

# The Impact of Christianity Among the Misings of Majuli A Research Study

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## ABSTRACT

Christianity, as perceived in India, has been associated with Western culture and civilization. Since the preachers of the Christian faith were originally from the West, the Indians who embraced Christianity gradually adopted and imbibed, together with the Christian faith, certain external aspects of their life style such as food, names, etc. The people of Northeast India had been exposed to the Christian faith even before the arrival of the British in Assam. The small percentage who embraced the Christian faith, lived that faith with attitudes which were quite different from that which they had earlier maintained, namely that everyone counted, that every individual mattered and that everyone had the right to life, property and, above all, a separate identity that is unique in culture, tradition and habits. Like many other tribal communities of Northeast India, the Misings of Majuli too have been introduced to Christianity in the recent times. A few of them have embraced the Christian faith. This research study looks into the main aspects of their life that have been impacted by their new faith. The research target included the Christian Misings and Misings of other faiths living in the same villages and localities, and thus arrived at the inside and outside perspectives of the effects of embracing the Christian faith.

**Keyword:** Impact, Christianity, Misings, Majuli, Conversion

## INTRODUCTION

Christianity, as perceived in India, has been associated with Western culture and civilization. Since the preachers of the Christian faith were originally from the West the Indians who embraced Christianity gradually adopted and imbibed, together with the Christian faith, certain aspects of their life style in food, names and manners. Certainly, Christianity called for a change of mentalities and practices – particularly religious practices which were radically opposed to the Christian faith. Thus the changes were internal and external, and they differed from those of other faiths as also differentiated the Christians from the others. Change of faith called for change of mentalities, and behavior which would be in accordance with the new faith. However, one needs to remember that this is true also of Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, etc., which were propagated in other countries, whether in Asia, Europe or America. The people of Northeast India had been exposed to the Christian faith even after the arrival of the British in Assam in 1826. They were, subsequently, more exposed to the Christian faith which taught that everyone counted, that every individual mattered and that everyone had a right to life, property and, above all, an identity that is unique in belief, culture, tradition and habits. However, history does not record that the Christian faith or the Christian culture was imposed upon the people of Northeast India who still continue to be a rich mosaic of varied cultures and religions.

Like many other tribal communities of Northeast India, the Misings of Majuli too have been introduced to Christianity in the recent times. The question of the conversion of a small group of the Misings in Majuli has attracted the attention of both the popular and academic world in the recent decades. This is because this new development has taken place in a land where Brahminical religious belief, particularly Vaishnavism and its institutions, govern the life and culture of those living in Majuli. (Nath, 2009)

The question, therefore, is about how and why Christianity has grown, even marginally, among the Misings and that too in Majuli which is known as a Vaishnava stronghold in Assam. The present study discusses the various aspects of this conversion of a few members of the Mising tribe into Christianity. However, one cannot escape the question as to why and how the Misings of Majuli, having their own religious faith, came to be included in the Vaishnavite faith. A corollary to this will be the next question as to why, if they can embrace the Vaishnavite faith, they cannot choose to embrace any other faith, including Christianity. However, the present research is restricted only to those who embraced the Christian faith, and therefore, deals with only one of the questions connected with conversion and the freedom of embracing the religion of one's choice.

### **THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In order to assess the impact of Christianity among the Misings of Majuli, the research student undertook a survey, both among those of the Christian community and those who are living among or adjacent to these communities, or those who have benefitted by the services rendered by the Christian Churches.

The survey was carried out in 14 villages (Gazaragaon, Ratanpur Mirigaon, Salmara, Kakuri Pamua, Ujioni Sarpai, Lakhimi Barpumua, Batmura, Azarguri, Charpie, Jengraimukh, Nagaonchuk, Jokaibuwa, Kulamora and Leptipursu) in Majuli. The questionnaire sets were distributed and collected back from 400 samples belonging to these 14 villages - 200 of whom belonged to the Christian community and the other 200 to those of other faiths.

A pilot study was conducted in the village of Jengraimukh among 30 people as the first step in the preparation of the questionnaire. Jengraimukh was chosen for the pilot study because all three Christian Churches are present in this village – the Baptist Church, the Catholic Church and the Believers Eastern Church. This village has also a Namghar (the prayer hall of the Neo- Vaishnavites).

This pilot study in the village of Jengraimukh was in the form of a case study. Based on an analysis of the data collected from this pilot study, the research scholar prepared three drafts of the questionnaire which was finally approved by his guide. The questionnaire sets were distributed by the research scholar personally and he was present when they were being filled in so that clarifications, if any, could be offered to the respondents. A random pattern was followed in choosing the respondents, care being taken to include people from all walks of life.

Two questionnaires were prepared keeping in mind the objective of the study, namely, the impact of the Christian faith on the Mising people of Majuli who embraced it. One questionnaire set was directed at the Christians themselves, while the other set was directed at people of other faiths living among or adjacent to the Christian communities. Therefore the principal questions, directed at both the groups, were so formulated as to gauge the effect of the Christian faith on the personal, social, educational, religious, cultural and economic dimensions of their life. The survey results are presented below under two headings: the first heading being the results of the survey done among the members of the Christian community, and the second the survey among the other believers.

**THE RESULT OF THE SURVEY AMONG THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES**

We begin the presentation of the results of the survey with the demographic details of the Christian respondents, followed by the thematic questions. A similar method will be followed for the other group.

**The demographic details about the Christian Misings participating in the survey**

From among the many demographic details, we are presenting below only the educational level of the Christian Mising respondents and their age, minimum and maximum. The table below gives the details about their educational qualification.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Illiterate	35	17.5	17.5	17.5
Upto VII	12	6.0	6.0	23.5
H.S.L.C	20	10.0	10.0	33.5
H.S	40	20.0	20.0	53.5
B.A	77	38.5	38.5	92.0
P.G	16	8.0	8.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

**Table 3.1.1: Educational Qualification of the Christian respondents**

The educational qualification of the Christian respondents to the survey questionnaire is given above. Nearly 39% of the respondents are graduates, while those having completed their class 12 studies come to 20%; this means that nearly 59 % of the respondents belong to the educated class. This also enables us to presume that their answers would be reliable and trustworthy, without implying that the others are less reliable or trustworthy, since truth or reliability is not the monopoly of the educated.

	Total no.	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Age	200	16	84	41.19	17.217

**Table 3.1.2: Age indicators**

The minimum age among the respondents was 16, while the maximum was 84. There were 200 respondents, and their mean age was 41.19, with the standard deviation being 17.217.

**How much of a more open mentality has the Christian faith given you?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
A little	11	5.5	5.5	5.5
Sufficient	55	27.5	27.5	33.0
Much	86	43.0	43.0	76.0
Very	48	24.0	24.0	100.0
Much				
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

**Table 3.2: The Christian faith has widened one’s mentality**

To the question as to how much the Christian faith had made their mentality more open and wider, 43% of the respondents responded with “much”, while 24% said “very much” to this question. 27.5% selected for their answer the option “sufficient”. Thus, it is evident that 67% were of the opinion that the Christian faith had made their mentality wider and more open than previously.

A word of clarification at this point. The questions were all closed ended, with five options of the Licher scale, namely, not at all, a little, sufficient, much and very much. To be noted in the response to

this questionnaire is that no one chose the “not at all” option. This is not indicated in the tables; consequently, the choice ‘sufficient’ is the mid-point among the options offered to the respondents.

**How much has the Christian faith made you better socially?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative Percent
A Little	4	2.0	2.0	2.0
Sufficient	44	22.0	22.0	24.0
Much	123	61.5	61.5	85.5
Very Much	29	14.5	14.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

**Table 3.3: The Christian faith has caused me to be better off socially**

61.5% of the respondents affirmed that the Christian faith had enabled them ‘much’ to be better off socially, while 14.5% raised this to a higher level of ‘very much’, whereas 22% chose the option ‘sufficient’ to answer this question.

**How much has the Christian faith contributed to your over coming superstitious beliefs and practices?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
A little	9	4.5	4.5	4.5
Sufficient	67	33.5	33.5	38.5
Much	93	46.5	46.5	84.5
Very much	31	15.5	15.5	100.0

**Table 3.4: Doing away with superstitious beliefs/ practices**

To the question about the Christian faith resulting in the reduction of or even doing away with their superstitious beliefs and practices, 46.5% affirmed that it had helped them ‘much’ in this regard, with 15.5% raising it to the ‘very much’ level, whereas 33.5% chose the “sufficient” level.

**How much has the Christian faith helped you to become a better human person?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
A Little	12	6.0	6.0	6.0
Sufficient	44	22.0	22.0	28.0
Much	101	50.5	50.5	78.5
Very much	43	21.5	21.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

**Table 3.5: Became a better person**

To the query about how much the Christian faith had helped them to be better human persons, 50.5% chose to answer ‘much’, with 21.5% answering ‘very much’, whereas 22% put it at the ‘sufficient’ level.

**Has becoming a Christian made you suffer socially at the beginning?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative Percent
A Little	18	9.0	9.0	9.0
Sufficient	71	35.5	35.5	44.5

Much	74	37.0	37.0	81.5
Very much	37	18.5	18.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

**Table 3.6: Suffered socially at the beginning**

A question was put to them, namely, whether they suffered socially when they embraced the Christian faith, or they moved into a new location. 37% stated that they did suffer ‘much’, with 18.5% raising this to the ‘very much’ level, whereas 36.5% chose the ‘sufficient’ level for their answer to the question.

**Has becoming a Christian made you happier than before?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative Percent
A Little	5	2.5	2.5	2.5
Sufficient	46	23.0	23.0	25.5
Much	107	53.5	53.5	79.0
Very much	42	21.0	21.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

**Table 3.7: Is happier than before**

The next statement of the questionnaire was about whether becoming a Christian had made them happier than before. One must keep in mind that this question follows immediately the question as to how much they had to suffer socially at the beginning of their Christian life. 53.5% of the respondents answered that becoming a Christian had made them ‘much’ happier than before, with 21% affirming that they were ‘very much’ happier, whereas 23% stated that it was the ‘sufficient’ level.

**Becoming a Christian has made me relate more with other people**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
A Little	12	6.0	6.0	6.0
Sufficient	43	21.5	21.5	27.5
Much	99	49.5	49.5	77.0
Very much	46	23.0	23.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

**Table 3.8: Relates better/ more with the others**

To the question whether the Christian faith had enabled them to related better/ more with other people, 49.5% answered that it had helped them ‘much’, with 23% ‘very much’ and 21.5% ‘sufficiently’ in relating better/ more with other people.

**My Christian faith has made me more generous in helping other people**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
A little	10	5.0	5.0	5.0
Sufficient	57	28.5	28.5	33.5
Much	92	46.0	46.0	79.5
Very much	41	20.5	20.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

**Table 3.9: More generous in helping other people**

46% of the Christian respondents answered that the Christian faith had helped them ‘much’ in being more generous in helping other people; 20.5% put this at the ‘very much’ level, whereas 28.5% put it at the ‘sufficient’ level.

**My Christian faith has contributed to the promotion and uplift of the status of women**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
A little	2	1.0	1.0	1.0
Sufficient	73	36.5	36.5	37.5
Much	98	49.0	49.0	86.5
Very much	27	13.5	13.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

**Table 3.10: The Christian faith has promoted the status of women**

Regarding the promotion of the status of women, 49.5% of the Christian Misings answered in the ‘much’ option, with 13.5% even choosing the ‘very much’ option, while for 36.5%, it was ‘sufficient’. Only 1% chose the ‘a little’ option, while there was no one who chose the ‘not at all’ option. Therefore, it can be stated that nearly 62.5% chose the ‘much’ option with regard to the Christian faith promoting the status of women.

**THE RESULT OF THE SURVEY AMONG THE OTHER BELIEVERS**

Having presented the results of the survey among the believers of the Christian community, we now present the results of the survey done among the other believers who live adjacent to or among the Christian communities and / or who have been beneficiaries of the services rendered by the Christian Churches. We begin with the demographic details of this group.

From among the demographic details of the others believers who participated in the survey, we give only their educational qualification and their mean age, both of which are presented below.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Illiterate	39	19.5	19.5	19.5
Upto VII	20	10.0	10.0	29.5
Upto HSLC	18	9.0	9.0	38.5
H.S	34	17.0	17.0	55.5
B.A	73	36.5	36.5	92.0
P.G	16	8.0	8.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

**Table 4.1.1: Educational qualification of the other respondents**

From the above table we see that nearly 37% of the respondents have completed their graduation, with another 17% their class 12. This means that nearly 62% of the respondents from the other religions belong to the educated class too. This is just a little less than the percentage from the Christian community, leading us to a similar conclusion about the trust worthiness of their responses to the questionnaire.

	No. of resp.	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Age	200	16	84	41.61	17.620

**Table 4.1.2: Age – extremes and mean distribution of the other respondents**

From the above table we see that the mean age of the entire group of 200 Misings of other faiths was 41.61, with the standard deviation being 17.620.



**How much, according to you, has the Christian faith given a wider and more open mentality to those who embraced Christianity?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative Percent
Very little	1	.5	.5	.5
A little	20	10.0	10.0	10.5
Sufficient	97	48.5	48.5	59.0
Much	78	39.0	39.0	98.0
Very much	4	2.0	2.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

**Table 4.2: The Christian faith has made their mentality wider and more open**

To the question as to how much the Christian faith had given to the Christians a wider and more open mentality, 48.5% chose the “much” option, whereas 39% went for the “sufficient” option among the answers. “Sufficient” being the mid-point among the choices, it is evident that nearly 77% of the respondents of other faiths affirm that there has been “sufficient” evidence of the Christians having a wider and more open mentality. We also note that there is a very small percentage of respondents choosing both the lower and upper extremes of the given options.

**Has the Christian faith caused the converted people to be better off socially?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
A little	21	10.5	10.5	10.5
Sufficient	83	41.5	41.5	52.0
Much	91	45.5	45.5	97.5
Very much	5	2.5	2.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

**Table 4.3: The Christian faith has caused the Christians to be better off socially**

To the question whether the Christian faith had caused the Christian Misings to be better off socially, 45.5% of the Misings of other faiths chose the ‘much’ option; only 2.5% chose the ‘very much’ option. The ‘sufficient’ option was chosen by 41.5%, whereas 10.5 chose the ‘a little’ option. There was no one who chose ‘not at all’ option. This leads us to conclude that 48% of the Misings of other faiths affirm that the Christian faith had caused the Christians to be better off socially.

**How much has the Christian faith contributed to the Christians over coming superstitious beliefs and practices?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Very little	2	1.0	1.0	1.0
A little	28	14.0	14.0	15.0
Sufficient	41	20.5	20.5	35.5
Much	46	23.0	23.0	58.5
Very much	83	41.5	41.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

**Table 4.4: The Christian faith has helped to overcome superstitious beliefs and practices**

To the question about the Christian faith resulting in the reduction of or even doing away with superstitious belief and practices among the Christians, 23.0% affirmed that it had helped them much in this regard, with 41.5% raising it to the very much level whereas 20.5% choose the ‘sufficient’ level.

**How much has the Christian faith helped the Christians to become better persons?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Very little	2	1.0	1.0	1.0
A little	23	11.5	11.5	12.5
Sufficient	61	30.5	30.5	43.0
Much	68	34.0	34.0	77.0
Very much	46	23.0	23.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

**Table 4.5: The Christian faith has helped them to become better persons**

To the query about how much the Christian faith had helped them to be better human persons, 34.0% of the Misings of other faiths choose to answer ‘much’, with 23.0% raising it to the ‘very much’ level whereas 30.5% choose the ‘sufficient’ level. Thus, it can be affirmed that 57% of the Misings of the other faith were of the opinion that the Christian faith had helped the Mising Christians to be become better persons.

**How much did the new Christians have to suffer socially, especially immediately after their conversion?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
A little	21	10.5	10.5	10.5
Sufficient	89	44.5	44.5	55.0
Much	88	44.0	44.0	99.0
Very much	2	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

**Table 4.6: The Christians had to suffer socially, especially soon after their conversion**

To the question put to them as to whether the new Christians suffered socially at the beginning or of their moving into a new location, 44.0% of the Misings of other faith stated that they did suffer ‘much’ with 1 % raising that to the ‘very much’ level, whereas 44.5% choose the ‘sufficient’ level as their answer to the question. This leads us to the conclusion that according to the 45% Misings of other faiths, the Christians had to suffer ‘much’ on account of their faith, and 44% put this at the ‘sufficient’ level, which is the middle option on the Licher scale.

**Becoming Christians has made them happier than before**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Very little	2	1.0	1.0	1.0
A little	32	16.0	16.0	17.0
Sufficient	55	27.5	27.5	44.5
Much	94	47.0	47.0	91.5
Very much	17	8.5	8.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

**Table 4.7: The Christian faith has made them happier than before**

The next question was about whether becoming a Christian had made the Christian Misings happier than



before. 47.0% of the Misings of other faiths answered ‘much’, with another 8.5% answering ‘very much’; only 27.5% chose ‘sufficient’ and 1% chose ‘very little’.

**Becoming Christians has made them relate more with the other people**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Very little	3	1.5	1.5	1.5
A little	38	19.0	19.0	20.5
Sufficient	65	32.5	32.5	53.0
Much	64	32.0	32.0	85.0
Very much	30	15.0	15.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

**Table 4.8: The Christian faith has made them relate better/ more with the others**

To the question whether the Christian faith had enable them to relate better/more with other people, 32% answered that it had helped them ‘much’, with 15% ‘very much’ and 32.5% ‘sufficiently’ in relating better/more with other people.

**The Christian faith has made the converted people more generous in helping other people**

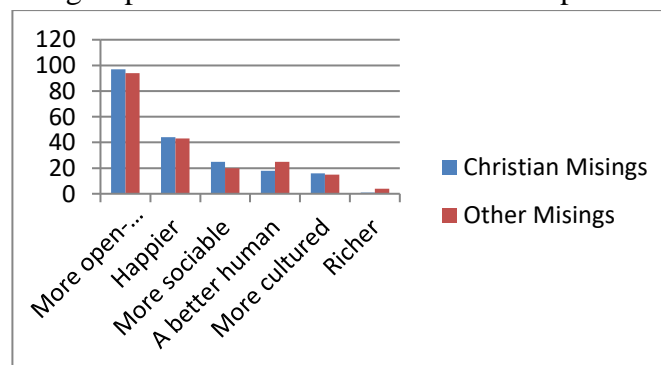
	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
A little	26	13.0	13.0	13.0
Sufficient	71	35.5	35.5	48.5
Much	68	34.0	34.0	82.5
Very much	35	17.5	17.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

**Table 4.9: The Christian faith has made them more generous in helping others**

The next question was about whether the Christian faith had made the Christians more generous in helping others. 34% of the respondents answered ‘much’, while 17.5% put it as ‘very much’; 35.5% chose ‘sufficient’ as their answer to this question.

**Becoming a Christian has made me/them ...(the perspectives of both the groups)**

Both the groups (the Mising Christians and the others) were given a single list of seven adjectives related to the life and experience of the Christian Misings. They were asked to put them in a descending order these six adjectives beginning with the best or highest experience. Surprisingly, there is a near concordance between both the groups. Below is the result of this comparative study.



**Graph 4.1 Becoming a Christian has made me ...**

The greatest effect that Christianity has brought about in the life of the Misings who embraced it has been that they have become more open minded. The respondents of other faiths are near unanimous in stating this. The second is that they have become happier; the third more sociable, the fourth a better human person and the fifth more cultured. About the fact of becoming richer (financially), of the 201 from both the groups, only one Christian Mising said that he/she had become richer; there were 4 from among the other Misings who had this opinion. The only difference of opinion is seen in the question of being better human person; while there were 18 Christian Misings who chose this option, there were 25 other Misings who had chosen the same option for the Christian Misings.

### **MOTIVES AND IMPACT OF THE MISINGS EMBRACING CHRISTIANITY**

Our survey revealed that one reason for the growing fascination of the people towards Christianity is the simplicity and less expensive nature of its rites and rituals. This simplicity of religious rituals has influenced most of the Mising converts as they were fed up with constant rituals, heavy expenditure and social discrimination that they faced in the name of religion, in their own tribal religion as also in Vaishnavism. They were exhausted with the heavy expenditure involved in their traditional beliefs and practices. They disliked animal sacrifices, the offering of *Âpong*, unnecessary lavishness, and the unorganized system of rituals. Moreover, traditional beliefs involved lots of rituals every year thereby draining out a family economically. According to them, traditional rituals are merely concerned with feasts and drinking without any proper devotion towards the Almighty. (Pegu, 2013)

As opposed to this, Christianity appears to be a simple religion without too much financial or social demand on the people. The church building is their place of prayer where both the rich and the poor occupy an equal status, pray together without any social division or distinction. Most important is the fact that the Church authorities do not force upon them rituals and the expenses involved in them. Moreover, even the most popular Christian feast like Christmas does not impose burdens on the people. There was an instance of a certain Bhimnath Pegu of Ratanpur village who was accused of witch-craft and murdered in the year 1998. After his death, the villagers still continued to look at his family with suspicion; therefore, his wife and children converted to Christianity with the hope that the villagers would spare them. However, the villagers still do not behave normally with this family and it has been deprived of its due social status. This, however, is a rare case. (Pegu, 2015)

Another reason for the attractiveness of Christianity was that the missionaries had initiated a number of schemes to help the people, especially the poor, in times of disaster and in times of need. The service of the missionaries through education and their sympathetic and enduring care of the sick and the suffering, has played a role in this connection. They are also engaged in social service, education, medical aid, financial assistance, etc. Thus, they have built houses for a few economically weaker families, and distributed relief materials to the people in times of disaster, irrespective of their religion, particularly during and after the floods. There are also several instances of the Christian Churches sponsoring poor children for higher studies. Mention may be made of Christian students like Tamil Pegu, Biju Pegu and Joy Doley who were provided financial assistance for their studies since they belonged to poor families. Today, Tamil Pegu and Biju Pegu have secured jobs and are well settled in life. (Pegu, 2013). The fact that the other Mising respondents of the survey have not contradicted the statements of the Christian Misings serves as proof of the veracity of these statements. In a climate of distrust and antagonism, one would have expected the respondents of both the groups to manifest a certain bias in their own favour; however, this was far from true in our survey.

Claims that the Christian offer of humanitarian help, especially education, health care, social services, etc., are incentives for conversion are countered by the statement that the Christian religion is basically a belief practiced in life rather than a set of credence or ritual formulae. The basic criterion for the authenticity of a genuine Christian life is the expression of love towards one's neighbour – that neighbour being anyone in need of help or support. These services are extended to all and sundry, irrespective of gender, religion or caste. Even the paid staff employed for such services belong to other religions, without facing any discrimination in service or salary because of their not being Christians.

### **Positive impact of embracing the Christian faith**

Impact can be understood as literally earth shattering, as the impact of a meteorite on any part of our globe, or it could also mean a long-lasting effect on human beings, as exemplified by the Oxford dictionary, "The impact of AIDS on the gay community". It is in this latter sense of the term that we intend to present the impact of the Christian faith on the Misings of Majuli who chose to embrace it. We presented the results of the self-evaluation of the Christian respondents, followed by the statement by the respondents of other faiths.

The most important impact has been in the field of the basic attitude of open mindedness. Nearly 49% of the Christian respondents chose this as the greatest difference in their lives, nearly that the Christian faith has made them more open minded. A slightly smaller percentage of other Misings are of the same opinion. This affirmation of both the groups stands out as distinct from the other aspects. 67% of the Mising Christian respondents affirmed that there has been 'much' change in their mentality towards the others, including 24% who said that this change was "very much". Surprisingly, the other believers put this impact at the top of their list. The highest score received from the other believers regarding the Christians was for the wider and more open mentality that was noticed in them- 48.5% chose the "much" option, whereas 39% went for the "sufficient" option among the answers.

The second impact is that becoming Christians had made them happier than before. One needs to recall that this question of being happy came immediately after the question as to how much they had to suffer socially at the beginning of their Christian life. 74.5% of the respondents answered that becoming a Christian had made them 'much' happier than before, including 21% affirming that they were 'very much' happier. The other believers too put this impact at the second place with 55.5% of the respondents affirming that the Christians were 'much' happier, including 8.5% who even put this happiness at the 'very much' level, while 27.5% spoke of them as being 'sufficiently' happy.

A third impact is that they have become better off socially. This was given a 'much' grading by a high 76% of the respondents, including 14.5% who graded it being 'very much'. This 'better off socially' is not understood from the financial perspective, but a holistic one. The other believers too put this impact in the third position. Thus, 45.5% of the other respondents use the 'much' to grade this topic, whereas 41.5% chose the 'sufficient' option to this theme.

The fourth impact was that the Christian faith had helped them to be better human beings. 72% of the Christian respondents chose the 'much' option in this regard, including 21.5% choosing the 'very much' option. 57% of the other believers chose the 'much' option in this regard, including 23.0% raising it to the 'very much' level, whereas 30.5% chose the 'sufficient' level.

The fifth impact has been that the Christian faith had enabled them to be more cultured. Thus, 72.5% of the Christian respondents expressed that the Christian faith had helped them 'much' in this regard, including 23% putting it at the 'very much' level. On the other hand, 47% of the other believers put this at the 'much' level, including 15% for 'very much' and 32.5% for 'sufficient'.

The Christian faith has also helped them in improving the financial situation of the individual 70.5% 'much', including 24.5% 'very much'. However, this does not mean that they have become financially richer. In fact, only 0.49% of the Christian respondents state that they have become financially richer, and this seems to resonate in the minds of the other believers, only 1.99% of whom state that the Christians have become financially richer.

A very important impact has been in the field of education. Nearly 89% of the Christian respondents were of the opinion that the Christian faith had promoted 'much' the education of their children. This is not to be surprised at, given the fact that education has been one of the primary services rendered by the Christian Churches to all the people of Northeast India from the very beginning of their presence in the region. This is also true for the rest of the country.

The Christian faith has helped them 'much' (66.5%) to be more generous in helping those in need, including 20.5% who said that this help was 'very much'. The respondents from among the other believers put this impact at the 'much' level (51.5%), including 17.5% at the 'very much' level, and 35.5% at the 'sufficient' level.

Yet still another impact is how the Christian faith had contributed 'much' (63.5%) to the eradication of caste-based discrimination in the society, including 20.5% who spoke of this as being 'very much', and 36% just 'sufficient'.

The next impact has been that the Christian faith has contributed 'much' (62.5%) to the promotion and uplift of the status of women; this number includes 13.5% who spoke of this contribution of Christianity as being 'very much'.

The Christian faith has enabled them 'much' (62%) to do away with superstitious beliefs and practices, including 15.5% putting this impact at 'very much', and 33.5% at 'sufficient'. We need to compare this with the statement of the other believers 64.5% of whom evaluated the impact as 'much', including 41.5% raising it to the 'very much' level.

Two aspects that have had an impact on the Missing Christians are that the Christian faith has made them more tolerant of the faults of others, (with 45% talking of it as 'much', including 9% even going in for the 'very much' option, 39% stated that there was 'sufficient' improvement in this regard,); in a quasi-agreement, the respondents from the other faiths put this at 'much' (50%), including 'very much' (10%), and 'sufficient' (30.5%); and b) that the Christian faith has contributed to the transformation of their daily life-style - 54% of the respondents graded this contribution as 'much', including 15% who put it at the 'very much' level, and 31% at the 'sufficient' level.

### **Negative consequences of the Misings embracing the Christian faith**

Consequences or collateral effects (positive or negative) are a more meaningful expression than negative impact. One such immediate consequence has been that the new Christians had to suffer socially soon after they embraced the Christian faith or after they moved into a new location. 37% of the Christian respondents stated that they did suffer 'much', with 18.5% raising this to the 'very much' level, whereas 36.5% chose the 'sufficient' option for their answer to this question. It appears that the Misings of other faiths have been more aware of this consequence on the lives of the Christians. Thus, 44% of the other believers stated that the new Christians did suffer 'much', with 44.5% choosing the 'sufficient' level as their answer to the question. Everyone seems to have been aware of this since none of the other respondents chose the 'very little' option in answer to this question. This consequence gains weightage when we understand that this was the fourth impact on the Christians, among the positive and negative ones, according to the Misings of other faiths.

We give below certain laments arising out of the conversion of some Misings into the Christian faith. Thus, an earlier sense of bond and unity in the Mising villages seems to have weakened because the Christians observe their own festivals and they do not take active part in the religious festivals of the others. It is also lamented that in place of *murong* (Mising public hall) and *Namghar* (Vaishnava common prayer hall) churches have come up in some areas. Christian celebrations seem to be adding to the traditional institutions and to the traditional folklore and festivals. These are trends in a new direction and may lead to the emergence of new types of social and political organizations among the Christian and non-Christian Misings. This is true of all cases of change of religion; one has to cease to observe the practices, especially religious and ritual, of the former religion and follow only those of their new religion.

Another lament is about the resurgence and revivalism of the traditional religion of the Misings, namely, the Donyi-Polo religious system. This resurgence is not restricted to the Misings, but is applicable to many societies, mostly due to the influence of the movement of indigenous cultures and religious.

The research scholar has not come across any report of conflict in the villages between the Christian Misings and the others of other faiths. However, there were isolated events, which did not involve the local people, but outsiders who were apparently paid goons.

Thus, on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2018, a group of about one hundred miscreants shouting slogans in favour of Satradhikar Janardan Deva Goswami and other religious groups reached Raidangani Banshichuk village. The village, dominated by Mising tribals, had been neglected by the upper caste Hindus. A few of them had accepted Christianity a few years back and they had also constructed a church in their village. But the members of these religious groups were furious with the growing popularity of Christianity and they had been threatening the tribal people of the area who had become Christians. Political backing has only increased the attack on the Christians in a rapid way. It was as a part of this overall communal polarization that the attack on the Church occurred. (source: the testimony of the Believers Eastern Church pastor)

Though complaints were filed at the police station, no actions were taken against the group of miscreants. A local resident Amulya Pegu said to *Sabrang India* that, 'the Misings are not believers of the Hindu religion. They have every right to choose their religion. It is strange that the fundamental rights of the people have been violated hereby the miscreants associated with religious and political associations. The police are also not acting. None has been arrested even after 48 hours of the incident.'

## CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of this research survey which has dealt with a practical question of life, the first question that needs to be studied and answered is: Does going against a particular custom mean that one is deviating from an essential cultural practice, and so going against one's culture, or even attempting to overthrow the old culture. Thus, dress, food, music and architecture which are very much connected with culture have been constantly on the evolving path, and have affected the majority of peoples except those without much physical contact with the other peoples or religions.

A second question in this regard is: Is religion the only or even the major factor that has brought about changes in the customs, practices and traditions of the people? The answer evidently is that there are other and stronger factors that change man. The mass media, e.g., the Hindi cinema, pop music, have had greater and stronger impact in this regard, irrespective of education, culture or religion. Hence, why single out religion and stigmatize religious conversion?



A third question is about what really counts in life: in the final analysis, is not the genuine happiness and progress of society and of the human person more important than the mere preservation of external and internal elements of traditional customs and practices?

Having met and interacted with Misings in their traditional religion and Misings who embraced Christianity, and having analyzed the questionnaires that were responded to by both the groups, it is our personal conclusion that the impact of the conversion of a few Misings to the Christian faith has been more positive than negative, and that the impact has been felt in the correct spheres of life. Thus, the first most important impact mentioned was that of acquiring a wider mentality than previously, and there is no denying the fact that such a mentality is the key to progress and development. This is substantiated by the affirmation of the respondents that their social status has taken a step higher than previously. A second major impact is that the people (the Christian Misings) are much happier than before. This appears to be in tune with the happiness quotient that is gaining more ground than the mere GDP criterion. Combine this impact with the next one, namely, that they have become better human beings, and one has the best choices that one can think of as being important for individuals and society. Thus, if these be the major aspects of the impact of Christianity on the Misings of Majuli, shouldn't one rejoice with them rather than lament a few minor social effects of 'conversion'?

We are living in an era when individual freedom and choices are more and more respected, e.g., one has the right to be vegetarian or even a vegan and he/she has to be catered to as such. One is free to wear the dress of one's own choice. Marriages are no more arranged by parents, but decided upon by the young people who want to be free to choose a partner, even one belonging to a different religion or caste. If individual freedom and choices at these social and personal levels are respected and upheld, what about the highest freedom, i.e., freedom to choose the god who seems to fulfill the expectations of an individual? One's parents might have a certain right to guide a person in one's choices, but even the parents cannot right fully tell their child/children to submit of a particular god/ religion. Given this premise, can anyone else, even the society or the civil authorities have such a right over the others? There is nothing more sacred and personal than the choice of one's god.

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3. Source: The testimony of the Believers Eastern Church pastor.