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A RECENT RESEARCH ON SOCIAL INCLUSION OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSIONS AMONG TRIBES IN BIHAR

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Abstract

It is common for discussion about a society's religious life to presume that there are two kinds of religion: "elite" and "popular"¹. Elite religion belongs to the experts, the educated or the clergy, whereas popular or folk religion is that of the people the ingrained beliefs, customs and values of a society. Research on the spread of Christian missions in many cultural context has shown that Christianity typically Blaine in with the local ways of life appropriate local mythologist make concession to local customs and even appropriate local believe and superstition. A portion of pre-conversion custom and culture are still practice by the maturity of Indian Christian communities. The "lived religion" of Indian tribal Christians and Dalit is composed of various threads. While dogmatic religion tries to make distinctions more complex and obvious, practical faith, or lived religion, has always been blended into different traditions. Baptism is merely the beginning of process of Christianization, which is full process of religion reform. It was stated that "raising the cultural level of the people" was the missionaries' legitimate goal in Bihar.

KEYNOTE -Social inclusion, Religion conversion, Dalit and Tribal Christian, Human Rights.

1. Introduction

For followers of Buddhism, Sikhism Islam, and Jainism Bihar is an excellent hub. The term "Bihar" comes from the word "vihara" which refers to a Buddhist monastery. At what is now known as Bodh Gaya, a village in Central Bihar where Buddhism was born, Prince Gautam acquire enlightenment and become the Buddha. From Bihar the ideals of nonviolence, human equality, and social justice were taken to Tibet, Japan, Sri Lanka and others of this Asian nations².

Bihar is connected to the older Hindu tales and stories of sanatana Dharma or the eternal religion. Sita was a princess of Bihar who was born in the little town of Sitamarhi in the province's north. She was the daughter of Videha's king Janak. This former Kingdom is now represented by the districts of Muzaffarpur, Sitamarhi, Samastipur, Madhubani, and Darbhanga. Just over the border in Nepal is Janakpur, the city of king Janak and the location of Lord Rama and sita's marriage. Hindus so assert that they adhere to the original from of Hinduism.

The birthplace and place of Nirvana for Lord Mahavir, the founder of Jainism, another monotheistic religion Bihar. The tenth and final Guru of the sikhs, Guru Govind Singh, was born and became a saint in Bihar. As mentioned in previous chapters, early 18th century Bihar also saw the expansion of catholic Christianity in addition to these other faiths. However, despite the missionaries' hard labour and numerous, large mission facilities numerous children's homes, development project and evangelistic and church planting efforts, the reaction in central and north Bihar was not particularly positive. The primary reason for this was the belief that Christian missionaries were connected to the colonial authorities.

It is noteworthy to mention that Mahatma Gandhi stated in his renowned Motihari address that following his k covert meeting with white missionaries at the Motihari Mission House, the missionaries were decent individuals who came to serve the Indian people and had nothing to do with the colonial authorities. The population in Bihar mistook the white missionaries for members of the colonial force despite this, and they faced opposition at every turn. The gospel received a very low reaction in Bihar and was unable to gain any traction. After many years of arduous labour by the missionaries, only a small number of people-mostly orphans and displaced individuals- become Christians³.

However, Christianity had a significant role in bringing about socio- religious reform among groups other than Hindu society as a whole in addition to reforming the lives of converts. In the beginning, Christian missionaries had a negative opinion about Hindus. There were repercussions from the missionaries' aggressive assault on the people's ancient religious rituals and social practices. Their criticism hand was mostly focused on Hindu idolatry and the sati ritual. Two basic types of Hindu reactions were Sparked by the attack on "popular Hinduism": reformative and conservative. They were both attempting to safeguard Hinduism against Christianity.

The missionaries were the first criticize the Sati ceremony and demonstrate that even the Hindu Shastras disapproved of this barbaric practice. Although infuriated the orthodox Hindu community, Raja Ram Mohan Rai made an attempt to change Hinduism by criticizing popular celebrations and rituals. Among the upper castes of Brahmins, Jesuit missionaries like as Father Roberto de Nobili and John de Britto⁴ of the Madura Mission were able to win over sincere converts. Additionally, it is common to come across other instances of conversion from various countries that some Christian missionaries have included in their testimonies, where conversions occurred as a result of a genuine shift in one's inner conviction and faith. The Raja of betiya's personal favouritism of Christian missionaries was a key element in the spread of Christianity in the region. Not only were the missionaries relocated to Bettiah, but they also received all the resources and support they needed to spread Christianity throughout his realm and win over Muslim and Hindus as Converts. Even though he was never converted, the Raja himself seems to have been greatly influenced by Christianity and occasionally attended Church services.

The extreme rigidity and orthodoxy of the Hindu society at the time was the second element contributing to the spread of Christianity in Bihar. Some Christians directly blamed Hindu Brahmin priests for their harsh and intolerable treatment of the proper members of Hindu society, which in certain circumstances also resulted in conversion; for example, widows were not given proper treatment in Hindu culture. These ladies immediately took refuge with the nuns in the mission converts, where they were welcomed and given permission to be married and start a family.

The perception of certain early missionaries, such as Father Joseph Mary, as excellent physicians, was the third element. There have been cases where Hindus have joined the

Christian faith at the request of Christian friends or missionaries, after long-standing requests they had for children, a lengthy illness, or something similar were granted. In these cases, the Hindus made scared vow before Saint Mary or Jesus Christ.

There were cases reported where parents in great poverty' sold' their kids to the missionaries. Orphanages housed these youngsters, or occasionally Christian families wishing to adopt them were given them. People from lower Hindu castes, such as the Musahars, Doms, Lohars, Dusadhs and so on, converted early on due in part to the caste hierarchy within Hinduism as well as societal injustices or mistreatment endured by these groups.

In 1850, Four tribal groups- Nubin of Hethakota, Ghuran of Karandi, and Keso and Bandhu of Chintakunitook- were converted in the Chota Nagpur tribal territory. Following some religious instruction they and their families were converted to Christianity.

2. Tribal society: Persistence and Transformation

With the exception of the Paharias, every tribe in Bihar holds the belief that they unite into the supreme Being, who is the creator of the Cosmos. This god is referred to as Dharmesham among the Oraons, as Ponomeshwar (Parmeshwar) or Bhagwan among the Kharias, as Candoor Thakuram among the Santhals, and as Singhbonga among the Mundas and Hos. There are tribal settlements where people worship Mahadev, Kali, and other deities⁵.

3. Continuity and Change in Tribal Society

The original spring celebration, Sarhul, is celebrated on the final day of Baisakhi (April-May) village priests decorate the sacred site of communal devotion, with flowers and offerings of cocks, goats, or sheep on this auspicious day. It's a time for immense celebration and joy.

On the final day of Asarh (June-July) the Naukha Parab is celebrated. On this day the village presiding deity receives the first fruits of the fresh harvests. The Karma festival is celebrated by both non-aboriginal people and aboriginal people. A Sal tree branch is planted in the Akhara during the month of Bahado, which is August through September 24 hours fast came before this, and people spent the night singing and dancing around the branch plant. On the day after Diwali people celebrate Sohrai celebration this is time to honour house pets that have been

groomed and adorned. After the pretty harvest in December and January, the Sanathals celebrate Sohrai. Although originally indigenous the holidays observed by the Christians were altered to accommodate their beliefs. Conversely, many traditional festivals have been replaced with a new set of the Christian holidays like Christmas Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, New Year's Day, and Dead Souls' Day.

One significant Dravidian tribe is the Oraons. Their main hamlet is on the chota Nagpur plateau's Ranchi District. The Oraons have traditionally believed in a multitude of gods, goddesses, deities and spirits⁶.

Many of these supernatural beings are honoured ceremoniously and on a daily basis at home. These days, there are less regular religious, festival celebrations in families and communities. Be celebrations are also less elaborate. Defect that the converted Oraons appear to have abandoned practically all of their customs and believes is noteworthy in this context. The observed divide between non-Christian and Christian Oraons may have resulted from this. There is little social interaction between the two groups, according to the findings.

The most basic, important, challenging, and pressing necessity of all the indigenization initiatives was theological.

The Church most continue to be both local and worldwide at the same time if the faith is to thrive in the community. Talk about God is theology. Theological knowledge transcends translation. For example, all the traditional titles for God where still used in the Bihari Adivasi language. When a convert became a Christian, their conception of God did not have to alter; the name of their pagan god did. The Adivasi Christian lived and died for years without ever being aware that the English term God even existed. Likewise, Yeshua has been anglicized to become "Jesus".⁷ The Adivasis refer to Jesus as "Yeeshu" or " Yesu". It promoted Christian indigenization faith.

Additionally, there has been notable shift in the Converts' religious belief. The last authority in a tribal village, the indigenous Baiga or Pahan, has been supplanted by a church employee called a catechist. There is a hierarchy above him that includes the Pope (sant papa), who is a member of catholic Church and recipes in Rome, and "Pramukh Adhyaksh," a member of the Lutheran Church in Ranchi. For catholics, the intermediate authorities above the catechist are

known as the Parish priest, Dean and Superior, Bishop, A, and Cardinal; for Lutherans, they are known as the Parish chairman, Illaka Chairman, and Anchal Adhyaksh (or Bishop). These authorities, who have specific jurisdictions and are priests or other ordained individuals, offer the people religious, social, and even economic leadership⁸.

The level of Christian village's sacred complex is another place where transformations might occur. A Christian village's sacred geography is extended by Parish stations and the mission Church, which have replaced the sacred group and the shrines of native gods and spirits. Other places of Christian significance, such as the village Church, Grotto, all locations with large wooden crosses, have also been abandoned⁹.

Indigenous sacred centres and other sacred events that were once associated with periodic rituals, sacrifices, and festivals have also undergone changes and, in their place, have emerged new sacred events such as such services, prayers, sacraments, and Christian festivals like Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, Ascension, all saints Day, cross Sena, Dharm Yatra (religious pairs held at the Parish level), etc.

The group of Christian specialists that villagers have direct or indirect contact with, such as Parish priest, village catechist, and several other types of priests and pastors in the denominational hierarchy, have replaced the indigenous sacred specialist like Pahan, Pujari, Susari, Mati, Bhagat, and Guru. Ancestor worship, or paschal worship, was a religious practice among the non-Christians that was limited to the senior member of the family or lineage. Thus, they served as religious experts, but that is no longer relevant because anybody, regardless of age, can participate in any questions ceremony or observance that defined personally meaningful.

Another shift is the quality of women's ¹⁰ religious status among Christians. It is common to find women leading their own religious women's groups, such as Mariam Sangat and Stree Samaj, which meet on Sundays and strive to instill in their members an ideal Christian way of life.

In the beginning, the Christians in Chotanagpur accepted Latin first names from European Christians, but they kept their tribal surnames, such as Lakra, Kujur, Tipoo, etc. Later missionaries baptized people with imaginative Indian and indigenous names as Prabhudayal,

Mashidas, Enem, Niral, Ohma, Baha, Seteng, Jatom, etc., and gave local names to their neophytes. They also demonstrated their inventiveness in neologism.

The religious System underwent numerous modifications. The previous domestic religion was practiced under a tree, in an open field, around the house, or within. As Christianity spread, the centres of worship move from villages where Christians lived to the church. Even the spirits' repositories moved from the ancestral home (siraghar)¹¹ to the nearby Christian cemetery, which the tribes periodically visited. Furthermore, after conversion, in addition to the newly established festivals, normal weekly (Sunday) church service also evolved into social events. Prior to conversion, festivals had served as Venues for social meetings.

A liturgical calendar for Adivasi catholic liturgy was proposed by Fr. Philip Ekka, SJ, at the Clergy Meeting (1967). He also gave a design for christianizing native Adivasi customs, agriculture practices, and life cycle rites. He ran a number of workshops. In the meantime, the Catholic Major Seminar at Ranchi, St. Albert's College, started publishing the yearly research journal *Sevartham*¹² in 1976 in an effort to clarify the parameters of Christian inculturation and interpretation within the Adivasi community.

Some writers have researched the people, places, concepts, and historical background associated with the American Baptist denomination's introduction of Christianity to Chota Nagpur and its subsequent dissemination to other areas. Based on the report submitted by the missionaries, that look at the few of the most notable patterns of the incidents. Many tribes are thought to have come together after becoming Christians, creating a single ethnic identity that was reflected in the political ambition of the Bihari tribes.

The motivation behind the Jharkhand movement is clear; it is concern for the preservation of language, culture, and identity as well as resistance to operation and rapacious exploitation. The native population of Chota Nagpur, an ethnically diverse tribal region, live in peace and harmony with the natural world. The British government allowed outsiders to enter the region in the guise of development, and these people moved in large numbers and took indiscriminate advantage of the resources.

Approximately concurrently, Christian missionaries also arrived in the region and attempted to homogenize the various ethnic groups through proselytising tactics. Christian missionaries

brought in much-needed health and educational programs, yet even with their Newfound religion, the converts' unique ethnic identities remained.

4. Religious conversion in India

India does not support any one particular religion or have a state religion. In essence, religion is a question of personal preference, faith, or beliefs. *Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary* defines religion as a belief that connects man's spiritual nature to a supernatural being and involves feelings of dependency and obligation, as well as the behaviors and sentiments that logically follow from such a belief. Everyone ought to be allowed to practice any religion they so desire. For this reason, everyone has the freedom to profess, practice, and spread any religion thanks to the Indian Constitution. Religious conversion is one of the most heated issues in the society and politics which can be defined as the adoption of any other religion or of a set of beliefs by the exclusion of other i.e. renouncing one religion and adopting another. People change their religion for a number of reasons, including¹³:

- Voluntary Conversions i.e. conversions by free choice or because of change of beliefs.
- Forceful Conversions i.e. conversions by coercion, undue influence or inducement.
- Marital Conversions i.e. conversions due to marriage.

5. Conclusion

There are four possible ways of conversion: 1) by persuasion, 2) due to one's social circumstances, 3) through inducements, 4) coercion or fraud. A thorough examination of the lengthy history of conversion in India reveals that the first and last categories-conversions resulting from a shift in one's inner beliefs as well as those brought about by compulsion and fraud are extremely few and far between. Through deceit or coercion, religion can never be taken seriously. When compulsion persists, at most, a person may convert to a different religion for a short while before returning to their original faith as soon as the coercive circumstance ends¹³. Ultimately most of the foreign missionaries were forced to depart the nation after independence because there was not a strong indigenous church or leadership to continue the mission work that the foreign missionaries had left behind with a few exceptions, Bihar Mission operations were nearly entirely shut down because the region lacked a robust indigenous church and leadership.

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