

ISSUES & CHALLENGES OF CONVERSION: A CROSS-SECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF TRIBAL CHRISTIANS AT NUAPADHI PANCHAYAT IN BALASORE DISTRICT, ODISHA

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ABSTRACT

Religious conversion has been a significant phenomenon in indigenous communities worldwide, with far-reaching consequences on their cultural identity, social fabric, and economic well-being. This essay focuses on the Santals of Balasore, an indigenous community in eastern India, and explores the complex dynamics of religious conversion among them. The Santals, one of India's largest indigenous groups, have traditionally practiced their unique animistic religion, known as Sarna. However, with the advent of colonialism and Christian missionaries, many Santals began converting to Christianity. Later, some Santals also converted to Hinduism, influenced by the Hindu nationalist movement. The present study will analyze the impact of religious conversion on the Santals in Balasore district of Odisha. The study is based on personal interviews of the selected respondents through interview schedule, personal observations and participatory rural appraisal tools i.e. semi-structure interview and focus group discussion carried out in the sample villages using Purposive and simple random sampling technique. The literature available reflects that there is no study conducted on religious

conversion in Balasore. There are very less studies are found on the concept of religious conversion in India. The research will focused on the impact of religious conversion on Santals of Balasore district in Odisha. So it is hoped that this study will be of immense importance for all concerns.

Key Words: - Religion, Christianity, Tribe, Religious Conversion

INTRODUCTION

We have the very famous quote of Albert Einstein, “True religion is real living, living with all one’s goodness and righteousness”. Indian society is vast and complex as it is the land of multiple religions, communities and culture. Unity in Diversity is one kind of identity of India. Due to its diversified nature, Indian society is considered unique in more than one sense..Religion in India is characterized by a diversity of religious beliefs and practices. Religious conversion is a process through which an individual convert from one religion to another religion. We can say that it is a long-term process. After converting to any religion an individual has to follow the rules and regulations of that religion along with practice of their culture. In India most of the people are converting from Hinduism to Christianity and only few people are converting from Hindu community to Islam community. In very essential case people are choosing Islamism for conversion but those who are converting from Hinduism to Christianity, between them most of the people are Tribal people. There are several kinds of reasons are presented before the process of religious conversion. Before knowing about the reasons behind conversion, we have to understand about Religion, Christianity, Tribes and Religious conversion.

Conceptual Framework

□ Religion;- Religion is a set of organized beliefs, practices, and systems that most often relate to the belief and worship of a controlling force . Such as;- personal god or another supernatural being. According to an estimate by the few research centre, 84% of the world’s population has some type of religious affiliation.(Mark Stibich, Nov 14, 2022)

□ Christianity;- Christianity, less commonly referred to as Christianity, is an Abrahamic Monotheistic religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. It is the world’s largest and most widespread religion with roughly 2.4 billion followers representing one-third of the global population. Christian believes in one god that created heaven, earth and the universe. The four largest branch of **Christianity are the Catholic** Church (1.3 billion), Protestantism (800million), the Eastern Orthodox Church (220million), the Oriental Orthodox church (60million), though thousands of smaller church communities exist.

□ Scheduled Tribes;- The term “Scheduled Tribes “ first appeared in the constitution of India. Article 366 (25) defined scheduled tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article- 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purposes of this constitution”.As per Census -1931, Scheduled Tribes are termed as “ Backward Hindus “ living in the “Excluded “ and “Partially Excluded” areas. The Government of India Act of 1935 called for the first time for representatives of “Backward Tribes” in provincial assemblies.

□ Religious Conversion;- Religion is basically a matter of choice, faith or sets of belief. Everyone should be left free to choose the religion of their own choice. Religious conversion is one of the most heated issues in the society and politics, which can be defined as the adoption of any other i.e. renouncing one religion and adopting another. Religion conversion is the adoption of a set of beliefs identified with one particular religious denomination to the exclusion of others.

THEORITICAL ORIENTATION

□ Intellectualist theory on religious change:- Religious change is ongoing phenomenon in any human society, and it varies from society to society. There are many reasons or factors that are responsible for religious change in any society or culture. And its interpretation by different models differs greatly depending on the theory employed to investigate the nature of change. Horton's Intellectualists theory of religious change focuses more on the development of the traditional African Cosmology in response to the world cosmology precipitated by the two world religions (Christianity and Islam). Religion change has taken different dimension in this age of scientific discovery. Missionaries are not seen in great number as it used to be but religious change keeps taking place rapidly. Intellectualists' theory of Horton forms as a base for explanation of religious change.

The Intellectualist theory of religious change is also related to religious conversion of tribal people towards Christianity. There is a hidden power working, which is not shown to others but motivate people to convert their religion to Christianity. Due to lack of education it is easy to trap them with

various methods. Like:- providing them money, work, material things, education, etc., This is provided by Christian Missionaries in a latent way.

□ Theory of Max Weber: - Max Weber initiated a large scale study of religion around the globe. In the “ Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism”, Weber examined the impact of Christianity on western thinking and culture. In the Eastern religions,

Weber sees barriers attaining higher levels of spirituality by escaping from the toils of

the mundane physical world. Such a perspective does not easily lend itself to making and spending money. To Weber, Christianity was a salvation religion that claims people can be “ saved” when they convert to certain beliefs and moral codes.

This theory is also related to the conversion of people from tribal community to Christian community. It also influence the believe system of tribal people. They are thinking that Christian religion is the only religion, through which we can get easily Lord Jesus, and also we can access salvation easily. If we will convert our religion, then we will definitely relief from all kinds of pains, sin, etc. Because of these kinds of beliefs, tribal people are converting their religion towards Christianity.

□ The Cognitive Load Theory:- Cognitive load theory emerged in the late 1980s from the of John Sweller and his colleagues. The theory is based on our knowledge of the structure and processes of the human mind, known as human cognitive architecture. Human cognitive architecture helps us understand how we learn, think, and solve problems. Social Cryptomnesia is a psychological and sociological idea. It is a cognitive bias experienced by

entire cultures following social change. Cryptomnesia refers to an implicit memory phenomenon often individuals false belief that their idea is original; however in reality, they have previously come across the said idea and have forgotten that did.

This is theory is related to religious conversion of tribal people. Tribal are simple in nature, which for they believe in supernatural power without applying any kind of reasoning ability. It makes very easy to convenience them for anything. Because of this kind of blind beliefs, they convert from tribal community to Christian community. They are motivated that, after conversion to Christianity they will definitely get salvation. Only Lord Jesus can save them from ghost, sin or evils. After converting to Christianity they will definitely get Lord Jesus.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Krishnsa. Ankur, (2023) in his article “Contestation of Tribal Identity in Jharkhand” described that the acceptance of other religions, the entire socio-religious set up of the tribals has undergone a heavy transformation. At present, they are fighting for their respective identities. As a Christian, they are not entitled to contest from a seat reserved for

Scheduled Tribes candidates. It is argued that they are not eligible on the ground that “as a Christian” they are no longer a tribe since they are abandoned the animistic faith, are not follow the manners and customs of the tribe and have no affinity of interest or aspirations with the tribal people.

Ali, Aaley (2023) in his study ,” An Analytical study of Religion In Tribal Societies” described that after conversion, Christianity gave the tribals a model of westernization. Here, it will suffice to say that the Church

organization, western education, values and morals reached the tribals through Christianity. Their introduction implied a demand to give up tribal belief and practices. In some cases, traditional festivals were reinterpreted in terms of Christianised myths.

Remya, P. K (2022) his work, “Dalits into Dalits Christians: Antagonism of Purity & Pollution”, described that the dalits who were converted to Christianity started facing another kind of social inequality and oppression within the hierarchy of Christian churches. Even though the Dalits converted to Christianity, their social identity is still restricted to the prefix of “Dalit” in Dalit Christian. They are treated as untouchables within Christianity.

Prashad, Anirudh(2021) in his journal, “Christians of Tribal Origin in Jharkhand: Implications on Demography and Development”, explained that the tribal population Of Jharkhand has been declined as per census 2001. The decline of tribal population also led to the decrease in the reserved seats for the Assembly of Parliament records that the Christian of Tribal origins have not formed separate political identities, which have several negative side effects. Whatever the missionaries do, they do only for increasing number of Christians of tribal origin in the state.

Pallavi, Swarnika (2020) in her article “Religious Life and Conversions of Tribal Society in Undivided Bihar,” is said that the converted Oraons seem to have given up almost all their traditional beliefs and practices. The social interaction between the Christian Oraon and Non-Christian Oraons has been found to be minimal. Converts, did not have to change the name of their ancestral God when they became Christians, the understanding of God changed.

METHODOLOGY

The broad objectives of the study are:

- To understand the socio-economic background of the converted Christians.
- To study the reasons behind the conversion towards Christianity.
- To understand the Issues & challenges of converted Christians.
- To study the current status of converted tribes.

The design adopted in this study is descriptive and analytical in nature. The main purpose of this research has been to very minutely examine the problems of converted tribal Christians. Data are collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data are collected from respondent of Remuna block in Balasore District. Secondary data are collected from books, journals, articles and different websites.

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FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

It is very important part in Social Science research to gain knowledge about the social background of the respondent. It not only helps the researcher to understand the respondents but also to roughly judge the kind of replies that will origins from the respondents. This profile gives a detailed idea of the particulars of the respondents. Socio-economic and demographic profile always indicates about the current social, economic and educational status of the respondents. The way they eat, perform exercise, take rest, play, behave with others, think, plan, etc. are included in the term ‘ Lifestyle’. As per the present study is concerned this includes the individual details, educational status and occupation profile. Age, gender, occupation, monthly income, education etc. are those variables which are taken by the researcher to understand the socio-economic background of the respondents.

DISTRIBUTION OF EDUCATIONAL STATUS AND REASONS OF CONVERSION

EDUCATIONAL STATUS	SOMEONE FORCED	LIKE CHRISTIANITY	BELIEVE IN JESUS	TOTAL
ILLITERATE	2(4%)	10(20%)	18(36%)	30(60%)
PRIMARY EDUCATION	—	5(10%)	10(20%)	15(30%)
SECONDARY EDUCATION	—	2(4%)	1(2%)	3(6%)

COLLEGE			2(4%)	2(4%)
TOTAL	1(4.17%)	5(20.83%)	18(75%)	(100%)

The table reveals data on educational qualifications of the respondents and the reasons of conversion. It was found that 60% of the respondents are illiterate, between them 4% are forced by someone to convert Christianity, 20% are converted by their own choice only for liking Christianity and 36% are converted because of their believe in Jesus. 30% of the respondents are having education from primary to middle level, between them 10% are converted by liking Christianity, 20% are converted by believing on Jesus. 6% of the respondents have from high school level education between them 4% are influenced through Christianity and rest of 2% are converted because of their trust on lord Jesus, And 4% of the respondents are from college level education, and all are converted because of believing on Jesus.

Conclusion

Data were collected through different interview questions to identify the challenges faced by converted tribal in their day to day life. It has been found that, all the respondents are converted towards Christianity due to their beliefs system. Such as :- getting salvation, getting reliefs from diseases, etc. Still now they are believed in supernatural power. It has been found that most of the respondents are illiterate and all of the respondents are engaged as a daily labour in Khadan. There is no ultimate option for them except working in Khadan as a daily wage labour, because they have no agricultural land. They are fully isolated from their family, tribal

community and Hindu society. Therefore, maximum of the respondents are living in nuclear family. Due to the isolation, the limitation of their communication area is very short. Because of it, they can't improve their background and their children can't improve their communication skills. At the time of their religious conversion, the tribal people are beaten by the Hindu people at that society. Only for it, the people are not feeling safety at that society. Therefore, they are feared to interact/ communicate with anyone except their community. The socio-economic background of all the respondents is very poor. Maximum of the respondents are unable to give higher education to their children. Due to lack of education and awareness, the system of early marriage is presented in that society. They are unable to give nutritional food to their children. Therefore, their children are suffering from many kinds of health issues at many times. They are living an unhealthy and unsafe life. They are not aware about all the programmes & policies about the Government, Therefore they can't get those facilities, which is provided by Government.

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