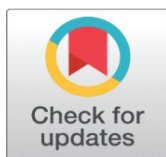
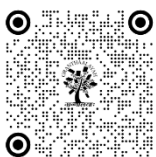


THE IMPACT OF CHRISTIANITY ON SANTAL TRIBAL IDENTITY: A CASE STUDY OF WEST BENGAL

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of Christianity on the cultural and social identity of the Santal tribe in West Bengal, India. The Santal tribe, one of the largest indigenous communities in the region, has traditionally practiced animistic beliefs and rituals. However, the introduction of Christianity in the 19th century led to significant changes in their religious practices, social structures, and cultural norms. This research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing ethnographic fieldwork and interviews to explore the complex negotiation between indigenous Santal practices and Christian doctrines. The findings reveal that adopting Christianity has resulted in a unique syncretic identity for many Santal converts, characterized by a blend of traditional customs and Christian beliefs. The study highlights the erosion of certain traditional practices, such as nature worship, festivals, and oral traditions, while noting the preservation of some core cultural values. The impact of Christian conversion on social cohesion, economic relationships, and educational outcomes within the Santal community is also discussed. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for further research to understand the long-term implications of religious conversion on indigenous identities and the importance of considering cultural sensitivities in the context of social change.

Keywords: Santal, Tribal Identity, Christianity, West Bengal, Cultural Syncretism, Religious Conversion, Indigenous Practices, Etc

1. INTRODUCTION

The Santal tribe, one of the largest indigenous communities in India, has a rich cultural heritage that has been influenced by various external factors, including religion. Traditionally animistic, the Santals have maintained their unique spiritual practices, which revolve around the worship of nature and ancestral spirits. However, over time, their beliefs and customs have been influenced by Hinduism, Christianity, and to some extent, Islam. This religious syncretism has resulted in a complex tapestry of traditions, where ancient tribal rituals coexist with elements borrowed from mainstream religions. The impact of these external religious influences is evident in their festivals, art forms, and social structures. Despite these changes, the Santals have managed to preserve many of their core cultural values and practices, demonstrating a remarkable ability to adapt while maintaining their distinct identity in the face of modernization and globalization (Tyler. 2001). The impact of external religious influences on the Santal tribe is evident in various aspects of their culture and society. Their festivals, art forms, and social structures have been notably affected by the introduction of new religious practices and beliefs, particularly Christianity. Traditional Santal animistic rituals and nature worship have been partially replaced or modified to incorporate elements from mainstream religions. This has led to changes in

their ceremonial practices, artistic expressions, and community organization. However, despite these external influences, the Santals have demonstrated a remarkable ability to preserve many of their core cultural values and practices. They have managed to maintain their distinct tribal identity while adapting to modernization and globalization. This resilience is reflected in their continued use of traditional languages, adherence to certain customary laws, and preservation of unique cultural traditions. The Santals' ability to selectively integrate external religious elements while retaining their fundamental cultural essence showcases their adaptability and the strength of their cultural foundations (Nurchayono, Rohmad & Astutik, 2019). This syncretic approach allows the Santals to navigate the complexities of modern society while preserving their unique identity. By incorporating elements from other religions, they demonstrate a remarkable capacity for cultural evolution without compromising their core beliefs. This adaptive strategy has enabled the Santals to maintain their distinct cultural heritage in the face of external pressures and changing social landscapes (Sahnir, 2022). The Santals' syncretic approach to religion and culture demonstrates their remarkable adaptability and resilience in the face of modernization. By selectively incorporating elements from other religions and cultural practices, they have developed a unique strategy for preserving their identity while engaging with the broader society. This approach allows them to navigate the complexities of contemporary life without sacrificing their core beliefs and traditions. The Santals' ability to evolve culturally while maintaining their distinct heritage showcases their resourcefulness in responding to external pressures and societal changes. This adaptive strategy has proven crucial in ensuring the continuity of Santal culture and identity, even as they interact with and integrate into the wider social landscape. The Santals' syncretic practices serve as a testament to their cultural flexibility and their commitment to preserving their unique way of life in an ever-changing world.

Understanding the impact of Christianity on Santal tribal identity is crucial for comprehending the broader socio-cultural transformations within indigenous communities in West Bengal. The introduction of Christianity among the Santal people has led to significant changes in their traditional beliefs, practices, and social structures (Murphy, Phiri, Grummell, Yerokun, & Tembo, 2015). This religious shift has influenced various aspects of Santal life, including their cultural traditions, education, and economic activities. As Christianity gained influence, it introduced new concepts of morality, spirituality, and community organization, which have both complemented and conflicted with traditional Santal values. The process of religious conversion has also affected the Santals' relationship with other tribal and non-tribal communities, potentially altering their position within the broader social hierarchy of West Bengal. Examining these changes provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics of cultural adaptation, identity formation, and social change among indigenous populations in the region (Nweke, 2023).

Previous studies have extensively documented the historical spread of Christianity among the Santal tribe, highlighting its significant impact on social and educational development within the community. The introduction of Christianity to the Santals, primarily through missionary efforts in the 19th and early 20th centuries, brought about substantial changes in their traditional way of life. Missionaries established schools, healthcare facilities, and vocational training centers, which played a crucial role in improving literacy rates and overall educational attainment among the Santals. Furthermore, Christian teachings and practices influenced social norms, leading to the gradual erosion of certain traditional customs and the adoption of new cultural elements. This religious transformation also contributed to the empowerment of marginalized groups within the tribe, particularly women and lower-status individuals, by promoting equality and social justice. Consequently, the spread of Christianity among the Santals has been recognized as a catalyst for modernization and socio-economic progress, albeit with complex implications for their indigenous cultural identity (Rahmatullah, Rahman, Mollik, Jahan, Agarwala, & Hasan, 2010).

However, there is limited research on how the adoption of Christianity has specifically altered the Santal tribe's traditional identity and cultural practices. This study addresses an important gap in the literature by examining how Christian conversion has impacted the cultural traditions and identity formation of the Santal tribe. The research employs ethnographic fieldwork and interviews to explore the complex negotiation between indigenous Santal practices and Christian doctrines. This research contributes to our understanding of religious conversion's impact on indigenous cultures and the complex processes of identity formation in the face of cultural change. It offers insights into how traditional communities adapt to and incorporate new religious beliefs while maintaining aspects of their cultural heritage.

This study addresses a significant gap in the existing literature by offering a comprehensive examination of the transformations in Santal tribal identity subsequent to the introduction of Christianity. The research explores how the adoption of a new religious belief system has influenced and reshaped the traditional cultural, social, and spiritual

practices of the Santal people. By analyzing the complex interplay between indigenous traditions and Christian doctrines, the study seeks to elucidate the ways in which Santal identity has evolved, adapted, or resisted change. This investigation not only contributes to our understanding of religious conversion's impact on tribal communities but also provides insights into the broader processes of cultural adaptation and identity formation in the face of external influences.

The adoption of Christianity has had a significant impact on the traditional identity of the Santal tribe in West Bengal. Many Santal individuals have embraced Christian beliefs and practices, leading to changes in their religious rituals, social structures, and cultural norms. This shift has created a complex interplay between traditional Santal customs and Christian teachings, resulting in a unique syncretic identity for many Christian Santals in the region.

2. AIM & OBJECTIVE

The primary objective of this research is to examine the extent and nature of the impact of Christianity on the cultural and social identity of the Santal tribe in West Bengal. To enhance its clarity and precision, consider to Briefly explain what is mean by "cultural and social identity" in the context of the Santal tribe. The main objective into specific aspects you will investigate, such as the Changes in religious practices and beliefs, Shifts in social structures and hierarchies, Alterations in traditional customs and rituals, Impact on language and education.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review encompasses a comprehensive examination of existing studies on the influence of Christianity on tribal identities, with a particular focus on the Santal tribe in West Bengal. Based on the provided context, there are no papers directly addressing the impact of Christianity on Santal tribal identity in West Bengal. However, several papers offer insights that could be relevant to this literature review.

Basu and Amin (2000) discuss the historical and cultural factors affecting reproductive change in Bangladesh and West Bengal, highlighting the importance of language identity in facilitating the spread of modern ideas. This could be relevant in understanding how Christianity might interact with Santal tribal identity through language and cultural diffusion (Basu & Amin, 2000).

Hann (2007) critiques the anthropology of Christianity, suggesting that mainstream Christianity in its Eurasian homelands remains understudied. This perspective could be valuable when examining the impact of Christianity on tribal identities in West Bengal (Hann, 2007).

House et al. (2006) explores ethnic and cultural identity among urban Southwestern American Indian youth, parents, and elders. While not directly related to the Santal tribe, this study's qualitative approach to understanding ethnic identity across generations could inform your research methodology (House et al., 2006).

Chowdhury et al. (2006) investigates alcohol use patterns in West Bengal villages, providing insights into the cultural landscape and social changes resulting from development. This study could offer context on the broader sociocultural environment in which the Santal tribe exists (Chowdhury et al., 2006).

Kunovich (2006) examines the salience of Christianity for national identity in Europe, which could provide a theoretical framework for understanding how Christianity might impact tribal identity (Kunovich, 2006).

4. METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research method has been adopted to explore the impact of Christianity on the Santal tribal identity in West Bengal. Used a qualitative approach, which means we focused on gathering Ethnographic data by conduct the fieldwork for collected in-depth information rather than numerical data. This approach allows researchers to explore complex social and cultural issues by examining people's experiences, beliefs, and perspectives in detail.

5. CHRISTIAN AND CHRISTIANITY

Christians are followers of Christianity, a monotheistic religion centered on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Christianity is based on the belief that Jesus is the Son of God and the savior of humanity, whose coming as the Messiah was prophesied in the Old Testament (Moore, 1921). Christianity emerged in the first century and has since become a

global religion, spanning across cultures and continents (Poloma & Poewe, 1995). The core tenets of Christianity include belief in Jesus as the divine incarnation, his death and resurrection for the salvation of humanity, and the importance of a personal relationship with God (Hurtado, 2003; Magezi & Banda, 2017). Interestingly, Christianity has been influenced by and has adapted to various cultural contexts. For instance, in South Korea, Christianity found resonance with traditional religious culture, particularly Korean Shamanism, leading to a uniquely Korean form of Protestantism (Kim, 2000). Additionally, the expression of Christian faith often involves material culture, including devotional objects and environments that help believers experience the divine in their daily lives (Mcdannell, 1996). In conclusion, Christianity is a diverse and complex religion with a rich history and global presence. While centered on Jesus Christ, it has evolved and adapted across different cultures, incorporating various practices and beliefs while maintaining its core doctrines. The Christian identity is shaped not only by theological beliefs but also by cultural contexts, personal experiences, and material expressions of faith.

6. SANTALS AND CHRISTIANITY

The Santals are the largest tribal community in India and neighbour country in Bangladesh, primarily residing in districts like Rangpur, Dinajpur, and Rajshahi (Rahmatullah et al., 2010; Rahmatullah et al., 2012). They have a rich cultural heritage and traditional. Santali is their mother tongue through which they have created very rich oral literature which is coming from generation to generation. Their Traditional medicine practices, although these are gradually being lost (Rahmatullah et al., 2012) The Santal community is divided into twelve clans, each with its own unique traditional culture and rituals practices (Rahmatullah et al., 2012). The Santal community also faces challenges related to early marriage, with most Santal couples marrying before the minimum legal age in Bangladesh, influenced by factors such as ethnicity, family patterns, and illiteracy (Uddin, 2015). Santals are being converted to Christian religion at the Beginning of 19th centuries. Among the Santals community often 2% are adopted Christian religion, such as religious conversion make a division in their community which is divided in Christian Santal and non-Christian.

RESULT

Colonialism in India expanded primarily through British rule, which began in the mid-18th century and lasted until 1947. The British East India Company initially established trading posts and gradually gained control over large parts of the subcontinent (Gilmartin, 1998; Narayan, 1995). The introduction of English language education, as formalized by Lord Macaulay's Minute of 1835, played a significant role in shaping the linguistic landscape of South Asia (Kachru, 1994). The colonial period saw the introduction of new technologies, such as steamboats (1819-1839), which further facilitated British control and economic exploitation (, 1991). Colonialism influenced religious practices and social norms, often leading to complex and contradictory attitudes, as seen in the case of alcohol consumption patterns in India (Sharma et al., 2010).

Christian missionary work in India began in earnest during the 18th and 19th centuries, coinciding with the expansion of European colonial powers in the subcontinent (Etherington, 2004). The 19th century, in particular, was characterized as the "Great Century of Christian expansion" by Kenneth Scott Latourette, marking a period when missionary activities spread to cover all corners of the world, including India (Sarna, 1981). Interestingly, the impact of Christian missions in India was not limited to religious conversion. Missionaries played significant roles in various aspects of Indian society, including education, medicine, language, and anthropology (Etherington, 2004). They also influenced cultural exchanges, particularly involving women, and contributed to the development of new religious movements (Etherington, 2004).

Christian missionary work in West Bengal can be traced back to the broader context of missionary expansion in the 19th century, which Kenneth Scott Latourette characterized as the "Great Century of Christian expansion" (Sarna, 1981). During this period, missionary activities spread to cover all corners of the world, including the Indian subcontinent. The development of Christian missions in West Bengal was likely influenced by the broader patterns of missionary work in British India. Missionaries often worked alongside the colonial administration, with their activities intertwining with imperial expansion (Etherington, 2004). However, it's important to note that in some cases, the missionary frontier ran ahead of empire, suggesting that missionaries sometimes operated independently of colonial authorities (Etherington, 2004). While the provided context doesn't offer specific details about the start of Christian missionary work in West Bengal, it does highlight the complex relationship between missions, empire, and local populations. The response of the

missionized, their counteractive programs, and battle for cultural survival are aspects that have received less scholarly attention (Sarna, 1981). This suggests that the introduction of Christian missions in West Bengal likely involved a dynamic interplay between missionaries, colonial authorities, and local populations, with varying degrees of acceptance, resistance, and cultural exchange.

Jeremiah Phillips (1812–1879) was an American Baptist missionary who had come to Kolkata (India) in 1836. He and Eli Noyes were started work on Santal as an aboriginal tribe lives predominantly in Orissa, West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, and Jharkhand. He opened a school where the first educational facility for the Santals in Jellasore in 1845. He developed a writing system for the Santal language using the Bengali script. He published *An Introduction to the Santal Language* in 1852, and translated parts of the Bible into the Santali language (Shavit, 1990). Jeremiah Phillips made significant contributions to the documentation and preservation of the Santal language in the mid-19th century. Recognizing the need for a written form of this primarily oral language, Phillips ingeniously adapted the Bengali script to create a writing system for Santali. This innovative approach allowed for the systematic recording of Santali vocabulary, grammar, and cultural knowledge. In 1852, Phillips published "An Introduction to the Santal Language," a groundbreaking work that provided a comprehensive overview of Santali linguistics and served as a valuable resource for both linguists and missionaries. Furthermore, Phillips undertook the ambitious task of translating portions of the Bible into Santali, making religious texts accessible to the Santal people in their native language. These efforts not only facilitated communication and literacy among the Santal community but also played a crucial role in preserving and promoting their linguistic and cultural heritage.

Lars Olsen Skrefsrud (1840 – 1910) was a Norwegian Lutheran missionary who had come India in 1863. He was the founder of Norwegian Santal mission and under this mission he has established the Benageria Mission at Benageria, Santal Pargana in 1867. He learn the Santali language as well as he collected at list 30000 Santali words. He wrote a Grammer book which the name was 'The Grammer of the Santali language' (1873). Skrefsrud's efforts in learning and documenting the Santali language were instrumental in preserving and promoting Santal culture. His grammar book became a foundational resource for future studies of the Santali language and helped standardize its written form. The establishment of the Benageria Mission provided a platform for education and cultural exchange, fostering a deeper understanding between the Santal community and the missionaries. Lars Olsen Skrefsrud, a Norwegian missionary and linguist, made significant contributions to the study and preservation of the Santali language. In 1887, he edited a book titled "Hor Koren Mare Haparam Koreyak Katha," which translates to "The Traditions and Institutions of the Santals" in English. This work was a crucial compilation of Santal folklore, customs, and traditions, providing valuable insights into the culture and oral history of the Santal people. Skrefsrud's efforts in documenting and publishing this material not only helped preserve important aspects of Santal heritage but also contributed to the broader field of anthropological and linguistic studies in the region. The book remains an important resource for researchers and scholars interested in Santal culture and the history of missionary work in India (Tleubaevna, 2023). Lars Olsen Skrefsrud had a Journal which the name was Hor Hopon Ren Pera (1890). The journal was exclusively accessible to Santals who had embraced Christianity. Furthermore, missionaries translated the Bible into Santali and published it in these journals. The journals also included religious hymns in Santali, which were inspired by biblical passages. This process facilitated the gradual expansion of Christianity among the Santal community (Choksi, 2020).

The introduction of Christianity in the 19th century has had a significant impact on Santal identity and culture. Many Santals have converted to Christianity, leading to changes in their religious practices, social structures, and cultural norms. This has created a complex syncretic identity for Christian Santals, blending traditional customs with Christian beliefs.

7. DISCUSSION

As colonialism expanded, Christian missionaries established outposts in regions inhabited by the Santal people, promoting Christianity among them. These missionaries founded educational institutions where impoverished Santal children could receive education. However, this opportunity came with a condition, at least one family member had to embrace Christianity. This approach led to the widespread adoption of Christianity among the Santals. Consequently, a rift emerged within the Santal community, separating them into two groups, those who had converted to Christianity and those who had not (Wilfred, 2014). Such as the educational institutions is Bhimpore Santal Mission. The educational institution had a significant enrollment of Santal children, including both males and females. It primarily functioned as a

boarding school. The campus featured two distinct dormitories: one for students who had embraced Christianity and another for those who maintained their traditional beliefs (Jana, 2008).

Santal are the largest tribal community which has specific criteria to identify as a community. The Santal community has several distinctive characteristics that identify them as a unique tribal group: 1. Traditional medicinal practices: The Santals have their own medicinal practitioners who rely heavily on medicinal plants for treating various ailments (Rahmatullah et al., 2010; Rahmatullah et al., 2012). These practices vary among the twelve clans of the Santals, with the Soren clan being one example (Rahmatullah et al., 2012). 2. Language: The Santals have their own dialect, which is used for communication within the community and with their traditional medicinal practitioners (Rahmatullah et al., 2010). 3. Cultural beliefs and practices: The community has strong cultural beliefs that influence their health-seeking behaviors, including a preference for traditional medicine and practitioners (Cáceres et al., 2023). 4. Socio-economic status: The Santal community often faces challenges related to weak infrastructure and limited access to public services, which impacts their health and well-being (Cáceres et al., 2023; Vyas et al., 2019). The Santal community's identity is shaped by their unique medicinal practices, language, cultural beliefs, and socio-economic circumstances. These factors contribute to their distinct tribal identity and influence their interactions with modern healthcare systems and society at large.

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Adopted Name (Christian)</i>	<i>Original Name (Non-Christian)</i>
1.	Stiphen Tudu	Sibu Tudu
2.	Fransish Murmu	Mashang Murmu
3.	Ruben Rushen Kisku	Lakhan Kisku

Source: Collected by author

The Santal people are organized into twelve clans, each with distinct surnames such as Murmu, Mandi, Kisku, Tudu, Besra, Hansda, Soren, Hembram, Chore, Pawriya, Baskey, and Badeya. Every Santal individual incorporates one of these surnames into their full name. These surnames are passed down through generations as part of their heritage. The Santal community observes numerous rituals associated with birth ceremony (Murmu, 2023).

In the Santal community, a naming ritual takes place precisely nine days after a child's birth. For male infants, the grandfather's name is bestowed, while female infants receive their grandmother's name. Subsequent children are named after their maternal grandparents. The third-born child is given the name of Ankle or Aunt. This naming custom is deeply rooted in Santal tradition. However, Santals who have embraced Christianity, although initially following this naming practice, later visit a church to give their children new names. Table 1 illustrates the names of Santal Christians and non-Christians across various districts in West Bengal. It has seen that the Christianity has created a significant divide within the Santal community, separating Christian converts from non-Christian Santals. This has affected social cohesion and traditional practices. The Christian Santals have abandoned many traditional religious practices, rituals, festivals and cultural traditions. This includes changes to birth, marriage and death ceremonies. There are notable differences between Christian and non-Christian Santals in terms of religious practices, social interactions, and attitudes towards traditional culture. Both groups tend to claim superiority of their own beliefs, creating tensions and conflicts within the community. Christian conversion has led to a deliberate distancing from traditional Santal identity, with many aspects of tribal heritage being discarded.

According to Weaver's analysis, even among Native Americans who consider themselves Christian, traditional ways often remain important and honored (Elliott & Weaver, 1998; Weaver, 1997). Many practice syncretism and religious dimorphism, indicating a blending of Christian and traditional beliefs rather than a complete abandonment of tribal heritage. This suggests that conversion to Christianity does not necessarily lead to a rejection of traditional identity. Interestingly, the persistence of traditional practices alongside Christianity has sometimes led to communal tensions and misunderstandings (Elliott & Weaver, 1998; Weaver, 1997). However, Weaver argues that Native American literature speaks across these divisions, developing the idea of "communitism" - a nexus of communal and communitarian values that forms the bedrock of Native spirituality. Such as the Christian Santals often maintain aspects of their traditional identity and practices even after Christian conversion. The relationship between Christianity and Santal heritage appears to be complex and varied, rather than a simple case of deliberate distancing or discarding of traditional elements. We can noticed, the Santals of Bhipore are facing an identity crisis, caught between the influence of Christianity and movements to preserve Santal identity (Jana, 2008). Mr. Shyamal Kumar Jana discussed the impact of Christianity on tribal identity among the Santals of Bhipore, West Bengal. The main arguments and claims he made that the question

of identity arises from feelings of insecurity among minority groups. Santal communities are increasingly focused on asserting their identity at both group and individual levels. Christianity has had a significant influence on Santal culture and identity since the 19th century. While it provided a new ideology and expanded their horizons, it also created divisions within the community. There are notable differences between the two groups in terms of religious practices, marriage customs, and attitudes towards traditional Santal culture. Non-Christian Santals often view Christian converts as having abandoned their ancestral beliefs and traditions.

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Month/Season</i>	<i>Festivals</i>	<i>Place of worshipping</i>
1	January	Sakrat Parab	Each Family
2	February	Magh Bonga	Beside the village
3	March	Baha Bonga	Jaher Than
4	April	Rohoni Bonga	Border of the place
5	May	Erok Sim Bonga	Beside the village
6	June	Muchiri Bonga	Beside the village
7	July	Ashariya Bonga	Jaher Than
8	August	Karam Bonga	Each Family
9	September	Janthar Bonga	Beside the village
10	October	Dansai Parab	In the village
11	November	Shaharai Parab	In the village
12	December	Runda Sakrat	Each Family

Table 2 Santals Festivals among Santals.

Santal people are very much joyful for the celebrating and worshipping of festivals annually. Therefore, they had created various kind of festivals. These festivals are continuing to celebrating throughout the year (See, Table-2) whereas the festivals has associate their cultural heritage. These festivals are 'Baha Bonga' (Haha worship), 'Makmore Bonga' (Makmoreworship), 'Shohoray Porob' (Shohoray Festival), 'Dansay Porob' (Dansay Festival), 'Magh Bonga' (Magh worship), 'Rohoni Bonga' (Rohoni worship), 'Erok Bonga' (Erok worship), 'Muchri Bonga' (Muchri worship), 'Ashariya Bonga' (Ashariya worship), 'Karam Bonga' (Karam worship), 'Runda Porob' (Runda Festival), 'Sakarar Parab' (Sakarar Festival), etc. The festival is a social institution which is provides an opportunity for individual or communal worship of various gods and deities and eating special foods, wearing dress. Santal are eating special food is call 'Sore Daka' at the time of worship. They will wear the own traditional dress call 'Panchi Parhar' and 'Panchi Dhuti'. The 'Panchi Parhar' for female wear and 'Panchi Dhuti' for male wear. Santals are belief religiously that Marang Buru is their main God who is worshipping in these festivals throughout the year (Murmu, 2017). Christian Santals, however, do not participate in these traditional ceremonies or worship Marangburu as their deity. Instead, they primarily engage with Christian missions, attend church, and adhere to biblical principles in their religious practices. Interestingly, Christian Santals continue to observe various marriage customs that have been part of Santal society for generations, although with minor modifications to align with their own beliefs and practices. The paper argues that Christian conversion has significantly transformed Santal culture and society, creating divisions and leading to the loss of many traditional practices and aspects of Santal identity. However, it acknowledges some common bonds still exist between the groups.

This study has examined the profound impact of Christianity on the cultural and social identity of the Santal tribe in West Bengal, India. The findings reveal a complex interplay between traditional Santal practices and Christian doctrines, resulting in a unique syncretic identity for many Santal converts. The adoption of Christianity has led to significant changes in religious practices, social structures, and cultural norms within the Santal community.

8. CONCLUSION

The research highlights the erosion of certain traditional practices, such as nature worship, festivals, and oral traditions, among Christian Santals. However, it also notes the preservation of some core cultural values and the emergence of a new, blended identity. The impact of Christian conversion extends beyond religious beliefs, affecting social cohesion, economic relationships, and educational outcomes within the Santal community. The study reveals a notable schism between Christian and non-Christian Santals, with each group often claiming superiority of their own beliefs. This division has implications for social interactions, marriage practices, and overall community unity. Despite these challenges, some common bonds and a sense of tribal unity persist, particularly in times of need. The research also underscores the complex nature of identity formation in the face of religious conversion and modernization. The Santals

of Bhimpore, in particular, face an identity crisis as they navigate between the influence of Christianity and movements to preserve traditional Santal identity. In conclusion, this study contributes to our understanding of the long-term implications of religious conversion on indigenous identities. It emphasizes the need for further research to explore the nuanced ways in which tribal communities adapt to and incorporate new religious beliefs while maintaining aspects of their cultural heritage. Future studies should consider the broader socio-economic implications of these changes and explore strategies for preserving valuable cultural traditions in the context of religious and social transformation.

9. FUTURE SCOPE

Future research could further investigate the long-term cultural and social implications of religious conversion among the Santal community, potentially comparing similar effects in different regions or among other tribal groups

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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