

**RELIGION AND NATIONALISM AMONG
THE MADIGAS OF GADWAL SAMASTHAN,
HYDERABAD STATE, CIRCA 1898-1960**

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

the award of the degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled “RELIGION AND NATIONALISM AMONG THE MADIGAS OF GADWAL SAMASTHAN HYDERABAD STATE, CIRCA 1898-1960” submitted by Venna Abhilash in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of this university has not been submitted for the award of any degree of this or any other university and is my own work.



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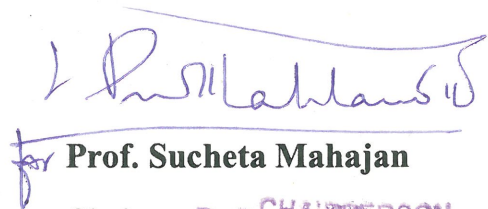
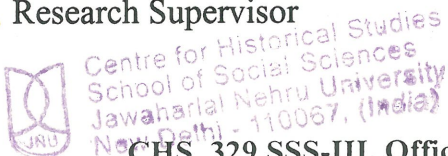
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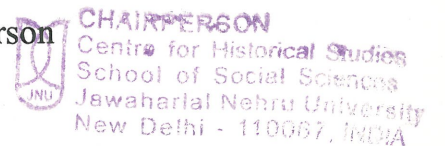
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Glossary

<i>Agraharam:</i>	Exclusive Settlement of the Brahmin caste group
<i>Alludu:</i>	nephew. Term used by mother's brother to address his sister's male children.
<i>Arundhati:</i>	Goddess from whom the Madigas draw their lineage from.
<i>Begari:</i>	free and forced labour
<i>Bhakti:</i>	religious movement that emphasized devotion to god as a way to salvation.
<i>Bhangi:</i>	untouchable caste group in parts of north india.
<i>Brahmin:</i>	Priestly class and the highest caste in social hierarchy.
<i>China:</i>	small
<i>Dafada:</i>	drum used by Madigas.
<i>Devamma:</i>	village goddess
<i>Dhan:</i>	act of charity
<i>Dharmashastras:</i>	law books written by Brahmins.
<i>Dora:</i>	Lord
<i>Gadu:</i>	a term of disrespect
<i>Garu:</i>	a term of respect
<i>Huzur:</i>	royal presence
<i>Inam:</i>	tax free lands
<i>Izzat:</i>	honour
<i>Jati:</i>	Endogamous groups in a locality.
<i>Kalyanotsavam:</i>	festival that marks the marriage ceremony of deities.
<i>Madiga:</i>	untouchable lather workers in Telugu speaking regions.
<i>Mala:</i>	untouchable caste group above the Madiga caste
<i>Mama:</i>	mother's brother.

<i>Matha:</i>	Brahmanical theological centres.
<i>Mathangi:</i>	Goddess of the Madigas.
<i>Panchama:</i>	literally meaning 'Fifth' term is used to refer to untouchable caste groups who are outside the four fold varna classification.
<i>Pariah:</i>	untouchable caste group in southern India in the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala.
<i>Patel:</i>	village headman
<i>Patwari:</i>	village accountant
<i>Pedda:</i>	big
<i>Puntulu:</i>	teacher
<i>Raja:</i>	ruler of a kingdom.
<i>Rathotsavam:</i>	procession of Brahmanic deities on chariots
<i>Samasthan:</i>	Hindu kingdom
<i>Shudra:</i>	group occupying third position in the <i>varna</i> system.
<i>Terrumadiyan:</i>	open ground where chariots carrying the deities are kept
<i>Varna:</i>	four fold division of the natural /social world
<i>Vetti Chakari:</i>	free and forced labour
<i>Yellamma:</i>	patron deity of the Madigas

List of Abbreviations Used

APSARC	:	Andhra Pradesh State Archives and Research Institute
MBCBC	:	Mennonite Brethren Centenary Bible College
NAI	:	National Archives of India
NMML	:	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

Introduction

This thesis tries to examine the making and remaking of caste and religion under colonialism and its consequences for the struggle for dignity by untouchable caste groups in the *Samasthan* of Gadwal of the Hyderabad state. Colonialism inaugurated a dark as well as august chapter in the history of struggles for dignity by the untouchable caste groups. While caste and untouchability were reinforced due to colonial economic and religious policies, the British simultaneously introduced liberal ideas of equality, liberty, and humanism. Access to liberal ideas and education, modern employment opportunities and introduction of slow hesitant constitutional reforms brought a new confidence among the untouchables to take on the ideology of Brahmanism and the practices of caste society. Hyderabad state was no exception to this new awakening among untouchable groups and these ideas and institutions soon reached its doors. The activities of Christian missionaries and political organizations such as Arya Samaj Congress and Adi- Hindu movement brought a new ferment for change among the untouchable groups.

The colonial period inaugurated a struggle for identity by untouchable groups in various parts of India. Struggle for identity occur in a contestation with opposing ideologies and groups. This is because identity evolves through a dialogue of the self with the others and therefore the attitudes of the other impact identity formation of the self. Charles Taylor points out that “non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted or reduced mode of being”.¹ Historians observe the formation of the untouchable identity in the colonial period in a dialogue with Hindu Brahmanical traditions and colonial modernity. While Brahmanical Hinduism denies untouchables recognition of equal worth and distorts their self-identity, colonial modernity brought forth the idea of equality of all human beings unleashing thereby the possibilities of developing a positive self-image.

¹ Quoted from Chinnaiah Jangam, ‘Politics of Identity and the Project of Writing History in Postcolonial India: A Dalit Critique’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol 1, no 40, October 3, 2015, pp. 63

Construction of Modern Hinduism

Historians argue that Hinduism as it exists today is the result of a social cultural construction that occurred during the colonial period. The historical roots of this construction of caste and religion could be traced to the discourses promoted by the colonialist, Orientalist scholars, Hindu reform organizations, National movement and the organizations of the untouchable caste groups. Ronald Inden argues that while the west conceived its agency in state, market and reason, it displaced the agency of South Asian people into the institution of caste and its indological counterpart, Hinduism.² This has necessitated a whole scale dismissal of political institutions of India and casting of Hinduism essentially in idealist terms rather than seeing it as a political institution. In this conception, human thinking in South Asia is reduced to symbolic and religious as opposed to rational and secular of the West. Critiques of this view have pointed various lacuna in this conception of Orientalist knowledge. Richard King argues that one cannot prove that all Orientalist scholarship was intended to be used for colonial ideological control.³ It is also not true that colonial subjects were passive objects of knowledge. Homi Bhabha shows that oriental discourse was often used by colonial subjects for cultural resistance against colonialism⁴. Others point out the impact of Orientalist discourse on the Occident.⁵

More importantly, historians have increasingly pointed out the important role of native aristocracy and local political processes in bringing forth Orientalist discourse

² Ronald Inden 'Orientalist Constructions of India', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 1986, pp. 401-446.

³ King argues that "German Orientalists on the one hand, and Japan on the other, cast doubt upon Said's thesis that Orientalist discourse is always associated with an imperial agenda, since Germany had no Eastern empire to manipulate and control, and Japan was subjected to Orientalist discourses without ever being colonized by the West" King Richard, 'Orientalism and the Modern Myth of Hinduism', *Numen*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 1999, pp. 146-185.

⁴ Homi Bhabha, 'Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817,' *Critical Inquiry* 12, 1985, pp. 144-165.

⁵ Pollock shows the impact of orientalist discourse on the Occident. The orientalist discourse by bringing the notion of Aryan ancestry, brought into existence a politics around Aryan identity in Germany. This created a powerful internal narrative which shaped the creation of German national consciousness and led eventually to internal colonization of Europe. See, Sheldon Pollock, 'Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power Beyond the Raj', in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer eds. 1993, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1993, pp. 76-133.

on caste and religion⁶. King pointed out that “western influence was a necessary but not a sufficient causal factor in the rise of this particular social construction. To argue otherwise would be to ignore the crucial role played by indigenous Brahmanical ideology in the formation of early Orientalist representations of Hindu religiosity”⁷. G. Aloysius points out that ideological formulations arise out of political economic relations between people.⁸ He points out “ideological imagination needs to be read against the political economy of group relations of the period and “*caste in the singular cannot be, understood without understanding caste in the plural*” [emphasis added].⁹ While the instinct of self-preservation of the empire explains the adoption of hierarchical values by the British, it is the willing acceptance of caste *varna* forces of the riverine valley which helped to generalize it at an all India level.¹⁰ Pamela. G. Price details the origin of non-Brahmin in Madras presidency as arising from the centralized dispute mechanisms namely Anglo-Indian legal system set up by the British in collusion with Brahmanical elements ¹¹.

Robert Frykenberg argues that this Hinduism was constructed out of bits and pieces and by amalgamating structural features of various religious, social, economic and political systems in India. Brahmanical religious ideas which laid out religiously ordained hierarchy between all life forms and genetically, culturally and ritually distinct groups of people is one such source. Colonial administration popularized the view that this Brahmanic logic lies at the core of Hinduism. While Brahmanic views were held with varying degree of influence before the advent of British, the adoption of this view by the colonialists helped to expand its domain to areas unknown and less influenced

⁶ Frykenberg points out that British officials numbered 1 to 1000 in Indian administrations and it is impossible to imagine that they did not influence representation of Hindu religion or caste. Robert Frykenberg, ‘Constructions of Hinduism at the Nexus of History and Religion’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol.23, No.3, 1993, pp.523-550.

⁷ Richard King, ‘Orientalism and the Modern Myth of 'Hinduism'', *Numen*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 1999, pp. 146-185.

⁸ G.Aloysius ‘Caste In and Above History’, *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol. 48, No. 1/2 , March-September, 1999,pp. 151-173.

⁹ *Ibid*, p.160

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 151

¹¹ Price G Pamela, ‘Ideology and Ethnicity under British Imperial Rule: 'Brahmans', Lawyers and Kin-Caste Rules in Madras Presidency’, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1989, pp. 151-177.

by it. In this way Hinduism at its core came to be associated with a religiously defined caste system alone¹².

The logic of imperial rule also led to the use of caste and contributed to the construction of modern Hinduism.¹³ Since Indian sub-continent was culturally diverse consisting of communities formed on the basis of purity of blood, no single group could rule over it by imposing their value system on others. The Turko-Mughal emperors entered into a contract of patronage of communities where their respective purity is respected. This logic therefore dictated a position against fundamentalism, orthodoxy and ideological exclusivism. Since the Raj was the new imperial system it drew on earlier imperial institutions and ideologies that signified this tolerant regime incorporating a belief in purity of birth. “By an estimate in 1830 the expenditure by the Company on Hindu institutions ran upto 10 lakhs a year and company officials were ordered to preside over Hindu temples similar to Hindu kings”.¹⁴ With the takeover of temples by the imperial government, local functionaries and officials became involved in the day-to-day decision-making of temples. In the process the government itself constructed a huge “informational, institutional and intellectual infrastructure”.¹⁵ As a part of the duties of regal rule, British initiated a project of knowledge production.¹⁶ Susan Bayly argues that the colonial officials relied on the majestic Mughal surveys such as the Ain-i-Akbari for its District Gazeteers and was definitely not one of the first to resort to classification of the population of India based on socio-cultural attributes.¹⁷ Different mode of knowledge gathering such as Census, ethnographic studies and codification of Hindu and Muhammedean laws and translation of Sanskrit scriptures were undertaken.

¹² Susan Bayly , ‘Western Orientalists and Colonial Perception of Caste’, in Sumit and Tanika Sarkar ed. *Caste in Modern India : A Reader*, Ranikhet, 2014.

¹³ Robert Frykenberg, ‘Constructions of Hinduism at the Nexus of History and Religion’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol.23, No.3, 1993, pp.523-550.

¹⁴ Ian Copland, ‘Christianity as an Arm of Empire: The Ambiguous Case of India under the Company, c. 1813-1858’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 4, Dec, 2006, pp. 1025-1054.

¹⁵ Robert Frykenberg, ‘Constructions of Hinduism at the Nexus of History and Religion’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol.23, No.3, 1993, pp.523-550.

¹⁶ Susan Bayly , ‘Western Orientalists and Colonial conception of Caste’, in Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar ed. *Caste in Modern India : A Reader*,., Ranikhet ,2014.

¹⁷ *Ibid*

The prejudices and world view of the colonialist namely Judeo-Christian theological background influenced this construction of Hinduism. King argues that due to the Judeo-Christian traditions of relying on the written texts for understanding the religion of western societies in Europe, the Orientalists, located the core of religiosity of the Indians in the *Dharmashastras*.¹⁸ These texts were written by Brahmana law makers and reflected the views of this section. The modern construction of Hinduism is radically different from the religious phenomena that existed in the subcontinent before the arrival of the British. Romila Thapar argues that historical reality of India was sects rather than religions.¹⁹ Sects were differentiated from each other not by differences from orthodoxy with the established religion as seen in Judeo-Christian faith but in differences in rituals or ‘orthopraxy’. Thapar defines Brahmanic religion as it existed in the ancient period as that based on segmenting religious practice based on caste, while *Sramanic* religion (Buddhism, Jainism and other non-Brahmanic sects) attempted to universalize their religious teaching.²⁰

Religion was mostly confined or practiced in the private domain of the home and differences if any between religious communities emerged from multitude of practices. It is argued in a similar vein by King that the *Dharmashastras* on which the Orientalist scholars relied, show an acknowledgment of a plurality of local, occupational and caste contexts in which different customs and rules applied.²¹ Aloysius similarly points out that Brahmanical culture was prevalent only in riverine plains which produced huge surplus. Such a culture did not prevail in hilly areas. In the intermediate regions which were not surplus rich, rigid caste hierarchy did not exist and only a loose sense of hierarchy prevailed.²² The myriad beliefs on super natural power and customs and practices among different groups of people in different parts of the country were often contradictory and had very little in common among them. British scholars amalgamated all these belief under one umbrella term ‘Hinduism’. In this

¹⁸ Richard King, ‘Orientalism and the Myth of Modern Hinduism’, *Numen*, Vol.46 No 2, 1999, pp.146-185.

¹⁹ Romila Thapar ‘Syndicated Hinduism’ in Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke ed. *Hinduism Reconsidered*, Delhi, 2001, pp. 54-81.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p.63

²¹ *Ibid*, p.64

²² G. Aloysius, ‘Caste In and Above History’, *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol. 48, No. 1/2, March-September, 1999, pp. 151-173.

process they brought together groups which had little in common with each other and imputed a sense of community to them which they purportedly developed in opposition to other religion such as Islam. The religious identification of the western civilization with Christianity which developed in animosity to other world religions influenced this conception of 'Hinduism'. A differentiation thus developed between communities called 'Hindu' and 'Muslims' and 'Christians'. The Hinduism so constructed which brought together the world view of colonial masters and Brahmin aristocracy was essentially 'Brahmanic Hinduism' which relied on *Dharmashastras* and Vedas to develop its core belief system.

What could be the impact of coming of the modern form of Hinduism on the religious and political consciousness of the untouchable groups and its scholarly study? Certain view of the untouchable began to circulate as result of the hegemonic sway of Brahmanical Hinduism. A Brahmanic view of Hindu religion also promoted a conviction that untouchable are a depressed group who lacks agency on their own. The construction of modern Hinduism forced political actors of the colonial period to direct all their ideological energies in a contestation or a reformation of it. This ensured that debate on religion and caste will occur within the ideological precinct of Brahmanic Hinduism, which is now considered as a pan Indian phenomena. The existence of popular religion and its connection to caste was glossed over especially by intellectuals located in urban towns. The beliefs of the lower orders were described as superstitions and portrayed as corruptions from the high culture which needed to be reclaimed by reform.

Hindu reformers, conservatives and untouchable movement on caste and religion

Since social and political interests were at stake, the emerging colonial public sphere responded to such a construction of Hinduism. In the discussion that follows, we delineate the positions of three different sections on Hinduism and untouchability. Colonial period witnessed the emergence of conservative, reformist and rationalist position on caste and religion. Taking use of orientalist ideas of glorious ancient past of India, the reformist sections formulated their agenda as 'going back to the Vedas' and of ridding Hindu society of untouchability. Thapar points out that most of the

reformers were the products of Missionary schools.²³ They could therefore attempt a comparison between Christianity and Hindu beliefs. A comparison between Christianity and Hinduism often led to a desire for reform along Judeo-Christian line. Reformers argued for the creation of an ecclesiastical organization for Hindu beliefs. They also desired the introduction in Hindu religion of practices such as reliance on holy book.²⁴ These educated sections were also consumers of orientalist texts on religion now translated to English and vernacular languages.

The argument of orientalists that India had a glorious ancient past was used by the reformers to counter the attack of missionaries on the institution of caste in Hindu religion. Reformers redefined the meaning of caste. They argued that rigidity of the caste system was a later corruption. It was *varna* which is more flexible and just that prevailed in the golden ancient period. Since missionaries attacked the institution of caste, reformers tried to counter it by redefining the meaning of *varna* in Hindu texts. Therefore reformers argued for 'going back to the Vedas'. Their ideas gave rise to the organizations of the Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj. They also chalked a reform programme for the untouchables. While Hindu reformers felt the need to reform religion before the exodus of untouchables from it weakens it, conservative sections on the other hand felt the need to ignore such a critique. The conservative sections among Hindu society perceived these efforts at reform as an unnecessary reaction to missionary critiques.

Radically different from these reform arguments, rational critiques of untouchability based their critique of caste society and untouchability on modern ideas of humanism and individual liberty. They pointed out the irrationality of treating humans as less than animals. They put the blame of untouchability on the deplorable conditions created by caste society through social exclusion, denial of wells and water resources and educational facilities. While reformists argued that untouchables should

²³ Romila Thapar 'Syndicated Hinduism' in Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke ed *Hinduism Reconsidered*, Delhi, 2001, pp. 54-81.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.55

adopt non-violence in order to morally reclaim themselves, rationalist considered the behaviour of the caste Hindu as irrational and inhuman.²⁵

Untouchable movement soon responded to the emergence of Hinduism as the civic religion of the nation. Their responses drew on the ideas of social and religious reformers and rationalist thinkers. Adi-Hindu movement could be seen as the first radical reaction of the untouchables to the emergence of Hinduised India. Ramnaryan Rawat²⁶ and Chinna Rao²⁷ have pointed out that the Adi-Hindu movement of untouchable caste groups in both United Provinces and Hyderabad State in the 1920s put forward a new plank of politics of self-identity. The basis of this demand, as Rawat argues, was that the Adi-Hindus had a separate identity from the caste Hindus as they had their own pasts, which were deliberately erased by the cunning and deceit of the Savarna Castes.

Dalit struggle for Identity

Recent scholarship on histories of the untouchables aims to examine the political agency of these caste groups in their struggle for dignity. Ramnarayan Rawat uncovers three phases of Dalit activism during the colonial period in the United Province.²⁸ In the period between 1920 -1930, Adi- Hindu movement worked through caste *Mahasabhas* and local caste groups in neighborhoods and drew on the *bhakti* tradition to create a separate identity for the untouchable caste groups. The thrust of these activities were towards attaining 'ritual purity' and 'clean status'. By connecting the 'unclean occupations' with the religious traditions of *Kabir Panthi* and other *bhakti* cults, Adi-Hindu movement attempted to remove the stigma attached to these occupations. The next phase of the movement (1940-46) was directed towards more participation in nationalist politics. In mainstream history writing, this period is

²⁵ Romila Thapar 'Syndicated Hinduism' in Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke ed *Hinduism Reconsidered*, Delhi, 2001, pp. 54-81.

²⁶ Ramnarayan S. Rawat, *Reconsidering Untouchability : Chamars and Dalit History in North India*, Bloomington, 2011

²⁷ Chinna Rao, *Dalits Struggle for Identity: Andhra and Hyderabad State, 1900-1950*, New Delhi, 2003.

²⁸ Ramnarayan S. Rawat, *Reconsidering Untouchability: Chamars and Dalit History in North India*, Bloomington, 2011.

considered as one of Congress domination over autonomous politics of the Dalits.²⁹ However, Rawat considers this period as a new phase in the political dynamism of untouchable movement most noticeable in the activities of Schedule Castes Federation. This is because quite distinct from Adi-Hindu movement which sought accommodation within Hinduism and defined caste as a religious problem, in this period, untouchable organizations began to view caste as socio-economic and political problem. Rawat argues that the participation in nationalist politics by untouchables was not an affirmation by them of the stand of the Congress on the caste question. Congress and Gandhi defined caste as a religious problem of the Hindus whereas untouchable political groups during this period agitated for political representation thereby defining caste as a political problem. Access to education and political power were seen as critical issues faced by Dalits by the 1940's. Such an agenda was set by Ambedkar in the run up to the Poona pact of 1932.

Studies on Dalit struggles in the Telugu speaking regions of Madras presidency and the state of Hyderabad have also focused on the development of Adi- Hindu movement and the relation of untouchable leaders of these regions with Gandhi and Congress. The periodization of Dalit radicalism follows the pattern laid down for United Province by Rawat. Chinnaiah Jangam argues that in the period, 1932 – 1946, untouchable leaders began to define caste as a socio-political problem in coastal Andhra.³⁰ However we notice significant departures in the experience of struggles of the untouchables in the Telugu speaking regions. The reports of local struggles were of mass conversion to Christianity *or Harijan* uplift programmes of the Congress. There were no reports of independent untouchable leaders or schedule caste organizations spearheading local struggles of the kind reported by Rawat and Nandini Gooptu for United Province.³¹ It is pertinent to note that neither in coastal Andhra nor in Nizam regions, the struggle of the untouchables fashioned elements of popular Hinduism, such as the *bhakti* tradition as a tool for constructing a separate identity. The Adi- Hindu

²⁹ Ramnarayan S. Rawat, 'Making Claim for Power: A new Agenda in Dalit Politics of Uttar Pradesh, 1946-48', *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 37, no.3, 2003, pp.585-612.

³⁰ Chinnaiah Jangam, *Contesting Hinduism: Emergence of Dalit Paradigms in Telugu Country, 1900-1950*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2005.

³¹ See, Nandini Gooptu, 'Caste and Labour: Untouchable Social Movements in Urban U.P. in the Early Twentieth Century', in Peter Robb ed., *Dalit Movements and the Meanings of Labour in Colonial India*, Delhi, 1992.

organization in Nizam region also put forward the demand to record the untouchables as having a separate religious existence from Hinduism in the 1920's, however the cultural content of this separate religious identity was not spelled out as clearly as in the United Province.

Christian missions seem to be a political factor in the Dalit struggle for dignity in Telugu country as distinct from the United Provinces. Historians have studied conversion drives and political agitations for secular demands separately and have not probed the intellectual and organizational connections between both. A. Satyanarayana details the contribution of Christianity to the making of an anti- caste and anti-Brahmanical ideology of the untouchables.³² Jangam traces the intellectual journey of Gurram Jashua a poet from the untouchable community belonging to Christian family who inherited caste oppositional consciousness from Christianity.³³ These studies point out the influence of Christianity on the development of anti- caste ideology of the untouchable movement. The influence of conversion seems to be indirect on mainstream political struggles of the untouchables according to these historical studies. However taken together these studies in different regions in colonial India chronicle the development of an untouchable struggle over identity based on a confrontation with caste Hinduism.

Scholars who have explored the untouchable movement in the Telugu speaking region have limited themselves to the Madras presidency. Studies on movements in Hyderabad state was purely limited to elaborating on the Adi-Hindu movement and the intellectuals from the untouchable caste groups based in Hyderabad. This focus on activities in the capital city of Hyderabad, leave us with little understanding on the relationship between local assertions in northern, eastern and western Telangana regions on one hand and organizations and intellectuals based in Hyderabad on the other. However, the existence of local struggles of various hues from all the three regions could be ascertained by a cursory examination of archival sources and were also reported in less well known historical studies. I. P. Asheervadam argues that though the Adi-Hindu movement was a decade long campaign and electrified the city

³² A. Satyanarayana, *Dalits and Upper Castes: Essays in Social History*, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 147.

³³ Chinnaiyah Jangam, 'Desecrating the Sacred Taste: The Making of Gurram Jashua – the Father of Dalit Literature in Telugu', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Volume No.51, April 2014, pp. 177-198.

of Hyderabad in the entire 1920's, its effect was felt in the Mahbubnagar region in the 1930's only.³⁴ It is through such works and sources that we get to know the wider impact of such movements on towns and villages in the Telangana region. The synergy between local and regional dynamics that push conversion drives and political movement of the untouchables in coastal Andhra is richly described by scholars such as A. Satyanarayana, Chinna Rao and Chinnaiah Jangam, while movements in Hyderabad state are reduced to mere footnotes in the history of untouchable movement in the Telugu speaking regions of Madras presidency.

In contrast, one can infer the rich history of the state of Hyderabad from works on political phenomenon such as communalism. The politics in the Nizam region owes its particular character to its existence as a princely state. Manu Bhagavan argues that princely states were constructed as traditional and religious backwaters (called as India) in order to project progressiveness of the enlightened rule of the British in 'British India'.³⁵ In many princely states this approach of the British engendered appropriation of this 'authentic Indianness' by local regimes who argued that progress in this region occurs on the basis of authentic values of 'India'. In some princely states this approach culminated in an identification of state religion with the religion of the ruler and the subjects of these rulers were treated differently based on their religious status. Copland points out that regime of Nizam resisted communalization of the state and he along with many other princes followed the policy of religious neutrality more strictly than the British.³⁶ However the religious policy of the Nizam was socially conservative and defined religious pluralism as an important pillar of state policy that was recognized as essential to uphold social order and peace. This policy of the Nizam government continued up until the decades of the mid-1930s and restricted free propagation of religion and politicking over religious identity. This stymied the efforts of the untouchables for religious reform.

³⁴ I.P. Asheervadam is a theologian attached to the Mennonite Brethren Church. Biblical Seminaries in the Telangana area have recorded the local struggles of the untouchables in Mahbubnagar region, which is the western part of the Telangana state. See Asheervadam, I.P, *Dalit Conversions to the Mennonite Brethren Church*, Unpublished M.Phil Thesis, United Theological College, Bangalore, 1998.

³⁵ Manu Bhagavan, 'Princely States and the Hindu Imaginary: Exploring the Cartography of Hindu Nationalism in Colonial India', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 67(3), 2008, pp. 881-915.

³⁶ Ian Copland, 'Communalism in a Princely India: The Case of Hyderabad, 1930-1940', *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume no.22, issue no.4, 1988, pp. 783-814.

The social conservatism of the Nizam was compounded by his hostility towards political and constitutional reforms. The newspapers were allowed to commence operations only on strict conditions of payment of a hefty deposit against the publication of objectionable matters. Political meetings could be arranged only after taking permission from local police. It was only from the mid-1920s that there was a growth in the circulation of both vernacular and English press. Most importantly, most kinds of political activities were prohibited in the State of Hyderabad.³⁷ Due to these twin aspects of curbs on both the press and political organizations, the movement of the untouchables, we argue, could not make much headway in this region.

Ian Copland investigates the changing contours of communal politics in the period of 1936-1947. He identifies politicization and proselytizing as the main factors for the growth of communal tendencies in the state. The demand for responsible government in princely states which gathered momentum from 1936 onwards, brought to Hyderabad, the tendency of politicization of communal identities. This soon resulted in a bitter competition between Arya Samaj and *Ittiha-ul-Muslimeen* for increasing their numbers as a pre-requisite for capture of power. Although the historical work of Copland is insightful on the nature of princely states and its wider connections with British India, it holds limited utility for understanding the politics of the untouchable movement in the state. Missionary records, on the other hand, show that communalization of the politics in the Hyderabad state led to a politicization of the untouchable identity. It is important to examine the growth of communalism and its impact on politicization of untouchable identity. Scholars who study movement of the untouchables in Hyderabad have so far restricted themselves to a study of the activities of Congress and have not subjected to critical enquiry, the dynamics unleashed by communalization of politics in Hyderabad state.

The Telangana province in the state of Hyderabad is generally considered to be backward. A historian remarked that it was almost fifty years behind the Telugu speaking regions of the Madras Presidency.³⁸ Fast paced changes in agrarian relations, breakdown of hereditary occupations, migrations to Burma, and rapid spread of English

³⁷ Ian Copland, 'Communalism in a Princely India: The Case of Hyderabad, 1930-1940', *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume no.22, issue no.4, 1988, pp. 783-814.

³⁸ Ramana Rao, *Economic development of Andhra Pradesh*, Bombay, 1958.

education, were cited as important factors causing a political assertion of untouchable caste groups in coastal Andhra.³⁹ Chinna Rao's study demonstrates the role of socio-economic and political factors such as the rise of a middle class among the Dalits on their identity formation from 1900-1950.⁴⁰ While the economically backward Hyderabad state was not immune from the larger socio-economic changes engendered by colonialism, Copland notes that industrialization was lagging behind in the state of Hyderabad.⁴¹ Hyderabad state was largely an agrarian society groaning under the weight of feudal exactions.⁴² The Telangana region of the Hyderabad state experienced feudal oppression more acutely than other regions. The practice of *vetti chakiri* or forced labour imposed on untouchable groups was more prominent in the Telangana than in Marathwada region of the Hyderabad state.⁴³ The demands of the untouchable movement therefore were a response to these unique conditions in the Hyderabad state and will be probed in the thesis.

This historical difference between Telugu country and United Province namely Christian missions as a political actor and the absence of *bhakti* cults informing mainstream political ideologies of the untouchable movement opens a fresh field of intellectual enquiry. What is the synergy between local struggles of various hues including conversion to Christianity on one hand and larger untouchable movement on the other hand, in the Nizam ruled Telangana area of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh? What were the socio- economic and religious conditions to which the assertions of the untouchables were directed? The last two decades before the integration of the Hyderabad state to Indian union and its ramifications for the struggle for dignity of untouchable groups is also a point of enquiry. What was the impact of the energies released by politicization of the Hyderabad state after a long period of repression of democratic politics and civil society on the growth of untouchable organizations and ideology? The historical lineages of contemporary movement of conversion and political representation in the Telangana state has to be sought in the struggle over

³⁹ A. Satyanarayana, *Dalits and Upper Castes: Essays in Social History*, New Delhi, 2005.

⁴⁰ Chinna Rao, *Dalits Struggle for Identity: Andhra and Hyderabad, 1900-1950*, New Delhi, 2003.

⁴¹ P. Sundarayya, *Telangana People's Struggle and its Lessons*, New Delhi, 1985.

⁴² Ramana Rao, *Economic development of Andhra Pradesh*, Bombay, 1958.

⁴³ Ramnarayan S. Rawat, K. Satyanarayana 'Introduction' in Ramnarayan S. Rawat, K. Satyanarayana ed, *Dalit Studies*, Durham, 2016.

identity that occurred in the colonial period. In the next section we elaborate the agenda and concerns of Dalit historiography which informs this present study.

A critique of mainstream History writing

The emergence of Dalit historiography has challenged existing cannons and schools of history writing. Historians who self-consciously adopt a Dalit paradigm of history writing have pointed out serious lacuna in Nationalist, Marxist and Subaltern schools of history writing. Nationalist historians viewed the national movement as a popular mass movement which is inclusive in character. They underplayed the internal contradictions of Indian society around class and caste cleavages. They have also ignored conflicting perspectives on the idea of Indian nation as imagined by different caste and class groups. The development of national consciousness in this account is an elite achievement attributed to upper caste personalities.⁴⁴ Rawat and Satyanarayana calls this approach in history writing as the ‘*Harijan* perspective’.⁴⁵ The caste studies informed by this perspective have focused on elite led initiatives of socio-political reform among the Dalits. The ‘*Harijan* perspective’ also informs those studies that trace ‘sanskritization’ attempts by the lower castes during the colonial period. The sanskritization model as laid down by M. N.Srinivas assumes that Dalit struggles for mobility are attempts at imitation of religious practices of caste Hindus. Satyanarayana subjects historical studies on socio-cultural reform movement in Andhra region to a critical scrutiny. He points out that these studies focus on reforms of rituals undertaken by caste associations of Shudra castes and explain them as attempts at sanskritization.⁴⁶ The protest inherent in them and the secular motives informing such activities were given insufficient attention. The model of emulation denies “autonomous consciousness to Dalits and also prevent us from recognizing their role in initiating social struggle against caste hierarchy”.⁴⁷ This view of the untouchable draws its

⁴⁴ A. Satyanarayana reviews nationalist history writing of Andhra as seen in the work of Venkatarangaiah and Sarojini Regani. They glorify the national movement and elaborate episodes and personalities of the national movement. See A.Satyanarayana, *Dalits and Upper Castes: Essays in Social History*, New Delhi, 2005.

⁴⁵ Ramnarayan S. Rawat, K. Satyanarayana ‘introduction’ in Ramnarayan S. Rawat, K. Satyanarayana ed *Dalit Studies*, Durham, 2016.

⁴⁶ A. Satyanarayana, *Dalits and Upper Castes: Essays in Social History*, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 123.

⁴⁷ Ramnarayan S. Rawat, K. Satyanarayana ‘Introduction’ in Ramnarayan S. Rawat, K. Satyanarayana ed, *Dalit Studies*, Durham, 2016.

inspiration from the 'idea of civilizational unity' as portrayed by national leaders. Hindu religion in this account unite Indians and social change in India occurred through the process of sanskritization which accommodated newer and newer groups within the Hindu fold. The civilizational unity in these accounts therefore is the result of the operation of Hindu religion and culture. This conceptual framework forced the historian to study 'sanskritization' movements alone and they completely ignored movements which were anti-Hindu. A study of these movements would have suggested ruptures in 'civilizational unity' proposed by national leaders and nationalist historians.

The conceptual framework of colonialism versus nationalism also hides the Dalit actors and their agendas as they operated during the colonial period.⁴⁸ Both nationalist and Marxist historiography operates within this conceptual frame. Marxist historiography points out that class cleavages inform different kinds of nationalism. However they also consider imperialism as the primary contradiction pushing popular movements of this time period. Indian socio-economic backwardness was attributed to colonialism by these two schools.⁴⁹ The socio-religious movements of the Dalits which made use of 'colonial modernity' were therefore outside the ambit of study of these two schools. The movement for temple entry or access to public spaces and anti-untouchability agitations were not anti-colonial in their motivation. The framework of colonialism versus nationalism precluded possibilities of "sympathetic evaluation of lower caste movements which often used colonial policies, western ideas and resources".⁵⁰ Independent movements and personalities from the Dalit community were regarded as sectarian, anti-national and pro-British in these approaches. Rawat and Satyanarayana argue that the Nationalist historians, while positing the contradiction between the nation as a whole and the imperial rule helped the nationalist elite to appropriate power. Marxist historiography brought focus on the role of the working class and peasants in the freedom struggle. However they glossed over "these specificities of socio-cultural forms of oppression and indigenous struggles and

⁴⁸ Ramnarayan S. Rawat, K. Satyanarayana 'Introduction' in Ramnarayan S. Rawat, K. Satyanarayana ed, *Dalit Studies*, Durham, 2016.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*

⁵⁰ Sumit Sarkar quoted in Ramnarayan S. Rawat, K. Satyanarayana 'introduction' in Ramnarayan S. Rawat, K. Satyanarayana ed *Dalit Studies*, Durham, 2016.

ideas”.⁵¹ Both these schools of history writing reduced colonial state as a purely secular and external entity. The role of the colonial state in reinforcing caste society and nationalizing Hinduism and ideological and cultural struggles against it are hardly topics covered by these schools.⁵² This has resulted in a neglect of study of complex transformations that occurred during the colonial period.

However another trend of history writing can be seen in the work of Cambridge historians. Washbrook and Baker disparage the existence of anti-colonial consciousness and consider the national movements as competition and struggle among internal groups.⁵³ The struggle of the internal groups was also over the definition of nationalism. Jangam quotes with approval, Washbrook’s argument that the ‘imperial rule was hardly the golden age of the Pariah’.⁵⁴ Rawat points out that colonial officials and their Brahmin allies conspired to chain Chamars to the leather industry. Both colonial officials and upper castes contributed to the spread of the stereotype that Chamars are criminals who poison cows.⁵⁵ Frykenberg audaciously argues that company raj was a Hindu raj which furthered ritual and civic disabilities on untouchable caste groups.⁵⁶ In response to this historical reality, non-Brahmanic castes revolted against both colonialism and Brahmanical traditions. Jangam points out that, Phule, the non-Brahmin leader from Maharashtra, clearly comprehended the growing collusion between Brahmanism and colonialism and directed struggles against both, while upper caste reformers restricted themselves to reform of their respective communities.⁵⁷

The scholars who follow methods and agenda of Dalit historiography have also expressed their disillusionment with Subaltern historiography. Jangam wonders

⁵¹ Chinnaiah, Jangam, ‘A Dalit Paradigm: A new narrative in South Asian historiography’, *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume no.50, issue 1, 2016 pp.399-414.

⁵² Ramnarayan S. Rawat, K. Satyanarayana ‘Introduction’ in Ramnarayan S. Rawat, K. Satyanarayana ed *Dalit Studies*, Durham, 2016.

⁵³ A.Satyanarayana, *Dalits and Upper Castes : Essays in Social History*, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 122-123

⁵⁴ Chinnaiah Jangam, ‘Politics of Identity and the Project of Writing History in Postcolonial India: A Dalit Critique’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 1 no .40, October 3, 2015, pp. 63 -70.

⁵⁵ Ramnarayan S. Rawat, K. Satyanarayana ‘Introduction’ in Ramnarayan S. Rawat, K. Satyanarayana ed. *Dalit Studies*, Durham, 2016.

⁵⁶ Robert Frykenberg, ‘Constructions of Hinduism at the Nexus of History and Religion’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol.23, No.3, 1993, pp.523-550.

⁵⁷ Chinnaiah Jangam, ‘Politics of Identity and the Project of Writing History in Postcolonial India: A Dalit Critique’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 1 no .40, October 3, 2015, pp. 63 -70.

whether the categories of elite and subaltern correspond to social reality in terms of caste, class or community.⁵⁸ Partha Chatterjee also concurs and points out that in the specific context of India, “subaltern consciousness cannot but contain caste as a central element in its constitution”.⁵⁹ The fundamental tool of subaltern ideological domination in the Indian context is caste and ideology of Brahmanical religious traditions. The two categories of elite and subaltern do not reflect this dimension of social power and therefore fail to capture the reality of social existence of either the subaltern or the elite. Since the categories of subaltern and elite are purposefully constructed to bear upon a critique of modernity, it does not allow a questioning of pre-modern inherited privileges.⁶⁰

Jangam argues that subaltern historians consider pre-modern forms of struggles as radical and have not engaged with Dalit struggles against colonial and caste Hindu oppression which made use of colonial modernity.⁶¹ While subaltern historiography engaged with epistemic violence engendered by imperial knowledge production and racial ideas, they do not pay the same heed to an understanding of ideological violence implied in traditional hierarchy of caste. Jangam points out that it is important to extend the method and insights of subaltern historiography which is reading “alternative stories of the marginalized in the mainstream acts”.⁶² The political agenda of subaltern historiography of including subaltern past or ‘minority histories’ in order to expand the scope of social justice and representative democracy could be carried forward by Dalit historiography.⁶³ The realization that Dalits are also subjects of history occurred after the entry of lower caste movements and parties in North India after the 1990’s.⁶⁴ This

⁵⁸ Chinnaiiah Jangam, ‘Politics of Identity and the Project of Writing History in Postcolonial India: A Dalit Critique’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 1 no .40, October 3, 2015, pp. 63 -70.

⁵⁹ Partha Chateerjee, ‘Caste and Subaltern Consciousness’, in Sumit and Tanikar Sarkar ed. *Caste in Modern India : A Reader*, Ranikhet, 2015.

⁶⁰ Chinnaiiah Jangam, ‘Politics of Identity and the Project of Writing History in Postcolonial India: A Dalit Critique’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 1 no .40, October 3, 2015, pp. 63 -70.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p.68

⁶² *Ibid*, p.68

⁶³ *Ibid*, p.66

⁶⁴ Ramnarayan S. Rawat, K. Satyanarayana, ‘Introduction’ in Ramnarayan S. Rawat, K. Satyanarayana ed. *Dalit Studies*, Durham, 2016.

has radically changed the view of their role in making of modern India and national movement.

Debate on Memory, Experience and Ethnography in Dalit Historiography

The paradigm set for Dalit history writing has also brought into focus the need to use new type of sources or imaginatively examine the archival sources already used by other historians. Satyanarayana points out the importance of using sources in the vernacular to understand Dalit struggles for dignity since caste associations and Dalit intellectuals wrote in this medium.⁶⁵ Sources such as novels, poems and caste histories written in the vernacular will enable us to understand Dalit ideology formation. He also exhorts historians to ‘decode’ official archival sources such as, Census, gazetteers and committee reports.⁶⁶

Missionary reports in south India are an untapped source for writing Dalit history. While missionaries were undoubtedly influenced by colonial notions of India and Hindu society, they also recorded the socio-cultural life of the untouchable group which they encountered during their proselytizing activities.⁶⁷ Popular cults such as *mathangi* were vividly described in missionary accounts.⁶⁸ They also recorded the connections between religious ideology of Brahmanism and caste disabilities imposed on the untouchables. Conversions were a mass phenomenon aimed at a new positive group image and missionaries unwittingly recorded this process in the course of their mission activities.⁶⁹

Scholars have also pointed out the need to use personal interviews and historical memory to understand dynamics of identity formation. The methodology employing a critical interplay of archive and memory could be seen in Badri Narayan’s work.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ A.Satyanarayana, *Dalits and Upper Castes: Essays in Social History*, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 126.

⁶⁶ *Ibid* p. 126

⁶⁷ Yagati Chinna Rao, *Writing Dalit histories and other essays*, New Delhi, 2007, pp. 2-20.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p.12.

⁶⁹ Yagati Chinna Rao, *Writing Dalit histories and other essays*, Kanishka publishers, New Delhi, 2007, p. 13.

⁷⁰ Badri Narayan, *The Making of the Dalit Public In North India: Uttar Pradesh, 1950-Present*, New Delhi, 2011.

Narayan investigates the historical lineage of the political consciousness of Dalits in the state of Uttar Pradesh which enabled the Bahujan Samaj Party to capture power. Using the *baat-se- baat* methodology or participant observation, Badri Narayan not only collected oral histories from villages, towns and cities, but conducted an in-depth exploration and analysis of the official archives. Badri Narayan by juxtaposing oral histories with archival information, argues that the *Nara-Maveshi* movement was not mentioned in the official archives at all, but was reported by the Dalit respondents as one of the local struggles that has contributed to the radicalization of political consciousness of Dalits in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Hence, a seemingly unimportant movement missing in the archives forms a crucial element of Dalit memory. This aspect also reveals the possibility of developing a dialogue between different kinds of archives and oral histories. The methodology used by Badri Narayan is highly relevant for developing a pluralistic approach to the topic of research. In our project also we have continuously moved between sites in Gadwal and people's memory of events and archives, which enabled us to refocus our enquiry.

The work of Ranajit Guha offers a model for adapting anthropological tools to a historical study⁷¹. Taking up the theme of the religious beliefs of the untouchable caste groups of the *Doms* and *Bhangis*, Guha's central concern is to study the element of subversion in the religious myths of these caste groups. Guha argues that religion is the oldest archive in the subcontinent. Underlining its importance, all the principal features of dominance and subordination are recorded in it as codes of authority, collaboration and resistance. These codes have their origin in historically articulated structures of power".⁷² Guha's analysis offers several important approaches for studying myths. First, he lays down the structure of the myths in terms of its three components: grammatical, genealogical and cultic. Second, he introduces a classificatory scheme for the type of myths used by the lower castes based on either the *Puranic* tradition or the mores of the village life.⁷³ Guha looks at the semiotic meanings of myths, in terms of looking at the relationship of meanings of words to each other in

⁷¹ Ranajit Guha, 'Career of an Anti God in Heaven and on Earth', in Partha Chaterjee ed., *The Small Voice of History*, Ranikhet, 2005.

⁷² Ranajit, Guha, 'Career of an Anti-God in Heaven and on Earth', in Partha Chaterjee ed., *The Small Voice of History*, Ranikhet, 2005.

⁷³ *Ibid*

a system. Taken together this approach can be identified as ‘ structuralist’ approach to the study of consciousness.

Such an exercise does not really involve the act of living and engaging with subordinate communities. Chatterjee argues that the tasks set out by the subaltern studies thirty years back can no longer be carried forward by methods employed by it.⁷⁴ The method employed by Guha in the above article is that of reading the significance of social and cultural practices by describing the underlying concepts that purportedly informs them. Anthropological studies today have dislodged this understanding of cultural practices. They point out the “autonomous existence of embodied institutional practice whose significance cannot simply be read off by the texts describing the underlying concept”.⁷⁵ A religious ritual for example is not merely the realization of a theological concept, the subject may practice without being aware of the dogma that informs these practices. Cultural practices are related to concepts in more complex ways. Therefore, cultural history, he argues cannot merely be the study of texts but should focus on practices. This means that cultural historians should shift their focus from intellectual history to ethnography. In anthropology, the description of myriad social practices is anchored in a monograph by connecting disciplinary level theories and debates. This makes the elaboration of particular events, practices and people, general and insightful. Such an approach is difficult for a historian who has to build a narrative flow of history.⁷⁶ Chatterjee suggest that historians can make such a study accessible outside the region while preserving its integrity by bringing cross- cultural comparisons. In this study, we have tried to describe myths and rituals in Hindu and Christian religion as embodied practices and situate them in group relations.

Vijaisri Priyadarshini’s work employs an ethnographic method.⁷⁷ Her study could bring out the connection between the myths and the rituals performed and practiced by the Madiga community in the popular cult of *Mathangi*. However the historical events and process which shapes the rituals associated with the popular cult

⁷⁴ Partha Chatterjee, ‘After Subaltern Studies’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume XLVIII, No35, September 2012, pp.44- 49.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, P. 44

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 47

⁷⁷ Vijashri, Priyadarshini , *Dangerous Marginality : Rethinking Impurity and Power*, New Delhi , 2015

of *Mathangi* and its changing nature is not addressed in her study. We have tried to connect in this thesis, the popular cults of Madigas such as the '*Mathangi* tradition' to historical processes such as changes in religious beliefs and practices in Brahmanical religious traditions and social relations and practices of other caste groups in the state of Gadwal.

The suggestion to use oral interviews and popular memory was not well received by all historians. Some Dalit intellectuals have also debunked the importance of such methodological exercise in the academia and have posited a position of 'my memory as opposed to your history'. In this process, the chasm separating professional historian and popular histories that informs Dalit movements has widened. The use of memory has brought out the question of canonical status of 'experience' to validate certain interpretations of historical events and processes. Kancha Illaiah wrote on an article on the futility of historical conventions with respect to collection of evidence for the writing of Dalit – Bahujan histories.⁷⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty have largely assessed this approach to history writing brought about by democratic movements as a negative development in history writing and an attack on the method of history.⁷⁹ The entry of Dalits in democratic politics does not help to the redraw disciplinary boundaries of history. He argues that "the very use of history for purposes of debate among the lower castes is in a state of decline".⁸⁰ This is because subaltern groups are using their own perceptions of the past and show scant regard for evidence and argumentation. This project of fashioning history as a political weapon could be illustrated through the work of Kancha Illaiah. Illaiah makes a case for basing the study of the pasts of the Dalit-Bahujan community entirely on their experience. By doing so, he rejects the use of conventional sources of history and ways of reading them. In short, he dismisses the discipline of history as a whole in studying the past of marginalized groups. According to him subaltern pasts do not need the validation by a professional historian. Since such an approach is a denial of the need for professional history writing, Chakrabarty

⁷⁸ Kancha Illaiah, 'Productive Labour Consciousness and History : The Dalit Bahujan Alternative', in Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty ed., *Subaltern Studies IX : Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi, 1996.

⁷⁹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Public Life of History: An Argument out of India', *Post Colonial Studies*, Vol.11, No.2, pp. 2008, 169-190.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, P.169

considers the entry of dalits in democratic politics as not contributing significantly to the discipline of history in India.

Other historians who focus on writing Dalit histories have criticized this above position of Chakrabarty. Jangam points out that the above position of Kancha Illaiah is the result of an ahistorical reading by him of Dalit Bahujan struggles.⁸¹ He considers such an approach to history as harmful for the politics of emancipation of subaltern groups. He argues that Dalit consciousness can be raised better by bringing to light the historical experience of caste oppression and by narrating “the rich history of anti – Brahmanism and anti-casteism” that animated colonial public sphere.⁸² He further states “mere polemics and protest, instead of raising ‘DalitBahujan consciousness’ rob them of their historical roots and disempowers their claim for a rightful place in history and society”.⁸³ D.R. Nagaraj calls the approach of Kancha Illaiah as “the pathology of sickle swallowing”.⁸⁴ He criticizes the substitution of mythmaking for history and points out that it is important to lay out a proper historical context of the emergence of caste practices and Dalit resistance to it. Nagaraj work engages with both academic and popular history to bring forth the experiences of Dalit-Bahujans in the cultural arena as shaped by their interaction with caste Hindus.⁸⁵ Jangam argues that such a lineage of history writing should be recognized and preserved. According to him, Chakrabarty ignores this dominant trend in Dalit writing which pay attention to the historical method while assessing the impact of the entry of Dalits into mainstream electoral politics in redrawing disciplinary boundaries. Making Kancha Illaiah, an example of writing Dalit history is therefore a ‘self-defeating exercise’.⁸⁶

The agenda of Dalit historiography

Dalit historiography lays out certain distinct objectives for a study of India to offer a new perspective on it. They are “a) for grounding issues of human dignity as central to

⁸¹ Chinnaiah Jangam, ‘Politics of Identity and the Project of Writing History in Postcolonial India: A Dalit Critique’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 1 no .40, October 3, 2015, pp. 63 -70.

⁸² *Ibid*, P.68

⁸³ *Ibid*, p.68

⁸⁴ D. R Nagaraj, *The Flaming Feet and other Essays*, Ranikhet, 2010

⁸⁵ *Ibid*

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p.67

the study of Indian history, b) examining discursive practices that allowed caste discrimination to persist c) moving beyond the conceptual obsession with the framework of colonialism versus nationalism”.⁸⁷ By laying down these objectives, historians such as Rawat and Satyanarayana have exhorted historians to reclaim Dalit as a subject of history. Following these pointers we lay down the broad objectives of this study. The thesis attempts to understand the complex transformation of Hindu religion in the *Samasthan* of Gadwal and untouchable responses to it. In the first chapter an effort is made to undertake an intellectual history of the construction of Madigas and their religion during the colonial period thorough Census activities. We also describe the construction of the identity of the Madigas and their religion by missionaries and ethnographers. The untouchable response to such a construction of their identity is also explored. We elaborate the Adi- Hindu movement in the Hyderabad state and its organizational activities. The radicalization of the political position of the untouchable is also explored. We elaborate the ideological positions of Adi-Dravida League and Independent Schedule caste federation. This chapter provides a background to understand the emergence of Brahmanic Hinduism and untouchable assertions against it in the area of study, Gadwal *Samasthan*. The changing relationship between popular Hinduism, popular cults and Brahmanical religious traditions in the *Samasthan* of Gadwal is explored in chapter two. It is hoped that this exercise will elucidate the reasons for the appeal of Adi-Hindu movement and conversions to Christianity for the untouchable groups during the colonial period in the state of Gadwal. We therefore aim ‘to examine discursive practices that allowed caste discrimination to persist’ and the struggle of untouchables for ‘human dignity’ in the state of Gadwal.

Dalit historiography lays down an objective of uncovering untouchable version of nationalism which recovers the agency of the untouchable persons and groups who worked in various political and religious organizations of this period. This is explored in chapter three which narrates the struggle of the untouchables in Congress party and Christian missions in the *Samasthan* of Gadwal. These two chapters together explore the struggle for dignity of the untouchables of Gadwal which interacted in complex ways with mainstream political movements. We therefore aim to move beyond the ‘binaries of nationalism versus and colonialism’ all the while elucidating the complex

⁸⁷ Ramnarayan S. Rawat, K. Satyanarayana, ‘Introduction’ in Ramnarayan S. Rawat and K. Satyanarayana ed. *Dalit Studies*, Durham, 2016.

interaction between anti-colonial struggles and the struggle for dignity by the untouchable groups. Taken together the chapters of this dissertation is a modest attempt to end the marginalization of Dalits in history writing and to enhance the contemporary struggle for dignity of these groups with positive stories of their earlier struggles for emancipation. Dalit historiography also aims to explore the lineages of contemporary Dalit activism. This objective is met by exploring various organizations and ideology that influenced and shaped local struggles in the *Samasthan* of Gadwal. It is hoped that by exploring the dynamic relation between local and region, in terms of connections between missionary policies and local conversion drives, nationalist discourses and their appropriations by untouchables, a fuller picture of untouchable struggle for identity in Hyderabad state can be brought out. Through this exercise it is hoped that certain gaps which exist in the study of untouchable assertion in the Hyderabad state which were mentioned in the beginning of this chapter such as the impact of communalization of politics that occurred in the Hyderabad state on hastening untouchable assertions and the synergies between local and regional dynamics will be brought forth through this study. In this study, I explore the crucial question of the role of religion in the political consciousness and identity of the Dalits. Specifically, I aim to examine the role of the Madiga caste group in initiating religious change from 1898-1960 in the *Samasthan* of Gadwal in the State of Hyderabad.

Chapter 1

Colonial Construction of Madiga Identity in the Hyderabad State

In this chapter we trace the varying influence of ideologies and processes upon the construction of modern Hinduism and caste as seen in the Hyderabad State. In order to attempt such an inquiry, we examine the politics around the construction of the identity of the Madiga caste group. We examine the conceptual categories that underpin the construction of Madiga identity in the Census and its contestation by untouchable caste groups through their organizations. As the untouchables were not passive recipients of such a construction, we examine the historical response of the untouchable caste groups in general and the Madigas in particular in the state of Hyderabad. This chapter therefore provides a broad setting to understand the events that occurred in Gadwal *Samasthan*.

Colonial Construction of the Religion and Identity of the Madigas

The colonial construction of Hinduism affected the categorization of the religion of different caste groups in the Census operations that began in 1871. In this section, we examine the Census data pertaining to the untouchable caste groups in the state of Hyderabad from the Census of 1891 to 1931. Bernard S Cohn has argued that the Census operations affected all Indians. The effect initially began as a response from the intelligentsia in Bengal to the manner in which the Census captured the socio-cultural life of the Indians. By the 1930s its effect could be felt among all sections and even the remote towns and villages.¹ While Census operations consolidated the Brahmanic view of caste and religion, it also gave caste groups an opportunity to define themselves ritually and otherwise in comparison to others and to redefine their social life.² Many lower caste groups used Census operations to force a dialogue between modern ideas of equality and old social identities.

¹ Bernard Cohn, 'Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia', in *An Anthropologist among the Historians and other Essays*, Oxford, 1987.

² Chinnaiah Jangam, *Contesting Hinduism : Emergence of Dalit Paradigms in Telugu Country, 1900-1950*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2005.

The colonial construction of the untouchable caste group of the Madigas can be seen from the Census data. The Madigas were listed as performing the occupations of leather work and agricultural labour in the Census of 1891 and 1901.³ The traditional occupation of tanning has several components such as skinning of dead animals, leather dressing and the making of leather ropes, leather buckets for hauling water from the wells and other leather articles used in animal husbandry.⁴ In the subsequent Census of 1911, they were listed under the occupations of 'Village Watchmen' and 'Menials' and do not find a place in the occupations of 'Leather Workers'.⁵ The castes that are found under the category of 'Leather Workers' are the Chambar and few caste groups mentioned as 'others'. This categorisation of the Madigas as village watchmen and menials continues in the Census of 1921.⁶

As village menials, they performed the occupations of scavengers, guides, village watchmen, executioners and *begaris* or forced coolies. They worked as village criers, announcing by beat of the drum (*dafada*) decisions of the authorities. Many serve as menials in the houses of Muslim landlords. One of the significant developments is that a few members of this caste group have taken to agriculture and could set themselves up as cultivators.⁷

The Census of 1921 record a shift in occupations from leather working to agricultural labour and cultivation by the Madigas. But some of them continued with their traditional occupation. The Census of 1921 clearly states that the term Chambar is also applied to those Madigas in Telangana who made leather sandals. The Census of 1921 puts the population of Chambar in the princely state of Hyderabad at 1,12,534, of which some belonged to the Madigas who are spread out in the Telugu speaking regions and the Chambar, who occupy a similar social position to that of the Madigas are found in the Marathi speaking regions. This shift in occupations changed the forms of address or the terms used to refer to the Madiga community. They were referred to by the name

³ *Census of the State of Hyderabad, 1891 and Census of the State of Hyderabad, 1901*, Mazhar Hussain, Times Press.

⁴ Syed Siraj Hasan, *Castes and Tribes of the Nizams Dominions*, 1941.

⁵ *Census of Hyderabad State, 1911*, Mahomed Abdul, Times Press, 1913.

⁶ *Census of Hyderabad State, 1921*, Rahmatulla Mohammed

⁷ Syed Siraj Hasan, *Castes and Tribes of the Nizams Dominions*, 1941.

of '*Madigoddu*' to denote their occupation of 'Leather Working' in the Census of 1891. This label was given to them as long as they performed this task. In the 1911 Census, where they were categorized as 'Village Watchmen and Menials', the term used to refer to them changed to 'Madiga'.⁸ One should note the derogatory nature of the former and the value neutral nature of the latter term. The meaning of the term *Madigoddu* is 'that fellow' belonging to the Madiga caste. In Telugu language, the word *Gadu* is contrasted with the term *Garu*. These terms indicate the amount of respect/honor and familiarity/contempt vested in the person who is addressed by these terms. While *Garu* is respectful and is often used to address landlords, the word *Gadu* indicate the familiarity of the person with the other, indicating therefore the suspension of respect, and is reserved for servants. When used in peer groups and between friends, the term indicates the level of intimacy between two people. Intimacy being a relationship of mutual trust, personal boundaries can be bridged in that fashion without inviting retaliation from the other. The term is dismissive of the personhood of the individual when used against people with whom one is not intimate. This reference is derogatory when used against the untouchable because it assigns an inferior and sub-human existence to them. The basis for assigning such inferiority is impurity associated with the hereditary occupation of leather working and therefore also indicates higher level of contempt. The term *Madigoddu* is used to address an individual of this caste group. However, such a reference extends the identity given to the caste group to the individual as well and he has no other identity apart from the one as a member of his community. The humiliation that arises from the usage of this contemptuous term is complete and total since the identity of the individual is fully subsumed under the identity of the group.

Here the collusion between the colonial state and native elites becomes apparent. Cohn argues that the Census officials outsourced the task of filling in the socio-economic and religious data required for the Census enumeration to the native elites who completed the task of enumeration. The Census enumerator visited the home of the village headman or accountant and asked them for information on each particular household. They did not even visit the households to ask for details, as it is usually done

⁸ *Census of Hyderabad State, 1911, Mahomed Abdul.*

in an ethnographic survey.⁹ The information gathered through such an exercise therefore reflected the existing norms and values of the caste Hindus towards the Madigas. Once collected, the colonial state froze this derogatory term of '*Madigoddu*', thereby completing the process of collusion between two principal parties.

Shift in occupations from 1891 to 1911, played a crucial role in the change in the terms used to refer to this caste group in official Census reports. The breakdown of relations akin to *jajmani*¹⁰ has been reported by Thurston for the Madras Presidency and Russell for the Berar region of the Central Provinces.¹¹ This shift in occupation could have reduced the usage of the derogatory term of '*Madigoddu*'. Instead, the term 'Madiga' began to be used from the Census of 1911. By this time, the Madigas became less dependent on the caste Hindus for carrying on their hereditary occupations due to modernization of the leather industry. They also shifted to other occupations. This would have affected terms of address used to refer to them. The term 'Madiga' does not carry negative connotations and signifies only the name of the community. Even the dominant castes such as the Reddy and the peasant caste of Boya in the region under study are referred to by their caste names such as 'Redollu' and 'Boyollu'.

It was precisely during this moment of change in occupations that the Census also reported a change in the religion of the Madigas. It is interesting to note the reasons cited by the Census of 1921 for a decrease in population of the Madigas. "Compared with their strength in 1911, they show a decrease of 17 per cent. The decreases are due to not only the vicissitudes of the seasons and the visitation of the epidemics, *but also to conversions from amongst them to Christianity*" [emphasis added].¹² According to this account, Madiga ceases to be a Madiga in the Census, when he or she converts,

⁹ Bernard Cohn, 'Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia', in *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*, Oxford, 1987.

¹⁰ Jajman means the patriarch of a household. The village community allocated the task of lifting of dead cattle from the houses of peasants to particular Madiga households. Each Madiga household was assigned a fixed number of peasant households and was therefore attached to the jajman. He was dependent on him for procuring the raw material for carrying on his hereditary occupation. Such a system was fixed by custom. But Thurston reports the breakdown of such a system in the Telugu speaking regions of the Madras Presidency by 1911 due to the penetration of market relations and setting up of modern tanneries. See, Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Volume V, 1909 and R.V. Russell, *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces*, Volume IV, 1916.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Census of Hyderabad State, 1911, Mahomed Abdul.*

thereby implying that the caste status of a group stems purely from their membership in Hindu religion. Simon Charsley points out that the category of untouchable owes its genesis in a large measure to the categories such as *apisya Shudra* or polluted Shudra used by Risley who was a Census commissioner and an ethnographer in colonial India.¹³

A look at the Census from 1891 to 1931 and other official sources during the colonial period shows the categorization of the beliefs of the Madigas. The Census of 1921, 1931 and Syed Siraz Hasan's work delve into the nature of the religious beliefs of the Madigas. The earlier Census records for 1891, 1901 and 1911 have categorized the religion of the untouchable castes under the category of 'Hindu'. They give information only for the religion of the tribal groups of the Andh, Bhil, Erkula, Gond and Lambada under the category of 'Animists'. Siraj Hasan, the colonial ethnographer on the other hand points out the animistic nature of the beliefs of the Madigas.

The Madigas are said to be animistic in their beliefs as they pay more reverence to the malevolent deities of diseases, ghosts and spirits and deceased persons than to the Sanskritic gods of the Hindu pantheon.¹⁴ The goddesses or gods worshipped by this caste group are Mathangi, who is their principal deity. Many also consider Renuka or goddess Yellamma as their patron deity. Other malevolent goddess worshipped by this caste group were Mari Amma, Murgamma or Durgamma (she goddess presiding over children), Pochamma (the deity of small pox), Maisamma, Ellamma, Gauramma, and Mahakalamma. The offerings to these goddesses are goats, buffaloes, fowls and liquor which are subsequently partaken by the devotees themselves.¹⁵

The Census of 1921 for the state of Hyderabad, on the other hand, categorizes the religion of the untouchable caste groups as 'civilized animists'.¹⁶ Census defines them as "the lower strata of Hindu society who are in their beliefs and practices no better than animists and such of the animists as have come under the influence of

¹³ Simon Charsley, 'Untouchable: Whats in a Name?', J.Roy Anthropological Institute, (N.S), No.2,1996, pp.1-23.

¹⁴ Syed Siraj Hasan, *Castes and Tribes of the Nizams Dominions*,.1941.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Census of Hyderabad State, 1921, Rahmatulla Mohammad.*

Hinduism and have cast away their tribal denomination to assume the garb of Hinduism”.¹⁷ This Census also states that the civilized animists formed 19% of the total population of the state of Hyderabad. We see a shift in categorization of the untouchable religion from ‘Hindu’ to ‘civilized animist’ from the Census of 1891, 1901 and 1911 to 1921.

However the definition of civilized animists was done in such a fashion as to include them in ‘Hinduism’. The categorization of the religious beliefs of the Madigas in the state of Hyderabad shows the manner in which the colonial Census officials privileged the acculturation process or the Brahmanic model of assimilation to explain the religious beliefs of diverse groups of people. It is due to this bias that the Census of 1931 clearly sees no room for belief systems apart from Brahmanical religion and assumes that the trajectory of the religion of the Madigas would take the form of merger into Hinduism. The Census of 1931 clearly states that,

The method designed to separate Hindus from Animists has been in vogue since 1891 but it is by no means without flaws”. It also states that “aboriginal tribes coming under Hindu influence are prone to adopt Hindu ideas and prejudices and take part in Hindu festivals. Thus, the difference between the aborigines and their Hindu neighbours as regards social customs and religious observances gradually fades away and they ultimately come to be regarded as Hindus.¹⁸

The Census approvingly quotes Sir Edward Gait’s remarks in his All-India report for 1921, “the practical difficulty is to say at what stage a man ceases to be an Animist and becomes a Hindu. Therefore, as time goes on, the procedure of drawing a line of demarcation between Animists and Hindus would serve no useful purpose, because Animism is the ante-chamber of Hinduism”.¹⁹ Through such statements, the Census reports seem to clearly privilege the overarching framework of Hinduism into which the animistic beliefs of the Madigas were collapsed. Acculturation as described by historian D.D. Kosambi shows the way in which the religious beliefs of the tribal

¹⁷ *Census of Hyderabad State, 1921, Rahmatulla Mohammad.*

¹⁸ *Census of Hyderabad State, 1931, Gulam Ahmed Khan.*

¹⁹ *Ibid*

groups were integrated into Brahmanic Hinduism.²⁰ This concept is very important for analyzing the historical changes in religion. But social anthropologist Virginius Xaxa argues that such a process occurred only during the pre-colonial period and applying the same to the colonial period deforms our understanding of tribal religion.²¹

Missionary Views on Hinduism and Untouchables in Gadwal

The Brahmanic conception of Hinduism and caste percolated to the Indian masses through Census operations and with the proselytizing activities of the missionaries. The missionary accounts were also influenced by the views of Orientalists and saw the socio-religious life of the Madigas through this lens. From memoirs to books, the missionaries critiqued the role of the Brahmin in Hindu religion. The missionaries identified the Brahmin as the fulcrum of the Hindu social system. They identified precisely those reasons that tied the ideological hegemony of the Brahmin with the subordination of the Madiga in the religious sphere. However, the popular beliefs in the village in which the untouchable groups participated along with village community were described as superstition and not as religion. Status of religion was reserved only for Brahmanic Hinduism.

The world view of the missionaries with respect to religion and caste can be seen in some of the missionary accounts from Gadwal. Writing in 1915, missionary Hiebert remarks:

India is the only mission field in the world that has the caste system to contend with. The caste system is a religious system, representing the very heart of Hinduism, and touches life at every point. It is hard to grasp how completely it binds the Hindu population of India, how unbendingly rigid it is, and how it harbors within itself all kinds of injustices and evils. It has hindered the development of the church in

²⁰ D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, London, 1965.

²¹ Virginius Xaxa, 'Transformation of Tribes: Terms of Discourse', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.34 no.24, 1999, pp.1519-1524.

India in a twofold way: it has kept multitudes away from Christ and out of the church, and it has kept the church inwardly weak and divided.²²

In theological discussions, these missionaries took Brahmanic religious beliefs and teachings as the only point of reference. Conversions in Gadwal mostly occurred among the Madigas. In order to convince Madigas to convert to Christianity, the missionary talked to them about the inadequacy of Hindu philosophy and Sanskritic gods of the Hindu pantheon. However these converts were barely acquainted with these Hindu gods. Syed Siraj Hassan clearly points out that “The Madigas are said to be animistic in their beliefs as they pay more reverence to the malevolent deities of diseases, ghosts and spirits and deceased persons than to the Sanskritic gods of the Hindu pantheon”.²³ Missionaries also trained these converts in Hindu and Christian philosophy. The rare exposition of a Madiga convert, Ambrose in 1890 in Mahbubnagar which is adjacent to Gadwal, shows the ways in which the missionaries took the religious beliefs of the Brahmins as the reference point in their conversion efforts.

One morning missionary Chute took Ambrose, a local evangelist with him and went into town and preached the gospel. The next day a government peon came to the tent of Chute with a message that the Tahsildar wishes to see Chute at the Cutchery (court house). Chute took Ambrose with him. A large crowd had gathered at the Cutchery. Among them were educated Brahmins and many priests. A priest from Mangalore had also come to refute Christianity. The Tahsildar asked him to speak on the subject of religion. Requesting for some time to speak on the matter, Chute decided to give the floor to Ambrose. Ambrose made the walls of the old Cutchery resound with the news of the glad tidings. He refuted idolatry and the claims of the Hindu triad, with arguments and illustrations drawn from their own writings, with such irresistible force that the people came to the conclusion that there was not one prop on which the religious system could stand.²⁴

²² *A short biography of J.H Voth*, 1915, MBCBC, Hyderabad.

²³ Syed Siraj Hasan, *Castes and Tribes of the Nizams Dominions*, 1941.

²⁴ Chute quoted from, I.P. Asheervadam, *Dalit Conversions to the Mennonite Brethen Church*, Unpublished M.Phil Thesis, United Theological College, Bangalore, 1998, p.187.

The point of reference in Ambrose's exposition of the tenets of Christianity and refutation of Hindu religion was the *Dharmashastras* written by the Brahmins. Gods belonging to the Hindu triad or Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva were refuted. The missionaries were dealing only with Brahmanical religion and not with the village deities, which the mass of people worshipped. The missionaries in Gadwal even looked at the outlook of the mass of the Hindus from the view point of Brahmanic Hindu philosophy of *karma*. They pointed out that Indians have a fatalistic outlook to life.²⁵ A. A. Unruh, the missionary at Gadwal *Samasthan* reports,

The union troops are expected in Gadwal any time. Or people on the compound were real scared when suddenly jeeps passed our compound to the river. They thought *Razakars* came to the compound. I see how easy it is to scare these people. They have very little thought about danger and seem to take it calm till something unusual comes along and everybody runs. *They don't look upon danger with courage but with fatalisms.* [Emphasis added].²⁶

This report from 1948 shows that despite the long association with the untouchable groups, missionaries could not make an independent judgment about their religious values and continued to see them through the Brahmanical prism. The missionaries ignored elements of popular culture due to this Brahmanical bias. Scholars have pointed out that the missionaries labeled the sacrifices to the village deities by the non-Brahmins as mid-summer madness.²⁷

Missionaries also referred to social groups by their *varna* status and not by their *jati*. In Gadwal, missionaries referred to converts or persons who were interested in the teaching of gospel by their *varna* status alone. They make reference to the *jati* status of a person only when they speak about the agricultural caste of Reddy in Gadwal. This

²⁵ A.A Unruh., Report on My Experience of the Police Action, September,1948 . File no. M.209, Peter Penner India Mission Research Files. MBCBC. A.A Unruh are a missionary couple based in Gadwal from 1937 till 1965. Also see, *Harvest Field*, June-July, 1941, MBCBC, Hyderabad.

²⁶ *Ibid*

²⁷ Priyadarshini Vijashri 'In Pursuit of the Virgin Whore: Writing Caste/Outcaste Histories', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.45 (44/45), 2010, pp.63-72.

caste was dominant in the region. There were only two social groups in the world view of the missionaries – the Brahmins and the Shudra. Reverend Unruh reports in 1907:

The Brahmins spread the news that we came to take their children and to poison their wells. We could not do anything at first. But we camped near that village for two weeks and went out preaching in the surrounding villages. The people gained confidence in us and came out in crowds to hear the gospel. Being harvest time, the Shudras could not come by the day. They came after eight o'clock at night and often stayed till one o'clock at night near our tents and listened to the gospel.²⁸

In the 1930s we have reports of conversions among the agricultural peasant castes. Unruh reports in 1932, "I am sure you will be greatly interested in our new experiences of in gathering Shudras in our field. They are coming. I wrote in my report that a delegation of Catholic Christians came to see me about joining the Baptist Church. They are all of the higher class of Shudras (Kammas)."²⁹ From these references, we can infer that the missionaries operated with the category of *varna* and not *jati*. Scholars have shown that *varna* is inadequate to capture the socio-cultural phenomena of caste in India. They have put forward the importance of *jati* to understand the regional variations in the caste system.³⁰ The missionary Unruh, came close to the concept of *jati* when he identifies the Kammas as higher classes in Shudras, thereby pointing out himself the inadequacy of *varna* categories to capture status differences.

It is pertinent to note that the missionaries did not use the term *panchama* to refer to the untouchables. This term was widely used by the *Dharmashastras* and by political actors in the early 20th century, to refer to the Madigas, however we notice missionaries avoiding the usage of this term. Since, missionaries connected caste status only to religious status, they thought that once an untouchable converted, he/she would lose their caste. His or her identity consequent upon conversion to Christianity is that of a Christian. This missionary view was also in line with the view of the Census

²⁸ Copy of the Report from Corenius Unruh, Palmur, South India to Boston, January 18, 1907, MBCBC.

²⁹ Correspondence between Cornelius Unruh to Dr.J.C.Robbins, Secretary of the A.B.F.M. Society, 152, Madison Avenue, New York City, United States of America., April,1932, MBCBC.

³⁰ S. S. Jodhka, *Caste: Short Introduction*, New Delhi, 2012.

commissioners. We saw that when a section of the Madigas converted to Christianity, the Census commissioner considered them as 'Christians' and did not refer to them any longer as 'Madigas'. The Census of 1921 stated that "compared with their strength in 1911, they (Madigas) show a decrease of 17 per cent. The decreases are due to not only the vicissitudes of the seasons and the visitation of the epidemics, but also to conversions from amongst them to Christianity".³¹

Imposition of caste disabilities continued on the untouchables even after conversion thereby signaling that caste position and treatment is not only related to religious status but also to the existing socio- economic system.³² This phenomena of continuation of caste disabilities on Christian converts would not have escaped the attention of the missionaries who were close to the untouchables and visited their homes regularly. It is paradoxical that missionaries persisted with a view that a person loses his caste after conversion when it is clear that Madiga converts continued to be subjected to caste disabilities. It is also interesting to note that higher caste groups were still called by their respective caste names after conversion. Both the Census and the missionaries connected caste position only to religious status, therefore logically a person would lose his caste upon conversion. The principle should apply equally to all caste groups, if it is to be consistent. However we see that only the untouchables lost his caste consequent upon conversion, and the caste status of other caste group was independent of their religious affiliation. Is it possible that the association of caste with religion is only made to justify the imposition of civic and religious disabilities on untouchables? In that case, it would seem that the colonial officials colluded with Brahmanic forces to ensure it.

Another instance that shows the influence of the views of Orientalists is in the reform programme initiated by the missionaries for the Madigas who had converted from their earlier animistic religion to Christianity.³³ These included giving up of the

³¹ *Census of Hyderabad State, 1911*, Mahomed Abdul.

³² Chinnaiah Jangam, *Contesting Hinduism: Emergence of Dalit Paradigms in Telugu Country, 1900-1950*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2005.

³³ I.P.Asheervadam, *Dalit Conversions to the Mennonite Brethren Church*, Unpublished M.Phil Thesis, United Theological College, Bangalore, 1998. Asheervadam details the reform measures instituted by the missionaries for the untouchable converts in Gadwal and in the Mahbubnagar region.

food habits of beef eating and drinking of liquor. Such reform measures were similar to the ones outlined by them for the Valmiki caste group in Delhi.³⁴ Brahmanical view put forth the idea that disabilities on the untouchable caste groups were imposed due to eating of beef.³⁵ In south India, consumption of liquor has also been identified as another ground for practicing untouchability.³⁶ We see the missionaries instituting reform measures which makes the untouchables more acceptable to the Brahmanical castes. These reform measures were broadly in line with the Brahmanic norms of purity and pollution and thereby appealed to their sensibilities.

Reform and Radicalism in the Telugu Country

In this section we examine the exchange of ideas on caste and untouchability between the conservative, reformers and untouchable organizations during this period in the public sphere of Telugu country. Hindu social reformers had a decisive impact in the formation of public sphere in coastal Andhra and Hyderabad state. They initiated a dialogue with conservatives who defended the institution of caste and practices of untouchability. Reformers redefined the meaning of *karma* and *varna*. *Varna* position was redefined as based on individual merit rather than one acquired at birth.

Conservatives found these argument lacking in merit. Chinnaiah Jangam details the activities of *All India Varnashrama Samiti* in coastal Andhra region which exposes the logical inconsistencies in the reformers ideas on *varna* system.³⁷ Conservatives pointed out that each individual exhibits different qualities of various *varna* at different stages in his life. For example, according to them, a person may turn aggressive at a later stage in life clearly exhibiting Kshatriya qualities while he was calm and composed in an earlier stage showing the qualities of a Brahmin. Therefore, it would be arbitrary to fix the *varna* of a person at any given point in time. It was important therefore to continue with birth ascribed *varna* status. They pointed out that differences of quality

³⁴ John Webster, 'Varieties of Dalit Christianity in North India' in Rowena Robinson and Joseph Marianus Kujur (ed.) *Margins of Faith: Dalit and Tribal Christianity in India*, New Delhi, 2010.

³⁵ Vivekananda Jha, 'Candala and the Origins of Untouchability', *The Indian Historical Review*, Vol.13, no's.1-2, 1986, pp.186- 210

³⁶ K.R. Hanumanthan, 'The Evolution of Untouchability in Tamil Nadu- A.D up to 1600', *Indian Historical Review*, vol.23, 1996, pp. 41-60.

³⁷ Chinnaiah Jangam, *Contesting Hinduism: Emergence of Dalit Paradigms in Telugu Country, 1900-1950*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2005.

between groups is natural, created by God. Most of them reiterated the *Shastric* rules of untouchability. They pointed out that untouchables were denied temple entry because that mode of worship was not suitable for them and that they could worship god and attain salvation if they followed the injunctions of the scriptures. Debates between these sections and on the rationale for caste and untouchability were theological in nature since their reference for debate was the Hindu scriptures.³⁸

Socio-religious reformers remained within the ambit of Hindu scriptures. The religious reform movements advocated ways to increase the religious merit of the *panchamas* which are prescriptions for gaining purity according to the *Shastras*. Reform activities such as giving up alcohol and beef consumption and animal sacrifice were prescribed for elevating the socio-religious status of the untouchables. In essence, these reform activities focused attention on the untouchable self. They pinned the blame for the deplorable condition of untouchables on the character and lifestyle of the *panchamas*.³⁹

The untouchable organizations formulated their reform on the basis of the guidelines provided by the socio-religious reformers coming from the Brahmin caste. Jangam points out that untouchable organizations were closer to reform organizations dominated by the Brahmins and showed hostility to the non-Brahmin movement and its organizers. Jangam postulates that hostility of the untouchable intellectuals to the non-Brahmin movement was due to the fact that it was spearheaded by Shudra castes who were their immediate oppressors in the agrarian economy. Moreover, non-Brahmin movement did not address the issues of the untouchables. This may have led to the affinity of these intellectuals for religious reform as advocated by enlightened Brahmins in reform organizations.⁴⁰ Adi-Andhra organizations started by the untouchables propagated ideas of Hindu reformers. Hindu reformers made the question of caste and untouchability an internal matter of Hindu religion affecting only those who follow this faith. On similar lines, the Adi-Andhra organization defined untouchables as Hindus

³⁸ Chinnaiah Jangam, *Contesting Hinduism: Emergence of Dalit Paradigms in Telugu Country, 1900-1950*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2005.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

alone and excluded both non-Brahmins and Christians from their organizational activities.

The ideological offense by the leaders from the Hyderabad state was the first resounding response to the colonial construction of the untouchable caste groups. The public sphere of Andhra region of Telugu country was more vibrant as it was part of the Madras presidency. In this region there were conducive conditions for the growth of civil society such as freedom of press and organization, spread of English education and so on. However, it was the untouchable intellectuals from the Hyderabad state who clearly stated the agenda of the movement in Telugu country. These leaders from Hyderabad also gave ideological leadership to the movement. The Hyderabad untouchable intellectual and activist Bhagya Reddy Varma decisively influenced the ideological contours of the untouchable movement in the Telugu country.⁴¹

The immediate trigger for the movement in Hyderabad state was the categorization of the religion of the untouchable caste in the Census. The Census of 1921 had categorized the religion of the untouchables as 'civilized animists'. Census enumerators have commented that there was a deluge of petitions to change the category to 'Adi-Hindus' in the upcoming enumeration in 1931. This was due to the decade long campaign in the 1920s launched by Bhagya Reddy Varma. Due to these demands the Madigas were included under the category of 'Adi-Hindus' in the Census of 1931.⁴²

Although Bhagya Reddy mounted the first ideological offense against Brahmanical traditions, he remained within the framework of reform activities put forward by the Hindu reformers in coastal Andhra. Bhagya Reddy fashioned a religious identity for the untouchable caste groups using the racial categories of Aryan and pre-Aryan indigenous population. He argued that untouchables were the original inhabitants of India and their culture is distinct from caste Hindus who are descendants of Aryans. Although he tried to fashion a pre-Aryan identity for untouchables, he saw them as members of the Hindu nation. In an illustration of the Adi-Hindu flag drawn

⁴¹ *Ibid*

⁴² *Census of Hyderabad State, 1931, Gulam Ahmed Khan.*

by Bhagya Reddy he included symbols of Hindu nation such as Swastika along with bow and arrow signifying the pre- Aryan roots of untouchable identity. Jangam argues that Bhagya Reddy “oscillated between the constructions of a separate identity for untouchables and integrating them within the emerging Hindu nation”.⁴³ He tried to integrate untouchables into the “Hindu social and cultural processes within the reformist framework”.⁴⁴ Bhagya Reddy propagated Hindu Brahmanical rituals and exhorted the untouchable caste groups to follow them.

Jangam points out the organizational connections between Adi-Hindu movement started by Bhagya Reddy in Hyderabad and Arya and Brahma Samaj.⁴⁵ The spread of Brahma Samaj and its arguments on *varna* and *karma* were well accepted by this group. Bhagya Reddy was given the *varna* of Brahmin, but he declined it and adopted the surname 'Varma' (surname given for Kshatriya *varna*) arguing that ‘he is a man of practical action’.⁴⁶ It was due to this association of Bhagya Reddy Varma with Hindu reform organizations that he sought a closer association with Hinduism. It is in this context that one has to place the demand for change of the religious status of the untouchable caste groups from ‘civilized animists’ to ‘Adi-Hindu’.

Such politics around religion under the Adi-Hindu banner such as demands for cutting themselves off from Hindu religion coincided with the events reported by Ram Narayan Rawat for the Adi-Hindu movement from United Provinces from 1924 to 1928 led by Swami Achhutanand.⁴⁷ An examination of the response of the untouchable caste groups to the Census shows that while pitching their demands, they remained, as Cohn argued for the intelligentsia in Bengal, in the overall framework erected by modern Brahmanical Hinduism.⁴⁸ Hence, these untouchable caste groups in Hyderabad state along with other caste groups in colonial India did not challenge the main assumptions

⁴³ Chinnaiah Jangam, *Contesting Hinduism: Emergence of Dalit Paradigms in Telugu Country, 1900-1950*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2005.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*

⁴⁵ *Ibid*

⁴⁶ *Ibid*

⁴⁷ Ramnarayan Rawat, *Reconsidering Untouchability: Chamars and Dalit History in North India*, Bloomington, 2011.

⁴⁸ Bernard Cohn, ‘Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia’, in *An Anthropologist among the Historians*, Oxford, 1987.

of emerging social order and thereby were part of a broader process in the time period before the entry of Dr B. R. Ambedkar.

However the attempts of the Adi-Hindu movement and Bhagya Reddy Varma to remain within the cultural universe of Brahmanic Hinduism did not go unchallenged by other untouchable leaders and organizations. This led to schism in the ranks of the untouchable movement in the Hyderabad state. The Census of 1931 reports that the Adi-Dravida Educational League, a faction of this movement opposed the inclusion of the 'Depressed' classes under the Hindu category in the Census. A section of the Adi-Hindus opposed the demand of the Adi-Dravida Educational League. They argued that "the conception of god, the mode of worship, the system of rituals, the code of customs, the manner of dress and way of life are identical with that of caste Hindus and argued that religiously Adi-Hindus are Hindus".⁴⁹ Adi-Dravida Educational League took a radical position on Hinduism and anticipated the political line of Ambedkar in the 1930's. The faction fights among the Adi-Hindus shows the extent to which the untouchable caste groups could pitch their campaign for settling their relationship with Hinduism through an awareness generated by the Census.

Jangam points out that the Adi-Hindu intellectuals argued for the removal of untouchability and due to political pragmatism they did not demand the removal of caste or community within society.⁵⁰ With the famous declaration made by Ambedkar in 1935 that he will not die a Hindu, he drew a direct connection between caste as sanctioned by Hindu religion and the disabilities imposed on the untouchable caste groups.⁵¹ These views of Ambedkar radicalized and energized untouchable leaders and

⁴⁹ *Census of Hyderabad State, 1931*, Gulam Ahmed Khan.

⁵⁰ Jangam demonstrates that the period of 1920-30 saw the spread of organisational activities of Congress which drew into its fold for the first time the antagonistic classes of Brahmins who dominated Congress in the earlier phases and agrarian classes of Raju, Kamma etc. Many educated Dalits also joined it attracted by Gandhian reconstruction programmes. It is this political atmosphere of hegemony of Congress which forced many Dalit intellectuals to tone down their attack on Hindu nationalism and upper caste leadership. See, Chinniah Jangam, *Contesting Hinduism : Emergence of Dalit Paradigms in Telugu Country, 1900-1950*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2005.

⁵¹ It was in October 1935 at Yeola, Maharashtra, that Ambedkar declared 'it was my misfortune that I was born a Hindu Untouchable. It was beyond my power to prevent that, but I declare that it is within my power to refuse to live under ignoble and humiliating conditions. I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu.' See Christopher Jaffrelot, *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability: Analysing and Fighting Caste*, Delhi, 2006, pp. 120.

intellectuals and led to the formation of an assertive untouchable constituency from the year 1935 onward.⁵²

Jangam shows that the same individuals who argued in the previous decade that caste can continue but not untouchability, had a remarkable change in this position in the 1930s. These leaders argued that there is nothing surprising in the assertion of Ambedkar that he will not die a Hindu.⁵³ Kusuma Dharmanna, an untouchable Gandhian leader in coastal Andhra pointed out that Ambedkar mulled the option of conversion only after the failure of the Gandhian methods such as *satyagraha* to reform Hindu society. In a polemical debate with the Sankaracharya of Sringeri Matha, who argued that untouchability can be removed however attacking caste is another matter, Dharmanna pointed out that caste and untouchability are linked and one cannot exist without the other.⁵⁴

Due to the momentum provided by the movements in the 1930s at the all India level, organizations belonging to the depressed classes from the United Provinces showed an interest in understanding the conditions of the untouchables in the Hyderabad State. The All India Adi-Hindu Depressed classes organization from the United Provinces sent a delegation to inquire into the conditions of the untouchables in the Telangana and Marathi regions of the Hyderabad State. They were acting on the reports of the State Congress and Aryan News Agency and sought the permission of the Resident and the Nizam for conducting an inquiry.⁵⁵ The correspondence between the President of this organization and the Resident of Hyderabad is as follows,

In view of the conflicting reports published by the Congress and Aryan news agencies regarding the political condition of the Depressed Classes in Hyderabad State, the All India Adi-Hindu Depressed Classes Association have decided to send a deputation of selected

⁵² Chinnaiah Jangam, *Contesting Hinduism: Emergence of Dalit Paradigms in Telugu Country, 1900-1950*. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies. 2005.

⁵³ Kusumu Dharmanna, " *Nenu Hinduvudanuga Chachhiponu!*" (I will not die as a Hindu), *Krishna Patrika*, 2 November 1935, p. II. Quoted in Jangam, "*Contesting Hinduism : Emergence of Dalit Paradigms in Telugu Country, 1900-1950*". Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies. 2005.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*

⁵⁵ Proposed Visit of a Deputation of All India Delegation of the Depressed Classes to the Hyderabad State, 1940, Home Political File no. L6/a2958, Installment no. 30, List no.4. APSARC.

Representatives of the Depressed Classes for the purpose of studying the situation on the spot. This deputation will consist of 1. Rai Sahib Har Pershad Tamta, M.L.A. 2. Babu Ram Pershad Tamtam, Advocate, M.L.A. and 3. My poor self Mr. Ram Sahai. Mr. Baldeo Pershad Jaiswar will act as Secretary of this deputation. We propose to start in the second week of March and will go to Paithan, Nanded, Hyderabad, Bidar and Adilabad in order to judge for ourselves the truth of the allegations made by the Congress leaders against the Government of the State. As representative of the British Crown, I would beg you to let me know if the Nizam's government will approve of this move and if it would be possible for us to meet you and discuss the situation when in Hyderabad.⁵⁶

This episode shows the increasing scope of the political activities of the untouchable caste groups by the late 1930's. The views of Ambedkar clearly influenced the setting up of Independent Scheduled Castes Federation in the Hyderabad State. In the 1940s, it was the Hyderabad branch of the Independent Scheduled Castes Federation set up by Ambedkar that outlined a clear break of untouchable caste groups from Hinduism. One of the resolutions passed by The Hyderabad State Independent Scheduled Castes Federation on the reforms proposed by the State of Hyderabad shows us this response,

The Working Committee of the Independent Scheduled Castes Federation is shocked to find in the amended reforms of the State the unholy and unjust inclusion of the Scheduled Castes in the Hindu-fold in spite of their repeated declarations that their community is a distinct and separate political entity in the body-politic of the State and emphatically protests against the deplorable attitude of the government to bring their Community under the Hindu-fold which has been suppressing them from time immemorial. The Hindus not only despise them as social and political untouchables, but also it is their avowed religious faith to treat them as the meanest and lowest strata of humanity.

⁵⁶ Letter from Mr. Ram Sahai, M.L.C, United Provinces to the Hon'ble Resident at Hyderabad, 1940, Home Political File no. L6/a2958, Installment no.30, List no.4. APSARC.

To bring them constitutionally under the inhuman subjugation of such a ruthless religion, the Government is treading on the dangerous path of perpetuation of social injustice and exploitation and thereby sowing the seeds of discontentment and disruption in the peaceful political growth of the state in general and the Scheduled Castes in particular.⁵⁷

This resolution crystalizes the entry in Hyderabad state of a radical and belligerent position against Hinduism taken by Ambedkar a decade ago in 1935. Their position is markedly different from the position of Bhagya Reddy who sought accommodation within Hindu religion. The above resolution by the Hyderabad State Independent Scheduled Castes Federation, on the other hand, stated that no accommodation of untouchable was possible within Hindu religion as “the Hindus not only despise them as social and political untouchables, but also it is their avowed religious faith to treat them as the meanest and lowest strata of humanity”.⁵⁸ The resolution pointed out that Hindu religion had become an element of body politic and a position of including untouchables within such a political system will have severe consequences on the position of untouchables. The collusion of this state with the caste Hindus was shown as ‘unholy’ and ‘unjust’. Untouchable community according to the resolution was “a distinct and separate political entity in the body-politic of the State”.⁵⁹ We see Hyderabad State Independent Scheduled Castes Federation threatening dire consequences for the state government if they were included in the Hindu fold. They said that this move by the government would sow the “seeds of discontentment and disruption in the peaceful political growth of the state”.⁶⁰ We see the organization gearing for political agitation. In this instance there was an attempt to carve out a distinct political identity equivalent to that of a minority religion quite distinct from Hinduism for the untouchables. From the 1930s, we see the construction of a pan Indian untouchable identity based on their engagement with Hinduism.

⁵⁷ Resolutions passed by the Working Committee of The Hyderabad State Independent Scheduled Castes Federation on Reforms of the Hyderabad State, July 1946, All India State Peoples Conference File no.16, Part II, NMML.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*

⁵⁹ *Ibid*

⁶⁰ *Ibid*

There were critical changes in the political assertion of the untouchable caste group with respect to their relationship to Hindu religion in the period after 1930. Rawat has also pointed out that even though most historians consider the decade of the 1940s as the heyday of nationalist politics which integrated untouchables into its fold, this period should be recorded as a period of radicalization of untouchable identity and the growth of their organizations.

Conclusion

We have argued in this chapter that the Census and the accounts of missionaries followed the Brahmanic model of purity and pollution which affected the manner in which they recorded the socio-cultural life of the Madigas. We also pointed out that the views of the missionaries in Gadwal and the region of Mahbubnagar were broadly in line with the views of Census enumerators. They identified individuals who were interested in listening to the gospel by the *varna* and referred to the Hindu triad of the Brahmanical world view as the gods of the Hindus. Even their reform aspects were informed by this viewpoint. By doing so they pit themselves against popular culture by referring the village deities as evil and sacrifices as ‘mid-summer madness’ utterly devoid of spirituality. These actions of the colonialist in collusion with Brahmanical forces created Brahmanic Hinduism as the civic religion of the emerging state and nation. Socio-economic discrimination and injustice became the fundamental principle of the organization of state and nation with dire consequences for the untouchables.

We showed the presence of two types of reaction of untouchable caste to this modern construction of Hinduism which became a part of the state ideology and public sphere of colonial Telugu country. The first and the reformist variety led by Bhagya Reddy Varma sought greater association with Hinduism. The reformists asked for accommodation within this Hindu nation. The second response can be seen from the ideology of the Hyderabad State Independent Scheduled Castes Federation. This section clearly understood the emergence of Caste Hinduism as the civic religion of the nation and could point out its harmful effect on the untouchables. They asked the state to recognize them as a ‘separate political entity in the body-politic of the State’. This divergence of views between the reformist and radical sections were the source of friction between Bhagya Reddy and Ambedkar and shaped the politics of untouchable groups in Hyderabad. Through this chapter, we could see the construction of Hinduism

in the colonial period in Hyderabad and the response of the untouchable caste groups to such a construction from 1910 to the late 1940s. In the next chapter, we aim to explore the effects of such a construction on the untouchable caste group of the Madiga in Gadwal.

Chapter 2

Religion and Social Change in Gadwal

This chapter maps the changes in religion from 1898-1950 in the *Samasthan* of Gadwal. In the colonial period, Hinduism and caste system as a single system began to spread to hitherto untouched areas.¹ Susan Bayly for Punjab², Prem Chowdhry for Haryana³ and Pamela. G. Price⁴ for dry land regions of India in general have shown the spread of such a system to new areas where the Brahmanical religion had been weak. In this chapter, we aim to see whether such a system which privileges the Brahmanical viewpoint spread to Gadwal and its effect on the existing religious beliefs and practices of caste groups. Benjamin Cohn reports that with the decline in the use of military power, *Izzat* or honour began to assume an important element of kingly power and increasing ceremonialism was observed in the political culture of Hyderabad state, most noticeable among rulers of *Samasthan*.⁵ Conservative sections in colonial period seem to see the Princely States as places where Brahmanical Hindu culture was actively supported and nurtured.⁶ It is due to these peculiar historical circumstances that prevailed in Gadwal that we aim to see the cultural change among the Madigas.

We begin with a caste conflict that occurred in one of the villages in the *Samasthan*. This event took place in 1898 and shows the first signs of the assertion of

¹ G. Aloysius, 'Caste In and Above History', *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol. 48, No. ½, March, September, 1999, pp. 151-173.

² Susan Bayly, 'Western Orientalist's and colonial conception of caste' in Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar ed, *Caste in Modern India*, Ranikhet , Delhi, 2010.

³ Prem Chowdhary, *Political economy of production and reproduction, caste, custom and community in Northern India*, London, 2011.

⁴ Pamela. G. Price, 'Kingly Models in Indian Political Behavior: Culture as a Medium of History', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 29, No. 6, June, 1989, pp. 559-572. She points out that religious symbolism helped the king to infuse sacred with political authority and vice versa and supported the prevalence of monarchical values. The importance of Hinduism in the reproduction of royal status continued during the colonial period also.

⁵ Benjamin Cohn, *Kingship and Colonialism in India's Deccan: 1850-1948*, UK, 2007. Cohn reports that rulers of *Samasthan* especially Gadwal used elephants mostly to show kingly power even after the use of elephant for military and other industrial activities have become obsolete. Another example is the use of honorific titles for which there was a competition among rulers of *Samasthan*. The king of Gadwal could attain the title of Maharaja after he paid a hefty *Nazarana* to the Nizam. *Samasthan* is a Hindu kingdom of free standing. Its prestige is based on the measure of ancien origin.

⁶ Manu Bhagavan, 'Princely States and the Hindu Imaginary: Exploring the Cartography of Hindu Nationalism in Colonial India', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 673, 2008, pp. 881-915.

the Madigas in the religious sphere. In order to understand this historical response of the Madigas, we delineate the structure of religion that operated in colonial Gadwal *Samasthan*. In the next section, we discuss the links between Brahmanical Hinduism and popular culture and region and village. We notice certain critical changes which took place in the realm of popular culture due to the impact of Brahmanism. In the concluding sections we detail the responses of the untouchables namely sanskritization drive by the Malas and conversion by the Madiga as a critical response to these religious developments in Hindu beliefs.

The beginning of change: 1898 case

The Muhamaddan reports a case of hostile response of the caste Hindus to the conversion of Madigas in one of the villages in 1898.

If ever the unfortunate country of John China man⁷ comes to be pulled to pieces either by the cupidity of Europe or as the result of the supineness of the Chinese themselves, the root of the everlasting would lie at the door of such of those missionary bodies who having much more legitimate functions unattended to in their respective territories with the ostensible purpose of preaching the gospel but in reality as so many martyrs ready even to lay their lives down if thereby they could succeed in embroiling the natives into trouble with their own nations.⁸

What the German missionaries have succeeded in doing in China, some tried on a much smaller scale to work out at the Gadwal *Samasthan* of these dominions. Not being able to domineering to their own liking, upon the people or the revenue authorities, the missionaries located here are alleged to have made a report to the British resident, on what ground dependent safety not, which report Mr. Chichele Plowden to the government of his highness the Nizam for enquiry. Thereupon, the administration acted very wisely in the appointing Mr. Justice

⁷ John China man is a term used by British to refer to Chinese collies. It was then used to refer to anyone who is a native of China.

⁸ The reference is to imperialist and missionary policy in China and the episodes of Boxer Revolt which took place in 1898-1900. The incident in Gadwal also took place in 1898, hence the comparison between both these events by the Muhamaddan newspaper.

Nizamuddin, a honest official in the entire Nizams administration. No one therefore could find fault with his finding on the complaint of the missionaries. He completely exonerated the *Samasthan in* question, in other words, the complaint is made to appear as false and totally unfounded.⁹

It is further reports,

Since the preachers of peace and goodwill had all but succeeded in bringing about ‘trouble and ill will to the village’ they have settled in, the best course open to them at the turn their false complaint has taken, would be to shake the dust of the said settlement of their feet and turn their attention to fresh fields and pastures now.¹⁰

This event in Gadwal shows the trouble stirred up by the missionaries in the villages they settled down and set up their mission station. The American Baptist Mission was the first to start their activities in the region of Palamoor, the ancient name of the present day Mahbubnagar area in the year 1885.¹¹ American Baptist Mission expanded from its base in Ongole where it had already created a section of untouchable converts and conducted work for food programme during famine of 1840.¹² The Gadwal region was supervised by the missionary Elbert Chute from his station in Mahbubnagar. Gadwal was made a separate mission station in 1893.¹³

Various historians have reported on the changing missionary policy in South India which was the bastion of evangelical success in India.¹⁴ Copland argues that the

⁹ *The Muhamaddan*, 17 January, 1898.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ B.Z. John, *Centenary of the Mennonite Brethen Church*, Board for Foreign Missions, Hillsboro, Kansas, 1961.

¹² I.P. Asheervadam, ‘Dalits search for Christianity in pre-independence India’ in Joseph Prabhakar Dayam, Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar and I.P. Asheervadam ed. *Mission at and from the Margins*, Edinburgh, 2015

¹³ B.Z. John, *Centenary of the Mennonite Brethen Church*, Board for Foreign Missions, Hillsboro, Kansas, 1961.

¹⁴ The earliest Christian influence in south India was in 15th and 16th century of mostly Roman Catholic churches and Protestant missions in areas such as Pondicherry and Goa. This is because British disallowed Mission activities in British areas till 1819. See H Bugge, ‘Christianity and Caste in XIXth Century South India: The Different Social Policies of British and Non-British Christian Missions’, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 43e Année, No. 103, July – September, 1998, pp.87-97.

relation between the missionary societies and English East India Company was initially cool. This was so because missionaries perceived that the religious policy of the British was turning India into a Hindu raj. This state of affairs was reversed in the subsequent period when both of them realized they have a common aim of providing education.¹⁵ Missionaries believed that English education would reduce superstitions and would create default Christians while Raj thought it would create loyal subjects. During this period 1813-1830 and after the passage of Charter Bill in 1813, the influence of missionary views on Hinduism also seems to have propelled the promulgation of social reform laws by the Company.¹⁶ After the Mutiny of 1857 however, one notices a parting of ways between them. While education did not provide a critical mass of converts for the missionaries, it also did not produce loyal citizens.¹⁷ The missionary activities also contributed to the view that Raj is secretly aiding and abetting missionary activities in India. While British Raj subsequently severed all official ties with the missionary societies, the needs of evangelism also pulled missionaries away from the Raj.

Missionaries shifted focus from elite education to vernacular evangelism among the Hindu lower caste including an increased emphasis on direct preaching, vernacular elementary schools, rural medical missions and self-financing or governing churches.¹⁸ G.A. Oddie reports a corresponding change from the initial hostility to Hindu culture to a more “discriminating opposition to caste and high caste Brahmin elitism as the fundamental problem of Hindu society”.¹⁹ The earlier view that caste is a social system was discarded and caste was perceived as fundamental to Hindu religion.²⁰ Until the 1820’s there had been a level of tolerance in all Protestant missions to caste distinctions

¹⁵ During this phase, Anglicans and missionaries began to develop more collaborative relations. This is more pronounced in the activities of the British Missions. See H Bugge, ‘Christianity and Caste in XIXth Century South India: The Different Social Policies of British and Non-British Christian Missions’, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 43e Année, No. 103, July – September, 1998, pp.87-97.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Ian Copland, ‘Christianity as an Arm of Empire: The Ambiguous Case of India under the Company, C. 1813-1858’, *The Historical Journal*, 494,2006, pp.1025-1054.

¹⁸ Philip Constable, ‘Scottish Missionaries, ‘Protestant Hinduism’ and the Scottish Sense of Empire in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century India’, *The Scottish Historical Review*,862, 22, 2006, pp. 278-313.

¹⁹ G. A. Oddie, *Social Protest in India*, Delhi, 1979.

²⁰ See H Bugge, ‘Christianity and Caste in XIXth Century South India: The Different Social Policies of British and Non-British Christian Missions’, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 43e Année, No. 103, July – September , 1998.

within the church, but this changed. From this time on, the Protestant missions, stressed the importance of deleting caste identities and caste behaviour in their Churches including the customs of widow-burning and child-marriages. They also attempted to reform the social system in the villages by some form of land reforms in favour of the *Pariahs*.²¹ The great famine of 1877-78, destruction of hereditary occupations, economic dislocations and the consequent search for new patrons by untouchable groups also aided the spread of Christianity in South India.²² Missionaries soon emerged as benevolent *Dora* landlord who “fanned desire for liberation among the lower castes and were seen as standing with them during the times of struggle”.²³ The new conversion strategy yielded great results and the entire South Indian society was shaken by the large group-movements or mass-conversions in the 1870s and 1880s.²⁴

Policies of missionaries such as famine relief, land allocation, anti-caste stance and rural literacy aided by lower caste enthusiasm for a new religion resulted in a mass movement charting its way from Ongole to Mahbubnagar impacting the Madigas of Gadwal.²⁵ I.P. Asheervadam points out that the native preachers and converts from Ongole spread the news about mission activities and ideas of Christianity as they came to attend cattle fairs in Mahbubnagar region.²⁶ He argues that missionaries were responding to the religious demands of the Madigas who actively sought out the possibilities of social change implied in mission efforts.²⁷ The first convert to

²¹ Jangam reports on the reaction of orthodox sections to such moves of Missionaries. These sections pointed out that untouchables ultimately depended on caste Hindus and they will not be able to till the land if they cannot procure livestock from larger Hindu society. See, Chinnaiiah Jangam, '*Contesting Hinduism: Emergence of Dalit Paradigms in Telugu Country, 1900-1950*', Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2005.

²² B. Forrester, *Caste and Christianity*, London, 1979.

²³ I.P. Asheervadam, 'Dalits search for Christianity in pre-independence India' in Joseph Prabhakar Dayam, Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar and I.P. Asheervadam ed., *Mission at and from the Margins*, Edinburgh, 2015.

²⁴ Mostly only Christian missionaries undertook relief activities during famine. During the period from 1871 to 1901, the growth rate of Christian population in the Madras Presidency was over four times greater than the growth of population as a whole. See G.A. Oddie, *Hindu and Christian in South East India: Aspects of Religious Continuity and Change*, London, 1991.

²⁵ G. A. Oddie, 'Christian Conversion in the Telugu County, 1860-1900: A Case Study of one Protestant Movement in the Godavery-Krishan Delta', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 7,1975, pp.61-79.

²⁶ Asheervadam details the complex relation between material and spiritual needs. See , I.P. Asheervadam, ' Dalits search for Christianity in pre-independence India' in Joseph Prabhakar Dayam, Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar and I.P.Asheervadam ed., *Mission at and from the Margins*, Edinburgh, 2015.

²⁷ Asheervadam details the complex relation between material and spiritual needs. See , I.P.

Christianity in Gadwal was a Madiga named Chinna Kistappa who converted in 1890. During this decade and half, the Madigas showed considerable enthusiasm for Christianity till its culmination in the event reported by the *Mohammedan*.

This event occurred in the middle of a famine that raged from 1897 to 1902 in Gadwal.²⁸ A description of the activities of the missionary Chute gives us an idea of the radically different ways in which the missionaries operated in the last decade of the nineteenth century. He was found distributing copper coins to the famished and along with the first Madiga convert Chinna Kistappa. He was in the midst of poor and lower caste to such an extent that he contracted cholera in Gadwal.²⁹ The sight of Madiga preacher rubbing shoulders with the white *Doras* or masters, preaching along with them gave a message of equality and new order of power. The emergence of new patron or *Dora* and its capacities for material munificence that strike at the root of old order was sure to generate hostility among the village elders and authorities. This could have been a source of ill will among the caste Hindu's in the *Samasthan*.

It is interesting that this newspaper item compares the conflict generated by mission activities in Gadwal to the Boxer rebellion. The Boxer rebellion was clearly an incident in which Christianity was used as a weapon of imperialism and was a case of 'national' versus 'imperial'. However this incident was compared to missionary action of aiding Madigas in Gadwal. The ways in which the authors thus constructed a national versus imperial framework to tell us the story of 'the trouble in Gadwal' is ingenious. In order to use such a framework, the author characterizes the different actors of this trouble such as untouchables, missionaries and local authorities and 'people' in a certain fashion. While the character of the lower castes who gave silent support to the missionaries is compared to the 'suppiness' of the local Chinese who committed treason; missionaries were shown as akin to the 'cupid European', the other actor in the Boxer rebellion.

Considering that the article was written from the view of the local authorities,

Asheervadam, 'Dalits search for Christianity in pre-independence India' in Joseph Prabhakar Dayam, Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar and I.P.Asheervadam ed., *Mission at and from the Margins*, Edinburgh, 2015.

²⁸ *Ibid*

²⁹ John Weibe, *Great things god has done*, 5th April, 1959.

the implication of casting the missionaries as 'cupid' is to show them as greedy for power. This sentiment is followed up in the next paragraph where tracing the root of the conflict, the author reports that “not being able to domineering to their own liking, upon the people or the revenue authorities, they took the case to the Resident”.³⁰ Missionary is shown as ready to supplant the power of the local revenue authorities and other notables of the region. Historians have described the various ways in which missionaries acted as counter power to the local authorities and landlords in Coastal Andhra region. One missionary famously drew a gun against a landlord who refused to give a Christian boy break from work to attend to nature’s call.³¹ The newspaper depicts the action of the untouchable caste on the other hand as entirely due to their cowardice and moral weakness or resulting from 'suppiness'.

We could glean that the author is attempting to define nationalism in a certain fashion and project it as the general sentiment of the country. The aggrieved parties in this case are the ‘local authorities and people’. The missionaries as ever ready to “lay down their lives down if thereby they could succeed in embroiling the natives into trouble with their own nation”.³² When one goes by this reporting that the aggrieved are the local authorities, there is absolutely no contradiction in seeing the missionaries as foreigners who were inciting natives against their own nations. Here, the newspaper assumes that the Madigas have equal rights along with the caste Hindus because they too by definition of the nation were the natives of India. Assertions for change by untouchable caste groups were the product of machinations of missionaries who wanted to embroil “the natives into trouble with their own nation”. The *Muhamaddan* tries to combine traditional notions of tranquility based on social status quo with modern notions of illusory rights of the untouchable caste groups within the nation. A new definition of modern nation based on unequal rights and responsibilities and ascribed status which historians have termed as the ‘emergence of caste Hinduism as the civic religion of the nation’ was in the offing and was to shape the emerging civil society in

³⁰ John Wiebe, *Great Things God Hath Done*, 5th April, 1959.

³¹ Pramoda Rao, ‘The Nature and Pattern of the Christian Church as a Reflection of Christian Missions In Andhra Pradesh 1884-1960 : A critique’. in Joseph Prabhakar Dayam, Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar and I.P.Asheervadam ed., *Mission At and From The Margins*, Edinburgh, 2015.

³² *The Muhammadan*, 17 January, 1898.

Telugu speaking Telangana province of the Nizam region as everywhere else.³³ Caste order as the base of the emerging nation was already beginning to get established.

The 1898 event represents a flashpoint that shows the beginning of cultural change among the Madigas. Even after this complaint was made, the missionaries resumed their normal activities in the *Samasthan*.³⁴ Though the mission headquarters was in neighbouring Mahbubnagar, missionary Chute stayed for an entire year in a small house in Gadwal for preaching the gospel in 1900. This event was to shape the response of the *Samasthan* towards the missionaries, which plays itself out in the time of missionary Huizinga in 1907.

Patronage of Brahmanical Hinduism at Gadwal: 1814 -1930

Scholars such as Arjun Appadurai have argued that with the establishment of the British Raj as the hegemonic power in India, the princely states were deprived of the key means of enforcing their power.³⁵ Hence, they took recourse to religion and time honoured traditions to project their kingly power. The colonial construct of 'British India' and 'traditional India' to describes areas ruled by British and Indian princes respectively helped to construct princely states as pristine, timeless traditional and religious Indian states.³⁶ While the British constructed the princely states in this fashion for their political agenda of displaying their 'progressivism', the princely state actively appropriated such a construction for their own political ends of internal control. In this project, Brahmanical culture seems to have come in handy for the Gadwal Raja. Robert Frykenberg argues that the power of Brahmanical Hinduism was felt by the beginning of the nineteenth century and response from caste groups to such a construction was recorded in the 1820s and 1830s throughout the country.³⁷

The influence of Brahmanical customs on the *Samasthan* was felt through the

³³ Chinnaiah Jangam, 'Contesting Hinduism: Emergence of Dalit Paradigms in Telugu Country, 1900-1950', Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2005.

³⁴ John A. Wiebe, *Great Things God Hath Done*, 1959

³⁵ Arjun Appadurai, 'Kings, Sects and Temples in South India, 1350-1700 A.D,' *Economic and Social History Review* 14 1, 1977, pp.47-73.

³⁶ Manu Bhagavan, 'Princely States and the Hindu Imaginary: Exploring the Cartography of Hindu Nationalism in Colonial India', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 673, 2008, pp.881-915.

³⁷ Robert Frykenberg, 'Constructions of Hinduism at the Nexus of History and Religion', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol.23, No.3, 1993, pp.523-550.

Mathas that were established within the *Samasthan*.³⁸ The Ahobila Matha was the first to be established, around three hundred years ago by Vaishnava Brahmins.³⁹ Oral interviews and sculptural evidence found in the Chenna Keshava temple, that is located inside the fort at Gadwal⁴⁰, indicate that the Raja was the disciple of this Matha.⁴¹ They were entrusted with the task of providing services at the Chenna Keshava temple in the fort and also organising the *Rathothsavam*.⁴² In return they were given *inam* lands for these services, which were located in the vicinity of the Gadwal town and also near the bank of the river Krishna.

In this context, it is worth pondering whether this letter addressed from the Raja of Gadwal to the head priest of the Ahobila Matha can be taken as an evidence of the increasing spread of Brahmanic religion in Gadwal.⁴³

Raja Rama Bhoopla Rayuduyour most obedient and humble servant offers his adoration. Myself and all my Retinue are doing well here in 4th Margasira Sudha of this year. You must be pleased to favour us from time to time with sacred letters letting me know the good progress in the daily feeding of Brahmins and advance made in the cultivation and inculcation of sacred Vedas and Hindu theology and philosophy at your sacred quarters. The sacred letter which your divine has been pleased to send in the month of Sravana Sudha through A. Raghavacharlu and Venkata Dishtulu was received with all honours and due dignity on the auspicious day of the 10th Karthigai Babula.

I placed it on my head and thereby I was absolved of all sins. I was

³⁸ *Mathas* are Brahmanical theological centers. Their functions are to conduct studies and deliberate on Brahmanical works such as Dharmashastras, their commentaries and also on treatises on philosophy. They also disseminate their works through pamphlets and meetings. *Maths* were first established by Adi Sahankaracharya in the ninth century.

³⁹ Interview with Rangachary, retired school teacher, Gadwal town, May 6th and 7th, 2017.

⁴⁰ The Raja of Gadwal resided in the fort. It was located in the centre of the town.

⁴¹ Interview with Parthasarathy, Advocate, Gadwal town, May 7th, 2017.

⁴² Ratha means a chariot. *Rathothsavam* refers to the practice of placing the images of deities on a chariot and carrying them in a procession throughout the town or a village accompanied by the chanting of mantras and blowing of trumpets.

⁴³ Letter addressed to Sri. Van Satakopa Ranganatha Yatindra Matha Desika, the head priest of Ahobila Matha by His Highness the Raja of Gadwal, December, 1814' sourced from the Temple documents of the Ahobila Matha, Gadwal town on May 6th, 2017.

directed to send camels, peons and palanquin bearers to enable your divine grace to travel to the Northern countries to dispel all gloomy darkness of ignorance and spread luster by the glorious rays of your divine learning and thus achieve universal triumph. A little delay was caused in procuring a passport from the town of riches Hyderabad and it is herewith sent as per your directions. Be pleased to place your sacred feet in this part of the country and absolve all your servants from sin. All the remaining circumstances would have been brought to your divine knowledge by the letters addressed to your divine grace by Ramanujacharlu, the Muttam agent at this place. Thus, I render my endless adorations to your sacred feet – Royal Seal of Gadwal”⁴⁴.

The second theological center that had an influence over this *Samasthan* was the Mantralaya Matha.⁴⁵ This Matha was located in the nearby Kurnool town. The followers of this center known as the Madhwa Brahmins migrated to Gadwal around two hundred years ago to set up agraharams. Though a late entrant, the Madhwa Brahmins were able to capture key posts in the administration in the town and in the surrounding villages. The post of Raja *purohit* in the Rajas court invariably went to the Madhwa Brahmins and they were also placed as *patwaris* or village accountants.⁴⁶ Hence, unlike the Ahobila Matha which supplied priests and theologians, the Madhwa Brahmins constituted the landed aristocracy. It is also reported that the Mantralaya Matha enjoyed *Inam* lands worth 50 lakhs of rupees by 1959, thereby showing the importance of this Matha over the *Samasthan*.

Oral interviews show that the cultural world of the Raja and therefore the links between this tiny *Samasthan* and religious centers in British India were constantly expanding. The king of Mysore also patronized the Ahobila Matha.⁴⁷ A photograph of the 1940s shows the Raja of Mysore washing the feet of the head priest of the Matha.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ ‘Letter addressed to Sri.Van Satakopa Ranganatha Yatindra Matha Desika, the head priest of Ahobila Matha by His Highness the Raja of Gadwal, December, 1814’ sourced from the Temple documents of the Ahobila Matha, Gadwal town on May 6th, 2017.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*

⁴⁶ *Ibid*

⁴⁷ Interview with Rangachary, retired school master, Gadwal town, May 6th and 7th, 2017.

⁴⁸ Introduction on Ahobila Matha . Private Collections of Rangachary, school teacher, 1965.

Thick network of religious relations began to emerge between theological centers and prominent temples and little kings such as Wadiyars at Mysore and Rambhopal in Gadwal. It is also in the colonial period that the Raja sought relations with the Mantralaya Matha in Kurnool in the neighboring British India. The Raja of Gadwal donated jewelry to the deities at the famous hill shrine of Tirumala in British India. He donated land for horticulture for the *naivedyam* or offerings for the lord and started a tradition of sending the famed Gadwal sari to dress the lords consort Padmavati. It is said that the opening prayers in this temple on a particular day used to invoke the name of the Raja of Gadwal as a patron.⁴⁹ The role of princely states such as Gadwal and Mysore as bastions of Brahmanical culture seems to be corroborated by reports which say that “Mysore is a model state for the Hindus in India”.⁵⁰ Frykenberg argues that British administrators by ruling over temples, inaugurating temple festivals and partaking in rituals became divinely ordained authorities or ‘*huzoor*’.⁵¹ Thomas Monroe who continued the tradition of giving tax free Inam lands to the Raghavendra Swamy Matha at Mantrayalam was worshipped as a deity in parts of Kurnool.⁵² The attempt of a Hindu king to preside over a *dharmic* order and partake of sacred kingship is therefore hardly surprising.

Changes in political equations forced these native rajas to depend more and more on Brahmins both for ideological control of the kingdom and for running the administration. This tilted power more in the favour of Brahmins compared to the ruling group of Reddies. The Raja of Gadwal summoned an Agraharam sabha in 1915, which was a forum for the holders of these tax free lands. In this sabha, he scolded a Brahmin for not wearing the proper attire. The Brahmin responded with a sharp poem critical of his patron.⁵³ The second event took place in 1924. In response to the Raja's demands,

⁴⁹ Interview with Samara Simha Reddy, ex-Minister Gadwal town, May 7th, 2017.

⁵⁰ ‘Mysore’, *The Hindu*, February 5, 1889, and Interview of Rangachary, retired school teacher, Gadwal town, May 6th, 2017.

⁵¹ Robert Frykenberg, ‘Constructions of Hinduism at the Nexus of History and Religion’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol.23, No.3, 1993, pp.523-550.

⁵² *Madras District Gazetteer, Bellary Reprint 1916* Chapter XV - Adoni Taluk, Page no 213, it is said that Munroe took off his shoes while approaching the Murti and after a spiritual encounter with Swamy who offered him consecrated rice, and he accepted it and ordered it to be used in the preparation of his meals for that day. We could see that Munroe behaved as expected of an imperial authority in India.

⁵³ Maddullapalli Subrahmanya Shastri, *Gadepalli Vaari Kavitha Pithasamu*, The Poetry of Gadepalli, 1933.

the Brahmins in the Dharoor village surrendered their *inamdari* rights and migrated. This behavior of the Brahmins can be contrasted sharply with the story of Gopal Acharya who wrote the famous *Dasasahatyam* (1720 -1790). Having disagreed with the king, he cried and ran to the forest, there he put his head inside an anthill to die, however Shiva came out of the anthill and requested him to construct a temple. Here the Brahmin was shown to be at the mercy of his cruel patron and without hope, to be rescued only by the divine.⁵⁴ Due to the death of the Raja, between 1930-1937, the *Samasthan* was under the regency of Adi-Lakshamma.⁵⁵ Due to the absence of a male figure on the throne, the Brahmins put forward the proposal that they also should be allowed give out gifts at the literary fest frequently organized by the king to showcase his power. This incident sparked off a sharp discussion between the pundits attached to the establishment and the oligarchy of the Reddies in the court of Gadwal. These three events show the increasing power of the Brahmins in the *Samasthan*. It reflects in a broad manner, the increase in the power of the Brahmins which occurred in the colonial due to this caste group availing modern western education and employment. In the three instances we narrated above, we see the Brahmins being acutely aware of their indispensability for the native rajas. This could be sharply contrasted to their earlier position in the state and society of Gadwal, clearly reflected in the story of Gopala Acharya. He depended on the king for his livelihood and status in society. The increasing power of Brahmins during this period had severe consequences on the political economy of village society since most of these Brahmins were granted Inam lands in villages.

Sacred and Political Geography

The famous *Rathotsavam* in honor of Chenna Keshava temple, the maintenance of *agraharams* through Inam lands within the boundaries of the Gadwal town together make up the 'sacred geography', which was then combined with the political geography of the Gadwal town. The influence of these *Mathas* can be seen in the grandeur of the annual *Rathotsavam* held in honour of Chenna Keshava Swamy, deity patronized by the Raja of Gadwal. It has an interesting origin story that dates back to 1761 was widely reported during the colonial period. The story behind this custom goes

⁵⁴ *Ibid*

⁵⁵ C.H. Acharya, *Biography of Paga Pulla Reddy*, 2005.

this way:

One day the Raja of Gadwal, Sombhupal went on one of his hunting expeditions. He saw in a particular part of the forest his hounds being chased away by a fox. He constructed his fort in that location, hoping that his descendants born on that soil would become brave and heroic.⁵⁶

“But he faced several hurdles in the construction of the walls of his fort, as they crumbled every time he built them. The royal astrologer was sent for and asked for the non stability of the fort wall. The astrologer advised the Maharaja to sacrifice a Brahmana with a small head but big brains. The Raja then conducted a literary contest in which the prize money was one lakh rupees and various other gifts. One Brahmin named Keshava Chari from Kanjeevaram modern name Kanchipuram from Tamil Nadu won the literary contest. He also fit the description given by the royal astrologers of a small head and big brain for the sacrifice.

One day, on the pretext of showing Keshava around his newly built fort the king led Keshava to the rampart which would not hold and for the building of which a new foundation pit was built. While Keshava Chari was looking into the pit shown by this royal patron, the later seized the opportunity and drawing his sword in a flash cut off Keshava charis head and tumbled his body into the foundation pit. The Raja rejoiced over the sacrifice and the resulting stability of the wall of his fort. The Rajas joy soon turned into a curse. All the food that was placed before the Maharaja turned into filth, the cooked rice turning into wriggling worms. The Maharaja was reduced to the verge of death by starvation and his whole kingdom was plunged into despair and lamentation on his account while his life hung in balance Keshava Chari appeared to him in his dream and told him that he would die without a male issue. But Keshava relented a bit and told the Maharaja that the only hope of saving his soul from eternal damnation and punishment depended on his building a

⁵⁶ *Census of India*, 1961, Volume II, Andhra Pradesh, Part VII-B, Fair and Festivals, Mahbubnagar District.

temple and enshrining therein an image of Keshava Chari in pure gold and the regular performance of the Sambhavana not only by him but also by his descendants”.⁵⁷

It is important to note the large imprint of elements of Brahmanical belief system in this story such as greatest sin as the killing of a Brahmin, punishment as life without male issue, atonement as *Sambhavana* or giving *Dhan* to Brahmins. The Raja in the seventeenth century did not think twice about killing a Brahmin in the first place. More importantly it is another Brahmin, an astrologer, who suggested the sacrifice of a Brahmin as the solution to strengthen the fort. Human sacrifice is inconsistent with Brahmanical beliefs which consider ‘*agama*’ traditions of Brahmanical worship as far superior to forms of worship which involve bloodletting.⁵⁸ In the world view of the non-Brahmanic traditions on the other hand human sacrifice is the highest form of worship. Sacrifice of the Brahmin is more potent in this system because of the association of magical power possessed by the Brahmin due to his position as the ritual specialist. This shows the lack of consistency in the story making it difficult to place it in any one belief system. This implies extrapolation of elements into the story at various time periods and by different kinds of people.⁵⁹ The story would have acquired its Brahmanic features later on. The purpose of the story and its retelling is to emphasize the power of the Brahmin and the need to invest in them special privileges. The story and its enactment in the *Rathotsavam* was crucial in the construction of an unequal social, sacred and political geography in the *Samasthan* of Gadwal.

The *Rathotsavam* in honour of Chenna Keshava is an annual affair and is held in the month of February and was completely funded by the Raja of Gadwal. The lord Chenna Keshava Swamy is generally housed in the temple that is located in the fort of

⁵⁷ Nippani Ranga Rao, Research note, ‘Misrule in Gadwal’, All India State Peoples Conference, file no. 64, Hyderabad State, 1938-49, NMML, *The Times of India*, ‘Weird Story of a Pandits Curse on a Maharaja : Origin of Hyderabad Custom, Largesse to Brahmins a Relic of Human Sacrifice’, December 3, 1932.

⁵⁸ Interview with Rangachary, retired school master, Gadwal town, May 6th and 7th, 2017.

⁵⁹ The interpretations on the sacrifice of the Keshava by the king varied in the two reports we found in archive namely Times of India report and Census. We asked elites from different caste groups to interpret this story and asked them whether the action of the king to kill a Brahmin is a sin or not. Brahmins pointed out the wide prevalence of the curse of the Brahmin on many kings who mistreated them including the king of Mysore. Elites from artisanal and peasant caste groups pointed out that it is the kingly duty to bring prosperity to the kingdom and therefore in the larger interest he could sacrifice anyone and such an action therefore is morally correct.

the Raja. It gives the impression that it is deity of the household of the Raja because common people of all caste groups were excluded from worshipping it for the entire duration of the year. One oral interview puts it as such “the temple was the household deity of the Raja and except the Raja and his family no one was allowed to enter the temple. The temple therefore belongs to the private trust set up by the Raja after he left for Hyderabad in the 1960’s”.⁶⁰ While Chenna Keshava is a personal deity of the Raja, it was used once a year to create a public spectacle of such proportion that it caught the imagination of the missionaries and was also perpetuated in popular memory as larger than life. This event was preceded by other annual events such as the famous cattle fair at Gadwal town held on *Seri* lands which were under the direct control of the Raja.⁶¹ Prizes were awarded to the owners of the successful bullocks in stone dragging. Football and other matches, magic, arrow shooting, lotteries, dramas and cinemas are some of the events held during the fair and festival.⁶² We can see a similar pattern in the neighboring Wanaparthy *Samasthan* where the cattle fair and the *Rathotsavam* were held simultaneously. The missionaries reported that they pitched their tent near the ground where the fair was held and preached.⁶³

The Census of 1961 says that “Sri Chennakeshava Swamy Brahmotsavam is celebrated for ten days in the months of February to March”.⁶⁴ The three deities of Chenna Keshava and his consorts were carried from the Gadwal fort by priests belonging to the Ahobila Matha to the place where the three chariots or cars are kept.⁶⁵ The elephants belonging to the *Samasthan* were employed to bring water from the nearby Krishna River for bathing the idols.⁶⁶ The elephants were used to hold upright a ten foot strong wooden pole on which a colorful tent is arranged. The reference to state elephants is also corroborated by Nippani Ranga Rao, who says that fodder was collected from ryots towards the maintenance of these animals and was called Elephant

⁶⁰ Interview with Executive officer of the Jamulamma Temple, Gadwal town, May 5th, 2017.

⁶¹ Interview with Naganna, Autodriver, Gadwal town, May 7th, 2017.

⁶² *Census of 1961, Fairs and Festivals, Mahbubnagar District, Ramana Rao.*

⁶³ *Harvest Field, March, 1939.*

⁶⁴ *Census of 1961, Fairs and Festivals, Mahbubnagar District, Ramana Rao.*

⁶⁵ Interview with Vasant Rao, Advocate, Gadwal town, May 6th, 2017.

⁶⁶ C.H. Acharya *Asamana Vyakti : Paga Pulla Reddy*, Biography of Paga Pulla Reddy, 2004.

Tax.⁶⁷ This huge tent was erected in the iconic *Teru Midhanam* or ground. *Teru* means a chariot and *Maidanam* refers to a ground. The three chariots or cases were brought to the *Teru Maidanam* and prayers and pujas were conducted in the company of musicians blowing trumpets and beating drums. The photographs taken by the missionaries show the procession being led by person dressed in shiny dress and pearl studded turban.⁶⁸ The caste groups that were allowed to participate in the Rathothsavam were the Vaishnava priests and Brahmins of both the Ahobila Matha and the Madhwa Brahmins, the Reddies, the artisanal caste groups such as weavers and smiths. The untouchable caste groups were not allowed to participate in the ritual celebrations in the *Teru Maidanam*. The personal god of the Raja was used for public procession and shows the use of religion for cementing the rule of the Rajas. This becomes even clearer when the Raja tries to position himself as a Hindu Raja and seeks the blessings of the head of the Ahobila Matha.

As we said the story of Chenna Keshava and its annual ritual enactment in the Rathothsavam reinforced the spiritual authority of the Brahmins and the secular power of the Raja. The public function also disseminate ideas of Brahmanic Hinduism on the divinely ordained nature of caste inequalities. Brahmanic Hinduism finds its existence not only through these theological and religious activities but also by way of constructing a sacred and political geography in the town of Gadwal. In the northern part of the town was located the fort and inside the fort is the temple of Chenna Keshava Swamy. The fort is at once a political and a religious center. The ruling class belonging to the sub-caste among the Reddy caste group called *Pakanati* resided near the fort, the trading caste group of Komati and some Reddy families called as Sahukars also resided close to the fort, at a distance from the main Reddys. In the east, the Raja of Gadwal maintained two *Agraharams* namely *Pedda* or big *Agraharam* and the other small or *Chinna Agraharam*. The Vaishnava Brahmins who were affiliated to the Ahobila Matha resided in the former whereas the Madhwa Brahmins, who were affiliated to the Mantralaya Matha resided in the *chinna* or small *Agraharam*.⁶⁹ In the south, the

⁶⁷ Nippani Ranga Rao, Research note, 'Misrule in Gadwal' All India State Peoples Conference, File no.64, Hyderabad State, 1938-49, NMML.

⁶⁸ *Frazens Memories*, 1957. MBCBC, Hyderabad. Book contains photographs of the socio-cultural life of the people in the Nizams dominions. This montage of photographs was put together by the missionaries who had their mission stations in the Hyderabad.

⁶⁹ Interview with Ranagachary, retired school teacher, Gadwal town, 6th and 7th May, 2017.

habitations of the untouchable caste groups and Muslims were located in an area called *Ganjipet*. The word *Ganji* means starch and the Malas and Madigas were employed in preparing it in this part of the town. In conformity with caste rules of the period, this locality was placed at a distance of one kilometer from the main settlement in the town. In the west, the *seri* lands or the lands belonging exclusively to the king and lands that were given by him to his officials, Brahmins, men of letters were also situated.⁷⁰ These lands were cultivated with the help of hired labourers from the caste group of the Boyas.⁷¹ This caste group was also employed as palanquin bearers for the royal family. Gadwal town therefore gives us the impression of a stark separation between the ruling class and the common people living in *Ganjipet*.

Missionaries⁷², a member of the All India State People's Conference⁷³ and oral interviews⁷⁴ have described the town in vivid detail. The town had deep trenches at its boundary. It had lofty gates at all corners to regulate the entry of people from outside the town. This applied to both people coming from the villages under its jurisdiction and those from British India and other regions of the Hyderabad state. The gates were erected near the current location of the road that leads to Kothapally village. These entrances were manned by armed soldiers of the *Samasthan*. The fort inside the town had a moat and was protected from enemies. It was this setup that made Nippani Ranga Rao who visited this place in 1940 to remark that he was transported to the sixteenth century.⁷⁵ This was the geography which combined the caste exclusivity of the town with its Brahmanical aura which we can call as the combining of sacred geography with the political symbols of the *Samasthan*. The use of a personal god for public processions shows the deployment of religion for cementing the rule of the Rajas. Although Chenna Keshava temple is located inside the fort which is the private residence of the King, during the Rathotsavam, the deity is shown to the people in Gadwal. It is a huge

⁷⁰ Interview with Naganna, auto driver, Gadwal town. May 7th, 2017.

⁷¹ Interview with Naganna, auto driver, May 7th, 2017.

⁷² Correspondence between Unruh and Janzen on the 16mm films being send from Gadwal to Kansas, 1952, MBCBC

⁷³ 'Misrule in Gadwal', All India State Peoples Conference, File no.64, Hyderabad State, 1939-47. NMML.

⁷⁴ Interview with Rangachary Retired school teacher, May 6th and 7th, 2017.

⁷⁵ 'Misrule in Gadwal' All India State Peoples Conference, File no.64, Hyderabad State, 1939-47. NMML.

congregational religious event that attracted almost forty thousand devotees. After the procession, the deity is returned to the temple in the fort. In this context, we can argue that the divinity resides in the fort which is also the residence of the Raja.

We also notice the use of the state elephant and state police in the Rathothsavam.⁷⁶ One need not hesitate to assume here that the number of elephants deployed in the Rathothsavam must have been higher in the past, thereby showing the scale in which it was celebrated. Also the deployment of state police as guards for this procession, shows the close association of the authorities in the festival. The political flavor of this festival combined with the Brahmanical culture it radiates resulted in a distinct political and sacred geography. The Raja considered his duty to protect this sacred geography, an attempt which was put to a fine litmus test in the Huizinga case of 1907.

Region and the Village

While the pre-colonial society thrived on established difference in modes of worship and Brahmanism defined itself as a superior system based on its claim to exclusivity and superiority of mode of worship⁷⁷, the colonial period while expanding and developing Brahmanism on new lines also enabled its adoption by lower castes. This is due to various socio-economic conditions brought by colonial rule such as spread of road, railway and other information and communication network and easy spread of printed Sanskrit texts and development of a wider society.⁷⁸ These changes could also be observed in Gadwal.

The development of new pilgrimage routes that straddled the boundaries of the Hyderabad state is another specific development during the colonial period. Oral interviews show that the upper castes of Brahmins and the trading caste group of Komati started the practice of going to the famous temple of Tirupati in the Chitoor district dedicated to Balaji, who is considered to be an avatar of Vishnu. The artisanal

⁷⁶ Correspondence between Unruh and Janzen of the 16 mm films being sent from Gadwal to Kansas, 1952. See *Frazens Memories*, 1957. The book contains the picture of the *Rathothsavam* in Gadwal taken in 1930 by the missionaries.

⁷⁷ Romila Thapar, 'Syndicated Hinduism' in Gunther Dietz Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke ed. *Hinduism Reconsidered*, Manohar, Delhi, 2001, pp.54-81.

⁷⁸ M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, Hyderabad, 1995.

caste of Vadderolu or carpenter caste also started visiting the famous Srisailam temple, which is dedicated to Shiva. Both temples are seats of Brahmanical worship.

The development of these pilgrimage routes in the colonial period show that the worship of Sankritic gods was not only restricted to the town of Gadwal but began to penetrate the villages in this *Samasthan*. The construction of railways, which connected important centers in the state of Hyderabad facilitated the development of pilgrimage routes. A missionary reports that “During the dry season, Indians attend many festivals and as a result many more people travel from one hill top to another and from one centre of idol worship to another to where these oriental gatherings take place. The passengers stick to one another like flies in the train”.⁷⁹

In the colonial period we have many reported cases of sanskritization of caste groups or even entire villages. In the village Macherla in Gadwal the principal occupation was weaving and was mostly inhabited by the Padmashali caste group. “The residents of Macherla had once migrated to Sholapur to eke out their livelihood. They had then visited Pandarpur, a pilgrim centre dedicated to lord *Vithoba*, which was nearby. After some time they came back to their native land and constructed a small temple, dedicating it to *Panduranga*. They are performing *pujas* and *bhajans* regularly. Gradually *Rathotsavam* also started”.⁸⁰ It is important to note that *Vithoba* is *bhakti* cult which represented lower caste assertion in Maharashtra. The sect decried the importance of priests, rituals and social distinctions in Brahmanic Hinduism and developed what is known as “*Varkkari*” tradition of worship.⁸¹ However in Macherla *Vithoba* has been turned into a Sanskritic god. Brahmanical rituals such as *Rathotsavam*, *Brahmotsavam* and *Kalyanotsavam* could establish themselves in the villages of Gadwal between 1760 and 1880.⁸² Many temples also came up during this period in various parts of Gadwal which fashioned themselves as poor man’s Tirupati

⁷⁹ *Harvest Field*, March-April, 1940.

⁸⁰ *Census of 1961, Fairs and Festivals*, Mahbubnagar District, Ramana Rao.

⁸¹ Philip Constable, ‘Scottish Missionaries, ‘Protestant Hinduism’ and the Scottish Sense of Empire in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century India’, *The Scottish Historical Review*, 86, 222, 2006, pp. 278-313.

⁸² *Census of India, 1961*. This report gives us the list of aghrahams and the time period in which these Brahmanical rituals of *Brahmotsavam*, *kalyanotsavam* procession to celebrate the marriage of the deities and *Rathotsavam* procession in a carriage originated in the villages of Gadwal.

or Srisailam.⁸³ We see the slow import of the sacred and political geography to the villages.

While king fostered the exclusivity of Brahmanical religion and the distinction between high and low culture, a sanskritization of the religious world of 'low culture' could also be noticed in this period. Lower caste groups used sanskritization as a tool for resistance during this period due to reduction in the salience of local communities and development of larger society and economy. What could be the impact of the spread of forced and voluntary sanskritization of the majority caste groups on the untouchables during the colonial period? Missionaries have reported that most number of converts in Gadwal came from villages as compared to the town. This should direct our attention to the religious situation prevailing in the villages and its effect on the Madigas. It is therefore ironical that the missionaries in Gadwal did not focus on the changes in the realm of popular culture that were caused due to systematic percolation of Brahmanical religion. This is not surprising when they were influenced by the colonial construction which often saw the realm of popular culture as a residue of the great tradition of the Brahmins.⁸⁴

Of particular importance to us is the relationship between the Madigas and semi-settled agriculturist and what was then perceived as 'criminal' tribe of Boyas. These two together constitute the majority of the population in most of the villages. Thurston describes the Boyas as a 'criminal' tribe "who worship some of the popular Hindu gods such as *Hanuman* but are most close to the religious beliefs and customs of the untouchables".⁸⁵ They were reported to worship *Mathangi* which was firmly associated with the Madigas. They also kept some of their women as *Basavi*. The tradition was that if there is no male issue, the girl is allowed to contract sexual relations with whom so ever she likes, and the children born of that union were considered as belonging to her father's house. This is a custom that is also prevalent among Madigas.⁸⁶

Connections between the Agraharams in the town of Gadwal and the

⁸³ *Harvest Field*, March-December, 1941.

⁸⁴ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, England, 1978.

⁸⁵ Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Volume V, 1909.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*

surrounding villages were forged to maintain a link between high and popular culture. Oral interviews shows that by the 1930's there was a general increase in the number of *agraharams* in the villages of Gadwal.⁸⁷ The Madhwa Brahmins were sent and they settled down in several villages.⁸⁸ It was necessary to maintain links between the town and the villages. For this purpose, the Raja Purohit invariably came from this sub-caste. Also the use of the surname 'Rao' by the Madhwa Brahmins seems to suggest that the *Talukdar* of Gadwal also came from this caste group.⁸⁹ Also the priests residing in specific temples in Gadwal town had links with the *patwaris* in the villages.⁹⁰ The Mathas were attached to the *agraharams* in both the town and the villages of Gadwal in the colonial period.⁹¹ After this initial exercise of settlement, the Brahmins in some villages took over the local temples, which were hitherto worshipped by the 'criminal' tribe of the Boyas in the area. It is also mentioned that the Raja formalized this takeover attempt of the Madhwa Brahmins around two hundred years back by rebuilding of the Sri Anjaneya Swamy Temple, in Beechupally, Itkyal Taluk.⁹² The additions made to this temple by the Brahmins were a *Mandap* or courtyard in front of the main shrine. The rituals and the myths surrounding this worship must have also changed. In many villages of Gadwal one could notice the emergence of *Anjaneya Hanuman* worship uniting the two caste groups of the Brahmins and Boyas.

We argue that due to the impact of Brahmanical culture in the villages in the colonial period, there was a drift on the part of the Boyas towards not only Sanskrit gods but also changes in the earlier tradition of mother worship namely *Mathangi* among this group. Today this caste group worship *Renuka* and their patronage of *Mathangi* seems to be on the wane. This we argue is the result of a long historical process of amalgamation and accommodation of popular mother cults in mainstream Brahmanic Hindu beliefs of the *shakti* cult. Attempts of local rulers to impose *puranic*

⁸⁷ Interview with Kashi Raghavendra Acharya, priest of Panduranga Devalayam, Gadwal town, September 10, 2016.

⁸⁸ Interview with Ranagachary, retired school teacher, Gadwal town, May 6th and 7th, 2017.

⁸⁹ Petition of Dharvesh Ali Chinipad to the Nizam against the authorities of the Gadwal Samasthan, Home Political, Installment no.41, List.16, serial no.243,file no. nil. 1923.

⁹⁰ Interview with Prabhakar Rao, ex-Patwari, Nandini village, Gadwal, September 20, 2016.

⁹¹ *Census of India 1961, Fairs and Festivals*, Mahbubnagar District.

⁹² Inscriptions from the walls of the Hanuman Temple, Bechupally, Iktyal Mandal, and Interview with Boya Arachaka of the Temple, May 6th, 2017.

tales atop animistic beliefs of the lower castes is reported from earlier period also. In sixteenth century, temples across Karnataka saw the rise of *Renuka* cult with *puranic* tales attached to it, and the tradition was amalgamated in to the *shakti* cult.⁹³ In the *shakti* tradition, as argued by Vijashri, the goddesses *Renuka* and *Mathangi* are sisters.⁹⁴ In the story of *Renuka-Matangi*, Renuka was the wife of Jambuva muni who got tempted by a handsome man. Parasuraman her son killed her at the orders of Jambuva Muni. *Mathangi* sheltered *Renuka* for some time before her death. Due to a misunderstanding both women were killed by parasuraman who later brought them back to life. However in his hurry, he attached the head of *Mathangi* to *Renuka*. This event therefore mark the birth of kinship and biological ties between the two goddesses.

Successive *puranic* additions turn this non- Brahmanical cult more Brahmanic. The story of *Renuka* retains the possibility that women get attracted to handsome men which an irrational and jealous Jambuva Muni seems to punish. While cult of *Renuka* brought Brahmanical additions such as Parasuram into the story, the next change in the cult moved it more firmly into the *shakti* tradition.⁹⁵ Renuka cult was replaced the worship of *sati* and a temple was dedicated to her in called *jogulamba* the mother of yogis at Alampur. *Jogulamba* is none other than mother *parvati* or *sati*. The story of *sati* is a tale of wifely devotion and she immolates herself to save the honour of her husband, Shiva. This character of the goddess is a far cry from the independent *Yellamma* who exists without a husband and *Renuka* who got attracted to another man. Brahmanic patriarchy connected the generative power of woman to her reproductive ability alone which is harnessed by her marriage to a man.⁹⁶ The spiritual merit of woman in this system is measured by her wifely devotion. The import of such ideas turns the separate cult of the non-Brahmins into an aspect of Hindu religious system. Recently Gadwal was made into separate district known as *Jogulamba* Gadwal. Despite the existence of layers of cults which were contradictory to each other, there is an attempt made to project a unified belief system. This enables non-Brahmins caste such

⁹³ V. Jaganathan, 'Yellamma Cult and Divine Prostitution: Its Historical and Cultural Background', *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, Volume 3, Issue 4, April 2013, pp.1-5

⁹⁴ Priyadarshini Vijashri, *Dangerous Marginality : Rethinking Impurity and Power*, New Delhi, 2015

⁹⁵ *Ibid*

⁹⁶ *Ibid*

as Boyas to distance themselves from the untouchables by moving from *Yellamma* to *Renuka*.

Boyas in the colonial period mostly worshipped *Mathangi* and not *Renuka* and the historical imprint of the same could be observed in the present *Jamulamma* temple at Gadwal. While *Jamulamma* considered as a form of *Renuka* is the main deity at this temple, there is a small statue of *Mathangi* at the corner of the temple. The priest of this shrine is both Boya and Madiga although Madigas after conversion to Christianity discontinued the practice of ritual observance here. It is to be noted that the rare instances where missionaries describe popular culture during the period before the 1930's, they refer to the cult of *Yellamma* which is a popular name for *Mathangi* and the word *Renuka* was not used.⁹⁷ Due to the impact of Brahmanism, the Boyas stopped sharing beef with the Madigas during the ritual sacrifice towards the end of the colonial period and also took to the more sanskritic *Renuka*.

This historical response of the Boyas were to have a major impact on the religious situation in Gadwal more clearly in the post-colonial period. This drift also set the stage for the conflict between the Boyas, who now set themselves up as independent cultivators and the Madigas remaining as agricultural labourers in the post-colonial period. The ideological conditions that were created due to impact of Brahmanical culture in the colonial period were furthered cemented by material conditions in the immediate post-colonial period. The relationship between the Boyas and the Madigas is now cast in the idiom of purity and pollution, where attempts at temple entry by the Madigas were thwarted time and again by the Boyas. But this new found unequal relationship based on the purity pollution model, sits in an uneasy fashion with the Boyas continuing to patronize the *Mathangi* tradition, however in a much reduced and attenuated form.

The *Devamma* festival was conducted by the village as a whole.⁹⁸ Patronage to the *Devamma* festival was in all possibility was given by the Police Patel of the village

⁹⁷ *Harvest Field*, March-April, 1940.

⁹⁸ 'Hindu Religious Festivals in the Nizam Dominions, Pedda Devara Festival', File no.773, Constitutional Affairs Secretariat, File no. 773, APSARC. This file gives us the information on Devamma festival. This file was given to the secretary of the Constitutional Affairs in the Nizams Government by Raja Bahadur Venkat Rama Reddy.

who was the main administrative figure in the village.⁹⁹ Scholars such as Brenda Beck¹⁰⁰ have argued that the untouchable caste groups are locked in a kinship relation with the pastoral caste groups. The pastoral caste group, which is ranked higher in the caste hierarchy than the untouchable caste groups are always given the status of ‘*mama*’ or any other kinship term that reflects their rank. *Mama* is mother’s brother. The untouchable caste groups are given the kinship term of ‘*alludu*’, which means nephew in Telugu language and shows that they are lower than the pastoral groups. Hence the purpose of the usage of such kinship terms is to dilute the divisions among groups in village society, so that they can participate in a collective manner in the ritual. But the dilution is not to an extent that it removes hierarchy altogether.

In the case of the *Devamma* festival, such a kinship relation can be seen between the untouchable caste group of the Madiga and the criminal tribe of Boya during the colonial period.¹⁰¹ The description of Boyas by Thurston did not distinguish them in any significant manner from the Madigas.¹⁰² “During the ritual, the Madiga cuts the head of the buffalo and places it on his head”.¹⁰³ “He carries the bleeding head around the fields of the village, which constitute the outermost boundaries of the village. The fields on which the blood falls constitute the ritual boundary of the village and shields the village from harmful spirits and deadly diseases such as plague”.¹⁰⁴ These beliefs among the villages of Gadwal had a salience in a context where the Raichur district of which Gadwal was a part, was constantly visited by plagues. The plagues were reported from 1880s to the early 1940’s¹⁰⁵.

⁹⁹ ‘All India State Peoples Conference, Hyderabad State’, Part II, 1946-47, File no.66,NMML.

¹⁰⁰ Brenda Beck, ‘Right-Left divisions in South Indian Society’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.29, 1970, pp. 779-798.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Samara Simha Reddy, ex-Minister from Gadwal, 7th May, 2017.

¹⁰² Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, 1909.

¹⁰³ James George Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, and Henry Whitehead, *Village Gods of Southern India* Association Press, Calcutta, 1921.

¹⁰⁴ Henry Whitehead, *Village Gods of South India*, Association Press, Calcutta, 1921.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Cholera at Raichur’, *The Pioneer Newspaper*, 1899. Missionaries describe an encounter between them and worshippers of goddess of pox diseases. They were sitting by a well ancient in nature with carving of idols, soon a group of women and men gathered and proceeded to cut a goat and cook the meat. While the women were described as the priests of this gathering, men are shown as anxiously waiting. Soon they realized that this was not the shrine of the goddess they intended to visit and women insisted to find the right shrine. Missionaries urged them to give up idol worship and they responded that they know the stones are dead and there is only one god, but god does not bother with their troubles so they are doing everything they know to stop the scab from spreading to other

The meat of the sacrificial was shared between the Madigas and the Boyas which showcases the close kinship links between them. This is further corroborated by Thurston who reports that the Boyas used to relish on beef and pork.¹⁰⁶ But due to percolation of Brahmanical culture, the Boyas stopped taking the meat from the Madigas in the late 1940's. As an old woman from the Boya community puts it "our elders used to take the meat from the Madigas, but we don't".¹⁰⁷ The Origin story reported by Whitehead in 1920 cited religious disabilities of the Madigas as a rationale for this festival.

A Pariah well versed in the Vedas came to the village disguised as Brahman. The Karnam or village headman was a Brahmin who is blind. The untouchable impressed the elders of the village with his talk. Learning that the untouchable who is disguised as a Brahmin is man of influence, he agrees on the advice of the village elders to give his daughter in marriage to him.

The untouchable man and his Brahmin wife in time begetted three children. One day a resident from the village of the untouchable came to this village and recognized him. The resident went back and informed his mother who was worried about her missing son. The mother sets off to the village to meet her son and meets him by the well used by the Brahmans of the village. The son tells not disclose his identity and takes her back to his father-in-law's house and introduces his mother as dumb.

Filled with joy that her mother-in-law has visited their home, the wife ordered a meal with a dish called Savighai, which is wheat flour baked with sugar and made into long strings. During the meal, the mother forgetting her injunction of silence asked her what Savighai was, saying that it looked like the entrails of an animal.

The wife grew suspicious that firstly her mother-in-law could speak and

members of the family and community. See P.V and E Balzer, 'Village life as seen on tour' *Harvest Field*, March April No 2 1939.

¹⁰⁶ Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, 1909.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with two old women from Boya caste who were Talari or watchmen of the *Jamulamma* Temple at Gadwal town, September 10, 2016.

secondly wondered how a Brahmin could not know a dish like savighai. She started following the mother-in-law and her husband and finally came to the conclusion that they belonged to the lower castes. One day, she sent her children to the school, when her husband was away from home and managed to get rid of the mother-in-law from the house for a few hours and then set fire to the house and burnt herself alive

By virtue of her great merit in thus expiating the sin she had involuntarily committed, she reappeared in the middle of the village in a divine form, declared that the villagers had done her great wrong by marrying her to a Pariah and that she would ruin them. The villagers implored mercy in abject terror. She was appeased by their entreaties, consented to remain in the village as their village goddess, and commanded the villagers to worship her.

When she was about to be burnt in the fire, she vowed that her husband should be brought before her and beheaded, that one of his legs should be cut off and put in his mouth, the fat of his stomach put in his head, and a lighted lamp placed on top of it.

The villagers therefore seized the husband, stripped him naked, took him in procession round the village, beheaded him in her presence and treated his leg as fat as directed. Then her children came on the scene, violently abused the villagers and village officers, and told them that they were the cause of their mother's death. The deity looked at her children with favour, and declared that they should always be her children, and that without them no worship should be offered to her. After being beheaded, the husband was born again as a buffalo, and for this reason, a buffalo is offered in sacrifice to Uramma, the village goddess.¹⁰⁸

In this story we notice two contradictory stands of affirming endogamy while asserting the kin bonds between caste groups. We also notice elements of Brahmanical

¹⁰⁸ Henry Whitehead, *The Village Gods of Southern India*, Association Press, Calcutta, 1921.

beliefs such as sin and atonement through ritual oblations connected to taboos on inter caste relations. We postulate that the increasing landed power of the Brahmins in this period in Gadwal may have necessitated an intervention in religious beliefs. Belief about kin boundaries and its religious wrong were enmeshed along with popular beliefs about kin relations between caste groups among whom marital and sexual relations were not uncommon. Respondents from Mangali or barber caste informed us that Brahmins used to make the blood from the sacrifice of the buffalo fall on their feet as a proof of the condoning of the sins committed by the Madigas. Others from the Mangali or barber caste and the Madigas informed that it was the Brahmins who narrate this story.¹⁰⁹ Even a person from the dominant caste group of the Reddy informed us that these stories were invented by the Brahmin.¹¹⁰ A cursory examination by us of this practice in the many villages of Gadwal have shown us that only in those villages where Brahmins constitute a landholding class of a significant volume, one notice this practice of Brahmins participating in a bloody sacrifice which is generally seen as unsuitable to their high status.

It was this condition that was fashioned by the highly Brahmanical culture in the Gadwal town and the changing nature of the village festivals and increasing power of Brahmins in general that may have pushed the Madigas to convert to Christianity in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Missionaries cite the purely Brahmanical Hinduism existing in Gadwal as one of the primary reason for large scale conversion in Gadwal.¹¹¹ Arthur argues that conversion were more successful in Gadwal because it was 'a pure Hindu state' with very little spread of Islam and Christianity could not spread in areas where there was significant population of Muslims.¹¹²

It is to be noted that the influence of *bhakti* cult seems to be weaker in this region. Oddie reports the influence of Vaishnavite *bhakti* on the untouchables in various parts of coastal Andhra¹¹³. In regions of Maharashtra where Scottish Presbyterians were

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Mangali Mallesh and Bhemmesh, Desharajupalli village, September, 2016.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Marappa, Gattu village, Gadwal, September, 2016.

¹¹¹ *A Short Biography of J.H.Voth*, Board for Foreign Missions, Kansas, United States of America, 1915.

¹¹² D. J Arthur, 'A Study of People Movement Theory in the context of the Gadwal Field of the Mennonite Brethren Church in India'. Unpublished M.A.Dissertation, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, 2006, MBCBC.

¹¹³ Geoffrey.A.Oddie, 'Malas and Madigas : Their Life and Livelihood c.1860 -1932', in Joseph Prabhakar Dayam, Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar and I.P.Asheervadam ed., *Mission At and From*

involved in missionary activities, they were shown to be engaged in delivering Christianity through the medium of popular Hinduism¹¹⁴. In Gadwal on the other hand, missionaries do not seem to engage with popular cults, any such engagement is limited to a general attack on idolatry and superstition¹¹⁵. Therefore, we can postulate that large penetration of Brahmanical culture and the weakening of popular cults of the lower castes in addition to weak or non-existent *bhakti* or popular Hinduism must have set the stage for the confrontation between landed upper castes especially Reddies and Brahmins on one hand and untouchables on the other.

Changing religious consciousness of the untouchables

The ability to sanskritise in the first place and most importantly make the new god public through processions cannot be achieved by caste groups which lack monetary resources and numbers behind them. The structural position of the untouchables as '*Panchama*', or the fifth category in the varna¹¹⁶ scheme of things which was reinforced and made rigid during this period made sanskritization attempts of untouchables a failure from the beginning. Brahmins in Gadwal points out that Panchama cannot be saved by *bhakti*. While Shudras can be saved through *bhakti* and devotion *Panchamas* who possess only Karma cannot be saved in this fashion¹¹⁷.

From the 1920s onwards, the untouchable caste group of the Mala used to migrate to adjacent parts of Karnataka for three to four months. They harvested the jowar crop in neighbouring villages of Karnataka and returned to their villages in the *Samasthan*. Due to this migration, they came in contact with the worship of *Narsappa* or Narasimha Swamy, an avatar of Vishnu in Karnataka. It is said that Narsappa came to one of the villages from Karnataka in a tiffin box carried by the Malas.¹¹⁸ The Malas

The Margins, Regnum Books, Edinburgh, 2015.

¹¹⁴ Philip Constable, Scottish Missionaries, 'Protestant Hinduism' and the Scottish Sense of Empire in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century India, *The Scottish Historical Review*, Vol. 86, No. 222, Part 2, October, 2007, pp. 278-313.

¹¹⁵ *Harvest Field*, November-December, 1941.

¹¹⁶ Varna is a social division that is commonly present in Brahmanical law books called the Dharmashastras. There are four varnas of the brahman, kshatriya, vaishya and shudra. The panchama, which literally means fifth was reserved for the untouchable caste groups. They were considered to be outside the pale of caste society or the varna scheme.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Prabhakar Rao, ex-Patwari Nandini Village, Gadwal, September 20th 2016.

¹¹⁸ Oral Interview with Kashi Raghavendra Acharya, priest of Panduranga Devalayam, Gadwal town,

in this particular village of Desharajupalli started worshipping Narsappa from the year 1925. The rationalization of this co-option of a Sanskritic god is given by the priest from the Mala community. He says that Narsappa came in his dream and asked him to start worshipping him. But the *Mala Dasi* or priest from the Mala community had reservations about a sankritic god coming to the Harijan wada or *cheri* because they consumed beef here. The god replies by saying that he knows his conditions and he would reside in the Harijan wada because the *Mala Dasi* has won him over through *bhakti*.¹¹⁹ A temple was constructed by the Mala caste group to this god in their colony or *cheri*.

The attempt at sanskritization as we saw before in Macherla could morph into a successful full-fledged sankritic form of worship with public features such as participation from most caste groups in the village. On the other hand the attempt, of the Malas was restricted to building a temple in one corner of their *cheri* and no attempt was made to install this temple in one of the public places in the village. These would amount to setting up as alternative centre in opposition to the established places of worship frequented by the caste Hindus.¹²⁰ However in some places in Gadwal, their attempt at religious mobility was more successful. Some Madiga respondents pointed out that the Malas have access to cultural resources such as ability to become priests in Hinduism and pointed out that the Malas are priests in a temple in neighbouring Alampur Taluk.¹²¹

This access to cultural resources coupled with the Adi-Hindu movement which forged a greater association with Hinduism paved the way for religion becoming a ground for disunity in the movement led by untouchables in the state of Hyderabad. While Madigas converted to Christianity, Malas attempted accommodation within Hinduism. It is this spread of hegemonic Hinduism which existed in the political economy of social relations between different caste groups which ultimately radicalized the Madigas to take recourse to conversion. In order to fully understand the oppositional culture that the Madigas tried to establish with the help of various religious and political

September 15, 2016.

¹¹⁹ Oral Interview with Narsappa, Mala Dasi, Desharajupalli Village, Gadwal. September 8, 2016.

¹²⁰ Interview with Marappa, village Gattu. Gadwal, March 10, 2016.

¹²¹ *Ibid*

forces we now turn to the Huizinga case of 1907.

Huizinga was a missionary from the American Baptist Mission. As we recall, their mission station in Gadwal was opened in 1893 and missionary Chute manned it from Mahbubnagar. Huizinga took charge of the Gadwal field in 1903. He wanted to build a new mission compound in Gadwal town and applied for permission from the authorities of the *Samasthan* but his application was stalled by the authorities of the *Samasthan*. Exasperated by the dilatory tactics of the authorities, Huizinga wrote to the Resident of Hyderabad for expediting the matter. The matter was then referred by the Resident to the Nizams Political Secretary's office. The frequent exchange of letters between the *Samasthan authorities*, the Residents office and the Political Secretary shows the unfolding situation.

Due to the pressure from the Resident, the Political Secretary ordered an on the spot enquiry by the *Subedar* of Gulbarga. The *Subedar* went through the reasons given by the *Samasthan* and ruled in favour of them. For a case that stretched for almost two years, the *Samasthan* could ultimately deny the permission to set up a mission building inside the Gadwal town. In this case, we see the policy of the *Samasthan towards* the missionaries and the reasons that went into its formation.

The denial of Huizinga's application to set up a mission building inside the Gadwal town has several reasons. We begin with the 1898 case reported in the *Muhammadan* newspaper. The actions of the missionaries ended up creating ill will among the inhabitants of the village. Their actions went against the caste privileges of the caste Hindus by inciting the lower castes against the caste Hindus. Romila Thapar argues that it is the caste Hindus who have Dharma. They are supposed to uphold the dharmic order.¹²² Dharmic order means the performance of their duty by the caste Hindus so that the effort of each goes to the maintenance of a social order. In this effort, the duty of the untouchable caste group is to assist and facilitate the duties of the caste Hindus. In the event of the failure of such duties of the untouchable caste groups, the caste Hindus are given the social sanction to take the necessary action to restore the normal working of the social order.

¹²² Romila Thapar 'Syndicated Hinduism' in *Hinduism Reconsidered* ed. Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke, Delhi, 2001, pp. 54-81.

During the last decade of the nineteenth century, Asheervadam details the response of caste Hindus to the conversion of the Madigas. “The caste Hindus beat them and forced them to drink Kallu or toddy to the point of drunkenness”.¹²³ Landlords used to pay the daily work of the Madigas in liquor apart from the customary grain payments. The drinking of toddy was also seen as a filthy habit which could cloud the discretion and decision making powers of a sane man by the caste Hindus. Such a practice was suitable for the Madigas but not the caste Hindus. This lifestyle of the Madigas was a disability, on which was based the privileges of the caste Hindus. That the lifestyle of the Madigas was seen as integral to the caste identity of the Madigas can be seen from the response of the Madigas themselves to the conversion of their caste fellows. Chute describes one such incident where the relatives of a woman who converted warned her that “if she does not drink liquor and ‘go under water’ baptism she will lose her caste”.¹²⁴

In this backdrop, the authorities of the *Samasthan* denied permission to the three sites selected by Reverend Huizinga.¹²⁵ The first was purchased by Huizinga from the kotwal of Gadwal town, Veera Reddy and the objection was based on violation of revenue and land rights but also religious, while the second and third sites requested by the missionary was not granted citing purely religious grounds. The letter from A.J. Dunlop, Secretary to the Revenue Department of the Nizams Government to the Political Secretary of the Nizams Government reports it the following manner,

The sites selected by the Reverend. Mr. Huizinga are objected by the *Samasthan* for the following reasons:

Site no.1 Veera Reddy’s Land

Because there is a temple of Hanuman in the vicinity 2 because Veera Reddy the present holder is not considered to be entitled to sell the land without obtaining the previous sanction of the *Samasthan* , and 3because

¹²³ I.P. Asheervadam, *Dalit Conversions to the Mennonite brethren Church*, Unpublished M.Phil Thesis, United Theological College, Bangalore, 1998.

¹²⁴ John Wiebe, *Great Things God Hath Done*, 1959.

¹²⁵ ‘Letter from A.J.Dunlop, Secretary to the Revenue Department, H.H.Nizams Govt to The Political and Private Secretary to his Excellency the Minister’, Home Political File no. R7/f.48, serial no.908, Installment no. 13, List 1, APSARC.

it has not yet been ascertained whether the land is really Inam and if so, what are the conditions attached there to.

Site no.2

A mela is held on this land from a long time past and the inhabitants of Gadwal congregate and remain. Also there are two Hindu temples and a Mahomedan cemetery in its vicinity.

Site no. 3

It is the Seri land of the Raja endowed for Chenna Keshava Naivyadya offering. The rajah objects to give this land. I again the Secretary to the Revenue Department addressed the Talukadar on the subject and have personally spoken to the Rajah but according to the latest communication, neither the Rajah nor the Rani will give any of the sites referred to, nor any Inam or Seri i.e. their own private holdings at Gadwal.¹²⁶

Resident could give alternate reasons to show that the grounds on which the objections were given by *Samasthan* were frivolous. For site one, the Resident pointed out that if any confusion prevailed over the title of the *Inam*, it could be cleared by consulting the records kept by the *Samasthan*. Based on this ground of confusion over the title of the Inam, the *Samasthan* delayed the application for a year. This casts a doubt on the motives of the *Samasthan authorities*.¹²⁷ In the second site, the Resident could refute the reason of the presence of a Hanuman temple by pointing out that it was a small wayward shrine which was in ruins. Also that this site selected by Huizinga was nearly five hundred yards away from this shrine, which shows that there was a respectable distance between both.¹²⁸

It is pertinent that the missionary felt the need to concur with the broad religious

¹²⁶ Letter of the Major Craig from the Residents office to the Political Secretary, Nizam Government, Home Political File no. R7/f.48, serial no.908, Instalment no. 13, List 1, APSARC.

¹²⁷ Letter of the Major Craig from the Residents office to the Political Secretary, Nizam Government, Home Political File no. R7/f.48, serial no.908, Instalment no. 13, List 1, APSARC.

¹²⁸ Letter of the Major Craig from the Residents office to the Political Secretary, Nizam Government, Home Political File no. R7/f.48, serial no.908, Instalment no. 13, List 1, APSARC.

policy of the state which prescribes peaceful coexistence of religions. Despite such nuanced argument by the missionary and the resident at Hyderabad who arbitrated in this case, political secretary of Nizam government, felt the need to labour over the differences between the religious policy of Nizam and British India. The Resident's office pressed for a response from the Nizam's government with respect to the freedom of British subjects to set up religious buildings. Major Haig wrote, "the objections hitherto raised by the local authorities appear to be frivolous and not as such will be accepted by the Government of India who expect the Reverend G.J.Huizinga to "enjoy *in the Hyderabad State the same facilities in acquiring landed property as are extended to a subject of the Hyderabad State who may wish to acquire land in British India*" emphasis added.¹²⁹

The Nizam responded to this thus,

His Highness the Nizam has been pleased to remark that the facilities to be given to British subjects in acquiring land in His Highness Dominions for religious buildings and churches is a different matter from according facilities to them in acquiring land for agricultural or ordinary residential purposes, *because in the former case, it is the duty of His Highness Government to consider the religious feelings of the local residents, so that there may be no likelihood of any religious disputes or disturbances in the future* emphasis added and it was due to objections of this nature that so much delay has taken place and finally government has to send an officer to settle the matter after local enquiry.¹³⁰

Since the objections based on disturbance to social religious and economic order were found to be frivolous, the Nizam government concurred with the resident. The Huizinga case in Gadwal brings out the contrast in the religious policy of British India and the Nizam government. While the former allowed the missionaries to establish themselves with ease in the Telugu speaking regions of the Madras Presidency, the missionaries faced a problem in starting their activities in the latter. Gadwal was no

¹²⁹ *Ibid*

¹³⁰ *Ibid*

exception to such kind of treatment meted out to the missionaries. In a village in Warangal Suba, a *patwari* assigned the land selected by the missionaries to a *ryot* and put hurdles in razing their mission buildings and buildings new ones and even selling their properties.¹³¹ Similar cases were reported from various parts of Nizam dominion including Nalgonda, Warangal, Raichur and Gulbarga.¹³² One case from Gulbarga wherein Mohammedan residents molested a woman missionary had to be settled out of court due to the immense political implications of the case.¹³³

Here one is reminded of the argument made by Manu Bhagvan that the “British administrators invented princely states as simplistic, religious backwaters out of necessity, to have them serve as a contrast to Western progressivism”.¹³⁴ It is these notions of alternative Indian modernity which accommodates a larger role for religion in princely state which was used by the Hyderabad state to stall any progressive changes of the kind initiated by Huizinga. Hyderabad resisted being cast as a traditional religious state identified by the religion of its ruler as occurred in other princely states such as Jammu Kashmir, Baroda, and Mysore. The rights of its subjects and the obligations of the king were therefore not anchored to the religious identity of the ruler unlike what occurred in Kashmir where Muslim subjects were left out in the cold.¹³⁵ In the arguments made by Nizam we could see how he conceived of a multi-religious state where ‘social order’ was given primacy over religious identity.¹³⁶ Therefore the denial of permission to missionaries was well within the overall religious policy of the Nizam.

It is this threat to the social order which motivated the antipathy of rulers of Gadwal. The element of assertion of the Madigas was clear in the missionary activities. Scholars such as Asheervadam argued that Madigas constituted ninety nine percent of

¹³¹ Application of Missions in Warangal Suba for permission to construct buildings, Home Political File, APSARC.

¹³² Application of J.H. Voth for permission to construct buildings, Home Political File, APSARC.

¹³³ Molestation of a missionary by a Muhumedian, Home Political File, APSARC. 1915.

¹³⁴ Manu Bhagavan, ‘Princely States and the Hindu Imaginary: Exploring the Cartography of Hindu Nationalism in Colonial India’, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 673, 2008, pp.881-915.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*

¹³⁶ Copland points out that it is only after the middle of the 1930’s that Hyderabad became highly communalised and Nizam began to take partisan positions based on religion. He attributed this change in Nizam’s policy to “political reforms, migration from external communities, and alliances with right-wing religious-political organizations”. See, Ian, Copland, ‘Communalism in Princely India: The Case of Hyderabad, 1930–1940’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 224, 1988, pp. 783-814.

the converts.¹³⁷ They also played a crucial role in spreading this religion through kinship networks. The missionaries were therefore a front for the Madigas to develop their own cultural resources as they were important people who had resources and access to officials. It is therefore entirely plausible that the authorities saw Christianity as the religion of the Madigas. Rani of Gadwal reportedly told her son who was then studying in Bangalore not to fall in love with a Madiga who was alternately seen as a Christian.¹³⁸ While reports of missionaries from Nalgonda are full of wonderful stories of conversion by upper caste such as Naidu, Raju, and Kamma and even other lower caste groups, missionary chronicles from Gadwal do not report many such incidents.¹³⁹

The according of permission to Reverend Huizinga would have meant a statement of power for the Madigas. It implied that their religion got a foothold in the power centre, and they would have moved closer to the centers of power in Gadwal town and away from the despicable *cheri* or colony frowned upon by the caste Hindus in the villages and their residential settlement of *Ganjipet* in Gadwal town. It most importantly underlines the commitment of the authorities to maintain the political geography of Gadwal town, of which residential segregation and access to certain areas in the town are key aspects. This becomes clear when the case ends with the missionaries allowed to construct their mission station outside the boundaries of the wall of the town and the refusal of reverend Huizinga to occupy it. But the missionaries were forced to settle down on the land allotted. This is corroborated by oral interviews which points towards the Kothapalli road for the location of the *Dorala* Bungalow or Lords Bungalow.¹⁴⁰

Another implication that arises from this case is that, as it was the town of *agraharams*, the temple of the Chenna Keshava Swamy, and the Brahmanical aura that surrounds it, the problem of fitting the missionaries into the religious landscape could

¹³⁷ I.P.Asheervadam, *Dalit Conversions to the Mennonite brethren Church*, Unpublished M.Phil Thesis, United Theological College, Bangalore, 1998.

¹³⁸ C.H. Acharya, *Asamana Vyakti : Paga Pulla Reddy*, Biography of Paga Pulla Reddy, 2004.

¹³⁹ Reverend Cornelius Unruh, Nalgonda Report, 1930.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Naganna, Autodriver, Gadwal town, May 7, 2017. The residence of the missionary was called as *Dorala* bungalow in the Telugu speaking regions of the Madras Presidency as well See Pramoda Rao, 'The Nature and Pattern of the Christian Church as a Reflection of Christian Missions In Andhra Pradesh 1884-1960 : A critique'. in Joseph Prabhakar Dayam, Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar and I.P.Asheervadam ed., *Mission At and From The Margins*, Edinburgh, 2015.

have proved difficult for the authorities. Site number three was denied to the missionary citing pollution implied in frequent visit by Madiga converts in lands specifically dedicated to offering or *Naivydyam* to the deity of Chenna Keshava. These circumstances prods us to argue that sacred and political geography had a decisive role in denying the application of Huizinga. The denial of permission to Huzinga contrasts strongly with the permission given to the Arya Vaishya Sangha, an organization of the Komatis, or the trading caste group which opened its branch in Gadwal in 1915,¹⁴¹ almost close to a decade after Huizinga was denied permission.

This action also had the effect of stemming the increasing power of the missionary *Dora* or lord. As Rao reports, when a Madiga was faced with oppression from the landlord in Coastal Andhra of Madras Presidency, the missionary pulled out a gun at the landlord and threatened him with consequences.¹⁴² This episode shows the rise of the benevolent missionary *Dora* over the local landlord. It raised the hopes of the Madigas in securing their due interests through the good offices of the missionary.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we started with the first flashpoint that is associated with the assertion of the Madigas and its opposition by caste Hindus, namely the 1898 case. By delving into the case, we could see in a nascent form, the position the Madigas would acquire in the new emerging political ideology namely nationalism. In trying to explore the reasons for the assertion of Madigas through conversion to Christianity, we delineated the structure of religion present in Gadwal. We argued that the highly Brahmanical culture was carefully cultivated in Gadwal in the colonial period through links with Mathas, celebration of festivals on a grand scale and practices that point to the presence of a sacred and political geography. We also tried to gauge the influence of Brahmanical religion by seeing its ramifications in the realm of popular culture. For this, we focus on the social relationships that under gird the cult of *Mathangi* and festivals such as *Devamma* and the changes that have occurred in this time period.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Photograph of this organization from field visit, September, 2016.

¹⁴² Pramoda Rao, 'The Nature and Pattern of the Christian Church as a Reflection of Christian Missions In Andhra Pradesh 1884-1960: A critique', in Joseph Prabhakar Dayam, Peniel Jesudason Rufus Rajkumar and I.P. Asheervadam ed. *Mission At and From The Margins*, Edinburgh, 2015.

We finally dealt with the Huzinga case of 1906. We noticed that some of the ideas of sacred and political geography that were prevalent among the ruling sections get reflected in a striking manner in this episode. We argued that it was the element of the assertion of the Madigas which was present in this case that led the *Samasthan* authorities to deny this application despite pressure on them for almost two years. This chapter largely covered various events that show the assertion of the Madigas from the last decade of the nineteenth century to the 1920s. The changed nature of the Madiga assertion through mass conversions due to the entry of the Ambedkarite movement and the nationalists, makes the 1930s and 1940s a qualitatively different phase. We explore this phase in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Religion and Nationalism among the Madigas of Gadwal

In this chapter we explore the decades of the 1930's and 1960's. Mass conversions and an engagement with the national movement led by the Indian National Congress changed the nature of the cultural and political assertion of the Madigas. They emerged as an agent in the political landscape of Gadwal. We discuss two dominant influences on the Madigas in their bid to build their political agenda in Gadwal namely the independent movement of the untouchables led by Ambedkar and the second being nationalism. These influences changed the political consciousness and activities of the Madigas of Gadwal directly and indirectly and brought them into conflict with the missionaries who in the meantime became estranged from the political and spiritual aspirations of the untouchable Christians. In this chapter we explore the changing missionary policy from 1890 to 1960. It is this change in policy which pushed the Madigas of Gadwal to develop an 'untouchable version of nationalism'.

Religion as a political Issue in Telangana region

The effect of Adi-Hindu movement led by the untouchable caste groups in the Hyderabad state was felt in the increased cultural assertion of the Madigas in Gadwal during the 1930's and 1940's. The Adi-Hindu movement of the 1920's wanted greater association with Hinduism and made a case for sankritisation. Sanskritization was not merely an attempt to raise oneself in the caste hierarchy but also an assertion of independent, dignified and equal existence within Hinduism. The impact of the movement was felt in the Gadwal region in the decade of the 1930's.¹ A Dalit leader from the Madiga caste argued that the Madigas and the Brahmins were not different as both of them originated from the same mother, goddess Arundhati.² This was an argument also made by Adi-Hindu leaders.³ Similarly the iconography of the temple

¹ Asheervadam argues that the effect of the Adi-Hindu campaign was not felt in the region of Mahbubnagar till the 1930's while it affected the rest of the Hyderabad state in the 1920's itself. Refer to I P asheervadam, *Dalit Conversions to the Mennonite Church*, unpublished M.Phil Thesis, United Theological College, Bangalore. 1998.

² Interview with Marappa, Village Gattu, Gadwal, September 7th, 2016.

³ ChinnaiahJangam, *Contesting Hinduism : Emergence of Dalit Paradigms in Telugu Country, 1900-1950*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2005.

which the Malas of Desharajupalli built in the 1930's, which we identified as a sanskritization bid shows the mutual existence of the Brahmanic god of *Narasappa* and the non-Brahmanic goddess *Yellamma*.⁴ Sanskritization attempts should not be seen as mere imitations of upper caste culture and traditions. We should also notice the elements of protest implied in them. The exercise of inverting prevalent Brahmanical myths such as the *Kamadhenu* were attempts on the part of the untouchable groups to achieve access to Hinduism on new terms.⁵ Guha demonstrates the role of untouchable caste groups such as Doms and Bhangis in subverting prevalent Brahmanical myths in order to provide an alternative ground for their position in the Hindu cosmological order.⁶

The entry of Ambedkar onto the political scene provided further thrust to the processes that were present in the 1920's due to the Adi-Hindu movement. However the Ambedkarite movement of the 1930's did not want any association with Hinduism as opposed to the Adi-Hindu movement which asked for an equal, independent and dignified existence within it. The Ambedkarite movement by calling for severing ties with Hinduism brought about a change in the nature of the untouchable movement in Gadwal as well. The missionary in charge of the Nalgonda mission station in Hyderabad state points to the role of Ambedkar in forcing different religious and political groups to engage with untouchables which culminated in a great politicization of the untouchable masses. Missionary Unruh reports:

The declaration of Dr. Ambedkar – which I personally never believed was sincere – has aroused Muslims, Hindus and Christians alike. A great effort to win the depressed classes for these respective religions is being made. The Roman Catholics, were hitherto indifferent towards these people. They made little effort to win the lower classes. But since the famous declaration of Ambedkar, they have tried everything in their power to win our Christians and heathen from the Depressed classes over to Catholicism. They offer good salaries to young Baptists who can

⁴ Interview with Narsappa, Village Desharajupalli, September 6th, 2016.

⁵ Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, 1909.

⁶ Ranajit Guha 'Career of an Anti-God in Heaven and on Earth' in Partha Chatterjee (ed.), *The Small Voice of History*, Ranikhet, 1995.

read even a little and this way try to entice our Christians over to their community.⁷

The Arya Samaj and Muslim organizations also tried to convert the untouchables to their respective religions.⁸ It is reported that several monetary incentives were offered by Muslim organizations to convert.⁹ Unruh reports an incident in which Muhameddan missionary agency sent the name of 400 Christian converts as likely converts to Islam to its main branch at Hyderabad. He reports “missionaries took up this issue with Hyderabad Muhameddan mission and they said they also want to do the same work that Christian missionaries do, namely to lift these poor classes to a higher standard of life”.¹⁰ All these factors combined to produce a sharp focus on the political choices that the untouchable caste groups would make with respect to religion.

Paradoxically during this period of intense politicking over untouchables, we see the Christian missionaries moving further away from the secular and spiritual aspirations of the untouchables. The politicization of religious identity which occurred in the decades of 1930’s in the Hyderabad state was an entirely new phenomenon. Missionaries who operated purely as religious agents found it difficult to understand its significance. At the cusp of this new politicization of the untouchable which appealed to their secular and religious aspirations we see the missionaries exclaiming “There is going on a struggle in the hearts of the people. *We, who have been brought up in the Christian Church have no idea what it all means for them* [emphasis added]. But the fight must be fought and will be fought. We feel that the time is near, when the breaking through the line will come. It is dawning”.¹¹

‘Men don’t live by Bread alone’

In this section we focus on the evangelical policy of the missionaries from the 1930’s onwards which was clearly and radically different from that of their predecessors. In

⁷ Reverend Cornelius Unruh, ‘Annual Report, Nalgonda, South India’, 1936, .MBCBC, Hyderabad.

⁸ Reverend Corenlius Unruh ‘Nalgonda Report’ of the M.B Church, 1930, MBCBC, Hyderabad.

⁹ *Ibid*, p.2

¹⁰ *Ibid*,p.2

¹¹ Reverend Cornelius Unruh, ‘Annual Report of Nalgonda 1936’, Deccan, South India. MBCBC, Hyderabad.

the last decade of the nineteenth century, missionary Chute saw the need to combine the secular aspects with the religious in the conduct of mission in Gadwal. For this purpose he operated with the concepts of dignity of labour. John reports that Chute made bricks for the new mission building with his bare hands.¹² “When he had to take a break for drinking water, he held the jug with his elbows to drink it”¹³ thereby showcasing a disregard for notions of purity and pollution. He worked along with few members of the artisanal caste of Vaderollu to make the solid cart for his gospel tours in the neighboring villages. This cart was famously called the buffalo express.¹⁴ Chute also viewed economic uplift of the untouchables as a necessary work of the mission. He bought two hundred acres of government land and distributed it among the new converts and named this enclave as *Bethlehem*. Though some of the converts sold their land, Chute thought that it would cultivate a taste for better living among the new converts. He was also instrumental in setting up the tannery for Madigas in Amarachinta, which is in Mahbubnagar region. With his venture, he tried to channel the traditional skills of the Madigas into modern profit making ventures.

Thurston reports that the jajmani relations were breaking down between 1900 and 1909¹⁵ in areas of the Madras province. Such observations were also made by Russell for the Berar region of the central province which is adjacent to Telangana region of the Hyderabad state¹⁶ consequently; Madigas were forced to shift their occupation from leather work to agricultural work.¹⁷ In Gadwal the hereditary occupation of leather work carried out by Madigas faced threat of erasure due to the setting up of a tannery in the town of Raichur thirty kilometers away from the *Samasthan* in 1909.¹⁸ Action of missionary Chute of providing alternative employment to those who were displaced by destruction of hereditary occupations seems to be in line with the actions of missionaries in Coastal Andhra region of the Madras Presidency

¹² B.Z. John, *Centenary of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 1960.

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ I.P. Asheervadam, *Dalit Conversions to the Mennonite Church*, Unpublished M.Phil Thesis, United Theological College, Bangalore, 1998.

¹⁵ Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, 1909.

¹⁶ R. V. Russell, *Caste and tribes of central province*, 1916

¹⁷ *Census of Hyderabad State*, 1911, Mazhar Hussain, Times Press, Bombay, 1913.

¹⁸ *Imperial Gazetteer of India, provincial series*, 1901

and the Medak region of the Hyderabad State.¹⁹

Missionary Chute, however, insisted that the motive for conversion should not come purely from secular reasons and there should be a 'conversion of the mind'. Chute did not convert people who received mission's help also because he was also afraid that "opposer's will cry that 'we could only win rice Christians'".²⁰ But he did not see secular aspirations of the untouchables as detrimental to their spiritual elevation. We see missionary Hopkins reporting on the famine thus "but hunger is a real thing and food is so tangible a matter that the simplest mind can realize need and seek for supply. Christians and missionaries prayed and soon missions could get help from the board. And many denounced their god and said Jesus is the only god".²¹ Chute working during famine time exclaims "have we not all seen of the misery in poverty stricken villages. Those who have not have not eyes to see'. The sight of half famished and naked crowds begging for food and clothing will never fade from our memories."²²

In contrast, we see the missionaries in the 1930's, adopting a completely different position on the secular aspirations of the Madigas. The reports written from 1930 to 1936 by the missionary Cornelius Unruh of American Baptist Mission situated in Nalgonda shows the growing shift in their policy from the mid 1930's.²³ This was due to the entry of Ambedkar on to the political scene and the national movement, both of which find special mention in these reports. The growing focus on the 'untouchable problem' increased the bargaining position of untouchable groups and strained their relations with the missionaries. The politicization of the depressed classes in the 1930's was not liked by the missionaries. Such politicization led to increasing secular demands from the converts. Missionaries found it difficult to field such demands due to the world wide depression from 1929 onwards and political changes especially in Russia which

¹⁹ *The Medak Diocese Bulletin, Tanning Training Project in Ramayapet, Medak*, Volume I, No.2, Easter Number March, 1954.

²⁰ B.Z. John, *Centenary of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 1960.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid*

²³ In Gadwal, the missionaries implemented this policy after some years. It is therefore important for us to look at the Nalgonda reports. Nalgonda was a district in the Telangana region of the State of Hyderabad. It was one of the mission stations of the American Baptist Missions along with the Gadwal field. Nalgonda is located 185 kilometers east of Gadwal. It is a fertile area which is drained by the river Krishna.

resulted in a reduction in funding for mission activities.²⁴ The first conflict was over the issue of providing village teachers or *Puntulu* to Christian villages. Missionary Unruh wrote in 1930”

Out of the great movement of the years before last year arose much work for the missionaries and the Pastors. Many had come out and took baptism and each new village believe they have a right claim to demand a *Puntulu*, but as we were unable to provide theses villages with a teacher, there seemed to be in many place a great disappointment, which gave us much anxiety.²⁵

In order to tide over the shortage of preachers many temporary measures were implemented. “*Decons* were appointed who are given 6 week to 2 month bible training, singing and prayer. It is clearly understood they will not be paid by the mission for their service and that they must conduct prayer meetings when the pastors can’t come and do it”.²⁶ “Sometimes students who have completed 3 form were sent as teachers, some villages were serviced by nearby preachers and teachers. The villages which supported a pastor refused to pay for him if he provided services to other village and other villages did not want to contribute to a pastor who lived at a distance in another village”.²⁷ Most often wives of pastors were requested to fill in for them for which no monetary compensation was given or even when it was given it was a mere token of appreciation. Unruh reports:

The wives of pastors and preachers are engaged in village work as much as they can without regular pay. Most of them are real help to their husbands in their churches as well in the evangelist work among non-Christians. They often had to work in the field to support family. If funds are available at the end of the year we should give them a small help as recognition of their help to the church.²⁸

²⁴ Nalgonda Reports of 1930 and 1937 report severe fund crunch.

²⁵ Reverend Cornelius Unruh, ‘Nalgonda Report,’ 1930.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 4

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.4

²⁸ Reverend Cornelius Unruh, ‘Nalgonda Report,’ 1930.

The pastors were either underpaid or not paid at all for months by the missionary in charge of the Nalgonda field. These conditions of financial crunch and increasing secular and spiritual demands of untouchables generated in the missionaries, a resentment towards them. Missionaries began to resent the demands of the untouchable converts or would be converts. They started to paint the untouchables as a group who get easily swayed by monetary allurements and were given more to material thinking than worry over salvation. Mr and Mrs C.Unruh reports how “Christian converts from the untouchable caste fall prey to money allurements and have to be reminded that ‘men do not live by bread alone’ ”.²⁹

As most of our Christians are poor they easily fall prey to those who offer them material help. The Muhameddan teacher offered them help in land, loan for cattle, loans to work their land and clothes. Moreover they used a very clever method to approach our Christians, telling that Christianity and Muhamadanism were practically the same thing. Both believe in one god, reject idolatry, but they say “there is one thing and that is that we Muhamedanians can help you materially while the *mission is bankrupt and they also ask you to bear even the burden of the mission work* [emphasis added]. After we explained to them, one outstanding woman said “*religion is not to give us our daily bread god has given us wings – she meant hand and feet - and we have to earn our bread ourselves. Religion brings us salvation Muhumedeinisim is too poor for living Christians because men don’t live by bread alone*”[emphasis added].³⁰

While the Madiga attempts at conversion were always seen purely through a secular reasoning, others were shown as converting due to theological reasons. Unruh reports how women from Muslim families asked for ‘living bread’ or Holy Communion, upper caste converts were shown as moved by the bible alone.³¹ As we saw before the early missionaries saw no such need to cast the Madiga in that light or

²⁹ *Ibid*, p.6

³⁰ Reverend Cornelius Unruh, ‘Nalgonda Report,’ 1930.

³¹ *Ibid*, p.15

felt that their secular aspirations were a hindrance to spiritual growth.

Missionaries were also focusing on making churches self-sustaining due to dire financial conditions and therefore paid good attention to converts from upper castes.³² Missionary policy in the period 1910-1920 also attempted to create self-sustaining churches but the motive was to encourage the spiritual growth of the Church. In the changed context, upper caste converts were courted. This is because in the long run they could contribute significantly to the church and reduce the financial burden of running the missions. The Nalgonda reports notes the monetary contribution made by the upper caste converts. For example, Unruh reports that when one upper caste man wanted to convert, he sent for the missionaries but bore the entire cost of their transportation and stay.³³ In earlier period also missionaries were interested in gathering upper caste converts because they believed they could provide better leadership in the church than untouchables. They also believed that the entry of upper castes missionaries would reduce the scourge of caste which is an obstacle for the conversion of India to Christianity. However, in the period after 1930 pragmatic reason of money and funding seemed to have informed their desire for upper caste converts. Unruh reports that “I am sure you will be greatly interested in our new experiences of gathering Shudras in our field. They are coming. A delegation of Catholic Christians came to see me about joining the Baptist Church. They are all of the higher class of Shudras (Kammas)”.³⁴

Along with increasing attention to gaining converts from upper caste we also notice a change in the missionary attitude towards caste. Unruh reports “I see among them (Shudras) a great change of attitude towards us and the mission workers. They are beginning to plan and think as what ways they can possibly join Christianity *without breaking away entirely from their own people*”. [emphasis added]. Upper caste converts were assured that conversion to Christianity need not mean estrangement from their kin and caste members. Chute in 1910, on the other hand, made no such promise to the upper caste converts but merely noted that “but were not for the trouble which they fear they may receive from caste prejudices, thousands in this field today would have

³² *Ibid*, p.28

³³ *Ibid*, p.28

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.29

rejoiced to follow the savior in ordinance of baptism”.³⁵ This move also led to an importation of caste rules into the working of the church. Unruh reports

I am sorry that the financial situation is so hard at this time. With this movement (reference to the conversions among the Shudras or agricultural castes in Nalgonda), a great new problem is connected. We have to follow up this movement, *by educating some of the Shudras for the work among the Shudras. We have to encourage to send some children to the Boarding school and it might be necessary to have them separate for a while and it will involve greater expenses.* [emphasis added] I had to get a Shudra preacher from another village and I have to pay him, but there are no provisions for such extra work. Mrs. Unruh and myself have gone into it with the possibility that we might have to pay that salary ourselves. We dare not let it go.³⁶

Unruh details how getting upper caste converts also entailed extra cost since Shudra teachers and pastors had to be provided for them and he was also mulling the idea of setting up of separate boarding school for their children. Other rules in the church were also relaxed in order to accommodate the interests of upper caste converts. The change in the policy of missionaries from the middle of the 1930's was clearly visible in the incident of conversion of Shudra Venkaiah. Unruh reports;

“When I came to the house of that Shudra Venkaiah, he came out and told me that he found rest and peace of his mind through faith in the lord Jesus and that he was anxious to take baptism. I found that I had a true believer in Christ before me. Now my pastors were a little perplexed as to how to handle the case. He being a Shudra, they come from the outcastes, who should baptize him? The missionary of Nalgonda baptizes no one anymore, so they came to me requesting me to baptize him. I said they should ask him by whom he wanted to be baptized”.³⁷

³⁵ B Z John, *Centenary of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 1960.

³⁶ Correspondence from Cornelius Unruh, Fairview Ootacamund to Dr. J.C. Robbins, Secretary of the A.B.F.M Society, New York, United States of America, 1932.

³⁷ Reverend Cornelius Unruh, ‘Nalgonda Report’, Deccan, South India, 1930.

The very act of giving a choice to the person to avoid baptism from an untouchable pastor was an indirect way of importing caste rules into the church. The second choice given by the missionary to the Shudra was the place where he wants to get baptized. As baptism involves a water body such as a well, a pond or a river, Shudra Venkaiah chose to do it in his own well. Unruh reports

But where shall we baptize you? He was asked. So he chose to be baptized in his own well. We had to walk two miles for it and when we came there we found that the well had 15feet deep water so I told him that it was impossible to baptize him in that well. In the meantime his daughter came and pleaded with him not to take baptism. Hearing that pleading it could have made hard heart soft, I thought that he would give up, but he sat quiet as in great struggle, but did not say a word. Finally his daughter turned to me begging me not to baptize him. I told her I was sorry for her but I had to do when he asked me for it. Suddenly Venkaiah rose and said ‘on the other side of the village is a Madiga well and there is much less water, let us go there’ and he went ahead and we followed him. When we came near to that well, his daughter and his son-in law came running and stopped us and begged once more not to baptize him. Finally, she said, ‘if you think you must do it then at least be baptized in the village tank which was another half mile further’. But he said ‘all the water is lords whether in my well or in a Madiga well and I am going to get baptized in a Madiga well. But finally we advised him to be baptized in the tank and so my touring pastor baptized him in the tank. Sure he is a wonderful man and we believe that a new opening is coming among the higher castes.³⁸

As we saw above, baptism of the upper castes were conducted in their own wells rather than in the wells of Madigas or even in common village tank. Some of them were allowed to be a Christian without undergoing Baptism.³⁹ They were provided Shudra preachers and it was decided to keep the upper caste students in a separate boarding School. While provision for these implicit demands of upper caste converts were being

³⁸ Reverend Cornelius Unruh, ‘Nalgonda Report,’ 1930.

³⁹ Reverend Cornelius Unruh, ‘Nalgonda Report’, 1937.

arranged, untouchable converts were denied teachers, preachers and asked to not to “live for bread alone”.⁴⁰ This policy of the missionaries in courting the caste Hindus by importing caste rules of segregation into the church was radically different from the approach of the early missionaries. Chute’s approach belonged to the broader missionary policy of the late nineteenth century, which placed utmost emphasis on singling out cultural leaders such as the Brahmins for attack. In response, the Brahmins seemed to have spread malicious rumors against them.⁴¹

As shown earlier, the early missionaries did not feel the need to pit the secular and spiritual needs of human beings against one another and understood the complex socio-religious impulses of the lower castes which stemmed from their caste position, the later missionaries seems to be moving away from such an understanding. It is interesting that many converts from the American Baptist Mission took up Catholicism only to come back. However the reason they give for reconversion was not material but social.

When our Christians accept Christ they like to sing. A group of Mala belong to Catholics came over to our church. After hearing the joyous singing they came over. They said “we have not a message like you and nor have we hymn like you.”⁴²

It shows that the untouchables preferred modes of worship which were in tune with their communal way of life. They also preferred more democratic forms of worship such as congregation and were opposed to the hierarchical ecclesiastical structure of Catholicism. But missionaries could not grasp the complex socio-political and spiritual yearnings of the untouchable groups which stem from their caste position. The selective application of one principle to two different caste groups and the action of pitting the secular against the spiritual aspects of religion was started in Nalgonda. This missionary policy soon coalesced into a principled opposition to nationalism.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 16

⁴¹ Correspondence between Reverend E.Chute and Babor, the Foreign Secretary of the American Baptist Missionary Union, Palmur, Janumpet P.O, Deccan, September 18,1907. Also see, Gerhard Wilhelm Peters, *The Growth of Foreign Missions in the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 1947.

⁴² Reverend Cornelius Unruh, ‘Nalgonda Report’, 1937.

“Render unto Caesar things that are Caesars”

The missionary policy on nationalism can also be traced to the manner in which they viewed the secular and spiritual aspects of religion. Here we have the views of missionary Voth on Gandhi. He reports that

One hears much of the non-violence of Gandhi and it is said that he takes his teaching from the Bible, respectively from Jesus. Let me quote a few words from an Indian newspaper that I find appropriate. There seems a tendency on Gandhi's part to compare his theory of non-violence with the methods practiced by Jesus. But it must be made clear that Jesus never exercised his meekness for ulterior ends, not even for securing just rights. For example, Christ did not say to people who complained that they were required by the roman government to give personal service to 'lie down on the road and refuse to move' but he said, if any man 'compel thee to go a mile go with him twice' and he did not lend continence to suggestions that it might be proper to suggest non-payment of taxes. What he said was render unto Caesar things that are Caesars.⁴³

There is no warrant in the teaching of Jesus in thinking that non-violence on the part of the Jews who are in truth non-violent will led to a change in heart in Hitler. Jesus said 'pray for them that despitefully use you and prosecute you, that you may be the children of your father, not that his army cease.'⁴⁴

In these remarks we again come across the disdain of the missionaries of mixing secular aspects in religious matters. According to the missionary, Gandhi wanted to achieve secular aims with saintly aura around him. He should not invoke Jesus for secular activities. Indulging in secular activities using religion is not spiritual. He thinks that Gandhi used religion for achieving secular ends. We see a distinctive missionary policy being developed in Nalgonda on secular aspirations of the untouchable converts and on caste and nationalism. This policy was used again by the missionaries in the late

⁴³ Reverend J.H.Voth, 'Views on Gandhi', *Harvest Field*, January –February, no.1, 1939.

⁴⁴ Reverend J.H.Voth, 'Views on Gandhi', *Harvest Field*, January –February, no.1, 1939.

1940's and 1950's to halt the attempt at indigenization of the church by the Madigas in Gadwal. The struggle between the Madigas who were influenced by national ideas and tried to address secular issues and the missionaries who insisted on the need to focus on the spiritual in the late 1940's in Gadwal will be discussed in the next section.

Mass conversion and politicization of untouchable identity: 1930-1945, Gadwal

Gadwal too witnessed mass conversions as a result of politicization of the untouchable identity which occurred from the middle of the 1930's. Missionary A.A.Unruh⁴⁵ reports that in the year 1936 alone, three hundred and fifty six people had taken to Christianity in Gadwal. This is the first year in which we hear of mass conversions. It is these sheer numbers that were involved in conversions from this community that makes Arthur⁴⁶ and Penner⁴⁷ to argue that Gadwal had the highest number of Christians in the entire Mahbubnagar region. This process only gathered strength in the following years. It can be seen from one incident of mass conversion in the village of Madlabanda in 1941. In this village, the depressed classes asked for a teacher and a bright student B.David, whom the missionaries could not help with further with studies, went there to 'earn his food'.⁴⁸ Even the adults from the Madiga community sought education. Soon, David faced opposition from the caste people. School boys were beaten up but he stayed on. Houses of sixteen families who wanted to take to Christianity were burned down by caste Hindus of the village. Unruh reports the events thus

In winter time, with scant clothing the loss of house was severely felt, their goats and whatever they possessed in the line of food, clothing and cooking utensils was gone. *Two days later a delegation came to mission compound and requested them to come to the village as soon as possible. They want to be baptized even if they would have to pay for it with their*

⁴⁵ A.A. Unruh refers to the missionary couple who were in charge of the Gadwal field station. They belonged to the American Mennonite Brethren Mission. This mission bought the Gadwal field, which included the mission buildings from the American Baptist Mission, which ran this field from 1885 to 1936. A.A. Unruh refers to Abram and Annie Unruh.

⁴⁶ D.J. Arthur, *A Study of People Movement Theory in the context of the Gadwal Field of the Mennonite Brethren Church in India*, M.A.Dissertation, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, MBCBC,2006

⁴⁷ Peter Penner *Russians, North Americans and Telugus*, (Minatoba,1998).

⁴⁸ *Harvest Field*, May –December, Vol.6, no.3, 1941.

life [emphasis added]⁴⁹

This episode of mass conversions brings out various textual layers in the act of conversion. The Madigas seem to have grasped the importance of literacy as they specially sought the services of David. Even adults were willing to participate in literacy classes. The venomous response of the caste Hindus to the attempt of the Madigas for self-improvement, which could hardly be seen as a confrontational stance, took the Madigas by surprise. Injustice of such a venomous response was what forced the Madigas to make a public spectacle of conversion. The rage and fury of the Madigas at this action of the caste Hindus is what spurred this bold attempt to confront village society despite possible reprisals. Jangam details the type of instruments of economic coercion that the caste Hindus in Telugu speaking areas of the Madras Presidency were deliberating on using in a case of conflict with the untouchable caste groups.⁵⁰ These were refusal to provide consumption loans desperately sought by the agricultural labour population of the untouchables and denial of crucial social and economic relations. These measures were expected to make the Madigas to fall in line in an agrarian village economy. Despite the possibility of a yet more furious attack since the act of conversion is far more confrontational than seeking education, we see the untouchables in this village set on such a course with a sense of urgency and determination.

The action of calling the missionaries to the village Madlabanda to conduct Baptism ceremony for which they were willing to pay with their lives was clearly a political act. The Madigas wanted the Baptism ceremony to happen in their own village and thereby issued a direct challenge to caste Hindus. This historical response of the Madigas in this phase of mass conversion stands out clearly from that of the actions of the early pioneer converts. The early converts did not get baptized in their own villages but rather went looking for the missionaries and then got baptized in a well or a pond

⁴⁹ *Harvest Field*, May–December, Vol.6, no.3, 1941.

⁵⁰ Veerabhadra Pakayaji (Sivapurapu), *Candalasparsha Mandanamoo* (The Ornament of Untouchability), Shruthi Sanjivini Mudraksharashala, Vijayawada, 1922 quoted in Chinnaiah Jangam (2005), *Contesting Hinduism : Emergence of Dalit Paradigms in Telugu Country, 1900-1950*. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies. 2005.

which was located in another village or close to the mission station.⁵¹ Hence, the mass conversions represented a new and hitherto unseen wave of political consciousness.

The initial motive of the Madigas clearly was not conversion. They only wanted to take advantage of the educational opportunities provided by the Mission. However that decision to call a pastor for gaining literacy ended badly for them pushing them into converting to Christianity. This is because in that moment of upper caste Hindu backlash, the Madigas clearly ascertained the link between caste and religion. As the missionaries report “winter time, with scant clothing the loss of house was severely felt, their goats and whatever they possessed in the line of food, clothing and cooking utensils was gone”.⁵² Madigas ran to mission compound two days later seeking the conduct of the public act of baptism.⁵³

It was due to this overtly political nature of this invitation given by the Madigas to the missionaries that the caste Hindus decided to deny missionaries entry into the village. They refused to give water, food and initially even permission to camp. At last they were given permission to camp close to the village. Earlier account of conversions details how the missionaries meandered across various streets in the village while upper castes were shown as either ignoring them or greeting them with boredom or benign curiosity.⁵⁴ This changed attitude to missionaries shows that religious propagation was perceived as benign as long as it did not attempt to alter social order. The act of conversion by Madigas was clearly one such attempt and was therefore furiously resisted by caste Hindus.

The missionary account details further evolution of the conversion drive.

One young man who had been healing by witchcraft was willing to leave his practice. At 3 o’ clock we went to a nearby well and had the privilege to baptize 47 people, all cleansed by the blood of Jesus. And young David works but with new courage and joy. We also visited the

⁵¹ I.P. Asheervadam, *Dalit Conversions to the Mennonite Brethren Church in India*, Unpublished M.Phil Thesis, United Theological College Bangalore, 1998.

⁵² *Harvest Field*, May –December, Vol.6, no.3, 1941.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Harvest field*, April-March, 1930

surrounding villages and found that it was a mass movement for in every village, nearly all the lower caste people wanted to baptise”.⁵⁵ Because it was harvest time and would interfere with the agricultural work, we had to postpone the baptism of nearby villages. Then plague struck the place and it was impossible for us to get people together. Just two days ago we had a special request from a village, which is untouched by plague to come quickly. They are afraid that if the plague visits their village and they die, they would not go to heaven⁵⁶.

In the above account we see various events. Action in one village seems to have spread to a significant number of neighboring villages. We see the Madigas of other villages impatiently asking the missionaries to conduct baptism despite obstacles such as harvest season and plague. The action of the Madigas to convert to Christianity before the plague carries them away shows their urgency to leave Hindu religion that was filled with humiliation for them. Missionaries show how Madigas attempt to quicken the process of conversion much against their wishes of who wondered whether they are spiritually ready for such an act.

It is also significant that what the missionaries reported as “one young man who had been healing by witchcraft was willing to leave his practice”.⁵⁷ This is one of the direct references to the *Mathangi* tradition. It shows that this practice was not immune from the pressures of the mass conversions from 1936 to 1942 in Gadwal. It most importantly shows that the dangerous power that is present in the *Mathangi*, who comes from the Madiga caste group, is not an unchanging ritual role but is conditioned by the historical process. We have already shown that the position of the *Mathangi* was intrinsically linked to the cult of *Yellamma* and *Devamma* festival and any changes in these, as incorporating Brahamanic Hinduism, could have implications for the former. Hence, the dangerous power that resides in the *Mathangi* seems to be no longer sufficient for this caste group to continue this ritual role in the late colonial period.

⁵⁵ *Harvest Field*, May-December, Vol.6, no.3, 1941, MBCBC.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

While we witness a fury and determination in these acts of mass conversions, the missionaries who facilitated this action remained cut off from the aspirations of the untouchable caste groups. The missionaries were convinced that the people were prepared for any hardship for baptism and saw this action solely through the religious lens. In reality it was their realization that no progress can occur for them as long as they remained within the Hindu fold that gave them an urgency to enter a new religion. Missionaries mostly saw acts of vendetta of the caste Hindus such as burning of the houses of the Madigas as religious prosecution. Missionaries throughout this episode stood with the Madigas and arbitrated with village society for them. Missionary C. Unruh reports another such incident of prosecution of the Madigas by local authorities in Nalgonda. One man was chained both feet and arms and taken 4 miles to another village, and missionaries arbitrated to release the man.⁵⁸ A.A. Unruh in Gadwal also pleaded with village people when there was an opposition to baptism although the reasons for such action were spiritual and not humanistic.

Missionary policy on Madigas in Gadwal

By 1940's Madiga Christians had already staked a claim to the Church. Arthur examined the reasons for the high rate of conversions in Gadwal and pointed to the role of family and kin networks in the spread of conversion.⁵⁹ Asheervadam advances an unconventional argument⁶⁰ that it was not the zeal and initiative of the missionaries that were responsible for conversions in Gadwal during the colonial period. Instead according to him it was the Madigas who were overzealous for conversion and missionaries only responded to them. Asheervadam thereby points out the initiatives taken by the untouchable caste groups in ushering cultural change. Such an argument can also be substantiated by examining the incident of mass conversion in Madlabanda village in 1941. It was the Madigas who requested the missionaries to baptize them. This was true for the early pioneer converts in the last decade of the nineteenth century

⁵⁸ Reverend Cornelius Unruh, 'Nalgonda report', 1930.

⁵⁹ D.J. Arthur, *A Study of People Movement Theory in the context of the Gadwal Field of the Mennonite Brethren Church in India*, M.A. Dissertation, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, MBCBC, 2006

⁶⁰ The argument of Asheervadam differs considerably from the argument of Chinna Rao, who approves of the activities of the missionaries as the only saving hand for the advancement of the untouchable caste groups on all fronts. For Rao's works refer to, *Dalits struggle for Identity, Andhra and Hyderabad, 1900-1950*, New Delhi, 2003, 'Dalit Movement in Andhra Pradesh: A Historical Outline of a Hundred Years' *Indian Historical Review*, Vol 42, Issue 1 pp:113-139, June 16, 2015.

as much as it was for the Madigas during the phase of mass conversions from 1936 to 1942.

Asheervadam also points out the labour and initiative of the 'village preacher' from the Madiga community in effecting conversions. Due to the peculiar indifference of the Baptist and Menonite Church to proselytizing activities in Gadwal, we see the Madiga converts and their pastors slowly taking control of the church machinery and administration. Missionary reports admit shows that Gadwal station was much neglected.

The field was in charge of Mr. Wathne in 1919 and he reported that year there had been no resident missionary at Gadwal for five years. It is a very hard field to work, no railroad, or even good cart roads. The numerous changes in the missionaries, and the frequent absence of any, have greatly hindered the work. The latest move was the designation to Gadwal of Reverend W.C. Owen and wife from their return from furlough⁶¹.

Other problems faced by the missionaries were the severe heat of the field due to its position between two rivers of the Krishna and Tungabhadra which often strained the health of missionaries.⁶² It is in this context that the village preacher became an all important figure in the church organization. These preachers attended to their work with real missionary zeal. Unruh describes one such Madiga village teacher who was assigned to one village. But on his own initiative he went to another village and preached the gospel.⁶³ It shows the amount of initiative taken by the Madigas in spreading Christianity in the villages of Gadwal. It is also pertinent to note that the teacher David, whose services were sought by the Madigas in village Madlabanda had the dual functions of teaching and preaching. Some other accounts also show that when the missionaries retired to the Ooty hills for three months every summer, they placed immense faith in the local preachers to run the Gadwal field in their absence.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Gerhard Wilhelm Peters, *The Growth of Foreign Missions in the Mennonite Brethen Church*, 1947.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Harvest Field*, March – April, No 2, 1940

⁶⁴ Gerhard Wilhelm Peters, *The Growth of Foreign Missions in the Mennonite Brethen Church*, 1947.

Village pastor not only sowed seeds of discontent but also orchestrated act of defiance and managed the situation politically. Even in situations of extreme turmoil such as arson committed by the caste Hindus in the village of Madlabanda and intimidating the young students in 1941, the village preacher was undeterred. One surely cannot discount his role in clearly comprehending the political nature of mass conversions and planning counter strategies in the wake of upper caste reprisals. The village preacher was clearly a political activist and an insurgent in disguise.

The local converts were also invested in religious activities to a large extent. The efforts of the Madigas extended to supporting their own village churches. Missionary Unruh reports that some of these villages did not see a missionary for almost ten years. Converts seem to have developed organizational capabilities as they could devise a system for running of the village church for almost ten years without the presence of a missionary. Unruh reports that “ in one village in the far corner of the field, where there were about seventy Christians, there had been no missionary for some ten years”.⁶⁵

Converts made regular contributions to the sustenance of the church. While it was a missionary policy adopted more clearly since 1910 to develop churches as self sustaining entities,⁶⁶ the manner in which converts embraced this aspect of missionary organization in Gadwal was striking. Unruh describes his activities after his arrival at the Gadwal mission station in 1938.⁶⁷ He took one year to repair the dilapidated bungalow and studied the Telugu language. He then went on a six week tour in a trailer attached to an oxen cart. He talked to the village folk from 6 in the evening till 2am in the morning. He describes how contributions from Christians were going up every year, which was referred as ‘harvest collections’. New converts were reported as going from house to house collecting grains and giving it to Unruh. The collections were higher even in the event of a crop failure. Unruh describes

Since the word of our coming was not sent ahead of time, they did not get adequate time to prepare for collections. We have not communicated

⁶⁵ A.A. Unruh ‘A Visit of the Outskirts of the Gadwal Field’, *Harvest Field*, March-April, 1940.

⁶⁶ Reverend J N C Hiebert, *The Growth of Telugu Church*, A Short Biography of J.H.Voth, 1915.

⁶⁷ A.A. Unruh, *A Visit of the Outskirts of the Gadwal Field*, *Harvest Field*, March-April, 1940.

of our arrival in that village, but they collected contributions from all the households of Christians and gave it to me.⁶⁸

The enthusiasm of the poor Madigas to contribute financially for the church shows the way in which they asserted ownership over the church. These activities of the village preacher and the Madiga converts came in a context of indifference on the part of the missionaries towards the Madigas. This should be seen as a part of the policy as laid down in the Nalgonda Reports. One is immediately reminded of David's case here. He had to sustain himself by offering his services in return for food in the village of Madlabanda in 1940-1941. Missionaries were aware that acts of conversion would be followed by demand for preachers and teachers and their inability to meet these demands, similar to the events in Nalgonda was beginning to affect the loyalties of church members. In Gadwal we have a reported case of Christian converts joining Catholic Church on the promise of local village teachers.⁶⁹ The missionaries felt that demands were putting a huge burden on the financial resources of the mission. This is reported from the tours undertaken by Unruh of the villages in Gadwal in his trolley.⁷⁰

The demand for village teachers was intimately linked to adult education. Basic literacy especially for adults is a means to access a resource that was the key to breaking the cultural reproduction of caste Hindus. It is all the more so since the Brahmins were the only literate people in the villages of Gadwal. Literacy was a job requirement for this caste group since they worked as *patwari* or village accountant. One respondent from the Brahmin caste group proudly told us that if anybody in the village received a letter through post, the person had to come to the *patwaris* house to get to know its contents.⁷¹ The missionaries instead of understanding the social content of this demand saw it only through its financial ramifications. Here, the missionaries of Gadwal had a much weaker ground to stand on than the financially strained American Baptist Mission at Nalgonda in the 1930's, since they had sufficient resources. While showing indifference to these demands, the missionaries secured their comforts such as

⁶⁸ A.A. Unruh, *A Visit of the Outskirts of the Gadwal Field*, Harvest Field, March-April, 1940.

⁶⁹ 'Minutes of the 53rd session of the Missionary Conference of The American Mennonite Brethren Mission held at Gadwal, Deccan', 1941. MBCBC, Hyderabad.

⁷⁰ A.A. Unruh 'A Visit of the Outskirts of the Gadwal Field', *Harvest Field*, March-April, 1940.

⁷¹ Interview with Prabhakar Rao, ex-Patwari Nandini village, Gadwal, September 5th, 2016.

demanding a car from the foreign mission board for their travel on the rocky roads of Gadwal and a proposal to build a new mission station in the vicinity of the railway station.⁷²

Missionaries more or less viewed the motives of conversion of the Madigas with suspicion or disdain. In the instance of mass conversion described above we see the missionaries fretting over the spiritual readiness of the “would be converts”. Unruh remarks “It is not easy at a time of revival where people know nothing of Christian principle to decide who is ready who is not. May the lord lead”.⁷³ While on one of his tours to villages in Gadwal, missionary Unruh noticed that there was little or no work for the laboring classes due to the onset of crop failure.⁷⁴ He continues “on all sides, the question, how shall we and our children live is being asked. He wonders “would the concern about salvation were as keen as that for food and clothing”.⁷⁵ This statement shows that the missionaries viewed such attitudes of Madigas as unspiritual.

In Gadwal, the changing missionary policy of neglect of secular aspect of the life of the Madiga convert soon generated a conflict within the church. Soon this culminated in a power struggle in the church between the local pastors and the missionary on the crucial question of indigenization of the church which we turn to later.⁷⁶ The misrecognition of the secular and spiritual aspirations of the Madigas also culminated in a slow drift of the untouchables to mainstream nationalism in Gadwal. It is to be noted that villages of mass conversions from 1936 -1940 were also the site of nationalist activity in the 1940's.

Turn to Secular: National Movement in Gadwal

In the earlier phase from 1898-1930, missionaries reported that the Madigas cited

⁷² Minutes of the reference committee of the Mennonite Brethren Conference held at Gadwal, July 1946.

⁷³ *Harvest field* No 3, May-December, vol.6, 1941.

⁷⁴ A.A. Unruh ‘A Visit of the Outskirts of the Gadwal Field’, *Harvest Field*, March-April, 1940.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ While in Nalgonda these views on Madigas also generated its counterpart in terms of offering greater dignity to upper caste converts, in Gadwal we notice a slow drift of the Mennonite Church to the *Samasthan* authorities. Gadwal due its circumstance of backward economy where education as a component for social mobility were largely absent did not witness any large scale conversion of the upper caste during the colonial period. However the question of caste came back to the church in the decades of the 50's and a debate on nationalism and ‘Gospel for social action’ was initiated.

hereditary occupations as one of the factors for their conversion from Hinduism to Christianity.⁷⁷ Most accounts of conversion place its impact and causes squarely within the political economy of village society. For example, conversions generated conflicts in the village society because of the change of behavior due to conversion such as giving up alcohol and increasing adult literacy. This led to strains in the relationship between peasants, landlords on one hand and Madigas on the other.⁷⁸ Oral histories point out that with the availing of adult education, the Madigas could read the debt documents which put to test the usual practice of inflating the debt of Madigas by landlords which occurred due to their illiteracy.⁷⁹ Some of the converts stopped turning up for work due to better awareness and self-respect. One can therefore infer that religious activities also contributed to disturbing the secular socio-economic relations and were crucial in the spread of conversion. It is this aspect of secular aspirations which had already found an indirect outlet in conversion which was furthered and radically changed by nationalist discourse on feudalism and national economic reconstruction.

The question of *begari* or forced labour was debated by colonial officials as early as 1915.⁸⁰ In the 1930's, both the untouchable caste groups and the nationalists took up this issue and the Nizam's government abolished it in 1923. But due to weak implementation, this issue gained traction from the 1930's. The All India State Peoples Conference took up this issue in its District conference held in 1939 in Mahbubnagar district.⁸¹ Reports point out that Christian missionaries in some parts of Telangana took the *farman* issued by the Nizam and made many untouchables aware of the new provisions of the law and hoped to gain converts through such activity.⁸² This was an issue that directly touched a chord with the untouchable caste groups since most of them were required by laws or custom to provide forced labour to upper caste landlords and officials.⁸³ The period between 1936-37 and 1950 can be taken as an entirely new phase

⁷⁷ *Sixty Years of MB Mission*, 1956

⁷⁸ Interview with Benhur Ross, Pastor of Mennonite Brethren Church at Gadwal Town, 6th May, 2017.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*

⁸⁰ Question Regarding the discontinuation of the system of employing beggars(forced labour), Home Political, File No R9/b10, Revenue and Agriculture Matters, 1915.

⁸¹ 'All India State Peoples Conference Hyderabad State', File No: 66, 1946-47, NMML.

⁸² Chinnaiah Jangam, *Contesting Hindusim : Emergence of Dalit Paradigms in Telugu Country, 1900-1950*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2005.

⁸³ A forest official in Karimnagar District beat a person to death while he was doing forced labour for him. It was this issue that started the debate mentioned above among officials in 1915 on the inhuman

of the assertion of the Madigas. Asheervadam argues that the post the passage of the temple entry bill, a flurry of political activity was noticed among the untouchable caste groups.⁸⁴

The late 1930's was also a period where the activities of the national movement picked up pace in Gadwal under the leadership of Paga Pulla Reddy. The first major movement launched by the Congress was around the issue of access to forest lands directly contributing to the politicization of the peasantry and masses in general.⁸⁵ Nippani Ranga Rao has reported that Gadwal was hit by a plague in the year 1939. In the event of a plague the entire village had to be evacuated and camped on a ground away from the main settlement. For building make shift huts, the people needed leaves from the palm tree, which offer a good deal of protection from heat and are also water resistant to an extent. The Raja refused permission to the people to cut leaves from the forest even during this time.⁸⁶ Along with this issue, the recognition of the State Congress that palm trees were a source of revenue yielding almost three crores of rupees, the leadership gave instructions to its cadre to cut down these trees.⁸⁷ Other sources show that palm was a source of allied industries such as sugar.⁸⁸ Within Gadwal, the revenue from palm went to the *Samasthan* itself. The movement of 1942 therefore centered on the gaining of the right to the produce of the forest.

We do not know much about the participation of the Madigas in this movement, but it is undeniable that as part of village society, which was affected by the plague of 1939, they too would have resented the denial of access to forests. It is due to this first widespread movement of 1942, that the anti-*Samasthan* attitudes that had been sown in the minds of the Madigas for the first time during the Huizinga case were furthered.

conditions that were associated with this practice. The Karimnagar episode of begari show that even officials were entitled to this practice. Home Political file no. R9/b10, Revenue and Agriculture Matters, 1915, APSARC.

⁸⁴ I.P.Asheervadam, *Dalit Conversions to the Mennonite Brethen Church in India*, Unpublished M.Phil Thesis, United Theological College, Bangalore, 1998.

⁸⁵ Home Political file, 1942.

⁸⁶ NippaniRanga Rao's research note 'Misrule in Gadwal', All India State Peoples Conference, File no.65, Hyderabad State, 1939-47, NMML.

⁸⁷ Criminal Investigation Department Secret File, 1947.

⁸⁸ Palm as a source of Sugar, Report. Home Political, 1932. file ,APSARC.

This partly explains the influence of the national movement on them and their political activities in 1949.

The ground work for the nationalist activity however was prepared by the youth in Gadwal. It comes close on the heels of the forest agitation in 1942. Paga Pulla Reddy reports that

In 1943, a few youths of Gadwal gathered together and started the 'Young Intellectuals Association'. It established its branches in Ieeja and Rajoli, the two big villages of the *Samasthan* and imparted literary-cum-political knowledge by conducting meetings and conferences participated by the prominent political leaders. It undertook adult literacy classes in some villages and also extended the Gandhian Constructive programme to Gadwal.⁸⁹

We argue that these may have affected the Madigas because untouchability was singled out as an issue for attack by the nationalists. Also they seem to have furthered the educational efforts of the untouchable caste groups. A promise was made that a future government set up by the State Congress would establish educational facilities for the untouchables. This promise was fulfilled by the nationalists who set up schools at all the three levels and also established colleges in Gadwal in the period 1952-1960. Missionaries record in 1950 talks about the fulfillment of the promises of national movement which drew many untouchables into its fold. "For the first time in the history of school education, scholarships has been received for many of the Harijan converts to Christianity greatly facilitating financial side of student life. Government also gave liberal grant for the development of Amarchinta tannery which Chute initiated for Madigas".⁹⁰ Also oral interviews from one respondent from the untouchable caste group shows that nationalist leaders such as Paga Pulla Reddy went to the villages of Gadwal even in the post-colonial period and encouraged untouchable households to send their children to school.⁹¹ It is undeniable that untouchables put a lot of faith in the promise of betterment of their life in independent India. We see the missionaries

⁸⁹ Paga Pulla Reddy, 'Problems of post-Police Action in Gadwal', *Silver Jubilee Souvenir of Government High School*, Gadwal, 1967.

⁹⁰ B.Z. John, *Centenary of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 1960.

⁹¹ Interview with Marappa, Dalit activist, Village Gattu, Gadwal, Septemeber 6th, 2016

expressing hope that independent India will outlaw untouchability; therefore Christianity will be able to flourish.⁹² This action of nationalists in gaining the trust of the converts contrasts poorly with the missionaries.

Missionary attitude to secular aspirations of the untouchable converts appeared inadequate especially in the light of the promises of the national movement. Around this time as a response to this missionary attitudes, we see the Christian converts trying to change the Church along the earlier missionary lines, however incorporating the new concepts of 'self-rule' and 'national identity'. In this process, we see the Madiga Christian converts bringing forth a new definition of nationalism which could be called 'national popular'⁹³ to retain their hold on their church and their country.

My Church, My country

The ideology of nationalism also influenced the views of the Madigas on the ideal type of Church organization in Gadwal. Nationalism as an ideology was liberally used by Christian converts to argue against the dichotomy constructed by missionaries of secular and spiritual life of converts. Consequently these converts attempted to orient the church along the interests and aspirations of local Madiga converts. We argue that this process generated a push for democratization of Church, of retaining the church as a crucial cultural resource for untouchables from the incursion of the upper caste converts. In the way in which Christian converts defined nationalism, they not only exhibited their anti- imperialist credentials, but also their interpretation of mainstream nationalism shorn of its caste and elite religious moorings. This could be argued as an articulation of 'national-popular'.

The conflict between the native Madiga converts and the missionaries could be located in the changing policy on indigenization of the church. There is a stark contrast between the policy of the early and later missionaries on indigenizing the church. One of the early missionaries J.N.C Hiebert puts forth his views on the indigenization of the Telugu church in 1915 thus

⁹² John Wiebe, *Great Things God Hath Done*, 1959.

⁹³ Gramsci defined 'national popular' as a variety of progressive nationalism which he contrasts with fascism. Aijaz Ahmed, 'Fascism and National Culture : Reading Gramsci in the days of Hindutva', *Social Scientist*, Vol no. 21, ¾, (March-April, 1993), pp.33-68.

Our mission in India is called 'The American Mennonite Brethren Mission'. The church that is to be established on the field in India is not to be called 'The American Mennonite Brethren Church'. It is to be called the 'The Telugu Mennonite Brethren Church' or perhaps only 'The Telugu Brethren Church'. I hope we notice the distinction. There is necessarily much that is foreign and American that is connected with a mission supported and *led* [emphasis added] by Americans. The future church cannot be encumbered with all this foreign element. It must be fully Indianised, it must be indigenous. Our Americanism's cannot and need not be translated into this Indian church. *I do not mean that it should in any way compromise with paganism* [emphasis added]. That is something entirely different. *Not everything that is American is Christian and not everything that is Indian is pagan* [emphasis added]. The future church of India must be adapted to its own peoples, customs and ways. We cannot put a Sauls armour of western patterns over this new Telugu church, but we must leave it to its simple ways, which are far better suited to its fields.⁹⁴

The idea of indigenisation as put forward by Heibert shows the need to adapt the functioning of the church to the customs of the land. Most importantly, Heibert seems to think that support received and leadership provided by the Americans to the activities in India seems to be a foreign element that could encumber the church. But in the late 1940's, the later missionaries were not open to this idea. As we have already shown, several factors ranging from the movements launched by untouchable caste groups and Ambedkar, the influence of the national movement, changing missionary policy towards the untouchables and focus of the missionaries on their day to day comforts rather than the real needs of the Madiga converts in the villages and finally the development of organizational capabilities of the Madigas seems to provide the impetus for such a change in missionary policy. It was the adverse ideas contained in this changing missionary policy implemented first in Nalgonda and later in Gadwal that pushed the Madigas to evolve a response. This response was refracted through the prism

⁹⁴ *A Short Biography of Reverend J.H.Voth*, 1915.

of nationalism. While many converts stood ground and fought to change the mission and politics around them, others went back to Hinduism or became spiritually inactive.

The erosion of the social base of the mission seemed not to have perturbed the missionaries in fact became more rigid in their position. Unruh, the missionary in charge of Gadwal mission station reports in 1945

I find that some of our workers have gone back under the influence of the National Ideas of India. Other have grown and become more spiritual. I believe that the struggle of the spiritual and unspiritual part in the church has begun. We need a lot of wisdom and understanding to guide the church of God through this period.⁹⁵

Unruh was of the opinion that clubbing secular activities with religious affairs of the church is not the right approach. The attitude of missionary Voth towards Gandhi was similar to the one displayed by A.A.Unruh towards the Madigas in Gadwal in the late colonial period. It is probably this attempt of the Madigas to give a socio-economic content to their mission efforts that set the stage for their further participation in the national movement. Some of them took up arms during the Police action against the *Razakars*⁹⁶ in 1948. Missionary Unruh gives a day by day account of his experience during the Police action and reports that “some of our village workers have joined the guards and forsaken their duties”.⁹⁷ A.A.Unruh reports that the nationalists and the troops of the Union were busy flushing out the *Razakars* from Gadwal. The identity constructed by the Madigas during the 1920’s and the 1930’s was taken forward in Gadwal by imbibing important lessons from the national movement in the 1940’s. While missionaries seemed not to have imbibed the spirit of the times, as far as Madiga are concerned there was no going back. This was soon reflected in the ideological

⁹⁵ Correspondence between Rev. A.A. Unruh at Gadwal and Rev. Janzen Hillsboro, Kansas, ‘The struggle for Independence under Nehru with side effects : Nationalism’, File no: M.209, Peter Penner India Mission Research Files. MBCBC, Hyderabad, 1945

⁹⁶ *Razakars* are an armed militia sent by the Nizam to terrorize the people into give their allegiance to the Nizam and not to the Indian Union. As Gadwal was one of the borders areas of the Hyderabad State, the activities of the *Razakars* seem to be widespread. For the movement of *Razakars* in Raichur District, refer to Establishment of Home Guards on the borders of the Hyderabad State, Congress Movements, file no.32, H.E.H the Nizams government Office of the Secretary to Government, Judicial, Police and General Departments, Hyderabad Deccan. 13th November, 1947

⁹⁷ A.A. Unruh, Report of my experience at the time of the Police Action, Hyderabad State, September 1948. File no : M.209, Peter Penner India Mission Research Files, MBCBC, Hyderabad.

challenge they mounted against the missionaries.

The major conflict between the missionaries and Madiga converts was around leadership and allocation of resources for secular concerns. The said conflict spread over the late 1940's and lasted the entire decade of the 50's. While the ideological response of the missionaries is visible from the reports and letters they have written, we infer the positions that the Madiga converts took from the polemics that missionaries used against their supposed enemies in the church namely, pastors from the Madiga caste. In the one incident we report below, these pastors undercut the authority of the missionaries and wrote directly to Foreign Mission Board at Kansas for greater allocation of resources for 'social action'. The Board was swayed by their arguments and the missionary A.A. Unruh wrote back urging them not to take a tactical and ideological line as proposed by the native pastors. Missionary Unruh reports

Is the great emphasis on social action and social work the small contribution which the Christian community will like to make to the poorer world? Will the talk about injustices and small contribution of material goods quiet our conscience? Would it not be more pleasing to god when we instead of contributing a little, we go and share the sufferings of the people and bring them the greatest gift of god, the gospel of a new life. The world needs nothing more than the gospel of grace, the way of eternal life and disciplinship to Christ. Where the bible speaks about salvation, it speaks about the spiritual aspects of life. Salvation in Jesus Christ is promised but never salvation from the physical results of Sin. The only worldly blessing of salvation I find is a life of godliness: But godliness is profitable unto all things, having a promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.⁹⁸

In this struggle for more allocations of resources for social action and work, the Madigas used the discourse of Nationalism. The nationalism so propounded by Madigas was 'popular national' as opposed to Hindu nationalist strains in mainstream Nationalism. National popular meant giving a popular content to this ideology. In the case of Gadwal, it meant a version of nationalism, which identifies nation with the

⁹⁸ A.A. Unruh, 'Gospel or Social Action', 1968, MBCBC.

untouchables. Madigas worked to orient the church along the national line or along the Madiga way. Surprisingly Madigas could set the terms of the debate on nationalism and define it in a certain way and we see the Missionaries merely responding to it. Unruh while arguing against indigenization cites the need to avoid the tag of a religion being associated with one particular social group. However at no point did they counter that to be national is to be identified with the Madigas. Madigas discourse on nationalism is the point of departure for the arguments made by the missionaries.

He cites the need to avoid the influence of anthropology on the missionaries, which he calls as disproportionate.⁹⁹ It means that due to the influence of colonial anthropology, the missionaries saw the need to identify with the customs and mores of 'natives'. Hence, Unruh attacks the principle of 'going native' that was ingrained in the practice of colonial anthropology. He admonished the missionaries who earlier accepted the need for indigenization of the church pointing out that it was this policy which eventually led to charges of hypocrisy by native Madiga converts. The Madiga while arguing for greater allocation of funds for rural teachers pointed out the double life led by missionaries as a 'native' in the Gadwal field and 'European' in the hills of Ottacamund. Unruh argued that it is this ideological bias for going native, which had led to conflict in the Church while "theologically Christianity is not opposed to class distinctions".¹⁰⁰ He gives a new meaning to the scriptural injunction of "sharing life". While Chute and early missionaries identified sharing life as lending one's hand when confronted with extreme situations of famine and poverty to fellow Christians, Unruh on the other hand sees it as being with them spiritually and bringing to the poor the balm of the gospel. The very fact that Unruh had to attack both colonial anthropology and nationalism was due to the force of the arguments put forward by the Madigas, who could successfully bring an equivalence between 'going native' or 'going national' with 'being with the Madiga'. On the face of this argument, Unruh had no other option other than to distance Christianity from nationalism. While Christianity propagates the idea that 'godliness is profitable on to itself' nationalism talks about bringing socio-economic justice. By emphasizing the need to nationalize the church the Madigas are seen to further socio-economic justice.

⁹⁹ Letter from A.A. Unruh to Foreign Mission Board, Kansas, U.S.A. 1963.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*

Another important source of conflict was over leadership. It seems that the Madigas repackaged the lessons learnt from participating in the national movement by putting forth demands of change in leadership. They fashioned a critique of the style of functioning of the missionaries. The critique of the Madigas against the missionaries seems to be borne out of evidence, where foreign missionaries headed all the important committees that were in charge of different aspects of the church. In contrast, the Madigas were assigned more labour intensive tasks such as teaching and preaching in the villages, which was difficult considering the state of roads and communication in the late colonial period. This was in addition to the poor pay or underpaying them for these tasks performed by them.

The refusal of the missionaries to let the Madigas get the control of the church is seen by Missionary Unruhs statement in 1959.

The group of Pastors is getting more determined to get the control of the church. The field recommended to ex-communicate the pastors two sons and one young man. On Friday, the church will meet. The pastor is organizing a big group to vote against it. We are trusting the Lord. Our Brethren say that if they are not ex-communicated they will leave the church and organize separate¹⁰¹

The trigger for such a leadership battle was determined by the willingness of the Madigas to develop independent cultural resources for themselves through Christianity. We can see through this correspondence that the Madigas seem to have mustered a sizable strength to call for a division of votes on the leadership issue in Gadwal. The organizing of a big group to vote against the matter listed by missionary Unruh shows that the matter was decided in favour of the pastors group.¹⁰²

Madigas connected the leadership issue to the issue of socio-economic justice. The missionaries promoted a Brahmin convert to a leadership position in the church in

¹⁰¹ Correspondence between Abram and Annie Unruh at Gadwal to Reverend A.E.Janzen, Hillsboro, Kansas, 1959. File no M.209. Peter Penner India Mission Research Files, MBCBC, Hyderabad.

¹⁰² The pastor mentioned in this correspondence of A.A.Unruh was Aaron. The pastor was the first to have sent a letter to the Foreign Mission Board at Kansas, U.S.A. This letter of the pastor dealt with the highhandedness of a foreign missionary other than Unruh. This letter was quoted by Penner in his work, *Russians, North Americans and Telugus*, (minuetobha 1997)

the year 1956. Along with such moves, we also see a host of other changes in the activities of the Church. The *Samasthan* authorities not only quickly processed their application for a new land for the construction of a new mission building but most importantly reduced the amount of taxation on the mission building in Gadwal from Rs.85.00 to Rs.15.00 in the year 1946.¹⁰³ Such attitudes of the *Samasthan* contrasts sharply with the year 1898 when Reverend Chute had to make a complaint to the Resident and Huizinga in 1907 had to wait for almost two years to get permission for construction of a mission building. The Madigas converted to Christianity from Hinduism to develop their own religion. The Christian religion in Gadwal was invariably associated with the Madigas. For example in the 1940's the Rani of Gadwal dissuaded her not to marry a Christian from Bangalore as she thought that she might be a Madiga.¹⁰⁴ Hence, the promotion of a Brahmin to leadership position and the entry of caste rules in the church pushed the Madigas to stake their claim to this religion. The battle over control of the church was not a narrow power struggle but was about determining the nature of spiritual life in the Church.

Madigas not only introduced the concept of socio-economic justice as the agenda of nationalization into the church, they also defined what it is to be a Christian. The views of the Madiga on what it meant to be a Christian were grudgingly accepted by missionaries who called them 'well instructed' but 'carnal members'. We see the missionaries being defensive of showing leniency to upper caste converts. This is because the Madiga converts could prove that such ethical leniency went against 'one standard of spiritual life in the church'. Unruh reports

New converts, who because of their recent conversion from the world, from a society which has no biblical instruction carry over outlook on life from the non Christian world. The church always had one standard of spiritual demands for all its members but it has to show more patience with one group than with another. "Carnal but well instructed members of the church wanted to be treated the same way as these new converts

¹⁰³ Minutes of the 53rd session of the Missionary Conference of the American Mennonite Brethren Mission held at Gadwal, Deccan, 1941, MBCBC, Hyderabad.

¹⁰⁴ C.H. Acharya, Biography of PagaPulla Reddy, *AsamanaVyakti*, 2002.

from heathenism”.¹⁰⁵ Unruh further reports that the “old converts were afraid of this new emphasis and new life.”¹⁰⁶

By pointing out the need for nationalism, the Madiga were seen to fight against caste injustice both inside and outside the church. The historical experience of the Madigas in Gadwal goes against the argument often cited by Dalit historiography with respect to nationalism. Jangam argues that the untouchable leaders remained within the limits of the discourse set by nationalism.¹⁰⁷ He points out that this limited the ability of the untouchable groups to develop an independent cultural and political assertion. By focusing only on leaders who operated in the sphere of politics of an entire region such as the Madras Presidency, he seemed to have missed out on the importance of local struggles in shaping independent consciousness of the untouchable groups. Here we have a successful saga scripted by the Madigas, who used the discourse of nationalism to further their socio-economic interests in both secular and religious realm. In that process they transformed the meaning of both religion and nationalism.

¹⁰⁵ Correspondence between Abram and Annie Unruh at Gadwal to Reverend A.E.Janzen, Hillsboro, Kansas, 1959. File no M.209. Peter Penner India Mission Research Files, MBCBC, Hyderabad.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁷ ChinnaiahJangam, “*Contesting Hinduism: Emergence of Dalit Paradigms in Telugu Country, 1900-1950*”, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2005.

Conclusion

“On the day I converted, I felt that a load has lifted of my shoulders. I felt that it is a dawn of a new day. We did not achieve much from Gandhi. We got nothing from Razakars either. My father was illiterate and a Jeetakadu. He helped the Muslim traders in our village to store the wealth that Razakars looted from the people. When my father asked for few gold coins, he was told to scoot. We supported all, but we got nothing. My father insisted that I go to school. Every time I ran away from school, he would beat me and send me back. Today I stand with the light of Christ shining on my shoulders”----- Marappa on his experience of conversion in the year 1960

The mute, dumb and dirty *Bangi* is a popular trope time and again used to describe the untouchables by nationalists, historians and other social scientists. In opposition to this demeaning portrayal, self-conscious untouchable movements have fashioned the militant and rebellious identity of the Dalit. The term Dalit which means ‘broken’ invokes the past and present of caste oppression and the struggle of the untouchable groups against it. Through this thesis, we traced the historical process by which the untouchable caste group of the Madigas shaped the cultural identity of the oppressed but rebellious subjects in Gadwal *Samasthan*.

In chapter one, we explored the process by which the colonial state in collusion with native elites constructed an identity for the Madigas. This identity which had both social and religious aspects was shaped by the larger process of the construction of modern Hinduism. The colonial state constructed the identity of the untouchable groups only with reference and in relation to Brahmanic Hinduism. As argued in this chapter, the Census officials and missionaries played a crucial role in disseminating Brahmanic Hinduism in the State of Hyderabad. In the Brahmanic religious tradition, an untouchable is a *panchama* on whom a contemptuous identity is imposed because of his occupation of leather work and scavenging. The untouchable deals with biological waste and thereby displays his despicable spiritual character. By connecting caste

position only to Brahmanic Hinduism and its tenets, colonial rulers reinforced prevailing stereotypes about the untouchables.

According to Brahmanic traditions, an untouchable's spiritual worth is related to his occupation. This justifies practices of untouchability by the caste society. The application of this principle would mean that change in occupation indicates a consequent change in social status. Census officials have consistently noted the gradual shift of Madiga caste from their hereditary occupation of leather work to other occupations. Many have become agricultural labourers, some have become cultivators. This is clearly noticed in the Census of 1911. This would therefore imply a change in their religious status if one goes by the logic of untouchability. However, the creation of the untouchable identity demonstrates the reification of their status irrespective of their current and changing occupations. The identity was so fixed that it resisted change despite transformations in their social and economic status and relation with the village society in colonial Gadwal.

In Gadwal, the untouchables were not only agricultural labourers, but many were also peasants, who tilled small plots of land. The construction of the identity of '*panchama*' and later 'Harijan' by Gandhi with reference to only their status within Hindu religion and society had severe consequences on the socio-economic status of this group. Citing their '*panchama*' status as absolute, civic and other forms of disabilities were inflicted time and again on this group in Gadwal. In many villages of Gadwal, untouchables were coerced to provide forced labour for landlords, petty officials and the Raja. As Aloysius stated that 'Caste in the singular has to be located in caste in the plural' implying that an ideological offence has to be located in the political economy of social relations between groups.¹

It is this baleful construction of identity which impelled the untouchable groups to embark on a struggle to reclaim their selfhood. We argued that the untouchable activities and movements were very much a part of the wider civil society that developed in the state of Hyderabad during the colonial period. We assessed the responses of the untouchable caste groups against Brahmanic Hinduism that took

¹ G. Aloysius, 'Caste In and Above History', *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol. 48, No. 1/2, (March-September, 1999), pp. 151-173.

specific shape during the colonial period. This construction of Brahmanic Hinduism had social implications for the untouchable caste groups, who gave a resounding response via the historic Adi-Hindu movement during the 1920s. Aware of their position in the Hindu social system, the entire movement was geared towards securing the demand of changing their religious status from 'civilized animists' in the, Census of 1921, to 'Adi-Hindu' in the forthcoming enumeration in 1931. They succeeded in securing this demand. The movement was historic precisely because it was the first movement that raised the political consciousness of the untouchable caste groups in the State of Hyderabad.

But as certain scholars have argued it was the ambivalence in the very ideology of this movement, as shaped by its highly influential leader, Bhagya Reddy Varma, that set the stage for the next phase of movement of the untouchables from 1932 onwards. Bhagya Reddy Varma stridently advocated a separate identity for the untouchables by fashioning a pre-Aryan past for the community. However, he simultaneously asked for an accommodation of untouchable caste groups within Brahmanic Hinduism. He adopted the arguments of the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj in coastal Andhra that untouchables could be accommodated within a reformed Hinduism, which has redefined the categories of *varna* and *karma* on the basis of individual merit and action. This accommodation, however, required following a code of reform as advocated by the reformists. Bhagya Reddy Varma urged the adoption of nonviolence as an ethic, preached vegetarianism among the untouchables, asking them to abstain from alcohol and animal sacrifice. His ideology and action should not be viewed as merely the imitating ways of the Brahmanic caste order. However, the course of action followed by him strengthened the legitimacy of Brahmanic ideology and gave it wide currency in Hyderabad state.

It is these possibilities of compromise inherent in his position that led to schism in the Adi-Hindu movement in the Hyderabad state. A new faction came to existence within the movement called the Adi-Dravida League, which rejected the position of Bhagya Reddy Varma and argued that untouchables are not Hindus. Their views on Hinduism not only anticipated the position of Ambedkar, but indicated the shift in the discourse of the untouchable movement in the state of Hyderabad. This resulted in the establishment of the Independent Scheduled Castes Federation which took a more

radical position with respect to Hinduism. With the emergence of the independent Scheduled Castes Federation, a new assertive and belligerent untouchable identity was articulated and expressed in the state of Hyderabad. A new type of 'Dalit' identity was represented together with the formation of the Independent Scheduled Castes Federation. This work traces the emergence of political consciousness among the untouchable caste groups with respect to their engagement with Brahmanic Hinduism and the transformations in their consciousness in the state of Hyderabad. Through an understanding of the regional dynamics, we moved to the *Samasthan* of Gadwal in Chapter Two to understand the specific context in which the Madigas could usher cultural change.

In Chapter Two and Three, we dealt with the assertions of the Madigas primarily through their conversions to Christianity and the engagement with the National movement. Chapter Two broadly dealt with their assertion in the form of their conversion from 1898-1930. The context of their assertion, especially with reference to the making of a 'Hindu' state in Gadwal shaped by the ideology of Brahmanic Hinduism was the theme of Chapter Two. Owing to the active support of the authorities of the *Samasthan* to Brahmanical rituals, festivals such as *Rathotsavam* and *Mathas* in the town of Gadwal displayed a distinct Brahmanical character. The Raja of Gadwal drew the legitimacy of his rule from the 'blessing of the divine' which was offered to him and the state by the spiritually 'pure' Brahmins. The Raja considered as his duty to protect and continue patronage to Brahmanic Hinduism and its theological activities. For this purpose, he actively supported *maths* and *agraharams*.

The penetration of this highly cultivated Brahmanical culture into the villages brought out critical changes in the realm of popular culture. The impact could be felt in the settlement of the Madhwa Brahmins on a large scale in the rural countryside of Gadwal. We particularly analysed the *Devamma* festival in order to study the changing relations between caste groups due to the impact of Brahmanism. The breakdown of earlier relations, based on collectivity, between the criminal tribe of Boyas and the Madigas in the *Devamma* festival in demonstrated in the refusal of the former in sharing the meat of the sacrificial buffalo with the latter. Another change was the Boyas' move towards the more Sanskritized goddess, Renuka, and thereby drifting away from *Mathangi*, the goddess of the Madigas. Traditionally, *Mathangi* had also been the

goddess of the Boya caste/tribe. Such changes unravel the impact of Brahmanism in the domain of popular culture and the new position of the Madiga in the evolving cultural context. Various social changes also occurred among these tribal/caste groups. The customs and traditions the Boyas shared with the Madigas were discarded.

The Boyas were historically worshippers of the god, Hanuman, and the Madhwa Brahmins who worshipped Vishnu and his incarnations attempted to bring them closer to caste society. However, they were brought within the ambit of Brahmanical worship, displacing Boya priests who had previously manned the shrines and small temples of Hanuman and anointed themselves as religious specialists in these temples. The Boyas made tremendous efforts to bring themselves into the fold of a 'respectable' Hindu caste society. The Boyas were *Talaris* or watchmen who were given the job of supervising the work of *vetti chakri* (free labour) by untouchables. As Aloysius pointed out, the political economy of social relations inform and reinforce ideologies of dominations.²

The penetration of Brahmanical Hinduism via the imposition of pure, vegetarian gods introduced a sacred geography connected with caste and untouchability, purity and pollution in the villages. The town of Gadwal epitomized this geography which we discussed in detail in Chapter Two. This provided a model for emulation in villages. Sacred geography was also a political geography. Religious relations were simultaneously socio-economic and political relations, and therefore sacred geography coincided with the political geography. The contestation over religion was also a contestation of caste relations based on the political economy of an autocratic and feudalistic agrarian society. We discussed the Huizinga's case as an example of the first religious and socio-economic contestation by untouchable castes in Gadwal. The case represented much more than filing an application for the construction of a mission building by the American Baptist Church in the town of Gadwal. It encapsulated at its core the element of the cultural and political assertion of the Madigas. We argued that it served as the second flashpoint apart from the first one of the 1898 case of complaint made by the missionary Chute to the Resident of Hyderabad. Taken together, both these events of 1898 and 1907 marked the beginnings of anti-*Samasthan* attitudes and sentiments among the Madigas. This second chapter thus identified the cultural

² G. Aloysius, 'Caste In and Above History', *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol. 48, No. 1/2, (March-September, 1999), pp. 151-173.

conditions and tried to locate the cultural assertion of the Madigas in Gadwal. The period of 1898-1930 therefore becomes the first phase in the assertion of this caste group in the *Samasthan* of Gadwal.

In Chapter Three, a conscious attempt is made to connect the wider movements of the untouchables and the activities of the Congress at the level of the State of Hyderabad combined with the independent assertion of the Madigas in Gadwal. We also connected the changing missionary policy of this period to the political changes in the state of Hyderabad and their impact on the evolution of the socio-political and cultural assertion of the Madigas in Gadwal. Ambedkar and his ideas had an indirect impact on the Madigas in Gadwal. Was it a coincidence that the conversions of Madigas into Christianity in Gadwal adopted the line of 'not dying a Hindu' quite firmly at a time when Ambedkar had himself declared that 'though he was born a Hindu he would not die as one'? Converts after converts whom we met repeated Ambedkar's famous lines, when we enquired from them about what they knew of this historical personality. We argued that the movement of mass conversions represented a hitherto unexpected wave of political consciousness among the Madigas in Gadwal.

However, by looking at the effect of communalisation on the missionary policy of missions based in Gadwal, we could establish complex connections between socio-cultural and political assertions. The communalisation of the state led to a race for converts. This was accidentally triggered by the assertion of Ambedkar that 'He will not die a Hindu' and by the tussle for power between Arya Samaj and Muslim elites who anticipated democratic political changes in the Hyderabad state in the decade of the 1930's. Although such a statement by Ambedkar was propitious for missionaries who worked to increase the number of converts, they were not in a position financially to take advantage of it. Moreover competition among religious groups to gain the loyalty of the untouchables strained the missionaries financially and physically. It is in this context that the missionaries developed a clear antipathy towards the opposing forces who competed for untouchable loyalties which included other missions, nationalist and Ambedkarite movements. Their helplessness and frustration may have also led them to develop antipathy towards converts and potential converts from the untouchables.

We discussed the hostility of the missionaries towards the ideology of nationalism and Ambedkar. The Nalgonda Reports from 1930 to 1937 display the dislike of the missionaries to both these political forces. This is because both these forces either directly or indirectly instilled stridency and ‘cunning’ among the Madigas who started bargaining with various political forces. Madiga converts turned their attention to secular aspects, such as the demand for more educational facilities due to the influence of both these political forces. Such a shift in focus from the spiritual to the secular was not welcomed by the missionaries. We particularly cited missionary Voth’s criticism of Gandhi for using religion for political and secular purpose as a case in point. Since secular demands were at the centre of this political competition, untouchables were critiqued as being greedy and ‘unspiritual’. They were given lessons on Christianity as to how ‘not live for bread alone’. As Madigas started to make attempts to gain control of the church, missionaries were soon forced to reverse the policies of the early missionaries such as Reverend Chute and Reverend Hiebert towards the Madigas and on broader issues of indigenisation of the church. This shift in policy and its implementation by missionaries, first in Nalgonda from 1930 to 1937 and later in Gadwal in the late 1940’s, is discussed. The issue of whether Christians could devote their resources to secular issues or confine themselves to the traditional spiritual tasks shaped the nature of polemics exchanged between these two parties. We argued that the Madigas appropriated nationalism in creative ways and their assertions demonstrate that secular and spiritual aspects can go hand in hand with being a Christian. They most importantly forcefully advanced their position that being national means standing and identifying with the Madigas. They gave a national popular definition of nationalism that was shorn off its Hindu mornings. The appropriation of the language of nationalism to fight their ideological battle against colonial missionaries was a creative move on the part of the Madiga pastors. It showed their will to exert control over a cultural resource they had assiduously cultivated for almost seventy-five years in Gadwal. With this, the long struggle for the formation of the cultural identity of the Madigas, that spanned almost seventy-five years, came to an end.

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