



A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CONVERSION NARRATIVES AMONG DALITS AND ADIVASIS IN KANDHAMAL, ODISHA

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

By challenging stereotypical understandings of conversion in Kandhamal – such as the assumption that Christian growth is driven solely by Dalit conversion, or that Panas (Dalits) are inherently Christian while Kandhas (Adivasis) are Hindu – this paper uncovers the ground & unspoken realities of converts' life situation in Kandhamal, Odisha. Through an analysis of conversion narratives from both groups, it compares the nature, causes, and consequences of Dalit and Adivasi conversions.

Keywords: Conversion, Kandhamal, Panas, Kandhas, Hindu, Christian

Religious conversion is a highly sensitive act in today's communally charged atmosphere. In India, it is interpreted primarily in three ways. The first view sees it as subversion – an atrocity, an act of adharma, and a conspiracy to divide the nation along religious lines. Proponents of this view link conversion to national security and cultural integrity, arguing that proselytization is a tool to destroy Indian culture and destabilize the polity. The second perspective views conversion as enlightenment, where individuals seek to “save” others by sharing their convictions. Their aim is to challenge intra-religious domination by creating a singular religious identity, often framed as extending a global “Kingdom of God,” one soul at a time. The third view interprets conversion as a protest against oppression, both religious and secular. From this standpoint, it is an aspiration for spiritual and social betterment – a form of liberation from exploitative systems and a path toward true emancipation. (“Rethinking Religious Conversion” 2008)

Kandhamal, a district in Odisha that experienced communal riots between Hindus and Christians in 2007–08, serves as a prime example where all three interpretations hold some truth. It cannot be denied that conversion has not been taken place in Kandhamal, a fact clearly reflected in the Mohapatra Committee report on the Kandhamal crisis. The report states: “The violence in Kandhamal was the result of concentrated discontentment prevailing among the people since long. They relate to conversion, re-conversion; land-grabbing and non-maintenance of land records; and fake certificate issues” (“Kandhamal Lies Nailed,” 2009). No doubt, there are hardly any records of conversion in Kandhamal officially (may be due to the in-force of Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967). But, informal conversions by both *Dalits* (*Panas*) and *Adivasis* (*Kandhas*) have been taking place, driven by the active presence of both Christian missionaries and the VHP. On one hand, Christian missionaries claim intra-religious domination as the root cause of conversion. On the other hand, the Sangh Parivar views these as forced conversions and therefore attacks converted Christians, especially *Dalit* Christians, without understanding the divergence of conversion within and between *Dalit* and *Adivasi* (tribal) communities. Instead of understanding the actual nature of conversion happening in Kandhamal, the VHP attributes the growth of the Christian population—from 75,597 in the 1991 census to 117,950 in the 2001 census – solely to *Dalit* conversion to Christianity. Conversely, in some villages, Christian-run NGOs have concentrated their services among *Dalits* (SCs), excluding *Kandhas* (STs) and OBCs. In such a scenario, it may seem as though almost all *Adivasis* in Kandhamal are Hindu and all *Dalits* are Christian. But in reality, not all *Adivasis* are Hindu, and not all *Dalits* are Christian; there are *Adivasi* Christians (*Adivasis*) and Hindu Harijans (*Dalits*) in Kandhamal. Therefore, *Dalit* conversion is not the only cause for the growth of the Christian population in Kandhamal. Conversion is happening among both *Dalits* and *Adivasis*. Communalism is not a result of *Dalit* conversion to Christianity; rather, it is a reason for it.

Based on an ethnographic study conducted in Kandhamal between November 2013 and March 2014, this paper presents findings from the author's PhD thesis at JNU. The research initially sampled four villages across the Baliguda and Tumudibandh blocks,

specifically selecting two communally affected villages (Barakhamba and Kutamgarh) and two non-affected villages (Mundasai and Malipada). While the study initially focused on these, it expanded to cover 10 villages to pursue relevant cases. Employing the snowball sampling method, 50 individuals who had converted or re-converted were interviewed (Mishra, 2015). Among them, 33 were *Dalits* and 17 were *Adivasis*, challenging the premise that Christian population growth in Kandhamal is solely due to *Dalit* conversion, while highlighting that *Dalit* conversion rates are higher than those of *Adivasis*. For detailed comparison, this paper analyzes three *Dalit* and three *Adivasi* conversion cases.

By comparing the conversion narratives of *Dalit* and *Adivasi* communities, this paper examines the realities of religious conversion in Kandhamal. The paper is structured in three parts: the first outlines the socio-economic conditions of *Dalits* and *Adivasis* in Kandhamal; the second explores the views of both *Dalit* and *Adivasi* converts; and the final part provides a comparative conclusion on the conversion experiences of these two groups.

I

The present Kandhamal district was carved out of the erstwhile Boudh-Phulbani district and consists of two sub-divisions: Kandhamal and Baliguda. It is located in the northern extremity of the Eastern Ghats, bounded by Boudh district to the north, Rayagada district to the south, Ganjam and Nayagarh districts to the east, and Kalahandi district to the west. The name of the district, 'Kandhamal' is derived from its major inhabitants, the *Kandhas*. According to the 2001 census, the district had a total population of 648,201, of which 336,809 were Scheduled Tribes (STs) and 109,506 were Scheduled Castes (SCs), with the remainder belonging to other communities. The district is predominantly tribal. Numerically, the *Kandhas* constitute the largest tribe, comprising nearly 90% of the total ST population, while the *Panas* (*Dalits*) make up nearly 80% of the total SC population in Kandhamal. Besides these SC and ST communities, other castes present include *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Sundhi*, *Karan*, *Kulta*, *Gauda*, *Mali*, *Teli*, & *Sunari*.

Being Dravidian, the *Kandhas* inhabited this hilly tract long before the advent of the Aryans. Following the fall of the Harappan culture, the ancestors of the *Kandhas*, along with other inhabitants, moved towards the Gangetic valley and established settlements at the foothills of the Himalayas. Over time, they migrated to different parts of the country. One section of the tribe separated and settled in Odisha via the Vindhya Mountain range. In this context, a folk song exists: "Himalaya ra andh, binja giri ra *Kandha*, Athe jelen Kandhen, Basalya kalasur mandh" (Ratha, 2010). It is believed that the *Kandhas* migrated from Madhya Pradesh and entered the Kalahandi district, where they divided into two groups. The branch that took a southeast direction likely proceeded to the Belghar region in the southwest of the Kandhamal district (Ratha, 1993). The *Kandhas* first established their foothold in Sapangada, located in the Tumudibandh block. *Kandha* legend tells that prior to their settlement in this district, the land was occupied by the 'Kurumas,' a peace-loving community domiciled in Paberi, Ghodapathar, Linepada, Purangada, Kainjhar of Khajuripada, Chakapad, and Tikabali blocks. After a minor skirmish with the *Kandhas*, the Kurumas were forced to leave this land, subsequently migrating to the neighboring districts of Ganjam and Daspalla (presently in Nayagarh district). Thereafter, Kandhamal became a stronghold of the *Kandhas*.

On the other hand, the *Panas* are the majority community among the non-tribal population of this district. In Kandhamal, they were originally brought by *Kandha* and Hindu kings to render service to their communities. Historically, the *Kandhas* held control over the total land of Kandhamal; therefore, they considered themselves Rajas (kings) and the *Panas* as their prajas (subjects) (Mohanty, 2008; Lingaraja, 2008). Initially, the *Panas* worked as wage labourers on *Kandha* lands and provided important links between them and the outside world. They assisted the *Kandhas* with tasks ranging from tilling land and clearing forests for cultivation to stealing children for human sacrifice (Bali). Due to this, they earned a reputation as a "criminal caste" from both British police and Hindus in neighboring villages. British Gazettes record that, in some cases, *Panas* were forced to provide their own children for Bali if they failed to supply others. Now, having abandoned this inhuman practice, the tribes still label this caste as a "criminal caste." These *Panas* are known as *Kandria Panas*, whose culture is similar to that of the *Kandhas*. Gradually, the number of *Panas* in the district increased with the migration of *Panas* from Ganjam during the Bhanja administration; these are popularly known as 'Odia *Panas*' in Kandhamal.

However, this social solidarity between these two worlds in Kandhamal collapsed, perhaps due to conversions during the post-1947 period, or the British "divide and rule" policy. The latter involved enticing the *Panas* with higher wages to clear forests for roads, buildings, railway projects, or paper industries. Other contributing factors included the introduction of new land relations that deprived the *Kandhas* of their traditional forest rights, the 1855 British policy establishing a Shiva temple that denied entry to the *Panas*, and the rise of a "babudom" (peons or clerks) among the *Panas*. In retrospect, all these factors cumulatively weakened the relationship between the *Kandhas* and *Panas*.

Bishnu Mahapatra and D. Bhattacharya (1996) argue that the *Kandhas* felt threatened once the *Panas* began interacting more within the market economy following British rule. While the *Kandhas* chose to avoid interaction with the British administration for most of the 19th century, the *Panas* increased their involvement. After independence, the *Panas* secured government jobs and became moneylenders using surplus money earned from business and employment. By 2008, 20% of the *Panas* had become landowners, with an average holding size of half an acre. As forest resources depleted and wild animals vanished, the *Kandhas* became dependent on the *Panas* for a regular supply of sacrificial animals to appease their "father gods and mother gods." A few *Panas* took advantage of their financial position to act as moneylenders, forcing the *Kandhas* to mortgage their land. Consequently, the tribal *Kandhas* lost their land to a few *Panas* (The Ugly Face of the Sangh Parivar). The *Kandhas* felt that the *Panas*, who were once their dependent ministers, could become landowners, thus viewing the *Panas* as exploiters and land

grabbers. However, it is not entirely true that the *Panas* became landowners solely by exploiting the *Kandhas*. It is also a fact that some *Panas* acquired land as gifts from *Kandha* kings, awarded long ago for their services and assistance in human and animal sacrifices. Nevertheless, it is true that the *Panas*, with support from both the state and the church, have been cornering the maximum benefits of constitutional reservations due to their educational and economic advantages. Furthermore, the *Kandhas* allege that the *Panas* conceal their Christian identity, claiming to be Scheduled Tribes (ST) or Hindu Scheduled Castes (SC) by producing forged certificates. The *Kandhas* fear that the *Panas* are poised to dominate them economically, politically, and culturally. Meanwhile, the emergence of the *Panas* as an assertive community has become an eyesore to upper-caste Hindus, not only in Kandhamal but also in other parts of Odisha. Consequently, stereotypes of the *Pana* as ‘betrayers,’ ‘cunning,’ ‘deceitful,’ and ‘exploiters’ have entered caste discourse in the region.

II

In the pre-British era, the solidarity between the *Kandha* and *Pana* communities in Kandhamal was remarkably strong, characterized by a distinct ruler-ruled relationship, with the latter being absolutely dependent on the former. With the advent of the British era, the *Kandhas* lost their traditional ruling position, along with their customary rights over land and forest, leading to a profound identity crisis. This loss likely fueled the *Kandhas*’ dislike for the British and Christianity. Conversely, the *Panas* began interacting with the emerging market economy under the British government. They grew closer to Christianity and its ‘civilizing mission,’ resulting in the conversion of many to Christianity. Observing the growth and development of these converted *Panas*, some *Kandhas* also began converting, looking to improve their own situations. This section explores the experiences of three *Dalit* converts and three *Adivasi* converts, conveniently selected from the 50 converts mentioned earlier, to develop a comparative understanding of their conversion experiences.

Narratives of *Dalit* Conversion...

Baanda Digal (Conversion due to suffering in riots)

Baanda Digal is a labourer belonging to the *kandria Pana* community. He identifies as a Hindu by birth, noting that his father, Gadru Digal, remained a devout Hindu until his death. Baanda’s spiritual life is a blend of traditional Hinduism and ancestral animism. He maintains that the two belief systems are deeply interconnected rather than distinct. For instance, during November and December, he observes *Manabasa Gurubara*, worshipping the Goddess Lakshmi just as other Hindus across Odisha do. Simultaneously, he plays a vital role in the *Podo Puja*, participating in the ritual buffalo sacrifice—a tradition attended by both *Kandhas* and *Panas*. His faith is rooted in the sacredness of the natural world, as he offers worship to the soil, trees, mountains, and animals.

Following the communal riots of 2007, he converted to Christianity along with his family. His decision was driven by the suffering he endured during the violence. He recalls that while his family was celebrating Lakshmi Puja between November and December, local *Kandhas* broke into his home, destroyed his crops and rice, and set his house on fire. Fifteen days after the riots, he embraced Christianity, citing the *Kandha-Pana* ethnic conflict as the primary reason for his conversion. Today, he and his family are active church members and have gradually moved away from Hindu traditions. He is firm in his faith, stating that he would rather die than return to Hinduism. He finds great happiness and peace in his new life, claiming that as Christians, his family avoids “evil works” such as drinking, creating fear, or cheating—behaviors he associates with his former environment

Dhruba Digal (Conversion due to suffering in riots)

Dhruba Digal is a *Kandiria Pana* who wears many hats: he is a farmer, a small business owner, and an Ayurvedic practitioner. He converted to Christianity following the 2008 communal riots. In his village of Barakhamba, both the *Kandha* and *Pana* communities live side by side. While all the *Kandhas* in the village identify as Hindu, the *Pana* community is divided: only 5% consider themselves Hindu, while the remainder have gradually converted to Christianity. Reflecting on his past, Dhruba notes that before 2008, he identified strongly as a Hindu. He actively participated in religious traditions, such as visiting temples for worship and attending the *Podo Jatra* and *Kandula Jatra* festivals. He also regularly celebrated Lakshmi Puja. However, the 2008 riots marked a turning point in his life; after his house was destroyed and burnt by Hindu and *Kandha* groups, he chooses to leave his original faith behind. Despite being a Hindu *Pana*, he was affected by the riots just like the Christian *Panas*. When he asked the Hindu leaders of his village for the reason behind his suffering, they replied with sympathy, admitting it was a mistake. Some leaders even told him that *Panas* needed to be killed first and helped later. This mistake stemmed from the wrong assumption that all Scheduled Castes (SCs) were Christians. However, the reality in his village during the 2008 communal riots was that 90% of *Panas* were Christian, while 10% were Hindu. Internally, the relationship between Christian *Panas* and Hindu *Panas* was not good; Hindu *Panas* wanted Christian *Panas* to come to the temple, while Christian *Panas* wanted Hindu *Panas* to come to the church. On the other hand, the Hindu *Kandhas* viewed both Christian and Hindu *Panas* as enemies. In fact, their hatred toward the *Panas* was not based on religion, but rather on ethnicity. In the eyes of all *Kandhas*, all *Panas* are thieves and cunning by nature, and they believe they are being exploited by them. He says that in the 2008 riots, they took the opportunity to punish the *Panas*. While the communal riot occurred along religious lines, the exploitation took place along both ethnic and religious lines

Dhruba stated that while he might have overlooked what happened to him during the 2008 riots, the reaction of Hindu leaders following his victimization as a Hindu was intolerable. This led to his decision to convert to Christianity. He added that his choice was influenced by the significant population of Christian *Panas* in his village. After converting to Christianity, he is no

longer exploited by the Hindu leaders of his village because he has stopped visiting them. He feels liberated from Hinduism, yet admits that he has not personally changed; he remains the same person he was before. According to him, his conversion was solely a reaction to the injustice he experienced within Hinduism.

Sanjeev Digal (Conversion due to social discrimination and ‘Caste Certificate’)

Sanjeev Digal is a *Kandria Pana* from Barakhamba village, where he currently serves as the Nayeb Sarpancha. His father, Chakradhara Digal, passed away as a practicing Hindu; therefore, Sanjeev was a Hindu by birth. However, he chose to change his religion in 1993 at the age of 17. At that time, the village was home to both Hindu and Christian communities living side-by-side. Sanjeev’s decision was influenced by his observation that the conduct of the Christian community was particularly commendable compared to others. Since there was no communal tension during that period, he grew up participating freely in both Hindu and Christian rituals and celebrations.

However, he says the real problem started when he applied for his caste certificate and the then-sarpanch of his village refused to sign it. The sarpanch told him that because he attended Christian functions, he was not Hindu. This denial caused 17-year-old Sanjeev Digal great mental distress. He thought, ‘If I am not considered Hindu enough for a certificate because I attend Christian functions, then I will not remain Hindu.’ Consequently, he stopped attending Hindu functions and celebrating Hindu festivals, and began going to church with the intention of becoming a Christian. Over time, he converted and is now a Christian.

According to the former Sarpanch, there was a specific reason why he refused to provide his signature. His brother, Dayanidhi Digal—who remains a Hindu to this day—contested the 1993 Sarpanch election against the incumbent, Nilambara Patra. Sanjeev claims that Nilambara Patra campaigned by exploiting caste and religious sentiments. Patra belonged to a dynastic family, and in that region, the *Kandhas* viewed themselves as royalty. Because of this perceived status, Nilambara Patra secured the support of the *Kandha* community. Throughout the Kandhamal district, including in Sanjeev’s village, there is a deep-seated prejudice held by the *Kandhas* against the *Panas*. Sanjeev Digal believes it was this alliance between Nilambara Patra and the *Kandhas* that ultimately led to the Sarpanch’s refusal to sign.

Sanjeev Digal provides another reason for his conversion to Christianity, rooted in his family’s history. Approximately 50 to 60 years ago, his family enjoyed a prosperous lifestyle and ran a successful business. They were wealthy enough to lend money, paddy, and rice to the local Odia and *Kandha* communities (predominantly Hindus) using their land as collateral. According to Sanjeev, when these borrowers were unable to repay their debts, they would legally register their land in his family’s name. His family then cultivated this land for many years. However, when Sanjeev was 16 years old, the then-Sarpanch, Nilamber Patra, forcibly seized the property. Sanjeev claims the Sarpanch, supported by other Odia and *Kandha* locals, confiscated their harvests and barred the family from further cultivation. Sanjeev attributes these actions to the deep-seated jealousy the Odia and *Kandha* people felt toward the *Pana* community because of their economic success. Feeling alienated by a Hindu-dominated social environment that he perceived as hostile and discriminatory, Sanjeev decided to convert to Christianity.

He admits that although he converted to Christianity on his own, it wasn’t his choice at the time—he forced himself into it. However, he gradually realized that the Christian environment is highly conducive to a good life, based on love, service, and justice. He is now proud to be a Christian.

Experiences of *Adivasi* Conversion...

Lokesh Pradhan (Conversion for Self-Development)

Lokesh Pradhan is a high school teacher. He shares that his father, Sharshu Buda, identified as a Hindu and remained so until his death. Lokesh has two brothers; one is still Hindu, while the other recently converted to Christianity following Lokesh’s own conversion to Roman Catholicism in 2010. Crucially, Lokesh’s conversion was done legally. However, he explains that while he is legally a convert, he is not yet an institutionalized Christian. The church has not fully accepted him because his marriage did not take place in a church, and he has not yet received Holy Communion (*Divya Prasad*), a requirement for full integration into the faith. Despite this, he visits the church daily and prays regularly at home.

Before converting, he decided to abandon his former way of life (which was largely Hindu) in 2005, as he urgently needed a new path. He stated that the people of his earlier religion did not understand the difference between good and bad, and were so conservative that they refused to listen to new ideas. He mentioned that irrationality is deeply rooted in his former culture; for example, they would not allow certain people into their home, including Brahmins. As an educated person, he did not believe in treating others differently. Furthermore, he was against all kinds of mantras and *tantras* because many animals are killed for these practices, and in the end, they prove to be irrational. While in his former religion, he was psychologically disturbed because it failed to provide any moral encouragement, which was his primary reason for leaving it.

Once upon a time, he was a member of the RSS and claimed to know about their forced conversions, stating he could provide a hundred such examples. Furthermore, he mentioned a problem with the attitudes of RSS members, saying they view people merely as numbers and do not show respect to others. These were the reasons he decided to convert after leaving the organization.

He says he converted to Christianity after observing others leading good lives following their conversion. He explains that he was drawn to the communal worship, as it resembles practices from his previous religion. Psychologically, he is doing well and believes he can now provide a better future for his children.

Eshak Mallick (Conversion to deal with humiliation)

Eshak Mallick is a auto driver who converted to Roman Catholicism to marry a Scheduled Caste (SC) Christian girl. According to Eshak, he fell in love with the girl and wanted to marry her, but neither his family nor hers supported the relationship. Consequently, he secretly brought her to his home. Upon discovering this, his father, who was Hindu at the time, beat him and disowned him, telling him there was no place for him in the family. Denied refuge, Eshak and his wife went to his uncle's house, located 10 km away. His uncle also rejected them, saying, "Our intention was for you to marry an *Adivasi* girl. Why did you marry someone outside our caste and religion?" Forced to leave again, Eshak took his wife to a nearby village close to his father-in-law's home to settle down. While he was working and living there, people from his father-in-law's village spotted them in the market and on the road. Eventually, Eshak's mother-in-law came to see her daughter. Distressed by their poor living conditions, she brought them to her home and provided them with a small, separate room to live in, situated a short distance from her house.

Eshak stayed there and went to work every day. Whenever he left for work, his wife would go to her mother's home. Because he disliked this, they frequently had conflicts. One day, his wife asked him, "Please do not go to work on Sunday. Let's go to church." Although he refused at first, she finally succeeded in taking him to church. Initially, he refused to enter the church because he felt uncomfortable with Christianity, so he would sit outside every Sunday. Gradually, he started interacting with the people attending the service, and eventually with the priest, listening to his words. Later, he began reading the Bible. One Sunday, his wife asked him to convert to Christianity before going to church, urging him to confess his sins to the priest and receive Holy Communion. He did exactly as she asked the following Sunday. After converting, he continued to live at his father-in-law's house. He noted that after his conversion, all the members of his father-in-law's house treated him much better than they had before.

He stayed in his father-in-law's house for a year, visiting his village occasionally in between. During this period, a communal riot broke out. After the riot, when he visited his village, his parents asked him to return home. Though surprised at first, he later returned with his wife. Afterward, he learned that his Hindu father had suffered greatly during the riots because of Eshak's conversion to Christianity. Furthermore, his entire family had converted to Christianity due to the suffering caused by the riots. Currently, Eshak is very happy with his family.

Jhikiri Majhi (Conversion due to exploitation in the name of culture)

Jhikiri Majhi is a born *Kandha* who has been exploited by his *Kandha* brothers due to their traditions. He converted in 1948. According to him.

"I was within the Kandha tradition and then I had converted to Christianity. The reason of my conversion is the exploitation faced by me in Kandha tradition. At that time, people of Kandha tradition forced the people to drink alcohol near the celebration of goddess earth. My father had died very early. At that time, I was a small child and hence I was ignorant about the Kandha culture. That is why, I was not worshipping either earth or pig or tree. Kandha people put pressure on me. When I said to them that I do not know anything about worshipping, they did not listen to me and threatened to beat me"

Jhikiri's mother took him to his maternal uncle's house. During his stay, his ancestral property in his village was seized by the *Kandha* people. Seeking justice, Jhikiri approached certain village leaders who were Christians and, at the time, held significant power. His second motive for the meeting was to express his desire to convert to Christianity. He believed that by becoming a Christian, he would no longer be required to follow *Kandha* worship practices. When he presented his situation, the leaders replied, "We know there is no salvation for those who practice idol worship. Your people are forcing you into it, but it yields no results; only Jesus can liberate you. We do not object to your wish; rather, we welcome you into the faith." From that day forward, Jhikiri began adopting Christian culture and eventually formally converted following his baptism. When he returned to his village as a Christian, his *Kandha* brothers drove him out. He sought help from the village Sarpanch, who called a meeting with the elders of the *Kandha* community. The Sarpanch told them, "It is because of your pressure that Jhikiri became a Christian. Stop troubling him immediately. If you continue, I warn you, I will have you all sent to jail." Following the Sarpanch's warning, Jhikiri was finally liberated from the exploitation.

III

The foregoing views of both *Dalit* and *Adivasi* converts demonstrate how communal riots often acts as the cause of conversion, though conversion is referred to be the reason of communal riots in the context of Kandhamal. In fact, some conversions of *Dalits* to Christianity in Kandhamal occurred due to ethnic tensions between the *Kandha* and *Pana* communities. Communal riots between Hindus and Christians provided an opportunity for *Kandhas* to attack Hindu *Panas*, masked as ethnic conflict. This attack was fueled by false propaganda claiming that "*Panas* are Christians and *Kandhas* are Hindu." The silence of mainstream Hindus regarding these attacks hurt the sentiments of Hindu *Panas*, forcing them to convert. They publicly stated that "they are ready to die for Christianity, but they will never return to Hinduism." Before converting, these Hindu *Panas* identified themselves as Hindus, despite following animistic traditions. They admitted that they were forced to become Christians rather than doing so by choice. However, after converting, they reported feeling relieved that they were no longer being used by upper-caste Hindus to serve vested interests. Overall, it can be concluded that the injustice within the Hindu social structure was the driving force behind some *Dalit* conversions to Christianity in Kandhamal. Furthermore, the testimonies suggest that other factors contributing to the conversion of Hindu *Dalits* include the better treatment by the Christian community, biased and orthodox Hindu attitudes, caste-based politics, and jealousy among Hindus regarding the progress of others.

On the other hand, the conversion of *Adivasis* leads to a similar conclusion. In this context, suffering during communal riots has become a major cause for conversion to Christianity. Often, it is the first generation that has suffered, subsequently leading to the conversion of the second generation. Besides these communal issues, the conversion of *Adivasis* to Christianity has brought forth many serious issues in Kandhamal. Firstly, the inadequacy of the Hindu religion in providing moral encouragement to the tribals (*Adivasis*) has been a factor. In Kandhamal, people traditionally associated *tantra* and *mantra* with Hinduism and considered those who practiced them as Hindus. These practices initially helped them solve their problems to a great extent. However, this eventually devolved into a profession solely focused on profit. Consequently, false *tantrics* emerged, offering fruitless results, and their exploitation became a cause for conversion. Secondly, a reason for conversion is the forced reconversion efforts by RSS members. This is highlighted by the views of Lokesh Pradhan, a former member of the RSS, who left the organization due to the use of force against innocent Christians with the intention of reconverting them. Thirdly, the pursuit of a better life is also a cause of conversion. Due to the government's failure to undertake developmental work in Kandhamal, and the success of missionaries in their civilizing mission, conversion has taken place. In fact, people do not put pressure on the government; rather, they simply join Christianity. Love is the fourth reason for tribal conversion. When an *Adivasi* Hindu boy falls in love with a *Dalit* Christian girl, both families often refuse to agree to the marriage. At this juncture, the boy may secretly bring the girl to his home, but he is driven out by his family for acting against their interests by marrying someone outside his caste and religion. Gradually, he comes under the influence of his wife and her family, leading to his conversion. In this connection, the rigidity of *Kandha* or Hindu culture is also responsible for conversion. Fifthly, tribal conversion to Christianity is characterized by initial uneasiness followed by gradual interaction and conversion, as reflected in the Eshak Mallick case. Sixthly, conversions to Christianity among tribes occur due to the absence of Hindu symbols and a Hindu 'civilizing mission' on one hand, and the assurance given by the Bible of salvation after death on the other.

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