

# RELIGION AND SOCIAL CHANGE AMONG THE TRIBES OF SOUTH CENTRAL INDIA

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DECLARATION

Certified that the dissertation entitled:  
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## CONTENTS

Pages:

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

<u>Chapter- I</u>	INTRODUCTION : CONCEPTS AND THEORIES	...	1- 32
<u>Chapter- II</u>	REVIEW OF LITERATURE : BOOKS AND ARTICLES	...	33- 64
<u>Chapter-III</u>	ANIMISM, HINDUISM AND CHRISTIANITY : INTERACTIONS	...	65- 87
<u>Chapter- IV</u>	SOCIAL CHANGE AMONG THE TRIBES OF SOUTH CENTRAL INDIA: MUNDA, ORAON AND SANTAL	...	88-117
<u>Chapter- V</u>	C O N C L U S I O N	...	118-129
	APPENDIXES	...	130-131
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	...	132-137

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**Chapter-I**

**I N T R O D U C T I O N**

## Chapter-I

### INTRODUCTION

The tribal people, very often known as the aboriginals, the Adivasis or the Scheduled Tribes live in forests, hills and naturally isolated regions of India. Nearly all of them have been in continuous contact with their neighbours, the majority being the Hindus. These contact conditions have led them to adopt the culture patterns and life styles of the Hindus. By adopting the Hindu way of life some tribes have claimed themselves as the members of the caste system. Besides the influence of the Hindus, another significant factor which has brought considerable transformations in tribal culture is the Christianity. A large number of tribes have been converted to Christianity. The change of religion has greater sociological implications. It causes changes in other spheres of life, i.e., political, social, economic etc., for religion is linked with other elements of the society in a complex way. Since the focus of our study is on the religion and social change it is necessary to examine the uses of the terms in sociological and anthropological literature.

**PART-I****Concepts and Theories****Religion:**

Supernatural beliefs are present in every known societies. Their variety seems endless. Any definition of religion must encompass this variety. At its simplest, religion is the belief in the supernatural. A theologian or a psychologist may begin with a somewhat different interpretation, but in sociological terms, H.M. Johnson defines it "as a more or less coherent system of beliefs and practices concerning a supernatural order of beings, forces, places or other entities : a system that for its adherents has implications for their behaviour and welfare : implications that the adherents in varying degrees and ways take seriously in their private and collective life."<sup>1</sup>

T.N. Madan and D.N. Majumdar define religion "as the human response to the apprehension of something, or power, which is supernatural and suprasensory."<sup>2</sup>

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1 Johnson, H.M., Sociology (New Delhi: Allied Publications Pvt.Ltd, 1980), p.392.

2 Madan, T.N., and Majumdar, D.N., An Introduction to Social Anthropology (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1977), p.151.

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Emile Durkheim, in his major work Elementary Forms of Religious Life, provides a sociological interpretation of religion. 'Religion' to him "is unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden, — beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called Church, all those who adhere to them."<sup>3</sup> According to B. Malinowski, "Religion is a mode of action as well as system of belief, and a sociological phenomena as well as a personal experience."<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the definitions of religion encompass man's belief in supernatural forces. Beliefs and rituals have been found to be the main component parts of all religions; primitive or modern. Sometimes magic is associated with religion. In fact, the veil between two is very thin and slight change in the formulation of words and art of performance may convert a magical formula into a religious hymn.

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3 Durkheim, Emile, Elementary Forms of Religious Life (New York: The Free Press, 1915), p.62.

4 Malinowski, B., Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays (New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1954), p.24.



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Many sociologists and social anthropologists have been interested in the study of religion since eighteenth and nineteenth century. These studies were based on either an evolutionist perspective or a functionalist perspective. The evolutionists have tried to find the origin of religion and to know the course of its development. Spencer, Tylor and Max Muller belong to this group. The functionalists like Malinowski, Radcliffe Brown, Evanspritchard and others have attempted to study the function which the religion performs to maintain the continuity of society. International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences has noted: "all these studies of religion made by sociologists and social anthropologists can be grouped into three types or patterns, such as, first, they have studied religion as a central theoretical problem in the understanding of social action. Secondly, they have studied the relation between religion and other areas of social life such as economic, political and social class etc. And, thirdly, they have studied religious roles, organizations and movements."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, vol.13-14, p.406.

Spencer and Tylor explain religious beliefs in primitive societies as an intellectual attempt on the part of primitive man to understand the natural phenomena and biological events. Tylor's theory of origin of religion is known as animism. According to this theory primitive man, as a result of his experience of natural phenomena and biological events like sleep, trance, illness, death on the one hand, dreams and visions on the other, believed in the duality of his own nature. He believed that there were two souls, i.e., body soul and free soul. The latter was believed by them to be immortal and when it left the body death occurred. To control and appease these spiritual beings primitive men worshipped them. "Their ancestor worship was the earliest forms of worship and tombs the earliest forms of temples. Animism consists of such a belief in the role of spiritual beings in human life; it is a kind of polytheism. Tylor believed that in course of time there was evolutionary development in religious spirits and forms and the progress was from polytheism towards monotheism."<sup>6</sup>

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6 Madam and Majumdar, op.cit., p.155.

Spencer's view on origin of religion is slightly different from that of Tylor. In his view, the origin of religion is to be found in the belief in ghosts rather than in souls. Death is seen as a temporary absence of ghosts from the body and the primitive man believed in the return of the ghosts to the body. When it did not return they believed that it might inhabit somewhere else. Thus the idea of ancestral ghost developed into gods.

Tylor's earliest German critic Max Muller whose name is associated with "Naturism" said that animism is a later development in the history of religion and postulated a pre-animistic stage when religious beliefs supposedly consisted of worship of objects of nature. "It is maintained that an attitude of awe or love and reverence towards objects of nature is born as a result of a 'diseased' mind which invests lifeless things with life and all the power associated with life. This error of mind according to this theory is born out of defective language. Such linguistic errors as the sun rises and sets, or thunder sends rain or that trees bear flowers and fruits, give rise to belief in some power inherent in the sun, thunder, trees, etc."<sup>7</sup>

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7 Ibid., p.156.

The merit and usefulness of these evolutionary theories emerges when they are taken together as each of them expresses some essential truth regarding the development of primitive religion.

In the Elementary Forms of Religious Life, (1915), Durkheim has presented what is probably the most influential interpretation of religion from a functionalist perspective. In his sociology of religion two things are important. These are the collective organization of men for community cult and the dichotomous relationship between the sacred and the profane. In the words of Raymond Aron "Durkheim's concept of sacred consists of a body of things, beliefs and rites. When a number of sacred things maintain relations of coordination and super-ordination with one another so as to form a system of the same kind, this body of corresponding beliefs and rites constitutes a religion. Religion hence pre-supposes first, the sacred, next the organization of the beliefs regarding the sacred into groups; finally rites which proceed in a more or less logical manner from the body of beliefs."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Aron, Raymond, Main Currents in Sociological Thought, 2 (London: Pelican Book, 1979), p.53.

In Durkheim's view religion produces collective sentiments and maintains social solidarity. The belief in rituals and their practices bring the members of a community together and from there develops collective solidarity. "Religion is something eminently social. Religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities, the rites are a manner of acting which takes rise in the midst of the assembled groups and which are destined to excite, maintain or recreate certain mental state in these groups."<sup>9</sup>

Malinowski, the British functionalist is one among those who rejected Durkheim's view that collective effervescence which arises in the communal gatherings was the cause of the origin of religion. His interpretation of religion is based on the data he collected in the small scale non-literate societies. Studying the Trobriand Islanders of the Coast of New Guinea, Malinowski concludes, "magic and religion exist to help the individual to meet the social and

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9 Durkheim, E., op.cit., p.22.

biological needs and to overcome the anxiety and  
 crises."<sup>10</sup> He has found in New Guinea that each and  
 every activity, be it agriculture or distant sailing,  
 is associated with magic and rituals. Like Durkheim,  
 Malinowski sees religion as reinforcing social norms,  
 values and promoting social solidarity, so, Malinowski's  
 distinctive contribution to the sociology of religion  
 is his argument that religion promotes social solidarity  
 by dealing with situations of emotional stresses and  
 strains which threaten the stability of society.

Radcliffe Brown, the structuralist-Functionalist  
 elaborated many ideas that were implicit in Durkheim.  
 His theory of religion is based on his empirical study  
 of Andaman Islanders. According to him rituals are  
 the most important factors of religion and the beliefs  
 are secondary. Like Durkheim and Malinowski, he is of  
 the opinion that religion is an important constituent of  
 society, which enables its members to live together in  
 an orderly social way. This orderly way of life depends  
 upon the existence of collective sentiments among the

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10 Malinowski, B., op.cit., p.63.

members. The collective sentiments in the minds of the individuals regulate the conduct of each individual according to the needs of society. According to Brown "Rites can be seen to be the regulated symbolic expressions of certain sentiments. Rites can, therefore, be shown to have specific social function when and to the extent that they have for their effect to regulate, maintain and transmit from one generation to another, sentiments on which the constitution of society depends."<sup>11</sup> Thus, he sees a close relationship between the form of religion and the form of social structure.

Another important scholar in the study of primitive religion is Evans-Pritchard. Like his predecessors he criticised the Marxists who held the view that religion is a form of false consciousness. He rejected the idea of analysing belief system by separating it from practice. He emphasized the importance of analysing religious fact as a whole in relation to other institutional systems of the society. According

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<sup>11</sup> Radcliffe Brown, A.R., Structure and Function in Primitive Societies (London: Cohn & West Ltd., 1971), p.157.

to him, religious rituals, magic, witchcraft, sorcery and oracular divination were important in primitive society and the analysis of these facts provides great knowledge to the sociology of religion.

The work of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman is another important development in the sociology of religion. They regard the sociology of religion as a part of the larger field; the sociology of knowledge which is concerned with the meanings and definitions of reality held by the members of a society. According to them, there is a close relationship between the sociology of religion and human world-building. Religion helps to build, maintain and legitimate the universe of meaning. They say "Throughout the human history religion has played a decisive part in the construction and maintenance of universe".<sup>12</sup>

Max Weber has also analysed the relationship between religion and society. He is of the opinion that religion plays an important role in bringing changes

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12 Berger, P., and Luckman, "Sociology of Religion and Sociology of Knowledge", in Robertson, R., ed., Sociology of Religion (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), p.68.



in society. In his famous book The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism, Weber examines the relationship between the rise of certain forms of Protestantism and the development of Western industrial capitalism. He argues that the essence of Capitalism is the pursuit of profit. Capitalist enterprises are organized on rational bureaucratic lines. Business transactions are conducted in a systematic and rational manner with costs and projected profits being carefully assessed. Underlying the practice of capitalism is the 'spirit of capitalism', a set of ideas, ethics and values which are identical to the ethics and values of Protestantism.

The protestant religion, especially the calvinism has certain guidelines for conduct. A man must have a calling in life, which he pursues in a determined way. Attainment of fruit of calling or labour is a sign of God's blessing. A man must acquire wealth which he should reinvest for profit but not for luxury or entertainment, Weber says "When the limitation of consumption with this release of acquisitive activity, the inevitable political result is obvious; accumulation of capital through ascetic compulsion to save."<sup>13</sup> Thus, according to Weber the calvinism led to the development of capitalism in the West.

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13 Weber, Max, The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism Trans. by Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p.172.

### Social Change:

Change is the law of nature. Social change occurs in all societies, slow, perhaps, in primitive societies and rapid in complex modern societies. Gradual and slow or rapid and spectacular, social change does occur irrespective of the type or location of human society in the world, for change in society is inevitable.

Studies of social change in the non-literate societies have been confined to the modifications in social life. Anthropologists have introduced such terms "culture contact", and "acculturation" to express the way in which new patterns of behaviour or types of relationship were acquired and incorporated into a primitive social system. Sociologists generally use the term "social change" to alterations in non-material culture i.e., values, mores, social institutions, which lead to technological and other innovations. These alterations are found in the economic, social, political fields of activities of people.

For a better understanding of process of social change, we may consider some of the definitions of social change. The concept of "social change" has been interpreted differently by different scholars.

According to Kingsley Davis, "By social change is meant only such alterations as occur in social organization - that is, structure and functions of society."<sup>14</sup> Moore, defines "social change is the significant alteration of social structure (that is of patterns of action, social and interaction), including consequences and manifestations of such structures embodied in norms (rules of conduct), values, cultural products and symbols."<sup>15</sup>

Emphasizing social relationship, MacIver and Page write, "Our direct concern as sociologists is with social relationships. It is the change in these relationships, which alone we shall regard as social change."<sup>16</sup>

According to Lucy Mair, "the study of social change is a historical one, it is a matter of tracing a process overtime. The Anthropologists must ask how

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- 14 Davis, K., Human Society (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1970), p.622.  
"Reconsideration of the Theories of Social Change",  
15 American Sociological Review, vol.25, 1960, p.336.
- 16 MacIver and Page, Society (New Delhi: MacMillan India Ltd., 1985), p.511.

the change is brought about, what is it that is changing. Ideas on study of social change have developed alongwith ideas on the subject matter of anthropology in general."<sup>17</sup>

On the basis of these definitions it may be concluded that social change refers to modifications which take place in the life pattern of people. It does not refer to all changes going on in the society. The changes in art, language, technology, philosophy may not be included in the term 'social change' which should be interpreted in a narrow sense to mean alterations in the field of social relationships. Thus social change will mean variations of any aspect of social processes, social patterns, social interactions or social organization. It is a change in the institutional and normative structure of society.

#### Social Change and Cultural Change:

The difference between social and cultural change is largely theoretical, for the two are so closely interwoven that a distinction is very difficult. Social change refers to changes in social structure and social relation-

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17 See, Mair Lucy, "Some Current Terms in Social Anthropology", in, The British Journal of Sociology vol.14, no.1, March 1963.

ships. Cultural change refers to the changes in values, behaviour, art, language, technology etc., of the society. Culture is the pattern of learned behaviour and society is people, in group relationships and interactions together with the resulting structure and forms, who share a culture. When changes in culture take place, changes in structure and forms of society also occur. Similarly, social change brings about cultural change. So it can be said that though a distinction between social and cultural change may be made but practically this is not always possible. As a result most sociologists consider these two terms interchangeable.

The theoretical approach to social change generally used in social anthropology today is that of structural-functionalism developed by Radcliffe Brown. This particular approach to social change has been used by many eminent sociologists to explain the structural and the cultural change in society. Beattie comments: "Sociologists and social anthropologists now know more than they used to about processes of social and cultural change. They are not much concerned as earlier generation was with the problems of diffusion of 'culture

traits' nor are they hypothesizing about the possibility of some kind of social evolution. They are now concerned with the explanation of modifications in a people's social institutions and values, through not in terms of any simple 'blanket' principle but rather in terms of multiplicity of processes which are involved in that often, contemporaneously. This awareness is due to the considerable body of data, which numerous detailed field studies explicitly concerned with change have contributed to any understanding."<sup>18</sup>

#### Concepts and Theories of Social Change in India:

Sociologists and social anthropologists have attempted to formulate concepts and approaches to study the processes of social change in India. Towards the end of nineteenth century both British and Indian scholars being influenced by the theories of social change of West started studying the social change in India from certain perspectives. From then onwards a variety of concepts and approaches have emerged. These approaches could be classified into following types:  
 (1) Evolutionary approaches, (2) Cultural approaches—

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<sup>18</sup> See, Beattie, J.H.M., "Culture Contact and Social Change", in, British Journal of Sociology, vol.XII, 1961, pp.165-75.

Sanskritization, Westernization, Little and Great tradition, and Multiple traditions; (3) Structural approaches; Differentiation and Mobility Analysis and Dialectical-Historical approaches."<sup>19</sup>

Evolutionary Approach:

The exponents of evolutionary approach are Ethnographers and sociologists like W. Crooke (1896), D.C. Ibbetson (1916), Rieley (1915), N.K. Dutt (1931), G.S. Ghurye (1945- & 1932), B.S. Guha (1937), J.H. Hulton (1955 & 1932), etc. The units of their analysis are the village community, caste and family. They have emphasized the study of the factors and the stages of the development of caste system. Their writings were not based on empirical findings but on the data derived from myths, epics, history and folklore. Their village and land systems studies are similarly oriented either to finding out the historical stages of growth or their comparative evolutionary sequence and succession of forms.

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<sup>19</sup> Singh, Y., Social Stratification and Change in India (Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1980), p.95.

### Cultural Approach:

This approach has become dominant in the analysis of social change in India. It assumes that sources of change lie both inside and outside the system. The scholars like M.N. Srinivas, Mackim Marriott, Hilton Singer, and S.C. Dube have constructed certain concepts and used them in the study of the process of social or cultural change in India. Their writings are based on the empirical study.

Srinivas has attempted to study the social change systematically by formulating the concepts of "Sanskritization and Westernization. He defines Sanskritization" as the process by which "low" Hindu caste or tribal or other group changes its customs, ritual ideologies and way of life in direction of a High and frequently twice born caste."<sup>20</sup> The sanskritization of a group generally results in improving its position in local caste hierarchy. Not only the Brahminical model but also Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra models of Sanskritization also exist in India. The Sanskritization process is not confined to the Hindu caste, it also occurs among tribal or semi-tribal groups. This usually results in the tribe undergoing Sanskritization claiming to be a caste and therefore Hindu.

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20 Srinivas, M.N., Social Change in Modern India (Bombay: Orient Longman Ltd., 1977), p.6.



Associated with Sanskritization is his concept of Westernization, which refers to all cultural changes and institutional innovations in India due to its contact with Western nations, particularly the United Kingdom. This process is wider than the sanskritization. Thus, Srinivas has attempted to analyse the processes of social change through these concepts. But the fact which he himself admits is that these concepts help in understanding cultural change rather structural change.

#### Little and Great Tradition:

Robert Redfield has first used the concept of tradition and its social organization to analyse social change. This approach assumes that each civilization consists of two traditions — Little and Great. The former is of the folk or the unlettered peasants and the latter is of the elite or the reflective few. Each tradition has its social organization that is institutionalized roles, statuses and personnel. Both traditions taken together symbolise a world view which represents the unity of civilization. The changes in these traditions originate from within and without. Each tradition and its social organization changes first by the factors from within and it is called orthogenetic process. At

the same time it also undergoes changes by the impact of other traditions and this process is known as heterogenetic process.

Milton Singer and Mackim Marriott have used Redfield's sociological formulation to understand process of social change in India. According to Singer, Indian civilization is 'primary' or 'indigenous' civilization which was fashioned out of pre-existing folk culture. Both the little tradition and the great tradition found to exist side by side in different regions, villages, castes and tribes. All Indians share a common consciousness, similar outlook and ethos. This common consciousness is formed by factors like sacred books, sacred objects, a special class of literati (Brahman) and other agents of cultural transmission. Because of the strong continuity with the past the acceptance of 'modernizing' and 'progress' ideologies does not result in linear form of social and cultural change, but many result in the 'traditionalizing' the modern elements."<sup>21</sup>

Mackim Marriott has supported Singer's view in his studies. He describes the nature of relationship between "Little" and "Great" traditions in terms of two concepts:

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21 Singh, Y., op.cit., p.103.



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'parochialization' and 'universalization'. "The first is when elements of the "Great" tradition percolate downward and become organic part of the "Little" tradition losing thereby their original form. The second process operates when elements of "Little" tradition (deities, customs, rites, etc.) circulate upward to the level of "Great" tradition and are identified with its legitimate forms."<sup>22</sup>

As a critique of dichotomization of traditions, S.C. Dube was felt that two traditions are not sufficient to analyze the processes of change in India. He has given six-fold classification of traditions, which, he thinks, provides a better framework for the understanding of social change in India. "There are classical tradition, emergent of national tradition, the regional tradition, the western tradition, and the local sub-cultural traditions of social group."<sup>23</sup> However, Dube's classification of traditions also does not eliminate the limitations of traditional approach to the study of social change.

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22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., p.104.

### Structural Approach:

Although culturological approach to analyse social change is dominant in India, the structural aspect is not neglected. A structural approach attempts to study the changes in the institutionalized, roles, statuses and social relationship. Scholars in India have tried to study the caste, kinship, class, occupational group, factory administrative structures etc., which comprise distinctive field of social interaction and constitute the structural realities. These studies are conducted sometimes independently and sometimes as a part of social mobility of occupations and groups.

Studies of social change in family structure is done by the scholars like I.P. Desai, 1964, K.M. Kapadia, 1958, B. Cohn, 1961, T.N. Medan 1962, A.M. Saha 1964, P.M. Kolanda 1968, Lambert 1963, Radhakamal Mukherjee and Baljit Singh 1961, etc.

We find the study of segmentation in caste communities and political parties in the writings of F.G. Bailey 1963, F. Barth 1960, A.C. Mayer 1965, R. Nicholas 1963, 1965 and 1968, Y. Singh 1971, M.N. Srinivas 1955 and 1959, Rajni Kothari, M. Weiner and R. Kothari 1965, etc.

Social mobility in the caste system is examined by M.N. Srinivas 1968, B. Barber 1968, B.S. Cohn 1962, I. Habib 1963, K.M. Panikar 1955, A.M. Saha 1964, Y.B. Dumble 1968, etc.

The dialectical historical model is also used to study social change in India by the scholars like S.A. Dange 1949, A.R. Desai 1966, 1959, D.P. Mukerji 1957, and 1958, Ramkrishna Mukherjee 1955 and 1965, etc.

Thus each approach has advantage of its own for the study of social change but none of them can provide a comprehensive enough perspective on social change in India.

## PART-II

Tribal people comprise 7.76 per cent of India's population with a strength of over 51 million persons. They are numerically and culturally a significant category. India's tribal population is not only very large but also very diverse. They differ from one another in many respect, viz., racial traits, social organization, cultural pattern, language, economic, religion, customs and beliefs, system, etc. They live in different geogra-

phical regions, speak a variety of languages and are engaged in different types of economic activities. Therefore, the diversity of tribal India reflects in a way the diversity of country as a whole.

As change is inevitable in all society, ... it is wrong to say that tribal culture is static and tradition-bound. During the last four or five decades, there has been a substantial change in tribal culture. "Any analysis of pattern of transformation to which tribal India has exposed reveals two sets of processes at work: the traditional and the modern."<sup>24</sup>

The traditional process is characterised by the impact of the dominant cultural groups on tribals as a natural course of event. This process of change has long been in operation among the tribals and resulted in Hinduization, Sanskritization, Tribe-Caste and Tribe-peasant continuum, revitalization movements and the like.

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24 Sachchidananda, Changing Munda (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1979), p.14.

The modern processes includes, Christianization, industrialization, modernization, and the planned, sponsored or engineered change\*. They are of recent origin and are external factors which do not emerge as a result of normal, gradual contacts of tribals with the non-tribal cultures. The tradition-bound tribal societies which prior to the independence of India were almost a closed system suddenly became exposed to the forces released by the community development movements, industrialization and urbanization, modern education and technology, in short to the process of modernization. However, all these are selective and sectional.

Among the forces of change operating in tribal cultures, Hinduism and Christianity are significant. A general transformation is witnessed in every aspect of life of those tribals who have come in contact with or adopted either Hinduism or Christianity. Tribal religion

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\* Planned Change:- Planned change is one of the processes of social change in which changes in the society occurs in an intended direction. The social legislation and the executive measure play an important role in this process of change. Through them traditional beliefs, attitudes, pattern of behaviour are being changed and the new behavioural patterns are institutionalized in the society. For instance, the practices of burning of widow, taking of dowry, untouchability so on and so forth have been banned in India by legislation.

exerts a strong influence on their social, political, economic and cultural life. As a result of their relatively simple technology and low degree of differentiation in social structure, there is a greater involvement in religious sphere. Therefore, the change in religion of the tribes has often led to corresponding changes in other aspects of their life.

The tribal people who live by farming and manual work have not remained isolated. Nearly all of them have been in continuous contact with their neighbour Hindus. It is not that they came in contact with the latter in recent past. N.K. Bose says, "These contacts go back at least to the days of Ramayana and Mahabharata, for in them there are reference to tribal communities, who are referred to as Jana. Even in Vedic literature there are references to people who were different in physical appearance and who worshipped strange gods."<sup>25</sup> Due to these contacts some tribes have become Hindus and there has been a great change in belief, rituals and practices of life cycle ceremonies of tribals. Now one can notice the operation of Sanskritization as well as detribalization processes among the tribals.

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25 Bose, N.K., Tribal Life in India (New Delhi: National Book Trust of India, 1971), p.2.



Like Hinduism, Christianity has since last century been an important factor of change in tribal areas. S.C. Roy and Sachchidananda describe in detail the work done by Christian missionaries among the Mundas. K. N. Sahay in his book Under the Shadow of Crosses analyses the impact of Christian missionaries on the Oraons of Ranchi. He observed that Christianity has been an important factor of cultural change among the tribals. There are other scholars who have studied the work of Christian missionaries among the tribes of different parts of India.

Now we find a large number of tribals converted to Christianity in South Central India, the major tribal belt in India. Oraon, Munda, Kharia, and Santal are the four major tribes of this area. These tribes have been greatly exposed to Christianity. Scholars differ in their opinion with regard to the causes that led the tribes to accept Christianity. Some say that it is only for the material gain the tribes embraced Christianity. Some others are of the opinion that they adopted Christianity in order to free themselves from the oppression by landlords and moneylenders. The landlords took away their lands and collected arbitrary

tax. The tribals could not win the legal fight in the Court because the local administrators were partial to the vested interests. The Christian missionaries took great interest to restore the lost rights of the tribals on land. The missionaries fought for the tribal cause and won. So the latter's faith and obligation to the missionaries developed and strengthened. Thus S.C. Roy says, "It was their expectation of securing redress of agrarian grievances with the powerful help of Christian missionaries that appears to have attracted most, if not all, the earlier converts to Christianity, it would be unfair to say as is sometimes said that they made converts through inducement of securing them their lost right in land and other worldly advantages."<sup>26</sup> Whatever may be the causes of conversion among the tribals, one cannot disagree with the fact that Christianity has become one of the major forces of tribal cultural development in India. The effects of Christianity on the tribals has been described by different scholars in many different terms and concepts. Dr. Minz says, "Some describe it as a proselytisation, others say it as 'westernization'.

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26 Roy S.C., "Effects of the Aborigines of Chotanagpur of their Contact with Western Civilization", in, Man in India, vol.2, 1982, no.1.

still other mention it as detribalization and so on. These concepts describe the effects of Christianity with a negative emphasis."<sup>27</sup>

Of course, there are certain negative effects: Christianity destroyed the traditional beliefs and values held by the tribes. Further, it divided tribes into two groups i.e., converted tribes and non-converted tribes and the former always feel that they are superior to the latter. In spite of all this, the positive effects are seen to be more significant. The work of Christian missionaries among the tribes has brought far-reaching changes in every aspect of their life. They received modern education and became politically conscious. They acquired techniques of modern farming. They gave up traditional pattern of worship which included less civilized practices. Their sense of morality developed.

S.C. Roy, who has a close understanding of the Chotanagpur tribes and the working of Christian missionaries, has commented on the contact of aboriginals of Chotanagpur with the Western civilization. He writes, "Thus the two main channels through which the Western cultural influence reached the native people of

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27 Nirmal Minz, "Transforming Effects of Christianity on the Tribes of Chotanagpur", in, P.D. Sharma, ed., The Passing Scene in Chotanagpur (Ranchi: Naitryee Publications, 1980), p.73.

Chotanagpur are first the channel of British administration and British officials and secondly, the channel of European Christian missions and missionaries."<sup>28</sup>

According to him, the second one is more effective vehicle of Western influence on the culture of Chotanagpur tribe.

#### The Scope and Objectives of the Study:

The importance of religion in understanding social and cultural change cannot be overemphasized. It is a fact that religion is a binding force in society. Change in religion leads to further changes in other aspects of life of the individual. In this light the present study is concerned with examination of the changes that have occurred in the societies of Oraon, Santal and Munda tribes due to the impact of Christianity and Hinduism. Besides these two factors of change, what is proposed to be examined is also the effect of industrialization on these tribes. In this area major industries were set up after independence and the tribals were greatly affected by that. So the transformation of Oraons, Mundas and Santals cannot be delineated

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28 See, Roy S.C., op.cit.

accurately unless we also take into account the effect of industrialization. The present study is not based on empirical data but on available published works, monographs, periodicals, census data, newspaper reports, etc.

Chapter-II contains a discussion on the available published books and articles on this subject. There are a few scholars who have published works on this area. Therefore, I think, it would be very useful if we discuss about them. Chapter-III, presents a description of animism, Hinduism and Christianity. It describes the interaction pattern among these three religions in this tribal area. Chapter-IV, gives an analysis of the effects of Hinduism, Christianity and industrialization on Oraons, Mundas and Santals. It discusses the changes that have occurred in belief system, rituals, ceremonies, political, educational and occupational patterns of these three tribes. The last chapter is the conclusion.

Chapter-II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE : BOOKS AND ARTICLES

## Chapter-II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE : BOOKS AND ARTICLES

There are sociologists and social anthropologists, both Indian and foreign, who have studied tribal societies in India. They have written about their demography, social history, ethnography, their social structure, religious universes, political functioning etc., etc. But few of them have analysed the changes that have been taking place in the tribal societies in India due to the working of traditional as well as modern forces of change. I discuss below some works of the scholars which deal with the consequences of the tribes' contact with the Hindus and Christians and also of the process of industrialization.

#### Books:

Sarat Chandra Roy is one among the pioneers in the study of tribal societies in India. He was greatly inspired by the evolutionist approach to the study of society. He believed that the historical knowledge of the tribes should help us in knowing better the culture of the people.

His monograph Mundas and Their Country, contains only one chapter on ethnography and five chapters on history. In the earlier chapters he tries to trace the origin of the Munda tribe on the basis of folklore, linguistic and pre-historic traditions. He proceeds to construct the history of the tribes from the time of the Vedas to the beginning of the Christian era. He describes how the Mundas have been in continuous contact with the Hindu Rajas, officials, zamindars and the religious sect like Vaishnavism. According to him, these contacts brought manifold changes in Munda society and their culture. Their traditional economic system and political structure was destroyed. In the religious sphere also the Hindu influence is observed. Roy says: "in the Panch Parganas a number of well-to-do Mundas have adopted religious faith of their more civilized Hindu neighbours."<sup>1</sup> The Mundas have begun performing marriage ceremony in the Hindu way.

An interesting account is given by him of the growth of Christian missions in Chotanagpur. The Christian missionaries gave them support of all sorts

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1 Roy, S.C., Munda and Their Country (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1970), p.99.



in their fight against the oppression of landlords and money-lenders. They spread education and democratic ideas among the tribes. Due to the missionary influence the Mundas gave up belief in witchcraft and drinking liquor, eating animal flesh and abolished premarital sexual relationships. Besides preaching religion the missionaries started philanthropic institutions like schools, health centres, orphanages and cooperative banks among the tribals. Roy narrated also the Birsa movement and other social movements among the Mundas. The chapter on ethnography contains a full account of daily life of Mundas, their dress, agriculture, tribal organization, social and religious ceremonies, folklore and songs.

Thus this work is a good combination of history and ethnography. He presents an exhaustive picture of the life and cultural change among the tribes. But this book gives us the information only about positive effects of tribes' contact with Christian missionaries. It has not analysed the negative effects on tribal societies.

In his Bihar District Gazetteers : Santal Pargana, 1965, P.C. Roychaudhury discusses about the impact of

Christianity on the Santal tribe. He provides the picture of the change and continuity in the culture of Santal of Santal Pargana. He observes that the converted Santals in comparison to non-convert Santals are more educated and politically more conscious. They do not believe in Bongas or spirits and do not generally take part in tribal convention and festivals. But he says: "the fact is that old and honoured tribal customs are still continuing in the families of Christian Santals unless they are in direct conflict with the Christian faith."<sup>2</sup> In this context he gives an example of the marriage system of the Santals. The marriage of the Santal Christian family is generally celebrated in the Church. But the ways of performance are very much similar to those of non-convert Santals. The rule of exogamy is followed, bride price is given and the role of go-between is recognized. Thus according to him, due to the impact of Christianity we notice certain changes in Santal society, but the continuity

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2 Roy Chaudhury, P.C., Bihar District Gazetteer : Santal Pargana (Patna: Government of Bihar, 1965), p.959.

of certain old customs cannot be denied. Roy Choudhury's observation is accurate. We find the continuity of some elements of traditional culture in almost all the Christian tribal families or groups.

In the book The Structure of Hindu Society, 1975, N.K. Bose has tried to identify the organizing principles of Hindu society, the factors which ensured its continuity and the forces by which it ultimately declined. Bose has tried to combine three approaches, viz., Ethnological, Indological and Socio-historical to study the Hindu and Tribal society in India.

According to him the contact between the Hindus and tribes, which existed since Manu's time is one of the main factors of cultural change among the tribes. During his field study among the Juangs, Savaras, Bhuyas of Orissa and Santals, Mundas and Oraons of Chotanagpur he found that some segments among them either have been absorbed in the local caste hierarchy or some have incorporated Hindu elements into their socio-economic and religious systems. He shows how the tribals worship Hindu Gods, practise certain

festivals and ceremonies in the Hindu way.

Regarding the causes of the attraction of the tribals to the higher system of Hinduism, Bose says that it was the higher technical efficiency and division of labour rather than the superior political power and complex social organization that attracted the tribes. The tribes were placed in lower strata of cultivator or peasant in Hinduism. They did not resist this status because the Hindus gave them the autonomy of their occupation and freedom to practise their beliefs and cultural values.

Thus by combining Ethnology, History and Indology, N.K. Bose developed a new approach which was followed by some scholars to study Indian society. However, regarding the tribes' conversion to Hinduism he took the pro-Hindu stand. With regard to causes of conversion he has given only the economic factor, and ignored the social and political factors which attract the tribes into Hinduism.

Verrier Elwin, in his book A Philology for NEFA, 1964, describes the ways or mechanisms by

which the progress and development of the tribal people of India could be achieved. The first few chapters are devoted to the delineation of the socio-economic, religious life of the numerous Indo-Mongoloid tribes inhabiting the area of North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA). The peculiar feature of NEFA is that there are no landlords, no money-lenders, no liquor vendors coming from outside. Hence the harmful effects arising from outsiders' presence are absent here. Elwin writes: "tribal art and culture, social organization, traditional institutions are still strong and vigorous. The old religion is still a power for good and has not yet been touched by other systems. Tibetan or Burmese Buddhism has had little effect on them."<sup>3</sup>

In next few chapters Elwin discusses about the drawbacks of two approaches, namely: the policy of isolation and the policy of assimilation for the development of tribal and their culture. He says

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3 Verrier Elwin, A Philosophy for NEFA  
(Shillong: Government of Assam, 1964), p.7.

that the isolationist approach was followed by the British for certain political gains like keeping the tribes away from the political movement. Since the British period some anthropologists and administrators have been supporting this approach. Dr. Elwin is also a supporter of it. But he has advocated temporary isolation for certain tribes because before independence the contact of the tribes with outside world was leading to economic exploitation and cultural destruction. Elwin says: "Neither I nor any other anthropologist would dream of suggesting such a policy since independence."<sup>4</sup>

The assimilation of tribes with other people would lead to the breakdown of tribal society, loss of tribal virtues and rapid acquisition of the vices of civilization. According to Elwin "it will lead to the disappearance of former independence, cooperation, self-reliance in arts, crafts, the dance and music. Further the tribes will be transformed into castes."<sup>5</sup>

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4 Ibid., p.46.

5 Ibid., p.49.

He has rejected the above two approaches as genuine and appropriate approaches for tribal development. He has supported the late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's policy for the development of tribes and their culture. He states that Nehru's policy is the middle path between doing too little and doing too much. It is one which aims at the development of tribal life and culture with respect. It would not ignore the past but would build upon it. It would bring the best of modern world to the tribes in such a way that they will not destroy the traditional way of life.

Next few chapters contain the description of appropriate steps or measurement that should be taken for the development of tribal life and culture. Land is very important for the tribesmen. It should be protected from outsiders' encroachment. Their right on forest should be protected. In order to guarantee their self-sufficiency in dress it needs to protect the weavers from market competition. Development of inferiority complex among the tribes is a social as well as political problem. In order to do away with this problem others would respect the tribal religious system and their social institutions like such as dormitory.

Thus Elwin presents a good picture of the problems the tribes have been or are facing now-a-days. The suggestions that he gives for the development of the tribal life and culture except few are acceptable. Elwin supports shifting cultivation among tribals. But shifting cultivation may be possible only if there is unlimited land in this country. Further it can be said that his book is more of the nature of political analysis than that of sociological one.

G.S. Ghurye has examined the status of tribals in the total Indian social structure. His book The Scheduled Tribes, 1963 may conveniently be divided into four parts. In first part he discusses the status of tribes in Indian society. In the second part, he delineates the acculturation of the tribes and the problems that the acculturation process leads to. The ethnographic description is given in the fourth part of this book. And lastly he deals with the problems of integration of tribals in the light of latest political and constitutional provisions.



While Ghurye tries to define the status of tribes in India, he takes into account the statements given in this matter by Britishers like J.A. Bains, Enthoven, E.A. Gait, J.J. Marten and Hutton. They argue that it is difficult to distinguish Hinduism from tribal religion or animism. They say that Hinduism is the amalgam of the cultures of the Aryan and the pre-Aryan tribes of the forest. The tribal religion represents, as it were, surplus material not yet built into the temple of Hinduism. He points out there are some tribes which are totally Hinduized or partly Hinduized. These tribes are Santals, Mundas, Oraons, Kurmis, Bhuyans, Konds, Gonds, etc.

In the context of acculturation, he divides the so called aboriginals into three classes. First, the Raj Gonds and other who have fought the battle and are recognized as the member of high status in Hindu society. The second consists of those who are partially Hinduised owing to close contact with Hinduism. The third category of tribes live in forest and hills without having any contact with

Hinduism. He says that it is the second category which suffers from the loss of social solidarity, moral depression, economic oppression and cultural decay.

Ghurye, like Elwin, favours the polity of sympathy and respect for the tribal institution and their various system. He suggests measures for the protection of tribal right on land and forest, the creation of self-administrative units, encouragement of the religious practices and values, the dance except the mixed dance and songs and the development of their language. These measures should be taken through constitutional protection and social service. The problem of acculturation that Ghurye has pointed out in this book are found among all the tribes who are in close contact with the Hindus. He has given appropriate suggestions for the solution of the tribal problems and the development of the tribes.

In his book, Culture Change in Tribal Bihar : Munda and Oraon, 1964, Sachchidananda explains the changing tribal culture due to its long contact with outsiders. According to the author "the object

of the study is to trace the causes and the forces which led to cultural change and the extent to which lives of the tribes have been affected. Whether these changes are healthy or whether, there has been social disorganization or maladjustment consequent upon culture contact."<sup>6</sup>

This book is the result of his field study in some Munda and Oraon villoges in Bihar. He has observed that the agencies of culture change are urban contact, the influence of Hinduism, Christianity and education. He states that the effects of missionary activities of several denominations are felt in every aspect of the life of the tribals. In second chapter, he given a vivid description of the changes in living conditions, dress and ornaments, food and drinks, dance and song etc. The second chapter contains the description of the changing economic structure. The traditional farming practices ceased to exist and the phenomena

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6 Sachchidananda, Culture Change in Tribal Bihar (Patna: Bookland Pvt.Ltd., 1964),p.1.

of cash crops, local markets and gaingolas are emerging in tribal societies. The next chapter deals with the traditional socio-religious institutions like Dhankuria (Oron) and Gitiore (Munda) and how these institutions are losing their importance. It also gives the account of changes in family and marriage systems. The next chapter contains the explanation of religious belief systems.

The tribals being influenced by either Hinduism, especially Vaishnavism or Christianity have now given up spirit worship. The tribal pantheon has been enlarged by the inclusion of Hindu gods and goddesses. The Christian section of the tribals perform different Christian festivals such as Christmas, Easter, All Saints day, etc. Much more important than the change in beliefs and rituals is the influence in the field of education. Education has been one of the biggest achievements of Christian missions. Another important effect of missionary activity has been the impetus given to political organization and the spread of political consciousness. Sachchidananda describes also the contra-acculturation

movements among the tribals. He was found in the village of Mali a strong resistance to change among the tribals.

Thus Sachchidananda has observed accurately the changing cultures of two tribes. His findings may be applicable to other tribes in India, who are exposed to the working of Hinduism, Christianity, industrialization and education. Hence it provides valuable information in the field of the study of tribes.

Martin Orson's book, The Santal : A Tribe in Search of a Great Tradition, 1965, is an important work on the process of acculturation and transformation among the tribes. He observes that Santals have long been exposed to acculturative encounter with the surrounding Hindu castes for many generations and incorporated many Hindu traits in their cultural pattern. They are influenced also by the process of industrialization. He observed that in Jamshedpur industrial complex the solidarity based on class or lineages does not exist among the Santals.

Some of them have given up their traditional ancestor worship and now lead a secular life. The Santal tribal elites are engaged in contra-acculturative social movements asserting tribal distinctiveness, by elaborating a myth in support of such distinction.

Oraon has examined the transformation processes before 1955 and observes that Santals passed through alternative phases of emulative acculturation and political solidarity movements. Through both the phases Santals were aspiring to raise their status. On the basis of his study of Santals Oraon makes a generalization regarding the tribal transformation incurred of their interaction with Hindu society. He has suggested that when tribe becomes aware of the low social status assigned to its members by dominant Hindus, its members usually aspire to improve their rank. The rank path may be broadly of two categories: the economic and the political. When the tribes come in contact with the Hindus they start doing the economic activities such as basket making, weaving, oil pressing, etc. In course of time they adopt the

Hindu cultural values and claim themselves to be the caste members. If the rank path is economic, the interaction process leads towards cultural assimilation in the dominant non-tribal milieu. If the economic improvement is blocked, the encysted groups usually seek status through ethnic political solidarity. The present Jharkhand movement is an example of it.

Martin Oraon's observation of two ways of status improvement among the tribes is noteworthy. But these are not the only ways. There are tribes who think that by adopting Hinduism or Christianity their status would be improved. For instance, the tribes who have accepted Vaishnavism or Christianity feel superior to other non-converts.

R.O. Dhan's book: These are my Tribesmen, 1967, contains the analysis of impact of Christianity on Oraon tribes. This book is the result of her field study in the village Mali in Bihar. Here she describes the geographical location and demographic features of Oraons their social, political, economic and religious structures and the changes that have

occurred in these structures in course of time due to the impact of Christian missionaries. She observes that the economy has changed and with it the structure of the community. The Bhumihari lineages are no longer land-holding groups. The authority of traditional panchayats has declined. The nuclear family has replaced the traditional joint family. Dhan writes: "Missions are to some extent responsible for the disintegration of tribal community. It (Christianity) divided the community into Christian and non-Christian, split the Christian community into various denominations. Further there is a conflict between the bonds of loyalty to church on the one hand and bonds of kinship on the other. But Christianity has not caused complete disruption, both Christian and non-Christian tribes lives together."<sup>7</sup>

The book presents one side of the coin and ignores the other. Dhan describes here the positive effects of Christianization process among the tribes. She has not taken into account the bad effects like the detribalization process and the stresses and strains,

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<sup>7</sup> Dhan, R.D., These are My Tribesmen (Ranchi: G.E.L. Church Press, 1967), p.97.



which the converted tribes usually face. The Christianity has undermined the tribal solidarity by dividing the society into converts and non-converts. It put restrictions on their marriage, cultural and religious activities. It asks them to discard the belief in witchcraft magic or exorcism. The replacement of traditional tribal cultural elements by the of Christians can be regarded from the tribal point of view negatively, that is as a detribalization process. So Dhen's views regarding Christianization among tribals can said to be pro-Christian.

Another scholar, K.N. Sahay, examines in his book Under the Shadow of Cross, 1976, the impact of Christianity on the Orsons of Chotanagpur. He wrote the book on the basis of the data collected during his field study conducted in the year 1960 in four villages, Shefali, Jaipur, Sanwaria and Buntal in Ranchi district in Bihar. The first two villages are Christian, the third one is inhabited by the followers of traditional tribal religion and the last one is inhabited by the mixed population, Christian and non-convert tribals.

Regarding the causes of conversion, K.N. Sahay is of the opinion that "speaking on a tribal level

historically, we note that it was the long exploitation of the aboriginals of Chotogagpur by the landlords which prepared a suitable ground for mass conversion."<sup>8</sup> Besides this they created a situation which is favourable for the conversion. With regard to the effects of Christianity on tribals he comments: "with the conversion the old faith in Sarna\* religion was changed and the new Christian faith was introduced. But a change in religion — the focal aspect of culture — meant vast sociological implications which further led to corresponding changes in festivals, village organization, rites de-passage, social and personal life, dance, dormitory and sex life and inter-relations within the tribal communications."<sup>9</sup>

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8 K.N. Sahay, Under the Shadow of Cross (Calcutta: Institute of Cultural Research and Applied Anthropology, 1976), p.479.

9 Ibid., p.11.

\* Sarna religion: Sarna refers to a "sacred grove" where several indigenous deities and spirits are believed to reside and are worshipped. Several tribes like Munda, Oraon, Santals and Hos of Central India regard 'Sarnaism' as their religion.

The Christian impact led to the emergence of caste-like groups which destroyed the homogenous nature of tribal society. Joint family gradually split up into two or three more families. The religious interest was no longer confined to the village but extended beyond it through Church organization. On the moral and ethical grounds the tribals have given up dancing, drinking and animal sacrifice in the worship. The village Church replaced the traditional political organizations and the new social leaders like Christian Priests emerged.

According to Sahey, "all these changes may be analysed in the light of five cultural processes which are oscillation, scrutinization, combination, indigenization and retroversion."<sup>10</sup> Oscillation process is the time when two religions i.e., tribal religion and Christianity was practised at the same time. This generally happens in the first generation of converts. The next process is cultural scrutinization which leads to elimination of certain Sarna elements on the one hand and the retention of others on the other.

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10 Ibid., p.21.

on proper scrutiny. This process is associated with the second and third generations. This process is followed by the process of combination in which the converts mix up the retained Sarna elements and the Christian elements.

The next cultural process is indigenization in which particular elements of Sarna religion are replaced by that of Christianity. The last cultural process is the Retroversion. The converts reevaluate the previously eliminated Sarna elements and readapt them after necessary modifications. Sahay states that these cultural processes are of great theoretical importance. These may be found operating among the tribes whose history of conversion is the same as that of the Oraons of Chotanagpur.

K.N. Sahay's book is a valuable one in the field of the study of the process of Christianization among the tribes in India. The theoretical formulation that he makes for the course of adoption of Christianity by Oraons are found to be operating among the other tribes of India, who are inclined towards Christianity.

Another important work in this field is that of J. Troisi. In his book Tribal Religion : Religious Beliefs and Practices Among the Santals, 1979, Troisi attempts to examine the social function of religion in a Santal society. He tries to show how religion plays an important role in maintaining solidarity, continuity and bringing changes in society. He does not analyse religion as a body of doctrines, but as manifested and expressed in its beliefs and rituals, which are invariant factors in all religions. He has written this book on the basis of his field study conducted from the year 1972 to 1974, in a village called Pagro located in the district of Santal Parganas.

In the first chapter of the book, he gives the conceptual and theoretical clarifications. Next chapter contains a detailed description of the social structure of the Santals, their demographic characteristics and social organization. In next two chapters he delineates the gods and goddesses and their rites, rituals and the festivals. He deals

also with the relationship between magic and religion in Santal society. In the concluding chapter he discusses the Santal religion and shows the continuity and changes in this religion due to the influence of Hinduism and Christianity. He has observed that Santals have borrowed some elements from either Hinduism or Christianity. These two superior religions have not totally destroyed their traditional culture, values and beliefs. They are proud of their past and continue to practise their rites, rituals, festivals and ceremonies in traditional ways, though with some modifications.

Thus Icisi being influenced by the functionalist approach especially that of Radcliffe Brown has attempted to study the Santal society. He successfully shows that religion which is an integral part of and which performs an important role in tribal society maintains the continuity of society. And change in it leads to the changes in other structures or the systems of society.

Articles:

S.C. Roy's paper "The Effects on the Aborigines of Chotanagpur of Their Contact with Western Civilization", is a valuable study of the spread of Western cultures among the tribes of Central India. He has described the religion of Chotanagpur tribes as the crude system of spiritism or animism. The religious ideas of these tribes were changed to some extent by the influence of Hinduism. According to Roy, the most important factors of change of tribal way of life in this area are the British way of life and the Christianity.

The introduction of direct administration by the Britishers in these areas brought to the tribals the ideas and methods of Western administration. However, the administrative system of the Britishers has positive and negative effects on the tribals. The tribals were morally depressed by the introduction of zamindari and judicial systems. But the criminal law introduced by the Britishers had no doubt a beneficial effects on tribes. It attempted to stop the objectionable practices such as trial by ordeal,

witch-craft and persecution of witch-craft. Roy also refers to the constructive role of Christian missions in modernizing the tribals. There was a considerable improvement in tribal ethic as a result of Christian missionary work.

In another article, "A New Religious Movement Among the Oraons", Roy discusses the new religious movement started by some sections of Oraons who were being greatly influenced by Hinduism and Christianity. The leaders of this movement tried to reform their primitive and animistic religion as well as to elevate their position to the level occupied by the Hindus and the converts, and to remedy their agrarian grievances. They tried to eradicate the belief in spirit, animal sacrifice and consumption of animal flesh and liquor. According to Roy "they named their new faith as Kurukh Dhanam or in sometimes Khakat or Bhakti. The followers of this are called Tana Bhagats."<sup>11</sup>

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11 See Roy, S.C., "New Religious Movements Among the Oraons", in, Man in India, vol.1, 1921, p.4.



N.K. Bose in "Some observations on Industrialization and Its Effects on Tribal Life"<sup>12</sup> tries to show that the impact of industrialization on the tribes is a contrast to the Hindu impact on tribal social organization. The tribes when they came in contact with the Hindus maintain their solidarity by living together, while industrialization destroy their internal solidarity. The tribal like any member of a caste goes individually to the factory and sells his labour. Even if the whole village go people are not regarded as one community in the new situation. But the old ties exist to some extent. Thus the tribal sees his individual interest first and then the interest of his community. Bose's observation on the impact of industrialization on tribes is indeed, very significant. But he has taken into account only one aspect of life, it would have been more interesting had he discussed the impact of industrialization on religious, political and economic activities of tribes.

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12 Bose, N.K., "Some Observation and Industrialization, and Its Effects on Tribal Life", in, Man in India, vol.42, 1962, pp.5-9.

In his article: "Impact of Industrialization on Tribal Life"<sup>13</sup> Pranab Kumar Dasgupta discussed the transformations of Santal society due to the industrialization. He conducted field work in the year 1962 among the Santals living in adjacent villages of Chitranjan in West Bengal. He writes that industrialization leads to several changes but continuity of certain traditional tribal cultural elements can not be ignored. He has observed that the Manjhi and the traditional village head, the larger political organization, have ceased to exist. The Jaherthan or the Manjhithan which are the shrines of village have also disappeared. The joint family system moves towards some kind of nuclear pattern. He says that before the setting up of industrial complex marriage with other community was unknown among the Santals. But in the new situation such kind of marriages are found in Santal Society. The traditional economic structure of Santal was based on agriculture. Gupta noticed the loss of interest in agriculture. He found that belief in Witchcraft and magic still exists today. They perform festivals like Saherei

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13 Dasgupta, P.K., "Impact of Industrialization on Tribal Life", in, Anthropological Survey of India, 1964, vol.13, pp.85-106.

and Bahe without marked change except in the degree of participation.

Similar opinion is expressed by L.P. Vidyarthi, in his paper, "Industrialization and Social Change in Chotanagpur".<sup>14</sup> During his field study in four industrial complexes in South Bihar he found that a majority of unskilled labourers in industrial complexes are tribals. He states that the new situation has disturbed their homogeneous social life. As they interact with the people from heterogeneous backgrounds, their social and religious outlook change. The changes are also seen in their language, food habits and dress pattern. There is also a shift in occupational structure due to technological development in the villages. They now practised basket-making, poultry-raising, rice-shelling and weaving. The tribals who work in the industrial complexes bring to the villages the urban way of living and this has caused the blending of rural and urban way of life.

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14 Vidyarthi, L.P., "Industrialization and Social Change in Chotanagpur", in, P.D. Sharma, ed., The Passing Scenarios in Chotanagpur (Ranchi: Naitryee Publications, 1980), pp.137-57.

The article, "Tribe, Caste and Tribe-Peasant Continuum in Central India", of Surjit Sinha is the study of transformation of the Bhumij of Purulia and Singhbhum district of West Bengal under the influence of regional Hindu caste system. According to Sinha there is not a precise definition which can explain clearly where the tribe ended and caste began. The author has attempted to examine the relative position of the isolated Hill - Maria and Hinduized Bhumij tribe in Central India in terms of two types of continua, the tribe-caste and tribe-peasant.

Sinha states that the socio-cultural system of lower caste Hindus or peasantry is on the one hand isolated from that of elite caste and on the other hand has great similarity with that of tribals. According to Sinha, "The Tribe-Caste and Tribe-Peasant continuum is mainly concerned with the process by which the tribes are integrated with the traditional civilization of India."<sup>15</sup> He cites two examples of tribal integration with Hindus. Among the Hill-Maria tribes of Bastar, though there is no concept of 'high' and

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15 See, Sinha, S., "Tribe-Caste and Tribe-Peasant Continuum", in Man in India, 1965, 45(1), pp.57-83.

'low' caste but, the concept of 'big' and 'small' caste exists. Those who practise degrading occupations are regarded as small castes. Like Hindus, they regard the Muslims and Christians as low castes. There is a good deal of similarity between the Hill-Maria religion and that of peasantry. Similarly, the Bhumij of Barabhum village have social stratification and rank consciousness and have other characteristics which are very much similar to that of peasantry. Sinha's above discussion throws light on two processes, Sanskritization and Tribalization. In some areas in India Hindus adopt some cultural elements of tribes and in some other areas tribes initiate the Hindu ways of life. For this we face difficulty in distinguishing tribes from Hindus.

Another scholar Dr. Nirmal Minz, in his article, "The Transforming Effects of Christianity on the Tribals of Chotanagpur", has attempted to show the impact of British administration and Christianity upon the tribes of Chotanagpur. The author recognizes the modernizing role of Christianity and Christian missions on the Chotanagpur tribal society. He says that Christianity has become one of the modern forces of modern history of Chotanagpur to change the tribal

life. It has extended its influence on the economic, social and political life of the tribals and enabled them to adjust themselves to the new situations of social, economic, religious and political. The missionaries started schools, hospitals, and other institutions in the tribal areas and these institutions for the first time provided employment.

Further Christianity extended the network of social relationships of tribes. Through the institutions like Church and diocese they came in direct contact with the people of other region. In the cultural sphere also it plays the transforming role. The traditional values and religious beliefs were changed. The Christian missionaries gave the tribal language a written and literary form. This article shows that Dr. Minz's views on impact of Christianity on tribals is pro-Christian.

Chapter-III

ANIMISM, HINDUISM AND CHRISTIANITY : INTERACTIONS

Chapter-IIIANIMISM, HINDUISM AND CHRISTIANITY : INTERACTIONS

India is the most complex of the higher civilizational areas of the world in the sense that here live different people, speaking a variety of languages, following different cultural and spiritual traditions and maintaining different types of social organizations and institutions. In a special manner India is the land of religions. Within this sub-continent of Asia are found religions which are among the most primitive and the most advanced of all religions known to man. The major religions that we find in India are Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam and Christianity. These religions are practised by the people of plains and are regarded as advanced. Another religion which exists in India and is followed by the aboriginals or the people living in hills and forest is regarded in many terms such as Animism, Bonqaiem, Spiritism, Sarnaism or Tribal religion. Among all the above religions Hinduism is the oldest one and Buddhism and Jainism are its offshots. Christianity found a home in South-West India in the first century A.D. And since then it has been a continuous tradition in India until the present day.



A comparative study of the elements of different religions is a subject of recent development. Such studies of Indian religions are done by various scholars. But all these works are confined to only the advanced religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, and Christianity. There is a paucity of comparative study of advanced religion of India on the one hand and tribal religion on the other. Such type of studies would certainly contribute more knowledge to the field of sociology of religion. We have stated that Santal, Munda and Oraon tribes are greatly influenced by the surrounding Hindus and by the Christian missionaries. This influence led to changes in tribal religious beliefs and practices. Here we discuss the similarities and differences between Hinduism, Christianity and Tribal religion. Then we focus on the influence that one exerts on the other.

### Hinduism:

Hinduism is perhaps the oldest as well as the complex of all living religions. It is unique in nature. When Hinduism came to exist is not definitely known. Jesus Christ in the Christianity or prophet Mohammed in Islam or Gautam Budha in Buddhism is

regarded as the founding father. But there is no one whom we consider as the founder of Hinduism. Hinduism does not have central organization like the Church. Thus, Hinduism has neither its founder nor a central organization. It grew spontaneously through various stages of civilization.

Although a host of saints and sages are associated with Hinduism, none of them can claim to be its founder. They have only contributed to its growth. Further Hinduism does not have well-defined, rigid, and dogmatic principles of faith and practice. There are various beliefs and practices. In Hinduism some believe in one God, some other believe in number of gods and goddesses, and there are still other who do not believe in any god. There are various ways of worship and prayer, but Hinduism more often speaks of three, the way of action the way of worship and prayer and the way of devotion.

Hinduism, as we have said above, is an amalgam of various kinds of beliefs and practices. K.M. Sen says that it has been recognized as a religion of Aryans, but various ethnic and cultural groups have exerted influence from time to time in shaping its beliefs and practices.<sup>1</sup> It believes in the theory

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1 Sen. K.M., Hinduism (Penguin Books, 1961), p.2.

of rebirth. Man takes birth again and again because of his deeds. Man can release himself from the cycle of birth by attaining moksha or liberation. There are three paths to attain moksha; path of knowledge (Jnana marga), path of action (karma marga) and path of devotion (bhakti marga).

However, more important than these beliefs and practices in Hinduism is the relationship between Hinduism and society. It is said that Hinduism is not only a religion but also a social system. Its unique feature is the varna system, which divides the Hindu society into four strata in a hierarchical way. Traditionally only he has been able to be a Hindu who has belonged to any of the four varnas — Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Sudra, present in Hindu social system. The present caste system in India is perhaps developed from these four Varnas. According to some sociologists, caste system is the structural basis of Hinduism.

Another important feature of Hinduism is that it is divided into various sects. The main sects in Hinduism are the Saivism and the Vaishnavism,

Table-I**DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION BY RELIGION, INDIA 1981**

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Population (million)</b>	<b>Percent to total population</b>
<b>Total Population<sup>*</sup></b>	<b>665.29</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Hindus</b>	<b>549.78</b>	<b>82.64</b>
<b>Muslims</b>	<b>75.51</b>	<b>11.35</b>
<b>Christians</b>	<b>16.16</b>	<b>2.48</b>
<b>Sikhs</b>	<b>13.08</b>	<b>1.96</b>
<b>Buddhist</b>	<b>4.72</b>	<b>0.71</b>
<b>Jains</b>	<b>3.21</b>	<b>0.48</b>
<b>Other religions</b>	<b>2.77</b>	<b>0.42</b>
<b>Religion not stated</b>	<b>0.06</b>	<b>0.01</b>

**Source:** Census of India paper 3 of 1984- Household Population by Religion of Head of Household. Census of India 1981 Series 1, Part 11-B (111)

\* Excluding Assam, where Census could not be held due to disturbed conditions in that state during 1981 Census operation.

Table-I shows the number of adherents to the six major religions and their percentage to the total population. It is difficult to get the accurate number of persons following the tribal religion because of difficulty in classification. Some of them are included in Hindus and some others in Christians. In 1981 Census they are included in the category of other religion.

According to the 1981 Census (Series-1 Part 11-B(111)) Total tribal population (excluding the state of Assam) is 51,628,638 persons.

Table-II

**DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION OF SANTAL,  
ORAON AND MUNDA IN BIHAR, ORISSA AND WEST BENGAL 1971**

Tribes	States		
	Bihar	Orissa	West Bengal
Munda	686,972	24,145	198,701
Oraon	822,841	14,849	291,173
Santal	1,762,591	8,923	1,376,980

- Sources:
- 1) Census of India 1971, Series,16 Orissa Part V-A
  - 2) Census of India 1971, Series 4 Bihar Part-V-A
  - 3) Census of India 1971, Series-22 West Bengal Part V-A.

Table-II, shows the number Santals, Mundas and Oraons in three states - Bihar, Orissa, and West Bengal. If we take the population of these tribes in three states together, Santals form the majority. The population of Oraons and Mundas occupy the second and the third place respectively.

Some regard Saktism as a sect in Hinduism. Tiwari says: "It is regarded as the offshoot of Saivism".<sup>2</sup> The followers of Saivism worship Siva as their God. Senkara, the great Vedantist, popularised the Siva worship. On the otherhand, the Vaishnavites worship Vishnu as their God and the Vaishnavism was first popularised by Ramanuja and then by Madhva. Hindus who worship the Sakti (the female part) of the God, or Siva-Sakti mostly in the form of Durga, Kali are called the followers of Saktism.

Besides the above three main sects, in modern times certain social and religious reformers have been able to attract certain Hindus around them to form new groups within Hinduism. It is very clear whether these groups can be called new sects in Hinduism but this much is definite that persons belonging to these groups have certain characteristics in their faith and belief which distinguish them from common mass of Hinduism. There are a number of sects such as Vallabhacharis, Chaitanyites, Swami Narayanis, Satnamis,

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2 Tiwari, K.N., Comparative Religion (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidasa, 1983), p.10.

Bramha Samajists, Arya Samajists etc. These sects have arisen from the common source Hinduism but have maintained separate identities in terms of belief, doctrine, ritual and outlook.

The common places of worship in Hinduism are the temples, where reside gods and goddesses. All Hindus, irrespective of their age and sex, go to the temples and offer prayer to the Gods and Goddesses. The Brahmins generally perform the religious rituals in the temples. There are numerous men with Charismatic personalities who have tried to extricate the Hinduism from superstitious beliefs and practices. Men like Sankaracharya, Ram Manohar Roy, Dayananda Saraswati, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Vivekananda and others have not only tried to reform Hinduism but also preach true Hinduism among the masses.

### Christianity:

Of all the Semitic religions, Christianity has proved to be the most influential and has dominated a large population of the world specially the Western world. But unlike the Hinduism it has both its origin and its founder. Christianity originated in

the teachings of Jesus, who is regarded by Christians as the 'son of God' and also the true image of God. Unlike Hindus, the Christians believe in one supreme God, which has personality of Jesus. Christianity is based on ethics and believes in particular ways of worship and prayer. Like Hinduism it also believes in salvation and after death life.

Like Hinduism we find many sects in Christianity. Broadly speaking, Christians are divided into two sects: Catholics and Protestants. In a general way it can be said that the former represents the traditionalists and the latter reformists. "The two are divided mainly on the question of authority of Church".<sup>3</sup> The former believes that Church is the representative of God on the earth and that God reveals his truth through it. The Church is, therefore, a must for the salvation of man and the Pope is the divine authority. On the other hand, the Protestants hold that man can directly establish his relationship with God and the mediation of Church is not needed for him. To them

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3 Berry, Thomas, Religions of India (New York: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1971), p.56.



Bible is the only source of Christian beliefs and practices and only the authority of Bible is to be accepted. However, both these two main sects are divided into further small sects. Catholics are divided into Roman Catholics and Eastern orthodoxy. The Protestants are divided into Lutherians, Calvinists, Anglicans and so on.

Another feature of Christianity is that it is prone to missionary activities. But as far as Hinduism is concerned conversion as such has no place since the status of every individual is irrevocably fixed by birth, nothing that he may do or declare can bring about any change of the sort we call conversion. We find Christian missionary activities all over the world. They not only preach their religion but do some beneficial work like the establishment of schools, health centres, etc. Commenting upon the missionary activities in Christianity and other religions F.L.K. Hsu says: "Christianity is prone to missionary activities. While most believers of Asian and other creeds see no such need to proselytize. The merit

of this is care about others. The Christian record of fighting against social injustice is more impressive than that of any other religion.<sup>4</sup> Like the temple among the Hindus, Church is the public worship and prayer place.

#### Christianity in India:

Syrian church was first established at Malabar coast in the first century A.D. Since then missionaries from different Western countries came to India and established their church. Prior to nineteenth century missionary activities were confined to South India only. In the nineteenth century, a Christian missionary, Father Gossner entered the tribal area of south-central India and established a church at Ranchi.<sup>5</sup> This was followed by the coming of missionaries from other countries to this tribal region. Gradually the

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4 Heu Francis, L.K., "Christianity and Anthropologists", in, M.L. Pradhan et.al., edg., Anthropology and Archaeology (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p.209.

5 Sahay, K.N., Under the Shadow of Cross (Calcutta: Institute of Social Research and Applied Anthropology, 1976), p.44.

missionaries became successful in converting many tribes into Christianity.

Now we find a sizeable Christian population in India. One-twentieth (5.53%) of tribal profess Christianity in India.<sup>6</sup> Is there any similarity between Christianity in India and that in the West? Ofcourse there are some similarities but there are some differences between the Indian Christianity and that of West. As we find various sects in Christianity in West, so also there exist in India many Christian sects. Although Christianity believes in some ethics, worship and prayer, there is a difference in quality of faith in action. The Western christians are members of a church, attend funeral, marriage and Christening ceremonies. The Indian Christians are different. Here most Christians participate in ancestor worship, pay homage at temples, consult astrologers, and often celebrate two types of marriage ceremonies (Christian and indigeneous). For instance, the marriage of a Christian Orsons is a series of traditional and Christian

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6 Vidyaerthi, L.P., and Rai, B.K., Tribal Culture of India (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1985), p.237.

practices mixed together. Before and after the marriage ceremony at the Church the Orsons practise several traditional ceremonies such as Lotapani, Uddu khesa, Patinanna, Harwa Benia and so on and so forth.<sup>7</sup>

The Indian nonliterate and tribal Christians mix up indigenous practices and beliefs with Christian rituals and theology. The Indian Christians are polytheistic. We find the absence of missionary activity and the absence of critical examination of religious beliefs. Further, the Western Christians tend to marry to any other Christian. But among the Indian Christians we rarely find such marriages being celebrated. A caste Christian or a Christian tribal always prefers to marry within his caste or tribe. Thus we find that there is a marked difference between Christianity in India and Christianity in Western countries.

#### Animism:

The tribal religions in India are regarded by scholars in many terms. Some characterise them as

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7 Sahey, K.N., op.cit., pp.292-328.

animistic, while other call them as spiritism and still some other regard them as Bongalism. Troisi says, "In the Census of 1901, the tribals were enumerated as animistic, while in the 1911 Census they were classified as tribal animists."<sup>8</sup> Those who regard tribal religion as animistic are being influenced by Tylor's theory of Animism. The term 'animism' refers to 'soul worship'. According to Tylor, the primitive people worshipped both animate and inanimate objects because they believe that these objects were endowed with indwelling souls. But Tylor's theory is discarded by many scholars, J. Troisi, who made direct observation of Santal religion, is of opinion that the Santal religious system can not be explained by the theory of animism because Tylor's approach is rationalistic and individualistic. It does not explain the social basis of religion. Further, the theory of animism does not take into account the emotional aspect of religion.

S.C. Roy characterise the tribal religion as spiritism. He gives a more definite and clear-cut definition of tribal religion by saying that it is

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8 Troisi, J., Tribal Religion (Columbia: South Asia Books, 1979), p.240.

'an organized system of spiritism set on a background of vague animatism', recognizing a supreme deity, nature and ancestor spirits and several impersonal powers and forces.<sup>9</sup>

According D.N. Majumdar the tribal religion can be regarded as Bangaism. In his study of Hos he found that their basic belief lies in an impersonal and supernatural power, a force called Bonga. It pervades all space and is believed to take any form or shape. The Hos have derived the idea of Bonga from the mysterious object around themselves. Majumdar is of view that it is also applicable to the religious beliefs of the Mundas and Santals. But Troisi says, "it fails to describe Santals' perception and relationship with their Bongas."<sup>10</sup>

#### The Tribal Religion:

N.K. Bose states that one of the universal features of tribal faith in India is that all beings are supposed to be endowed with a living spirit.

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9 Roy S.C., Oran Religion and Customs (Calcutta: Industry Press, 1928), p.4.

10 Troisi, op.cit., p.243.

Animals and plants, rivers and mountains, are no exception to this rule. The dead who have apparently left us are yet with us and it is through remembrance and religious offerings that we have to renew our relationships with them on due occasions. What is significant in the tribal religion, or "animistic" beliefs of our brethren, the Mundas, the Santals, the Oraons is that the whole world is peopled by spirits is thus rendered holy.<sup>11</sup> So like Hindus the tribals believe in rebirth of soul.

Thus the tribal people worship their ancestors' souls and the natural objects like, rivers, mountains, trees, and the identical bodies like sun and moon. Like any other tribal people of India, the Oraons, Mundas and Santals are governed by the dictates of the supernatural world. They practise both ancestor worship and the worship of the natural objects. They have five tiers of gods and goddesses. They worship supreme God, the village deities and the household deities. They have their own religious

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11 Bose, N.K., Tribal Life in India (New Delhi: National Book Trust of India, 1971), p.63.

specialists, who perform religious duties in prescribed manner. However, unlike Hinduism and Christianity, the tribal religion professes a belief in the propitiation and worship of a host of supernatural powers which are supposed to be benevolent, while others are malevolent and propitiated out of fear. In Hinduism and Christianity, God is propitiated not out of fear but love. The supernatural beings of tribal religion have only local significance, while Christianity claims to be a world religion.

The tribals have an elaborate system of village worship centred in the sacred grove where the godlings of the village reside. The grove consists of a cluster of trees and it is taboo to cut them down. Vidyarthi says, "Among the Munda, Ho and Oraon tribes there are only sal trees in the grove. Among the Santals there are sarjam trees. It is known as Sarna among the Mundas and Oraons and Jshera among the Hos and Santals."<sup>12</sup>

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12 Vidyarthi, L.P., and Rai, B.K., The Tribal Culture of India (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1985), p.255.



The way they worship their God and Goddesses is different from that of Hindus and Christians. They sacrifice animals like goats, sheep, calves, buffaloes, pigs, etc., before their God. The sacrifices are performed by their religious specialists who are generally elder people. The women and young people are set apart from the scene of worship. It is only after marriage or when one becomes a father that a young tribal generally starts participating in religious activities and acquires a knowledge of these things. So age and sex are significant criteria which go to determine the religious participation and activities of the tribal religion.

Like Hinduism and Christianity, we find the charismatic leaders among the tribes in India. For example, Birsa Munda among the Mundas and leaders of Bhagat movement among the Santals, Oraons and other tribes. Birsa Munda was a man with Charismatic personality. His fellow tribals believed him as having divine qualities. Birsa Munda attempted to purify the tribal religion. He preached against belief in spirits or Bhuts, animal sacrifice, drinking of liquor

and other immoral practices existing on the tribal religion. Due to his charismatic personality, he could get large numbers of followers.

There are two aspects of tribal religion: transcendental and pragmatic.<sup>13</sup> The transcendental aspect refers to the long term welfare of the society, maintenance of institutions, continuity of society by proper passage of individuals through the life cycles from impending birth to the departure of soul. The pragmatic aspect refers to the tribals' search for personal benefits, for immediate needs and for individual welfare. The Hindus tend to maintain different forms, practitioners, and behaviour pattern for each of these two aspects of religion. The transcendental aspect is mainly in keeping of the higher jatis and the pragmatic is in the charge of lower. On the other hand the tribal people do not maintain two distinct complexes. They tend to use similar forms, practitioners, and patterns for both functions of religion. Both

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13 Mandelbaum, David, G., Society in India (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1984), p.582.

tribals and Hindus believe in asceticism. Asceticism is usually respected by tribesmen as a powerful way of exerting pressure of certain Gods but it is not elevated as the supreme path as among the Hindus.

Thus we see major similarities and differences between the wider religions like Hinduism and Christianity on the one hand and the tribal religion which is restricted only to certain regions on the other. As we have said earlier, the tribesmen are surrounded by the majority of Hindus, and the former are consciously adopting the elements of superior Hinduism. And these elements have mixed up so tightly with tribal culture that it makes a little difficult to differentiate the tribes from Jati people.

#### Interactions:

The impact of Hinduism on tribal religion is manifold. Hindu influence is being observed on their belief systems, attitude towards super natural powers, rituals, religious ceremonies and festivals and so on. Earlier the tribes' attitude towards the mysterious supernatural powers and beings was one of reverential

fear. The idea of gods with benevolent nature might have come to their mind when they come in contact with higher culture such as Hinduism.<sup>14</sup> They have enlarged their pantheon by including Hindu Gods and Goddesses like Rama, Siva, Durga, Kali, Hanuman, Lakshmi, etc. In certain places they need the services of Hindu religious specialists in the worship of certain gods and performing rituals like birth, marriage and death. Their ways of worship of deities are also moulded by Hinduism.

The tribal religious specialists before performing any religious duty purify themselves by taking bath.<sup>15</sup> On certain occasions they chant mantras like "Hari bol, Hari bol which are of Hindu origin.<sup>16</sup> The Hindu influence has led to the occurrence of religious

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14 Roy, S.C., Oran Religion and Customs (Calcutta: Industry Press, 1928), p.2.

15 Sachchidanand, The Changing Munda (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1979), p.336.

16 Roy, S.C., Mundas and Their Country (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1970), p.98.

movements like Birsu Munda, Iana Bhaqat and Kharwar. These movements primarily aimed at to reform the tribal religion which was embedded with superstitious beliefs and practices. The leaders of these reform movements have asked their fellow tribes men to give up the belief in bhuts or spirits, witchcraft, animal sacrifice, taking of alcohol at the time of worship and so on.

The festivals of the tribals are usually associated with religious rituals. Besides they perform the Hindu festivals like Dussehra, Diwali, Ramnavami, etc., they perform their traditional festivals in Hindu pattern. The Hindu religious cults like Vaishnavism and 'Bhakti' have exerted great influence upon the tribals. For instance in the Panch Parganas a number of well to do Mundas have adopted the faith of their more civilized Hindu neighbours by performance of Vaishnava form of religion.<sup>17</sup> Thus, we see the interaction between Hinduism and Tribal religion.

Since the hold of Christianity in this area <sup>is very strong</sup> the interaction between tribal religion and Christianity is obvious. The converted Christians are the members of

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17 Roy, S.C., Ibid., p.99.

denominationalized Church and believe in Jesus as their supreme God. They pray and worship in the way that is prescribed in the 'Bible' and also practise Christian festivals like Christmas, Easter, All Saints Day etc. At the same time they have not given up the traditional beliefs and customs. The Christian tribals still worship their ancestors' spirits and the belief in witchcraft is very strong even today. They perform two types of marriage and two types of funeral ceremonies — one in tribal way and the other in Christian ways. The reason behind the existence of the elements of two religions is that the missionaries allow the existence of those traditional elements which do not come in direct conflict with the Christian faith. Thus, it can be said that the South Central India has been the playground of three religions — Hinduism, Christianity and Tribal religion.

Chapter-IV

SOCIAL CHANGE AMONG THE TRIBES OF SOUTH  
CENTRAL INDIA : SANTAL, MUNDA AND ORAON

#### Chapter-IV

### SOCIAL CHANGE AMONG THE TRIBES OF SOUTH CENTRAL INDIA : SANTAL, MUNDA AND ORAON

No society is found to be static and so also its culture. The tribal society and culture have undergone several changes in course of time. In a previous chapter we have found that several scholars have described how the ways of life of tribal communities are undergoing changes. They have pointed out the causes behind these changes as Hinduization, Sanskritization, Tribe-Caste Continuum, Tribal-Rajput Continuum, Revitalization, Bhagat movements, Christianity, Urbanization, Industrialization, Community Development Programmes etc. We shall now discuss about three factors i.e., Hinduization, Christianity and Industrialization responsible for the transformations in religious, social, political and economic life of three tribes namely, the Santal, Munda and Oraon of south-central India.

The above three tribes, at present, do not live in isolation. They have since long back been in contact with their surrounding Hindu population. The contact conditions led to the adaptation of Hindu ways of life



by these tribes. As a result changes in every aspect of life of the tribes came forth. Sachchidananda, K.S., Singh, L.P. Vidyarthi and many others share the view that the extent of acculturation in all spheres viz., language, economy, religion, folklore has been considerable. Like Hinduism, Christianity has been an important factor of cultural change among these tribes since the British rule. In 1845 Christian missionaries, for the first time, entered Chotanagpur area. Since then the missionaries of various denominations have been successful in converting the tribes into Christianity. The majority of tribal Christians in this area are Catholics and Protestants. "In middle India, in Bihar, one-tenth of total tribal population is Christian. In terms of tribo-wise distribution the highest number is among the Kharias (two-thirds), Mundas (one-fourth) and Oraons (one-fourth).<sup>1</sup>" The Santal Christian population in south-central India occupies the next place. Besides Hinduism and Christianity, the industrialization process is another factor of change in the society of these tribes and their culture.

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1 Vidyarthi, L.P., and Rai, B.K., The Tribal Culture of India (New Delhi: Orient Publishing Company, 1985), p.459.

Since independence the pace of industrialization has been accelerated. Many industries have come up in the tribal areas of South Central India. So, we shall now discuss in details the changes that have come up in religious, social, economic and political life of the Santals, Mundas and Oraons. Here social change is described in relative rather than absolute terms. This is because traditional elements continue to persist among the tribes which have undergone social change.

#### Changes in Religious World:

The religion of the three tribes : Santal, Oraon and Munda is composed of three elements — the worship of Gods and spirits, the rituals, and the totemic ceremonies. They worship different spirits. Their sacred belief in spirits has led to animism. For them animals, plants, trees, ponds, rivers, stones, hills, etc., are all abodes of spirits. The dead persons are no exception to this. They live through the souls. In this context Vidyarthi observes, "the tribals believe that disease, famine, scarcity of water, low fertility of soil, low production of crops, high incidence of

death, etc., all these happen only when the evil spirits are not worshipped properly and the sacrifices are not made timely."<sup>2</sup> Besides beliefs in powerful spirits, the Santals, Mundas and Oraons believe in taboo, totemism, magic, sorcery and ancestor worship.

The Santals, Mundas and Oraons believe in and worship five categories of gods or deities. The first is supreme deity. These are Sing Bonga (Munda), Haren Bura or Cande Bonga or Thakur Jiu (Santal) and Charas (Oraon). These are believed to safeguard the people and they are worshipped by the whole community. The help of these spirits is sought in hunting, fishing and agricultural pursuits. They are considered as protective spirits by these tribes. The second class of gods are presiding deities of the village, which are named as Jaher Ege by the Santals, Hatu Bonga or Jaher Bura by the Mundas and Chala Pechho or Darha by the Oraons. These spirits are regarded as protectors of the village. The third categories include

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2 Vidyarthi, L.P., The Mallas : A Study in Nature-Man-Spirit Complex of a Hill Tribe (Calcutta: Bookland, 1963), pp.141-42.

the household deities. These household deities are generally their ancestral spirits and are believed to reside in the house. These are known as Ora Bangas among Mundas, Baranda pachho and Chiarl Nad among Oraons and Orak Bangas among the Santals. The tribes have <sup>a</sup> strong belief in the benevolence of these spirits. Certain other spirits are believed to be present everywhere, in trees, in stones, in streams, hills etc. These elemental and nature gods are called Buru Bangas by Mundas and Santals, and Mug, Satbahini by the Oraons. The tribes believe that when these spirits are not worshipped properly they will cause calamities like disease, death, famine, failure of crops, etc. They are also afraid of harmful spirits like Bhute which, they believe, cause diseases like small pox, fever, etc. The fifth category of gods are protecting deities of certain families. Thus, the Santals, the Mundas and the Oraons worship both benevolent and malevolent deities.\*

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\* Note: I have taken all the above mentioned names of different deities of the Santals, Mundas and Oraons from the works of L.P. Vidyarthi, S.C. Roy, J.N. Madan and D.N. Majumdar, N.K. Bose, K.W. Sahay, J. Troisi, etc.

Apart from their belief in natural objects as having supernatural powers the tribesmen recognise their relationships with the animals and plants in the form of totem. The Santals, Mundas and Oraons have their totemic clans. Their clans are named after plants or animals or material objects, which they always regard as sacred. According to Vidyarthi and Rai, "All these tribes consider that the totemic plants or animals have helped or protected their respective ancestors of the clan concerned or have proved to be of some peculiar use or service. The people show reverence for and do not destroy their totemic objects. They also refrain from eating their fruits or flowers."<sup>3</sup>

The religion of these tribes like Hinduism, is embedded with rituals. The performance of the rituals give them group feelings. So the religion strengthens their social solidarity. Apart from this there is a close relationship between their magico-religious practices on the one hand and the economic activities on the other. Agriculture is their dominant economic activity. They know that a variety of dangers are involved in their agricultural task. The dangers like

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3 Vidyarthi, L.P., and Rai, B.K., op.cit., p.245.

failure of crops, draught, flood, etc. are believed by them to be caused by certain spirits due to the lack of proper worship. To appease these spirits the Santal, Mundas and Oraons have a series of seasonal rites and festivals, which mark the different periods of their agricultural year.

The religious worship is mainly congregational. The tribes sacrifice the animals like fowl, goat, sheep, pig, etc., before their gods. The offering of and drinking of rice beer is part of their worship. They have their religious specialists who officiate the rites. Among the Mundas and Oraons the religious headman is called Pahan and is responsible for religious matters in which he has great influence and prestige. The Santal village priest is known as Naek. Apart from the various festivals the tribes perform rites-de-passage such as birth, marriage and death ceremonies. The Santals, Mundas and Oraons are endogamous groups. They marry within their tribe but outside their clans. Both monogamy and polygamy exist among these three tribes.

The traditional religion of Santals, Mundas and Oraons is now undergoing change. The way the religious

and religious practices have undergone changes indicates that the Santals, Mundas and Oraons have been greatly influenced by the Hindus and Christian missionaries. The constant contact with the modern culture has resulted in diverse changes in their religious practices and beliefs. However, the core of primitive cult practices still dominates their religion.

We saw that the tribal people have their own pantheon. Still they are blended with other faiths of non-tribal neighbours. Effective among all these are Hinduism and Christianity which have put their religion in melting pot. The impact of Hinduism has been felt for several centuries, whereas Christianity is a modern force, a century old. Their impact is seen on the diverse beliefs and rituals prevalent among the Santals, Mundas and Oraons some of whom have forsaken their traditional religion and embraced a new one. Some others are following reformed version of their own religion.

D.G. Mandelbaum writes, "The transition in religious outlook shifts a tribesman from a close and unknowable Cosmos to a vast universe that is unknowable

in all its reaches."<sup>4</sup> The Santals, Mundas and Oraons have enlarged their pantheon by including Hindu gods like Rama, Mahadeva, Durga, Kali, etc., They also use certain words for their deities which have come from Hinduism. The word Thakur Jiu is not a Santal word but has been taken from Sanskrit. A similar tendency has been observed among the tribals when they indiscriminately apply the Hindu word Thakur and Munda word Sing-bonga to their high God Canda or when Canda is syncretised with the Hindu deity. They call Rama under the Rama Canda, and when they accept other gods and goddesses they generally give tribal names."<sup>5</sup> Sachchidananda gives an elaborate description of the Hinduization among Oraons. He writes, "Oraons have started performing Swami puja in Sawan (June-July) and offer a goat at Devi mandap. The Pahan (priest) leads the worship

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4 Mandelbaum, D.G., Society in India (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1984), p.586.

5 Raha, A.K., "Religious Beliefs and Practices Among the Santals", in, U.K. Ray and A.K. Das, eds., To Be with Santals (Calcutta: Cultural Research Institute of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Government of West Bengal, 1982), pp.45-46.



performed with incense, rice-beer, gur, ghee, vermilion and bar patra. A few Oraon youths learn Mantras and worship Hindu deities."<sup>6</sup>

These Mundas, Oraons and Santals, who have become members of Hindu jati system, use the services of Brahmins in the performance of ritas and rituals. They perform the birth, marriage and death ceremonies. Due to the impact of Hinduism certain religious movements have taken place among these tribes. These are called Bhagat movements among the Oraons, Kharwar movement among the Santals and Birsa Munda movements among the Mundas. These movements have reformed the tribes in a number of ways. Under the impact of these movements the tribes have gave up some of the social vices such as drinking liquor, criminal activities and have adopted respectable habits.

The adaptation of a number of Hindu deities, festivals, customs, and concepts, however, has not

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6 Sachchidananda, The Changing Munda (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company), p.39.

changed the basic character of the religion. The belief in bongas is still strong. Similarly the most important annual festivals and rites of passage are observed in many Santal, Oraon and Munda villages. Though some Santals, Mundas and Oraons have converted to Hinduism, this does not mean a complete break with their earlier religious traditions. In spite of their borrowing elements from Hinduism, they have preserved the essential core of their religious tradition.

As to the impact of Christianity we saw that various scholars have viewed the Christianity as an important factor in transforming the religious beliefs of the tribals. The Christian sections of the Oraons, Mundas and Santals have given up belief in various supernatural spirits. They now believe in and worship Jesus Christ as the only God. They practise the rites of passage and ceremonies in Christian ways. They perform Christian festivals such as Christmas, Easter, All Saints Day, etc.

The scholars who have studied the Christian influence on Santals, Mundas and Oraons, however, have found the continuity of traditional religious elements among the converts. The belief and practices which do

not contradict the Christianity continue to exist. Roy Chaudhury, who has studied the Santals of Santal Pargana, refers to "the fact that old and honoured tribal customs are still continuing in the families of the Christian Santals unless they are in direct conflict with Christian faith. The birth of a child is followed by some kind of purification of house, bathing, festivals as among non-Christian Santals. Even during sickness the aid of the customary ojhe is sought."<sup>7</sup> Similarly S.C. Roy has commented, "Time honoured custom of clan-exogamy has not been interfered. As much of the old tribal custom at birth, marriage and death as are not inconsistent with Christian doctrine is allowed to remain."<sup>8</sup> Others like Sachchidananda, K.N. Sahay, R.O. Dhon, Nirmal Minz have agreed to the above fact. Thus converted Santals, Mundas and Oraons practice two types of religious beliefs and practices.

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7 Roy Chaudhury, P.C., Bihar District Gazetteers: Santal Pargana (Patna: Government of Bihar, 1965), p.959.

8 Roy, S.C., "The Effects on the Aborigines of Chotanagpur of their Contact with Western Civilization", Man in India, vol.62, no.1, 1982, p.92.

Apart from their contact with Hindus and Christian missionaries, these three tribes have been exposed to the process of industrialization, which also, to a great extent, caused changes in their religious outlook and beliefs. According to P.K. Das Gupta, the Jaherthan or majhithan, shrines for the Santals in Chittaranjan industrial complex ceased to exist.<sup>9</sup> L.P. Vidyarthi has also observed that the traditional cycle of rituals and festivals has been disintegrating in Jamshedpur industrial area. The tribes continue to practise the caste religion. They believe in Hindu gods and goddesses and hold ideas like purity and pollution, theory of Karma, etc.<sup>10</sup> In the industrial towns and cities, some sections of the Mundas, Oraons and Santals are not religious minded. They hold secular outlook and do not worship or believe in any gods or spirits.

In recent years there has been a newly awakened interests in religious festivals and in identifying with

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9 See, Das Gupta, P.K., "Impact of Industrialization on Tribal Life", in, Anthropological Survey of India vol.13, 1964, pp.85-106.

10 Vidyarthi, L.P., "Industrialization and Change in Chotanagpur", in, P.D. Sharma, ed., The Passing Scene in Chotanagpur, (Ranchi: Naitryee Publications, 1980), p.152.

their traditional religion. "Many educated Mundas claim Sarnaism as their religion. In urban centres too the tribal festivals of Sakhul and Karam are celebrated with great enthusiasm. This may be due to the resurgence of ethnicity."<sup>11</sup>

Change in Social Structure, Organizations and Institutions:

Social life is very essential to human life. It is based on the social phenomena such as social organizations, social interactions, social order, economic institutions and so on. It involves the ways of grouping and ranking of people for carrying out of various activities, for common existence sharing in common activities under the bonds of relationship. It is a web of relationship between various social organizations and individuals. The tribal people have their own ways of life that makes their social life specific in nature. They have their own social structure and organisations. All the tribes in India do not have

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<sup>11</sup> Sachchidananda, The Changing Munda (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1979), p.336.

same social design. However, one social phenomenon which we find in social life of every tribe is that their social organizations are intermingled with each other, viz., socio-economic, socio-political, religious-economic, so on and so forth.

On the basis of comparative data it has been suggested by T.C. Das<sup>12</sup> that tribal organisation in India reveal seven types. His examination is based on the type of unit and their relationships. These seven types are illustrated below:

1. Tribe - Local Group - Families
2. Tribe - Clans - Families
3. Tribe - Moities - Families
4. Tribe - Phratries - Clans - Families
5. Tribe - Moities, Phratries - Clans - Families
6. Tribe - Sub-Tribes - Clans - Families
7. Tribe - Clans - Sub-Clans - Families

The Santals, Mundas, and Oraons have the social structure of Tribe-Clans-Sub-Clans - Families. Tribe is

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12 Das T.C., "Social Organization of Tribal People", in, The Indian Journal of Social Work, vol.14, no.3, 1953.

the broadest group. They marry inside their tribe. It is divided into many exogamous clans. The clan is in turn divided into numerous exogamous subclans and the subclans are divided into exogamous families.

"In Bihar and West Bengal the Santals are divided into 12 clans called 'Paris' of which one is supposed to have disappeared long ago. Every 'paris' is divided into sub-clans or sub-groups, 'Khunt' and number of Khunts in various 'Paris' varies between 13 and 28. Thus they are in the pattern of the Tribe - Clan - sub-Clan - Family - Individual. The Mundas, the Oraons and the HDs of Chotanagpur have more or less the same design. They are divided into exogamous clans; i.e., the Mundas and the HDs in Killa and the Oraons in Gotoz."<sup>13</sup>

Family is another way of forming the group. The Santals, Mundas and Oraons have patrilocal, patrilineal, patriarchal families. In regard to the size of the family, both nuclear and joint families are found among them. They are also divided into lineage groups. Members of one lineage claim themselves to have descended from one ancestor.

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<sup>13</sup> Vidyanthi, L.P., and Rai, B.K., The Tribal Culture of India (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1985), p.156.

Thus from the above discussion we get the picture of ways of grouping in their social life. Unlike Hindu society, the society of Santals, Mundas and Oraons is characterised by the absence of social stratification. However differentiation exists on the basis of age and sex. They lead a group life in which all the members are regarded as equals. The influence of Hindus, Christianity and industrialisation has brought division and disintegration to this homogenous and undivided tribal society.

Mandelbaum says that "when the tribalmen become jati members they shift from relative equality among kinsmen towards the hierarchy in which dependence is incumbent on every one. Even those at a very top of a jati order must depend on those inferior to them. Role specialization does increase productivity and social stratification does provide incentive for aspiration but both require a greater dependency than does the tribal norm".<sup>14</sup> The Hinduism led to the division of tribal society into Hinduized tribes and animist tribes.

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14 Mandelbaum, D.G., op.cit., p.586.



Similarly conversion to Christianity divides the tribal society into converted tribes and non-converted ones. The Hinduized tribes and the tribal Christians always feel superior to their fellow tribesmen. The Christians are further divided into different denominations such as Catholics and protestants. Thus Hinduism and Christianity caused the hierarchical division in the society of Santals, Mundas and Oraons. Similarly the impact of industrialization on them led to social disorganization, violation of social codes, slackening of kinship bondage and less adherence to traditional norms.

The tribes when their traditional social organizations became ineffective in satisfying the needs of the members, migrate into industrial complexes. This out-migration weakened the group solidarity of the community. This also leads to social differentiation among migrants as well as non-migrants. A section of migrants finds economic security by becoming permanent industrial workers. They improve their social status. It adopts new cultural norms. It starts differentiating itself from such of its kinsmen who have not achieved

that status. As a result of this differentiation normative pattern of community loses its influence in controlling their behaviour.<sup>15</sup>

Another significant change at the structural level may be noticed in the wider extensions in religious life of the Christian village. For example, "A Sarna Orson village formed almost an independent unit in itself having separate religious authorities and sacred centres. But after conversion the religious interests of the villagers remained no longer confined to their own village and specially got extended over large areas covering those of the Parish, the Bikhariate, Illaka, Diocese, Synod, Arch-Diocese, Anchal, Cardinal and so on with a hierarchy of priests, religious authorities and sacred centres. This structural extension does not stop at village district or province level, but has gone far beyond this country."<sup>16</sup> Thus Christianity acted both as a force of fission and fusion. It, on the one hand,

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15 Sachchidananda and Mandal, B.B., Industrialization and Social Disorganization: A Study of Tribals in Bihar (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1985).

16 Sahay, K.N., Under the Shadow of Cross (Calcutta: Institute of Social Research and Applied Anthropology, 1976), p.48f.

weakened the tribal solidarity by creating caste-like groups in society and on the other strengthened inter-tribe relationship by bringing different tribes under one denomination and religion.

Further, the significant change is noticed in the institution of family. The traditional family was the joint family. Now the joint family is divided into two or three small families. These newly formed cannot be called nuclear family in the real sense of the term. The members of these families have all types of relationships with their kinsmen. They attend all types of rituals and ceremonies. At the time of financial crisis they extend help to their kinsmen. So the Christian sections of Santals, Mundas and Oraons and those who live in industrial cities have all the features of traditional joint family except that they do not share one kitchen or live under the same roof.

At the level of cultural contents the Akhra and the youth dormitories were the important institutions of socialization and training centres among the Santals, Mundas and Oraons. Now the Akhra, the youth dormitory, traditional dance and festivals have been on the decline

due to the impact of new ideals, ethical values and in general a new style of life.

#### Change in Political Life:

Political activities exist in all society. A society requires some kind of system or mechanism to govern and control its members otherwise its existence becomes impossible. However, all societies do not have similar political system. The Santals, Mundas and Oraons have developed their own political associations and agencies. The Santals, Mundas and Oraons have various kinds of political associations such as elders, families, clan group, village and tribal territory. Each association extends some kind of control over its members. However, the most politically significant among these is the village. Each village has a village council which exercises considerable influence over the social, religious, economic affairs of the tribes. The village council is presided over by the person generally head of the community. His office is hereditary among the Santals and Oraons. The Mundas of Chotanagpur elect their headman.

In middle India the secular headman known among the Oraons as Mahato and among the Mundas as Munda. The Manjhi is the head of the Santal village.<sup>17</sup> The Manjhi act also as a religious head of the Santal community. The village headman is entrusted with political, judicial and revenue powers. The Mahato, Munde and Manjhi among the Oraon, Mundas and Santals settle all types of familial disputes in the village and collect revenue for the Britishers. The authority of village headman among these tribes started declining since the British rule. The Britishers introduced the zamindari system which made the zamindars all in all of the village. The village panchayats became ineffective. The village headman lost his power. The Pargana or Parha panchayats among Santals, Mundas and Oraons which consisted of many villages, have ceased to exist today.

Regarding the Hindu impact on political life of the tribesmen Mandelbaum writes, "Tribesmen usually feel small organization as subjects of a ruler or a citizen of a state. But with involvement in jati society they

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17 Vidyarthi, L.P., and Rai, B.K., op.cit., pp.206-07.

become more open to political influence from outside, their communities and their own village affairs tend to become more politicized. Factions and feuds are not absent from tribal society but alliance politics seem to be more prevalent in jati society.<sup>18</sup> This statement is very much true to the Hinduized sections of Mundas, Oraon and Santals.

The traditional political organization of Santals, Mundas and Oraons received a jolt when Christian missionaries entered the tribal areas. Besides their religious interests they started taking part in village affairs by active assistance in securing justice for the converts organizing village committees like Mandalis, Samities, etc. The priests often become heads of these organization and virtually controlled the village affairs.

In the post independence period inauguration of statutory panchayats and later the panchayati Raj also gave a set back to traditional panchayats. The headman is now elected and any villager can seek election. After independence political consciousness has grown

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18 Mandelbaum, D.G., op.cit., p.586.

considerably. They are now aware of their political rights and duties. Those who are working in industries have become the members of the trade unions and take active part in union activities. The Jharkhand movement — the demand for a separate tribal state — which still continues, is a shining example of growing political awareness among these tribes. Regarding the impact of the working of democratic values and ideas in Indian society in general and tribal society in particular Nihari Ranjan Roy has remarked:

"Independence, democracy, adult franchise have released many hitherto submerged social forces. These forces are now at play in many areas of our social, political, economic and cultural life. We have been witnessing some of these forces at work in the tribal communities. Basically it is in part a search of a sense of identity, for a sense of belonging and for self-determination in a new social order. The old order of theirs is in a fast process of disintegration."<sup>19</sup>

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19 Roy, Niharranjan, "Introductory Address", in, K.S. Singh, ed., Tribal Situation in India (Simla: Institute of Advanced Studies), p.22.

Changes in Economic Life:

Land and forest was important source of livelihood of Mundas, Santals and Oraons in south-central India. Agriculture was the basic occupation. Besides cultivation they pursued hunting and fishing, however, these were secondary occupations. Their contact with Hindus, Christian, missionaries caused great changes in occupational structures of Santals, Oraons and Mundas. Besides these two factors, industrialisation process has played the major role in the transformation of their occupational structure.

Those tribes who entered Hinduism and find a position in lower caste group did the occupations like oil-pressing, weaving, rope making etc. The Hindus did not disturb rather gave them occupational autonomy. "In economic relations, the Hinduized tribes shift from sharing liberally with all in a small community to more selective and directed sharing with those of a larger (Hindu) society. From dealing quite open handedly with jajmani associated and in the guarded game of commerce with customers and merchants."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Mandelbaum, D.G., op.cit., p.586.



However the impact of Hindus on economic life of these tribes was limited to small sections. It is the Christian missionaries which facilitated economic transformation of tribes in large scale. It was the Christian missions which opened schools, hospitals and other institutions of service which for the first time provided a meaningful employment to the tribal converts. They became teachers, preachers, cooks, nurses, peons, chaprasis, malis, priests and so on, on monthly salaries. The missions opened credit cooperative societies and grain godas and the tribals were employed in these societies. These societies saved the tribals from the economic exploitation by the money-lenders.

Apart from this many tribals were employed in the industries, and coal mines as skilled or unskilled workers. The tribals in surrounding villages of the industrial complexes are engaged in the occupations like rice-selling, weaving, pottery, basket making, etc. Thus they are giving less importance to agriculture. Now agriculture has not remained as subsistence economy, it is being commercialized. The occupation of agriculture became secondary to the factory occupation or job.

At the axis of self, Christianity has been an important factor in modifying the socialization and training processes of a child. The Christian tribal personality moulded under the strict guidance of the Christian village priest and under close association of the local and regional churches inculcates in himself the Christian value attitude system and his basic personality structure shows considerable deviation from the Sarne tribal group. The Christian tribals also differ in their dress, food habits and housing patterns from the Sarne tribals.

Since independence, the Government of India has been making several efforts to improve the general lot of weaker sections of Indian population. The first step in this regard is that it has given constitutional safeguards to the tribal in the matters like social discrimination, job, education, their administration and so on. Further it has launched various tribal development programmes and schemes. These developmental programmes may be grouped into five categories, i.e., economic, educational, health and sanitation, communication and housing, socio-cultural and political.<sup>21</sup> Various

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21 Vidyarathi, L.P., and Rai, B.K., op.cit., p.432.

committees appointed from time to time for the evaluation of the working of these schemes report considerable improvement in the economy, education, health and sanitation of the tribals and on the whole in their entire way of living.

Social workers, social welfare agencies, social reformers are working to uplift the tribals. Vidyarthi and Rai have mentioned the working of such agencies among the Santals, Mundas and Oraon. They say "Biher Adimjati Seva Mandal is the first of its kind while the other is the Santhal Peheria Seva Mandal in Bihar. These institutions are given grants to run schools, hostels, dispensaries, etc. in the tribal areas. In Orissa also the Orissa Adivasi Congress was a forum of tribals for looking after their interest."<sup>22</sup>

These voluntary social service organizations have done considerable humanitarian work. They have also attempted to reform certain elements of the culture of these tribes, viz., drinking of liquor, animal sacrifice, belief in witchcraft, dancing of boys and girls together, etc.

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22 Vidyarthi L.P., and Rai B.K., op.cit., p.429.

Thus, the above discussion provides us a general impression about the ongoing process of transformation in the society and culture of Santals, Oraon and Mundas due to the working of Hinduism, Christianity and industrialisation. But what is the rate at which these changes are taking place and at what direction all these changes are going on? Do all the above factors cause transformations at same rate? And do they lead the changes in one direction? While answering these questions we agree with the views of Vidyarthi and Rai that rate and direction of change vary from one process to another.

Hinduization is a traditional process of change among these tribes. In the past it was the only factor responsible for causing changes in the social, political, economic, religious and secular spheres of tribal culture. In this process the tribes have adopted Hindu 'ways of life' of their respective region. The rate of change in this process is slow and selective. While the traditional process brought the 'Hindu model'

before tribals, the modern process such as Christianity and industrialisation placed before them the Western, urban and the democratic model. Christianity and industrialisation have brought significant change in sacred, social, economic, educational and political life of these tribes. The rate of change in modern process is faster than that of traditional. However, the change in the process of industrialization is more rapid and faster than the Christianization process.

Chapter-V

C O N C L U S I O N

Chapter- VCONCLUSION

In this study an attempt has been made to portray the religion of Santal, Munda and Oraon as an integral and essential part of their society. We have seen that their religious universe and social structure are so intimate that one cannot be fully understood without the other. Their religious beliefs and practices are usually associated with the activities in other spheres of their life, be it political, social or economic. Because of this intimacy between their religious universe and society, changes in the former lead to changes in the social, political and economic structure of the Santals, Mundas and Oraons. To explain such change discussion has been made mainly on the factors like Hinduism, Christianity and industrialization which have brought these transformations.

It is important to note from the beginning that religion like culture has everywhere been undergoing a certain degree of change through a process of acculturation. Acculturation refers to a two-way process; adoption or adjustment of the ways of life

of culturally superior groups to that of inferior groups. We have examined that change in the society and culture of Santals, Mundas and Oraons is due to their adoption of certain elements of Hinduism and Christianity. The Hindus and Christians have tolerated the tribal way of life. For instance, the tribals often retain habits such as drinking liquor and eating pork even after Hinduization. Likewise, Christianity has often allowed to practise polygamy among the tribal converts in the north-east and central India.

We have stated earlier that the tribals of India have been influenced by the traditions of their neighbouring communities, the dominant community often being the Hindu community. From very early times there have been several points of contact between the Hindus of the area and the tribal communities living within it. This is evident from the fact that the tribals have borrowed heavily from the ideas and institutions of the Hindus. The Hinduism also has borrowed animistic beliefs — spirit worship, witchcraft etc., from tribal sources.



It is evident that the religious universe of Santals, Oraons and Mundas are characterised by three features; the worship of spirits or deities, the rituals and the totemic ceremonies. Their contact situation with the Hindus led to the influx of certain elements of Hinduism into their traditional deities. The Santals, Mundas and Oraons started worshipping Hindu gods and goddesses like Rama, Krishna, Mahadeva, Kali, Durga, etc. The ways of performing religious rituals also moulded after the Hindu ways. The Hinduized tribes used the services of Brahmins in performing certain rituals and ceremonies like birth, marriage and death. Further they celebrated the Hindu festivals such as Holi, Ramnavami, Diwali and the like. We have noted that the Hindu influence led to occurrence of certain socio-religious movements among these tribes. These are the Bhaget movements among the Oraons, Kharwar movement among the Santals and Birsa Munda movement among the Mundas. All these movements tried to reform their religion which was embodied with superstitions and vices. They preached the idea of worship of one God and asked their followmen to abandon inhuman and bad practices like animal sacrifice, eating of animal flesh, drinking of liquor and the belief in bhuts and spirits.

Besides this our examination of the transformations in social, political and economic sphere of the life of these tribesmen reveal that the adoption of a number of Hindu deities, festivals, customs, values and other elements has not changed the basic nature of their religion and society. They are still the worshipper of spirits or bhuts and natural objects. The traditional norms and values are followed and the religious rituals, ceremonies and festivals are still observed by them.

The Hindu impact has created a crisis in the society of Munda, Oraon and Santal. It has destroyed the homogeneous nature of society. Various caste-like groups have appeared among them. The Hinduized sections feel superior in every respect to their fellow tribesmen. So the division of their society into superior and inferior groups has undoubtedly weakened the tribal solidarity. Further, not only the prejudice against certain occupation but also dietary taboos, child marriage and restrictions on remarriage of widows and divorcees and the vices like untouchability are gaining a foothold among these tribes when they are



losing ground in the larger urban centres. Such type of development will continue so long as the people in rural India give importance, and respectability to the more puritanical nature of Hindu morality.

As regards to the impact of Christianity, it has brought changes in all aspects of life of these tribes. The converted christians have discarded belief in spirits and worship Jesus Christ as the only God. They practise religious rituals and prayers as prescribed in the Christian religious text. Further, the Christian festivals such as Christmas, Easter, All Saints Day, etc., are being celebrated by the converts.

The Christian missionaries gave them the modern political ideas. Their traditional political organisations were replaced by the Church organisation. New social leaders like Christian priests emerged. They imbibed the feeling of self-help and self-confidence and the idea about their historicity, and identity. The missionaries highlighted tribal culture by writing books on tribal customs, languages etc. Much more important than the change in belief and ritual is the influence in the field of education. The role

of modern education in bringing social change and political awareness is well-known. There is a positive relationship between the conversion to Christianity and social change and modernization. The literacy percentage among the Christian tribals is higher than that of the non-converts (see Appendix). Education helped in improving the moral character to a large extent. On moral ground they gradually gave up drinking, animal sacrifice and the dancing of boys and girls together.

We have also found that the Christian missionaries, besides their evangelical works, have done many philanthropic activities which have undoubtedly been of immense benefit to the tribal Christians. They started schools, hospitals, health centres, orphan centres, leprosy centres, cooperative banks, grain gales, etc. The converted tribals for the first time got jobs in these institutions. The financial institutions saved the tribesmen from oppression of money-lenders. Thus, Christianity has provided the model of westernization in the tribals in the shape of Church organization, western education and above all western values and morals.

Christianity, indeed, played a significant role in modernizing the tribal society, but the adverse effects that it brought to it could not be ignored. The Christian Oraons, Mundas and Santals are facing certain stresses and strains because of being converted to Christianity. Puritanism is one of the reasons, why Christianity has not made a greater impact. The conservative and puritanical standards regarding drink and sex found in some of the Christian traditions represented by the missionaries, especially the Lutherans and Catholics, led to the propagation of total abstinence from rice-beer drinking and from participation in certain social dances. These protestant missionaries considered drinking of rice-beer as degrading and the dances as obscene. They also exhorted their converts not to play certain musical instruments and their traditional drums so that they would not be tempted to participate in the tribal dancing. Their insistence on the obscene character of these dances has infused in Munda, Oraon and Santal Christian a sense of immorality.

In view of these puritanic sanctions, the tribes frequently object that if they were to become Christians

they would have to give up their joy and pleasure which is an essential part of their way of living. As Santals, Mundas and Oraons think of it, pleasure is pre-eminently a social phenomenon. In view of all this the lives of these tribal Christians who are excluded from participating in these traditional manifestations of tribal rejoicing, appear colourless.

The most deep rooted objection, however, is to the fact that the Christian method of evangelization often have tended to draw the Santals, Mundas and Oraons out of their own milieu, consequently posing a serious problem to tribal solidarity and making the converts feel insecure. The Santals, Mundas and Oraons saw in Christianity, especially as preached by the rigid protestant sects, something that threatened to become a disintegrating influence in their society. Large scale conversion to other religion directly resulted in a loss of identity. The individual tribal knows no security apart from his village and the tribe. But the protestant missionaries thought that in order to convert the Santals, Mundas and Oraons they had to isolate the latter from their own traditional milieu. Their way of life, values, and norms had to be changed and the values, attitudes, behavioural patterns and

the way of life of the western people had to be inculcated. So trying to evangelise the Santals, Mundas and Oraons by such a substituting approach, tended to disrupt the tribes' unity and cohesion. It alienated the Munda or Oraon and Santal convert from his own tribe.

A cleavage between the converts and their community also arises as a result of substantial changes in the rites and ceremonies which surrounded a tribe's life cycle. For example, among the Santals the non-Christian practice the janam chatior or birth ritual, for the Santal Christian it is baptism. In the former the child is given the protection of the tribal bongas and in latter he renounces all association with Bongas. The preliminaries for a Christian marriage are much akin to a tribal non-Christian marriage. At the first stage the role of go between is recognized and the bride price is given. But Christian marriage is generally held in a Church and is officiated at by a pastor. While among the non-Christians the most important part of marriage is Sindradan, or smearing of brides forehead with vermilion, among the Christian the exchange of rings by bride and groom marks them as husband and wife.

Another main factor in producing tension lies in the sphere of marriage laws. Although the village Hunda, Oraon and Santal Christian abhors the thought of inter-marriage a few individuals have ignored the rule of tribal endogamy and have contracted marriages against which there are no Christian sanctions. Similarly, while cross-cousin marriage is not tolerated among the non-Christian, among the Santal Christian it is not prohibited. On the other hand while there is no bar for a non-tribal-Christian to marry more than one wife this practice is strictly prohibited among the converts. Similarly, divorce can be obtained by a tribal non-Christian but it is completely tabooed for a Christian.

The impact of industrialisation has also created uneven situation and crisis in the society of these tribes. It has caused social disintegration, violation of traditional norms, weakening of kinship relationships, and less adherence to traditional occupation. If all the process of change and existing situations in the society of these tribes are to be looked at from the tribal side then the pattern of change can be called 'di-tribalization'. If it is looked at from a wider angle then the trend of change can be called a march towards higher goals.



Though these tribes are going through an accelerated process of transformation due to the influence of Hinduism, Christianity, industrialization and modernization, neither of the above processes has totally destroyed the tribal culture. The belief in spirits is still strong. Traditional festivals, ceremonies and dances are being performed in their villages. Their traditional cultural values and ideas, the social organisations and institutions are still in vigour.

All this goes to show that the separate identity and culture of the Santals, Mundas and Oraons shall continue to exist, albeit, in a changed form. There is a common sociological and anthropological assumption that an inferior culture coming under the influence of a superior culture loses its independent identity and completely submerges in the latter. However, this does not find favour in the present study which has analysed the consequences of Hinduization, Christianization, and modernization of the culture and society of the Santals, Mundas and Oraons.

**Suggestions for Further Research:**

1. The tribal belts of north-western Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, south Rajasthan and Gujarat should be studied in terms of the impact of Hinduization, Christianization, industrialization, etc.
2. Political development, emerging tribal leadership, economic development and agrarian question in south-central India could be studied in depth.
3. Intensive research is needed in tribal communities to bring out their socio-economic political problems and evolve right approaches to solve these problems.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX-ILiterate Population Among Mundas, Oraons and  
Santals in Bihar, 1971<sup>1</sup>

<u>Tribes</u>	<u>Total Population</u>	<u>Literate Person</u>	<u>% to total Population</u>
Munda	723,166	117,917	17
Oraon	876,218	150,609	18
Santal	1,801,304	135,280	8

APPENDIX-IILiterate Population Among Mundas, Oraon and  
Santals in Orissa, 1971<sup>2</sup>

<u>Tribes</u>	<u>Total Population</u>	<u>Literate Person</u>	<u>% to total Population</u>
Munda	222,117	29,473	14
Oraon	164,619	26,881	17
Santal	452,953	41,054	9

1 Census of India 1971, Series-4 - Bihar  
Part 11-C(i)

2 Census of India 1971, Series-16 P 11-C(i)

APPENDIX-IIILiterate Population Among Mundas, Oraon and  
Santal in West Bengal, 1971<sup>3</sup>

<u>Tribes</u>	<u>Total Population</u>	<u>Literate Person</u>	<u>% to total Population</u>
Munda	198,701	18,301	10
Oraon	291,173	28,346	10
Santal	1,376,890	1,09,250	8

APPENDIX-IVDistribution of Literate Persons Among Scheduled  
Tribes in Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal, 1981<sup>4</sup>

<u>States</u>	<u>Total Population</u>	<u>Literate Person</u>	<u>% to total Population</u>
India	51,628,638*	8,441,447	16
Bihar	5,810,867	987,397	17
Orissa	5,915,067	825,668	14
W. Bengal	3,070,672	405,597	13

3 Census of India 1971, Series 22, West Bengal, Part 11-C(1)

4 Census of India 1981, Series 1, Part II B (111).

\* Excludes the population of Assam.

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