

# Rethinking the Imagined Community: Changing Religious Identity of Tribes in Chotanagpur during the First Half of Twentieth Century

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## Abstract

This paper intends to study how the religious community is determined by the geographical expression and by the political boundary. In colonial Indian census, there was a category of tribal religion which disappeared after political freedom of India. All non-Muslim and non-Christian tribals were assumed as a Hindu in post colonial census. The assimilation of the faith of minority by the religious majority through the imagined political boundary or so called the national movement is part of my research endeavour. I will try to figure out how the political boundary became a determining force in reconstructing a religious community or how the faith of tribals was replaced by Hinduism. In this paper I will focus on two tribes of Chotanagpur i.e. Munda and Oraon. How the faith of tribal in general and the religion of Mundas and the Oraons in particular got changed through the concept of Indianisation will be the key point of discussion in this paper. It would be interesting to know how far the dominant majoritarian politics of Hinduism incorporated and assimilated the tribal faith into Hinduism through the 'imagined native religion' which perhaps was none other than Hinduism.

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*Index terms—*

## 1 Introduction

This paper intends to study how the religious community is determined by the geographical expression and by the political boundary. In colonial Indian census, there was a category of tribal religion which disappeared after political freedom of India. All non-Muslim and non-Christian tribals were assumed as a Hindu in post colonial census. The assimilation of the faith of minority by the religious majority through the imagined political boundary or so called the national movement is part of my research endeavour. I will try to figure out how the political boundary became a determining force in reconstructing a religious community or how the faith of tribals was replaced by Hinduism. In this paper I will focus on two tribes of Chotanagpur i.e. Munda and Oraon. How the faith of tribal in general and the religion of Mundas and the Oraons in particular got changed through the concept of Indianisation will be the key point of discussion in this paper. It would be interesting to know how far the dominant majoritarian politics of Hinduism incorporated and assimilated the tribal faith into Hinduism through the 'imagined native religion' which perhaps was none other than Hinduism.

According to Romila Thapar, "religious identity tends to iron out diversity and insists on conformity, for it is only through a uniform acceptance of the religion that it can best be used for political ends. The attempt is always to draw in as many people as possible since numbers enhance the power of the communal group and are crucial in a mechanical view of democracy." <sup>1</sup> In the early nineteenth century, it was still not uncommon for references to be made to "Hindu Christians or "Hindu Muslims" as distinct from those who were not native born or culturally indigenous to the Indian subcontinent. <sup>2</sup> Hindu came to be the concept used by people who have tried to give greater unity to the extreme cultural diversities which are native to the

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43 University of Delhi. e-mail: rizvisamar.rizvi6@gmail.com continent. Such efforts, even when they have involved'  
44 only one way of looking at different kinds of cultural phenomena in India, have almost invariably been part of  
45 some institutional, ideological, or political agenda. As instruments for drawing all of India together, the program  
46 behind each effort has sometimes been overt and explicit; at other times, covert and hidden; or even, albeit  
47 rarely, simultaneously conscious and unconscious. ?? Chotanagpur had witnessed the activity of many Hindu  
48 organizations like Hindu Mahasabha, Arya Samaj, Shradhanand Trust, Sharadhanand Dalitodhar Mission, Arya  
49 Pratinidhi Sabha and Bihar Navyuvak Society. ?? The Arya Samaj was established at Ranchi in 1894 primarily  
50 with a view of propagating Vedic Philosophy as propounded by Dayananda Saraswati. It arranged lectures  
51 and discourses through its preachers in some areas of Chotanagpur and people of other faiths were admitted  
52 into the Arya Samaj fold through shuddhi (purification). This purification ritual is resorted to by upper-caste  
53 Hindus affected by 'polluting' contact. But the Arya Samaj used it to reconvert-that is, they reinstated their  
54 "ex-Hindus" who had become Christians, Muslims, or Sikhs. ?? As institutional efforts to defend the old order  
55 or to reform it, many of these organizations became radically and self consciously "Hindu." Defensive, exclusivist,  
56 fundamentalistic, militant, or revivalist, their purpose was to "purify" the "sacred soil" from pollution and to do  
57 so by means of radical "reconversion" (shuddhi). Attitudes toward and ethnic or religious community not deemed  
58 to be properly Hindu, meaning not legitimately native to Bharat Mata became increasingly and intolerant, if not  
59 violent. ?? Babu Jagat Narayan Lal, wrote in the newspaper 'Indian Nation'.

60 The fact that Christian Missions have concentrated practically the greatest part of their immense resources and  
61 energy upon them should waken the Hindus community to a sense of its duty, and the fact that they have already  
62 trained and prepared a formidable army of native preachers for the 3 Ibid, 5-6 4 Sahay, K.N. (1981) 'The Hindu  
63 Impact on Tribal', in P. Dash Sharma, (ed)The Passing Scene in Chotanagpur ( Ranchi) 59 5 Jaffrelot,Christophe  
64 (2007) Hindu Nationalism, ??Delhi) 233 purpose makes it imperative that public-spirited Hindus and rich and  
65 large-hearted Hindus donors who love their religion and culture as deeply as their country should turn their  
66 attention to this great and urgent problem. The Hindu Sabha and Hindu Mission have been doing something.  
67 The All India Swami Shradhanand Memorial Trust, with its meager resources yielding hardly more than an  
68 income of a few hundred rupees per month has been persuaded to turn its attention to this question and it is  
69 some consolation to note that it has taken it up. But, what can its limited resources avail in face of the whirlwind  
70 campaign of Christianity.

71 The fact that in the district of Ranchi alone, nearly three lakhs of Oraons and Mundas have been converted into  
72 Christianity, that in one thana thirty-one thousand out of thirtyseven thousand Oraons have become Christians  
73 and in another fifteen thousand out of seventeen thousand have turned Christians and that the conditions of  
74 several other thanas of the district is also similar, should be enough to open the eyes of the Hindus. I hope  
75 the Hindu community and Hindu institutions of every denomination will wake up before it is too late to save  
76 the situation. ?? Labelling themselves Hindu, they saw themselves as defenders of Hinduism. These Hindu  
77 movements, in varying degrees, blended together nativist elements which are peculiar to many if not all, radical  
78 conversion movements and they did this with a particular kind of nationalistic fervour. 8 Hindu identity was  
79 defined by those who were part of this national consciousness and drew on their own idealized image of themselves  
80 resulting in an upper-caste, brahmanadominated identity. ?? In the Ninth Bihar Provincial Hindu Conference,  
81 Thebla Oraon moved the following resolution:

82 1. This conference is painfully conscious of the alarming progress of the proselytising activities of the Christian  
83 Missions in Chotanagpur, carried on and intensified with the aid of elaborate and well financed schemes offering  
84 inducements to the unwary aboriginal Hindus and records its empathetic opinion that a stage has been reached  
85 when all Hindu bodies regardless of their creed and complexion should collaborate and pool all their resources  
86 to counteract this move and stop this progressive decline of the Hindu population by every possible means at  
87 their disposal. 2. This conference directs the working committee of the Bihar Provincial Hindu Sabha to take  
88 the matter immediately in hand and also solicit the help and guidance of the All India Hindu Mahasabha on this  
89 issue. This conference directs the working committee to constitute a local sub-committee consisting of suitable  
90 persons to keep a close watch on the situation and advise the working committee in this matter.

91 3. This conference declares that all tribes inhabiting Chotanagpur be classified for administrative purpose  
92 under a common name 'Adibasi' who are and have always been Hindus. 4. This conference empathetically  
93 asserts that all special rights, privileges, protective laws and ameliorative measures calculated to benefit such  
94 tribes should be available exclusively to those who remain in the ancestral Hindu fold and retain their traditions.  
95 This conference further declares that these special privileges should not be available to those who have forsaken  
96 their ancestral faith. 10

97 So, the term Hinduism is not only religious but political also. The fact that there is no clear marker between  
98 what is religious and what is political (that is, nation) has been kept deliberating vague. This confusion has  
99 become wonderfully convenient in serving the many kinds of interests and purposes of chauvinisms which have  
100 arisen in the twentieth century. As a case of synecdoche, such obfuscation, sometimes crude and sometimes  
101 insidious and subtle, has been made to serve an imperialistic ideal giving a common name to everything that  
102 exists within ritual and sacred boundaries of "the Motherland" or "the Nation." 11 Anticonversion sentiments  
103 received a major stimulus from Savarkar's very far-reaching and influential definition of 'Hindu' in 1923 which  
104 uniquely combined 'Pitribhumi' and 'Punyabhumi' (i.e. fatherland with holy-land). Through a very effective  
105 appropriation of nationalism by Hindu majoritarianism, the indigenous origin of religious beliefs, practices, or

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106 institutions was made the supreme criterion for nationalism. It became easy to brand Muslims and Christians  
107 as alien and unpatriotic by definition, a charge particularly effective against Christians in the colonial era due  
108 to their religious affinity with the British rulers. ??2 Hindu nationalism and the conversion issue are intimately  
109 related. In his essay, *Hindutva*, Vinayak Damodar Savarka, defines a Hindu as a person who is Indian by  
110 ethnicity, national allegiance, and religious affiliation. ??3 This ideology crystallized largely in reaction to the  
111 proselytizing activities of Christian missionaries. Socio-religious reform movements such as Brahmo Samaj and  
112 revivalist Hindu Movements like the Arya Samaj were partly formed to cope with frequent aggressive religious  
113 propaganda. The latter initiated a Hindu conversion technique which was in fact borrowed from the Christian  
114 missionaries but shaped along the lines of a traditional ritual, called Suddhi. ??4 It cannot be denied that Hindu  
115 organisations made a determined and focused attempt to 'Hinduise' the tribals. Surprisingly, the activities of the  
116 Hindu missionaries among the tribals had by and large been ignored by all scholars. In fact some of them like  
117 S.L.Doshi have totally denied the proselytizing activities of the Hindus. Perhaps he was convinced by Gandhi  
118 according to whom, "Hinduism is the most tolerant religion because it is non-proselytizing." ??5 In a way Gandhi  
119 was supporting the concept that "Hindu is always born and not made" ??6 and it has nothing to do with  
120 missionary activities. A question then emerges that if a Hindu is always born and not made, and if Hinduism  
121 is not a proselytizing religion, then why was Arya Samaj established? What was the need of suddhi movement?  
122 Not only this, there are a number of movements proudly bearing the word 'Mission' in their titles. For example,  
123 Ramkrshna Mission, Chinmaya Mission, Divine Light Mission, and so forth. One of the publications of Chinmaya  
124 Mission about Shankracharya bears the title: *Shankara the Missionary*. 17 Furthermore, Sumit Sarkar has posed  
125 a very pertinent question that if Hinduism is not a proselytizing religion, then where did all the Buddhists of  
126 ancient India go? 18 Sarkar argues that from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onward, expansion of Hinduism directed  
127 towards the tribals became more organized through Shuddhi and paravartan. 19 Some Hindu ideologues like  
128 Gokul Chand Narang supported the Gandhi's understanding of Hindu missionary and proselytizing activities  
129 and said that Hinduism grew up without a rival. He argues that when it was flourishing, there was no other  
130 religion in existence. According to him, this fact and the general trend of Hindu doctrines account for the absence  
131 of a zeal for conversion and a regular system, propaganda or mission for proselytization. ??0 Hence, Narang  
132 questions the very existence of other religions such as, Buddhism, Jainism and for that matter all tribal faith.

133 The idea of a single and ancient religion gradually spread and solidified, becoming dominant and pervasive.  
134 Thus, it created a perpetuated two accompanying myths. Both of these myths were expedient, if not essential, to  
135 the continued political integration of India in colonial rule and both are no less expedient for the same political  
136 ends today. The very first one was the belief that Hinduism is a benign, "inclusivistic," and singular religion,  
137 epitomizing all that is eclectic, syncretistic, and tolerant in human behavior, doctrine, and ritual; and the second  
138 was the belief that Hinduism is a religion of majority and it represents the 15 Pattanaik, D.D. (1998) *Hindu*  
139 *Nationalism in India* (Delhi) 10. ??6 Mathew,C.V. (1999) *The Saffron Mission* ??Delhi) vast majority of India.  
140 Both the constructions had served to incorporate all indigenous population of India as being an integral part of  
141 Hinduism. ??1 For the construction of Hindu Nationalism the Sacred Books of the East from has also served  
142 as a textual foundation. This, particular Hinduism, constructed by Company's Orientalist pundits had inspired  
143 nationalist leaders from Gandhi to Nehru. ??2 The conversion of tribals into Islam and Christianity attracted the  
144 attention of Hindu organizations. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, one of the propounders of cultural nationalism  
145 and the leader of the Hindu Mahasabha, directed all his efforts to bring tribals into the Hindu fold. Savarkar  
146 wrote "Every person is a Hindu who regards and owns this Bharat Bhumi, this land from the Indus to the seas,  
147 as his fatherland as well as Holyland, e.i. the land of the origin of his religion. Consequently the so called  
148 aboriginal and hill tribes also are Hindus because India is their Fatherland as well as their Holyland of whatever  
149 form of worship they follow." 23 His enthusiasm towards the conversion movement helped in spreading of shuddhi  
150 movement in various tribal areas. The Shuddhi movement was not just a reconversion movement but also a  
151 movement against the Muslims and Christians. ??4 Theoretically the critique of shuddhi movement is not only  
152 on the basis of conversion of the followers of different faiths into Hinduism, but also the fact that the movement  
153 was based on the false assumption that the tribal populations that lived within the political boundary of India  
154 were Hindu before their conversion to Islam and Christianity. It ignores the existence of the tribals' own faiths.  
155 Through this they tried to redefine the history and the faith of tribals, and further imposed their own faith on  
156 the tribal community. Here, the dominance of the politically powerful communities over the less powerful ones  
157 is apparent. This thinking had clearly opened the space for the coercion of the tribal population. The motive of  
158 suddhi movement was to engage Hindus in missionary work for conversion.

159 An analysis of some of the primary sources sheds light on their methods and motives of these missionaries.  
160 There is evidence that they were not only using propaganda but also force for converting tribals to Hinduism. N.  
161 forcibly cut his Tiki and converted him into Hinduism. Charge sheet under section 341 I.P.C. against Chandrika  
162 Prasad and two others has been submitted and case is pending in the court of the Sub Divisional Officer, Latehar.  
163 No action has been taken against Chandrika Prasad to prevent him from carrying on his missionary work, and  
164 he is in fact still carrying it on". ??5 The First Information Report lodged in Balmuth Police Station was not an  
165 isolated case but there is more evidence which shows that Hindu Missionaries were using force to convert tribals.  
166 In a different case, the secretary of the Shradanand Trust, Pandit Dharmbir Vidyalkar along with the same  
167 Chandrika Prasad Singh, the prominent leader of Hindu Mahasabha of undivided Bihar, were named in a FIR  
168 for using force to convert tribals into Hinduism.

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169 "On the 22 nd of June a First Information Report was lodged against Pandit Dharmbir Vidyalankar, secretary  
170 of the Shradanand Trust, and against Babu Chandrika, at Chandwa police station by one Budhu Oraon on the  
171 ground that they had forcibly converted him to Hinduism. No action has been taken to preclude Pandit Dharmbir  
172 or Babu Chandrika Prasad from carrying on their missionary work". ??6 In both the cases there were no arrests  
173 or any action against the culprits suggesting the organized political power of Hindu missionaries. This forcible  
174 conversion was not a sudden reaction against Christianity but part of hatred campaigns which were carried out  
175 by the national and local level Hindu leaders over the time. V.D. Savarkar tried to fuel the 'Hindu sentiments'  
176 against Christianity and Islam. He said, "The Hindu catholicity of outlook and the accompanying tolerance has  
177 been a great asset, but now-a-days it is also showing the need for revision, especially in the face of hostile and  
178 pseudo-secularist forces who tried to exploit this virtue as a weakness. Time has come to make an effort to take  
179 back those who belong to this soil into Hindu fold." 27 These provocative thoughts of Savarkar had a disastrous  
180 consequence on the followers of other faiths. Forcible conversion started in many tribal areas and Chotanagpur  
181 was also not untouched by this practice.

182 Coercion was one of the methods of conversion adopted by the Hindu missionaries, which is unfortunately  
183 neglected by the historians in the case of Mundas and Oraons in the region prior to 1947. Apart from the  
184 evidence of coercion such as above, there is also evidence of the nature of propaganda work that was being  
185 carried on. A play in Hindi titled, "Hindu Ho Jaoonga" (I Will Become a Hindu), was published in Padre: How  
186 have I not made a true Christian of You? Yohan: If you had, then by now I would have had white as yours is.  
187 A pure Christian is white. If the skin is not white, then how can I be a pure Christian? Jesus Christ was white.  
188 A pure Christian should be white.

189 Padre: It is the will of God whether one is black or white.

190 Yohan: If it is the will of God to be black or white, then it must be his will that I am black. Lord Vishunu,  
191 Lord Rama and Lord Krishna are all dark. I am black, therefore I will be a pure Hindu. Oh! I have 'made a  
192 bad mistake. Being a koel (a black bird). How much honour a black koel Gets! The white egret which eats fish  
193 is always cursed as a murderer. Twenty years have passed, yet no white Christian has ever offered a daughter in  
194 marriage, nor is my houses like their bungalows. I have no motor car nor do I have money like they do. I call  
195 myself accursed that I have left the religion of my ancestors for this religion that does not give me anything. I  
196 am ashamed to call myself Yohan and to call my father Etta Oraon.

197 Padre: yes, we have been discussing the issue of the marriage of the daughters and sisters of the black padres.

198 Yohan: No black Christian will give his daughter to a padre. You should first give your daughters to black  
199 Christians. You cannot be clever about this. As you have given your teachings so must you give your daughters?

200 Padre: See, Yohan! You are not capable of managing the daughters of the padres.

201 Padre: The daughters of a padre are used to bungalows, cars, English wine, good clothes, furniture, etc.,  
202 because they are daughters of wealthy men.

203 Yohan: Why are they wealthy? Why am I not wealthy? This is why I say that you have not made me a pure  
204 Christian, otherwise I would have been rich. You have made me a Christian and left me in this country. You  
205 should take Christians to Europe. If I have left the religion of this country, I should not remain here shamelessly.  
206 You, too, should not eat and drink from this country and yet separate the people of this country from their own  
207 brothers.

208 Padre: What is, then, your decision? Yohan: When the color of the skin does not change; when there is to be  
209 no marriage with the daughters of the padre; when I cannot be rich and intelligent as you are; when I have to  
210 live in this country, then it is useless for me to remain a Christian. Clearly, I should become a Hindu.

211 Padre: Hindu religion is not true; Christianity is the true religion.

212 Yohan: I believe that Hindu religion is pure because it is vouched for by the Earth, the Sun and the Moon.

213 Padre: How's that? Yohan: Has anyone ever gone to the Sun or the Moon to ask whether there will be an  
214 eclipse? No one has told us either. Yet astrology, which is a part of Hindu religion, says the truth about eclipses.  
215 The sunrise and sunset timings are also predicted. This is proof of the truth of Hindu religion. Can you present  
216 one proof of the truth of Christianity?

217 Padre: (quiet after this logical argument, To Yohan) Come to the bungalow, later. (Climbs into car and goes  
218 off, saddened.) Yohan: (To me) Sir! Please purify me and turn me into a Hindu. ??9 As we have seen earlier, the  
219 idea of fatherland is raised here again. Identity is tied to one's land, and cannot be transcended by an abstract  
220 conversion of religion. Yohan, in the play, believes that Christians should be in Europe as Hindus should be  
221 in India, and that if he is a Christian, he should be transported to, and have an equal share in the bounties  
222 of the West. He thinks he has been compromised through this conversion to Christianity and he must take on  
223 the dominant religion of the land. This dialogue between these two characters clearly establishes the inseparable  
224 connection between land and faith, and reasserts Savarkar's idea.

225 Chandrika Prasad, publisher of this document and the third character of this conversation, is clearly ??9  
226 Ghosh, Abhik (2006) 233-234 using all kinds of propaganda to justify his argument. He not only used economic  
227 and social status of tribals after conversion but also the colour of their skin. This is an evidence of how the  
228 self-perception of the tribals about their identity and their insecurities were being manipulated. It is interesting  
229 to note that in the entire play, the focus is not on what Hinduism can offer to the tribals but on what Christianity  
230 cannot offer to them. Hence, both the motives of conversion as well as methods appear to be driven by an anti-

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231 Christian feeling rather than being guided by some altruistic moral need to better the lives of the tribals through  
232 Hinduism.

233 Gandhi had taken almost the same line as Chandrika Prasad but in a more subtle way. In *Young India* he  
234 said, "There was a time when I was wavering between Hinduism and Christianity. When I recovered my balance  
235 of mind, I felt that to me salvation was possible only through the Hindu religion and my faith in Hinduism grew  
236 deeper and more enlightened." ??0 In asserting that "salvation was possible only through Hindu religion" he  
237 very cleverly imposed the superiority of Hinduism over Christianity. This was nothing but propaganda against  
238 Christianity. Being a great politician, Gandhi was propagating Hinduism in little different way of Chandrika  
239 Prasad. Chandrika Prasad had not said anything about what Hinduism can give to the tribals and his main  
240 focus was what Christianity cannot offer. Gandhi, however, lured his reader with the candy of salvation, which  
241 was according to him only possible through Hinduism. Despite the fact that the shuddhi movement was carried  
242 out by the Arya Samaj and consequently riots had taken place in many areas, Gandhi had shown his love for  
243 the Samaj and on many occasions appreciated the great role played by the Arya Samaj. ??1 The antiquity of  
244 Hinduism had also become one of the propaganda points to show its superiority over other religions. According  
245 to Gandhi, "...the Hindu has an age-old civilization. His civilization has passed through the experiences that the  
246 two recent ones (Muslims and Christians) are still passing through." ??2 We don't know about what experience  
247 Gandhi is talking about. Perhaps here he is trying to say that people should adopt Hinduism because it is more  
248 matured in the sense of its antiquity than the other two religions, and through experiences through the passage  
249 of a long period of time Hinduism is more evolved than Christianity and Islam.

250 Anti-Christian campaign was carried out by many Hindu organizations. They spread insecurity and therefore  
251 there was great agency in the matter of uniting 'Hindu sentiments' to counter Christianity.

252 In a confidential letter to Merriman, Commissioner, Chotanagpur Division, the writer of the epistle says, "It  
253 appears from the reports received that Jagat Narayan Lal and the Hindu Mahasabha are attempting to work up  
254 an anti-Christian and anti-missionary campaign in Palamau. It appears that he has also recently visited Khunti  
255 where he stayed at Sharadhanand Ashram". ??3 In his reply Merriman said, "The most important matter for  
256 report is Jagat Narayan's campaign for conversion of Christians. I refer to your D.O. no. 2519-C, of the 5th July  
257 1935.

258 During the past fortnight Jagat Narayan has visited Ranchi district accompanied by Pandit Dharambir  
259 Vidyalankar, Secretary of the All India Shradhanand Trust and Chandradeo Narayan, Secretary of the Bihar  
260 Navyuvak Society. There were meetings and speeches at Lohardaga on the 27 th June and at Ranchi on the 30  
261 th June. On the 30 th the party also visited Khunti. Lohardaga and Khunti are the two places in the district  
262 where the Sharadhanand Trust has got schools. Jagat Narayan lamented Hindu sectarianism and urged Hindus  
263 to try to convert aboriginals instead of allowing them to become Christians. The party again visited Lohardaga  
264 on 1 st July 1935 and the opening of at least 20 primary schools for aboriginals was discussed". ??4 These facts  
265 give clear indications of the development of a campaign started in Palamau through Chandrika Prasad for the  
266 conversion of aboriginals. Perhaps it was the threat of Christianity which compelled Hindu missionaries to open  
267 schools for the aboriginals.

268 "Chandrika Prasad is reported to have been active in his campaign during the past fortnight but Baksi, Deputy  
269 Commissioner of Palamau thinks that there is a movement among the supporters of the Hindu Mahasabha to  
270 remove him from his preaching campaign. He claims 450 converts up to date. One Pandit Ramgobind Prasad,  
271 who is native of the Patna district and has been working in the Shradhanand Trust Ashram at Lohardaga for  
272 some 18 th months, has been deputed to the newly opened branch of the Shradhanand Trust at Chandwa and is  
273 vigorously preaching in Chandwa and Balumath Police Station. He has good knowledge of Oraon and enlivens  
274 his meetings with a Harmonium. He is obviously a more suitable man from the Mahasabha point of view than  
275 Chandrika Prasad". ??5 Certain facts can be deduced from the above report. Firstly, it is clear that various Hindu  
276 organisations like the Hindu Mahasabha and the Shradhanand Trust were cooperating in the use of manpower  
277 and resources for their mission in contrast to Christianity where different groups had been working more or less  
278 ??3 Patna State Archives, Home Department, Political Branch, File No.194, 5th July 1935 ?? 3 34 Patna State  
279 Archives, Home Department, Political Branch, File No.194, 12 th July 1935 ?? 8 35 Patna State Archives, Home  
280 Department, Political Branch, File No.194, 12 th August 1935, 16 independently and sometimes even against  
281 each other.

282 Hence, we can see that they were trying to make an organised and united effort to woo the tribals. The use  
283 of music and of people conversant with tribal languages in preaching also shows that the Hindu missionary effort  
284 was not as half-hearted and unorganised as it has been portrayed by most of the scholars. It is also clear that  
285 besides force, they were using subtle ploys like music, plays and the use of their own language to attract the  
286 tribals. However, as far as the rendering of charitable service to the tribals is concerned, the two schools run by  
287 the Shradhanand trust mentioned in the above extract are the only activities of this kind for which evidence is  
288 available in the primary and secondary sources consulted for this research.

289 The prime motive and also the urgency felt by missionaries to spread Hindu influence among the tribals are  
290 also clear from the following extract. It is the statement of Babu Jagat Narayan Lal, published in the newspaper  
291 'Indian Nation'.

292 Chotanagpur is already known as the stronghold of the Christian Missionaries. But the condition, which now  
293 prevails here, is simply appalling. The march of 5,400 converted Oraon and Munda Christians on the silver

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294 jubilee day of in the town of Ranchi alone was a sight which it will be difficult for the Hindus of the town to  
295 efface from their memory. Thana after than a and sub-division after sub-division in the districts of Chotanagpur  
296 are succumbing to the onslaughts of the Christian Missionaries who have trained and deputed hundreds and  
297 thousands of converted Christian preachers from amongst the Oraon, Munda and Santhals themselves through  
298 silent, sympathetic and continuous work of nearly 50 years, backed by immense resources to absorb as rapidly  
299 as possible, the remaining Hindus of their fraternity, several lakhs of them have been already converted, and the  
300 pace at which these conversions are now proceeding is alarming indeed.

301 While attention of the Hindus have been drawn to the problem of the 6 crores of untouchables, thanks to  
302 the noble efforts of lofty souls like Mahatma Gandhi, the late Swami Shradhanand, Lala Lajpat Rai, Pandit  
303 Malviya and of institutions like the Hindu Mahasabha, the Arya Samaj, the Harijan Sevak Sangha and others,  
304 the attentions of the Hindus yet remains to be drawn to the problem of redeeming and elevating crores of those  
305 hardy and tribal Hindus who live in the hills and the forests of our country and are designated variously as Kol,  
306 Bheels, Mundas, Oraons and others and misnamed aboriginals, instead of Hindus in the various districts and  
307 provinces and who, although neglected so long by their co-religionists, have continued to love and practice the  
308 Hindu religion and its various rites and ceremonies in their own way. ??6 The above extract clearly showed the  
309 level of insecurity that had been aroused amongst the Hindu organisations due to the rapid spread of Christianity  
310 among the tribals of Chotanagpur. Here, we can see an assumption by the Hindu organisations that the hitherto  
311 neglected tribals were actually Hindus. Although terms like 'redeeming' and 'elevating' have been used, the  
312 means by which this task could be achieved had not been thought as being worthy of mention. The focus  
313 was more on dissuading the tribals from becoming Christian rather than trying to improve their quality of life  
314 through Hinduism. Akshoy Kumar Dutta, Brahma editor of Tattvabodhini Patrika and possessing a considerable  
315 rationalist reputation asserted, "Even the women within the household have started turn Christian! Will we not  
316 wake up even after this terrible development"? 37 Hostile attitude towards Christianity and Christian preaching  
317 emerged amongst the orthodox segment of Hindus. In the work of Hindu Missionaries an aggressive spirit of  
318 resistance to Christianity was evident. ??8 The Ninth Bihar Provincial Hindu Conference was organised at Ranchi  
319 on 14 th April 1940. The proceedings of the conference commenced with the singing of the Vande matram song.  
320 In his 1 presidential speech Shyama Prasad Mukherji said that, "Problem in our province arises in connection  
321 with the future of 'Adivasis' which must be solved in a spirit of full justice and sympathy." From the same platform  
322 the Maharaja of Panchkot, Kalyani Prasad Singh Dev addressed the conference and said that the Hindu Sabha  
323 would try its level best to keep the aboriginals in the Hindu fold.

324 "Hindu mara nahi hai. Iska chetra sankirn nahi hai, jo koi jis kisi Bhartiye dharm me vishwas rakhta hai,  
325 wahi Hindu hai. Wo hi hamare apne hain. Chotanagpur ke Adivasi humare hi jaise Hindu hain. Hum apne  
326 dosh se unhe alag nahi hone denge. Ab humari aankhen khul chuki hain." 39 (The Hindu man has not died.  
327 His range is not parochial. Whosoever believes in whatsoever faith in this land, is a Hindu. They are all ours.  
328 The aboriginals of Chotanagpur are Hindus like us. We will not let them be separated from us because of our  
329 own faults. Our eyes have opened, and we are awakened now.) ??0 Golwalkar expressed almost the same view  
330 time to time from different platforms. Golwalkar proposed that for the integration of tribals, one and the same  
331 formula applies: "They can be given Yajnopavita (the sacred thread given 36 A Path of Caste Hindu Deplored,  
332 Indian Nation News Paper, ??anchi, 8-7-1935. 37 during Vedic initiation). They should be given equal rights  
333 and footings in the matter of religious rights, in temple worship, in the study of Vedas, and in general, in all  
334 our social and religious affairs. This is the only right solution for all the problems of casteism found nowadays  
335 in our Hindu society". ??1 The ghost of Christianity over the minds of both the leaders (Kalyani Prasad Singh  
336 Dev and M.S. Golwalkar) is very much obvious. Just to prevent the conversion of tribals into Christianity, they  
337 were ready to give social status to tribals within Hindu fold. They were assuming that all the indigenous people  
338 are basically Hindu and they should be within the Hindu religious system. Their writing depict the miserable  
339 plight of the tribals were not the cause of worry, but what really worried them was the conversion of tribals  
340 into Christianity. Perhaps their line of thought was that owing to the hierarchy in Hindu religious system where  
341 the tribals had virtually no position, they are being attracted to Christianity. This necessitated these offers of  
342 equal status, which they thought would be a carrot for the socially inferior tribals who had been so for ages.  
343 Devendranath Tagore, Brahma Samaj leader also tried to awaken the Hindu society through social reforms and  
344 welfare measures in order to avoid the 'danger of the invasion of Christianity.' He discussed with his friends the  
345 ways and means of protecting Hindus and their tradition, and started a school for 'Hindu welfare'. He encouraged  
346 the Hindus to take initiative in social reform and participate in public activities. ??2 So, we see that the motive  
347 behind the social reforms was not really guided by the philanthropic intension and for uplifting the low caste  
348 Hindus and tribals, but that it was the 'danger of Christianity' which compelled them to do so.

349 In the Ninth Bihar Provincial Hindu Conference, Swami Satyanand moved the following resolution: "This  
350 conference declares that the Hindu sanghatan and the Sudhi movement is a vital necessity for the strengthening  
351 and consolidating of the Hindus in Bihar".

352 While explaining the meaning of the resolution he stated that, "A religion which did not perform Suddhi was  
353 bound to die sooner or later. Let all the Hindus of whatever part they might be considered as brethren. It  
354 was their negligence that so many aboriginal Hindus had been converted into Christianity. If they would go  
355 to the Assam and the interior of Ranchi districts they would see that these places appeared to have belonged  
356 to Christian religion. Attempts should be made to reconvert 41 M.S.Golwalkar:Bunch of Thoughts, cited in

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357 Koenraad Elst (2002) inclusion in the census as Hindus on a limited scale before 1947. After 1947, however, their demands seem to have been fulfilled in the recording of the non Christian tribals as Hindus. <sup>1 2</sup>



Figure 1: 25

17 Ibid,18.

18 Sarkar, Sumit (2002) 221

19 Ibid

[Note: 20 Narang, Sir Gokul Chand(1966) *Glorious Hinduism*(New Delhi) 92 ]

Figure 2:

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<sup>1</sup>Thapar, Romila (1998) *Imagined Religious Community?*(New Delhi) 3-4 <sup>2</sup>Frykenberg, R. E.(2009) *Constructions of Hinduism* (New Delhi), 5

<sup>2</sup>Rethinking the Imagined Community: Changing Religious Identity of Tribes in Chotanagpur during the First Half of Twentieth Century

”On the 22 nd of May, Balu Oraon lodged a First Information Report at Police Station Balumath alleging that Chandrika Prasad, a Hindu Mahasabha worker and others had  
21 Frykenberg,R.E.(2009) 17  
22 Ibid, 18

*[Note: 23 Savarkar, V.D. (2002) Hindu Rashtra Darshan cited in Koenraad Elst,]*

Figure 3:

Figure 4:

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359 Christian students to receive Christian religious instructions and draws the attention of the Government and  
360 district board to take step to stop compulsion and to refuse and withdraw the grants from such schools as do  
361 not comply with their directions in this behalf. 2. This conference records its satisfaction at the awakening that  
362 had taken place among the Hindu Adibasi who forms the bulk of the aboriginal population of Chotanagpur and  
363 Santhal parganas offers its warm congratulation to the workers devoted to this noble cause". ??4 Sjt. Hareshwar  
364 Datta, Secretary, District Hindu Sabha, Chapra moved a resolution stating that "this conference resolves that  
365 the non-Christian aborigines, Adibasis be recorded under head 'Hindu', in the next census." ??5 If we look at  
366 some of the earlier sources we will see that this particular demand was not new. Mr. Hallett mentioned this nine  
367 years before the conference.

368 A fortnightly confidential report from Commissioner's Office, Ranchi to Mr. Hallett informs, "Vigorous  
369 propaganda at the back of which is the Hindu Mission, Calcutta, is going on to induce the aboriginals to  
370 record themselves as Hindu during the census" ??6 Thus, it is obvious that the chief thrust of the movement  
371 was not 'Hinduisation' through propagation of Hindu ideals and beliefs among the tribals, hence bringing about  
372 a qualitative change in their lives and more importantly their identity but, 'Hinduisation' by keeping them away  
373 from Christianity. In fact, they explicitly declared that all unconverted Christians were actually Hindus. As far  
374 as the Christian tribals were concerned, the focus was to be on the Shuddhi ceremony, again a mere perfunctory  
375 ritual that again would not have caused any real change in their identity or perception about life. In fact  
376 the growing emphasis on recording all non converted tribals as Hindus, clearly shows that the motives of the  
377 Hindu organisations was not so much concerned about the way of life and perceptions of the tribals or their  
378 self perception of their identity as much as it was concerned with officially recording them as Hindus and not  
379 Christians. Hence, it can be concluded that, the fact that these organisations ??3 in spite of their organised  
380 efforts, had limited impact on the identity of the tribals and had more to do with their own limited motives.  
381 In the 1950's, promotion of highly sanskritised Hindi and cow-protection to fight against Christian missions was  
382 made into an early plank of Jan Sangh activity as Hindutva forces sought to regain the ground lost after the  
383 murder of Gandhi. 47 Till the recent anti-Christian campaign, the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) may have  
384 been associated in the public mind primarily with Ramjanmbhumi and the onslaught on Muslims, culminating  
385 in the destruction of the Babri Masjid. But at the time of its foundation, its main thrust had been directed  
386 primarily against Christian proselytization in the tribal areas especially in Chotanagpur and Madhya Pradesh.  
387 ??8 According to Andre Beteille, "in today's India, tribes which answered to the anthropologist's conception of  
388 the ideal type are rarely to be found." ??9 The process of inclusion embraced the life of tribal population. As  
389 such, it allowed for the inclusion of India's inhabitants, whatever their form of worship, however monotheistic  
390 or polytheistic. At the least, this action included as "Hindu" those who fell outside the pale of purity, hundreds  
391 of millions who could never be allowed to defile or pollute the sanctity of proper dwelling places. These fiats  
392 became devices for incorporating all tribal population. 50 This Hinduism is not only proselytizing in its aims but  
393 chauvinistic, exclusivist, fundamental and even imperialistic, in its demands. It aims, in its most extreme form,  
394 to represent all the native people of India. 51 "In Gramsci's terms the class, which wishes to become hegemonic,  
395 has to nationalize itself and the new 'nationalist' Hinduism comes from the middle class." ??2 The motive of the  
396 Hindu missionary activities seems to have been the urgency to quell the wave of tribal conversion to Christianity  
397 rather than any genuine ideal to better their lives and bring a qualitative change through Hinduism. However,  
398 the evidence of primary sources shows that in their methods they were quite organised and united, contrary to  
399 the views of most scholars. Their primary concern however was 'Hinduisation' through the formulation of the  
400 Shuddhi ceremony and later the mere recording of tribals as Hindus in the census. Hence, the impact of these two  
401 processes of Hinduisation also seems to have been concomitant with their motives. The most important impact  
402 that the Hindu missionary organisations seem to have had on the tribal identity was perhaps their