Subject: Anthropology

Production of Courseware
- Content for Post Graduate Courses

Paper No. : 05 Tribal Culture of India
Module : 22 Religious Conversion among Tribes

Development Team

Principal Investigator
Prof. Anup Kumar Kapoor
Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi

Paper Coordinator
Prof. Anup Kumar Kapoor
Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi

Content Writer
Prof. Anup Kumar Kapoor and Ms. Kiran Singh
Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi

Content Reviewer
Prof. A. Paparao
Sri Venkateswar University, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh

Anthropology
Tribal Culture of India
Religious Conversion among Tribes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Module</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject Name</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paper Name</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Module Name/Title</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Module Id</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Content

1. Introduction.
2. Concept of Religion
   2.1. Definition of Religion:
3. Conversion.
4. Summary.
5. Conclusion.

Objective of the study:

- Student will be able to learn the Religious conversion.
- Student will be able to learn the factors of religious conversion.
1. Introduction:

The religion of the tribal people of India. Has face many up and down to get better life style and economically. The tribal community which is under study had their own traditional, ancestral religion. Involve the worship of the supernatural powers. Their religion is animism religion. Worshipping of the spirit and belief in spirit existence. But now the tribal people are living the a converted religion . That is Christian religion, Hindu, Buddhism religion. Conversion to another religion swept to entire part of the India among the tribal community. Had embraced Hinduism, Christianity yet the traditional belief system, cultural system had changes to this time.

2. Concept of Religion:

The first advocate, as power of the arguments that religion may not be universal were 1st classical evolutionist. Who believe that both magic and religion are the characteristics of the simple society. With the prevalence and advancement of science both religion and magic was declined. According to the E.B. Tylor classic evolution belief are three systems. That is magic; religion and science are system of knowledge. All three are used the term from contemporary course, cognitive system of knowledge. Both magic and religion are founded belief which is invariables, assumptions untested. Simply matter of belief and hence they are would not able with stand scientific scrutiny. Because of the scrutiny both system magic and religion will be exploited. It will exploit the myth once the myth is exploited. It will never regain it back.

According to the Marx. Religion was characters of simple class are divided into society. Where they were rich/ poor people. Marx believes that religion as ideology used for oppressive and exploiting people. Religion assured people of the next worth in which they would happy. Religion justifies the fatalism. It’s all have faith because of destiny of people. Religion justify their exploitation, powered people there existence.

Religion therefore deprived people off their revolutionary favour, spirit. And Hence Marx Believe that class divided the society. Society religion was nothing but the “opium of the masses”. Religion made people to accept their state of life. “Religion is as as if real. Real for people who believe.” By Clifford Gertz.

Anthropological approach is different from the theological approach. The study of the communist society. Study reveals that although the state did not subscribe any religion. It’s people who continue to have faith in there respective Pantheon. The state did not subscribe any religion. But people continue to worship there pantheon. Cults and sects are increasing in numbers. Money is building of a new
religion. Amount kept in building of temples, Gurudwara, church. E.B. Tylor (1871) gave “primitive culture”. It’s shortest definition of religion.

2.1. Definition of Religion:

According to E.B. Tylor one can make distinction between the material and spiritual aspects of life. He considered this distinction of Universal value. All societies make distinction between the materialistic and spiritual aspects. Spiritual aspects are concerned with the domain of supernatural (Supernatural things beyond the nature).

According to the Robert Smith. Religion is concerned with beliefs, value, rituals, and practices. Emile Durkheim says Religion is unified set of belief and practices. Main breakthrough in definitions of religion came with the Emile Durkheim work in French that is “The Elementary forms of religious life” 1912. This work devoted to an understanding of “Totemism”, Durkheim regard thus is earliest form of religion. Durkheim rejected two definitions which was often refer to. a) Defining the religious in terms of supernatural. B). He rejected definition of religious in terms of God and Goddess.

Paul Rodin Do we find God in primitive religion. God is omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent. So three characters attribute to God. The concept of God in terms of the property one who present everywhere. The idea of God is distinct identity. This notion which is not found in primitive religion. He said the concept of the “Juedo Christian” concept in western. Primitive society divine being. Where God is seen as Patriarchal, male all are powerful knowing. But Emile Durkheim discuss the religion in his book in detail.

Buddhism lack the concept of God. But has the novel truth, sacred path, which ones has to follow. The aim of the life as define by the Buddha a permanent relief from the cycle from live and death. Such relief called by the Buddha as Nirvana. Nirvana concept is closer to the Hinduism concept of “Moksha”. Buddhism one must follow aim of life. The noble truth is superior to everything. There are four noble truth.

i). The world is full of suffering that is “Dukh”.
ii). Desire is cause of suffering.
iii). Attain the state of desirelessness.
iv). Follow the path of righteous.
Buddhism doesn’t have the concept of deity. No worship of Buddha. But still truth was revealed through Buddha that one must keep faith in Buddha. But noble truth is superior to everything. Jainism also not has the concept of God and worship. But whole concept is following a particular life.

Undertaking the comparative study Emile Durkheim says all society divided universe around them into two categories from a comparative study of religious from the world into two parts.

   i) Every day mundane world for which Emile Durkheim used the word profane. Profane does not imply impurity, inauspiciousness, dirt, soil or something dealing with lower entity. In fact the word profane implies everyday life. Thus economic institution is part of profane.

   ii) Other components is things, objects place event things which are used as “a set a part” and “forbidden”. Those which are forbidden meaning have taboos with respect their approach. One cannot approach them just like them. This thing forbidden Emile Durkheim called “Sacred”. They could be ordinary, things, objects, ordinary being. “Thing without any distinctive extra ordinary property”.

Marvin Harris sacred cow. Things which are sacred neither regards as inspiring nor utilitarian but kept for sacred. People stricted adopted stricted rule with regarded to approaches them. Religion deals with the sacred things. Thus Emile Durkheim said Buddhism does not have sacred. But four noble truth Buddhism followers are sacred.

3. Conversion: “Hindu” are traced to ancient Persian who employs and refers to the inhabitant of India. Who were are belief to be not in one single set of religious. Hindu systems are by membership in hierarchically arranged called caste “Jati”. Those who are born in caste alone qualifies to consider as the Hindu. Traditionally the process of Hinduisation of non-Hindu is gradual fashion. The process of cultural transformation is also old fashioned. Hindu caste system doesn’t required any set of beliefs and customs as pre condition. The gradual process of changing to Hindu is by the creation missionary of Hindus called the “Shudi Karan” (Purification rituals or conversion ceremony). Hindu conversion in India generally take the mass conversion. Not individual process but it’s entire jati process of conversion. Arya-samaj, arrangement to convert into Hindu for both individual as well as mass conversion is make by the neo-Hindu Arya samaj. Meaning to conversion is completely cut off their ties with their caste. For example the tantis (weavers) of Bihar began to call themselves Ansari after becoming Muslims.
In Punjab, the Musallis Bhangi (sweepers) adopted the more respectable title of Musallis. This is endogamy caste unit was prior existence to conversion. By this how muslims society in India has characterised by the multiplicity of endogamous caste group.

Lower caste in India started to convert into Hindu by the “Shuddhi” (Purity) process. It refers to a state of ritual “purity” needed for the performance of one’s Dharma. Dharma has both rituals “purity” needed

For performance of one’s dharma. It observes the duties assigned by the Brahmin scripture for social well dimension. Performance of religious rites and social intercourse.

Mass conversion of certain Muslim groups by the Arya samaj and also instance of isolated individual muslim undergone the Arya Sudhi karan ceremony.

There are several studies which says the tribal has converted to other religion in the need of better life, economically, status etc. For instance the Bhumij of the Madhya Pradesh have been influenced by the Kshtriya caste of Hindu. And they sanskritized their “life style” as Kshtriya. They also formed the Bhumij Kshtriya Association in 1935. Gaddi Tribes are closely associated with Rajput culture Hinduism. Cheros and Kharwars have long assimilated as Rajput caste in regional caste hierarchy.

Inhabitants of oracon tribes village accepted the worship of Hindu Goddess Parvati and God Shiva. Also observe at many places these convert peoples also having the temple priest. They have given up the eating of Beef and drinking of alcohol. They also knows the story of Mahabharta, Ramanayana, chalisa of god like Hanuman and Shiva.

The Mundas have been influenced by the bhakti cult. They have adopted the panchang of hindi calendar and pandit. They started loss their faith in own Bonga religion. Brahmin was adopted and invited for marriages and other ceremony purpose. A study was conducted by the (Vidyarthi, 1966) on Munda tribes from Ghaghra Village. He found the emergence of “Manjhis” caste have adopted Hindu life style.

The process of the sanskritization was started among the tribals by bhagat movement in middle India. The aim of movement was to purify the religious and social life and higher form of Hunduism.

In western India among the Bhill tribe Mahadev is the supreme deity. Other deity like Indira raj, Hanuman, Ganesh. In Gujarat social reforms has occurred to raise the higher level of the communities. Some of them utilise the service of Brahmin like Naikas, Dablu. Under the impact of the Bhagat
Movement other also started to take place for social reforms like Tana Bhagat movement, kamru Bhagat movement, Mahadev Bhagat and Vishnu Bhagat movement.

In southern India scene was similar. Tribe such as Chenchus, Muthavan and Kadars have started the belief in Hindu practices adopted Lingaya as their deity. Kali is deity of Kadar tribe also adopted from the neighbouring Hindu caste belief and practice. Along with the practices of the Hinduisation. It was reported that Hindu residing near the tribal village. They have started accepted the morals and values and practices of tribal belief. This is called “Tribalization”. According to the study of the Rai (1963) Gops is Hindu caste adopted the tribal way of life style in Singhbhum. He reported that no one can distinguish between the GOP caste and Ho Tribal people in the village.

3.1. Effect of the Modern Factors:

Christianity: Since the British rule Christianity have play an important role for cultural changes among the tribes. The process of the proselytization was seen first in Assam Tribes among the Khasis Tribes in 1813. Then it’s also observed in Madhya Pradesh Bhill tribe and in Chotanagpur Oraons tribe. Missionary along with the co-operation of British Government. Started to convert people into Christianity. Firstly conversion was on individually the started on masses level.

In Bihar total one-tenth of the tribal population is Christian. The impact of Christianity has less covered in part western India Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra. And Major conversion was seen and reported from the south India. It was reported that Toda Tribes have converted about half of the population. Christianity has replaced original religion and loss of the faith from own religion. The Conversion has basically started because of the poor miserable condition of the tribes. They are very low and backward in terms of economically, they were exploited by the zamindars and upper caste. Upper caste people don’t allow them to touch the water-well, untouchability were high.

Conversion in North-east: The reason for the conversion is the traditional practices of the sacrificing the animals during rituals and ceremony. In Manipur conversion started from 1918. Christian Missionary was opposed to the sacrificing animals. They attracts the people to adopt the western family structure, lifestyle and education system, music and dance. Among the Kachars Nagas tribes. Tribes living in north Lushais. Messaic movement raise and promised to liberate the nagas from kuki tribes and British.

Bhakti movement also led to conversion in the religion. By the twenty century there are many devotional cults are developed. Religious expression. Such puranic tradition cults are Shivanism cult and Vishnuism cult. Shivanism cult does not follow any rules and regulation so it can be perform by
any one. While Vishnu cult have rules and regulation so only priest can follow. Cults were God centred rather then man-centered. So it led departure of there own religion to god cult. The ritual of the sacrificing was left and worshipping devoted to the icons of the temple.

**Impact of urbanization and industrialization:**

Industralization process came up with the “pull factor”. Because industries was exploiting the natural resources, forested area and hilly areas of tribal areas. Population was growing near the industry area. Numbers of the city and urban area are increasing in numbers as well. This led to changes in tribal culture patterns. Under the influences of Industry.

In chotanagpur tribal areas were exploited for coal mining. Mining industry was set up in Bokaro and Dhanbad district. The twin industry coal and iron have done large numbers of exploitation of natural resources. Chotanagpur industry attracted lots of tribal people from the village. Industry based area also led to develop the urbanization process. Now tribal people got employment industry. Tribal people and outsider started to live in same area. This led to process of assimilation cultural shocked. Tribal people learned other cultures, customs and belief. When some of them not get absorbed by the acculturation process. They got in frustration and cultural socked. Tribal local culture was disintegrated during the formulation of the industry.

The income of the villagers has gone high and they learn heterogeneous life style. Heterogenous life style means variety of the religion, language and social norms, values.

Younger generation attracted toward s the industry. But this younger generation is not skilled as industry required for jobs. So they were getting lower salaries in comparison to skilled and engineers from the outsider. They also have the curiousity for learning. Industrialization also led to isolation. They were isolated in terms of family, culture. Traditional family has become very weak. Because family moving in another area in search for jobs. The case of the relationship of the tribal with non-tribal are coming in light in new dimension.

Religious Conversion also took place because of the political dramas. Oraon tribes of the odisha. According to many studies Christian missionaries converted families in a village. Political parties have large invested in the free education, free medicines and free food. This show the tribal also required money. Church offers the incentive to convert into christanity. Which included the rice and milk. Some of the tribes converted to Hindu. They established Lord Ram idols in their home. Begins to go temple. This led to changes into life style. Some of them depend on the job rather than on agriculture economy.
In Gujarat 2014 a controversy arises had erupted. When right wing has organised a “Ghar-wapsi” drive. It was reported that about 100 Muslims in Agra Uttar Pradesh converted. Another incident was seen when claimed that 39 tribal Christians were re-converted to Hinduism in Maosit- hit Bastar district of Chhattisgarh.

Source: [http://images.indianexpress.com/2015/01/religious-conversion-l.jpg](http://images.indianexpress.com/2015/01/religious-conversion-l.jpg)

Religious Conversion among Tribes.

Sources:

4. Summary:

Tribal religious conversion had begun after the entry of the Christian missionary in the hilly area such as north-east. Missionary came with the western education and Christianity and thus led to suddenly exposes to the outside of the world. The missionary brought the changes in tribal people life living standard and the people to complete abandon of their religion. By this people started to convert in Christianity religion gave them peace, new hope. Christianity has changes the every aspect of the life such as social aspect, political and economical aspects. Social changes has observed not only on the statistics bases but also has feel on minds of the people. The Value, beliefs and customs of the tribal people has fast changed. Due to process of the sanskritization, Modernization, Westernization, Industrialization. The process of the acculturation and cultural shocked also observed during the Industrialization and Urbanization. Difference was highly reflected from simple society to complex society, individualization, frustration, conflicts. These all led to the de-sanskritization. Different part of the India was passing from the different changes and conversion of religious. Christian faith is strongly rooted so people have no intention of changing back to their traditional religion. Some of them transformed themselves due to situation like pulling factors. Influenced by the other culture and beliefs for betterment. Just because it’s more acceptable by the higher caste and societies.

Modernization has its positive aspects too. Modernization has brought the level of literacy and awareness of the education. This help tribes to get better conditions of living. Government has also place a important role by putting up the several developmental and welfare scheme for Tribal. Employment level has raised. Earlier days tribal used to practice agriculture and herding of cattle. Now working in factories have become trend. Now no more agriculture cultivation are practiced. Due to industrialization tribal have low land holding with them.

Conversion of the religion is due to the materialistic approach. It’s not only evolutionary changes but the possibility of economic and politics. Tribal people are facing the serious transition both socially and politicals. Christianity missionary to maintain their cultural hegemony over the changes in outlook. The Christian converts within their community interpreted their indigenous life style benefiting to the rational without giving negative to impact of westernization and proselytization.

5. Conclusion:

Christian missionary has been very active in tribal areas. Still indigenous tribes are merge with the homogenous structure of caste system with advancement in social and economically. Tribal people constantly have faced trauma and exploitation from the upper caste. To be the part of society and grow up into social and economical. They started to Bhakti movement, moving upward in the caste system.
Recently education related awareness has helped the tribes to come up. From the industrialization and urbanization tribal are exposed and more exploited by the non-tribals. The modernization process is slowly killing the tribal life. And it’s also disintegrating the cultural resources of the tribal community.