

RELIGIOUS CONVERSION AND INDIGENOUS IDENTITY: THE CONTEXT OF ORAONS IN CHOTANAGPUR

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The present study deals with the conceptual framework of ‘Christians of Tribal Origin’—either born or converted. The study of identity formation and articulation of the ethnic Oraons is in the context of religious conversion in the Chotanagpur region of eastern India using ethnographic methodology. The complexity of the identity question of the Oraon community is examined under five sub-headings. The paper concludes that both the religious conversion and tribal identity are multifaceted through the historical deposit of collective actions and experiences in the ethnic formation of a new religious community in the context of Oraon tribals converting to Christianity. The paper argues that despite the experience of fragmentation, there are negotiations, restructuring, and convergence of the old and the new based on the common grounds of culture, land and other resources, and the dreams, hopes, and aspirations of the community.

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