



RECONSTRUCTING CHRISTIAN MISSION: THE ISSUE OF CULTURAL TENSION IN INDIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE HINDU FUNDAMENTALIST INDICTMENT

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Abstract: Even after the post-colonial and post-independence period, Christian mission has been accused and misunderstood as instigating western superior cultural ideology to the people of India and endangering the culture of the land. To a large extent, it can be assumed that the accusation is also factual as most of the Churches fail to resemble itself according to the culture of the Indian people. Christianity has been symbolized as anti-national and anti-cultural by some Hindu Fundamentalist and these has brought detrimental effect producing hatred and violence towards Christianity in the country. The observation has brought interruption to the progress of Christian mission and the status of Christianity has been challenged to prove its validity to the masses of Indian people. This context finds it crucial to reconstruct Christian mission for successful venture. The process of reconstruction give attention towards the necessity of inculturating Christian Mission according to the Indian cultural norms; not just Indianizing or giving Indian names to western cultural practices. This process of inculturation, thus, would results in the restructuring or reinterpreting Christian practices corresponding to the Indian culture especially with regards to the understanding of conversion. Successful and authentic inculturation process would subside misunderstanding and bring acceptance towards Christian mission which will bring new vision to the Church and its mission work.

Keyword: Christian mission, Hindu fundamentalist, culture, reconstruction, inculturation, conversion.

1. Introduction: This article critically observe the criticism of christian mission in India specially referring to the Hindu Fundamentalism indictment on Christianity as endangering the culture of the land and give a missiological reconstruction to avoid misunderstanding and elimination of confusion towards christian mission. From the coming of Christian missionaries in India till today, Christianity and its mission work has been closely observed by the secular and theological world. Many Hindu fundamentalist think that Christianity originated in the western countries and therefore is a foreign religion with distinct cultural setup. They accused Christianity of having a separate culture which is superior than other existing culture and that they instigate this to the local who embraced christianity. As such, Christianity is blamed for disintegration and bringing about separation and isolation from the local culture. Therefore, it is necessary to missiologically¹ analyse these criticisms rethink and reconstruct Christian mission work.

¹ Missiology can easily be described as the intentional and ongoing Christian theological study or reflection of God's mission and the church's missionary activity, which includes the history, the character and purpose of missionary work.

2. Criticism of Christian Mission from the Hindu Fundamentalist: It is undeniable that Christian mission have brought changes in the socio-cultural and religious life of the local people. But, the changes brought by the Christian mission has been adversely challenge by the Hindu fundamentalist where they think that the new faith does not have any sense of connectedness and attachment with the Indian tradition and culture. Even in the post-independence period, the criticism of Christian mission still continued among the Hindu fundamentalist. An over-view of their detestation to Christian mission may be categorised in three major points:

i. Christian Mission and Supra-Cultural Ideology: One of the basic criticisms of Christian mission by the Hindu fundamentalist have been the superior ideology imparted by the missionaries. M.S. Golwalker, the main ideologue of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)² used the term ‘Cultural nationalism’ to attribute to the Christian mission work. He rejected the Christian mission work in India, which, according to him, does not have any respect and value towards the cultural tradition of India.³

RSS identified that the Christian missionary ideology devalued the Hindu cultural practices, and it does not pay reverence to traditional culture of the people. Golwalkar in his book *Bunch of Thought* described Christians as forsaking their land, not grateful to nor feeling for their motherland: together with the change in their faith, gone is the spirit of love and devotion for the cultural practices they were attached with.⁴

The Sangh Parivar⁵ always quoted “Evangelization in India appears to be a... policy to... re-establishing western supremacy. Its objective is... to disrupt the solidarity of non-Christian societies...”⁶ Golwalker mentioned that the imparting of this ideology to the people led to the denouncement of their traditional practices and to the conversion of Christianity.⁷

The missionary zeal, from the Hindu point of view, has been to convert Hindus by belittling the Hindu cultural practices. “They do not have a respect for Indian culture,” said Arun Shourie.⁸ Jaffrelot in his book mentioned that what provoked angry protest by fundamental Hindus was abused and denigration of Hindu dieties. The Hindu fundamentalist disliked Christian missionaries who spoke about Hinduism as a religion steeped in idolatry and inequality of caste system.⁹ The missionary, according to the Hindu fundamentalists, is the one who attacks the time-honoured Indian customs and institutions, sacred literature, traditions, historical memories, and associations. They wish to destroy Indian society, culture and civilization and are the greatest enemy of the Hindu people, said Ananda Coomaraswamy.¹⁰

ii. Christian Mission and Conversion: Another and the major criticism of the Hindu fundamentalist towards the Christian mission falls on the issue of conversion. The Hindu leaders believes that Christianity is a foreign religion and conversion to Christian faith involves vital abandonment of Hindu culture and heritage.¹¹ They also charge that conversion makes the convert anti-national, even a traitor. Mark T.B Laing mentioned Golwalkar saying, ‘Conversions not only change the religion and cultural value of the converted, but also their nationality.’¹²

² Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh abbreviated as RSS is a right-wing charitable, educational, volunteer, Hindu nationalist, non-governmental organisation.

³ Mathew Thomas, “Christian Missions in the Pluralistic Context of India – The Relevance of Gandhian Approach” (D.Th dissertation, Mahatma Gandhi University, 2002).

⁴ M.S. Golwalker, *Bunch of Thought* (Bangalore: Jagarana Prakashana, 1980), 166-167, cited by Rodinmawia Ralte, op. cit., 43.

⁵ The Sangh Parivar refers to the family of Hindu nationalist organisations which have been started by members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

⁶ P. Paramenswaran, *Evangelisation 2000 Or Politics of Subversion?* (Bangalore: Sahitya Sindhu Prakashana, 1999), 15, cited by Rodinmawia Ralte, *Hindu and Hindutva* (Taiwan: PTCA, 2014), 78-79.

⁷ Mathew Thomas, op. cit.

⁸ Arun Shourie, *Missionaries in India - Continuities, Change, Dilemmas* (New Delhi: Harper Collin Publishers, 1994), 47.

⁹ C. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics 1925 to the 1990s* (London: Hurst, 1999) 14, cited by Joe Arun, *Conversion and the Rise of Hindu Fundamentalism: A Case Study from Tamil Nadu, South India*, <https://www.idcridialogue.com> (28/7/2015)

¹⁰ Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Essay on National Idealism* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1981), 125, 152.

¹¹ Brojendra N. Benerjee, “Conversion,” in *International Review of Mission* LXXII / 287 (July, 1983), 397.

¹² Mark T.B. Laing, *Nationalism and Hindutva: A Christian Response* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005), 181-182.

Specifically mentioning conversions, Savarkar said that Hindus who were converted to Christianity did not belong to the Hindu nation. This was due to their taking on a new cult and having as their holy land not India. Like Savarkar, Golwalkar too saw that 'Hindu culture' was becoming weakened by outside influence (Christianity) and he proposed that Hindus should be united to form a '*Hindu rashtra* (Hindu nation). This was conceived against the reality of conversion to Christianity and in particular against the influence of the Christian missions in India.¹³

The Sangh Parivar indicts Christians of indulging in the conversion programme which destroys the culture of the indigenous people and distances the converted community from the national mainstream and "threatens the national integrity."¹⁴ Seshadri maintains, "Conversion leads to cutting themselves away from national mainstream... The converts become easy tools in the hands of agents of Christian imperialistic powers."¹⁵ Ram Swarup also warns that giving free hand to Christians for conversion leads to the total destruction of the native culture.¹⁶

Many leaders of the BJP have called for a ban on religious conversions. Dr. Kailash Nath Katju, the then Home Minister, made a declaration in the Parliament on 22nd April 1953, that foreign missionaries working in the country engaged in social work, medical, education were welcome, but if they indulged in proselytism it would be undesirable.¹⁷ The former Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has called for national debate to discuss the issue of religious conversion and exhorted missionaries to give up the policy of conversion.¹⁸

For the Hindu fundamentalist, accepting Christianity would mean accepting the colonial culture. Conversion is the transformation of an Indian into an extension of alien culture and influence.¹⁹ Conversion in the Hindu fundamentalist sense not only makes Hindus abandon the Hindu nation but it opened a door for cultural misconception.²⁰

iii. Christian Mission and Mission Station: Mattam argued that the Hindu fundamentalist detestation to the Christian mission was its colonial attitude implied through the establishment of mission station. As the converts were economically poor, the missionaries tried to protect them by gathering them together in Christian colonies.²¹ Subhash Anand quotes Sharma mentioning

"Faced of western culture, foreign character of the missions, suspicions regarding the motives conversion and above all their (converts') abject economic dependence on the mission bounties, perhaps, were the most important causes for the cultural isolation of the converts."²²

A Christian author Joseph Troisi also testifies the change in religion similarly brings about changes in food habits and many other socially important aspects of life. This way, Christians automatically form a separate community breaking the age-old bonds of tribal solidarity.²³

So, for the Sangh Parivar, the conversion of Hindus to other religions destroys Hindu culture, distances the converts from the mainstreams and gives rise to disloyalty to the nation, enhancing disunity among the people.²⁴ The impression to them is that of the establishment of a small, tight, well-knit communities alienated from the cultural practices of the traditional Hindus', buttressed by intermarriage and considering themselves to be a part of world Christianity. The lives of these Christians have been so changed they feel immeasurably superior to their own unconverted relatives.²⁵

¹³ V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (Bombay: S.S. Savarkar, 1969), cited by Joe Arun, op. cit.

¹⁴ Ashok Ghowgule, *Hindutva and the Religious Minorities* (Mumbai: Hindu Vivek Kendra, 1997), 3, cited by Rodinmawia Ralte, op. cit., 80.

¹⁵ H.V. Seshadri, *The Way* (New Delhi: Suruchi Prakashan, 1991), 28-29, cited by Rodinmawia Ralte, op. cit., 80.

¹⁶ Rodinmawia Ralte, op. cit., 81.

¹⁷ Brojendra N. Benerjee, op. cit., 396.

¹⁸ Mathew Thomas, op. cit.

¹⁹ Sita Ram Goel, *History of Hindu-Christian Encounters* (New Delhi: South Asia Books, 1990), 370.

²⁰ A. Chatterjee, *The Concept of Hindu Nation* (New Delhi: Voice of India, 1995) 24-30, cited by Joe Arun, op.cit.

²¹ J. Mattam, S.J & P. Arockiadoss, S.J, eds., *Hindutva: An Indian Christian Response* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publication, 2002), 164.

²² Ibid.

²³ Rodinmawia Ralte, op. cit., 81.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ J. Mattam, S.J op. cit., 164.

3. Reconstructing Christian Mission: From the above discussion, we can point out that Christian missions in their mission perception were unconscious of the fact that their theology was culturally conditioned; they simply assumed that it was supracultural and universally valid.²⁶ In his book *Ecumenical Missiology*, Lalsangkima Pachuau pointed out that the people of other faiths do not experience Christian mission primarily as an activity that concentrates on wholeness of life, but as one that creates a rival community, superior and not available elsewhere.²⁷ Conversion to Christianity is viewed as something alien, a symbol of oppression and enslaving power imposed upon the people of India against their will, and therefore essentially evil and wrong, causing disorder in India thereby uprooting the people from its cultural practices. This ideology of the west have influenced the Christian mission so much till today that a careful analysis of our mission reveals almost the same mission practices and understanding. Christian mission is labelled as a mission that threatens, a mission that breaks up community and a mission that does not connect. As such, the Hindu fundamentalist believed that Christian mission do not find a place in India since they are felt to belong to a cultural unit altogether different from the Hindu. They are believed not sharing the common civilization and culture.

There are undeniable facts present in the Hindu fundamentalist criticism of Christian mission. To overcome such criticism and to bring out the validity to Christian mission to the culture it engaged with, it has become intrinsically necessary to missiologically rethink and reconstruct Christian mission works and validate it for continual existence. In this process of reconstruction, the relevance and necessity of the paradigm of inculturation and a broader implication on the understanding of conversion will be discussed.

i. Reconstruction through Inculturation: Christianity was primarily blamed by the Hindu fundamentalist for its supra-cultural ideology. The accusation of Christian mission by the Hindu fundamentalist of its supra-cultural ideology and triumphalism has doubtlessly caused stagnation in the progress of Christian mission. This tension could be subsided by directing Christian mission towards the process of inculturating itself according to the culture of India. If theology and Christian mission does not correspond to the living reality and culture of the people then the relevancy and validity of it can be doubtful. And if mission has to correspond to the culture of India, it needs to inculturate its theology, practices and norms to the culture it engaged with.

Inculturation has been one of the most important paradigm in Christian mission venture. Inculturation could simply be understood as the process of making the gospel meaningful, connecting and incarnated into a local culture. In his dissertation, Vijaya Joji Babu quoted Michael Amaladoss, who is one of the most celebrated Indian theologian, saying that “inculturation is the way in which the people freely respond to the Gospel, live their faith and become Church in a particular place.”²⁸ Pierre Charles introduced the concept “enculturation,” at home in cultural anthropology circles, into missiology. J. Masson later coined the phrase *Catholicisme inculture* (inculturated Catholicism) in 1962. It soon gained currency among Jesuits, in the form of “inculturation.” In 1977 the Jesuit superior general, Pedro Arrupe introduced the term ‘inculturation’ to the Synod of Bishops, and from this on it became universally known.²⁹

In 1982, the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) adopted the Ecumenical Affirmation [on] Mission and Evangelism and declared a Mission Statement. This statement accept a wide relation between Gospel and Culture and asserts the call for inculturation in its mission.³⁰ The interrelationship of gospel and culture had been an influential theme of the 1990’s at Salvador de Bahia, in Brazil in 1996. The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union

²⁶ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shift in Theology of Mission* (Bangalore: Centre for Contemporary Christian, 2006), 562.

²⁷ Lalsangkima Pachuau, “Ecumenical Missiology: Three Decades of the Historical and Theological Development (1952-1982),” in *Ecumenical Missiology: Contemporary Trends, Issues and Themes*, edited by Lalsangkima Pachuau (Bangalore: The United Theological College, 2002), 192.

²⁸ Michael Amaladoss, *Becoming Indian: The Process of Inculturation* (Bangalore: Dharmaram, 1992), 10. cited by Vijaya Joji Babu Valle, “*BECOMING INDIAN: Towards an Indian Contextual Ecclesiology*,” (Ph.D Dissertation, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2010)

²⁹ David J Bosch, op. cit., 561.

³⁰ Jacques Matthey, “Missiology in the World Council of Churches: Introducing the Most Recent Statement of the World Council of Churches on Mission,” in *Ecumenical Missiology: Contemporary Trends, Issues and Themes*, edited by Lalsangkima Pachuau (Bangalore: The United Theological College, 2002), 72.

had ushered in a new world order in which cultural and ethnic factor underlay many conflicts. It was clear by this time that each culture had to discover its own way of expressing the gospel rather than replicating western models. Respect of cultural integrity has become a strong emphasis.³¹

Inculturation first and foremost pays respect to the agents; the local culture. Its emphasis is truly on the local situation that is rooted in the tradition of the people and therefore appeals to their deeper levels of consciousness.³² As a result, a particular culture and tradition no longer participated as the ones with supra-cultural and superior conception, who have all the answers. But, they are in equal existence with the local people. Inculturation is much of the church mission born anew in each new context and culture. It helps the people to bring forth from their own living tradition, an original expression of Christian life which is understandable, local, acceptable, and respected. T.V. Philip, an India theologian, has understood the Church as 'contextual' and 'catholic.' He pointed out that cultural contextuality does not mean isolation but affirmation of the gifts of each culture for the proclamation of the gospel in communion with other context. Similarly, catholicity does not mean sweeping away of particular identities, but is the expression of the fullness of truth that can be experienced in each particular context.³³ Hwa Yung rightly says, "One key criterion of an adequate theology of mission would be whether it is able to speak to the physical and social needs of humanity in their own situation."³⁴

Speaking about the essential of inculturating the gospel, Lee and Stephen Bevans has mentioned that it is necessary to recognize the importance and value of the local culture in which the churches lived and participated.³⁵ Ariarajah also writes that 'In no way could churches become partners in nation-building if they considered the religion and culture of the majority of the peoples with whom they lived to be in complete 'discontinuity' with their new life in Christ.'³⁶

Felix Wilfred, a renowned Indian theologian with an in-depth study on inculturation, said that religious pluralism is shaping the theology of the Church and as such it shapes the theology of inculturation too.³⁷ He suggested that inculturation is the recognition of cultural conditioning. As is the case with other world religions, Christianity too is culturally conditioned. "Christian faith has existed only and always in the concrete and definite cultural and religious environments."³⁸ Wilfred is aware that "it is not possible to refrain from articulating the Christian faith and message in a particular language and culture" and he does affirm the "transcendence of the Christian message above all particular traditions, forms, etc." He suggests though that the "universality of Christian faith is affirmed not by denying or transcending particularities but by experiencing the universal and the transcendent in the particular or in the concretum of a determined cultural context."³⁹

Michael Amaladoss, think that inculturation "is not merely a new way of expressing, but a new way of being." Inculturation leads to the emergence of a local Church. Inculturation is necessary "not only for the life of the Christian community, but also for its ongoing mission."⁴⁰ Amaladoss suggested that inculturation in India should not be a mere inculturation based on the high culture of India Brahmanical class since this will be irrelevant to most Christians who were poor and who did not identify themselves with the high culture of India. Therefore, he proposed for inculturation that goes beyond this. In the process of this, Amaladoss suggested that the Church must be prophetic and counter-

³¹ Op. cit., 132-137.

³² Op. cit., 568-569.

³³ T.V. Philip, *Edinburgh to Salvador: Twentieth Century Ecumenical Missiology* (Delhi&Tiruvalla: ISPCK&CSS, 1999), 226.

³⁴ Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for Authentic Asian Theology* (Oxford: Regnum Press, 1997), 65.

³⁵ Daesung Lee and Stephen Bevans, "Culture," in *Ecumenical Missiology: Changing Landscapes and New Conceptions of Mission, et. Al*, Kenneth R. Ross, Jooseop Keum, Kyriaki Avtzi and Roderick R. Hewitt, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2016), 206

³⁶ S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Gospel and Culture: The Ongoing Discussion within the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC, 1994), 10.

³⁷ Felix Wilfred, *Sunset in the East? Asian Challenges and Christian Involvement* (Madras: University of Madras, 1991), 140 cited by Vijaya Joji Babu Valle, "BECOMING INDIAN: Towards an Indian Contextual Ecclesiology," (Ph.D Dissertation, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2010)

³⁸ Felix Wilfred, *Sunset in the East?* 143.

³⁹ Felix Wilfred, *Sunset in the East?*, 144.

⁴⁰ Michael Amaladoss, *Becoming Indian*, 5-13.

cultural by being a community of sharing, committed to justice for all, opting particularly for the poor and oppressed, to struggle with them for equality and justice. Being a prophetic and counter-cultural gospel-community cannot be limited to some religious communities but has to extend to the entire community.⁴¹ This suggestion of Amaladoss has also brought to light that the inculturation process should go beyond mere inculturation and must be liberating for each individual in their own social, cultural and religious settings. Also that, the inculturating process should be authentic and should not be limited to Indianizing western culture or vague change of names into Indian language. Authentic inculturation is the true imperative where the Church must originate in Indian religio-culture and traditional concept thereby connecting the masses of the people in their own contextual and cultural existence.

Till today, the church in India cannot take its Indian form. This has been due to our lack and limitation of inculturating the Church to Indian cultural system. Since, the traditional mission ideology has not been able to speak to the local context of the Indian people, abuse and denial has resulted. The validity of Christian mission in India should be judge according to its success in inculturation process. The theological exercise of Christian mission could not ignore the socio-cultural, economic and religious distinctiveness of the Indian people. The church needs to be inculturated in each local cultural milieu, and that there are positive elements in other Indian religions (mainly the Hindu tradition) to be imbibed into the life and ritual of the church. Commenting on the RSS chief K. S. Sudarshan statement, the Churches and the mission work needs to dissolve our other worldly cultural allegiance and remain true to the indigenous culture of India by establishing *Swadeshi* Churches.⁴²

ii. Reconstructing the Understanding of Conversion: The Hindu fundamentalist accusation of conversion as basic element of colonizing the Indian to a foreign religion and culture could be acceptable to a large extent since many of the Churches and mission works in India adopted the traditional understanding of Christian mission. The traditional Christian mission, mostly, emphasise on the renunciation and abandon of old religious, cultural and traditional life and practices to the people it encounter. During the 19th and the early part of the 20th century, Christian dominated region mostly experienced cultural dominance and unrecognition of their inherited local culture. Till the present days, controversy with the understanding of conversion and the confusion it brought about to the Hindu fundamentalist has been a trending issue and because of this several states in India has adopted the ‘Anti-Conversion Law,’ or prohibited the conversion to other religion.⁴³

To challenge this issue of conversion, the contribution of John Stott, one of the world renowned Christian theologian, is worth noting. He pointed out that in the New Testament, the verb *epistrephō* is sometimes used in its passive form to mean “be converted” (for example, Acts 3:19 AV). But at the same time, it has an active sense and means to “turn.” When used in ordinary, secular contexts its first meaning is to “turn around.” Its other meaning is to “return,” as when an unwanted greeting returns to its giver. Therefore, conversion according to Stott is a turn away from sin in repentance to returning towards God in faith.⁴⁴ True conversion involves repentance, and repentance is renunciation. It is renunciation from sin or what is evil. For Stott, conversion does not necessarily have to do with the renunciation of ones’ inherited culture. Conversion does not require the convert to step right out of their former culture into a Christian subculture that is totally distinctive.⁴⁵

Christopher J.H wright, an Anglican missiologist, also commented on Stott argument on conversion saying that whatever conversion means, it has to take place within culture—in dynamic and inescapable engagement with culture.⁴⁶ In his expanded book on John Stotts’ ‘Christian Mission in the Modern World,’ continue to say that Christians who break loose entirely from the society in which they were nurtured may find themselves rootless and insecure, and may even—with conventional restraints

⁴¹ Michael Amaladoss, *Beyond Inculturation: Can the Many Be One?* (Delhi: Vidyajyoti/ISPCK, 1998)72-73 cited by Vijaya Joji Babu Valle, “*BECOMING INDIAN: Towards an Indian Contextual Ecclesiology*,” (Ph.D Dissertation, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2010).

⁴² Mathew Thomas, op. cit. Swadeshi means originated or born in India.

⁴³ Chhattisgarh (2006), Jharkhand (2017), Uttarakhand (2018), Uttar Pradesh (2021), Gujarat (2021), Madhya Pradesh (2021), Haryana (2022), Himachal Pradesh (2022), and Karnataka (2022).

⁴⁴ Christopher J H Wright, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2015) 185-186.

⁴⁵ Christopher J H Wright, op. cit., 193-194.

⁴⁶ Christopher J H Wright, op. cit., 212.

removed—lapse into moral license. They may even develop a Christian “communalism” that gives them a new security in which to live but cuts them off from their former friends and relatives.⁴⁷ It is not a necessary part of our Christian allegiance to be iconoclasts, and to destroy the culture of the past for no better reason than that it is old or that it was part of our preconversion life.⁴⁸

In his book ‘The Call of the Minaret,’ Bishop Kenneth Cragg, an Anglican scholar and theologian, sums up the relation between conversion and culture stating,

‘Baptism, bringing persons within the church, means their incorporation by faith into the supranational fellowship of Christ. It does not, properly understood, deculturalise the new believer; it enchurches him. That “enchurchment,” as its impact widens, bears creatively upon all areas of its context. The new Christian becomes responsible to Christ for his old setting and to his old setting in the new truth. But he is not thereby “going foreign.” All that is not incompatible with Christ goes with him into baptism. Conversion is not “migration”; it is the personal discovery of the meaning of the universal Christ within the old framework of race, language and tradition.’⁴⁹

Dr. M. M. Thomas, one of the renowned Indian lay theologian, is concerned with the implications of the Church and the converts which becomes increasingly isolated from society. He therefore encourages the idea of a “Christ-centred secular fellowship outside the Church.”⁵⁰ He identified the significance of Christ-centered fellowship transcending the Church and religious boundaries as it focuses on the conversion of religion towards Christ rather than on the conversion of individuals from one community to another, which is regarded as the root cause of all communal issues related to conversion. Christopher J Wright mentioned M.M Thomas elaborating his position by adding that “conversion to Christ” should not necessarily imply “conversion to the Christian community.” Instead converts should seek to build up “a Christ-centered fellowship of faith within the society, culture and religion in which they live, transforming their structures and values from within.” A convert from Hinduism should not be obliged to separate himself “from the Hindu community in the social, legal and religious sense.”⁵¹ Thomas’ concept of Christ-centred fellowship is derived from the notion of the universal salvation of humanity is. Thomas did not oppose conversion to Christianity. But he insisted that, “there is a necessity for decommunalising conversion.”⁵² Conversion to Christianity should not have a communal tone. It is intrinsically necessary to understand and practice conversion in a decommunalising nature so as to connect the person with the existing society and perform social and moral duties.

In connection to M.M. Thomas, Wright has also observed that conversion should leads to social action. That is because a convert to Jesus Christ lives in the world as well as in the church, and has responsibilities to the world as well as to the church. Conversion must not take the convert out of the world but rather send him or her back into it, the same person in the same world, and yet a new person with new convictions and new standards. If Jesus’ first command was “come!” his second was “go!”—that is, we are to go back into the world out of which we have come. Paradoxically, conversion combines a turning away from the world (in the sense of its sin and rebellion against God) with a turning toward the world. Commitment to Christ involves commitment to the world into which and for which he came.⁵³ Conversion to Christianity or accepting Jesus Christ should not mean abandonment of ones’ inherited culture. It should not distance them from their previous context, families and cultures. Conversion should not be understood as an isolation from ones cultural and practices to another as has been accused by Hindu fundamentalist through the Christian mission station approach. The new faith which they acquire must inturn be rooted and be connected to their indigenous cultures so that they must feel belongingness to their present society and thereby fulfilling their social responsibilities as well.

⁴⁷ Christopher J H Wright, *op. cit.*, 194.

⁴⁸ Christopher J H Wright, *op. cit.*, 195.

⁴⁹ Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1956), 336.

⁵⁰ M. M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization: Some Crucial Issues of the Theology of Mission* (Madras: CLS, 1971), 13

⁵¹ Christopher J H Wright, *op. cit.*, 201-202.

⁵² M.M Thomas, “Inter-religious Conversion,” in *Religion, State and Communalism a Post Ayodhya Reflection*, eds., J John, Jesudas Athyal (Madras: Then Academy of Ecumenical Indian Theology and Church Administration, 1985), 95.

⁵³ Christopher J H Wright, *op. cit.*, 192-193.

4. Conclusion: Human context is always cultural and to be human is to be cultural. Culture is always inter-cultural since cultures are always solely independent but intersecting. The dynamism of the inter-cultural is always present in the situation of the inter-religious. Like Koyama has said, ‘Christian Theology cannot be relevant if it does not seriously engage with the complex reality of culture.’⁵⁴ Christianity does not have a particular culture. It is universal and it must penetrate each culture it encounters. The Church must call for all-our efforts to enlarge its scope, reconstruct herself according to the existing culture of India and stand in solidarity with the rest of the total community in its struggle to absorb cultural misconception. Mission today, in India, struggles to discover herself in the context of plurality of religions and cultures. While understanding herself, it is imperative for our mission to unfold Christian Mission according to and in connection to the Indian culture.

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