

Tribal Indians burn cardinal's effigy to protest Bible translation

RANCHI, India - A group of tribal people in India has burned effigies of Ranchi Cardinal Telesphore Toppo, holding him responsible for a Protestant Bible they say insults their indigenous religion.

On Sept. 22 protesters shouted slogans against the prelate, the first Asian tribal cardinal, reported the Asian church news agency UCA News. They blamed him for the publication of the "anti-tribal Bible" and burned effigies of the Catholic leader in front of the bishop's house in Ranchi.

The Bible Society of India, a Protestant organization, published the Bible translation into the Oraon tribe's Kurukh dialect in 2000.

Manoj Lakra, a journalist, told UCA News the protesters hold Cardinal Toppo, an ethnic Oraon, responsible for the Protestant translation because they do not understand denominational differences and consider the cardinal head of all tribal Christians in the state. The Catholic Church is by far the largest Christian group in the region and is popular for its education and health services.

The protesters told members of the press in Ranchi they objected to the translation's rendering of "tree" as "sarna" in the Book of Deuteronomy. "Sarna" denotes the tribal worship place normally set under a tree. The word is also used to describe the community of non-Christian tribal people who follow the Sarna worship system.

The protesting group is considered to have the backing of pro-Hindu groups in the area, UCA News reported. The group did not explain why it waited eight years after publication of the translation to air objections.

Cardinal Toppo told UCA News the translated word “was wrong,” but noted that the Catholic Church does not belong to the Bible Society of India. The society’s officials in the state, he added, have acknowledged the mistake and announced they will withdraw the Bible.