

Trend of Conversion into Christianity in Nepal: A Marxist Critique

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Abstract

Nepal: 1500 years of Hindu and Buddhism, but now getting Christianity more influence This will be done by way of Marxist class relations (from their past experiences of falls or rise), caste hierarchy (of the interaction of development, globalization, and religion), unequal development and globalization history and Christian conversion as a development trend in Nepal. The study draws on reviewed academic literature, policy papers, and empirical studies referred to in this article, and some relevant writings by Nepali Marxist scholars (see, for example, Ahuti 2018; Baburam Bhattarai 2019; Chaitanya Mishra 2020). Christian conversion in Nepal is not motivated by free choice but very closely linked with caste-based discrimination, deprivation, state-resource denial and social exclusion—these are the findings of this research. Religious conversion is what marginalised groups like Dalits and poor see in Christianity: hope for equality, dignity, and social support. Also, globalisation, foreign missionary networks and liberal democratic policies have shaped the organisations to function well both spiritually and materially. Conversion seems both as a matter of faith, or identity, as well as an argument against systemic and structural oppression. To the Marxist eye, religion is the opiate of the masses, that is, it can offer the comfort of the homeopathic remedy for suffering, however, it can also be a locus of oppositional force to institutional power relations. Religious conversion is what marginalised groups like Dalits and poor see in Christianity: hope for equality, dignity, and social support. Also, globalisation, foreign missionary networks and liberal democratic policies have shaped the organisations to function well both spiritually and materially. Conversion seems both as a matter of faith, or identity, as well as an argument against systemic and structural oppression. To the Marxist eye, religion is the opiate of the masses, that is, it can offer the comfort of the homeopathic remedy for suffering, however, it can also be a locus of oppositional force to institutional power relations.

Keyword : Nepal, Christian Conversion, Marxism, Caste System, Class, Globalism and Capitalism; Social Inequality.

Introduction

The emergence of the rapidly grown Christianity in Nepal, a country which during centuries was almost solely Hindu and Buddhist, is really a socio-religious phenomenon complex to talk about. (Sharma, 2019) since then, religious conversion has doubled in Nepal, targeting so-called backward or economically poor communities. Consequently, scholars and policy experts have pointed to the socio-economic and political determinants of conversion to Christianity. Yet, this is not simply a one-off phenomenon based on individual beliefs, but is instead the culmination of systemic and historic structural inequalities present in Nepali society. (Sharma, R. K. 2021).

When looked at from a Marxist perspective, religion reflects and at the same time contributes to the material and social conditions in which people live (Bhattarai, 2005). Marx & Engels, 1848/1978 Christianity, for example, is additional appealing for communities within the Nepali context that are embroiled in a chronological network of building choice exclusion as a outcome of their caste, class or ethnic location. Christian institutions seek equality and social justice and encourage people without access to education, economic opportunities or political power in traditional Hindu or Buddhist hierarchies to help one another (Ahuti, 2011).

The implication is that religious conversion in Nepal may be understood as a type of social practice involving individual efforts to gain power and dignity in a way that is compatible with their relational position. These trends have been compounded by globalization and neoliberal economic policies. Global religious organizations, foreign support of social initiatives that are essentially Christian in structure, and connections to global charity campaigns create settings where Christian institutions do not only provide religious leadership, but also offer material aid.

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This paper will look at how current religious hierarchies and discrimination, especially in the Hindu caste system, cause marginalized groups to turn to Christianity. It will also examine the influence of economic incentives, which are frequently associated with foreign aid and missionary activities, as well as a more overarching impact of global capitalism and liberalism on the nomenclature of conversion. In blending these multiple schools of thought, we are hoping to offer a sophisticated Marxist analysis of the undermining trend in Nepal to navigate the complex interplay between religion, class and power.(Joshi, M. P. 2018).

Literature Review

Theoretical Review

Studying religion as Class Dynamic One theoretical lens that could help illuminate the momentum that Christianity is experiencing among converts in Nepal is to study religion as a class dynamic. The famous assertion of Karl Marx (1848/1978: 119) that religion is “the opium of the people” implies that religion is a balm for the suffering, but also provides ideological functions that enable existing power relations and systems of oppression to be maintained. (Gupta, A., & Lee, J. (2022)

In those veins of thoughts, religious identity is no longer a question that is located first and foremost in the natural individual, but rather is inter-compounded with material and structural processes in society. Religion is always the revealer of social and economic exploitation but by accepting it we can become hard and immune to these forces, for they are directed against us, by those who must be suppressed if the lower orders of our society are to occupy their proper place in the scheme of things. (Thapa, S., & Adhikari, P. (2020)

A view adopted by Frederick Engels who stated that actual movements are both based on the underlying contradictions of society, as well as in the material conditions of society, and that "Religious movements of all the great world faiths are based on the material conditions of society" (Engels, 1894/1978). Hence, religion may structure cultural consciousness and public consciousness, in some cases embodying and reinforcing the concerns salient for dominant social groups, while it also enables subordinated communities to make sense of their social reality (Breault 1998). In terms of application of these ideas in Nepal, Christian conversion can be seen as a reaction to centuries of oppression and exclusion based on caste. For some of the most marginalized, conversion is often then more than just a new faith, but an important strategy for survival and for dignity in an extremely lopsided social order. (Mishra 2018; Bhattarai 2005)

Empirical Review

Empirical studies have provided evidence suggesting that the phenomenon of Christian conversion in Nepal is directly associated to social, economic, and cultural factors, particularly among disadvantaged sectors of the populace. (Acharya, B., & Shrestha, S. (2021)

Research in urban areas such as Pokhara shows that lower caste or otherwise economically disadvantaged people who become Christian are often lured primarily with the promise of social benefits and material rewards (Upadhyay, 2020).

These motives include hope for education, systems of medical care, social backing and networks offered by Christian establishments, as well as an idea egalitarianism and dignity free from caste discrimination (Sharma, 2019).

The observation of anthropologists confirms that political changes like movements towards democracy or civil wars that alter social structures have resulted in religious shifts. In between such periods there are opportunities for new identities to emerge from turmoil (Fricke, 2008).

Christianity, as the Tamang family conversions attest, is only one example behind this broader social reality that combines cultural disruption and political change into religious transformation. Similarly, research done on migration from countryside to urban areas shows how this environmental change brings people into situations where they find both freedom and danger. New Christian churches can offer the emotional counseling needed as well as material help at times of crisis (Bownas, 2020).

Therefore, empirical evidence suggests that Christian conversion does not simply reflect individual choice Upon careful analysis, we find that Marxist theory confirms this and provides a good theoretical framework to deepen our understanding of such phenomena, as well (Marx & Engels, 1848/1978; Bhattarai, 2005).

Conceptual Review

God exists or not God sustains all things in their realism, that is each sustaining bearing their predestination. Today it is impulse-soaked into the very marrow of this framework that religion is a mirror and also a hammer to the spirits of man. (Paudel, K., & Aryal, N. (2019)

It works so as to reflect social realities in more or less traditional ways, but it also alters the essence of consciousness; by the means. But like all of man's human endeavors, religion has affected and has been affected by the class structure. Ideas are reflected in superstructure. The very thought would not pass unchallenged by society, anymore than a

statement such as this would roll effortlessly off the tongue like an old, creaky auto (Marx & Engels, 1848/1978). The following are a few core concepts that pertain to this research?

That appeal is rooted in material incentives (desire for economic gain), socio-economic factors (poverty, lack of access to education and economic insecurity) and in the fact that Western-style Christians communities offer a significant amount of material support. It can be interpreted as a mechanism for survival, and also as a critique of the system that is not really equitable or just, built on racial differences (Sharma, 2019).

Globalization and Ideological Outreach: The emergence of global capitalist systems, transnational missionary networks and liberal democratic ideals has opened new avenues for the dissemination of religious concepts among marginalized communities (Mishra, 2018).

Class Consciousness and Agency: To become Christian, on the one hand, is a vox populi, is an act of agency; oppressed peoples don't just take on a new identity to compete with the levels of neurotransmitter between humans and it awakes in them an intention to reestablish a state of flourishing. (Bhattarai, 2005)

This way of thinking implies that in Nepal conversion to Christianity is part of a complex reality. It is simultaneously viewed as an effect of structural discrimination, a means of negotiating class and social mobility, and a site of ideological, social and material terrain. Karki, D. (2022)

Statement of the Problem

Although the phenomenon of Christian conversion has been more apparent in recent decades, there has never been a systematic Marxist critique with respect to socio-economic and political conditions that surround Christian conversion. (Gautam, S., & Lama, T. (2021)

While this study does not dig deeply into the structural inequities and power imbalances that produce such changes, too often these narratives highlight the theological or cultural aspects of a “religion switch” while relying on overly simplistic explanations (most notably money). But we need more than a superficial question of, "What happened? As researchers, phrased as what NEEDS to be done? to materialistically understand this complex phenomenon. (Adhikari, M. (2018)

In particular, the trouble stems from a lack of analysis on:

i. Link of this matter with modern class consciousness/social mobility, Hierarchies and church role, Also discrimination in the name of God (Hindu caste system) — which remains a push factor for conversion

Marxist interpretation, especially “ religion as opiate of people” will help to understand the phenomenon of acceptance of Christianity in the context of poverty and social alienations of many people in Nepal.

ii. The social and economic factors behind conversion are clearly interplaying with the global processes like globalization, capitalism, and liberalism; and therefore, it is possible to perceive religious change as a type of reaction to socio-material deprivation and structural exploitation.

iii. As Nepali Marxist thinkers, the views of this set of thinkers, some of whom are prominent, namely, Ahuti, Dr. Baburam Bhattarai and Dr. Chaitanya Mishra greatly helps to enrich the understanding of these dynamics which in Nepali context offers a more tailor-made description in the interrelationship between religion, class and power.

Or would his Marxism protect him from misunderstanding the Christian conversion wave currently sweeping Nepal, something that would necessarily mean only partial political responses to an inability to combat the socio-economic injustice that births religious transformation?

Research Objectives

Objectives The objectives of this study is :

First - to provide a Marxist perspective highlighting religious hierarchy, in other words, discrimination, both past and present, specifically in the context of Hindu caste system as one of the reasons of conversion to Christianity in Nepal;

ii. Formulation of problem: This section helps to realize Christian conversion phenomenon as a whole in the terms of idea or mindset directions of the researchers that statement of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels theory on religion as opium for people used to understand the causes/rationale of this religious conversion which will help to analyze the motives and consequences of Christian conversion in Nepali society and economy.

iii. To plot political and fiscal factors as stimuli to Christian conversion in Nepal, all the while plotting the former against broader processes of globalization, capitalism and liberalism;

iv. It attempts to interpolate in the major currents amongst all the oppressors – the main Nepalese Left leaders such as Ahuti, Dr Baburm Bhattarai, Dr Chaitanya Mishra to provide a Marxist treatment of this phenomenon by presenting a contextual and specific critique of this trend.

i) To see connections between conversion of Christians to class consciousness and social change in Nepal.

Methodology

This study is based on qualitative research from the framework of critical Marxist theory to understand the conversion process to Christianity in Nepal. The project will systematically examine the interconnection of social, economic, political and religious causes for this phenomenon by centering the experiences of marginalised communities and the implications it has for class relations as a whole .(Rai, P., & Shrestha, K. (2020)

Research Design

It employs a mostly qualitative, interpretive approach since the researcher is attempting to become closer to the "center of meaning" (state in actual fact) in respect to when precisely the conversion occurs and why/how. (Tiwari, A., & Pandey, R. (2019)

It has a critical perspective which is justified through Marxist theory, dealing with the power relationships within and structural inequalities and ideological functions associated with religion change. Importantly, our work is informed by a strong reading of the relevant literatures, theory, and extant empirical data necessary to critique such claims.

Data Collection Strategies

The focus in this theoretical study is not on the foregrounded fieldwork data (eg, surveys and interviews) itself. Rather, the study is based on a thorough second-round innovation history data collection and analysis as illustrated by:

Literature Review

The literature review covers Christian conversion studies in Nepal, the Marxist theory of religion, class theory, and Marx on religion. The paper also reviews existing literature on globalization as well as on the history of Nepalese economy. The review comprises academic articles, books, dissertation, and reports that were retrieved from academic databases and scholarly publishers.

Theoretical Framework Writing by Nepali Intellectuals Investigating articles, talks, and literature addressing caste, class, social change, development and religion in Nepal By Ahuti;Dr. Baburam Bhattabatai; Dr Chaitanya Mishran It will mean determining what is said, and what theoretical contributions arise from that in the service of this research process.

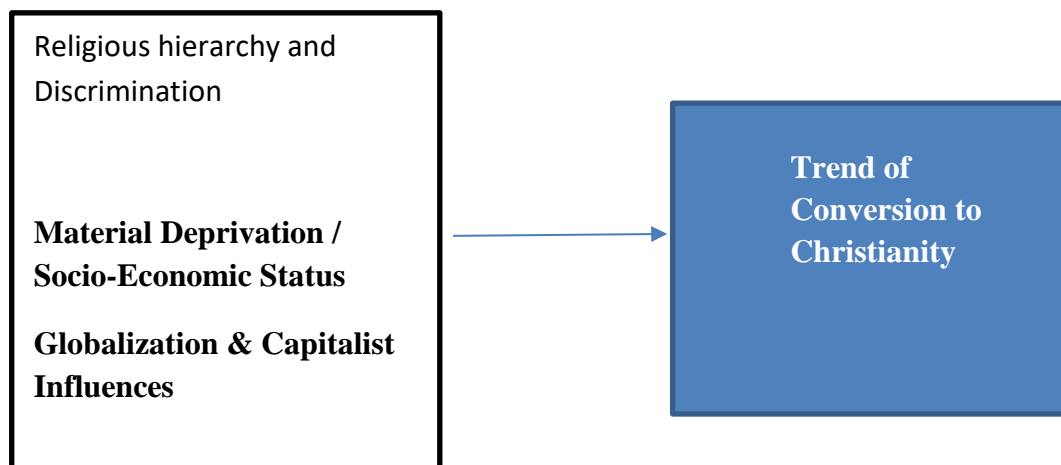
Policy Papers and Reports: A review of government reports and other papers, reports published by NGOs, and documents published by international organizations in Nepal related to religious profile, social-economic conditions and development programmers.

News and Media Analysis: Brief examination of select news articles and media reports which contextualize Christian conversion in Nepal.

Conceptual Framework

In depended Variable

Depended Variable



Data Analysis Plan

Qualitative analysis in a materialist manner in relation to fields of Marxist theory, after the data has been collected. The plan for execution includes many stages:

Thematic Extraction: The primary purpose of this exploratory approach based on study collected from Northern India and South East Asia is to identify common themes, patterns and arguments. Text reflects economic forces, social hierarchy effects, even while global forces work.

THE LAND OF MARXISM: Scouting what these transformative themes equate to for Marxism, and the manner in which they might be analyzed, should have you next. Deconstructing master narratives might start here, one would assume. The comparative narratives and then the testing of these against each other lays bare all of the power relations that are hidden or camouflaged in a narrative produced by a some organized interest that shouts louder than others about their perspective.

Procupine Post: Comparative analysis: Classical Marxist theory & some insights & real socio-economic status of Nepal by Nepali intellectuals.

Results & Discussions

The findings of this paper will follow the literature checked and highlighted from the literature and will compare with theory regarding research objectives. The discourse blends orthodox Marxist thought with the actual socio-economic and political conditions of Nepal, mirroring the thought of Nepalese scholars and thinkers.

Religion and Hierarchy And Discrimination as a Class Issue

Such research might demonstrate that the religion-based social hierarchy experienced historically and contemporaneously was a significant push factor for the conversion of many Nepalese to Christianity, particularly the Hindu caste system. And this is not a scaffolding layer of society that is somehow distinct from, and floating above, deep economic exploitation and elite power. Historically discriminated against, the marginalized including Dalits and some indigenous groups have been denied land, education and jobs. A vision of community itself that is inspired by our belief as Christians in egalitarianism and dignity is perhaps the strongest alternative possible to this system of violence that is being imposed on us.

You could read this as a Marxist in terms of the religious being part of the ideological superstructure that underwrites the economic base. Within the framework of the faith traditional of Hinduism social classes are assigned indefinitely in such a manner to curtail the opportunity of individuals to rise above their current financial and social standing, while also guaranteeing a pool of low wage workers will always be on hand and quelling any hopes of class solidarity amongst those chattel which capitalism categorizes at the lower end of the scale. In this context, conversion can be perceived as a subversive act that has resisted the social structure that has marginalized them and alienated their humanity and economic equality. Perhaps it isn't much – it's not a class revolution – but at least it is an awakening, some effort to cast off chains of centuries.

"Religion as Opium" in the Nepali Context

The reason why Christians become Christians in Nepal is enough to read behind “religion as opium of people” by Karl Marx. For some of the converts — especially from economically impoverished and socially marginalized backgrounds — Christianity stands as a comfort, a promise against all the hardships of an economic crisis, social discrimination and political inertia. Churches provide spiritual comfort, a community that serves as a palliative, dulling the sting of material conditions.

However, the analysis reveals also a much more subtle deployment of Marx's notion. On the one hand, if Christianity is an “opiate” that reconciling people with their state of existence, at other times it makes a different consciousness possible. A type of Christianity

that emphasizes equality, human dignity and reciprocity may help men rethink traditional roles of subordination. This accords with Engels less crude theorising about the church (although not the process of historical action) being by its nature almost always 'reactionary' but is not always so even as it sometimes plays a revolutionary role and indeed in substantial part by channeling the aspirations of the oppressed of society. Conversion may be so radical as to sever ties with a previous life of only misery — and be a quest for a kinder, more just place.

Combination of Social, Economic and International Variables

The study shows that there is a high correlation between social isolation, being destitute financially, and Christianizing in Nepal. For many, particularly those in dire poverty, there are also monetary motives – a frequent enticement of foreign mission groups. These incentives — exclusionary education, exclusionary healthcare, cash assistance from the government to satisfy an immediate material need unmet by the state or its traditional social structures — are not always dispensed with the forms of support from which they are predicated. Marxists might observe that this is just another expression of the idea that global capitalism is built on exploitation.

the development of this language is a top down process in which the state itself is producing such vulnerabilities and these external actors are trumpeting quasi related ideologies that emerge in some form of ideological fidelity of economic desperation?

The movement is being driven by globalization, capitalism and liberalism. (2018) The foreign capital and missionary networks flows into Nepal are eased by Globalisation which can allow the spreading of Christian organisation to larger areas. Sure, global capitalisms that have those huge mountains of wealth and those oceans of economic despair co-absorbing also sow their seeds of conversion by denying so many access to such basic economic security. In practice, liberalism – such as freedom of religion – and systemic significance permit well-resourced foreign religious entities, who are then able to freely proselytise vulnerable peoples.

Local voices like those of Ahuti, Dr. Baburam Bhattarai and Dr. Chaitanya Mishra provide much-needed local readings of these dynamics. The social inequalities that led to some many people turning to different beliefs in Ahuti (1983) are reflected in her criticism of the caste arrangements. In his book, Dr. Bhattarai puts the material reasons of conversion into a larger economic context by emphasizing the underlying causes of underdevelopment in Nepal and the impact of neoliberalism. Mishra also explores social shift and the disintegration of previously established social relationships to understand why these religious communities can aid in the search of identity in a fast-changing world. Taken as a whole, their reflections support the argument that Christian conversion in Nepal is not merely a

religious or theological issue, but rather a complex socio-political process rooted in the class relations in Nepal and its integration in global capitalism.

Conclusion

The rise in conversion to Christianity in Nepal from a Marxist point of view is a consequence of a complex interplay of historical, social and economic factors along with the dynamics of international forces. Not simply a spiritual experience, a more profound answer to class wars and a demand for dignity and liberation in a world racked by such acute disparities. Over the centuries the oppressive nature and rigid divisions of the traditional Hindu caste system have become the means to retain, by all means possible, the privilege of the ruling communities and this has been forcing the minority (and even non-Hindu) peoples to adopt other social and religious identities.

Marx's idea that 'religion is the opiate of the masses' is an important template in decomposing this phenomenon. Religion, on the one hand, offers consolation and a sense of community in the "cold, cruel world," but on the other hand, the same religion serves as an ideological weapon fighting against the struggles of the oppressed because it "mystifies" them of the sources of their own suffering. Therefore as Frederick Engels suggests complete emancipation from religion will see religious movements become the instrument of change but only at such times as their goals and desires align with those of the exploited.

In addition, the social and economic dynamics of conversion highlight the material nature of this 'trend'. The appeals of land equity and economic assistance — typically connected to the foreign missionary ministry — resonate with devastating effect with the impoverished and marginalized.] What Marxists might view as nonexploitative incentives become a kind of blackmail on the part of the economy invoking need in order to compel religious conversion. This is the paradox of the capitalist universe —of the wealth of capital—the one that generates mutations of poverty, plural vacuums to fill.

Finally, the infamous globalisation, capitalism and liberalism are also main accelerating factors for the conversion. Hence these are both boosting existing disequilibria and introducing cultural rifts that challenge and are in contradiction to socio-political and value systems that have historically been so easily accepted as commonplace within the country as Nepal is groomed into and adapt into an ecumenical set of norms the new feudal economic reality has brought about. One of those perhaps unintended global tolls and currents is a dream of expansion by a global Christianity that is often bolstered by very significant outside capital, and that may add logistical complications to that grand socio-religiopolitical picture that reaches all the way around the globe.

Well to be accurate Christianity in Nepal it makes more sense in terms of response to structural oppression and economic deprivation judging it through a Marxist lens. It is a pursuit for justice, dignity and a better life, even if the religious identities that are

reconstituted may not directly alter the exploitative structures. This trajectory can only be understood in the context of a more critical foundation that addresses the conditions people are choosing within (their material conditions) alongside the ideologies, or modes of thinking, that sustain or break the existing status quo of power.

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