STUDYDADDY

Get Homework Help From Expert Tutor

Get Help

Anger over Virgin Mary dressed in tribal sari

Around 20,000 march on church in protest over statue

- Ritu Sharma, New Delhi
- India
- August 27, 2013

Some 20,000 tribal people in Jharkhand state in eastern India have marched on a village church, accusing local Christians of trying to convert them by dressing up a Virgin Mary statue in tribal clothing.

Members of the animist Sarna faith have been complaining since the statue was inaugurated in the Singpur village church in May.

But the standoff escalated on Sunday when the marchers took a normal statue of Mary to the church, aiming to replace the offending item, which depicts the Virgin Mary wearing a sari with traditional red borders, holding the infant Jesus.

Police blocked the protesters 25 meters from the church. Local head of police Jagannath Oraon said that they were seeking to avoid a confrontation and peace was quickly restored.

Bandham Tigga, head priest of the Sarna tribals, said the sari-clad statue marks the latest effort to deliberately confuse and convert tribal people in the area.

"If the idol of Mother Mary is shown in the outfit of a tribal woman, then 100 years from now people will think that Mother Mary was a tribal from Jharkhand," he said.

Cardinal Telesphore Toppo, who is also the archbishop of the state capital Ranchi, defended the statue saying it was inside the church compund and therefore not in a public place.

"Christians are also tribals and we have full rights to tribal traditions," he said. "How can Sarna members exclude us when they speak about tribal culture?"

Conversions remain controversial in India with rules differing by state. Several have passed anti-conversion laws in the past decade, a trend that the US State Department claims is designed to institutionalize Hinduism.

In Jharkhand, tribal followers of Sarna outnumber Christians but their animist faith is not recognized officially by the Indian government.

STUDYDADDY

Get Homework Help From Expert Tutor

Get Help