

## Religion Influence of Missionaries on Socio-Cultural Life of Tribal Society

**Binay Kumar Bimal**

Associate Professor

MMC, Patna University

### Abstract

**Introduction:** A tribe is a group of people who live and work together in a shared geographical area. A tribe has a common culture, dialect, and religion. They also have a strong sense of unity. The tribe is usually headed by a chief. A tribal society is a group of tribes organized around kinships. 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. **Objectives:** To assess the religion influences Religion Influence of Missionaries on Socio-Cultural Life of Tribal Society. **Method:** The primary as well as secondary method use of data collection. **Conclusion:** 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.

**Keywords:** *Tribal, Culture, Society, Caste, Religion*

### Introduction

Indian history has witnessed various changes in society. Most of it encompasses the caste system followed religiously in our society. Apart from the social structure in the cities, there were other societies that flourished on the sidelines known as tribal societies. These societies did not follow the rules of Brahmins and had their own set of customs and rituals. Furthermore, they were also not divided into subclasses or caste, like other religions. These tribal societies were usually groups of people who had kinship bonds. These tribes were mostly involved in primary activities related to agriculture or animal husbandry. Some of them are also hunter-gatherers. Out of these tribal societies few tribes were also nomadic. This meant that these tribes or groups of people move from one place to another and search for livelihood or other reasons. The settled tribal groups on the other hand had land and animals which they owned jointly as a tribe. The Tribe leader divided the animals and lands according to the needs and requirements of his people. These tribes were spread all across the country. Most of the tribes lived in forest Hills desert and farfetched places. There are even shreds of evidence of tribal clashes amongst themselves as well as societies of other religions.

The tribes continue to keep their freedom and culture separate from the rest of us. On one hand, they kept their societies separate from us but on the other hand, they were also

dependent on us for their needs. We also traded in many handmade articles and wares from them. This led to a gradual change in both societies. Present-day historians have begun to use such oral traditions to write tribal histories.

### **Types of Tribal Society in India**

The Khokhar tribe in Punjab was really influential in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Later on, the Gakkhars became much more important. Their chief was made a mansabdar by Akbar. The Multan and Sind were dominated by the Langahs and Arghuns. The Balochis were another big and influential tribe in the northwest. The Shepherd Tribe of Gaddis lived in the Himalayas. The far north-eastern part of the subcontinent, too, was entirely dominated by tribes like the —Nagas, Ahoms, and many others.

In several areas of modern Bihar and Jharkhand, Twelfth-century Chero's chiefdoms had also emerged. Raja Man Singh, the renowned Akbar's General, in 1591, attacked and defeated the Cheros. They had taken a big amount of spoils but were not entirely suppressed. Under Aurangzeb, the Mughal army invaded many of the Chero fortresses and subjugated the tribe. The Mundas and the Santals were among other important tribes who lived there, as well as Orissa and Bengal.

The highlands of Maharashtra and Karnataka have been home to Kolis, Beards, and many others. Kolis also existed in many parts of Gujarat. Large tribal societies of Koragas, Vetars, Maravars, and many others were even farther south. The big tribe of Bhils was scattered across the whole western and central regions. By the end of the 16th century, most of them had settled.

Farmers and even some of them were zamindars. However, many Bhil clans remained hunter-gatherers. The Gonds have been found in large numbers all across modern-day Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

The Banjaras were the most important nomadic traders. Their caravan was commonly called *tanda*. Sultan Alauddin Khalji used Banjaras to transport grain to town markets. Many pastoral tribes have been rearing and selling animals, like cattle and horses, for the rich. Different small peddlers also travelled from village to village. They've made and sold goods such as ropes, reeds, straw mattresses, and coarse sacks.

### **Modern Tribal Society**

Varna-based society and culture and tribal people have constantly interacted with each other. This interaction has caused both kinds of cultures and societies to adapt and change. There were a number of different tribes, and they took on a wide range of livelihoods. Over a span of years, many of them merged into a caste-based society. Others, however, have rejected both the caste system and conservative Hinduism. Some tribes have established extensive provinces with well-organized systems of government. They have thus become powerful and influential. This pulled them into conflict with larger, more complicated states and empires and evolved into the modern tribal society.

In a universe different race, creed and religious populations are living in different parts of the world's continents. The religion unites 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.

### **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, Budhism, 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.

### **Types of Religion in Bihar:**

According to the 2011 census if we look at then, there are eight types of religious groups of populations are living in Bihar and tribal population (1.28%). They are Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, and Jain, other religion and non-religion group.

### **Social 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 supernatural 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."

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 discarding 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.

### **Rational of the Study:**

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.

**Objectives of Study:**

1. To understand the importance of religion in human society.
2. To know the forms of religion in Indian.
3. To understand the influence of religion towards tribal society
4. To know the status of cultural behavior in the tribal society.

**Method:**

**Population:** Out of twenty nine (29) STs, Santal is the most populous tribe, having a number of 367,612, constituting 48.5 per cent of the total ST population of the State. Oraon and Kharwar are the second and third largest tribes, having a number of 120,362 and 100,735 respectively. Two other major tribes in the descending order are Gond and Munda. Along with Santal, Oraon and Kharwar, the five STs constitute 86.8 per cent of the total tribal population. Eight tribes, Bedia, Ho, Mahali,....upto Lohara having population in the range of 2,572 to 13,993 account for another 8.1 per cent and the remaining sixteen tribes, along with the generic tribes constitute the residual 5.1 per cent of the total tribal population of the State. Twelve tribes have below 1000 population. Of them, eight tribes are less than 500 in number. At district level, more than three fourth tribal population of Banka, Jamui, Kishanganj, Araria and Madhepura are Santal, closely followed by Saharsa (72 per cent) and Purnia (65 per cent) districts. Though Oraon are primarily concentrated in Purnia and Katihar districts, they have their highest proportion (70 per cent) to total ST population in Supaul district. While Kharwar have their maximum concentration in Bhagalpur district, Gond in Siwan district followed by Bhojpur and Kaimur (Bhabhua) districts. Munda have their highest concentration in Katihar districts but they constitute only 4.3 per cent total tribal population of the district.

**Sample:** Tribal people of Bihar those are influences of missionaries

**Source of Data Collection:** Primary and Secondary method.

**Analysis and Discussion**

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.

**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.

**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.

**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 belief 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. 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.

**Education and social life:**

An introduction to education by Christian missionaries in tribal pockets is an important gift for tribal populations of Bihar. The Christian Missionaries took initiatives to reform and rebuild the tribal life style through formal and moral education. 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.

**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 Bihar district is change in living and community life. The intra community conflict or inter community conflict is solved by the village. 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. 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).

4. *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.

5. *Educational change:* Before Christian Missionaries, the tribal population's district of Bihar particularly in the state was living in dark with minimum education. The availability of education institutions were rarely found in the tribal pockets. Both male and female are equally educated among tribal. The tribal of district of bihar are well aware on education and male and female children are given equal importance for higher education.

**Change in tribal economy:**

The land cultivation and collection of forest produces are the primary source of tribal economy livelihood district of bihar. 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 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.

#### **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. 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 tribe's base based associations functioning within the tribal society.

#### **Conclusion:**

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.

#### **Reference**

1. *Dr. Ramnath Sharma, Rural Sociology, Rajhans Press Publications, Dharma-Alok, Ram Nagar, Meerut (U.P)*
2. *Dr. Satya Pal Ruhela, Indian society structure and change, Shubhi publications, 15, A.K.D Towers, Sec-14, Gurgaon 122001, Haryana-India*
3. *Dun, Joachim Dung. "Religion and Influence of Missionaries on Socio-Cultural Life of Tribal in Sundargarh District." International Journal of Physical and Social Sciences 7.9 (2017): 1-11.*
4. *Goody, J. (1961). Religion and ritual: the definitional problem. The British Journal of Sociology, 12(2), 142-164.*
5. [https://censusindia.gov.in/tables\\_published/scst/dh\\_st\\_bihar.pdf](https://censusindia.gov.in/tables_published/scst/dh_st_bihar.pdf)
6. *J.L. Kachroo, General Sociology, cosmos boookhive (p)ltd, corporate office:831, phasev, Udyog Vihar, Gurgaon (Haryana)-122016*
7. *Kingsley Devis, Human society, Surjeet Publications, 7-K. Kolhapur Road, Kamal Nagar, Delhi-110007, India*
8. *Kumar, G. S. J. (1996). Religion and society. MD Publications Pvt. Ltd.*
9. *P. Gisbert, Fundamentals of Sociology third edition, Orient Longman Private Limited 17, Chittaranjan Avenue, Kolkata 700072*
10. *The constitution of India, As modified up to the 1st December, 2007, Government of India Ministry of Law and Justice*
11. *Vidya Bhusan, D.R Sachdeva, An Introduction to Sociology, Kitab Mahal, 22-A, Sarojini Naidu Marg, Allahabad.*
12. *Warren, Louis S. God's red son: The Ghost Dance religion and the making of modern America. Hachette UK, 2017.*