

Historical Analysis of the Activities of Gossner Mission Church among the Adivasis of Lohardaga (1848-1947 A.D.)

Navin Kumar Bara

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of History, Ranchi University

Abstract

Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church was the first to open its church in Chotanagpur. The beginnings of which led to opening of other churches in the region. The paper attempts to look into its activities till independence.¹ It aims to document the gradual development of its relation with the Adivasis² of Lohardaga district³ of Jharkhand. Based on the church records and the empirical evidences collected as the native Adivasi of the region, the paper tries to look into the factors that led to the conversion of Adivasis to Christianity and the apprehensions that prevented a large number of Adivasis from converting into Christianity. As a micro study of Lohardaga district, this paper beholds mission's methods of work related to preaching of the gospel and its works in the health and education sector. In this process it also delves into the practices of the missionaries to indigenise an exotic faith amongst the so called 'backward Adivasis'.

Reminiscence from my childhood

I was born and brought up in Lohardaga in a very humble set up. Little did I realise in my childhood that I was an Adivasi whose family had faith in Sarnaism or ancestral faith of the Adivasis. This was quite different from the two institutionalised, popular and faith of the mainstream of my area i.e, Hinduism and Christianity. When I look back to my bygone days, I always remember my school days and friends. Every day after returning from school I used to go outside to play with my friends as it was common for children back then. We always used to go to the other *mohalla* (locality) or village for plucking seasonal fruits like mango, tamarind or jamun etc., which were planted on the side of the roads. When I was in fifth grade, my father bought me a new bicycle and I started going to the school on it with my other friends. The shortest route to the school took us to some wastelands, fields strewn with rocks and a few houses. On our way, I came across a locality called 'Mission Compound'. The compound had

¹ Also known as German Mission or Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church. Originally it was founded by Johannes Evangelista Gossner of Berlin in 1842. The mission is officially registered as Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church of Chotanagpur and Assam.

² Literary means 'Ancient Dwellers'. A vernacular term for Indigenous people and widely used to refer the tribal population.

³ The earlier name of old Ranchi district was Lohardaga. The name of the district was changed in 1899 from Lohardaga to Ranchi. Subsequently, Lohardaga became a separate district in 1983 when Ranchi was divided into Lohardaga, Ranchi and Gumla.

large green trees, some of which were laden with fruits. Emboldened by the quietness and aloofness of the area, I together with my friends decided to go there to steal ripe fruits. It was a modest thing in those days for kids to wander around for plucking sweet seasonal fruits. On one of these exploratory searches, one day I came across a huge, old building, about which I was clueless. That old structure was a church that lies along with some small mansions, a field and a graveyard. It was my first encounter with the church. Its architecture, stature and ambiance charmed my juvenile heart. I felt like I had explored a big and old treasure. I came back to home and asked my mother about it. She told that “It is very old and possibly built by foreigners”. It made me even more fascinated and curious. After that I often passed by the compound to see the old church and the people who came here to worship. However, I could not muster the courage to enter the building for some strange fear that my childish heart created about that building.

When I completed my schooling and got enrolled in Gossner College, Ranchi in intermediate, coincidentally, some of my classmates were from this Mission Compound and later they became my friends too. As some of my friends lived in Mission Compound and were Christian converts, I felt comfortable in entering the Church building that had enthralled me for years comfortably. During their Social and religious functions like- confirmation or marriage, they also invited me. I have been an inquisitive person since childhood and being a *Sarna* Adivasi I had many questions regarding Christianity and the customs my friends followed although we shared same clan name, language, dressing sense and food habits. I opted for Honours in History in my graduation, as I wished to have a better understanding of my land, people, the buildings and the perception about us ‘the Adivasis’ in the academia. I wished to know that how these old charming buildings were built in areas where the Adivasis lived in the huts! How did such an interior and hilly area of Chotanagpur plateau become witness to large scale conversion? What inspired them to break their old tradition and adopt another religion? Was there any resistance from the side of the traditional Adivasis, if so, what was its nature? Those Adivasis who converted to Christianity, did they preserve their customs in any way or did they just integrate with new values or customs? These were the questions I was eager to know. So when I got the opportunity, I decided to get an answer by looking at the history of Christian missionaries in this area and chose Lohardaga district for this.

My training as a student of history prompted me to look into the advent of churches in the district. The process that started in 1845 with the establishment of Gossner Mission and continued with the coming of many Christian religious missions as Roman Catholic Church, Anglican mission and the others in a gap of few years changed the socio- cultural and religious makeup of the region. Christian missionaries came here primarily for preaching gospel but the ground realities of this region prompted them to address secular problems largely dealing with their economic and agrarian issues. They were particularly interested in the issues of Mundas and Oraon Adivasis who were numerically stronger in the region⁴ (MacDougall 1985:186). Additionally, it also helped them in getting religious converts. The geographical position of Lohardaga, its better road connectivity and cooler climate that generally suited the Europeans prompted them to open their mission here (Mahto 1971:30). In 1848 i.e., just three years after

⁴ Adivasi communities. Listed as Scheduled Tribe in the constitution.

Historical Analysis of the Activities of Gossner Mission Church

opening of the first mission in the region the Gossner Mission opened its station in Lohardaga. This article tends to discuss the activities carried out by the Gossner Mission in the colonial period in this region. Divided into three broad sections; the first part discusses their advent and expansion in the area, second attempts to analyse the impact of their activities on the Adivasis of the region and third discusses their methods of preaching of Gospel and their initiatives in educational and health sector. Drawing largely on the church records, books and secondary sources that are extant in local offices of the mission, this article attempts to present a historical overview of their activities.



Fig. 1 Gossner (G.E.L.) Church of Lohardaga mission compound.



Fig. 2 Internal view of Gossner church



Fig. 3 View of mission compound from where the dwelling houses and Lutheran school.



Fig. 4; Graveyard of mission compound.

A brief History of Gossner Mission Church in Lohardaga

In the first few years of 1840s the German missionaries came into contact with the Adivasis coolies and scavengers working in deplorable condition in Calcutta. The information they collected from them about the region prompted them to make the region the field for their

religious activities. Chotanagpur Plateau; an area inhabited predominantly by the Oraon and the Munda adivasis therefore was selected to be the field of future activity for the Gossner priests. In 1846, mission opened its centre at Domba, an Oraon dominated area. Failure of the priests to find converts clubbed with difficult terrain and unsuitable climatic conditions for the German missionaries prompted them to abandon the station and open a new mission centre in 1848 at Lohardaga, which was also an Oraon dominated area (Bara 2010:11). Another centre was opened in 1850 at Govindpur. This was in the pre-dominantly Munda region located in the south east direction of Ranchi and the missionary mainly instrumental in taking this responsibility was H. Batsch who had left the Domba mission centre after the death of his wife in 1848 (Tete 1969:22). Subsequently, many other centres were opened at different parts and adjacent areas of Ranchi. The north-western region of the Chotanagpur plateau where Lohardaga was located, had been an important place for the British due to the availability of minerals in the area.

The process of proselytisation of the Adivasis started immediately after the arrival of missionaries. In the year 1846, the process started with some orphan children who were baptised in Ranchi by the missionaries. They were the easiest to convert as there was absence of any familial or village ties that might pull them to any other religious affiliation and this became an impetus for the Gossner mission (*Panjika*⁵ 1996:2). Soon two missionaries named Carl Conrad and Johannes Barner were sent to Lohardaga for preaching in the newly opened mission centre. On 9th June 1850, four Oraons namely Kesho, Bandhu, Ghuran and Navin Doman voluntarily baptized along with their families. Missionaries were happy with this beginning and they registered it as a huge accomplishment. Soon a huge church named Christ Church was built in Ranchi which became a prominent symbol of their success. The sacrament of the church started on the occasion of Christmas in 1855 (Chatterton 2012:7; Roy 1912:228). During this time, the mission centre of Lohardaga was operated from the mansion of Deputy Commissioner of Ranchi Hannington. For a short period it was observed that the East India Company officials collaborated with the Church to increase their clout in the area. Apart from Conrad and Barner, Christian Behrens (1849-51), Henrich Batsch (1849-52), Johannes Sieck (1849-51 & 1853-57), Ludwig Herman Gerndt (1851-56) and Rudolph Gerndt (1851-55) also worked in Lohardaga before the commencement of 'The Great Revolt of 1857'. By this time a total 900 natives had been baptized in Chotanagpur, majority of them being Oraons and Mundas.

Although the missionaries witnessed success in preaching and proselytising, they faced continuous resistance from the local landlords and Adivasis (Tete 1969:166). The situation here was quite complex and paradoxical because the mission's attitude was in favour of the latter and antagonistic towards the former. Unjust demand of the landlords had created disenchantment in the minds of Adivasis against these landlords and they fought and won many cases against them (Sa 1975:81, MacDougall:1985). Thus, the spread of Christianity made the local landlords anxious because it was threatening mainly their economic interest. They were also angry with the native convert who collaborated with the missionaries and reclaimed their ventures successfully. There are several examples of the atrocities done by the landlords who held Christian missionaries responsible for changing the socio-economic relations in their region. In

⁵*Panjika* is a yearly handbook of Gossner mission (G.E.L.) Church containing prayers, history of the church, statistics of the followers and priests of the church etc.

the year 1855, a missionary named Herzog was attacked, beaten and left to die by them (Sa 1975:87; Sheetal 2008:26). Some landlords even tried to manipulate the government employees against these missionaries and also hired a lawyer and sent him to Calcutta in 1856 to defend their case.

The Adivasi community initially showed apathy towards these missionaries who were altering their socio-religious and cultural sensibilities. Initially, they neither came to these missionaries for any medical support, nor did they send their children to missionary schools due to the fear of conversion (Kalapura 2014:104). Their fear was not pointless as they had been witness to the conversion of some orphaned children earlier, who were entrusted to the German missionaries by Hannington himself. (Chatterton 2012:6; Kalapura 2014:104; Minz 1995:5; Panjika 1996:2). The Adivasis feared that this was an onslaught on their ancestral religion and they were unkind to all the efforts carried by missionaries towards their education and health. They even unleashed their anger upon the neo-converts from amongst themselves. These converts had to face excommunication from their community, ill treatment by their brethren and animosity from the landlords, who apprehended that it was a ploy of the British to weaken their control over the Adivasis. There are numerous instances of atrocities on the converts. There are examples of converts like, Kesho and Bandhu whose house were burnt down and their cattles were taken away by the people known to them. These were so harsh and intolerable that many neo- converts decided to revert to their ancestral religion. Others like Ghuran were forced to quit his new religion. Some of the converts as is the case of Navin Doman were even threatened to be murdered by the 'anti-Christ group'. The Christian missionary sources recounts that these dedicated souls continued to stick to their faith amongst odds (Minz 2010:14). The oppression of the landlords also failed to deter them.

When the revolt was suppressed the missionaries came back and tried to fulfill the increasing demands of conversion. The old mission centres of Lohardaga along with others remained deserted. Mission attained success in converting adivasis to Christianity in Ranchi. However with the growing number of converts in Ranchi the managerial responsibilities increased and the new challenges resulted in a split within the mission. The dissensions within the mission were caused by the organizational crisis, lack of trust among the missionaries and power politics within its own ranks. After the death of Rev. Gossner in 1858, Emil Schats became the head of the Gossner mission church of Ranchi and after his departure from India Friedrich Batsch, one of the pioneer members of Gossner mission became the head but his way of working was not appreciated by any priests. Some young priests complained to the curatorium at Berlin about malversation of Friedrich Batsch and some other senior missionaries (Kalapura 2014:95; Wustey 2017:50). In order to solve this conflict, the curatorium proposed a new constitution for Gossner mission in Chotanagpur by which a three member committee was supposed to lead the mission instead of a single head. This decision was unwelcomed and it received enormous criticisms from various fronts. Important personalities of the mission like Friedrich Batsch, Henry Batsch, F. Bohn, A. Herzog, F. Cruger and H. Pohlenz vehemently opposed this proposal and left the mission along with their 600 followers and joined the Anglican mission (SPG mission) on 16 April 1869 (Chatterton 2012:16).

Even before the split, the missionaries were vigorously expanding the mission station wherever they found new possibilities. Between 1858-1868 new mission centers were established in places like Purulia in 1863, Chaibasa in 1865, Porahat in 1867 (Kalapura 2014:93). The ideological developments in the new regions became possible with the help of local people but the mission intended to extend its activities in every direction with its headquarters in Ranchi. This would have enabled them to reach different adivasi communities and even lower caste Hindus. They envisaged to spread in areas like Purulia station which was towards the east of Ranchi (having a large Bengali population), the Chaibasa and Porahat stations which were south of Ranchi and among the 'Ho' community. Prior to these attempts in the pre revolt phase they also tried to reach the north of Ranchi among the Santhals. For this purpose, a station was established at Khirgaon in Hazaribagh in 1853 which was abandoned due to outbreak of Santhal Hul of 1855. After the situation eased a little in 1862, a new station was opened at Singhani in Hazaribagh (Tete 1969:68).

The mission also decided to revive the old mission stations for the Oraons and the Mundas in Chotanagpur. The three important centers Burju (1869), Govindpur (1870) and Lohardaga (1871) were chosen. The first two centers were majorly inhabited by the Mundas and the third one was dominated by the Oraons. The Burju was a new establishment whereas Govindpur and Lohardaga were the old abandoned mission centers which were supposed to be rebuilt. In addition to managing issues of increasing local followers, growing competition with other missionary groups also became the basis for the opening up of new stations and rebuilding the old ones. On one hand the Anglican bishops and seceded priests were thinking of converting more people to the Anglican mission (Severg 1969:7; Wustey 2017:51-52). On the other hand, the Roman Catholic mission was also trying to create a firm base in the region. They established a centre in the Chaibasa region in 1869 and mission's priests were using various tactics to attract native people to adopt its church (Severg 1969:12). In this situation, the converts of old abandoned stations could be easy targets for the new missions in comparison with new places where the light of Christianity hadn't reached yet.

Rebuilding the Lohardaga station was not an easy task. In 1871, August Lorbeer went there where he found that the old one had already been ruined due to lack of maintenance and was abandoned long time ago. Previously Lohardaga station was opened in a mansion provided by Deputy Commissioner Hanington, at the same place where Kutchery and municipality office was built later (Tete 1969:166). So Lorbeer rebuilt the station and a new location was chosen for this purpose. A bungalow, church, school and boarding house were also built later for the convenience of the missionaries (Tete 1969:166). Lorbeer had to organise the Christians of Lohardaga region who became independent thinkers in the absence of missionary. For example, a person named Masihdas, descendent of a native convert, who declared himself a messiah and formed his own sect by incorporating both the religion, Sarna and Christianity (Girald 2019:147).

All the work had been done well by Lorbeer and Ferdinand Hahn, a missionary who arrived at Lohardaga mission station in 1877. Hahn brought Masihdas 'throne' when he left Lohardaga for preaching in the surrounding hills (Girald 2019:148). Ferdinand Hahn did many work for the expansion of Christianity in the region. He learnt Kurukh, the mother tongue of Oraon adivasi

and in more than 20 years of his stay in Lohardaga he involved himself in the works of translations of Catechism, bhajans, histories, educational primers and portions of the Bible in Kurukh with the help of some educated Oraon converts (Girald 2019:162). He also wrote Kurukh Grammar in 1900 and recorded Oraon folk tales in *Insight into the Spirit World* in 1905 after his departure from Lohardaga (Girald 2019:14). Through Kurukh language he tried to win the trust of natives and at the same time it also helped him to reach more people for the preaching. With his inspiration, his pupil Suleman Khalkho opened a second Church in Chatti, twenty-seven kilometers east towards Ranchi which served initially as a shelter for missionaries and later pastured by Suleman Khalkho (Girald 2019:188-189). In the year 1895, when Gossner mission was celebrating its Golden Jubilee, the total number of Christians in Lohardaga was 2,338 (Girald 2019:348) and in the same year the total number of converts reached about 40,000 in all the 13 mission stations (Kalapura 2014:99) including previous mentioned mission stations as well as newly added mission stations at Takarma in 1875, Chainpur in 1892, Chakradharpur in 1893 and Khuntitoli & Gumla in 1895. (Severg 1969:8,12,13).. The period of Ferdinand Hahn was important in terms of health services in Lohardaga. During this period various hospitals and dispensaries were run by the Gossner Mission in Chotanagpur. In Lohardaga, a Leper Asylum was opened by Hahn in 1882. Apart from this, asylum for epileptic was also opened in Lohardaga where people came for the treatment (Girald 2019:348). Hahn was followed by Daniel Kaiser (1890–1892), Benjamin Lauzemis (1892-1897), August John I (1895-1897), and Paul Wenzlaff (1897-1915), Gustav Beckmann (1900-1915), Ziech (1908-1915) and Paul Barsch (1908-1915). First three were posted during the time of Hahn, while others served after his departure until they were interned by the British government during First World War. The missions dissensions affected the functioning of the Church and the Adivasis who expected to receive help from them in their land and agrarian issues were unhappy.

Missionary records claim that the missionary workers enlightened the adivasis about the sufferings that the ryots were experiencing from the landlords. The landlords often forced the adivasis to undertake *begari* or *beth begari* work (forced labour). Also, if the rent fell in arrears, the landlord used to send his men in the village to extract the due and the ryots of the village had to bear their expenses in the name of *talbana* (subsistence allowance), sometimes even after the rent was paid. Apart from this, some other taxes such as *Dashahara Salami* were also imposed on Adivasis and the servants of the landlord extracted these cesses arbitrarily by taking their cattles in the name of sacrifice. Moreover, there have been some instances where the servants demanded bribes to leave some villagers untouched (Jha 1964:122-123). The adivasi ryots were not even provided any rent receipt for such payments. By this tactic the landlord compelled adivasis to pay extra or work for them for free because without a written receipt their case had no legal standing against the landlord in the court (The Calcutta Review 1869:119). If anyone tried to oppose, they instituted false suits upon them and won. It was assumed that the police and judiciary would be on the side of the landlords. Missionaries believed that their sympathetic attitude towards the Adivasis and their efforts to safeguard their interest from the landlords, displeased the local landlords and so they were against spreading of Christianity. A major change in this period was that the Adivasis mustered the courage to oppose oppressive landlords with the help of Christian missionaries.

Missionaries adopted many other methods, to assist the Adivasis in their struggle against the landlords. The missionaries went beyond the priestly functions by aiding the Adivasis in the fight with landlords through legal and judicial methods (Sahay 1968: 927). This proved to be another key factor to attract people to the mission. As the missionaries were well aware of the new laws and legal technicalities, the Adivasis won many court cases against the landlords with the assistance of missionaries. But due to this help, they became the target of the landlords during the revolt of 1857. However, the mission continued to aid Adivasis as they found this pattern beneficial. A large number of converts accepted Christianity in the hope of getting help (MacDougall 1985:201).

The material help rendered to the Adivasis however proved to be a mixed blessing. The British authority did not take kindly to the missionary involvement in the agrarian matters. This however did not have much impact on the missionaries or the Adivasis. Independent of the influence of the missionaries, leaders of Sardar movement and some converts of the Gossner mission started sending petitions to the British authorities to get their land back, pointing out the defects of land survey of 1869 (Sa 1975:326). This happened because the Adivasis began to feel that the missionaries were not helping them as per their expectations (Sa 1975:102). However, the petitions were seen by the government as political agitation and hence got rejected. The British authorities also suspected the role of the German missionaries in influencing the Christian converts. So the government pressurised the missionaries in 1876 to stay away from agrarian matters of Adivasis. When the church accepted it, they felt the reverse effects on the process of conversion (MacDougall 1985:187). During the 1880s, a great decline was therefore witnessed in the rate of conversion (MacDougall 1985:255). No new stations were opened by the mission during this period because of the decline (MacDougall 1985:105). Furthermore, Burju mission station recorded a total of 773 converts leaving the mission in 1881. They either joined other churches or reverted to their traditional faith (MacDougall 1985:104). It broadly reflects the nature of conversion during the 19th century. It also made it clear to the missionaries in particular that schools and hospitals alone were not enough to attract the people to accept Christianity. Adivasi populace in general considered their overt and covert assistance in the agrarian issues more important.

Impact of Christianity on Adivasis

It becomes clear therefore that rather than the moral regeneration, the main motivation behind conversion was to regain land rights throughout the 19th century. It would not be unfair to comment that Adivasis in Chotanagpur largely got converted to Christianity to save their ancestral lands with the help of missionaries (MacDougall 1985:201; Sa 1975:81). Religious motivation for conversion was less strong amongst the Adivasis of Jharkhand. The accounts further claim that there are many cases of Adivasis reverting back to their ancestral faith when the church failed to resolve their land and agrarian issues. The cultural life of the Adivasis was also connected to their roots and they practised their customs irrespective of change of faith.

Those who converted to Christianity continued to follow the old tradition such as drinking *Handia* (rice beer), dancing and singing in *Akhra* etc. This was done despite their prohibition by Gossner mission church and restrictions imposed on those who got converted to Christianity. In this connection it may be pointed out that many converts expressed their reluctance towards these restrictions and there were cases in which people joined Roman Catholic mission which was liberal towards all of these (Tete 1969:41). The priests of Roman Catholic Mission not only permitted them to follow old traditions but also enjoyed it with the converts. They mixed freely with them and some of them even appreciated it. For example, priests of Roman Catholic Mission used to put their hand on *Handia* pot and pray in the name of purification and after this performance they used to allow the converts to drink it (Tete 1969:72). Clearly, the missionaries were trying to indigenise the religion by making its practices more acceptable for natives. This seemed to help them in gaining more followers. In this perspective, we should see the conversion as a two-way process in which both the parties got benefitted. The missionaries got followers and the natives got their lost lands and some dedicated souls who were interested in providing health, legal and educational benefits to them.

In the 20th century, we find a perceptible change in the nature of the spread of Christianity. At this time the number of converts grew rapidly in comparison to the preceding century. During 19th century, the matter of agrarian rights was directly related to conversion, after that the process of indigenisation of the Christian practices became prominent for conversion. Missionary records mention that some Adivasis remained loyal to the faith even in the wake of animosity and ill will for Christians in Jharkhand. A case in point is that of Daud William Luther Singh reflecting prominently in the missionary accounts who took baptism in 1857. He remained committed to the faith even during the time of great Revolt of 1857 when situation was chaotic for missionaries. Later he went to Anglican mission in 1869 and served in the Anglican church (Tete 1969:6; Wustey 2017:13).

After the suppression of the revolt the conversion activities rose sharply in the area. It can be corroborated statistically. If we see the average rate of conversion for the period of first 45 years from 1850-1895 i.e, the first phase, the average number of conversion was 888 per year. However, the rate of conversion was not same for the entire period. Between 1859 and 1871, the number of converts rose from 1,600 to 17,000 (on an average 1,283 converts per year). This was the time, when the mission was vocal towards the land issues of the Adivasis. The following years however showed a decline in the rate of conversion, while the years between 1880 and 1886 were disappointing for missionaries with only 234 converts per year on an average. This happened mainly due to the change in policy of Gossner mission to not get involved in the ongoing Sardar movement. The Adivasis felt disenchanted with this attitude of the missionaries and this resulted in the decline in the number of converts.

By 1895, the number of converts had reached approximately 40,000. So for first phase (1850-1895), the land issues were prominent for conversion. The next 20 years between 1895-1915 i.e, the second phase, experienced rapid growth when the number of converts rose to approximately to 1,00,000 (on an average 3,000 converts per year). This phase that started after Birsa's *Ulgulan* (1895-1900) experienced decline in overt activities of Adivasis against the British and the

Christian missionaries. This helped the Gossner mission to increase its efforts for the conversion of the Adivasis.

The last decade of the 19th century and the initial years of the 20th century were relatively peaceful in the context of political activities and revolts in Chotanagpur. With the help of missionaries like John Hoffman, the British tried to settle land issues of the Adivasis and implemented Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (CNTA) in the year 1908. Churches of all denominations tried to utilise this period for their indigenisation with the Adivasis and make their presence more acceptable. Printing press was opened and the missionaries attempted to learn the vernaculars and even translate Bible in native language. Additionally, seminaries were opened in the area to train the natives into priestly activities and broaden the base of the church. The underlying reasons for higher rate of conversion from 1895 to 1915 can be searched in these activities of the church. For the period of next 32 years between 1915-1947 i.e, the third phase, the total number of followers of Gossner Mission rose from 1,00,000 to 1,69,474. The average rate of conversion for this phase was 2,171 per year which was however lower than the second phase but much higher than the first phase. Considering the fact that the third phase was having issues like detention of German missionaries by the government, stiff competition with other churches and lack of experience of native priests in organisational matters, the number of converts seems impressive. It was then that the native converts came to be appointed as the head of the churches and schools. Also for the first time, the young school going Adivasis organised in various groups such as *Jonkh Sabha* of Lohardaga and *Crus Sena* of Chainpur and started wandering from village to village to popularise faith through cultural practices. They performed the psalms and songs of Bible in Kurukh (Bilung 2019:230-31). The themes of these psalms and songs were often based on criticism of ancestral religion of natives referred as animism by the Europeans and in appreciation of Christianity (Tete 1969:167). Nahum Kujur, Modmasih Lakra, Theophile Tirkey and Kushalmay Lakra were linked with *Jonkh Sabha*, who wandered across villages to give performances accelerating the spread of the Gospel. Undoubtedly these led to the spread of Christianity amongst the Adivasis. This pattern became very crucial, as for the first time all the activities of church from top to bottom were handled and organised by native converts. This clearly influenced the Adivasis and it can be said that at this phase the church and its preaching penetrated crossed the cultural barrier of Adivasis and grasped them in its foothold.

Other than the conversion of the Adivasis into an exotic faith, the advent of Christianity influenced them and their society in many other ways. Christian scholars believe that Birsa's Messianic movement and Tana Bhagat movement of 1914 had clear influence of Christianity. Dasgupta (1996:250) agrees that the doctrines and practices of the movements such as collective prayers, chanting of mantras, singing of songs and the role of preacher etc. resembles Christian practices. These claims stands contested in the light of recent studies and scholars as Martin Tete (1969: 41) do not agree to such biased interpretation. The origin of the movement was as an action against Christian missionaries. Tana Bhagat movement of Gumla was popular amongst the Oraon Adivasis and it persuaded them to leave Christianity and join the Bhagat sect. In some villages such as Damkara and Lambdon of Palkot, Gumla many people reconverted themselves to the Bhagat sect (Tete 1969:41). For instance, 80 families of

Gossner Mission converts, reconverted to their old faith under the influence of Tana Bhagat movement (Dasgupta 1996:249).

Also, the Oraons were hoping for a messiah to get rid of their miseries. Sometimes, the messiah could be as remote and unknown person to the Adivasis as the German emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II (Fuchs 1965:36). This idea itself didn't come spontaneously. The Oraons were consistently watching the German missionaries and were aware of their strength and size. As the German missionaries had nationalist sentiments and they supported their country against Britain in the First World War, at least mentally and emotionally, it was possible that the Oraons might have had some information about Germany and its conflict with the British in the First World War (Dasgupta 1996:247-48). Following the British suspicion for the Gossner church in these years, the missionaries were forced to leave India. Missionaries' departure from Chotanagpur left behind about 100,000 converts without the structure of church (Mahto 1971:136). The possibility of them reverting back to their old faith and losing Christian converts who were perceived as the supporters of British rule, state was forced to make certain arrangements for the converts. Government assigned an Anglican, Bishop Westcott to take the responsibility of Gossner mission schools and its regular missionary functions. In 1917, Mr. Westcott changed his mind and asked for some kind of arrangements including merger of Gossner mission church into Society for Propagation of Gospel (SPG) church (Mahto 1971:181; Minz 1995:19; Severg 1969:21). He went to the National Missionary Council at Calcutta regarding this issue. The Council decided to send a four-member committee to assess the will of followers of Gossner Church of Chotanagpur. Divided into two groups, the members of committee visited various places between May and June, 1919. The western part of Ranchi district, predominantly an Oraon region, was visited by two members of the committee namely Dr. S.K. Dutta (Chairman) and Revd. Dr. F.R. Felt, while the eastern part of the district, a Munda dominated region was visited by Revd. Z. John Hodge and Prof. S.C. Mukerjee (Severg 1969:23). Oraons opposed the decision in various meetings. The mission records mentions the name of Patras Tirkey of Tingiriya village who strongly opposed the amalgamation with the SPG church in the meeting held in Lohardaga (Minz 2013:7). Under popular pressure, the committee decided to give autonomous status to the Gossner mission. On 10 July 1919, the announcement for autonomy was made in the meeting held in Christ Church, Ranchi.

During this time, the pioneer priests namely Revd. Manmasih Toppo, Barnabas Khalkho, Prabhudayal Lakra, Emmanuel Ekka, Christoday Ekka and Christkalyan Kujur led the followers of Lohardaga (Minz 1995:24). Initially, there were issues related to finance and inexperience of the missionaries posted in this region. This was overcome by the help of American Lutheran missionary C.A. Rupley; the situation further improved to some extent by 1925, when the German missionaries were permitted to come back (Minz 1995:29). The missionary activities gradually regained momentum and continued despite hurdles even during the Second World War. By the time, the British left India, the church had been able to baptise 1,69,474 into Christianity (Kalapura 2014:102). The diffusion of socio-political awareness amongst the Adivasi Christians was another aspect that came in the wake of their contact with Christianity. The above reading of the world situation may be cited as one. These developments from mid 19th to mid 20th century were associated with consequent changes in Adivasi society. For

example, the messianic movement started among the Oraon Adivasis which ultimately turned into political agitation and merged with ongoing national movement.

The Adivasi leadership, which emerged in the 20th century, mostly came from educated sections; many of them being educated from missionary institutions (Areeparampil 1992:233). They were the founders of early socio-political organizations that were being established since 1898. For example, an organization named 'Christian Association' was established in 1898 by the Adivasi students of Gossner Church with the aim of spreading education. Similarly, 'Chotanagpur Catholic Co-operative Society' of 1909 by J. Hoffmann and Dacca Students Union of 1912 by J. Bartholmen were established with the aim of upliftment of Christian converts. The Chotanagpur Improvement Society (*Unnati Samaj*), a political organisation formed in the 1920s, was led by Christian converts and catechists like Paul Dayal, Joel Lakra, Theodore Huard and Anand Masih Topno (Areeparampil 1992:235). Furthermore, the educated adivasi Christian leadership that emerged in the early 20th century advocated for the upliftment of the Adivasis. This further turned into a sub movement which ultimately merged into the demand for a separate statehood of Jharkhand.

Mission's working methods among the Adivasis

The Gossner mission during this period was mainly working on three fronts; preaching gospel health and education. The objective of all three methods was to spread Christianity amongst the Adivasis of the area. Initial resistance to the efforts was obvious, so the mission tried to adopt certain local practices so that native population would not treat it completely as alien and strange. To facilitate his efforts, Ferdinand Hahn learnt the Kurukh language of the Oraon adivasis and translated the Bible into it. Missionary Benjamin Lauzemins, who was then posted in Lohardaga, also helped Hahn in the translation of the *New Testament* in Kurukh (Girald 2019:348). Under Hahn's guidance, many Kurukh *dandi* (songs) were composed and printed. Native priests named Urbanus Kujur, Madhan Lakra, Emmanuel Lakra and Jilo Tigga also helped him to accomplish his goal so that the natives could connect well with the faith and its preachers (Minz 1995:13; Tete 1969:166). Another missionary Mr. Nottrot, who was working in Munda region, produced same kind of work in Mundari and Ho language as was done by Hahn in Kurukh (Minz 1995:14).

Increasing the number of a new generation of native converts had always been the main concern of the missionaries. The missionaries expected that western education could be another tool by which new generation of natives could ingress into Christianity. The missionaries opened several schools and training centres. The Gossner mission had started a primary boarding school in Ranchi which developed into Middle Vernacular Standard in 1884 and to Matriculation Standard in 1896. In Lohardaga an upper primary school for girls had already been established in 1886 (Singh 2004:99). Besides this, the German mission had also opened 26 boarding schools with 1,974 students including 626 girls in the area. The German mission also established 12 Kindergarten schools with 423 wards. Apart from this a lace school was opened for girls in 1906. Several village schools were run by the mission where native Christian converts had been given the responsibility of teaching. Traditionally, the educational institution like *Dhumkuria* (youth dormitory) prevailed among the Oraon Adivasis and they were reluctant to send their children to

the mission schools. 'One *anna*' per week was given to encourage them to come to mission schools (Wustey 2017:12). Apart from this, the missionaries also went door to door for bringing the children to their mission schools. Later, many children who enrolled in mission schools took baptism (Tete 1969:6).

A printing press was established earlier to fulfill the requirement of education related activities. For training of native teachers, a Theological Seminary was also opened in Ranchi in 1867 (Roy 1912: 250-253). During Second World War the seminary school of Ranchi shifted to Govindpur for six months and then in Lohardaga in 1944 and it was brought back to Ranchi again in 1948. However when it was in Lohardaga, the significance of Lohardaga rose up (Tete 1969 :168).

Developing medical facilities was considered to be the next important tool for spreading the faith. The attempts at this started as soon as they established themselves in Lohardaga. Missionary Conrad, who was also a doctor, treated patients regularly in the hall of deputy commissioner's mansion in the initial years of establishment of Gossner mission in Lohardaga. He also used to preach among his Adivasi patients the teachings of Christianity. The patients who were cured were tempted to change their perception not just about Christianity but about their own religion too. Traditionally, the Adivasis of this region used to believe in conjuring and visiting *Ojhas* (exorcists) and *Sokhas* (conjurers) to get rid of all their sufferings. It seems that the Adivasis gradually began to rely on the mission doctors and their medicines. As a result new dispensaries were opened at various places e.g., a Leper Asylum was opened at Lohardaga in 1882 and a hospital and dispensary was opened in Ranchi in 1890. People used to come here in large number for treatment. In the year 1908, a total of 19,004 people were treated in different hospitals of Gossner mission in Chotanagpur, out of which the total number of people undergoing treatment in Ranchi and Lohardaga was 4,220 and 1,918 respectively (Roy 1912:255-256).

The pattern of conversion of Adivasis after independence witnessed marked changes after independence when the governments created ministry for tribal welfare and dedicated two schedules of the constitution for the Adivasis. The number of persons baptized by the Gossner mission rose from 1,69,474 to 3,80,212 between 1947 to 1986, which might be an outcome of growth in population. The persons baptized after this period was slow and reached 4,21,000 in a year in 2011(Panjika:2012, 2013, 2018, 2021). There has been a considerable increase in the followers of Gossner church since independence which largely is an outcome of substantial growth of Adivasi population in these years. Fast changing contours of religious conversion in Jharkhand have an important role to play in these developments.

Conclusion

From the above pages, it becomes quite clear that the north-western region of Chotanagpur was important for the Gossner mission because of its location and predominance of adivasi population. In this region, Lohardaga formed the epicenter for the mission activities, and for a time being the mission activities in adjoining regions of Gumla and Palamau were also operated from here. The region of Lohardaga also became the work place of missionary Ferdinand Hahn whose contribution is significant in the expansion of Christianity in Lohardaga. Translation of Bible in Kurukh language played an important role to indigenise Christianity. In 20th century the *Jonkh Sabha*, established in Lohardaga, became an important tool for preachment and attracting the people in the religion of cross.

It could also be said that throughout the period between 1845 and 1947 the relationship between church and adivasis were not the same and it was influenced by the imperative of both the parties. At first, the church tried to make its foothold in the region by making large number of followers and for achieving this goal it worked on the education and health sectors in the region. Most importantly, it also helped the adivasis in their agrarian issues by assisting them on legal matters. Similarly, the Adivasis also took help of church and adopted Christianity in order to save their ancestral land. So the relationship between adivasis and the church was based on a mutual understanding and benefit. There was a time when this mutual benefit shook up, as it happened during 1880s, the repercussions were felt on both sides. The church lost its followers, while the adivasis lost a companion who could be act as a mediator in dialogue with the government. The result came in the form of radical phase of Sardar movement and then Birsa revolt during the last decade of 19th century. On the other hand, in the 20th century issues like process of indigenisation of Christianity and the declaration of autonomy of Gossner church played significant role in conversion of adivasis. Christianity was then no longer considered as a foreign religion and the natives baptised in large number despite the fact that the Gossner church became powerless and was no longer a friend of the government.

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