

Interrogating Bishwas: Reimagining a Christian Neighbourhood in Kolkata, India

Authors : Abhijit Dasgupta

Abstract : This paper explores the everyday lives of the Christians residing in a Bengali Christian neighborhood in Kolkata, termed here as the larger Christian para (para meaning neighborhood in Bengali). Through ethnography and reading of secondary sources, the paper discerns how various Christians across denominations - Protestants, Catholics and Pentecostals implicate the role of bishwas (faith and belief) in their interpersonal neighborhood relations. The paper attempts to capture the role of bishwas in producing, transforming and revising the meaning of 'neighbourhood' and 'neighbours' and puts forward the argument of the neighbourhood as a theological product. By interrogating and interpreting bishwas through everyday theological discussions and reflections, the paper examines and analyses the ways everyday theology becomes an essential source of power and knowledge for the Bengali Christians in reimagining their neighbourhood compared to the nearby Hindu neighbourhoods. Borrowing literature from everyday theology, faith and belief, the paper reads and analyses various interpretations of theological knowledge across denominations to probe the prominence of bishwas within the Christian community and its role in creating a difference in their place of dwelling. The paper argues that the meaning of neighbourhood is revisited through prayers, sermons and biblical verses. At the same time, the divisions and fissures are seen among Protestants and Catholics and also among native Bengali Protestants and non-native Protestant pastors, which informs us about the complexity of theology in constituting everyday life. Thus, the paper addresses theology's role in creating an ethical Christian neighbourhood amidst everyday tensions and hostilities of diverse religious persuasions. At the same time, it looks into the processes through which multiple theological knowledge leads to schism and interdenominational hostilities. By attempting to answer these questions, the paper brings out Christians' negotiation with the neighbourhood.

Keywords : anthropology, bishwas, christianity, neighbourhood, theology

Conference Title : ICAR 2023 : International Conference on Anthropology of Religion

Conference Location : Helsinki, Finland

Conference Dates : July 06-07, 2023