

# Christian Missionaries in India and Niyogi Committee Report 1956 : A Critique of Non-Implementation of its Recommendations

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## *ABSTRACT*

During colonial administration Christian Missionaries freely adopted and followed the policy of conversion especially of dalits and tribals across India. Even after Independence and implementation of Indian Constitution in 1950, Christian Missionaries took advantage of certain provisions of the Constitution and continued the policy of conversion in India. The activities of Missionaries were seriously observed and severely criticized that ultimately led to the formation of Niyogi Committee in 1954 by the Congress Government in Madhya Pradesh. In 1956, the Committee submitted its Report to the Government. But the Government never took it seriously and did not implement its recommendations. The Missionaries, therefore, without any kind of hindrance followed the policy of conversion and freely continued to convert especially dalits and tribals to Christianity in India. Consequently Christians made up between 2 % and 3 % of India's population in every census. Moreover, in the light of population growth percentage according to census 1951-2011, in spite of ups and downs in Christian population growth percentage, it is quite apparent that Christian Missionaries have been active in converting dalits and tribals to Christianity by inducing or alluring them under the curtain of providing them social services (Srinivas 1985:107; Srinivas 1998:52). In this context, National Family Health Survey and Census Reports 1951-2011 are highly significant and eye-opener as they reveal the unbelievable failure of public representatives in accepting and implementing recommendations of Niyogi Committee and in checking conversion of dalits and tribals to Christianity all over the country. It is, therefore, expedient to observe the recommendations and trace and assess the failure of law makers to implement it with its alarming effect on demographic structure of India.

**Keywords: Tribals, Dalits, Conversion, Missionary, Committee.**

## **Introduction**

After a thorough study during 1954-1956 based on contacts, interviews, written statements and replies, visits etc. the Committee (chaired by M. Bhawani Shankar Niyogi, a retired Chief Justice of the Nagpur High Court included five other members viz. M. B. Pathak, Ghanshyam Singh Gupta, S. K. George, Ratanlal Malviya and Bhanu Pratap Singh) submitted its report after recording that "there was a general complaint from the non-Christian side that the schools and hospitals were being used as means of securing converts." It said that "Reference was also made to the practice of the Roman Catholic priests or preachers visiting newborn babies to give ashishâ

(blessings) in the name of Jesus, taking sides in litigation or domestic quarrels, kidnapping of minor children and abduction of women and recruitment of labour for plantations in Assam or Andaman as a means of propagating the Christian faith among the ignorant and illiterate people." The report writes that especially Roman Catholic missions used money-lending as a device for proselytization. They gave loans which were later written off if the debtor became a Christian. Thus the report of the Committee exposed truth of the social services of missionaries and their focus on conversion of poor people of India. Therefore, the committee gave the following recommendations:

### The Niyogi Committee Recommendations

1. Those missionaries whose primary object is proselytizer should be asked to withdraw and the large influx of foreign missionaries should be checked;
2. The use of medical and other professional services as a direct means of making conversions should be prohibited by law.
3. Attempts to convert by force or fraud or material inducements or by taking advantage of a person's inexperience or confidence or spiritual weakness or thoughtlessness, or by penetrating into the religious conscience of persons for the purpose of consciously alerting that faith should be absolutely prohibited.
4. The Constitution of India should be amended in order to rule out propagation by foreigners and conversions by force, fraud, and other illicit means,
5. Legislative measures should be enacted for controlling conversion by illegal means.
6. Rules relating to registration of doctors, nurses and other personnel employed in hospitals should be suitably amended to provide a condition against evangelistic activities during professional service, circulation of literature meant for religious propaganda without the approval of Government should be prohibited. (Goel 1998: 163-164)

### Objectives

The sole effort of the study is to disclose that the recommendations of Niyogi Committee were not seriously taken, and its non implementation led to the growth in Christian demography as they continued their policy of conversion in India. For the purpose, they established schools, hospitals, welfare societies and orphanages and provided social services to increase followers of Jesus.

### Data and Methodology

The study is based on published sources consisting of edited and authored books, reports of field investigation and articles published in journals and as available in archives and libraries in India. The materials relevant to the topic and available in google scholars' contributions and Census Reports are other significant sources of the study. The paper mainly traces the non-implementation of the recommendations of Niyogi Committee leading to growth in conversion and demography of Christians in India.

### Literature Review

Most of the books on Modern Indian History and Tribal history and Culture focused on successive growth of Christian Missionaries in India but there is no mention of formation of Niyogi Committee and its recommendations.

K.S.Sing(1985, New Delhi) Pradip K. Bhowmik et al (2016, New Delhi), R.C.Verma (2017, New Delhi),

V.K.Tiwari 1998, Mumbai) S.K.Tiwari and Srikamal Sharma 1997), V.S. Upadhyay and V.P. Sharma (1988, Bhopal) and H.C.Upreti (1982, Jaipur) discussed various aspect without mentioning Niyogi Committee and its recommendations. Even in recent studies and writings by Ram Ahuja (2017, Jaipur),

S.N.Sen (2017, Calcutta), Mahto (2015, Delhi), Veer Bharat Talwar (2012, New Delhi), Grover and Yashpal (2005, New Delhi), Amit Prakash (2001, Hyderabad), Percival Spear (1978), the formation of the Niyogi Committee 1954 and Report 1956 are not discussed.

### Non-implementation of the Recommendations and its Effects

Conversion has been a contentious issue in India. (Debnath 2013:164) since colonial regime which gave a favourable opportunity to the missionaries to work among tribals and dalit of India without any restriction (Sahay 1987:289-317). Even after Independence, the missionaries continued to follow the policy of conversion. So the demand for an anti-conversion law has been raised at multiple levels, with political statements regarding a national anti-conversion law. During the British colonial period, particularly during the latter half of the 1930s and 1940s, laws restricting religious conversions were originally introduced by princely states headed by Hindu royal families. The states that have enacted anti-conversion laws make religious conversion by force or allurement a punishable offence. These states enacted the laws "in an attempt to preserve Hindu religious identity in the face of British missionaries. More than a dozen princely states, including Kota, Bikaner, Jodhpur, Raigarh, Patna, Surguja, Udaipur and Kalahandi enacted anti-conversion laws. (<https://www.pewresearch.org>)

But presently there is no central anti-conversion law. After independence, Indian Parliament introduced

a number of anti-conversion bills, but none were enacted.(Goel2020:327,348) The first Indian Conversion (Regulation and Registration) Bill was introduced in 1954. It sought to enforce “licensing of missionaries and the registration of conversion with government officials”. This Bill failed to gather majority support in the Lok Sabha as PM Nehru persuaded the Parliament to through out the Bill.(Goel2020:327) .Then after six years again in 1960 a Bill was introduced in the Parliament for protecting SCs. and STs from change of religion forced on them on grounds other than religious conversions .As the ruling party resisted it, the Bill was rejected. However, this was followed by the introduction of the Backward Communities (Religious Protection) Bill in 1960.The Bill aimed at checking conversion of Hindus to ‘non-Indian religions. It included Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism. In 1979, the Freedom of Religion Bill was introduced in Parliament. It sought “official curbs on inter-religious conversion. These Bills were also not passed by Parliament due to a lack of political support. This made the situation so critical that the then Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee called a National debate on religious conversion in January 1999. (Raj2001:32;Sarkar,Sarkar and Datta2004:2) In 2015, the Union Law Ministry suggested that a law against forced and fraudulent conversions could not be created at a national level, since law-and-order is a State subject under the Constitution. However, state governments can enact such laws. So over the years, several states enacted “Freedom of Religion” legislation to restrict religious conversions carried out by force, fraud, or inducements.

“Freedom of Religion Laws” are currently in force in eight states — (i) Odisha (1967), (ii) Madhya Pradesh (1968), (iii) Arunachal Pradesh (1978), (iv)

Chhattisgarh (2000 and 2006), (v) Gujarat (2003), (vi) Himachal Pradesh (2006 and 2019), (vii) Jharkhand (2017), and (viii) Uttarakhand (2018).The laws passed in Himachal Pradesh (2019) and Uttarakhand also declare a marriage to be void if it was solemnised for the sole purpose of conversion, or a conversion was done solely for the purpose of marriage. In *Stainislaus vs. State of Madhya Pradesh and Others*(1977) ,the Supreme Court ruled that the right to propagate does not mean the right to proselytise . The apex court also overruled the stand (1967) of the Odisha High Court that said proselytism was within the scope of Article 25 as it is central to the Christian faith.

In 1967,the first “Freedom of Religion” Bill was passed (essentially regulating conversions into minority religions )in Odisha ,at a time when the population of Christians in the State was 2 lakh or 1.1% of the population ,compared to the population of Hindus that was 1.7 crore. Out of twenty-eight States only twelve States of India have anti-conversion laws. These States are Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh. Enforcement of these laws varies across different states. Courts have ordered some states to pause enforcement of their anti-conversion laws while others are actively charging individuals.

Thus “Freedom of Religion Laws” are in force in eight states and “Anti-conversion Laws” in only twelve states. It is to be noted that non-implementation of the entire recommendations all over the country led to the growth in demography of Christians in India as it is evident from Census Reports 1951-2011 and National Family Health Survey, 2015

**Table-1**

**Population Growth Percentage**

Sr.No.	Year	All	Hindus	Muslims	Christians
1.	1951-61	21.6	20.7	32.7	29.09
2.	1961-71	24.8	23.7	30.9	33.0
3.	1971-81	24.7	24.0	30.7	17.0
4.	1981-91	23.9	22.7	32.9	17.8
5.	1991-2001	21.5	19.9	29.4	22.6
6.	2001-11	17.7	16.7	24.7	15.7

**Source-Indian Census Reports ,1951-2011**

In this context percentage of class category religion is no less significant: Table-2

**Percentage of Class Category Religion**

Sr.No.	Class	S.Cs.	STs.	OBCs.	Total
1.	Buddhists	88	9	1	98
2.	Hindus	29	10	44	77
3.	Christians	21	29	26	76
4.	Muslims	3	2	55	60
5.	Sikhs	38	0	19	57
6.	Jains	3	0	12	15
7.	All	21	10	44	75

**Source-National Family Health Survey,2015**

It is to be noted that the growth rate of the Christians in India has suddenly “jumped from 17.5 per cent during the 1980s to 22.5 percent during the 1990s. Sharp increase in the growth rates in Bihar,

Gujarat, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi” is astonishing. Christian growth rate has been “above 30 per cent” in said states. (Premi2007:167-168) Here it is worthwhile to state regions with significant Christian population. The largest Christian population is in Kerala at 6.14 million, it is 18.4% of the State population, majority in Nagaland at 87%, Mizoram at 86% and Meghalaya at 75%. Plurality in Manipur at 42% and Arunachal Pradesh at 30%. Significant population in Goa at 25 %, Pondicherry at 6.3% and Tamil Nadu at 6.2%. Therefore. according to Census 2011 data, Christianity is India’s third-largest religion with about 26 million adherents, making up 2.3 percent of the population. It is worthwhile to mention state wise the Christian population in India.

**Table-3**  
**Christian Population in India, Census 2011**

State/UT	Total Population	Christian %	Christian Population
Kerala	33,406,061	18.38	6,141,269
Tamil Nadu	72,147,030	6.12	4,418,331
Meghalaya	2,966,889	74.59	2,213,027
Nagaland	1,978,502	87.93	1,739,651
Jharkhand	32,988,134	4.30	1,418,608
Manipur	2,855,794	41.29	1,179,043
Assam	31,205,576	3.74	1,165,867
Odisha	41,974,218	2.77	1,161,708
Karnataka	61,095,297	1.87	1,142,647
Andhra Pradesh	84,580,777	1.34	1,129,784
Maharashtra	112,374,333	0.96	1,080,073
Mizoram	1,097,206	87.16	956,331
West Bengal	91,276,115	0.72	658,618
Chhattisgarh	25,545,198	1.92	490,542
Arunachal Pradesh	1,383,727	30.36	418,732
Goa	1,458,545	25.10	366,130
Uttar Pradesh	199,812,341	0.18	356,448
Punjab	27,743,338	1.26	348,230
Gujarat	60,439,692	0.52	316,178
Madhya Pradesh	72,626,809	0.29	213,282
Tripura	3,673,917	4.35	159,882
Delhi	16,787,941	0.87	146,093

Bihar	104,099,452	0.12	129,247
Rajasthan	68,548,437	0.14	96,430
Andman and Nicobar Islands	380,581	21.28	80,984
Puducherry	1,247,953	6.29	78,550
Sikkim	610,577	9.91	60,522
Haryana	25,351,462	0.20	50,353
Uttarakhand	10,086, 292	0.37	37,781
Jammu &Kashmir	12,541,302	0.28	35,631
Himachal Pradesh	6,864,602	0.18	12,646
Chandigarh	1,055,450	0.83	8,720
Dadra &Nagar Haveli	343,709	1.49	5,113
Daman and Diu	243,247	1.16	2,820
Lakshadweep	64,473	0.49	317
<b>India</b>	<b>1,210,854,977</b>	<b>2.30</b>	<b>27,819,588</b>

### Conclusion:

Admittedly the non-implementation of the entire recommendations of the Committee is a big national issue. It is utter failure of public law-makers. Though Census data shows ups and downs in numerical strength of Christians, it is definitely not good for keeping intact demographic equation. (Prasad:1-140) It hinders the nation-building process as the Christian converts took pride in fighting for the British Government during national struggle in 1857 (The Niyogi Committee Report 1956:20). It seriously impacts tribal society and culture. A noted Social Scientist Sachchidanand discussed it in detail and observed, "While the Missionaries might have succeeded in their efforts to modernize the tribal and to make them good Christians, their efforts worked considerably on the debit side also. Conversion led to a break-up of the social solidarity of the village and hastened the process of detribalisation." (Sachchidanand 1976:334). Undoubtedly, the Missionaries played a key role in spread of education (Mahto 2015:95) and also contributed to tribal literature in shape of books

and research papers on grammar, dictionary, songs and rhymes etc. (De 2013:339-447) but they never deviated themselves from their mission of conversion in India. Debnath rightly pointed out that "Mass religious conversion are often held to accumulate political gains. The common agenda of almost all mass religious conversion is to free the downtrodden from inequality and poverty. But reality shows the reverse picture. No religion has so far assured equality to the converted people." (Debnath 2013:170) Presently Christians are in majority in Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram, and rapidly growing in Kerala, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Goa and Andaman and Nicobar islands. Goel rightly noted that "Converts to Christianity in North East and Central India have constantly evinced separatist and secessionist tendencies. Their denunciation of Hinduism reveals their real intention of making India a land of Jesus followers. So it is high time to enact a national law against conversion with gradual implementation of entire recommendations of the committee.

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