

# **The Impact of Resource Dependency of Indian Higher Christian Educators in Constructing the State of Exception**

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## Abstract

The paper discusses how Christian higher educational institutions in a city in South India navigate their way through Hindu state hegemony and how the actions of the educators of these institutions impact the rest of the Christian community. In the recent past, under Hindu right-wing politics, the social demeaning of the Christian community in India has been exhibitionist. The economic destabilization of the community is more systemic, deliberate, and covert. The present state machinery attempts to criminalize the community using the anti-conversion law that seems to subvert constitutional provisions that protect religious minorities. By focusing on higher educational institutions, this paper intends to understand how criminalization, through the forced conversion narrative, dismantles the decades-long 'goodwill' earned by the community for rendering educational services to the public. For the present Indian state, this criminalization is an excuse to advocate Carl Schmitt's maxim "sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception". Constructing minorities as disturbers of peace, public order, causing disharmony and a threat to the Hindu nation, provides the executive fodder to create the 'state of exception'.

I used ethnographic studies, interviews, analysis of historical documents on constitutional assembly debates on minority rights and education, and Supreme Court past and pending judgments on cultural and educational rights to understand how educators advocate for themselves and the impact it has on the larger Christian community in the city and elsewhere. Resource dependency theory provided the framework to understand how they negotiate with state and external agencies by altering their environments by absorbing constraints. The petite bourgeois tendencies of the educators in the institutions prevail at the expense of the rest of the community. The silence and the lack of resistance from them due to dependency provide more ammunition for the Hindu regime to develop confidently the state of exception.

## Extended Abstract

The protection of the sovereignty and security of the Indian nation-state against its internal threats has gained traction in the last few years despite the narrative being prevalent for decades. Since 2014, the internal threat has been marked as religious minorities in India, particularly the Abrahamic religions along with the Sikh community. The animosity towards the Abrahamic religions, particularly Islam and Christianity, has been greater as they are associated with conquerors, the Mughals, and the British Empire. While considerable documentation has occurred regarding the atrocities against the Muslim community under Hindu nationalism, the attacks on the Christian community pales in comparison. The Christian population has a two percent presence in India which hardly makes them a threat to Hindus. The institutions they hold seem to be of greater concern to those in power, because of the economic wealth and prestige they hold especially in urban areas. The

attack on the Christian community, though exhibitionist in nature, helps instill the climate of fear among the Christian lay folk, yet, the actual attack has been more covert and long-term. As large landholders in prime estate urban areas, their physical presence in service sectors like education, NGOs, and the medical fields creates a significant dent in institutional memory despite their minuscule numbers. This is perceived as an impending threat to Hindu nationalists who hope to build the narrative that religious minorities deserve no rights and are second-class subjects of the Hindu state.

The Christian higher educational institutions in Kappadikere\* in Karnataka, India, not only have to deal with neoliberal pressures but also the loss of monopolistic power in private higher education with the rise of professional institutions managed by various dominant caste blocs and their politicians. These institutions have the additional burden of navigating around the anti-conversion law that suggests that free and subsidized education imparted to women and marginalized communities like the Schedule Castes and Tribes are acts of inducement to convert to Christianity. In such an environment, navigating their way with the executive and its bureaucracy has been a growing challenge. Accessing constitutional provisions of the right to freedom of religion and cultural and educational rights has become harder with bureaucratic caveats placed not just by the union government but also by the state government who have similar politics even if they belong to a different party. While the state relegates its responsibilities to these private entities by offering funding or support, a number of these institutions become dependent on the instructions of the state to survive.

### **Frameworks**

Using Carl Schmitt's (1985, 1996) understanding of the sovereign claiming the right to decide the state of exception and the subservience of the law to the sovereign, I understood the deep implications in India when those in power advocate for Hindu nationalism. Having this exceptional power allows them to subvert the Indian constitution and challenge the basic framework that seemed untouchable by the protections of the Keshavananda Bharati case. Secularism would be the first to fall to establish a theocratic and fascist state. This aligns with the Hindu Nationalist ideology of the secondariness of all other religions to Hinduism. This advocacy to determine the state of exception translates to how the state perceives minority institutions. Several decades of protection that Christian educational institutions received under Art 29 and 30 of the Indian Constitution around educational and cultural rights seem hard to access through the re-interpretation of Supreme Court judgments by the bureaucracy that aids the Hindu Nationalist agenda.

Christian Higher educational institutions have to be studied through the lens of power. I focus on the resource dependency theory (Jeffery & Salancik, 2003) to understand how administrators navigate and negotiate with the state and its machinery and divisions within itself. The movement toward fragmentation makes collective decisions harder. The positionality of various institutions in the hierarchical order determines what decisions are made. Such decisions have a significant impact on the community as a whole. These institutions run by the clergy, tend to align with the demands of the state rather than the community, directing our attention to the petite bourgeois tendency of those in power (Cabral, 2022).

### **Methods**

I began with 22 interviews with various administrators across the city in the south of India. Mostly fathers and sisters run these institutions and occasionally, deans of departments with a significant role in decision-making for the institutions. They drew attention to the state's constant attempt at

subverting constitutional provisions and making it impossible to avail minority status or the minority certificate that were once constitutional guarantees.

This pushed me to explore the archives, particularly the Constitutional assembly debates, as one of the interviewees suggested that the right to freedom of religion and cultural and educational rights was a compromise for Christians giving up the demand for separate electoral votes.

Studying various court cases across the country on the interpretation of Art 29 and 30 indicates the number of means by which minority rights were effectively being chipped away systematically for decades.

The present court proceedings for the Aligarh Muslim University demand to maintain a Muslim Minority Status is an attempt to disregard other constitutional benches that provided favorable judgments to minority communities.

I did ethnographic studies by being part of a couple of public events on the National Education Policy 2019 in the city with a large representation of Christian educators. I was also part of a multi-denominational peace rally as an act of protest by Christians in the city against the atrocities experienced by Christians in the state of Manipur.

### **Findings**

Educational institution administrators, despite holding significant power and the ability to change the narrative keep their cards close. Education is reduced to a neoliberal commodity of exchange and institutions become factories and business ventures alone catering to the elite.

There is a significant change in how decision-makers within the community have changed their tactics over time. This change in tactics seems to give confidence to the right wing and the Hindu state to attack Christian lay folk, with a good example being the Manipur attacks. The silence of those in power, or the weak attempt at protest is carefully observed by the state and the Hindu-right. This discord between various communities within the Christian community and educational institutions has a significant impact on how laypersons look at the church for support.

There is a clear disconnect between how lay folk and those in power perceive Hindu nationalism and the climate of fear impacts these institutions less. However, when the attacks get personal, is only when the clergy decides to move and protest. Anti-conversion laws directed at their institutions and attacking their economic interests resulted in people in power coming together to deliberate their precarious position.

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