

Original article

Madang: Journal of Contextual Theology
(Madang J Contextual Theol) 2025 December
Vol.44, 77-90
<https://doi.org/10.58302/Madang.2025.44.6>

Received: November 04, 2025
Revised: December 22, 2025
Accepted: December 22, 2025
Published: December 30, 2025

A Narrative Reading of Brothers' Fear in Genesis 33: A North East Tribal Appraisal

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Abstract

The Kukis and the Meitei people have a long history of living together in the region of Manipur. The recent clashes in Manipur between Meitei and Kuki have once again brought to the forefront the complex and volatile situation in the region. These conflicts have complex underlying causes, including issues related to identity, ethnicity, land disputes, economic factors, and political grievances. While it is an attempt to draw parallels between historical narratives of territorial disputes and modern-day conflicts metaphorically, it is crucial to recognize that these situations are influenced by a wide range of factors, including political, economic, social, and historical dynamics specific to the region.

Genesis 33:16 territorial separations between Esau and Jacob where Esau took the way to Seir, and Jacob journeyed to Succoth. The Kuki groups in Manipur harden stand shift from separate administration to separate state demand under Article 3 of the Constitution. The group also said that the “ever-widening differences” between the Kukis and the Meiteis remain “irreconcilable”. So far, there have been no statements from either the Central or State governments on the Kuki legislators’ demand. The ongoing conflict in Manipur has a long history of insurgency and arm conflict involving multiple groups with diverse grievances.

The economic condition of the region remains, by and large, unchanged. The reason for this is to be found not so much in the macro blueprint of the ‘Act East Policy’ but rather in its problem of implementation. The people of the grassroots have been largely overlooked. In the attempt to push the country towards the ‘Act East’ the North east remains just a corridor. All this are in the interest of the ruling BJP government. The present article proposes a narrative solution to the ambiguity that characterizes the final outcome of the Jacob-Esau story by focusing on the narrative art of the story. Narrative criticism determines how various signals within a text guide readers in deciding what the text means. The researcher hopes to show in what follows that the story does not end merely on a note of genuine reconciliation between brothers but, more significantly, proposes a radical understanding of reconciliation that transcends practical arrangements for territorial separation between enemies whether individual or nations.

Keywords

Territorial, Reconciliation, Fear, Violence, sharing

OPEN ACCESS

pISSN: 1738-3196 eISSN: 3091-7824

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1. Introduction

The Kukis and Meiteis have a long history in Manipur, but the clashes on May 3, 2023, highlighted ongoing tension rooted in identity, ethnicity, land disputes, and political grievances. These conflicts are influenced by various historical, social, and economic factors.

Genesis 33 features a similar conflict narrative between Jacob and Esau, who reunite after a long separation to seek reconciliation. This story pattern, known as the “meeting of Brothers” narrative, reveals character and imparts lesson through its plot.

This article explores the narrative art of Genesis 33 to propose a resolution to the ambiguous outcome of the Jacob-Esau story. Using narrative criticism¹, it examines the implied author² and implied reader³ to interpret the text. Additionally, it interprets the narrative through the lens of North East India's tribal cultures, drawing parallels between the biblical story and indigenous practices, particularly in the context of identity crisis, alienation from the land and culture, exploitation and economic dependency. This situates it firmly as a biblical paper with a cross-cultural theological emphasis. This approach frames biblical study as an exercise in cross-cultural theology, necessitating a re-interpretation of Scripture to ensure its relevance. Without this, Christianity risks remaining a superficial import, unable to take root within tribal contexts.

2. The Plot of the Jacob-Esau Story

The plot of Jacob and Esau in Genesis 33 is a significant and emotional moment in the biblical narrative. It is part of the larger story of the twin brothers, Jacob and Esau, who were born to Isaac and Rebekah. Their relationship was marked by conflict and rivalry, with Jacob deceiving Esau to receive their father's blessing and birthright.

In Genesis 33, after many years of separation and estrangement, Jacob and Esau finally reunite. The encounter takes place when Jacob is returning to the land of Canaan after spending several years living with his uncle Laban in Paddan Aram, Jacob is filled with fear and apprehension because he knows that he had wronged Esau in the past stealing his birthright and blessing.

Bar-Efrat explain “ reversal in the direction of the plot development is to be found in the narrative dealing with Jacob's return after his twenty years of service with Laban in (Genesis 32-33)”⁴. Alfert Agyena asserts, “The story of Jacob-Esau is governed by what is known as a unified plot”⁵. The narrative intricately weaves together various elements to highlight Jacob's profound fear of an impending encounter with his estranged brother Esau. This dread is rooted

- 1 Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (USA: Basic Books, 1981), p.x-xi. Cf. Richard G.Brown, “Narrative Criticism: Human Purpose in Conflict with Divine Presence,” in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, edited by Gale A.Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), pp. 17-44. M.A. Powell, “Narrative Criticism,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, edited by John H.Hayes (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), pp.201-204. Margaret M.Mitchell, “Rhetorical and New Literary Criticism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies* edited by J.W.Rogerson and Judith M.Lieu (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 627.
- 2 Implied author mean author as known from the text. It means the perspective from which the works appear to have been written. The concept of implied author is significant for interpreting works that have multiple author or that are anonymous or with no real author tale that develop over a period of time. Cf. Powel, “Narrative Criticism,” pp. 202-203.
- 3 Implied reader means audience presupposed by the text. Those who actualized the potential for meaning in texts, in consistent with the expectations ascribed to their implied authors. Powel, “Narrative Criticism”, 202. Narrative reading methodology refers to understand narratives, such as stories, novels, and other forms of storytelling. This methods aims to analyze and interpret the elements and themes present in the narrative to gain insights into the author's intentions, character development, plot structure, and the overall message conveyed in the text.
- 4 S.Bar-Efrat, “Some observations on the analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative” in *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol.XXX, Fasc.2 (1980): p. 166
- 5 Alfert Agyena, “When Reconciliation Means More than the ‘Re-membering’ of Former Enemies The Problem of the Conclusion to the Jacob-Esau Story from a Narrative Perspective (Gen 33:1-17),” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 83/1 (2007): p. 123.

in an earlier incident in which Jacob's manipulation stirred Esau's resentment, stemming from the unjust deprivation of his firstborn blessing. This anxiety amplifies when news arrives that Esau is approaching accompanied by a sizable force of four hundred men, triggering a wave of panic within Jacob. He takes several measures to decrease the impact of the impending blow and to abate Esau's anger; he divided all his belongings and all his family into two camps, he sends many herds one after another as presents to Esau and he offers fervent prayers to God. In Genesis 32 before the fateful encounter Jacob fights with a mysterious "man", who in a sense may be taken to stand for Esau, and compels him to give his blessing. In the morning he approaches his brother with the greatest apprehension manifested by his bowing down to the ground seven times. Now Esau runs to meet him, but contrary to expectations, Esau embraces and kisses his brother. There is no longer any bitterness in Esau's heart, and the brothers are reconciled. In such a plot, all the episodes are relevant to the narrative and have a bearing on the sense of meaning of the story.

3. The Climax of Jacob-Esau Story and Resolution

The peaceful end to the trouble relationship of the brother appears to be upset by the events in the final scene of the story, conveyed by the narrative unit of (Genesis 33:12-17). Following their peaceful reunion and after having been persuaded by Jacob to accept the gift of animals brought for him (Gen 33:11), Esau proposes to his brother to let them travel together. Jacob, however, citing the inability of his young kids as well as the milking animals among his flocks to keep pace with Esau and his entourage, asks to move on at his own pace till he catches up with him at Seir. There upon Esau further proposes to leave a contingent to his men with his brother for escort but, once again, Jacob politely turns down the offer. At this juncture, the brothers part company, with Esau taking the road back to Seir while Jacob makes his way to Sukkot where he builds himself a house and erects some sheds for his flocks.

Given divergent interests and conduct of the protagonists shown in this final scene some scholars have been quick to point out the anticlimax⁶ nature of the Jacob-Esau story. Whereas Esau is forthcoming and affectionate in his bearing, his twin brother is cagey and eager to keep his distance from the latter. To be sure, it is interesting to know how this divergence is illustrated by way and manner in which the brothers address each other in the final scene of the story. While Esau uses the more affectionate and personal term אָח (ʾāch in reference to a person's own blood brother Gen 33:9), Jacob, for his part, insist on keeping the relationship very official, preferring to address Esau as אֲדֹנָי (ʾādōnī "my lord" or "my master" in Gen 33:13, 14, 15), and himself as עֶבֶד (ʿēbād "Servant" in Gen 33:14). Even the narrative style in (Gen 33:12-17) clearly underlines this contrast in the brothers' conduct by means of the reference to their different destination (Seir

6 G.W.Coats, "Strife without Reconciliation: A Narrative Theme in the Jacob Traditions", in *Werden und wirken des Alten Testament: Festschrift für Claus Westermann Zum 70.Geburtstag*, edited by Rainer Albertz et al., (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1980): p.103

and Sukkot)⁷ and the syntax of vv.16-17. In this regards, those scholars are probably right, who in their assessment of the conclusion to the story, consider it as ambiguous or, at best, a case of strife without reconciliation.

The researcher wants to bring out some of the attempts made by scholars to explain this ambiguity in the story. G.W. Coats one of the most frequently cited and invariably challenged opinions on the nature of reconciliation between the brothers. Coats concludes “the framework story itself develops entirely on the theme strife without reconciliation”.⁸ Coats argues, the oath taken indicates a formal acceptance that reconciliation has been achieved and must be solemnly upheld: “this heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and will not pass beyond this heap and the pillar to me, for harm” (Gen 31:52). Having been reconciled to Jacob, Laban takes his leave by kissing and blessing his daughters and grand children, not because he wishes to exclude Jacob, as Coats argues, but to include these members into the new relationship.

Coats’ conclusion that the strife between Jacob and Esau continues in Chap 33 rest upon the contention that “reconciliation cannot occur if the reconciliation parties continue to live apart”⁹ This would be true if the reason for their continued separation is strife, but the narrative seems to counter this explicitly. It is true that the brothers are again separated by the time we read the end of the chapter, but separation may be caused by many factors, not only strife. The Bible doesn’t mention Judah or Israel being vassals of Edom, there’s no consensus on the interpretation of the biblical story involving Jacob and Esau. I would agree with Westermann’s assessment:

The narrator wants to say that reconciliation between brothers need not require that they live side by side; it can also achieve its effect when they separate, and each lives his own life in his own way... Jacob and Esau remain brothers, though each in his separate living space.¹⁰

This conclusion is supported by two further pieces of information regarding the brother’ relationship, Jacob and Esau are together at the burial of their father (Gen 35:29), while (Gen 36:6-8) gives a specific reason for their separation prosperity¹¹. Esau went into the land away from his brother Jacob. Their possessions were too great for them to dwell together. This final statement shows that the reason for separation.

7 Gen 33:16-17 reports that the brothers head for different destinations, namely Seir and Sukkot. From the geographical point of view the two localities are world apart. Wheres Edomite country (Seir) lay in the far south, immediately after the Dead Sea, Sukkot is to be found in the Jordan valley, north of the Dead sea. While it may be difficult to reconcile these geographical distances with those of die narrative world of the Jacob cycle, the point of die narrative is clear, namely the territorial separation between Esau/Edom and Jacob/Israel. Were the nationalist interests of the narrator come into play? M.R.Hauge, “The Struggles of the Blessed in Estrangement”, *ST* 29 (1975):15. Hauge notes that the east is often the place to which the losers in the conflict are exiled.

8 G.W.Coats, “Strife without Reconciliation”. 90.

9 G.W.Coats, “Strife without Reconciliation”. 26

10 Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*. Translated by John J.Scllion S.J (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), p.527 on chapter 33 as reconciliation. J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Eugen, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1991), pp. 206-207. Cf. Peter D.Miscall, “The Jacob and Josephs Story as Analogies” in *Journal Studies of the Old Testament* 6 (1976): p.36.

11 As seen correctly by Thomas L.Thompson. *The Origin Tradition of Ancient Israel, 1: The Literary Formation of Genesis and Exodus 1-23*, JSOTSup, Vol. 55. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987). p. 114

4. Jacob and Esau Story from the Narrative Perspective

The present article proposed a narrative solution to the ambiguity that characterizes the final outcome of the Jacob-Esau story by focusing on the narrative art of the stories. This segment will show that the story does only end on a note of genuine reconciliation between brothers but also more significantly, that it proposes a radical understanding of reconciliation that goes beyond the practical arrangement of territorial separation between former enemies, whether as individual or as nations. Two main categories of narrative evidence support our reading of Jacob-Esau Story as a case of fraternal strife and reconciliation. The researcher examine the divergent viewpoint held by the characters in the two final scene of the story, the characterization of the protagonist of the story, most especially their status as round characters, and finally, some other relevant details, which have often been overlooked in the assessment of the quality of the reconciliation between brothers.

4.1. The divergent viewpoint in the final scene of the story (Gen 33:1-17)

Character judgment in a story often drives the narrative, and these differences play a significant role. For example, when the characters are made to perceive things differently or conduct themselves in contrasting manner, the result is usually a situation of conflict or tension, which then calls for resolution, in order to bring the story to a successful conclusion. Such is the case in the final two scenes of the Jacob-Esau Story, which at first sight seems to give credence to the view that the reconciliation between the brothers, as the tension between them appears not to have been resolved. Let us examine two scenes from this perspective.

4.1.1. Genesis 33:1-11

The flight had been made necessary by Jacob's offence against Esau; the return is possible only through reconciliation or setting aside the long-standing enmity. Jacob literally ran into Esau and his 400 strong escort. The unexpected nature of the event, as well as Jacob's limited perspective, is here conveyed by the use of the expression *וַיֵּרָא וַהֲיִנֵּה* (*wayārē' wehinneh* "behold and saw" Gen 33:1)¹² There is a debate among scholars on the accepted principle "Esau hates Jacob" and therefore it would be expected that his kiss would be insincere.¹³ Speiser compares Gen 33: 4 with Enuma Elish, falls on his neck, embraces, and kissed him¹⁴. This comparison is made with the Babylonian myth Enuma Elish that describes the creation of the world and the rise of the Babylonian god Marduk to supreme authority. The comparison is usually made with

12 R.B. Chisholm, Jr., "A Rhetorical Use of Point of view in Old Testament Narrative", in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (October – December 2002): p.404. Cf D.J.McCarty, "The use of Wehinneh' in Biblical Hebrew", in *Biblica* 61(1980): pp.330-342. In Biblical Hebrew it usually carries an overtone of feeling. Cf. Tamar Zewi, "The particles *וַהֲיִנֵּה* and *וַיֵּרָא* in *Hebrew Studies* 37 (1996), pp.21-37.

13 Cf. Mois A.Navon, "The Kiss of Esau" in *Jewish Bible Quarterly* Vol 35/2 (2007): p. 128. In the case where the number of dots and letters are equivalent, the dots come to add to the text, providing additional meaning. This highlights that Esau had genuine pity and kissed Jacob with all his heart. However, if we interpret the word "kiss" in its simple meaning (sincere or not), the dots become effectively meaningless. Consequently, the proposal suggests that Esau actually intended to "bite" Jacob, using the word "kiss" as a cover for his true intention.

14 E.A Speiser, *Genesis* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1987). p. 257. Cf. Esther J. Hamori, "Echoes of Gilgamesh in the Jacob Story" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 4 (2011): pp. 625-642

the idea of reconciliation and the embrace of brothers, particularly when Esau embraces Jacob. Esau's perspective in the scene is portrayed as underdeveloped, yet it is evident that he is filled with open excitement at the sight of his brother and willing to welcome him back.

Genesis 33:1-11 narrates the reconciliation between Jacob and Esau after many years of estrangement. As stated above, conflict being engendered by divergence viewpoints and interest, which have come a long way from the situation of tension and strife in (Gen 25: 27-34; 27:1-45). One could speak of a visible common interest of the brothers in (Gen 33:1-11) where Jacob admits his guilt and asks for pardon from his brother by means of the powerful symbolic gesture of falling on his face seven times (v.3)¹⁵ Esau's reaction is crucial in this reconciliation. Instead of holding onto past grievances and anger (Gen 27:41), he runs to meet Jacob and warmly embraces him. The act of weeping together shows the depth of their emotions and highlights the potential for healing and restoration. Esau's question about the family members also indicates his willingness to engage in conversation and rebuild their relationship.

Returning to Jacob's preparations, the messengers deliver Jacob's message to his estranged brother, giving a brief account of his life since their separation, a catalogue of his belongings, and the purpose of his approach: "that I might find favor לְמִצְאֵי־הֵן (limetzo hen "in your eyes" Gen 33:8). Here we encounter another term הֵן (hen) which plays an important role as the account unfolds in these chapters.¹⁶ After the brothers have reunited and Esau enquires about all the "gift" מִנְחָה (minchāh) which were send to him, Jacob reiterates that this were send meant "to find favor (הֵן) in the eyes of my Lord" (Gen 33:10). The brothers go back and forth as to whether or not Esau should keep the gift, at which point Jacob responds:

No, please; if I have not found favor הֵן with you, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God-since you have received me with such favor. Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have everything I want. So he urged him, and he took it (Gen 33:10-11).

It is interesting to note that the passage to such a common vision does not occur smoothly. In particular, the gift brought to Esau appears to have caused some momentary divergence of opinion between them but which is then quickly resolved (cf. vv 8-11). Whereas for Jacob, the gift is meant to mollify his brother and to influence him, Esau sees things quite differently. For him, it is an unnecessary offer (v.9) and, at worst, an attempt to compromise his goodwill. It is only after Jacob has revised his intention behind the gift, namely by turning his 'bribe' מִנְחָה (minchāh) into

15 Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*. pp.524-25. Westermann takes the example of the Amarna letter show "I fall prostrate at the feet of my lord, seven and seven times" that took place between an overlord and his rebellious or otherwise culpable vassal. In Ugarit (EA 45): Qatna (EA53): Hagar (EA228) I/we fall at your/the feet (of the king, my/our lord,) 7 times and /plus 7 times. Cf. Ellen F.Morris, "Bowing and Scraping in the Ancient Near East: An investigation into Obsequiousness in the Amarna letters" in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 65/3 (July 2006), p. 186.

16 On the term הֵן see See David N.Freedman and Jack Lundbom, "הֵן" in *TDOT* 5 (1997): 24-29; Terence E.Fretheim, "הֵן" in *NIDOTTE* 2 (1996): pp.203-206. This term carries the idea of "acceptances" and in the realm of human relationship; seeking such favor often includes the elements of giving gifts, deferential language, and prostration. Ex Gen 34:11, 42:21, 11 Sam14:22; Ruth 2:10; Ps 31:10. *TDOT* VIII, p.469. The expression "to find favor or approval (hen) in someone's eyes. Cf. Walter J.Houston, *Contending for Justice Ideologies and Theologies of Social Justice in the Old Testament* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), p. 43. Ruth 2:8 'favor' is the beneficent recognition bestowed on the perspective client by one who has been invited by a patron.

בִּרְכָתִי (birekhāthi) 'blessing' thus stating that he wants to give back the "blessing" to his brother. It is offered to you, he says, because God was favorable to me. He points yet again to the relationship between "Blessing" and "favor"¹⁷ that this momentary divergence of perspective is resolved.

4.1.2. Genesis 33:12-17

The anticlimax in the story is found in Genesis 33:12-17 as some of the scholars have already pointed out. Esau is forthcoming and ready to be help in every way to his brother (vv 12, 15), Jacob is manifestly cagey and seems to have a hidden agenda when he turn down both his brother invitation and offer (cf 13-14, 15b, 17). This divergence in perspectives and conduct between the brothers (since they go their separate ways) clearly give credence to the opinion that their reconciliation, if anything at all, is a qualified one.¹⁸ Viewing the disagreement between the brothers in the final scene of the story has nothing to do with the past conflict, which has just been resolved as they were able to meet without any threat of violence. It seems that the brothers' differing perspectives revolve around how to manage their new relationship; while Esau advocates for an immediate, closer physical reunion (cf. Gen 33:12, 15a) Jacob prefers to maintain a healthy distance from his brother, at least for the time being.

4.2. Relevant Narrative from Jacob Esau Story

There are usually a number of important narrative details of the Jacob-Esau story that are often overlooked in discussing the nature of the reconciliation between the rival brothers. In this section the researcher would like to draw attention to four of these, which support our contention that the story is about genuine reconciliation between two individuals.

4.2.1. Absence of threat and violence

The first narrative detail is the absence of any further threat of violence between the brothers to the immediate literary context of the Jacob-Esau story. Esau's plan to eliminate his brother for what he did to him as soon as their old father is dead (cf. Gen 27:41), is clearly abandoned by the time the brothers reunited in Gen 33:3-4. Even with old Isaac now of the way (cf. Gen 35:29), we are not told anywhere that Esau has made any moves to carry out his threat.¹⁹ The absence of further threat of violence is a crucial element of peace. It indicates that the brothers have moved beyond their past grievance and animosity, allowing for the possibility of peaceful coexistence

4.2.2. Excessive fear and Reconciliation

More significant narrative detail is Jacob excessive fear of his brother, prior to and even after their reunion. As noted above, the importance of these particular features of the story has

¹⁷ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*. p.526. Cf. Terrence E. Fretheim, "Genesis" in *The New Interpreter's Bible* Vol 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), p.572. For Fretheim מִנְחָה (Minchah) meaning the gift or tribute that Jacob sent on before him. Cf Mark G. Breet *Genesis Procreation and the Politics of Identity* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 99. For Breet it is gift sacrifice.

¹⁸ Coats, "strife Without Reconciliation"... p. 82. In the opinion of Grüseman he see a beginning of a new conflict instead of reconciliation Cf. Frank Grüseman, "Dominion, Guild, and Reconciliation: The Contribution of the Jacob Narrative in Genesis to Political Ethics" in *SEMEIA* 66 (1974): 71

¹⁹ See the case of Joseph's brothers in Gen 50:15-18 where, after the death of their father, they become fearful of a possible reprisal from their wronged brothers.

often been overlooked despite the narrator's repeated reference to them in (Gen 32: 8a, 12). This fear is a significant obstacle to peaceful relationships and nation-building. The narrative acknowledges that reconciliation is a gradual process that requires time and effort to build trust and confidence.²⁰ It challenges the idea that physical proximity alone is proof of genuine reconciliation and highlights the need for change of attitude and a willingness to reenter a relationship with the former adversary

4.2.3. Tešûbâ and Metanoia

“The concept of Spiritual Transformation”: In Hebrew, another word that captures the essence is תְּשׁוּבָה (teshuvâ)²¹. This term is often used in Jewish contexts to describe repentance, returning to God, or a significant transformation in one’s way of thinking and living. It embodies the idea of a deep, spiritual, and moral change, much like the concept of *metanoia*²² a profound change in one’s heart and mind.

4.2.4. Renouncing Greed and sharing

The story emphasizes how the brothers stopped being greedy and started sharing with each other. This change symbolizes a shift from caring only about personal power to being willing to work together. This kind of shift is crucial for building a strong and prosperous nation. The Bible verse in Genesis 33:12 “Let us journey on our way, and I will go alongside you”, reflects the idea of journeying together, suggesting that people need to actively participate and work together. For a new nation to succeed, citizens must support it and make sacrifices for the greater good through collective decision-making.

5. North East India Tribal Appraisal

From the North East India tribal perspective, the story of Jacob and Esau's narrative offers profound lessons in conflict resolution, forgiveness, and restorative justice. In the narrative, Jacob's act of giving gifts to seek Esau's favor is a demonstration of humility and willingness to take responsibility for past actions. This gesture reflects a desire to mend broken relationships and promote healing, resonating deeply with indigenous values of community harmony and reconciliation.

20 In a normal process of reconciliation between people emerging from violence conflict, there is always a period of trust and confidence building. It is not possible, and could even be highly damaging to the process to expect a quick move from the act of mutual forgiveness to a instant physical communion, or to the harmony prior to the break. The parties involved will need time to adjust to each other and to work out their renewed relationship and this cannot and should not be forced.

21 BDB, ..., p.1000. cf. Fabry, "שׁוֹבֵב שׁוֹבֵב; שׁוֹבֵבֶה; מְשׁוֹבֵבֶה; תֵּשׁוֹבֵבֶה" in *TDOT* edited by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, Heinz-Josef Fabry XIV (2024): pp 461–522. Symmachus also translates šûbâ (Isa 30:15) with *metanoia*.

22 Ceslas Spicq, Translated and edited by James D.Ernest, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* Vol.2 (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), pp. 471-72. It defines *metanoia* as “to know after, change one’s mind, repent; *metanoia*, repentance”. In its original Greek context, *metanoia* is a compound word consisting of “meta” (meaning “after” or “beyond”) and “noia” (meaning “mind” or “understanding”). Together, *metanoia* signifies a radical shift or turning point in one’s consciousness, leading to a new way of perceiving reality and oneself. It involves a heartfelt realization of past errors, a desire to make amends, and a commitment to live differently in the future.

In many North East tribal cultures, resolving conflicts often involves ceremonies and acts that symbolize respect, humility, and a commitment to restoring peace. Genesis 33: 10 "If I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand" Jacob's offering of gifts can be seen as akin to indigenous practices where peace offerings or tokens are given to resolve disputes and show sincerity. Time immemorial, peace building efforts are found among the Nagas. Although it is historical fact, it is difficult to place an exact date in most instances because it only had oral tradition, with no written records. *Putisü* among Ao's (War indemnity) the loser's village will then give *Putisü* to the victor's village²³ *Aksü*, the feast of peace²⁴ where the two eldest Chiefs of the village enter into the peace Covenant, eat from the same plate, and drank rice-beer from the same cup. This particular act of reconciliation is called '*jatang-yongtang*'.²⁵ Ambassadors had protection and were not harmed by their enemies. The supernatural forces would punish both the attackers and their village. J.P. Mills, writing about this a century ago, also mentioned similar intermediaries among other tribes²⁶. This approach aligns with the teaching of Jesus, who emphasized forgiveness and the importance of loving one's enemies.

Similarly, the narrative in Genesis 33:12, where Jacob says, "Let us journey on our way, and I will go alongside you" is a shift for building a strong and prosperous nation. Power sharing has been the subject of a contentious public discussion, with proponents emphasizing pacifying qualities while opponents highlight its spectacular failures, the risk of a lack of accountability, and the possibility of political rivalry in a large coalition administration. As Lijphart remarks: "There is a strong trend for some nationality, ethnically or religiously divided countries to implement some form of power sharing. And there is a wealth of abstract evidence and journal stories that point to power sharing having the ability to play a significant role in reducing violence. The consensus model of democracy, which is characterized by power sharing and the decentralization of power at all levels, was chosen by many prosperous and peaceful countries that are ethnically and religiously divided".²⁷ This insight reinforces the idea that the principles of peace and reconciliation, whether in ancient tribal cultures or modern political system, are vital for fostering stability and harmony.

Genesis 33:15 Esau proposes to leave some of his men with Jacob as an escort which is again declined by Jacob. This action on the part of Esau revealed him as a round character that changes his earlier stance towards his brother. The implied reader sees in the final scene of the story, seeking to protect the weak in his camp, though politely turning down the offer

23 Interview with Aokumba Pongen (Dibuia Village), Retd. School Teacher, August 5th 2023. *Putisü* varies from village to village the gift will be 30 cows, 10 salts and 3 dao. Cf. Imkongmeren Imchen, "Peacebuilding from Ao Naga Perspective", in *Search of Peace: Tribal Resources for Peacebuilding in North East India*, edited by Rasouselie Laseto, Shimreingam L. Shimray, Lovely Awomi James et.al (Jorhat: ILEMA, 2013), p.199.

24 Yangkahao Vashum, "Pukreila and Aksu: Tribal Theology of Peace making," in *Peace Making in North East India*, eds. Yangkahao Vashum and James Woba (Jorhat: Tribal Study Center, 2012), 233.

25 *Jatang-yongtang*, which is also called as '*Chiyongsem*', means 'Sharing in eating'. This feast signifies that henceforth there will be free inter-marriage and inter-social relationships.

26 J.P. Mills, *The Lotha Nagas* (London: Mcmillan, 1921) reprinted by the Government of Nagaland in 1980, 100.

27 Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (London: New Haven Yale University Press, 1999). P 258.

to escorted by Esau. This mirrors the necessity for stronger parties to protect the vulnerable in Manipur. Efforts must be made to ensure the safety and security of all communities, particularly those most affected by conflict and violence.

The narrative in Genesis 33:16-17 describes the territorial separations between Esau and Jacob where “Esau took the way to Seir, but Jacob journeyed to Succoth”. This biblical account resonates with the current situation in Manipur, where since May 3, 2024 the violence in Manipur the Kuki groups in Manipur harden stand shift from separate administration to separate state demand under Article 3 of the constitution²⁸. The distinct living areas of these communities are also a result of historical migration and settlement patterns. The Meiteis, with a longer history of centralized kingdoms, established themselves in the fertile valley, whereas the hill tribes, including the Kukis and Nagas, maintained more autonomous tribal societies in the hills. This division has been a source of ethnic and political tensions in the region, as issues of land ownership, political representation, and cultural preservation continues to spark conflict. The parallels between the biblical narrative and the contemporary situation in Manipur highlight the ongoing challenges of managing diverse communities with distinct identities and the importance of addressing these issues through dialogue and reconciliation.

The group also stated that the “ever-widening differences” between the Kukis and the Meiteis remain “irreconcilable”. The violence has resulted in the deaths of over 200 people, displaced around 60,000 individuals, and led to the burning of 7,000 houses. This conflict has sharply divided Manipur along ethnic lines,²⁹ with both communities living separately and refusing to co-exist in the future.

A Pastor from Churachandpur stated, “to co-exist together is out of question; the only solution will be a separate territory in whatever form”.³⁰ A displaced Meitei echoed this statement: “We were living in the hills, we used to visit the valley frequently and sell goods here, we had our vehicles running, and business was good. Now, our house is no longer there, our means of livelihood are gone and there is constant threat if we ever make an attempt to visit even the remains of our homes.”³¹ So far the Kuki’s and Meities communities equally lost lives and property, living a refugee life in their own land. The possibility of co-existing together in the future is becoming a significant question.

Fear and insecurity are the main discouraging factors for returning. Many houses have been demolished or taken over by power groups, and when security forces have created buffer zones that restrict movement between the ethnic lands. According to the reports of the community leaders, displaced people are not in a mood to go to the same places where they will not feel safe or unwanted. Ethnic split has been hardened by the psychological stress of camp life,

28 B.R. Ambedkar, *The Constitution of India* (New Delhi: Prabhat Prakashan Pvt.Ltd, 2023), p.1. It talks about formation of new State and alteration of areas, boundaries or names of existing states. In clause a. form a new state by separation of territory from any state or by uniting two or more states or parts of states or by uniting any territory to a part of any state.

29 *Nagaland Post*, Vol XXXIV No.128, Monday April, 15, 2024.

30 Interviewed with Rev. Robert Pastor from Churachandpur on 18th May 2024.

31 Telephonic conversation with Oinam Cheema, a displaced Meitei at Manipur on 20th May 2024 (Time 8:30 pm).

coupled with no system of reconciliation in place viable protection against safety, justice, and restitution is absent, and hence voluntary return has not been reached,

Whether territorial separation or reallocation is possible in Manipur depend on various factors, including political will, legal feasibility, and the desires of the people of Manipur and the Indian government. This complex and sensitive issue demands careful consideration within the framework of Indian law, democracy and federalism.

The scraping of the Free Movement Regime (FMR) on Feb 8th 2024³² has created significant confusion and concern among the indigenous groups bordering Myanmar, as it threatens to create a wall of differences between communities. Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from the lands or territories, as affirmed by Article 21³³. They face a profound dilemma: “If we leave our ancestral village, what will be our cultural and spiritual identity? If you do not allow us to cultivate, what will we eat? If you do not allow us to practice shifting cultivation, what will become to our religion and identity-our religion and identity are centered on the soil. How can we worship God?” This crisis highlights the urgent need for policies that respect the cultural and spiritual connections of indigenous concern.

The reconciliation between Jacob and Esau in Genesis 33 highlights the power of diplomacy and forgiveness in resolving conflicts. The “Act East” policy adopted by the Modi government needs to re-engage in light of the ongoing violence in Manipur. The ethnic clashes including large scale vandalism and arson of places of worship, particularly churches are very disturbing. The “Act East” policy, introduced by the Indian government to strengthen its engagement with the countries of Southeast Asia and East Asia, aims to promote economic, political, and cultural ties with these nations. “Act East” policy emphasized building strong diplomatic ties and overcoming historical differences to promote cooperation and mutual growth among nations. It’s important to note that these connections are metaphorical and symbolic, as the context of a biblical story and a government policy are vastly different. However, today the “Act East” policy seems to have transformed into an “Act Least” policy for the North Eastern people. Ethnic clashes and violence are prevalent, and freedom of speech is being curtailed by the government. It’s a complex situation where the ideas of reconciliation and cooperation seem distant from the ground realities. Investor will ask tough questions about safety, infrastructure and connectivity to Southeast Asia which was to be through Manipur.

6. Concluding Remark

The story of Jacob and Esau provides valuable insights into the nature of reconciliation and peace building. The absence of threat and violence, highlighting the crucial elements of moving beyond past grievances for genuine reconciliation, Jacob’s excessive fear, emphasizing that

³² *Nagaland Post*, February 9th 2024

³³ Indigenous people shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return.

reconciliation is a gradual process requiring time and efforts to build trust and confidence. The act of renouncing greed and sharing, symbolizing a shift from individual power to cooperation, which is essential in nation-building. Furthermore, the ongoing conflict in Manipur highlights the challenges of disarmament and the need for trust-building measures to ensure a fair and transparent process. Prime Minister Modi ji said “Sabka saath, sabka vikas” meaning “together with everyone, development for everyone” This phrase encapsulate a political and developmental philosophy that emphasizes inclusive growth and progress for all members of society, regardless of their background, caste, religion, or economic status, who have contributed in nation building. However, it has not yielded its promise as desired. The economic condition of the region remains by and large unchanged. The reason for this is to be found not so much in the macro blueprint of the Act East policy but rather in its problem of implementation. The people of the grassroots have been largely overlooked. In the attempt to push the country towards the east, the North East India remains just a corridor.

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