

Sarbeswar Sahoo. *Pentecostalism and Politics of Conversion in India*. New Delhi, India: Cambridge University Press, 2018. 220 pages. \$90.00. ISBN-10: 1108416128

In *Pentecostalism and Politics of Conversion in India*, Sarbeswar Sahoo, Assistant Professor of Sociology at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (IIT), presents the complexity of understanding conversion in India. From the context of the tribal communities of Rajasthan, Sahoo attempts to provide a "holistic interpretation" of conversion to Pentecostalism in light of the recent anti-Christian violence in India, highlighting the "competing projects of conversion of both Christian missionaries and Hindu nationalists" (pg. 7).

In the introductory chapter, Sahoo opens up the discourse by presenting the Christian and Hindu claims for and against the tribal conversion to the Pentecostal expression of Christianity.

In chapter two, Sahoo unpacks the rise of Pentecostalism in India and namely in the state of Rajasthan. Sahoo highlights the Native Missionary Movement (NMM) and the Calvary Covenant Fellowship Mission (CCFM) for successfully propagating Pentecostal mission works among the tribal communities. Sahoo notes that the "divine healings, emphasis on Spirit worship, strict rules, and belief system and 'holistic development' through active social ministries have...helped spread Pentecostalism among tribals" (pg. 35). Sahoo also presents the new converts' financial and social trepidation, who are at risk of losing their communal identity due to their new Pentecostal religious identity.

In chapter three, Sahoo takes the analysis a step further by presenting four narratives of contemporary religious conversion from Rajasthan to demonstrate the complex nature of conversion at the grassroots level. First, the Hindu nationalist narrative, which advocates against conversion rigorously and accuses the missionaries of gaining converts through allurements. Second, Sahoo presents the local Christian missionary narrative that rejects the Hindu nationalist accusations and sees missionary work as within the bounds of Indian constitutional rights of propagating religion. Third, the convert's narrative demonstrates that the conversion happens due to "tension-producing situational factors" (pg. 77), highlighting the instances where the village gods were not powerful to bring healing and peace, but the missionaries prayed, and healing occurred. Fourth, the Hindu Adivasi narrative, which acknowledges the rationale for conversions as healing from disease and material benefits, but also sees conversion as angering the Hindu gods and ultimately undermining the sense of tribal solidarity. Through these four narratives, Sahoo establishes the sociological complexity of understanding conversion.

In chapter four, Sahoo focuses on women's conversion experiences in the tribal villages of south Rajasthan. After a brief history of women and Pentecostalism worldwide, Sahoo narrates various Adivasi women's conversion experiences at length, demonstrating the "experientialist" (pg. 99) aspects of Pentecostalism that enabled the women to experience the transcendent, which led them to experience freedom and equality in churches.

Finally, in chapter five, while highlighting the nature of Hindutva politics that has been driving the anti-conversion violence in India, Sahoo also draws attention to "competing projects of conversion" (pg. 127) among both Christian missionaries and Hindu nationalists. Like Christian missionaries, Hindu nationalist groups have also established development projects to curb Christian conversion and to reconvert the Christians back to Hinduism. Sahoo also provides a political analysis on such competing projects of conversion that often puts the Christians in a disadvantageous position compared to their Hindu counterparts.

In general, Sarbeswar Sahoo's book is a much-needed addition to the subject of conversion from a more sociological and ethnographic perspective. It portrays the Indian grassroots reality where the competing local understandings of conversion are held in tension. One of the main objectives that Sahoo's study brought forth is to go "beyond the 'materialist incentive discourse'" (pg. 159) as a motivation for conversion. Sahoo shows that the process of conversion is complex, where material allure is just one piece of the puzzle. Another strength of Sahoo's work is in highlighting the development projects of Hindu nationalist organizations to compete with the Christian social service activities to provide empowerment and even conduct "reconversion" (*gharwapsi*) rituals if any converts wish to go back to Hinduism.

Although *Pentecostalism and Politics of Conversion in India* is a well-researched, easy-to-read work, some may sense that Sahoo's analysis is more sympathetic towards the Pentecostals than the Hindu nationalist side. However, Sahoo, who is not a Christian (which he mentions in the book), provides ample ethnographic data to balance that deficit if anyone perceives it as biased. Nonetheless, religious scholars and students interested in Christian mission, Pentecostalism, and religion & politics will find the book an intellectual asset.

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