

## Socio-psychological Reflection of Religious Mobility: A Case of Thachanadan Moopan

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**ABSTRACT** This paper deals with religious life of Thachanadan Moopan, a tribal group of Wayanad, Kerala, with an intention to focus upon the changes that are taking place in their life, especially in the religious sphere. They still practice some traditional elements of culture. Traditionally, they believed in ancestral spirits and they have their own deities. The social and political structure of the traditional Thachanadan Moopan completely is contingent with the religious beliefs and practices. Traditional religious pattern and behavior is mainly based on the myths, sacred and secular performances, sorcery witchcraft etc. The present study focuses on the changes happening in the religious life of Thachanadan Moopan. The main research questions were: What are the factors that lead to religious mobility? What are the subsequent changes appearing in the social institutions after religious mobility? It is revealed that the close cultural contacts and the socio-psychological conditions are the strong determinants for their option for other religions such as Hinduism and Christianity. The major factors for such adoptions are the influence of missionaries, mass media and the longing to move upwards in the social stratum. To be equal with the other plains people, they have to imitate them because they are surrounded by the vast environment of Hinduism. Education and medical camps are the attracting factors behind Christianity. The process of Hinduization and Christianization is increasing day by day fragmenting Thachanadan Moopan into segregated smaller groups with new identities.

### INTRODUCTION

Classical as well as neo- evolutionary theories strongly uphold the idea of societies and cultures continue to change from a simple state to a complex one. Thus, change could be witnessed in every sphere of social life but not necessarily at an equal pace. All the social institutions that we have today are in the gradual process of change. But the changes in religious life are viewed at different wave length and especially when the change is radical from one kind of faith to the other. Change from one religion to another is presumed to be a conversion. This change can occur not only from one religion to another but also between different denominations of the same religion. For example, one person can change his religion from Hinduism to Christianity just like that a Christian can move to different denominations within Christianity. Kox (1991) points out that Richard Travisano defines conversion as a change of someone's general or "pervasive" identity. Conversion is personal (Straus 1979; Snow and Michalek 1984) and communal, private and public. Most of the thinkers link conversion with personal and social situations. They understand conversion as a function of the

interaction between (characteristics of) the individual and the social environment. Conversion is that the experience involves radical personal change (Snow and Michalek 1984). Kipp (1995) views that anthropologists and historians usually speak of conversion as a social or political phenomenon, it may indeed be the action of a collectivity such as a kin group or a village.

As religion gives a world view to the individual, it channels the individual to lead a social life, which is based on the values and ideas of that religion. Religious identification is an important feature of Indian social relations and an important source of social location (Salisbury 1969). Even in the modern world, why religion is important is because it provides what is essentially a security blanket and a sense of certainty in an uncertain world. It also allows people to cope with personal tragedy and hardships that we all go through life. Cornwall (1987) quoting Berger says that individuals come to adopt a particular world view through some form of socialization: either early childhood religious socialization, or by switching worlds through re-socialization (that is, the conversion process). Through the process of socialization, individuals obtain a group identity. But on the contrary. When

a socialized person goes for a re-socialization, that is, the process of conversion, then the problem of identity arises. As the religious identity is what he/she gets by birth, socio-psychological problems arise with he/she moving to any other religion. In these contexts, it is important to study the religious mobility with regard to social and psychological level. Moore (1987) explains individuals' role in the group. He observes where homogenous performance is the norm, the individual with variant capacity or even internally may effectively change the norm at least in minor degree.

There are several factors which account for a social transformation in the society. According to Jain (1995), animistic ideology is the prime factor for bringing about social change. In his study on the Bhils, he found that whoever changed their religion to Hinduism was called Bagat Bhils and those converted to Christianity were called Christian Bhils. These Bagat Bhils and Christian Bhils brought about changes in the primordial institutions of Bhils. Pohlong (2004) also views that there are two kinds of changes. One is change at the periphery and second is change at the core. Change in the periphery refers to the changes in technology and at the core refers to the change in the religion, where the meanings and values are reflected. Thus, he concluded that changing ones religion is changing ones culture.

In many cases conversion implies the tensions between individual consciousness and the structural requirements of the community life. The present study is about a tribe which has its own cultural value and traditional systems whose belief systems and values change due to acculturation. This change in the overall life style and religious behavior causes social change in the community.

The study was conducted during December – January of 2007-08 in the Wayanad district of Kerala. The area for the study covered the hamlets in the settlements of Kadachikunnu, Kottanadu, Kallumala and Cheengollam. The study is based on both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data was collected through the anthropological methods and techniques like participant observation, survey method and interview schedule. Fifty households were selected for data collection and the data was mainly collected on the traditional and changing religious life. Thus, old people are interviewed to know about the traditional belief system and knowledge. Major issues discussed were the importance of traditional belief

system in the Thachanadan Moopan's day to day social life and the causes and consequences of changing traditional religious ways of life. Religion is most sensitive and closer to the life of people. Therefore, strong rapport establishment is essential for reliable and in depth data collected. Nevertheless, by cross checking with different informants, efforts had been made to keep such gaps to minimum.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The focus of the present study is on the religious change of the Thachandan Moopan, a tribe, given the status very recently in 2003 and residing in the state of Kerala. This paper looks at the social dimension of religious change. The close contact with the alien cultures of non-tribal people influenced and resulted in changes in the social and cultural features of Thachanadan Moopan. Thus, it is visibly seen in the socio-cultural life of the tribe under consideration. The main concern of the present study is to understand the situations under which alien religions make their way in or opted for leading the peculiar lifestyle of the acceptors and the subsequent reaction of the members of the community.

### **The Perspective of Religion and Change**

A brief but focused review of the works on this subject would help us to understand how the problem was conceptualized and treated, as the term conversion from its historical antiquity was used in derogatory sense of forced or coerced religious change by the conquering and colonial regimes. Religious conversion has always been and remains today a controversial issue in many of the world's regions.

Christianization in Africa is reported by Gabbert in his study of Colonial Southwest Tanzania (Gabbert 2001). The mission of the Protestant Moravian Church among the Nyakyusa of southwestern Tanzania did not depend on the alleged greater rationality of a world religion, nor was it simply a result of colonial domination. It depended on the ability of the missions to address existing inequalities and tensions within Nyakyusa society. Pentecostalism is reported to have arrived on Italian soil in 1908 as part of its rapid, global diffusion from the United States (Cucchiari 1988). He examines the phenomenological and socio-cultural character of Sicilian Pentecostal conversion

and compares this transformational experience to that offered by traditional Sicilian shamanic practice. He put forward the idea that the comparative study of religious transformation is best furthered when the conversion experience itself is the center of investigation rather than the cause or consequence of conversion events. The forest Tubelo foragers in spite of initial resistance accepted Christianity not due to imposition rather to maintain their distinct identity from coastal communities with whom they have a long history of poor relations. Furthermore, the missionaries efforts to meet their pressing needs such as economic (by planting coconut) and health (by serving dozens of lives from measles epidemic) had a strong influence in establishing trust with the forest Tobelo (Duncan 2003).

Citing Apatani situations of Arunachal Pradesh, Chaudhari (2004) concludes that physical illness is also a reason to embrace Christianity demonstrating that one of his respondents got rid of spiritual possession through the prayers of missionaries while the traditional *apatania puja* (*Danyipolo*) failed to deliver the goods.

The studies on religious conversion are mainly based on the psychological and sociological point of view. Psychological point of view gives interest to the individual. Thus, the concept of conversion has been limited to its being defined as a psychological change within the individual (Alston 1971). Alston says a more sociological approach would ignore the personality factors involved, and emphasize the socio-economic statuses of those who change their religious affiliation for any reason. Thus, we shall use the term religious mobility rather than the term conversion, though in many cases they both refer to the same behavior, a change in religious affiliation.

Hefner (1993) insists on the interpenetration of psychological models of conversion with socio-political ones. With regard to conversion, two general models of conversion are there, *brain washing model* and *social drift*. First one promoted by psychology and clinical psychology. According to brain washing model, cult members use coercive means and deprivation to exercise mind control over new converts- "stripping" their previous identities, neutralizing their powers of will, creating dependence on the cult and programming them with the cult beliefs etc. Social drift model says that people become converts gradually, even inadvertently through the influence of social relationships, especially during times of personal strain. The brain washing approach concentrates

on cult member's efforts to convert outsiders, while the drift hypothesis focuses on the experience those outsiders have as they become converts. Social drift model is more favoured by sociologists. Kilbourne says about different types of conversion. He discussed about the psychopathological conversion. It generally emphasizes individually or in combination the neurotic conflicts, psychological distress, unmet needs, or frustrations of the convert (Kilbourne 1989). Lofland's concept of "divine precepts" also explains the cases of physical torture to accept the new faith. Lofland's treatment of the "divine precepts" group focuses upon personal problems in problem setting-up the seeker for conversion, and/or up on social influence processes by which the seeker adopts the new reference group and its world (Straus 1979). Singer (1988) points out that Richardson says, the new generation of conversion studies represents "something akin to a paradigm shift." The paradigm shift referred to here is the changed old paradigm to a new. In the old paradigm, conversion is generally viewed in passivist and deterministic terms, whereas in the new paradigm conversion is generally explained from the standpoint of active agency (that is, self-directed behavior), personal choice, meaning, and negotiation.

Kipp (1995) views that anthropologists prefer to narrow or specify "conversion" to indicate merely the public, formal change of affiliation, leaving motivation, beliefs, and other inner experience explicitly mooted. Firth (1976) views that from an anthropological standpoint, conversion has three major aspects: i. a change in the system of general cosmological beliefs, and/or a change in the system of symbols in which those beliefs are expressed; ii. a change in the system of social actions related to such beliefs and symbols; iii. a change in the system of persons operating and controlling the symbols and benefitting from the actions. The relationship between these aspects is not necessarily symmetrical, one-to-one. For example, people may cease to worship their traditional gods, to make shrines or temples for them and to make offerings to them, without ceasing to believe that those gods are still in existence, even powerful. But their beliefs will have altered to the extent that they have been willing to desert their traditional worship in favour of a new form of worship, presumably because they regard the new God as even more powerful.

Conversion implies the acceptance of a new locus of self-definition, a new, though not nece-

ssarily exclusive, reference point for one's identity (Hefner 1993). Thus, most necessary feature of religious conversion, it turns out, is not a deeply systematic reorganization of personal meanings but an adjustment in self-identification through at least nominal acceptance of religious actions or beliefs deemed more fitting, useful, or true.

Sociologists have conventionally approached religious conversion as something that happens to a person who is destabilized by external or internal forces and then brought to commit the self to a conversionist group by social-interactive pressures applied by the "trip" and its agents.

Kilbourunie and Richardson (1989) view conversion at either the intra individual or inter individual level. The intra-individual level of analysis explains conversion as resulting from factors within the individual (for example, personal constructs, predispositions, biology, internal states, etc.). The inter-individual level of analysis, on the other hand, explains conversion as resulting from factors occurring among individuals or between individuals and the social environment, for example, group influences, social networks, societal stress, cultural milieu, organizational setting, social role, alienation, anomie, etc.

Individual decisions as to which groups belong to were influenced by social factors and the aggregate of individual decisions had social implications (Nizzimi 2004). Duncun (2003) discusses the importance of local and global incidents influencing the individual decisions to conversion. Religious change is only labeled "conversion" if it occurs across a boundary (Gellner 2005).

There are several views supporting and contradicting religious mobility. Indian constitution also provides rights to accept and propagate any religion according to individual desire. Article 25 of Indian constitution is a right which gives us a wide opportunity to 'profess, practice and propagate' religion. Thus, the individuals are entitled not only to hold particular religious beliefs, they can, in addition, practice and propagate their particular religion and as Article 23 says, "Conversion from one religion to another brought about by coercion or under influence shall not be recognized by law and the exercise of such conversion or undue influence shall be an offence" (Rakshit 2000).

Here the question is how the social situations of the people changes with the religious change? As Parruscci (1968) said the essence of religious conversion is change. To Freeman (1951), social change refers to any repetitive alteration in the

established modes of behaviour in a given group or society. It refers to a new method or mode of behaviour which modifies or replaces the old activities of people. It includes changes in social techniques, relationships, behaviour patterns, folkways, mores, institutions, etc. Just like that religious conversion causes social change in a community. Garonna (1999) views societal change, which takes a variety of directions and forms and in no way can be assimilated or reduced to a single dimension, is often accompanied by a perception of insufficient understanding and lack of control. Isichei (1991) in his study on Anguta traditional religion observes the well-known pattern of the remote high God and suggested that when people's lives were bounded by the microcosm of village life, local spirits were more appropriate to their needs. When they found themselves part of a wider world, they looked for a God who could be worshipped everywhere and by all people.

Moore (1968) defined social change as the significant alteration of social structure (that is, of patterns of action, social interaction), including consequences and manifestations of such structure embodied in norms (rules of conduct), values, cultural products and symbols. In this point of view, any alteration to be socially significant has to be accepted by the majority of the people and has to be assimilated or integrated in the society. When we look at Moore's point of view, if a person converts from one religion to another, his social and personal relations change. Anthropologists introduce terms like *culture contact* and *acculturation* to express the way in which new patterns of behaviour or type of social relationships were acquired and incorporated into a primitive social system. Acculturation comprehends those phenomena, which result when groups of individuals having different cultures, come into first hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups (Upadhyay and Pandey 1993). Moore (1965) points out the chief modes of acculturation as imperialism, wars, conquests, missionary religions (Buddhism, Christianity and Islam), mass migration, individual migration, trade tourism, transported labour, transfer of knowledge, formal communications, etc.

Social change also happens by a process of borrowing of cultural elements from some other contemporary cultures. This may happen by adoption, *which means the act of taking and applying something or putting into practices originally* (Nordscog 1960). People may adopt or

imitate some object or ideas. Related to this process is another concept called diffusion, whereby a trait spreads from one culture to another. It is the process by which an invention or a new institution adopted by one society is also adopted in neighboring areas. Barnbas (1967) states that several factors are responsible for social change and they produce a cumulative effect on any particular situation. All elements of a society are not susceptible to change within same space, with the result of over a period of time.

Based on the concept of diffusion, Srinivas (1952) introduced the concept *Spread* in which he advocates mainly two ways of spreading Hinduism, that is, vertically and horizontally. By vertically, he means Brahmins in any linguistic area share some cultural and ritual forms with all castes including the lowest in that area. By horizontally, he means Brahmins everywhere in India have many Sanskrit rituals in common irrespective of geographical and linguistic diversities. Upadhyay (1993) defined diffusion as the process by which culture traits, discovered or invented at one place or society, are spread directly or indirectly to other societies or places. Although the exact origin of specific cultural traits is difficult to trace, but diffusion of a trait can be traced.

K.S. Singh (2003) in his book, *Hinduism and Tribal Religion*, wrote that even though the census data on tribal religion have never been exactly comparable, the number of tribals following their religion declined by 33 percent between 1921 and 1931. It declined from roughly one-third (18.2 million) of the tribal people in 1931 to about 6 percent in 1981, with Hinduism claiming 87 percent and Christianity 7 percent of adherent among tribals.

The census of India 2001 shows that the Scheduled tribes professing Hinduism account for 93.7 per cent. Christian tribals are 5.8 per cent while less than half per cent of tribals follow Islam and religion not stated.

### Cultural Background of the Community

Thachanadan Moopan is a Scheduled Tribe in Wayanad district in Kerala. Their settlements are scattered and their huts were clustered in each settlement. The field work was conducted in four villages, viz. Kadachikunnu, Kottanad, Kallumala and Cheengollam. They have two social divisions called *chali* or *kulam* (clan) and *tharavadu* or *padi* (lineage). Social divisions acted as the social control mechanism in the society and helped to maintain

social order. There are 36 *padi* and 101 *kulam*. Not all the thirty-six *tharavads* exist now. Three of them are extinct as there is no male member in those families to maintain the *tharavadu*. The *tharavadu* and *chali* system due to its non-utility is going into oblivion gradually which is a reflection of structural change. New generation people are not at all aware of the *padi* names (Choondal 2003). In the *padi* level, there are heads called *Moopan* and *Lepan*. In the *chali* level, the head is known as *Chaalithekkanam*. These heads are also the religious heads of the community. Nowadays, the traditional political system of Thachanadan Moopan has lost its significance. Government or modern political system has an important role in the maintenance of social order. For resolving conflicts and disputes within the community, they are mainly seeking the help of the police and judiciary. Thachanadan Moopan service society was formed in 1997 to press for their demands and represent the needs of the community to the government authorities.

Based on the ancestral spirits, 36 *Padi* and 101 *Chali* are divided as sister *padis* and sister *chalis*. *Kurikkal* is the ancestral spirit of *Padi* and *chali muthachi* is the ancestral spirit of *Chali*. According to their belief system, they have seven *kurikkal* and seven *Chali muthachi*. Thus, each *kurikkal* and *muthachi* belongs to a number of *padis* and *challis* respectively. Thus, few *chali* or *padi* comes under one ancestral spirit and call them as sister *chali* or *padi*. Thachanadan Moopans practice clan and lineage exogamy. Thus, marriage with sister *chali* is prohibited. Monogamy is the recognized type of marriage. Bride price is common. Remarriage of widow or widower is permissible. Widow occupies the same position with other females. The widow can marry only from her husband's *tharavadu* but not the husband's brother.

Their traditional economy was based on hunting, fishing and food gathering using simple technology. Customary territorial rights are observed in their hunting activity. If anyone crosses their territory while hunting, compromising talk had to be made between the parties and trespasser. If needed, fine was imposed on the trespasser. After distribution, the left portion of the prey was given to those who corner the game first. They offer heart of the animal to the deity *Guligan*. The Moopan and Leppan have an important role in the hunting. Moopan used to distribute the game to all members. The game is equally distributed among the members of the settlement. They store the excess meat by

mixing with a paste of turmeric and salt, and were dried in sunlight. Both men and women were engaged in the food gathering activity. They used to collect fruits, leaves and mushrooms from the forest. In case of fishing, it is only a secondary source of food. They use different techniques for catching fish. The fishing was done in almost all months but January and February are considered as the season of fishing because during this period the water levels go down in the streams and it is easy for them to fish. Thachanadan Moopan are experts in basket making using bamboos which are sold to the visiting contractors. They have no land of their own and have to work under the landlords for a year, and they had to continue the contract for next one year if they failed to refund the debt. They get one *seru* paddy as coolie per day. This system is known as *mallipani* (*malli* means *nellu*) that is, paddy. But at present, they are mainly wage labourers in tea and coffee plantations. Very few are involved in other activities such as Tribal Promoter, Teacher, Driver, Pastor, Clerk, Hostel Worker, Forest watcher.

For formal education, Saksharatha Mission is working in the study areas. Today the educational status of the Thachanadan Moopan is found to be progressing due to the intervention of the Saksharatha Mission. After matriculation most of the students hesitate to continue their higher education. Low economic background of the parents along with their illiteracy acts as the preventive factor in continuing higher education.

### Religious Life of Thachanadan Moopan

There is a popular myth associated with origin of name of the community. Choondal (2003) says that there was a conflict between *Eleri* and *Mothali* in Nilamboor. At last *Eleri* beat (*Thachu*) *Mothali*. As *Mothali* is superior in position, due to fear of punishment *Eleri* with his family and relatives escaped to Wayanad. *Elery* and *Mothali* are the equivalent terms for *Moopan* and *Lepan* in Wayanad. It is believed by the people thus they got the name Thachanadan. Another myth regarding their origin is that *karivilli kariyathan* came to the forest as *malankuravan* and *malankurathi* (hunters). To assist them in the forest there was a *muthan* and *muthi* (local word for old men and women). This *muthan* and *muthi* and their children are the ancestors of the Thachanadan Moopan. Thachanadan Moopan believe in one supreme diety called *KarivillyKariyathan*. The

myth about the origin of Thachanadan Moopan community has been described earlier related to this deity.

It is believed that their ancestral spirit reside in *kânayam*. *Kânayam* consists of bunch of sticks. It is made out of jackfruit tree (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*). *Kânayam*, is also the symbol of authority, only found in *Moopan*, *Lepan*, and *chali thekkanam*'s house. So it is not available or no one can have it in one's own house. Thachanadan Moopan use stone to represent their deities. There is a taboo about the *kânayam* that nobody outside the *tharavadu* and *châli* is permitted to touch *kânayam* and marriage between the members of *tharavadu* and *châli* is also prohibited. Thachanadan Moopan worship the objects which are considered as the weapons of their gods and deities. *Bagavathi* is the goddess of Thachanadan Moopan. While getting the possession of *Bagavathi*, they use the weapon to symbolize that he or she is possessed by *Bagavathi*. Both male and female, who are able to speak the matter thoroughly and clearly could get possession. *Gulikan* is one of the deities of Thachanadan Moopan. Before each and every hunt, the people go and seek permission of the *Gulikan* and also they worship it for a good hunt too.

There is a myth about ancestral spirits. It is believed that ancestors are the helpers of *karivilli kariyathan*. Thachanadan Moopan are the descendents of these ancestral spirits. As per the myth, *muthan* and *muthi* have six daughters and seven sons. The *Muthi* and six daughters form the seven *muthachi* of 101 *chali* (lineage) and the seven sons are the *kurikkal* of 36 *padi* (Clan). Based on this *muthachi* and *kurikkal*, the *padi* and *chali* divisions have been formed.

*Moopan* and *Lepan* had multifarious responsibilities. *Moopan* performs all sorts of religious ceremonies. He led the important events of social and economic significance. And he acts as the medicine man who identifies the spirits responsible for causing diseases and prescribes the nature of sacrifices to be made. As a spiritual guide, he secures blessings of the spirits by propitiating them from time to time. *Velichapadu* acts as an intermediary or medium between God and ordinary people. The person who gets *darsha-nam* (trance) is the *velichapâdu* on each occasion. *Velichapadu* has role in several occasions, during *Utsavam*, during the selection of *theackân* of the *châli* (head of the clan) etc. If any problem is encountered in a family or *tharavâdu*, they call the *velichapâdu* to

find out the reason. *Velichapâdu* reveals the reason for the dissatisfaction of gods or goddess or ancestral spirits, the offence they have committed etc. and also gives orders and advices. The one who have knowledge about medicine is called as *châkran* (male) or *châkrathi* (female). They know the curing ways to most of the diseases with long years of experience. They use herbal plants and *manthrâs* (chants) to cure diseases. If the disease is minor, they only give the charmed water. Sometimes they give thread to wear around the body. They also have a practice of *kandam vekkai*, in which the *châkran* or *châkrathi* measures the hand of the patient, to determine the nature of disease.

They practice sorcery and witchcraft which is locally called *odiyani pani* or *odi vekkuka*. They practice these mainly to cure the diseases. The traditional knowledge of sorcery and ethnomedicine is preserved by some specialists and is not open to public. Knowledge in the magical practices is accessible only to a few selected persons among them and they should keep them as secret and treat them as most valuable treasure. This secret knowledge about medicinal plants and magical rites are always transferred orally through generations. *Kâvu* is the main worship centre in which their main deity *karivillikariyathan* stationed. It contains few trees, such as *kaatu Chembakam* (*Michelia champaca*), *Pâla* (*Alstonia scholaris*), *poomaram* (*Delonix regia*), banyan tree (*Ficus Benghalensis*), neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*), *poola* (*Bombax ceiba*) and other local wild trees are also found. The important sacred performance in this *kâvu* is *uthsavam*. Thachanadan Moopan performs some other sacred and secular performances. The sacred performances are ritually important. For example, the ceremony called *châlile oottu* is a ritual related with propitiation of ancestral spirits. In this ceremony they prepare food and provide it to the ancestral spirit. They also perform rituals for the selection of new *kâranavar*. Their harvesting ceremony called *kathiretukkal chatangu* is performed on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the Malayalam month *Thulam* (October-November). *Kolkali* is one of the folk plays of Thachanadan Moopan. *Vattakali* is also another folk play. This is performed mainly on the occasion of marriage ceremonies. Compared to other performances, *kolkali* and *vattakali* are secular in nature because they play these performances without considering any time and space. On the other hand, other rituals

are performed in a time period and on special occasions.

### Religious Mobility and the Changing Life

In this study, out of 50 households, 30 households claim Hinduism, 9 households claim Christianity and the rest of the 11 households belong to the original belief system of the tribals. Thachanadan Moopan has varying contact with other religions. Their contact with Hindus is very intimate as they are the largest neighbors in the settlement, while their contact with Christians is limited. The Muslim contact in the study settlements is negligible. The impact of Hinduism and Christianity is visible, that is, the process of Hinduisation and Christianisation, on the Thachanadan Moopan is a sure possibility.

### Hinduisation

*A number of views are there regarding the status of tribes in the varna system of Indian society. Some of them points out that tribes are part of the varna order 1. Brahmin, 2. Kshatriya, 3. Vaisya, 4. Sudras, 5. the Panchaparameswaras, under which the tribes or the 'adivasis' are included (Ramanunni 2007). References are there to show the relation between the tribes and other caste groups. Tribals are now visiting some of the Hindu temples and they are arguing that it's their right to do such and such ritual. For example, Lord Venkateswra of Thirupathi, the richest of the Hindu shrines in the world is associated with Kurumbas and Lambadi tribes (Das 2003).*

On the other hand, some of them are of the view that tribes didn't belong to the varna order, they are apart from that and call their religion as 'tribal religion'. Based on the historical context, social thinkers say that tribes are the people who first lived in this geographical area and Hindus are the Aryans who migrated from some other regions. Thus, while talking about Hinduisation, one should think about the concept of 'Sanskritisation'. Srinivas (1952) introduced the term *Sanskritization* and stated that *the process by which a low Hindu caste or tribal or other group changes its custom, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of height and frequently twice born caste*. In the view of Srinivas, people convert themselves by adapting the customs, rituals, etc. of the superior or the higher caste to show their *superiority over others or to be equal*.

Here the question arises is: do the tribals who worship Hindu Gods and Goddesses belong to converted category?

Thachanadan Moopan traditionally believed in their supreme deity *Karivillikariyathan*. Now they believe that *Karivill kariyathan* is the incarnation of Lord Siva and Parvathi, the Hindu gods. They also believe in other Hindu gods such as *Ganapathi*, *Subramanian*, *Kâli* etc. The Hindu gods and goddesses appear in the houses of Thachanadan Moopan, by means of calendars, photos and in other forms. But they are kept for their aesthetic values more than as objects of worship. Belief in the witchcraft and sorcery is declining but belief in the ancestral spirits, and taboos are still persisting. Education, economic security and availability of modern medical facilities are the breaking factors of age old beliefs.

Nowadays, they are constructing small temples for Hindu deities. They also started worshipping in a manner similar to that of Brahminical tradition by fixing a *poojari* (a person from *Namboothiri* caste or a person from their own community) to perform the ceremonies and the role of *Moopan* and *Lepan* as religious functionaries is declining. In the case of Hinduisation, nobody is inspiring or forcing them to accept Hindu Gods and Goddesses. Instead, some factors such as the need to be upwardly mobile in the social stratum, and to be equal with the other plains people, makes them imitate them because they are surrounded by the vast environment of Hinduism, which often belittles tribal people. There is the inferiority complex created in their mind that they are worshiping the sticks (*kânayam*) is also one of the factors that compels them to accept the higher caste Gods and their manner of worshipping. When the tribal section becomes more Hinduised, they become ashamed of their habits and customs and try to deny or conceal them. This sense of inferiority is perhaps the best indicator of a transformation of a tribal group into a caste since it denotes a loss of its dignity, its pride, its sense of equality and its independence (Kattakayam 1983). Channa (2000) views that education imparted by Christian schools, no doubt tended to look down on tribal customs and cultural expression. Hence, the educated youth tended to disassociate themselves from tribal cultural values and their expressions. They gradually acquired a western mentality and disdain for their ancestral cultural values. These are some of the factors that lead the tribes to accept Hindu belief system. Here we can see the process of 'acculturation' and 'cultural contact' to understand the way

in which new pattern of behaviour or type of social relationships were acquired and incorporated into a social system. Nordscog (1960) also opines that adoption (that is, people may adopt or imitate some object or ideas) also causes for social change. Cultural integration has also at times resulted in the destruction of some tribal cultural elements, especially in the early stages of Christianity and more among the Protestants than among the Catholics.

Hinduised Thachanadan Moopan still practice ancestral worship, rituals and ceremonies. Thus, we can see the process of syncretism. Syncretism has been defined as *the attempted reconciliation or union of different or opposing principles, practices, as in philosophy of religion* (Menon 2003). Gusfield (1967) views the capacity of old and new cultures and structures to exist without conflict and even with mutual adaptations is a frequent phenomenon of social change; the old is not necessarily replaced by the new. The acceptance of a new product, a new religion, a new mode of decision-making does not necessarily lead to the disappearance of the older form. New forms may only increase the range of alternatives. Both magic and medicine can exist side by side, used alternatively by the same people.

Nowadays they perform rituals and ceremonies of Hindus like house warming ceremonies, *ezhuthiniruthuka* (the initiation ceremony related to education) *sivarâthri*, *Shri Krishna jayanthi* associated with Hindu gods. We can see the impact of mass media which reflects and personify Hindu mythology and deities respectively. Even though the older generation people are illiterate, they watch TV and understand the Hindu epics. Thus, mass media plays an important role in the mobility towards Hinduism. Kilbourne and Richardson (1989) say that there is a plethora of books, journals, magazines, radio programs, TV programs, cassettes, records, and so on that make packaged and privatized religious, spiritual, and psychotherapeutic experiences available to almost everyone.

### Christianisation

Acceptance of Christianity is reported among the Thachanadan Moopans of the study village. There are nine families consisting of 42 members (26 males and 16 females) that have joined the Pentecostal denomination of Christianity.

The missionaries from the nearby churches (Arapatta and Kaniyampatta churches in the study



area) came to villages preaching about Christianity. This was started during 1990's. People who have expressed faith in Christianity embraced it actually with showing much deviation from their traditional way of behavior. The steadfastness of their faith in Christianity is mostly attributed to the personal experiences of blessings they felt when they got a prayer support from the pastor. The people who are with physical and mental discrepancies and diseases got cured. This makes others believe that Christianity is the real path. They believe that if they follow Christ their problems can be solved. There is no external pressure of any kind to join Christianity. The effect of conversion experience has been found to be positive, bringing about a new direction, and helping to stabilize and motivate individuals in a particular direction, the measure of perceived purpose in life has been found to increase in converts (Ho-Yee Ng 2001). As the Christianised Thachanadan Moopan are kept away in all the social activities from the traditional Thachanadan Moopan, the converted people created their own group joining with other caste and tribe members who have become Christians. Many sections of different tribes come together under the same religious leadership and the network of church (Sundar 2001:264).

If we ask the reason they say that their acceptance of Christianity is due to their faith in Jesus Christ. They also believe that they can get rid of alcoholic addiction once they come under the fold of Christianity. Poverty is also a factor for the religious conversion. Poverty and conversion are not directly related. The Christian missionary zeal is based on charity and equality of all human kind. As such all those who are under the tyranny of poverty and hegemony prefer to go close to Christianity as it is not only relieving for them but also providing primary needs of health care and education free of cost to all those deserving without any discrimination. The possibility of the educated getting a good job so that they can raise their standard of living at least in the future must have promoted some of the Thachanadan Moopan to come into Christianity. The missionaries being charitable supply new clothes during festival time, and medical services as a help to the poor families which is really a boon to them. They also help during the marriage occasion and house construction, if the family is not financially capable. Due to the close contact with the outsiders, they are now interested to give education to their children. Even though the government provides stipends, it is not

enough for a student to meet all needs for the whole year. Thus, missionaries' giving new dresses, books etc., make them go the way of Christianity. They are also giving medicines through medical camps, not only to the Christians but to all people whoever seeks their help. This is unbearable for the traditional Thachanadan Moopan, though they have good relations with their Hinduised counterparts. Thus, they never allow the Christianized group to join and participate in their activities because they work and participate in other religious group rituals and ceremonies and functions. They do not obey the rules of the Moopan, instead they go and take advice from the Pastor and other church members. It is a great insult for the traditional Moopan. Thus, they keep distance from the Christianized people. It was also found that Christianized people do not worship and propitiate the ancestral spirits and supernatural like the Hinduised people. They do not keep any purity concept. Thus, they may have to face the wrath of the gods and also those who interact with them. Thus, traditional people keep distance from the Christian Thachanadan Moopan.

Christian Thachandana Moopans' social life is fully related with church. And they have their own way of worshipping, following lifecycle rituals and way of life when compared to the traditional Thachanadan Moopan and the Hinduised Thachanadan Moopan. But Christianised Thachanadan Moopans left idol worship, ancestral worship, superstitious beliefs etc. They abstain themselves from all the formal rituals and the use of the *tulsi* leaves, rice flour, oil, flowers, use of betel leaves for the ceremonial purposes. Christianised Thachanadan Moopan do not use any kind of jewels or ornaments.

The Thachanadan Moopans say that they do not maintain any contact with their Christian counterparts. They are not allowed to participate in any of the lifecycle rituals of Thachanadan Moopan. They treat them as aliens. The converted created for themselves a new endogamic group by marrying within the pentecostals. But in such cases there is no geographical boundary. They can marry any pentecostal anywhere in the world.

One of the important ceremonies in the life of these Christianized people is the *Jnanasnanam* (Baptism). The word 'baptism' originated from the 'batizeen' meaning to 'dip in the water'. Baptism, thus, literally means immersion in water, of who is to be baptized in a religious ceremony. Baptism is a sacrament by which the recipient is solemnly admitted to membership of Christ's holy church

and thereafter grafted in to his physical body (Sholparker 1990).

It is believed that a person can baptize only when he/she understands and accepts the way and words of Jesus Christ and not under force. Thus, baptism is applicable to the person who volunteers to accept the tenets of Jesus Christ. It is a ritual performed by the church on this occasion. In the morning, the person to be baptized, his family, relatives, friends and the church members go to a stream. The pastor and devotee enter in to the stream, the pastor prays, and then the pastor led the person to immerse in the stream.

Their marriage ceremony is very simple. In most of the cases, marriage proposals come through the Church. If both the parties like, they fix the date of the marriage in the home itself. Before the date of marriage, for three Sunday bride and bridegroom should be there in the church during prayer time. If the bride and bride groom are from distant villages, it is not necessary to come to the same church, instead the bride goes to her church and groom goes to his. During this time, the pastor makes a public announcement in the congregation that, marriage is fixed between this boy and girl (name of the boy, girl and their parents mentioned), does anybody have any objection to it? It is done in the church initiated by Pastor. In the marriage ceremony, first the pastor prays and then the people gathered there sing a song. After that, Bibles are exchanged between both bride and groom. Bride won't wear any jewels as the Pentecostal belief system does not permit it. After that everybody claps and sing the songs. Then, the pastor reads a chapter from the Bible. Then, both bride and groom write their signature by saying I will be with him/ her till my death.

Every Sunday the believers gather in the church for Sunday divine service. The pastor starts with a small prayer. After that those gathered sing songs praising Jesus Christ. Then, the pastor sings the song and others repeat the song with clapping. Again the pastor reads a chapter of proverb from the Bible. Next, those who ever felt good things in their life through the prayers share the same with everybody. As there is much social distance created between the Christianised and the other Thachanadan Moopan, these people are more inclined towards the church rather than towards their own kinsmen. Their important festivals are Christmas and Good Friday, the former denoting birth of Christ and the latter reflects Jesus as

resurrected from the death on the third day from his crucifixion done on Friday.

Christmas Day, is an annual holyday celebrated on December 25 that commemorates the birth of Jesus. On Christmas day morning at four 'o' clock they go to church. In the beginning they give a starting prayer, and then sing three or four hymns commemorating the birth of Jesus and go into worship. Then they give offering to the church both in cash and kind. It may be money or any other things depending on the person. Then there may be a drama or skit by the youth and the children. After that the Pastor gives the Christmas message, specially from Mathew, Mark, Luke and John (from New Testament). After that they sing Silent Night hymns with a candle in the hand. Then they cut the cake and distribute chocolates. At last they all say 'Amen' and disperse from the church.

### Analysis

Thachanadan Moopan, of the study area were originally the forest dwellers who have moved out of their habitat due to various reasons. These groups are now in contact with the mainstream areas as the forest laws and policies do not let them live in forest any more. Their social, economic and cultural life was fully adapted to the forest environment. Animism being their religion, they give utmost importance to nature and its governing principles. But when they came to the mainstream areas, many changes took place in their life including in religion. The important factor behind it is the social and cultural contact with surrounding non-tribals. The Thachandan Moopan of the four study settlements have varying contact with other religions. Contact with Hindus is very intimate as they are the largest neighbours in the settlement, while their contact with Christians is limited. The Muslim contacts in the study settlements are negligible. Thus, we can see the impact of Hindus and Christians, that is, the process of Hinduisation and Christianisation, on the Thachanadan Moopans a sure possibility. The religious mobility to Christianity was associated with only a limited number as compared to Hinduism. The factors influencing Hinduisation and Christianization are varied within the community. For Hinduisation is happening because of the strong cultural contact with the mainstream Hindus. In fact, they live in Hindu environment and there are similarities between the cultures. For example, the Hinduised people treat *KarivillyKariyathan* as the incarnation

of Lord Shiva and Parvathi, which is acceptable to both sides, the closeness between the two cultures can be seen. This kind of similarities in both cultures lets them agree they are Hindus, which is believed to be the advanced form of their own culture. Another attesting factor to this view is the emerging temples in the places of sacred groves of Thachanadan Moopan. When we look at the mobility towards Christianity, the situation is extremely different. When they embrace Christianity based on individual conviction, they ignore all the traditional beliefs and practices, even the day to day life also changes rapidly. Here, the ignoring process of Hinduisation is happening unnoticed through long periods of interaction of the whole group within the canopy of Hindu culture. But the acceptance of Christianity is a sudden individual decision of a negligible few. The sudden changes in the values customs and practices create social incompatibility within the endogamous group and psychological distance leading to the creation of a new group. But those who accept Hinduism do not leave their traditional practices, rather the tribal beliefs and Hindu practices are fused together. Thus, on the basis of religion Thachanadan Moopan are divided in to two distinct groups that are Christianized and Hinduised. The traditional tribal group could not keep its separate identity as it is reduced to a minority and the marriage between them and those Hinduised is unavoidable as the difference between them is very thin and both of them are amalgamated.

### CONCLUSION

In the present context, people are embracing Hinduism and Christianity because of several reasons. The occurrence of Christianisation is less compared to Hinduisation. In the case of Hinduisation, some of the traditional elements of their culture are still persisting as we observe in their day to day life. Thachandan Moopan now worship the Hindu gods and goddesses. They started constructing temples for Hindu gods within the sacred groves called *kaavu*, where they propitiate their deities. In the past, the *kanayam* which is believed to be the abode of their ancestral spirits is found only in Moopan and Lapan houses. But the Hindu gods are found in every home whomsoever believes in them. They also started to practice Hindu rituals and festivals like *shivarithri*, *navarathri*, house warming ceremony etc. This type of synchronization of animism and Hinduism is

taking place. However, these changes are causing the elimination of some of the traditional rituals and practices of the society. For example, the ceremony called *eengayum manjalum vekkuka* is conducted for four days after the birth of the child. In that ceremony they put a piece of turmeric in front of each and every house to inform that the pollution regarding the birth of the child was over. But now it is not practiced because they are spreading in other areas and difficult to reach each and every house. It also appears odd to their Hindu neighbours. Thus, naturally some customs and practices are losing their importance and new ones are making their way in. Thus, we cannot say that Hinduism is not causing the degradation of the traditional culture but the pace at which changes taking place is slow and gradual.

When we look at the process of Christianisation, people transform fully into new belief system. These religious transformations started with the involvement of missionaries in the socio- cultural life of the tribes. The missionaries from the nearby churches like Kniyambatta and Arapetta come to preach about the importance of education and modern medical facilities apart from evangelism. These missionaries take care of the people with the physical and mental problems, hazardous diseases and the alcohol addicts. These works of charity attract the people apart from the ideals of equality, love and compassion. Tribal people are mostly affected by alcoholism but evangelism helps them to overcome it. The church helps the poor families for their health care, marriage and educational needs also. They give free education and medicines to all. Even though there is stress and depression in the first stage of adopting a new religion, these are to be solved with the prayer support of the pastor. Their sacred and life cycle rituals are changing according to the new religion.

Another important factor is the distinction between the three groups, that is, the unchanged, Hinduised and Christianised Thachanadan Moopan. But in the case of the first two groups, there is no distinction as mentioned earlier and the only distinction is with those Christianised. The importance of mass media such as radio and T.V programmes are also influential in the process of both Hinduisation and Christianisation. They are giving information about the epics and testaments. It is easy to acquire from them because most of the aged are non-literate. Thus, the process of acculturation, cultural contact and personal conviction are the main reasons for the religious

mobility among the studied people. As pointed out in the beginning, those changes that are taking place in religious life during the course of cultural evolution cannot be branded with such terms as conversion which impute an implied sense of force and coercion. Rather the study reveals that this change has to do with social and psychological reality in an individual's life.

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