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Educating Santals
The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Joypurhat (Bangladesh) and the Issue of Cultural Alienation

Carmen Brandt

Halle (Saale) 2011

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Foreword

This study was originally meant to be a short article for a German magazine. The idea behind it was to give a wider audience some insights into the present situation of some Adivasis in the North-West of Bangladesh. But the purpose of giving just some insights into Christian missionary endeavours among Santals turned out to be, in the end, only the beginning of a series of questions whose answers broke the mould of an article.

Nevertheless, I cannot claim that the present publication is an in-depth study on the subject. It is first and foremost a working paper which has the potential to grow in several aspects and directions depending on further interest and emphasis. And I do hope to raise more interest among the readers and, finally, the urge to explore in detail the questions which I have raised but not been able to answer satisfactorily.

I would like to thank the people who helped me with this study. First of all, I am grateful to Basanti Murmu who was willing to share her experiences and fears openly with me, and who bravely insisted on my publishing her real name, to emphasise her credibility. My thanks also go to Eric Monnier who was an open respondent to my critical questions.

And of course I have to thank Rahul Peter Das who gave me the opportunity to share this study with a wider audience, who encouraged me and challenged my thoughts and ideas relentlessly, and whose painstaking editing work made this publication more accessible too.

Others who deserve my thanks are my husband Nasimul Ahsan Deepu, who drew my attention to this topic, as well as Mahmudul Hasan Sumon, Mohammad Hasan Ashraf, Boris Wille, Satyanarayana Adapa and David Cashin, with all whom

I could share my thoughts and questions.

The matters broached here are controversial, but I have throughout done my best to scrupulously avoid taking sides, or twisting or suppressing material to suit a particular point of view. Whether I have succeeded in this is for the reader to judge. I hope that I have.

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Introduction

This study is connected to a discourse that is succinctly delineated by the following polemic (PELKMANS 2009: 423):

> Jeff, a Youth With A Mission (YWAM) missionary in the post-Soviet Republic of Kyrgyzstan, voiced his analysis of why foreigners go to Kyrgyzstan as follows: "Typically there are only two reasons why people come here. Either they are here for business or they are missionaries. So basically when you ask someone what he is doing and he says he is a volunteer or English teacher, then you immediately know the category." … Given that Jeff had only mentioned business and evangelization, I asked him how he would categorize development workers. It seemed he had been waiting for that question, and he used the opportunity to argue that foreign led and run organizations are hardly ever motivated by a purely humanitarian stance. Major secular development organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Soros Foundation, he pointed out, are about economics, and their employees are driven by career prospects and monetary compensation. By contrast, most small development organizations are connected to churches, Jeff explained. Their humanitarian efforts are part of evangelical missions, and their employees motivated by being in God's service.

One may subscribe to this point of view, one may not, but the fact is that the nexus between development and proselytisation, particularly for Christianity and Islam, is increasingly becoming the subject of both study and public debate. One aspect of development is education, whose prominence in missionary activity is too well-known to need special comment,[1] and it is with this aspect, within the framework just referred to, that this

[1] Cf., for instance, HEREDIA 1995.

study is concerned, its geographic focus being Bangladesh.

Over 35% of the population of Bangladesh lives below the poverty line.[2] 45% can neither read nor write.[3] But the most densely populated territorial state also has one of the highest concentrations of development initiatives dedicated to changing this status quo. However, not all actors within this growing development industry act in concert. Among the countless non-governmental organisations (NGOs)[4] we also find religious ones primarily or secondarily disseminating their respective religious doctrines (as a rule Islamic or Christian), and among these are certain church institutions whose main objective seems actually to be the Christian mission among the Adivasi[5]

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[2] *The World Factbook* of the Central Intelligence Agency estimates the figure for 2010 at 40% (<*https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bg.html*>, accessed March 31, 2011).

[3] The UNESCO Institute of Statistics estimates the literate population over 15 years of age at 55% for 2008 (<*http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=210*>, accessed December 20, 2010).

[4] According to ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK 1999: 3, more than 20,000 NGOs were registered in Bangladesh at the time. Of course, this number excludes various non-registered NGOs and private development and welfare initiatives. With such non-registered societies included, ZOHIR 2004: 4110 estimates even 22,000 to 24,000 NGOs in Bangladesh.

[5] In using this term I am following general usage in both Bangladesh and India among Adivasi and non-Adivasi groups alike, even though etymologically and historically "Adivasi" (Hindi *ādivāsī*, Bengali *ādibāsī*), literally "original inhabitant", is inappropriate for the Santals in Bangladesh as opposed to those in India, as only under British rule did Santals settle in East Bengal from other parts of South Asia (see for instance ALI 1998: 39f.). This does not place them among the "original inhabitants" of East Bengal, though the term is obviously appropriate on a pan-South Asian scale. In any case, "Adivasi" also has a political connotation, in which connection attention may be drawn to SEN, S. 1997: 8f., without in any

population. One of their target groups is the Santals of the plains in north-western Bangladesh.

Though ethnically the most homogeneous of the larger states in South Asia with around 98% Bengalis,[6] and having a population of almost 90% Muslims, Bangladesh is nevertheless home to a large variety of ethnic and religious minorities. That such minorities are, not only since the establishment of Bangladesh in 1971, under continuous threat by members and institutions of the majority population, is the subject of countless academic and non-governmental studies.[7] While the focus of these studies is mostly the religious and cultural diversity whose preservation

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way siding with or against the views voiced: "David Hardiman discussed at length the reason for using the term adivasi instead of the term 'tribe' in his 'The Coming of the Devi'. Along with it it must be noted that the adivasis do never like to be considered as 'tribe', which to them, means sub-national or sub-caste. This is fully consistent with the Brahmanical concept, which allows for the existence of various traditions, but insists on their subordination to an over-arching Brahmanical framework. On the otherhand [sic] the 'tribe' considered themselves as special people by identifying them as 'Abo do hor Jati' (We are hor folk). Our historians [sic] attitude of looking towards the adivasis started from the concept of 'tribe', and unfortunately, not from that of 'horhopon'." In Bangladesh, the use of the term in official parlance is contested; cf. AHMED 2010: 19.

[6] This number is given in official statistics for the country, as well as *The World Factbook* (cf. above, note 2). However, activists lobbying on behalf of ethnic minorities often claim that the number of non-Bengalis in Bangladesh is higher and hence the percentage of Bengalis lower. One reason for their different perception seems to be their delinking ethnicity from language use, whereas most statistics link the two, which may lead to ethnic groups switching to the use of Bengali being classified as Bengalis, but also to tongues formerly classified as "dialects" of Bengali today being classified as independent languages; an example is Chakma.

[7] Recent publications on this topic are BARKAT/ZAMAN/KHAN/PODDAR/HOQUE/UDDIN 2008 and BARKAT/HOQUE/HALIM/OSMAN 2009.

provides one of the main arguments in applying for development funds, the activities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church seem to be the converse of such efforts. Santals are only one target group for its proselytising endeavours; other ethnic minorities, for instance Mandis[8] and Oraons, and religious minorities, like other Christians and also Hindus, are targeted too.

The Santals are, with a population of six millions, one of the biggest Adivasi groups in South Asia. The majority of Santals lives in the Indian states of Jharkhand and West Bengal; only a minority estimated at around 300,000[9] can be found in Bangladesh. The traditional belief system of the Santals is polytheistic and polyritual and is based on the worship of Bongas (Santali *boṅga*), the belief in supernatural beings and ancestral spirits and a large variety of distinct festivals. While some Santals have integrated Hindu elements and festivals into their traditional religious system, others fully profess Hinduism, while still others have over the last century converted to Christianity. Like a vast majority of the members of all other Adivasi groups in Bangladesh, the Santals too are very often deprived of their

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[8] The Mandis are better known as Garos. But since the latter appellation is today considered inappropriate by most researchers (cf. BAL 2000: 73), I too shall use the former term, though I am aware of the fact that this may be a typical case of political hypercorrectness, witness a publication by a Bangladeshi author belonging to this ethnic group who terms himself and the other members of his ethnic group Garos — even while drawing attention to the dislike they harbour for this term (JEṂCĀM 1994: 7).

[9] BARKAT/HOQUE/HALIM/OSMAN 2009: 244. It is very difficult to find accurate data on different Adivasi groups in Bangladesh because they are often not counted separately in the census. According to RAFIQUE 2003: 62 and BARKAT/HOQUE/HALIM/OSMAN 2009: 244, they were, however, separately enumerated in the census of 1991. The Santals at that time numbered more than 200,000 (considerably more than the maximum of 112,325 JALIL 1991: 8 had surmised on the basis of pre-census data).

land, suffer from the economical and cultural domination of their Bengali neighbours, and lack constitutional recognition, access to basic supplies, primary health care and education.[10] Although some secular development projects[11] can be found in Bangladeshi Santal villages, in the last decades above all missionary institutions[12] have shown most interest in their welfare. Indeed, asked for the reason of the Adventists' focus on ethnic and religious minorities, the president of the Bangladesh Union Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church — Eric Monnier, a Swiss citizen — replied in a personal interview that they want to help these minorities and protect them from the Muslim Bengali majority by giving them the chance to become equal members of an influential global group.

But gradually these activities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are being resisted by some target group members who fear cultural alienation. In the following, I shall attempt to ana-

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[10] BARKAT/HOQUE/HALIM/OSMAN 2009: 248f.: "Around a half of the Santals (46%) has never gone to any school. A 53 percent of them have not even completed a single year of formal education. The mean number of years of schooling of the Santal people is 5.6. Only around a 2 percent of them have passed SSC. A 6 percent of them have been reported to be going to NGO schools for attaining education." This is based on a survey of 220 households (p. 243).

[11] The term "secular development project" refers to projects which might also be funded by church based organisations, but try to bring positive changes to the Santals without impinging upon their traditional belief system. One Bangladeshi NGO offering primary education to Santal children without asking them to convert to Christianity or Islam is Ashrai (Bengali *āśraẏ*), which has its head office in Rajshahi.

[12] How serious and committed other institutions and individuals too, as distinct from the Seventh-day Adventists, are in the Christianisation of Santals is shown for instance by MARANDY 2006 (the intensity of commitment of MARANDY 2006 is lost in MARANDY 2006a).

lyse this dispute by citing the example of a primary school run by Seventh-day Adventists in a village in the district of Joypurhat in Bangladesh.[13] Santal activists, particularly those belonging to the Adivasi Nari Kalyan Sanstha (Bengali *Ādibāsī Nārī Kalyāṇ Saṃsthā*), i.e. Organisation for the Welfare of Adivasi Women, allege that education is being utilised in this school not only to Christianise the children, but also to make them distance themselves from their families and society,[14] thus destroying the social fabric of the Santal community and leading to cultural alienation.

The Concept of Cultural Alienation

The terms "culture" and "alienation" both denote more than just one concept. Furthermore, both terms are used rather inflationarily in different contexts in innumerable studies mainly from the humanities,[15] which in addition is prone to lead to bigger confusion when it comes to the phrase "cultural alienation".

Nevertheless, in spite of the complexity and fuzziness of this phrase it still seems to be the most appropriate denomination for the phenomenon explored in the present study, as shall be underpinned in the concluding part.

Instead of using the phrase "cultural alienation" borrowed from any single theoretical discourse, which might lead to generalisations, it will be only used as a singular designation for the manifestations of the individual case studied here; theories

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[13] I am, like CAMPS 2008, withholding the name of the locality (to forestall possible harassment of the villagers by interested parties or media).

[14] See, for instance, CAMPS 2008.

[15] For a detailed account on the use of the term "alienation" in various disciplines see, e.g., JOHNSON 1973a.

and other case studies regarding this otherwise heterogeneous concept will only be included for trying to narrow down the meaning of the phrase as applied here. This may seem idiosyncratic, but given the conceptual confusion actually prevailing[16] one choice seems as good as another, so that it seems best to work with a concept defined exclusively for this one case, so that all who regard this will be able to do so on the same basis. I therefore prefer to define "alienation" the way it will be used by me in this study as follows:

The term "alienation" refers to an individual or a group of people estranged from its hitherto native group because of factors creating a boundary which cannot be crossed anymore. These factors might, for instance, include the prohibition of intermarriage, the exclusive attendance of religious and cultural festivals, the prohibition of activities/symbols important for the ties between the members of the original group, etc. Further, besides such active alienation which can be marked by social boundaries, alienation may also be imagined or imputed. Thus, people may be held by others to be alienated, and considered estranged from a group/society, although they might hold themselves to be members of this group/society and not actively subscribe to deliberate demonstrations of difference.

Moreover, what "cultural alienation" means can be best understood by resolving the issue of the term "culture". Paul M. Collins devotes a long discussion to this concept in his study on *Christian Inculturation in India*, from which the following two paragraphs are sufficient to emphasise the idea that culture is neither homogeneous nor stagnant, but, rather, alterable:[17]

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[16] Cf. the large variety of concepts for "alienation" in JOHNSON 1973b.

[17] COLLINS 2007: 4. Collins himself quotes from an online publication,

> Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture consist [sic] of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas, especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand, as conditioning element of future action.
>
> Culture therefore is:
>
> (a) Something that is learned, not inherited;
> (b) something that is shared by all or almost all members of some social group;
> (c) something that the old members of the group try to pass on to the younger members, and
> (d) something (as in the case of morals, laws and customs) that shapes behavior, or structures one's perception of the world.

NEWBIGIN 2008: 346 adds besides language also particularly religion to his definition of culture:

> And one must also include in culture, and as fundamental to any culture, a set of beliefs, experiences, and practises that seek to grasp and express the ultimate nature of things, that which gives shape and meaning to life, that which claims final loyalty. I am speaking, obviously, about religion. Religion — including the Christian religion — is thus part of culture.

In the context of the present study, namely proselytising activities under the mantle of education, clearly points (a) and (c) above need our special attention, as the conditions of (b) and (d)

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namely KLEMPE n.d., which itself cites the first of the two paragraphs below from KROEBER/KLUCKHOHN 1952: 151. — For a more complex discussion on "culture" see, for instance, GEERTZ 2006. Given the fact that so much has already been written on "culture", a more detailed discussion shall be avoided here.

too can be fulfilled when culture is something that is learned and passed on to younger members of a cultural group by older members. This does not disregard the fact that "culture" seems to alternate already from generation to generation due to various internal and external factors, which often cause so-called generational conflict, for despite such more or less unavoidable alternation of culture from generation to generation especially factor (c) constitutes an important link between old and young in the cultural group. Moreover, where formal education is not yet a standard — like in many Santal villages in Bangladesh — older people, particularly parents, grandparents or other older relatives, have to take full responsibility for passing on knowledge, be it everyday-life, religious, or cultural knowledge.

That education may contribute to alienation is known, for instance through Gerald M. Reagan's study on formal education in the USA (REAGAN 1973). Although the concept of alienation Reagan uses seems inappropriate for the case of the Santals because of the different context,[18] his treatise nevertheless makes clear that education is an important factor for shaping a society. And in a society or cultural group in which education plays a minor role, the changes caused by the introduction of formal education may be immense. For though education, formal or non-formal, seems never free of "morals, laws and customs" intentionally or accidentally passed on by teachers, and perhaps contrary to notions held by the parents, mostly the teacher too is a member of the same cultural group and will ideally not contribute to a significant alternation of culture or even cultural alienation. But what happens when education becomes the

[18] Reagan criticises the bureaucratic structure of formal schooling in the USA as making people "turned off" (p. 322), giving up on both the school system and themselves as a result of their school experiences.

main tool of a third party for spreading its "morals, laws and customs"? What happens when the educators spread new ideas which are contrary to the "morals, laws and customs" of the older members of a cultural group? Does this contribute to cultural alienation, to alienation of the young from the culture of their elders? Does it lead to further processes of alienation? At the end of this study I shall try to answer these questions.

Christianity in South Asia

Today, around 24 million Christians live in India,[19] more than 400,000 in Bangladesh,[20] and various numbers in the other South Asian countries. But while Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are perceived as native religions of South Asia,[21] and Islam, at the latest after the establishment of Pakistan in 1947, has acquired entrenched recognition as a religion belonging to South Asia despite this status being increasingly challenged at least in India by so-called 'Hindu Nationalists',[22] Christianity seems to be the belief which struggles most for acceptance as a 'local' religion of South Asia, notwithstanding

[19] Data according to CENSUS OF INDIA 2001.

[20] Figures on the number of Christians in Bangladesh vary, the upper limit being around 1 million. The Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics gives the number, based on the Census of 2001, at 0.3% of a total population of 130.03 million, which works out to around 390,000 persons in 2001 (cf. <*http://www.banbeis.gov.bd/bd_pro.htm*>, accessed December 21, 2010).

[21] The different autochthonous religions of the various Adivasi groups are often lumped together under the label "animism", and are not seldom perceived as forms of Hinduism

[22] In this view, both Islam and Christianity "are to be identified as 'foreign' because both accept and employ cultural paradigms, which largely have their origins outside of India" (COLLINS 2007: 18).

that Christians easily outnumber Buddhists in the region and especially in India, though probably not in Bangladesh.[23] The reasons for this might lie in the colonial past, when Christian missionary activity was sometimes perceived as a weapon to weaken the resistance of the local population against the colonisers, even though several missionaries in the past seem to have had more sympathies for the anti-colonial endeavours of the locals than for the colonial power,[24] examples being the British missionaries James Long and Verrier Elwin, and the American[25] missionary Samuel Stokes.[26]

A further factor is the perceived link between Christian religion, the colonial past and economic hegemony. Even though the rise of new and 'non-Christian' powers such as China and India is rapidly changing the existing structures, the dominant perception is still very much that described in the following:[27]

> Christianity has been, historically, the modernizing and Westernizing religion that has spread over the globe in concert with the mercantile and industrial expansion of capitalism and the establishment of colonial empires. Today Christian countries (with Japan being the single exception) overwhelmingly control the world's productive resources and manufacturing, banking, and

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[23] Other religions which do not have their origins in South Asia, but have followers there, are Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Bahai'ism etc. Interestingly, such non-autochthonous religions find next to no mention in discourses on indigenity, maybe because they are in terms of adherents comparatively so minuscule that they remain beyond the horizon of attention.

[24] An interesting study on the initially hostile relationship between Christian missionaries and the East India Company in India is FRASCH 2008.

[25] In accordance with common usage, "American" relates to the USA.

[26] On Long see, e.g., ODDIE 1999, on Elwin and Stokes EMILSEN 1994.

[27] BROUWER/GIFFORD/ROSE 1996: 2.

commercial institutions, as well as the dissemination of culture generated by scientific, academic, and commercial sources.

In the light of the above, the ties between South Asian Christian communities and foreign church institutions, foreign missionary activities, and even non-Christian 'Western' organisations and institutions can be perceived as an impediment to the recognition of Christianity as a 'local' religion. But all reservations against Christianity, mainly based on its perception as a 'Western' religion and the presumption that the 'West' (i.e. as a rule Europe and Northern America) does not shy from exploiting religion for its aim of dominating the world economically and politically,[28] cannot mask the fact that Christianity is nonetheless a religion today entrenched in South Asia like the other religions listed above, as evinced also by the "popular manifestations of Christianity in India" (DONIGER 2002: xi) as described in several contributions to RAJ/DEMPSEY 2002, and the undeniably long history of Christianity in South Asia.

According to its own tradition the history of the oldest Christian community in South Asia, of the so-called Saint Thomas Christians in Kerala, is traced back to the first century of the Common Era.[29] After that, besides Christian migrants from Persia and Syria, mainly the activities of Europeans — Portuguese, French, Danish and Germans — from the fifteenth century onwards led to a steady rise of the local Christian population. In Bengal, the most active and successful were Portuguese traders, conquerors and missionaries. As a result a sizable portion of the

[28] Cf. NARAYANAN 2002: 259 on the RSS "criticism of evangelical activity which it says does not have 'spiritual content.' This activity, it alleges, is an 'out and out imperialist conspiracy' …".

[29] Cf. on this, for instance, MORAES 1964: 25ff. But the dating is controversial; see as an example in this regard, SHARAN 2010.

Bengali Christians even today professes the Roman-Catholic creed, and many still bear Portuguese surnames such as Gomez, Rosario, D'Souza etc.

But the history of Christianity in South Asia has already been exhaustively detailed in various publications,[30] and therefore need not be discussed further here. Much more relevant in the given context are the proselytising attempts from the time of British rule onwards.

Missionary Activities and Education under British Rule

After the Battle of Plassey in 1757 the British East India Company (EIC), initially founded for trading purposes, was over the next hundred years gradually able to establish its ruling power in many parts of South Asia. Since because of the fragmented geopolitical status quo of South Asia at that time the EIC did not rule its regions of control in a unitary way, but rather found mainly two forms of exercising its rule, namely direct governance and indirect governance in which local rulers accepted the hegemony of the EIC in exchange for a limited internal autonomy, the situation of mission activities too must have varied from region to region.

The heterogeneous character of the different South Asian regions, the diverse forms of their dependence on the EIC and of course the varying interests of the EIC in the individual regions also led to a heterogeneous relationship of the EIC with the different mission institutions.[31] Thus, in the South, "an attitude of

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[30] Two such are NEILL 1984-1985 and SINGH et al. 1982–, which may serve here as good examples.

[31] For more details on the relationship between missionary activities and the East India Company between the years 1793 and 1857 see, for in-

friendly co-operation"[32] between the British rulers and mainly Protestant missionaries, e.g. from the Danish-Halle Mission, prevailed for many years.[33] On the other hand, in the North, where the Germans from the Danish-Halle Mission had been the first to establish, in 1706, a Protestant mission on Indian soil,[34] it was mainly the increasing influx of British missionaries, among them predominantly Protestants, from 1786 onwards which led to a rather hostile attitude towards the Christian mission, since the EIC feared the missionaries' exertion of influence over Company rule, unrest among the locals because of intervention in the existing religious setting, and ultimately economic loss.[35] The EIC changed its official attitude towards missionaries later on with the Charter of 1813 not only because of the growing pressure from missionary societies in Great Britain,[36] but also "because of the realization that the missionaries could be used for educational activities so that some Indians could be trained for service in the imperial government".[37]

In spite of this quotation, however, the attitude of missionaries towards education was ambivalent, at least according to Joseph Marandy, who writes that (MARANDY 2006a: 264)

> education was considered secondary rather than primary and

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stance, FRASCH 2008.

[32] NEILL 1984-1985, 2: 146.

[33] A good example is the jointly run printing press in Vepery; cf. LIEBAU 2008.

[34] Cf. DHARAMPAL-FRICK 2006: 143.

[35] See p. 11 above, also NEILL 1984-1985, 2: 146-151.

[36] For more information regarding the Charter of 1813 which granted missionaries more freedom in India see NEILL 1984-1985, 2: 151-155.

[37] See PADINJAREKUTTU 1995: 58.

> many missionaries could not place it on equal footing with proclamation … . Therefore, there has always been tension between those who engage themselves in direct proclamation of the gospel message and those who are involved in other secular activities like education or health care services.

But even if so, then those prioritising proselytisation over education cannot have been a truly significant group, for it is common knowledge that the history of missionary activity in British India is, in fact, inextricably linked with educational enterprise.[38]

The most famous British missionary and educationist is undoubtedly William Carey, who was also one of the founders of the British Missionary Society in 1792. Like Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg of the Danish-Halle Mission almost a hundred years before in South India, he too realised after his arrival in East India in 1793 that it was necessary to approach the locals in their own language, what led to the first translations of the New Testament into several Indian languages, e.g. Bengali, Sanskrit, Oriya and Hindi. Because of the hostile attitude of the EIC towards missionary activities Carey and his fellow missionaries established a Mission Press in 1800 and, besides a hundred primary schools over the years, the Serampore College in 1818 in which local ministers where educated, in then Danish ruled Serampore.[39]

Another important missionary and educationist was the Scot Alexander Duff, who in 1830 established his first college, today known as Scottish Church College, in Calcutta. Unlike Carey, Duff was an advocate of English as the language of education, and above all believed in higher educational institutions as

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[38] On this process see also KOPF 1969: 129ff.

[39] NEILL 1984-1985, 2: 186-201.

a way for winning converts to Christianity among the locals.[40]

Carey's Serampore College and Duff's Scottish Church College — along with the best-known college in Calcutta, the Presidency College,[41] established in 1817 by Rammohun Roy together with Radhakanta Deb, David Hare and others as the Hindu College for the higher education of the sons of rich locals eager to be introduced to Western knowledge[42] — became important pillars of the so-called Bengal Renaissance. Instead of leaving their cultural background behind and embracing the West's culture and religion, i.e. Christianity, together with its knowledge, graduates of these colleges internalised the ideas of European enlightenment and nationalism, modified those according to their background and became not only spearheads of Hindu reform movements, such as the Brahmo Samaj, but later on also agents of the anti-colonial movement and pioneers of Indian nationalism, an example being Subhas Chandra Bose who obtained his B.A. in philosophy in 1918 at the Scottish Church College. Thus the idea of winning converts to Christianity through higher Western education led, besides minor success, rather to the opposite in Bengal, irreversibly strengthening Indian nationalism and ultimately becoming a catalyst for the unavoidable disempowerment of the British in India.[43]

According to PADINJAREKUTTU 1995: 72:

> In general one could say that the missionary movement of the nineteenth century and its encounter with India had the following characteristics. Mission was considered to be the extension of Eu-

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[40] NEILL 1984-1985, 2: 307-310.

[41] Since 2010 Presidency University.

[42] NEILL 1984-1985, 2: 167.

[43] See, e.g., NEUBERT 2008 and NEILL 1984-1985, 2: 364-373.

> ropean Christianity in India, and the majority of the people rejected this foreign religion but accepted the cultural and technological achievements brought about by Western education. The awakening of nationalism was one of the direct results of this.

Another setback for the missionaries in the nineteenth century was the Indian Rebellion of 1857, one of whose causes "was undoubtedly the belief in the minds of many Indians that the government was engaged in a conspiracy to change the faith of Hindus and Muslims, and turn them into Christians".[44] While the uprising strengthened anti-British feelings and caused more suspicion towards Christian missionaries, it also ended the rule of the East India Company and led to the establishment of the British Raj in 1858 under the British Crown.

In the opinion of Elizabeth Susan Alexander, growing nationalism among the higher classes was one reason for the shift of the missionaries' focus:[45]

> These growing trends [of Indian nationalism] caused a major shift of emphasis in British Protestant missionary attitudes by the early years of the twentieth century. Missionaries abandoned the old method of "destructive criticism" of Hinduism and ceased to be primarily concerned with proselytisation and conversion statistics.[46] … While education missions were not rejected, rural mis-

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[44] NEILL 1984-1985, 2: 417.

[45] ALEXANDER 1994: 8. Alexander adds in a footnote: "Missionaries were divided over the comparative merits of work among the educated class and work among the rural outcastes among whom conversions were far greater. However, neither was abandoned by missionaries in the twentieth century."

[46] This relies on KUMARADOSS 1983: 168: "The confident, proselytising Christianity of the nineteenth century was replaced by a more cautious approach emphasising education, medical care, and other indirect benefits."

sions received emphasis. Agricultural settlements and village schools came to be established increasingly to uplift village Christians.

But not only had the growing nationalism among the educated urban Indians caused this shift of focus and attitude towards proselytising endeavours. New agents, rival missionary groups, might also have played their role in the changing Gospel venture. In any case, the question of how far the method of "destructive criticism" of Hinduism was really abandoned is difficult to answer decisively in retrospect. For while well educated Indians who resisted the missionary endeavours left a good amount of critical writing on Christianity, the non-educated obviously were not able to follow their fellow compatriots, so that we can only speculatively draw conclusions from present-day critiques. The account below on the Seventh-day Adventist Church mission in Bangladesh will show that even today criticism of Hinduism and the religion of the target group members, in this case the religion(s) of the Santals, is still an important tool for spreading the Gospel, though the agents today have a different background.

The Discovery of New Target Groups by Missionaries

In the first half of the nineteenth century the proselytising endeavours of the different missionary institutions — especially in Bengal, but also in other parts of East India — had only rather limited success among different groups of Bengal's societies. Whereas "a considerable village movement towards Christianity had taken place, and had survived under rather unfavourable circumstances" in the extreme South of India, in Bengal a village movement which had seemed promising in the 1830s and

1840s under the leadership of the German missionary J.W. Deerr of the Church Missionary Society ultimately failed.[47]

But after the Charter of 1833 allowing citizens of all nations the almost unrestricted residence in British India,[48] the end of the first half of the nineteenth century increasingly brought new agents, namely American[49] missionaries, new methods, and new success among other target groups, e.g. lower castes, Dalits[50] and Adivasis,[51] to East India. That mass conversions seemed more likely to happen among these groups, while among the higher social strata conversion to Christianity was only selective, can also be witnessed in the successes of the London Missionary Society which was active in the North and the South of India:[52]

Numerically, by far the greater portion of the Christian communi-

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[47] NEILL 1984-1985, 2: 336f.

[48] NEILL 1984-1985, 2: 176.

[49] Cf. note 25.

[50] Cf. note 45. Note too COLLINS 2007: 18f. "The vast majority of Christian adherents, whose tradition comes from the work of Western missionaries are lower caste or indeed mainly outcastes, those whom Gandhi referred to as Harijans, and who today are known by the Sanskrit word 'Dalit' meaning 'broken, torn, scattered and crushed'." For possible reasons for this see, for instance, MANDELBAUM 1972: 567-569.

[51] It is obvious that the categories used here and in the following are generalising and take into account neither the actual complexity of labels such as "caste" and "tribe", or "Dalit" and "Adivasi", which are heatedly discussed topics, nor that the boundaries both between these groups and with other populations were more porous than publications by British colonial ethnographers would let us suppose. But this is not the place to discuss such issues, all the more so since only a brief, and therefore of necessity superficial, overview is intended here.

[52] GOODALL 1954: 21. Since the focus in the context cited is on "castes", "tribes" are not mentioned.

> ty within the Society's area was drawn from the outcastes. … But work among the castes had not been altogether fruitless; there had been outstanding individual conversions from the Brahmins, and the Church in Bengal was relatively rich in leadership drawn from higher castes.

And although the groups today known under the designations "Dalit" and "Adivasi" were both socially disadvantaged, the proselytising endeavours among them must have been different because of their differing relationships to the mainstream population. Adivasi groups tended to live more separately from the mainstream population with fewer connections, especially economic ones, to the ruling classes — not necessarily in completely isolated regions, but nevertheless as a rule not forming any social group without whose cooperation the social structure of the mainstream population might have been threatened. As opposed to Adivasis, forming a more or less self-contained social system, the Dalits were more likely an integral part of a bigger social system. But as with any statement on South Asia, this one too has to be qualified. One extreme counterexample for the economic dependence of dominant classes on Adivasis is the Adivasi origin of many workers who serve(d) as labourers on tea plantations in Bengal. Nevertheless, the general pattern does show the differences mentioned.

The greater integration of Dalits in social structures of the mainstream population led to dominant classes, predominantly in rural areas, fearing their conversion to Christianity and hence the potential lack of further cooperation with these dominant classes. "Clearly, the conversion of low-caste labour was seen as more dangerous than that of distant hillmen … ."[53] Or, as

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[53] CARRIN/TAMBS-LYCHE 2008: 117.

Stephen Neill puts it:[54]

> The position of village Christians was very different from that of the educated converts, whose fortunes we have been considering. They were ceaselessly exposed to attack, mainly from two quarters — the village community and the landlord class. Christians were a threat to the complex and endlessly interrelated order of village life. In that life of varied mutual interdependence nonconformists could not be tolerated. If a whole village, or a large section of a village, decided to accept the Christian faith, such a group might be able to maintain itself in the face of whatever hostility might arise. If a small group, or a single individual, decided to change religious allegiance, hostility, though short of actual violence, might reach levels which it was by no means easy to endure.

Such problems faced during proselytising endeavours among low-caste people and Dalits might have led to the shift of focus of some missionary groups to ethnic minorities, Adivasis. But there were also other reasons for the discovery of these new target groups.

Instead of investing in a higher education system for locals from higher social strata, especially American missionaries started focussing their endeavours on ethnic minorities. In Orissa, according to Dasarathi Swaro, the American Freewill Baptists converted mostly tribals, mainly Santals, whereas converts of other missionary institutions, mainly British Protestant, were "men of 'Caste, credit and consideration'" (SWARO 1990: 48). The first missionaries of the American Freewill Baptist Mission, which was organised in 1833, entered Orissa in 1835.[55] Otis Robinson Bacheler describes this process thus

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[54] NEILL 1984-1985, 2: 381f.

[55] BACHELER 1856: 121, 123.

(BACHELER 1856: 126):

> Our first missionaries, Brethren Phillips and Noyes, with their wives, having arrived in India, spent the first six months, while engaged in the study of the language, laboring in connection with the English General Baptist missionaries; Mr. Phillips at Balasore, superintending the bazar schools connected with that mission, and Mr. Noyes at Cuttack, in the English mission school. At the end of that time, by the advice of their brethren there, they determined to occupy a separate field. Sumbhulpore, a native tributary state, lying on the Mahánadi River, two hundred and fifty miles above Cuttack, was at first selected. After a tedious journey up the river, in native boats, which occupied them nearly a month, a portion of which time was spent in preaching, and distributing Scriptures and tracts among the villages on its banks, they arrived at their station.

According to this account it could be presumed that these American missionaries started their work in remote areas of Orissa, which were furthermore not under direct control of the British East India Company, because British missionaries already occupied other fields, viz. the cities and villages of the mainstream Oriya population. It might have been, so to say, more or less the 'fate of the last' for the Americans to enter a "separate field", namely the regions which had until then received less attention by other missionaries, and that this ultimately drew their attention more or less by coincidence also to ethnic minorities.

Eli Noyes, one of the first American Freewill Baptist missionaries in Orissa, writes about his first encounter with Santals, at the end of 1838 (BACHELER 1856: 136-138):

> *December* 20*th*. Came to a small village in the heart of a dense jungle. As soon as I came in sight of the houses, I felt persuaded I was coming among old acquaintances, they so much resembled

> the stick huts of the Coles[56] of Sumbhulpore. When I saw the jet black people, with a necklace of white beads about their necks, and their peculiar dress, if dress it might be called, I was more confirmed in my opinion. I immediately alighted from my horse and inquired if that was a village of the Coles; but was not a little surprised at being so soon transported from the Oriyas to a people who could not understand a word I said. I looked about with astonishment at the romantic change, till at length I found an old man, who could speak broken Oriya, of whom I gained the following information. He said they were not Coles, but Santáls.

It is not clear whether Baptists like Noyes were actually the first to have proseltytised amongst the Santals, but there is no doubt that American missionaries were pioneers among the ethnic minorities in East India, as is also shown by their activities in North-East India, where they started preaching already in the 1840s among the Adis in Arunachal Pradesh, though it was only after decades of their preaching that the local tribes started

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[56] "Cole" in this extract is obviously a spelling variant of "Kol", on which DALTON 1872: 152 writes: "The special Ethnographical number of the Journal of the Asiatic Society published in 1866 contains a paper by me entitled the Kols of Chútiá Nágpúr. Under this appellation, according to the ordinary acceptation of the term, are included the Oráons as well as the Múndas and their cognates, but I will now adopt the classification suggested by Mr. George Campbell in his Work on Indian Ethnology, and treating as Kolarians those only whose language is Múnda or Kol … ." Dalton himself subsumes the Santals (along with various other Austro-Asiatic speaking groups) under "Kol", while Noyes obviously does not, in which he seems to have been followed by most other authors. "Munda" and "Kol" have mostly been used as synonyms, both for a particular "tribe" as well as generically for ethnic groups speaking or presumably once speaking Austro-Asiatic languages. "Kol" is rarely used today, being considered derogative; on this cf., for instance, BODDING 1993, 3: 558, who also points out that "the word is not generally used by the Santals", as Noyes' description confirms.

converting to Christianity, namely in the last decade of the nineteenth century (DAWAR 2003: 55).

But the Americans were not alone in the remote areas among ethnic minorities. Other missionaries too seem to have looked for regions where no dominant British missionary institution was active: the "Welsh mission in the Khāsi hills" and the "German Gossner mission among the Kols" from 1841 onwards, and also the Swiss Basel Mission in the Nilgiri hills in South India from 1846 onwards, which was an endeavour among the "tribal people" initiated by the British government.[57]

The last exemplifies the friendly attitude of the British authorities in the middle of the nineteenth century also towards non-British missionary groups, albeit with certain reservations:[58]

> In a great many cases the officials regarded the missionaries as friends, and warmly approved of what they were trying to do in the educational and social fields, though with reservations as to the advisability of their evangelistic efforts.

Relations between different missionary groups seem to have been cordial too, since "the new arrivals in many cases took advice; one mission helped another; the spirit was that of co-operation rather than of rivalry".[59] Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that a certain rivalry existed at the same time. For how otherwise can it be explained that it was mainly non-British missionary groups who shouldered the biggest burden and risked the lives of their people[60] in remote areas? Neill himself

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[57] NEILL 1984-1985, 2: 352ff., 354ff., 356f.

[58] NEILL 1984-1985, 2: 332f.

[59] NEILL 1984-1985, 2: 359.

[60] Thus the first attempt of the Gossner Mission to spread the Gospel among the Gonds in Central India left four of the six missionaries dead of

states that the Basel mission "unwillingly agreed to undertake work among the tribal people in this area",[61] i.e. the Nilgiri Hills. If these missionaries were unwilling to work there, why did they still do so? Because of lacking alternatives? Note too the American Baptist missionaries' account of their move to remote areas of Orissa on p. 22 above.

But even if proselytising in remote areas may have been burdensome in the beginning, the missionaries cannot have been too displeased on realising that the rate of success among the ethnic groups there was much higher than among the majority population.

The Necessity of Primary Education

At the same time, British missionaries themselves started to devote their attention to ethnic minorities, such as the Santals in the Santal Parganas. Thus, the Calcutta Committee of the Church Missionary Society decided to establish schools among the Santals during the 50s of the nineteenth century (MALLICK 1993: 162). The ruling party at that point was, however, only to some extent interested in supporting the missionaries and their new efforts, and the proposed financial funding for education was stopped in July 1854 by the Court of Directors of the East India Company which in the beginning itself encouraged "the spread of secular education among the tribes". Nevertheless, the Church Missionary Society was even without the help of the East India Company able to open schools among the San-

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cholera in the first year (NEILL 1984-1985, 2: 354). The American Baptist missionaries too had to mourn fatalities in their ranks, including the deaths of female missionaries in 1837 and 1840 (BACHELER 1856: 128, 133f.).

[61] NEILL 1984-1985, 2: 356.

tals, fourteen alone in 1860. But the British authorities changed their attitude after the rebellion of the Santals in 1855-1856,[62] and in 1862 granted financial aid to the Church Missionary Society for its school programme (MALLICK 1993: 162f.).

In this context it must also be mentioned that between 1855 and 1862 important changes took place on the administrative level, and that 1858 marked the year of the establishment of the British Raj, which undoubtedly brought new actors — and new attitudes towards missionary activities.

It should, though, also be pointed out that the interest of the East India Company had already shifted much earlier, in 1836, presumably under liberal and utilitarian influence, from higher education to primary education, which, however, did not automatically mean an interest in missionary primary education. The British authorities rather thought of strengthening the already existing, indigenous schools. By 1866/1867, the supported *pāṭh'śālā* system in Bengal consisted of 3,037 schools with 29,666 pupils, which could be seen as a success. But like the higher education system, these primary schools too attracted "mainly the upper and middle classes", and ultimately failed as educational institutions for the masses.[63]

The final change in the rulers' estimation of the role of missionaries imparting education was brought with the already mentioned Santal rebellion of 1855-1856. Even though the root cause seems to have mostly been economic oppression,[64] the

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[62] On this uprising see, for instance, KAVIRAJ 2001. For a collection of contemporary documents, written mainly by British administrators, see RAY 1996, also SINHA 1990.

[63] CARRIN/TAMBS-LYCHE 2008: 114.

[64] Cf. already MAN 1867: 109-123.

missionary Ernest Droese (Ernst Dröse) "stressed how the 'extreme ignorance' and 'absurd religious beliefs' of the Santals was a major cause of the rebellion, whereas Christian education had kept other villagers away from it".[65] Not only Christian missionaries, but the British authorities too seem to have agreed with this assessment. Thanks to funds granted by the colonial administration, already by 1881 the Church Missionary Society could count 57 schools with 982 Santal students.[66]

Other missionary institutions, too, were at that time already active among the Santals, e.g. Scandinavians from 1867 onwards,[67] the United Free Church of Scotland since 1870, and, finally, American missionaries, among whom Seventh-day Adventists could already be found (MALLICK 1993: 160f.). Especially the Scandinavian Lutheran Mission proved to be most successful with nearly 5,000 baptised Santals by 1911, whereas the total number of Santal Christians in the Santal Parganas was only 7,896 — a "poor conversion" according to Samar Kumar Mallick (MALLICK 1993: 161).

Interestingly MAN 1867: 140 mentions that already at that time (1867) Christian Santals were teaching other Santals in schools of the Church Mission Society:

> The trained Sonthal Christian teachers before mentioned, assisted by Hindoos and Bengalis learned in the language, have been, on the whole, moderately successful in their endeavours. They have to fight against great superstition and ignorance; and bearing in mind Mr. Lehman's judicious words, — "It is not desirable that the

[65] CARRIN/TAMBS-LYCHE 2008: 115.

[66] CARRIN/TAMBS-LYCHE 2008: 117.

[67] For a detailed account on Scandinavian missionaries among the Santals see the comprehensive study by Marine Carrin and Harald Tambs-Lyche (CARRIN/TAMBS-LYCHE 2008).

> people should embrace Christianity without being first properly influenced thereto," — we may presume that those who have become Christians, are Christians in the true acceptation of the word.

However, since the missionaries also offered other social services besides primary education, e.g. medical care and social welfare, the suspicion was aroused that people embraced the new faith only because of material advantages, leading to the term "rice-Christians" being coined; this might explain the low number of converts referred to above (p. 27). Though detailed statistics on the number of primary schools and students are missing, it could be surmised that the number of converts in 1911 might have come close to the number of primary students over the years. Indeed, Mallick writes that particularly elderly Santals showed no interest because of various prohibitions associated with Christianity, but did not mind the young Santals being educated. Mallick illustrates this with the following anecdote of a missionary approaching an old Santal:[68]

> "Will the Christian God allow the old people to get drunk twice a week?" he asked, "Certainly not" was the reply. "Then teach our boys and girls", said the old man, "but leave us alone."

The supposition that mainly primary education led to an increase in conversion among the Santals would allow the number of 7,896 Santal Christians in 1911 to be seen not as a failure, but as a success. The supposition can, obviously, not be proved, but, as will be seen below, the Seventh-day Adventists' proselytisation methods among Santals in present-day Bangladesh tend to point in this direction.

While the motive of the British Government's support of mis-

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[68] MALLICK 1993: 162, quoting HOULTON 1949: 79.

sionary education among the Santals was preventive, one may presume that at the latest after missionaries realised that primary education among ethnic minorities was the ultimate key for winning new church members, more endeavours were made in this field. For instance, the American Baptist missionaries' first proselytising success among Santals in Orissa was only possible because of primary education (BACHELER 1856: 143f.):

> Little religious interest was manifest among the Santáls until 1847. Mr. Phillips established a school at Jellasore, into which several of their youths had been drawn. There they learned to read their own language, reduced to system, and *written, for the first time, in a book*. The minds of some of these were gradually enlightened, religious instruction was sanctified, and they began to manifest a deep interest in spiritual things.

Should the linkage between primary education and conversion in the case of the Santals be an accurate assessment, then it would give the lie to the statement of Peter McNee, a Baptist missionary from New Zealand, that education is a failed method of evangelism in Bangladesh (MCNEE 1976: 136ff.). Viewed in this light, the strategy of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to impart primary education with the help of target group members, in this case Santals, as teachers, would make sense.

Christian Missionaries in East Bengal

By the end of the nineteenth century, missionary attempts, mostly by British Baptists, were also partly successful among different Adivasi groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts,[69] where also schools and furthermore hostels for young students seemed

[69] See for instance SCHENDEL/MEY/DEWAN 2000: 167-190.

to have been an important proselytising tool already at the beginning of the twentieth century.[70] Hence today, various Adivasis, for instance some Marmas and Chakmas, as well as the majority of Bawns, Lushais and Pankhos, in the Chittagong Hill Tracts profess Christianity.

In the plains of East Bengal Christianity was already present for a much longer time. As mentioned above (p. 12), most active and successful were until the arrival of the British the Portuguese. Another very influential, more urban Christian community, though as a rule in the economic and not in the proselytising field, were the Armenians.[71] Contacts between the local population and these Christians were seemingly limited to the majority ethnic group, i.e. Bengalis, anyway.

Only with the arrival of the British and particularly Protestant missionaries did the focus shift also to ethnic minorities. The first British missionaries who entered East Bengal in 1793 were from the Baptist Missionary Society. In the nineteenth century others followed: missionaries of the Church Missionary Society in 1805, the United Society for Propagation of the Gospel, the Council for World Mission in 1862, and the Oxford Mission in 1895. According to Peter McNee's overview (MCNEE 1976), non-British missions began their activities in East Bengal much later than in West Bengal, i.e. in the end of the nineteenth century. Australian Baptist missionaries were the first in 1882, followed by representatives of the New Zealand Baptist Mission in 1886. American missionaries were also in that region among the last to become active: the missionaries of the Churches of God in North America in 1905, and, finally, the Seventh-day

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[70] SCHENDEL/MEY/DEWAN 2000: 172f.

[71] On these cf., for instance, SETH 1937.

Adventists according to McNee in 1919 (McNee 1976: 40), though according to other sources the latter had already established a mission station in East Bengal in 1906.[72] The two different dates for the arrival of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in East Bengal indicate one omnipresent problem regarding Christianity in East Bengal: the huge lack of in-depth studies of high quality on the history of Christianity in this region.

Indeed, in a publication from 1926 it is stated that the Adventists had established the first school among Santals in Bengal already in 1900 (Olsen 1926: 523):

> The Babumohal Mission had its beginning in the year 1900, when W.A. Barlow secured a small plot of land near Simultala, a town in the Santal country, where in due time he opened a school for boys. This was the first Seventh-day Adventist boarding school among Santal people, and by means of it the first Santal converts were obtained.

But Simultala belongs to present-day Bihar, which is probably why it is not mentioned any more in regard of Adventist activities in Bengal. And though the exact date of the start of Adventist activities in East Bengal is not given in this publication, it can nevertheless be concluded that McNee's date is wrong, because Olsen states that already in 1910 Hindu children visited the Adventist school in Gopalganj (Olsen 1926: 524).

Unfortunately, McNee gives no detailed account of the target groups of the other missionary institutions, and merely points out only superficially the problems of the missionaries, and their successes (McNee 1976: 43):

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[72] According to Land 2005: 32, the first station of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in East Bengal was established in 1906, and the first church in 1910 (in Barisal).

> Bengal did not appear to be a favourable place for missionary activity, nor was it considered a top priority for evangelism. There may have been other factors such as opposition to new Missions by the main line Missions in the country. Yet the Christian community doubled between 1911 and 1941, whereas the population of the country increased by only one third.

Interestingly, McNee also points out above that there was a certain rivalry among the already established, viz. the Catholic and British, missions, and the newly arrived missionaries.

Unlike most other studies about missionaries in this region,[73] from McNee's publication it is also apparent that the Catholic missionaries too played an important role in modern proselytising endeavours. But in contrast to Protestantism, the Catholic faith was already a long established institution in East Bengal at least since the end of the seventeenth century, and could be therefore perceived as a "local" religion attempting to expand its membership in an already familiar environment. But the Catholic population in East Bengal at that time seems to have been overwhelmingly Bengali, and it is not clear when exactly and why Catholic missionaries started their missionary activities among the ethnic minorities. It could be supposed, though, that they did this in connection with the start of British missionary activity among those target groups, maybe due to fear of being outnumbered by non-Catholics and losing their entrenched dominant position in the region.

Today members of the Santal and Oraon community and the vast majority of the Mandis in the plains of Bangladesh are Christians.[74] For the most part Adivasis in the Chittagong Hill

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[73] Though see JEṂCĀM 1994: 73f.

[74] According to JEṂCĀM 1994: 73, 95% of the Mandis of Bangladesh are

Tracts, however, profess Buddhism, while many Adivasis in the plains adhere to different so-called animist beliefs, though many have integrated Hindu elements into their religions and cultures.[75] On the other hand, various Dalit and similar Hindu groups too were successfully converted to Christianity.[76]

Though even before the independence of Bangladesh some East Bengali Santals were already Christians, the attempts of Christian missionaries to convert Santals seem to have reached new dimensions after 1971. Although the presence of NGOs in Bangladesh goes back to colonial days, and although a number of NGOs existed already during the time of East Pakistan, it was the destructive cyclone of 1970 and the War of Independence which attracted a huge amount of foreign funds and accompanying NGO activity. While foreign funded projects initially concentrated on relief and reconstruction, they also marked the beginning of the development industry in Bangladesh, in which a vast variety of different actors works with various agendas.[77] Among these are also NGOs with and without missionary tasks funded by Christian organisations.

The Religious Setting of the Santals in East Bengal/Bangladesh

There is a large body of literature on the polytheistic and polyritual religion of the Santals, briefly described above on p. 4.[78]

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today Christian.

[75] For an interesting overview of ethnic minorities in Bengal, and theoretical discourses on them, see SENDEL/BAL 1998.

[76] An interesting case study is presented by ZENE 2002.

[77] Cf. above, note 4.

[78] For a general introduction to traditional Santal religion, TROISI 1979,

However, hardly any works focus on the belief system of the Santals of Bangladesh in particular, though JALIL 1991 has relevant data. An important publication for understanding the present-day religious life of the Santals in Bangladesh is ALI 1998. Though the author, Ahsan Ali, does not give a detailed account of their religious practices, his research approach is very relevant for our study (ALI 1998: 22):

> However, this resecrch [sic] tries to provide a complete and coherent description about the Santals of the Barind region of Bangladesh and to document the process of change reflecting de-Santalization (de-tribalization) in Barind and the process of formation of identity of the same in West Bengal, India.

For his research Ali studied the Santal population in four villages in Bangladesh and in one in West Bengal, India, and compared them with each other in the perspective of the influence of dominating outside factors which might bring change to the traditional culture and religion of the Santals. Potential influences were Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and urbanity. According to ALI 1998: 23,

> the process of change of the Santals of Barind has been due to the impact of Christianity and not by Hinduisation or Islamic culture and this has slowly brought about disintegration in the traditional life of Santals and led to their gradual isolation from the wider society.

JALIL 1991: 22 too holds that both Islam and Hinduism have had little effect on the religious and social life of the Santals of Bangladesh.

It seems surprising that Islam, the dominant religion in Bang-

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HEMBRAM 1988 and MATHUR 2001 might be suggested.

ladesh, has had no discernible influence on the Santals, and that, rather, another monotheistic religion, namely Christianity, has brought clearly observable change. This is all the more striking given the fact that the Christian religion is a latecomer in Bengal, as ALI 1998: 46f. too points out:

> Islam has practically no effect on them at all. It is rather surprising, especially when one takes into account their contact with the Muslims for over five centuries from the thirteenth century onwards. … After the Great Santal Rebellion (1855), the most potent outside influence is that of the Christian Missionaries. Throughout the Santal Parganas and Barind tract, these Missions are scattered. They educate the Santals the rudiments of modern knowledge, treat them in hospitals of their own when ill and look after the lepers in the Leper Colonies. The Missionaries confess that they are out to preach and teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ for salvation, but the indirect result of the educational activities can easily be seen from the changed effect among the tribe.

One may speculate why Islam seems to have been unattractive as far as the the Santals are concerned. HOSSAIN 2000 says:[79]

> As reported by the key informants and my observation confirm that the Muslim landlords often exploited the Santals. This tend to have developed negative attitude of the Santals towards the Muslims.

Further, according to UDDIN 2008: 216, the Muslim Bengali family structure is "autocratic", with the husband/father dominating, whereas the Santal family structure is "democratic or egalitarian", i.e. biased against autocratic structures. Should this be an accurate assessment, then one could see such factors as also contributing towards the lack of attraction of Islam. However, they would, on the whole, probably also hold true for

[79] Reproduced as in the original.

the Hindus the Santals have been in contact with.

But in the case of Hinduism, according to Ahsan Ali there is "a give and take policy … between the Hindus and Santals in terms of culture change" (ALI 1998: 269f.). This would mean that the relationship to Hinduism is different from that to Islam, so that factors other than those tentatively mentioned above may be involved. Maybe the influence of Hinduism on the culture and religion of the Santals lies in the nature of Hinduism, itself a polytheistic and polyritual belief system, which, on the one hand, still provides enough space to practise non-Hindu rituals, that are not seldom also just incorporated, and on the other hand does not require any clear-cut identity shift.[80] I shall return to this issue below, on pp. 51ff.

But what seems most important for our study is the fact that Ali concludes that Christianity is responsible for a fission within the Santal community he studied in Bangladesh, leading to "two social groups — Christian Santals and non-Christian Santals" (ALI 1998: 270).[81] He attributes this to economic dependence of the Santal villagers on the Christian mission, the Bangladesh Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church, in the Christian village studied, and calls the process of conversion to Christianity, which began there "during the last phase of Pakistani rule", "starvation conversion"[82] because of the completion

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[80] What Horce Hayman Wilson enunciated in 1828 has today become a platitude (WILSON 1828: 1): "The Hindu religion is a term, that has been hitherto employed in a collective sense, to designate a faith and worship of an almost endlessly diversified description." This has given rise to a long and still ongoing discussion about the term "Hinduism" and the nature of what this refers to, to go into which this is not the proper place.

[81] Cf. also above on p. 34.

[82] Cf. the expression "rice-Christians" above (p. 28).

of the proselytisation process in 1974 — the year of a major famine in Bangladesh (ALI 1998: 71).

In the following, we shall see whether the recent activities of Seventh-day Adventist Church missionaries among Santals in Bangladesh fit the pattern Ahsan Ali discerns.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Bangladesh

The focus of this study is limited to activities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in some Santal villages in the district of Joypurhat, and does not claim to be a complete account of the activities of either this church in Bangladesh as such, or of other missionary groups in the country. Nevertheless, a few brief remarks on the history and activities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Bangladesh seem in order.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, which already in the beginning of the twentieth century had started working in then East Bengal,[83] has one of the internationally most active Christian missions. It also works under the banner of its development organisation Adventist Development and Relief Agency.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is an evangelical church, and was officially formed in 1863 in the state of Michigan in the USA. Like other Adventist groups whose roots lie in the beginning of the nineteenth century, the members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church too believe in the Second Advent of Christ. Claiming to have more than fifteen million members world-wide, it is one of the largest free churches; this seems mainly due to its missionary activities, both among non-Christians and other Christian denominations, among the poor in developing countries of South America, Africa and Asia.

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[83] See pp. 30f. above.

According to its self-depiction the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Bangladesh consisted of 114 churches and nearly 30,000 members in 2010.[84] To which age groups these members belong is not apparent from the statistics given. According to the manual of the mother church in the USA only people who truly believe in the ideals of their church and have been duly examined are — voluntarily — baptised,[85] for which reason this church is known also for adult baptism, while in other churches infant baptism is a common integral part. But the manual gives no clear statement about the age of potential new members, and children too may be baptised in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.[86] Indeed, since it is difficult to say when somebody is mature enough to embrace a religion with full conviction, the practice in reality seems to be quite flexible. In any case, voluntary baptism is doubted by Santal activists in the village in the North-West of Bangladesh which was studied; they claim to have over the years observed different forms of pressure against children and their parents used by the Seventh-day Adventists since these came to the village.

Seventh-day Adventists in Joypurhat

According to the activists mentioned on p. 6, in 1998 some unknown Santals came to the locality (cf. note 13) and bought a

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[84] SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST ONLINE YEARBOOK 2010. As I could not obtain a printed edition of the *Yearbook* this data is based on the web edition, which by default gives the current statistics, in this case for 2010.

[85] GENERAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS 2005: 29-35.

[86] GENERAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS 2005: 29: "While there is no stated age for baptism, it is recommended that very young children who express a desire to be baptized should be encouraged and entered into an instruction program that may lead to baptism."

piece of land. They introduced themselves to the villagers as members of a welfare organisation, who wanted to bring education to the community. After completing the construction of the school building they went from house to house and asked the villagers to send their children to the newly established school. Based on the income of the parents, they wanted to charge no school fees or to take only half of the regular amount. Additionally, all students were offered two free school uniforms a year and one daily meal.

According to reports of the American Freewill Baptist Mission, which was, as mentioned above (pp. 21f.), active among Santals in Orissa during the nineteenth century, the missionaries in those days complained about the lack of interest among Santals in education, and their failed attempts in convincing them to send their children to school (SWARO 1990: 144f.). More than a hundred years later, education seems to be seen in a different light at least among the Santals in Bangladesh, and, given the additional offer to feed their children once a day, as well as the lack of any alternative affordable and good education, the Santal villagers welcomed the initiative of the strangers and started sending their children to this school.

It was, however, not long before it became known to the parents that besides common subjects the school teachers also placed emphasis on preaching their religious doctrine to the children. But since the students, taught in their mother tongue and not the majority language Bengali, made good progress in the other subjects, the parents accepted the added religious classes and continued sending their children there.

According to the activist informants, the situation today is the following: While some parents are open to the preaching of the Adventists and regularly or sporadically attend their services in

the subsequently built village church, other parents have started complaining that this school contributes to the alienation of their children from their own culture, religion and even family, and that the children are being baptised without their parents' consent, and beaten when they act against the dogmas of the Seventh-day Adventist Church — which seems to be perceived as quite a different matter from being beaten for not studying, a teaching method still common in South Asian educational institutions.[87] But even when accusing the school operators of committing such acts, parents still seem to want to send their children to this school, since they see the need for education and lack attractive alternatives.

When the activists attempted to counter what they perceived as alienation and keep the children close to their traditions by from time to time arranging cultural events — including singing, dancing and theatre — for the children after school, the school operators allegedly began putting pressure on the parents in a different manner. Although the Adventists in the beginning had promised to abstain from school fees or asked for only half the regular amount, they started sending bills to the parents of children who were not yet baptised. The bills included full school fees charged retroactively over a longer period, and meant a heavy burden for the parents. Parents complaining about the bills to the school operators were given the choice of paying the school fees, allowing the Adventists to baptise their children, or taking their children from this school.

While some parents decided to allow baptism, others pre-

[87] This refers to secular as well as religious institutions. See, for instance, UNICEF 2008. In 2010, Bangladesh banned corporal punishment in educational institutions, though it is doubtful whether this ban is actually being widely followed.

ferred taking their children from this school, leaving them uneducated, or started sending them to a public school more distant from their village, which ultimately meant an additional financial burden because of transportation costs, apart from the fact that the medium of instruction was no longer Santali. But none of the parents were able to pay the bills of the Seventh-day Adventist school. Though primary education in public schools in Bangladesh is in principle free of charge, additional costs, such as for stationery, school books, uniforms, transportation etc., not seldom prevent poor parents from sending their children there — even though poor parents of primary students, both male and female, are provided with a food subsidy per month under the Food for Education programme as an encouragement to provide education to their children.

It must be highlighted that the above is based on accounts of my activist informants; I cannot vouch for their veracity. However, these activists do not see things in a purely black-and-white fashion; for instance, even while voicing her concerns Basanti Murmu, spokeswoman of the Adivasi Nari Kalyan Sanstha (cf. p. 6), expresses appreciation for the education the missionaries impart, and does not wish them to leave the village.[88] Their allegations should, therefore, be taken seriously, even if

[88] CAMPS 2008: "[Question:] Würden Sie es begrüßen, wenn die Missionare das Dorf wieder verließen, auch wenn das bedeuten würde, dass die Kinder wieder ohne Bildungsmöglichkeiten wären? — [Answer:] Nein. Wenn sie das Dorf verließen, wäre die einzige Bildungsmöglichkeit für die Kinder verschwunden. Ich glaube, sie müssten sich eher für die Entwicklung der Adivasi-Gemeinde einsetzen. Aber im Namen von Entwicklung zwingen die Missionare der Adivasi-Gemeinde ihren Glauben und ihre Gedanken auf. Was kann ich jedoch sonst vorschlagen? Wir selbst haben nur eine sehr kleine Organisation und können keine Alternativen anbieten."

cum grano salis, and discussed with due attention to the wider context, which may shed more light upon the matter.

The Exclusionary Mission of the Adventists

Peter McNee's study (MCNEE 1976), already referred to above (pp. 29ff.), attempted to identify potential target groups for missionary activities and successful strategies. The subtitle of the book, namely *Making Missions More Effective in the Mosaic of Peoples*, points to what he means. At first glance, calling Bangladesh a mosaic of peoples seems rather ironic, because it is, after all, ethnically the most homogeneous among the larger states of South Asia, with around 98% of the population consisting of Bengalis.[89] But is seems obvious that McNee is referring to the large number of different ethnic minorities in Bangladesh, minuscule though each of them may be when compared to the crushing weight of the majority ethnic group, and maybe also to religious minorities among the Bengalis themselves.

His book is an appeal to missionaries to respect the social structure, class, caste and tribal lines, in Bangladesh, and to "make that structure the vehicle of the Gospel" (MCNEE 1976: 25). He explains (MCNEE 1976: 29):

> So much foggy teaching and evangelism has alienated converts from their caste and tribe, thus denying that there can be *Muchi* Christians and *Namasudra* Christians. For some reason the converts were taught to think of themselves as Christians with no racial[90] roots at all!

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[89] On this cf. note 6 above.

[90] "Racial" here seems to be due to "tribe" in the previous sentence, whereas the examples given are due to "caste". Nevertheless, the manner of presentation does remind one of the difficulties of delimiting the cate-

McNee further holds the cultural alienation caused by conversion to Christianity to be an obstacle to church growth (McNee 1976: 28):

> This report shows clearly the most important factor in the non-growth of that church. In most cases when becoming a Christian is seen as a denial of one's own culture and people, a racial matter instead of a religious matter, then the Church will not, nay cannot grow.

McNee is here actually recurring to an issue that is as old as the advent of Christianity from Western Europe in South Asia at the turn of the sixteenth century. David G. Mandelbaum has given a succinct but nonetheless illuminating overview (Mandelbaum 1972: 564-572), his personal conclusion being (Mandelbaum 1972: 568):

> Converts might have adapted the religion to the social system more smoothly, as indeed the Syrian Christians did, had it not been for the overseeing presence of the resident missionaries. These men were generally against the Indian social order yet were unable to provide feasible alternatives. As a result, converts were mainly made from very low jatis, from those who had nothing to lose and perhaps could gain something in status and livelihood.

McNee and Mandelbaum seem to be in agreement. Joseph Troisi in his study on Santal religion (Troisi 1979) too seems to hold similar opinions. Pointing out that Protestant missionaries of all denominations had since the beginning of their missionary activities insisted on the new converts giving up major aspects of their pre-conversion life (Troisi 1979: 265ff.), thus effectively creating a cleavage between Protestant and other

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gories of "caste" and "tribe" in colonial as well as post-colonial times.

Santals, he contrasts this with Catholic missionaries who "tended to be more accommodating and liberal regarding those customs which were not in direct conflict with the Christian faith. Thus, for example, their converts were not completely discouraged from rice-beer drinking and dancing unless carried to excess" (TROISI 1979: 267). Troisi comes to the conclusion that "the more normative a religion is the less seems to have been its impact on Santal religious beliefs and practices", so that "it is very difficult for an individual Santal to become a Christian" (TROISI 1979: 272). He makes a very interesting comparison with Hinduism in this regard, holding "that while 'popular Hinduism' which is less normative, has had a considerable impact on Santal religion, 'sectarian Hinduism' which is highly normative, has exercised only a passing and relatively peripheral influence on Santal religion" (TROISI 1979: 273). It is for similar reasons, he concludes, that Catholicism appealed more to the Santals than Protestantism.

But such criticisms seem to have had no impact on Seventh-day Adventist missionaries, who seem, rather, to practise the opposite. Indeed, the strategy of the Adventists in the case being discussed here seems to deny any space to traditional cultural elements, at least on the evidence of what the children are taught, as can be seen in the following two songs they must, according to my informants, learn by heart in school:[91]

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[91] Not only the Bengali translation supplied, but the original Santali text too was written down in the Bengali script: the transliteration given here is in accord with this script and does not follow the Romanised form adopted by BODDING 1993. The orthography of the original —both the Santali and the Bengali — is faithfully reproduced, including all mistakes (even in ligatures). Note that this has led to some features of the Bengali spoken in the extreme West of Bengal, and also by the Santals there, coming to the fore (e.g. /*u*/ for /*o*/ of "standard" Bengali).

Song 1 (taught in class 2)

Santali original	*Bengali translation*	*English translation*
ām do nā sonāmuṇi	tumi sonāmuṇi	You are a gold jewel.
ñan do nā sūruc'muṇi	āmi sūruc'muni	I am a sun jewel.
yīśu āḥ man'lāṃ do-haẏ tāẏā.	yīśur man jogiẏe rākh'ba.	We will keep Jesus satisfied.
cạndire ṭikali	kapāle tilak	The Tilak on the fore-head
yālāṃ lāgāo kārām ḍạr.	lāgābanā kārām ḍāl	[and] the Karam twig we won't put.
yīśu āḥ kuruś khun'ṭi cin lāṃ lāgāo.	yīśur kuruś khuṭi cihna lāgāba.	Jesus' wooden cross we will wear [as] a mark.

Song 2 (taught in class 3)

Santali original	*Bengali translation*	*English translation*
hoṙ'more sāj-bāj hoṙ'-ko ñelā	śarīle sāj-goj mānuṣ dekh'be	The decoration on the body humans will see.
antare sāj-bāj yīśu ñelā.	antare sāj-goj yīśu dekh'be.	The decoration inside Jesus will see.
pātā chātā dibi ṭạnḍi	pātā chātā dūrgā pūjā	Pata, Chata [and] Dur-ga Puja
śaẏ'tānāḥ jhāli.	śaẏ'tāner jāl.	are the nets of the Devil.
yīśu pānjāẏem ser'-mām ñamā.	yīśur pichane yāo sbarga pābe.	Follow Jesus; you will reach heaven.

In both songs it is obvious that the children are on the one hand asked to abandon cultural and religious elements still pre-

sent in their village, and on the other hand requested to embrace the belief in Jesus. The first song asks them to give up symbols related to the culture and religion of their parents. Though the Tilak on the forehead is mainly known as a symbol of Hindus, Santals in this area use it too. This symbol, like various Hindu festivals, has been integrated and 'Santalised' due to contact with Hindu neighbours and/or attempts of 'Hinduisation' which started in the beginning of the twentieth century in this area of East Bengal.[92] Conversely, even though some Santals in this village call themselves Hindus, they still observe Santal rituals, for instance the ritual with Karam twigs, which are placed in fields used for agriculture for averting harm from crops, and together with Karam flowers are used for celebrating a kind of 'Thanksgiving' in the month of October.[93]

In the second song the children are taught not only to replace traditional symbols with the new symbol of Jesus, the cross, but furthermore also requested to stop attending traditional festivals. The festivals named, Pata, Chata and Durga Puja, have been integrated from Hinduism. They learn that these festivals are tools of the Devil and will not help them in reaching Heaven. My informants from this village claim that children often tell them that their school teachers even beat them if they find out that they have been attending these and other festivals observed by the villagers (cf. above, p. 40).

The Standpoint of the Adventists

Even though I have opined that the allegations above should

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[92] See, for instance, CHAUDHURI 1987.

[93] For a more detailed account on the Karam festival, although in an Indian Santal village, see GAUTAM 1977: 176ff.

"be taken seriously, even if *cum grano salis*" (pp. 41f.), it is obvious that the sources they are based on are not disinterested, and aim to discredit the felt intruders into their community. So in March 2010 the charges by the Santal activists were discussed with Eric Monnier, the President of the Bangladesh Union Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Monnier said that he definitely could not be expected to have an overview over all Adventist activities, especially in remote villages, but that he was willing to discuss the charges.

The reproduction of this discussion below is not literal, but rather a synopsis giving the gist of the replies, since the interview was not recorded. Nevertheless, what is reproduced below is accurate, as it is based on notes taken down only after repeated questioning to preclude the possibility of any misunderstanding.

Charge 1: The Adventists focus on primary schools and thus on young children.

Answer: Education is an important tool for social empowerment. In the past hospitals were also an important part of the Adventists' charity work, but hospitals are nowadays too expensive.

Charge 2: The Adventists allure children with free primary education and later on demand school fees from non-baptised students.

Answer: It is possible, because donors abroad want their donations to be spent on Adventist children. And since the schools' maintenance depends on foreign donations, non-Adventist children might have to pay school fees.

Charge 3: In Adventist schools Santal children are asked to abandon the traditional Santal culture and religion.

Answer: The distinction between culture and religion in regard to Adivasi communities is difficult and very often both overlap.

But the belief in certain deities, symbols, and rituals is backward and prevents human development. Superstition is stupid.[94]

Charge 4: The Adventist teachers beat a child when they come to know that it attended a Santal festival.

Answer: The teachers are Santal first generation converts and might still cling to typical inherited cultural elements.[95] And beating students at school is a quite common practice in South Asia anyway.[96]

Charge 5: Santals convert to Christianity because of material advantages.

Answer: Eric Monnier is fully aware of this fact, especially when he visits villages where he is always treated as a guest of honour because of his white skin. But the second generation will truly believe.

Regrettably, it was realised only subsequently that, if the

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[94] This latter was said several times during the conversation.

[95] In this context Monnier remarked on the erroneous notions portrayed by the last line of the first song (p. 45), since Adventists are supposed to shun external symbols.

[96] Cf. above, p. 40. Interestingly, E.G. Man, in his publication of 1867, mentions the following regarding beating Santal children at school (MAN 1867: 138): "For their mothers and fathers make a point of never beating them; and should corporal punishment be inflected by the master, he runs the risk of losing all his pupils." But over a century has passed since then, and, moreover, Man is describing another geographical region. Nevertheless, this does raise the question about the nature of beating school children in South Asia, i.e. its origination and historical as well as geographical/ethnic/cultural spread, in particular, whether this is an 'import' into Santal culture or not. — It may not be out of place to mention here that according to the ancient medical work *Suśrutasaṃhitā* (Uttarantra 27,6), frightening or beating infants may cause malignant entities (*graha*-) to attack (and enter) them (*tarjitān tāḍitān vā ... hiṃsyur ete kumārān*) (I am grateful to Professor Rahul Peter Das for pointing this out).

charges of the Santal activists are true, the Adventist school in question might be contravening Article 41(2) of the Constitution of Bangladesh,[97] and be acting illegally. Thus it was not possible to question Eric Monnier on this point.

Christianity and Loss of Tradition

The two standpoints presented here illustrate only the perspectives of the two most vocal agents — the missionaries and the Santal activists. While the Adventists from their perspective seemingly want to protect and help their target group to become members of a strong modern global group by means of education and abandonment of "superstition", the Santal activists are seemingly interested in keeping or creating a unity of the Santal community through the preservation of cultural and religious identity markers.

That the fear of a fission within the community is not unjustified is made probable by the remarks of Ahsan Ali referred to above on pp. 34ff.[98] JALIL 1991: 85f. too draws attention to the loss of tradition among the Santals of Bangladesh due to Christianisation and the lure of medical treatment, education and "indispensable wants of human life" (*mānab jībaner atyābaśyak cāhidā*), and the alienations this causes. In this connection he

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[97] "No person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instruction, or to take part in or to attend any religious ceremony or worship, if that instruction, ceremony or worship relates to a religion other than his own."

[98] See also ALI 1998: 269 (table). Cf. too MALLICK 1993: 164, even though this concerns West Bengal: "The educated [Christian] Santals, though constituting an almost microscopic minority, emerged as a distinct group among the Santals, having different aspirations and sometimes almost totally cut off from their traditional ways of life."

cites a Santal song: A Christian maiden and a non-Chrisitian youth are walking holding hands. The youth says that they should not hold hands. The maiden replies that she has not really become Christian, but only been educated, so there is no fault in holding hands.

The loss of religious and cultural elements may indeed mean the loss of a common identity and thus possibly of the glue keeping the community together. But for the individuals concerned the abandonment of religious and cultural elements may lead to upward social mobility. Besides about 160 primary schools the Seventh-day Adventists also run five boarding schools in Bangladesh, where the brightest students can obtain a high school degree, and ideally secure employment within the Seventh-day Adventist institutions, receiving a salary their parents might not have been able to even dream of. These jobs might then include teaching other Santal children in primary schools in villages, what makes these children potential tools for further proselytising. Apart from this, "missionary school education" even today carries a certain status throughout South Asia, so that the prospect of a job outside Adventist circles through an education in an Adventist institution may be a powerful allure in its own right.

That the prospect of a job is the main cause for conversion is, for instance, also the opinion of a representative of the Ramakrishna Mission in north-western Bangladesh whom I interviewed. Although he refrained from criticism of Christian missionaries in general, he did remark ironically that converting to Christianity nowadays is nothing but playing lottery for a job.

However, job opportunities, or in general a chance for upward social mobility, are not the factors for potential fission. They are only reasons which are cited for converting to Christianity;

it is the latter which is taken to lead to fission. The question to be addressed here is, therefore, not why and how Santals in this case are converting or being converted, but what it is about Christianity that may lead to this potential delimitation. In this regard, it may be helpful to contrast Christianity with the other important religions in the region.

Inclusionary Hinduism

Christianity, like its sister religions Judaism and Islam, is monotheistic, with a strong point of reference in one holy script, despite different versions and exegeses of this, and different internal groupings. Hinduism, by contrast, is a collective term for a variety of belief systems lacking a single authority or definition and an exclusive holy script.[99] The very idea of there being an "-ism" subsuming this conglomerate is based on an originally outsider perspective, though the denotation and accompanying classification is now widely accepted by those thus characterised and classified. Indeed, the term "Hindu" itself is non-native to South Asia and originally a geographical appellation.

Descriptions of Hinduism as a uniform structure in the mould of Christianity thus conceal their basic differences. "Conversion" in the case of Hinduism does not entail the acceptance of certain central tenets or characteristics which exclude all others;[100] rather, Hinduism's polytheistic und polyritual character

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[99] Cf. note 80 above.

[100] Hinduism does not, contrary to common descriptions, require acceptance of the authority of the Vedas, validity of the caste system, worship of images or in temples, or sacredness of the cow, to name just some characteristics often associated with it. One can reject some or all of these while still claiming to be, and be regarded as, a Hindu, as many historical and contemporary examples show. Indeed, defining a "Hindu" is a pro-

leaves enough space for retaining cultural and religious elements after "conversion", which in most cases would probably be better characterised as "assimilation" or the like anyway.[101]

Since the traditional Santal belief system is also polytheistic and polyritual, it provides scope for the integration of new deities and rituals. Thus 'Hinduisation' from the perspective of both the Hindu and Santal belief systems does not require the full replacement of deities, beliefs, concepts etc. While the 'Hinduisation' among different Adivasi groups in India and Bangladesh has led and continues to lead to different results, including the complete abandonment of traditional belief systems and rituals, in the case of the Santals in Joypurhat it has led, rather, to the augmentation of their traditional belief and cultural system with Hindu elements. Instead of a replacement of key elements, some Santal elements were 'Hinduised', and some Hindu elements 'Santalised', leading to an inclusionary amalgam of both religious traditions, but yet with discernible differences to the Hinduism of the local non-Santals, irrespective of whether the Santals concerned call themselves Hindus or not (overwhelmingly, they seem not to).[102]

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blem even the Indian Constitution and Supreme Court have not been able to solve definitively (cf., e.g., ELST 2002, SEN, R. 2007).

[101] It is for this reason that 'Hinduisation' and its derivatives have consistently been placed within quotation marks in this study.

[102] As Dhanapati Bag writes on Santals in Birbhum in West Bengal (BAG 1987: 2 of second pagination): "Obviously, — at least in the case of Birbhum — without their participation the Hindu celebrations would lose much of its [sic] charm. Yet the Santals do not involve themselves in Hindu religious ceremonies. The question why they come to the Melas and take part in the festivals in spite of their not being Hindus, has been raised neither by the leaders of Hindu society nor by the Santals. Such a question, one hope [sic], will never be raised."

This unclear demarcation has, as is well known, led to claims by Hindu activists that the Santals, as well as other Adivasis, are actually Hindus or proto-Hindus, coupled with efforts to situate them firmly within the fold of "Hinduism". Such processes have taken place in South Asia in the remote and recent past, are still ongoing in India and Nepal, and also have repercussions in Bangladesh.[103]

Samar Kumar Mallick remarks on 'Hinduisation' attempts at the end of the second half of the nineteenth century (MALLICK 1993: 170.):

> This process of acculturation should not be overemphasised. The Hinduizing movement among the Santals began to lose momentum and popularity as it failed to protect the Santal ryots from their social and economic degradation. The forces of acculturation affected only a small section of Santal community. Though the tribal tradition and purity could not be preserved in toto, the basic structure of Santal society and economy remained more or less unaltered particularly in remote villages. The Hinduising [sic] movement among the Santals, even the adoption of some Hindu gods, could not prevent them from participating in their own religious festivals and ceremonies which continued to be held with abandon gay and splendour in the traditional lines.

Given this initial position, would 'Hinduisation', whether due to contact with neighbouring Hindu populations or purposefully planned 'Hinduising' movements, have been more successful at wooing Santals into the Hindu fold if it had offered more prospects of upward mobility, if the economic prospects of Hindu Santals had been brighter and they been better educated than

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[103] Cf., e.g., MURMU 2004: "In fact, the authority of the traditional headman is deteriorating because of the application of the 'Hindu law' on the Adibasi, the so called tribal peoples of Bangladesh."

non-Hindu Santals? Lacking actual data, we cannot but speculate, though it cannot be overlooked that being a Hindu in Bangladesh today might not seem a particularly bright prospect. In any case, our concern here is not with conversion as such, but with the delimitation this brings with it.

In 1922, Rabindranath Tagore (Rabīndranāth Ṭhākur) remarked that India was unlucky in having two main religions in the form of Hinduism and Islam, the former liberal in belief, but restrictive in custom, the latter liberal in custom, but not in belief.[104] Tagore was a keen observer, and his remark on Hinduism remains very pertinent, for he is describing what throughout the ages upwardly mobile groups undergoing 'Hinduisation' have realised — and then adjusted to by changing not their beliefs, but their customs, ritual ideology and way of life in the direction of higher social groups ("castes"), in a process now known as "Sanskritisation".[105]

But this process cannot as a rule lead to upward social mobility of a single individual, since any such mobility is group-based.[106] This must make one pose the question of any possible

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[104] ṬHĀKUR 1978: 376: *bhārat'barṣer emani kapāl ye, ekhāne hindumusal'-māner mato dui jāt ekatra haẏeche; dharmamate hindur bādhā prabal naẏ, ācāre prabal; ācāre musal'māner bādhā prabal naẏ, dharmamate prabal*.

[105] According to GUPTA 1988, it was Benoykumar Sarkar who first coined the term in 1937. However, it is a moot point whether Sarkar used the term in the same sense as M.N. Srinivas, who used it in the sense given above about fifteen years later.

[106] SAXENA 2005: 107: "No doubt individual members of caste [sic] have not been able to change their caste and status, yet castes, or sub-castes as a whole have succeeded in rising [sic] their status. The process by which the objective has been achieved has been described by Srinivas, he call [sic] it Sanskritization."

profit accruing through 'Hinduisation', particularly among a group such as the Santals whose economic privation and educational backwardness can hardly be expected to be ameliorated easily on the group level. It is obviously such a situation which Anil Saxena has in mind when he writes (SAXENA 2005: 107f.):

> However, the mobility associated with Sanskritization results only in positional changes in system [sic] and does not lead to any structural change. Sanskritization process promoted the sacred outlook, whereas westernization promoted the secular outlook. Lower caste peoples realized that mere sanskritization was not enough, which only helped them to improve their status within the immutable varna system. They realized that the adoption of the westernization process which [sic] helped them to move up in the social scale without the limitation of jati or varna.

Viewed in this light, even though 'Hinduisation' would in principle allow the retention of traditional Santal cultural and religious elements, for the individual Santal today having more choices than in pre-colonial times "westernization" would seem to be the more profitable alternative.[107] But since in South Asia secular development options are rare for the common man, Christianisation would seem to be the readiest alternative for upward mobility available, at least theoretically.

Exclusionary monotheistic religions

While Hindus and 'Hinduised' groups even may include various Christian and Islamic elements in their belief system, the two monotheistic religions Christianity and Islam, like Judaism, today rarely leave space for the inclusion of elements from oth-

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[107] All the more so if one considers the remarks on being Hindu in Bangladesh today on p. 54.

er religions,[108] though this has not always been so, and even today there are exceptions. Thus, although the Islam in Bangladesh is still known for its inclusivistic elements, often labeled "syncretistic", which can still be observed in the so-called "folk Islam",[109] the way it is taught today by religious institutions and appears in the political field is predominantly exclusionary. Especially the political Islam propagated by various legal, and illegal, so-called "Islamist" organisations leaves no space for different interpretations and the inclusion of elements of other religions. The constitution of Bangladesh is no longer secular,[110]

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[108] ṬHĀKUR 1978: 375 held that Christianity and Islam cannot tolerate other religions and strive to eliminate them, and allow no commingling without acceptance of the religion (*pṛthibīte duṭi dharmasampradāẏ āche anya samasta dharmamater saṅge yāder biruddhatā atyugra — se hacche khṛṣṭān ār musal'mān-dharma. tārā nijer dharmake pālan karei santuṣṭa naẏ, anya dharmake saṃhār kar'te udyata. eijanya tāder dharma grahaṇ karā chāṙā tāder saṅge mel'bār anya kono upāẏ nei*).

[109] As an example, cf. MIAN 1999: 158, albeit with a caveat: "As a result, the *Bhāsān yātrā* held strong appeal among both communities [viz. Hindus and Muslims]. Such attraction pertains unbroken even today, as is evident from the attendance at its occasional performances throughout rural Bengal. Unfortunately, the modern electronic age, with its multifarious gadgets, is gradually stifling it and consigning it to total oblivion."

[110] The Constitution of Bangladesh of 1972 included the commitment to secularism in Articles 8 and 12 and did not begin with any religious invocation. After various vicissitudes, in which efforts were made to strengthen its Islamic character particularly under military rule, the present position is that the Basmala stands at the beginning, "absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah" stands in the Preamble and Article 8, from which secularism remains deleted, Article 12 including the commitment to secularim too remains deleted, and Article 2A defining Islam as the state religion remains in force, as does Article 25(2) emphasising the relationship to other Muslim countries on the basis of Islamic solidarity. There is an ongoing debate about the legality of constitutional changes made during the periods of military rule, and the present Government has decided to

and public media have since the early 1990s been increasingly filled with descriptions of attacks on religious minorities such as Hindus or Christians, on groups such as the Ahmadiya whose Islamic credentials are disputed, and on individuals critical of certain aspects of Islam.[111] In this atmosphere, the numerical increase[112] of government supported[113] and non-government supported Madrasas for children of Bengali Muslims might contribute its part to efforts to homogenise the religions and cultures in Bangladesh. As in the case of the Christian school in Joypurhat, in the case of the Madrasas many parents who lack secular alternatives or are too poor to pay for any other education send their children to these religious educational institutions.[114]

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reinstall secularism in the Constitution after a Supreme Court verdict to this effect, while retaining Islam as the state religion. But this has not yet been implemented.

[111] E.g. Taslima Nasrin, Humayun Azad, Daud Haider etc.

[112] Though such an increase doubtless exists, the claim that Madrasas are "mushrooming" is contested; cf., for instance, WORLD BANK 2010:7.

[113] This refers, of course, to the Alia Madrasas, which seem to be a unique Bangladeshi feature. Interestingly, Mumtaz Ahmad's study of Madrasa education comes to the conclusion that it is not the non-government, but particularly the government sponsored Madrasas that are most actively involved in partisan — including radical Islamist — politics, (AHMAD 2009). However AHMAD 2009: 37 also makes the general remark: "The interesting point to note here, however, is that this level of 'extremism' is generally viewed as 'normal' and 'expected' by many madrasa *ulama*, based on their religious training and beliefs." At the same time, Ahmad's study, as also do others (e.g. ELLIS 2007), points to the blanket linkage between Madrasas and Islamistic extremism as being a misconception.

[114] However, poverty alone cannot explain Madrasa attendance. WORLD BANK 2010: 19: "In other words, while poverty is certainly a strong correlate of madrasa enrollment, household poverty by itself cannot be the only

This general atmosphere prevailing in the country has to be taken into account when analysing the impact of Christian missionary activities in Bangladesh and their choice of target groups, as also the reaction of the majority community and the authorities. However, it is beyond the scope of this small study to deal with such matters.

Nevertheless, it does strike one that the majority community or its beliefs do not seem to be involved, either positively or negatively, in the whole process described for Joypurhat. The state, too, remains neutral, which has drawn criticism, as the following makes clear (MANNAN 2008: 159):

> The state, despite the adoption of Islamic principle in the Constitution, always remains unconcerned about religion. This could be the reflection of broader sentiment of Bengali Muslims who are secular and non-communal in character … . As an outcome, the state ignores the activities of other religions, which proselytes tribal and ethnic groups into a particular religion. The State policy of indifference is advantageously utilized by a particular monotheistic religion sponsored by European and North Americans [sic] churches. This religion, although [it] is very successful to proselyte large members of the ethnic community also causes erosion in the community spirit built upon an animistic religion.

Mannan's argument seems based on concern for the Santals involved, thus echoing the arguments of the Santal acitivists cited above, but at the same time he criticises the state for tak-

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explanation for the growth of religious school enrolment in Bangladesh. In the country madrasa enrollment has been increasing while overall poverty level has been falling." There is a proviso, though (pp. 19f.): "Our finding that household poverty only partly explains the incidence of madrasa education does not capture the effect of living in poor areas where there is under provision of public goods by the state."

ing a secular and not an Islamic stance towards proselytisation by other religions, which could lead to the conclusion that it would be all right if there were an Islamic proselytisation among the Santals, and that of course would not be in keeping with the concern voiced for "erosion in the community spirit built upon an animistic religion". Quite apart from the question of whether the state is indeed so secular, or whether it is indeed a "reflection of broader sentiment of Bengali Muslims who are secular and non-communal in character", this criticism of "indifference" thus seems problematic as an argument. On the other hand, it would, if actually to be taken in the sense suggested, lead to the conclusion that only Islam should have a right to proselytise in Bangladesh, which could be seen as confirming what was said on pp. 55f. on exclusivism.[115]

Indeed, the question of proselytising Christian groups is part of a larger discourse involving the majority Muslim community, and having nothing to do with ethnic minorities, to which AHMAD 2009: 48 draws attention:

> There is, however, a great deal of concern on the part of the madrasa *ulama* about the activities of the Christian missions in Bangladesh. Many of them believe that most foreign NGOs are funded

[115] It must not be overlooked, though, that similar charges of state indifference towards the activities of Christian missionaries are also voiced in officially secular India by certain Hindu groups. On the other hand, it is these very Hindu groups who are in their turn commonly accused of striving to turn Hinduism into a monotheistic religion with unitary dogmas (cf. in this context also the remarks on "sectarian Hinduism" on p. 44). Then again, it could be argued that the very fact that a religion which cannot allow different religious beliefs to coexist within its fold violates the principles of tolerance underlying — as various interpretations of it argue — Indian culture. As all this shows, the issue is quite complicated; here, I cannot do more than draw attention to it.

> by Christian missions and are working to convert poor Bangladeshi Muslims through food and job incentives. One of the main reasons for the *ulama*'s opposition to girls' schools in rural areas operated or sponsored by foreign NGOs is their fear that these schools are, in fact, meant for converting young Muslim girls to Christianity, or, at least, sowing the seeds of doubt about Islam in their vulnerable minds.

As is evident, we are here entering a discourse in which the issue of cultural alienation of Santals through Christian proselytisation is only peripherally relevant, if at all. Instead of searching for reasons why the Government of Bangladesh does not prevent such proselytising, it therefore seems more sensible to search for the reasons for the disinterest of the Santals concerned towards Islam. I have already remarked on this above (p. 35), though it must be emphasised again that those remarks are of speculative character. We now also have further considerations to take into account, namely what was said on 'Hinduisation' on p. 55. On the one hand, taking up Islam would, ultimately, lead to the same problem of fission in Santal society as Christianity is held to lead to, since this monotheistic religion too cannot in principle tolerate competing religious notions under its umbrella, and upholding this principle seems to be gaining more and more importance in present-day Bangladesh. And as regards social upward mobility, it is doubtful whether conversion to Islam could offer the same benefits as conversion to Christiantity seems to do, especially in view of the fact that in Bangladesh conversion to Islam would, in contrast to conversion to Christianity, ultimately have to go hand in hand with de-Santalisation and Bengalisation,[116] in which process Santals

[116] Cf. in this context what BAL 2010: 25 writes on the Mandis: "During the first years after independence, Garos found themselves urged by the

would for a long time not be able to compete with ethnic Bengalis. Thus irrespective of whether Bengali Muslims care or do not care about the religious affiliations of the Santals, *a priori* the advantages of conversion to Christianity would seem to outweigh those of conversion to Islam. And in any case, the problem we are here focusing on, namely the question of cultural alienation, would not be done away with — in contrast to 'Hinduisation', which, however, does not seem attractive for the other reasons detailed above.

Trends in Other Regions

But we must, in this context, not forget that the starting point of our discussion was the question of cultural alienation not *per se*, but as brought about by the activities of Christian missionaries, in this case Seventh-day Adventists. This is, however, not unique to our case; indeed, that the abandonment of native culture may be demanded by Christian missionaries is nothing new and has been observed in various regions of the world.[117] There is, obviously, also a large amount of literature on the cultural alienation this causes or is supposed to cause. As we cannot delve deeply into this matter here, only some examples

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state leaders to unite as Bengalis, and after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975, again as Muslims. Yet they firmly rejected both identities and instead emphasised counter discourses in which they presented themselves as Bangladeshi Garos and Christians. In the process they further unified as a distinct ethnic community in Bangladesh, different from Bengali Muslims/Muslim Bengalis, but more strongly rooted than before in Bangladesh; the country which they now claimed as their motherland, despite the fact that the motherland still had not accepted them on their own terms."

[117] Of course this may hold true for Muslim missionaries too, but we are not concerned with these here.

shall be cited.

Sutarman Soediman Partonadi, for instance, describes tendencies in Javanese Christianity similar to those described above, and remarks on this (PARTONADI 1990: 231):

> The missionaries suffered from what is commonly called "Western captivity"; that is, they were so thoroughly westernized that they were unable to view the world from another perspective. Everything was viewed according to their Western standard.

He then goes on to quote from MASTRA 1979: 371:

> But when Christianity was introduced in Bali the missionaries identified the European Christian culture with the Gospel and tried to impose it on the new converts. Missionaries told the newly-converted people that their culture and religion belonged to the demons and urged their destruction. They did not distinguish between western culture and Christian culture, between European Christian culture and the Gospel.

In a similar vein, MUGAMBI 2008: 354 writes on Africa:

> Cultural depreciation and insensitivity in the modern missionary enterprise has arisen from an erroneous theology of mission, which presupposes that the acceptance of Christianity necessarily demands total rejection of the African cultural and religious heritage and adoption of the culture of the missionary without question or critique.

Other examples come from Latin and North America with reference to the Native Americans, but also from China (e.g. LEE 1995) and smaller countries of South Asia (e.g. PERERA 1998). While some studies emphasise the practices of Christian mission in the past, it would seem that in the last few decades a growing trend is discernible among missionary institutions from North America to reproduce these same practices today.

However, the resultant overall picture is anything but clear, for Christianity as a "replacement community" (DEVALLE 1992: 163) seems to create not only alienation between Christian and non-Christian members of the same ethnic group, but also, and conversely, reinforces or even creates ethnic identity.

A well-known example is that of the Mandis (Garos) in Bangladesh:[118] here Christianisation has gone hand in hand with a strengthening of ethnic identity in the context of the discourse of indigenity, in the process of which the Mandis rejected the claims of assimilation into both Bengalihood and Islam (BAL 2010).[119] Already in BAL 2000: 134 we find:

> The question remains which came first: a shared Garo (ethnic) identity or Christianity? Was Christianisation the incentive to ethnic unification, or did ethnic sentiments results in a conscious decision to convert to Christianity? Or were both processes instigated by other developments?

Whatever the answers to these questions might be, it is obvious that the churches among the Mandis play rather an integrating role, as opposed to the seemingly opposite in the case of the Seventh-day Adventist Church among the Santals, as BAL 2000: 155f. points out:

> In the long run, Christianity proved an important factor in the process of unification of the lowland Garos. I mentioned various reasons which have contributed to the ethnogenesis of Garos. Other than that Christianity offered a 'modern' identity and provided links with the international world, it also offered Garos a shared platform to organise and to define themselves as one distinct, ethnic group.

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[118] On the nomenclature see note 8.

[119] Cf. note 116.

This development fits the pattern of self-confident Christianised groups that inculcate ideas and ideals that are utilised to form social movements based on an ethnic, i.e. 'tribal' ideology that historicises itself, but is, in the words of a researcher, "a mixture of some old elements detached from its living indigenous social roots, and newer alien elements" (DEVALLE 1992: 154). The process has been described by Sajal Nag (NAG 2002: 139) as being based (i) on the standardisation of language (originally for effective proselytisation and preaching) and the creation of a literary standard, (ii) education spreading knowledge of and in this new standard language,[120] leading to greater intra-tribal contacts and the formation of tribal elites, and (iii) the structure of the Church itself:

> Equally important has been the ideological and organizational contributions of the Christian Church to the tribal identity. It offered an attractive ideological alternative to the previously held weak belief system. At the same time it is also true that to a great extent the people modified and indigenized the Gospel, there were nevertheless certain features of the received forms of the new faith that brought about changes in their world view and in doing so contributed to the development of tribal identity. The most important element of the new faith was perhaps its comprehensive nature. Whereas the traditional tribal religions had generally been perceived to be relevant mainly to the village or group of villages, Christianity was proclaimed as relevant to the whole tribe.

This "reformist ethnicist" (DEVALLE 1992: 135f.) element, heavily influenced by Christianised groups and particularly Santals, played a major role in the ideology and background of

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[120] In regard to language, the process of Christianisation clearly differs from that of Islamisation in the region, as the latter emphasises not the convert's language, but (an) "Islamic" language(s) which should be learnt.

the Jharkhand movement in India,[121] which has ultimately led to the creation of Jharkhand state. It is, therefore, not surprising that a Catholic Santal has formulated a theology of liberation that expressly calls for "the Santal Church first and foremost to inculturate her-self [sic] in Santal soil. This inculturation would necessarily mean joining hands with all secular forces that are struggling to liberate the oppressed Santals" (RAJ 1990: 107).

The Question of Cultural Alienation among the Santals

In the beginning of this study the following questions were raised (pp. 9f.): What happens when the educators spread new ideas which are contrary to the "morals, laws and customs" of the older members of a cultural group? Does this contribute to cultural alienation, to alienation of the young from the culture of their elders? Does it lead to further processes of alienation?

If we take Newbigin's definition of culture given above (p. 8), which sees religion as an intrinsic element of culture, into consideration, then the conversion to another religion automatically must lead to a certain degree of cultural alienation. But there

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[121] On this see particularly BAUMAN 2010: 196ff., also DEVALLE 1992: 135ff., ICKE-SCHWALBE 1983: 56, ROY, R. n.d.: 21 or (with more or less identical wording) ROY, S. n.d.: 43f. Obviously, this development may be portrayed positively or negatively depending on the author's viewpoint. An example of the latter is UPADHYAY 2002: "It may be worthwhile to mention that almost all the leaders of Jharkhand party, which emerged as a political outfit of the tribals in 1949, were Christians. … Christian missionaries made concerted efforts to keep the tribals alienated from the mainstream polity of the country. However, heavy influx of non-tribal population from the plains of Bihar following industrialisation and consequential urbanisation of the area and successful operation of the then Congress Government to win over the leaders of the movement thwarted such attempt of the missionaries at least temporarily."

are, potentially, different levels of cultural alienation, especially in regard to who gets alienated from what or whom: an individual from a group, a group from its own culture, a small group from the larger group, and so on. In our example of the Adventists among Santals, the potential group for alienation processes consists primarily of primary school children[122] who are allegedly inducted into a new religion by missionaries, who to a certain extent instill into them new values and morals, as well as the conviction of the worthlessness, or rather futility, of some religious and/or cultural elements of their parental tradition, such as certain symbols and festivals.

If we take these allegations at face value, then we may ask to what extent these notions are able to penetrate the consciousness of these children and thus contribute to children and parents drifting apart intellectually. Only a long-term study can answer this question, though the avoidance of traditional festivals by children out of fear of being beaten (cf. p. 46) would already point towards the possible course of developments. Irrespective of the reasons for avoiding religious/cultural festivals, the end result would be that the knowledge and practical implementation of these festivals might not be transferred as a cultural element from the older generation to the younger. In that case we could indeed talk of cultural alienation.

But only one group of children attends the school of the Seventh-day Adventists, while another group is enrolled in a public school; other children do not go to school at all.[123] This means

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[122] Also among the Adis in North-East India in the 1970s the main target group consisted of school children, in that case boys, who were educated by missionaries and then "sent back to their villages to spread the 'message of Christ'" (DAWAR 2003: 56).

[123] Cf. in this regard BARKAT/HOQUE/HALIM/OSMAN 2009: 249: "The av-

that there are definitely children in the same village who do not face pressure from the side of their teachers regarding the participation in the Santal festivals, though a slight alienation which formal education might in general cause must be considered. In this situation the end result could be that this generation of children is divided by different sets of values and morals, ultimately creating different ingroups primarily on religious grounds.

In spite of the pessimistic analysis of J.N.K. Mugambi,[124] generational conflict between baptised children and their non-baptised parents might be superable because of the bonds of kinship. But would the difference between the two groups of children be bridgeable? Both groups might construct their identities with quite different sets of identity markers, which could lead, for instance, to new marriage patterns, as already indicated in the song cited above on p. 50.

Ellen Bal's study on the Mandis indeed indicates these kinds of results, for according to her findings (BAL 2000: 127) the Adventist Mandis of Dhaka differ from other Mandis in that they do not practise endogamy regardless of the religious back-

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erage distance of a school from a Santal household is 0.7 km. — and it requires around 26 minutes only to reach there on an average. However, even this distance has been reported to be considered by Santals as a reason for not sending all children to schools. This indicates that there is a lack of awareness among the Santals about the necessity of education as financial incapability has not been reported as a reason in this regard. In addition, it has been reported that they do not send all their children to school as the medium of education (i.e., language) is not appropriate."

[124] MUGAMBI 2008: 357: "Unfortunately, some of the message that has reached Africa in the name of Christianity has been culturally so alienating as to become terribly bad news. When a young person is taught that everything his parents and ancestors have taught him is wrong, how is he expected to consolidate his personal identity?"

ground, but choose spouses first and foremost on the basis of religion, namely of being an Adventist too. The spouse-to-be must belong to the Adventist Church. "This means that there are no actual restrictions or sanctions when it comes to marrying a Bengali Adventist." Thus, being an Adventist is conducive to intermarriage with Bengalis, which other Mandis seemingly shun.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the phenomenon of Adventists marrying only other Adventists is found among older Santal Adventists too, though it is unclear whether this also implies the crossing of ethnic boundaries as in the case of the Mandis Bal has studied. It is obvious that this adds another dimension to the problem of fission and alienation, because this involves not only Christians and non-Christians, but also Christian Adventists and Christian non-Adventists.

As in other areas undergoing Christian proselytisation, in Bangladesh too several Christian denominations "compete with each other for Santal members to be kept under their control" (MANNAN 2008: 164).[125] That this might lead to a small ethnic group being so badly splintered that the cohesion of the whole group dissolves is clearly a realistic possibility. If so, then as a proselytising strategy this rivalry would seem to be counterproductive given Peter McNee's admonishment: "The Church cannot grow where the converts deny their ethnic background" (MCNEE 1976: 29).[126] But actually the Seventh-day Adventist Church is growing even though, if the accusations discussed by us are true, the converts are asked to deny their cultural and in

[125] Of course rivalry among different denominations is nothing exclusively Christian, as it is known from areas of other missions, for instance Muslim missions, too, but that is not our concern here.

[126] See also above, p. 43.

the long run maybe even their ethnic background.

There is, however, another factor to be considered. Chad M. Bauman in his study on Christianisation remarks on the motivation of new converts (BAUMAN 2008: 240f.):

> They follow their own self-interests, whether those interests be material, ideal, or — as I suspect is generally the case — a mixture of both. Moreover, and this is an important point, people get something out of *not* converting as well, for surely self-interest, material and ideal, has prevented as many conversions as it has prodded.

Of course, this, as also the rest of our discussion so far, blends out the matter of belief. But the definition as well as ascertainment of true belief is a difficult, maybe even a hopeless undertaking; there is not yet any means to determine whether what people state that they believe is in fact what they do believe, or what they believe at any point of time is the same as what they believe at another point of time. Maybe belief plays a role in conversion, maybe it does not, but here and now we cannot go into this. Moreover, as Nandini Chatterjee points out,[127] "the definition of 'religious identity' is in reality a description of civil status, not of religious belief or social behaviour" (CHATTERJEE 2010: 1155).

If we now, blending out the matter of true or actual belief, consider Bauman's observation, then the question that comes to mind in the case given is obviously: Why do some members of the Adventists' Santal target group not convert, even though others do so? I am certain that there are many reasons which can come to mind, but we are not primarily concerned with conversion as such, but with the cultural alienation that con-

[127] Referring to an article by Marc Galanter, published originally in 1971.

version might cause. No attempt to answer this question shall, therefore, be made here.

Nevertheless, this question does turn our attention to the issue of resistance to conversion, obviously by those not in favour of conversion. Could, possibly, motives other than, or in addition to, altruism or anxiety about cultural/ethnic cohesion play a role? For instance, might those opposing the Adventists' endeavours actually be doing so out of fear of losing positions of power? Compare in this context DAWAR 2003: 59:

> The indigenous leaders were opposed to the missionaries' activities since they perceived a threat to the survival of their traditional culture. These leaders were either pursuing their education outside NEFA or they after having completed their education were either employed in Government offices or were involved in public activities.

In other words, the very persons voicing protest in the cases Dawar studied were those who had already acquired privileged positions. This of course leads to various questions, not the least of these being the issue of trustworthiness of accusations or imputation of motives. So that no misunderstanding crops up, I wish to put on record that the documented songs on p. 45 make it very probable that at the very least some of the allegations made by the Santal activists are true. However, that does not absolve me from the necessity of looking at the issue from all sides if I aim to do so in an unbiased matter. Unfortunately, I do not have any other data to go by, so that I can do no more than point to the matter here, without being able to offer any definitive answer.

But the latter consideration leads also to another factor which is usually not referred to in discussions on loss of identity and alientation, namely whether these are necessarily to be viewed

as negative. Attention may be drawn in this regard to Suchibrata Sen, a Bengali scholar with seemingly Marxist leanings, who writes on the Adivasis and particularly the Santals in West Bengal (SEN, S. 1997: 109f.):

> The steam roller of historical changes is fast making the concept of ethnic solidarity a thing of the past. The adivasi society is crumbling down from within. The more quickly the alienated Santal cultural consiousness accepts the reality for what it is, the better and faster would be its process of integration with other poor sections of the society. Then there would be a broader cultural consciousness within a totalising whole. The other poor sections of the society also need the realisation that accommodating the Santals and other adivasis within its fold is a must for its survival.

The context here is that of "Indianness" and class struggle, but one nevertheless finds in this extract an echo of Eric Monnier's remark given above on p. 5. This is, however, a matter which cannot be resolved by empirical research, as it involves worldviews and ideologies. As such, little more can be done here than drawing attention to the issue.

Outlook

The potential for proselytisation is the same for Seventh-day Adventist, other Christian, Muslim, and also other possible missionaries. However, the potential for upward mobility and social advancement of the individuals targeted for proselytisation seems greater in the case of belonging to a missionary aided Christian community. There is thus potential for using similar tactics for Christian proselytising among poor Muslims too, though it is obvious that attempts to create inroads into the majority community will definitely lead to reactions very different

from those in the Santal villages. Questions regarding possible resistance to missionary activity among religious minorities in Bangladesh have to be seen against this background. As long as no viable alternatives for social upward mobility can be offered them, there is little hope of appeals to cultural or ethnic solidarity being taken very seriously, so that it is doubtful whether the protests of Adivasi groups such as our Santal informants against Christian proselytisation will be effective, or will even be voiced in appreciable numbers. On the other hand, the matter is not, on the whole, seen as affecting the majority population, at least for the time being, so that it is not surprising that only few Bengali Muslims have voiced criticism.[128] The state has remained neutral so far even though it no longer has its original secular character (see pp. 56f.), and will perhaps not interfere in future either as long as the majority population is not concerned.[129] Whether infringement of constitutional rights, if such should be proved,[130] will have consequences, remains to be seen. The whole issue has, of course, to be seen also in the context of Bangladesh's dependence on foreign donors.

In any case, the Seventh-day Adventist Church missionaries are only cashing in on a market which they have not themselves created; any containment efforts aimed directly at them will therefore have only short-term effects, since they would not address the root causes leading the groups in question to take up the offers laid out before them. The religious educational institutions merely fill a gap left by the Bangladeshi state. Only suf-

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[128] Two such examples are ALI/NURULLAH 2007 and ISLAM n.d.

[129] Cf. also MANNAN 2008: 150: "Historical indifference marks the relationship between the Bangladesh state and the Santal community."

[130] Cf. p. 49 above.

ficient availability of affordable alternative secular education can counter their offers. Indeed JALIL 1991: 100f. holds that if Hindus and Muslims alike continue to disregard the Santals, the day may come when all Santals in Bangladesh are Christians, and places the responsibility for helping them maintain their heritage at the door of the Government of Bangladesh.[131]

Be all that as it may, Christianisation as such does not automatically lead to the breakdown of ethnic or cultural solidarity or cultural alienation, and can indeed lead to the strengthening of ethnic and/or cultural bonds, as the examples on pp. 63ff. show. It may be that the culture is changed, or that the cultural or ethnic bonds are different from what they were before Christianisation, but that is not the same as their being absent.

Further, there is the question of different proselytisation approaches, some missions being more sensitive towards sociocultural factors than others; see in this regard pp. 42ff. above. If what the Santal informants relate is accurate, then the Adventists in Joypurhat are clearly not in the camp of those taking such factors into account, whereas other missionaries, also such as are active among the same target group, might be.

This paints a rather complex picture, making it difficult to attempt predicting the future course of events. Religious differences need not necessarily lead to alienation within a cultural or ethnic group, while at the same time established traditions and patterns may be broken down and reworked, with a potential of differentiation as well as of new cohesion.

If we look at the process of Christianisation among Santals in India and Bangladesh comparatively, then according to ALI

[131] This is, however, accompanied by regret that neither Hindus nor Muslims have made sincere attempts to convert the Santals to their religions, and is thus hardly a disinterested statement.

1998: 22, referred to above on p. 34, the process in Bangladesh is the opposite of the process in India, since it is leading to what he terms "de-Santalization (de-tribalization)". However, it must not be overlooked that Christianisation among Santals in Bangladesh is, on the whole, a more recent phenomenon than in India. On the other hand, the groups responsible for Christianisation in India were different, and seem to have had strategies different from those of the Seventh-day Adventists. So in this case too it seems to me that any prediction as to future developments will have to take too many variants into account to be more than quite speculative.

When I started on this study, I was under the impression that I was dealing with a clear-cut case of cultural alienation, easy to describe and to pass judgement upon. But in the course of the study, and as the above also makes clear, I have realised that simple black-and-white dichotomies based on "cultural alienation" probably paint a much too simplicistic picture of the complex realities which this small study has attempted to portray and discuss. This is a conclusion that will probably disappoint those looking for clear results or solutions, but in the light of the above I would be being intellectually dishonest if I claimed that these are there.

There is, however, one aspect that has materialised from the discussion above, and which I would like to highlight. In doing so, I reproduce what HILL 2002: 130 has written in the context of endangered languages, and which can serve, *mutatis mutandis*, for a description of what is happening in the spheres of culture and religion too, so also in the case of the Santals of Joypurhat we studied:

> Most language endangerment today is not the result of a free choice among linguistic options, but is instead the result of discri-

mination, of direct attack on the languages as such, as well as indirect attacks on local cultural and linguistic identities through every form of oppression and stigma, which have the aim of reducing those who have made them to deculturated and marginalized populations on the lowest rung of global hierarchies.

What is happening in Joypurhat seems also to be only a reaction to a similar state of affairs. The Seventh-day Adventists seem to offer individuals a way out; were it otherwise, they probably would not have success. The root of the problem, if this be deemed one, therefore should be searched for primarily not in them or their efforts, even if some aspects of these are clearly seen as controversial, but in the factors making these appear more attractive than whatever else is on offer.

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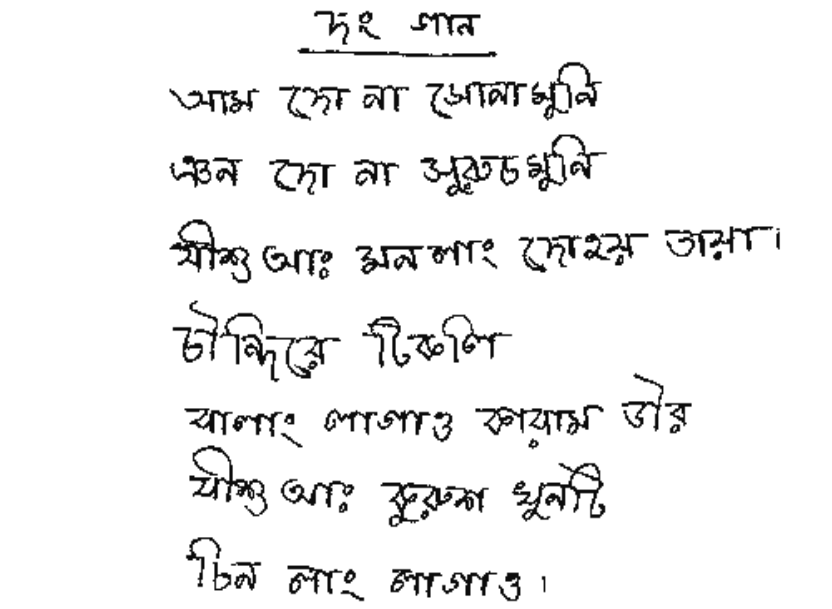
Appendix



বঙ্গানুবাদ

তুমি সোনামুনি
আমি সুরুচমুনি
যীশুর মন জোগিয়ে রাখব।
কপালে তিলক
লাগাবনা কায়াম ভাল
যীশুর কুরুকা খুটি
টিক লাগাব।

Facsimile of Song 1 on p. 45
as recorded by my activist informants

২ঃ গান

হোড় হোরে আজ বাদ্ হোড়কো এঞেলা
অন্তরে আজ- বাজ যীশু এঞেলা।
পাতা জাতা সিধি চৌন্ডি
শয়তানাঃ খালি
যীশু পাছারেম সেরমাম এতমা।

বঙ্গানুবাদ

করীলে আজ-গোজ মানুষ দেখবে
অন্তরে আজ-গোজ যীশু দেখবে।
পাতা জাতা দুর্গা পূজা
শয়তানের জাল
যীশুর পিছনে যাও স্বর্গ পাবে।

Facsimile of Song 2 on p. 45
as recorded by my activist informants

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