



Churches in Tapi: A Mission on Reforming Adivasi

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Abstract:

The Christ Missionary activity gained momentum only after the arrival of churches that came with the traders from Europe. Outside of their homeland, Christianity is the oldest home in India. Christianity in Indian is primarily due to the efforts of evangelization of the European missionaries from 16th Century. Christian Churches understood the local citizen and makes the attractions towards modernization. The Churches are on the mission to make demographic change in Tapi district. The present study discussed about de-tribalization of adaptation of tribes of Gujarat into Christianity or increasing politicization of the whole issue of conversion. The tribes in Gujarat are not only on the margins of faith, but are also marginalized in terms of their identity and in terms of economy, culture and religious believe.

Key Words: Evangelization, Adivasi, Christ Community, New Dharm-sthal, Sign of the Times

I. Introduction:

The conversion of tribal communities into other religions initiated the religious change and cultural change in the community. It has resulted in westernization, urbanization and changes in cultural practices, ritual, occupation, tradition causing harmful repercussions of tribal ethnicity and values. Together with the Adivasi's belief system and worldview, their egalitarian ideology and the relation with nature have to be considered in order to understand their social system. The adivasis are organized into local communities, equally ranked and having democratic assembly and consensus. In general the world culture brings to one's mind things of the past. Culture represents historically transmitted patterns of meanings, embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions, expressed in symbolic forms by means of which human beings communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitude towards life (Gnanaprasadam 1988). The Christian mission have always been engaged in what is today called the process of contextualization and evangelization. Many Adivasi, especially in South Gujarat, settled

the city centers and suburbs closer cities to Tapi, Surat, Valsad and Navsari occupy the economically. Traditionally the process of Hinduisation of Non-Hindu gradual fashion that turns in the creation of new society in Adivasi community. They know the story of Ramayan, Mahabharat, Hunman Chalisa but having Father as a rhe temple priest. They have adopted new culture and started loss their faith in own Tribal religion.

II. Methodology:

During the study, the historical, explanatory, systematic and combination approach is given. The study is made principally on the basis of existing literature; books; periodical articles; research articles, search associated to internet access and unpublished writings. It also includes of field interview; primary data collection and secondary data collection especially for Adivasi community of Tapi district.

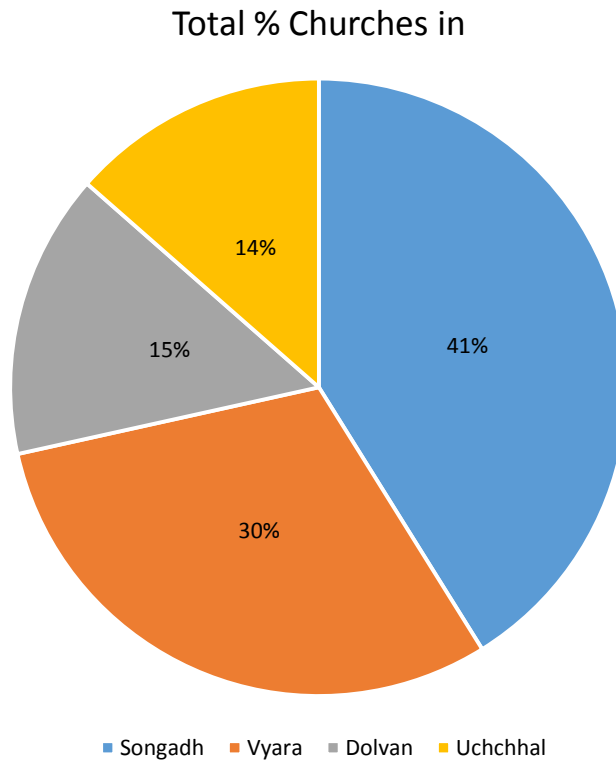
III. Result:

During the study, Songadh, Vyara, Dolvan and Uchchal taluka studied mainly. Complexity theory of independent cultural acceptance and force for conversion via agents that interact with each other in many ways. In general terms, is concerned with stability and change in demographic change that makes more complexity (Waldrop, 1992). The social culture and religion culture resides especially in the social relationships within and between institutions and agents (Shackley *et al* 1996). It is highly complex because in the interactions of missionary and religious institutions with vulnerable people by changeover adaptation of Adivasi to Christianity. This domain results in local disaster to manifold ways in local community structure that change their original beliefs and identity. These changes observed by increasing the number Churches Songadh, Vyara, Dolvan and Uchchal taluka (Graph-1). In these four talukas, Songadh has maximum 41% of Churches, that creates enforce of existing community, provide an opportunity for adaptation of new culture and religion that leads to demographic change in villages. Local knowledge and understanding of Adivasi culture and religion is



different than adapted culture of Christian Adivasi. In recent decades several publications^{1,2} pointed to this demographic change in Tapi district that creates

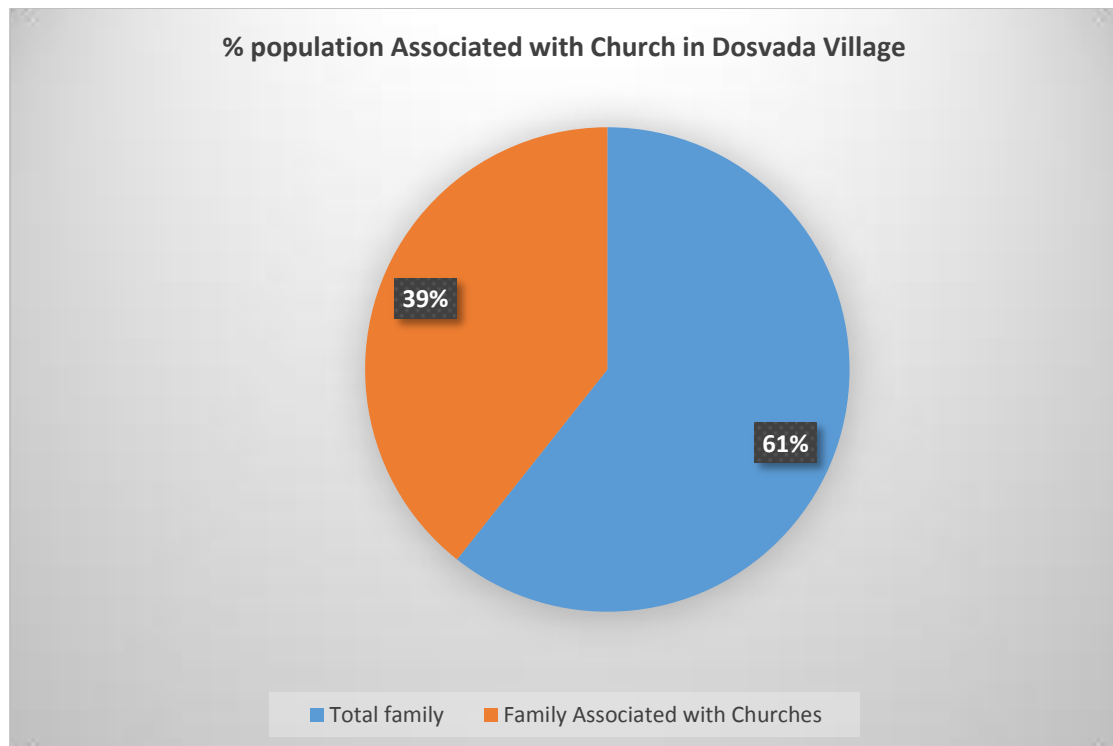
religious crisis and conflict among local Adivasi population. The conversion has basically started because of the poor miserable condition of the tribes.



Graph:1- The dominance of Churches in four talukas of Tapi district. Total percentage of new religion place in Songadh, Vyara, Dolvan and Uchchhal, 41%, 30%, 15% and 14% respectively.

¹Gujarat: Ancient Hindu temple in Tapi demolished to Build a Church, Hindus prohibited from offering prayers published in OpIndia, October,2022. <https://www.opindia.com/2022/10/gujarat-ancient-hindu-temple-in-tapi-demolished-to-build-a-church/>

²Adivasi Smaj ne Nasth karvanu motu shadyantra, Divyabhaskar, Bardoli-Vyara Edition, 6th March, 2024



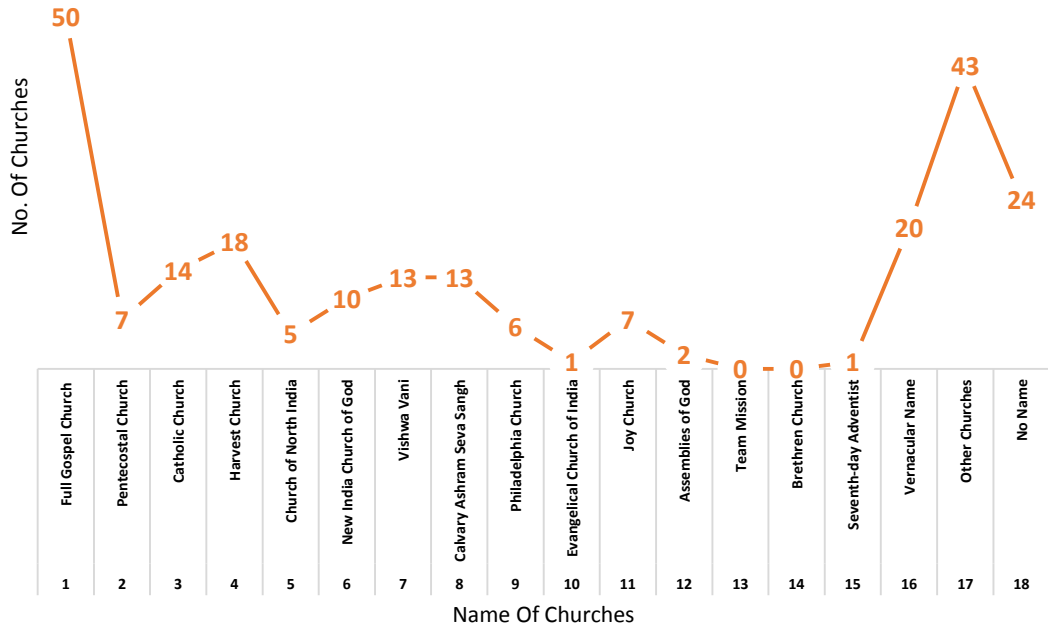
Graph:2- Population dynamics of Songadh Taluka where Dosvada Village has 61% population is converted in Christianity.

At the beginning many factors observed in the district that missionaries becoming familiar with the Adivasi religious mentality, besides the original sin theory of Christianity, they established theory of faithfulness. This results in genocide of Adivasi religion, culture, and believe in the whole district (Graph-2). The Dosvada village where 61% of population follows Christianity, due to this external disturbances, internal absolute segregation of family and society become normal in the district. Upto to certain level Adivasi family values are collapse, when the Christianity as the ideology offers oppressed social strata increasing distance among the community. Furthermore, the Christianity was considered as destroying the social order which stressed the paternal relationship between Bhil Raja and his people, as well as filial piety as the most essential virtues³.

³Ibid., p.219

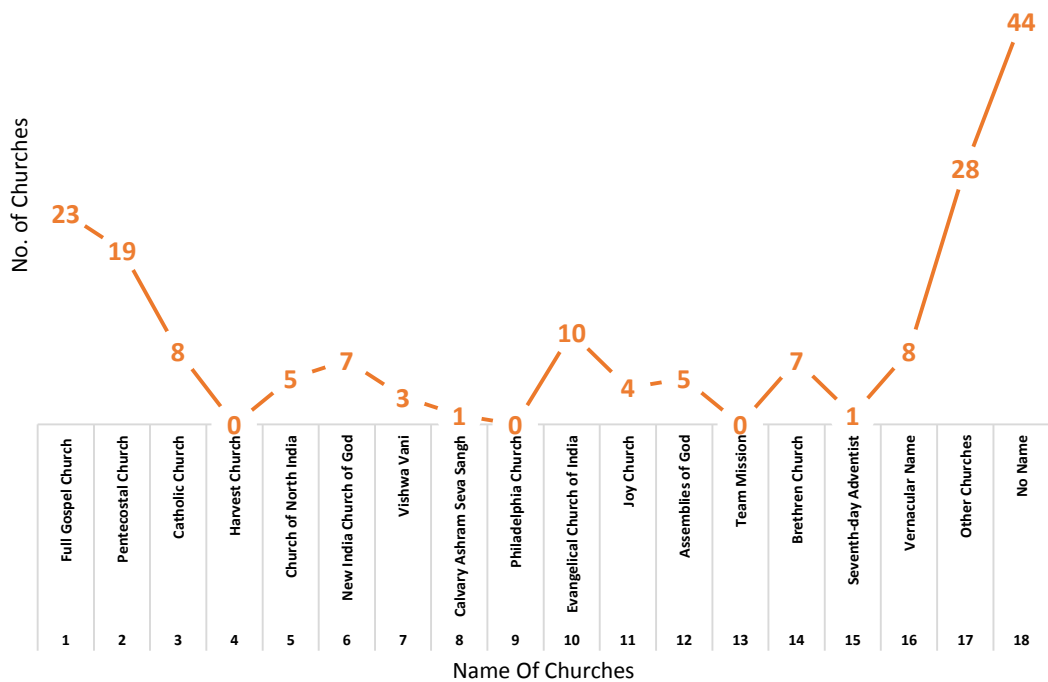


TOTAL NUMBER OF CHURCHES IN SONGADH



Graph:3- Total number of churches in Songadh taluka.

TOTAL NUMBER OF CHURCHES IN VYARA



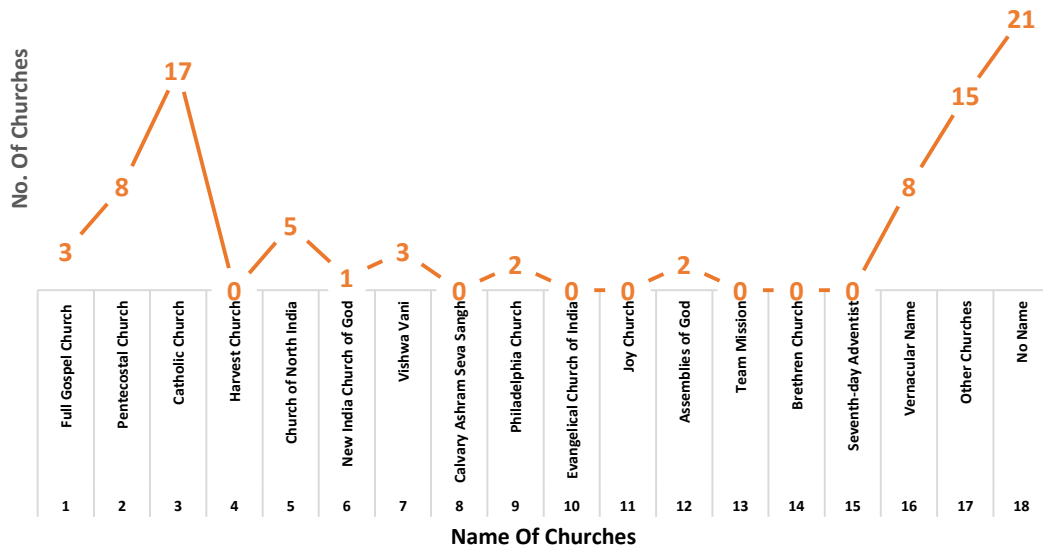
Graph:4- Total number of churches in Vyara taluka.



The district such as Tapi, where majority of the Adivasi community residents live on small pieces of land which barely have playground for children. The church started to apply Eurocentric understanding of the land and creatively adopt a hybrid model which would use land ownership which is an asset of Adivasi community. Total 18 different missionaries are establishing their hybrid

model and evangelization of Adivasi in Tapi district (R. Trivedi, 2024^c). It is problematic to observe that the church has a captive mindset to establish its own agenda which affect the majority of the population. The church should be involved in advocacy by not only being role model to making its owned land by changing mind of local community (Graph 3 to 6).

TOTAL NUMBER OF CHURCHES IN DOLVAN

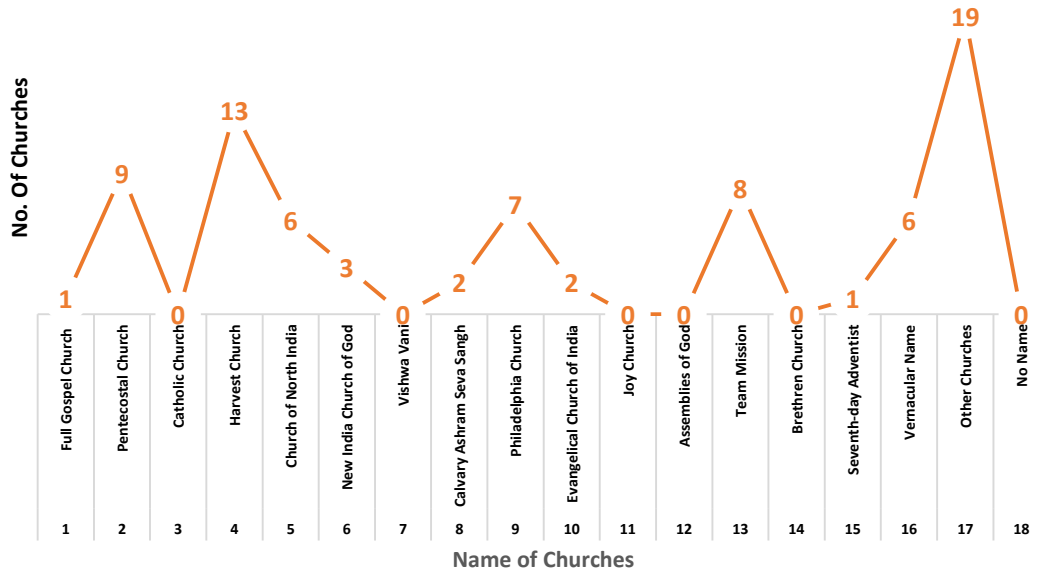


Graph:5- Total number of churches in Dolvan taluka.

Vyara and Songadh Taluka having more than 230 and 170 churches respectively which shows adaptation and penetration mechanism of missionaries in town place of district (Graph-3 and 4). The Full gospel churches activities are overshadowing in the both town area whereas Catholic churches evangelical and captive activities observed in Dolvan taluka (Graph-5). It is important to note that some local churches are proactive in their advocacy efforts in making the land they own accessible to ordinary residents of their local communities.



TOTAL NUMBER OF CHURCHES UCHCHAL



Graph:6- Total number of churches in Uchchhal taluka.

There is around 236 churches found in vernacular language among them most are in Songadh, few of the churches also running NGO in dialect language replace the RAO named as *Mandal*. The current reality of lack of confidence among Adivasi community cause of tension in local people and a “serious dilemma” for struggling protecting own religion and culture. On other hand, churches involved in education, health and skill development activities, Uchchal where 5.47km² area only having total 77 Churches proactive (Graph-6). These results give the scenario of the churches that force to adapt new culture to Adivasi community of district.

IV. Conclusion:

This study used a biblical interpretive framework of Jeremiah 29:7 to reflect on the role of the church in the current conversation of available to ownership of land in Tapi district. The church is a privileged institution with many assets, but still enjoying reforming Adivasi by serious change in demography, cultural identity, social structure and re-colonization of christianity in rural and sub-region of Gujarat. The total 569 churches area can use for slum communities, townships and many other forms for poor communities but this shows a meaningful step to make reforming of Adivasi community in Tapi district. This study alluded an example of impact of churches that

leading and involving in conversion and changing in religious population.

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