CHAPTER VIII

WORLDVIEW, PERCEPTIONS OF GOOD-LIFE AND DEVELOPMENT AMONG THE HILL SAORAS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The chapter aims to make a comparative analysis between the traditional and modern concept of worldview, perception of good-life and development, which may also refer to the perception of non-convert and convert. The former focuses on the non-converts perception and understanding of life, whereas latter focuses on the changing perception of good-life, worldview, and development with special emphasis on Christianity as a new way of life. Besides the supernatural perceptions, it intends to examine the preferential notion of good-life relating to the pragmatic and material aspects of life among both the groups in changing situations. The chapter is mainly based on the case studies gathered from the non-converts and converts and tries to analyse the individuals as well as community perception of good-life and development. The focus group discussion organised at toddy drinking places also added very good information on the non-convert Saoras. It also aims to relate whether the supernaturalism has any bearing or manifestation on the practical or material aspect of day-to-day life.

Many of the indigenous communities in the process of transition are facing serious intimidation to their livelihood and survival. The rising problem of hunger, malnutrition, unwilling-migration, lack of minimum
survival options, external threat to their natural-living eco-systems and resource base etc., are the major problems confronted by the indigenous population. Not only that the ethnicity and cultural identity of these populations are also poignant in peril. The idea of living in harmonious relationship with nature and self-sustained life-style of many communities are drawn from their worldview and concept of happy life has also been seriously eroded. For some communities too, rapid social change opens new jobs and new perspectives (Hamilton & Seyfrit, 1993). In this perilous situation, the key questions however, comes very often is how the indigenous communities are coping these situations how their concept of good life and happy life is still surviving or changed. If so how these concepts are surviving.

But before that some other important questions cropped up into our mind are what the "good life" is for people living in remote pockets and contested environment for sustenance? How do we measure it? How can communities create and take advantage of opportunities to make individual and communal life better in accordance with national standards and/or their notion of the "good life"?

One of the common ways to deal with defining and measuring the "good life" is to use the concept of individual and community well-being. According to Wilkinson (1991), well-being is a concept meant to "recognize the social, cultural and psychological needs of people, their family, institutions and communities."1 From this definition, the complexity of the concept is clearly seen. It indicates a necessity to consider different aspects of a community (such as quality of life), as well as economic and social structures.

The concept of community well-being is one of the frameworks for community assessment of quality-of life, community health, community

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capacity, etc. As Kusel and Fortmann put it in their works on the forest communities in Canada, the concept is focused on understanding the contribution of the economic, social, cultural and political components of a community in maintaining itself and fulfilling the various needs of local residents.²

The studies of community well-being use several approaches. Some studies analyze certain factors influencing well-being, such as poverty or economic development. Other studies focus on general well-being and try to identify factors forming well-being in the communities. However, they build on a mix of indicators regarding how people themselves perceive different aspects of their lives.

Despite the differences of the approaches, what is common for all of them is the use of social indicators as one of the main tools of well-being assessment. The selection of indicators depends upon the purpose of the assessment. Locally generated indicators may differ from public service generated lists. There are certain widely accepted sets of indicators that focus on aspects of individual/community well-being, which include poverty, economic options, need of the people, personal physical and mental health, education etc. However, without a complete idea on a particular community and its concept of worldview and good life no purpose of assessment can be fulfilled. Hence, the Hill Saoras a community chosen for the present study is suitable for examination.

8.2 THE WORLDVIEW, PERCEPTION OF GOOD-LIFE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE HILL SAORAS

The first question that cropped in the mind is what is a happy life? How a person becomes happy? What is the concept of happiness? Perceptions vary from person to person, community to community, and culture to culture. There may be slightly common expectation or ground for good life but the perception would not be the same. The modern industrialized society's perception of good life is far different to the simple folk society.

The classification of Hill Saoras has already been made into groups- traditional or non-converts and non-traditional or converts hence need no repetition. Now let us start our discussion from the traditional group of Hill Saoras and their concept of good life and worldview.

The Hill Saora concept of good life, happy life and well-being are not similar to the mainstream perception. It has its unique understanding and perception of these concepts although some interpretations or objectives are apparently similar. In almost all the indigenous folk societies the concept of happiness and prosperity is associated with or determined by the power of supernatural forces. As an indigenous community still living a traditional mode of life style and ancestral cult Hill Saoras concept of good life, happiness and prosperity is mainly revolved round the supernatural and ancestral spirits, which they called Sonnums. The term 'well-being', prosperity, happiness etc., are not directly referred by the Hill Saoras but their expression gives the sense of the meaning of these terms. For instance, while they said we got bansa biti, it means good property, good cropping etc., but then it too depends upon the mercy of the Sonnums.

The Hill Saora considers it to be good life when they do not evade Ukka (customs in vogue) and commit Erssee (actions causing wrath of god or the supernatural powers). Verrier Elwin has described that Erssee includes incest and breaches of religious norms. The fear of Erssee encourages the strict
adherence to the socio-religious practices, so that spirits and ghosts would not cause diseases, epidemic, cattle diseases, crop diseases, truancy of rain fall, and so forth. The Buya (priest) and Kudan (shaman) are the intermediaries, between the individuals and such unseen powers, who by dint of their professional lore are capable of ensuring good life. The intermediaries are also conceive of having familial relationship with their tutelary (Illdas) of opposite sex in the underworld. Each of the intermediaries interprets and translates the desires and activities of the spirits with the help of her/his tutelary. The supernatural powers are supposed to take active interest in human affairs. The key to good life is to know, in advance, the desires of the spirits and deities (Sonnums) and their social conditions in the underworld and are to be invited together for participation in the social gatherings and functions.3

The religious functionaries are expected to observe Ukka even more rigorously. These functionaries commit Erssee by violating the Ukka and this has severe social consequences, as they arouse the wrath of their tutelary deities. The wrath of tutelary spirits would culminate in causing crop failure, scanty rain, more diseases, epidemics and all conceivable catastrophes.4 The customary and patterned behaviour, the social behaviour in confirmation with common to the Ukka have made Hill Saora social system a living one through generations, isolating them from their neighbours. The Ukka and Erssee have constituted Saora moral values. These are the guidelines for leading a good life in Saora society.

In relation to the supernatural world the traditional perception of good life and happy life is closely linked with the supernatural and ancestral spirits. For the non-convert to live happy and prosper means to first keep

4 ibid., p.33.
your ancestors happy. They are the sole determinant of human life. From material well being to the physical health, from agriculture to health everything is determined by the supernatural forces.

However, due to the impacts of several change agents more often by the external agencies and some extent by the internal dynamics of population the pressure for material need of the population became mounted. These factors are already mentioned in previous chapters need no repletion. In due course of time the material need became essential and realised by the people. Hence, the perception of good life and development of the non-converts is slowly changing from the rigid supernatural interpretation to the modern rational and material understanding. The acceptance of modern and natural medicine for healing, modern economic activities like horticulture for good cash, small business and other modern economic activities to fulfil their material need. The lessening of number of sacrifice, very rare celebration of agriculture rituals and ritual healings has been observed among the non-converts. The positive attitude towards education also gives evidence that they are marching towards modernisation. However, the concept of supernaturalism still associated with some rigidity in the perception of good-life among the traditional Saoras.

To substantiate some of the above facts among the non-converts two important case studies are given as the representatives.

Case study: Pasito Karji/ Male/ 45/ Traditional/ Allengal

The Kirtun (Christians) are drinking salap (toddy) and eating Bungteljel (buffalo meat) secretly, although is restricted by their religion. They are more clever after became Christian. The attitude of theft started among them. Earlier there was no quarrel now they themselves are quarrelling for
property, money (lebu). They are indulged in Daribo (illicit affairs). After being Kirtun they are also keeping two to three wives and now boycotted from the Girja. The youth are not going to work in the bagada. They are just wasting their time in roaming here and here. We Indu (Hindus) have no restriction on food; we sit and drink together. We worship our fathers and forefathers (Yayangji and Jujungji) who looks after our crops in bagada, gives us good crops, granting us good health, protecting us from other bhutas (the evil spirits). But the Christians do not worship their fathers and forefathers. They do not obey any religious norms neither they celebrate the most important Guar and Karja for them. How can we live better if disobey our Sonnums? Now because of disobedience we are getting very little rain and poor cropping than earlier. This is because many of them became Kirtun.

He also states that “We are Indu and will continue to live in it because our Sonnums (supernatural and ancestral spirits) gives us everything like good crop, good health and good harvesting. My wife is Kudanboi (shamanin).” The very interesting thing he has mentioned that “because of our Sonnums I learn and give medicines to the people. If I give up this practice I will die because the Sonnum who taught me this medicine will get angry and cause me severe illness (assu) from which we can not survive.”

Pasito also clarifies that a son is necessary who will take care their parents in old age and will perform the Karja and Guar ceremony after their death. He has two sons and both of them are going to school. He also perceives that education will give them wisdom and service in government so that they live better. Good crops, good income, sufficient food, etc are the factors evident in his opinion which will provide a god and happy life.
Case study: Agina Sabar/47/Male/Alangda.

Agina had adopted Christianity in the year 1990. He again returned to his original faith after three years in Christianity. He has admitted that “I left Christianity because of heavy restrictions on food and drinking. Eating buffalo and pork are prohibited. Drinking toddy of Salap is strictly banned. However, since childhood we have been brought up by drinking Salap (Caryota urens) toddy and greedy for meat. Salap toddy is good for health. It provides energy and strength to work in the swidden and paddy field. That’s why, without toddy we can not work hard. However, I faced lots of constraints after I became Christian. Now I have been participating in traditional worships but not frequently, like before.”

Agina states “when I was in Assam for about four years I was earning good amount of money and were getting good food than this place (village). My only problem was to return to the village and take care of the family, father’s property and agriculture. Otherwise, that is a good place to have good job and good income for the future of your family.

In his final statement Agina has says, “Our Indu Saora people are better than the Christianised. The Christianised people are very clever and cunning. They are always jealous and complex in their mind. They are hankering after money and telling lies every time. Our traditional people are very simple and innocent. They do not lie or quarrel with each other but share their food and drink together happily. They are hard working and are always busy with their own work. The Christianised youths are having many illegitimate affairs with the girls. Even the small school going boys and girls have so many sex affairs and most of them got early marriage and diverted from their study. Many of the Christians are also accepted more than one wife which is
restricted in Christianity. So they are not true (Sakai) Christian." However, the above case studies have examined and substantiated some of the fact related to the traditional perception of good-life in relation to the supernatural, pragmatic and material world that expressed by the non-convert Saoras. It will be incomplete without analysing the (modern) changing perception of the convert Saoras in a comparative perspective.

8.3 THE CHANGING PERCEPTION OF GOOD LIFE AND DEVELOPMENT

The modern or changing perception of good life refers to the perception and understanding of the converted Saoras to lead a self-sustained happy life. It is interesting to note that the movement of conversion among the indigenous communities started with the idea of opting or living a good and happy life in place of a disadvantaged or impoverished life. The same is the case with the Hill Saoras.

The very movement of conversion was started from the practice of frequent animal sacrifice in healing the illness. The healing tradition has the serious impact on the economy of the Hill Saoras. The ultimate result of the ritual sacrifices was acute poverty and death due to lack (absence) of medical care. This was the major cause of economic deterioration and serious crisis in livelihood, has already mentioned in the previous chapter. The missionaries have provided the health care services to the Hill Saoras who get practical benefits not only from health point of view but more importantly save them from living continuously with poverty and insolvency. The new perception of good-life began from the assurance people get out of it. In this circumstances, Christianity as a new way of life has emerged. In departure to the earlier perception, the worldview, perception of good-life and development of the converts took a new shape.
The life style and culture of the indigenous population have shown a remarkable change. The perception of good life and prosperity is very much associated with economic factors and material necessity among the convert Saoras. Unlike the traditional sections a good life in the perception of a Christianised Saora depends more upon the practical efforts and judicious thinking. For instance, their movement against ritual sacrifice for healing the patient. Education, health, new avenues for income etc., are among other things given main priority for achieving a good life and prosperous life as has been clear in almost all case studies of the coverts. Except supernatural interpretation, the converts' perception of good life and prosperity are not different to the modern-mainstream way of life.

Case study no. Turkanu Raika/54/Male/Tarbel/Christianised.

Turkanu converted to Christianity 16 years back at village Karanjasing. He holds the view that “in our traditional Hindu (in Saora called Indu) religion people worship near rock, tree, and on the roads by offering blood, meat, rice and wine to the Sonnums (ancestral spirits). The Sonnums are malevolent who frequently express their greedy nature for meat and wine. In the ritual worships (Purpur) while Kudan or Kudanboi (shaman) talk with them through trance (Mir) they demand for buffalo (Bungtel), pigs (Kamboon), fowl (Kansim), goat (Kumme), wine etc., besides symbolic offering of dress (Sindri), paddy (Sarr), money (Libu), rice (Runku), etc. However, we do not know whether the shamans are talking really with the Sonnums or not. What I think is that the shamans are lying to the people and taking everything used in the rituals like meat, wine and rice.”

Turkanu also explained that lots of money is spent in the rituals for which the Hill Saoras are suffering from indebted. He said that “for these indebtedness I had to sold my lands Saroba (paddy land). For any kind of
diseases we were performing ritual sacrifices with fowls, pigs, buffaloes, wine, etc. without going to the hospital. As a result the problem of the patient persisted more seriously became difficult to be cured. The final result is death and misery.” Turkanu interrogates, “How can a person be cured without eating medicine and only by giving sacrifices to Sonnums to whom we practically do not talk directly?” “These were blind traditions and beliefs which made our people impoverished since olden days”, he stressed.

Narrating his story of conversion Turkanu says: “I accepted Christianity (Kirtun as the Saora called them) about 16 years back. Thereafter my life has changed in several cases with the blessings of Kitung (God). Not only have me my whole family got happiness and peaceful living. Now we are cutting the hair, wearing good cloths, etc. and having regular bath than our forefathers were doing. However, in early days we were only using Karanja (Pongamia glabra) oil as body oil. Now we are using coconut oil, other cosmetic oils, soaps, shampoo, etc. Of course, Karanja oil has good medicinal value than any other oil which has been used in massage therapy in bone setting, cold, body-ache, scabies and many other skin diseases.”

“Earlier we were using loin-cloths (Ulliakap) in which we were looking naked or like a monkey. I was using the loin cloth during my childhood. Our forefathers were not having bath regularly and were not keeping us clean. Only ritual sacrifices were offered while a person was falling sick, without taking any medicine. We had no education. We had no idea about the outside world. After I accepted Christianity Jesun (Jesus) had blessed us for this new life. I am sending my two children to school although I could not be educated. We are taking medicines for any kind fever and illness from the hospital.”

Turkanu further narrated that “before becoming Christian I meet Ferry Allabi and David Saheb, the missionaries from Canada working for the health
care development of the poor Adivasis who are suffering from destitution due to their age-old tradition of ancestral worship for healing the sick. They were coming from Serung where they have established a hospital. David Saheb advised me to take medicine to get well from the disease. He also suggested stopping ritual sacrifices and offering prayer to Jesun who can heal us from all kinds of illness. Jesu Christa is our God."

Turkanu was suffering from high fever continuously and went to Serang hospital for treatment in getting information from village Karanjasing that a very good has been given in free of cost and so many Saoras got cured there. Narrating his experience Turkanu said that “in Serang hospital Saheb doctor gave us medicine, cloths, milks, food, etc. in free of cost. They provided us accommodation and care us very well. They were giving treatment to both Indu (Hindu) and Kirtun (Christian) equally. The Sahibs were speaking fluently in Sora. Three days after I got well and then onwards I have been taking all my family and relatives to Serang hospital whenever any one fallen seriously ill.” However, two years later Turkanu converted to Christianity at Karanjasing Church.

Criticising the traditional customs of marriage Turkanu explained that “earlier Akuisirung (marriage by negotiation) for instance, a girl was given marriage by her parents by taking wine from the bridegroom. The bride has no independent choice. Some cases the father of bride promised to the groom’s father to give her daughter for his son without the knowledge of the bride by drinking wine long before they are grown up. The bride and groom may not know about each other or the promised made by their fathers. At the later stage one may not agree to keep his promise. As they grow they come in contact and choose with their own spouse. If any one of them fall in love with some other person then starts the quarrel and fight. Even those parents who
had given their commitment could turn down their promise. However, so
many instances of this kinds are seen in the past which created serious inter-
Birinda and inter-village rivalry and feuds."

The Christianised Saoras are far from this problem because they do not
follow these customs in selection of spouse. The boys and girls are given
independence to choose their own partner. They are given the chance to
interact and discuss mutually their desire to marry. But that has to be
informed to the Village Christian Mandali through letter written by any one
party or both. If a girl wishes to marry a boy 'institutionally' she has to write
to the Mandali to pursue the matter with the boy and his parents to know their
willingness for the proposal then to finalise the negotiation. Love marriage or
marrying without the consent of both the families (Dariboisirung) is also
solemnised, if requested to convince their family, by the Mandali.

When asked about how you will live a good and happy life, Turkanu
emphasizes more on economic or material aspects rather than the spiritual or
non-technical one. He stressed on the necessity of paddy land (Saroba) and
swidden land (Baroon) with good cropping.

From the case studies collected on the notion of good life and prosperity most
of the opinion emphasizes on the basic necessity of sufficient food, good
harvesting and good health, education. Besides, material necessity many
people preferred to have a son who can take care of the parents at the old age.
The Hill Saoras are fond of in living within a communal and corporate life.
They always prefer to live with their family kins, friends, therefore, visit the
house of relatives (Dayalsing) during lean and leisure times. They spend their
times with fellow feeling and cooperation.
Case Study No.  Tamas Raika /56/ Male/ Tarbel.

Tamas is presently a Chalak (Bible teacher) at Alangda. His traditional name was Partina which was his grand father's name. The name of the grand parents is usually given to their grand children, as per the traditions (Ukka). Partina accepted Christianity at Serung of bordering Gajapati District in the year 1964 leaving all his traditional faith and practices behind. His name has then changed from Partina to Tamas.

Criticising the traditional practices and beliefs Tamas explained that “in our earlier times we were wearing a tail like dress in which we were looking naked. With that dress (Ulliakap) we were feeling ashamed. The life was so pathetic. We had no awareness about the outside world and the way of life of other people. There was lack of education and wisdom of the people. People were very poor and were not getting minimum good food. The source of income was very less and limited. The most important and serious problem was that we were exhausting all our money for sacrifices of fowl, pig, buffalo, goat, etc. in offering to the bhutas (Sonnums). We always worship our ancestors by giving sacrifices to get cure from the diseases because ancestors as the cause of our illness. Continuous ritual sacrifices made the people more poor and destitute. They have been living with great financial liability to the local Doms who provide sacrificial animals (buffalo) in cash or some times on credit. Our people faced serious exploitation while repaying the loans during the harvesting period, the time on which the Doms eyed on, by charging heavy interests on their loans. However, the ultimate result was death. Because without taking medicine how can a persons illness will get cured?

Tamas opines stated that “after I became Christian my life and family life has changed a lot. We wear good dress, became educated, sending our
children to schools. Our food habits have been changed and we are now getting some how many other good foods than only Uabkul (gruel) we were eating earlier. There has been improvement in our income and doing better in agriculture. We gave up ritual worship to cure illness and taking medicines and injection (Passsee) for healing the patient. The drinking of wine was an addiction earlier is completely given up and restricted in Christianity.

Tamas clarified that "in early days I sold my land for giving sacrifices to Sonnums. We were highly indebted by frequently purchasing the sacrificial animals. Now I am saving huge and unnecessary expenditure by giving up those ritual sacrifices. I had a very difficult and distressed life." He said with emotions that "by the grace of Jisu Christa we came out of that suffering life and living with happiness."

In philosophical perspective Tamas has stated that "in Christianity after death of a person his/ her soul goes to heaven (Sargadesha) and to be live with God (Kitung). But in our traditional religion (Purban Saora Darma) the soul of a deceased goes to Kinnaraidesha (under-world/ hell). The dead are greedy, malevolent and cadaverous in nature. They always demands meat and wine through causing illness to fulfil their selfish desire to their living kins. Kinnaraidesha is the abode of those dead ancestral and supernatural spirits (Sonnums).

The love and fellow feeling among the Christians are stronger. We are not living hungry for a single day and getting food by the grace of Kitung (God). We always rely on Jisu Christa. Every thing is in his hand. The social

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5 Its nearest meaning according to the Hindu religious belief is Narka and nearest English meaning hell. However, the Saora concept of underworld does not mean exactly the Hindu concept of Narka.
6 Kitung in traditional concept of the Saora is the creator of the Saora. In the Christianised perception Kitung is understood as the creator of whole mankind and its meaning is equated with God.
perception of Tamasa has indicated that a son is preferred in the family who will take care of his parent in the old age.

Case Study No. Disna Raika/36/ Male/ Angora/Christianised.

Disna converted to Christianity about 12 years (in the year 1990) back. He has narrated his life history and the changes in his life after he became converted to Christianity. He describes: In the past (Purban) we were living in a shameful manner. The dress we were using was like a tail in which, a person was looking like a naked monkey. The women were using only a skirt (Gatungkap) without covering their breast. The living conditions of the people were unhygienic and unhealthy. The concept of cleaning the cloths and to have regular bath was very poor. Earlier people were afraid of outsiders because their dress and appearances are completely different to us. There was no education and awareness of our people about outside society. We were ignorant about outside world and the wisdom of other people.”

Disna reported that “after I accepted Christianity I found better and positive changes in my livelihood conditions. I learnt to read and write in Sora. I am also sending my children to school. We are maintaining cleanliness of our house and dress. I gave up drinking wine, which was very bad habit. My family is getting good dress and good food than ‘earlier’. If any one in my family falls sick I give them medicine or take injection from the doctor or hospital and offer prayer (Garbiran) to jisu Christa. Now I am living happily along with my family.”

Criticising the life style of traditional people he says, “In early days people were fallen sick frequently due to their unhygienic pattern of living.

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7 Purban means previous traditional times and state of living. It basically refers to the state of living in the traditional Saora faith.
8 Refer to his living conditions while he was in the traditional Saora religion.
Instead of taking medicines they perform Purpur (worship) and sacrifice of fowl, pig, buffalo, goat, etc. for curing the disease, which is completely a blind belief in no way cure the patient. Now all these practices are gradually changing. We are interacting freely with the outsiders without any fear. All this became possible because of the blessings of Kitung.”

In comparison to the worldview in Christianity and traditional faith Disna narrated his perception about the life in this world and the otherworld. He says, “In Hinduism after the death of a person its soul (Puradan) goes to Kinnaraidesha, which is called underworld or in a narrow sense called hell. However, in Christianity a man’s soul goes to heaven (Sargadesha) after its death and lives with Kitung (God). It is Jisu who will take him/her to heaven.”

Case Study No. Raonsi Raikal 52/Male/Sagad/Ch.

Raonsi is presently a Chalak (Bible teacher) at Borai. He adopted Christianity in the year 1966 immediately after his marriage. Raonsi narrated his personal life experience during traditional times and the new religious faith. He holds the view that “before me my mother adopted Christianity with the persuasion of my maternal uncle who belongs to village Karanjasing. Our family was practising traditional Saora religion. She was a shamanin (Kudanboi) in her parental village Karanjasing and then in Sagad. Our family was practising traditional Saora religion. We were four brothers. Once, three of my younger brothers including me were suffering from malaria and continuous (serious) fever. In our society we rarely know the name of disease but only know in the name of Sonnuns (ancestral and supernatural spirits) who causes the disease. At that time we called malaria and viral type of fever as Sayunasum or Dorisum. However, as a shamanin my mother arranged the sacrificial worships to heal my brothers, as our usual tradition in early days. She as a shamanin followed the tradition with strong belief in actions of
Sonnums and provided frequent sacrifices. The sacrificial rituals were continued for about two months as my brothers were continued to become serious. Each time a bigger sacrifice was demanded by the Sonnums and we had to offer. Because, we wanted to appease them (Sonnums) in anyway to get my brothers cured. We were very much scared of their rage. Thus, our family became forsaken and heavily indebted in purchasing the fowl, pigs, buffaloes and goats for ritual purposes. Finally, instead of getting cured three of them died, one after another. The family suffered from serious loss of money, time and physical strain but the most tragedy was death of my brothers.

Immediately after the death of my brothers I got with high fever. My maternal uncle then suggested my mother to take me to the missionary hospital at Serango. After the death of my brothers my mother had lost her faith and interest on traditional worships and sacrifices. She then realised and took me to Serango hospital with the help of my uncle. There, after taking medicines I got cured within three days. We stayed there for four days and got completely cured. The doctors also provided me free medicine, food, cloths, accommodation etc. The doctors were Gora Sahibs who had persuaded my mother to stop sacrifice and to take medicine for diseases. They also persuaded us to accept Christianity. However, with the persuasion of my uncle my mother first became Christian and in subsequent period I also accepted Christianity leaving all our traditional practices and beliefs.”

In criticising the traditional religion and practices of the Hill Saoras Raonsi has argued that “the traditional Lanjia society is full of superstition and blind belief for which people have been suffering from poverty, ill-health and misery. The ancestral spirits are always greedy for meat (Jellu) and wine, so as the people themselves. In each and every ritual occasion the sacrifices made in the rituals are practically shared by the people and the shaman (Kudan).
However, Christianity has given us happiness, prosperity and peaceful living.”

Case Study No.  

*Janjeka Dora*/58/Male/Anjarsing

*Janjeka* is a first generation convert in this area. In his case study he has emphasized on three important factors.

He holds the view that “in traditional* Indu* religion people were suffering from serious financial constraints and poverty due to their frequent ritual sacrifices and worships. Each ritual worship (*Purpur*) must be followed by a sacrifice of fowl or pig or buffalo or goat or cow. Even for a minor fever or illness the *Sonnums* demands sacrifice. So much money was needed to purchase the sacrificial animals and money for us like poor people is a great thing. However, whatever the problem may have you have to offer the sacrifice to get the person cure. The ghosts or Sonnums who generally causes illness has to be appeased at any costs to get the patient well. However, the expenditure meted out for ritual worships made us highly indebted and financial destitute.

Secondly, by giving his radical view against the traditional religious and healing practices *Janjeka* said that the most pathetic situation in our traditional religion is that people are worshiping and offering meat and wine to the *Sonnums* to cure a person from the disease. He has interrogated that “how can a person be cured without taking medicine or going to the hospital?” The patient ultimately become more serious and dies, which brings more tragedy and misery in the family along with heavy financial destitution.

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*Most of the converted *Saoras* refer the traditional group as Hindu, which in local *Sora* dialect they called it *Indu.*
Thirdly, the time factor. For frequent performance of rituals in traditional Saora religion involves so much of time and effort. Many rituals involve long time performance which hampers their daily work of livelihood and survival. The poor Hill Saora faces so much difficulty to manage his agricultural and non-agricultural work.

Finally, Janjeka has narrated his life after conversion. He says “my family life and the life of other people who accepted Christianity has changed a lot. In Christianity we do not need to spend so much money and time in rituals. There is no ritual to give animal sacrifice to Sonnums (Bhutas). People go to Girja (church) in every Sunday for one or two hours then return to their work. We are praying Jesus and eating medicines if falling in diseases. We are wearing good dress and eating good food than earlier. The frequent spending on healing rituals is stopped and we are now able to save from serious indebtedness and exploitation from the local Doms traders, who provided us the sacrificial animals. Now by the grace of Kitung (God) we became able to get education and better life.”

Case study no. Kablu Dalbehera/60/Male/ Anjarsing.

Kablu Dalbehera, aged about 60, a man of village Anjarsing adopted Christianity more than 40 years ago. He claims that Christianity has given him a new and better life. Criticising the religious practices and life style of the traditional Hinduised Saora Kablu says that “in Indu after the death of a person its soul (Puradan) goes to Kinnaraidesha (underworld or equivalent to hell) but in Christianity the soul goes to Sargadesha (heaven) and lives with Kitung (God or Jesus). In Hinduism Sonnums always demands sacrifice without which there will be serious damage to life and well-being of the
family but in Christianity only prayer (Garbiran) is offered to Jisun who made our life happy and prosperous. Heavy expenditure of money is prohibited in Christianity, while among the traditional Saoras each ritual performance is done by a sacrifice which needs huge expenses. We have learned Saora language and alphabet and are now become able to read and write. I am now writing letter to Assam and other places to my relatives and friends. Through missionaries we have been able to come in contact with the outside world and have some awareness about other outside society which was earlier completely unknown to us."

I am now sending my children to schools. Economically we are now better up than earlier. We are getting good food and taking medicines when fall in diseases. He is acknowledging the mercy of Jesus Christa for this change in his life and said that "he is rearing all of us".

The worldviews of both the groups have definitely had some bearing in determining their livelihood (practical). The difference of perceptions by these two groups of Hill Saoras is that there was always a fear psychosis existing in the minds of the traditional group about the ancestors and their anger and mercy to lead a happy and peaceful life. The Christians just offer prayer to Kittung God (Jesus) with love. As there is no belief in ancestral worship there is no fear or anxiety among the Christians. They have complete departure from the ancestral religious traditions and rituals.

Case study no. Kambul Dalbehera, aged about 52 years, village Anjarsing adopted Christianity some 30 years ago. He has narrated all his life history before and after conversion to Christianity. He holds the view that:

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10 Hill Saora used the term Jisun to refer to the name of Jesus Christ in local Sora dialect. This is also written in the Saora Bible.
When I was in Assam my father and mother had died from Mardisum (cholera) even after offering lots of sacrifices. Then after five six months my elder brother too died in Sayunasum (high fever like malaria). In our Saora religion disease and illness are caused by Sonnums. To cure a patient the sacrifices of animals are essential. Continuous sacrifices in the rituals have made us heavily indebted by spending lots of money in purchasing the animals. However, after the death of my brother I lost all my interests and faith in worshiping and sacrificing for the Sonnums. In the meantime, I came to know about Christianity first in Assam and then from some people Karanjasing. I saw they (converts) are living happily and peacefully with their family. They are no more sacrificial offering of meat and wine are given to the Sonnums for disease. All the traditional rituals are prohibited in Christianity. Taking wine is completely banned. The Christianised are well in dress pattern, food habits, health, education and economy than their traditional counterpart. First of all the Kirtuns are well aware about the outside world and day to day living of the modern mainstream society. I then visited to Serango hospital and expressed my willingness to become Christian. Finally, I got baptised (Duban in Sora) along with three other persons of my village at Karanjasing Church.”

Kambul has reported one of the conflicting situations arises with his friends who converted to Christianity along with him before six years. He states that “after six years remain in Christianity two of them rejoined in ancestral (Sonnums) worships and drank wine and sacrificial meats which were prohibited among the Christianised Saora. Meanwhile, I fell in chicken pox (Sinyal) with three other persons of my village. All the villagers along with these two persons had threatened and came to beat me with the reason that “I invited the bhutas (Sonnums) to the village to cause the disease by
becoming Christian”. One of them was a Kudan. However, I defied and counter charged him that “you are a Kudan and you have invited the Sonnums, how do you say that to me?” They threatened me to join in Purpu (ancestral worship). But I bluntly refused to do so and dared them to arrest me to police station with the Kudan. In the same year I was elected as Ward Member of my village. Later they avoid fighting with me and made friendship with me.”

Kambul also described another instances of his social life after he converted to Christianity. He says “I accepted second wife because my first wife had no male child. According to the Mandali principle a person is not allowed to marry more than one wife of the first one is alive. Violation of this principle invites suspension of primary membership and forbid a person to participate in any religious events of the Mandali. Hence, I was suspended from the membership of the Church. Nine years after my second marriage my first wife died I, then, wrote to the Mandali to forgive and allow me to the Church. Finally, I was accepted. During those nine years I was regularly offering my prayer to Kittung (God) at my home.”

When asked about the why do you prefer a son than a girl? Kambul replied that at the old age a son will take care of him and provide food. Because, a girl will live with her husband and in-laws house and she can not take care of her parents at the old age.

Criticising to the traditional practices and belief systems he said that “our ancestors (Sonnums) are always greedy for meat and wine. Even if we have nothing in our home and are living with poverty our Sonnums demands fowl, pig, buffalo, goat and wine. They do not care for people’s tragedy and poor economic conditions but frequently caused disease for meat and wine. That even creates doubt on the Kudan/ Kudanboi. Because we do not know
whether the Sonnums are really taking to the shamans and ask for meat and wine. It is rather a blind belief and covetousness of the shaman for meat and wine, who lies to the people for their own interests."

Elaborating the changes in his life after conversion Kambul states that "people calling us Lanjia Saara because earlier the dress we were using (even now by some aged person) was like a tail hanging behind. Lanjia Saara in local Oriya means the Saara having a tail. With that dress we were looking like a naked monkey and now feeling ashamed of our past. Jesus changed our life and we are now wearing good dress and getting good food. My children are going to school. Unlike our forefathers we are having bath daily. Liquor is completely prohibited among the Christians. When children fall sick I took them to the hospital and give medicines. Earlier we were afraid of government officials, Panos, Dombs and Paikas and were hiding in the forests. But now we are frequently visiting to the outside market and town and are sufficiently familiar with the outsiders." Kambul is now able to read Bible and write letter to his friends and relatives I ‘Sora.’

Case study: Singa Mandal/ 52/Male/Ch./ Agora.

Singa accepted Christianity 30 years ago by leaving all his traditional beliefs and practices behind. His opinion is basically focused on the material aspects of good and happy life, although he referred to the mercy of God in granting good lie and peaceful living. In the present circumstances Singa has observed that in the contemporary situation the following things are necessary to lead a happy and prosperous life:

i. Good harvesting and sufficient food for the family,
ii. Sufficient land for cultivation of paddy,
iii. Good income,
iv. Education and wisdom,

v. A son to take care of at the old age; and 

vi. Of course, the mercy and blessings of Prabhu (God). As a convert he has referred to the Jesus Christ.

Besides the above, Singa has mentioned that good communication and road facility will develop the area as well as the style of life. He states that “the road and communication now helping in the improvement of the standard of living of the people. Karanja, Tamarind, Jackfruit, red gram, sorghum, and many other products are sale in the market due to development of roads. We are able to go to the outside places for business and search of new income sources such as wage labour, service, small contractors, etc. Due to road and communication people became aware about the outside world and tried to search new economic opportunities and small jobs outside.” He has stated that “we were facing serious difficulties in early days because of very bad communication facilities. We had to walk for far distance by passing through several hills and ghats to reach at Gunupur, Nuagada, Gumma, Serango. Now to carry some heavy materials or goods we are hiring the trekkers, tractors and any other suitable conveyance directly to our own village.” He also stated that although there is better road connectivity now than earlier to the villages still the standard and conditions of roads needs more improvement upto bring bus services to this area.

Earlier due to lack of awareness and wisdom about the outside world our forefathers and fathers were exploited by the local Dumbas and Paikas. Earlier they were cheating and exploiting us with hard bargaining at the time of purchasing our products. They were forcibly and cunningly negotiated with us and were purchasing our produces in a very negligible price. Our innocent people were exploited by the Dombs by giving credit of sacrificial animals (buffaloes and goats) for ritual purposes. Now we do not need to purchase
Farewell to the Ancestor: A teacher preaching the Bible on his right sitting a woman Bible teacher.

Image no-89

Accepting a New Way of Life: women hearing the message in Sunday Church.
In Search of a Happy Life: The attendant of the male in Sagaad Baptist Church

Raising funds through collection of offerings.
The Bible teachers and office bearers of all the Mandalis of the area that comes under one Pastor are receiving orientation for the next month teaching at Putta. They are sharing their food after the session.
buffalo or pigs or goats any more because in Christianity there are no sacrifices and rituals worships. Secondly, after accepting Christianity we got education and became aware about the outside world, societies and market. Now our people are rarely becoming the victims of exploitation by the Dom and Paika traders. We are now selling our products more or less in good price than earlier.”

Happiness, Aesthetic and Recreational Life of both non-convert and convert Saoras.

During the celebration of rituals or ceremonies the traditional Saoras adopt a very cautious approach and show humbleness towards their ancestors and dead. They can not be over joy. Each ritual or festive occasion is meant for appeasing the ancestors with humbleness and seek the supernatural blessing. They do not get the ritual occasions are entertaining and pleasant. They do not celebrate the rituals for their own pleasure but to get the prosperity and good eyes of the Sonnums by making the Sonnums happy. Ancestor worship is one of the unique features of Hill Saora religious traditions. But for Christian Saora each ritual occasion is an occasion of happiness and joyful, although with full devotion. They have celebration of festivals like X-mass, Good Friday, New Year, etc. with sufficient fans fairs, feasting and merry making.

Summary

Our study also shows perceptions of a good life and development in the context of supernaturalism, pragmatic and material aspects of life and development based on some case studies. We have analysed perceptions of individuals relating to self-sustained and happy life in the present circumstances. Philosophically, the perceptions of good life can be divided
into two categories: traditional and modern which also non-convert and convert Saoras.

Supernatural forces play a major role in the community’s well-being and happy life by providing good monsoon, good crops, good harvests and good health and so on. They can also bring calamity, poverty, epidemic and disaster in case of disobedience and negligence. To live a happy and prosperous life means to first keep your ancestors cool and happy. Their happiness benefits on two counts first: (i) no diseases no sacrifice and (ii) no exploitation and hard bargaining from the animals.

The dead have the utmost importance in the religious culture of Hill Saoras. The good-life and well being depends upon the mercy of the dead. The sorrow and happiness, health and sickness all depend upon the ancestral spirits. Therefore, the death rituals in the Saora religious traditions are very intricate and carried out with strict observation of rules and customs by offering huge sacrifice of buffaloes. Without dead the religion of Hill Saora is non-existent. They also preserve and protect the seeds over the loft (Maadaa), crop fields from wild animals, insects, etc.

In contrast to the non-converts, the converts’ way of life is similar to the modern way of life or the life-style of the mainstream population. The case studies of the convert Saoras indicate that good harvesting and sufficient food for the family, sufficient land for cultivation of paddy, good income, education and wisdom, are the main attributes of a good life. A son to take care of the parents in the old age and of course the mercy and blessings of the Prabhu (God) are other aspects of a good life. A convert refers to the Jesus Christ. A good communication and facility of roads, wisdom and awareness help to check exploitation.
Although both the groups mentioned about a strict observation of supernatural and ethical guidance to lead a happy and good life, the non-convert Saoras are more rigid and vigorously follow religious and supernatural principles and ethics compared to the converts. It is observed that the concept of a good and happy life and well-being is not the same among the Saoras and the non-Saoras. As an indigenous community the Saoras are still having a traditional mode of life and ancestral practices of cult. The Hill Saora's concept of good life, happiness and prosperity is mainly revolves round the supernatural and ancestral spirits, which they call Sonnums. Both the Saoras- the non-converts and converts have some common perceptions relating to existential concerns.

We have also analysed the role of technical and non-technical aspects of indigenous knowledge in self-sustained life and community well-being. It has observed that the non-technical aspects are weakening with the influence of the practical aspects induced by the external as well as internal forces of change. To lead a good and prosperous life the emphasis is now shifting towards the material and practical achievements in place of supernatural and non-technical values.