



Research Paper

The Amabeda - Bade Tevda Incident in Chhattisgarh

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Abstract: Disputes linked to religious conversion and ritual practices in Chhattisgarh's Scheduled Areas have increasingly intersected with questions of governance, administrative authority, and social order. This paper examines the Amabeda - Bade Tevda incident of December 2025 in North Bastar Kanker district, Chhattisgarh, as an empirical case study to analyze how such disputes evolve under conditions of institutional ambiguity [1]. Drawing on primary documentary evidence including detailed media reports, written complaints, and reported digital communications, the study reconstructs the sequence of events surrounding a contested burial, subsequent violence, illegal conversion and broader social mobilization [2]. Rather than advancing normative judgments, the paper situates the incident within the structural context of Fifth Schedule governance, highlighting the interaction between customary authority, formal administration, and external organizational involvement [3]. The analysis suggests that the escalation cannot be understood solely through the lens of religious difference, but reflects deeper tensions arising from delayed administrative resolution, perceived institutional partiality, and the entry of external actors into the disputes.

Keywords -Scheduled Areas governance, Religious conversion disputes, Tribal customary institutions, Administrative response and bias, Conflict escalation dynamics, Amabeda-Bade Tevda case study,

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I. Introduction

Governance in Chhattisgarh's Scheduled Areas operates through a layered institutional framework combining constitutional protections, customary authority, and formal administrative mechanisms [4]. While this framework is intended to safeguard tribal culture, it often generates zones of procedural uncertainty when competing normative systems intersect. Disputes associated with religious conversion have emerged as a recurring point of tension within this arrangement, particularly when changes in religious affiliation bring with them alterations in ritual practices related to worship, land use, burial, and collective identity [5].

The Amabeda - Bade Tevda incident, which unfolded between 15 and 18 December 2025 in Kanker district, offers an analytically useful case for examining these dynamics [6]. The episode involved disagreement over burial practices following the death of a Non-Christian individual (Father of converted Christian), subsequent violence involving multiple groups, and a delayed administrative response that culminated in wider social mobilization [7]. Rather than treating the incident as an isolated clash, this paper frames it as an instance where institutional ambiguity, external mobilization, illegal conversion and administrative discretion converged.

The central research question guiding this study is: How did governance structures and administrative practices shape the trajectory of the Amabeda - Bade Tevda incident, and what does this reveal about the management of conversion-related disputes in Scheduled Areas? The paper proceeds by outlining a conceptual framework, reconstructing the incident empirically, and situating it within broader structural patterns.

II. Conceptual and Analytical Framework

This study adopts an institutional governance perspective commonly used in security studies and public policy research. Rather than attributing outcomes to individual intent or ideological motivation, the framework emphasizes institutional interaction, the manner in which formal law, customary authority, and administrative discretion intersect in practice.

In Fifth Schedule areas, governance authority is distributed across elected panchayats including Gram Sabhas, traditional tribal customary laws, district administration, and law enforcement agencies [8]. Religious conversion introduces an additional normative layer, particularly when converts seek to exercise religious practices that diverge from established traditional tribal community norms [9]. Prior reports from Scheduled Areas suggests that such intersections frequently produce procedural uncertainty, wherein officials hesitate to act decisively due to legal ambiguity, fear of escalation, or concerns over perceived bias [10].

This framework allows the Amabeda - Bade Tevda incident to be examined as a process shaped by structural conditions: burial practices, the presence of external organizational actors, and the timing and sequencing of administrative intervention.

III. Context: Religious Conversion and Scheduled Areas in Chhattisgarh

Chhattisgarh has witnessed a gradual increase in reported religious conversion activity, particularly in tribal-dominated districts [11]. Census data indicate a rise in the officially recorded Christian population over the last two decades, while independent reports suggest that informal and unregistered religious spaces may significantly exceed official figures [12] [13]. These developments complicate administrative oversight and accurate demographic assessment.

Conversion activity has been disproportionately concentrated among tribal communities, where limited access to state services, and the presence of missionary networks intersect [14]. While conversion is legally permissible under certain conditions, disputes frequently arise around associated practices, including burial, worship, and participation in collective rituals [15].

Burial practices, in particular, occupy a sensitive position within tribal governance. In tribal villages, cremation or burial follows customary norms tied to ancestral land and collective consent [16]. Deviations from these norms, especially when conducted on private land without community or Gram Sabha's approval, have previously generated disputes, sometimes escalating due to delayed or unclear administrative intervention [17].

IV. Methodology and Sources

This paper relies on qualitative analysis of primary documentary sources, including:

1. Detailed, time-stamped factual reports of the events in Amabeda - Bade Tevda.
2. A formal written complaint submitted by a local resident detailing alleged illegal conversion practices, burial disputes, violence, and administrative conduct .
3. Contextual reports on conversion practices and church networks in tribal regions of central and eastern India .

The analysis follows a descriptive-analytical approach. Events are reconstructed chronologically, followed by interpretation focused on institutional behavior rather than legal culpability. Digital communications referenced in the documents are treated as reported evidence relevant to perception and mobilization, not as legally authenticated proof.

V. The Amabeda - Bade Tevda Incident: Empirical Reconstruction

5.1 Death and Initial Community Deliberation (15-16 December)

On 15 December 2025, a resident of Bade Tevda Mr. Chamra Ram Salam died during medical treatment at Kanker district hospital. No dispute was reported at the hospital level. The body was transported to the village later that night. On the morning of 16 December, village representatives convened a customary discussion to determine funeral arrangements in accordance with established tribal practices [18].

During this period, according to local villagers, individuals associated with Christian institutions and external organizations were present at the site. The deceased's Son and some family members, having adopted Christianity, asserted their intention to conduct burial rites according to Christian customs on private land within the village boundary [18].

5.2 Escalation and Administrative Presence (16-17 December)

Tensions escalated as disagreements over burial location and ritual authority intensified. Statements recorded of villagers indicate that threats and assertions of political or administrative backing were made by some individuals supporting the burial, contributing to heightened fear among local residents [19].

Police personnel arrived intermittently and advised restraint, indicating that senior officials would assess the situation. However, despite these assurances, the burial reportedly proceeded with Christian customs without formal authorization in a contested location. Attempts by villagers to submit written objections were delayed or declined, according to complaint records [18].

5.3 Digital Evidence and External Mobilization (Evening of 17 December)

Digital materials circulating locally on the evening of 17 December, including screenshots of WhatsApp communications, reportedly referenced mobilization by individuals linked to Bhim Army networks [20]. While the authenticity and forensic status of these materials remain unverified, their circulation contributed to a widespread perception among villagers that the violence involved organized actors from outside the immediate community.

Testimonies from local tribal residents, including statements attributed to the Pargana Manjhi (Traditionally dead of 40 villages), indicate that groups identified as Bhim Army members or supporters, alongside members of the Christian community, participated in physical assaults on 17 December [21]. Several villagers were reportedly injured and hospitalized. These accounts, while not constituting judicial findings, are documented consistently across multiple submissions and testimonies [21].

Analytically, the relevance of these claims lies in their implication of externalized mobilization, which tends to shift disputes from negotiated community processes toward confrontational mass action.

5.4 Allegations of Administrative Bias

Alongside claims of external involvement, villagers repeatedly alleged bias on the part of district-level officials, including the Superintendent of Police, Sub-Divisional Magistrate, and Tehsildar [22]. According to local accounts, administrative responses during 16-17 December were perceived as selectively permissive toward one group while constraining others [22].

These assertions remain allegations rather than determinations of misconduct. However, governance research indicates that perceived bias can undermine institutional legitimacy as effectively as demonstrable bias, particularly in plural and high-trust-deficit environments. Complaint documents suggest that the absence of clear written orders or transparent clarification regarding burial legality reinforced suspicions of administrative partiality .

5.5 Transfer of the Burial and Destruction of an Allegedly Illegal Structure (18 December)

On 18 December 2025, after approximately 3:00 PM, the body was transferred to a Christian graveyard located outside the immediate Tehsil area, effectively resolving the original burial dispute. This transfer occurred after significant violence had already taken place [23].

Local accounts state that during the process, tribal villagers attempting to accompany or engage with the transfer were subjected to physical force by individuals identified as members of Bhim Army and members of the Christian community. These claims are documented in written submissions but have not been independently adjudicated [22].

Subsequently, a group of villagers damaged a alleged church structure in Bade Tevda, described by them as an illegally constructed building lacking administrative permission. Available documentation suggests that this act emerged as a reactive response following prolonged tension, physical violence, and perceived institutional failure, rather than as a pre-planned objective [24] [18].

5.6 Post-Incident Mobilization and the Chhattisgarh Bandh (24 December)

In the aftermath of the violence, organizations (Social/Trade/Business) under the banner of Sarva Samaj announced a statewide Chhattisgarh Bandh for 24 December 2025 [25]. Media reports described the bandh as widely observed across multiple districts, with significant participation and limited counter-violence [26].

While bandh participation cannot be treated as a precise indicator of public opinion, its scale indicates that the Amabella - Bade Tevda incident resonated beyond its immediate geographic context, becoming symbolically linked to broader concerns regarding governance, conversion, and administrative neutrality.

VI. Analysis: Institutional Dynamics and Escalation

The Amabella - Bade Tevda incident illustrates how conversion-related disputes in Scheduled Areas are shaped by overlapping institutional uncertainties. Administrative intervention remained largely reactive rather than preventive [22]. Law enforcement presence did not translate into decisive mediation or formal orders prior to escalation, reflecting broader challenges in Fifth Schedule governance where officials often operate under conditions of legal ambiguity and political sensitivity.

The reported involvement of external actors further altered the conflict trajectory by expanding the scale of mobilization and reducing opportunities for localized negotiation [20]. Digital communications, regardless of their legal status, functioned as accelerants by shaping perceptions of threat and coordination [20].

VII. Comparative and Contextual Considerations

Comparable disputes in other tribal regions, including parts of Jharkhand and the Northeast, exhibit similar patterns: initial ritual disagreement, administrative hesitation, followed by rapid escalation once external actors enter the dispute [27] [28]. These cases suggest that such incidents are less about isolated religious antagonism and more about unresolved jurisdictional ambiguity within plural governance systems.

The Amabella - Bade Tevda case aligns with these broader observations, indicating structural rather than exceptional dynamics.

VIII. Discussion

The integrated evidence suggests that the Amabella - Bade Tevda incident emerged from a convergence of illegal conversion, delayed administrative response, and external mobilization. Resolution of the burial dispute occurred only after significant social cost had already been incurred, highlighting the consequences of institutional indecision.

The case underscores how perceived administrative partiality, illegal conversion and the absence of transparent procedural decisions can erode trust, prompting communities to seek redress through collective action rather than formal channels.

IX. Conclusion

This paper has examined the Amabella - Bade Tevda incident as a case study in governance and administrative response within a Scheduled Area. By reconstructing events empirically and situating them within a broader structural context, the analysis demonstrates how conversion-related disputes can escalate when institutional authority remains procedurally ambiguous and externally contested.

The study does not introduce prescriptive solutions. Instead, it identifies areas for further research, including clearer procedural frameworks for ritual disputes, mechanisms for early administrative mediation, and the role of digital communication in conflict escalation. Addressing these gaps remains essential for understanding governance stability in culturally plural and legally complex regions.

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