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Q3(c)

Critically assess the impact of Christianity on tribal culture and identity

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · Anthropology GS 2 · 15 marks · Impact of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and other religions on tribal societies.

8.1 Impact of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and other religions on tribal societies.

Core demand of the question

- Examine the impact of Christianity on tribal culture and identity
- Keep the answer to a 15-mark length of about 200 words

Revision summary

Missions cut some brew, hunt, and ancestor rites.

Schools and scripture created a literate tribal public.

Naga and Chotanagpur cases show church fused with clan politics.

Converts and non-converts may split the same tribe.

Legal ST status and Christian **census religion** can sit together.

Introduction

Christianity entered many Indian tribal regions through mission schools, medicine, and a new congregation. It remade culture and identity without simply erasing tribe.

Body

Culture: loss and recasting

- Mission attacked brew, some hunt rites, and clan sacrifice as pagan. Sacred grove and ancestor cult often shrank.
- Roman script, hymn, and church calendar replaced or sat beside the old festival year, as among **Oraons**, **Mundas**, and many **Naga** groups.
- **S. C. Roy** already saw a legal and ritual split in Chotanagpur. Later churches became a parallel public.

Identity: new and old

- Literacy and a printed Bible created a named people who could petition the state. Naga and Mizo public identity is unthinkable without the church.
- **Christianity can fuse with tribe:** clan exogamy continues, and the pastor sits near the village council.
- **It can also split tribe:** convert versus non-convert factions, and a new elite of teachers against grove priests.

Political afterlife

- Churches supplied hostels and a middle class that later staffed movements and parties.
- Hindu reform and reconversion politics treat the same change as cultural theft. Anthropology treats it as conversion plus **indigenisation**, as in **Naga** Baptist life.
- **Identity is therefore dual:** Scheduled Tribe in law, Christian in **census religion**, tribal in kinship.

Flow diagram

Mission church -> Literacy new calendar
Mission church -> Shrink grove sacrifice
Mission church -> Tribal Christian public
Tribal Christian public -> Faction elite split

Conclusion

Christianity thinned some spirit rites and built a literate tribal public. Culture was recast, not simply deleted. Identity became tribe plus church, with new splits inside the group.

Facts & figures

Naga churches

Baptist and other congregations that became central to Naga public identity.

Oraon/Munda missions

Chotanagpur conversion that layered church on clan and village custom.

Census religion

Administrative box in which many STs are listed as Christian while remaining tribal in law.

Indigenisation

Local language, clan, and council inside the church rather than a pure European parish.