Children’s Perspectives on Religion: The Case of Christian Children in Tamil Nadu, India

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Master thesis

Abstract

This thesis is about Christian children’s perspectives on religion in Tamil Nadu, India. More specifically the thesis seeks to explore how children view religion and how they seek knowledge about religion in their daily lives, examine what role religion plays in their everyday lives and examine how children’s perspectives on religion influence their social practices. Various theories and concepts are used to analyze children’s perspectives on religion. A broadened conception of the sociology of religion together with a broadening up of the conception of sociology of childhood has given this study an advantage to shed a new light on children and religion.

A mosaic research approach involving multiple, qualitative methods of data collection have been used. The combination between several different participatory tools (see appendices) and the more traditional methodology of interviewing and observations provided me with a wellgrounded understanding of – and factual insights into – children’s perspectives on religion.

It has often been proved challenging for children to grasp what religion is. However, this study has found out that children's perspectives on religion were rather straightforward and related to something personal and everyday life experiences. Children in this research had their own personal experiences on religion and highly, idiosyncratic ways of thinking. Religion is constantly encountered in all the arenas of Christian children's lives in Tamil Nadu. This study has found that religion plays a major role in helping children actively negotiate their own religious lives in the overlapping spaces between children's and adults' worlds; spaces of play, school and friendships. It was found out that children's perspectives on religion influence their social practices, and their social practices influence their perspectives on religion.

Furthermore, the findings of this thesis reveal that viewing children either as human beings or human-becomings should be brought to the level of hybridism. From this study's theoretical examinations and empirical findings on both the social and religious aspects of children's lives, the artificial analytical 'being-becoming dichotomy' is both non-existent and fluid. Children are both human beings and social agents in their own right; and human-becomings in search of maturation seeking for changes and transformations in their social, spiritual/religious lives.

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I am a Christian. I believe that conversion is abhorrent when it is done for the wrong reasons. I have always believed that every person can reach their God through their own religion. But reading the comments on the raging conversion debate has brought many ideas to the fore. First, the country needs a clear understanding of ‘conversion’, at least in terms of Christianity. There are a few small sects, such as Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other fairly fundamentalist Christian groups who convert. Not from a Western perspective but from the perspective of humanity and decency. The Brahmo Samaj protested against child marriage, sati and encouraged widow remarriage. A lot more has to be done within Hinduism to fight conversion effectively. Children of Tamil Nadu - An Analysis. Acknowledgements. Additional Resources. Events. A child can only be adopted if he/she is Hindu, not previously adopted, not married and has not completed fifteen years of age. If the adoptive family already have a son or grandson or great-grandson (paternal lineage only) in their home they are not permitted to adopt a son. If the adoptive family already have a daughter or grand daughter (paternal lineage only) in their home they are not permitted to adopt a daughter. In the case of multiple wives, the adopter must decide who the adoptive mother is and who the step-mothers are. Under the maintenance part of the act, A Hindu must provide for his/her legitimate and illegitimate children. Downloads ». Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act. For instance, though the all-India TFR - defined as the number of children likely to be born to a woman over her lifetime - is 2.6 for Muslims, compared to 2.1 for Hindus and 2 for Christians, the rate for Muslims varies widely from 1.7 in Tamil Nadu to 4.1 in Bihar, the state with India's highest fertility rate in the country. Similarly, the Hindu TFR ranges from 1.4 in Kerala to 3.3 in Bihar. In the case of Muslims, there are 10 such states. All but one of these ten states had a TFR well below replacement level. In the case of Hindus, there were 22 states where their fertility rate was at or below 2.1. Once again, 18 of these 22 states had an overall TFRs at or below the replacement rate.