

A Socio-Evangelistic Mobilization of the Depressed Castes in late 19th Century Colonial Coastal Andhra

Santha Kumari Jetty
Columbus State University, Georgia, USA
Jetty_santhakumari@columbusstate.edu

Abstract

The socio-evangelistic mobilization of depressed castes was afforded by Christian missions in 19th century colonial Andhra, by advocating that depressed castes disengaged with old traditions, customs and worship. While this efforts was viewed with suspicion by some, educated members of the society accepted missionaries as agents of social change among depressed castes. Missionaries were great pioneers of education within the region, conducting vernacular and English schools for children, irrespective of caste. This combination of proselytization and reform created avenues for upward social mobility among the depressed castes especially in South India. In the light of proclaimed spiritual equality and the just society afforded by Christianity, a new wave of adherence and conversion began among the depressed castes, influenced by the Gospel – a consciousness combined with deep dissatisfaction with established order. A combination of internal and external factors contributed to reform and precipitation of change in society, as social mobility was legitimated by a desire to convert. The main objective of this article is to examine the growth in social consciousness among *Mālas* and *Mādigas*, as they encountered Christian missionaries, and were motivated to consciously abandon their traditional religious practices to adopt a new faith. Through Christianity, they progressed in education and achieved occupational mobility, striving to create social identity.

Keywords: Caste, Christianity, Coastal Andhra, missionaries, social reform

Introduction

Conversion and social change among the depressed castes¹ of Andhra Pradesh, especially the *Mālas* and the *Mādigas*, in the second part of the 19th century makes

¹ A term used by the Colonial administration to designate those who were considered outside the four-fold varnas/castes. In the hierarchically ordered Indian society the 'caste people' were categorized as upper castes and *Sūdra* castes (Backward/middle or lower castes). Traditionally, those outside the four-fold castes were called 'outcastes' or panchamas (fifth caste), 'untouchables', etc. After Independence, the Depressed Castes/Classes were officially called 'Scheduled Castes' and

an interesting study for the dynamics of upward social mobility. It is unsurprising that in the second part of the 19th century, Christianity and missionaries spearheaded various social, economic, religious and spiritual reforms among depressed castes (Varikoti-Jetty, 2019). The main goal of this paper is to briefly outline the upliftment of the *Mālas* and the *Mādigas* under the influence of Christian missionaries in the context of their present-day social status, while contradictions have been created by the Scheduled Castes Order (1950). According to the order, SCs or Dalits exist only among Hindu, Buddhist or Sikhs, whereas converted Dalits are denied SC status and debarred them from Government benefits. In order to comprehend how Christian converts lack privilege in independent India, where laws push them down the socio-economic ladder, it is essential to know more about the upliftment of these castes by Christian missionaries in the second half of the 19th century. The geographical area of this study comprises districts of Vizagapatam, Godavari, Kistna, Guntur and Nellore that were erstwhile parts of the Madras Presidency (Government of India, 1909: 288). According to official records, Christian converts in the Madras presidency belonged to the Lutheran, Baptist and Anglican denominations (Risley, 1903: 387). According to the Census Reports of 1871, there were 7,670 Christians in the Kistna district alone (with Guntur) and 10,802 without Guntur by 1891 (Cornish, 1874: 102). Guntur district alone, stood at a headcount of 79,479 (Sturart, 1893: 69) and in 1901, together with Guntur, Christians of the Kistna district formed the highest proportion of the Christian population than any other district north of Madras city (The Government of India, 1909: 324). Also, according to the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Baptists in Nellore and Ongole were counted to be 88,967, and the Lutheran adherents of the Kistna and Godavari districts stood at 20,000 at the close of the 19th century (Ibid.). Today, Christians are found in large numbers in the coastal districts of Vizianagaram, Vizagapatam, two Godavari districts, Krishna and Nellore district. As far as Coastal Andhra is concerned, a maximum number of converts belonged to the *Māla* and *Mādiga* castes, since these were the only groups that received Christian missionaries to construct a new and positive social identity, and consciously changing their lives to enhance their status (Forrester, 1977: 45). While *Mālas* were traditionally an agricultural laboring caste, the *Mādigas* were traditionally leather workers (Baines, 1912: 9). These castes had suffered social and economic marginalization for centuries and references to their 'non-Aryan' origin can be found in Oppert's *On the Original Inhabitants of Bharatavarṣa or India* (1898). The *Mālas* were more homogeneous, with various sub castes and *Jati* (birth), traditions and customs. Nicholson describes *Mālas* as '*Kudipaita*' or a right-hand caste, that allowed their women to wear a cloth over their right shoulder (1926: 91-103). Being an agricultural labouring caste, they were also engaged in the allied occupation of weaving (Baines, 1912: 9). They were known to work for the *Súdra* caste in return for a minimum wage (Dubois, 1906: 49). While the *Súdras* supplied them with cotton, *Māla* women spun clothing for *Súdras* (Ware, 1912: 82). They were known

recently the generic term 'Dalits' is functionally adopted by the Scheduled Castes themselves. (Roth and Wittich. 1978: 493; also see M.N. Srinivas' 'Introduction', in Srinivas, 1990).

to be Saivite prior to conversion into Christianity (Nicholson, 1926: 91). The Madigas on the other hand were denoted by the name *Kārāvāra*, or according to the Sanskrit dictionary, the *Carma- Kāra* (Charmakara), who were shoe makers and leather workers (Williams, 1892: 221). Due to their handling of leather, *Mādigas* lived a considerable distance away from upper caste dwellings (Thurston, 1909: 294). According to Thurston, the *Mādigas* belong to the 'left-hand caste' or the *Edamapaitavaru* (Thurston, 1909: 295). The left-hand faction was considered to comprise of trading classes and artisanal castes, whom *Mādigas* helped (Dubois, 1906: 25). Social and economic conditions among these two castes was attributed to their occupation that involved agriculture serfdom and leather handling and they were poorly compensated for their work, often being considered slaves. Traditionally, until Christian conversion, the *Mālas* and the *Mādigas* were regarded as Hindu, and they took on an important role in village festivals (Clough, 1891: 93). Despite differentiated social standing and a lack of homogeneity, these two castes were placed at the same rung on the caste social ladder.

Christian Missionaries

After the East India company permitted Christian missionary activities with the passing of the Charter Act of 1813, colonial India received a growing number of Christian missionary societies (London Missionary Society, the Canadian Baptist Mission, the Godavari Delta Mission, the Church Missionary Society, the American Evangelical Lutheran Mission, and the American Baptist Mission) that made their way into Madras Presidency, areas that included coastal Andhra. While Christian missionaries worked among natives by preaching the gospel, rendering works of mercy and empowerment possible, by establishing educational institutions, health care facilities and economic avenues, the conversion of natives remained a primary motive. The London Missionary Society (LMS) was the first to lay mission foundations in coastal Andhra, in early 19th century, their evangelism preparing future ground for missions here. LMS missionaries were actively interested in translating the Bible and other scriptures and literary tracts. A revised version of the New Testament, portions of the Old Testament and twenty thousand tracts were printed under the guidance of Revs. Cran, Granges, Hay, Gordon, Porter and Dawson (Hough, 1845: 504). While Christian missions largely worked among lower castes, some early converts came from upper caste society, such as Purushottam Chaudhary, Pulipaka Jagannadham and Anandarayer, a *Brahmin* and Telugu Bible translator. At the end of the 19th century, there were a reasonable number of native converts connected to the LMS stations of Vizagapatnam and Vizianagaram (The Government of India, 1885: 140). The missionary activities of the Canadian Baptist Mission (CBM) were concentrated in Cocanada (present city of Kakinada) from 1874 and spread to Vizagapatam, Bimlipatnam, Tekkali, Gunnanapudi, Tuni, Akidu (Akividu), Samalkota, Vuyyuru, Bodagunta, Yelamanchili, Bobbili, Avanigadda, Ramachandrapuram, and Pithapuram (Craig, 1908: 34). The CBM established a vast

network of educational and technical schools, bringing a perceptible change to the life of converts, by providing converts and their children with educational and employment opportunities. In terms of other missions, the founder of the Godavari Delta mission (Plymouth Brethren Mission), Anthony Norris Groves, established an independent mission as an alternative to the mighty government-supported mission establishments of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). Guided by the principles of 'precedence of the scriptures' over 'Ecclesiastical Authority and Church', Groves and his associates worked strenuously in the Godavari delta region to proclaim the Gospel. Their wives gathered village women on the other hand and taught them the Gospel (Groves, 1869: 644). The missionaries of the CMS first came to Masulipatnam with active support from the British Crown, from where they spread to Bezwada, Kondapalli and Eluru. The first CMS missionaries were 'University Men' Robert Turlington Noble and Henry Watson Fox, who were convinced of reaching out to Hindus by preaching in bazaars and utilizing Christian schools as agencies of conversion (Stock, 1917: 102). But the slow pace of conversions made missionaries turn their attention to the depressed castes, who were eager to receive external support. This was testified by the *Mālas* of Pattametta who asked missionary Rev. Sharkey "if they were to convert into Christianity, whether they could wear the Sharai (shortpant)? (Gledstone, 1941: 7) The CMS mission won the hearts of the *Mālas* and even at present, Christian adherents of the *Māla* caste outnumber other castes. Some historians view the conversion among depressed castes as a 'caste movement', wherein caste was transferred into the Church after conversion (Manickam, 1988: 55-56).² Another prominent mission, the American Evangelical Lutheran Mission conducted vast missionary enterprises in the towns and surrounding villages of Guntur and Rajahmundry. Founded by Rev. Christian Frederick Heyer of the Pennsylvania Ministerium on 31 July 1842, the first converts were *Mālas* and this tradition continues (Wolf, 1896: 87). This missionary activism also resulted in the taking up of the missionary activities by clergymen, namely, Burger, Dunkelberger, Fink, Neudoerffer, Roy Strock, Slifer, Prakasam, Moyer and Gopal (Swavelly, 1952: 229). Last but not the least, the American Baptist Mission (ABM) founded by Rev. Samuel S. Day was known as "the miracles of modern missions", and activities of this mission were concentrated in Nellore, Ongole and other adjacent towns and villages. The mission had a humble beginning in the city of Richmond, Virginia, in 1835, and Rev. Day conducted evangelical services in Nellore for twenty-six years thereafter, resulting in the mission being named the '*Lone Star of the Telugu Mission*' (Smith, 1883: 42-44). The conversion of Yerraguntla Periah at the mission and the admission of *Mādigas* into the Church ushered a multitude of other *Madigas* into the Christian fold (Clough, 1891: 84). Conversions took place on a large scale at Talakondapadu, Markapur, Ongole, Ramapatnam and Vellumpilly (Clough, 1891: 268). At the group conversion at Vellumpilly on 3 July 1878, a number of 2222 people were baptised. In 1882, six

² During the early decades of the nineteenth century the activities of the Lutheran Church in North America were confined to two bodies, namely, the Ministerium of Pennsylvania and the General Synod. (Drach and Kuder, 1914: 12)

hundred villages under the influence of the ABM, contained ten American missionaries, forty-six ordained native preachers, two hundred and forty-nine unordained native preachers, two hundred theological students, and an estimated fifty three thousand adherents (Sherring, 1884: 410).

Group conversion movements among the *Mālas* and the *Mādigas* between 1870 and 1950 are important and also contextualized within the Indian Independence movement that led to the decline of missionary activities and the emergence of Indian church leadership. Contrary to the public opinion on the 19th century Christian conversion of depressed classes in Andhra region that they were coerced into becoming Christians, this paper argues that the depressed class conversion was based on voluntary choice, notwithstanding the consequential benefits that they might have received due to such conversion. Converts made conscious decisions about their new faith. For example, Pagolu Venkayya from Raghavapuram said, "this is my God, and this is my Savior. I have long been seeking for Him, now I have found Him" (The Church Missionary Society, 1881: 190). Similarly, Yerraguntla Periah's burning zeal for the souls of his fellow-men led flock of the *Mādigas* into Christianity (Cough, 1891: 63). In Rev. Clough's words, the converts' minds were not fixed on rupees but wanted salvation for their souls. The people pleaded him by saying, "we are very poor, our huts are fallen down, and we have not much to eat but leaves. But we do not ask you for money. We will not ask you for the smallest copper coin, even though we starve to death, we believe in Jesus, we want to be baptized" (Clough, 1891: 264). When the Gospel came, people received and accepted it; however, it is important to note that baptism was administered only after a thorough demonstration of faith (Clough, 1899: 5). In the mission stations of the CBM, frequent group baptisms were reported not only under missionaries, but also under the native leadership. It may be noticed that conversion here did not occur solely due to the deprivation of people under famine conditions. Instead, even under thriving economic conditions, the aspirants called for better ways for achieving an alternative identity through Christianity. At the end of the 19th century, the CBM had already established eighty churches in Cocanada, Kollair, Akidu and Gunnapudi. With an aggregate membership of about seventeen thousand Christians, church congregations maintained a vast circle of village communities guided by teacher-evangelists (Craig, 1908: 258). The Godavari Delta Mission had also conducted significant evangelistic work through preaching and educational activities among depressed castes. During the construction of the anicut across the Godavari River at Dowlaishvaram between 1847 and 48, thousands of coolies were employed by the chief engineer Sir Arthur Cotton, who invited Rev. Beer and Rev. Bowden to preach the Gospel (Moses, 2004: 130). By 1880, six native preachers were fully engaged in preaching the Gospel, while three hundred converts founded a local Christian fellowship, covering some thirty villages (Sherring, 1884: 417). The CMS began evangelizing in 1847 in the Kistna District and the *Māla* village headman of

Kondapalli was the first to convert (Moses, 2004: 35). He shared the Gospel, not only among his fellow caste men, but also in the neighbouring hamlets where it was reported that more than 100 men were placed under Christian instruction (Lovett, 1899: 138). *Mālas* living in the Pattametta area of Bezwada asked Rev. Edmund Sharkey to baptize them, and Rev. Sharkey's efforts were complimented by fellow missionaries such as Rev. Henry Fox, Rev. Thomas Young Darling, and Rev. F. N Alexander (Oddie, 1977: 73). The statistics on mass conversions in the Kistna District comprised of 1,414 converts in Masulipatnam, 516 in Bezwada, and 756 in Raghavapuram (Mackenzie, 1883: 289) The group conversion movement in Andhra saw considerable speed during the first decade of the 20th century, where Christian populations grew at a fast pace of 12,855 per month (Moses, 2004: 184). The missionaries of the American Evangelical Lutheran mission too, were quite fruitful in their evangelistic tasks, beginning in 1844. Their first converts were among the *Mālas*, and in 1859, when other missionary societies were struggling to get even a single convert, the number of baptisms at the AELM were recorded to be forty-four. Besides this, there were 16 confirmations and 109 communicants. In 1867, the number of Christians under the AELM's influence stood at six hundred and eighty, with three hundred and fifty communicants. By 1894, there were nearly two thousand *Māla* Christians in Bhimavaram, who were active in the tasks of church building and consecration under the AELM. In 1905, Dr. Harpster reported that there were 11,938 baptized members at the Church (Drach and Kuder, 1914: 291 and 355). However, the ABM's group conversion movements were the most remarkable in modern missionary history. Rev. Clough was the most important missionary, to lead *Mādigas* group conversions. On 2 July 1878, on the banks of the river Gundlakamma, a large number of people gathered in a Tamarind grove, asking Rev. Clough for Baptism, "we do not want help. By the blisters on our hands we can prove to you that we have worked and will continue to work. If the next crops fail, we shall die. We want to die as Christians. Baptize us, therefore!" (Clough, 1891: 279). On that day itself, 2202 *Mādigas* took baptism and were admitted into the Church (Moses, 2004: 32). At Ramayapatnam, another 600 converts were baptized in gatherings that are described above (Downie, 1892: 115).

Christian Converts

Conversion lifted individuals and families out of depressed conditions, recreating their identity, based on their upliftment process (Pickett, 1933: 78). The propagation of the Gospel invariably involved the establishment of educational institutions, health care facilities, skill building schools and technical training, and relief measures during natural calamities (Mackenzie, 1883: 289). Conversion did not simply entail a change of religion, but it entailed many changes in other aspects of life — like social, economic, educational, cultural

and so on. Upon being baptized, the *Māla* and *Mādiga* converts placed themselves under instruction, and demonstrated an intense desire to learn (Lovett, 1899: 138). The desire for education, especially for future generations, rather than the tending of cattle or agricultural field, was the most significant outcome of mass conversions in Colonial Andhra (Oddie, 1975: 73). In Rev. Clough's words, converts begged for teachers to be sent to their villages (Clough, 1891: 302). Boys and girls, who had received education in mission schools became intelligent members of the community (Ibid.,: 381). When a village had an adequate number of Christians, a primary vernacular school was begun there, with subsidies received from the government. Boarding schools provided converts with opportunities of self-expression and self-discipline, and after completing middle-level education, pupils were sent for teachers-training, to teach in village schools (Wolf, 1896: 225-226). The learning schedule in schools began with the basic instruction in Christian doctrines, followed by classes on basic language. Instruction in English was also started at the primary level, besides arithmetic, geography, history, land mensuration, and area calculation, all taught in the vernacular Telugu (Morris, 1878: 96). In 1858, government schools and colleges were opened for every caste, class and creed (The Government of India, 1858: 9) and the Madras government's commitment towards the education of the depressed Castes was demonstrated by its call for equality in all educational matters, and the admission of all sects and castes within institutions (Morris, 1878: 100). The Wood's Despatch of 1854 was a great achievement for the depressed castes, as well as for missionaries, as it was the official policy on education in Colonial India.³ In their efforts to lead and collaborate with the government, they worked hand in hand with the latter and benefitted from grants and subsidies (Sharp and Richey, 1920: 25). Christian missionaries showed the most interest in the welfare and material

³ The Wood's Despatch was the first comprehensive and conscious effort of the British government to take up the responsibility of education of the natives on official lines. A well planned system of education was introduced in every Presidency whose principal features were: (1) The constitution of departments in the several provinces or presidencies for the administration of education.

(2) The establishment of Universities at the Presidency towns.

(3) The creation of training schools for teachers for all classes of schools.

(4) The maintenance of the existing government colleges and high schools, and the increase of their number when necessary.

(5) The establishment of new middle schools.

(6) Increased attention to vernacular indigenous schools for elementary education.

(7) The introduction of a system of government grants-in-aid.

(8) The provision of Vernacular school books and

(9) The annual examination for government rewards

(see Satthianathan, S. 1894).

Full Ref: Satthianathan, S. (1894). *History of Education in the Madras Presidency*. Madras: Srinivasa Varadachari and Co Publishers.

improvement of depressed caste converts and taught them to sustain their livelihood through industrial training (Lapp, 1938: 23).

The educational work of the LMS was pioneering, as they opened a native school as early as 1805. Later, a girl's school and an Anglo-vernacular school was opened in Vizagapatam. However, in 1845, the Director of Public Instruction directed all small vernacular schools maintained by the LMS to be merged into one native Anglo-vernacular High School, and this school became the only one of its kind in Madras Presidency (Francis, 1907: 63). By establishing schools, and by employing native converts in printing houses, to distribute a number of Christian literary works, the LMS mission laid the foundations for educational networks between missionary societies. The initial educational activities of GDM became a path for launching the mighty educational enterprise carried out by the CBM and the AELM. Mr. Beer's Boys' School at Narsapur and Rev. Bowden's School provided converts drawn mainly from the *Mādiga* caste with education (Morris, 1878: 40). By its Jubilee year in 1924, the CBM had four hundred village schools with an attendance of more than ten thousand pupils (Groves, 1869: 314). They also ran two high schools attended by 1500 boys, one industrial school, one ordinary school, one Bible women's school and one theological seminary (Ibid.). Students received free books, food, shelter and clothing and these institutions benefitted the *Māla* and *Mādiga* students greatly (Kutty, 1990: 23-24). Students earned enough to fund their own boarding and clothing, and also supported other mission schools through their newly acquired industrial skills in agriculture, poultry farming, gardening, etc. (The American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society, 1922: 74). Mission schools, moreover, followed local government directives to extend free and elementary education to backward sections of the population. The government also aimed at the qualitative improvement of pupils life by influencing their habits through instruction, health awareness, recreation and discipline. Much attention was paid to the modification of moral habits that would reform social life and the environment through hygienic habits and cleanliness (The Government of India, 1915: 3-4 and 10). These measures were attuned with missionary advocacy about eradicating social ills, the four demons of dirt, drink, debt and disease and it can be said that the mission imparted education to all converts and the downtrodden (Kutty, 1990: 24). CMS missionaries on the other hand, were said to be 'school masters first' as they established a school network system, even prior to the commencement of gospel preaching in Masulipatnam. From 1854 onwards, four hundred *Māla* children attended the village schools of the CMS mission at Masulipatnam, Ellore and its surrounding areas (Morris, 1878: 39). A school was started in 1854 at the CMS Ellore station, as missionaries observed how much local inhabitants longed for education (Ibid.,: 37). Rev. F. W. N. Alexander founded an elementary school exclusively for the converts as the *Mālas* increasingly sought baptism (Ibid.,: 38-39). There was also a boarding-school for Christian girls in

the mission compound, where forty pupils received instruction up to the fourth standard. In 1862, Rev. Alexander's wife also started a boarding school at Ellore with nearly 90 pupils, primarily meant for converts, who were admitted free of charge owing to their financial backwardness (Ibid.). During the 1880s, the CMS maintained 84 vernacular village schools with 6,573 students (male and female) and had 180 Christian teachers (Sherring, 1884: 423). The AELM maintained an Anglo-Vernacular school which eventually became the Andhra Christian college and by the middle of the 20th century, schools maintained by the AELM at Rajahmundry became transformed into Luthergiri theological college, Women's Bible training school, two normal training schools, three high schools for boys, two high schools for girls, three nurses training schools, four trade schools (agriculture, carpentry, weaving and lace making), seventeen higher elementary schools and eight hundred and ninety two elementary schools, with an enrolment of 46,809 pupils. This extent of educational enterprise demonstrates the spread and depth of missionary influence within the region (Highland, 1945: 19). The Census Commissioner in 1911 observed, "although converts to Christianity are recruited mainly from the aboriginal tribes and the lowest Hindu castes who are almost wholly illiterate, they have in proportion to their numbers three times as many literate persons as the Hindus and more than four times as many as the Muhammadans (Molony, 1913: 296). According to the Report on Public Instruction in Madras Presidency for the year 1911-12, the government emphasized on industrial education (The Government of India, 1938: 45). Regarding improvement in agricultural work, students were required to read books on topics associated with rural life, understand village maps and acquire knowledge about village accounting systems to understand the demands made by their employers. This strategy helped students to understand business transactions with landlords, whom they paid rent and grain dealers who procured their crops (Vakil and Natarajan, 1966: 156). The pioneering educational work of the ABM in Ongole also started with the establishment of an Anglo-Vernacular school in 1867 that developed into two separate institutions; one for boys and the other for girls (Baker, 1947: 290). Rev. Clough gathered hundreds of famine orphans into mission schools and orphanages (Dennis, 1899: 395). And these schools did well in their annual examinations, organized by Madras University (Downie, 1892: 59). The Free Church Mission school at Nellore, named the Coles Ackerman Memorial High School came under the management of ABM missionaries in 1887. Pupils learnt plowing, irrigation, planting seeds and other necessary operations here, as part of agricultural education that enabled them to earn enough to pay for their own fees, boarding and other expenses. The prospect of them getting jobs as preachers and teachers after an eighth-grade degree, made parents of children enthusiastic enough to send their children to be educated, instead of sending them for agricultural labouring. In the field of female education, the Hunter Commission of 1881 recommended that female education be supported through local, municipal and provincial funds. The Commission also recommended that

girls schools could apply for higher rates of government aid, in case these schools educated lower caste girls (Sathianathan, 1894: 193). Christian missionaries also encouraged female education, for not just the depressed castes, but also for Hindu and Mohammadan women. Owing to mission efforts, the first generation of Māla and Mādiga caste girls were educated till the fourth and fifth forms, entering government service as teachers, preaching assistants and Bible women (Syamala, 2003: 33).

In the field of health care, missionaries undertook humanitarian services by prescribing simple remedies for common diseases and temperance campaigns that created a feeling of wellness and health Harper, 2000: 191) and missionary wives, who were often trained as nurses, rendered efficient assistance in treating native women Craig, 1908: 106). Women converts were also employed as Bible women to carry out Zenana work: visiting Hindu and Muslim women to spread the message of gospel, and health and wellness awareness (Burton, 1996: 395). There was great increase in the number of vaccinations in this period including that of infants (The Government of India, 1902: 221). However, this was also a time for frequent occurrences of malaria, cholera and small pox epidemics, blamed on festival gatherings and flood waters that spread infection in Kistna and Guntur districts and the government sought to counter this by appointing deputy inspectors of vaccinations in these districts (The Government of India, 1923: 221 and 226). 'Health weeks' were also organized at the Dornakal diocese, where musical dramas about health were staged, and booklets on sanitation and precautionary methods were distributed (Azariah, 1930: 46).

By the last quarter of the 19th century, the British government began transforming ranked economic rights into absolute economic rights by monetizing rural economy (Dutt, 1901: 170). Traditional produce and service related occupations were disturbed among villagers and agriculture was commercialized. In addition, railways and communication facilities were also set up. Besides traditional occupations, there were new and alternative occupations, like brick-making and tile-making and channels for acquiring new jobs were based on primary education. Castes like the *Mālas* and *Mādigas*, many of whom were educated by now, began teaching at missionary and government schools, along with preaching, missionary supervision, organizing catechism classes in village churches, midwifery in mission and government hospitals, and engagement with military, police, railway and telegraph services. The apparent economic progress of the *Mālas* and the *Mādigas* can be traced in government reports and accounts, apart from missionary reports, wherein their education was used as an effective mechanism of understanding their rights within village economy, both in terms of remuneration and debt management (Morris, 1878: 101). According to Henry Morris, the author of Godavari descriptive accounts, improvements in agricultural methods benefited

not only the agricultural castes, but also the labouring castes (Ibdi.). Agricultural cooperative societies were organized by missionaries with government support, not only for enabling agricultural credit, but also for practical demonstrations that improved agricultural technology, the distribution of seeds and the use of manure (The Government of India, 1932: 64). After 1865, canal constructions were undertaken within the region and these works offered employment to thousands of *Malas* and *Mādigas* (The Government of India, 1868: 190-194). Missionary societies in coastal Andhra also set up cottage industrial units, mainly for converts, who had lost their traditional livelihoods subsequent to conversion. Various small-scale industries such as printing, leather manufacturing, brick-making, aluminum work, tailoring, and lace-making began with investments made by the mission and the local government. Additionally, carpentry, weaving units, and the burning of lime and brick as a cottage industry economies were begun (The Government of India, 1917: 109). Carpet weaving factories were established at Tadepalligudem and Ellore by the American Evangelical Lutheran Mission (The Scottish Missionary Society, 1924: 259-260), while weaving factories were established in Cocanada and Nellore by the Canadian Baptist Mission and the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (Ibid.). By 1909, handloom industries were improved in ways that could gain workers profit from their work (Ware, 1912: 82) and training courses were conducted in collaboration with industrial schools that improved weaving technologies (Noble, 1930: 257). According to the 'Memorandum on the Progress of the Madras Presidency', a number of depressed castes were enlisted as sepoys, and also as cooks, nurses and horse keepers in the domestic establishment of Europeans Raghavaiyengar, 1893: 85). As per the Indian Factories Act of 1881, the government, under the department of labour, created many employment opportunities that trained and helped the *Mālas* and *Mādigas* (The Government of India, 1923: 188), in turn leading to great occupational mobility within the region (Ibid.,: 216).

Therefore, conversion to Christianity offered especially depressed caste converts a new social identity, especially with the growth of vernacular and English education that resulted in greater social and occupational mobility among them (Forrester, 1980: 77). Missionary endeavours that ameliorated the degraded conditions suffered hitherto by the *Mālas* and *Mādigas* took place on an unprecedented scale that had never occurred before. This was also noted by many Hindu reformers and social scientists of the time. According to Srinivasa Raghavaiyengar, the Inspector-General of Registration of the Madras Presidency, "the best thing that can happen to them is conversion either to Christianity or to Muhammadan religion, for there is no hope for them within the pale of Hinduism" (Raghavaiyengar, 1893: 85). In short, Christian missionary undertakings in India were not just limited to evangelizing and converting, but they empowered the poor and depressed castes through

material and educational means, thereby helping them to improve in many conceivable ways.

This aspect of conversion did not, however, leave the culture of the converts unchanged. As converts took conscious decisions to convert, certain un-Christian practices were abandoned, such as idol worship and the consumption of *tsachina mamsamu* (carrion) and alcohol. However, converts also adapted Christianity to native religious practices and ceremonies, such as at the occasion of birth and weddings (Liebau, 2007: 46). In Rev. Clough's words, "Christianity brought the sword of change that had cut through the social evils that the *Mālas* and *Mādigas* had to suffer with" (Clough, 1891: 166). The Baptist Church members in Ongole practiced complete abstinence as both men and women from churches were admitted to the Christian Temperance League as members (Dennis, 1899: 120). These perceptible changes in society were noted by many such as, Carol Graham as, "cleanliness in place of squalor, temperance instead of drunkenness, a concerted effort towards clean-living, honest dealing and truthfulness, above all the discovery of the most precious of human possessions, self-respect were the outward results of inward spiritual transfiguration" (Graham, 1946: 56).

Conclusion

Missionaries set foot in India to evangelise, and received enormous response in return from the depressed castes belonging to the *Māla* and the *Mādiga* of Coastal Andhra. Though missionary services were available to all, irrespective of caste, large segments of these two castes made a conscious decision to break away from traditional religion and the caste system that had hitherto relegated them to degraded positions. Now, the question is, did the *Mālas* and the *Mādigas* really achieve socio-economic mobilization? While the historically verified presence of large conversion rates among these communities in official missionary and government reports testifies to this, a lot can also be accorded to the zeal for change and reform within the community. The socio-economic mobilization of Christian *Mālas* and *Mādigas* in coastal Andhra can, therefore, also be attributed to their own reformist zeal that combined with conversion and the educational benefits and economic opportunities provided to them within the various missions that were operative in the region. That Christianity as a 'social religion' and Christian missionaries as 'social reformers' created institutions for the betterment of the depressed castes is undoubted, but this growth also came to an abrupt halt, when the progress of Dalit converts became hindered by the Scheduled Castes Order of 1950 that disqualified Dalit Christians from constitutionally guaranteed protection and privileges, that were instead reserved for Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh Dalits.⁴

⁴ The Constitution of India accorded in 1950 a new nominal identity 'Scheduled Castes', to the Depressed Classes. However, since 1970s certain leaders among them have preferred to use the

Several scholars have studied the plight of Christian converts from the depressed castes or Christian SCs and Dalits. The exclusion of Christian SCs from reservation in education and employment has affected them negatively and their deprivation from representation within democratic institutions, and denial of reservations in educational institutions and public employment has hampered their development. At the same time, Dalit Christians have also failed to develop strong political leadership; instead focusing too much on the inner politics of the church to safeguard their own interests by overlooking a call fight for the common good of the converts.

Acronyms

1. ABM: The American Baptist Mission
2. AELM: The American Evangelical Lutheran Mission
3. CBM: The Canadian Baptist Mission
4. CMS: The Church Missionary Society
5. GDM: The Godavari Delta Mission
6. LMS: The London Missionary Society

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term Dalits, in place of Scheduled Castes. Since this term has gained much currency in the present time, we have used this term in our discussion above. These belong to different religious persuasions. Hence Scheduled Caste converts to Christianity are called Dalit Christians. (See Varikoti-Jetty, 2019).

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