



– Institute's Colloquium –

Dr. Sarbeswar Sahoo
(Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi – Guest Professor in
Summer Term 2015 at the Institute of Ethnology)

Understanding Anti-Christian Violence in India

Religious conflict, commonly known in South Asia as “communalism,” has a long history in India. Religion and exclusivist religious identity have acted as sources of conflict in India during the post-colonial period. Although Hindu-Muslim conflict had been, what Varshney (2002) calls, the “master narrative” of Indian politics, it is observed that since the 1990s the Christian populations have increasingly become the targets of violence. The central question is why has violence against the Christian population increased in different parts of India? Drawing on fieldwork in the tribal dominated regions of Rajasthan in Western India, this paper will focus on two important and interrelated issues: (1) the contested cultural identity of the tribals (*adivasis*) in India, and (2) the politics of religious conversion. While the imperialist position has stressed the separateness of tribals from Hindus, the Hindu nationalists have argued that the tribals constitute an indispensable part of Hindu social and religious order. Such ambiguity has led to deep contestations over the nature of tribal identity in India. Considering this, in the name of doing development, both the Christian missionaries and Hindu nationalists have been involved in “competing projects of conversion” that has given rise to conflicts in the tribal regions of Rajasthan.

Sarbeswar Sahoo is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi. During 2011-13, he was Humboldt Postdoctoral Fellow at the Max-Weber Centre, University of Erfurt, Germany. He received his PhD in Sociology from the National University of Singapore, and has also taught there as a Visiting Fellow. His research interests include Globalization, Civil Society and Democratization, and Sociology of Religion and Violence in the Indian context. His recent publication is: *Civil Society and Democratization in India: Institutions, Ideologies and Interests* (London: Routledge, 2013).

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Institute of Ethnology
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Everybody is welcome!