

Evangelical Christian Dynamics in Sri Lanka

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During the last six decades, but more specifically during the last two decades, many parts of South Asia, including Sri Lanka, witnessed a relatively a large influx of new Christian sects based in US, Europe and East Asia. In Sri Lanka, in recent times, this situation has led to heightened tension among religious communities and in certain instances given way to violent conflict. An alarming trend has been the recent wave of organized attacks on evangelical churches in Sri Lanka. Another significant development in the so-called unethical conversions discourse has been the proposal of anti-conversion bills in the parliament by the Jathika Hela Urumaya, a party made of Buddhist monks and the Minister in charge of Buddhist Affairs.

In this paper, I will discuss why people join these evangelical movements and assess the consequences of dynamics of new Christianities in Sri Lanka. I have come to the conclusion that the popular explanation of the alleged economic incentives offered by these groups is inadequate to understand why people join these new Christian sects and remain in them. The reasons for membership in these groups are varied and complex. The behaviour of some of these groups has been a catalyst for conflict formation. Moreover, there also seems to be a link between extremist nationalist politics and violence directed against evangelical Christian sects operating in Sri Lanka.

The study is based on selected areas in Sri Lanka. Participant observation and in-depth interviewing are the major methodologies used in the study.

Key Words: Religion, Conversion, Christianity, Fundamentalism, and Violence

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