

Conversion and Transformation of the Indigenous Communities in North East India: A Study of the Encounter of Christianity with Khasi Indigenous Religion and Culture

**Rev. Dr. Blatei Nongbri
Vice President,
Fellowship of Indian Missiologists [FOIM]**

One of the fundamental features of the indigenous society in North East India during the colonial and post colonial period has been the encounter of Christianity with the traditional religion and culture. This encounter resulted in the large-scale conversion of the various tribes from their traditional religion to Christianity. However, this study will concentrate mainly on the conversion of one of the major tribes, the Khasis who inhabit the present Indian state of Meghalaya.

Methodologically, in contrast to the dominant approach on the subject, this study initiates a shift by attributing 'agency' to the indigenous people and recognises them as the active participants in the whole process of interaction. Further, this study will approach the subject from the missiological and historical perspective. Though, while there will be an inter-disciplinary nature to the study, the primary approach will be historical.

For this study I am using mainly the missionary sources available in the archive of the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth and the Sacred Heart Theological College, Shillong, India. In addition, secondary source which have certain bearing on the subject has been used extensively. However, conscious effort has been made to use the oral literature/sources available in the form of folklores, songs, traditions, popular memories, rituals, belief systems and narratives. They are the oldest archives that yet remain unexplored.

This study found that this process of conversion led to a cultural interaction between the indigenous religion and culture with Christianity. It is noted that conflict, assimilation and incorporation characterized the nature of this interaction. Further, the paper finds that both socio-cultural and pre-existing religious ideas facilitated the process of religious change. Consequently, through the various forms of missionary activities, transformation took place not only in the religious realm but also in their cultural and social landscape. Nevertheless, this transformation is not only in terms of change but also in terms of continuity of the socio-cultural, religious practices and ideas. Consequently, it resulted in the emergence of a unique form of Christianity which is local and not necessarily Western.