TRADITIONS, CONVERSION AND SOCIAL CHANGE :

AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN INDIA

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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled TRADITIONS,CONVERSION AND SOCIAL CHANGE : AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN INDIA , submitted by BINITA BEHERA for the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY, is an original work and has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university.

We recommend this dissertation to be placed before the examiner for evaluation.

PROF. J.S.GANDHI

(Chairperson)

PROF. T.K.OOMMEN

(Supervisor)

To

My Grandfather
and my parents

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER - 1
INTRODUCTION

When one's attention is directed to India, one will
find a society that has the diversities of a continent and
the unities of a civilization. Looking through its cultural
history, it is seen that in spite of the multifarious
differences of language, race, ethnic identities and
religions, there is also to some extent, a basic unity in
the thinking, feeling and living of Indians which waxes and
waves with the changing political constellation, but never
ceases. It has primarily been a land in which there was
continuous cultural diffusion, owing to trade relations,
emigration, conquest and colonization. Owing to these
factors, it had acquired a unique soil of flexibility in its
cultural inventory.

Nowhere has the variety of religious response been
greater than in India. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and
Sikhism had their births here. And religions such as
Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism and Judaism came from
without and developed their own indigenous forms in the
land. Each of these has its own 'Great Traditions' -- those
rites and beliefs declared orthodox by the leaders, shared
widely by its followers, codified in its structures, and
institutionalized in its great shrines and organizations[1].
However, each has its markedly varying folk 'Little

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Traditions' too -- the parochial beliefs and practices of the populace that combine elements of the great traditions with local religious customs. Apart from these faiths, is of course the animism practised by the various aboriginal tribes found in India. They further add variety to the rich religious complex of the land.

The religious diversity is of course, closely connected with the great social heterogeneity that characterizes India -- a heterogeneity reflected in the differences between castes living together in any locality and the regional variations within the same broad caste groups. It is a heterogeneity compounded by the existence of tribal groups on the one hand and by the overlay of Muslims and European cultures on the other[2]. Thus by accepting cultural and social diversity and incorporating it into a system of structural exchange, India gave rise to a pluralistic society that has proved to be remarkably stable. For the most part, the reaction of Indian civilization each time to such factors which tended to disturb its societal stability, has been characterized not by militant resistance but by cultural assimilation and adaptation; thus through the diversification of identities, tasks and roles, new groups and cultures have been incorporated within the society, without undermining its ideological and structural base.

This study has grown out of a desire to make a sociological analysis of the 'Christian communities' as they exist or rather as they co-exist in India. It is an effort in the direction of correcting the widespread misunderstanding among non-Christian Indians about Christians in India, taking them as one group with total disregard to the fact that Christian communities that live in different parts of India have different-traditions and come from different ethnic-social backgrounds. As a matter of fact contextualization holds ground among the Christians in India. At its deepest level, contextualization means that Christians continue to be part of their social context, while at the same time being part of the new evolving reality.

Another common misnomer which the study attempts to demystify is that Christianity in India is generally believed to be closely associated with the Europeans, and it is supposed to have come to this land as a result of colonization. But, as a matter-of-fact, Christianity has come to India as early as 52 A.D. only a few years after its genesis in Israel. Thus it came to India, much before even Islam. And Christianity as it exists in India is not an exotic transplant of Western Christianity. The religion does provide to the Christians, a way of life which cannot be

dissociated totally from the matrix of Western culture. Nevertheless, it did undergo cultural change and produced a christian community as distinctively Indian as the Muslims and the Hindus of India, and thus culturally they owe little to the Westerners.

Taking a historio-cultural observation of the Christendom in the world, it is seen that Christianity as it spread to different nations did not exist in these lands in an absolutely sterilized form. Jews who were the first converts to Christianity, continue to take themselves as "fulfilled Jews : Jews who had found the Messiah, Jews who still went to the temple, Jews who still married Jews"[3]. Christianity as it developed in Europe, was profoundly influenced at its high cultural level by the Greco-Roman civilization that preceded it and at its popular level by the folkways of the pagan villagers and townsmen who became Christians[4]. Likewise, Christianity as it developed on the Indian subcontinent was similarly influenced by Hinduism and Hindus and that their influence was profound. Indeed, probably more profound than the influence of pre-christian Europe and Europeans on Christianity, because after all Christianity did not develop on the subcontinent as successor to a moribund Hinduism, but as another faith in a vibrant and ever-changing civilization of Hindus.

Needless to say contrary to the belief of Christianity in the essential equality of all believers irrespective of caste group, sex etc., the Christian community at large, does exhibit quasi-caste like traits. Such traits among the Christians enjoy the sanction of custom and usage; but not, as they do among Hindus, the sanction of religion.

When conversion to Christianity takes place, it is rarely epiphanous. (Here I am referring not to conversion of Individuals, but conversion of groups). Usually through a long slow process, two steps forward and are step backward of acculturation from Hinduism, does "Christianization" take place, a process of generations that for many communities is still ongoing. The process tends to seesaw and zigzag inconclusively among many, especially so in the wake of the quest for cultural identity in India after it attained independence.

India's acquiring the status of a new state came to be animated by a powerful motive -- 'the desire to be recognized' by every cultural-ethnic group. As, I. Berlin has observed :

> "the sole aim is to be noticed : it is a search for an identity, and a demand that the identity be publicly acknowledged as having import, a social assertion of the self, as being somebody in the world"[5].

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The Christians of India too, find their sense of self bound up in the gross actualities of blood, race, language, locality or tradition.

The Christians of India, thence finding themselves between their 'Christianness' and 'Indianness', draw a line of demarcation in the ritual life. Their ritual life can be understood in terms of two aspects : the ceremonies of the house i.e. the social, and the ceremonies of the church i.e. the canonical[6]. Domestic rituals reveal a Christian community which is in consonance with the wider Hindu cultural domain. In fact, the domestic rites prepare the key celebrants for the canonical rituals through the codes of food, prestations and formalized language; a particular state is induced whereby celebrants are marked off as different and separate, and this mood prepares them for the rites of passage into which they are about to enter within the sacred space of the church[7].

Inspite of the differences, there is also an essential unity of the entire community as it exists in India. In the Christian community sacraments are acts of worship that are understood by the worshippers to give access to an intimate union with the divine and to be efficacious for salvation. The sacraments that are common to all Indian Christians, nay, all Christians the world over inspite of their

ecclesiastical and denominational differences, are namely Baptism and Eucharist. The core of the Christian sacrament system is the Eucharist, also known as the Communion Service or the 'Mass'. The ritual is based directly on the table grace of Jewish observances as solemnized in the Passover Seder[8]. It consists of a ritual meal of small amounts of bread and wine, commemorating the farewell supper of Jesus before his death and extending the presence and friendship of Jesus to his followers through the ages[9]. Partaking in the 'Holy Communion', brings the Christian congregation of the Church to be linked together in a unity of being the 'Chosen People'[10]. In the Christian understanding, the ritual is not effective in isolation from the community; on the contrary, it is effective precisely in its reshaping of the imagination and sense of identity of the worshippers, their bringing about a transformation of individual and social life. Through this, hence, the group feeling enters the social mentality; an integration is constructed.

In this study, four christian communities of India have been selected, each representing a particular socio-ethnic group, within the Indian social structure. Each of these exist in isolation to each other, so far as the cultural practices are concerned. An analysis of their cultural identities would unfold their distinctiveness.

Before proceeding to any sociological study, it is both important and appropriate to discuss the relevant sociological concepts, that inform the selection and organization of the background material of the study.

Culture is essentially a socio-psychological phenomenon. It is carried in the minds of individuals and can find expression only through the medium of individuals. The super-individual quality of culture is illustrated by its ability to perpetuate itself. It seems that the transmission of culture has somewhat the same quality as the apostolic laying on of hands. Its genuine transfer from individual to individual or from one generation to the next can only be accomplished by personal contacts.

Certain cultures have declined. The decline of cultures when it does occur, can usually be traced to causes outside them. Cultures, like organisms, may become so accurately adapted to a particular set of conditions that, when these conditions change, they are unable to make the necessary re-adjustments quickly enough. This failure results in paralysis[11]. However, there are other cultures which have gone on quietly enriching their content by inventions and borrowings, changing their form, and achieving better and better adaptations to their particular settings. In fact, they are rebuilt bit by bit by adding new elements, working

these over to fit the rest of the culture and dropping elements which have become poorly adapted to existing conditions[12]. The dominant Indian culture namely, Brahminical Hinduism is a culture which allows lot of flexibility within certain boundaries.

Cultural integration may be considered as the general acceptance of a mode of behaviour by a community which provides the social basis for its integration in that community. Linton's conception of cultural integration may perhaps be the most appropriate concept to be invoked for the present inquiry. He distinguishes between three aspects of culture -- 'universals', 'specialities', and 'alternatives'. In terms of Linton's cultural integration theory, while the 'universals' and 'specialities' within any culture normally form a fairly consistent and well-integrated unit, the 'alternatives' necessarily lack such consistency and integration[13]. Thus, cultural integration can be measured by determining the proportion of alternatives in relation to universals and specialities. The lower the proportion of alternatives, the higher the degree of cultural integration. 'Universals' are traits which are common to all members of the society[14]. Those elements of culture which are shared by the members of certain socially recognized categories but which are not shared by the total

population of the community are termed as 'specialities'. Lastly, in every culture, there are a considerable numbers of traits which are shared by certain individuals but which are not common to the whole of the society or even to all the members of one of the socially recognized categories of specialists. These are called 'alternatives'[15]. They all represent, from the point of view of the entire culture, alternative reactions to particular situations or different ways of achieving the same ends.

The universals and specialities of a culture form a fairly consistent and well integrated unit which set the basic patterns for the life of the group. The alternatives, on the other hand, lack this consistency, integration and stability.

The thrust of this study is to examine the cultural 'dynamics' as it exists in the Indian society in general and the Christian community in India in particular.

The first chapter is an 'Introduction' to the present study. It gives a description of the objectives, the theoretical framework and the chapterisation planning of the study.

The second chapter is on the Syrian Christians of Kerala. They have niched a special place for themselves on

the cognitive map of Kerala's culture. Their claim to Brahminical (though mixed with Nairs) high ritual status and their strict adherence to Brahmin customs and rituals has made them always to be in the eye of the storm of controversy pertaining to Indian Caste System.

The third chapter deals with Oraon Christians. They form a close-knit community of their own, amidst the wider Oraon tribe taken as a whole. The community is resultant of what is specifically referred to as 'Mass (conversion) Movement'.

The fourth chapter deals with Chuhra Christians. Chuhras are 'untouchables' existing outside the caste hierarchy as it exists in Punjab. Their main occupations were defiling i.e. sweeping and carrying of night soil. Their conversion is also in terms of 'Mass (conversion) Movement'.

The fifth chapter deals with Anglo-Indians. They represent the 'Eurasian Christian Community' which is peculiar to India. Their allegiance to Christianity was taken to be synonymous with the British culture.

The last chapter, summarizes the main findings and provides the researcher's observations on the basis of the study.

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CHAPTER - 2
THE SYRIAN CHRISTIANS

The Indian Orthodox Church also known as the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church is one of the oldest churches in Christendom and the most ancient in India[1]. Tradition has it that the Church was established by St. Thomas, an apostle of Jesus Christ in 52 A.D[2]. This claim to the apostolate of St. Thomas is supported by a significant monument : The community of St. Thomas Christians. In olden times, they were called the St. Thomas Christians, though today they are generally referred to as the Syrian Christians - they use Syriac liturgy in their worship.

Historically speaking, at the dawn of Christianity, there existed countinuous flow of trade between the West and the East, especially the Malabar Coast, which was better known as the land where the pepper grew. There was a succession of contacts with foreign Christians i.e. the Christian 'East Syrian' traders[3]. In one of the trade vessels, St Thomas is believed to have arrived. The earliest converts were said to be the Namboodiri Brahmins, and in course of time, other divisions of dominant castes joined their ranks. The community was further strengthened with the immigration of Syrians from Mesopotamia to the port of Muziris in 345 A.D. led by Thomas, a trader from Canna in Jerusalem, who came to Malabar owing to the persecution unleashed by King

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Sapor II, who ruled over Persia from 309 to 379 A.D[4]. The Syrian Christians, are thus a combined product of the conversion mission of St. Thomas and the trade connections between the Middle East and the Malabar Coast.

FACTORS FAVOURING GROWTH AND SURVIVAL

The church established by St. Thomas vaxed in strength in the succeeding centuries. The circumstances which prevailed in Kerala in the early centuries helped the members of the church to obtain a superior niche in the social edifice in Kerala.

One major factor facilitating the growth of this community was the tolerance of the Hindu rulers. Inspite of the predominance of Hindu religion and culture, Kerala under Kulasekhara Varman, a Chera King, was free from inter-religious conflict of a sectarian nature[5]. That the Chera Kings followed a liberal policy of religious toleration is evidenced by their grants to the christians, the Jews, etc[6].

Besides, the religious outlook of the people was so eclectic that no religion was considered by any section of the community as inferior to the other. The Hindus, who constituted the majority of the population, gave donations to the temples of other religions as well. In fact, the religious institution of all non-Hindu communities,

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Buddhists, Jains, Christians and Muslims were referred to as 'Pallis' with great respect. Thus, the picture of religious life in that age was one of understanding and harmony in the relations between followers of different religious faiths.

Another factor that worked positively in making the Syrian Christians, an integral part of the Indian society, was the assimilation of the community to its environment. Although, the worship of the Church and theology were entirely foreign, in social life and customs, the community is completely Indian[7]. This was mainly through the fact that the unit in Hindu society was the caste and the Christian desire to continue as a separate community was to the non-Christians not only acceptable but inevitable. Hindus expected the Christians to conform to the general conventions which governed caste society and the latter conformed[8]

Last but not the least, another factor that worked in favour of their survival and holding a recognized place in society, was the barrier of the Western Ghats, which kept that part of the country from the invasion of the Muslims[9].

THE SYRIAN CHRISTIANS AND THE CASTE SYSTEM

In the case of Kerala, as in other parts of the world

and also as at all times, the domain of religion and power has been inextricably intertwined. It was seen here that the region's most successful regimes, were those which used techniques of conspicuous piety and patronage to map their new domains onto an expanding sacred landscape of shrines, pilgrimage places and other repositories of sacred power and energy[10]. On the other hand, every community and caste group also wanted to play the dominant role in the polemics of caste and thus legitimate power in the society, and so was the case when the Syrian Christians entered the caste system.

Caste system holds no uniform pattern in the Indian society as a whole. While the four great varna divisions of the caste system can be recognized in most parts of the country, the ramifications in each region show a different picture.

In Kerala, there were Brahmins who were called the Namboodiris, the Sudra Caste of Nayars, the farmers and the fighters[11]. The Vaishyas or trading castes as a category was missing; this gap was conveniently filled by the Syrian Christians. In this, they were welcomed by every ruling family because they emerged as very able traders and merchants. Their foreign connexions were also of great value in providing a market for produce, so much so that the local

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rajas gave them monopoly of trade in very many products.

In course of time, it was seen that many Nairs rose to the position of sovereigns in many kingdoms. The Kerala region contained a shifting array of contending cheifdoms and principalities, and owing to the looseness of these spheres of dominance, the cheifdoms of Malabar were highly militarised societies[13]. In this background, the Nairs were recognized as a powerful warrior population. Like other Indian trading and maritimes groups, the Syrian Christians too developed a strong tradition of occupational and geographical mobility. Earlier, they equated themselves only with the Namboodiris but now they opened their ranks to Nairs and largely intermarried with them. They also took to military occupation, apart from trading. And by 15th century, they had risen to prominence as skilled military men. In the martial culture, they came to acquire a central place[14].

Owing to the foreign connexions, the community had merchants of wealthy following. They had vast resources and personal abilities. Their abilities and usefulness as traders and warriors were recognized by the local rajas. They were rewarded with royal grants of land and many of the most important churches of the community have foundation accounts which focus on the role of indigenous kings as

patrons and benefactors. They were given recognition by the grant of concessions and privileges recorded on copper plates[15]. They were also given certain honorific titles, most of which they shared with the Nairs e.g. Tharakan, Panikkar etc[16].

The Syrian Christians belonged to a rank below the Brahmins. A peculiar feature of the caste society was that in the eyes of the Brahmins, the Christians' touch and presence was required to purify defiled objects and even temples[17]. The Hindu kings made them live near the palaces in order to profit by their service in getting defiled articles purified. They were reckoned at par with the Nairs. Moreover, the relation between the two in each locality depended upon the prevalent demographic, political and economic variables.

Associated with other concessions, was the grant of services from certain castes and the responsibility of protecting them. e.g. such castes were the carpenters, blacksmiths, goldsmitns etc. There were the Chavers who even courted death to defend the rights of Christians and of their churches[18]. The Syrians continued to adhere to Hindu norms of purity and pollution. By the late nineteenth century the Syrians started undertaking mass 'conversions', for purely tactical reasons. And these 'converts' were

members of dependent labouring groups who had long-standing service ties to Syrian landholders. As far as the Syrian Christians were concerned, these new 'convert' tenants and labourers had not undergone any transformation in status or identity by virtue of their conversion. They related to their Syrian Christian patrons in much the same way as they had to the higher Hindu castes. They were all hived off into separate churches of their own and the Syrian patrons maintained strict endogamy along with commensal restrictions. This rank consciousness and its adherence to customs linked with food, language and culture, went a long way in their being classed as 'Savarna' persons of clean castes and standing in the Hindu moral order. In consequence, they were granted one of the most critical signs of ritual status within the society i.e. the right of access to Hindu temples and sacred precincts[19].

Thus the Syrian Christians did not disturb the social structure but got integrated with the under social environs in totality by being a very part of it.

RITES-DE-PASSAGE

The Syrian Christians appeared to have lived in two world at the same time, but with no consciousness of tension between them. They were Christians of Mesopotamia in faith

and worship and they were Indian in all else[20]. The way of life of the Syrian Christians was deeply influenced by the society and environs in which they were placed. Most importantly, this assimilation was essential for survival. The customs which they shared with caste Hindus must be seen as much more than superficial borrowings from Hinduism.

The first child is always delivered at the mother's house[21]. The mother and the brother of the expectant woman arrive at her conjugal home in the fifth or seventh month of her pregnancy to take her home. This is observed among the Namboodiris also.

Certain restrictions are imposed upon the expectant woman both at her conjugal home and her natal home. She is not allowed to travel or visit others, particularly after dark. Sometimes she has to wear a black bangle in order to ward off the evil eye.

Fair colour is preoccupation with the average Syrian Christians, reflecting perhaps a desire to be equated with Brahmins. The daily rite in favour of this was strictly practiced - gold from the girl's mother's wedding ring is scrapped off and put in milk, a herb called 'kurunthoti' was also boiled in it[22]. The expectant women had to drink this potion daily.

Birth of a boy is heralded with joy and the sound of 'Kuruva'[23]. A similar cry is made by the Namboodiris and Nairs on such occasions[24]. After the birth, the horoscope of the child is cast. Then a priest or male relative would say in the child's ear, 'Moron Yesu Masiha' (Jesus christ is Lord'). The child is fed with three drops of honey in which little gold is rubbed. This custom which is shared with the Namboodiris is claimed to ensure prosperity[25]. Pollution of the mother is observed for ten days. This custom was observed among the Brahmins. After the purification, the husband's family went to see the baby. Care is taken that the party consists of an odd number, as even member is held to be inauspicious. The baptism takes place at this time or later. After it, the mother returns with the baby to her conjugal home. On the twenty-eighth day, the maternal uncle of the child ties the 'arringanam' (gold waist-band) on the child's hip, its shape differentiates symbolically the sex of the child.

Six months after the birth, came the function of 'annaprasanam', in which the mother's grandmother hands over the child to the father. The priest places sweet rice with plantain and jagerry before the father and the father feeds a little to the child[26]. The custom is continued among the Namboodiris[27].

The education of the child begins at three or four years of age and a ceremony similar to the thread ceremony observed by the Hindus, though not so elaborate, takes place. The teacher was in most cases, a Hindu. In the ceremony he sits down near the child; a brass dish full of of paddy is placed in front of them. A lamp is lit and the members of the family stood round while the teacher took the child's forefinger and traced with it on the paddy, the words, 'Hari Sri Ganapathe Nama'[28]. In modern times, a Christian priest is often called to perform this ceremony and the name of 'Jesus' is substituted for that of the Hindu diety[29].

Marriage is seen as a sacramental bond, among the Syrian Christians[30]. In common with the rest of the people of Kerala, girls were previously married off before puberty. This continued till 1599, the Synod* of Diamper abolished child marriages[31]. The initiative in negotiating a marriage rests with the girl's family. If the girl is approved by the boy's side, then both sides meet formally to decide over the dowry, ornaments etc. This was followed by proclamation of

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* A Synod is a session or conference of representatives of the church, including bishops, priests and lay people, convened by a legitimate authority to discuss and decide on matters of doctrinal and disciplinary importance.

banns, i.e. formal proclamation in the church of the intended marriage.

The betrothal ceremony is marked by firstly exchange of letters of confirmation and a written promise on a piece of cadjan leaves between the two parties[32]. This is observed in the same way among the Nairs and Namboodiris. Secondly, the dowry or 'stridhanam' exchanges hands during the betrothal ceremony. The bride's mother stands watching the proceedings with the lighted lamp in her hand, and makes the remark that 'agni', the fire would be a permanent witness to the transaction[33]. The end of this ritual is marked by the Parish priest praying. This is an important ritual event for it expresses the entry of two families into an affinal relation with each other. The custom was that the dowry must always be an odd number of units, a Hindu convention, like the orientation of the principals in the transactions[34].

The Syrian Christians used to cater to the Hindu way of fixing days and moments for weddings based on astrology, but since the Synod, they have resorted to Sundays to conduct weddings. It was regarded auspicious because it is the day Christ rose from the tomb. But they continued to add that on Sunday, Rahu Kalam (an inauspicious time by astrological reckoning) is over early[35].

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An important rite of separation was observed among them -- the marriage is solemnized only after the girl's family gifts four percent of the dowry to the church. The bride's departure from her natal church is symbolized by a letter called the "Desakuri" stating that she has no dues towards the church and that she has not been excommunicated at any time[36]. Without the Desakuri she cannot be affiliated to her husband's church. This is followed by an important rite of incorporation called Naddavarkam, whereby the women takes membership in her husband's Sabha, and here too a percentage of the stridhanam must be made over to the church as the gift[37].

The days that followed the betrothal were marked by intense preparations in both houses, such as, relations had to be summoned, special foods prepared etc. Most of the work was done voluntarily by the neighbours e.g. Pulayars would bring firewood, Ilavas chickens and plantains and the local Nairs would also look in. A very big undertaking took place on the Thursday before the wedding, when close relatives would erect the end posts of a large-palm-thatched shed or 'Pandal' in front of the girl's house, where most of the ceremonies would take place[38]. The privilege of using pillars at the four ends of the shed was an ancient one shared only with the Brahmins[39]. On the day before the marriage, the servicing castes attached to the Syrian

households came and settled in the house till the wedding day -- the 'thattan' (goldsmith) who made the 'tali' or marriage locket and other ornaments, the 'pannen' (tailor) and the 'asari' (carpenter). The goldsmith would place the Tali or minnu in a small shallow bronze vessel containing rice as a symbol of the fertility of the union[40]. The locket traditionally was a fleck of gold, ornamented with a cross[41]. Each of the servicing castes were paid in cash and kind thus signifying that the patron-client relationship was not merely an economic one.

The matrimonial celebrations start with 'Antham Charthal' - the first ceremonial shaving of the bridegroom on the eve of the marriage[42]. This custom was prevalent among Nairs in the same form[43]. This custom probably dates from the time when boys were married young and this would be their ceremonial first shave. This was followed by the ceremonial bath by the bride and the groom. This is taken from the Hindus who considered marriage a sacrament and so internal and external purity is demanded as a preparation for it[44] Among Hindus, bath has a symbolic meaning of internal and external purification. The night before the marriage, the groom's brother-in-law removed seven threads from the 'Mantrakodi' which is the ceremonial Sari presented to the bride by the bridegroom[45]. The threads were twisted

into a single strand, on which the Tali was hung.

Before the bridegroom set out for the church, he was brought to the Pandal where he received blessing from his first teacher. When the ritual was over, the 'asan' or teacher was honoured with gifts. This ceremony is called 'Guru Vandanam'. This is strictly a Brahmin custom[46]. It is in line with the old tradition of Gurukula system. According to it, the utmost respect was shown to the teacher by the pupils, and it was in keeping with this norm that at the time of important events like marriage, the first teacher was invited to give blessings to his pupil. The party now set out in a procession to the church, accompanied by musical band and royal umbrellas etc. Many a times the groom used to ride an elephant and the bride was carried on palanquin. These particular elements were reminders of old times when these privileges were bestowed upon them by the local rajas[47].

Juxtaposed with the canonical rituals i.e. that pertaining to the church, are certain traditional ones. The most important rite was the tying of the tali. It is considered the moment of marriage. The priest places the tali thread of the minnu in a knot[48]. Soon after, the priest blessed the 'mantrakodi' and gave it to the bridegroom. Standing behind the bride, he unfolded it and put it over

her head. The Namboodiri Brahmins alone, apart from the Syrian Christians, used the term 'Mantrakodi' for the bridal costume[49]. Among the Nairs the term 'Pudava' is used for the same[50].

Apart from the wedding proper, the couple were treated to sweets in the church itself which the elder married sister of the groom had brought on the previous day. It is called "Aini Ururuttu", which is a special sweet prepared by mixing rice flour with a type of sweet palm juice which is used only by the Syrian Christians, apart from the Brahmins[51].

On reaching the groom's house, the couple are supposed to enter the house with their right foot placed first. Like their Hindu brethren, they take it to be a good omen[52]. They are greeted by a close female relative who holds in her hand, a kindi which is a bronze vessel with a spout containing water, a Nila villaku which is a bronze lamp with an extended stand which is lit and a small kinnam, which is a shallow container which holds a betel leaf, some water and a fine muslin containing a small amount of finely powdered rice and some grains of unhusked rice. A small hole is made in the cloth. The relative faces the couple dips the muslin containing powdered rice and unhusked grains into the water and touches the brow of bride and bridegroom thrice. This

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particular rite is one of fertility and auspiciousness, the separate elements of which constitute the symbols of sexuality, procreation and domesticity, the kindi for the masculinity and the kinna for the femininity, the unhusked rice for reproduction and the powdered rice for consummation[53].

Among the Syrian Christians, old age is a time of meditation and increasing detachment from the affairs of everyday life. Here, the influence of Hinduism which associates renunication with old age is clearly present.

When a person nears the time of death, the priest is called. The priest recites the creed of faith and 'taila abhisekham' (the anointing oil) is administered. The family turns the individual so that his face is turned towards the east, associated with the second coming of Christ. Following death, the eldest son has the duty of closing the eyes of the dead person. All fires in the kitchen, are immediately extinguished and no cooking is done in the house until after the funeral has taken place[54]. As soon as there is knowledge of a death in the neighbourhood, the kinship network tightens considerably. Neighbourhood ties too become analogous to kinship ties. The family is given the freedom to mourn as others take over routine tasks. Neighbours and kinsmen must cook food, bring coffee and tea and look after

the small children in the house[55]. The corpse is bathed by the servants, and no relative would help or touch the corpse[56]. When all are assembled, the funeral procession leaves for the church to lay the body at rest. Women of the household do not accompany the procession (usually).

After the funeral, the relatives and mourners return home and since those who have been in attendance have probably fasted for many hours, it is customary for a simple meal to be served. This is known as 'Pashni kanji' - it consists of rice, dal and curds[57].

On the tenth day after death, a ceremony known as Pullakuli which is the ceremony of purification is held. This custom was borrowed from the Brahmins, who still observe it[58]. On the anniversary of the death each year, the 'chattam' derived from the sanskrit word 'shradham', ceremony is performed[59].

THE CATEGORY OF SPACE

It is in the building of houses that the dialogue between Hindu and Christian customs is most evident. The Hindu asari (master builder) who builds for the Christian client keeps to the customs and rules that he would follow for a Hindu client[60]. Astrology naturally, plays a major role. Every house must be located within its own seat of

strength, and if this is not so, it is believed that the misfortune may fall upon the thaccan (carpenter) who follows the rules laid down by the 'Thaccu Shashtra', the treatise containing the rules of measurement, location and construction[61]. The site of the land has to be carefully chosen. The sites which are three, five or six cornered in shape, are considered inauspicious. Among Hindu rituals that accompany the building of a house, a significant one is prayers offered by the craftsmen to the Hindu diety Ganapathy at the time of laying the foundation stone. The interesting point of such rites is that, the Syrian Christian clients, do not actively participate but are onlookers and also provide whatever materials are required by the asaris and feast them as custom requires[62]. Once the house has been built, the 'veedu kudasa' or ritual for making the Christian house ready for occupation takes place to exercise the Hindu influence. In this, the priest goes through every room with a censer, holy water and strips of palm-leaf, and mark each door with the sign of the cross. Only after this ceremony, the house is considered ready for habitation[63].

A careful examination of the diverse elements in the various practices prevalent among the Syrian Christians, definitely shows that among strands drawn from Hindu, Syrian and western cultures, the community is especially indebted

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to the high caste Hindus of Kerala, the Namboodiri Brahmins.
Though tradition claims that most of the Christian
settlements in early centuries were located near the
colonies of Jews, there was hardly any chance for the
Nazaranees* to assimilate elements from their culture,
because the Jews by nature were an isolated community[64].
Fourth century onwards, the minute local Christian community
had contacts with the Syrian immigrants, who began to settle
down in Malabar in large numbers. Being in the good books of
the local raja was important and having done it, they came
to enjoy a rightful place in the society, they also shared
common interests and took pride with the rest of the
citizens of Kerala, that they were all "Malayalees",
speaking the same language and observing the same customs,
in general. A point to note here is that the Christians
celebrated then, as they do now, 'Onam', or the national
festival of Kerala, with the same eclat as their Hindu
brethren[65]. Thus their customs and manners, life and culture
conformed to the general pattern evolved in the land where
they lived.

Two principles were operative among the gradual
evolution of the Syrian Christian community. Diffusion may
be either 'natural' or 'organized'. The former is largely

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*   Another name of the Syrian Christians.

planned. If the attitude of the natives or the wider society is tolerant and friendly the fusion of cultures and peoples goes on very rapidly. But, at the same time when two cultures come in contact, there are points of assimilation and isolation which are largely determined by the racial characteristics and the strength of social heritage[66]. Diffusion is also to be understood as a selective process. A group accepts some culture traits from a neighbour, at the same time rejecting some and also modifying some of the borrowed elements. In the case of Syrian Christians, the outward form of Christianity has been diffused more readily than the functions and meanings. The principle of assimilation operates most naturally. In fact, especially after three or four generations, the children of this community (comprising more of Syrian immigrants) are born and brought up and educated in the native culture, tend to assimilate cultural elements from the native Hindus.

The advent of the Portuguese into India in general and the society in Kerala in particular began with the 'discovery' of a sea route to India by Vasco de Gama in 1498. Trade was not the only concern of the Portuguese, whose ecclesiastical and civil administration were closely linked. The Portuguese expressed dissatisfaction with the Syrian Christians' interpretation of Christianity. To allow Christians living in their midst, who follow 'strange'

usages was not acceptable to the Portuguese, especially to their clergy[67]. They did not lose time in trying to persuade the Christians of St. Thomas to conform to the discipline of the Latin community. In the light of this, the Synod of Diamper was convened and conducted by Don Alexius De Menezes, Archbishop of Goa, on June 20, 1599. The Synod of Diamper issued a series of ordinance to wipe out all traces of Hindu influence from among the Syrian Christians[68]. It is said to be an event of far-reaching significance in the history of the Indian Church; it is also known for the extraordinary nature of the decisions taken and their effects on the Malabar Church. Its main objectives was to bring about a general renewal in the faiths and practices of the Malabar Church in India. The foremost aim was to remove for good all Mesopotamian and Nestorian influence in matters of faith and church organization, and in liturgical formulae and to eliminate the social customs, rites and rituals which were Hindu in appearance. It was by all means 'cultural cannibalism' as Stephen Neill calls it[69]. As a reaction to this, in 1653, the Christians broke free from Portuguese ecclesiastical domination with the 'Koonen Kurisu Revolt'[70] because the Portuguese impact threatened the Christian edifice to which these people had been accustomed for centuries. The Portuguese did not achieve the desired objective in full. The Christians continued to subscribe to

age-old notion of caste superiority as is testified to by the evidence of Canter Vischer (1717-23). The Dutch Chaplain says :

> "It seems that they keep very strict genealogical records and they will neither marry nor in any way intermingle with the new low caste christians, being themselves mostly Castado Nairos i.e. nobility of the Nair Caste, in token of which they generally carry a sword in hand as a mark of dignity"[71].

All the social events, for the Syrian christians were occasions for social intercourse and gatherings, not only of members of the community, who lived in the same locality and worshipped in the same church. This feeling of oneness and common interests, welded each village group into one homogenous body, bound together either by ties of kinship or by the parochial ties of religious affinity. Such a social pattern bred an innate conservatism that fostered the observance of old customs, which remained absolutely unaltered till revolutionary changes brought about by the Western education, industrialisation etc. hit them. It is almost certain that they are very old customs traceable to a time when Christianity was introduced in Malabar. But it is essential to remember that the votaries of christianity as a religion, zealously guarded the fundamentals of their faith as the most treasured of their possessions, even though it was essentially Indian.

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CHAPTER - 3
THE ORAON
CHRISTIANS

The Oraons are a tribe settled in the heart of Chotanagpur plateau, which comprises of parts of Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. In this chapter, we are dealing with Oraons of Bihar. They are a predominant tribe of Central India.

Among all the factors that have operated in bringing about social change among them, by far, Christianity is the prime factor that opened a new chapter in the life of the Oraons.

FACTORS FAVOURING CHRISTIANITY

Christian missionaries in Chotanagpur present a landmark in the socio-economic history of the land. Their advent marked a definite era in the history of the hitherto backward area; subsequent activities of the missionaries started to profoundly affect the life of the people.

The Oraons were primarily agriculturists. They suffered exploitation at the hands of the Hindu landlords in the form of encroachment of tenancy rights, begari, etc. The missionaries helped in this aspect by giving legal advice, winning a case in court on their behalf and monetary protection from the moneylenders[1]. Another factor which worked in the favour of conversion was that generally the

missionaries had intimate terms with the British administrators, and the former used to utilise the opportunity in the temporal interests of the converts[2].

Certain elements of their culture too was responsible for paving the way for the new religion. In (tribal) animism, belief in spirits, witches and witch doctors play an important role in their life : some sections of the people were chronically suffering from the dread of malevolent spirits or witchcraft. They were thus compelled to sacrifice fowls, goats etc. to the spirits and pay fees to the witch doctors, which indeed was taxing on their resources. Moreover, the lives of the elderly tribal women were also insecure because of the 'superstitions' of witchcraft. When the missionaries came to Chotanagpur, they offered a complete emancipation and exemption from such fears and superstitions. They assured the people that a spirit could not harm a Christian[3].

Other factors that encouraged conversion was the association of the religion with the white ruling class. To a large extent, conversion held the promise of their elevation over their non-christian tribe-fellows and also over the landlords who were mostly Hindu. Opening of schools, hospitals etc. further facilitated conversion. Education especially functioned in the most positive way to

establish influence over young minds.

Thus, owing to the above-mentioned reasons, many showed their willingness to join the church, voluntarily.

RELIGION

Tribal religion is a curious mixture of theism and animism. Theism is the belief in a supreme force and animism is the belief that all things are the abode of spirits. These spirits also preside over illness and epidemics. Their belief is due to the fact that they are unable to explain satisfactorily to themselves the phenomena in the cosmos and on the earth, and so they attribute them to the activities and machinations of intelligent, personal and superhuman powers. And they believe that as humans, they too have the capacity to influence these powers by propitiating and appeasing them with sacrifices, offerings, etc.

'Sarna' is the religion practised by the Oraons[4]. The term Sarna is a Kurukh* term which derives its meaning from the 'sacred-grove' where Sarna Budhia (old lady of the grove) and several other deities are believed to reside, and thus, it is sacred to the Oraons[5]. The Sarna religion has many elements -- bongaism, naturism, totemism, taboos,

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*   "Kurukh" is the language spoken by Oraons.

ancestor-worship, pantheism and magic. According to Roy, "The Sarna religion is an organised system of spiritism set on a background of vague animism"[6].

Tribal religion includes the belief in a high-god. He is separate and altogether superior to all other deities and spirits; maker of the universe and of men, guardian of the moral code, benevolent and immutable. The Oraons' high-god is 'Dharmes' -- the beneficent one. They believe that he is thwarted in his benevolent designs by malignant spirits who must be propitiated in time, because once these spirits succeed in their purpose, the Dharmes is powerless to save the victim. The Oraons have a great dread of ghosts and spirits. Every rock, road, river etc. is feared to be the abode of ghosts. The divine power is identified with many powerful deities. As many as ten different types of such supernatural powers are recognised among Oraons. Each deity has its own influence, like one protects the fields, another protects the home, a third property and so forth[7]. Like other Indian tribes, among them too, belief in totems and taboos is largely prevalent.

With the acceptance of Christianity, the entire socio-religious set-up of the Oraons has undergone heavy transformation. The Christian Oraons find a resemblance between 'Dharmes' and the 'Father God' of the Christians.

They now use the word 'Dharmes' for the God of the new faith[8]. The numerous spirits, deities of 'Sarnaism' have come to be regarded as manifestations of 'devil' (in Christianity). The old belief in these has fallen into disuse. Roy, refers to the readjustment of the old and the new religious faith among the Oraons,

> "... the Christian dualistic doctrine of the
> spirit of good and the spirit of evil -- God and
> angels on the one hand, and the malignant spirits,
> and the 'evil eye' and 'evil mouth' on the
> other"[9].

A change in religion, meant its sociological implications further leading to corresponding changes in festivals, village organization, rites-de-passage, social and personal life and dance, dormitory and sex life.

RITES-DE-PASSAGE

Each occasion of the life-cycle such as birth, marriage, death are given due importance by the Oraons. Each of it is marked by a multiplicity of taboos, rituals, omens etc.

A child is highly valued in the Oraon community. A number of precautions and many pre-natal and post-natal taboos are observed, in order to protect the child as well as the mother from evil spirits. For example, an expectant

mother is not allowed to go out alone, particularly in late evenings and night hours because she is considered susceptible to influence of evil spirits. With the acceptance of Christianity, many of the pre-natal taboos have been done away with.

When an Oraon mother is with the child for the first time, the 'Joda-kamna' ceremony is performed[10]. The object of this is to finally severe the connection of the girl from the ancestral spirits of ther father's clan, and protect her and the baby from their evil influence. This practice has been given up by the Christians.

In case of difficult labour, the witch doctor is summoned and he propitiates the deities, so as to ease her pain. The Christians in such situations, now call the catechist or village pastor, who prays to God for the suffering woman. The first ten days in the infant's life are believed to be critical and the relatives always keep a watch over the infant. This period is delicate for the mother too, who is ceremonially unclean and polluted. Thus, they are believed to be susceptible to the influence of evil spirits. Traditionally, objects of Sarna importance like the axe, plough-blade, fishing net etc. are kept near both the mother and the child as they are believed to act as protective charms. The Christians have rejected these charms

as "heathen" and they have replaced these by images of Christ, St. Mary etc. Here we observe that fear of evil spirits is still lurking in the minds of Christians, but after conversion (to Christianity) they have 'Christianized' the practice. Its a case of cultural replacement.

At the end of the of confinement period, a purification ceremony takes place which is called 'Chchatti', it denotes 'the great community feast'. This is followed by name-giving ceremony. An important rite in this is the 'Tikhil tira' in which an elderly member of the family would drop two grains of rice in a leaf-cup filled with water and go on uttering the names of the ancestors. The name at the utterance of which, the grains come closer is chosen for the baby[11]. In case this does not happen, the child is named after the day of birth. When the child is about six-months old, the ceremony 'Mukho-Mandi' or first rice-feeding ceremony is performed[12]. On this occasion, puja is performed to the gods/ancestors and a few grains are fed to the child. The Christians have now come to celebrate 'Chchatti' along with the Baptismal ceremony -- Snan (Sacramental bath). This is done for no other reason, but for the sake of convenience, and together, the ceremony is now come to be known as 'Snan-Bhat', the 'Bhat' of course denoting the feast. The 'Mukho-Mandi' is still celebrated but sans the propitiation of the deities. Christian prayers are offered for the child on this

occasion. The general trend among the Christians (Catholics) is to name the child after the Saint with whom the birthday of the child coincides, or also after biblical characters. There is a trend continuing among them i.e. to translate the Latin names into Hindi such as William and Veronika into Pratapchandra, Pratima respectively. In the present times, owing to cultural 'retroversion', there is reevaluation of previously eliminated Sarna elements and their readoption after necessary modifications to suit the changed needs and outlook of the convert. It is in such a manner that 'Tikhil tira' has been readopted. The Christians now, put the grains in the water in the name of the 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit'.

Many a times, incidence of infant mortality in some families is very high. The Oraons attributed it to working of some evil spirit; the infant used to be placed in a 'manure pit' for some moments and was named 'Fekua' (cast away), 'Gendura' (belonging to the manure pit), the purpose is to divert the attention of the evil spirit, from the child[13]. The Christians now, instead perform a special Mass and prayers are offered to ward off any evil influence.

Mundan is the Sarna custom that marks the first tonsure of the child. On an auspicious day, the hair is shaved off by grand father or a bachelor or village blacksmith, spirits

are propitiated followed by a lavish feast. This ceremony continues among the Christians, but it has lost all of its ritual significance. An important Sarna custom is to bury the placenta and the navel cord in front of or inside the house because the belief is that it might be dug up and utilised for magical purposes[14]. This custom is strictly followed among Christians too.

Among the Oraons, the parturient women is not allowed to cook food for the first 10-12 days owing to pollution. The christians too observe this taboo, though they rationalise it by saying that the parturient woman is weak, and so she isn't allowed to cook.

Among the Oraons, the ear and nose piercing are mainly confined to girls below ten years of age. These called 'Kan-Bedhna' and 'Nak-Bedhna' respectively[15]. In case of boys only the former is performed. Tatooing is generally confined to girls. It is adorned as a decoration. The ear and nose piercing has been discontinued and the tatooing has been christianized by the Christian Oraons. Earlier, the body was adorned with designs of flowers and now it has been replace by christian symbols such as cross.

When Oraon boys attained the age of twelve, 'cicatrization' is performed on them. The scar marks are

called 'Sika'. It is a sort of initiation ritual which the boy has to undergo before admission to 'Dhumkuria'. The Dhumkuria is the bachelors' dormitory -- a relic of the hunting stage of the Oraon society when it served as an effective organisation for food quest and an useful seminar for training the youth in socio-religious observances[16]. Members of it used to perform many functions, social, economic, ritualistic etc., and they worked as one corporate body. It was the prime medium for learning tribal music and dance. A similar institution also existed among the girls.

'Cicatrization' has lost importance, because of the decay of Dhumkuria, in the post-conversion society. In the sense that pre-marital sex was allowed in the traditional Oraon society, the general atmosphere in Dhumkuria stimulated sexual urges and led to promiscuity in large-scale. With the advent of Christianity, such things were vehemently opposed by the missionaries on the grounds of morality. The main reason for decay of this institution was the propaganda carried on by the Church and the Social Welfare Workers[17]. Opening of schools further dealt a severe blow to it. In villages of mixed population of Christian and non-Christian Oraons, mostly the Christian youth formed a dormitory system parallel to the traditional Dhumkuria, which was used only for group-study or learning Bhajans i.e. Christian religious songs. The 'Sangat' is also a more.

newer trend; this was formed by Christians to perform important social funcitons for the entire village[18]. 'Akhra' or the dancing ground is of much importance to Sarna Oraons, where dances are performed everyday. But the Christians do not give much importance to dances, they dance only on occasions of certain Christian festivals, and that too, dancing after sunset has been banned by the religious authorities. Dances are organised in the precincts of the Church and the Grotto.

Among the Sarna Oraons, the institution of marriage holds high significance. The proposal is always initiated by the "Agua" -- the 'go-between' from the boy's side[19]. This is continued among the Christians too. Tribal endogamy and totemic clan and village exogamy is maintained among both the Christian and Sarna Oraons alike. Traditionally, marriage was taboo between jetha (eldest among siblings) boys and jetha girls and tunia (youngest among siblings) boys and tunia girls. It is believed that such marriages do not prosper and that one of the couple is sure to die. Now, the Christians unable to do away with the belief, rationalize it by saying that when such a boy and girl come together in conjugal life, they fail to adjust because of the similarity in their temperaments, hence such negotiations should be avoided[20]. Among the Oraons,

negotiations are initiated after the 'Karma' festival takes place in August. Among the Christians, the first negotiations involve a belief that they should not be done in the month of Pus (November-December)[21].

During the progress of negotiations, various omens (Sagun) are observed when either side, visits the other side's village. Only if the omens are favourable, do the Sarna Oraons proceed with the negotiations. Same is the case with the Christian Oraons.

In view of the fact that Christianity strictly believes in the non-dissolution of marriage and its stability, opportunities are to be given to the boy and the girl to exercise their full discretion. The early Catholic missionaries evolved a custom which would provide an opportunity to the boy and the girl to see each other and express their choice publicly. It is called 'Lotapani'[22]. The interesting point about it is that the idea of engagement is itself of Christian origin but the way it is executed is based on Sarna traditions.

The Sarna Oraons perform various rituals in their marriages. 'Khed-norhna' is the ceremony in which the boy's party are welcomed at the girl's house by washing their feet and anointing it with oil[23]. 'Sanni-Pahi' is reciprocation of the same by the boy's relations at the boy's house.

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'Koha-Pahi' or 'the big-relationship feast' denotes an elaborate ceremonial feast given to the girl's side by the boy's relatives. It comprises of an important rite called 'Bahi-jorna' (clasping hands) in which the bride-price is settled in a symbolic way. Both the families propitiate their respective village deities for the smooth performance of the marriage by performing Marwa Puja. The boy's family perform 'Gram Puja' before proceeding to the girls village for the welfare and safe return of the party[24]. Each of these rituals are accompanied by consumption of ceremonial rice-beer, lavish feast and offering libation to the gods. All of these elements are eliminated by the Christians, though the ceremonies are continued.

The boy's relatives and friends go in a procession, which is called 'Barat' to the girl's village. On the outskirts they are received by the customary welcome ceremony called 'Parchhana' in which both sides dance and sing to the beats of the drums and there is a mock-fight, this symbolises the traditional mode of capturing the girl after defeating the girl's kinsmen[25]. This is continued among the Christians.

Marriage ceremony comprises of certain rites -- one important rite is 'Isung-Sindri' in which vermilion pots are exchanged between the couple and they smear vermilion

diluted in oil on each other. At this time, marriage songs are sung, that relate to conjugal love and are full of indecent allusions. This is followed by 'Gurkhi-Tirkhna' - in which the couple along with a few female relatives are screened from all sides. Both stand on a curry-stone*, the boy behind the girl, with his toes enclosing her heel as a fork. Meanwhile some male relatives of both sides stand outside the enclosure with a sword in hand and go on brandishing it to ward off 'evil eye'[26]. Both these ceremonies of Sarna importance have ceased to exist among the Christians.

When the 'Barat' arrives back, the couple are first taken to the Devi-Mandap to pay respects to the village diety, and are then taken to the boy's home, where they pay respects to the clan deities of the boy. This has been discontinued among the Christian Oraons, owing to it being opposed to the principles of Christianity. 'Marwa Khapua' or 'awakening under the Marwa' is an Oraon custom which is celebration of first conjugal night[27]. Boys and girls stay up the whole night under the Marwa and cut obscene jokes with the retiring couple. This occasion is marked by a special dance called 'Domkanch' which comprises of bold and

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* The curry-stone is symbolic of domesticity among the Sarna Oraons.

vulgur body movements. Marwa khapua is still practised among the Christians, though the 'Domkanch' dance and obscene jokes have been eliminated. The young boys and girls now sing Bhajans[28].

After the marriage is over, customarily, the marriage shed is uprooted by the son-in-law of the family who gets a pot of rice-beer as his remuneration. This practice is still continued among the Christians.

The Sarna Oraons generally cremate their dead. But if a person dies after sowing and before harvest, the body is provisionally buried and then cremated later on[29]. The mode of disposal of the dead also to some extend depends upon the status of the person concerned. The sole mode of disposal of the dead among the Christian Oraons is burial.

When death occurs, the body is taken out of the house and placed in the courtyard with its head towards the south[30]. The body is bathed and then anointed with oil and turmeric paste. Among Christian Oraons, the body is bathed and then anointed with oil only. Ash is now spread in the room, and the room is closed. The relatives and friends carry handfuls of Baipi paddy (paddy which has fallen down) to the house of the deceased; out of this rice-beer is distilled and there is community drinking. But among Christians, though bringing of Baipi paddy is continued, it

is spent on meeting the expenses of a Mass for the dead to pray "for the peace of his soul and his entry into the heavenly kingdom of God"[31]. Infact, the Christian element of offering the Mass has been so integrated within the indigenous framework of this practice that many Christians, especially of the younger generation, do not even know the original use of Praipi paddy.

Just near the dead body, a tile containing charcoal and a small cup containing some oil is kept. Persons who go in the funeral procession, smear their hands, head and feet with oil. This practice is continued among the Christians too[32].

Among the Oraons, persons dying in unnatural circumstances such as accident, snake-bite etc. are buried, not in the cremation ground but outside it. The unmarried persons too are buried. If a pregnant woman dies, the legs are broken and the body buried on the outskirts of the village, as she is believed to become a witch after death. Among the Christians, this restriction is not there. Everyone, irrespective of the circumstances in which he or she dies is buried in the christian-communal graveyard. However, exception is made in two cases, if a child dies before getting baptised and if a person had received community boycott (Mandli Bahar), then their body is not

entered into the communal grave yard, nor the catechist joins the funeral. The body is buried outside.

Among the Sarnas, the old custom was to place coins in the mouth of the deceased and utensils inside the grave. The Christians practise this, in a modified form. They put a cross or a rosary with the dead body.

Among Oraons, after coming back from the funeral, the party returns home, where they have to undergo purification by fumigation from the smoke of burnt grain's husks. Everyone undergoes lustration too by rubbing a little turmeric paste on their bodies before returning home, the male relatives shave off their air and moustache as a sign of bereavement.

A village elder propitiates the ancestor-spirits to include the deceased in the community of spirits, by sacrificing a pig or a fowl. This is called 'Utur-Khila'. It has been discontinued among Christians. Even the purification rites mentioned above here ceased to exist among the Christians.

The relatives of the dead offer earth with left hand five times into the grave. This is called 'Mati Dena'. It is continued among Christians, though in a modified form. The Christians now offer earth with their right hand, thrice (in

the name of 'the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit'[33]. There is an indigenous practice among the Oraons to learn the cause of death. The 'Ash' that had been spewn on the floor of the house is now examined after returning from the funeral. It is believed that if there is an indigenous sign of thread, it would mean that death is natural, but if clawprint is seen, then death is caused by witch-craft. This practice continues among Christians, too. However, the indigenous symbol of thread has been replaced by the Christian symbol of cross, thus indicating a natural death (a death by the will of God)[34].

Later, the female relatives go back to the cremation grounds and collect few-bones of the deceased. These are then washed, anointed with tumeric paste and put in painted earthenware jars. Once a year in the month of January, the harbora (bone-drowning) ceremony is performed. The jars are taken by the female relatives to the 'kundi' or 'bone-drowning place' by the side of a stream or water-course where they are finally deposited[35]. This practice has been definitely banned among the Christians.

FESTIVALS

Among Sarna Oraons

There are various rites and ceremonies, magical observances and precautions by which the Oraon society seeks to ensure safety and prosperity to the village community as a whole at each stage in the annual cycle of its simple economic pursuits, and the feasting and rejoining and social reunion marks their successful termination. These pursuits are food-gathering, hunting, cattle-rearing and agriculture.

Although hunting has been long superseded among the Oraons by agriculture as the principal mode of occupation, it is given importance due to its intimate connection with Oraon agricultural operations. The 'Phagu Sendra' is undertaken every year in the month of March. It marks the start of the ploughing of the fields. 'Bisu Sendra' is undertaken in April-May. It is celebrated just before the time for sowing paddy seeds. Success in this hunt is of prime importance. Lack of success of an Oraon village at this hunt is believed to bode failure of paddy crops and consequent famine and starvation. The 'Jeth Sendra' is under-taken in June. After the Jeth Sendra, the Oraons abstain from killing any wild animals for the next two months i.e. until the paddy crop is fully developed, as it

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is believed that a breach of this taboo will injuriously affect the growing paddy crops.

There are two festivals connected with fruit-gathering. The 'Phagu' is celebrated in spring time. It marks the end of the old year. 'Sarhul' is a festival which follows phagu and it symbolises, the coming in of spring with its varieties of flora, blossoming plants and trees. Of these, the Sal blossoms form the most striking feature of blossoming nature in the land of the Oraons. Sarhul is a religious festival held in the 'Sarna' or 'the Sacred grove' and all the dieties and spirits believed to be residing in the grove are worshipped[36]. Until Sarhul is celebrated, no Oraon is supposed to gather, eat or use the new fruits in any village. Sohrai is a festival in connection with cattle-tending. The cattle are bathed and worshipped, by feeding them and annointing them with vermilion diluted in oil. The cow-shed deity is propitiated with fowl.

The Oraons are primarily agriculturists, so the festivals connected with it are given prime importance. 'Hariari' is held in the month of July-August after the sowring is over. Sacrifices are also made to the deities to get a bumper crop. 'Kadlata' is celebrated in the month of August, when the rice grains have formed in the stalks. At this time danger is apprehended from all quarters, such as

the birds, 'evil eye' etc. and so, the sacrifices are made to the village deities to ward off the danger. 'Karam' festival is celebrated a day after Kadlota. 'Khalihani' puja is performed when the crops have been harvested and are ready to be stacked in the grains godown. The last in the series is the 'Nawakhani', in which the first fruits of the crops are offered to the deities, spirits etc.

Among Christian Oraons

The Nawakhani is still practised by the Christians, though with modifications or rather 'Christianization'. Instead, of offering the new grains to the same deities, they are commemorated with religious services in the village church and some portion of the grains is donated to the church[37].

'Katni Parav' is a custom adopted by the Christians. It is in line with the Khalihani puja. During Katni Parav, the Christians go out in a procession holding their thanks-giving offerings of crops[38]. The first paddy blades are weaved into long chains and decorate the entrance of the church and their own houses.

Sohrai has also been retained with modifications. In its commencement, a special service is held to bless the cattle. One interesting point to note is about a particular

rite in Sohrai. The Sarna Oraons sprinkle rice-beer on the hoofs of the cattle to express reverence to the animals who are an asset to them[39]. Now the Christians sprinkle 'holy water' on the hoofs, so that the animals may remain healthy, serviceable and be saved from evil influences.

AN ORAON VILLAGE BEFORE AND AFTER CHRISTIANIZATION

The traditional village system consists of two types of leaders in village, the 'Pahan' who is the religious head and the 'Mahto' who is the secular head. It is commonly held that the Pahan makes the village while the Mahto runs the village. By 'making' the village it is meant that the Pahan maintains a harmonious relation between the villagers and the supernatural beings, in the interest of his village community. By 'running' the village, it is meant that the Mahto runs the secular administration of the village[40].

These two leaders jointly look after the administration and well-being of the village, with the collaboration of an elected Panchayat. Besides these, the office of 'Mati' or witch doctor is of importance too. He administers treatment of different ailments by the help of traditional herbs and also by magical observances. He is consulted in matters of black magic.

Among the Oraons, several villages were united into a Parha[41]. There were Parha Panchayats which settled the inter-village disputes, and also heard appeals from the judgements of village Panchayat.

In any Oraon village, the two probabilities are either a village which has an exclusively Christian population or a village which has a mixed population with both Christian and non-Christian Oraons.

In case of the Christian villages, it is seen that there has been a total transformation in the socio-religious structure. The Pahan has been replaced by Catechist or a Pastor. These authorities are ordained persons having defined jurisdictions and provide religious, social and even economic leadership to the people in the village. Besides him, the Panch or councellors are found in the Christian village, as they existed earlier. In fact, the catechist and the village Panch run the whole administration of a Christian village. The Panch form the second layer of leadership

who wield a strong influence in organisational matters of a Christian village[42]. They are consulted in all matters concerning the village. In the pre-Christian days, the Panchayat used to meet only when some dispute was to be settled. With the advent of Christianity, the importance of

this village council was recognised, and so it was not simply retained, but revitalized by making it more democratic and participatory; thus now, the meetings which are called the 'Mahavari Baithiki', are held every month and it was mandatory on the part of one male member of each family to attend it[43].

'Church Mandli' was a newly evolved life force of the villagers. These work under the guidance of the local pastor or a priest[44]. The supreme influence of these church authorities is visible in village affairs.

In case of the mixed village, a Panchayat exists, but the guiding power is the local pastor or the nearby missionaries. In such villages, the Christians who have their Church Mandlis, may or may not take part in the affairs of the village Panchayat. However even in most of such villages, it is seen that they actively participate in the village Panchayat, as it is they who provide the local intelligentsia. Due to their better education and economic resources, they form an elite and the non-Christians act willingly, under their directions.

The 'Parha' system is now almost dead in all other areas except a few pockets where under the new-found inspiration from the Christian tribals, it is still maintained as an active force. In fact, the political

organisations has received the impetus from the missionaries. The Sangat, can be called a Dhumkuria minus the latter's ritualistic and religious functions. It has been evolved by the Christians and is an organisation of Christian Oraons that volunteers its collective labour, to any villager whether Christian or non-Christian. The non-Christians too are welcome to be part of the 'Sangat', but membership for them is not compulsory.

WHITHER CHRISTIAN ORAONS

When the Christian missionaries appeared on the scene, it was a time when local tribals were grooaning under the exploitation from the non-tribal land-lords, money-lenders and the British administrators.

At this point of history, the new religion came as an emancipating factor in the tribal life and there was subsequent embracing of Christianity by the tribals in a bid to safeguard their economic and social rights. The Christians were given a special treatment and care by the missionaries. They began to acquire a superiority complex because the new religion brought advantages of legal support, change in life style, education etc. which transformed them entirely. Thus the Christian community emerged as a privileged class among their Sarna tribe-

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fellows. And they now assumed a caste - like feature. They closed their ranks by endogamy and wanted to draw a line of distinction from the Sarna Oraons. Thus, it can be said that Christian Oraons rejected many practices because of their being contradictory to the principles of Christianity. Apart from this, they also rejected several practices because they wanted to shed all associations whatsoever with the tribal past. This was exactly what the missionaries had in mind for them. Considering the circumstances in which they were converted, the missionaries wanted to make them firm and strong Christians and the striking cultural homogeneity was the main force deterring it. (Education came much after conversion). So the missionaries encouraged the line of distinction which was slowly drawn between the Christians and the Sarna Oraons. For example, the Sarnas used to add the word 'Oraon' after their first name such as 'Etwa Oraon', 'Somra Oraon'. The Christians started to add the name of their respective clan viz., "Francis Lakra", "John Toppo" etc.

In course of time, the situation changed, the insularity of tribal life was broken down further and after some time the national movement gained footing, in which the Christians were the leaders.

The other factor which came into play was a radical change in the attitude of the Christians due to the Decrees passed in the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican held in 1962-65 which allowed the Roman Catholics living in different parts of the world to incorporate the elements of local culture into the Christian and church life as much as possible to the extent that it does not contradict their religion (Christianity).

Finally, the dual processes of industrialization and modernization effected the tirbals substantially. More and more cultural contacts with the non-tribals added the crisis of 'ethnic identity' of the tribals in general and Oraons in particular. In the wake of this in 1963, the **Adivasi-Sanskritic Sangh** (Tribal Cultural Society) was established at Ranchi by the mission authorities. Thus it was the Christian tribals who became torch-bearers in this journey towards a new political identity.

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CHAPTER - 4
THE CHUHRA
CHRISTIANS

Christianity in Punjab can be considered as a relatively recent phenomenon in India. John C. Lowrie was the first Christian missionary who arrived at Ludhiana in 1835 and established the first mission station in Punjab.

Originally, the missionaries of the Punjab only attempted to convert the upper castes, since they regarded others as beyond the reach of the methods they preferred -- intellectual argument and moral suasion[1]. This reaching out to high caste people (who in those days formed the literati) gradually developed into a strategy. Realizing the powerful influence exerted by the high caste people upon the rest of the society (in Punjab), and converting that influence for the cause of spreading the Gospel of Christ, the missionaries soon became convinced that winning the high castes was the key to evangelizing the region as a whole.

The low caste and out caste groups were extremely responsive to the new faith, but the missionaries had a restrained attitude towards them due to the fear that the reception of large numbers of depressed classes into the church would interfere with the conversion of the upper castes. They were aware of the deep prejudice of caste Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims alike towards the Chamars, Chuhras etc. Due to this reason, they made use of 'Urdu' as the

language of preaching. Urdu was the literary language spoken by the educated and those who had business dealings in the city. Using Urdu for preaching, thus limited it to higher caste/class people[2].

The most distinctive feature in the church history of Punjab, however is the 'mass movement' toward christianity among the Chuhras which began around 1875 in and around Sialkot district and continued through most of the Western Punjab for the next forty years. It resulted in converting remarkably large numbers among the Chuhra caste, so much so that by 1915 all but a few hundred members of this caste professed Christianity. As a matter of fact, today in Punjab out of 2,50,000 Christians on the Indian side, 98 percent come from Chuhra background[3].

POSITION IN THE TRADITIONAL SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Caste system is a unique phenomenon and has produced a social order radically different in many respects from any known outside of India. The Indian social order consists of four varnas which in turn can be subdivided into various caste groups. The four varnas are supposed to include all groups recognized in the Hindu system. Outside of this arrangement are only the barberous and despised people, to whom is given the name "Mlechchhas"[4]. They are also

referred to as the Panchamas i.e. forming the fifth varna. The Chuhras of Punjab are a subcaste belonging to the Panchama category. They are an 'outcaste' community who mainly performed the occupations of sweepers, leatherworkers and are also extensively employed as agricultural labourers. Apart from these, other aspects of how they lived, contributed to their being stigmatised i.e. they were carrion-eaters. Owing to these, they were subject to ritual impurity. Prolonged ritual impurity acquires the character of a stigma. For this reason, they were treated as 'untouchables' and even 'unapproachables'; due to the meagreness of their income, they are condemned to a life-long experience of devastating poverty; they were denied the comfort of sharing the religion of their Hindu overlords, not being allowed access to the scriptural traditions, or to the temples.

However the term 'outcaste' doesnot denote individuals without a caste in a caste-ruled society[5]. In fact, they are very much members of a caste, owing allegiance to the group authority. Ironically though, but they are, inspite of their numerous social disqualifications, vital to the Hindu concepts and practices and are expected to be in attendance at many social and religious occasions[6].

In Punjab, it was seen that the Chuhras had to live in separate sections on the outskirts of a village or in a separate part of the town, with at least one street between their residences and those of the higher castes[7]. In many places, they were restricted from using certain roads, schools, wells and temples, so as not to "pollute" them.

BELIEFS AND PRACTICES AMONG CHUHRAS
BEFORE THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY

In 1881 Census, Denzil Ibbetson placed the Chuhras among the "lower menial castes" and specifically, the first among the Scavenger Castes of the Punjab[8]. However their actual occupations varied according to both region and religion. In the eastern Punjab, the duties of the Chuhras included sweeping both in private homes and on village lanes, making dung cakes, grazing cattle, and serving as village messengers[9]. In the central Punjab, where they were most numerous, Chuhras also did these things but were primarily agricultural laborers[10]. However those who had become Sikhs or Muslims, generally refused to remove night soil.

Ibbetson recorded that as many a sixteen gotras or clans were enumerated among the Chuhras[11]. The origins and ancestry of the Chuhras remain a puzzle. Ibbetson has said

that they come from a stock of aboriginal tribe of vagrant habits, hunting and eating vermin, carrion etc. Later when they settled down in villages, they abandoned their vagrant habits, but had to settle as menials. They continued eating carrion and were made to do the filthiest work to be performed, namely scavenging[12].

Their dark skin colour as well as remnants of totems in their religion have been seen as evidence of pre-Aryan, Dravidian origin[13]. They had a religion of their own which was characterized as "hagiolatry pure and simple". It consists merely of a confused veneration for anything and everything, its followers, or rather their teachers, may have found to be considered sacred by their neighbours, whatever be its origin. Thus we find in the Punjab that in the religion of the scavenger castes, the tenets of the Hindus, the Musalmans and the Sikhs are thrown together in the most hopeless confusion, and that the monotheism taught by the medieval reformers underlies all their superstitions.

The Chuhra religion centered upon Bala Shah/Balmik. They believed that God is one and that Bala, who adored the high priest, mediator and teacher of God. They had no temples, but made dome-shaped mounds of earth facing east, dedicated to Bala Shah, with niches for lamps[14]. It is generally after the harvest that there is a 'Jag' (worship

or sacrifice involving lots of people) conducted by one of their priests. It includes much hymn singing, recitations of the genealogies mentioned earlier, and the sacrifice of rice, ghi, gur, and a chicken or even a goat over a fire[15]. Superstition, fetishism and ancestor-worship were common.

Ibbetson has pointed out that with the rise in the social life, the original religion was gradually modified so as to bring it more into accord with the religion of the respectable classes. As a matter of fact it is curious how generally the observances, if not the actual religion of these lower menials follow those of the villagers to whom they are attached. Chuhras will bury their dead in a Musalman village and burn them in a Hindu village[16].

RITES DE PASSAGE

The church has insisted that the marriage of Christians be a Christian marriage. Compared to Indian social marriages, the Christian westernized marriage ceremony is dull and out of harmony with prevailing group standards and conventions. Had the old customs been altogether social and secular and involved no violation of Christian rules of conduct, the church could sanction their use alongside that of the church ceremony, but unfortunately some of the most appreciated of the old ceremonials are idolatrous; while

others are inconsistent with the Christian ideal of the relations between husband and wife. So on the insistence of the missionaries, the Christian Chuhras totally severed themselves from their previous social practices.

However the kinship practices and relations that formed the social organization were maintained as earlier, since they in no way had religious underpinnings.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF LIFE

The largest kinship unit recognised by the Christian Chuhras is the 'Zaat'. Those who belong to the same Zaat assert that they descend in patrilineal fashion from the same man[17]. It is exogamous. Among the Chuhras, marriage is forbidden between a man and a woman who are paternally related. Every Zaat, or patri-clan, has its own name[18]. This is sometimes the name of an animal.

The Zaats also command different levels of respect. The Zaat is not merely a category of people who are not allowed to marry each other. Belonging to the same Zaat is on occasion used as a principle upon which a relation can be based. Men of the same Zaat and the same generation can, if it pleases them both, henceforth regard each other as Zaat-bhai, which signifies they will frequent each other's company and help each other out whenever the need arises.

Similarly, a man and a woman can also accept each other as Zaat-bhai and Zaat-behen respectively. The same can be said about having a Zaat-behen.

The Zaat-relation usually also functions as one link in a fictive kinship relation which consists of various links[19]. Fictive kinship plays an important role in the society. Thus the extensive form of fictive kinship obtains among the Christian Chuhras everywhere on the sub-continent. Practically everyone made use of kinship terms for everybody else although between most of them there were no blood ties that could be traced. Each Zaat-relation is expressed with an exchange of specific behaviour with specific rights and duties.

The 'Khandaan' denotes the actual kinship relations which form the core, on the basis of which the super-structure of fictive kinship is elaborated[20]. People who descend patrilineally from the same man and can trace their descent, belong to a 'Khandaan'. A distinction has been made by 'Mayer' between the Khandaan of cooperation and the Khandaan of recognition :

> "The Khandaan of cooperation seldom extends among the Christian Chuhras, further back into the past than four generations and consists of people who know each other aird and in general, share a social relationship. The Khandaan of recognition goes back very many generations in time"[21].

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Those who belong include all people who have descended patrilineally from the same man, even if they are not conscious of this fact, as long as they can trace their common descent should they want to. Social visits and exchange relations are irrelevant to the Khandaan of recognition[22]. Emphasis lies completely on line of descent and its eventual traceability.

Christian Chuhras from the same village together constitute a 'Biraderi'[23]. This social entity, based on locality, is exogamous. Within the biraderi, the daughter of one man is the daughter of all, a clear example of "village-kinship", so that marriage between a boy and girl from the same village would be like the marriage of a brother and sister. Those in a biraderi who consider themselves part of one Khandaan are often collectively designated as a 'sharika biraderi'. When comparatively many Christians reside in a village, they usually belong to different Zaats. In such instances, the biraderi is for the most part very distinctively separated into a number of sharika biraderis.

From the beginning the missionaries saw that a biraderi was a competitor to the idea of church and Christian community[24]. It is also for all purposes, an association of castemen. Originally it took cognizance of everything that happens -- completely controlling the life of each individual

sweeper, thus taking away all independence and initiative[25].
The missionaries tended to break the authority of this
because they felt that this would hinder formation of
Christian community and it accentuates continuance of even
those old 'heathen' customs which were in opposition to the
Chrisitan faith. J.W. Pickett has in this regard said that
"biraderi stands for Bhagat-Birth-Bhangism"[26]. Biraderi in
the Punjab village would include all social and secular acts
in totality -- "all-of-life" problems.

The biraderi has to some extent been grafted with the
rural church-community. In fact, it is partly or almost
wholly transformed by the church into a community resembling
the old but with a different self-picture and with new
motivations to love and service. In the urban context, the
Christians did not create new biraderis to replace the ones
which they had left.

The biraderi's function seem to have been taken over
initially by the local church sessions and by the local
missionaries. However when the Inidan priets replaced the
European missionaries, their authority seemed to have
declined further. Instead of it, the community developed a
number of more specialized voluntary organizations through
which its members could deal with certain common tasks and
problems. Among these were the Christian Endeavour, the

Christian Mutual Fund Ltd, and Indian Christian Associations.

FACTORS FAVOURING SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY AMONG CHUHRAS

According to Mark Juergensmeyer, "religion" as a description of India's cultural affiliations could mean three elements i.e. 'qaum, panth and dharm'[27]. The quam is understood as a large religious community such as that of the Muslims. The panth meant the fellowship of those who revere a lineage of spiritual authority. And the dharm meant customs and codes of social obligations and spiritual behaviour, such as those entailed by caste or ritual and implied in observing the polarity between pure and impure[28].

In Punjab, for the untouchables, the dharmik element of religion i.e. Vedic Hinduism held no appeal. Under it, they were a caste group that had always been at the bottom rung of the social ladder, despised and exploited by all. The Christian message of the 'brotherhood of all mankind' struck a responsive chord within the Chuhras. They saw in the invitation to become Christians, an opportunity to escape from their down-trodden position in the Hindu caste system.

Another factor which worked in a positive way for the conversion to christianity was the disillusionment from alignment with the two religious groups -- Sikhs and

Muslims. The descendants of converts from the much despised Chuhra caste found that they were relegated to an inferior group called the 'Mazhabi Sikhs' as compared to the Sikhs of Rajput and Jat origin[29]. This was despite the fact, that Sikhism in principle repudiated caste system[30]. Likewise the Muslims also did not accept them at par with them, but called them 'Musallis', treating them with a measure of disdain[31]. Therefore, when the missionaries preached the Christian faith, the Mazhabi Sikhs and the Muslim Chuhras too were unusually responsive to Christianity.

Another factor was that in Punjab, the Chuhras were a caste on move because as noted by Gandhi, "caste had much less force in this region than in other areas of India"[32]. This was due to two reasons -- sociological and religious. The sociological reason is that over half the population of the Punjab is made up of Jats, a nomadic group who entered the Punjab some centuries ago and modified the traditional caste structure, in the sense that the usual competition for status ranking in the caste hierarchy had come to be complicated by tensions between the Jats and the non-Jats[33]. And the religious reason is that a large proportion of Punjabis are not Hindus, they are either Sikhs or Muslims. Both of these religious groups theoretically do not have caste[34]. This has a considerable influence on the tide

towards social liberalism.

Besides, one more factor which facilitated acceptance of Christianity is that Punjab has been the meeting grounds for a bewildering variety of cultural traditions, starting from the Aryans, who evolved the vedic religion here to other groups such as the Greeks, the Tartars, the Moghuls and the Afghans[35]. For this reason, it was exposed to and was receptive to all new cultures. When Christianity as a religion came wearing the garb of Western culture, Punjab was extremely responsive.

Another factor operative in favour of Christianity was that the Chuhras having an inferior standing in the caste structure, were much freer from the restraining rules and harsh customs that prevented the spread of the Gospel in the higher caste. They had no caste position or privilege to lose; as outcastes they would suffer no defilement from the presence of those who had been baptized[36]. Thus the Christian were not ostracized by the non-Christian Chuhras. They were allowed to live in the sweeper bastis (colonies). Apart from the above factors, the material benefits further induced the Chuhras to convert to Christianity.

THE MASS MOVEMENT

The distinguishing feature of Christian mass movements is a group decision favourable to Christianity and the consequent preservation of the converts' social integration. Whenever a group larger than the family, accustomed to exercise a measure of control over the social and religious life of the individuals that compose it, accepts the Christian religion, the essential principle of the mass movement is manifest[37].

The movement among the Chuhras in Punjab began when Ditt, the first convert among them, unlike all previous converts in the Punjab, retained his place in the group to which he had belonged, and then persuaded that group in his village to throw off the age old bondage to vedic and animistic superstition and fear for the liberty which he had found in the new religion -- Christianity[38].

Instead of staying within the mission compound for the period of instruction which followed baptism in the region in those days, Ditt went back to his village, and by a valiant fight he turned group opposition, that would have expelled him, into group approval that carried all the Chuhras of his village into a confession of the Christian faith. He continued his previous occupation. After the

decision of his village group, the Chuhras in other villages became interested and within few years, increasing numbers of them, acting together, entered the Christian fold[39]. Within forty years in the Civil District of Sialkot only small fragments of the Chuhras community remained outside the Church[40].

The principle that operated to bring Chuhras throughout Sialkot to Christ was established when that first little group in Ditt's village made its decision and was received into Christian fellowship. In addition, the traditional decision-making process often worked in favour of conversion to Christianity among low caste groups rather than against it, as among high caste groups.

Usually the decision to convert was made by the head of the family or by the leaders of either the entire caste brotherhood within a village or of a faction within that; the other members of the family, faction or brotherhood simply consented to the decisions of their accepted leaders. Hence the basic motivation for conversion may have been more the desire to express confidence in the leadership and maintain the solidarity of one's family, faction or caste group within the village than the desire to reap the social or religious benefits of conversion to Christianity.

This movement among the Chuhras was successful in leading to large-scale conversion to Christianity. This can be compared to a similar movement among another untouchable caste group. These were the 'Megs' who were weavers by occupation. Among them the movement started in 1859, but it got arrested by 1862[41]. The main reason for the mass movement getting bottlenecked among the Megs is that contrary to Chuhras, they had remained staying within the mission compound for an enforced time period of instruction. This separation from their family and Kinsmen, resulted in a schism being created in the Meg group. After the time gap when the Megs returned to their villages, they were subject to social ostracism and extreme persecution that developed both from within the group and from the surrounding Muslims and caste Hindus. Persecution from the other castes was primarily due to their refusal to continue their previous occupations.

One factor that worked in favour of the Chuhra movement was their continuation of their past occupation, and so, the other castes were indifferent to the conversion, because the status-quo was not threatened by their religious conversion.

POSITION IN THE POST-CONVERSION SOCIETY

Embracing christianity brought about some changes in the position of the Chuhras in the social structure, but there were many elements of the past which continued to exist. Many of them continued in the old occupations of sweeping and curing leather[42]. In fact, since they continued with practising the traditional occupation the caste Hindus and Muslims did not feel threatened by their changing of religion.

Residential segregation which was there before conversion, also continued after the Chuhras embraced Christianity. Earlier these colonies were solely known as the 'out-caste Mohalla,' now it also came to be referred to as 'Christian Mohalla', where most of the Christians of the village live.

Many members continued to receive the traditional payments in kind which characterized the old and intimate jajmani system of village economy in which the sweepers, barbers, carpenters and others practising services/trades in the village had a number of hereditary patrons or jajmans, whom they served and who in return took care of them. But in course of time, their number dwindled and the missionary now emerged as the patron. Most of the converts gladly accepted

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this paternalism. Habituated to village jajmans, they turned naturally to the missionaries for assistance. In fact, many of the low caste group, came to regard the mission schools and medical facilities as ones on which they had special claims for scholarships, for conessions in hospital fees, for preferences in obtaining employment as nurses, teachers, etc.[43].

Thus, as compared to the high caste converts, the Chuhra group not only experienced fewer breaks with their past, but was also socially and culturally, the more homogenous of the two.

The oppressive treatment to which the untouchables have been subjected for many centuries has contributed to the development of an inferiority complex. This is referred to as the 'depressed-class mentality'[44]. The 'karma doctrine' that their degradation is due to their misconduct in previous births, has strengthened these inhibitions.

But Christian teaching, followed by active Christian worship, has introduced a new force into their lives strong enough to loosen and in many cases to destroy those inhibitions, and to restore the possibility of normal response to stimulations. In the words of J. Waskom Pickett, "they see opportunities and take hold of them, with a confidence they had never known before[45].

Changes have been brought both in the attitudes of Christians towards work other than to which they or their group had been accustomed, and in the public attitudes toward the taking up of new work by these converts. This subsequently results in social mobility. Many Christians have acquired new concepts of themselves which have made it possible for them to undertake work that was inhibited by ole concepts. Hindu and Muslim neighbours likewise have acquired new concepts of the Christians and have encouraged, or at least tolerated, work by them that would have been impossible, had the old concepts not given way to the new[46].

SOCIAL CHANGE -- GRADUAL BUT STEADY

The high caste Hindus have gradually acquired a new respect for the untouchables, which is less likely to show by a violent break with the past than by the encouragement of a gradual assumption of rights. The change took a typical course. In some villages, the pastors had been allowed to draw water from the village well, used by all except the untouchables, then the preacher-companions of tne pastor, then other guests in the pastor's home, then boys of the local Christian group home from high school, then members of the local group associated in the public mind more with the pastor and what he stands for than with the old life of the caste. In such villages, new customary rights for Christians

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of outcaste origin were built up slowly[47].

The untouchables have been subject to oppressions and they did not resent these. Even if they resented the treatment they received, but ordinarily they hid their resentment. On the contrary, the direct response to oppression, increases among Christian converts. Growing independence and a diminishing fearfulness is seen among Christian Chuhras[48].

In the face of conversion, few old aspects of caste persisted within the Christian community. The small numbers of caste Hindus who joined the Punjab church were addressed in a dignified manner, with the title of "convert", whereas recruits from the Chuhra caste were known instead as "mass movement christian" or simply "Christians"[49]. Conversion as a means of change was seen differently by the differing caste groups. Whereas, the high caste Christians wanted to flaunt their high caste identity (though indirectly), the Chuhras on the contrary wanted to conceal their low caste identity. It was the members of the Chuhra christian group who left behind their family names and adopted foreign names such as John Samuel, Paul Massey and the like, whereas the upper caste converts retained their ties to the caste system by continuing to use their Hindu or Sikh names[50].

In the initial years of the Chuhras joining the church, the ritual of 'Holy Communion' presented a special problem, so far as the high caste Hindus were considered. This problem surfaced owing to the fact, the small percentage of all other Christians, apart from the untouchables, comprised of largely Brahmin converts. All communicants are supposed to take the chalice and bread together. The church obviously could not acknowledge the prohibitions against commensality, but managed to accomodate upper caste sensitivities nonetheless. The problem was solved in two ways : by establishing separate worship services for those who spoke English and those who spoke only Punjabi, which de-facto eliminated the lower castes from English speaking services. And also by ensuring that the high caste converts sit at the front of the church so that they would use the communion implements first, before they became polluted by the Christians of lower castes[51].

USE OF PUNJABI LANGUAGE

As long as evangelistic efforts were concentrated in urban areas on literate people, Urdu was used. When the emphasis shifted to rural illiterate Chuhras, their mother tongue, Punjabi was essential to be used for the preaching of the Gospel[52]. In 1891, Rev. I.D. Shahbaz, a pastor of Sialkot translated the Psalms into Urdu verse retaining the

common western tunes. However these proved unpopular[53]. The western tunes sounded strange and unfamiliar to Chuhras and Urdu, the language of literate urban people too was only partially understood by village Christians. Hereafter, the Psalms and hymns began to be written in Punjabi and set to indigenous tunes. These were extremely appealing to the rural congregations especially because their message spoke clear to every villager[54]. Besides, the tunes were easy for them to learn as they were of local origin, having familiar tone and rhythm patterns.

NEW FORMS OF RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION

New customs and positive expressions of the village faith are now visible in the rural setting. The dancing of the 'Bhangra' - a Punjabi village folk dance has become in some cases an accompaniment to Christmas caroling. The womenfolk have been leaders in this innovation[55].

When the Chuhra renounced their old ties, they gave up also one of the most colourful and highly organized systems of religious festivals and rites to be found anywhere in the world. The Christians cut themselves off from village-wide ceremonies and household customs connected with almost every event in the human life-cycle. Campbell in his book, **The Church in the Punjab,** describes the various changes seen in Christmas celebrations in the villages in Punjab. The

celebration begin now with the formation of 'celebration committee' -- very like the Hindu neighbourhood committees, which, from ancient times, have met to organize religious dramas and festivities[56].

The traditional service was periodically interrupted by the Pastor's shouts of *"Bolo ! Yisu Masih ki Jai"* (shout : Give glory to Jesus) and the congregation responding to this cry each time with a full-throated "Jai" (Praise !)[57]. This is quite similar to the periodic shouts of "Sat Sri Akal" which comes in a Gurudwara meeting, in response to the invitational phrase "Bolo So Nahal"[58]. Similarly, the offering more than any other aspects of the service demonstrated a uniquely Punjabi adaptation. Both general and christmas offerings were given by the individuals by placing these on the alter. These offerings were never given by adults directly, but were placed first in the hands of small children, who placed it on the alter. It is exactly the same way as the traditional "chadawa" or offering in the Sikh religious service in a Gurudwara.

Thus, it was the Chuhras who sought out christianity, and the other way around. The missionaries did not reach out to them because they were suspicious about the motives of the new conerts. Besides they feared that allowing them would sully the church's reputation. In a brisk exchange of

letters between the mission field and various denominational head offices, a number of missionaries warned about the consequences of "raking in rubbish into the Church".

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CHAPTER - 5
THE ANGLO-INDIAN
CHRISTIANS

The Anglo-Indian Christian community is by far the (Christian) group, which has always found itself amidst controversy of all kinds, social, cultural and political. Christianity was one markedly significant aspect of ideology that they inherited from the British[1]. Apart form being a religious minority, it is also a linguistic and racial minority community[2]. The current constitutional definition of an Anglo-Indian is as follows :-

>"Anglo-Indian means a person whose father or any of whose male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is domiciled within the territory of India and is or was born within such territory, of parents habitually resident therein and not established there for temporary purposes only"[3].

But the social definition frequently differs from the official definition. For instance, offsprings of Portuguese-Indian origin, or offsprings of an Indian man and an Anglo-Indian woman, sometimes identify themselves as Anglo-Indians.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THEIR ORIGIN

The origin of the community goes back to the days of European Renaissance, when Portuguese globe-trotters found India a fertile land for their colonial as well as evangelical ambitions. They were the first Europeans to

arrive in India. As few Portuguese women dared to come to India, the men were by necessity, driven to form permanent or semi-permanent connections with Indian women. Many such relations were even patronised by their leaders, like Alfonso de Albequerque; thus a community of mixed origin had been born. This group was called 'the Luso-Indians'. The English too followed the path of their European precursors[4]. Without family, having no legitimate way to give vent to natural passions and without any satisfactory arrangement for intellectual and emotional entertainment, many of them drifted to promiscuity with the native (Indian) women[5].

Another reason for the above was the English, though in the beginning sought out mates among the Luso-Indians, soon the clergy and the government disapproved of such marriages, as the Portuguese women were staunch Catholic followers. Rather they now encouraged marriages with the natives, but made sure that the women converted to Protestant Christianity.

Many of the poor ones still went for temporary engagements and many of the rich ones could afford a more respectable fashion of the time -- 'taking mistresses'. For decades, the practice continued unabated, both of marriages and irregular unions and resulted in the presence of a considerable numbers of 'half-castes'. At this point one can

observe significant differences in the policies and practices of the British and the Portuguese regarding religion, especially conversion, and regarding local women. The Portuguese as part of their colonial expansion, considered it their duty to take Christianity along with their commercial pursuits[6]. Therefore wherever their commerce took them, they established not just trading stations but Christian communities. This demonstrates an interesting characteristic of the Portuguese -- the overriding importance of belief over biology or cultural ancestry.

In contrast, the British policy was to refrain from interfering with the religion of the people, fearing that such interference might conflict with their chief reason for being in India, which was commerce. For that matter the British did not demonstrate much concern for even their own religious observances[7].

However the British were presented with a dilemma when some became concerned about the religion of the offspring. They were willing to leave the Indians and the Portuguese to their religions, but when it came to the religion of their own mixed offsprings, the importance that religion had in Europe, the wars and divisions over the two branches of Christianity, made this too important a matter to be ignored

even for the sake of commerce[8]. Thus, for the Portuguese, religion was of primary importance, for the British, it became important secondarily, as a dilemma to be dealt with.

FACTORS LEADING TO GROUP-IDENTIFICATION

From the year 1600 to 1790, the mixed marriages and irregular alliances occurred and the offsprings of such marriages were treated as English in all respects. In 1784, the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.) included the following appeal in its Mission Report :

> "The Society has received information that there is a considerable number of children born annually in the British Settlements in the East Indies, of fathers who are European and mothers who are natives... the fathers of these children being usually soldiers, sailors and the lower order of people, too often neglect their offspring and suffer them to follow the caste of their mothers...; if a christian education were bestowed upon them, their manners, habits and affection would be English, their services of value in the capacity of soldiers, sailors and servants, and a considerable benefit would accrue to the British interest in India..."[9].

Thus at this time, the British attitude was that these mixed offsprings were useful and they encouraged their socialization into British life and culture.

The Anglo-Indians as a separate entity were born out of an important transition in the style of life of the British

in India, which occurred in the beginning of nineteenth century. The British in the early years started, as traders, established themselves in small settlements with the permission of Indian rulers. They accepted mixed unions and the offsprings of these unions and accepted Indian culture as suitable to Indians and parts of it, as suitable for themselves. However, in the beginning of the nineteenth century, they became rulers and reformers despising Indian culture, affirming racist ideology and practising racist policies[10].

Besides, the Eurasians were becoming numerous and thus threatening shortly to outnumber the Europeans in the Company's employ. The opening of the Suez Canal, facilitated the way for both the men and women of Europe to come to India in increasing numbers. The coming of the English women especially completed the establishment of a color line : the attachment of a decided stigma to marital and extra-marital relations with Indian women and strong social discrimination against the children born of such unions[11]. On the occasion of granting of the Charter, it was provided that they should be readmitted to employment under the Company. But they were no longer permitted to fill the more desirable posts. These were filled directly from England[12].

The dilemma of Anglo-Indians lies not so much in being of mixed Indian and European ancestry, but lies rather in their unique life-history as a people, first very much thought of as members in the society which accepted them and then this society around them changed, and finally, they were initiated into their own identity as a separate social entity by the development of racism.

They developed a communal identity as a response to repressive measures enacted by the East India Company. Indeed, their alienation from the ruling race was not something, the Anglo-Indians welcomed, but as it was imposed from above, it had to be endured. By the time of 1919 Reforms, they evolved into a well-recognised and endogamous group. On the other side, their socio-cultural set-up and deep-rooted disdain for Indians did not let them try to merge into mother's community. The Britisher wouldn't mix with them and they in turn had a distaste for Indians, an attitude they imbibed from the Britishers[13]. Indians in turn, with their strict laws regarding caste, were not eager to accept Anglo-Indians into their highly stratified society. They also saw the Anglo-Indians as lackeys of the British.

Community identification stems from shared experiences, culture, ideals, race and language. It entails inter-

dependence, common goals and a sense of "we" within the group. As a consequence of alienation from both British and Indian society and sharing as they did, culture, ideology, race and language with other Anglo-Indians, a sense of group identification emerged. Growing 'community consciousness' was signposted by a number of incidents which included a move for community definition and hence recognition and community's submissions to the various commissions, that came to India to work out a policy for increasing self-government. The Anglo-Indians hence, came to view themselves as a distinctive community whose connecting bond was Western culture and dual European and Indian racial ancestry[14].

RITES-DE-PASSAGE

The way of life of a people has a historical continuity which gives it certain characteristics. The Anglo-Indian way was considerably derived from Europe in general and England in particular, though adaptations to the social environment within which they lived, was inevitable. Much of the cultural content was consciously derived from the 'White' sources[15]. However, cutting through the bond of European origin have been the sharp edges of economic and social differences. There are different levels of living in the community and the manifestation of values and symbols of the

whites seems to vary from level to level[16].

Their rites-de-passage reflects their allegiance and self-identity, both formed form the British culture. In none of these, even a trace of any cultures of India is found.

Among the Anglo-Indians, marriage is exclusively dependent upon the choice of the individuals concerned. Actually, the parental consent is not much taken into consideration. Normally, parents agree, though they may not approve of the match. It is important to note that just like them, the British parents rarely use their authority in influencing their children's marriage[17]. This of course is owing specifically to the 'courtship period', where opportunity is available to select the partner of one's own choice. Most of the oppertunities for mate-seeking are through social gatherings and also through circle of friends. Pre-marital courtship or 'dating' is a general course to take before marriage. The courtship patterns are in line with those of their European fathers, among whom kissing as a courtship pattern is an essential aspect during this period[18]. Other courship behaviour which is tolerated is holding hands and putting their arms around each other in public[19].

The Anglo-Indians practise monogamy. Faith in Christianity had given rise to strong belief, both in word

and in action, that marriage is a permanent relationship between one man and one woman, indissoluble, `until death do us apart'[20]. Their marital prohibitions too are in accordance with the patterns of the English people who can marry relatives, not falling in the category of the same blood. In Western tradition the first cousin is related to them in the second degree and second cousin in fourth. More specifically speaking, among anglo-Indians, marriage is forbidden within the first and second degrees of relationship.

`Engagement' is an important course of action leading to marriage, which brings forth the `role' or patterns of reciprocal behaviour, between the fiance and fiancee. Generally, the formal announcement of engagement was made at a `simple' and `homely' social gathering organised by the girl's parents[21]. However, most times among the British, engagement means, the boy placing an `engagement ring' on the third finger of her left hand. The ring alone is simply a public declaration of an intention to marry, and a means of discouraging the attentions of other men. The wedding may follow within a few days, or perhaps not for a year or two, and if the girl changes her mind in the meantime she normally returns the ring[22]. This is where the Anglo-Indians are different. They generally have a gathering of some sort

on the occasion, because occasions like these provide a time
to gather together and reaffirm their "communityness"23.

Marriage rites among Anglo-Indians are specifically
religious and symbolise the sacramental bonds of marriage
Thus Church-Weddings are the most common. Among the Anglo-
Indians the bride is dressed in a long, elaborate, white,
wedding gown, and a bridal veil is also worn by her[24]. This
is similar to what the English bride wears for her
wedding[25]. The arrival of the bride is welcomed by the organ
playing usually, the hymn : 'Here comes, the bride, all
dressed in white'. The normal procedure is for the bride to
be formally 'given away' by her father or guardian. He leads
her into the church, where the bridegroom, attended by his
groomsman, or 'best man' (an unmarried friend), is already
waiting. The bride too, is attended by the girls or young
unmarried women called bridesmaids. The bride and bridegroom
stand together before the clergyman, and after the father
has declared that he gives the woman to be married to that
man, they declare the 'marriage vows' - taking each other as
wedded wife and husband, for better or worse; and the man
declares to her 'with this ring I thee wed' placing a plain
gold ring on the third finger of her left hand. The
procedure as described above among the Anglo-Indians, is
followed exactly the same way among the British[26].

An old English post-marital tradition is that when the bridal couple come out of the Church, Confetti, a modern substitute for corn (indicative of woman's fertility and the achievement of material prosperity) is thrown on them. This is also practised among the Anglo-Indians[27].

After the ceremony, all usually go back to the bride's home, where the 'wedding cake' and the 'drinking of a toast to the happy pair' is the most outstanding feature of the occasion[28]. The bride makes the first cut into the wedding cake and small pieces are served to persons present there. Last but not the least among the marital practices was, 'carrying the bride over the threshold' while entering their new house just after the party. This has a wide prevalence in the European countries, especially Britain.

In England, it has long been customary for the body of any person, who has died to be enclosed in wooden coffin, which in then buried[29]. Generally, the churchyard was the burial ground for the parish. This is the common practice among the Anglo-Indians too. In England, since 1885, cremation too has become very common, once it was declared permissible[30]. Not so among Anglo-Indians though. Among the English people for funerals, it is customary for the coffin to be carried away from the house in a special vehicle called a 'hearse' provided by the 'under-taker', who is paid

to make all the funeral arrangements. The coffin is carried by friends from the hearse to the grave, followed by relatives and other friends in a slow procession. The funeral ceremony among the Anglo-Indians is also observed in the same manner. Wearing black clothes on the day of death to burial is common among the English, so it is among the Anglo-Indians.

STYLE OF LIVING

The idea of a distinctive 'Anglo-Indian' way of life is probably a myth more than a reality[31]. They vary a great deal as to tastes, interests, values, income, education, occupation and such other cultural and social attributes. The differences are mostly regional and also socio-economic. Yet, because they have a common heritage of language, religion and various elements of western culture, and because there is a common bond of self-identity as Anglo-Indians, certain cultural uniformities have also developed so that generally speaking, an Anglo-Indian "sub-culture" with all of its variations, is in many ways distinguishable from the Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Parsi culture.

The furnishings of Anglo-Indian homes can be said to symbolize a western style of life. The physical features of such homes are by no means uniform, varying according to the educational and income levels of the occupants, their tastes

and interests. Among the middle class or lower class, there is seen an effort to maintain the 'near English' look, such as by way of furniture, there is usually an old rickety table, a cot or two, some equally rickety benches and very often some wooden boxes[32]. In many houses, old blackish heavy chairs, dining tables and hat stands are very common. In some families old pianos are also seen[33]. As one might expect, middle and upper income families generally reside in houses or apartments that are comfortably spacious and at the same time having the essential amenities for modern living. The decor and furnishings bear the earmark of western and in particular British, interior styling : there is the ubiquitous over-stuffed living room furniture, mahogany or oak tables, floor coverings that may have been fabricated in an European mill, all commonly intermingled with furnishings of indigenous origin.

Wall pictorials displays often include portraits of the occupying family, or other relatives, sentimental religious pictures or inscriptions, photographs or drawings of familiar Indian or European landscapes, portraits of Indian and British notables such as Gandhi, Churchill or even the British Royal family. The homes of the well-placed Anglo-Indians, were not only comfortable, but in many ways, gracious. The expensive furnishings, the cut-glass and

silverware, the battalion of servants were part of the pattern of such houses. In fact, the carpets, the silverware, the cut-glass decanters and the whisky, wine and brandy glasses would be almost priceless today.

Anglo-Indians are thoroughly conditioned to Western food preferences and drinking-dining behaviour. The kind of food they eat, methods of food preparation, and the style of food consumption definitely show the influence of western way of life.

As commonly found in Indian houses, many middle-class Anglo-Indian houses have their kitchen in the rear portion. In many bungalows, it is constructed some distance away from the main building and connected to it by a covered passage[36].

Since the techniques and methods of every-day cooking is blend of Indian and Western features, the kitchen paraphernalia also reflects it. A stone slab for pounding known as 'Pata', a round iron plate used for making unleavened bread are common in their kitchen. There is also arrangement for baking, this arrangement is very Western. An interesting observation made by Gaikwad is that :

> "a common complaint of Anglo-Indian women who have been to England recently, is that they do not get the pounding stone for preparing spices, or 'dekchi' a narrow mouthed pot for cooking lentils"[37].

In an Anglo-Indians home, the common Indian way of sitting on the floor for eating is not followed. Food is taken at the table. In fact, dining table is a common feature in almost all houses. Those who cannot afford chairs, have benches or wooden boxes that are used for that purpose.

As a general rule, they are non-vegetarians. They have no taboos against the consumption of beef. pork, fowl or fish. Yet, the influence of Indian culture is apparent in their acquired taste for Indian 'curries' and domestic 'sweets' as well as their extensive consumption of rice or food products made with a rice base. Breakfast was essentially English i.e. porridge, eggs, fruits and coffee among upper class and upper middle class[38]. In middle class and lower class families, substantial items of Indian food like 'parathas' are taken with tea or coffee, at the time of breakfast[39]. Lunch was essentially Indian for all, with the upper class having an elaborate menu. In some homes, after the soup, there was the usual curry and rice, vegetable and other fruits or a sweet afterwards. Dinner was somewhat along the English pattern : roast, stews and pudding[40].

Knives and forks are very common among upper class and spoons are commonly used by all, irrespective of class. Artifacts used in the consumption of food tend to resemble

those of Western peoples. In the middle-class, these include servicing dishes, proper cups and saucers, porcelain plates and cutlery.

Table manners likewise show the influence of the West. At regular meals within the home, middle class Anglo-Indians almost invariably sit on dining room chairs at a dining table, often at pre-arranged places for members of the family or invited guests. The behavioural aspects of food consumption -- the proper way to use a knife, fork or spoon; or the acceptable way to serve others -- resemble the European style of eating. In fact, the traditional Indian practice of eating solely with one's hands without benefit of table utensils, is socially unacceptable, and for some downright offensive[41]. These behavioural patterns also create a cultural and psychological obstacle that actually makes difficult intimate interaction between Anglo-Indians and Indians who follow the traditional mode of food consumption.

However, the early morning tea seems to be part of the British cultural legacy, just as soup is usually an introduction to the evening meal. Liquor and wine is also very common among Anglo-Indians.

SOCIAL CLUBS AS MEANS OF ENTERTAINMENT

There is a widespread tendency for the people such as Anglo-Indians in countries especially like India to identify with their own groups or communal association and often exclude from membership or participation, those who represent a different community. The social club was one such means to maintain exclusiveness. The example for the Anglo-Indians was of course set by the British-in-India.

The British clubs grew in numbers and a rigid social code was enforced. Members of other communities including the Anglo-Indians were squeezed out. British commercial life was rigorously graded. Only those who were above the shop-assistant class could enter the clubs. This kind of snobbery projected itself in varying degrees into the Anglo-Indian social milieu. Thus the real raison d'être of the early clubs was the defensive psychological armor they afforded against the hostile attitudes and sometimes discriminatory actions of British42. One of the first of these organizations was the East Indian Bengal Club of Calcutta. Anglo-Indian Railway Institute too occupy a special niche in the Anglo-Indian social life. The Senior Institute, the 'Inster'as it was called was usually due to the presence of the community especially where they were employed in large numbers.

These clubs provide facilities and an appropriate setting for social gatherings and organized or unorganized recreation. These provide facilities for tennis, billiards, swimming, dancing, dramatic performances, musical programmes and such games as "housie"[43]. The clubs usually had a very fine-boarded dance-floor[44]. They had at least one super-band, and most times, music and dance went on till the small hours of morning. Each of these also used to have an excellant bar. Club-life of such kind is the scene in British society of that time too[45].

Anglo-Indians are ardent racing fans, finding in horse-racing an exciting spectacular sport and an opportunity to satisfy their gambling interest[46]. Friends and relatives often gather in homes for card-games, dancing etc. The house-party is a popular recreational activity, especially, for young adults. More so, because the rules of behaviour in these parties may be less rigid or formal than in institutionalized settings, or because less expensive activities are involved, dances in houses have a wide appeal. Round the year, there are many special balls such as May Queen Ball, New Year's Ball, Easter ball etc., organized by the Anglo-Indian associations[47]. Thus it is observed that dancing is a regular feature of the socio-cultural life of Anglo-Indian.

Intellectual interests play a minor part in the leisure time of most Anglo-Indians[48]. Their social clubs do not usually have extensive library facilities, but there may be displayed popular magazines and possibly a few books of light fiction, especially traditional detective stories. Here as a point of departure we can take into account an important fact. The Anglo-Indians emulated the British-in-India. The latter in most ways had carried the European social life to India from home and superimposed it upon the Indian life[49]. However, these British-in-India were largely 'low Europeans'[50], though they tried to project a false aristocracy[51]. They were not well read, nor were they men of taste. The absence of extensive library facilities is contrary to the social clubs in England, where compulsorily, in each club, there was a library and a writing room too[52].

Group singing of popular and sentimental songs - invariably western in theme and music is also a favourite form of informal recreation, among the Anglo-Indians who gather in the spirit of good fellowship. During Christmas and Easter, in the evenings there was, usually much community singing, around the piano, an adjunct of practically every Anglo-Indian home[53].

ATTIRE AND SPEECH

Consonant with their cultural orientation, Anglo-Indians usually wear western attire. Often, the men wear "bush" shirts of Indian style, but never a dhoti. This is also owing to the climatic factors. The youngsters wore shirts, coats, stiff collars overlapping the coat with a bow-tie and boots or shoes. Women wore frocks or skirts and blouses of different cuts[59]. The 'Sari' is extremely rare among Anglo-Indian women. It is thus observed that, the dress of the Anglo-Indian woman is conspicuously different from that of her Indian counterpart where as the dress of the Anglo-Indian man is not so different from his Indian counterpart[55].

Anglo-Indians pride themselves on being the principal repository of the English language in India. In its institutional form this repository is the Anglo-Indian schools employing English as the medium of instruction. Throughout their long history as minority, they learned their "father tongue" but were indifferent to their "mother tongue", an indigenous Indian language.

Nevertheless, their social experiences did not actually parallel those of the British and of the Britis-in-England; hence it is not surprising that certain linguistic

deviations occurred, especially in modes of speech. The English spoken by them is dialectical[56]. The distinctive style tended to set them apart from both the British or the English-speaking Indians. These speech forms came to be known prejoratively as 'chee-chee', a mincing pronuciation of English words or phrases[57]. They are known to speak in a metallic falsetto with a curious sing-song accent. In the Kolar Gold Fields in South India, many drop the 'n' and 'g' suggestive of early British influences[58]. It is not pidgin, the strong influence of English education in the Anglo-Indian schools sees to that. Nor is it a patois, since it is universal in India and not confined to a particular district[59].

The term Anglo-Indian might conjure up a mental image of a people with an intriguing mixture of British and Indian customs and beliefs, whose religion is a blend of elements of Christianity and Hinduism and whose social structure shows peculiar adaptations to Indian society mixed with vestiges of British society. But such a picture is almost totally false. In only one characteristic i.e. physical appearance, do they show a blending, ranging from those whose appearance is indistinguishable from the British through all variations to those indistinguishable from other Indians. But culturally, such a blending is not evident for they are almost totally western in culture[60]. While it has

been true that, "mixed bloods of India were socially ostracized by both the Indian and Englishmen",[61] the Anglo-Indians are not torn within themselves, i.e.pulled on one side by western culture and on the other by Indian culture[62]. They accept and are committed to the culture they have, which is a British-derived culture. Thus they very much have a clear self-identity about who they are and what their culture is.

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CHAPTER - 6
CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

At the end of the study, we would like to say that 'conversion' is not necessarily defined in one way, it has varied meanings depending upon the group which undergoes it. The most common use is to see the psychological view of religious conversion, thus meaning, 'the re-orientation of the soul of the individual, deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved[1]. The notion of conversion in this sense includes the ideas of a sudden and complete transformation and appears to be largely a reflection of the Western Christian experience. It does not explain the experience of most converts to Christianity in a non-Western cultural environment.

Analysing the conversion process among the first three communities, it is seen that though conversion appeared to be the same among them all, there are major sociological differences. For the Syrian Christians, the 'conversion' meant the process whereby people opt out of one's religious community and join another.

Malayalees so to say, had ample opportunity - more so than people anywhere else in India to have foreign contacts

and thus to train themselves in the field of accommodating foreign innovations. In fact, one gets the strong impression that the single most important factor in Kerala society, during the middle ages, was the influence exerted by foreigners who came to the area by sea.

But on the other hand, while a change of religious fellowship for the Chuhras does not necessarily signify an inner change or transformation, it does suggest a certain initial level of dissatisfaction -- a restless people seeking for something better. They had experienced a 'pariah status' and were therefore positively inclined to Christianity, as it seemed to offer them a way out of their oppressed condition. So for the Chuhras, 'conversion' meant a means to assert a new identity, a palpable declaration that association with the old community was somehow negative compared with identification with a new community. Thirdly, 'conversion' from the point of view of the tribals was a change involving the transitional beliefs. Robin Horton has written about this viewpoint with regard to African region and has explored the relationship between social change and developments in African cosmology[2]. The world of the lesser spirits was especially appropriate in communities which was comparatively isolated and dominated by subsistence farming. However, when these communities became increasingly exposed

to the wider world and, as communications improved, people gradually began to feel the need for more satisfactory systems of 'explanation', prediction and control[3]. Similarly speaking among the Oraons, the attention paid to the lesser spirits slowly shifted to a greater focus on the character and cult of the Supreme being. Notions of a Supreme being were more highly developed in Christianity, as compared to the Oraon animism. Besides, Christianity afforded a new and more effective world view which better equipped the Oraon villager to cope with the problems and challenges of the wider world. Owing to this reason, there was mass conversion among them.

The fourth community under study is the Anglo-Indians. Their difference in this regard from the other three communities is that they are natural Christians, born out of British-Indian miscegenation. Christianity for them meant as another aspect which distinguishes them from the other Indians'. They, in fact see no unity whatsoever between themselves and the Indians, they say that the only thing they have in common with the Indian Christians is 'sharing the ballot boxes'. So everything Indian is for them 'heathen'[4].

At the end of the study, we would also like to draw out the differences between 'culture' and 'social structure' by

invoking Clifford Geertz' definition of the two :

> "On one level is the framework of beliefs,
> expressive symbols and values in terms of which
> individuals define this world, express their
> feelings and make their judgements; on the other
> level, there is an ongoing process of interactive
> behaviour, whose persistent form we call social
> structure. Culture is the fabric of meaning in
> terms of which human beings interpret their
> experience and guide their action; social
> structure is the form that action takes, the
> actually existing network of social relations"[5].

I have analyzed the intricacies of culture in my study.

Studies can also be made of the Christians as they exist in

the Indian social structure; their integration or separation

from the other social groups. Besides , a study can also be

made of what conversion to different religious faiths means

for the 'dalits' or 'outcastes' in the Indian society, and

what is the effect of conversion for each group.

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