

**RELIGIOUS CONVERSION AND CHANGE OF
SOCIAL STRUCTURES**

A CASE STUDY OF THE RAVIDASIS OF BIHAR

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JOSE K. JOHN

**CENTRE FOR HISTORICAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI - 110 067
INDIA**

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DECLARATION

Certified that the dissertation entitled **Religious Conversion and Change of Social Structures : A Case Study of the Ravidasis of Bihar**, submitted by **Shri. Jose K. John** is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this university. This dissertation has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university and is his own work.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Prof. Satish Saberwal
Centre Chairperson

Dr. Bhagwan Singh Josh

Prof. Satish Saberwal
Supervisors

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The structure of a society can be thought of as comprising two levels : primary and secondary. The long-standing, patterns of relationship among groups or individuals in a society are called primary level structures whereas, the external, goal-oriented, instrumentalist forces, be they ideologies, programmes, associations or mvements, can be called secondary level structures. The change that occurs as a consequence of mutual interaction between these two categories can be called structural change.

This study examines the structural changes that seem to have occurred in the primary level structures of the Ravidasi communities in two villages under the influence of a secondary level structure — the Christian Mission.

This study is based not only on primary data from field survey but also on historical records. Primary historical sources, both government and Church sources, have been found very valuable.

Needless to say I have depended on a number of persons and institutions for this study. To all of them I owe deep gratitude. However, they are not responsible for the errors, if any.

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Jose K. John

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INTRODUCTION

Society is constituted of individuals and their collectivities and all social change necessarily works through the individual. On the process of change in such a construct, Saberwal says,

If social structure is defined as the totality of the patterns of enduring social relations in society... leaving aside the quick, revolutionary re-shaping of societies, men change the links in their patterns of social relations one at a time, and when 'enough' men have changed 'enough' links, we are likely to say, that 'the structure has changed'.¹

This implies individual choices in change. The individual is understood as the principal unit of change.² While individual choices are influenced by ideologies and experience, the latter also is formed by the former.

Any social change that involves alterations in the basic, primary level structures and in the normative or ideal patterns, and attempts at a radical-transformation in the basic framework can be called a structural change. On the other hand, any social change which effects only re-arrangement or reformation of norms can be called an organizational change.³

The structure of a society can be thought of as comprising two levels: primary and secondary. Primary level structure of a society includes all those social, economic, political, religious and other institutions and groups which are seen as *given* by the members of that society. Examples of primary level structures in village

¹ S. Saberwal, *Mobile Men, Limits ^{to} Social Change in Urban Panjab*, p.235.

² *Ibid.*, p.236.

³ L.S. Ainaur, *The Dynamics of Caste Relations in Rural India*, p.14.

societies (this being a village study) are the caste *panchayat* (*jati panchayati*), money-lending (*mahajani*), patron-client relationship in religious service (*jajmani-purohiti*) and so on. These are considered primary because the operational limits of the roles and statuses related to such groups and institutions are generally very much crystallized due to legitimacy conferred on them by tradition.⁴ The secondary level structure, on the other hand, consists of those groups and organizations (formal or informal) which are formed for certain goals and whose members have certain roles. Examples of secondary level structures are clubs, associations, political movements, societies, Church organizations and so on. While the patterns of inter-group relationship at the primary level structure are generally *given*, the cooperation and conflict at this level tend to be habitual whereas, at the secondary level structure, the intergroup relationship are more "instrumental" and "strategic" or goal-oriented, and therefore vulnerable to the events of both within and without the social structure in question. The secondary level structure, though considered the "soft" sector of society, can immensely influence the primary level structure.⁵

The external forces of change (secondary level structures) seem to reinforce the primary level structure or change it depending upon the thrust of the alignments between groups at this level. The interaction between the two categories of structures seems to take place at two levels : at the level of co-operation and at the level conflict.⁶ In the former case the primary level structure is reinforced and the *status quo* of the totality of the society is consolidated.

⁴ Hetukar Jha, J.B.P. Sinha, S. Gopal and K.M. Tiwary, *Social Structures and Alignments*, p.79. This categorization of structures has been developed on the basis of the concepts of "symbolic interaction" and "rational action" suggested by Habermas in *Towards a Rational Society*.

⁵ Jha, *et al.*, *Ibid.*, p.15.

⁶ Jha, *et.al.*, *op.cit.*, pp.39-40.

It was also observed that the forces at work at the secondary level structure had been responsible for change or *status quo* in the primary level structure thereby causing change or *status quo* in the secondary level structure of the village.⁷ In the latter case, the inter-group relationships are strained due to contradiction between the two levels thereby causing a change first at the primary level and then in the whole structure. This will depend upon the issues of conflicts and the force of conflict generated at the secondary level structure.⁸

At times external forces of significant magnitude impinge upon the dynamics of events and give rise to a new structure which can be delineated as secondary level structure. This is relatively purposive and modifiable and hence temporary.⁹

This study explores the change of structures that may have occurred in the primary level structures of the Ravidasi community of two villages, under the influence of a significant secondary level structure — a Christian Mission organization. The Mission's ideas, links and the package of development programme seem to have helped sustain a challenge and at the same time a conflict of ideas and values in the Ravidasis on the one hand, and mediated a consequent change in the primary level structures not through conflicts but cooperation with those who wanted to keep the *status quo*.

Studies on the influence of major secondary level structures in modern India, namely, organized religious movements, Christian Missions and so forth have not

⁷ This finding was based on the study of three villages in rural Bihar by H. Jha, *et al.* op.cit. Also see H.Jha, *Social Structures of Indian Villages, A Study of Rural Bihar*, p.27.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.39-40. The study shows that in a village where accomodation and patronage had been too vigorous, the conflict was rather contained and reinforced the primary level structure. (See for instance the study on village Prabhatganj, *ibid.*, p.56.

⁹ Jha, *et al.*, op.cit., p.73.

been exhaustive. Studies on Christianity in Indian society have largely focussed on conversions although some social scientists have paid attention to religious change and socio-economic mobility.¹⁰ While the latter studies have largely focussed on change after religious conversion, the frames of reference have been the earlier objectives of the ones converted and the missionaries, and such other factors that led to conversion. In this study I am not attempting to review the factors that led to conversion in a particular setting but the fact of conversion and the subsequent changes in the primary level structures. Hence, our basic questions are have these apparent changes been structural? If so what structures have been changed? What strategies have been employed? and so on.

The focus of this study is the community of Chamars (hereinafter Ravidasis),¹¹ one of the 23 Scheduled Castes in Bihar.¹² Placed at the lower rungs of the social ladder, the Ravidasis have largely remained backward in social, political and economic life. In recent years they seem to have attempted to rise in society through education, government welfare programme and so forth. By and large, their life appears to be one of struggle for survival as has been evident from their

¹⁰ For instance, R.L. Hardgrave, Jr., *The Nadars of Tamil Nadu*; K.N. Sahay, *Christianity and Culture Change in India*; L. Lobo, *Religious Conversion and Social Mobility*; D. Kooiman, *Conversion and Social Equality in India*, etc.

¹¹ Ravidasis: literally, followers of Ravidas, a medieval saint and contemporary of Kabir. Ravidas, of Chamar caste, has been revered as a preceptor (*guru*) by the Chamars in Bihar. I have used the term 'Ravidasi' in reference to Chamars as per the latter's dislike for the term 'Chamar' due to its pejorative connotation, and with due respect to the subject people of my study and as per their expressed wish (see Chapter II and IV for discussion).

¹² Though there are many communities who also claim to be included in the Scheduled Caste category, the government has recognized only 23 of them, the largest group being Ravidasis. See *Census of India 1981*, Series 4 Bihar, *District Census Handbook* (hereinafter DCH), *Bhojpur, District*, Part XIII, A&B.

involvement in naxalite movement¹³ in the area of this study - Bhojpur district. Some of them got converted to Christianity beginning in the early 1930s.¹⁴ It is hoped that this study based on village findings will contribute to the general study of the Ravidasis of Bihar. As such very few studies have been done on them.

Unlike conversions among the Scheduled Castes elsewhere in India, the conversion of Ravidasis in Bhojpur district, even in entire Bihar for that matter, has not been a 'mass movement'¹⁵ but individual attempts to change religion. Conversions occurred in thousands over a period of 50 years all over Bihar but seem to have followed the channels of kin group and family affiliations. These conversions which had started during the colonial period, continued after Indian independence. What might have been the reasons for these individual conversions?

It seems these conversions occurred as a result of the inadequacy of the Ravidasis' antecedent social conditions in fulfilling the individual's or group's social, psychological, economic and spiritual needs on the one hand, and the prevailing social conflicts on the other. We shall attempt to study the pattern of conversion briefly, with reference to the local history, and the theme of post-conversion structural change.

The subjects of our study - Ravidasi converts - are distributed in pockets of Bihar, south of the Ganga. Along with Rohtas district, the people of this district

¹³ On this theme see K. Mukherjee and R.S. Yadav, *Bhojpur: Naxalism in the Plains of Bihar*; J. Kananaikil, *Reaching Inward from the Periphery: The Experience of the Scheduled Castes in India*, etc.

¹⁴ K.N. Sahay, op.cit., J. Kananaikil, op. cit., etc.

¹⁵ 'Mass Movement' a term used by Protestant missionaries to mean mass conversions (see Chapter III for discussion). See John C.B. Webster, *The Dalit Christians, A History*, Chapter II.

(formerly Shahabad) are said to belong to a distinct geographical cum cultural division in Bihar¹⁶ whose language is Bhojpuri.

The Christian Missions have been active in this area since the 1920s.¹⁷ Since the late 1930s many Ravidasis converted to Christianity (in the Catholic Church) and Christian communities centred around Mission Stations/Centres¹⁸ have been established in many places. I have chosen Shahpur, a Mission station/centre where Ravidasi converts live in some 70-old villages around the Mission station located in Shahpur town. These converts, unlike earlier Christian communities¹⁹ in Bihar, lived in their villages, along with their non-convert relatives, and the ambient societies. In each village the number of converts may range from a few families to several families comprising a sizeable majority of the Harijan population of a village. I have chosen for my study two representative villages²⁰ under Shahpur Catholic Mission. Though this study is located in two villages, it reviews processes operative much more extensively in rural areas.

Pioneering studies on villages in India have been done by many social scientists with reference to the Ravidasis.²¹ Our study is not a comprehensive village study but a study on the Ravidasis of these villages.

¹⁶ The other divisions are the Maithili-speaking and Magahi speaking areas and the tribal belts of Chotanagpur and Santal Parganas.

¹⁷ Although Christianity began in Bihar in the 1700s this area came under its active influence in the 1920s when mission work in the area was undertaken by Patna Jesuit Mission, a missionary body.

¹⁸ Mission Stations/Centres are geographically specified Church administrative units where Christian converts form a community or parish, centred around a place of worship or a church.

¹⁹ The early Christian converts in Bihar lived close together in areas called Mission compounds, particularly when Capuchin (Franciscan) Missionaries worked there.

²⁰ By 'village' I mean the community of Ravidasi converts located in a village.

²¹ For instance, B.S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist Among Historians and Other Essays*, Chapter on Chamars.

Why two villages? We selected two villages for study in order to be able to study some of the diversity in the process of transformation in so far as the findings in one village corroborate those of the other, we may draw conclusions with greater certainty. Both villages have been in contact with the Catholic Mission and its functionaries at Shahpur. Of the two (Ganj and Barsaun) there has been longer contact in Ganj. The Ravidasis here have a majority among the Scheduled Castes, and nearly all of them had been converted. It is presumed that these might have greater social transformation due to these factors.

In the latter village, Barsaun, nearly 50 per cent of Ravidasis converted to Christianity. It had less contact with the Mission and being remotely located from the Church there seems to be lesser degree of social transformation. I have chosen these villages, one from each block, Shahpur and Behea, whose mutual interaction has been principally at the level of the parish at Shahpur Mission.

We are studying changes in the Ravidasi communities of Ganj and Barsaun, using the categories of primary level structures and secondary level structures in realms such as socio-religious structures and socio-economic structures. Several secondary level structures may have effected changes in these villages. We shall identify these in order to isolate them from one such secondary level structure, the Catholic Mission as a missionary organization. We shall study this in chapter III: its history, nature of work, mode of functioning, strategies, means and resources employed, and its functionaries - priests, nuns, catechists, other church workers and so on.

There have not been many similar secondary level structures which operated in these villages. We are studying, therefore, a society which has had very little

exposure to, and experience with, such processes as social reform movements,²² industrialization²³ modernization,²⁴ government development programme,²⁵ powerful colonial adjuncts as railways,²⁶ commercialized agriculture and so on.

When we attribute change to religion, we are not saying religion *per se* causes it. Religion is a package of faith content, composing "components of culture and development."²⁷ Faith, which is at the core of religion is contained in these components and can be distinguished only in concepts. In this study we would also examine the seemingly changed expressions of the culture and development components: what I call socio-religious-cultural structures²⁸ and the socio-economic structures, respectively. The change reflected in the Ravidasi converts may be due to their search for upward mobility and equality in society for which adoption of Christianity might have been a means, given the context of the Ravidasis during the period of our study (1930s - 1980s) (see Chapter II). Christian Mission alone seems to have delivered a package of organized religious, cultural, educational, economic and such other programmes.

²² For instance, the reform movements led by Mahatma Jotirao Phule among the Mahars of Maharashtra; see R. O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth Century Western India*.

²³ For instance, change due to industrialization: see Suresh Kumar, *Social Mobility in Industrializing Society*.

²⁴ For instance, on the impact of modernization among the Chamars of Agra (Jatavas), see Owen M. Lynch, *Politics of Untouchability*.

²⁵ Change occurred among the Bhangis of Rajasthan: see Shyamlal, *The Bhangis in Transition*.

²⁶ On changes due to exposure to colonial rule, entrepreneurship, etc., in three lower caste communities in Punjab, see S. Saberwal, *op.cit.*

²⁷ L. Lobo, *op.cit.*, p.181.

²⁸ The domains of these structures are distinguishable only in concepts; in actuality these are inter-linked (see Chapter IV for discussion).

We are not assuming a deterministic relation between religion and change. Could it be that factors other than religion played an important role in shaping change in these villages? It may be some ideologies, upheld by a particular religion, that bring about change (see discussion in Chapter IV and Conclusion). One cannot, at the same time, ignore the possible role of creeds, cults and practices in moulding the mode of living of a group that initially might have adopted the religion without comprehending its ideologies, values and demands, and may only gradually have comprehended and subscribed to these ideologies and values and abided by its demands. Therefore, while estimating the 'spiritual transformation' of the people one cannot ignore these components. Quite often the behavioural elements are conspicuous, and the faith content is not. Therefore we take note of the expressions of faith of the converts namely, rituals, ceremonies, observances, popular devotions, and so on. We also take note of the extent and process of adoption of the new religion by way of accepting its values, attitudes and world-views, and mechanisms of distancing from the former religion and assimilating the new one. To analyse the relatively nebulous domain of religious transformation the 'great' and 'little tradition' models seem to be very useful.²⁹ However we must take note of the 'nascent' state of the adoption of Christianity by the Ravidasi converts on the one hand, and the apparent dilemma³⁰ of the converts in professing this religion, on the other. We shall also study the process of mobility in key areas such as education and occupation.

²⁹ These models have been highlighted by R. Redfield, M.Singer and McKim Marriott. See C.J.Godwin, *Change and Continuity, A study of Two Christian Village Communities in Suburban Bombay*, pp.XIV-XV. For a similar study on change in religious culture among the tribal converts in Bihar, see K.N. Sahay, op.cit.

³⁰ The dilemma seems to be due to their being not included in the list of Scheduled Castes by the government, although the converts' own non-converted family members might be eligible for special benefits under these provisions (see discussion in Chapter III and IV).

The present study hypothesizes that the process of Christianization under the influence of the secondary level structures effected, to a large extent, some changes on the primary level structures of the Ravidasi societies of these villages and, to a lesser extent, the wider ambient societies. There may have been substantial changes in the former socio-religious structures, and consequent alternative socio-religious structures being formed. These changes effected concurrent changes in modes of expressing faith, devotions, locales and modes of worship, the pattern of relating to one's god as well as the degree of acceptance of values, world-views and dicta of the new religion.

There may have been considerable change in the socio-economic structure of the Ravidasi society under the influence of the multi-pronged, organized, social uplift programme of the Mission. These changes might have diverted the loci of the religious, occupational and status movements of the Ravidasi converts. While the people gradually accept alternative doctrinal principles and theological foundations presented by the new religion, we expect that at the same time, they experienced the pulls of their earlier doctrines and traditions even within the new Christian community.

The approach of this study being inter-disciplinary I have used historical, sociological and anthropological techniques in the methodology. Apart from archival sources, both government and Mission, other original sources as well as the method of observation and participant observation have been used. Both structured and non-structured interviews, often in-depth ones, have enabled me to reconstruct the story of the Ravidasi converts of these villages.

A two-month field study, during which time these primary sources were obtained, helped me to collect relevant information from non-convert, non-Ravidasi knowledgeable persons from a cross-section of people - of various regions, religions, age-groups and particularly the present and former functionaries of the Mission at Shahpur. The Church records both at Shahpur and elsewhere, especially in the Mission's headquarters in Patna, have also been used. Due to limited time for field study, this researcher could wade through only a few published and unpublished sources related to the Mission, currently available in the archives of the Mission's headquarters. Besides, building up good rapport with the informants for some of whom I have used pseudonyms, helped evoke spontaneous, uninhibited response from them. Their response was frank, and they have been generous with me.

This study is divided into three parts. The first part (Chapter II) deals with the position of the Ravidasis in the village societies especially in the socio-economic structures of these villages. We shall study the former religion of the convert Ravidasis and their former socio-religious structures (see Chapter IV, B). The second part (Chapter III) deals with the working of the Catholic Mission of Shahpur: its history, objectives, strategies, means and the Mission's functionaries and so on. The third part (Chapter IV, C) focusses on the processes and mechanisms of adoption of Christianity by the Ravidasi converts on the one hand, and the simultaneous means and strategies used by the Mission to effect changes in the socio-religious structures of the Ravidasi society, on the other. Similarly we study (Chapter IV, D&E) the strategies and means employed by the missionaries to effect changes in the socio-economic structures of the Ravidasi converts. In short, this is a study of change of structures - in religion and society. The study concludes with an analysis of our findings with a view to examine the hypotheses mentioned above. This study has all

the limitations normally attributed to micro-studies. To this researcher, its significance is in reading and interpreting the overtly or covertly communicated self-understanding, and unravelling the resources therein, of a subaltern people - the Ravidasis of Bihar.

Chapter II

RAVIDASIS IN BHOJPUR SOCIETY

Our study of the transition of the Ravidasi community, must necessarily include, a study of the wider ambient society. We seek to locate the Ravidasi community in the larger universe of interactions among various such communities in villages. This chapter thus explores two villages, their histories, the local history of Ravidasis, their position in the village society, the network of social relationships and the socio-economic structures.

A Two Bhojpur Villages: Ganj and Barsaun

Our two villages are located in Bhojpur¹ district, west central Bihar, which was carved out of the parent district of Shahabad in 1972 (see Appendix : Map-2). The district has 19 community development blocks (hereinafter 'blocks') and has its headquarters at Arah,² a municipal town with 1.57 lakh population. The district is sandwiched by the Ganga and its tributary Karmnasa on the northwest and its another tributary Sone (or Son) on the east. Across the Ganga are the districts of Saran in

¹ Bhojpur district seems to have got its name from a medieval Raja Bhoj of Ujjaini Rajput rulers of Shahabad who subjugated the local tribal chieftains of Rohtasgarh. See discussion below.

² 'Arah' has been variously spelt: 'Arrah', 'Arah' and of recent usage, 'Ara'. We shall use 'Arah', as used by Dr. Francis Buchanan who surveyed the district of Shahabad in 1812-1813. This survey was done as part of the general survey of the Bengal Presidency in 1807-14. See *An Account of the District of Shahabad in 1812-13*, Bihar and Orissa Research Society, 1934. 'Arah' was originally referred to as Aram Nagar (city of rest) in an inscription on an image found at village Masar ten k.m. west of the present Arah town. The population figures are from *Census of India 1981*, series-4 Bihar, District Census Handbook, Parts XIII - A&B, Bhojpur District (hereinafter DCH), Bhojpur, 1981.

north Bihar, and Balia and Ghazipur of Uttar Pradesh. To the east are Patna and Jahanabad districts and to its south is Rohtas district.

A.1 Ganj

Of the two locales of this study, one is village Osain-Ganj³, one of the 76 inhabited villages of Behea (also 'Bihiya') block (see Appendix : Map-3) in Bhojpur district. Having existed for over a hundred years as 'two villages'⁴ Osain and Ganj seem to have their own separate identities, although both have a single village *panchayat*. Since the converted Ravidasis of the village belong to the Ganj⁵ section, our study shall limit itself to that section (hereinafter Ganj or village Ganj)⁶, located eight kilometers west of Behea, an industrial and market town.

A one and a half-kilometer-long *kutchra* (unmetalled) road connects the village (Ganj) to a five K.M main *pucca* road between Banahi, the nearest railway station and Shahpur-patti (hereinafter Shahpur), the nearest market and town. The *kutchra* road leading to Ganj being uneven, an uninitiated traveller on an *ekka* (horse-drawn cart, the common means of transport) might hurt himself/herself as the cart will have to bump over stumpy ground in a bid to reach the destination. However most

³ The two-part name of the village indicates the bifurcation of a geographically contiguous single village area into Osain and Ganj by the Calcutta-Delhi railway track, laid between c.1854-1862. For administrative purposes the two parts constitute one village by the name Osain-Ganj. See DCH, Bhojpur, 1981, the village being SL. No:72, Thana No:205.

⁴ A village *panchayat* may have several 'villages' under it.

⁵ 'Ganj', my informants say, could be derived from '*ganja*', meaning bare land. The present area, a little elevated from the rest of the plains, could have been a bare patch of land. Hence the name.

⁶ Census figures quoted here pertain to the entire village.

travellers prefer walking along the dry, firm, slender edges of the mud-filled road. The road, meandering along the cultivable fields, enters a mango grove adjacent to the residential area of Ganj.

The first building that catches one's attention is a temple of moderate size. The temple, bordered by brick walls on four sides, look at least half-a-century old and is presently managed by *mahant* (Hindu abbot) Kamal Das of Teli caste. The *mahant* also does some priestly work.

Next to the temple is the government primary school, in a *pucca* concrete-brick building overlooking a dilapidated, mud-walled, thatched building, the school's former housing. A freshly painted signboard about a privately managed high school and technical (typing) institute, housed in an old residential building a few yards away, indicates the recent educational enterprise of the villagers.

The road leads into the upper caste section of the village which can be identified by its numerous *pucca* residential houses, even two-storeyed ones. A narrow lane branches off toward the south side of the village, and anybody acquainted with village India would know where that lane leads to: the Harijan *tola* (hamlet).⁷

In the *barka jat* (literally, 'big people' or high castes in local parlance) section of the village, are rows of *pucca*, concrete or tiled buildings owned by Brahmins and

⁷ Harijan colony in a village is always on the south side so that the northerly winds do not carry the stench, particularly due to hide work from the Chamar *tola*, to the upper caste *section*. See discussion below.

other intermediate castes (see Table 2.1). The preponderance of the bania castes⁸ (trading class) can be seen in a few well stocked shops, a luxury for an otherwise agriculture-oriented small village like Ganj.

Most Harijan houses are *kutchha*, with mud walls or a combination of brick and mud walls, and thatched roofs. Thirty houses in the Harijan colony are made of brick and cement of which 18 were built by the government for the Harijans and 12 by Ravidasis on their own. Ten, better off and the more mobile among the Ravidasis, have also bought some land adjacent to their *tola*, expanding the otherwise congested, narrow, Harijan tola.⁹ Some signs of "modernisation" such as television sets, electric fans, radio, electric irons, etc., can also be seen in some of the Harijan houses.

According to the **Census of India**, 1981,¹⁰ Osain-Ganj has a total area of 480.36 hectares of land with a population of 4181 persons in 585 households and 476 occupied residential houses. Of the 585 house holds, it is said Ganj has one-third. The percentage of Scheduled Castes in Osain-Ganj is 22.07, nearly all of whom should be in Ganj because Ganj alone has 178 Scheduled Caste households. Of the 420 households in Ganj, the uppercaste group has eleven households, the intermediate caste group, 223 households, the Scheduled Caste group, 178 households, and eight households belong to Muslims (see Table 2.1).

⁸ In Bihar the Bania castes are categorised as 'intermediate castes'.

⁹ Till some 20 years ago no Harijan in Ganj owned land or a *pucca* house. Some houses are newly built in the expanded area.

¹⁰ The figures given in DCH, Bhojpur, 1981 for Osain-Ganj seem to be far below the actual number of households. Besides the decadal variations, there seems to be a difference. When this researcher approached the block office, he was told that their data were arbitrary and unreliable. Hence the data given here are estimated from both the Census figures and researcher's own interviews with villagers.

Table 2.1
Demographic Representation of Ganj: Castewise

	Caste	No. of households	Percentage to the total households	Percentage of caste group
[A]	Upper Castes			
	Brahmin	11 (11)	2.6	2.6
[B]	Intermediate Castes			
	Bania	150	35.7	53.1
	Yadav	55	13.1	
	Koeri	18 (223)	4.3	
[C]	Lower Castes			
	Chamar	152	36.2	42.4
	Dusadh	2	0.5	
	Mehtar/Mestar	3	0.7	
	Bauri	3	0.7	
	Turi	12	2.9	
	Dhobi	6 (178)	1.4	
[D]	Others			
	Muslim	8 (8)	1.9	1.9
	Total	420	100.0	100.0

NB: The figures within brackets are on caste group total of households.

Sources:

- 1) Primarily based on interviews.
- 2) Also estimated from **Census of India**, 1981, Series 4 Bihar, DCH, Bhojpur, 1981, Parts XIII A & B.

Of the 178 Harijan households 85 percent are Ravidasis of whom 149 (99 percent) have converted to Christianity, beginning in 1939. There was also one Mehtar family which had converted to Christianity. Thus, the eight Muslim households and the 150 Christian households apart, all the rest are Hindus.

The general rate of literacy of Osain-Ganj is 28.72 percent whereas the rate of literacy of the Scheduled Castes for Ganj is not available but in Behea block is 13.63, (Census reports). This figure is far below the actual rate of literacy among the Scheduled Castes in Ganj. A Church survey on the Christian Ravidasis in central Bihar puts the rate at 60 percent.¹¹ Considering the education of a majority of Christian converts in Ganj over a period of 50 years, the rate of literacy among the Ravidasis in Ganj should be at least 60 percent (see Chapter III and IV on education). Of the 20 percent people employed in blue or white-collar jobs outside the village, 15-17 percent are Ravidasis. Except those Ravidasis employed in blue or white-collar jobs, all Harijans are engaged in agricultural labour. Except some of the Christian converts most of the Harijans are also engaged in their traditional caste-based occupations (see discussion below).

The majority (80 percent) of the intermediate castes are engaged in business and trade outside the village, even in cities far away. Almost the entire upper castes and a majority of the intermediate castes are economically well off, living on agriculture in their own land or business or both. The entire cultivable land is owned by the upper and intermediate castes. Few among the lower castes have some small plots of land.

¹¹ Jose Kananaikil, *op. cit.* pp.399-400.

The village has primary schools, one post office, electric supply, tube-wells, handpumps, wells and so on. Among the staple foods grown in the village are rice and wheat besides pulses, grams and cereals.

A.2 Barsaun

Barsaun,¹² the second locale of our study, is located at about ten k.m. northwest of Shahpur town. One of the 83 inhabited villages of Shahpur block (see Appendix : Map-4) in Bhojpur district, Barsaun is accessible through a *pucca* road which gets inundated during monsoons due to its proximity to the *Ganga-tal* (low-lying area on the bank of the Ganga). The village road being motorable there are private-owned buses, tractors, a few two-wheelers, four-wheelers, *ekkas* and bullock-carts available for transportation.

Bypassing many villages and cutting across vast stretches of paddy fields the road to Barsaun takes one even beyond the village; into the *Ganga-tal*. At a point just before the residential area the road bifurcates into the front side of the village and the rear side.

The village has a big temple and two small ones, a mosque, a government high school since 1975, a government middle school since 1965 and a government school since the 1920s. The Catholic Mission opened a primary school in 1948 which was closed down in 1980 (see Chapter III). There are other amenities such as post

¹² The name 'Barsaun', my informants say, could have been given to this village due to its rain-fed nature (*Barsauna*). Being close to the Ganga it might have been subjected to incessant floods. Local *buzurgs* (old and wise people) recalled many a flood and the consequent inundation of the area, and added reasons why many years ago the Harijans were re-settled at three different locations in the village.

office, a primary health centre, many a village square around a temple or two, gathering spaces under banyan trees, some tracts of uncultivated public land and so on.

Barsaun is conspicuous by its numerous *pucca* residences belonging mostly to two high caste groups, namely, Brahmins and Bhumihars (see Table 2.2). The latter constitute the majority (63.89 percent of households). The intermediate castes (123 households) comprising of 12 castes make only 13.68 percent of the total households (900). The 185 households of six lower castes (20.5 percent) and five households (0.56percent) of Schedules Tribes along with 12 households (1.33 percent) of Muslims make the rest of the population in Barsaun.¹³

The bulk of the 365.43 hectares of land under Barsaun is owned by the upper castes whose main occupation is agriculture. Service castes apart, the majority of other castes are small farmers, share-croppers, landless labourers and so on.

Except the land on which their houses are built, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes do not own any land. Their residences, located at three sites (due to re-settlement) in the villages can be easily identified by their contrast with the residences of the high castes: mostly mud-walled, low-built, thatched houses. Six Harijan households have built *pucca* houses of whom three are Christian converts who built on their own and the other three are Hindu Harijans helped by the government to build *pucca* houses.

¹³ Information obtained from my informants does not tally with that of the Census data, 1981, The more reliable method of observation and interviews yielded these data. See DCH, Bhojpur, 1981, the village being S.L.No.45, Thana No.61)

Table 2.2

Demographic Representation of Barsaun: Castewise

	Caste	No. of households	Percentage to the total households	Percentage of caste group
[A]	Upper Castes Brahmin Bhumihar	75 500 (575)	8.3 55.6	63.9
[B]	Intermediate Castes Vaisya (Bania) Yadav Sonar Teli Kahar Kumhar Lohar Barhyi Hazam/Thakur	50 40 8 5 2 5 3 5 5 (123)	5.6 4.4 0.9 0.6 0.2 0.6 0.3 0.6 0.6	13.7
[C]	Lower Castes Chamar Dusadh Dam/Bhagat Bhar Tentua Dhobi	125 40 8 2 5 5 (185)	13.9 4.4 0.9 0.2 0.6 0.6	20.5
[D]	Scheduled Tribes	5 (5)	0.6	0.6
[E]	Others Muslim	12 (12)	1.3	1.3
	Total	900	100.02	100.0

NB: The figures within brackets are caste group total.
The total figures in column IV exceeds 100 owing to rounding off.

Sources: 1) Primarily based on interviews.
2) Also estimated from Census of India, 1981, Series 4, DCH, Bhojpur, 1981, Parts XIII A & B.



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Except the 12 households of Muslims and 75 of Christian converts, all the rest are Hindu. In 1981, the rate of literacy of the village was 38.6, higher than the block average (26.26 percent) and even the district average (31.35 percent).

The literacy rate of the Scheduled Castes in the block is a mere 14.14 percent, but Church records indicate a higher rate of literacy at least among the converted Ravidasis due to a variety of reasons, prominent of which is the founding of the Mission primary school and its running for over 30 years. In addition, many convert students were educated by the Mission at least since 1951 and so literacy of the convert Christians could be as high as 50 percent (see Chapter III).¹⁴

Of the 185 Scheduled Caste households, 125 belong to the Ravidasi community. 70 Ravidasi families and five Dusadh families had converted to Christianity beginning from c.1949. As of now, 25 percent of them are practising Christians (see discussion in Chapter IV). Among the Harijans 12 are employed in blue or white-collar jobs. Of those employed, seven are Ravidasi Christians and the other five are non-Christian non-Ravidasis.

B Village History

The history of the two villages does not seem to have been written, but only recorded in memory, recalled by the *buzurgs* of the villages. In this section we shall

¹⁴ Till the 1980s most converts had studied in mission schools. Since they were found not to be practising their religion, the Mission dismissed some from the schools. A few of the informants tried to impress on this researcher that they, too, were Christians until their wards were dismissed from the mission schools!
Interview with a group of converts in Barsaun and also Shahpur Mission parish priest, Father Mani Thundathikunnel.

weave these recent and local histories of the Harijans in general and the Ravidasis in particular, into the general history of the old Shahabad district¹⁵. We shall briefly review the political, economic, social and religious histories of Shahabad as a whole, focussing at the same time, on the Ravidasi community as it participated in shaping their histories during the period of this study.

Shahabad has a colourful history, linked to its geography. The three natural divisions have been the background of powerful invading rulers and local resisting chiefs, the last of whom was Kunwar Singh who raised the banner of revolt against the British in 1857. Roy Chaudhary says, "It is the geography of the area that has made a Shahabadi (person belonging to Shahabad) what he is, a tough specimen of the human kind, brave, liberal and chivalrous but rather impetuous and often rash in character."¹⁶

The first natural division consists of the alluvial plains near the Ganga. Villages Barsaun and Ganj fall in this division. The second division is a flat country consisting of tertiary rocks and alluvium and the third is the Kaimur plateau. The physical features of the latter division were utilized in a series of small *garhs* (forts) by petty chieftains, monarchs, and feudal barons, to resist the overlordship of

¹⁵ Shahabad district: formed in 1685, consisted of Shahabad and Rohtas *parganas* and parts of the territory of king Balwant Singh of Banares. Rohtas was separated in 1784, again to be reconstituted in 1787, by the British government of India. The name 'Shahabad' (city of emperor) seems to be associated with Emperor Babur who pitched his camp at Arah in 1529 after his victory over the Afghan rulers of the province. The second last District Gazetteer of Shahabad written by J.F.W. James in 1924 mentions that Babur named this place 'Shahabad' in commemoration of this event. See P.C. Roy Chaudhary, *Bihar District Gazetteers* (BDG), Shahabad, 1966.

¹⁶ Roy Chaudhary, BDG, op.cit., p.44.

powerful invading emperors. A number of tribals and semi-tribals have lived here for centuries. Rohtasgarh, said to be the bastion of tribes such as the Oraons, Cheros, Kharias and Bhuiyas, has been the target of many ambitious rulers. The location of the *garhs*, with the plateau on one side and the Ganga on the other, created a natural constriction because of which all the armies of invaders, marching further eastwards, had but one way: Shahabad.

It is this area that had given shelter to the peoples, races, tribes and dynasties when they had their political battles in the plains. It is these fundamental characteristics of Shahabad district that have given a lasting impact on her people. Since time immemorial the Shahabadis have loved freedom inspite of the fact that they have often lost it.¹⁷

B.1 Shahabad in Ancient Times

When we delve deep into Shahabad's ancient past¹⁸ we see an accumulation of various traditions, resulting from one invasion after another. This area was known as the land of *Karushas*, a troubled area consisting of autonomous non-Aryan tribes. Very little information about Shahabad's pre-historic periods are available.

In the period of written history *Karusha* was part of the kingdom of Magadha by 400 B.C. the evidence of which is a Minor Rock Edict of Emperor Ashoka in a rock shelter, on the Chandan Sahid's hill.¹⁹ Though Shahabad was part of the Buddhist Kingdom, the general absence of Buddhist monuments in the district suggests that Buddhist influences were either absent or were erased by the later

¹⁷ Ibid., p.45

¹⁸ The periodisation of history here is purely conventional.

¹⁹ R.R. Diwarkar, *Bihar Through the Ages*, p 52.

Brahmanic order. The Chinese pilgrim Hieun-Tsiang in seventh century A.D., paid a visit to "Mo-Ho-Solo" in Shahabad, identified as village Masar, near Arah. It is said that he did not proceed to any other place in Shahabad because he found the Brahmin inhabitants opposed to the law of the Buddha.²⁰

The history of Shahabadis becomes part of the histories of various rising kingdoms such as the Sungas, the Kanvas, the Ailas of Orissa, the Kushanas and later, the Guptas. The Guptas were defeated by the Maukharis of Kanauj whose sway ended as the Pala dynasty (of Bengal) took control of Bihar. The extension of the Gahadvala dominions over Shahabad in mid 12th century led to the exit of the Pala dominion.

B.2 Shahabad in Medieval Times

The medieval period generally related to Muslim rule in India, is characterised by the Muslim invasion in Shahabad as well. The Muslim conquest which finally decimated the tribal chiefs of Rohtasgarh, was completed under the Mughals. There was resistance from both tribal chiefs as well as the Ujjaini and Kharwar Rajput chiefs of the plains of Shahabad. In 1743 the Marhata inroads into Bihar under Peshwa Balaji Baji Rao, however, left Shahabad unharmed.²¹

²⁰ A more convincing reason for the general absence of Buddhist monuments is that the region being under the control of the tribal kings, Buddhism might not have got stronghold over the tribal people who had their own strong tribal religions. Recent studies on the histories of the tribes of Chotanagpur have revealed that they trace their final defeat at the hands of the Mughals to 1610 (Jahangir's reign). This date is calculated by regressing 12-year-periods (from 1994). The Oraon tribals in Chotanagpur celebrate, once in 12 years, a ritual *jani shikar* (women going hunting in men's attire) which has continued ever since their defeat at the hands of the Mughals in Rohtasgarh. The ritual was repeated ~~this year.~~ ^{early}

²¹ Roy Chaudhary, BDG, op.cit., p.60.

B.3 Shahabad in Modern Times

Shahabad, then a province under the Mughal Governor Mir Qasim, of Bengal, passed on to the British in 1765 following the defeat of the Mughal forces at Buxar in 1764. Thenceforward, till 1857, Shahabad had a politically uneventful history. In 1857 Babu Kunwar Singh, his brother Babu Amar Singh and the Raja of Dumraon offered stiff resistance to the British, but were ultimately suppressed by the latter. The suppression was followed by a policy of 'reconciliation' and 'consolidation' of the administration by the British. Both the loyal petty chiefs and the insurrectionists fell to the subtle appeasement policy of the British rulers who granted them huge *zamindaris*. For smooth communication, large tracts of jungles, for which Shahabad had been known, were cut down and roads and railway tracks were laid.²²

Shahabad also has a great share in the freedom movement in Bihar. Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru, Dr. Ranjendra Prasad and many such national leaders visited various parts of Shahabad in the 1920s and 1930s, to invigorate the freedom movement.

The district is also known for its multi-religious traditions. The Jain inscriptions near Arah indicate a living Jain community, now and in the past. The Brahmo Samaj had set up a number of units in the district in the 1880s.²³ Hindu,

²² Recapitulating the prominent events of the British Raj, many of my informants instantly recalled how the '*gora sahibs*' cleared the thick jungles in Behea and its vicinity and first attempted to lay the railway track along the side of the Mahatin Dai Temple. Since the tracks were almost brushing the temple, the people objected to it. With due consideration for the religious feeling of the people the British made the necessary curve in an otherwise straight track to bypass the Temple. See reference to Mahatin Dai Temple below in Chapter IV and Appendix-9.

²³ Roy Chaudhary, BDG, op. cit., p.46.

Muslim and of late Christian religious traditions have made their own impact on the people of Shahabad. (See the multi-layered structure of religious traditions of Ravidasis in the conclusion).

B.4 Subaltern Histories

Unearthed antiquity is Shahabad's tradition today. Of the distant past are the Chero, Bhuiya, Oraon and Kharia tribal kingdoms, which were decimated by succeeding invaders.²⁴ And as such their histories are yet to be written.²⁵ The district has been neglected by historians, anthropologists and archivists. Nevertheless, their past experience has continued in the memories of their succeeding generations — the tribals of Chotanagpur.

Secondly, the history of the district has been a struggle to retain its distinct identity and independence. There seems to have been no history of subjugation of non-Shahabadis by the Shahabadis.²⁶ However, the history of the 'lesser' peoples of Shahabad, though unwritten, is replete with events of subjugation and decimation by the more 'powerful' peoples. The local attempts of these latter ones to establish and perpetuate their political, economic, social, cultural and religious hegemony over the 'lesser' ones is another facet of the ever sidelined histories of the subaltern peoples of Shahabad. The history of the Ravidasis of Shahabad is one such sidelined history. Practically nothing having been recorded in black and white, we must, once again,

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Tribal history relating to Rohtasgarh is the buried part of Bihar history.

²⁶ This category includes even those outsiders or *emigre* (Ujjaini Rajputs) who made Shahabad their home. See Roy Chaudhary, *op.cit.*, p.59.

rely on the memories of the *buzurgs* in order to reconstruct their past which would make a parallel history of the Ravidasi attempt to assert themselves in society. The other history, I submit, is the history of the Ravidasi adoption of Christianity. We shall review it in the next chapters. Before that a review of Ravidasi participation in the naxalite movement in order to locate their life situation during the period of our study.

B.5 Ravidasis and Naxalite Movement

Returning from work one evening a group of five Harijans had collected at a wayside tea shop (*dhaba*) talking excitedly to one another, apparently about the sensational murder of a Harijan in a village in Sahar block. After initial queries about the killing I asked them:

(JK) "What is the recent change that has been taking place in your society?" "*Chodiya saheb, Harijan ko kaun poochta hein?* (Let it be, Sir, Who cares about Harijans?)" said an old man in response. Then one, more articulate among them, a certain Shiv Prasad, the local secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist: CPI-ML), said:

(SP) Little change and much bloodshed. We have been *begar* and *banihar* for centuries. But what is our condition even now? When we ask for more (just) wages we are thrashed. The Naxalites only supported us. We too have some rights, to better wages, to land, to dignity.

(JK) So the Harijans have taken to Naxalism?

(SP) The situation in Bhojpur is such that sheer survival is our major concern. We don't understand any big ideology. But one thing we are convinced. *Latheith ka hukum lathi hein to hamara jawab bhi lathi hoga* (If the landlord's lathi (big stick)-wielding musclemen's order is lathi our answer will also be lathi).

(JK) What about the government and the police ? Don't they ever protect you?

(SP) H'm! the *sarkar* (government) and the police.

Have they ever rescued us? All that the *sarkar* does is to brand any outspoken Harijan as "naslait" (Naxalite) and shoot him down. All in the name of 'law and order'. The landlords are in collusion with them, you know. *Chor chor mausera bhai* (a thief is cousin (brother) to his own kind).²⁷

The study of the Naxalite Movement in Bhojpur is a study of agrarian violence against the poor in that district. It also gives us an idea about how new power-equations were being shaped between various castes and classes.²⁸ Since the focus of this study is Ravidasis in Ganj and Barsaun we shall briefly review the agrarian social scene of the area as it has affected them.

The only movement in which some Harijans seem to have found confidence was the Naxalite Movement²⁹ which started in 1967 in Bihar. Charu Mazumdar, the Naxalite leader from West Bengal, visited Bhojpur in that year and started the first *Kisan Sammelan* (peasant convention) there. The movement, now apread into other districts of Bihar, particularly in the south central districts where it is very active, got the initial fillip from Bhojpur. The local leaders of the movement came from

²⁷ Interview with Shiv Prasad and group members, Shahpur.

²⁸ In Bihar, if people were to be categorized into classes in terms of possession of political and economic power, class and caste are interwoven. By and large the upper castes belong to the upper class and the lower castes belong to the lower class. Beteille's study of caste, class and power relations confirms this reality in Bihar. He says today class positions have acquired a certain measure of autonomy and it has detached itself from the caste structure. But it is not entirely caste-free. See Andre Beteille, *Caste, Class and Power: Changing Pattern of Stratification in a Tanjore Village*, p.223.

²⁹ It is a radical outgrowth of the Communist movement in India (Marxist) which began from a group of some 60 tribal villages in Siliguri district in West Bengal in 1967. See also K. Mukerjee & R.S. Yadav, op. cit. pp.41-45.

different Harijan and poor peasant classes. The first prominent leader, Jagdish Mahto, belonged to Ekwari village, Sahar block in Bhojpur. About 90 percent of the Harijans in Bhojpur were sympathizers of the Naxalite Movement.³⁰

The Naxalite Movement in Bhojpur seems to have unleashed a chain of organized armed encounters between Harijans and poor peasants on the one hand, and the rich upper caste landlords and the neo-rich intermediate castes on the other. 54 major armed encounters in which hundreds of Harijans and a few landlords were killed were reported from seven southern blocks in Bhojpur district in a period of 12 years (1967- 1979).³¹ One such incident, in which one of the close relatives of my informant Shiv Prasad was killed, took place right in Behea *bazar* (market) in 1972. These incidents which had sweeping effect on the Harijans in Bihar have equally affected the Ravidasis of Ganj and Barsaun. However, Behea and Shahpur blocks have been relatively free of such violent incidents.

One Biswanath Yadhav, the CPI *sarpanch* of Raghunathpur, a village in Brahmpur block, nearby said:

Men can tolerate all. But when women and daughters are assaulted it becomes intolerable. Anyone who revolts is called a Naxalite. Like in Bhadwar, a village in Brahmpur, the labourers demanded more wages so the landlords harassed them. The police are the same caste-types. Harijans have been raped, looted and arrested - all in the name of Naxalites.³²

³⁰ J. Kannanaikil, op. cit. pp.430, 432.

³¹ See K.Mukerjee & Yadav, op.cit., for a well documented study on the Naxalite encounters in Bhojpur, Chapter III, pp.43-121.

³² Quoted in Ibid., p.162. Also, in 1970, the Bihar State administration set up special police cells to protect the 'law abiding' landlords. In 1975, the state ministry decided to provide "every able-bodied person" in the families of landlords with a gun for protection against "anti-social" elements, especially in Patna and Bhojpur districts. See J. Kananaikil, op.cit., p.433.

Violence against Harijans in the recent past has been not only by the high castes but also the *nouveau riche* among the intermediate castes. A study of ten major events of agrarian killings in Bihar from 1977-1980 reveals that class interest is interwoven with caste interest.³³ While there have been clashes between high castes and intermediate castes, the latter seem to have been subjecting the lower castes to severe oppression. The intermediate castes, particularly three most numerous, prominent and powerful ones-Ahir, Koeri, Kurmi - seem to have looked upon the Harijans as suspects. This was because when these three castes formed an association called the **Triveni Sangh**³⁴ (organisation of the confluence of three rivers) in 1934, and began to throw up challenge to the high caste dominated Indian National Congress, the Harijans seem to have supported the Congress.³⁵ Under the leadership of its Chamar leader Jagjivan Ram, the Congress tried to secure the votes of the Harijan castes.³⁶

Moreover, during the first half of this century a number of caste associations had been founded by their respective castes in order to protect their own interests. Practically all the high caste groups had their own respective caste associations. Among the intermediate castes were associations such as the **Kurmi Kshatriya Hitaishi** (1908), the **Gopi Jatiya Sabha** (1912), the **Ahir (goala) Movement** (1914), the **Triveni Sangh** and so on. Among the Scheduled Castes were the **All -India**

³³ For a detailed analysis on agrarian killings in Bihar see John Mathew, **Class and Caste Dimensions of Rural Atrocities in Bihar, 1977-1980**, MA Dissertation, Pune University, 1981.

³⁴ The Sangh's declared objectives: to foster solidarity among the three castes, to participate in democratic politics, to oppose and retaliate upper-caste tyranny like *corvee*, *begar*, rape and social ostracism. Also quoted in K. Mukerjee & Yadav, op.cit., pp.27-28.

³⁵ K. Mukerjee & Yadav, op.cit., p.31.

³⁶ Though a Harijan himself, Jagjivan Ram was against the **All-India Depressed Classes Conference**, Patna Meet: see *The Searchlight*, March 27, 1937, and April 13, 1937. See also *Depressed Classes Documentation* (DCD), Vol.I, pp.362,367,376.

Depressed Classes Conference, the Pasi Sudhar Sammelan, the Dusadh Mahasabha, the Bihar Provincial Khet Mazdoor Sabha, etc.

What has been the position of the Harijans in the agrarian structure of Bhojpur? In a district with a population of 2.4million (Census 1971) people the Harijans constituted 14.52 percent of whom nearly 77 percent were landless agricultural labourers.³⁷ Of the Harijans the Ravidasis constituted over 29.37 percent, the largest category, followed by Dusadhs and Musahars. This indicates that the Ravidasis constituted a very large proportion of the landless agricultural labourers in the district. Day after day, year after year, they toiled in somebody's lands, often forced into *begari* and *banihari* (systems of labour: *begari* is semi bonded work, also worker, attached to any landlord; *banihari* is timebound contract labour to any landlord). And yet their economic condition has not improved much.

The reason for this pathetic condition of the Ravidasi community in the overall agrarian structure can be traced to several centuries of social discrimination based on caste, social distancing and economic oppression.³⁸ During the 1920s and 1930s the system of *begari* and *abwaba* (illegal exactions in addition to formal rent) were major sources of tension between *zamindars*, poor peasants and landless labourers. The *bakasht* (lands taken over by landlords in lieu of arrears in rent) lands gave rise to numerous landlord-peasant confrontations.³⁹ In the 1930s the **Kisan Sabha**

³⁷ The Census of India figures say over the years the proportion of landless agricultural labourers has only increased despite much scope for non-agricultural category jobs in recent years. This reflects increased rural poverty. *Census of India, 1971 (1975) Series I, Paper I*, pp. x-xi.

³⁸ A detailed study on the agrarian history related to the Ravidasis is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

³⁹ A.N. Das, *Agrarian and Socio-Economic Change in Bihar, 1900-1980*, p.132.

(farmer's congregation),⁴⁰ tried to reduce the rift between landlords and poor peasants, but the landless *kisans* (mostly Harijans) benefitted little.

Despite Shahabad being the main arena of Sahajanand's operation and the **Kisan Sabha's** avowed resolution to obtain *kisan's* rights, the vast majority of landless agricultural labourers (Harijans) in Shahabad, seem to have benefitted little whereas the already landed class (particularly the Bhumihars) who seem to have dominated the **Kisan Sabha** stood to gain much.⁴¹ Thus, neglected by the government, oppressed by the upper caste landlords, threatened by the intermediate castes and hunted down by the police the Harijans had, beyond a point, no choice left but that between starvation or slavery and armed resistance. This was, apparently, the background of most Ravidasis of Bhojpur and as such has been the history of the Ravidasis in Ganj and Barsaun as well.

C Social Institutions and Structures

How shall we describe village society in Bhojpur? Is it only a 'peopled' geographical space created for administrative purposes? Is it a mere collection of people belonging to various castes or religions engaged in diverse occupations and performing various functions? All these and much more. Social scientists and civil

⁴⁰ **Kisan Sabha** was founded by Swami Sahajanand Saraswati (originally Naurang Rai, a Brahmin born in 1889(?) in Gazipur, Uttar Pradesh, took to *sanyasa* in 1907). In 1936 the **Bihar Kisan Sabha** became provincial (state) unit of the **All India Kisan Sabha**. See W. Hauser, (ed) *Sahajanand on Agricultural Labour and the Rural Poor*, pp. xv, 46,68.

⁴¹ The **Kisan Sabha** had several meetings in Behea. The Swami toured the district extensively. See *Indian Annual Register*, 1936, Vol. I, p.491; Notes from Bihar and Orissa Administration Report for the year 1935. See also K. Mukerjee & Yadav, op.cit., p.19, quoting W. Hauser, *The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, 1929-1942*, pp.77-78.

administrators⁴² have described it in various ways. Some have described it as the 'little republic', 'a body of co-owners of the soil', and 'an emblem of traditional economy and policy'. Still others have described it as a 'village and community'.⁴³ Two concepts are included in the latter definition: village and community. They imply a geographical entity and a body of social institutions pertaining to a group of people. This study being a review of the transformation that seems to have occurred in the Ravidasi communities of Ganj and Barsaun, a brief overview of their social institutions and structures is in order. The living space ('peopled space') in the village consists of several *tolas*. Each *tola* is inhabited by a distinct social group (*jat*), which will not inter-marry or inter-dine with other groups. Brahmins, Rajputs, Bhumiars and Kayasthas - upper castes - live in separate *tolas* as do the Harijans. Within the Harijan tola each caste group lives in a separate *tola* such as Chamar *tola*, Musahar *tola* and so on.

The geographical location of the Harijan tola indicates the low status of the Harijans in the villages. Within the Harijan tola the Chamar tola is to the south. The location as it is today comes partially from the tradition of separation on account of untouchability. Secondly due to the stench from hide work, the traditional occupation of the Ravidasis, they were allotted the south side of the village living space.⁴⁴ It can also be traced to the practice among the feudal landlords to settle their *begars* and *baniars*, in the most unprofitable part of their lands.

⁴² British Administrations also attempted to study Indian villages: Munro, for instance.

⁴³ L. Dumont, "The Village Community from Munro to Maine" in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, No.9, December 1966, p.67.

⁴⁴ We have seen elsewhere that the geographical location of the south allotted to the Chamar in ancient times was to avoid the northerly winds carrying the stench from hide work from the Chamar hamlet.

The physical separation of different caste groups into distinct geographical units within the same compact village, is compounded by a hierarchy of social status.⁴⁵ The actual position of the caste groups within each village is not the same (see Table 2.1 and 2.2). With the upper castes on the top of the hierarchy, the 'outcastes' at its bottom, and a number of stratified groups in the middle makes the village society in Ganj and Barsaun. This also coincides with the social, political and economic power position of the three caste categories in the village. Each caste group is continually contesting for power with the others. In Ganj though there are Brahmins who are traditionally and ritually⁴⁶ considered at the top of the Hindu social ladder, yet the Baniyas dominate owing to economic power. In Barsaun, on the other hand, the Bhumihars, numerically more than all other castes and ritually less 'pure' than Brahmins, claim the highest power position. Among the intermediate castes the Yadavas claim the highest power position in both villages. Among the Harijan castes in Ganj, the Ravidasis being numerically and economically better off, are stronger whereas in Barsaun their power is closely contested by the Dusadhs.

The real power struggle now is between the feudal-type landlord upper castes and the intermediate castes: the newly rich intermediate castes.⁴⁷ However, if the challenge ever came from the lower caste category, both the above categories combined to oppose them, the evidence of which we have seen in the Naxalite Movement in Bhojpur.⁴⁸ This situation seems to have led to a mobilization across

⁴⁵ J. Kananaikil op.cit., p.373.

⁴⁶ The position of the Brahmin at the top of the hieracrhy is due to his being the 'purest' ritually and hence claim the maximum social distance from the 'least pure' or the 'unclean' castes (Harijans).

⁴⁷ Susanne Hoerber Rodolph and Lloyd I. Rodolph, **Determinants and Varieties of Agrarian Mobilization**, University of Chicago, 1980: quoted in J. Kananaikil, op.cit., p.373.

⁴⁸ Op.cit., in Section B.5

caste lines among the lower castes. This was partly because of the growing violence against the lower castes by the upper and middle castes together. The Naxalite Movement seems to have created a context for such unity and cohesiveness among the lower castes. Examples are aplenty where in upper caste-Harijan encounters, the latter group, inspite of their caste differences, have joined together to oppose the upper castes. The situation seems to be creating horizontally polarized para-communities in the lower castes. We see the same pattern of change in the Harijan society under the impact of Christianity (see chapter IV).

There are other social institutions which are structural⁴⁹ in nature. These are the body of social, economic, cultural, religious and political relationships between caste groups and within individual castes. The substance of social relationship is the role each individual or community has acquired. Hetukar Jha says,

The role of a person indicates *how* that person holding a particular status *relates* to other role-players in the role-set; this corresponds to the status held by that person because role represents society's demands on him as an incumbent of that role.⁵⁰

Dahrendorf suggests that these roles are prescriptions of conduct and are independent of the individual's choice. These roles are 'given' or, in other words, institutionalised.⁵¹

Thus, social relationship of a Ravidasi with other members of the village community, is guided by a package of 'given' roles. These relationships being

⁴⁹ 'Sturcture' has been used to highlight the stability of relationship as if an edifice.

⁵⁰ Hetukar Jha's study of rural Bihar was done in three villages in three cultural divisions of Bihar namely, central north Bihar, east and west central Bihar. See H. Jha, *op.cit.*, p.24.

⁵¹ Ralf Dahrendorf, *Essays in the Theory of Society*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, p.37.

institutionalised, in course of their long duration in tradition, these are what may be called basic social structures of a village community. Jha says there are two levels of social structures: 'primary level structures' and 'secondary level structures'. In Ganj and Barsaun the primary level of structures are constituted by such institutions as *mahajani* (money-lending), *bataidari* (share-cropping), *janouri* (patron-client, semi-bonded labour relationship), *grihasthi-pawani* (hereditary patron-client relationship), *jati-panchayati* (caste *panchayat*) family (this is the collective family or one or more households of the same (ancestry), *khandan*, *jajmani-purohiti* (patron (*jajman*)-client (*purohit*) socio-religious relationship), *tola* (hamlet: has an identity of its own as social space for different caste groups such as Ravidasi tola, Musahar tola, Koeri tola and so on), etc. The interrelationships between individuals and caste groups have been crystallized by tradition. These have a certain legitimacy due to tradition and have become institutionalized. In other words, the primary level structures cover the core of "everyday life" in the village.⁵²

The secondary level structures, on the other hand, consist of those groups and organizations (formal or informal) which are formed for certain goals and purposes and the roles and statuses of which are generally taken by their incumbents as depending solely on the relevance of the objectives for which the particular groups and organizations have been formed.⁵³

At the secondary level structure, the inter-group relationships are more "instrumental" and "strategic" and are, therefore, vulnerable to the events of both

⁵² Berger and Luckman have called the primary level structures as "social reality par excellence". See F. Braudel (founder of Annales School of History), *Afterthoughts on Material Civilization and Capitalism* (tr) Patricia M. Ranum, The John Hopkin University Press, Baltimore, 1977, p. 6-7, where he uses the concept of 'everyday life' of society. Also quoted in Hetukar Jha, *op.cit.*, p. 27.

⁵³ H. Jha *et al.*, *op.cit.*, p.15.

within and without the social structure in question.⁵⁴ These are external institutions such as associations, organizations, parties, trusts, Church, boards, etc. We shall study some of the main primary level structures with a view to understanding how, under the impact of some secondary level structures, the Catholic Mission for one, the former ones got weakened or de-structured as new, parallel, alternative structures emerged. The study of this process is the burden of the coming chapters.

C.1 Mahajani

It puzzled me, greatly, to learn that Moti Ram Chamar, the Ravidasi whom I met (see interview below) at the house of Narayan Tiwari, a Bhumihaar zamindar of Barsaun, was a 'bonded' person. Caught in a whirlpool of debt and suffering from abject poverty in spite of him and his family being employed in his *malik's* (Tiwari) house for two generations, Moti Ram Chamar seemed to be a true representative of the victims of *mahajani*. Moti Ram Chamar was an enigma to me. I pursued his trail home.

Out in a corner of the Chamar hamlet (*Chamtoli*) was he, in his house one evening, avidly smoking an Indian smoking pipe (*hukka*) alone and in deep thought, sitting on his legs, on the ground. Seeing me he recognized (having met earlier) and welcomed me in the typical warm Ravidasi hospitality and brought out the best of his sitting furniture, the multipurpose woven wooden cot (*khattiya*). To my question how he became a debtor (*karzdar/kaduka*) he said,

⁵⁴ Ibid., Jha had developed this categorization on the basis of the concepts of "symbolic interaction" and "systems of purposive rational action" suggested by Hebermas in *Toward a Rational Society*, Beacon Press, 1970, pp.91-94.

(MRC) We had a patch of land, my father used to tell us. But had to lease it out to the *mahajan* (moneylender) following his failure to repay an earlier loan obtained to marry off his elder sister, my aunt.

Then again, my father borrowed money at various occasions especially during the 'great' famine (1966). It was a terrible time, you know. All our cattle were dead. All the while we had been working as *begar* in lieu of the debt. And we are still working to reply the debt. We are five in the family; three sons, one daughter and my wife.

(JK) Don't you keep an account of how much you have paid back and how much you have yet to pay, and so on?

(MRC) *Ka karen sabeb. Garib logon ki nasib. Hamra ke koi parhe-likhe nahin ke* (What to do, sir. The fate of poor people. Nobody in the family is learned).

(JK) Why did you not send your children to school since schooling was free?

(MRC) *Kaise* (how?) My *malik* told me, '*Re, Motiya, tora layikwa parhe affsar bani? karz kaun chukayega?*' (You, Moti, your son will study and become an officer? Who will pay back the debt?)⁵⁵

Moti Ram Chamar, a Hindu poor *begar* of Barsaun is not an isolated case of debt-victim thanks to the practice of *mahajani*. There are several other debtor-forced labourers (*karzdaar-begars*) in the village. The poorest ones are of the Musahar caste.

One of the social structures of the village, *mahajani* is an institutionalized monetary or economic relationship between a borrower and *mahajan* (literally, the great/big people).

⁵⁵ Interview with Moti Ram Chamar, Barsaun.

Moneylenders usually belong to Bania caste but can be of any (upper) caste who lend money.⁵⁶ The *mahajans* make advances to the needy, either in money or grain, and are repaid entirely in grain at harvest. Part of their grain they sell wholesale and part they keep to lend out to other borrowers. The rate of interest was always very high in relation to the value of the grain at harvest time.

Mahajani as a village structure is more than just a monetary institution. The dependence of the poor on the *mahajans* grows due to the exorbitant rates of interest charged by the latter and the subsequent borrowing by the increasingly abject poor. On the other hand, rarely does a *mahajan* suffer losses in his business of lending. Exploring the pattern of relationships between the *mahajans* and the *karzdaars*, Jha says that the *mahajani* relationship with low income groups implied caste-based social discrimination, exercise of power, reiteration of submissiveness and so on.⁵⁷

The Ravidasis in our villages had to borrow from *mahajans* either to meet the expenses of daily life or to meet marriage expenses. Once a debtor, always a debtor. They borrowed again to repay the earlier debts, then multiplied, thereby to fall into the vicious circle of *karz-begari* (*begari* was forced upon them in lieu of repayment). To illustrate, the *mahajans* did not treat a debtor merely as a person in a business relationship, but as a 'low' class person. They were insulted, abused and addressed with disparaging terms such as *re* and *be*. The debtors had to sit on the ground whereas the *mahajans* would sit on a chair, and the latter were addressed as *malik sarkar, babu, huzur*, etc. The *mahajans* would enforce the repayment of loans with labour and would resort to a court of law. Several Ravidasi families in Ganj and

⁵⁶ Buchanan, op.cit. p. 430 : calls them *Grihastha Bepari* (trader-farmers).

⁵⁷ H. Jha, op.cit., p. 115.

Barsaun had been bonded as *mahajani-begars*⁵⁸ in the early 1930s and 1940s, and had been entangled in court cases and litigation by their creditor *mahajans*. The latter used to retain some debtors in bondage, often by increasing the debt amount by false accounts.

C.2 Bataidari

A second component of social structures in our villages was share-cropping (*bataidari*). A common agrarian relationship between the landed and the landless, *bataidari* system strengthened during the British period. Near the Ganga, Buchanan noted, all the land was let by regular lease (*patta*) and each tenant gave an agreement to pay a rent (*kabuliat*) which they paid in money rent or in kind (*nukadi*). Sometimes the tenants took an advance (*tukadi*) for their cultivation which tended to enmesh them in continued tenantry, dependence,⁵⁹ and often oppression by landlords. The *bataidars* being powerless did not challenge the oppression. But there were some who did challenge for, Buchanan remarks that in those areas the tenantry was "too high spirited to submit to the most trifling abuse and being willing to fight with anyone for a *cowrie*."⁶⁰

The "spirited tenants" of his times(1810s) might have been the intermediate cultivating castes who later became owners of the tenant-lease-land due to government legislation and their own assertion of power and subsequently became

⁵⁸ This type of debtor-*begars* are to be distinguished from the *jans* (attached labourers) to a traditional landlord even though the latter might be a money-lender (*mahajan*). See Chapter IV for further discussion.

⁵⁹ Buchanan, op.cit., p.340. Barsaun being in the Ganga-tal might have been one such village.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

the neo-rich class of the first half of this century. However, the condition of the lower caste *bataidars*, then and now seems to have remained the same. This was the background in which agrarian social reformer Swami Sahajanand began to organise *kisans*.⁶¹

My informants in village Ganj and Barsaun said that the vast majority of the *bataidars* were either landless, belonging to the 'low' castes' or small land holders. The economic disparity between these and the landed class only increased as the former became increasingly impoverished due to debts and landlessness. Allowing *bataidars* to cultivate small plots of land (not more than one acre), for a limited period of time (two - three years), and forcing them to support the *maliks* in court cases, or to work as *banihars* and so forth was common. It was also noted in our villages that most Ravidasis being landless, several of the able ones took to *bataidari* whereas, several others were mere semi-bonded labourers, without any share-cropping (*bataidari*) relationships with the landlords.

Bataidari relationship was long-standing and hence Jha says that it was part of the primary level structure of a village. Examining the pattern of relationship styles between *bataidars* and their *maliks* he says the relationship invariably worked in favour of the latter and increasingly impoverished the former.⁶²

C.3 Janouri

A third significant village institution is *janouri* (relationship between a *malik* (traditional landlord) and his traditional attached labourer, *jan* : can also be an

⁶¹ We have seen the **Kisan Sabha** movement in Shahabad.

⁶² H. Jha, *op.cit.*, p. 137.

attached ploughman (*halwaha/harwahi*)⁶³. There are two categories of *janouri*: one, a system where the attached labourers to a particular *malik* were free to sell their labour to others; and another, where the labourers were retained or attached to the traditional *malik* and hence unfree.⁶⁴

Buchanan reporting on Shahabad in the 1810s says the plough servants (then known as *kamiya* or *karoya*) did not seem to be held bound for advances made to the father, although part of the debt was often no doubt incurred in the son's marriage. He says, "Advances at the rate of rupees one to two were given in many places—a sum given to bind the ploughmen throughout the season.... Many persons, instead of giving money, allotted a small field which is cultivated by the servant with their stock, and he takes one-half of the produce."⁶⁵ The *jans* also had to give occasional service to the *maliks* (such as massaging and other domestic chores) and had to "leave his women to his (*malik's*) embrace."⁶⁶

In a survey conducted in the early 1980s it was found that 81 percent of the Harijan (mostly Ravidasi) families worked as *harwahis*.⁶⁷ In the early 1930s and 1940s most Ravidasi families in our villages were *jans* to one landlord or another. Of late there are fewer *jans* in these villages but among the two, Barsaun has more

⁶³ Ploughman are specialists in north Indian village. Ploughing field was considered a mean job and the high caste farmers, would get their vast fields ploughed with the help of their *begars* and *banihars*.

⁶⁴ Semi-bonded or bonded labourers in other parts of India were known in different names. See Jan Breman, *Patronage and Exploitation, Changing Agrarian, Relations in South Gujarat*, p.7.

⁶⁵ Buchanan, *op.cit.*, p.341.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 210. The arrangement of remunerating the labour of a *jan* or *harwaha* was done also in terms of land for cultivation to the latter often 'reserving' them with part of the payment in advance. The system is still prevalent in the villages under our study.

⁶⁷ J.Kananaikil, *op.cit.*, p.378.

janouri labourers. The *maliks* in both villages are uppercaste landlords. Some of my informants, formerly *jans* recalled the times when they struggled under the system. In one instance, a *jan* of a Bhumihar *malik* in Barsaun told this researcher about the difficulty he had in sending his son to school soon after the family got converted in the 1950s.

One day my *malik* came to my house (the *maliks* do not enter a 'low' caste's house, but only order from the road or send a servant) and said, 'your son is growing up. What are you going to do with him? Then I said, 'Ji, *malik*, the *padri saheb* has recently opened a school in the village.'

'H'm, flirting in the foreigner's religion, eh? When you get sick or need money for marriage who will care for you? The *gora saheb* (the whiteman)?'

I was afraid to send my son immediately to school. But when the *padri saheb* came and met my *malik* I was permitted to send my son to school.⁶⁸

In a study on village Chougain in Dumraon block of Bhojpur district, Jha notes that the *maliks* use pejorative language to address the *jans* who were related to them not only in economic pursuits but also in the social field of interactions. For instance, *jans* were not to sit on the same level as the *maliks*, had to settle in the *malik's* land (most *jans* being landless), had to work for the *maliks* according to the wishes of the *maliks* and so forth.⁶⁹ The very identity of the *jans* as individual human persons was removed by their being identified as the *jans* of a particular *malik*. The *maliks* abused *jans* when addressing them. It was in the interest of the *maliks*, however, to help the *jans* in crisis or defend them when assaulted. In short *Janouri* was a system of patronage and exploitation.

⁶⁸ Interview with Ramphal Ram, Barsaun.

⁶⁹ H. Jha, op.cit., pp.164-165.

C.4 Grihasthi-pawani

Another significant social structure which has continued to exist for centuries in our villages is the *grihasthi-pawani* system (literally, *grihasthi* means household, it means patron; *pawani* or *pawni* literally means three - fourth, it means traditional service-client). This system basically has to do with caste differentiation and occupational inter-relationship among castes. In this sense, apart from economic activities such as labour or specialized service, etc., there are implied religious duty (*dharma*), allocation of power and prestige.⁷⁰

Grihasths (those who do patronage) were the category of people privileged by virtue of being landlords were entitled by caste-based division of occupation to get specific service from the lower castes and service castes. The latter category, in turn, were given social protection and patronage by the former.

Every service caste (for instance, *dhobi* (washerman), *lohar* (blacksmith), *nai* (barber), *chamar-chamayin* (leather worker and midwife), etc.) had their own *grihasth* in a village or in many villages. In case there are fewer members in a service caste the *grihasths* in the village will be proportionately distributed among those members. At the same time these *grihasths*, wanting to get a specific service done, cannot obtain it from any other *pauni*⁷¹ other than those traditionally attached to their families. The *purohit*, who also performs a religious service is similarly attached to

⁷⁰ This system is often identified as an aspect of *jajmani* system . In Bihar other terms used are: *pauniya*, *pawani-pasari*, *kam karnewala*, etc. This system is also known as *pal*, *hari* in local parlance. But in our villages *jajmani* is a socio-religious relationship between *purohit* and clients (*jajmans*-all castes).

⁷¹ For instance five *dhobis* in a village divide among themselves say, 100 *grihasths* of the village and serve only the ones to whom they are attached.

several *jajmans* (patrons) who, in our villages, belong to all castes including the Ravidasis.⁷²

Thus in the *grihashti-pawani* relationship arbitrary changes are not permitted. A traditional worker cannot change a *grihastha* without the permission of the latter and of his own castemates. The service of *pawni* is for all castes including the 'low' castes.

Ravidasis as a service caste had four specialized services to offer to the village community: 1) removing dead animals for the village; 2) work on hide and leather; 3) play *dhogar* (a special drum played at childbirths, marriages, etc.) and 4) the service of *chamayin/gamayati* (mid-wifery, a job in which chamar women were adept and no other caste women would do). These works, all of them defiling in the Hindu mind, but essential in village life, were the *pawni* (service) rendered by the Ravidasis and as such were considered their *dharma* ascribed to their caste by birth (see discussion in Chapter IV). However, the more educated among them did not consider it so and have ceased to provide their *grihastha* with these services. Ram Kisun, an old Ravidasi convert from Ganj said,

(RK) My *grihastha* used to scold me and say, 'What is happening? If the Chamars give up *chamda* work (leather work) who will do it? These days the *dharma* is being neglected.'

(JK) Do you do *chamda* work now-a-days?

⁷² In some regions Brahmin priests did not oblige the 'low' castes. Shyamlal on a study on the Bhangis of Jodhpur says, the Brahmin priests did offer the former priestly service. See Shyamlal, *The Bhangis in Transition*, p. 76.

(RK) I left hide and leather work some 25 years ago. Why should I do it if that is the one which makes us polluted?

(JK) But you do some other type of *pauni*?

(RK) Yes, *dhogar bajaana* (playing the drum). It is our *sanskriti* (culture). Once my *malik* came and told me, 'My daughter is getting married. Remember, for generations your family used to play the *dhogar* in my *khandan* (family). Aren't you coming to play?' To which I agreed. Except the *dhogar* we don't do any other *pauni* now-a-days. Even my *gharwali* (literally, one who belongs to the house: wife) does not do *chamayin* work.⁷³

However, there are many Ravidasis who still do *pauni* for their respective *grihasta-maliks*.

D Moti Ram Chamar, the Untouchable

Having seen the status of Ravidasis in the village society we must enter into their psyche, to understand the Ravidasi personality, identity and subalternity.

Locating a Ravidasi in the village was not difficult. Chance had it, on a fine sunny winter day during my field study while I was conversing with Narayan Tiwari, a Bhumihar *zamindar* of Barsaun at his house, there came Moti Ram Chamar (to his *malik* Tiwari's house). Standing outside the courtyard, nervously twisting his shouldercloth with both hands, his face slightly turned to one side as to cautiously avoid a straight look at his *malik*, Moti Ram spoke the language of silence.

"*Re, Motiya, ka baat ba?*" (*Re* (disrespectful address), Moti what's the matter?) the *malik* asked.

⁷³ Interview with Ram Kisun, Ganj.

"*Kuchcho nahinke, malik*" (nothing special master). Moti Ram replied in the negative which, in this context, meant there was an agenda. Gesturing him to come inside the courtyard Tiwari told me, "A hard worker, but never out of debt." It was a compliment to his ability and a description of his plight.

Moti Ram came in and sat on the bare ground, a little away from the spot where fresh red brown marks of betel (*paan*) spit had fallen. Holding his shouldercloth with both hands, as if to cover his half-naked body, Moti Ram fumbled to say something. Finally clearing his throat and still looking down Moti Ram said,

"*Ji malik* (yes, master)... this time I and my sons joining together will work the whole season. We'll repay all the dues. I swear. But just once again, please give me a loan."⁷⁴

The sight of the half-naked, weather-beaten, middle-aged Moti Ram Chamar sitting on the bare ground on the courtyard of his *malik* and pleading for a loan which would further enmesh him in debt reminded me of Freeman's 'Muli'.⁷⁵ Moti Ram Chamar never sits on a cot or *pidha* (shortlegged wooden plank to sit on the ground). He might do so in his own house. But not in public where high castes are present, or in their houses. That tells much about the psyche of a Ravidasi in Ganj or Barsaun. The sight of Moti Ram Chamar sitting on the ground goaded me to probe a bit more into understanding the person of Moti Ram. What are his roots? What 'people-type' is he? What is his status in society ?

⁷⁴ Interview with Narayan Tiwari and Moti Ram Chamar, Barsaun.

⁷⁵ The front cover picture of 'Muli' the untouchable hero of the book by James M. Freeman titled *Untouchable An Indian Life History*, Indus an Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, New Delhi, 1993.

The Ravidasis of Ganj and Barsaun belong to the general category of Chamars found all over India under the name 'Chamar', 'mochi', 'muchi' or under different names.⁷⁶ Studies on Chamars in recent years have revealed that there are more than 1000 sub-castes (*up-jati*) among them. The Ravidasis of our village belong to the *Jhusia/Dhusiya*⁷⁷ sub-caste and do not marry outside this sub-caste.

I have used the term 'Ravidasi community' to refer to this group or sub-caste among the Chamars. Ethnographic studies in India, first undertaken by the British for colonial governance, categorized people into castes and tribes.⁷⁸ There were also communities which did not consider themselves then- and which do not consider now- either as castes or tribes. Therefore the concept of 'community' has been brought into recently by anthropologists. The term 'community'⁷⁹ is more dynamic, encompassing and does away with the pejorative nomenclatures associated with the use of caste names. The term 'chamar', for instance, given to those who worked on hide and leather became, in the course of time, a pejorative term due to their

⁷⁶ See O. P. Sharma, *Scheduled Castes; Population and Literates*, for area-wise concentration of Chamar castes in various parts of India.

⁷⁷ *Jhusia/Dhusiya* is the local name from Jhusi, near Allahabad. That the Dhusias or Jhusias may have originally proceeded from this area is probable. But Sherring says this clan of Chamars originally belonged to the east of Saidpur, in Ghazipur district, Uttar Pradesh. The Chamars (majority of them) belong to this sub-group. See Briggs, *The Chamars*, pp. 17,25. See also J. Kananakil, op.cit., p. 361.

⁷⁸ Various communities or peoples in India were first classified into categories in 1901 by H.H. Risley, the then Census Commissioner of India. Risley's classification was rather broad. In 1911, an enquiry was held to ascertain which of the castes and tribes were discriminated against on religious and social grounds. In 1921, for the first time, these castes were called 'depressed classes'. These were systematically categorized in the 1931 Census by the then Census Commissioner, Hutton. See for discussion H.H., Risley, *People of India*, (Collection of Papers), 1915.

⁷⁹ See *People of India Project*, K.S. Singh (ed), Anthropological Survey of India, The use of the term community is emphasized here. The series is an elaborate study on some 2795 'unique' communities (not castes) in India.

association with 'polluted'⁸⁰ articles and 'low status'. The self-introduction of my informant Moti Ram Chamar using the elusive, non-precise expression "*hum log harijan hein*" (we belong to Harijan caste) betrayed the abysmal depth of lowliness of his person. One need not ask further to which caste among the Harijans does he belong; it is evident from the way a Ravidasi avoids the use of the perjorative term 'chamar'.⁸¹ A survey conducted in 1980 of 80 families in 80 villages revealed that 50 percent of the Chamar respondents disliked the term 'chamar'.⁸² It is significant to note that the more literate the members of the community are the more they seem to dislike the name, and possess a lower self-image than that of the illiterate.⁸³ Most of our illiterate respondents preferred to use the general category name 'Harijan'⁸⁴ (as did Moti Ram too), probably due to their difficulty in pronouncing the official term 'Scheduled Caste'. For instance, one respondent said, "*Hum sedoold cast ka hein*" (I belong to Scheduled Caste).⁸⁵

The Ravidasis of Ganj and Barsaun do not seem to subscribe to the modern group-identity name 'Dalit' for, Kisun Dayal, one of my educated informants, who

⁸⁰ The pollution of the person is essentially due to physical contact with 'unclean' materials. Implied here is the consequent distance of the Chamar from the Brahmin for whom it is a must to avoid contact with such materials and labour. See P. Chatterjee, *op.cit.*, p. 194.

⁸¹ See discussions below on name and naming. Also I owe some insights from the talk with the Reverend Dinesh Kumar.

⁸² J. Kanaikil, *op.cit.*, p. 380.

⁸³ A study on self-image of Ravidasi women in Bhojpur district says, the level of self-image does not seem to correlate with the level of literacy. See M.D. Lizzy, *A Study on Chamar Women in Bhojpur District of Bihar, part III, Self-image*, p.86.

⁸⁴ But some elderly convert Ravidasis said: "Why 'Harijan'? We are Christians.", quite mindful of the pejorative connotation attached to the term. 'Harijan' literally means 'people of God'; a term given by Gandhi to the Depressed Classes in the mid 1930s. See M.K. Gandhi (ed.) *Harijan*, Feb. 11, 1933, p.7.

⁸⁵ See Chapter III & IV for discussion on the categorization of the Ravidasis in the Scheduled Castes list by Presidential Order 1950. The converts among the Ravidasis are left out of the category but they continue to assert that they belong to Scheduled Castes as is evident in the response of this informant.

heard about the all-India adoption of 'Dalit' name by the Harijans, remarked thus: "*Is mein barhe baat kya hein? Dalit to hum heien hein*" (What is new about it? We already know we are dalits (meaning, oppressed, trampled upon). However, in recent years they have begun to identify saying "We are Ravidasis"⁸⁶ and have begun to celebrate Ravidas *Jayanti* (birthday) in Ganj and Barsaun. The converts and non-converts conjointly organize the festival in their own villages.

D.1 The Ignominy of Name

'What is in a name?' asked Shakespeare. There is a great deal in a name and naming. Names define identities and accord dignity to persons. While conversing with my interviewee, Raghu Ram Robert, an elderly convert of Ganj, we heard an young man shouting to another, apparently in a quarrel between the two, "*H'm, chori-chamari karta hein!*" (you are doing stealing). The term stealing is co-terminous with the name 'Chamar'. The name-calling, in this instance, was done by none other than a Chamar himself whose name was *kudwa* (man from dust). What is obvious is that the Ravidasis themselves have internallized such pejorative phrases due to constant usage in reference to them.

But I was puzzled by '*kudwa*'. Why such a name? "Formerly we were not permitted to keep good names associated with great gods. We have begun to use

⁸⁶ *Ravidasi* (literally, follower of god Ravi): followers of Ravidas, a medieval saint of the Chamar caste, contemporary of Kabir. By and large the Chamars of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have begun to use this name for themselves mainly due to the efforts of a few Ravidasi organisations in Uttar Pradesh. The educated Ravidasis of our villages seem to be aware of these cultural movements. See K.N. Upadyaya, (Hindi) *Guru Ravidas*, 1983. Also see Bharti Kunwel, (Hindi) *Sant Raidas Ke Bishleshan*, 1985.

'Kumar' or 'Kumari' to our children only in recent times,⁸⁷ Robert told me. Subsequent enquiry fetched me a few Ravidasi names such as *gobar* (cowdung), *dhoda* (man with big navel), *bilkoduwa* (one who clears weed), *dukhan* (man of sorrow), *mangroo* (born of Tuesday, bad omen), *gajara* (carrot), etc., for males and, *phoolpathiya* (woman like a leaf), *chinti* (woman of worry), *dukhiya* (woman of sorrow), *loukhi* (a vegetable), *dhanuwatiya* (a type of gram), etc., for females.

An analysis of these and other names seems to indicate three attributes of Ravidasi nature, namely low calibre or intellect, low mental disposition and their precarious existence here and now. In the first attribute, the acceptance of an imposed non-literate culture and low social status through a process of constant 'outcasting' is evident as in '*bilkoduwa*' and '*gobar*'. In the second one, it seems that through names such as '*dukhan*' and '*dukhiya*' the Ravidasis continue to transfer their experience of bitterness or sorrow through their progeny, and the third attribute points to their precariousness in day-to-day struggles, (evident in the names '*mangroo*', '*loukhi*', etc.) which do not seem to allow them to think of the morrow.⁸⁸

A cross-section of my non-Ravidasi informants, while being engaged in conversation with this researcher, were heard using, inadvertently though, some such phrases and proverbs in the local tongue (Bhojpuri) which seemed pejorative to the honour of Ravidasis.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Interview with Raghu Ram Robert, Ganj.

⁸⁸ E. Mendonca, (Hindi) "Bhasha our Shoshan" (Language and Exploitation) in Jose Kalapura (ed), *Violence in Bihar*, pp. 125-127.

⁸⁹ For instance, '*chamar ki beti naam rajraniya*' (name is of a queen, but daughter is of a Chamar); '*chandan pada chamar ghar, nit uti kute kaam*' (even if a Chamar gets sandalwood what will he do but use it to pound leather?), etc.

The identity, position and status of a person in Indian society (read Hindu society of Ganj and Barsaun) are inherited or ascribed by birth. In the caste-based, hierarchically ordered society, each person has an ascribed position and roles. He is both related to and distanced from others depending on the extent of purity inherited by birth. He is in a way both included and excluded: included within his own caste and the Hindu system, excluded from other castes but within the Hindu system.⁹⁰ Moti Ram Chamar of the untouchable Ravidasi community, is one who is excluded to the periphery of society, the consequence of which is his poor self-image, the subalternity, which was evident in his words, "the cursed" caste.⁹¹

D.2 Legitimation by Myths

Perhaps nowhere is the identity of the Chamars more clear than in the myths and legends centered about them. One of the oft-repeated myths I heard in both the villages was the legend of the four brothers, the youngest of whom was the Chamar (see Appendix-1). The legend says the four brothers, of Brahmin origin, were equal in the beginning but the fourth one became 'defiled' when he removed the carcass of a cow under pressure from and obedience to his brothers who later rejected him and treated him as an 'outcaste'.

⁹⁰ On the principle of inclusion-exclusion Chatterjee quotes Dumant saying the "ground" of caste or what makes caste a system is the "unity of identity and difference". See P. Chatterjee, op.cit. pp.176-176. He also adds that it is a "contradictory unity" because whenever there was Brahmanical domination over the subordinate people using doctrines of *dharma*, purity-pollution and so on, there were incipient protests and defiance by the subordinated class, *Ibid.*, p.184.

⁹¹ See below: interview with Anil Prasad, Ganj. I owe the term 'periphery' (used as opposed as to 'centre') to J. Kananaikil, op. cit. On feeling low due to caste, see Pulin Garg and Josey Kunnunkal, *The Journey in Search of Untouchability*, pp.94-95.

Most legends⁹² say the Ravidasis were originally of high rank in society but later 'fell' to the 'low' rank within the caste system, due to their work on 'polluted' materials on the one hand, and the ostracization of the 'polluted' brother by his elder brothers, on the other. Thus their degradation in society was more "interactional" than "attributional".⁹³ It is clear from the myth that the Chamar became 'low' in relation to his brothers as they interacted. Subsequently his 'low' status seems to have acquired legitimation by tradition, myths, legends and so on, so that the status attributed to him stuck for ever thereby giving it an ascriptive character. Over the centuries even if the 'low castes' took to non-polluting occupations and had interactions with the high castes, their status did not become higher. This is evident from the way the Ravidasis continue to be considered low within the Hindu system in spite of their abandoning the polluting hide work and taking to say, agriculture and more high ranking occupations. An young, educated (graduate) and employed informant said,

Despite our (Ravidasi) community doing all dirty jobs for others, we are stigmatized and humiliated. When will this end? Though my parants did leather work, I have never done it. I am employed as an officer. Still they (higher castes) taunt me on my caste, indirectly if not directly.⁹⁴

The statement indicates the pattern of interaction between the upwardly mobile Ravidasis and the members of the ambient community. At my asking how he estimated the converts in Ganj, the headman of the village, Chaudhary said, "They have done well. They are more educated than the members of our caste. We don't

⁹² For similar legends see Briggs, op. cit., pp.16-17. See also P. Garg and J. Kunnunkal, op.cit., pp.70,72-73.

⁹³ I am applying here the theories of caste-ranking put forth by McKim Marriott, namely, "attributional" and "interactional" theories. See M.Marriott, "Interactional and Attributional Theories of Caste Ranking" in *Man in India* Vol.39, No.2, 1959.

⁹⁴ Interview with Anil Prasad, Ganj. See also P. Garg and J. Kunnunkal, op.cit., pp.87,88,94.

anymore consider them as 'untouchables'; also, there is no master-servant relationship between us and them."⁹⁵ At the same time some others said, "Whatever be the achievement, a Chamar is always a Chamar."⁹⁶

Social prejudices against the Ravidasis seem to have crystallized into certain stereo types about them. An informant from Ganj Baban Prasad, employed in a blue-collar job in Calcutta, was once asked by his colleagues to state his caste to which he said he belonged to the Chamar caste. Then they said, "No, you can't be a Chamar! you are capable, smart and well-mannered."⁹⁷ 'This is also evident in the manner in which non-Ravidasis seem to acknowledge the greatness of Ravidas as a saint among the Chamars and at the same time deny the potentiality of the Chamars to become saints for, a certain Brahmin said, "Ravidas was a great saint and social reformer. He must have been a Brahmin in his previous birth".⁹⁸ The near impossibility of the Chamars to attain virtue as Chamars, Ravidas being an exception due to his Brahmin lineage, is evident here.

The Ravidasis also seem to have internalized this imposed subalternity.⁹⁹ Instances are galore elsewhere in India where the 'low' caste communities, having achieved a certian extent of upward mobility by way of change of occupation, industrial and educational achievement and so on, seem to have invented myths of

⁹⁵ Interview with Vinay Kumar Choudhary, Ganj.

⁹⁶ Interview with Devendra Dubey and group, Ganj. Also compare with the proverbs on Chamars: stated above.

⁹⁷ Interview with Baban Prasad, Ganj.

⁹⁸ Talk with Gajanan Mishra Sahjauli, Shahpur.

⁹⁹ We have already seen several instances of this, Moti Ram Chamar, being one.

higher status origin or counter-myths and simultaneously attempted to wipe away¹⁰⁰ their low status origin myths, apparently in a bid to rise up in society.¹⁰¹ These sanskritization¹⁰² attempts have been, apparently, unsuccessful in societies where social status of persons are graded by birth and religious doctrines and theologies seem to give legitimacy to such a tradition of gradation.

The Ravidasis of Ganj and Barsaun opted out of such a system apparently because of this reason. At the same time they opted to adopt an alternative socio-religious system - the Christianity of the Catholic Mission of Shahpur - which, on the one hand, seems to have attempted to demythologize the low origin and low status myths of its followers by catechizing them in biblical myths and Church's equalitarian doctrines and, attempted to create alternative social structures which tended to transcend the boundaries of caste, on the other.

Thus we see two parallel processes of social change in these villages: one, the process of adoption of Christianity by the Ravidasis and second, the process of constructing alternative socio-religious and socio-economic structure assisted by the Catholic Mission at Shahpur. Study on these processes is the burden of the coming chapters.

¹⁰⁰ I owe this point to ^{Professor} Satish Saberwal in reference to his comments on this thesis.

¹⁰¹ For instance the Chamars of Agra (Jatavs) who invented higher status origin myths. See Owen M. Lynch, op. cit., pp.70-16. Similarly the Mahars of Maharashtra and Satnamis of Chhatisgarh who also attempted to create myths to lay claim on higher status origin. See Rosalind O' Hanlon, op. cit., pp.137-149. See also S.Fuchs, *Rebellious Prophets - a Study of Messianic Movements in Indian Religions*, pp. 97-106.

¹⁰² Sanskritization is a process by which a 'low' Hindu Caste, or tribal, or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high frequently "twice-born" caste. See M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*. Criticizing Srinivas, Lynch says this process had never been successful with regard to the untouchables. See Lynch, op. cit., p.5.

CHAPTER III

THE CHRISTIAN MISSION AT WORK

A. The Beginnings

The villages of Ganj and Barsaun came under the influence of the Christian (Catholic) missionaries in the late 1930s.¹ The Mission² is still active in the region, an area of 200 square kilometers around Shahpur town. The Catholic Mission's first centre in the district of Bhojpur was at Piro, 48 kilometers southwest of Arah, established in 1936, by Father Henry Westropp (1876-1952), an American Jesuit missionary of the Patna Mission.³ In 1938 the Mission established a centre at Arah from where this pioneer missionary of Ganj began visiting villages far and near and baptized⁴ many people, particularly Ravidasis. The first baptism from Ganj was in January 1939, administered by Father Westropp. Thenceforth the hundreds of Ravidasis belonging to Ganj, Barsaun and surrounding villages were baptized by him

¹ Already since 1897 Protestant missionaries of the Methodist Episcopal Church, from their headquarters at Arah, had been active in the region. We have no evidence of their influence in the villages of this study. On the Methodist Mission see Bihar District Gazetteers (BDG), Shahabad, 1966, p.168, and BDG, Shahabad, 1924.

² The term 'Mission' means a) a ministry commissioned by a religious organisation to propagate its work or carry on humanitarian work, and, 2) a local Church or parish dependent on a larger religious organisation for direction or financial support.

³ Patna Mission, a Jesuit missionary enterprise since 1921, covered an area of central and north Bihar and the Kingdom of Nepal. The Catholic diocese of Patna, whose territory was the same, was entrusted to the Patna Jesuit Mission. See history below.

⁴ Baptism is an initiation sacramental rite in Christianity by which a believer becomes formally a member of a particular Church or denomination.

and his successors.⁵ Most of these conversions⁶ were induced by family and kin group affinities. Though there were conversions from Dusadh, Mehtar, Musahar, Dom, Sonar, Koer, Dabgar and a few from high castes (Brahmin), the vast majority were Ravidasis. Before we probe into the changes in the social, religious, cultural and economic life of the Ravidasis after they were converted, we must identify the objectives of the missionaries and the strategies and means employed by them. We shall attempt this in this chapter.

A.1 From Capuchins to Jesuits

The history of Patna Mission can be traced to a short-lived Jesuit mission (1620-1621) to the court of Muqurim Khan, Mughal Emperor Jahangir's Nawab at Patna. Converted a Catholic in 1611 while serving at Goa, Nawab Khan (christened John Muqurim Khan) invited Jesuit priests after the manner of Emperor Akbar.⁷ The Jesuits stationed at Chandernagar, Bengal, responded to Nawab Khan and sent in 1620, Father Simon Figuieredo to Patna.⁸

However the missionary confronted stiff opposition from the city's Muslim gentry. The first mission ended abruptly when Father Figuieredo left Patna following

⁵ A total of 449 baptisms were recorded for the area till 1947. See **Baptism Register**, St. Joseph's pro-Cathedral, Bankipore, Patna. Initial recording of baptisms were done here. Since 1937 the records for the area were kept at Catholic Mission, Arah. See also **Baptism Register**, Arah Catholic Mission, 1937ff and for baptisms since 1947 see **Baptism Register**, Shahpur Mission, Vol.I & II.

⁶ Conversion' and 'Baptism' are inter-changeably used to mean the same thing in this study. According to Church sources baptism is preceded by a period of preparation and instruction in Christianity. See discussion in Chapter IV.

⁷ The three Jesuit Missions from Goa to the court of the Mughals began in 1589. On the Jesuit Missions and their accomplishments see Edward Maclagan, *Jesuits & The Great Mogul*. See also Hosten's Collection of manuscripts on the topic indexed in XLIII volumes. Vol.XXII-XXVII and XL deal on Patna Mission. See also F. Vannini, *Tibet-Hindustan Mission*, p.88.

⁸ F. Vannini, op.cit., p.88-89.

a violent encounter with the local Muslims in which he was wounded and one of his disciples killed. The Nawab, on transfer, also left Patna in 1921 to settle down at Panipat, his native town.

The second Christian Mission to Patna was undertaken by Italian Franciscan (Capuchin) missionaries who, in response to the invitation of the Tibetan King of Lhasa, set up hospices en route at Patna, Bettiah in north Bihar and at Kathmandu, Nepal. Resident at Patna since 1709, Father Felix Montechio and his successors catered to the motley community of European Christian traders and soldiers besides Armenian Christians of Patna.⁹ The Capuchin Mission, organized under the Prefecture¹⁰ of Tibet-Hindustan Mission in 1707, covered the entire area of Hindustan and the kingdoms of Nepal and Tibet.¹¹

Already in Bettiah Father Joseph Mary, a well respected priest, had founded in 1745 the first local Christian community of Bihar.¹² The permission to found a Christian mission at Bettiah was obtained from Pope Benedict XIV by Raja Druva Singh of Bettiah Kingdom. By 1820s the locale of our study came under the Agra

⁹ Paul Dent, *A Brief History of Patna Mission*, p.4ff.

¹⁰ Church's dependent administrative unit for mission areas.

¹¹ For exhaustive exposition of the Tibetan Mission, See F. Vannini, *The Bell of Lhasa*. See also Anonymous, *Brief Account of the Capuchin Mission in Tibet*, p.19. After nearly forty years of mission work at Lhasa the missionaries were forced to give up their work in Tibet in 1745. A similar situation arose in Nepal, when members of the Nepali (Newar) Christian community were forced to give up their religion by the rulers. A group of 62 Newari Christians and the missionaries left Nepal in 1769 and were settled at village Chuhari, 10 kilometers north of Bettiah. This is the second oldest 'local' Christian community of Bihar.
See F. Vannini, *Christian Settlements in Nepal*, pp.107-136.

¹² The members of this community originally converted in kin groups from high and middle castes are known as 'Bettiah Christians'. op.cit., p.57.
See also F. Vannini, *Tibet-Hindustan Mission*, pp.33-34.

Mission of the Capuchins. In 1845, Patna was made a Vicariate¹³ comprising the kingdom of Nepal, Sikkim, Darjeeling, north and central Bihar and greater parts of Hindustan.¹⁴ In 1845 the Christian community of Patna Vicariate numbered 2700.¹⁵ In 1886 the Patna Mission area was made a part of the Allahabad diocese. The area of our study which is one of the 21 mission centres of Patna Mission was brought under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Patna diocese in 1919 and was entrusted to the care of American Jesuits of the Missouri Province in 1921.¹⁶

The Capuchin Mission emphasised the physical (geographical) and cultural isolation of the converts from their pre-conversion ambience so that they could be formed into 'pure' Christian communities. The Jesuits followed an 'open Church' policy and encouraged the converts to practise religion within their cultural ambience.¹⁷ They continued the spiritual ministries to the Christian community but with a demanding urgency for more 'returns' or 'results' by way of conversion of the "heathens". With 190 Religious personnel and lay Christian workers catering to over 6400 Catholics spread in 21 mission centres, the Jesuit missionary enterprise in the early 1920s seems to have established the foundations of two large Christian communities in Bihar, namely, the Santal Christians and the Depressed Classes Christians. Sliced further into a smaller ecclesiastical unit in 1980 Patna diocese now

¹³ Church's independent administrative unit for mission areas.

¹⁴ B.J. Pereira, *Historical Sketch of the Allahabad Diocese*, p.10.

¹⁵ The number mentioned in *Patna Mission Letter*, is 2000. *Patna Mission Letter* (PML), September-October, 1932, p.20. The PML, a bimonthly journal published by Patna Jesuits since 1922, contains information on Jesuit works in Bihar. The PML runs into scores of volumes which are available at Patna Jesuit Archives, Patna.

¹⁶ The Capuchin missionaries of Austrian decent working in India had been interned as enemy subjects during World War I, by the British government of India.

¹⁷ Popularly known as 'Mission Compound' system, the Capuchins encouraged converts to form Christian communities in the vicinity of a church. See Vannini, *Tibet-Hindustan Mission*, pp. 33-34.

comprises an area of 37,191.99 square kilometers spread in nine civil districts of central Bihar. The Shahpur Mission under which Ganj and Barsaun fall, is one of the 70-odd mission centres of Patna diocese where Christian worship is done either regularly or occasionally.

A.2 Mission to the Santals

Catholic missionaries were rather latecomers in the mission to the Santals, the largest tribal group, east central Bihar.¹⁸ However, within a decade's work something like a 'mass movement'¹⁹ was taking place among the Santals who converted to Christianity by the hundreds in mid-1930s. The Mission, handed over to the Jesuits of Patna in 1929, registered a 'return' of 21,240, converts during 1927-1938, an increase of 15,133 converts in a decade.²⁰ From their nearest outpost Bhagalpur, 115 Patna Mission workers were operating among the Santals in 1938 when the Mission was handed over to the Franciscans (Third Order Regular).²¹

¹⁸ Christian missionary work among the Santals began in 1860 by the Protestant (Church Missionary Society) missionaries. They were followed by other groups : the Scandinavian Lutheran Mission (1867), Wesleyan Mission (?), the American Methodist Episcopal Mission (1884) and the Catholic Missionaries (1927). See Pascual Oiz, *Blessed by the Lord, A History of Patna Jesuits (1921-1981)*, p.79.

¹⁹ 'Mass movement', a term coined by Protestant missionaries to mean mass conversion to Christianity which began in 1870s and lasted till the 1930s. Webster calls this a movement of the Dalits (most of the converts being from the Scheduled Caste communities) initiated by the dalits, not by the missionaries. See John C.B. Webster, *op.cit.*, Chapter 2, pp.33-76.

²⁰ Pascual Oiz's data on Santal converts seem to be a misprint. The number of converts during the above period, he says, was 21,240 from 1927-1928. Whereas, on p.83 he says, in one year (1929) a hundred Santals were baptized. The total number of converts-21, 240- was for a decade, not for one year.

²¹ The Santal Mission which was within the jurisdiction of Calcutta archdiocese had been entrusted to the Belgian Jesuits of Chotanagpur. In 1929, the Godda subdivision area was handed over to the Patna Mission. See Pascual Oiz, *op.cit.*, pp.82, 86, 88.

A.3 Mission to the Depressed Classes

From the beginning of the Patna Mission until 1936-37, mission work to the Depressed Classes was never high on the agenda of the missionaries in Patna. This is evident in their mission priorities set forth in the first missionary meeting in 1933. The priorities were: work among the Santals, establishing the Church among caste Hindus and Muslims, and training of younger missionaries.²² How, then, did the missionaries come to undertake mission work among the Harijans (Depressed Classes) of Bihar, or, more specifically, among the Ravidasis of central Bihar? Was it part of their response to the already growing awakening of the Depressed Classes in the 1930s? Were Patna missionaries a party to the response of the Protestant missionaries elsewhere in India to the mass movement by the Dalits?

Neither the contemporary literature nor opinions of contemporary missionaries alive today give any evidence of Patna's Catholic missionaries having any connection with the so-called mass movement elsewhere in India. I submit four circumstances that seem to have led them to become involved with the Depressed Classes of Bihar.

Apart from the insatiable 'zeal for souls' every foreign missionary of the time was fired with, there seems to have been a demand from the mission sponsors in America for greater "returns".²³ Impressed by the mass conversions of tribals in Chotanagpur both the Patna missionaries and their sponsors abroad asked: "How is

²² Pascual Oiz, *op.cit.*, p.100.

²³ 'Zeal for souls' : the missionary's legendary zeal for winning 'pagan' (non-Christians) to Christianity by baptism. 'Returns' is number of converts to Christianity.

it that you in Patna have so little to show in the way of conversions?"²⁴ Thus, the 'need' to show greater 'returns' seems to have been urging the missionaries to undertake work among the tribals and Harijans in the plains of Bihar.

Secondly, Patna's Catholic missionaries were also invited to respond to what may be called a 'religio-political movement' of the Depressed Classes led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. The Depressed Classes had been demanding separate electorates outside the Hindu fold. The 'Communal Award' of 1932, while identifying them as part of the Hindu fold did give separate electorates. Gandhi taking objection to this provision took to fast unto death until the provision was revoked. Thereby Ambedkar and Gandhi representing the Dalits and the Hindus respectively made a pact (the Poona Pact, 1932), whereby the former were given reservation in constituencies.²⁵ But there was opposition to the above arrangement from caste Hindus elsewhere.²⁶ The Dalits, confused and felt "betrayed", in an All-India Conference at Yeola, Maharashtra, on October 3, 1935, passed a resolution to leave the Hindu fold *en masse* and join any other religion which promised them equal treatment. There was a flurry of invitations from leaders of various religions to Ambedkar and his followers to convert to their respective religions. Among these

²⁴ The 'returns' in 1924 for Chotanagpur was 208,199, for Patna, just 699. Hence the concern. See also Pascual Oiz, *op.cit.*, p.81. It should be noted that the Chotanagpur Mission had been already 40 years old in the 1920s whereas, the Patna Mission had just begun work.

²⁵ Ravinder Kumar, *Gandhi, Ambedkar and the Poona Pact*, p.21. See also Trilok Nath, *Politics of the Depressed Classes*, Chapter V, pp.142-171.

²⁶ For instance, the All-parties Hindu Conference, Calcutta, the Bengal Council, condemned the Poona Pact. See *Depressed Classes Documentation (DCD)*, pp. 18-19, The DCD is a veritable documentation work containing newspaper and journal reports on the Depressed Classes in these years: 1931-1938.

were Buddhist, Sikh and Muslim leaders. Zelliott comments the "Christians were very cautious in their response".²⁷

To consider the Yeola resolution, the All India Depressed Classes Association organized an All-Religions Conference from May 22-24, 1936, at Lucknow in which speakers representing ten religious faiths were invited to present their respective manifestoes to the Dalits.²⁸ The final decision to leave Hinduism and convert to other religions was postponed to another meet in Patna the following year.

The Patna National Conference of the All-India Depressed Classes Association was held from April 9-11, 1937.²⁹ The local organizing Secretary, Babu Baldeo Pershad Jaiswar, had invited Patna's Catholic missionaries to present a manifesto to the Dalits as to what the Catholic Church had to offer to the Dalits. In response to this invitation, the Catholic missionaries had set up in 1936, a Committee headed by Father Michael D. Lyons.³⁰ The Catholic Committee did present what the Catholic Church held forth for the spiritual and material uplift of the Depressed Classes.³¹

²⁷ Eleanor M. Zelliott, *Dr. Ambedkar and the Mahar Movement*, pp.201-202, quoted in Webster, *op.cit.*, pp.20,109.

Except the Church Missionary Society (CMS), no Christian denomination responded to the Dalits by inviting them to convert to Christianity. See *Indian Annual Register (IAR)*, 1937, Vol.II, p.377. Also *IAR*, 1936, Vol.II, p.39. The All India Christian Conference Calcutta, 1937, condemned the CMS move, *Ibid.*, 1937, Vol.II, p.377.

²⁸ *IAR*, 1936, Vol.I, p.20, But for complete details of the conference see *DCD*, pp.76-87. Two Patna Jesuit priests Father James Creane and Father Michael D. Lyons had attended the Lucknow conference, see *PML*, Aug-Sept. 1936. No.8-9, p.78. See also *DCD*, Vol. p.368.

²⁹ Surprisingly there is no mention of this conference in *IAR* of that year. but see *DCD*, *op.cit.*, pp.367-372.

³⁰ See "A Report of the Catholic Diocesan Committee of Patna on Its connections with the All-India Depressed Classes Movement" and the "Second Portion of the II Report to the Patna Diocesan Committee to Impart Religious Instruction to the Depressed Classes" by Michael D. Lyons, dated April 16, 1937. Both reports in Patna Jesuit Archives.

³¹ To the Dalit leaders' question, "What will the Catholic Church do for us?", the Patna Catholic Committee gave the following answer:

a) "*Spiritually* we spread the message of Jesus Christ, and of Him crucified, and consequently those who accept this religion of Christ must expect trials and hardships

The Patna Conference, however, did not move any resolution on conversion due to caste Hindu opposition.³² Before being presented to the Depressed Classes Conference, the Catholic Committee manifesto had been widely circulated in many dioceses of North India. Such religio-political events might have created interest among Patna Catholic missionaries to work among the Harijans.

Fourthly, the Ravidasis of Patna and elsewhere themselves seem to have invited the missionaries for imparting religious instruction and conferring baptism. Already by 1930 there were a few Ravidasi converts in Nawada district, Gulni Mission.³³ Besides, the American Methodist Mission had converted nearly 9000 Ravidasis in Shahabad district.³⁴ Due to scarcity of personnel and financial resources they had neglected their on-going care of the converts who, in turn, tried to contact the Catholic missionaries to baptize their respective families in rural Shahabad.³⁵ Thus responding to the individual requests of individual converts and snatching at the opportunity of 'recovering' the Baptist converts in Shahabad district,

-
- b) on account of their religion.
"materially we are bound in by Christian charity to help our needy brethren and we shall comply with this obligation whoever and wherever we can. We point to the magnificent record of the Church throughout the world for so many centuries in lifting those who have become her children, teaching them to help themselves, and to help one another."

³² See newspaper reports on the conference : *The Searchlight*, April 13, 1937. A decade later on March 2, 1947, the Christian convert masters (school teachers) of Shahpur Mission had attended a meeting of the district Depressed Classes conference, at Koilwar, west of Arah. The meeting took note of the increasing conversion of Harijans into Christianity but did not pass any negative resolution against conversion. See *Daily Chronicles*, Shahpur Mission, Vol. I, Jan 1947-April 1959, March 2, 1947.

³³ K.N. Sahay, op.cit., pp.76-77. See also Paul Dent, *Patna Mission History*, Vol.I, pp.159ff.

³⁴ On Christian conversions in Shahpur see M.K. Gandhi, *Christian Missions, Their Place in India*, pp.63-66. The Methodist Episcopal Mission was established at Arah in 1897, but BDG, Shahabad, 1966, says they began work in 1900, p.168.

³⁵ D. Rasquinha, *A Theological Interpretation of the Religious Quest of the Dalit Christians of the Patna Church*, p.77.

the Catholic missionaries began to work among the Ravidasis of central Bihar.³⁶ Such circumstances presented by historical contexts seem to have triggered the Mission to work for the Depressed Classes in central Bihar.

B. Christian Mission at Work : Strategies and Methods

B.1 Mission Policy

The most significant biblical injunction a missionary keeps to heart is the gospel passage which says "go to the whole world and preach the Good News and make them disciples."³⁷ The missionaries not only seem to have taken this seriously but also believed that they were bound by and destined to mediate a divine plan by 'being sent'.³⁸ Not less momentous in its import seems to have been the directive of the Jesuit Superior General Father Ledochowski to the American Jesuit missionaries going to India. The directive, in a letter addressed to missionaries going to Patna, was "...a remarkable guide, a blueprint of the work to be done and the practical manner of doing it".³⁹ Among the many instructions were, the need to acquire adequate knowledge of the place, the people and languages and to have friendly dialogue with the Indians. "Beware of replacing Indian customs and thinking

³⁶ In early 1936, 30 Hindu and 74 Protestant Ravidasis were baptized in Shahabad district. See also P.Dent, *Patna Mission History*, pp.160-161. Contemporary literature especially PML reveals that the Catholic missionaries were wary of the mass conversion of Dalits into Christianity, saying that it would even "cheapen" their religion. Others argued that, although the Dalits were approaching them with mixed motives, they needed to be "saved". C.P.Miller, "As The Missionary Sees Them", in PML, Sept 1936, pp.87-92. Also N.J. Pollard, "Whither Outcaste India?" in PML, Aug-Sept, 1936, pp.75-76.

³⁷ Mathew's Gospel, 28:18.

³⁸ A missionary is a person 'being sent': literal meaning. See also Shyamlal, *Tribals and Christian Missionaries*, p.69.

³⁹ Pascual Oiz, op.cit., p.13-15.

as Americans think and act. Preserve rather than change religious usages, as it is proper. Impart to the people a solid formation of Christian life..."^{39a} The policies and strategies followed by the Catholic missionaries in the subsequent years seem to have been greatly shaped by the above directives.

Various methods were used by the missionaries to 'preach the gospel'. We shall study the salient ones with reference to understanding how the Ravidasis in the two locales of our study got converted and how some of the social structures of the Ravidasi society got transformed under the missionary impact.

B.2 Preaching the Gospel

Direct preaching of the gospel seems to have been the first and foremost among the means used by the Catholic missionaries of Shahpur. From his headquarters at Arah, Shahpur Mission's pioneer missionary, Father Westropp began occasional visits and preaching at Ganj (28 kilometers west of Arah) in 1936. This practice was continued by his first successor and first resident missionary of Shahpur, Father Nicholas Pollard, and the later missionaries. We have on record how a missionary preached in the 1930s. Travelling on a bicycle laden with a bag filled with some food and the requirements for holy Mass (Christian *Puja*) the '*gora padri*' (the White priest) in his cassock (priest's dress) and topi, would trudge up his way into a village and ask: "Where are the low caste people?" "I seek them out at once because those belonging to a high caste will seldom sacrifice their family pride for

^{39a} Ibid.

a 'cheap foreign religion'.⁴⁰ In the words of Father Lyons the more experienced of the village intelligentsia sadly would remark to their less wise neighbours that the shameless sahib was going to give the outcastes a few rupees and make them members of his foreign religion : "Of course, after baptism I do help the poor,⁴¹ the poorest you can imagine."⁴²

Let us follow the missionary in his trail.

'Become Christians?' he would ask. 'We'll become Christians,' they respond and add, 'And when we do become Christians you will fight our law cases for us, dig us a well, and build a school for our children, won't you?' So many of these poor people will accept baptism for the sake of material advantages, yet continue to worship their Hindu gods and fairies and devils as before... So I say, 'My dear brothers,⁴³ I am not out to deceive you. I am not promising you wells or schools, although I might send one or two of your brighter children to our boarding school. I promise nothing. I would like to help you, but my principal work is the spiritual good of your immortal souls. So many people need spiritual ministrations and sacraments, that I must not allow myself to be implicated in worldly matters. If you want to get to heaven, say so, and we'll talk; if not, please do not waste my time, for there are many souls to save. Far from helping you all the time I expect you to feed me as your religious teacher.'⁴⁴

⁴⁰ M.D. Lyons, PML, Aug-Sept, 1936, p.79.

However, many of my informants said Father Pollard would stop at any passerby and would lead a friendly chat with him. The high caste interviewees at Ganj had many an incident relating to Father Pollard and their association with him. But my Harijan convert respondents tell another story. According to them Father Pollard's first experience with the high castes was *nirasha* (hopelessness). The latter told him, "You are misleading the people. Don't touch the Harijans. Go away from here." Father Pollard went over to Patna, in despair, but came back to Ganj after consulting the Bishop who told him to stick on (see chapter IV).

⁴¹ This researcher was told that in early times some missionary gave money as a reward and inducement for baptisms. Some of my own aged Ravidasi convert respondents, however, deny they were given any money. Nevertheless some of them acknowledged that they did receive a small sum as inducement to attend the mission school.

⁴² M.D.Lyons, op.cit.

⁴³ The audience in a typical village meet would be all male. The meeting would be under a tree or in a common hall. In both cases women would only stand a little away from men's section.

⁴⁴ M.D. Lyons, op.cit.

Though not adept at the local tongue (Bhojpuri) the missionary would get across the message of the gospel with the help of a catechist.⁴⁵ The final appeal invariably would be to embrace Christianity by receiving baptism. If the listeners were ready and willing they would be baptized either in the village or in the church. The visit would conclude with Mass or prayer service. Often the missionary would pay a visit to the sick members of the community, pray over them and administer some medicines, the essential ones of which he would always carry during pastoral visits.

The preaching and prayer service were open to all. Though the venue of the discourse was the Harijan *tola*, occasionally some upper castes also would listen to the missionary.⁴⁶ Even as late as 1986, this researcher was told, many Bhumihars of Barsaun used to listen to the *pravachan* (discourse) by the priest.⁴⁷ Unlike some of the protestant missionaries the Catholic missionaries in Shahpur did not preach to market-crowds, road-side gatherings or at melas.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ A catechist is a paid, appointed local preacher cum teacher in a village mission school. He would go before the priest into a village, announce the priest's coming, prepare the people and help the priest in his pastoral visits. The first catechist who instructed and resided at Ganj, was Mr. Blacius, a 'Bettiah Christian'.

⁴⁶ *Historia Domus*, Shahpur Mission, 1964. These as well as *Litterae Annuae* are annual house histories of reports sent from Jesuit mission centres to their headquarters. Those baptized included both infants and adults whose age ranged from three to 60 years respectively.

⁴⁷ Interview with Jawaharlal Baptist, Barsaun.

⁴⁸ S. Manickam, *The social Setting of Christian Conversion in India*, p.116. On Catholic method of preaching : First the head catechist of the mission is sent to a village, usually the *Chamtoli* (Chamar colony), to inform about the coming of the priest to their village for instruction on Christian religion. Then the priest along with the catechist goes to the village, meets the villagers in the evening and gives them instruction on Christian religion. The priest also tells them about the goodness of Christianity and the benefits, both spiritual and material, that would accrue to them if they received baptism. The willing candidates are baptized. Sometimes the priest baptizes after several rounds of instruction by the catechists. Local catechists are appointed to further instruction. There would be several catechists under a mission station. They were paid by the mission either in cash or kind. After baptism eligible children are admitted to mission school and hostel. See Jose Kalapura, *Church's Mission in Patna*, p.13.

The response of Ravidasis in Ganj to the preaching seems to have been very positive in the early days (see Table 3.1 Chart No.1) but for the anti-conversion work of Arya Samajists. One of the convert respondents said,

Those days, the Arya Samajists used to come and check into the houses of Harijans and force *shuddhi* rite on us converts. I escaped because noticing the *swastika* sign on the main door of my house they inferred that my family was still Hindu and actually I overheard them from inside my hiding.⁴⁹

In Barsaun, there seems to have been a sudden euphoria over the prospects of becoming Christians. (See, for instance, the sudden spurt of baptisms in 1951 : Table 3.2, Chart No.2 and Appendix-2). Then there was slow response until the famine relief period (1967-68). The furtherance in baptism in the village in the 1980s (1984-86) seems to have been because of increased evangelisation and renewal work by the then parish priest, Father Jose Perumalil.

⁴⁹ Interview with Ramadhar Lucas, Ganj. On Christian conversions, the Harijan Sevak Sangh had made a report on Shahabad district. Gandhi himself had visited Shahpur, Belauti village, 4 kilometers from Shahpur town in 1937, and wrote a comment on the conversions. He notes that first the Catholic converts were from Protestant groups, and from the "Ravidas (Chamar) community", See M.K. Gandhi, op.cit., pp.63-66.

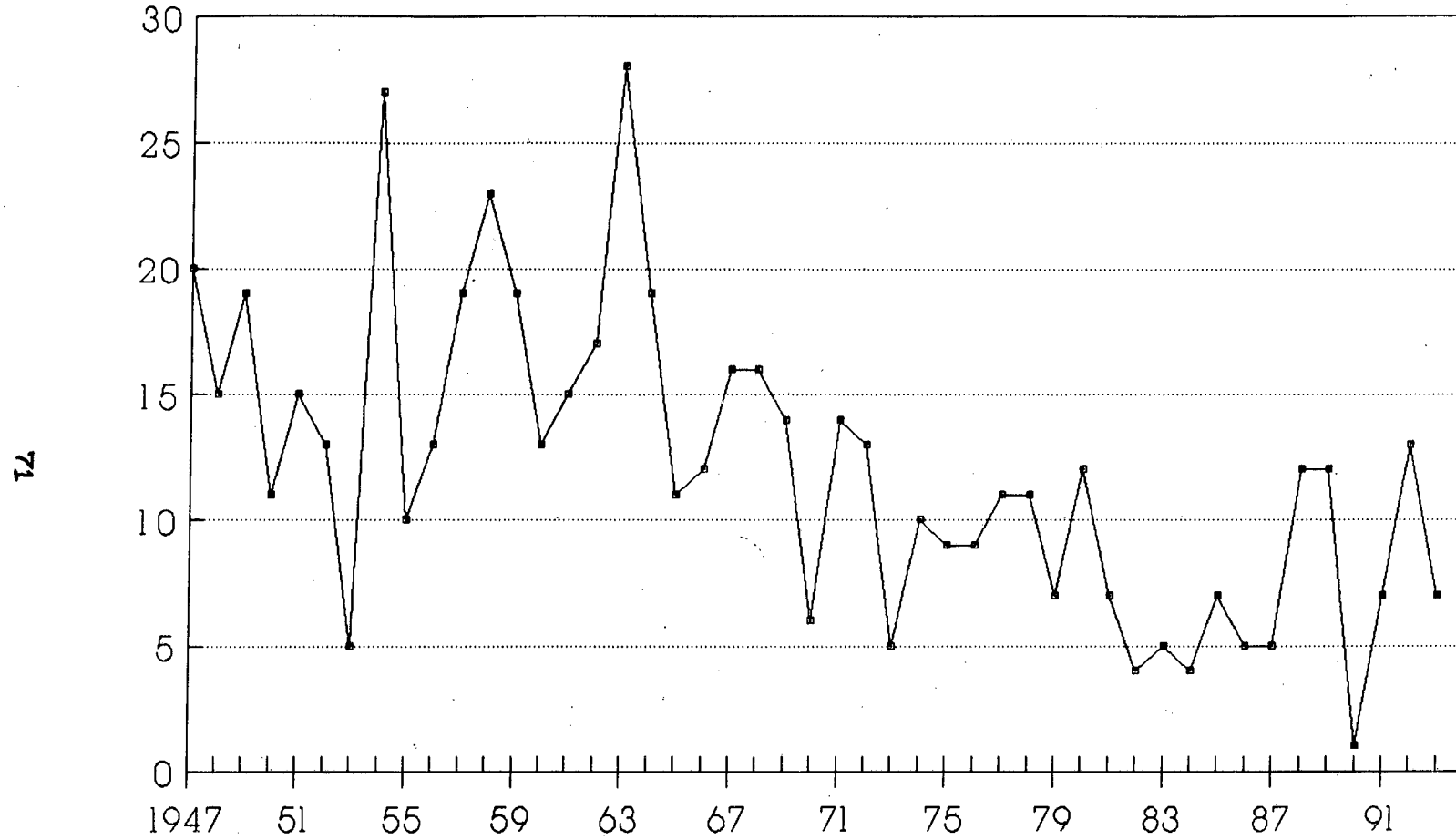
On Arya Samaj's counter-conversion or re-conversion (*shuddhi*) work see IAR, 1936, Vol. I, p.316.

The All-India Hindu Maha Sabha (18th session Lahore, October 1921-1923) in its 1936, session stated that a person can be converted to Hinduism, the contention being that a Hindu is born, not adopted (see IAR, 1936, vol. II, p.258).

The Bihar Provincial Hindu Conference March 29-30, 1939) expressed concern over the increasing conversions among the Depressed Classes of Bihar. The conference resolved to enhance the *shuddhi* movement. (See IAR, 1936, Vol. p.316)

On *shuddhi* movement in Shahpur one of my informants P.Sakhichand said the entire Harijans in Rudernagar, a neighbouring village, had converted to Christianity. But during 1940-50 all of them went back to Hinduism due to the *shuddhi* movement by Arya Samajists. Later some of them again came back to Christianity due to Father Pollard's efforts. The baptisms recorded confirm the conversions in Rudernagar.

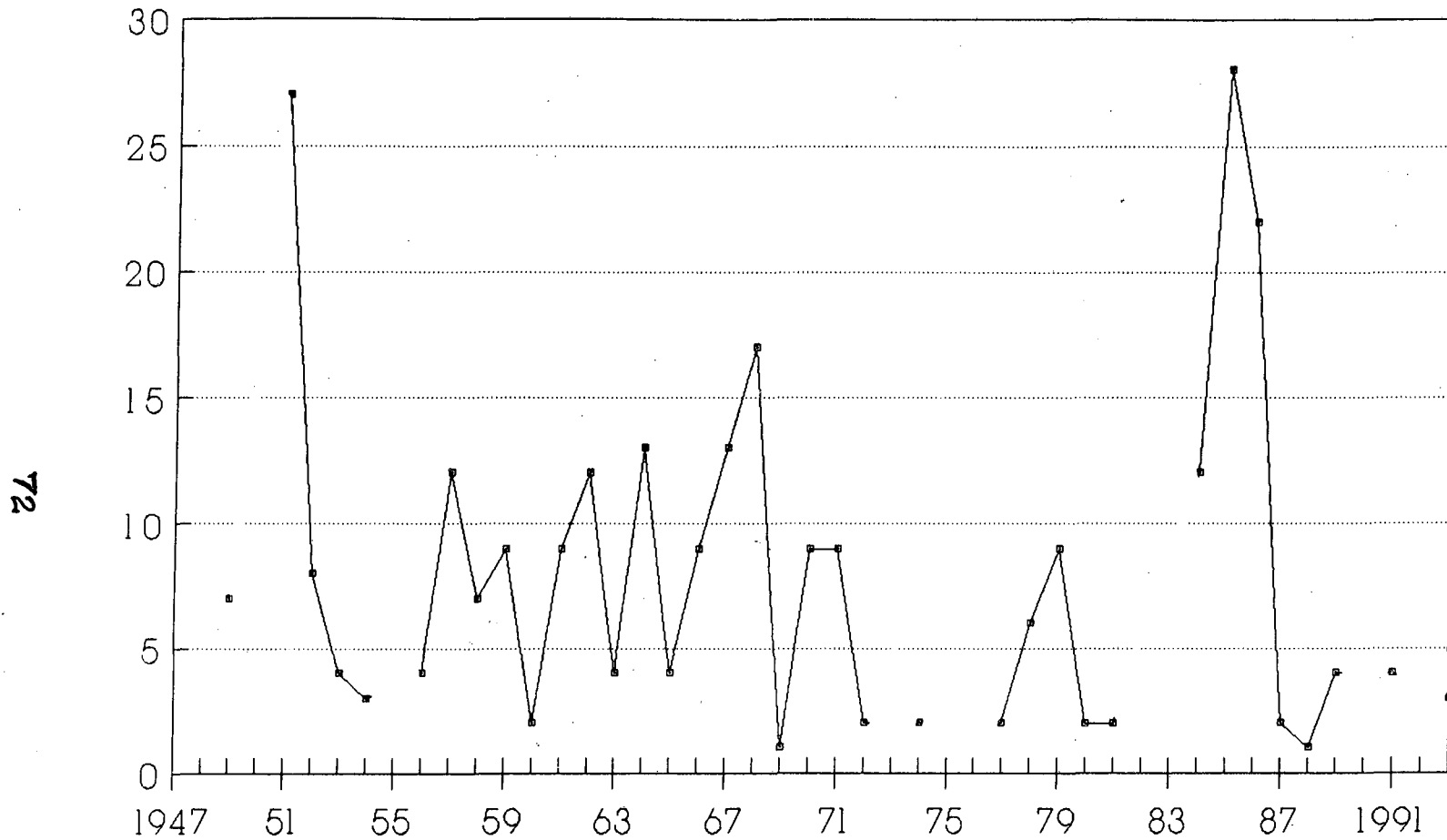
Chart No.1 Conversion Pattern in Ganj



Sources:

1. Baptism Register, Shahpur Mission, Vol.I and II.
2. Village Family Register, Shahpur Mission, Vols.xxix.

Chart No.2 Conversion Pattern in Barsaun



Sources:

1. Baptism Register, Shahpur Mission, Vol.I and II.
2. Village Family Register, Shahpur Mission, Vols.xxix

Table 3.1
Data on Baptisms in Ganj

Decade	1931-40	1941-50	1951-60	1961-70	1971-80	1981-90	1991-	Total
Baptisms	139	173	163	160	104	65	16	820

NB : From the baptism totals deduct five percent to rectify errors from double entry.

Sources :

- (1) **Baptism Register**, Arah Catholic Mission, 1937 with a copy of the baptisms of Shahabad district registered in the **Baptism Register**, St. Joseph's pro-Cathedral Bankipore, Patna.
- (2) **Baptism Register**, Shahpur Mission, Vol.I (1941-1968).
- (3) **Baptism Register**, Shahpur Mission, Vol.II (1968ff).
- (4) **Village Family Register**, on Ganj, Shahpur Mission.

Table 3.2
Data on Baptisms in Barsaun

Decade	1931-40	1941-50	1951-60	1961-70	1971-80	1981-90	1991-	Total
Baptisms	3	11	93	91	46	77	4	325

NB : From the baptism totals deduct five percent to rectify errors from double entry.

Sources :

- (1) **Baptism Register**, Arah Catholic Mission, 1937ff with a copy of the baptisms of Shahabad district registered in the **Baptism Register**, St. Joseph's pro-Cathedral Bankipore, Patna.
- (2) **Baptism Register**, Shahpur Mission, Vol.I.
- (3) *Ibid.*, Vol.II.
- (4) **Village Family Register** on Barsaun, Shahpur Mission.

Preaching and visiting always went hand in hand. A Catholic missionary did not seem to have visited a village only for preaching. Some visits were exploratory, for instance, in a period of four years (1934-38) Father Westropp had toured one

third of the district and had 200 villages in his visiting list.⁵⁰ It could be as well to console the sick or settle disputes. In one instance, Father Pollard mediated to settle a dispute⁵¹ between the Ravidasis and landlords in Barsaun (see Chapter IV).

The older Christian village of the two, Ganj, had missionaries making regular visits and preaching from 1936 to 1947. From 1947-1951, Father Pollard, residing at Ganj, had been visiting several villages around. In Barsaun, on the other hand, except for visits to confer baptisms as (recorded in Baptism Registers) regular visits began only after 1947.

Father Pollard, a Canadian Jesuit missionary of Patna Mission (1905-1984) was a man on the move. From his base at Ganj he made 105 visits to 25 villages in one year - 1947 (see Appendix-4).⁵² Considering the locations of these villages at distances ranging from two to twenty three kilometers from Shahpur and the *kutch*a conditions of the village roads, Father Pollard's forays seem to have been herculian.

For the converts in these villages the advent of their spiritual *guru*, apparently, was a rare honour as my informants said : "Formerly the *pandits* used to come to do puja at our asking and would demand undue *dakshina* (grain or cash

⁵⁰ Pascual Oiz, op.cit., p.122.

⁵¹ A number of instances of settling disputes either between convert families or converts and non-convert Ravidasis have been recorded in the **Daily Chronicles**, Shahpur Mission, Vol.I, II & III. The disputes could be on litigation between Ravidasis and high caste landlords, or, even among high castes themselves.

Note on **Daily Chronicles**: The Jesuit Missions kept daily record of events in the mission. Besides mention of mission work, particularly on baptisms, humanitarian works, etc., major political, social and natural calamities like floods, famine and even riots have been recorded.

⁵² **Daily Chronicles**, Shahpur Mission, Vol.I, (1947-1959).

remuneration for priestly service). But our fathers come on their own and do not make any demands".⁵³

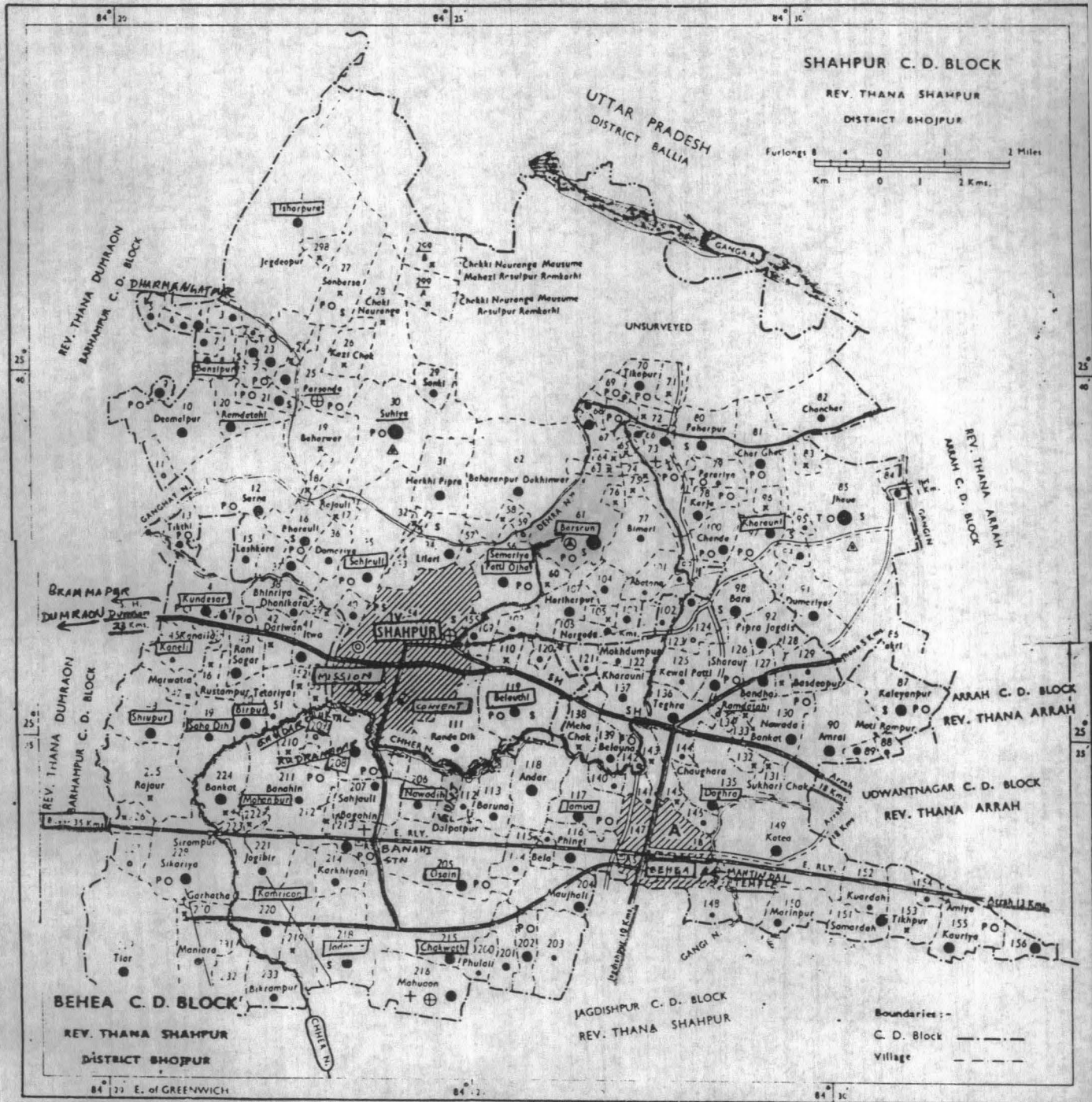
An energetic missionary, Father Pollard seems to have had cordial relations not only with the Christian converts but also people of other religions and government officials. A "popular figure" in Bhojpur district, the missionary was always on the move, on his cycle and, later, on a Hurley Davidson motorbike (the vehicle which earned him the name "Father Pilot" in local parlance). He seems to have been held in great respect by people of all castes and religions as was evident from their gathering at Shahpur on his golden jubilee (of being a Jesuit), to mourn his death in 1984 and also to commemorate the tenth anniversary of his death in January 1994 at which function this researcher also happened to be present. The village *malik* (headman) of Ganj Vinay Kumar Chaudhary, a bania landlord, proudly claimed that Father Pollard had stayed at his place for a brief period before he moved over to the Harijan *tola*.⁵⁴ After 44 years of contact with Ganj, Barsaun and 78 other villages in Shahpur Mission area (see Map-1), of which 28 years (1947-1974) were spent as priest-in-charge, Father Pollard was transferred to Chuhari Mission in north Bihar.

⁵³ Interview with Thomas Prasad, Ganj.

It is worth nothing the way a Catholic priest was considered by the converts who belonged to a Hindu culture. "He (the priest) is our new *jajman*", one person told me (See Chapter IV, C.3).

⁵⁴ Interview with Vinay Kumar Chaudhary, Ganj.

MAP No.1



Source : District Census Handbook, Bhojpur District,
Census of India 1981, Series -4 Bihar, Parts XIII A & B.

B.3 Education Service

In the scheme of organized missionary activity, education, after preaching, has been the key missionary work. Schools were looked upon as 'preparation for the gospel'. The Mission school was the means by which the gospel was preached to the young.⁵⁵ It was the main exhibition of "practical Christianity" and the "chief link" that bound the people to the missionary and the ambient, wider Hindu community.⁵⁶

The very first project Father Pollard undertook after he began to reside at Ganj was starting a village primary school there. Although there had been a government primary school at Ganj since the early 1930s, few Harijans attended it. Kewal Bihari Peter, one of my informants, told me that he began to attend the government-run primary school soon after his baptism in 1941.

It was not that we Harijans were debarred from attending schools. But the *barka* people (high castes) used to keep untouchability. They used to jeer at us Harijans, saying we were becoming audacious. The school master used to ignore us by not asking us questions. If I answered a question correctly due credit was not given. We Harijans were to sit at a separate bench at the rear side of the class room. Things were pretty hard for us in those days to attend school.⁵⁷

The Catholic village primary school, located in Pollard's two-room mud-house residence, right in the Chamar *tola*, was open to all castes. But due to social distance of purity-pollution the high castes initially did not attend it. The school still exists there now in a *pucca*, one-story, brick-walled, concrete roofed building, with some

⁵⁵ Formerly missionaries believed that education could illuminate the individual's mind which, in turn, would arouse conviction in the truth of the gospel. It was hoped that education would lead to conversion. See Shyamlal, *op.cit.*, p.76.

⁵⁶ S. Manickam, *op.cit.*, p.121.

⁵⁷ Interview with Kewal Bihari Peter, Ganj.

60 students reading from pre-primary to class IV. The students belong largely to Harijan castes, middle castes and the Muslim community. The former school master, a Bettiah Christian (higher caste Christians from Bettiah) has been replaced by a catechist-teacher belonging to Ravidasi community.

In Barsaun, too, a primary school was opened in the Harijan *tola* in early 1950s, but ceased to function in the 1980s due to litigation over the property on which the *pucca* school building stood.⁵⁸

The Shahpur Catholic Mission, for some years, had been running eight such village primary schools, besides the main primary and middle school, the Nirmala Shiksha Bhawan (NSB), founded in 1965 at Shahpur Mission compound. The mission schools were open to the public. But the converts, particularly, were encouraged, persuaded and often cajoled into sending their wards to schools.⁵⁹ Worthy students were admitted in the two hostels, one for boys and another for girls, both of which were started in the Mission compound in 1965 (see Table 3.3). Eligible students were sent to various Catholic high schools, colleges, technical or training institutes with the financial support of the Mission (See Table 3.4 & 3.5).⁶⁰ Many students from Ganj and Barsaun were sent to Arah Catholic High School, established in 1951, Patna Mission's premier high school for educating selected Harijan converts. Many of the employed converts and former students of this school told me that the

⁵⁸ Interview with Lakhon Lucas, Barsaun.

⁵⁹ It was said that in early years Father Pollard used to go from house to house and persuade the Harijan parents to send their wards, including girl children, to school.

⁶⁰ Till 1939, when a residential school was built at Arah, promising Christian boys from Shahabad district were sent to Crowning Middle School, Old Patna Cathedral, Patna City (old), seven kilometers east of modern Patna. See *Daily Chronicles*, Arah Catholic Mission, Vol. I, 1936-1967.

education in this school was the key factor in their getting blue or white-collar jobs⁶¹ (see Appendix-3).

Table 3.3

Data on Education Sponsoring : Hostel Accommodation

Five Year Period	1965-70	1970-75	1975-80	1980-85	1985-90	Total
Boys	25	50	60	70	60	265
Girls	30	60	70	60	55	275

Sources :

- (1) *Historia Domus*, Shahpur Mission, 1951ff.
- (2) **Scholarship Fund Files**, Shahpur Mission.

Table 3.4

Data on Education Sponsorship : Fees
(Average number of students helped per year since 1976)

Primary & Middle School	High School	College/ Technical	Annual Average
130	32	25	187

NB : Prior to 1976 (from c 1947) on an average 40 students studied in 8 village primary schools free of cost and on an average 120 students in Nirmala Shiksha Bhawan from 1964-1976.

Sources :

- (1) *Historia Domus*, Shahpur Mission, 1951ff.
- (2) **Scholarship Fund Files**, Shahpur Mission.
- (3) **Nirmala Shiksha Bhawan Registers**, 1964ff.

⁶¹ Arah Catholic School, established by Father Westropp and developed by Father Frank Welzmilller, began in a modest way in 1939 in a one-room chapel cum presbytery cum classroom building. The school upgraded into a high school in 1951, with its hostel for Christian boys was termed the 'Doon School' for Catholic (Harijan) students. Interview with Father Apoline D'Costa, 80, first principal.

Table 3.5

Data on Education Sponsoring : Mission Institutions

[A] School

Primary	Middle	High
1. Village Mission School (8)	Nirmala Shiksha Bhawan, Shahpur.	Catholic High School, Arah.
2. Nirmala Shiksha Bhawan, Shahpur	St. Mary's Middle School, Buxar, Bhojpur dt.	St. Joseph's H.S., Barh, Patna dt. St. Joseph's H.S., Dumraon, Bhojpur dt.

[B] College/technical/training

1.	St. Joseph's Inter-college, Barh, Patna dt.
2.	St. Xavier's College, Ranchi, Ranchi dt.
3.	Patna Women's College, Patna.
4.	Loesch Memorial Technical School, Patna.
5.	St. Treasa's Teacher Training Institute, Bettiah, Champaran dt.
6.	Holy Cross Teacher Training Institute, Hazaribagh, Hazaribagh dt.

NB : Many Christian students studied in government educational institutions

Sources :

- (1) *Historia Domus*, Shahpur Mission, 1951ff.
- (2) **Scholarship Fund Files**, Shahpur Mission.

It seems that it was the Mission's education policy to engage only Christian masters in its village primary schools.⁶² "They were not the most qualified of the teachers around," admitted Father Alfred Poovattil, former parish priest of Shahpur. "You could not expect wonders from the recently converted teachers who were from the lowest strata of society, and who did not have a culture of literacy." One of the reasons why the upper castes did not send their wards to mission village schools was

⁶² There were many non-Christian masters and students in other mission schools.

that the masters were converted 'untouchables'.⁶³ "But now the situation has changed. The majority of the educated people in Ganj belong to the Ravidasi Christian community. We go to some of their graduates for tuitions", Harendra Chaudhary said.⁶⁴

It was noted that Ravidasi students from such a non-literate cultural background have done relatively well academically in school. The Arah Catholic High School records point to this fact. With students belonging to all castes and creeds, particularly of the Ravidasi community, the school today is termed as one of the best in the district.

Schools proved to be very useful, it seems, for the mission in two directions: first of all they won entrance into and ensured links with the village and helped maintain friendly relationship with the wider social ambience. Secondly, the village schools became feeder schools for the mission schools in towns.

The education given to the children in mission schools was of two types: secular and religious. The secular education based on the government-prescribed syllabi, was common to all schools. Religious education, usually absent in government-run schools, was a must for mission schools. The school day started with a prayer and the national anthem. In hostels, the inmates (only Christian children were admitted to Shahpur hostels) had morning and evening prayers, recitation of the holy rosary and attendance at Mass in the Church. These daily exercises seem to have had a very 'christianizing' impact on the relatively new Christian initiates. One of the alumni of the hostel recalled: "Hostel life enabled us to gain much knowledge

⁶³ Interview with Father Alfred Poovattil, former parish priest, Shahpur.

⁶⁴ Interview with Harendra Kumar Chaudhary, Ganj.

about religion. Besides, the grounding in discipline helped me in later years. I myself am a school teacher in a city English medium school."⁶⁵

Apart from academic enrichment and character formation, the Mission's schools in Shahpur seem to have performed a 'levelling' function in the local Hindu society. Distinction of caste was not recognized, nor discrimination based on caste ever permitted, in the school. The schools were open to all castes and creeds. The students who belonged to various castes and religions had to sit side by side on the same benches. The mission schools did not provide separate benches for 'low caste' students. Any case of discrimination based on caste was firmly dealt with by the authorities. Despite objection from some high caste parents, the Mission's strict policy on caste seems to have created a perceptibly distinct social space consisting of students belonging to diverse and often mutually antagonistic castes (see Chapter II, footnote 95 and footnote 65 above).

Mission schools also seem to have provided an impetus to female education. Branded as village *chamayin* (mid-wives), whose occupation was very polluting in Hindu psyche. "Ravidasi women could not have ever thought of attending schools in Ganj fifty years ago."⁶⁶ Today a large number of Ravidasi girl students study in various mission schools and some are trained and employed as teachers in schools (see Table 3.3 on number of girl students in hostel. The table shows a greater number of girl students in hostel) "...because in the present village conditions, even today, it is more difficult for girls to attend school. Our society is not prepared to send girls outside the home."⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Interview with Vijayanand Prasad, Shahpur.

⁶⁶ Interview with Mahadev Michael, Barsaun.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

The Mission encouraged female education at all levels and sponsored their education at residential girls' high schools, colleges, technical and teacher training institutes outside Shahpur, in such places as Barh, Patna district, Buxar and Dumraon in Bhojpur district, Hazaribagh, Bettiah and at Patna (see Table 3.5).

One of the values consciously inculcated among the inmates of mission hostels was cleanliness, both personal and of the living space. The insistence on daily bathing (even in winter season), and on wearing clean clothes both at school and at Church service, seems to have fostered a culture of cleanliness hitherto lacking among the Ravidasi community. The hostelites were to do the cleaning of the Church and hostel premises daily, clean their own toilets and bathrooms. One of my informants, a Hindu Yadav worker in the Mission, said, "These were dirty Chamars till 'yesterday'. Today, they wear the cleanest clothes in the village Harijan *tola*."⁶⁸

The Mission at Shahpur seems to have had some difficulties in education work. First of all providing a minimum infrastructure such as land, building, and so on, was not easy.⁶⁹ The amiable approach of the pioneer missionaries seems to have eased the apprehension and prejudices of the villagers. It should be noted that 50 years ago none of the Ravidasis in Ganj of Barsaun owned any land.⁷⁰ Gradually the Mission managed to acquire land enough to put up small village school buildings in these two villages as well as in six other villages. Some of these schools were

⁶⁸ Interview with Sudhanshu Yadav, Shahpur. "Cleanliness is next to holiness", a Christian dictum seemed to have created a value of cleanliness among the Ravidasis of Ganj and Barsaun.

⁶⁹ Interview with Father John J. Kenealy, former parish priest, Shahpur.

⁷⁰ Interview with Vinay Kumar Chaudhary village headman, Ganj.

wound up in the 1970s due to misappropriation of the Mission's help by some converts themselves.⁷¹

A more formidable hindrance was the extreme poverty of the converted Harijans. Poverty hindered in two ways: the parents who lived from hand to mouth were often disinclined to send their children to school when their earnings, especially in a busy harvest season, might be of help to the family. The Harijan labourers of Ganj and Barsaun used to go to far away harvest fields in Piro block, south of Behea, for earning livelihood. This meant leaving children at home to manage the house in the absence of working parents. On the other hand, the children had to be sent to school often half-starved.

Another hurdle was from the village *maliks* (landlord masters) who objected to the children of some of their *pauni* (service-tenants) going to school.⁷² "How come the *pauni*'s children are going to school?" some *maliks* used to ask. "Re, send you son to my field. Re, who will graze the cattle?" My *malik* used to jeer at us.⁷³ In one instance, the Rajput *maliks* of Rudernagar, a village in the vicinity of Ganj, forced the Ravidasis to send their children to government school, and not to the Mission school. The mission school in that village was forced to close down.⁷⁴

There were further hindrances. The Ravidasi students themselves were not often inclined to study, partly due to the poor situation at home and partly due to

⁷¹ *Historia Domus*, Shahpur Mission, 1974.

⁷² We have already seen in Chapter II, C.4.

⁷³ The high caste people (*barka jat*) always addressed the 'low' caste people (*chotka jat*) pejorative terms such as above. Interview with Akhileshwar Joseph, Ganj.

⁷⁴ This school was closed down in November, 1947. *Daily Chronicles*, Shahpur Mission, Vol.I, Jan 1947-April, 1956.

their lack of perception of the utility and value of education. Examples of mission-sponsored students running away from hostels have been narrated to this researcher. Baban Prasad of Ganj, 45, an accountant in a firm in Calcutta, told me he was one such run-away student from Arah Catholic School. He said,

On hearing that I came away from Arah hostel, Father Pollard came to my house and told me to get back to Arah High School. He immediately put me back in the hostel. Had I not been taken back to school and hostel, perhaps, I would not have reached this position in life.⁷⁵

A further difficulty, a more serious one, in recent years was the hurdle caused by government discrimination to Christians of Scheduled Caste origin. One informant said,

Some of us were studying at Shahpur government high school. On knowing that we were Christians, the headmaster, a brahmin, threatened to suspend us unless we paid the fees saying we were not Scheduled Castes, and therefore not to benefit from the stipend meant for Scheduled Caste students. Just because we have believed in another religion our caste has not changed. We consulted the father-in-charge (Father Kenealy). The question was whether to reveal our identity as Christians. The Father said, 'Use your discretion. Under no circumstances lose your faith'.⁷⁶

It was against these adverse conditions that the Ravidasis of Ganj and Barsaun accomplished what little they have in education. But the future does not seem to look better, as neither the mission is able to support education of an increasing number of students nor the government is willing to stop discrimination based on religion. It is not surprising that of late almost 50% of these converts have decided to 'revert'

⁷⁵ Interview with Baban Prasad, Ganj.

⁷⁶ Interview with Shivanand Marcus, Ganj. See discussion on government policy in Chapter II and IV and footnote below.

to Hindu way of life or, better put, have preferred to remain non-practising, non-professing Christian Scheduled Castes.⁷⁷ The Mission being stringent about the actual practice of Christianity does not admit students from non-practising families and from families which have contracted Hindu marriages.

The Mission's help in education was geared to two goals: long-term, spiritual and short-term, temporal. To realize the former goal, secular education was accompanied by religious instruction so that the more literate they became, the more religiously informed they would be. The immediate goal of education was some gainful and useful employment. It is to be noted that among the Ravidasis of Ganj none but Christians are so far employed in blue or white-collar jobs, in government and private firms. Needless to say even those who are employed, but not practising the religion due to fear of losing their present jobs or the fear of their children being deprived of government benefits to Scheduled Castes, were educated with help from the Mission. In the opinion of Ganj village headman, 20% of the total population of Ganj are employed out of whom 15-17% are Ravidasi Christians.⁷⁸ The intermediate and high castes in Ganj, the majority of whom belong to business castes (see Table 2.1, Chapter II) prospered through business and not so much because of educational

⁷⁷ On non-practising / non-professing converts, see discussion in Chapter IV. Government reservation in jobs and stipend to Scheduled Caste students does not cover the Christian converts, under the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950. While the term 'Hindu' has been ambiguously defined, the Order was amended to include Sikhs of Scheduled Caste origin in 1956 and Buddhists of Scheduled Caste origin in 1991. The Ravidasi converts to Christianity continue to be left out though they, too, are victims of caste disabilities: doubly so for being 'low castes' and converts in the Hindu ambient society and 'low castes' in certain pockets in Christian society. Caste prejudices of Bettiah Christians in the early years, against Harijan Christians in Bihar, is a case in point. Also, the perceived caste discrimination against Shahpur Harijan Christians by Brahmin Christians of Shahpur. See *Gazette of India Extraordinary*, dated, August 11, 1950. See also *Census of India 1931, with Complete Survey of Tribal Life and Systems*, Vol.I, Chapter XI, pp. 382ff.

⁷⁸ Interview with headman, Vinay Kumar Choudhary, Ganj.

achievement and the consequent employment. Thus the rate of occupational mobility among the Ravidasi converts is more than among the upper castes in Ganj. In Barsaun however, the percentage of educated employed among the higher castes is much higher than among the Ravidasis. All the educated and employed (15) among the latter group are converts to Christianity: still practising the religion, or have been practising till recent years.⁷⁹

The Mission's contribution in the field of education of the Ravidasis seems to have enabled them to change from traditional occupations, particularly the 'polluting' work on hides and as *chamayin* (mid-wifery). From parish records and through interviews this researcher could gather that nearly 200 Harijan converts from Shahpur territory are presently employed in blue or white-collar jobs. Most of those are employed as school teachers in villages or cities, in the military, airforce, police, banks, hospitals, other government institutions, Church institutions, industrial firms and in other odd jobs. Fifty of the employed persons have migrated with their families to cities. Thus the impetus for this occupational mobility seems to have been given by the Mission first, by creating the necessary infrastructure for both academic and vocational education of the Ravidasis and, secondly, by positively discouraging them to disengage themselves from 'polluting' occupations and alternatively encouraging them to engage in alternative higher status occupations (Chapter IV for discussion).

How did Shahpur Mission manage to sponsor the education fairly a large number of students? Or, what was the Mission's investment in educational and other works?

⁷⁹ Interview with Ramji Ram, airforce mechanic, Barsaun.

It is to be noted that the Mission at Shahpur being part of the missionary enterprise of Patna Catholic diocese which was entrusted to the Patna Jesuit Mission, was completely dependent financially on the latter two religious institutions. The Catholic community at Shahpur being poor, it has not been able to support the Mission and so the latter continues to be dependent on the above bodies, except in certain areas of work.

The Mission's investment in education and other services has been of two types: financial and in personnel. The financial investment includes expenses in infrastructure, such as land, school and hostel building payment for lay staff, and so on, and also scholarships, fees, boarding and lodging for students and so forth. It is difficult to obtain separate data on the expenses on infrastructure and data on help received by students from Ganj and Barsaun. To probe into these is beyond the scope of this study. However, some data on the educational expenses on students for the entire Shahpur Mission are available from which we can estimate the extent of such benefits received by the students of Ganj and Barsaun.

First, on personnel investment.⁸⁰ As role-holders in the Mission, the religious staff (priests, sisters, brothers) perform various jobs which they do as long as their assignment at a specific mission centre lasts. Their service being a life-long vocation, therefore, cannot be measured in terms of number of hours but as a matter of convenience in terms of years. Some persons serve for a few months, others for

⁸⁰ A Catholic missionary's service in terms of volume and type of work presents a special category. Being unpaid and single, a priest or sister often shoulders many responsibilities simultaneously. For instance, a missionary in a remote mission centre could be a priest, preacher, accountant, teacher, legal expert hostel warden, administrator, physician of sorts, all rolled into one.

many years. For instance, Father Pollard as priest-in-charge served at Shahpur for 27 years. There are many sisters who served in the mission for more than 15 years. Thus in terms of priestly service person-years,⁸¹ a total of 72 service years were put in at Shahpur in a period of 45 years by 19 resident priests whose individual service periods varied from six months to 27 years. (see Table 3.6,#A and Appendix-5). As for service rendered by sisters, a total of 283 service person-years have been put in by a number of sisters during 39 years (1953-1991) (see Table 3.6,#B). In addition to these is the service rendered by trainee mission workers and occasional helpers.

In early years, the Mission records indicate, the Mission seemed to have borne the entire expenses of boarding, lodging and fees of Harijan convert students. Those who were able to pay were asked to contribute. The Mission seems to have dealt with each case individually. After 1976 the priest-in-charge, in consultation with the parish council,⁸² seems to have worked out a system of educational financing and sponsoring. In 1976 Shahpur parish set up a 'Father Pollard Memorial Scholarship Fund' to help raise funds for education and disburse them to deserving students. At the initiative of Father John Kenealy, the then president and treasurer of the Scholarship Fund, a Scholarship Fund Committee was set up which was authorized

⁸¹ Service person-years means the service of one person per year taken as a unit.

⁸² Shahpur Mission was raised to the status of a parish in 1973. A parish is an ecclesiastical unit of area under a pastor or parish priest: more independent than an mission centre/station. It also means a local church community. An elected body of parishioners which takes part in the administration of parish is a parish council. The Shahpur Parish Council was set up in 1971.

Table 3.6

Data on Service of Religious Personnel at Shahpur

[A] Priests

Period of Service	No. of years	No. of persons	No. of service person years
1936-1946	11	1 visiting priest	11 years
1947-1953	7	1 resident priest	7 years
1954-1980	27	2 resident priests	54 years
1981-1991	11	1 resident priest	11 years
Total	45	19 (absolute number)	72 years

[B] Sisters

1953-1959	7	3 resident nuns	21
1960-1971	12	4 " "	48
1972-1974	3	9 " "	27
1975-1991	17	11 " "	187
Total	39	NA	283

NB : Add occasional service of specialists and trainee workers.

Sources :

- (1) *Historia Domus*, Shahpur mission, 1951ff.
- (2) **Daily Chronicles**, Shahpur Mission, Vol. I, II, III.

to collect and disburse scholarships to worthy students. In 1976, 54 members of the parish contributed money to the Fund. The contribution, though small (two to eighty rupees per family) was significant. Another sum was obtained from the Shahpur Parish Credit Union or Cooperative Society (See Chapter IV, D.1 and Appendix-11).⁸³ The Credit Union scholarship was to be given only to those students who passed in first division. In 1978 the Credit Union made available a sum of 2855 rupees as scholarship. A third fund, Father Provincial's Fund,⁸⁴ was also available to Shahpur students who passed at least in second division. Deserving students of Ganj and Barsaun have been recipients of these scholarships (see Appendix-6).

What is significant is that the major expenses of the Mission were on education. Also significant is that the resources for education were gradually being mobilized locally with the help of the parish members through a process of thrift and saving.

Given the abject poverty of the Ravidasi converts, probably few would have obtained education but for the Mission's patronage. The most significant contribution of the Mission in this endeavour is the change of attitude towards education it seems to have brought about in the converts. The missionaries in effect used to force the parents to send their wards to school.⁸⁵ Gradually the converts seem to have understood the utility and value of education and have begun to encourage their wards and younger members of the family to pursue studies. A telling evidence of

⁸³ A cooperative society of parish members to foster the saving habit and to pool common funds for individual use of members.

⁸⁴ A Fund for education donated by Patna Jesuit Society through its provincial (superior). See **Father Pollard Memorial Scholarship Fund Register**, Shahpur Mission, 1976ff.

⁸⁵ See **Daily Chronicles**, *op.cit.*, and *Historia Domus*, Shahpur Mission, 1951-1987. Interviews with elderly converts corroborate the findings in these documents.

this attitudinal change is a letter written by a dying man of 30, Ajit Kumar Bhola of Barsaun on October 4, 1978 to Father Kenealy (the then parish priest) on the night before he died of cancer:⁸⁶

Dear Father in Faith,

The last wish of my life. The situation of the Harijan residents of my village is too poor. Many souls can be won over to Christ through the village. The reason is your village school in my village. If you care more for this school, many more may follow Christ's ideals. The lasting thanks to you and the reverend sisters and ask pardon for sins. Please receive my last contribution to Father Pollard Fund 20 rupees. If Christ is calling me for ever, what can I do? To all Christian brothers and sisters I ask pardon.

Yours in Christ,
Ajit Kumar Bhola

B.4 Medical Service

Medical service has been considered a powerful adjunct to missionary work. It was not merely a key to open the door into non-Christian communities but 'an integral' part of the gospel enterprise. The sight of human suffering moved the hearts of the missionaries who willingly followed the example of the 'good samaritan'⁸⁷ For this reason the medical mission had a powerful witness value in non-Christian lands. The missionary does not seem to distinguish between the body and the soul of an individual. As he aimed at saving 'souls', bodies could not be ignored, as Christian anthropology teaches that body and soul together make the individual a person of integrity and identity.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ With a historical insight, and probably with a hope that this letter would inspire succeeding generations, Father Kenealy preserved the letter in original. See **Father Pollard Memorial Fund Register**, Shahpur Mission, 1976, p.24.

⁸⁷ Gospel according to Luke, 10:29-37.

⁸⁸ S. Manickam, op.cit., p.169, quoting R.H.H. Goheen, "Medical Missions in India", in *International Review of Missions*, Vol. XIX, 1930, p.211.

From the humanitarian point of view, it was a Christ-like thing to 'heal the sick' and for this cause alone it was worthy of an honoured place in every missionary programme. As early as 1925, a Patna missionary (Father P.J. Sontag) wrote:

It was to the villages that we directed our patient bullocks (mode of conveyance of the period). In each one we reached I would first inquire about the sick, of whom there was usually one or another. A few words of comfort and such advice as I could give, together with my blessing, which they are always glad to receive, and by that time all the men actually at home would be gathered about me, and I soon found myself seated beneath some huge, centuries-old tree of which almost every village boasts of at least one or two....⁸⁹

Christian medical work in the region which includes Shahpur was first started by the Methodist Mission. The Mission maintained dispensaries in local mission centres and a hospital, 1950 on, at Pratapsagar, near Dumraon, about 30 kilometers west of Shahpur.⁹⁰

Though the Catholic missionaries began to work in the area (including Ganj and Barsaun) in the 1940s we have no evidence that they conducted professional medical work prior to 1953. However, Father Pollard being a priest cum missionary-healer, might have, during his innumerable visits to villages around Shahpur, cared for the sick or given some elementary medicines. During 1951-53, he used to spend two hours a day in a sort of dispensary at the mission.⁹¹

At the invitation of Father Pollard a group of three Catholic nuns of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBMV-a religious congregation founded at

⁸⁹ Joseph A. Gschwend, *The Patna Mission, India*, p.28.

⁹⁰ **Bihar District Gazetteers (BDG) - Shahabad**, 1966, p.168.

⁹¹ Pascual Oiz, *op.cit.*, p.126.

Nymphenberg, Bavaria) from Patna came to Shahpur for mission work on November 14, 1953. The congregation had been already working in Bihar and north India since 1853. These pioneer German nuns, Sister Prisca Hage, Sister Gerarda Reshland and Sister Alypia Abele, in the next ten years, engaged in medical work, particularly among rural women. The dispensary was enlarged into a 20-bed hospital, christened Misereor Hospital, in 1963.⁹² With five persons on the staff both out-patient and in-patient sections of the hospital seem to have rendered yeoman service to a very large number of patients as is evident in the annual records of the hospital. The average number patents treated was 27,418 during the first decade of its service : (see Table 3.7 and Appendix-7). The patients belonging to various castes and creeds came from an area of 500 square kilometers with a population of 400,000 in the 1960s. Though there were five government hospitals in the region none of them had any trained female nurses. Local women being reluctant to approach a male doctor and the only lady doctor and female nurses were at Arah (a distance of 28 kilometers), the hospital seems to have provided the much-needed facilities of trained female nurses to the rural, illiterate and poor women of the area.⁹³

⁹² Named after the funding agency. See *Souvenir, Under Mary's Mantle History of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBMV) in India and Nepal (1853-1986)*, 1987, Chapter on Shahpur.

⁹³ *Historia Domus*, Shahpur Mission, 1962: Background Information on Misereor Hospital. Also interview with Sister Anselma, IBMV, Shahpur.

Table 3.7

Data on Health Service by Misereor Hospital, Shahpur

Decade	No. of in-patients: tetanus	No. of in-patients: other cases	No. of out-patients in 10 years	Annual Average
1963-1972	1625	550	274,178	27,418
1973-1982	380 ⁺	414 [*]	243,157	24,316
1983-1992	435	208	195,910	19,591

+ Figures not available for two years

* Figures not available for six years

Sources :

- (1) Misereor Hospital Records, Shahpur.
- (2) Social Service Deptt. Records, Shahpur Mission.

However, in the early years many non-Christians around seem to have had some apprehensions and prejudices about the 'missionary intention to convert' using these service institutions.⁹⁴ Gradually they began to pour in regularly, at times at all hours of day and night, as emergency situations demanded. The large number of female patients in the patients' list indicates the greater trust of women on the service of the hospital particularly in cases of midwifery and tetanus. The medical team of the hospital also has rendered out-station services such as vaccination, health training to villagers, and so forth.⁹⁵

For a few years now there have been functioning a government referral hospital and some 15 private clinics around it, just a kilometer away from the

⁹⁴ Interview with Sister Modesta, Shahpur Convent. 78 years old, 31 years serving at Shahpur. See also *Souvenir, Under Mary's Mantle*, op.cit.

⁹⁵ In one such program, in cooperation with the government, the service team helped give DPT and BCG and polio vaccinations in 70 villages in six development blocks (in 1987). Interview with Sister Rose, IBMV, Shahpur.

mission hospital, on the road leading to Shahpur town. However, in an area where the facility of a hospital was a luxury, the mission hospital seems to have fulfilled an essential need of the people for some 40 years. Although to the Ravidasi converts of Shahpur (which numbered about 1500 in the 1970s) the Mission hospital's service might have been preferentially available, the fact that the vast majority of the clients were non-Christians (See Table 3.7 and Appendix-7), indicates the public utility and humanitarian nature of this institution. That the medical work positively influenced conversion is debatable as few such cases have been reported.⁹⁶

B.5 Other Humanitarian Works

B.5.1 Relief and Rehabilitation Works

The outbreak of calamitous famines and floods, which were a recurring phenomenon in Bihar, offered the missionary in Shahpur an impetus in a new direction - community development. The conviction seems to have been that spiritual salvation of the individual is interwoven with that of his community, and that the social and economic progress of any community must go hand in hand with its spiritual advance. "Moved by the severe sufferings of the people and acting on the Christian teaching on charity and altruism",⁹⁷ Father Pollard began to reach relief to the drought victims of many villages in Shahpur in 1951. Ever since, the Mission seems to have laid great emphasis on the corporate aspect of Christian life which produced a far more vivid impression of Christianity in the wider ambient

⁹⁶ For instance, the case of Lokendra Narayan Ojha, a brahmin convert. The hospital's help at several times seems to have influenced him and his family to convert to Christianity in 1982. Interview with Mr. Ojha (Thomas Ojha), Brahmipur.

⁹⁷ Personal recordings of Father Pollard, *Daily Chronicles*, Shahpur Mission.

community.⁹⁸ Though the Mission's work was primarily evangelistic meaning, preaching, it has had a strong element of humanitarianism. By humanitarianism is meant an "active concern for the welfare of all human beings irrespective of caste, economic position, religion, age and sex."⁹⁹ By organizing such emergency and community works for the needy, the missionary in Shahpur seems to have set a precedent for voluntary work in the area. The services included medical help, reaching relief such as grain, ready-to-serve food, milk powder, egg power, and also rehabilitation works such as digging wells, constructing houses, laying roads or repairing the existing ones, building canals and so forth.

Mission records say that the first organized relief work was undertaken by Father Pollard in late 1951, a year of draught resulting from failure of rains in consecutive seasons. With the help of local and state government officials the Mission opened a control shop and supplied grain to the people at reduced prices. But the people, particularly the casual labourers, had no money to buy grain. The government officials at Patna put at the disposal of the Mission 20 tons of dates which the Mission distributed among the poor people of all castes and creeds free of charge. Christian relief agencies from elsewhere also made available wheat, lentils, powdered milk and so on.¹⁰⁰

The famine in 1966 in Bihar was another natural calamity which caused terrible sufferings to people. There was inadequate foodgrain and water. Reports say

⁹⁸ S. Manickam, op.cit., p.244, quoting Arthur Mayhew, "The Christian Ethic and India", in L.S.S. O'Malley, (ed) *Modern India and the West*, pp.325-326.

⁹⁹ M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, pp.48-50.

¹⁰⁰ *Annuae Litterae*, Shahpur Missions, 1951.
See also *Daily Chronicles*, Shahpur Mission, Vol.II & III.

hundreds of people and thousands of cattle perished during the famine. The Catholic Mission at Shahpur headed by Father Pollard organized large scale relief works. There were 600-700 people fed daily at the Mission. To prevent misuse and misappropriation Father Pollard insisted that cooked food be given instead of grains as immediate relief and the food had to be eaten at the Mission itself.¹⁰¹

In the succeeding years rehabilitation projects, termed 'food-for-work' program', was launched by the Mission.¹⁰² Under this scheme people were not to be served ready-made food, but foodgrains would be given as equivalent to remuneration of labour contributed for such development works as canal making, constructing houses, digging wells making roads and so on. The scheme provided instant employment by way of labour for the otherwise unemployed casual labourers. Scores of supervisors and hundreds of workers belonging to various castes and creeds were drawn to the food-for-work scheme organized by the Mission in 67 villages of the area for over a decade (See Table 3.8).

Several of my non-Christian informants instantly associated the Catholic Mission with famine relief works. The one important memory they seem to cherish about the Mission's past history is this work.

¹⁰¹ **Souvenir, Under Mary's Mantle, op.cit.**
See also **Daily Chronicles, Shahpur Mission, Vol.II & III.**

¹⁰² The food-for-work programme in Shahpur was part of such programme undertaken at the diocesan level by the department of Social Welfare of Patna Diocese. The initiative, involvement and commitment were of the Mission centres.

Table 3.8

Data on Relief and Rehabilitation Service, Shahpur

Year	Type of calamity	Type of relief works (rel) / rehabilitation works (reh)
1951	Crop failure, draught due to inadequate rains	(rel) - distribution of grains, - ration shop
1953	two short floods	NA
1954	Crop failure due to inadequate rains	(rel) - distribution of grain, food to children in schools
1966 1967		(rel) - relief kitchen set up - daily feeding 500-600 people in peak months. (reh) - house construction, digging wells c1982 - laying canals - boys' hostel
1967	floods	
1971	floods	(rel) - feeding (reh) - employment programmes, shelter making
1972	---	(rel) - ration supply (all mission staff involved) (rel) - house construction for victims
1978	"worst" floods	- Social service to the handicapped, leprosy patients, destitutes, etc.

Sources :

- (1) *Litterae Annuae*, Shahpur Mission, 1951ff.
- (2) *Historia Domus*, Shahpur Mission.
- (3) **Daily Chronicles**, Shahpur Mission, Vol.I, II & III.

Sadanand Yadav, a Hindu old man of Sahjauli village adjacent to Ganj, said that for a long time when the government did not care to repair the only bridge (a 25-meter long, 12-meter tall wooden bridge on concrete girders) over river Chher (See Map No.1) along the main road from Banahi railway station to Shahpur market, Father Pollard got it repaired under his own scheme.¹⁰³ Motiram Koer, a small farmer of Gaudar (a neighbouring village) recalls how the Mission came to the succour of hundreds of starving people during the famine years. "But for the Mission's help hundreds more would have starved to death," he said.¹⁰⁴

The Mission continued to do the relief programme for another decade. In 1978 besides relief works for the flood-victims, the Mission constructed 280 houses for families and helped in the construction of 1500 houses.¹⁰⁵

Needless to say the villages of Ganj and Barsaun also were included under the Mission's relief and rehabilitation programmes.

It is to be noted that the local and higher government officials were very cooperative with the Mission in its humanitarian works (see Chapter IV). This is evident in the way the government made available transportation facilities, even railway wagons to transport relief materials from Calcutta to Banahi, the nearest railway station.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Interview with Sadanand Yadav, Sahjauli, Shahpur.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Motiram koer, Gaudar (Chak-Tal), Shahpur.

¹⁰⁵ Under Father Kenealy's leadership. See *Souvenir Under Mary's Mantle*, op.cit.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Sister Rose, See also *Catholic Relief Service files*, Patna diocesan Office of Social Welfare, Patna.

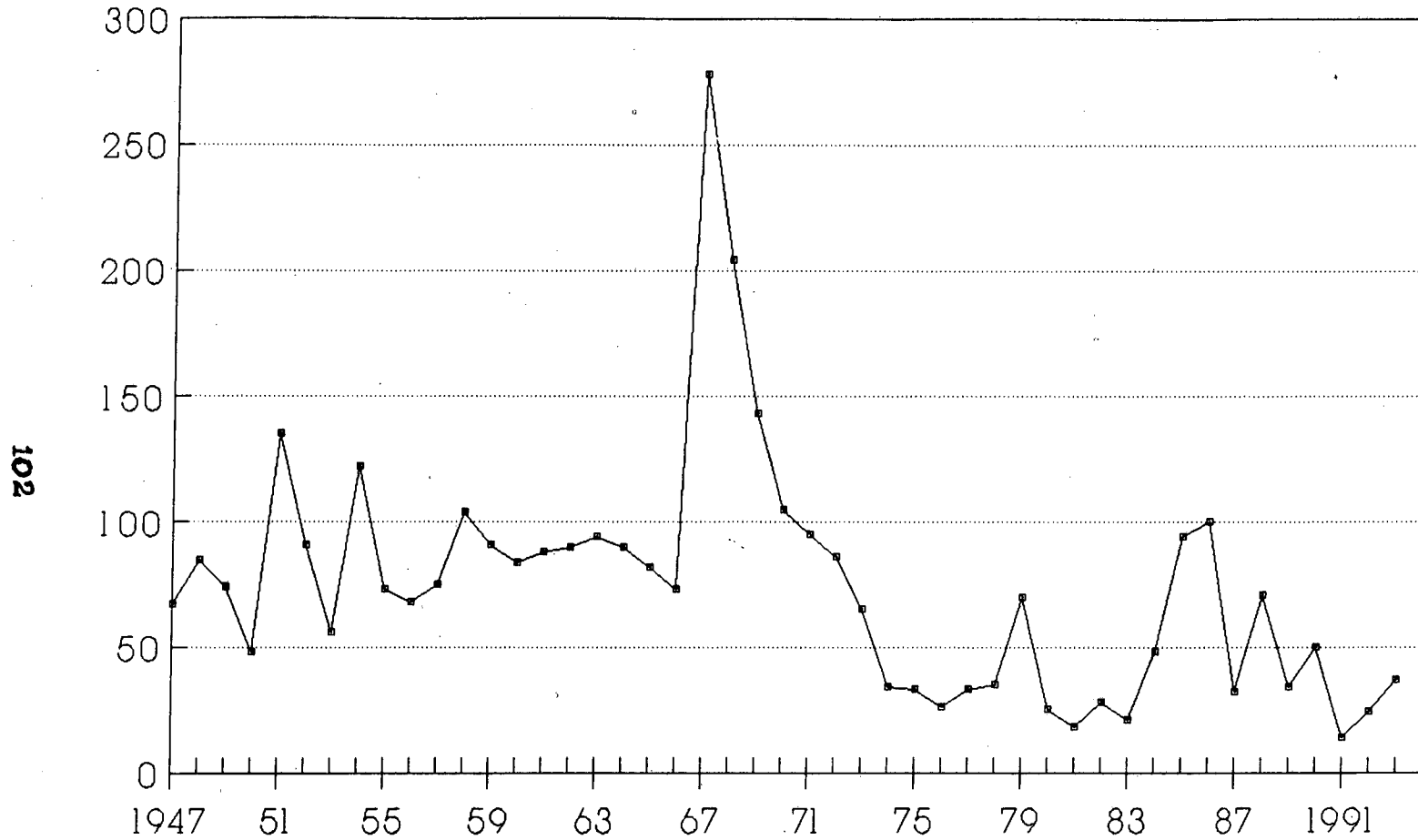
Relief works in Shahpur seem to have made much impact on the people around, particularly the Scheduled Castes who were the worst sufferers during the calamities. They seem to have sought to be baptized soon after the relief works were launched in 1967. Studies on conversions elsewhere have shown that relief works have induced conversions among the poorest classes. It was also said that missionaries have made use of relief works to enhance the number of Christians.¹⁰⁷ Our study on the pattern of conversion before, during and after the famine relief period confirms this view. The number of conversions in Shahpur shows an all-time high during the 2-year famine-relief-period (see Table 3.9 and Chart-III). The annual average number of conversions during the 20-year period (1947-1967) preceeding the great famine relief programme in 1967-68, was 84, whereas, the corresponding figure for the famine relief years was 241. The number in the next 20-year-period (1969-1988), went down to 58. The Mission records indicate that out of the total 67 villages in which relief works were undertaken only 17 villagers were fresh or new ones where baptisms occurred (see Appendix-8). The number of baptisms in these 17 villages was 28 during the two-year-period. Therefore, the rest of the baptisms which occurred during the famine-relief-period were from the villages already under the contact list of the Mission. This implies that the spurt of baptisms could be the cumulative effect of several decades of work, precipitated by services connected with famine relief.¹⁰⁸ We note from the Mission's records that these conversions were mostly from the Scheduled Castes, the vast majority of whom were Ravidasis.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ L. Lobo, *op. cit.*, p.6.
See also Dick Kooiman, *op.cit.*, pp.79-82.
See also John C.B. Webster, *op.cit.*, pp.44-45, 57-62.

¹⁰⁸ **Baptism Register**, Shahpur Mission, Vol I & II.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

Chart No.3 Conversion Pattern in Shahpur



Sources:

1. Baptism Register, Shahpur Mission, Vol.I and II.
2. Village Family Register, Shahpur Mission, Vols.xxix.

Table 3.9

Conversion in 'Normal' and Severe Famine Years

Period	Average Occurrence of Conversion		
	Ganj	Barsaun	Shahpur
1947-1966 (20 'normal' years)	16	8	84
1967-1968 (2 'severe' famine years)	16	15	241
1969-1988 (20 'normal' years)	9	7	58

Sources :

- (1) **Baptism Register**, Shahpur Mission, Vol.I & II.
- (2) **Village Family Register**, Shahpur Mission, Vols.XXIX.

Our findings from records corroborate what Father Pollard recorded in *Litterae Annuae* (Annual Letters) for Shahpur, 1951: He wrote, "All these relief works had a very stimulating effect on our missionary work, with the result that we had calls from all sides to take up conversion work in different villages."¹¹⁰ Again in 1972 he wrote: "It does take a lot of our time and strain our institutional resources. But it keeps us at the service of the poor, and these ultimate personal contacts yield a lot of fruit."¹¹¹ Did he mean conversion by 'fruit'? Devlal Sharma, a brahmin associate of the Mission for 40 years told this researcher: "Hundreds of 'low' caste people got converted to *Masihi Dharma* (Christianity) for getting the benefits of the Mission. No wonder many of these left *the dharma* once the Mission stopped the charity."¹¹²

¹¹⁰ *Litterae Annuae*, Shahpur Mission, 1951. The Mission records on baptism, op.cit., usually notify the caste of the converted.

¹¹¹ *Historia Domus*, Shahpur Mission, 1972.

¹¹² Interview with Davlal Sharma, 69, Gaudar Chak-Tal.

However, the pattern of baptisms in Ganj does not indicate famine-relief-induced baptisms as Table 3.10 (see also Chart No.1) show, whereas in the case of Barsaun there seems to have been relief-induced baptisms both in 1951 (draught relief year) and 1967-68 (famine-relief-period) (see Table 3.9).

Table 3.10

Data on Baptisms in Ganj, Barsaun and Entire Shahpur Mission

Decade	1931-40	1941-50	1951-60	1961-70	1971-80	1981-90	1991	Total
Baptism in Ganj	139	173	163	160	104	65	16	662 (383)
Baptism in Barsaun	3	11	93	91	46	77	4	293 (209)
Baptism in entire Shahpur Mission	200	532	799	1247	502	496	85	3798 (2763)

- NB: (1) The number in the last column is obtained after deducting errors due to double entry in the registers.
 (2) The number within brackets are actual number of baptized persons at present. This is estimated by
 (a) deducting those who have died,
 (b) deducting errors due to double entry,
 (c) deducting those married out and gone away,
 (d) adding those married in and come in.
 (3) This does not exclude non-practising/non-professing persons.

Sources :

- (1) **Baptism Register**, Arah Catholic Mission, 1937ff. with a list of the baptisms from Shahabad district in **Baptism Register St. Joseph's pro-Cathedral**, in Bankipore, Patna.
- (2) **Baptism Register**, Shahpur Mission, Vol. I, II.
- (3) **Village Family Register**, Shahpur Mission, vols.XXIX
- (4) **Funeral Register**, Shahpur Mission.
- (5) **Marriage Register**, Shahpur Mission.

But we also notice that the figures for baptisms in Barsaun reached an all-time high in the 1980s (Chart No.II). This seems have been due to the renewed interest of the baptized Catholics in religion following the Mission's efforts in catechesis

(renewal, retreats: exercises in spirituality) and rectification of Hindu marriages¹¹³ and so forth under the leadership of Father Jose Perumalil, parish priest.¹¹⁴ Thus, to conclude, relief-induced conversions seem to have occurred in many villages including Barsaun but not in Ganj.

B.5.2 Care of Orphans

Another area of humanitarian work of Shahpur Mission was care of orphans by the (IBMV) sisters of St. Catherine Convent, Shahpur. The orphanage which was started in 1964 began with the adoption of a female infant found abandoned on the road near the gate of the Mission hospital. Similar cases occurred in subsequent years as well. The total number of orphans adopted was 37 over a period of 22 years (1964-1985). Deducting those who died and those given in adoption elsewhere, the largest number of orphans resident at the orphanage in any one year was 22.¹¹⁵ Some of them have been given in marriage to employed young Christian men, others are either employed or are studying. The orphans, baptized, educated and brought up in entirely Christian milieu within the Mission/convent compound, are respected and considered as the children of the Christian community of Shahpur.¹¹⁶ "A bold

¹¹³ Many converts had been given in marriage to Hindu partners, partly due to the non-availability of right choice of partners in marriage within the nascent Christian society and partly due to the greater demand for educationally qualified brides who are mostly Christians. Though the Church prohibits marriage outside the community it has provision to validate Hindu/legal marriages through rectification in the Church ("*pak shaadi*"), later. Moreover many parents did not seem to care to get their children baptized as per custom. Also some were baptized on the 'eve' of getting admission to school or hostel of the Mission. See Chapter IV for further discussion.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Father Jose Perumalil, former parish priest, Shahpur.

¹¹⁵ The convent stopped adoption in 1985. It was felt that the orphans could be better cared and understood in family situation. The later orphans were given in adoption to families with the help of the local government authorities. Interview with Sister Laetitia, Shahpur Convent.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Sister Consolata, former superior, Shahpur Convent.

proclamation of the Christian care of the female child", said Sister Pooja, " the care of the abandoned and rejected of the society as a counter-culture".¹¹⁷ It is significant to note the impact of this work on the Ravidasi society. One informant said, "In our society women had secondary place. Earlier we were not sending our girl children to school. But the Mission's example of the care for the orphan girls has...given us a new value".¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Interview with Sister Pooja, Superior, Shahpur convent.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Bhuneswar Prabhu Sevak, Ganj.

CHAPTER IV

DYNAMICS OF CHANGE IN RAVIDASI SOCIETY

A. Preliminary Observations

Some indications of the change that seems to have occurred in the Ravidasi community of Ganj and Barsaun have already been noted in the previous chapters. In this chapter we shall identify and explore the dynamics, extent and loci of the change and estimate its magnitude. As has been done earlier, the findings in this study have been based on the peoples' own perceptions of change which I have been able to record, and my own observations as a participant in their life for a specific period of time.

We notice that the changes that have occurred in Ravidasi society over the 50-year-period of our study have been due to a variety of factors and under the influence of different agencies. The scope of this study being limited to one such agency: "secondary level structure",¹ namely the Catholic Mission of Shahpur, the study on the change in the above community is at the same time a study on the impact of the Mission through its missionaries and other constituent workers such as catechists, occasional preachers, social workers and so on.

Secondly we are attempting to measure the qualitative changes in quantitative terms and hence are not immune to the limitations of such an undertaking. Whether

¹ Jha *et al.*, *op.cit.*, p.15

the Christian contribution to the Ravidasis be judged by statistics, amount of financial assistance rendered, the quality and variety of services made available, or by the quality of the human character of the missionaries involved, our findings suggest that these were significant and of high quality.

While the number of baptized persons is a sufficient indication of the magnitude of conversions, can the depth of the latter be judge by a mere increase in the number of baptisms? Conversion can be defined as a transition in human character which occurs in a baptized person in terms of change of attitudes, world-views, beliefs and practices or in short, the comprehensive process of 'christianisation' of which baptism is just a starting point. The missionaries do not seem to have expected a sudden, tangible change in terms of transformation of character, betterment of life-style and so forth, in the converted Ravidasis. However, there seem to be some palpable changes in the Ravidasis of Ganj and Barsaun as a result of their contact with an 'alien' religion and 'alien' tradition,² through the missionary agents of Shahpur Catholic Mission.

Three major areas of change have been identified in Ravidasi society: socio-religious, socio-cultural and socio-economic. These are categories for analysis. As we have seen in the first chapter all these merge together in the villagers' lived-in experience. So also the objectives, strategies and programmes of the missionaries were multi-pronged: religious, cultural, material or economic, and so on. Each of these dimensions of change is linked with others.

² Christian religion and its tradition were alien to the villagers because first of all, Christianity and its tradition came from outside the Indian subcontinent, secondly the religion and its tradition were introduced to the villages by foreign missionaries.

Also, since the avowed objective of the missionaries seemed to be "spiritual transformation" of people, for which they evangelized them, we should be identifying the content of this "spiritual transformation". But how do we judge the spiritual state of a person in order to estimate the transformation? Spiritual life is a matter of inner, personal disposition toward goodness and love which can at best be judged by the person himself or herself. Of an inner orientation to goodness and love, externally we may observe changes of values, world-views, beliefs, practices, observances of traditions, in short, the ethos effected by religion.

In this study we examine indications of such change through opinions and narratives of incidents and of spiritual experience, etc., related to the broad categories of socio-religious and socio-cultural changes.

From the evidence of these changes we infer a spiritual transformation which, in the terminology of some of the then missionaries, would be "lifting the cultural level" of the people.³

A note about the subject of change. We have already categorized the converts into practising and non-practising/non-professing Christians. Since Indian Census Commissioner's enumeration of peoples after 1931⁴ does not indicate the persons' religious affiliation, we have no government records to assess the number of Christians in Ganj and Barsaun. But the Church's records are meticulous about the Christian religious life of the converts. Hence I have depended on these records as

³ Editorial, "Patterns in Patna" in *Jesuit Missions*, March 1963, Vol.37, No.2, p.8.

⁴ After the Census of India 1931, the religion-wise returns are not published and so we have no means to obtain the exact number of Christians in our villages. The Census reports give the total number for the district. This number is at variance with the Church records.

well as on interviews to assess the number of converts and the extent of practice of Christianity by them.⁵ As we have mentioned elsewhere, Church sources do not hold baptism as the only criterion to distinguish whether somebody is a Christian or not. Practising Christianity has religious or spiritual and sociological implications.⁶ A particular sect or Church not only instructs its members on the teachings of Jesus Christ, but also keeps an eye on their particular forms in which it organizes religion. The converts of Ganj and Barsaun being baptized in the Catholic Church, the Catholic way of life would be implied in saying 'practising Christianity'.

The converts were expected to be regularly associated with several institutions and activities: the church at Shahpur (see Map No.1) as the centre of Christian worship; the parish, as the community of Christians in a specified area; the sacraments as rites of interiorisation and practice of Christian religious life; and a host of other generally recognized Christian practices. If a convert does not profess the basic tenets of the Catholic Church, observe its particular laws on moral life, or associate with his area - parish, he was not considered a 'practising Catholic': he remains as a baptized Catholic, but in the category of non-practising/non-professing Christians. Hence, unless otherwise stated, when we say 'converts' or 'Christian Ravidasis', we mean the baptized Catholics who had been practising Christianity for at least one generation. The time criterion is important because, due to government's

⁵ There were three significant sources: the parish priest of Shahpur who maintains an office for parish administration and keeps a record of the 'progress' of the Christians in sacramental life. Having many years of experience and interaction with the Catholics of the area the present parish priest (Father Mani Thundathikunnel) seemed to have a stock of information about each individual of the parish which he was willing to divulge to this researcher; second, his assistants in parish administration, Sister Rose and the catechists who seemed to be well informed about each family of the villages; third, the Catholic community of the villages themselves also seemed to know quite well who was a practising Catholic and who was not.

⁶ See Franklin E. Frazier, *Race and Culture Contacts in the Modern World*, pp.115ff.

policy of not recognizing those Ravidasis who converted to Christianity as belonging to Ravidasī community⁷ and hence subjected to social disabilities, many converts have 'reverted' or have remained as 'non-practising/non-professing' Christians in order to secure government benefits which are given only to Ravidasis who are Hindus. Some call them 'Hindu Christians' or 'Christianized Hindus'.⁸

B. Early Religion of the Ravidasis

The religion of the Ravidasis of Ganj and Barsaun in the pre-conversion period seems to have centered around a pantheon of local gods and goddesses, a wide range of benevolent and malevolent spirits of the dead which were regularly propitiated, and the occasionally worshipped deities of the higher Hindu religion. An in-depth study of their religious life is beyond the scope of this study. Hence, we would only briefly review the salient features of their religious practices, beliefs, way of life and so on as recounted by my interviewees,⁹ in order to assess the socio-religious change that occurred in their society.

On their former religion, an elderly informant, Mohangu Baptist, a Catholic, said:

Formerly we used to worship our family dieties or personal gods and goddesses (*ishtdevta*) for which we kept special places of worship

⁷ See Chapter III.

⁸ The Census of India 1931 defines 'Hindu' as a social as much as religious term and really denotes membership of a system of organized society with great latitude of religious beliefs and practices, so that it is possible for a man to be a Hindu socially and to have a religious belief shared with others who do not regard themselves as members of the same society. Conversely there is no compelling necessity that all others of his society should share his beliefs. See *Census of India 1931*, With complete Survey of Tribal Life and Systems, J.H. Hutton, Vol.I, ch:XI, on Religion and Caste, p.382.

⁹ I have relied more on the information given by elderly informants who were converted as adults rather than relying on those who were born in a baptized family.

(*devasthan*). We also used to keep separate houses of ancestors (*sira ghar*) for the dead member of the family (spirits). We believed that unless we propitiated these deities and spirits we would be harmed. We used to make hen and goat offerings to these deities and spirits.¹⁰

Belief in benevolent and malevolent gods and goddesses apart, the Ravidasis seem to have kept an unbroken relation with their dead members of their families. They believed that the spirit survived after a person's death and hovered around the living members. It was the type of death and the age of the deceased person that determined whether a spirit was harmful or harmless. If a person died of old age, after having a married life and had his progeny to continue his generation, his death was considered timely or normal. His spirit was basically harmless. All other types of death were considered unauspicious and the spirits of these dead persons were to be propitiated to escape from harm by them. Every married person who died was entitled to get a *sira ghar* in the family. The blessings of the ancestors were sought on important events in family such as marriage, festivals and so on.¹¹

It was the malevolent spirits that the Ravidasis were more concerned about. Not only unnatural deaths but also sickness and suffering were attributed to the spirits. A multitude of spirits seems to have controlled the Ravidasi's life. An unmarried girl, after her death became *bamath* a dangerous spirit. An unmarried boy after his death became *manushya deva*, a less dangerous spirit. The spirit of a pregnant woman was called *churel* or *churail*, a very dreaded spirit. A married person after his death became *dak* (also called *bhoot*). The spirit of a *bhagat* (see below) was called *gun dak*.

¹⁰ Interview with Mohangu Baptist, Ganj.

¹¹ Kurien Kizhakekala & Jose Vadassary, *The Chamars, Their Beliefs and Practices*. A monograph based on a six-month field study done in the 1980s in a village in Gaya district, it explores the contemporary religion of the Ravidasis.

These spirits being harmful, were to be specially propitiated and be "watched out"¹² Sacred stones (*pind*) were ritually installed under a tree or in the open or near a local temple in order to worship these spirits. The sacrifices offered to these were graded, corresponding to the gradation of spirits.

Costly sacrifices of goats, pigs, cocks, liquor and so on were needed to propitiate the more dreaded spirits such as that of a handicapped person (*pret or pretni*), that of an evil man (*pischach*), the spirits of the burial grounds (*masan and masani*), etc. In short the description of Briggs (1920) on Chamar religion seems to be relevant even in the 1980s. He wrote,

The Chamar is saturated with animistic ideas... The diseases were considered as spirit-send and so were to be conciliated. Trees, animals, particularly serpents were seen as vehicles of good luck or bad luck....¹³

My informants said the life of a Ravidasi from conception to death was guided, surrounded and controlled by these beings of the nether world who were propitiated either by himself or through the dedication of a local priest-magician, the *bhagat*.¹⁴

There was close connection between disease and demons. The demons that caused diseases were legion. Some of my informants said that till recently they took to warding off diseases with black magic (*ojhagiri*) particularly to cure diseases like cholera, small pox and the like.

¹² G.W. Briggs, *The Chamars*, p.129.

¹³ Ibid., p.121.

¹⁴ *Bhagats* are religious specialists who officiate at religious ceremonies in honour of local deities. They are generally found among the lower castes. See also K. Kizhakekala & J. Vadassery, op.cit., pp.58-60.

The life of a Ravidasi was always surrounded by omens and luck and ill-luck caused by the ghosts. The realities of time, space, matter (both animate and inanimate), moving objects, creatures, plants, etc., were all considered to bring luck or ill-luck to him. The belief in the evil eye and the casting of spells was part of his life. In short, the cult of the mysterious seems to have occupied a large space of his religious life. Magic, which had the spirit-world for its background, therefore, had much to do with his life and destiny. The use of magic for nefarious or ulterior ends, both in the making of love-charms and in the working of injury to others, were common. Many of these devices were carried out by means of spells and incantations and through the agency of spirits under a shaman's control.¹⁵

So also the remedies and the practice of primitive medicine seem to have run into the world of the mysterious, into the realms of magic, and into the practice of the wizard's art. These magical remedies were used to protect cattle also.

Among the 'spiritual' mediators were the *bhagats* and *pandits*. While the former were called to install *pinds* and to all perform all rituals of the domestic religion, the latter were invited to officiate marriages.

The influence of higher Hinduism was seen in the belief in Vedic gods and later Hindu gods such as Ram, Krishna, and so on. The Ravidasis from early times seem to have believed in polytheism. Among these were also some religious specialists whom they approached. They were Brahmin astrologers, mendicants (*bairagis*) and other religious preceptors (*gurus*) of various Hindu sects attached to

¹⁵ Briggs, op.cit., p.169.

popular shrines. Although legally the Ravidasis were permitted to enter Hindu temples,¹⁶ they were not allowed inside the local temples.¹⁷ Their offerings were given from the outside and they, in turn, received the temple offerings (*prasad*) from the outside, except, they said in the Mahathin Dai Temple at Behea (see discussion below).

In modern times devotion to popular religious preceptors (*gurus*) particularly Saint Ravidas has been spreading among the Ravidasis of our villages. Known as *Shiv-Narayan Shakti*, a Ravidasi is officially initiated into the 'sect' or cult at special ceremonies. Kabir *panth* a sect following the teachings of Kabir, popular in eastern Uttar Pradesh, was also known to the Ravidasis. While some of the relatives of our informants followed Kabir *panth*, most Ravidasis other than those practising Christianity belong to Shiv Narayan cult-group.¹⁸

Briggs wrote in 1920:

The domestic ceremonies of the Chamars show much Brahmanical influence, and while the cardinal elements of Brahmanism are practised by them, still there is a very large admixture of details of ritual that belong to non-Aryan religion.¹⁹

The Ravidasis seem to have had a utilitarian and pragmatic approach towards the deities. If the deities were served and propitiated they believed, they would be helped in times of need, if not they would be harmed by the deities. Therefore they

¹⁶ Under the Temple Entry Proclamation Act, 1948, by the government.

¹⁷ This was more due to the continuation of traditional practices. The local *pandits* who recognized the 'low' castes might not have allowed them entry inside. My informant, Shyam Nath Misra, a pandit himself said so. However, at popular shrines such as Mahathin Dai Temple, where thousands of pilgrims gather, nobody would differentiate between the 'low' castes and the general public.

¹⁸ Interview with Mohangu Baptist, Ganj.

¹⁹ Briggs, *op.cit.*, p.234.

were very careful to install some of the important deities in their houses, and worship them by "feeding" them regularly. If they found the deities not "responding" they were discarded.²⁰

The outstanding fact about the Ravidasi religion was its lack of a reassuring and hopeful outlook. For the most part he lived in fear of malevolent powers and was engaged in propitiating them. He was gripped by superstition and took recourse to magical means to be cured of his diseases.²¹

C. Socio-religious Change

There seems to have been some structural²² changes in the religio-cultural edifice of the Ravidasis of Ganj and Barsaun after they were converted to Christianity. The process of adoption of the new religion over a span of 50 years has been characterized by various levels of 'christianisation'. Our study on this process reveals that it has been an ongoing one, as if in a flux, and has been characterized by simultaneous application of various mechanisms of adoption such as replacement, compromise or combination, persistence, indigenisation and the like. This process can be conceived as a continuum. Should one search for strains of the old and new religion at any particular moment of time, he would find both of these, but in different degrees. The domains of the socio-religious and religio-cultural change seem to have been in two closely inter-linked areas namely,

²⁰ K.Kizhakekala & J.Vadassery, *op.cit.*, p.55.

²¹ Briggs, *op.cit.*, p.236.

²² I have used the term 'structural' in order to underscore the changes characteristic of a society whose religious relationships are like 'structures' or edifices meaning, so strong that they mould the lives of the people. Refer to social structures, chapter II.

- a) beliefs^{22a} and practices.
- b) attitudes, values and world-views.

C.1 Christianity in Ravidasi Life: Beliefs and Practices

One of my informants, a Catholic said,

Worship in those days was done at home or under a tree or in the open field. But now we go to the Church to attend holy Mass, common prayers and to make offerings. We also pray for the dead...It is nice to see all Christians converge for worship at one place... Sunday is a day of prayer and socialization too. We meet the others, talk with each other after the Church service and discuss our problems. We feel we are not alone in our *tola*; there are others too who are facing the same problems as we do.²³

The statement of Baptist, an elderly Catholic, referred to changes not only in beliefs and practices but also to an orientation toward inter-village relationship. The geographical locations of the centres of worship, earlier and later are to be noted. In the former, domestic religion, it was inside the house, around it, in the open field, or under a tree. In the higher Hindu religion the centre revolved around the local temples, but entry to their *sanctum sanctorum* was restricted (op. cit.). In the more popular shrines the identities of the devotees not being so easily known, the centre of worship was even in the *sanctum sanctorm* as was noticed in the Mahatin Dai Temple²⁴ (see Appendix-9) and at Pir Mukdum Baba's *Dargah*²⁵(shrine) (see

^{22a} 'Beliefs' here formal acceptance of a body of 'truths' of tenets of faith of the Church. Some of these, especially the creed, are recited at every *puja* (see discussion below).

²³ Interview with Mohangu Baptist, Ganj.

²⁴ Mahatin Dai Temple : a *sati mandir* (temple dedicated in honour of a widow who immolated herself at the funeral pyre of her husband) where people of all castes go in thousands on Tuesdays. My informants said the temple was visited by a few non-practising Christian Ravidasis which induced me to undertake a field study of the above temple. Some local respondents said the reason why the low castes have had access to this temple was that the *sati mata* in question was not a Brahmin woman as was then held, but a Harijan woman.

Appendix-10) both at Behea. When they became Christians, the centres of worship seem to have shifted, functionally, to the Church which was away from either village (see Map No.1). Even the repositories of spirits shifted from the house of ancestors(*sira ghar*) to the Christian cemetery which they occasionally visited. Moreover, as in the pre-conversion period when festivals had been occasions for social gatherings, after conversion, besides the festivals, even weekly Church services (Sunday) became occasions for such gatherings.

(J.K) So you gave up all the former deities?

(M.B) Though some of our relatives (non-practising) still worship Goraya Baba, Barchi Baba and the Seven Ranis (all local deities) we have discarded them all. Now, we have 'Sant Yosef Baba(St.Joseph)', 'Sant Ignasu Baba (St. Ignatius of Loyola)' 'Mata Mariam' and so on.

(J.K.) What about the *pinds*?

(M.B) We told the Father (Pollard), that some misfortune would happen to us if *Pind Baba* was not served because he was like god for us. Then the Father told us, 'If the *Pind Baba* has been protecting you why this suffering and humilitation? Believe in God the Father, and he will protect you. You are children of 'God'. Now we have installed statues and holy picture of *Yesu Bhagwan* (Lord Jesus) and Mata Mariam.

(JK) So you believe the 'Christian God' protects you?

(MB) Yes, we believe we are loved and protected by God who is Father to us. We believe in Jesus Christ, His Son who is the real incarnation (*avatara*) and who came to give us salvation (*mukti*). Earlier we were more afraid of the gods....²⁶

With conversion to Christianity the Ravidasis of Ganj and Barsaun seem to have given up beliefs and practices of their former religion which went against the accepted Christian beliefs and practices. A new set of beliefs, creeds and tenets,

²⁵ Pilgrims of all castes go to this Muslim shrine to ward off possession and spirits through frenzied dance, trances, swinging, etc. Christian Ravidasis denied visiting this shrine.

²⁶ Interview with Mohangu Baptist, Ganj.

namely, the belief in God the Father, Christ Jesus the incarnated Son and the Holy Spirit (the Trinity) seem to have become the central point of their beliefs. These basic creeds of faith repeated time and again during religious instruction, holy Mass and prayers seem to have displaced their former beliefs. Secondly, there seems to have been a structural change in the manner of relating to the Christian God, such as, instead of propitiation, prayers, both formal and informal, symbolic offerings, prayer for the dead, etc., were made. However, the prayers for the dead, done during holy Mass and at other services seem to have been understood as the substitute to their former ancestor worship which they were expected to discard at baptism. A host of officially declared saints and venerable persons in the Church were sought after for intercessory functions through prayers.

They also seem to have identified in St. Mary, the Mother of Christ, an archetype of all the bygone female cult figures and deities. Special devotional practices to Mother Mary at the shrine or at home were held particularly at Saturdays and in the month of May.

Many rituals and religious practices such as sacraments, attending holy Mass, taking out religious processions, devotions to saints, novenas²⁷ and so forth have become part of their religious culture. Life-cycle ceremonies have been sacralized through Christian sacraments.²⁸

²⁷ Novenas are Christian popular devotions in honour of saints seeking their intercession for obtaining blessings of God; held usually for nine days prior to the particular saint's day called feast day.

²⁸ Christian understanding of sacraments holds that a sacrament is an external sign, instituted by Christ to signify an internal effect toward sanctification of man. Some sacraments are rites of passage, some are sacralizing rituals. See O. Gomes, *Village Goa*, p.214.

A number of totems and fetishes have been replaced with holy water (water blessed by a priest in a ritual), rosaries, blessed medals, pictures and the like. The life-cycle rituals, now performed mostly in the Church and sometimes at home, have been officiated by Christian priests. The days and seasons of the year have been classified as solemn festivals (such as Christmas and Easter), feast days, days of observances, seasons of rejoicing and of penance and so forth, so that a believer's entire life span has been brought under sacred worship.

However, cases of reversion to former practices in times of stress and strain have been reported. Some of the 'weak' Christians covertly did ancestor worship, consulted a witch doctor, or approached a *bhagat* or magician. Thus there seems to be some cultural and religious oscillation among some of the converts of Ganj and Barsaun.²⁹ This was evident in the response of Baptist to my query how often they consulted *bhagats* and *pandits* (Hindu priests). He said,

There were some Christians who used to privately consult *bhagats* to be cured of diseases. But we stopped calling them. The *pandits* are called for marriages only. But when the Church priests agreed to come to the villages to officiate at marriages we stopped that practice. Marriage is a social function and we want to invite all our relatives many of whom are Hindus. The Church is far away for us.³⁰

In spite of "re-adjustment" and "compromise" in certain aspects, we note that some former practices and beliefs have been so persistent among the Ravidasi converts.³¹ These beliefs and practices seem to have come in conflict with the newly

²⁹ Cultural oscillation refers to a process indicating instability and fluctuation between two essentially opposed sets of ideals and values belonging to two different traditions. See K.N. Sahay, *op.cit.*, p.237.

³⁰ Interview with Mohangu Baptist, Ganj

³¹ These features have been noticed in other nascent Christians as well. See Shyamlal, *Tribals and Christian Missionaries*, p.150.

adopted Christian beliefs, practices and values. In some cases persistence of the old beliefs, practices and values seems to have impeded the full realization of the Christian way of life. At the same time there seems to have been certain amount of indigenisation in religious practices particularly in marriage ceremonies and some popular festivals. Indigenization³² here refers to the replacement of Christian elements by Ravidasi ones, especially the ones not contradictory to the former. By permitting partial retention of the former marriage customs, keeping up devotional relationship with the dead, etc., the Church seems to have reduced the conflict that would otherwise have arisen in a rapturous abandonment of one's age-old religio-cultural customs. For instance, the marriage ritual, officially to be held in the Church, was permitted to be held in the village as per the people's custom. From the 1960s Father Pollard had encouraged such indigenization.³³

In marriage ceremonies Ganga *jal*(water) was substituted with holy water from the Church, Lord Ganesh's statue was substituted with statues of Jesus Christ and Mother Mary, and some such adjustments were made. Those indigenous marriage customs which came into conflict with Christian beliefs were, however, discarded. Attempts at indigenization were also done in folk tradition of the people particularly music, folk songs, story telling in poetry such as popularizing the singing of *Isayan* (Life of Christ in folk style in the local dialect).³⁴ Music and folk culture are very

³² K.N.Sahay identifies two types of indigenous practices: religious and social. The religious practices such as festivals, life-cycle rituals, etc., which come into conflict with Christianity were "scrutinized" and got eliminated. The social practices such as some life-cycle practices, marriage customs, etc., were retained. K.N.Sahay, op.cit., pp.165-169.

³³ J.Cox, *We Band of Brothers*, 50 Sketches of Patna Jesuits, Vol.I, p.132.

³⁴ Written in Bhojpuri this poetic presentation of the Life of Christ resembles *Ramayan*, the epic.

dear to the Ravidasis. One informant proudly said, "Though we left *Ramayan* we have now *Isayan*".³⁵

A significant aspect of the religio-cultural change has been the adoption of new names by the converts. Conversion being a break with the past and the beginning of a "new life in Christ",³⁶ receiving new names implied acquiring a new identity as Christian. The adoption of new names, usually after a Christian saint, became customary. Most early converts adopted completely new names which were Christian but sounded alien in the local tongue.³⁷ By the 1950s the Church encouraged indigenization in naming by permitting the use of Hindi (Hindu) equivalent of Christian names (for instance, 'Vikrant' for 'James', 'Anugrah' for 'John',³⁸ etc.). A study of the names of the converts in Ganj and Barsaun reveals a combination, often rhyming, of their former Hindu names and the newly adopted Christian names (for instance, Gopichand Gregory, Lakhan Lucas, Madho Mathew, etc.). The original first names have been commonly used whereas the Christian names have been used for official purposes only. The adoption of Hindi (Hindu) Christian names seems to have given the converts a new identity which previously had been identified with pejorative names (see Chapter II, D.1).

³⁵ Singing of *Isayan* has been a regular cultural event in villages in the evenings and in hostels. Interview with George Sakhichand, Ganj.

³⁶ Epistle of St. Paul, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Collossians 3:10.

³⁷ Caste names were removed and two Christian names were adopted by adult converts whereas the children received their father's name as their second name.

³⁸ The Hindi translation of Christian names made for use in Northern India was a functional one more in choosing an existing Indian name having the same meaning. Names reminiscent of Hindu mythology had been carefully avoided. For example, 'Ignatius' (Latin origin, meaning fiery, burning) is 'Tejkumar', 'Kevin' (Celtic origin, meaning comely) is 'Sunderlal', 'Irene' (Greek origin, meaning peace) is 'Shanta', 'Ruth' (Semetic origin, meaning friendly, beautiful) is 'Shobha', etc. See Sah, Bulcke, Wald (eds) *Hindi Christian Names*.

There were also seen in recent times elements of cultural retroversion that is, re-evaluation and re-introduction of some abandoned practices.³⁹ The first instance, this researcher was told, was at Ganj when a few converts who had given up *Chhat puja*⁴⁰ celebration decades ago (or celebrated it covertly in the village) took the liberty of celebrating it in 1989 at the grotto of St. Mary, in front of the Church at Shahpur. The lotus-shaped grotto with the statue of Mother Mary erected inside a glass case and built in a pond with water seems to have provided a suitable ambience for *Chhat* celebration. The self-initiated celebration, however, was devoid of the usual prayer to the *Chhat mata* as in Hindu celebration, but included prayer to the *Mata Mariam* and fruit offerings. "I did not object to it because it is an expression of people's faith, adapted and sustained in the light of new religion".⁴¹ But some early converts resented: "We are old Christians, We don't celebrate any Hindu festivals",

(J.K) What about Diwali, Holi, etc. Do you celebrate these?

(C.S) As a cultural festival we celebrate Diwali. It is a celebration of Christ, the Light of the World. But we don't do any puja although we join with the Hindus for celebration of Diwali and Holi.⁴²

The process of "combination" or replacement of socio- religious structures seems to have been simultaneous with the process of segregation from the former society and assimilation into the new Christian community.⁴³ There was noticed a sense of superiority over their being "liberated" from the clutches of awesome spirits

³⁹ K.N.Sahay, in op.cit., p.171, identifies these features in the tribal Christian community.

⁴⁰ *Chhat* : an important festival in Bihar celebrated on the 15th day of *Kartik* month, is specially significant for women who offer prayers for male children and husbands.

⁴¹ Interview with Father Mani Thundathikunnel, Shahpur.

⁴² Interview with George Sakhichand, Ganj

⁴³ See K.N.Sahay, op.cit., pp.227-263.

and ghosts and their becoming members of a "higher" organized universal religion. One informant said,

"Now we have a God who is universal. We have a better place of worship. Our Church is a clean place of worship. Being situated on the road side and near the hospital and school many non-Christian passersby also come inside the Church and listen to the discourse (*pravachan*)."⁴⁴

We notice a shift from the local, 'domestic' notion of God to one of a universal nature and so more 'powerful'. Secondly Christianity, in early years seems to have been referred to as "the religion of Father Pollard" as they were wont to associate sects with preceptors (*gurus*). Gradually as succeeding missionaries pointed out their witnessing mission to Christ, the Messiah, Christianity in Shahpur came to be known as '*Masihi Dharma*' (Religion of the Messiah, Christ).

Another aspect of their religious change was the prayer for national and ecclesiastical authorities: prayer for their welfare and seeking God's grace to enable them to discharge their duties in justice, which was done at every holy Mass and such prayer services. Also in a note of sympathy prayers were offered for the sick, the sufferings, the dead, etc.: an indication of their new orientation from individual welfare to welfare of the human community at large. Also, the religion of the converts of Ganj and Barsaun seems to have moved from oral tradition to a literate one. They have had access to the scriptures: the trained catechists from among them even interpreted the scriptures, they read the Bible at public functions and in the

⁴⁴ Interview with Marcus Peter, Ganj.

Church during services, and had religious training at schools and at special training centres. A significant aspect of the religious mobility seems to be their aspiration to become religious nuns, priests or brothers, a status considered high although it requires rigorous training, aptitude and motivation. Some have become nuns, but nobody had reached Catholic priesthood in these villages.

C.2 Christianity in Ravidasi Life: Attitudes, Values and World-views

Conversions did not seem to have automatically raised the "cultural level" of the Ravidasis of Ganj and Barsaun nor did they instantly acquire a higher social status in the ambient communities. Instead, they continued to be treated 'low' by the higher castes in the early years, and were sometimes jeered for their abandoning *dharma* and hobnobbing with a 'foreign' religion. They too, continued to discriminate against those castes who were considered further down the social ladder. A majority of the Ravidasi converts had been unwilling to inter-dine, much less inter-marry, with converts of other castes. "In one instance", so my informant said,

Father (Pollard) visited my family and ate food in our plates at home. Then he went to a Musahar Christian family and I too had accompanied him. There also he was given some snacks to eat which he gladly received and ate. I too was given but I had an aversion towards eating at a Musahar's house. The father did not say anything. But I began to reflect: What is it that makes this foreigner eat or interact freely with me an untouchable and do likewise in a Musahar's house? I felt the *Masihi Dharma* was demanding too much from us.⁴⁵

The Church seems to have mediated a process of removing the separativeness of caste groups and the attitude of caste-based discrimination among the various caste groups who converted in Shahpur. Most respondents said they were more influenced

⁴⁵ Interview with Nagina Prakash, Ganj.

by the personal examples of the functionaries of the Church rather than by the teachings of Christian religion on egalitarian principles, value of sharing, etc. How a role-holder could have effected change of values and attitudes, can be inferred from the letter of a missionary on his personal concern and approach toward the people.

It has been my good fortune that during the past ten years my work has brought me into intimate contact with many of the Depressed Class people, chiefly the Doms, Chamars, Dussads, Musahars.... I have eaten their food, have sat during the long evening about the fire listening to their 'shop-talk' of weather, crops... I have slept in their villages, and been a honorary member of their village councils... I have attended them when they were ill and been impressed by the fortitude with which they meet pain and adversity. I have knelt by their bedside and in the words of the Church gave the final blessing to their soul ere it crossed the threshold of eternity... and witnessed, too, their grief as they stood beside the open grave of one they loved.⁴⁶

The Church seems to have had its mechanisms too to reconcile the erring member by referring the person concerned to the village *panchayat* of Christians or the parish council or the parish priest himself. The believer was constantly guided by the functionaries of the Church who regularly visited him, conducted service or prayers for him, settled disputes if any, with the help of the village Christian *panchayat* or the parish council or through some other means. Rules and regulations also seem to have had their effects. In Church services, gatherings, or ceremonies, caste and any such considerations were strictly prohibited. They were made to realize that as Christians they were partaking of one and the same holy communion, believed to be Christ's body. The congregational prayers seem to have further reduced the caste divisions. Occasions such as taking meals from the common kitchen after Church services in the early years, participating in community feeding during famine times, taking meals together in their respective villages during festivals, prayer

⁴⁶ C.P.Miller, "As the Missionary Sees Them" in PML Supplement, September 1937, p.88.

services, community meals at hostels and such occasions seem to have eroded the caste differences among the Christian converts of these villages who originally belonged to different castes.

However, caste and kin ties have continued to remain in matrimonial relations. Except one instance in Ganj where a Ravidasi married a Battiah Christian, no such inter-caste marriage relations have taken place. However, among the urbanized members of the convert community of these villages, inter-caste marriages have taken place such as, among the Harijan Christians, Tribal Christians and Bettiah Christians of Patna,⁴⁷ The main considerations in these cases were higher income, prestigious jobs, better educational qualifications, etc.

The Ravidasis of Ganj and Barsaun did not seem to have accepted some Christian values. To my question, which were the aspect of their new religion they did not like, one of the informants said,

The Church's restrictions on marriage are too strict. Our Christian girls are more educated than other girls of our caste. So the Hindu bride-grooms want Christian brides. For the Christians obtaining the right choice of marriage partners is difficult because of our small number. But the Church does not permit Hindu partners.

Secondly, we are so confused sometimes about the many sects and denominations in Christianity. This I came to know when I began to work outside (in military employment).

Thirdly, I am sorry that our priests and sisters do not marry. It is a cruelty to nature and it is not necessary that they remain unmarried. Like other priests they can be married and be priests as well.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ These were the three major ethnic groups of urban settled Christians in Patna diocese. There are a few urban settlers from Ganj and Barsaun too.

⁴⁸ Interview with Ranji Ram, Barsaun.

There were also indications of their nominal affiliation to Christianity and partial understanding of it. Oft-repeated terms such as *asli*, *pasli*, *nasli/lachaar* (real, half-real, fake or luke-warm) Christians indicate three levels of adoption of Christianity as a way of life by the Ravidasis of these villages.

The earlier association of the Ravidasis with a "foreign" religion so referred by the Hindu members of the community seems to have disappeared, as was clear in the statement of one Devlal Sharma, a Brahmin associate of the Mission: "We disapprove of the *nakli* Christians, for they are neither sincere in Hindu *dharma* nor in the *Masihi dharma*"⁴⁹ Another informant said, "Some of the teachings of Christianity are difficult to follow. For instance, to forgive the one who slaps on one face: how can we forgive our oppressors?"⁵⁰ So also they seem to find the archetypal oppressor in every high caste. For instance, "the Ravidasi Christians in our villages covertly object to the presence of the few Brahmin Christians (the Ojha and Shastri families) saying, 'These Brahmins are coming to our Church to continue to oppress us. They want to deprive us of our benefits from the Mission.'⁵¹

The Parish Supervisor of Social Service Sister Rose told me that having become Christians they (Ravidasi converts) seem to think that the entire help of the Mission should go to them. The Mission also helps leprosy patients, the handicapped, those in abject poverty-all non-Christians.⁵²

⁴⁹ Interview with Devlal Sharma, Shahpur.

⁵⁰ Interview with Shiv Nandan, Barsaun.

⁵¹ Interview with Father Alfred Poovattil and Deo Narayan, Barsaun.

⁵² Interview with Sister Rose, IBMV, Shahpur.

C.3 Change of Socio-religious Structures

There seems to have occurred a re-locating of the social structure at the organizational and functional level of Christian religious life. The shifting of the family-village sacred complex to the Church-shrine-cemetery sacred complex was noticeable. So also the intermediaries such as *bhagats-pandits*-combine have been replaced by catechist-sisters-priests-bishop-combine. The former functionaries, unlike the Christian ones, have been free lancers performing spiritual activities voluntarily and freely whereas, the latter group, being part of the Church hierarchy have been commissioned, authorized and transferred as expediency demanded.

The Church as a primarily shrine and a place of worship also became a central place for all sorts of administrative, organizational and social activities for all Christians including those of Ganj and Barsaun. This newly formed trans-village community (parish community) seems to have adopted certain modes of working together for individual and common good.

The Christian way of greeting one another-*Jai Yesu* (May Jesus be praised) replaced the former style of greeting; yet another indication of the emergence of a new religio-cultural group in Shahpur area. The Church at Shahpur(see Map 1) though a few kilometers away from either of the villages, became a meeting point not only for purely 'spiritual' activities but also for cultural and economic activities(see below). The Ravidasis of Ganj and Barsaun having never come together formerly in a forum now began to meet at the Church complex which fact inevitably fostered socializing, sharing of experiences, lending of support to one another, frequent participation in communitarian activities and so on. A variety of

religio-cultural organization such as *Mahila Sangh* (Women's Organisation), All India Catholic University Federation (AICUF-organization for college students), Young Christian Students (YCS-organization for high school students) *Krus Veer* (Soldiers of God-organization for children), etc., seem to have helped this process of becoming a more unified community and also their acquiring self-confidence, leadership qualities, etc. In 1972 the Christian youth of Shahpur formed a Students' Union to help weaker students and to organize cultural festivals, conduct skits, dramas, etc.⁵³

These institutions had deanery, diocesan, regional, national and international level fora too, through which the Christian members of Ganj and Barsaun immediately became related to the universal Church organizations and were brought into the networking of these organizations.

The Christian converts of these villages seem to have been acquainted with the Christian communities outside Shahpur through Christian journals, magazines and so on to which some of them subscribe.

A significant administrative body of the parish was the Parish Council of Shahpur Mission to which adult Christian men and women were elected as representatives. Set up in 1972 the Parish Council, presided over by the parish priest, dealt with the management of parish institutions, settled family disputes and litigations affecting parish members, distributed scholarships to deserving students and performed a host of other activities of common concern. The Christians of Ganj and Barsaun have had opportunities for engaging in community-based activities through this organization.

⁵³ *Historia Domus*, Shahpur Mission, 1972.

In addition to the existing social (*jati panchayat*) and administrative (village) *panchayats*, the convents in Ganj and Barsaun also have had a functioning new socio-religious institution - a village Christian *panchayat* - in which converts of all castes of a particular village participated. Two of my informants (one from each village) were representatives of their own caste (*jati*) (Ravidasi) *panchayats*, their village Christian *panchayats* and also of their respective village *panchayats*. Thomas Sakhichand of Barsaun said he was called in to settle disputes in other castes as well. In a number of instances, the Christian leaders of these villagers, being more educated and known to be honest in giving verdicts, were called to settle disputes in the village *panchayats*.⁵⁴

Another change in new socio-religious structure of the Ravidasi Christian community was the introduction of an intermediate religious functionary, the catechist. In the relationship between the priest and the people in the village settings (see discussion below) the catechist has had a significant role. On the one hand, a catechist served as the representative of the villagers when he went to the parish priest, and on the other hand, he represented the parish priest when he came to the village with a message for organizing any religious function. Specially trained in the diocesan catechetical training centre at Mokama, east of Patna, these appointed, paid religious functionaries acted as instructors, school teachers, organizers or coordinators for village pastoral visits of the priest and so on. Often a catechist served many villages. Thus the former one-one relationship of individual Ravidasis with their respective *maliks* or *purohits/pandas/bhagats* has now been changed into more of a village Christian community - catechist - priest relationship.

⁵⁴ Interview with Shiv Prasad, Nawadih, Shahpur, and Thomas Sakhichand, Barsaun.

Another significant change that seems to have occurred in these villages is the replacement of the former socio-religious structure, *jajmani-purohiti* (patron-client), with a new type of *jajmani*⁵⁵ in the Christian milieu. A system of social relationship based on caste differentiation and occupational division, *jajmani* (patronage) was given to the *purohit* (priest) for his service in our villages, the priest (also called *pandits*) served all castes, including the lower ones. Those who received the service of an attached *pandit* became patrons (*jajmans*). The *jajmans* gave some remuneration for priestly service (*dakshina*) to the priest.

On rendering priestly service to the 'untouchable' Ravidasis, Shyam Nath Mishra, a Hindu priest said that he would perform religious rituals for them but would not receive *dakshina* in terms of food. Instead, he would receive cash, grain, flour or cereals which he would personally cook then and there and eat or take home.⁵⁶

Much like the *grihasthi-pauni* system, *jajmani-purohiti* also had social, religious and economic implications. Jha in a study of a Bhojpur village says,

It seems that the *jajmani-purohiti* relationship is considered to be an integral part of the sacred order.... The legitimacy of the sacred rituals performed by *purohitis* other than the attached ones would be even questioned.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *Jajman* literally means he who gives sacrifice, that is, the person who employs a priest to carry out a sacrifice from him. *Jajmani* (patronage), though points to a body of relationships - social, religious, economic, etc. - we have found in our villages that it is more socio-religious in nature between the *jajmans* and *purohitis*.

⁵⁶ Interview with Shyam Nath Mishra, Jagdishpur

⁵⁷ Jha, op.cit., p.172

At the social level it ensured a certain amount of cohesion and independence in village community. On the one hand the system derived from the exigencies of the caste-based occupational specialization or from the intricacy of crafts, but on the other hand it ensured the 'clean' castes with the necessary but 'unclean' services by a special group (for instance, the *pauni* service of the Ravidasis) for which the former gave patronage. This network of socio-religious exchange relationship was found to be always to the advantage of the patrons and not the clients.⁵⁸

The *jajmani-purohiti* in our villages, it seems did not give scope of enhancing social prestige or advantage for the Ravidasis who were *jajmans* just as the higher castes were. These was a social distance although there existed a service relationship in the case of Ravidasi - *purohit* relationship.

Under the impact of the Catholic Mission of Shahpur, there seems to have taken place a re-locating of the role of the priest in his relationship with his clients, the Ravidasi converts. We notice a comment by an informant. "We have given up our *pandas* (Hindu priests). Now we have our parish priest. He is our *jajman* too. It is a new *jajmani*. What else?"⁵⁹

The statement is indicative of the replacement of the existing *jajmani-purohiti* system with a new type of '*jajmani*' where the Christian priest functioned as a priest and patron (*jajman*) at the same time.

There were a variety of spiritual ministrations the priest did besides officiating sacraments. Thus, the dependence on the Christian priest, unlike in their former

⁵⁸ Jan Breman, *Patronage and Exploitation, Changing Agrarian Relations in South Gujarat, India*, p.13.

⁵⁹ Interview with George Sakhichand, Ganj

religion, became more comprehensive. That the priest in the Christian milieu enjoyed much higher social prestige than that of the *pandas* or *bhagats*, is another dimension.

However, the priesthood is not caste-based. Any qualified and trained Catholic could aspire for and become a priest. Secondly, in the new '*jajmani*', by the very fact that the priest performed the twin functions, also held much control - social, religious, moral, psychological and economic - over the clients. This new system of socio-religious authority, in the existing 'free' socio-religious life of the Ravidasis was a new phenomenon and as such seems to have been not well adopted as is evident from a statement of one convert:

We used to have the sacraments performed at our house and according to our own convenience. Now, we have to inform the parish priest at Shahpur, get permission, and we cannot get the service from any other priests.⁶⁰

This new '*jajmani*' in the socio-religious life of the Ravidasi converts seems to have been perceived by the converts as a new system of patronage cum priestly service cum control. However it did not seem to suffer the disability of caste differentiation and exploitation, for one of the informants, coming out of the priest's office at Shahpur after an hour-long discussion with the parish priest, told this researcher about his experience: *kurzi par baithake baat kiya* (the Father made his seated on the chair and discussed). When I recalled the experience of meeting Moti Ram Chaman sitting on the ground, at the foot of his *malik*, I understood the implication of his statement.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Interview with Mahadev Mark, Ganj.

⁶¹ Interview with Mohan Prasad, Bansipur, See also Chapter II, D.

D Strategy for Socio-economic Change

We have seen (Chapter III) that the missionaries at work in Ganj and Barsaun preached Christianity along with a combination of welfare and humanitarian works. The effect of these works, termed the "by-product of Christian evangelisation",⁶² mainly related to the realm of social and economic welfare. In fact, factors other than purely 'spiritual' such as education, co-operative society and the like, have been responsible for these changes. With reference to the Christian Mission at work in Ganj and Barsaun we can say that the mission was an external agency (call it "secondary level structure") which ushered in some structural changes in the socio-economic sphere also. For instance, the perception of the missionaries about the existing socio-economic structures and their exploitative mechanisms, their world-views, the deliberate and strategic steps taken by the missionaries and so forth are illustrative. We shall deal with these aspects in this section.

The understanding of the missionaries about the social condition of the Ravidasi converts seems to have been born out of their lived experience in the field. One missionary wrote in 1925. on the social implication of conversion which was tantamount to leaving one's caste:

The caste system is like the steel frame of Hindu society...It is the firm belief that a Hindu's birth, occupation and social position are determined in a previous life and that to change them in this life is simply impossible. To be 'outcasted' from one's caste is practical loss of everything, it is complete social ostracism.⁶³

Secondly, they seem to have held that economic conditions of the people below subsistence level could hardly offer scope for true Christian life with dignity and

⁶² See K.N.Sahay, op. cit., p. 165

⁶³ J.Gschwend, op. cit., p.8.

security. And so they believed that they had to concern themselves with economic projects and community development schemes particularly for those converts. Wrote a missionary:

Moreover, they are a simple people easily duped by the landlords, and at least some of them find it almost constitutionally impossible at their present stage of development to hold onto a piece of land...If they can raise their diet above the mere subsistence level, avoiding the ever-present spectre of starvation, a giant step will have been made toward lifting their whole cultural level.⁶⁴

It was in the nature of their work as missionaries to strive for spiritual upliftment and temporal welfare which always went hand in hand ⁶⁵ (see Chapter III) even though transforming the socio-economic structure of the society was not an explicit objective for them.⁶⁶ But the overall impact of their work, it seems, resulted in the establishment of alternative, parallel socio-economic structures. This was a socio-economic process. While we study that process we shall also review the ideological bases on which their strategies were founded.

D.1 Strategy for Change of Mahajani

We have seen that *Mahajani* system as an economic institution based on patron-client relationship, which should ideally help both the lender and the debtor, tended to entrench the borrowers in deeper debts and misery, led them to sell their land or mortgage it and become bonded labourers, often for generations (see Chapter II, C.1). Let us hear from a *mahajani* debtor who managed to free himself of debt-bondage. Kisun Dayal, 64, a Ravidasi convert of Ganj recalled:

⁶⁴ Quoting a missionary, editorial, "Patterns in Patna", *op. cit.*

⁶⁵ See A. Soares, (ed) "Conversion - Means and Ends" in *Truth Shall Prevail*, pp.37, 98.

⁶⁶ Also M.K. Gandhi, *op. cit.*, refers to the "Socio-economic programmes" of the missionaries in Shahabad (1937). It was also found that one type of action had multiple effects.

In times of want we had nowhere else to go. No government or other agencies came to our help. We had to depend on the *mahajan-maliks*. Sometimes we were abused and sent away when we pleaded for money or wages. They would say, 'No money will be given unless you hand over your goat, hen, or any valuables...' The interest rate was very high. If we could not pay back in time our cow or goat or hens were carried away or we were ordered to send our children to work as *begars*...

When we told Father Pollard about the harassment of the *mahajan-malik* he came to visit us. He told us how to keep proper accounts. Father Pollard went to meet the *malik* also. I don't know what he talked. But the *malik* did not henceforth harass us.⁶⁷

What transpired between Father Pollard and the said *mahajan* we do not know. What such an encounter was like could be guessed from a vivid narrative of a missionary:

A woman came to me one morning and asked me to buy a few tassar cocoons. There were 16 cocoons, worth a few pice, and I said to her, 'What shall I do with 16 cocoons?.'

'I do not know,' she said 'but I must have food for my baby will die....' I called my cook and his wife and asked what it all meant. They told me that the woman lived in the next village, that her husband was the *jon(jan)*-farm servant or serf-of a landlord. 'In that case,' said I, 'he has work. Why does he not support his wife?.'

He does not get enough to do so,' was the answer.

I was sceptical and puzzled. But since the woman was ill from lack of food, I made arrangement that she should be taken care of by the cook's wife. In the evening I called on her husband when he returned from work. He said he had a little land of his own but had no time to cultivate it as he was obliged to work for his Mahajan.

'Why *must* you work for him?' I asked.

⁶⁷ Interview with Kisun Dayal, Ganj

'Because my father borrowed money from him' was the reply.

'Your father borrowed money!' I cried in astonishment.

'How much?'

'Thirty-five rupees' said he.

'And did your father not repay this money?'

'No, he worked only a few years for the Mahajan and then died. Then the Mahajan told me that I would have to work for him.'

'How long have you been working for him?' I queried.

'Long before we were married,' Interposed the wife. A few more questions showed that he had worked for at least ten years.

I told him to go to his Mahajan in the morning and demand a written statement of the amount of money paid up by labour and the amount still owing, and to inform the Mahajan that until this account was given to me he need expect no further service from his *jon*.

After much persuasion the man agreed to follow my advice. The Mahajan was dumbfounded by this request.... A *jon*, a menial, an untouchable, had dared to walk up to him, a Brahmin, and demand a written statement of his account! Such impudence! Who put that big idea into that sunbaked, woolly protuberance that rested on the shoulders of this human draft-animal!

The Mahajan threatened, bullied, cajoled and threatened some more. The *jon* listened as a *jon* should listen to his master and then said, 'The father told me not to work for you till you showed him my account. I have spoken! And he went home. But the Brahmin did not bring the account. He kept bullying and worrying the *jon* till the latter was afraid to remain in his house and so I gave him shelter in the Mission....⁶⁸

⁶⁸ C.P. Miller, op. cit., pp 89-90

Kisun Dayal continued:

After the *Udhar Sangh* was set up, we began to deposit our small savings in the Sangh. We could mortgage our jewellery. The parish's *Udhar Sangh* (Credit Society) was a great help.⁶⁹

Many Ravidasi converts of Ganj and Barsaun had been debtors in the early decades of our period of study (1930s-1980s). The priest-in-charge of the Mission, Father Pollard and his assistant Father John Kenealy realized that debt was the worst economic enslavement of the people. Marshalling a few prominent Christians they established a Co-operative Credit Union⁷⁰ (short form: Credit Society) (see Appendix-11) at Shahpur in 1964 with a small amount of money as initial deposit. Both the number of depositors and the amount deposited increased steadily. The Credit Society had 79 members in 1966 and 219 members in 1990. The amount of money in fixed deposit in a bank increased from 100,000 rupees in 1975 to 215,000 rupees in 1990.⁷¹

The Credit Society seems to have been extremely helpful in clearing the old debts of the convert debtors and in loaning money at low interest rates. The money derived as interest of the fixed deposit of the Society's common fund has been used for various purposes besides loaning, namely, helping the poor (charity works), financing education of poor students and so on. Not only did it help the depositors in times of need but also helped in instilling the habit of saving and thriftiness. This parallel economic institution seems to have enabled the debtors to forego the

⁶⁹ Interview with Kisun Dayal, Ganj.

⁷⁰ Credit Union Societies had been functioning in many Churches in Bihar.

⁷¹ Credit Union Files, Shahpur Mission.

dependence on the *mahajans* and made the illiterate Ravidasis to better their financial management which helped in their becoming more self-sufficient. Since the Credit Society was managed by a committee, the individual members of the society had to be responsible and accountable to the whole body of creditor-debtors.

In Shahpur the parish priest, acting as the trustee of the Society, performed the functions of a banker as well by keeping accounts of the individual creditors and debtors, safe-keeping their mortgaged valuables, and acting as legal cum financial advisor to the illiterate or semi-illiterate Ravidasi converts. Instances where the debtors were not able to pay back the loan due to deterioration of their condition, were treated sympathetically and interest-dues on debt amounts were waived.⁷² We have also seen how the Credit Society contributed to financing education by raising a scholarship fund by its members (see Appendix-6). The distribution of this scholarship fund was done by the general meeting of the parishioners. Father Kenealy noted in 1975:

The distribution was settled at a general parish meeting where the applications were scrutinized and divided into three categories according to the need of the families. Thus a sum of 1700 rupees was divided among 30 families in a wonderful spirit of charity, and concern for the poorest, and the joy and satisfaction experienced by all has encouraged our people to try to provide even more money next year.⁷³

The Mission's mediation in creating a parallel socio-economic structure as the Credit Society seems to have liberated the debtor Ravidasi Christians of Ganj and Barsaun at two levels: theoretical and practical. The legal advice apart, at the theoretical level the Mission seems to have facilitated the spread of general

⁷² *Historia Domus*, Shahpur Mission, 1966,1975.

⁷³ J.Kenealy, in *Historia Domus*, Shahpur Mission, 1975.

awareness among the Christians of the problems of *mahajani* by creating an atmosphere and a forum for sharing problems at parish meetings and during pastoral visits to villages, and disseminating information on the issue from other mission centres. Moreover, the visit of the priest to the debtor-*begar* seems to have helped the latter morally and psychologically. At the practical level the establishment of this financial institution seems to have helped the debtor to liberate himself from his debt-trap. A few debtor-converts of Ganj and Barsaun reported that they had saved some money which was in deposit in the Credit Society which they would use in times of emergency.⁷⁴

D.2 Strategy for Change of Bataidari

We have seen (Chapter II, C.2) that though *bataidari* was an agrarian system of sharing the produce of land between the landed and the landless class, most often it strengthened the landed class and weakened the latter due to undue exaction of crop, with-holding of the share of the *bataidars*, etc. Many Ravidasi converts of Ganj and Barsaun belonged to the category of exploited *bataidaars*.⁷⁵ Thomas Sakhichand of Barsaun recounted:

I have been a *bataidar* for many years. Often it so happened that due to enforced work as *banihar/harwaha* I did not get enough time to tend my own cultivation. At harvest due share was not allowed to be retained. But in those days I did not have the courage even to stand up against my *malik*.

In 1975 when he (the *malik*: a certain Surnath Tiwari) was paying the wages, less than the minimum rate as he always did for many years,

⁷⁴ Interview with Shiv Mangal, Ganj.

⁷⁵ H. Jha, op. cit., p.137.

I told him I would complain to the police. But he threatened me. But I did file a case against him. Everybody was surprised. A Harijan filing a case against a Bhumihar landlord in Barsaun! There was pressure from many quarters to drop the case. But I did not. The local police inspector, a Muslim, came to make enquiry and settle the matter in the village itself. About a thousand people gathered. At the intervention of the inspector, I was cleared of all my blown-out-of-proportion interest on loan and promised to be paid the government fixed minimum wage including the meal (14.85 rupees and meal).⁷⁶

Sakhichand also recounted an incident when Father Pollard had filed a case against a Bhumihar landlord in favour of a *begar* in the 1950s. The verdict in that case was in favour of the *begar* through the good offices of the local block development officer.⁷⁷

Several instances such as these where the Mission came to individual converts were reported from the two villages. Though the Mission's mediation in obtaining justice to the exploited *bataidars* was not through any explicit or organized strategy, the institutional framework of the Mission seems to have provided the convert *bataidars* a sort of moral, psychological and social security on the one hand, and seems to have acted as a check on the exploiting category of *maliks*, on the other. The institutional framework of the Mission at Shahpur seems to have projected the impression of a "zamindari", with the parish priest as the "big master" (*barha babu*) at the helm of affairs, which had enormous power in terms of knowledge, money and influence with local and higher government officials, land, vehicles, buildings, etc. These perceived and real institutional resources were put to use to provide protection to the weaker sections of all Christian and non-Christian communities.

⁷⁶ Interview with Thomas Sakhichand, Barsaun.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

D.3 Strategy for Change of Janouri

Many Ravidasi Christians of Ganj and Barsaun had been *jans* for many decades, sometimes for more than one generation.⁷⁸ We have heard Ramphal Ram's difficulty in sending his son to school due to the opposition by his master (Chapter II, C.3). Though *janouri* was a system of patronage to the helpless labourers who often did not have work to do, it seemed to have worked as an exploitative mechanism against some of the Ravidasi *jans* of our villages. In many such cases, the Mission seems to have provided some institutional help to free the *jans*. However we have no records about the type of help, strategy used to free the *jans*, etc. As already mentioned the "zamindari" and "barha babu" impressions of the Mission and the parish priest respectively might have provided some social, moral and psychological support to the Christian *jans*. Also, from the responses, we gather that the missionary in-charge with his knowledge of legal matters and good relationship with the local and higher level government officials,⁷⁹ institutional resources and so forth seems to have provided two kinds of support to the *jans*: one, enabling the *jans* to get just wages and freeing them from the system of *janouri* itself; second, by providing alternative, parallel structures such as employment in the Mission's own institutions in Shahpur or outside, and educational facilities particularly vocational training, which enabled them to obtain jobs elsewhere. The Mission's Records say, by 1975 many of the Catholics had obtained jobs in private as well as government

⁷⁸ Some instances in these villages are of those who lost their lands and were drafted into *janouri* by *mahajans*.

⁷⁹ Good relations existed especially due to relief and rehabilitation works. See *Historia Domus*, Shahpur Mission, 1951, 1966 ff.

institutions. Those who got jobs in the 1970s seemed to be the ones the Mission had sponsored for education in the 1950s.⁸⁰

A narrative from a missionary might throw more light onto understanding the manner in which the Mission came to the help of Christian *jans*.

The next case was that of *jan* who had worked 14 years to pay off a debt of 40 rupees and still owed 45...

I invited the Mahajans to come my house to talk over the matter. They came, sometimes singly, sometimes in groups of three or four.

I explained to them that as a Priest I wished to be the friend and father of all, the enemy of no man. Then I asked them to state their grievance.

'You take away our *jon*. If you need labourers go and hire them. Do not take ours,' said several.

'I am not endeavouring to take away your *jon*,' I answered. 'You know how much land the Mission owns. Tell me, could it support your *jon*?' They agreed that it could not.

'Besides,' I went on, 'it would be wrong on my part to break up a system unless I have something better to put in its place. You are landlords, you can furnish labour to hundreds of poor people, and you do so. These people need you and you need them. So far your system is all right and I will help you to support it. But your system is bad, very bad in one regard.'

'What is that?' they asked, for they were genuinely interested this time.

'You treat your *jon* with less consideration than you treat your bullocks. You allow him no chance to educate his children, you forbid him to change his religion.... You keep him tied to you as a slave and his children have the same future before them-no freedom except to

⁸⁰ *Historia Domus*, Shahpur Mission, 1975.

work for you. And that is wrong. Pay him a living wage, give him a chance to acquire land and to educate his children-do that and I will help you to the full extent of my ability.'

Well, we talked and talked. Their animosity evaporated. They had to agree that my demands were not exorbitant, but - they could not accede to them. And why not? I can best answer in the exact words of one of the Mahajans, a fine, intelligent young man: 'What you say is correct, sir but you speak as a Padre Sahib and not as landlord. Were you in my place you would see that one cannot run an estate according to your ideas.'

And there the matter rested till this day except that a *better understanding exists between us and they are usually willing to listen to any request that I make in behalf of their jon* (emphasis added).⁸¹

Note that the priest's mediation was neither to destroy a system had it been just, nor to sow animosity between the *jans* and the *maliks*. Our informant said: "After conversion too we continued to work in the malik's house. But we would demand the minimum wages. If they did not comply, we were not afraid to leave them and seek work elsewhere."⁸²

It was noted that the Mission as a service institution to all in the locality was not inimical to the landlords of the area, nor did the latter consider the former as threats for, the records say, many from the high castes used to come to the Mission for instruction, and a few got converted too.⁸³ A letter from a missionary tells more of the relationship:

One could make out a very black case against the mahajan-maliks, and in my opinion, it would be a very unjust one. Some few are harsh and

⁸¹ C.P. Miller, op. cit., pp.90-92.

⁸² Interview with Rup Narain Raphael, Ganj.

⁸³ *Historia Domus*, Shahpur Mission, 1964.

cruel, but in general, from my experience, I have found them to be men of intelligence and of character. Injustice there is, but it results from the defects of the system rather than from the malice of the individual. But bad as it is, it would be unwise to endeavour to change it in a day.⁸⁴

Apart from pleading for a just deal for their *jans*, the missionaries also seem to have enabled the *jan*-converts to pursue education and aspire for better employment. Education was not only for acquiring wisdom but was geared to higher status employment. Through vocational guidance, training and general education, the Ravidasi converts in Ganj and Barsaun were able to attain occupational mobility whereas, that level of achievement was not noticeable among the non-Ravidasi or non-Christian Harijans. The Mission also helped many converts set up independent employment avenues such as tailoring, embroidery works and the like.⁸⁵

D.4 Strategy for Change of Grihasthi-Pawani

Grihasthi-pawani system as an occupation-based, patron-client social structure in Ganj and Barsaun, linking landowners with various service castes, functioned to the advantage of one group (the *grihasths*) and to the detriment of the other (the *paunis*: Ravidasis) (see Chapter II, C.4). While the *grihasths* gave social protection and patronage, the system did not give scope to the hide and leather worker Ravidasis for obtaining higher status occupations or jobs which, in turn, would have enabled them to achieve higher social status.⁸⁶ So also, because of the unchangeable 'dectum' of the *dharma* regarding the ascriptive nature of one's occupation, the

⁸⁴ C.P. Miller, *op.cit.*, p.92.

⁸⁵ *Historia Domus*, Shahpur Mission, Nos.1970-1980.

⁸⁶ Suresh Kumar, *Social Mobility in Industrializing Society*, pp.116, 175.

chamayin (midwife: also means woman of low morale) occupation could not be altered nor the associated low image of the Ravidasi erased.

Despite these socio-economic handicaps, a good number of Ravidasi converts succeeded in breaking away from the *grihasthi-pawani* system. What was the mechanism through which they achieved this? How did the Ravidasi converts achieve a proportionately greater social and occupational mobility? We have seen some of the factors such as education, alternate employment schemes and the like in the previous chapters. These apart, there seems to have been simultaneous ideological support given to the Ravidasis which, on the one hand, tended to "liberate" them from the condemnation of unchangeable 'low status' and, on the other, enabled them to acquire a better self-image, worthy of human beings. We have the following narration of a respondent; an elderly convert, aged 72, of Ganj who had lived in a mud hut till 20 years ago but now lived in a ten-room *pucca* concrete house, and owning an electric-powered flour mill, many modern amenities and so on.

(GS) Earlier, what were we? Just nothing but dust (*kurha*) and dirt(*khichad*). The *maliks* used to compel us to do dirty jobs at the same time keep us away saying 'you are unclean by birth'. For generations we have done *chamda-chamayin* work thinking, it was our *dharma* and our destiny.

(JK) Don't you do such works now?

(GS) No, sir. I left *chamda* work some 40 years ago: since I became a catechist (master) of the Mission.

(JK) Nevertheless, they (the villagers) still think you are 'unclean' due to your caste?

(GS) Let people think whatever they want. But I don't think one is born 'unclean'. That is a wrong understanding of man. Secondly, these days they would not dare to treat us 'unclean'.⁸⁷

He also narrated an incident which occurred at his tea shop cum hotel where a Rajput customer asked him to serve food. He refused to serve food to the highcaste landlord due to fear of being implicated for breach of rules of dining and told the latter that there was 'no' food. Then the Rajput compelled him to serve food saying he did not believe in untouchability any more.

Over the past few years the respondent had acquired some sources of power and status in society. Among his children, two daughters were married to office-employed persons, four of his sons were employed in blue or white-collar jobs in urban areas, one was an inspector of schools in a nearby district, and the last son was a college graduate.

Another respondent said,

Once Father Pollard asked a group of us why do the highcaste people say you people are 'unclean' and 'untouchable'?

'Because of our unclean occupation - removing caracass, skinning it, cleaning hides and making leather. Our wives (*mehraro*) do defiling job (*chamayin*)', said one. But another said, '*Karma ka phal hein* (result of our bad action in the previous birth), Father.'

We discussed many such things. Then Father said 'But if some of your occupations are really 'defiling' why do you continue to do these?'⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Interview with George Sakhichand, Ganj.

⁸⁸ Interview with Pascal Premchand, Ganj.

The missionaries' approach to the problem of the 'polluted' Ravidasis seems to have been different, for one missionary says,

Ten years of experience, almost daily contact with the Untouchable - has taught me not to relegate him to the scrapheap of Hinduism, but to love him as a fellowman. Yes, he has his faults plenty of them - some of them big glaring ones. I know that he tells lies, that he is tricky, deceitful... but I love him in spite of all his faults, because he is my fellowman, a sinner like myself, yet an adopted son of God....⁸⁹

Secondly, the missionaries did not admonish them to differentiate occupations on the basis of ritual pollution. However, in the socio-religious context of the Ravidasis of these villages, they did discourage the Ravidasis to continue the 'defiling' occupations - the *pauni* services. Besides, by facilitating them to aspire for and acquire alternate higher status occupations, it seems, some long-standing structural changes have been brought about in the Ravidasi society of Ganj and Barsaun.

We also note that the missionaries of Shahpur by so doing, did not estrange themselves from the village *grihasths*, nor did the latter oppose the missionaries, although there might have been some exceptions. We have the narration of an experience in the life of Father Pollard:

[Father Pollard seems to have requested the bishop (the higher authority of the Mission) in early 1950s to transfer him elsewhere from Shahpur due to his perceived opposition from the Rajput landlords of the area. The Bishop seems to have asked Father Pollard to meet the opposing Rajputs personally and explain things....]

Father Pollard went to the house of the Rajput, whom he thought the biggest trouble-maker of all. Surprisingly, he was kindly received.

⁸⁹ C.P.Miller, op.cit., p.89.

Before he could present his reasons for the visit, he was politely invited to sit down. Then he was offered a cup of tea and biscuits. Now he heard the puzzling questions: 'Well, Father, what can I do for you?' Father Pollard was nonplussed. He explained to the attentive Rajput the purpose of the mission work, the desire missionaries have to end poverty, and be of service to all. He would even educate the Rajput children, if he deigned to send them to the mission school. That was the end of the Rajput's opposition.⁹⁰

Our findings on these villages say that not all Ravidasi converts abandoned the 'defiling' occupations. The *pauni* service of the Ravidasis entitled them to acquire the skin of the dead animals which, after its processing, would fetch good money. Because of this even those Ravidasis who were well off continued to do the hide work till recent years. One such informant, an elderly convert, was asked;

(JK) When did you last remove the skin of a dead cattle?

(BB) Six months ago.

(JK) But you had given up such type of works several years ago?

(BB) True. But I could not resist the temptation. After all for years my forefathers had done it. Also, I needed leather for my *dholak* (drum).

(He added),

Of course, my sons (all educated and job-holders) did not approve of it.⁹¹

It was observed that most educated Ravidasis had left the *pauni* services whereas the illiterate ones, including converts, continued to do *pauni* services.

⁹⁰ Pascual Oiz, op.cit., pp.174-175.

⁹¹ Interview with Behadur Bernard, Ganj.

E. Mobility Paradigm

"Two most significant changes", said my non-Ravidasi informants, "in the converts of these villages have been education by the Mission and 'better jobs.'⁹² The loci of the changes seem to have been perceived in two paradigms namely, education and change of occupation. We have seen that these factors have also enhanced the social status and prestige of the Ravidasis in the ambient societies. This leads us to a discussion on two points : education is related to obtaining better jobs on the one hand, and both these enhanced social status and prestige, on the other.

The occupational structure of the landless Ravidasis prior to the period of our study, consisted of two types of works namely, agricultural labour for landlords and traditional *pauni* service both of which did not seem to have yielded any income beyond the level of subsistence. The only other avenue for employment, my informant said, was cheap labour and leather work in Calcutta.⁹³

During the past 50 years there have not been many avenues of employment except, perhaps, in the local leather factory⁹⁴ next to Ganj. Given that, the only

⁹² Talk with Dr. Nazruddin Ahmad, Banahi, Mr. Jai Prakash Singh, Block Development Officer, (BDO) Shahpur, *et al.* Mr. Singh said, "The Mission has done tremendous work for the development of the Chamars. Why did they limit to Chamars only?" By 'better jobs' they meant jobs as bank officers or clerks, school teachers, in the military, police, etc.

⁹³ There were many leather worker Ravidasis who had migrated to Calcutta for jobs of the same kind or as coolies, rickshaw pullers, etc. But most of them returned to their villages due to communal riots in Calcutta. Interview with George Sakhichand, Ganj. On the communal riots in Calcutta involving migrant workers from Bihar, see Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal 1905-1947*, pp.21, 50ff, 90ff.

⁹⁴ The leather factory situated near river Chher, on the main road to Ganj from the Mission had employed some local leather workers but dismissed them on their demanding higher wages

means that facilitated some of the Ravidasis to get blue or white-collar jobs seems to be education. We have seen their level of education, the process of acquiring it and the Mission's mediation in their education.⁹⁵

A social group that possesses a low level of education is a socially backward community and hence education has a diagnostic value.⁹⁶ That the untouchable Ravidasis were not able to acquire education earlier was not conjectural. A combination of social and psychological forces had been responsible for such a state of pathological subalternity.⁹⁷ In the case of the convert Ravidasis the burden of socio-religious taboos and dicta having lightened, and various socio-economic constraints reduced, they have been able to achieve a higher level education. That the 'unwilling' students of the 1940s and 1950s (See Chapter III) now want, by all means, to educate their wards is evidence of the removal of a mental blockage, and the presence of a psychological mobility.

Education seems to have enhanced mobility from agriculture-based occupations to non-agricultural ones and also from the traditional 'defiling' occupations (*pauni* services) to what they termed as "better jobs". In the case of the Ravidasis it was the 'defiling' works that 'lowered' their status. Thus occupation imply status, prestige and identity.⁹⁸ Had they continued in such 'defiling' works or improved their

(just wages). The factory is still running and employs some 20 leather workers, all from far away villages and I was told that the Rajput owner sends away the workers every few months so that they would not become permanent. Talk with Sadanand Yadav.

⁹⁵ When we say 'education' we mean comprehensive education which means besides formal education in schools, colleges, etc., the religious formation which included personality development, change of world-views and so on.

⁹⁶ A.B. Mukerjee, *The Chamars of Uttar Pradesh*, p.73.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.74.

⁹⁸ Suresh Kumar, *op.cit.*, pp.101-158.

economic standard through say, industrialization or commercialization of their traditional leather work, the prospect of attaining higher status would have been still bleak, because there seems to be limits to social mobility in a caste-based society.⁹⁹ The newly achieved occupation-based higher status is evident in the manner in which the members of the ambient society refer to those employed in "better jobs" such as (X), the school master, (X) the military man, etc., replacing the former way of identification such as (X), the Chamar, (X), the *jan* of (X), the malik, etc.

Education and 'better jobs' therefore, seem to be two significant upwardly pushing attributes of the convert Ravidasis in the perception of the ambient society. We see that these attributes have had social, economic, cultural, religious and political significance. That two of the Ravidasi converts became leaders¹⁰⁰ in the local politics was more than just personal achievements of these two people but also seems to have boosted the morale of the entire Harijans, in the political sphere. What appears to have endowed the converts to achieve some degree of upward vertical status mobility was change of occupations in which education was the chief means.

⁹⁹ For instance, the Agra Chamars (Jatavs): though they enhanced their economic standard through industrialization and commercialization of leather works and also attempted sanskritization, Lynch says they could not attain higher social status because the higher castes did not accept their claim. Lynch says it is impossible to achieve higher status for 'low' castes in a caste-based society. See O. Lynch, *op.cit.*, p.87. Also see Shyamlal, *The Bhangis in Transition*, p.30.

¹⁰⁰ One of them was Shiv Prasad, the Secretary of the block Communist (CPI M-L) party. The second one was a certain Bikram Prasad who stood for Lok Sabha elections from Buxar constituency in 1979 as an independent candidate. He was the first Harijan to contest elections at that level, probably in the entire district. See *Historia Domus*, Shahpur Mission, 1980.

CONCLUSION

We have been investigating the changes that have occurred in the Ravidasi communities of Ganj and Barsaun which came under the influence of the Catholic Mission at Shahpur. It goes without saying that the Mission with its multi-dimensional programme of spiritual and temporal works such as preaching, educational service, medical service, humanitarian works and the like, would have effected changes, to a greater extent, in the Ravidasis who adopted Christianity, and, to a lesser extent, in the wider ambient society.

The changes we have noticed have been in the realms of social, religious, spiritual, cultural and economic life of the Ravidasis, again in varying degrees. We have conceptualized these changes as change of 'structures', meaning change that altered the long-lasting networks of societal relationships. The local, village structures (*jajmani-purohiti*, *bataidari*, *janouri*, and so on) may be called primary level structures and the organizations emerging under external influences (such as associations, clubs, trusts, societies, Church organizations, etc.) may be called secondary level structures. We have broadly categorized these changes as socio-religious and socio-economic.

In the first category we examined the process of the gradual adoption of Christianity as a way of life starting with the one-time event of conversion/baptism and the consequent changes in : (a) their beliefs, practices and observances; b)

attitudes, values and world-views and c) the re-structuring of some of the earlier socio-religious structures.

Concerning the earlier religion of the Ravidasis we have noticed a preponderance of deities and spirits, both malevolent and benevolent, who were constantly "watched out" and propitiated either by themselves or by the local spiritual mediators, the *bhagats*.

Ravidasi religious practice used to be largely domestic, with places of worship inside the house, around it, under a tree, in the open field or near a temple. Under the influence of higher Hinduism, they occasionally visited some popular temple, revered a few religious preceptors and celebrated some popular festivals.

The process of adoption of Christianity was characterized by mechanisms such as combination or complete replacement of old beliefs, practices and observances with those of Christianity, assimilating themselves into a new religio-cultural community, indigenizing some Christian ceremonies with aspects of their domestic religion and higher Hinduism and so forth. We notice a shift from the local, domestic religion to a much more comprehensive notion of God available equally, in principle, to all adherents of the religion. So also the relation to God: the local gods, goddesses and innumerable spirits have largely given way to a universal, monotheistic power, God, the Father whom, they do not propitiate any longer.

Adoption of Christianity also effected certain changes in attitudes, values and world-views. The Christian community in Shahpur has come to be constituted through conversions from diverse castes, and this seems to have led to greater

inter-dining and inter-caste interaction in the course of almost all parish activities: Church services, village prayer services, pilgrimages, enrolment in Christian schools and hostels and participation in pious and cultural associations, etc. The overall effect of such day-to-day interaction appears to be in a tendency towards erosion of the separation and the hierarchy of castes within the Christian community of Shahpur which had high, middle and 'low caste' converts.

This emerging religio-cultural community also has marked trans-caste, trans-village and trans-regional affiliations. Through locally based, yet extensively networking associations and organizations, the Christian Ravidasis of these villages came into more or less active contact with international religio-cultural bodies.

Changes in the Ravidasi socio-religious life have been more palpable in the primary level structures. The former patron-priest relationship (*jajmani-purohiti*), got replaced by a new *jajmani-purohiti* of the Christian type in which the priest functioned as priest and patron as well. Another new socio-religious structure which came into existence in these villages was the village Christian *panchayat*, a *panchayat* of all the Christians in a particular village who might have belonged to different castes. Thus a Ravidasi convert now became a member of three *panchayats*, namely, his caste *panchayat*, the village *panchayat* and the new institution, the village Christian *panchayat*. A third socio-religious structure which came to be established in Shahpur was the parish council, a body of elected and nominated Christians representing various villages, castes and groups, in which the Ravidasi converts of Ganj and Barsaun also have been members. An administrative body of the local Christian community, the parish council seems to have enabled the members of these villages to democratically participate and contribute in programmes oriented toward community.

Our findings on Ganj and Barsaun show a noticeable gap between the Christianity practised by the Ravidasis and that preached by the Church. Many earlier beliefs, practices and observances continue; and the converts seem to be unable to accept certain values, attitudes and world-views of Christianity. If we conceptualize the process of adoption of the new religion, it is like a continuum in which elements of the old and new religion can be observed at any particular time. Their religious life may also be conceived as being made up of three overlapping influences - earlier domestic religion, higher Hinduism and Christianity, of which different persons and families partake in different measures. Within the 'great tradition' of Christianity there is the 'little tradition' of Ravidasi Christianity, the latter drawing upon both the 'little' and 'great traditions' of Hinduism.

The second area where some gradual yet significant change of structures has taken place is in their socio-economic life. We have considered only four main primary level structures: money-lending (*mahajani*), share-cropping (*bataidari*), semi-bonded labour-patronage system (*janouri*) and patron-client relationship in caste-based service (*grihasthi-pawani*). We have found that in most cases the landless 'low caste' Ravidasis had been exploited by their landlord masters (*maliks*) under these primary level structures.

Under the influence of the Mission, with its functionaries and their multi-pronged spiritual cum corporeal strategies, these structures got weakened and have been gradually replaced by similar but different, parallel, alternative socio-economic structures. These were the co-operative Credit Society (*Udhar Sangh*) in place of *mahajani*, ensuring of justice by missionaries to check gross exploitation in *bataidari*, and change of occupation through education in place of *janouri*. The

alternative to *grihasthi-pawani* was in enabling the converts to liberate themselves from the caste-based, traditional occupations (*pawani*-services) which had 'lowered' their status in Hindu society, and enabling them through formal higher education and religious instruction to prepare for higher status jobs, vertical status mobility and psychological mobility or 'spiritual' freedom from subaltern mind-sets.

These structures were new in the village contexts, parallel in that these corresponded to the old ones, alternative in that these have been substitutional and beneficial. The Mission seems to have used several strategies to achieve these changes. These strategies were not planned, organised or overtly aimed at these changes: but were implicit in the avowed objective of 'spiritual transformation' which constituted action for material welfare and social change.

The mechanisms through which these changes have been effected have been at two levels: ideas and practice. At the level of ideas, the Mission seems to have facilitated the spread of general awareness of the socio-economic problems of the society, creating a forum in the parish or in the village where their problems could be discussed and ironed out, giving psychological and moral support, and also supplementing the above with the supportive, foundational Christian principles, insights and doctrines so that the converts' psyche would discard some of the hitherto unquestioned dicta which seem to have chained them to perennial low status. In practice the Mission came to the succour of many bonded or semi-bonded, needy labourers, sponsored their children's education, and facilitated a process of gaining alternative employment and so on. Moreover, the institutional framework of the Mission at Shahpur seems to have established a new network of relationships between the Ravidasi converts on the one hand, and the landlord *maliks* and local and higher government officials, on the other.

It was observed in Mission records, and in interviews that while the missionaries pleaded with the *maliks* for say, better (just) wages in behalf of convert semi-bonded labourers, they did maintain friendly relations with the *maliks*. Also the institutional framework of the Mission at Shahpur seems to have projected an impression of a 'zamindari' with the parish priest, the 'big master' (*barha babu*) at the helm of affairs, which had enormous power in terms of knowledge, money and influence with government officials, land, vehicles, building complexes, etc. These perceived and real institutional resources were put to providing moral, psychological, social and financial protection to the weaker sections which included the converts of Ganj and Barsaun.

Our findings show that the overall effect of these alternative structures has been to free the Ravidasis from the exploitative former structures on the one hand, and to enable them to achieve a certain degree of mobility, psychological, educational, occupational and status, on the other. These achievements in absolute terms may not be high. But these are significant when we estimate these against their previous subaltern conditions. I may conceptualize these changes in terms of two adjacent columns of a figure, each column being representative of their pre-conversion and post-conversion life and having its distinct foundations to build up mobility. There seems to be an upper limit to the scope of mobility on the pre-conversion column whereas, there is no such limit in the 'post-conversion' column which is characterized by their adoption of an alternative socio-religious system.

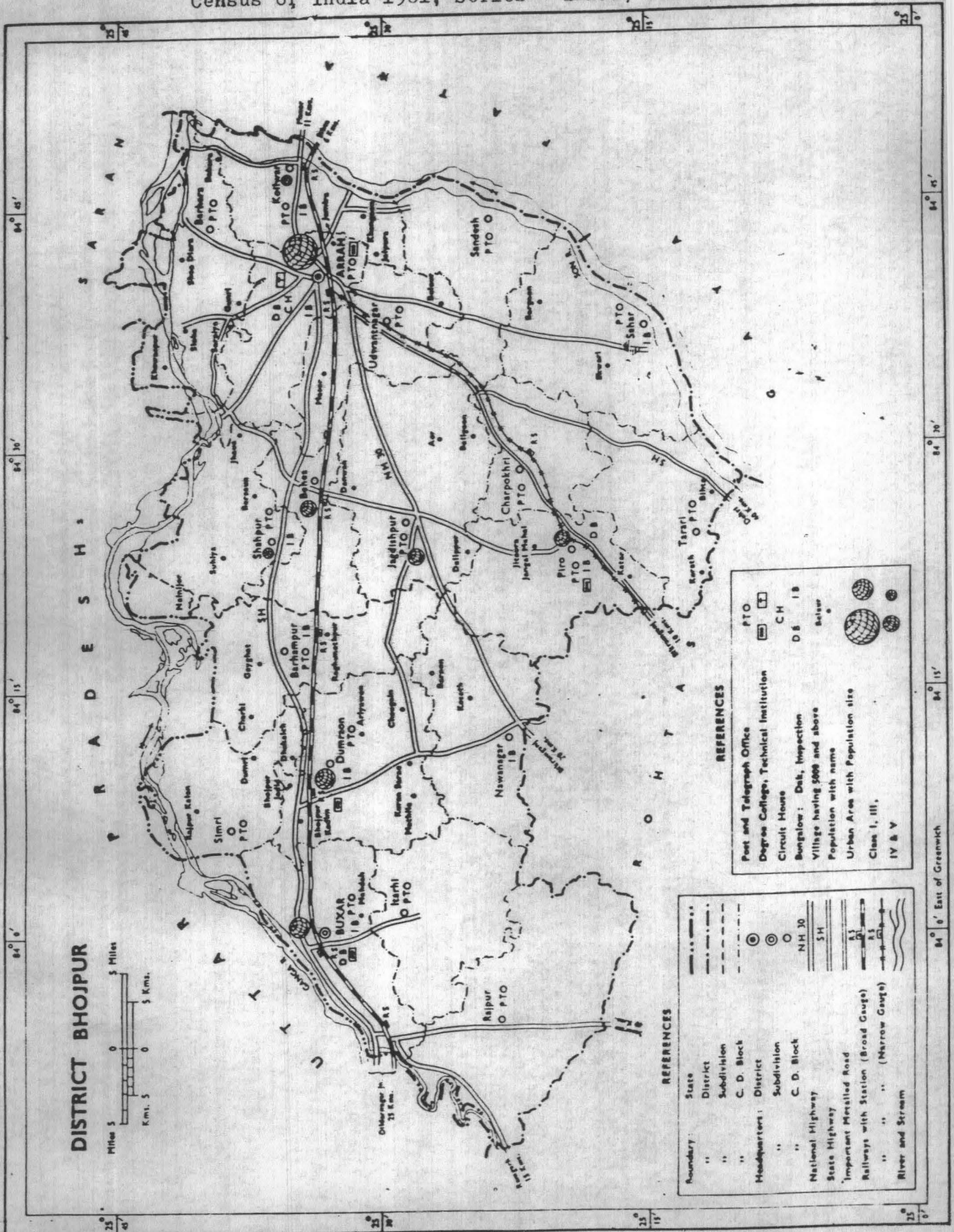
Studies on Harijan societies elsewhere in India have shown that the impact of secondary level structures certainly has enhanced educational, occupational and

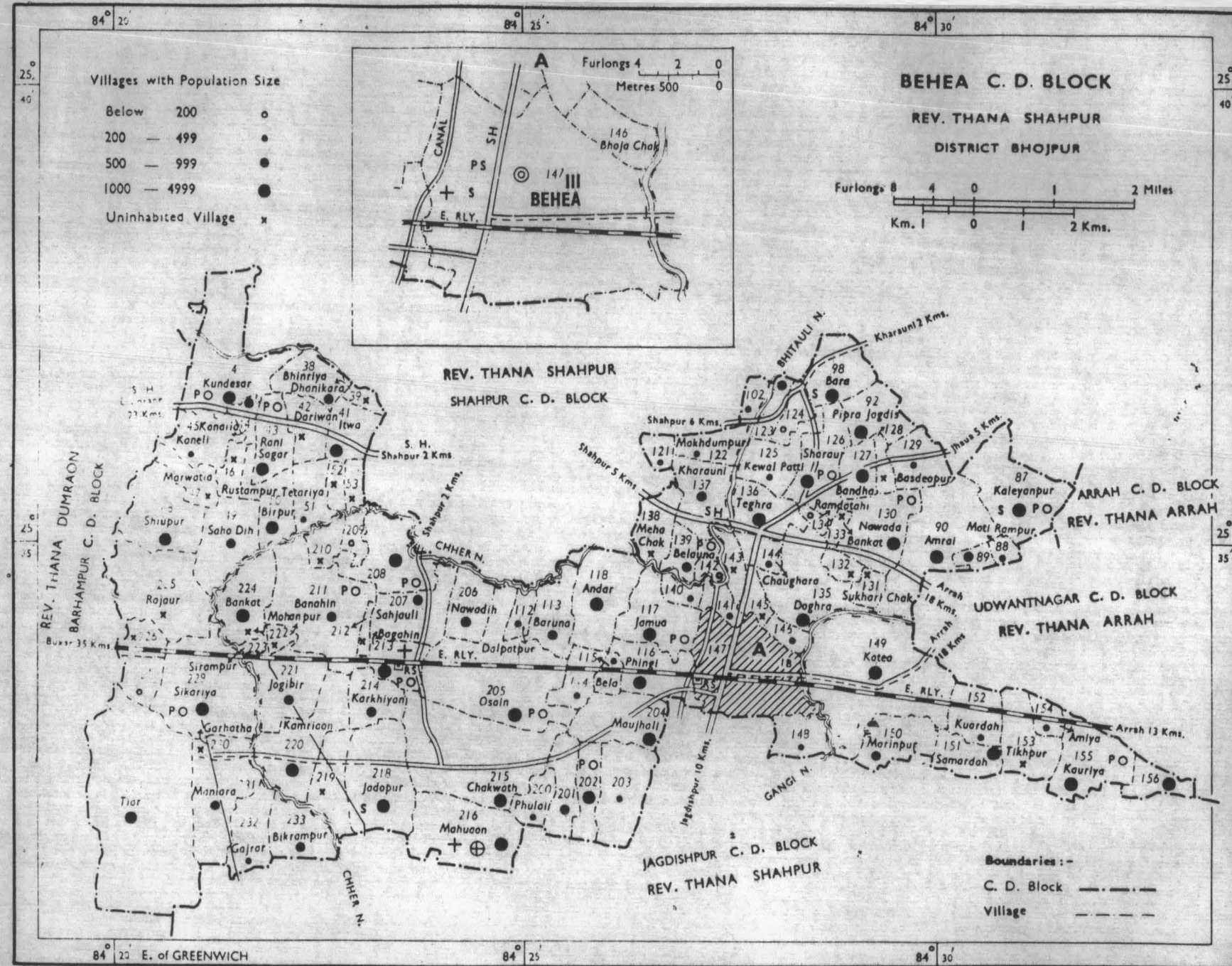
economic upward mobility in varying degrees. However, there seems to be little or limited corresponding status mobility within say, caste-based hierarchically ordered society. In other words, whatever the achievements the Harijans might have made, their status in such societies seems to have remained generally lower to the status of this or that caste 'higher' than them. This study on the higher status mobility achievement of the Ravidasis of these villages shows that a greater degree of success in enhancing this mobility has been made by the people concerned due to their adoption of an alternative socio-religious foundation to build on. This foundation seems to have let loose the shackles or mind-sets formed by the dicta of *karma-dharma*, purity-pollution and hierarchy. Through a new psychological universe of values and interaction, and experience of being accepted, honoured and accorded dignity, the Ravidasi converts seem to have actualized a psychological mobility. Examples are aplenty where such structural changes have been effected by similar agents which have adequate ideologies and their actualization programme. In the case of the Ravidasis of Ganj and Barsaun these structural changes occurred as a consequence of the mutual interaction between them and the Catholic Mission at this historical juncture. And that is their history.

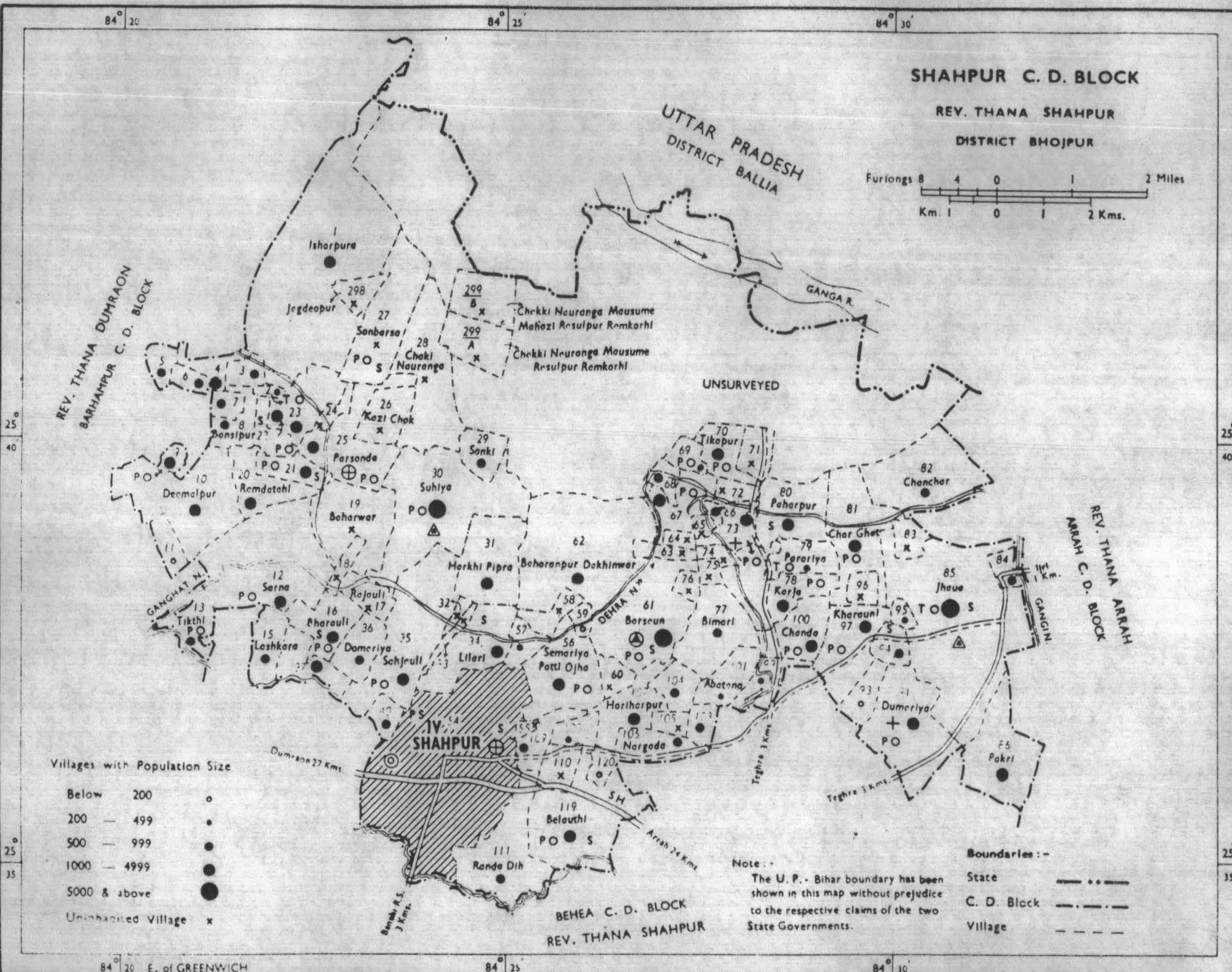
Appendix:

MAP No. 2

Source : District Census Handbook, Bhojpur District,
Census of India 1981, Series-4 Bihar, Parts XIII A&B.







Appendix:
 MAP No. 4

Source: District Census Handbook, Bhojpur District,
 Census of India 1981, series-4 Bihar, Parts XIII A & B

Appendix-1

Origin Myth on Chamars

In the beginning there was but one family of men and they were of all of the highest caste. They followed different occupations according to aptitude. It so happened that a cow died one day, and the carcass lay in the field until evening. Since no one could be found to remove the carcass, the three older brothers agreed that their younger brother should carry away the body, and that, afterwards, when he had bathed, they would receive him on the old footing of equality. To this he agreed. After much pulling and hauling, he managed to drag the carcass to the jungle. When he returned from his bath, his brothers refused to receive him, but compelled him to live at a distance from them. He protested but his protests were of no avail. They told him that henceforth he was to do the work of a Chamar, that is, to skin the animals that died, and to make leather and implements of leather. The brothers promised to take care of him in return to these services. Thus the Chamar caste arose.

For similar myths see Briggs, *op.cit.*, p.16.

Appendix - 2

Conversion Pattern at Ganj, Barsaun, Shahpur

Year	Ganj	Barsaun	Shahpur
1947	20	--	67
1948	15	--	85
1949	19	7	74
1950	11	--	48
1951	15	27	135
1952	13	8	91
1953	5	4	56
1954	27	3	122
1955	10	--	73
1956	13	4	68
1957	19	12	75
1958	23	7	104
1959	19	9	91
1960	13	2	84
1961	15	9	88
1962	17	12	90
1963	28	4	94
1964	19	13	90
1965	11	4	82
1966	12	9	73
1967	16	13	278
1968	16	17	204
1969	14	1	143
1970	6	9	105

Year	Ganj	Barsaun	Shahpur
1971	14	9	95
1972	13	2	86
1973	5	--	65
1974	10	2	34
1975	9	--	33
1976	9	--	26
1977	11	2	33
1978	11	6	35
1979	7	9	70
1980	12	2	25
1981	7	2	18
1982	4	--	28
1983	5	--	21
1984	4	12	48
1985	7	28	94
1986	5	22	100
1987	5	2	32
1988	12	1	71
1989	12	4	34
1990	1	--	50
1991	7	4	14
1992	13	--	24
1993	7	3	37
1994	(NA)	(NA)	~ 10

Sources:

- 1) **Baptism Register**, Shahpur Mission, Vol.I & II
- 2) **Village Family Register**, Vols. XXIX, Shahpur Mission.

Appendix - 3

Data on Education Sponsored by Shahpur Mission at Arah Catholic School and Hostel

Decade	No. of Shahpur Students admitted in	
	Arah Catholic School	Arah Catholic Hostel
1951-1960	10 NA(3)	9 NA(3)
1961-1970	39	31 NA(1)
1971-1980	47 NA(1)	35 NA(1)
1981-1986	32	27
Total for 36 years	128 NA(4)	102 NA(5)

NB: Data available till 1986 only.
NA(1) Data not available for (1) one year.

Sources:

1) Arah Catholic School Admission Register, Vol.I & II (1951-1975).

Appendix - 4

Missionary Visits of Father Pollard from January to December, 1947

Sl.No.	Name of Village	No. of Visits
1	Charwahi [Chakwath]	8
2	Bowli	7
3	Rudernagar	10
4	Chakani	7
5	Ramdatahi	6
6	Isharpura	6
7	Doghra	14
8	Nawadih	7
9	Bawna	2
10	Sahjauli	1
11	Belauti	2
12	Gai Ghat	1
13	Sahodih	5
14	Udhura	2
15	Kundesar	8
16	Kaneli	3
17	Brahmpur	1
18	Bansipur	3
19	Birpur	4
20	Raghunathpur	1
21	Bharasara	1
22	Osain	2
23	Gosainpur	1
24	Harnathpur	1
25	Anar	2
	Residing at Ganj (Jan 15, 1947 - Mar 20, 1951)	105

Source: **Daily Chronicles**, Shahpur Mission, Vol.I.

Appendix - 5

Priests Served at Shahpur Mission

Sl.No.	Period of Service	Name of priests	Type of Service
1	1936-1940	Father Henry Westropp	Visiting service
2	1941-1946	Father Nicholas Pollard	"
1	1947-1974	Father Nicholas Pollard	Resident
2	1953-1954	Father Devasia Kachiramattam	Pastoral
3	1954-NA	Father James S. Tong	service
4	1954-NA	Father Wargis Kappammotil	"
5	1957 (?)	Father Bernard Hass	"
6	1958-NA	Father Tony Grolling	"
7	1960, 1967	Father P. Mattscheck	"
8	1962-1963	Father Edwin Daly	"
9	1963-1980	Father John J. Kenealy	"
10	1967-NA	Father Philip Manthra	"
11	1967-NA	Father John B. Thakur	"
12	1974-NA	Father Mathew Mannaparambil	"
13	1977-NA	Father Stephen Ramchanat	"
14	1975-1978	Father Cherubim Sah	"
15	1980-1981	Father George Parel	"
16	1981-1984	Father Alfred Poovattil	"
17	1984-	Father James Kalapura	"
18	1984-1988	Father Jose Perumalil	"
19	1988 off	Father Mani Thundathikunnel	"

NB: There were others who served occasionally for shorter periods.

Sources:

- 1) *Historia Domus*, Shahpur Mission, 1951 off.
- 2) **Daily Chronicles**, Shahpur Mission, Vol.I, II, III.

Appendix - 6

**School and College Students Scholarship Assistance
Given in 1979-80, Shahpur Mission**

	Name	Div.	c/o Credit Union fund Rs.	c/o Scholar- ship Fund Rs.	c/o Mission Rs.	Total Amount Rs.
1	Virendra Kumar St. X	I	200.00	600.00	450.00	1250.00
2	Bir Bahadur St. X	I	200.00	600.00	740.00	1540.00
3	Prabhu Das St. X	I	200.00	600.00	--	800.00
4	Prabodh Kumar St. X	I	200.00	600.00	400.00	1200.00
5	Baban Prasad St. X	II	--	500.00	1125.00	1625.00
6	Tej Kumar St. X	I	200.00	600.00	1115.00	1915.00
7	Vijay Kumar St. X	I	200.00	600.00	1030.00	1915.00
8	Surendra Pd. Loyola	I	200.00	600.00	1200.00	1830.00
9	Deepak Kumar Layola	II	--	500.00	1700.00	2000.00
10	Charlie Surendra Patna U.	II	--	140.00	--	2200.00
11	Anita Kumari Bettiah	II	--	500.00	1000.00	140.00
12	Satish Collector Arrah	II	--	500.00	50.00	1500.00
13	Anand Kumar Prithwi Arrah	II	--	500.00	--	550.00
14	Hiralal Arrah	II	--	500.00	--	500.00
15	Rajendra Prasad Arrah	III	--	400.00	--	400.00
	Totals		1400.00	7740.00	8810.00	17,950

Source: Scholarship Fund Files, Shahpur Mission.

Appendix - 7

Medical Service by Misereor Hospital, Shahpur

Year	No. of in-patients		No. of out-patients
	Tetanus	Other cases	
1963	123	52	29863
1964	155	51	29729
1965	128	60	28544
1966	4213	57	24769
1967	251	52	32618
1968	257	53	24321
1969	229	53	25118
1970	160	56	26461
1971	78	60	25678
1972	31	56	27077
1973	23	56	23570
1974	48	52	24555
1975	56	43	24651
1976	35	50	21764
1977	46	82	26050
1978	66	44	21110
1979	32	38	20770
1980	74	49	23828
1981	-	-	24843
1982	-	-	32016
1983	-	-	28932
1984	51	69	28311
1985	34	61	28847
1986	140	38	27481
1987	75	40	23486
1988	60	-	18090
1989	50	-	12108
1990	10	-	9261
1991	15	-	10540
1992	-	-	8854

Source : Misereor Hospital Records, Shahpur, 1963 ff.

Appendix - 8

Villages where conversion tookplace during famine relief years: 1967-1968

The number within brackets indicates the number of baptism

1. Katai - Bhoj (1)	35. Bhada-Danwan (2)
2. Chota - Sasaram (1)	36. Barka-Birpur (5)
3. Gosainpur (3)	37. Baruha (5)
4. Rehiya (2)	38. Dharmgastpur (20)
5. Suhiya (7)	39. Shahpur (5)
7. Rehiya-Birpur (1)	40. Mahuar (1)
8. Sarfagar (3)	41. Sahjauli (2)
9. Ganj (16)	42. Jamua (3)
10. Jadopur (23)	43. Unwao (1)
11. Rudranagar (6)	44. Bhadawar (1)
12. Barsaun 916)	45. Bara Kharouni (3)
13. Isharpura (7)	46. Nainijor (1)
14. Pokraha (3)	47. Kusmariya (1)
15. Birpur (16)	48. Dumri (2)
16. Chakani (7)	49. Chota Nainijor (3)
17. Kamarion (36)	50. English-Bowli (1)
18. Nawadih (8)	51. Bhoda-Chapra (2)
19. Shivpur (8)	52. Bagain (3)
20. Harnathpur (9)	53. Bisopur (Bara) (2)
21. Semariya (5)	54. Chana (1)
22. Bansdipur (10)	55. Dawa (Danwan) (1)
23. Sahodih (2)	56. Ekdar (5)
24. Badaun Bharari (1)	57. Gopalpur (1)
25. Ekdar - Baruha (1)	58. Hardiya (1)
26. Kaneli (1)	59. Kathar (1)
27. Jewaniya (2)	60. Gaya (1)
28. Dumarian - Ganj (1)	61. Mahuar (1)
19. Kharouni (7)	62. Nainjor (Barki) (2)
30. Bowli (2)	63. Tier (2)
31. Bharauli-Barsaun (1)	64. Tribwani (1)
32. Kamaniya-Bowli (1)	65. Pokhara (2)
33. Bhada (3)	66. Osain (1)
34. Raghunathpur (14)	67. Parsonda (1)

NB: Total no. of baptisms during 1967-1968 = 312.
Out of which 28 were from 17 fresh villages.

Source:

1) **Baptism Register, Shahpur Mission, Vol.I, II.**

Mahatin Dai Mandir, Behea¹

The verity of the historical background of this *sati* temple seems to be obscured in many legends and their interpolated versions which are presently in vogue among the local people. It is said the local raja Ranpal Singh of the Hariho dynasty demanded *dola* (literally, the swinging chair; the palanquin carrying the bride. As per custom the newly-wed bride was forced by the raja to spend her first night with him) from Mahatin. But the latter revolted and cursed the raja. At this a massive column of fire engulfed both her and the musclemen of the raja who came to forcefully take her. Thus Mahatin became a *sati mata*.

There are other findings. The legendary song (*chalisa*) recently engraved on marble tablets on the walls of the newly built temple says there were two brides named Ragmati and Indumati and their bride mates (*dais*) were also two. The statues inside the temple are four in number. One of the temple *pandas*, Sadanand Chaubey, said the brides were brahmins. Ramesh Choudhary, a shopkeeper inside the temple complex said it was a misjudgement on the part of the raja to demand *dola* from the Brahmin bride. This implies *bola* was forced upon brides of other castes. The Harijan informants said *dola* was common and was asked of Ravidasi brides too.

Had Mahatin Dai been a *sati mata* belonging to brahmin caste how could it be that this temple is accessible to all low castes whereas, in a temple a few yards away from it, Harijans do not have access. Thousands of pilgrims, largely women,

¹ Since there were a few references by my informants to the pilgrimage to Mahatin Dai temple, I undertook a study tour of the shrine.

throng at Mahatin Dai temple every Tuesday. That the *sati mata* in question must have lost her identity in course of time due to assimilation attempts by *pandas* was another question raised by some social researchers.² As such the entire complex has now three more temples, the latest one being a 12-pagoda mahabir temple all of which seem to outshine the importance of the Sati temple.

Source: P.C.Roy Chaudhary, op.cit. pp.191.

² Also see Susai Raj and Jose Vadassery, Report on Study-tour in S. Raj, **Emerging Dalit Church of Bihar**, pp.60-62.

Pir Baba's Dargah, Behea¹

It is said that Hindu pilgrims also visit the *dargah* of Makhdum Saheb (Sufi Saint) at Behea. The pilgrims ward off spirits through frenzied dance and incantations. The legend says that the *pir* (Muslim Saint) being thirsty and no water available asked a Yadav cattle grazer to fetch milk. Since no milk was available the *pir* asked the Yadav to milk his virgin cow which to everybody's surprise yeilded milk at the *pir's* asking. The Yadav cowherd immediately followed the *pir*, later adopting the name *Chulhai baba* who is revered along with the *pir baba*. Among the pilgrims are Ravidasis too.

¹ The *pir Baba's dargah* of Bahea is identified as that of the 14th century sufi saint of Bihar, Sharafuddin Maneri. See Paul Jackson, *Bihar's Makhdum Saheb, Sharafuddin Maneri*, Wisdom of Bihar Series, Navjyoti Prakashan, Patna, n.d.

Appendix - 11

Credit Union

A Credit Union is a cooperative society which teaches its members to be thrifty and to save money to make loans among themselves at a very low rate of interest. The Credit Union is organized within a group already united by a common bond.

Started in Germany in the 1870s Credit Unions fulfilled an economic need of the people undergoing the rigours of debt, problems created by money lenders and banks. The founders, Delitzsch and Frederick Raiffeisen of Germany, Luzzati in Italy, had envisaged that people must help themselves and be formed into credit societies in which they saved money according to their means and lent among themselves to be free from the clutches of usurers. The organization became popular all over Europe, America, Canada and other places within a short time. The system was introduced in the Missions by missionaries.

Credit Unions are run for the members entirely by the members. The organization functions under the management of an elected committee. The committee and members are bound by the rules of the society.

Credit Unions encourage thrift. Saving money is not an end in itself : the pooled money is a tool which is put to useful purposes of the members or for common causes. Loans are the back-bones of Credit Unions, secured by guarantors. Credit Unions charge a low amount as interest on loans, have minimum infrastructural expenses and are run by volunteers among the members.

Source : "Credit Unions", by Francis Solomon, **Credit Union Files**, Shahpur Mission.

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