tribe שבט. These tribes functioned as 'a regional association of kinship

groups' which shared 'a common culture, history and territory, and which articulated this

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[666] Gottwald, *The Tribes of Israel*, 341.
[667] Meyers, 'Family in Early Israel', 19
[668] Christopher J.H.Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 53.
[669] Keefe, *Woman's Body*, 115-116.
[670] Gottwald, *The Tribes of Israel*, 340. Some scholars preferred to avoid the word 'clan' as translation of משפחה because in a common anthropological and sociological terminology 'clan' usually designates the 'exogamous' clan with communal land ownership and strongly centralized power. See more details in Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 44-70.

sense of common identity through a story of common ancestry'.[671] In early Israel, effective political power and judicial authority resided not with the tribe, but in the clans and lineages.[672] However, an individual in the Israelite community was known or identified in relation to these social units. This suggests that there was no real identity for an individual without reference to other members of the tribe; furthermore, land was the visible link between an individual household and these larger social units.[673]

The Israelite household or father's house בית אב seems to have similar characteristics to the smallest Mizo social unit, which is called *Chhungkhua* (family). As indicated earlier, a tribal sociologist, Malsawma, states that the joint or extended family has been the system favoured and practised by tribal people in Northeast India from time immemorial. The family consists of the father, mother, unmarried and married children (especially boys), and their wives, children and grandparents.[674] Sons after marriage do not usually separate themselves from their parents but continue to stay on with them under the same roof, eating together, working together and holding property in common. Even after sons and daughters move out to start separate family lives, the family relationship remains very strong. The joint family system still prevails among the rural villages but the system is dying out in urban areas.[675] Every household is supposed to be self-sufficient as far as possible and has a right to cultivate, use and live on the land as long as they belong to the village community. Most tribal people in Northeast India before colonial time, no-one, not even the family as a unit, had permanent, heritable or transferable rights other than the right of use or usufruct because

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[671] Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 92.
[672] Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 91.
[673] Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah,* 91. See also Carol Meyers, 'Household Religion', 119.
[674] Malsawma, *Sociology of the Mizo*, 53.
[675] Malsawma, *Sociology of the Mizo*, 53.

the land belonged to the community.[676] In Israelite society, Guillaume believes there is evidence for *Musha* land tenure system in the Hebrew Bible,[677] a type of cultivation of common land that required communal organisation.

A tribal biblical scholar, Lallawmzuala, observes that the next social unit in Israelite society משפחה seems to have certain similarities (in terms of nature and function) with the Mizo social and territorial subunit known as *Khua*.[678] The term *Khua* literally means 'village'. However, *Khua* is far broader in meaning than the English 'village'. Traditionally, all the *Khua* land was owned by the community under the stewardship of the village chief. However, every household was entitled to live, cultivate, and hunt within their own village area. Practically, the land belonged to the community under the stewardship of the chief and every member of the community was responsible for the maintenance of it. But, 'none had heritable, transferable and saleable right over the land'.[679] Lallawmzuala further asserts that since the tribal people are closely attached to the land, they usually identify themselves with their villages. '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 determined by the Khua or land to which he or she belongs'.[680] However, Lallawmzuala also fails to acknowledge the significance of the family/father household unit for an individual's identity and status, both in the life of ancient Israel and Northeast India

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[676] Lalrinawmi, 'A Feminist Critique of Land', 226.

[677] Guillaume, *Land*, 42-55.

[678] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 210. The area of each *Khua*'s land varied in size.In term of social organisation, *Khua* was normally comprised of some close and distant blood- related families or kinship groups, but was endogamous in nature. Though the people in the community were generally related by blood, the actual unity of the members of *Khua* was largely dependent upon land. There could be no *Khua* without land. An individual person would introduce himself/herself to strangers by using the name of his or her *Khua* rather than a personal name.

[679] *Mizoram Gazetteers* (Aizawl: Directorate of Art and Culture, Government of Mizoram, 1989), 153.

[680] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 211.

tribal contexts. In Micah 2:2 the prophet indicted the seizure of family estates rather than the

kin-group or clan משפחה.[681] Rogerson's argument seems plausible when he states that משפחה

did not itself own land, but had a responsibility to ensure that land remained the property of

the smaller units.[682] In a similar vein, Wright states משפחה 'did not own land collectively, nor

did it apparently have any coercive power over its family units'.[683] However, in Israelite

society it seems that some land was held for cultivation in common land that required social

organisation (cf. Deut, 32; Mic. 2:5; Jeremiah 37).

Keefe observes rightly the intrinsic connection between family household בית אב and

family property (נחלה). According to Keefe:

> In the decentralized, agrarian economy of Israel's highland villages, the landowning, family household-the [בית אב] bêt 'āb -was the basic social unit and the primary locus of economic production and consumption... The arable lands upon which family households depended were defined not in commodity terms as a form of capital, but as *nahala* ('inheritance'), inseparable from the meaning and integrity of the [בית אב] bêt 'āb itself.[684]

Even with the establishment of the monarchical state and the rising power of urban

centres, most Israelites continued to live within the agricultural community where the בית אב

remained the basic social unit. While many features of social and family law were altered by

the social transformation of the monarchical era, the basic patterns and values of early

Israel's kinship-based, agrarian, social world remained vital and relevant. However,

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[681] Raymond Westbrook, *Property and the Family in Biblical Law,* (JSOTSup, 113; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 13.

[682] Rogerson, *Theory and Practice*, 125.

[683] Wright,*God's People in God's Land*, 53. משפחה was a major constituent in Israelite system of land tenure and its primary function was economic. It existed to protect and preserve the viability of its own extended families through such mechanisms as redemption of both land and persons that were in danger of passing-or had already passed-out of the hands of kinship group (eg.Lev.25). See also Meyers, 'Family in Early Israel,'13. He also argues that the farm lands themselves were not held by the kinship group as a whole but rather, it seems, by the constituent family groups.

[684] Keefe, *Woman's Body*, 112-113.

the בית אב did not exist in isolation, but survived in mutual interdependence with other residential units within its locality or village. Again, Keefe states:

> The sodalities, designated by the term משפחה - variously translated as ''kinship group'', ''lineages'', ''extended family networks'' or ''clans'' were organised around bonds of kinship and geographical proximity. The language of kinship, whether real or fictive, symbolised the structure of solidarity and mutuality within which the families of the משפחה were bound together.[685]

James D.Martin [686] suggests that the categories of father household and clan sometimes overlapped and that the boundary lines between the two were very fluid. Some have argued that in the post exilic period clan (משפחה) was replaced by father household (בית אב).[687]

In Northeast Indian tribal society, *Chhungkua* (family) and *Khua* (village) are also markers of the religious identity of the community members. The term *Khua* in particular has religious implications. The English term religion is translated as *Sakhua* in Mizo. The word '*Sakhua*' is a combination of two names of the traditional deities, '*Sa'* and '*Khua*'. '*Sa'* means the creator and progenitor of the tribe or clan or race; '*Khua'* means the protector who dispenses wellbeing to human beings.[688] *Sa* was the deity worshipped by a family or clan, while *Khua* was a deity worshipped by the whole village. As Kipgen, a tribal historian, observes, 'If the worship of Sa was exclusively for the family and a clan, the worship of

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[685] Keefe, *Woman's Body*, 115-116.
[686] James D.Martin, 'Israel as a Tribal Society' in R.E.Clements (ed.), *The World of Ancient Israel*: *Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 99.
[687] Robert B.Coote, 'Tribalism: Social Organization in the Biblical Israels', in Philip F.Esler (ed.), *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in its Social Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006): 41.
[688] James Dokhuma, *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* (Aizawl: J.D. Press, 1992), 42.

Khua was a public affair for the whole village'.[689] In this sense, traditional Mizo religion was inseparably connected with clans, families, and village community.

As indicated earlier, משפחה has some common elements with *Khua*. According to Wright, משפחה is a kin group and is also 'a group of several units into a largely self-sufficient and self-protective organism'.[690] All the household בית אב within the kin group were bound together by the land because they all had a share in the same portion of land (נחלה). Land was the centre of unity that gave them a sense of oneness and solidarity within משפחה and a spirit of mutual help and support in difficult circumstances.[691]

Religious identity is intimately linked with political, economical and social aspects of identity.[692] Therefore, the accumulation of land in just a few hands also would have serious religious consequences. Fohrer may be right when he states that the displacement of small holders in Judean society affected their religious identity. He believes that anyone who lost land and house would also have had to sacrifice his religious identity and independence.[693] The portion of land and household was regarded as a visible evidence of a person's membership of the faith community and their share of the gift of God.

As indicated earlier, the clan or kin group משפחה was the first social unit beyond the father's house בית אב to which personal loyalty was strongly attached. In this social-cultural

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[689] Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 113.

[690] Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 48-49.

[691] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos,' 211-212.

[692] Janneke Stegeman, 'Decolonizing Jeremiah: Identity, Narratives and Power in Religious Tradition', (PhD Dissertation, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2014), 32.

[693] Fohrer, *Das Buch Jeseja* 1-23, 80. According to Fohrer, Verliert er seinen Besitz an den menschlichen Großgrundbesitzer, so tritt er zugleich aus seiner bisherigen Heligtums- 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 Selbständdigkeitt ein. So machen Großgrundbesitzer die judäischen Bauern religiös von sich abhängig.

context, the confiscation of land from any constituent household of the clan by any person whose 'power/god in their hand' (Mic.2:1) amounts to undermining the foundation of the socio-cultural identity of every member of the community. In fact, the Israelite had no separate identity detached from this basic social structure as the individual found identity and status within בית אב. Therefore, Micah's indictment 'They oppress a man and his house (בית אב), a man and his inheritance (נחלה)' and Isaiah's oracle 'Woe to those who join house to house and add field to field' appear to be highly serious accusations against individual identity and meaning for the victim of land grabbing which was taking place during their time. Commenting on Micah, Raymond Westbrook states that the verb עָשַׁק used here essentially means to deny people that which is rightfully theirs. In Mic.2:2 the reference is 'denial of inheritance-rights that are due to a household family'.[694]

Keefe notes that a family's control of its נחלה was vitally important because this was the basis for an ongoing relationship between the living and the dead. The land could not be sold because it did not belong to the present generation alone, but to dead ancestors and unborn descendants to come. [695] In a similar vein, scholars like Perdue and Niehr note that in ancient Israel the household was comprised not only of the living members but also of the dead ancestors and those yet to be born (cf. Jug 2:10; Gen. 12:2; 13:14-17; 25:8, 17; 49:29-33; I Kings 14:13; 2 Kings 22:20; Job 42:7-17).[696] In ancient Near East contexts, Stavrakopoulou asserts:

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[694] R.Westbrook, *Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Law* (Cashiers de la Reveu Biblique 26; Paris: Gabala, 1988), 36-37.
[695] Keefe, *Woman's Body*, 115.
[696] Leo G. Purdue, 'Israelite and Early Jewish Family', in Leo G.Perdue, et al (eds.), *Families in Ancient Israel* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997): 176. Herbert Niehr, ''Israelite' Religion and

> The ancestors played an important dual role within the lives of their descendants: they bore some responsibility for the fertility and perpetuation of the family line and household, and they acted as guardians and guarantors of inheritable property and places, including the plots of land upon which many ancient West Asian families depended, and upon which they themselves would likely be buried.[697]

There is also a suggestive allusion of ancestral cult in popular religion in ancient Israel and Judah,[698] perhaps designed to worship the dead as divine power ('elohim; I Sam. 28:13; 2 Sam. 14:16; Isa.8:19-20; cf. Num 25:2; Ps.106:28).[699] In any case, according to Purdue, through memory and honour, along with internment in the family tomb, the ancestors continued to be members of their households. Unborn progeny were also considered as members of the family.[700] Alfaro remarks:

> The poor were deprived of their 'inheritance', which might refer to their lands; Micah, however, seems to go deeper, thinking of the children of the family who are the most precious inheritance of their parents (cf.Mic2:9; Ps.127:3). The oppression of the parents results in greater oppression for their children, who are deprived of their future.[701]

Canaanite' Religion', in Francesca Stavrakopoulou and John Barton (eds.), *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah* (London: T & T Clark, 2010): 29.

[697] Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers: The Roles of Ancestors Veneration in Biblical Land Claims* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, 473; New York/London: T & T Clark, 2010), 5.

[698] According to Rainer Albertz, ancestor worship, which was performed daily and monthly, might have taken place at the domestic shrine, since teraphim, which seem to have been figurines of the deified ancestors (Gen 31:19,30-5), belonged to the house chapel, according to Judg 17:5. The ancestors were fed with vegetable offerings (Deut 26:14) in order to insure their protection of the family. These rituals might have played a major role in strengthening the identity of the nuclear family. For details, see Rainer Albertz, 'Family Religion in Ancient Israel and its Surroundings', in John Bodel and Saul M.Olyan (eds), *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008): 97-102. See also Karel van der Toorn, 'Israelite Figurines: A View from the Texts', in Barry M. Gittlen (ed.), *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2002): 54-55.

[699] Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 19. See also Nicholas Wyatt, *Space and Time in the Religious Life of the Near East* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 285; Theodore J. Lewis, 'How Far Can Texts Take Us? Evaluating Textual Sources for Reconstructing Ancient Israelite Beliefs about the Dead', in Barry M. Gittlen (ed.), *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2002): 198.

[700] Purdue, 'Israelite and Early Jewish Family', 176.

[701] Juan L.Alfaro, *Micah: Justice and Loyalty* (Grand Rapids: Wm B.Eerdmans Publishing Co,1989), 25.

Reading from psychological perspective, Lindblom, observes that the teachings of ancient Israel prophets were characterised by the principle of solidarity. Within the principle of solidarity, the people were considered as an organic whole, united by election and the covenant. As members of Yahweh people 'all Israelites were members of a sacrosanct organism and must be treated accordingly'.[702] When the powerful section of the people oppressed the poor and defenceless, the sacred unity was broken. It is likely that Isaiah and Micah deeply concerned about social solidarity which was apparently an inheritance from tribal culture of nomadic and semi nomadic times.[703] For them, exploitation of the poor and their property could mean loss of cultural identity, disintegration of social solidarity and being deprived of spiritual and psychological needs of the people.

It seems likely during Isaiah and Micah's time this strong sense of tribal and clan solidarity was showing signs of breaking down.[704] To be driven away from the land was to have a relationship broken, and expulsion from the community was absolutely devastating for an individual or household in tribal societies. Therefore, the encroachment and seizure of land in Israelite society was not simply political and economic oppression. It represented a destruction of the socio-cultural fabric, an attack on loss of religious freedom and identity, and a violation of a close-knit community's ways of life, customs and traditions.[705] It is very likely that the prophets like Micah and Isaiah witnessed small farmers being alienated from their ancestral land, deprived of their socio-cultural and religious identity, and isolated from

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[702] Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 344.
[703] Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 344.
[704] Leslie C. Allen, 'Micah's Social Concern 'Vox Evangilica* 8 (1973): 23.
[705] Cf. McKane, *The Book of Micah*, 9.

their roots. So they vigorously protested against the activities of the greedy and rapacious elites in Israelite society.

2. Land as a creation of God

The interrelatedness between God and land is clearly evident in the thought of both the early Israelites and Northeast Indian tribal people. Tribal people in Northeast India shares the ancient Israelite belief that land is a creation of God and ultimately under the ownership of God. There seems to be an underlying principle in both traditions that land and the divine or sacred sphere are intrinsically connected.

The traditional religion of the tribal people in Northeast India has been referred to by most writers as 'animism'. For example, British colonial officers like McCall,[706] and missionaries like F.W. Savidge, J.H. Lorrain,[707] David Kyles,[708] J. Merion Lloyd[709] and others describe the early Mizo religion as crude animism involving sacrifice to appease a variety of evil spirits. In one sense this view may be partially correct because the primitive Mizos did offer sacrifices to evil spirits in order to appease and propitiate them. But these sacrifices did not represent the Mizo religion as a whole.[710] Moreover, 'these sacrifices to evil spirits were', firstly, 'not obligatory for the Mizos'; and secondly, 'these sacrifices to evil spirits were to divert and dissuade the spirits from tormenting men and women. These evil

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[706] Major Anthony Gilchrist McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis* (First Published 1949; Guwahati/Delhi: Spectrum Publications, 2004), 67-68.

[707] James Herbert Lorrain, (Pu Buanga), *Dictionary of the Lushai Language* (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1940).

[708] David Kyles, *Lorrain of the Lushais: Romance and Realism on the North-East Frontier of India* (London: The Carey Press, 1944).

[709] Meirion Lloyd, *History of the Church in Mizoram: Harvest in the Hills* (Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, 1991).

[710] Lalpekhlua, *Contextual Christology*, 179.

spirits were regarded as the prime enemies of human beings'.[711] In contrast to this, John Shakespeare wrote about the Mizos' common belief in *Pathian* or God as follows:

> Practically all the divisions of the Lushai-Kuki [Mizo] family believe in a spirit called *Pathian,* who is supposed to be the creator of everything and is a benevolent being, but has, however, little concern with men.[712]

Edwin Rowlands is, perhaps, the only one of the missionaries to the Mizo people who had deeply studied and participated in Mizo religious and social functions. He accepted that the Mizo people offered sacrifices to God.[713] It is therefore not sufficient to identify the Mizo religion as animism. It was Liangkhaia, the first generation Mizo theologian and church leader, who defended this theological position in connection with the Mizo primal religion. As Liangkhaia put it, 'in its truest sense the Mizo does not worship evil spirits, but earnestly seeks and worships Pathian (God)'.[714] In a similar vein, K. Zawla, a well-known teacher, sums up Mizo primal religion in this way:

> The Mizo religion is not to offer sacrifices to evil spirits; rather it is a worship and submission of the community to *Pathian* (God), who is the creator, guardian and dispenser of blessing to human beings. The whole community gets involved with this religious worship of Pathian every year, although it is not obligatory to do so.[715]

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[711] Lawmsanga, 'Post Colonial Study of the Mission in Mizoram', (PhD Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2010), 55. See also C. Rosiama, 'Mizo Sakhua' in B. Lalthangliana (ed.), *Hranghluite Sulhnu* (Aizawl: RTM Press, 1996): 79.

[712] J.Shakespeare, *The Lushai-Kuki Clan*, *Part I and Part II,* (Reprinted; Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1975), 61. Lushai-Kuki was nomenclature for Mizo used by the British.

[713] *Reports of the Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church of Wales on Mizoram 1894-1957* (comp.K. Thanzauva: Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, 1997), 7. As he writes in the report in 1899, he states 'During the first tour, we witnessed one of the Lushai feasts, in which as they say, they worship their God. They generally sacrifice to demons, of which they are in great fear; but two or three times a year they worship their God. Two of these feasts are held; one after the clearing of the land for sowing, and the other after the 'harvest home'. This was a slight degradation of religion not to be forgotten; for two or three days the large village was 'given to drunkenness'; old women and old men would mutter in drunken accents, that they were worshipping God.'

[714] Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin* (First published 1938; Aizawl: LTL Publications, 2002), 49-50.

[715] K. Zawla, *Mizo Pi Pute leh An Thlahte Chanchin* (Aizawl: Hmar Arsi Press, 1974), 78.

There is therefore evidence that before the advent of Christianity in Mizoram the Mizo believed in the existence of a Supreme Being or Supreme Reality who created and sustains everything in this universe. The Supreme Being is known as *Pathian* and was believed to be the creator of all things and the one who holds the destiny of human beings. This is evident from the use of expressions such as 'Created by *Pathian* (God)' and, 'If *Pathian* (God) wills'.[716] He was also addressed as '*Pathian* nak kalh pa', which means '*Pathian* who formed the ribs'.[717] If this is a correct interpretation, it implies that *Pathian* is the creator of human beings and animals. Vanlaltlani, a Mizo feminist theologian, is also of the opinion that, even though the Mizo did not possess any elaborate account of creation, they believed that *Pathian* possessed creative power and created the world and all that is in it.[718] The *Thiamhla*, which means 'an incantation' or 'an invocation', recited by the *Sadawt* [719] during the sacrifice shows the creative power of Pathian:

> (One) who is worshipped by grandmother, answer (me),
> (One) who is worshipped by grandfather, answer (me);
> *Pathian*, who creates all trees and rocks,
> Answer my (sacrificial) boar,
> *Pathian*, who creates all human beings and animals,
> Answer my (sacrificial) boar.[720]

Challiana, who writes Mizo history, also states that it is *Pathian* who created everything in this world, heaven and earth.[721] The Mizo believed that *Pathian* is not only the creator of human beings but the creator and cause of everything in this world. *Pathian* is

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[716] Saiaithanga, *Mizo Sakhua* (Aizawl: R.Lalsawmliana, 1994), 3.

[717] Zairema, 'The Mizo and their Religion', in K.Thanzauva (ed), *Towards a Tribal Theology: The Mizo Perspective*, (Aizawl: Mizoram Theological Conference, 1989): 39.

[718] T. Vanlaltlani, 'The Experience of Pathian (High God) and other Deities in Mizo Religion and its Influence on Mizo Christians', (M.Th Thesis, Senate of Serampore College, 1990), 36.

[719] Sadawt means 'a priest especially such as employed by ruling chiefs'. See James Herbert Lorrain (Pu Buanga), *Dictionary of the Lushai Language* (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1940), 397.

[720] Vanlaltlani, 'The Experience of Pathian (High God)', 36.

[721] Challiana, *Pi Pu Nun* (Aizawl: Trio Book House, 1962), 23.

omnipotent, the bringer and dispenser of blessing and calamity.[722] On the one hand, the Mizo conceived *Pathian* as one who blessed the righteous with all sorts of blessings and good fortune. On the other hand, Pathian was also believed to punish the wicked with calamities and misfortune. Therefore, the Mizo were very afraid to do anything that was disliked by *Pathian*.[723] Pathian was believed to be 'an active onlooker from heaven and it was to him that they prayed when in trouble'.[724] Even though the primitive Mizo people believed in the existence of *Pathian* (who created all things and who attended to human beings and blessed them), and even prayed to him when in trouble, they had little knowledge concerning Him. Nevertheless, they firmly believed that there was a Supreme Being who was responsible for the creation of the world and the universe.[725] In looking at the Mizo conception of *Pathian* and its creation, one can also find that the Mizo believed in the integral relationship between the Supreme Being and the land.

As noted in chapter four, other tribes in the Northeast India like the Aos and Sangtam in Nagaland shared similar beliefs about land being created by God. They call their Supreme Being, Lijaba. *Li* means 'earth' and *jaba* means 'real'. This implies that the Supreme Being is 'the real soil'. Sometimes people use the name *Lizaba*. *Li* means 'earth' and *zaba* 'enter', so the name means 'the one who enters or indwells the earth or soil'.[726] The Supreme Being is believed to enter the soil just as a vital seed gets buried beneath the soil and

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[722] Sangkhuma, *Missionary-te Hnuhma*, 10.
[723] C.Lianthanga, *Hmanlai Mizo Nun* (Aizawl: Mizoram Publication Board, 1999), 6.
[724] Lalpekhlua, *Contextual Christology*, 181. Pathian was believed to be an active onlooker was illustrated by the story of Liandova and his brother. Liandova and his younger brother Tuaisial were orphans. In their miserable situations, Liandova used to console his brother saying, 'Tuaisial, lungngai ma ta che, zangkhua a la bungbu thei a ni. Pathianin bawkkhupin min en reng a lawm'(Tuaisial, do not worry, history can upside down. Pathian above is looking down on us)
[725] Lianthanga, *Hmanlai Mizo Nun*, 7.
[726] Longchar, *The Tribal Religious* Traditions, 106-107.

germinates.[727] Therefore, for the tribals, the land and the whole creation are the creative actions and manifestations of the Supreme Being. In other words, the Supreme Being is an integral part of the land; land is not external to God. Thus, in the tribals' view, land and the Supreme Beings are inseparably related.[728] This understanding reminds us of the prophet who heard God's messengers announcing that 'the whole earth's is full of God's glory' (Isa.6:1-3). In Hebrew thought, too, it seems that there existed a vital relationship between Yahweh and the land. Land is God's extension of himself and whatever happened to the land was extremely important to God. When God suffered, the land suffered (Gen.4:1-12, 6:5-7, 13). [729]

The idea that land reflects a creative act of God is also very pervasive in the Hebrew tradition (Gen. 1-2; Exod. 20:5; Ps. 24:1, 102:25 etc). The Priestly texts revealed that the sole owner of the land of Canaan is Yahweh; the children of Israel are only tenants (Lev. 25.23).[730] The land is frequently referred to as a gift and a grant to the patriarchs and the children of Israel (Gen.12:7, 15:18, 26:3, 28:13, Deut. 9:6; Ezk.37:11-12, Amos 9:14-15). Lev. 25 asserts that it is Yahweh who owns the land and who controls the conditions of its usage. Therefore, nobody has the right of permanent tenure of land or the right to sell or exchange land.[731]

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[727] Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions*, 107.
[728] Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions*, 106-107.
[729] J. Lawrence, *An Ethical Critique of Land Reform: With Special Reference to Kerela Land Reform (Amendment) Act,* 1969 (Delhi: CISRS and ISPCK, 1998), 83.
[730] Guillaume, *Land*, 10.
[731] Habel, *The land is Mine*, 98.

It is clear that in Hebrew thought, land is a gift from God and is seen as 'a visible sign of the abiding relationship which existed between Yahweh and his people'.[732] It is abundantly clear that the story of the patriarchs was inextricably linked with a 'divine promise of the gift of land', as can be seen in the case of Abraham (Gen.12:1-3; 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:18-21; 17:8) and to his descendants (Gen.26:3f; 28:13-15; 35:11f). Sometimes promise of land was given alongside other divine promises (Gen.13:16; 15:1-6; 26:4, 24; 28:13-15).[733] Moreover, God is presented as the active overseer of land division, either through Moses or through other chosen leaders (Num.26:52, 33:50, 34:13; 38:29). Davies succinctly argues that, 'Of all the promises, however, it was the promise of land that was to prove the most important and decisive for Israel, for this promise was reiterated and reinterpreted from one generation to the next in such a way that it became a living power and a seminal force in the life of the people'.[734]

The concept of land as a gift is explicitly expounded in the book of Deuteronomy. On this, Davies observes that although the 'land was the supreme gift which Yahweh was to bestow upon his people', it was not granted as 'a reward for Israel's righteousness (Deut.9:4f); rather, it was a token of the fact that God was acting to fulfil his promise to the patriarchs (Deut. 6:23; 9:5; 10:11)'.[735] As Davies rightly observes:

> ...any claim that Israel had a natural or intrinsic right to possess the land is immediately discounted in Deuteronomy, and it is repeatedly affirmed that Israel was given the land, and all the benefits and privileges that were associated with it, solely by the grace of God.[736]

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[732] Davies, 'Land', 350.
[733] Davies, 'Land', 350.
[734] Davies, 'Land', 350.
[735] Davies, 'Land', 350.
[736] Davies, 'Land', 350.

The book of Deuteronomy, thus clearly exemplifies that land was a great gift to all the people of Israel; this also implied corresponding requirements for humans.

Moreover, the Book of Deuteronomy identifies Yahweh as the owner of, and ruler over, the land in which Israel is to live. The Deuteronomic image of Yahweh is that of the universal monarch as the ruler of all lands and nations (Deut. 4:39; 10:14, 17).[737] According to Guillaume:

> In Deuteronomistic texts, landholding is based on the notion of grant predicated upon the strict observation of the terms of the grant. The notion of grant excludes 'private' property in the modern sense of the term. Land is possessed conditionally but never owned. As long as they observe the commandments, the children of Israel enjoy vines and olive trees they did not plant (Deut. 6.11; Josh. 24.13). Conversely, the punishment for non-observance of the commands is to build a house and plant a vineyard that others will enjoy (Amos 5:11; Zeph. 1:13) [738]

It appears that many passages in the prophetic writings were replete with an awareness of the significance of land for Israel and arising from its status as a gift from Yahweh. However, Pyper makes the cautionary remark, 'Throughout the prophetic tradition, the celebration of the liberation of Israel is consistently tied to the gift of the land of Canaan and the expropriation of the Canaanites'.[739] In a similar vein, Stifan Ateek observes that the God of the Bible, the God who saves and liberates, has been viewed by Palestinians as partial and discriminating; the Bible appears to them as 'slavery rather than freedom, injustice rather

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[737] Habel, *The land is Mine*, 37.
[738] Guillaume, *Land*, 10.
[739] Pyper, *The Unchained Bible*, 56.

than justice.' They have been unable 'to come to terms with its ambiguities, questions, and paradoxes-especially with its direct application to the twentieth century events in Palestine.[740]

The prophets indeed stressed that Yahweh is the real owner of land and 'Israel had no perpetual, inalienable right to the land, and that the people could, by their unfaithfulness and disloyalty to Yahweh, lose possession of it'.[741] Thus the prophets breathe out threatening words upon the nation who are unfaithful to Yahweh and protest against the unfair treatment and exploitation of poor people by powerful people. Amos, for instance, emphasised that Israel by nature was not 'indigenous' to the land of Canaan (Amos 2:10) and by no means had 'inviolable right' to dwell in the land of Canaan.[742] He vehemently warned that the Israel would suffer military defeat and be taken into exile due to their gross inhumanity and sinfulness (Amos 2:13-16; 3:11; 5:3, 27; 7:7-9; 7:17). Micah issued strong condemnations and warning to those who were exploiting the poor. He strongly warned that anyone who confiscates the fields and the houses of another man would be dispossessed (Mic.2:1-5).[743] Similarly, Isaiah was indignant against the accumulation of land in a few hands and issued warning of devastation and famine (5:8-10; 6:11-13).[744] For the prophets, therefore, confiscation or dispossession of land (Mic. 2;1-2, Isa. 5:8-10) could imply a denial of divine landownership and the refusal of Yahweh's creative power. This would also amount to a violation of Yahweh's will for his people and a disruption of the relationship between creator and creation. The phrase 'there is the power/god in their hand' (Mic. 2:1) suggests that the

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[740] Naim Stifan Ateek, 'A Palestinian Perspective: The Bible and Liberation' in R.S Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Voices From the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (London: SPCK, 1991): 281-283.
[741] Davies, 'Land', 353.
[742] Davies, 'Land', 353.
[743] Davies, 'Land', 353-354. See also, Davies, 'Why do we know about Amos?', 60-61; Shaw, *The Speeches of Micah*, 79.
[744] Williamson, *Isaiah* 1-27, 356.

prophet intends to portray the land grabbers as people who illegitimately see themselves as exercising absolute power, the power of God.[745] Therefore, a fitting punishment for these land grabbers is their exclusion from the distribution of land so that they have no share in the community of the Lord (Mic. 2:5) and reap economic ruin (Isa. 5:10).

Returning to the discussion about Northeast Indian tribal traditions, the ownership of land should be viewed within this wider recognition that the land belongs to the Supreme Being. As Thanzauva remarks, 'For tribals, land is the source of life and is sacred. It is creation and the gift of God who, at the same time, dwells in the land'.[746] Furthermore, for tribals, there is a strong organic unity between God, humans and land. This symbiotic relationship distinguishes the tribal concept of land from utilitarian western understandings that tends to see land as a means for human gratification. For tribal people, including the Mizo tradition, this organic unity does not end in the earth; it continues to exist even in the land of the dead or Mitthi Khua.[747] The relationship between humans and land is eternally bound. Similarly in Israelite society, one tradition speaks of an afterlife in Sheol, the abode of the dead, while another tells of the dead continuing to live in the tomb of internment. As Purdue states, 'Family tombs were located on the household's land, in part so that the ancestors could maintain a presence as a member of the family'.[748] The biblical accounts offer materials that a family member was gather next to the ancestor after death or was being interned in the family tomb (Gen. 25:8, 17; 49:29-33; Judg. 2:10). Therefore, from the tribal

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[745] Marvin Sweeney, *Berit Olam: The Twelve Prophets* (Collegeville, Minnesota:A Michael Glazier Book, 2000), 359.

[746] Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 173.

[747] Lalchawiliana, 'Theology of Land', 62-63. According to Mizo belief of life after death, in the Mitthi Khua, the souls of the dead work like the people here on earth to satisfy their needs. They even have to construct houses for their dwelling and they have to work in Jhum/ field. The soul of the dead feels pain and hurt, eat and sleep and work in Mitthi Khua. But life there is supposed to be only an imitation of earthly life.

[748] Purdue, 'The Israelite and Early Jewish Family', 176. See also Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 18-28.

perspective, the texts of Micah 2:1-3 and Isaiah 5:8-10 reflect the vital, indeed inseparable relationship between God, humans and land which continues to exist even in the land of dead. The organic unity between God, humans and land was broken down as a result of powerful people's forceful acquisition of land from small landholders. The prophets knew that both the motivation and actions of those who prospered from this were gross violations of Yahweh's will. They also declared that Yahweh would bring judgement upon the rapacious and greedy elite who deliberately seized the land of defenceless people.

3. Land as a Sacred Place

In this section we shall investigate the way tribal people in Northeast India look at land as a sacred place, a mother and a living entity. An attempt is made to see the striking parallels with the ancient Israelite tradition thereby creating space for an alternative reading of the given passages.

It is generally agreed that in the tribal concept of land, there is no place for an arrogant approach to nature which treats land and its creatures as mere objects for human use. The land and all creatures are sacred, a holy temple, the self-expression of God and above all it is part of tribal lives. Nirmal Minz, an Indian Tribal theologian, rightly observes:

> Tribal life is based and built upon a vision of human existence in which they are aware that land, forest and the country they occupy are the gifts of God. Therefore man, nature, spirits continue as the basic texture of existence, as what makes man truly human. Balance and harmony of man [sic]-nature-spirits are essential for man to continue to remain human. Any imbalance between and among these initiates a dehumanising process and hence this harmony has to be protected and promoted from generation to generation.[749]

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[749] Nirmal Minz, 'Primal Religion's Perspective on Ecology', in Daniel D. Chetti (ed.), *Ecology and Development* (Madras: Gurukul Theological College and Research Institute, 1991): 49.

The tribals' life has traditionally revolved around agricultural operations which depend upon land/soil. The way they treated the land/soil for agricultural purposes and developed respect for land was commendable. For example, as an agricultural community the Northeast Indian tribals, including the Mizo, practised shifting cultivation. However, the early Mizo performed purification rites before they cleared the jungle for the land they had chosen for jhum that particular year. When choosing a plot of land for jhum, if they found a *zawng lu ro* (the dry skull of monkey), *lei ruang tuam*,(an unlucky mound resembling a grave) or *thingzungkai* (the root of a tree crossing a stream supposed to be used as a bridge by evil spirits) within the chosen plot, they performed a sacrifice to appease the *ramhuai* (an evil spirit) which they believed was the dweller of the land. This sacrifice was usually performed in a solemn manner.[750]

When the jungle was cleared and burnt, several living creatures were usually burnt to death. In order to propitiate the *ramhuai* and thus secure health for the whole family, after *thlam* (jhum house) had been built, a sacrifice was offered using a cock and a hen. This sacrifice is termed as *Kang ralna*.[751] It was done for the purification of the soil and out of deep respect for the dead of living creatures. The Mizo believed that a *sih* (swamp or marsh) was usually inhabited by at least a family of spirits or *Huai*. So when a *sih* was found at the edge of a jhum, a sacrifice was offered in order to appease the spirits.[752] The tribal people in Northeast India including Mizos performed various land-related ceremonies; these included purification of the forest at the beginning of a jungle clearing, purification of the soil after burning of the jhums, dedication of fields to the Supreme Being, and thanksgiving and

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[750] Lalhmuaka, *Zoram Thim Ata Engah* (Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, 1988), 60.
[751] Lianthanga, *Hman lai Mizo Nun,* 206; Dokhuma, *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, 89.
[752] Lianthanga, *Hman lai Mizo Nun*, 202.

harvest festivals.[753] Most of these ceremonies were directed by the process of jhum

cultivation, and therefore directly connected with the fields. Since the tribal life depends

heavily upon the fertility of the soil, they developed a deep respect for the earth. Tribal

people invoked the soil to be kind, fertile and generous as they worked and sow seeds on it. A

religious rite was performed to the Supreme Being so that the soil would become more fertile

and fruitful. As these sacrifices were taking place on the ground, the earth was for tribal

people a temple, the dwelling place of God.[754]

Commenting on how tribal people's life related to the land, a tribal scholar

M.Horam categorically states, 'the early tribal life centred round the soil, the ancestral fields,

sowing and harvesting. Village feasts were directed by the agriculture calendar and seasons.

Most religious ceremonies and festivals were directly connected with the fields'.[755] For

example, the Mizo performed an annual sacrifice called *kawngpui siam* to ensure prosperity

for the entire village, especially in the hunting and trapping of wild animals.[756] It was

performed in connection with the land. This sacrifice was generally made in the evening, on

the main path just outside the southern entrance to the village. The priest and a few elders

cooked and consumed the sacrifice on the spot and invoked the Supreme Being.[757]

Additionally, the Mizo held another annual sacrifice for a bumper crop in the jhum and the

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[753] *Reports of the Foreign Mission*, 7; Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions.*109-110. See also Lalrinawma, *Mizo Ethos*, 138-148.

[754] Dokhuma, *Hmanlai Mizo*, 65-67.

[755] M. Horam, *Social and Cultural life of the Nagas* (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1977), 39.

[756] Malsawma, *Sociology of the Mizo*, 146.

[757] Lorrain, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, 238.

protection of the rice crops from possible diseases.[758] This was also closely connected with land and the fruit of land.

Various festivals were observed throughout the year and formed an important part of the tribal community. These served 'to mitigate, and more positively to sweeten the otherwise severe [year-round] struggle for daily life; provided an occasion for the display of their gay, jovial nature, for the periodic release of emotions, [and] helped in renewing social contacts and in strengthening community feelings'.[759] Most of the festivals were centred on the soil. For example, the main Mizo festivals, such as *Chapchar Kut, Mim Kut*, and *Pawl Kut*, were associated with jhumming and centred on the soil. *Chapchar Kut* was the most important and biggest of these three festivals, and was usually held in March soon after the jhums had been cut. This festival was held to invoke the blessing of *Pathian* or God for future cultivation and was also a festival of thanks-giving to *Pathian* for saving people from injuries and the like. *Mim Kut* was a festival reserved for the spirit of the dead when the first crop other than paddy was reaped; such crops were offered to the spirit of the dead.[760] *Pawl Kut* was a festival of harvest, and took place immediately after the harvest. It was a sort of thanksgiving, held to celebrate the end of one year and to welcome a New Year.[761] Again, these festivals revolved around the jhum and had close connection with agricultural operations.[762]

Tribal scholar Wati Longchar observes that, for tribal people in Northeast India:

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[758] Malsawma, *Sociology of the Mizo*,146.

[759] .Malsawma, *Sociology of the Mizo*,125.

[760] At the yearly Mim kut festival the spirit of departed are believed to revisit their homes and on that occasion also offerings are made to them.

[761] Malsawma, *Sociology of the Mizo*,127.

[762] C. G.Verghese and R.L.Thanzawna, *A History of the Mizos* Vol I (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt, Ltd, 1997), 23.

> Festivals and ceremonies are not only eating, drinking and merry-making, but are deeply connected with the soil. These festivals are celebrated not only to nourish and refresh physically, but also to invoke the Supreme Being's blessings on the soil. Through the celebration of ceremonies and festivals people invoke the land to be kind, fertile and generous as they sow and work on it.[763]

The tribal beliefs, festivals, sacrifices and rites have close connections with the land. The life of the tribal people depended on the fertility of the soil. Land for them is therefore not merely a space, but a *sacred* place. For tribal people, graves of ancestor are sacred and the resting place is hallowed ground.[764] Some tribal groups like the Mizo also observed a festival in honour of ancestors, the *Mitthi rawp lam*; this might be considered an ancestors' cult.[765] Commenting on the sacredness of the land for the tribals, K. Thanzauva writes, 'Land, for the tribals, is sacred because their religion does not centre around a temple or a church or a particular shrine, but the whole earth is the temple where they worship God'.[766]

The Hebrew Bible offers various suggestive allusions of land as a sacred place. Though land may not have be divinised, the patriarchs invoke the name of Yahweh in several places when they came into Canaan (Gen.12:6,8; 21:33; 26:24-25; 28:10-19; 31:52-53; cf. Hos 4:12-13). These places, at which alters were built, become centres of religious activity and, what might be called sacred sites or places.[767] Elsewhere, in the Hebrew Bible, the ground where Yahweh reveals himself to Moses and Joshua respectively is describes as holy

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[763] Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions*, 119.

[764] See also T.C.McLuhan, *Touch the Earth: A Self-Portrait of Indian Existence* (ABACUS: UK, 1973), 30.

[765] Dokhuma, *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, 44. Mitthi rawp lam is the name of a festival held in honour of one's ancestors and deceased near relatives in which their effigies are carried in a group in the village and are seated on the luhkapui platform and made to drink along with the living.

[766] Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 23.

[767] Diana Edelman,'Cultic Sites and Complexes beyond the Jerusalem Temple', in Francesca Stavrakopoulou and John Barton (eds.), *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah* (London: T & T Clark, 2010): 83.

ground (Ex. 3:5, Josh 5:15; cf.Acts 7:33).[768] As indicated earlier, patrimonial land (נחלה)

serves as a sacred symbol in ancient Israel society, holding the soil, the community and

ancestors together. There is also a suggestive allusion of ancestral cult in popular religion in

ancient Israel and Judah, perhaps to designed to worship the dead as divine power ('elohim; I

Sam. 28:13; 2 Sam. 14:16; Isa.8:19-20; cf. Num 25:2; Ps.106:28).[769] The presence of the

ancestor's bones in the soil bind the בית אב (bêt 'āb) to its land, revealing a sacred

relationship between family and land.[770]

There are also interesting parallels between the ancient Israelites festivals that had

agriculture origins and those of the Mizos. As noted earlier, all the Mizo festivals revolved

around agriculture and had strong connections with land. Similarly, according to Volkmar

Fritz, Jewish feasts such as Passover-Mazzot, the Feast of Weeks, and the feast of Tabernacle

are 'determined by the annual rhythmn [sic] of nature [and] have strong connection with

agriculture '.[771] Passover-Mazzot marks the beginning of spring and coincides with the first

harvest of the New Year, the barley harvest, and the births of new animal stock. The Feast of

Weeks coincides with the wheat harvest. The feast of Tabernacle or Booths in autumn takes

place at the time of harvest of fruit and grapes and conclude the harvest cycle of the year.[772]

Traditionally these festivals have been connected with decisive events in the early history of

Israel where God performed his powerful act (for example, the Exodus, the revelation on

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[768] Ziony Zevit, 'Preamble to a Temple Tour', in Barry M. Gittlen (ed.), *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2002): 75.
[769] Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 19.
[770] Olyan, 'Family Religion in Israel', 115-119.
[771] Volkmar Fritz, *The City in Ancient Israel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 187.
[772] Lemche, *Ancient Israel*, 217-219. According to Lemche, Passover was a variety of New Year festival, since it coincided with the first harvest of the new year, the barley harvest. Thus, a permanent ingredient in the Passover was the sacrifice of the first-fruits and the first of the new-born lambs as thank-offerings to Yahweh.

Sinai, the wandering in the wilderness).[773] However, like the Mizo festivals, all Israelite festivals also had strong connections with agriculture and were closely connected with land.

Viewed from the Northeast India tribal perspective, the prophetic texts of both Micah and Isaiah as appear to indicate the significance and sacredness of the land. It is most probable that the concept of ancestral land as sacred was deeply rooted in the theological thinking of tribal society and was alive and well in Israel and Judah in the monarchic period as well. Thus, for the prophets, powerful people's forceful acquisition of land from small landowners was a violation of the sacred relationship between land, family and God. As indicated earlier, land provided a place where people invoked the name of God. In addition, the ancestors' bones in the soil of the family tomb held together the family and their land. Micah and Isaiah appear to have been upholders of these traditional values. They vehemently breathed condemnation and warning to powerful people whose dubious acquisition of houses and ancestral land (נחלה) ignored Israel's traditional religious values. Therefore, from the tribal perspective, the texts of Micah 2:1-2 and Isaiah 5:8-10 reflect the alienation of sacred symbols of ancestral land (נחלה) from ordinary people. Such practices deprived people of their sociological and economic needs because the forceful acquisition of land undermines people's life support, festive activities and identity. This constitutes the ruining of the sacred relationship between land, family and God. As such the prophetic protest against such abuse is inevitable. Its punishment is deserved and inescapable (Mic 2:5 and Isa.5:10).

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[773] Fritz, *The City in Ancient Israel*, 187.

4. Land as Mother Earth

As indicated earlier, the pattern of the tribal people's life is directly related to land. The tribals cannot think of the Supreme Being or the community without relating to land. This deep-rootedness in the soil is unique to a tribal worldview. Land is conceived as mother. As noted in chapter four, most of the tribes have myths which say that they are born out of the earth. The Nagas tribe, the Mizos and the Garos say that their ancestors emerged from a big hole of the earth or from the womb of the earth. For example, according to Mizo myth, the Mizo came out of 'Chhinlung'[774] which lies beneath the surface of the earth. The men and women came out of 'Chhinlung' to settle the earth's surface. All these myths symbolically tell that 'the land is the mother; we are born out of the earth. The mother gives life, unity and identity to all living creatures'.[775]

Looking at ancient Israelite traditions, scholars like Jansen and Guillaume hold the view that the widespread ancient West Asian concept of a divine 'Mother Earth' in the Hebrew Bible is debatable.[776] However, there are various instances or suggestive allusions to the Mother Earth motif in Hebrew Bible. In this connection, I would agree with Lallawmzuala who asserts: '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

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[774] Chhinlung is commonly believed to be the name of the cave/hole from which the ancestors of the Mizo tribes came out. The word 'chhin' means 'cover' and 'lung' means 'stone'. Therefore 'Chhinlung' denotes 'covering stone'. This myth is quite common among other tribes of Northeast India. However, concrete and final conclusions about this cannot be drawn. The historicity and exact location of this Chhinlung is very much debatable. It has been interpreted in various ways and there is no consensus.

[775] Longchar, 'Dancing with the Land,' 123.

[776] W.Jansen, 'Land' in David Noel Freedman (ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol 4(New York: Doubleday, 1992): 143. Guillaume, *Land*, 187.

earth is never divinised.' [777] Habel also rightly notes, in Hebrew tradition 'the land is personified not as a goddess or Mother Earth, but as a kind of personal extension of YHWH her Lord' and human being rooted in the land.[778]

The Hebrew Bible offers material which affirms that human beings are rooted in the soil of the earth; this can be seen in the J-source creation story in the book of Genesis: 'Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and human became a living being' (Gen.2:7). The underlying principle is that soil is 'the source' and 'the ground of human' beings; human beings are 'part of the land and rooted in the land'.[779] Indeed, the name אדם that is given to humanity is derived from the ground אדמה. For the Yahwist, there is no more telling indication of the intrinsic relatedness of things than the similarity of words. So to call the human being אדם is to recognize its solidarity with Earth.[780] Though the wordplay between אדם and אדמה is evident, it is very likely that 'the affinity of those two is more than the word play of the writer or editor. Beyond the wordplay lies the potentially subversive claim that human being is derived from soil'.[781] Gene M.Tucker convincingly argues that the account of the creation story in Gen 2:5b-2:7 reveals 'the interdependence of the earth, humanity, and the deity...The humanity is

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[777] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 223.

[778] Norman Habel, 'The Suffering Land: Ideology in Jeremiah' *Lutheran Theological Journal*, Vol. XXVI, (May 1992): 19.

[779] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos ', 224.

[780] Carol A.Newsom, 'Common Ground: An Ecological Reading of Genesis 2-3', in Norman C.Habel and Shirley Wurst (eds.), *The Earth Story in Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000): 63. See also Beverly J.Stratton, *Out of Eden: Reading, Rhetoric, and Ideology in Genesis* 2-3 (JSOT Sup, 208; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 29-30; Ellen Van Wolde, 'Facing the Earth: Primeval History in a New Perspective', in Philip R.Davies and David J.A. Clines (eds.), *The World of Genesis: Persons, Places, Perspectives* (JSOT Sup, 257; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998): 30.

[781] Mark G.Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity* (London/New York: Routledge, 2000), 30. See also his other's work 'Earthing the Human in Genesis 1-3', in Norman C.Habel and Shirley Wurst (eds.), *The Earth Story in Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000): 80.

made from the soil and to it shall return (3:19)'.[782] The earth/the ground, the red אדמה is the

progenitor of אדמ, highly comparable to the Northeast Indian tribal concept of Mother Earth.

An important allusion to the Mother Earth motif is found in the book of Job when

Job affirms, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there' (Job

1:21). Human beings issue from the womb of a mother and return to their place of origin at

death. According to Hartley:

> The identification of thither/there (heb.Sama) is pressed by some. Since one
> obviously cannot return to one's mother's womb, 'there' might mean a return
> to 'mother earth' as the place of humanity's origin. The mother's womb in
> which a body is knit together was perceived as an extension of the earth (Ps
> 139:13-15). It was common in the ancient Near East to bury a person in a
> curled position, suggesting a return to the embryonic condition.[783]

Regarding an intimate relation between human and the earth, Hartley further argues

that just as Job came forth from his mother's womb, so he would return to the earth, the

mother of all living being.[784]

In the same vein, Clines observes:

> the mother's womb is the womb of Mother Earth. The best clue to the crux
> lies in Ps 139, where v.13 speaks of an individual's creation in the mother's
> womb, and v.15 of that same individual's creation in the depths of the earth.
> The images surrounding the origin of humankind and that of the individual are
> fused. So here too the imagery of an individual's birth is silently fused with

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[782] Tucker, 'Rain on a Land Where No One Lives: The Hebrew Bible on the Environment', *JBL* 116/1(1997): 8.

[783] John E.Hartley, *The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 75.

[784] Hartley, *The Book of Job*, 75. Similar words are found in Sir 40:1, we read 'Great travail is created for everyman, and a heavy York is laid on the son of Adam, from the day that they go out of their mother's womb, until the day that they return to the mother of all living'.

the imagery of humankind's creation, so that 'thither' is indeed the earth, not as technical term or euphemism.[785]

The same kind of idea is expressed in Gen.3:19 when God meted out punishment to man after the man and the woman had been disobedient, '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 return'. The preceding verses portray an alienation of אדם from אדמה. However, this verse clearly states that human beings are taken out of the soil and will return to the soil at death. As we have indicated above, Ps.139:13, 15 (MT.Ps.139:15,17) presents a clear description of how humans are from the ground: 'For it was you who formed my inward parts, you knit me together in my mother's womb...my frame was hidden from you, when I was being made secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth'. This speaks of the human body as being formed in the 'depths of the earth'.[786] There can be no doubt that this testifies to an intrinsic relationship between God, human beings and land within the Hebrew tradition.

Thus, 'the plight of the weaker citizens in Israel and Judah, referred to so often by eighth-century prophets, was the result of an economic development which, supported by royal court, had reached its climax in the eighth century'.[787] It is very likely that many peasants in the eighth century became rootless people; they became alienated from ancestral land due to forceful acquisition. It is apparent that the most serious accusation Micah proclaims against those who intentionally seize the properties of their neighbours is in 2:2:- 'They oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance (נחלה)'. As McKane notes, 'It appears that the foundations of a society are being shaken, that its structure is disintegrating,

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[785] David J.A.Clines, *Job* 1-20, (WBC, 17; Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1989), 37. Thither' could be euphemism for the underworld or Sheol (Job. 3:17, 19). But the verb 'return' is obstacle to this view.
[786] Clines, *Job* 1-20, 37.
[787] Mays, *Micah*, 64.

that nuclear institutions on which its stability depends, homesteads, families, fields, little communities rooted in the soil, are being swept away by robbery with violence'.[788] Koch also observes that during the time of Micah and Isaiah, powerless people were being driven out of home and land; they were losing the ancestral land (נחלה) which 'assures people of a peaceful free life and self-determination'.[789] This reflects the interconnectedness between humans and land which was now showing signs of breaking down. For tribal people, alienation from the ancestral land (נחלה) was tantamount to cutting off people from their roots. It threatened their life-support system, undermined the structure of socio-cultural identity, took away religious freedom and identity and disrupted the sacred relationship between God, humans and land. It seems likely that it was the elite's action in this regard that invited divine punishment and, with judgement proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah in a distinct manner. Both Micah and Isaiah used woe (hôy) oracles to emphasise the seriousness of the situation; the misdeeds of the culprits violated the basic order of life set by Yahweh and so destroyed the health and wholeness of the community.[790] According to Gitay, Isaiah proclaims the judgement 'in a language of oath, which prevents in advance the opportunity for refutation. It is impossible, in other words, to avoid God's punishment'.[791] The punishment itself is that the houses taken by force would be destroyed and that the land would produce only a very limited harvest (5:10). Similarly, Micah looked for Yahweh to bring punishment upon the exploiters,

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[788] McKane, *The Book of Micah*, 61.

[789] Koch, *The Prophets*, 94.

[790] Wolff, *Micah the Prophet*, 47; Mays, *Micah,* 62; Williamson, *Isaiah*, 40. According to Wolff, Woe (hôy) was heard publicly out on the street only during ritual mourning for the dead. This means then that by using this terror-inspiring hôy, both Micah and Isaiah are placing the wielders of power under God's verdict of death! Similarly Williamson states, Woe is a cry of grief familiar in laments over death. In prophetic use, it mounts by their very form 'a prediction of death', 'a proclamation of the judgement of Yahweh'.

[791] Gitay, *Isaiah and His Audience*, 102.

stripping them of their power. Their confiscated land would be taken away and the culprits would be excluded from the redistribution of land (2:5).

5. Land as a Living Entity

The tribal people of Northeast India do not think of land and all the things in it as inanimate objects; they regard them instead as having life and power in themselves.[792] As they perceive land as a divine and living entity, 'no one is allowed to spit on or poke the holy ground with a pointed metal or object during festivals and religious observances. Any action that may hurt the land is rigorously discouraged'.[793] They consider that human activities can evoke emotional responses from the land. As indicated earlier, tribal people invoke the Supreme Being and the land to be gentle, kind, fertile and generous during the beginning of jungle clearing, the dedication of seeds and the purification of the soils. The tribal people in Northeast India hold that that 'it was a taboo to alter a jhum's boundary line to one's advantage; it would result in ill health and could lead to death'.[794] For tribal people land is a sacred reality and a living entity, therefore, it should not be exploited for selfish gain.

In Hebrew thought also, it appears that land can be considered as a living entity that has emotional responses to human activities. Human acts of violence, greed, defilement and exploitation provoke the anger of the land. There are many instances of this in the Hebrew Bible. For example, after Adam breaks God's command not to eat the fruit in the middle of the Garden, God says that the ground is cursed 'on account of you' (Gen.3:17), or 'because of you'. A type of enmity ensues, in which the earth brings forth thorns and thistles; only the

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[792] Lalpekhlua, *Contextual Christology*, 175.
[793] Longchar, *The Tribal Religious Traditions*, 106-107.
[794] Lalpekhlua, *Contextual Christology*, 177.

painful and sweaty work of field labour can now produce bread. This relation does not arise from some stinginess of the earth, but as the result of its abuse.[795] Again, Tucker, referring to this account, asserts that 'one of the results of disobedience is the estrangement of humanity from nature, even from the life-giving arable soil'.[796] The same kind of idea is reflected even more clearly after Cain kills his brother Abel. Yahweh says 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 fugitive and wanderer on the earth' (Gen.4:10-13). The אדמה appears here as a living organism and reacts to the murder by withholding 'her strength', her fertility.[797] Von Rad notes that Yahweh's punishment of Cain goes beyond the punishment of Adam in Gen. 3:17.[798] It is so poignant that 'Cain's relation to the mother Earth is disturbed much more deeply. It is so shattered that the Earth has no home for him. As a vagrant and wanderer, alienated from the Earth, he must now spend the rest of his life'.[799]

The resulting deep sense of alienation is poignantly expressed in Cain's lamentation. Cain's outburst, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear' suggests that life under the curse is worse than death. Wittenberg observes, 'Genesis 4:14 describes the nature of alienation: to be driven away from the arable soil is to have all relationship broken, first of all with Yahweh (cf.Gen.3:10) and then with the protective bonds of the family'.[800] This clearly exemplifies that pollution and defilement of the land bring disaster and desolation for exploiters. The

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[795] Newsom, *Common Ground*, 70.
[796] Tucker, 'Rain on a Land', 9.
[797] C.Westermann, *Genesis 1-12: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1984), 306.
[798] Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 3rd rev.edn, 1978), 106.
[799] Rad, *Genesis*, 106.
[800] Wittenberg, 'Alienation', 110.

indigenous Australian Biblical scholar, Wali Fejo goes even further to suggest that the

violation of the earth by human beings is the reason for the flood in Genesis 9. When humans

fill the Earth with violence (Gen.6:11), they violate the Earth and the Earth becomes

corrupted. 'The earth as living reality is hurt by these human actions. The Earth suffers. Thus

God suffers'.[801] The earth/ground as a living entity, serving as Yahweh's instrument for

punishment, can be seen in the case of Korah, Dothan and Abiram when they opposed Moses

and Aaron. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, with their households

(Num.15:1-34).

In early Hebrew thought, there are several texts in which the land is also seen as

suffering and mourning as a result of human evils and the anger of God. For example, the

prophet Hosea cries out:

> Hear the word of the LORD, you children of Israel: for the LORD had a
> controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor
> mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. Swearing, and lying, and killing,
> and stealing, and adultery break out and bloodshed after bloodshed. Therefore,
> the land mourns, and all who live in it languish, together with wild animals
> and the birds of the air; even the fish of the sea are perishing'.[802]

In fact, the whole cosmos suffers from the effects of human sinfulness.[803] Jeremiah

similarly 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

the people said, ''He is blind to our way'' (Jer. 12:4). Above all, Jeremiah's personification

of land is notable (e.g.Jer. 6:19; 8:16; 22:29) and the 'land occasionally appears to be

identified with the people of Israel, both are similarly designated as Yahweh's inheritance (cf.

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[801] Fejo, 'The Voice of the Earth', 142.
[802] Hosea 4:1-3. The above quotation is taken from New Revised Standard Version.
[803] H.W.Wolff, *Hosea* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 68. See also Tucker, 'Rain on a Land', 13.

Jer.12:7-13)'.[804] The underlying principle seems to be that land is the living partner of Yahweh; it is portrayed as suffering and mourning because of the evil doings of human beings. At the same time, land is also seen as the source of peace, prosperity and justice (Ps. 72:3). Even though land is never divinised in the Old Testament, the land is not isolated from Yahweh. Rather it is a living entity which is closely associated with Yahweh and serves as God's instrument for blessing and punishment.[805] As indicated earlier, for the Northeast Indian tribal people, it was a taboo to move a jhum/field boundary line to one's advantage. This would result in ill health and could lead to death. Such belief has a similar parallel with ancient Israelites' prohibition of moving boundary markers at the head of fields or encroaching on the field of fatherless (Deut. 19:14, 27:17; Prov.22:28, 23:10-11; Hos.5:10). Deuteronomist was unequivocal in condemning such crime, denouncing 'Cursed is the man who moves his neighbour's boundary stone' (Deut.27:17).Yahweh will take up their case against the defaulter (Prov.23:11).

Returning to the discussions about Northeast India traditions, the tribal people in this part of India have developed respect and care for the land. For example, each Mizo village has its own sacred grove 'Ngawpui'. [806] No tree is allowed to be cut in the 'Ngawpui', except for those trees that show the signs of age and decay. Out of respect for nature, the Mizo people would only use dead wood for fuel.[807] The sacred grove or 'Ngawpui' is associated

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[804] Davies, 'Land', 354.
[805] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 228.
[806] Lalrinawmi, 'A Feminist Critique', 227.
[807] Lalrinawmi, 'A Feminist Critique', 227. Though overwhelming forest surrounding them, only dead wood is collected for firewood and they never fell the tree irresponsibly. See also McLuhan, *Touch the Earth*, 15. He notes that Wintu Indians of California lived on densely wooded land where it was difficult even to find clear land to erect houses. They would not chop down the tree, they would use only dead wood for fuel, out of respect for nature.

with 'beliefs, taboos and folklores which have helped in conserving the relicts of flora and

fauna'.[808] Commenting on how the early Mizo conserved the forest, Zairema states:

> Unlike modern towns, for instance, there was no organised fire service where firemen were trained in skills and techniques in putting fire out. Mizos were trained from childhood not to do any acts that might start uncontrollable fire anywhere and feel responsible for putting it out, if accidentally spread. To avoid forest fire, the whole village would cultivate a compact area and would built a fire-break round cultivation. If fire accidentally spread to the adjoining forest the whole village would act in unison, the women, the children would bring water and the men fought the fire.... The man who set fire to a forest was required to pay the heaviest fine Mizo customary law imposed on offenders[809]

In the same way, it appears that Israelite society had developed a similarly healthy

attitude towards nature. For example, the Deuteronomic law prohibits unnecessary

destruction of the forest even during siege warfare (Deut.20:19-20). In what is probably the

most direct biblical expression of sensitivity to the natural environment, verses 19-20 place a

restraint on the assumption that anything goes and that defoliation and natural destruction are

unlimited when one is at war. 2 Kings 3:19,25 reveals that 'Israel shared with the Egyptian

and other military powers in the Ancient Near East the common practice of destroying the

natural source of life invaded by her enemies'.[810] These verses protest against the reckless

destruction of the forest. In fact, even in times of urgent need in warfare, no one is allowed to

decimate the forest. Fruit trees are not to be cut down, for they can provide food both during

the war and after. Even non-fruit-bearing trees should not be cut down at random. 'Are trees

in the field human beings that they should come under siege from you?' is the Deuteronomic

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[808] Lalrinawmi, 'A Feminist Critique', 227.
[809] Zairema, 'What made the Mizo Tick' in *Mizoram Today* (Aizawl: Directorate of Information and Public Relations, 1996), 28.
[810] A.D.H.Mayes, *Deuteronomy, The New Century Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm.B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 296.

question that supplies the rationale for the law. This clearly implies an 'ecological right' in that human aggression is not to be directed toward nature.[811]

The plight of powerless people in Israel and Judah, referred to so often by the eighth century prophets, was the result of unprecedented economic development which perhaps affected land management. Supported by the royal court, this reached its climax in the eighth century. The effects of such radical change were enormous in that 'the old family properties around the villages were being broken up and the clan system pressed out of existence'.[812] As indicated earlier, the organic unity between God, humans and land relationships had broken down as a result of the forceful taking of land from peasants. In looking at eighth century Israel and Judah it is apparent that an alternative royal model of landholding was emerging and that this was in conflict with traditional understandings of land. Within this new ideology, land was seen mainly as a source of material wealth.[813] It was considered a commodity that could be bought, sold, traded and bargained, even grabbed or captured to serve the economic interests of the ruling class.[814] In this connection, Habel remarks: 'basic to this royal land ideology is the concept 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 earth as empire'.[815] Similarly, Whitelam articulates the dynamics of royal ideology in this way: 'Royal ideology provided a justification for the

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[811] Lalfakzuala, *Human Rights in Deuteronomy: A Sociological Approach* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2004), 115. See also Tucker, 'Rain on a Land Where No One Lives', 12.
[812] Mays, *Micah*, 64.
[813] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 229.
[814] Brueggemann, *A Social Reading*, 279.
[815] Habel, *The Land is Mine*, 17. For Israelite royal ideology, see also Antti Laato, *History and Ideology in the Old Testament Prophetic Literature: A Semiotic Approach to the Reconstruction of the Proclamation of the Historical Prophets* (CB Coniectanea Biblica, Old Testament Series 41; Stockholm: Almqwist & Wiksell International, 1996), 261-267.

control of power and strategic resources; it proclaimed that the king's right to rule was guaranteed by the deities of the state' and the king's central role in the cosmic order.[816] In this sense, royal ideology legitimised the powers of the sovereign.

It is very likely that prophets like Micah and Isaiah were protesting against this dominant ideology. Isaiah appears to be offering an alternative ideology when he proclaims, 'The Lord of Hosts has sworn in my hearing, Indeed large estate shall become desolate, Great and good ones-without inhabitant. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath, And a homer of seed shall yield but one ephah (5:9-10)'. Thus, the produce from the field is exactly one-tenth of what was planted. The land grabbers will reap economic ruin due to violating Yahweh's covenant. The appropriate punishment in Micah's view was to evict these defaulters from the privileges that they had denied to others (2:4); thus the land grabber would be excluded from the redistribution of strips of community land (2:5). According to Wolff, the land grabbers would have no share in the community of the Lord[817]; this would have been shockingly disastrous for them. Moreover, the land (as a living entity) would not produce fruit for wicked people who had violated the covenant (cf. Lev.26:20; Deut. 28:38). In response to the exploitation and unfair treatment of powerless people by the rapacious elites, its fertility is greatly reduced (Isa 5:10).

6. Land as a shared Community Resource

As noted in chapter four, land sharing has been an important feature and value of Northeast Indian tribal society. Most of the tribes in Northeast India hold to 'principles of

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[816] Keith W.Whitelam, 'Israelite Kingship: The Royal Ideology and Its opponents', in R.E.Clements (ed.), *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 121. See also Guillaume, *Land*, 159.

[817] Wolff, *Micah the Prophet,* 46.

communal ownership of land, [al] though they have divergent traditions and practices in relation to its management.'[818] For them, the land and its resources were a gift from the deity intended for the sustenance of all members of the community. Land was a common resource for the subsistence living of the entire community and one could not claim absolute ownership or authority over it. Rather, they shared rivers, forest, soil, fruits, animals and any valuable resources the land offered for the nourishment of life.[819] As indicated earlier, every member of the community had a right to live, cultivate and hunt, and everyone was entitled to benefit from and utilise the resources and products of community land. Regarding the ownership of land in the Mizo community, Thanzauva writes:

> Community ownership of land under the stewardship of the Lal, a village chief, was practised. Every member of a village community has right to use, hunt, live as long as they belong to the village community. Every year the chief in consultation with the village elders selected a particular range for jhum cultivation for the whole village community. After that, the land remained fallow until the cycle of about 8-12 years, was completed. In recognition to the chief-ship, fathang (paddy) was given to the chief by every family of the village.[820]

After the abolition of chieftainship, all the land became the property of the government in most parts of Northeast India including Mizoram: community ownership of land in its truest sense was therefore effectively eliminated. Consequently, the land system became more and more individualistic. When the need for jhum cultivation arises in villages, the Village Council is authorised to make annual jhum allotment in compact areas for a cluster of families.[821] As indicated earlier, land was never seen as a commodity that could be bought or sold. The idea of commercialisation was unheard of in the early tribal community

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[818] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 214.
[819] Lalrinawmi, 'A Feminist Critique', 223; Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 214.
[820] Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 181.
[821] Leblhuber and Vanlalhruaia, 'Jhum Cultivation', 84.

life. Since the land holds the community together, there is no genuine community without communal ownership of land. Since the community owns the land, individual identity is subordinated to community identity.[822] But with the passage of time, particularly after abolition of the chieftainship, a change of land system shattered the tribal sense of belonging and eventually created a crisis of identity. Alienation of the tribal land also means alienation of tribal culture, personhood and sense of place.[823]

Most of the tribes in Northeast India, particularly Mizo society are based on the principle of what is called, 'Sem sem dam dam, ei bil thi thi'. This means 'Equal share for all to survive; Curse to death who deviate from it'.[824] Literally it means 'Share, share and live; hoard, hoard and perish'[825] or 'Share and live, eat greedily and die'.[826] This is particularly true in their management and sharing of community land. Zairema, the tribal biblical scholar and theologian, describes the principles of Mizo society in an article entitled 'What made the Mizos Tick'. According to Zairema, 'Survival of the community is dependent on everyone [being] ready to share his life and what he has. To live for oneself alone would lead to

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[822] Lalrinawmi, 'A Feminist Critique', 229.

[823] Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 186.

[824] C.Lalkima, *Social Welfare Administration in a Tribal State: A Case Study of Mizoram* (Guwahti/Delhi: Spectrum Publications, 1997), 138. The first portion of the principle of the society, 'Sem sem dam dam', is the source of blessings and wealth. Parents teach to this principle to their children by saying, 'Sem sem dam dam', when children quarrel for attractive edible items and not allowing any of their children to have a greater share than their brothers and sisters. The Mizos in the past practised in true spirit the principle of 'Sem sem dam dam', but were courteous to guests and friends. The principle of life was clearly shown in an occasion of a hunter killing big animals like Sambar (a big Indian Deer) near a village. All the people of the village, young and old were invited to the site for a share of meat distributed equally as possible. The hunter would distribute a chunk of meat to widow and the poor even if they did not come to the site of the meat distribution. The principle of life 'Sem sem dam dam' in the life of Mizo was seen in the occasion of 'Sangha Tlangvuak' which means joint effort of fishing in a river. The fish gathered by all participants would be equally distributed as far as possible to the number of participants. The oldest person (male or female), though not making much contribution to the fishing would be given the first offer to take his or her share of the fish. The diver or the best contributor to the fishing would have the same share as the weakest of all.

[825] Vanlalchhuanawma,'Revival Movement and Mizo Society,' in Rosiamliana Tochhawng, K.Lalrinmawia and L.H.Rawsea (eds.), *Ground Works for Tribal Theology in the Mizo Context* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007), 84.

[826] This is my own translation.

extinction'.[827] In a tribal society, every individual is for the society and the society is for all; the resources of the society have to be shared. Sharing in Northeast Indian tribal culture is much more than sharing of materials prosperity with the needy, it demands sharing of life and labour which is reflected in their generosity,hospitality and kindness towards others. Even the moral code of Mizo, Tlawmngaihna was rooted in the philosophy of sharing.[828]

As discussed earlier in chapter four, the tribal situation in Northeast India, and Mizoram in particular, has changed considerably over the past three or four decades. In the process of modernisation and globalisation, there have been unprecedented social changes. The tribal society, which traditionally had a subsistence economic system and communitarian society, is now divided between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. Facing a new world, tribal society also has to learn new technologies, and adopt new competitive ways of life.[829] These rapid and radical changes have created problems for the tribal people of Northeast India, who are not yet equipped with the necessary technological skills. This is ultimately leading to problems of dependency and identity. During this transition, a few people, who have access to resources and important positions in government or business, have emerged as wealthy elite amongst the tribal people.[830] The changes that have occurred in Northeast India are I argue comparable to the changes that took place in the eighth century BCE within Judean society that was experiencing unprecedented economic development.

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[827] Zairema, 'What made the Mizo Tick', 24.

[828] Zairema, 'What made the Mizo Tick', 24. See also, R. Zolawma, 'Tribal Ecclesiology through A Diologue with Tribal Egalitarianism', in Lalramliana Pachuau, P.Mohan Larbeer and Wati Longchar(eds.), *Cantours of Tribal Theology: Issues and Perspectives* (Bangalore:BTESSC, 2015), 80-92.

[829] Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 38.

[830] Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 38.

In Northeast India, and particularly Mizoram, a new class of tribal capitalist emerged with the creation of the District Council in 1952. This was reinforced by the attainment of the status of Union Territory in1972 and full statehood later in 1987. Huge amounts of money from central government came in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.[831] Lalkima, a Mizo social scientist may be right when he comments:

> Money economy in Mizoram has brought the change that caused a tendency of creating social stratification among the people. In the absence of a caste system in the society every individual enjoys the close-knit homogeneous and class-less society. But the gulf between the rich and the poor has now emerged in the recent past in the society due to money power. [832]

In a similar vein, Prasad and Agarwal observe that the early-educated tribals, who at the decisive moment were privileged to become politicians and officers in the state government, together with a few business tribal rich, have had unlimited opportunities to control and monopolize the economy and the politics of the state. In due course, these people emerged as wealthy elite within the modern tribal society.[833] This elite group lived luxurious lives in the midst of the poor masses. In stark contrast to the massive poverty of the people, they possessed multi-storey buildings fitted with the latest technological comforts and luxuries, and lived a consumerist lifestyle.[834] Lalpekhlua, one of the tribal theologians, commenting on the stark reality of Northeast India's situation, stated that in the midst of many landless labourers, the elite group own all the accessible lands alongside the main roads

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[831] Vanlalthlana, 'A Critical Appraisal of Mizo Christian Revival Spirituality in the context of Poverty and Wealth', *Mizoram Theological Journal* 1, no.2 (1999): 42.
[832] Lalkima, *Social Welfare*, 139.
[833] R.N. Prasad and A.K.Agarwal, *Political and Economic Development of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1991), 235.
[834] Prasad and .Agarwal, *Political and Economic Development of Mizoram*, 235.

that are cultivable, leaving no land and forest for the poor.[835] According to him, the elite group in Northeast India is comparable to the Israelites whom Isaiah directed his protest against those 'who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no further place' (Isa. 5:8). [836]

In Northeast India, particularly in Mizoram, the privatisation and accumulation of land began with the coming of the British and became more pronounced after the abolition of chieftainship with the introduction of the land 'patta' system.[837] Successive governments gave land to individuals. As noted earlier, in order to control shifting cultivation as well as to provide land for the people, the government introduced the New Land Utilisation Policy, *Mizoram Intodelh* Policy (Mizoram Self-Reliant Policy) and other related-policies. Land was allotted to the people on a more permanent basis. In practice, however, these new laws became the root cause of privatisation and land accumulation because such programmes could not be successfully implemented within a short period. Perhaps mirroring the experience of eighth century Judean society (Mic. 2:1-2; Isa.5:8-10), the poor were compelled to sell their lands to the rich at a meagre price. Moreover, the rich and elite influential people acquired the share of the poor by influencing Village Council members. Land, which was never thought of as a saleable or buyable commodity, is now being bought and sold at the whim and desires of the rich people.[838]

Looking at ancient Israelite society, the question of whether the Israelite land ownership pattern during the pre-monarchical period was originally communal or private is a

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[835] Lalpekhlua, *Contextual Christology*, 77.
[836] Lalpekhlua, *Contextual Christology*, 77
[837] Leblhuber &Vanlalhruaia, 'Jhum Cultivation', 86.
[838] Lalchawiliana, 'Theology of Land',15-16

debatable issue. It is debatable whether the משפחה owned land given that a משפחה could be either a territorial unit or a widely scattered descent group. As indicated earlier, Rogerson is of opinion that although the משפחה did not itself own land, it had the responsibility to ensure that land remained the property of small units, the father's house, that were part of the משפחה.[839] However, it is very likely that משפחה relates to the major land-holding units of society, while בית אב refers to basic land-holding units as well as the land-working segment of the group. The evidence of Ps. 16:5-6 and Mic. 2:5 showed that משפחה held certain portions of land in common and that some redistribution of land did take place.[840] At the same time, there is evidence that בית אב had an important role in the ownership of land within the משפחה (Deut. 25:5; Judg.6:11, 21:24; Mic 2:2).

Interestingly enough, Lallawmzuala argues that like Mizo *Khua* (village), the משפחה can be considered as a separate territorial sub unit which had its own area. He holds the same view as Johnson who states that it was the primary social unit as far as territorial holding is concerned and it is a technical term for hereditary land tenure.[841] In terms of משפחה the term נחלה can refer to inheritance as well as rightful property or entitlement. It could 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'.[842] Drawing upon the principles that underpin ideas of levirate marriage and redemption law (Lev. 25:25; Deut.25:5; Ruth 4:1-6), scholars like Alt, Guillaume and

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[839] Rogerson, *Theory and Practice*, 125.
[840] Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 70.
[841] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 216.
[842] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 216.

Lallawmzuala point out that although the share of the land each household (בית אב) received

can be seen as the private property of each house in the modern sense, to a great extent it is

still considered as part of the community land of the משפחה. The land is not thus the property

of household in the full sense. The owner is not entitled to divest, donate, exchange or sell the

piece of land that has been assigned to him, but may only bequeath it. All the farmland

belonged to the community and was subject to periodical redistribution.[843]

It is very likely that even during the pre-monarchical period there existed a

symbiosis of private and communal land.[844] According to Dybdahl, the basic grain-producing

fields were held by משפחה and apportioned to the various בית אב on a temporary basis; this

represents a form of communal tenure.[845] Drawing on the musha'a tenure model, he suggests

that 'the woodlands and pasture land were probably common which all could use as the need

arose, while the vineyards, orchards, and perhaps vegetable gardens were in a sense privately

held in that they were not periodically redistributed and probably could be passed on as an

inheritance to future generations'.[846] However, even 'privately owned land' was subject to

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[843] Alt, 'Der Anteil des Konigtums', 349; Guillaume, *Land*, 42-43; Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 216. According to Alt, '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. Um Eigentum im vollen Sinne handelt es sich dabei aber nicht; der Inhaber darf das ihm zustehende Stück Landes nicht beliebig veräußern, verschenken, vertauchen oder veräufen, sondern nur verbena und kann sich demgemäß für die Zeit, in der ihm die Bearbeitung obliegt, nur als den verantwortlichen Nutznießer betrachten. Verantwortlich ist er nicht nur seiner Familie, seiner Gemeinde und seinem Stamm, sondern vor allem dem Gott seines Volkes Jahwe; denn dieser ist der eigentliche Eigentümer des ganzen Landes, und ausschließlich die Verleihung der Anteile durch ihn begrundet den beschränkten Rechsanapruch, den die einzelne Familie, aber auch jede einzelne Familie mit Ausnahme des anders versorgten Stammes Lewi auf ihre Ausstattung mit einem bescheidenen erbgebundenen Grundbesitz innerhalb der Ackerflur ihrer Gemeinde erheben kann'.

[844] Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 70.

[845] Dybdahl, *Israelite Village Land Tenure*, 96.

[846] Dybdahl, *Israelite Village Land Tenure*, 96.

משפחה and 'right to have such land was based on social rather than purely economic factors'.[847] It was not private property in a contemporary modern sense.

Biblical evidence for redistribution of land is scarce but has nevertheless been recognised by many scholars.[848] Some scholars like Guillaume refer to a form of communal land in the Hebrew Bible. According to Guillaume:

> The books of Numbers and Joshua delineate the principle that governs a communal tenure subject to regular re-allocation. The measuring rope in Mic. 2.5 is the clearest attestation of redistribution of land strips by the local assembly, the most obvious explanation for the exclusion of the land grabbers denounced in the previous verses. Redistribution of strips explains Jeremiah's hasty departure from Jerusalem better than any other explanation offered so far. Ignorance of the practice of periodical redistribution of arable land has brought much confusion in the translation of technical terms in the Psalms and in Deuteronomy 32. Finally, the prohibition of moving boundary markers at the head of fields makes better sense in the framework of strips that are reshuffled periodically and are thus delimited with flimsy marks. There is thus enough evidence to consider that the open-field system and the periodical redistribution of strips was an integral feature of the life of the people who wrote the bible. The concept of inalienability of land often encountered in exegetical literature only makes sense in the context of communal tenure.[849]

The biblical accounts offer considerable evidence to suggest that land, as a gift of God, had to be shared. As we look at the Israelite tradition, after the occupation of Canaan, we find that the Israelite tribes were each allotted their territorial areas. Num. 26:56 and 33: 54 insist that land is to be allocated to every tribe precisely according to the size of tribal unit. Similarly, it is clear from Josh.13-19 that the land was allocated in this way and that every tribe received a portion corresponding to its need. The land was apportioned by casting lots 'before the Lord' (Josh.18:10), and thus it was made clear that Yahweh himself was

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[847] Dybdahl, *Israelite Village Land Tenure*, 96.
[848] For example, Von Rad, Alt, Chaney, Lemche, Kaufman, Neufeld , Wright and others refer to communal land. Though sections of this land were allotted to families it remained 'common' property.
[849] Guillaume, *Land*, 52.

ultimately responsible for allocating to each tribe their portion of land.[850] According to

Davies, the traditions concerning the distribution of the land between the tribes were

important for two reasons.

> First, they served to emphasise the fact that the right of each tribe to the land it
> possessed was guaranteed by Yahweh, since he alone was responsible for its
> original allocation. Secondly, the traditions reflected Israel's belief that the
> land was to be divided on a broadly equitable basis, so that each clan and each
> individual household had the right to share in the inheritance of God's
> people.[851]

Lev 25-27 asserts that it is Yahweh who owns the land. It is Yahweh who controls

the use of the land, ownership of land, tenancy of land, and condition of land usage.

Therefore, nobody has the right to tenure of land or the right to sell or exchange land.[852] The

Israelites are therefore tenants rather than owners of the land that they cultivate. As tenants, it

is the responsibility of Israelites to sow the field and tend the vineyards with care and

concern. The early history of Israel, according to Pentateuchal narrative, could be seen as the

period of landlessness before they occupied Canaan. They look forward to the time when

they would occupy 'a land with milk and honey', which was believed to have been promised

by God to their ancestors. As the Israelites occupied the land, what is evident from the

territorial division of land in Joshua 13-19 is that land was fundamentally understood to be

shared among the members of the community.[853]Again, in Ezekiel's vision of restoration, the

constitution of Yahweh's community is inextricably linked with the redistribution of

Yahweh's land (Ezek.47-48).

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[850] Lalchawiliana, 'Theology of Land', 27.
[851] Davies, 'Land', 358.
[852] Habel, *The Land is Mine*, 98.
[853] Lallawmzuala, 'Values and Ethos', 215.

As indicated earlier, in Israelite society, בית אב was the basic unit of the system of land tenure, each having land נחלה from משפחה. Each household's land was inalienable and remained within the משפחה unless there was no other way to retain it. The Jubilee law in Lev.25:23-28 upholds the value of land sharing and intends to protect the inalienable right of each בית אב. Wright suggests that there is a combination of general redemption law and Jubilee law in Lev.25: 23-28. While the redemption law had the aim of preserving land of 'kin group' משפחה, the Jubilee law was concerned with the restoration of the land of the individual household בית אב.[854]

According to Lester L.Grabbe, agrarian land was considered an inalienable heritage granted by God, to be kept in the family in perpetuity. Therefore, land could not be sold permanently. 'Any sale was viewed in effect as a long term lease which reverts back to the family in the Jubilee year'.[855] From an economic perspective, the Jubilee year principle 'prevented the accumulation of resources by individuals' and 'ensured the fair and reasonable distribution of the land'. It aimed to restore 'social dignity' and 'economic feasibility'.[856] Commenting on Jubilee law, Fager states:

> The Jubilee rested upon the assumption that all Israelites were attached to the family land to the several families at the times of the conquest of Canaan; therefore there was the basic presupposition that God willed all Israelites to have a relatively equal opportunity share in the richness of the land. The Jubilee then became a mechanism whereby the original will of God was not thwarted by the misfortune or failure on one hand or by the greed of speculation on the other.[857]

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[854] Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 120-121.

[855] Lester L.Grabbe, *Leviticus* (Old Testament Guide; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 95.

[856] Grabbe, *Leviticus*, 95.

[857] Jeffrey A.Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee: Uncovering Hebrew Ethics through the Sociology of Knowledge* (JSOT Sup, 155; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 109-110.

As discussed in chapter three, it is highly likely that unprecedented economic development occurred in the eighth century BCE within Israelite and Judean society. This new development reshaped regional land management causing the dispossession of many peasants. As a result, the eighth century prophets Micah and Isaiah protested against the alienation of small landholders from their own land. Isaiah's main accusation against perpetrators 'who join house to house and add field to field' suggested that they did not leave any space for their fellow community members. According to Oswalt, Isaiah accuses 'the land grabbers of wanting to possess everything in sight until they could live by themselves in their own little world'.[858] As indicated earlier, the crime of accumulating large estates by joining together the small plots which were the inheritance of peasants was a 'violation of the sacred ordinance, the principle of distribution of land under Yahweh's ultimate ownership'.[859] Wildberger points out that the Hebrew word 'לבד' means more than our word 'alone'. The Arabic *badda* means 'divide' and the Hebrew לבד means 'all alone, be all by oneself'.[860] Williamson maintains that 'to dwell alone in the midst of land' may reflect an appreciation of the fact that ultimately the land was God's gift to his people; the attempt to expropriate the land will prove 'counter-productive' because there will be no one else left to work the farms.[861] The self-centred desire and greed that drive one to possess more and more resulted in social division in the community that ultimately left some sections of the people isolated from others. For the prophets, this is an attack against central confessional statement of Israel because the land, the great gift of God, now rests under the control of just a few.[862]

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[858] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 39.
[859] Premnath, 'Latifundialization ', 56.
[860] Wildberger, *Isaiah* 1-12, 198.
[861] Williamson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah*, 353-354.
[862] Wildberger, *Isaiah* 1-12, 198.

Similarly, Micah's accusation against land grabbers reveals that his ideal is the communal sharing of land (2:5); the violation of this principle undermines community solidarity. It appears that both prophets had witnessed the institutionalisation of greed and envy; this had become the bedrock upon which the eighth century Israelite and Judean economic system was based. From the perspective of tribal people, Micah and Isaiah may be seen to express deep concern about the threat to the communitarian value of sharing resources posed by the institutionalisation of greed and selfishness. The prophets thus offered a severe critique of the egoistic values of the greedy and avaricious elites, who completely ignored the needs of other members of the community and disrupted community solidarity.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this research, a Northeast Indian Tribal perspective has been used as a methodological tool to bring new insight to the understanding of land ownership abuse in Micah 2:1-2 and Isaiah 5:8-10. The foregoing chapters have demonstrated that the situation of Northeast India tribals, who have been alienated from their traditional land due to the impact of sanskritization, modernization and globalization, has some suggestive parallels to that of the people of Israel and Judah in the eighth century BCE, notwithstanding huge gaps of historical contexts between them. A new way of looking at landownership abuse through the Northeast India tribal experience has helped us to understand some plausible but often neglected factors behind the prophetic critique of land ownership abuse in ancient Israel and Judah society.

A long -standing scholarly tradition interprets land ownership abuse of Micah 2: 1-2 and Isaiah 5:8-10 in the context of socio-economic conflict alone. Dominant readings within this tradition have suggested that land ownership abuse in Micah and Isaiah occurred for economic and politics reasons. However, despite the popularity of these approaches, further examination suggests that these readings are not as obvious or objective as is often claimed. As the foregoing chapters have shown, reading Micah 2:1-2 and Isaiah 5:8-10 from a tribal perspective reveals that the main points of tension over land ownership abuse concern the religio-cultural systems which provided the people of Judah with identity and meaning. Throughout this work, I have reiterated this critique by prioritising liberationist hermeneutics, cultural and contextual postcolonial approaches as analytical tools appropriate for uncovering

these aspects of the tribal perspective, whilst remaining engaged with social scientific and 'historical-critical' methods.

I do not claim that the perspectives used in this research fully reveal the identities of the perpetrators and the victims of latifundialiazation in eighth century Judah. However, they do offer a new way of looking at ambiguous texts like Micah 2:1-2 and Isaiah 5:8-10. The development of a new interpretative method for approaching contextually ambiguous texts on landownership abuse, an approach that might be called 'Tribal Perspective', also opens a wide range of possibilities for further research. For example, the identities of perpetrators and victims, the motivations behind landownership abuse, and motivations behind prophetic critiques of land ownership abuse could be explored further through this perspective or other perspectives.

As noted earlier, the situation of conflict and crisis during the eighth century was precipitated by the economic and political policies of Judah and Israel's kings. While Israel's and Judah's increasing involvement in interregional trade brought much profit to the royal house and upper elites, it transformed the socio-economic order in ways which contravened traditional values and ethos. This has also occurred among Northeast Indian tribal peoples in modern times. The tribal experience suggests that the expansion of commercial agriculture and large highland estates fundamentally disrupted the communal relationship through which Judean rural people derived identity, meaning and significance. Under the pressure of the market driven economy, land came to be treated more and more as a commodity and human relations became increasingly driven by profit motives. As a result of this, social solidarity disintegrated and family structure was also adversely affected. A tribal reading perspective

suggests that commoditization of land and other production processes significantly undermined the rural Judean peasant population's sacred fabric of life.

I have also argued (contra to the approach of most biblical sociologists), that it would be inaccurate to situate the roots of this socio-economic and religio-cultural crisis in a clash between an 'Israelite egalitarian ethos' and a 'hierarchical Canaanites socio-economic system'. Socio-economic and religio-cultural crisis occurred rather as a result of competing understanding of the role of Yahweh between two groups –the monarchy and its aligned urban elites on the one hand and the rural peasant population on the other. A further contributing factor here was the shift from a local subsistence economy (within a reciprocal and redistributive system) to a market driven economy based on international trade. These factors combined to cause intrasocial tensions in Judean society. Contrasting ideologies within the society caused confrontation between two systems of land tenure and two correspondingly distinct worlds of social organisation, value and identity.

From the foregoing investigation I have shown that in Micah 2:12 and Isaiah 5:8-10, there is evidence that one generic group exploited another generic group. Looking at the socio-economic context of the eighth century BCE suggests that landownership abuse occurred with the growth of large estates acquired by upper class people. The ruling elite class exploited poor and defenceless peasant farmers by monopolizing the productive land through voluntary and involuntary processes; this then led many poor peasant free holders into debt and eventually debt-slavery. In turn, this allowed the formation of large estates. The foregoing investigations have shown that the religio-cultural identity and meaning of the rural peasants would have been severely disrupted by economic transformation and the emergence of a market-driven economy that favoured the elite class.

The present study has shown that it was not only the few individual greedy upper class people who were responsible for these developments. Rather, land ownership abuse needs to be seen a product of a transformative period in the eighth century that reshaped previous approaches to land management. Or to put it differently, the elite strategy of land confiscation or co-ordinated politics to monopolise the arable land had changed the land tenure system. This in turn led to a shift from local markets to a wider foreign market which favoured powerful upper class people and disadvantaged the majority of small farmers. Consequently, the Judean political elite worked to centralize the agrarian production in Judah through the process of latifundialization or the consolidation of land into large elite controlled estates. This deprived the rural population of their ancestral land and caused disintegration of family and social solidarity. Therefore the prophetic accusation against the perpetrators of this unjust practice was inevitable.

As has been indicated earlier, our investigation revealed there are certain areas of religio-cultural concerns or values and ethos which the prophets Micah and Isaiah tried to defend and safeguard when the community in Israel were sharply polarised. In the following discussion we shall summarise the results of my investigation of prophetic critique against land ownership abuse. Informed by reading Micah 2:1-2 and Isaiah 5:8-10 through the perspective of Northeast India tribal people, we may consider the following four dimensions of the prophets' critique:-

- Upholding the socio-political and religio-cultural identity of the Judean rural family and community
- Safeguarding the symbiotic relation between God, human and land
- Upholding land as a ground of human being and a living entity
- Upholding and defending the communitarian value of sharing

- **Upholding the socio-political and religio-cultural identity of the Judean rural family and community**

As indicated earlier, this research situates the roots of the socio-economic and religio-cultural conflict in contrasting ideologies and, understandings of land, family and society between the monarchy and its aligned urban elites on the one hand and the rural peasant population on the other hand. I have shown that the power of the monarchy and urban elite, and their sense of identity depended upon the expansion of prebendal estates, inter-state relations and the production of cash crops for export (such as grain, wine and oil). In contrast, the system of patrimonial land tenure and ties of mutual obligation or interdependence formed communal identity and meaning for the rural peasant population; their power structure was centred on the hill country village. In this socio-economic and religio-cultural context, the prophets protested against elite strategies of land accumulation and royal ideology or coordinated power politics which had destroyed the nexus of relationship between people and their land. Moreover, there appear to have been competing understandings of the sacred and the role of Yahweh between the two classes. For monarchy and urban elites, Yahweh was the royal God or 'national' God to set against the claims of the gods of other monarchies; monarchy provided the main mode of communication with Yahweh. Furthermore, the international market economy itself reflected an ideologically different conception of the relationship of land, people and God. For rural peasant people, Yahweh was the tribal God and the real owner of land; land was a gift of God to human beings. Divine ownership of the land was devolved to the community and land was to be shared according to the size of tribal units (cf.Num. 26:56 and 33: 54; Joshua 13-18; Mic 2:5). These two groups' conflicting understandings about Yahweh combined with the emergence of the market driven economy to create a serious crisis of identity and meaning

for Judean people. In such a context, the prophets tried to defend and uphold the socio-political and religio-cultural identity of the rural close knit community affected by land acquisition. They were committed to challenging and standing with who were isolated from their roots because of land grabbing.

As indicated earlier, at the heart of traditional socio structure in Israel and Judah, the land served as the symbolic foundation of meaning and identity of individual, family and nation. The בית אב (bêt 'āb) is not only an economic unit; it is also the place where every individual found their identity and meaning. The relationship of בית אב (bêt 'āb) to their נחלה (patrimonial land) was crucial in generating a sense of community and identity. In this context, and read from a tribal perspective the prophetic critique against the loss of patrimonial land would resonate with the disintegration of the traditional structure of Israelite identity and meaning. To put it differently, the prophets defended those who were being deprived through land grabbing and who were vulnerable to the loss of identity and meaning. From a tribal perspective, the prophetic critique of land ownership abuse appears to be directed to elite strategies of economic development that led to the families losing control of (and becoming alienated from) patrimonial/ ancestral land. In early Israelite and Judean society, family, land and communal solidarity were intimately linked together and this formed the basis of human identity and meaning. This was now being pulled apart by the increasing accumulation of land and commercialization of the processes of production and exchange. For the peasants, land provided not only a life support system but a religio-cultural symbol of meaning and identity. Therefore, it is not the socio-economic alone, but a religio-cultural conflict which invites prophetic protest against land abuse.

- **Safeguarding the symbiotic relation between God, humans and land.**

The previous investigation shows that the biblical traditions provide evidence that Yahweh is the owner of land and human beings are tenants only. It is also evident that the prophetic passages under study reflect the assumption that land was a gift of YHWH. As such, it should not be misused and abused through greed and power or else the consequences would be dire. The prophets tried to affirm that God is the real owner of land and that land is a gift from God to human beings. The underlying principle is that human beings are the tenants only and have no absolute power on land. At the same time, however, a new understanding of the relationship between people, land, king and God was being promoted- the idea that divine ownership of the land was devolved to the king, rather than to the community. It is evident then that there were conflicting ideas between two classes regarding how the divine ownership of land is expressed. Reading from a tribal perspective, the shift in land ownership referred to in these texts not only victimized those who lost their land, but also went against a long-established YHWHist tradition of land tenure. Any actions which destroy the symbiotic unity between God, humans and land therefore invite divine judgement.

From a tribal perspective, the foregoing discussion has demonstrated that for the prophets, the confiscation or dispossession of land (Mic. 2:1-2, Isa. 5:8-10) represents a denial of divine land ownership and resistance to Yahweh's creative power. It would also amount to violation of Yahweh's will for his people and disruption of the relationship between God the creator and his creation. The phrase 'there is the power/god in their hand' (Mic. 2:1) suggests that the prophet intends to portray the land grabbers as people who illegitimately see themselves as exercising absolute power or the power of God. Therefore, a fitting punishment for these land grabbers is exclusion from the distribution of land so they

have no share in the community of the Lord (Mic. 2:5) and reap economic ruin (Isa. 5:10) as well.

Reading from the tribal perspective, the texts of Micah 2:1-3 and Isaiah 5:8-10 reflect the vital relationship between God, humans and land; these three parties experience an intimate relationship that even continues to exist in the Mitthi Khua (abode or land of the dead). As indicated earlier, the family's control of its נחלה was the basis for an ongoing relationship between the living and the dead. The presence of the ancestor's bones in the soil bound the בית אב (bêt 'āb) to its land and expressed a sacred relationship between the family and land. The foregoing investigation has revealed that in eighth century BCE Israel and Judah the organic unity between God, humans and land was broken down as a result of the forceful acquisition of the smallholders' land by dominant powerful people. The prophets knew that both the motives and deeds of those who prospered from this were gross violations of Yahweh's will. As such God would bring judgement upon the rapacious and greedy elite who deliberately seized the land of defenceless people.

- **Upholding land as a ground of human being and a living entity**

Both Hebrew and Northeast India tribals' traditions affirm that human beings are rooted in the earth; they also view land as a living entity. From the foregoing investigation, both traditions uphold the underlying principle that soil/earth is the source and ground of human beings, and that human beings are part of the land and rooted in land. In looking at eighth century Israel and Judah it is apparent that an alternative ideology of land was moving against the traditional understanding of land. Within this new ideology, land was mainly seen as a source of material wealth. It was considered a commodity that could be bought, sold, traded, bargained over, and even grabbed or captured to serve the economic interests of the

ruling class. From the tribal perspective, the texts of Micah 2:1-2 and Isaiah 5:8-10 reflect the alienation of sacred symbols of the ancestral land (נחלה) was tantamount to cutting off people from their roots. It threatened their life-support system, undermined the structure of socio-cultural identity, took away religious identity and freedom. The prophets of the Hebrew were the defenders of traditional values and ethos in Israelite society and they raised their voices against injustice in no uncertain terms. Being partisans, they stood on behalf of the poor and defended the understanding of land as the source of life and ground of existence. They also upheld the principle of land as a living entity which calls for respect and care.

Prophets like Micah and Isaiah protested against this dominant ideology and Isaiah offered an alternative ideology, in which land, the living entity would not produce the resources the perpetrators expected (5:9-10). Instead, they would reap economic ruin because they had violated Yahweh's covenant. The appropriate punishment in Micah's view was to evict these defaulters from the privileges that they had denied to others (2:4). Thus, the land-grabbers would be excluded from the redistribution of strips of community land by the local assembly (2:5).

- **Upholding and defending the communitarian value of sharing of land.**

From a tribal perspective, the prophets seem to defend and uphold the communitarian value of sharing of land; they expected the land to be shared among the members of the community (e.g. Num.26: 56, 33:54; Jos.13-19; Mic 2:5). The Jubilee law in Lev.25:23-28 upholds the value of land sharing and intends to protect the inalienable right of each בית אב. The prophets did not understand land as a commodity which could be commercialised and opposed its concentration in the hands of a few to the disadvantage of the powerless majority; they protested vociferously against the intentions and activities of the

greedy elites of their time (Mic.2:1-3 and Isa.5:8-10). From a tribal perspective, the act of accumulating large estates by joining together small plots which were the inheritance of peasants was a violation of sacred ordinance, the principle that land was ultimately owned by Yahweh.

The texts under study (Mic.2:1-2 and Isa.5:8-10) have shown that in eighth century Israel and Judah, the self-centred desire and greed that drive one to possess more and more resulted in social divisions that left some sections of the community isolated from others. For the prophets, this was an attack against the central confessional statement of Israel with the land, the great gift of God, now resting in the hands of just a few. Similarly, Micah's accusation against land grabbers reveals that his ideal is the communal sharing of land (2:5); he regards the disruption of this as a violation of community solidarity. It appears that both prophets had witnessed the institutionalisation of greed and envy; these had become the bedrock upon which the eighth century Israelite and Judean economic system was based. From the perspective of tribals, Micah and Isaiah's condemnations could be seen as expressions of deep concern about the ruin of the communitarian value of sharing resources and prophetic critique against a cuture of ruthless greed and selfishness.

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