

## **Animism to Christianity a transmutation in religious faith among the Kuki tribes: An analytical study**

**Chandan Kumar Paul\***

### **Introduction :**

The sociological theory of religion, which Emile Durkheim developed in his Famous book 'The elementary Forms of religious Life', interpreted religion as functionalist perspective. Durkheim argues that all societies divide the world into two categories, 'the sacred' and the 'profane'. Durkheim considers the religion of Australian aborigines, which he calls totemism, as the simplest and most basic form of religion. The totemic object among the aboriginal people is connected not only with religion but also with clan membership. Each clan has a totem, usually an animal or a plant. Totem is a symbol; it is the emblem or blazon of the clan. It is its flag; by which each clan distinguishes it from all others. It is a being thus a religious or sacred object, inspires respect and awe. It is a sacred symbol. The totem is the outward expression of totemic principle or God.

According to Animism, the idea of the soul (anima) is central to religion. According to E.B. Taylor, primitive man hit upon the idea of soul because of an error. In his dreams, he walked about various places, engaged in various types of activities and met his dead ancestors even while his body remained in one place. He deduced from this experience that each individual has a double, another self, which has the power of leaving the body and travelling to distant place. This double is distinguished from the person in several respects. It is more malleable and plastic; for, to leave the body, it must pass out by its apertures, especially the mouth and nose. It is represented as made of matter, but of a matter much more subtle and ethereal than any which we know empirically. This double is soul.

Animism is essentially a belief in the existence of some supra -physical being with the body of every living being. This super-natural being survives even after the collapse of the physical body in which it is contained. After the death of a person this so-called super-natural is freed from the physical limitations and can wander anywhere without being restricted by time and space.

### **Religious values among the tribes of Tripura:**

All the tribes living in Tripura, with the exception of the Chakmas and Mogs, are all Animists. The Chakmas and Mogs are the follower of Buddhism. All the non tribal people are the follower of Hinduism. In the course of time due to interaction between tribal and non

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\* Visiting Lecturer Tripura Government Law College And Academic Counsellor NET Coaching Centre T U



tribal's, many tribal people became Hindus, side by side Animists. The tribal rites and customs are actually very old practices which may be called 'Loka Cara' (folk rituals) or 'Desa Cara' (local practices). These are based on their strange beliefs and wild life. Now a day's almost all religious ideas and practices as found in the general Hindu Society all round are also present in the Tribal people. Worship of deities, sacrifice of animals, prayer for health and wealth, progeny, bumper crop etc. rites for the deceased, marriage rites etc. are there among the tribes of Tripura. They perform these rites with the help of a tribal priest called 'Ochai'. Now-a-days sometimes a Bengali Brahmin priest is engaged by the educated tribal's. But in most cases they engage the 'Ochai', the tribal priest. Sacrifice of swine and fowl is a notable feature of the tribal ritual. A boar must be sacrificed in all important ceremonies. There is a proverb that when a marriage is settled, the domestic boar is in deep concern.

Tribals of Tripura are a step ahead of other tribal's in respect of assimilation with the main religious stream (Hinduism) of the country. They have changed many of their primitive habits of food, dress, demeanour etc. yet they have retained some of these old rites and customs, beliefs and reverences. Also they have acquired a new set of beliefs and thoughts from their long contact with the Hindu Bengalees and the Bengalee religious preachers. A small percentage of the tribal's profess Buddhism and a semi-large number have switched over to Christianity in the present century. The large majority remains within the Hindu fold.

### **Religious gestures and performance among the Kuki Tribe :**

There is no ancient text on tribal religion of Tripura barring the historical work 'Rajmala' in which there are some incidental discussions on the ancient religion of the tribes of Tripura. Some inscriptions of the old kings of Tripura also provide some scanty materials in this regard. On the basis of all these facts and personal visits and talk, the present writing is prepared on the religion of Kuki Tribe. The Kuki generally believe in a Supreme God who is just benevolent and good. The following worships are performed by Kukis and all these are--

#### **PATHIEN :**

The most benevolent God is "Pathien". He rules over this material world and all the diseases, misfortune and civil spirits may be driven off if he can be propitiated. The village magician or village ojha's who specially worship pathien is called "Thiam-pu" or "Jalned". For the treatment of illness, Thiam -Pu sits beside the ailing person and feels the pulse and asks some questions. Then he covers his face with a piece of white cloth about 4ft. long. Over piece of a burning charcoal which they call "Meirik-Al", Bero i.e. incense is Sprinkled. By smelling the incense smoke and reciting some magic spell Thiam-Pu will tell who will be appeared with what. Sometimes, Longtherai, Burahha, and Dain etc. all evil spirits are to be appeased with a white cock, a black cock, a white goat, a black goat etc. Then according to the result of this test, Thiam-Pu worship Pathien to propitiate the evil spirits and make the patient cured. . After giving to Pathien, if the patient does not come round, Thium-Pu will again appeal to "Lushari" for the patient. It is their belief that Lushari is the supreme God in Heaven and if Pathien fails to cure any patient by appeasing the evil spirits, appeal is made to Lushari by the Thiam-pu to make the patient cured. This is like an appeal to the Higher



Court if the party is defeated in the Lower Court.

#### **TARPA :**

In the month of Baishak (April/May), shib or Pathien or Tarpa is worshipped by the Kukis. Bison or buffalo is sacrificed to Pathien at the time of worship. The big knife with which the bison is cut down is called "Sal" by them. They cut the bison or buffalo at the time of sacrifice by the Sal reciting some magic spell in it with one stroke only. A high alter is arranged for Pathien's seat at the place of worship. A water-pot as the symbolic representation of Pathien or Shib or Tarpa is placed in front of the seat. Then a branch of cotton tree is planted before the water pot. A cotton thread spun by their indigenous spinning-wheel is strung. One end of the thread is fastened to the branch and the other end to the post where the bison or buffalo is tied for sacrifice. Nobody is allowed to cross the thread, under it. It is their belief that if any one crossing the thread, will become mad. Generally Pathien is worshipped for the welfare of the village and the human being as a whole. For sacrificing the bison or buffalo, four cocks and four bottles of rice-beer are required. After the worship, the water level of the water-pot is examined by the Thaim-Pu. If it increases, the result of the worship is good and Pathien is much pleased, if not the result is bad.

#### **LUXMI-PUJA :**

In the month of Agrahayan (December/January) when paddy is harvested Laxmi Puja is performed. At the time of Laxmi Puja, the following materials are required. Pig- 1, rice-beer- 15 bottles, cock -12 numbers, goat-4 numbers, duck-2 numbers, and egg-1 number. At first the goddess of the family is worshipped. A new earthen vessel is filled with newly harvested rice and the eggs are placed on the rice.

Then pebbles of Mainung-ma are placed. Thereafter, Ganga, Thunirao, Banirao, Burachha etc. are worshipped one after another. Then the two goats are sacrificed in the name of goddess Artci. The duck is sacrificed in the name of god Jam-dudu Kal-dudu. The seat of goddess Luxmi is adorned with Mainuma Kathama leaf for appeasing evil spirits, Dain puja is performed at a corner of the place without the knowledge of anybody.

#### **INDROI :**

Indroi is the family god. The Kukis also worship their family god Indroi. It is worshipped once in a year by every family for the betterment and benevolence of the members of the family and for their fortune.

#### **RODONA :**

At the end of the month Sraban (July/August) the God Rodona is worshipped. It is worshipped once in a year for not entering bad diseases in the village and fortune of the families.

#### **DAIROI :**

Dairoi is specially worshipped by anyone who wished previously to worship Him at any occasion. When his desire is fulfilled, he worships Him. The puja is generally held in the jungle by sacrificing a goat.

#### **KHAWAHULAL :**

Khawahulal is the god of the village. While the other tribal's of Tripura perform



Kerpuja for the benevolent of the village, the Kukis perform the puja of Khawahulal. On the date of this puja nobody is allowed to enter the village from morning till late at night upto the end of the puja.

### **TWALPATHIEN :**

The puja of Twalpathien is specially held at any time of the year decided by the elders of the village. It is worshipped when there is a good seasons and circumstances in the area when it is wanted to retain such a season round the year. To perform this puja, a date is fixed by the villagers and an invitation is sent to this God informing him that the puja will be held the next day and he would please take the offer, then this puja is performed on appointed day.

### **JHUM-PUJA :**

The Kukis generally perform Jhum puja at the time of Jhum cultivation. At first a site for Jhum is selected and before clearing up the jungle, the puja is performed. For performing the puja, two banana plants are posted at the place where the Jhum will be cultivated and seven pebbles which they call Mainung-ma are placed there. A special wild leaf is placed in between the two banana plants and before the pebbles.

The Kukis do not believe in the world beyond death and neither do they worship idol. They invoke the supreme deity for bliss and happiness not only for their own tribe but for all living beings. They proffer a big river, a tree, a hill, or a bamboo mat as a seat for their God-head. Some of their sacred invocatory hymns are as under:-

- (1) 'A Khale Kamuyoi sang yotangra Kanuyoi jei ceko jei ma luyong.'  
Meaning-O white-complexioned Mother! Come by the cosmic and slippery path and fill this place with your presence.
- (2) 'Simakuna Markuna sang yoyangra simniyam sarthyan Tangi thim Rata yoyangra kanu.'  
Meaning - The Deity of the North and the South of the East and West, the god of the seas, the deities from a far, come ye all through the Ariel route.
- (3) 'Chhip Chhip na hong shipra jei reng jora.'  
Meaning- Take you all the offerings I have made Goats, Pigs, Fowls, or bison are then sacrificed.  
When the sacrifice is over they all pray in unison to the Almighty for his blessings. In that time the hymns are-
- (4) 'Uka puma reng pathang miman dramo deshi Hoiraise, rejya hoirise, damron ung ren damrechhe.'  
Meaning- O, my king and the God of my suzerain let thy blessings do good to Man, my land and country; do good to us and the King.

### **Changes in religious practices due to influence of Christianity in Kuki tribe :**

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries passed without tangible progress of Christianity in Tripura. With the dawn of the 20th century hectic activities were started by Chris-



tian missions for the propagation of this faith in the hills of Tripura. Most of the interior areas were poor, uneducated, ill-fed, ill-clad and without any clear idea of religion. This was more applicable with regard to the tribals of the remotest areas, notably the Kukis and Lusais of the North-east. Accordingly a Christian mission from Manipur entered Tripura about 1910 to work among the poor Kuki tribe. It was known Thodo Kuki mission of Manipur. The kukis were then living in the Jampui Hills of Tripura. Accordingly in 1935 one Mr. H. Rankhal of The Thodo Kuki mission of Manipur went in search of a foreign mission which could take up the work of preaching Christianity among the tribals of Tripura. The Newzealand Baptist Mission was soon discovered at Brahmanbadiya, a town in the erstwhile district of Tripperah. Mr. Rankhal invited the mission, to work and begin Baptism work among the tribals of Tripura. The missionary sent by the WZBM was Rev. Jones. He visited Tripura in 1935 and started work. In 1938 he obtained permission from the tenth Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur to preach Christianity and established a Church in Arundhutinagar at Agartala. In the wake of the above mentioned mission of Newzealand, many other Baptist missions have come, such as The Anglican Church, Free Church Of India, Baptist Christian Union, Roman Catholic Mission etc. They all have cooperated in propagating Christianity, especially among the tribals. Some of them have left Tripura physically, but financing Crores of rupees for the purposes of missionary activities till today. Here I would like to mention some Christian missionaries who are operating Christianity in Tripura among the tribes.

**TABLE-STATEMENT SHOWING THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN TRIPURA**

SL.NO	STATE	AREA	NAME OF MISSION OPERATING
1	T R I P U R A	Agartala	Tripura Baptist Christian Union.(NZBMS)
2		Amarpur, P.O.	Tripura Baptist Christian Union.
3		Ambasa, P.O.	Tripura Baptist Christian Union.
4		Kamalpur	Tripura Baptist Christian Union.
5		Arundhutinagar	Tripura Baptist Christian Union.
6		Chailengta, P.O.	Seventh Day Adventists.
7		Chandira	Tripura Baptist Christian Union.
8		Jampui, P.O.	Tripura Baptist Christian Union.
9		Kailasahar, P.O.	Tripura Baptist Christian Union.
10		Kanchanpur, P.O.	Tripura Baptist Christian Union.
11		Kanchanbari, P.O.	Tripura Baptist Christian Union.
12		Kumarghat, P.O.	Tripura Baptist Christian Union.
13		Laogang Bazar, P.O.	Tripura Baptist Christian Union.
14		Damcheria	Tripura Baptist Christian Union.

**SOURCE: THE TRIBES OF TRIPURA A DISSERTATION BY S.B.K. DEV VARMAN.**

At present the young Kukis are Christian. Moreover, the Kuki Christians perform their religious ceremonies according to Christian convention. They go to Church every Sunday. On the 1st January, every year they celebrated the New Year's Day. On 25th December, they observe X-mas Day festival. Besides the Kuki Christians observe Easter Monday, Easter Saturday etc. festivals of the Christian faiths.



By religion, the Kukis were originally animist. They worshipped many tribal deities, gradually they have adopted Hinduism. Since 1931 it is noted that some of the Kukis adopted Christian religion. The number of Christians among the Kuki tribe is increasing gradually day by day. The following table will show the comparative strength of Christians and Hindus among the entire Kuki tribe.

**TABLE- CHRISTIANS AND HINDUS AMONG THE KUKI TRIBE**

SL. NO	YEAR	NUMBER OF KUKIS	HINDU	CHRISTIAN
1	1921	4,005	4,005	NIL
2	1931	1,479	1,207	172
3	1941	1,522	1,522	NIL
4	1961	5,531	3,185	2,345
5	1971	7,775	3,000 (approx)	4,000 (approx)
6	1981	5,500	3,000 (approx)	2,500 (approx)
7	1991	10,628	2,463	8,095
8	2001	11,674	NA	NA
9	2011	10,965	NA	NA

**SOURCE: CENSUS REPORT OF INDIA 1921-2001.**

It is clear from the above table that the Hindu-Christian ratio among the Kukis was 100:00 in the 1921 census report. But in the census report of 1981 the ratio became 55:45. Now the present situation is that Hindu-Christian ratio among Kuki tribe is respectively 10:90 (approx). Present situation is totally in-verse of 1921 census report in respect of religion. It is proved that the acceleration of Christianity among the Kuki tribe in a peak position.

While I have gone for data collection in 2012 in Dhuptali Kukibari under Udaipur Sub-Division and the village Lungchhir under the Sonamura Sub-Division, it is observed from the survey that in Udaipur Sub-Division 245 peoples of Rokhum Kuki community (out of 41 families) and 54 Rokhum Kuki peoples of Sonamura Sub-Division (out of 13 families) performs their religion as a Christian. During my survey Lalkhung Kuki a Panchayat Member of Dhuptali Kukibari, said about their religion that cent percent peoples of the village are Christian and Baptist Christian Missions operating Christianity in this area.

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