

## RELIGION AND INFLUENCE OF MISSIONARIES ON SOCIO-CULTURAL LIFE OF TRIBAL IN SUNDARGARH DISTRICT

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**Abstract:** India is secular country composited by multi-religious groups of populations. The Preamble of Indian constitution says we the people of India, having solemnly resolve to constitute India into a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic and to secure Justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. Based on these all religions have its own scripture and symbols to worship; its own ritual and particular ways of worshipping to God. Many thinkers/anthropologist viewed on religion differently according to their study and understanding. The ideologies of each religion are separate or somehow related, but rendering service to mankind is a service to God, is believed by all religions. There are some religious groups who sacrifice themselves throughout their life by doing social welfare services for poor, needy and destitute people, with the ultimate expectation of receiving heavenly reward after its death. The change must take place by rendering religious social welfare services or social services which may be considered as reformation or rebuilding of life. The change will be on social, education, religious faith, thought and attitudes or in rituals etc.

**Key words:** concept and view on religion, kinds of religious formula, Indian rural religion, contribution of missionaries into different sections of reformation and rebuilding of tribal life and possibility of tribal cultural existence in future.

**Introduction:**

God is pervasive, omnipotent and omnipresent He does not confine to a particular state, region, race, religion, community or groups. Therefore, there is nothing to say that a particular religion is false or true. Only difference is that the process or methodology of worshipping and believing from one another. Where there is fear there must be a religion. In a universe different race, creed and religious populations are living in different parts of the world's continents. The religion units people into one platform and create its separate unique identity. Without religion there will be no social control, therefore, religion is considered to be an agency of social control. The religion creates unique faith on God or super natural power. All religion has its own scripture and describe differently on Gods and its creatures. The ultimate aim of religion is to receive heavenly reward from God after death of human being. All religion believes giving of reward and punishment to human being is the duty of God. Hence, each and every religion needs development and welfare services of its own community.

**I. Meaning of Religion:**

Religion is one of an important social institution which control human behavior from evil acts. There are several religions in Indian society those are Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism (Jewish religion) Zoroastrianism and tribal religions. Many people say religion is a Dharma. In sacred Vedas of the Hindu, Dharma is born of truth or God, beneficial to people, accepted by good people, it helps a person to act ethically as it guide, inspires and helps him or her to follow the right path of conduct in life and avoid the path leading to immorality and perish. Dharma protects a person who follows it. If we analyze the definitions of religion then it could be found three important components. 1. Belief in the supernatural or of God, 2. It has specific symbol like flag, Om, cross, crescent moon and star, fire, wheel etc. 3. Specific rituals. Besides these there are many characteristic of religion they are as such; it is universal, belief in supernatural power, specific concept of God, special emotions like love, sympathy, prescribed religious action, specific symbols, own kind of place for worship, special religious associations, list of Do's and Don'ts, own mythology, scripture etc. On 7.11.1952 Sri Shridi Sai Baba in his message said, no man can live without religion, it is the vital part of his life. It is the living water which no person can afford to miss. It is the soul's nourishment. It is the gateway to the higher and better life. It is the discarder of ignorance. In

other hand religion is the supreme integrating and unifying social force in human society, because the religion regulates moral norms and values which are essential for the maintenance of the social structure. These stimulate the individual to control the actions of self and others and through which order is perpetuated.

## **II. Thinkers views on religion:**

With regards to religion there are many thinkers viewed in different ways. Marxist slogan “religion is the opiate of the masses” as a general proposition. Freud and his followers placed the root of religion in the unconscious. Thus individual’s idea of God is modeled after one’s father; God therefore, is nothing else but an exalted and sublimated father. William James also believe that the “religious attitude of individual originated in the unconscious and manifested itself in the conscious side of human mind, which he compared to an island of human consciousness floating upon the limitless ocean floor of the unconscious.” The other meaning is the religion entails an attitude of submission to and dependence on God through whose mercy the petitioned favor may be obtained. There are numerous definition defined by thinkers, the most essential definitions are as follow. According to W. Green religion as “a system beliefs and symbolic practices and objects governed by faith rather than by knowledge, which relates man to an unseen super natural realm beyond the known and beyond the controllable.” H.M Johnson defined “religion is more or less coherent system of beliefs and practices concerning a supernatural order of beings, forces, places or other entities.”

## **III. Objectives of Study:**

1. To understand the importance of religion in human society.
2. To know the forms of religion in Indian context.
3. To understand the influence of religion towards tribal society in Sundargarh district.
4. To know the future trends/status of cultural behavior in the tribal society.

## **IV. View on origin of religion:**

There are different theories have been developed by the early anthropologists which says religion in different way. Among them the evolutionary theory and functional theory are most common. Whereby the evolutionary theory of religion includes animism and naturism, but true aim of

religion is to establish the phenomena of sacred and profane in the society. There is no particular date and year of the origin of religion. Besides these there are many thinkers who viewed on religion differently. Among thinkers David Hume, Max Muller, and Giddings, Spencer and Tyler, Robert Ranulph Marett, W. Roberson Smith, Durkheim etc. are most popular thinkers on religion. Some says religion is a creation of man, some say religion originated primarily in ghost fear, or religion is consisted primarily of institution and practices and totemic is the very core out of which religion developed. Therefore, the origin of religion cannot be traced to a single source. The beginning of religion is as old as the human consciousness. There is no primitive society which was without a religion. It is fact that the men everywhere and always have developed religion. According to Tyler and Spencer, the idea of the soul is central in religion.

#### **V. Kinds of Religious formula:**

The author P Gisbert in his book fundamentals of Sociology mentioned there are three kinds of religious formula. They are **Monotheistic** which signifies the object of religion is a personal God as in Judaism, Christianity, Islam and some branches of Hinduism and **Polytheistic** admits many Gods and when no essential distinction is made between God and other things, so that every objects is a part or manifestation of the same divine is called **Pantheism** or **monism**. The formula of monotheistic and polytheistic says there is only one God, the other things are his creature, whereas the formula of monism is everything is God, all things are manifestation or parts of Him. But religion among preliterate people or early civilization usually intermingles with such phenomena as superstition, animism, fetishism, magic and totemism which may be known as forms of religion.

#### **VI. Constitutional provision:**

India is a secular country in which multi-religious population lives in different corners of the nation. The Part-III fundamental right of Indian constitution article 25 speaks about the Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion. Article-25. (1) Subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this Part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion. In the same way article 26 speaks of Freedom to manage religious affairs. In this connection article 26 included Subject to public order, morality and health, every religious denomination or

any section thereof shall have the right—(a) to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes; (b) to manage its own affairs in matters of religion; (c) to own and acquire movable and immovable property; and (d) to administer such property in accordance with law.

### **VII. Status of Indian rural religion:**

It is a country wherein 80% of people live in rural society with illiteracy or low literacy rate. The impact of religion on rural population is remarkable. Among rural population it is found that they are more religious than the educated mass. The influences of education diminish the influence of religious consideration. As most of the rural people are uneducated, they foster all kinds of superstition and dogmas, religious in nature. In social life of the village many believe in ghost, witches, good and bad omens that are operative in the communities. In fact the Indian populations are more religious than other countries population; therefore, in the word of Sir Hocourt Belter the Indians are essentially religious as European are essentially secular. Religion is still the alpha and omega of Indian life. Oscar Lewis found Indian religion essentially practical and realistic. Other thinkers agreed that the Indian are religious minded people.

Around 60% of Indian rural villagers are farmers. There may be various causes which have the effect of giving great importance to religion in the life of rural people in India. As in India multi-religious people are living the main aspect of Indian rural religion are the worship of Gods and Goddesses, sacrifices for them, belief in ghosts, various kinds of Sanskara or rituals and religious festivals. Indian rural religion includes the worship of Gods and Goddesses, worshiping of plants, trees, and animals, some beliefs in ghosts and witches, good and bad soul, faith in dream, religious consideration in dietary, habits, consideration of good and bad omen, superstitions in natural phenomenon (solar and lunar eclipse are believed to be the causes of catastrophes) assumptions concerning the supernatural (heaven and hell, rebirth, salvation etc) and moral beliefs.

### **VIII. Types of Religion in Sundargarh:**

According to the 2011 census if we look at then, there are eight types of religious groups of populations are living in Sundargarh district. They are Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Budhist,

and Jain, other religion and non-religion group. The Hindu stands first position with the number 15, 32,352 which makes 73.2%., Christian number is 3, 85,011 which makes 18.39%. The Buddhist and Jain are numerically lowest with the total number of 710 and 721 which makes 0.03%. The number of Muslims is 71391(3.4%), Sikhs are 5713 (0.27%), other religions are 89986 (4.3%), and non-religions are 7553 (0.36%).

### **IX. Missionaries work in Gangpur Pargana:**

Sundargarh district is the most tribal dominated district whereby more than 50 % of populations belong to Scheduled tribes. According to 2011 census the present status of Scheduled tribes' population is 50.7%. Before advent of Christian missionaries, the tribal of Sundargarh district were living their traditional life by worshiping plants or trees, Gaon devata or Gaon Khunt or so called them are known as Sarna or animism. An introduction of Christian religion brought varieties of changes in the tribal life. Christianity is the world's largest and most popular religion grew out of the teaching of Jesus Christ, a Jew born in 4 B.C Jesus had 12 disciples out of whom five spread his message in the world. One of his disciples St. Thomas migrated to south India. He spread Christianity there, made many converts, who are called Syrian Christians. Francis Xavier landed in Goa on May 6, 1542 followed by him protestant missions came to India in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This was considered as an era of Christian conversions and social welfare activities by various denominations of Christian missionaries groups. The Christianity, through its missionaries of various sects, has rendered unique social welfare services to the people of India especially the lower castes and tribes.

In Gangpur state (previous name of Sundargarh district) the Christian missionaries landed at Kesramal in the year 1908 with the purpose of teaching about Jesus Christ. It has already celebrated its centenary. The first Christian Priest was Fr. Ban Severin SJ arrived to Kesramal on 12.05.1908 and continued its work till 31<sup>st</sup> December 1908, followed by him Fr. Louis Cardon SJ, 1908, Fr. Sylvan Gros Jean SJ 1909-1915, and Fr. Edward Allary SJ 1909-1918, worked as Parish priest. The chief motive of Christian missionaries was to teach about Jesus Christ and rendering social welfare services to the people belonging to lower castes and tribes in Gangpur state in terms of giving them food, cloths, medicine and education. Among services the imparting of education was considered to be an important service which could change the

thinking, attitude and behavior of the rural tribes. Followed by the Kesramal catholic church following churches were established chronologically as parish, they are Hamirpur Rourkela sacred heart catholic church (1918), Gaibira St. Ignatius catholic church (1922), Jhunmur St. Mary catholic church (1925), and Kusumdegi our lady assumed into heaven catholic church (1929). After these the current status of Roman Catholic Church in the Rourkela diocese are 43.

#### **X. Education and social life:**

An introduction to education by Christian missionaries in tribal pockets is an important gift for tribal populations of Gangpur Paragana, in Sundargarh district. The Christian Missionaries took initiatives to reform and rebuild the tribal life style through formal and moral education. In the year 1903 the first mission primary school established at Kutenia village by the Christian Missionaries of Chhota Nagpur region. In the year 1908 the boys primary school established at Kesramal, and in the year 1940 the first mission High school established at Hamirpur Rourkela, in this way at present there are 148 Odia medium primary schools, 24 M.E schools, and 14 High schools are available in the Sundargarh district those are established by the Christian Missionaries. To look after all these mission schools it has a Catholic Board of Education (CBE), who understands the day to day problems of all mission schools in the district. Apart from Odia medium schools there are four to five English medium school have been established by the Christian missionaries who has separate management and administration. If we look at the current census 2011, then the total literacy rate of Sundargarh district is 73.34%. The male literacy rate is 70.69% and the female literacy rate is 57.37% in Sundargarh district. The average literacy rate in urban areas is 85.3% while that in the rural areas is 66.6%. Other hand there are 10, 62,349 populations belong to Scheduled tribes out of which 13, 42,322 are literate. The tribal male literacy nos. is 7, 50,147 and 5, 92,175 are female rest 2, 79,973 tribal are illiterate. There is no doubt in Sundargarh district both Govt. and mission schools are there, but most of the tribal are literate from the mission schools.

The focus given in missionaries schools are on quality of education and character building. The students discipline is next to an important focus given by the mission schools. Besides these, too many students passed out from the mission schools are doing jobs in banking sectors, education sectors, national and state level civil services, LIC, railways, police, govt. secretariat, and also

different well known companies such as Steel Authorities of India Limited, OCL, MCL, NALCO, BHEL and other well known companies etc.

## **XI. Influence of Christian religion on:**

**1. Thought and attitude:** The Christian religion has impacted on tribal thought and attitude. Tribal have changed their traditional thought to modern rational thinking. There is no more traditional thinking among tribal on living. They adjust themselves with the changing world community. There are some tribal who became popular in the international figure by their creativity efforts. With the influence of religion majorities of tribal tries to develop their developmental attitude in social, political, education and economic sectors.

**2. Change in living and community life:** The important change that has been observed in the tribal communities of Sundargarh district is change in living and community life. In every community there is provision of selecting village Panch who could look after the community people like a ward member. The intra community conflict or inter community conflict is solved by the village panch. They collect different contribution required by the church for community development or church development. This is a kind of religious informal care and welfare system. Their role in decision making is considered as an important decision within the Christian community. Village management depends on the village panch. Beyond this individual housing pattern and living style is far developed than the past. They belief on ideal living is the best living in the society.

**3. Change in belief system:** The tribal worship and belief to Gaon devata or Gaon shree, fear ghost, worship plants and also the belief in dream, super natural power, witch, superstition, totemic etc since from the ancestors. The belief system in tribal society somehow changed due to the positive influence of Christian religion and an impact of education. The traditional belief system is still continued in some of the tribal pockets where there is less domination of education and literacy rate and influence of Christian religion, even the religion has direct or indirect influenced to change their cultural practice such as using of blood during purification of family, rituals (birth and death), worshiping of Gaon devata etc.



**4. Change in tribal festivals:** The tribal observes varieties of festivals in different occasions. Tribal song and dance performed differently in different festivals and occasions. There are numbers of festivals observed by the tribal of Sundargarh that are gradually vanished from the tribal society. The festivals are as such Baisakhi or Jet Jatra, fagun, nuakhai, kartik Puni, Pus Puni, Kadoleta, depawali, Gumaha Puni etc. The observations of these festivals are left by the majorities of tribal with the influence of Christian religion. The present Christian tribal observes Nua khai and cattle festival as per the date fixed by the church; Christ Mass and Easter are current major festivals for the Christian tribes in Sundargarh district.

**5. Behavior and acculturation:** The Christian religion is not only responsible for changing of tribal thought, attitude and belief, but also it has influenced tribal to accept the new culture as per the changing contemporary society. Keeping different kinds of domestic uses, behavior (greetings one another), marriage system, dress pattern etc are all taken place by the influence of religion and education along with modernization and westernization. With regards to marriage the tribal marriage system is like a western culture, in which they get marry in church and followed by barat system is applied. Regarding the dress pattern the tribal are using no more traditional dresses, the boys wear full pant and salwar suit for girls.

**6. Educational change:** Before Christian Missionaries, the tribal populations of Sundargarh district particularly in the Gangpur state were living in dark with minimum education. The availability of education institutions were rarely found in the tribal pockets. Similarly awareness level on education was very less. In the year 1903, the first mission primary school was established in the village of Kutenia under Rajgangpur Block. In the year 1908 the Kesramal boys' primary school was established by the Christian missionaries that provided opportunity to tribal for education. Gradually trends of opening mission school increased in different corners of the district, and till date 148 nos. of mission primary schools has been established in Rourkela Catholic Diocese. Both male and female are equally educated among tribal. The tribal of Sundargarh are well aware on education and male and female children are given equal importance for higher education.

**7. Change in tribal economy:** The land cultivation and collection of forest produces are the primary source of tribal economy livelihood of Sundargarh district. The joint effort of education and Christian mission the tribal economy has been changed from the cultivation to doing services in Govt. and private sectors. The large numbers of tribal are doing jobs in Govt. and private sectors which changed their economic status and living standard. The standard of living among the Christian tribal have been changed from the past. Those are jobless they do only agriculture occupation but collection of forest produces are rarely observed in some parts of the district.

**8. Change in political organization:** There are very less numbers of Christian political representative's leaders are found in the district. The tribal are sensitized and aware on the present political field. As there is increasing of different social and political issues, the Christian tribal have formed various associations/Sangha to tackle the problem within their jurisdiction. The associations are district, deanery and parish level Mahila Sangha, fathers (aba) Sangha in parish level, youths' association, Diocese level Catholic Sabha (a Layman association), Deanery and Parish level Catholic Sabha etc. The primary functions of all these associations are to solve different religious, as well as social, political and economic issues among the Christian community and tribal as a whole. These are purely layman associations having its own executive body and constitution. The functions are implemented within the purview of its constitution and jurisdiction. Besides these associations, there are tribes base or Jati based associations functioning within the tribal society, they are popularly known as Jati Samaj association, e.g. Munda, Oraon, Kisan and Khadia Jati Samaj association or Parah. The role and functions of Jati Samaj association is to protect and preserve their ancestors' culture for future generation and tribal identity. The decision taken by the Jati Samaj is accepted and honored by the church.

## **XII. Future trend/status of tribal culture:**

In fact there is a great contribution of Christian missionaries towards the reformation and rebuilding of tribal life including social, religious, education and economic spheres. The tribal are unique in its cultural identity. The tribal culture does not match with the culture of other caste. In all over the world they are unique in its culture, dialect, political organization, religious faith etc. these entire component present the identity of tribal culture. The influence of Christian religion towards tribal social life is highly appreciable. Basically an introduction of education institution in the tribal pockets, have changed the tribal thought, belief, ideology and economic

position. The belief system is reformed and developed rational thought within the tribal society. The trends of acculturation in the tribal society is on going with the changing world community, which may hamper the status of tribal culture, so far example: tribal dialect is an important component that reflects its identity, but due to modern education, and influence of urbanization, westernization the language identity in educated mass is not found. Besides this some of the cultural practices has been Christianized which is needed as per the changing society, if such trend goes on in the tribal society then there will be chance of demolition of tribal culture and ethnicity.

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