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**Conversions and Transformations:
Missiological Approaches to Religious Change**

**Historical Reflections on Hindus Following Jesus
without Change of Religion**

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Abstract:

The concept of “world religions,” which developed during the colonial era as Europeans encountered the world, led to a standard missiological paradigm where following Jesus involved a change of religious identity. In India, legal enactments under British rule contributed to the reification of religious communities, making “change of religion” synonymous with “change of sociological community”. India today is convulsed by controversies over religious conversion and reconversion which are directly related to these historical developments.

This paper considers select Hindus who chose to follow Jesus Christ without changing religion or community. This alternate paradigm has persisted in Indian mission history, as evidenced by recent studies on “Churchless Christians”. Neither the traditional understanding of “secret believers” nor the more recent concept of multiple religious belonging capture what these people articulated and lived.

In some cases conversion to Christianity was followed by a rejection of identification with Christianity while still following Jesus, such as Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907) and Manilal C. Parekh (1885-1967). Others, however, were open followers of Jesus who were just as openly opposed to conversion to Christianity, like Kandaswamy Chetty (1867-1943) and K. Subba Rao (1912-1981). Narayan Vaman Tilak (1862-1919) made an effort to change standard paradigms and terminology, promoting Hindi as an identifier instead of Hindu. But this gained no traction, as Tilak’s brotherhood of baptized and unbaptized disciples of Jesus also did not survive.

These explorations and experiments by Hindu followers of Jesus will be analysed in light of the theme of “missiological approaches to religious change”.

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