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DECONSTRUCTING THE 'SELF' AND EMPOWERING THE 'OTHER' Visionaries in Colonial South India

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Abstract: While contesting the normative, and existential postulates, which insinuates that self as a process of separating oneself out from the matrices of others, this study examines the relationality and interdependence of 'self' and the 'other', exploring the complexity and dynamics of missionary 'self' and the Indian 'other'. While tracing the intricacies of the discourse of self through the prism of theoretical and empirical analysis, the study enumerates how missionaries ventured to empower the other by transcending the boundaries of nationality, language, culture and by deconstructing their 'selves'. This paper presents the trajectory of social construction of the missionary 'self' as a fluid, dynamic and ongoing process whereas the Indian 'others' was negotiated itself in a dialectical relationship with the socio-cultural context of their culture of origin and the host culture. It suggests that missionaries, well engaged with communities of different cultural landscapes, by teaching the socially and economically disadvantageous sections, deconstructed the conventional images of their 'selves' as strangers, firangis, foreigners, sojourners and resident aliens. By articulating the marginality and the profoundly ingrained 'otherness' of the underprivileged, they used transformative education as the most potential apparatus to create an inclusive society, which, they perceived, would instil a sense of transnational pastiche and intercultural interactions among the posterity.

Keywords: Dialectical Relationship, Firangis, Inclusive Society, Marginality, Missionary, Transnational.

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1. Introduction

The terms 'missions', 'missionaries' or 'visionaries' used predominantly in social, economic, political, religious, diplomatic, military and medical contexts, to suggest that they had / have some specific tasks to accomplish. These tasks, in many instances, could either be self imposed or empowerment oriented. Generally, missionaries are members of religious denominations sent into areas to disseminate the ideas of their religious faith. To achieve this end they had to have a series of encounters with the culture, language, faith, tradition, customs, and conventions of the 'other'. To deconstruct their 'selves' they adopted three predominant modalities—cultural deconstruction by wilfully denying their own culture, structural deconstruction by disassociating themselves from colonial fabrics and ideological deconstruction by defining their own social and cultural programmes to portray themselves as a completely different entities from the very foundations of colonialism. They also tried to project themselves as agents who can empower the other by locating themselves as torchbearers upon the path of progress and empowerment by introducing a large number of social affirmative actions such as education, health care, economic development, and social justice.

Attempting to explore the relationality and interdependence of missionary 'self' and the Indian 'other' it is observed that missionaries made every effort to deconstruct their selves and to empower the people with whom they had intercultural communications. The western missionaries were not the agents of colonialism and that Christianity was in India even before the establishment of British Empire. The discourse of deconstruction of missionary self became a historical reality when missionaries openly proclaimed that there was no formal negotiation between colonialism and Christianity and Christianity developed in India by and large by Indians, for Indians and of Indians as the missionaries played largely the role of facilitators.[1] The recent

[1]Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication Since 1500*, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, 20-21.

scholarship on this debate explores that colonialism and missionary Christianity are two different entities as both of them followed different modalities, objectives and intentions. The missionaries were both necessary and effective in colonial India, as separate entities. The primary objective of missionary presence in India was to 'enlighten' and empower people to achieve their desired result—religious conversion.[2]

Scholars like Robert Eric Frykenberg, Andrew Porter, Geoffrey Oddie, Brian Stanley, Dick Kooiman, Richard Fox Young and others who have worked on deconstruction of missionary 'selves' and empowerment of the 'other' argue that missionary historiography has become an art of storytelling in which the narrator plays a decisive role.[3] Despite the fact that there were ambiguous relationship between missionary self and the Indian other in the fields of religious conversion, domestic service and dissolution of power in the church, the ways in which these missionaries stood firmly for the cause of empowerment, egalitarianism, inclusiveness need to be critically studied.

According to some traditions St Thomas, one of the twelve apostles, was the first Christian missionary to India. Jawaharlal Nehru told in the Lok Sabha on 3 December 1955 that Christianity was as old in India as the religion itself, even before it went to countries like England, Portugal, Spain and other parts of the world.[4] By and large, when the Portuguese missionaries began their evangelization processes in India in 16th century, a considerable number of the high caste Hindus remained outside the missionary fold. It was the disadvantageous communities who showed interest as the missionaries offered them a "social

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[2]Frykenberg, *Christians and Missionaries in India*, 21.

[3]Daniel Jeyaraj, "Indian Participation in Enabling, Sustaining, and Promoting Christian Mission in India," in *India and the Indianness of Christianity: Essays on Understanding—Historical, Theological, and Biographical—in Honor of Robert Eric Frykenberg*, Richard Fox Young, ed., Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009, 26.

[4]Lal Dena, *Christian Missions and Colonialism: A Study of Missionary Movement in North East India with Particular Reference to Manipur and Lushai Hills, 1847-1947*, Shillong: Vendrame Institute, 1998, 12.

gospel of emancipation."[5] The empowerment of the 'other' became an unambiguous and explicit phenomenon when the earliest recorded conversion in Goa and large-scale conversion among the Paravas, a fishermen caste in the southern tip of the Indian Peninsula. Missionaries maintained that these fishermen were harassed and subjugated by the Arab traders on the one side and the high caste Hindus on the other. Consequently, the Paravas sought refuge from the Portuguese, seeking protection from the influential Arab traders. This favour was extended by the Portuguese in return for their consent to adopt the Christian faith.[6] The Portuguese utilised this favourable scenario and expressed that they had some kind of responsibility for the protection of the members of this indefensible community. Francis Xavier disseminated Christian faith in the southernmost areas, including Manappadu of the present-day Tuticorin district of Tamil Nadu, living in a cave for two years from 1542 to 1544. Being a coastal area, the Manappadu village was predominantly inhabited by the fishing community, with a considerable number of them being the so-called low caste Paravas. Already at the lowest rung of the social ladder and at the receiving end of the social order, the Paravas, over a period of time, became staunch supporters of missionaries and Christianity.[7]

The deconstruction of missionary 'selves' derived its ideology largely from Jesuit missionaries such as Francis Xavier, Roberto de Nobili, John de Britto and others. They began to live like Brahmins. In fact, a very few missionaries voluntarily changed their western names and attempted inculturation. For example, Father Nobili changed his name into Thathuva Podagar, John De Britto was known as Arulanandar, Father Battori as Periya

[5]Holt J. Beaglehole, "The Indian Christians: A Study of a Minority," *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, (1967): 59.

[6]Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses, and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 325.

[7]Geoffrey A. Oddie, *Imagined Hinduism: British Protestant Missionary Constructions of Hinduism, 1793-1900*, New Delhi: Sage Publications India, 2006, 81.

Paranjothinader and Father Joseph Beschi as Veerama Munivar. They learnt Indian languages and even got acquainted with the religious practices of the people.[8] In fact there was a kind of wilful shedding of their own culture in order to embrace the culture, tradition, customs, conventions and practices of the Indian other. For example, De Nobili was determined to become an Indian to the Indians. His new approach was a reflection of his wish to adopt the religious way of life of the elite Hindu; thus, he dressed like a Brahmin sanyasi (ascetic), restricted himself to a vegetarian diet.[9] Despite the fact that the Jesuit missionaries were criticised by some scholars for supporting the traditional usages of caste prohibitions, they, according to converts, became legendary figures in their lifetime. Consequently, the socially and economically disadvantageous communities, who embraced Christianity for both material and spiritual expectations, had a reverence for the missionaries.[10]

Scholars who had worked extensively on missionary politics and colonialism with special reference to India do suggest that there was an explicit cultural understanding between missionaries and colonial rule in India. The Euro-centric historians argue that the missionary-colonial nexus was explicit in the field of health care. They maintain that the colonial government did support and even funded medical missionaries in Asia and Africa;[11] missionaries did help greatly eradicating leprosy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[12]

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[8]Kumar Raj and Pruthi Raj, *Essays on Indian Culture*, New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 2003, 156-157.

[9]Henriette Bugge, *Mission and Tamil Society*, London: Curzon Press, 1994, 154.

[10]Marine Carrin and Herald Tambs-Lyche, An Encounter *of Peripheries: Santals, Missionaries, and their Changing Worlds, 1867-1900,* Delhi: Manohar, 2008, 10.

[11]David Hardiman, *Healing Bodies and Saving Souls: Medical Missions in Asia and Africa*, New York: Rodopi B.V., 2006, 6-7.

[12]Micahel C. Lazich, "Seeking Souls through the Eyes of the Blind: The Birth of the Medical Missionary Society in the Nineteenth Century China," in *Healing Bodies and Saving Souls*, 33-34.

Historian K. N. Panikkar, who supports the Euro-centric school of thought, argues that the "aggressive missionary propaganda" against the local culture and religion were possible in large parts of the country because of the deeper connection between the missionaries and colonial officials.[13] Similarly, attempting to situate the controversial missionary-imperialism connection, Parna Sengupta, who has made an extensive survey in Bengal Presidency, argues that for the ordinary nineteenth century Britons, missionary activity was one of the connections to the British Empire. On the success that the missionaries had scaled on this front, she establishes that the ultimate success was the massive imperial expansion.[14] Thus, she concludes that the missionaries and the British Raj were "willing collaborators" in the spheres of religion, culture, education and healthcare with a legitimising discourse on missionary literature.

Other historians, on the other hand, who identify themselves as Indo-centric scholars, propound the theory that in the colonial period, the missionaries attempted to deconstruct their selves structurally by disassociating themselves from colonialism and its intentions. Scholars such as Robert Eric Frykenberg, Andrew Porter, Geoffrey Oddie, Brian Stanley, and others, who have contested the Euro-centric interpretation of missionary politics, argue that the missionary activities had nothing to do with colonialism and the European Empire.

Pointing out the differences between the missionaries and colonialism, Andrew Porter,[15] demonstrates that the association between colonialism and missionaries are distinguished more by the sense of self-sufficiency under the divine superintendence rather than by any conscious or actual dependence on the fabrics

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[13]K. N. Panikkar, *Colonialism, Culture and Resistance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, 24-25.

[14]Parna Sengupta, *Pedagogy for Religion: Missionary Education and the Fashioning of Hindus among Hindus and Muslims in Bengal*, California: University of California Press, 2011, 10-12.

[15]Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914,* Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004, 116.

of their geopolitical ideologies. Subscribing to this ideological orientation, some other scholars explores the idea of autonomy in missionary politics. Geoffrey Oddie, for example, argues that missionary organisations were essentially autonomous and had little to do with colonialism. Accordingly, missionaries were in India to save souls while the colonisers had concern to acquire and maintain empire. He even appeals to historians to recognise this "essentially autonomous character" of colonialism and missionaries.[16] Despite his scholarly interpretation of the missionary construction of Hinduism, his works fall shot off offering adequate information on the cultural deconstruction agenda pursued by the missionaries.

Their central argument is that Christianity came to India even before the arrival of the Europeans. Therefore, colonialism and missionary Christianity are two different entities as they follow different modalities, and objectives. The primary objective of missionary presence in India, according to these scholars, was to educate, train up and enlighten all people.[17] In fact, Frykenberg ably confronts the position that Christianity in India was a western or colonial imposition.[18] Contesting the role of colonialism and the emergence of missionary Christianity, Frykenberg, who has an Indian *vamsavali* (genealogy),[19] argues

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[16]*Geoffrey Oddie, Religion in South Asia: Religions and Revival Movements in South Asia in Medieval and Modern Times,* New Delhi: Manohar, 1991, 12-*24.*

[17]Robert Caldwell, *Edeyengoody Mission, Tinnevelly*, Church Missionary Society Press, Madras, 10 September 1858, 21-38.

[18]Frykenberg, *Christians and Missionaries in India*, 16.

[19]He was born in 1930 in Ootacamund, in the Nilgiri Hills of Tamil Nadu. His parents were Baptist missionaries among the Telugu speaking peoples of Andhra Pradesh. See Richard Fox Young, "The Frykenberg Vamsavali: A South Asia Historian's Genealogy, Personal and Academia, with a Bibliography of His Works," in Richard Fox Young, ed., *India and the Indianness of Christianity: Essays on Understanding — Historical, Theological, and Biographical — in Honor of Robert Eric Frykenberg*, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009, 1-3.

that the causal conflation between Christianity and colonialism was crudely blunt and simplistic. According to him, the emergence of Christian institutions took place in South India long before the arrival of the Europeans and the East India Company. Not just that, he disagrees to agree that colonialism and Christian missionaries have something in common with special reference to religion. For him, both are two different poles. Presenting the missionaries as agents of change, he argues that the missionaries had strived to protect their converts especially when conflicts had risen with other religious groups.[20]

Pointing out the differences between the missionaries and colonialism, Andrew Porter, a contemporary of Frykenberg, delineates that the relationship between colonialism and missionaries are distinguished by their sense of self-sufficiency under the divine superintendence rather than by any conscious or actual dependence.[21] Subscribing to this approach Geoffrey Oddie argues that missionary organisations were essentially autonomous and had nothing to do with colonialism. This suggests that the structural deconstruction was explicitly pronounced in colonial India.[22] Emphasising the necessity of paternalistic benevolence, they suggest missionary presence became inevitable for the social, economic and intellectual development of the masses in general and the revival of socially disadvantageous people in particular.

Similarly, deconstructing the missionary selves became an explicit phenomenon in the modern period. For example, debates in the western Protestant countries were centred predominantly on the class structure. In the 18th century Britain, there was an ideological discourse in the church politics, popularly known as sandwich ideology, in which the dissenting middle class was sandwiched between the Anglican establishments and the poor classes.[23] The dissenting communities, which dominated the political life, formed the backbone of the middle classes

[20]Frykenberg, *Christians and Missionaries in India*, 17-21.

[21]Porter, *Religion versus Empire?* 116.

[22]Geoffrey A. Oddie, *Religion in South Asia,* 12.

[23]Carrin and Tambs-Lyche, *An Encounter of Peripheries*, 9.

accumulating great wealth during the industrial revolution. In a way, Protestant Christianity not only proved to be compatible with the western capitalist ethos but also as an important guardian of its values.[24] This ideology, over a period of time, facilitated the western missionaries in India to accommodate both the middle and low castes in their churches. Sandwiched between the middle and low caste groups, the high caste were given central place in the missionary discourse, for the missionaries felt that it would produce a downward filtration effect.

To make their ideological deconstruction to be acceptable by the people, missionary societies evolved strategies to portray missionaries as facilitators. The missionaries were supposed to posses some special qualities with a view to reach out to the people who were in socio-economic and spiritual needs. Missionary organisations made it mandatory that the missionaries should possess the nature of the distinguished piety to educate the poor. The missionaries must be men and women of culture and of constructive thought to accommodate everyone. They tend to leave everything, even the most cherished things of life and thought. The missionary is not only meant to love the people, but appreciate them at large.[25]

2. Empowering the 'Other': Social Rigidity and the Making of Egalitarian Society

Projecting the missionaries as agents of change and progress, epitome of empowerment, and embodiment of egalitarianism, Frykenberg argues that the missionaries had deconstructed their selves as 'masters' and strived to empower the disadvantageous people as 'servants' through socio-economic affirmative programmes.[26] To empower the other, the missionaries began to portray themselves as one among the other. The rigidity of caste system, which was seen by missionaries as the chief obstacle

[24]Linda Woodhead, *An Introduction to Christianity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 209.

[25]J. P. Jones, "The Protestant Missionary Propaganda in India," *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 8, 1 January 1915, 21.

[26]Frykenberg, *Christians and Missionaries in India*, 5.

against their conversion project, underwent a series of structural changes. For instance, the newly converted Christians began to reconsider in identifying themselves with caste titles. Nevertheless, Kerala, known for its cultural symbiosis, attracted a great deal of attention of people of various creeds, races and nations. It was not uncommon for the St Thomas Christians, the most ancient Christian community in India, to bear Hindu names.[27] Interestingly, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Jains and other religious communities lived in harmony there. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the history of Kerala witnessed a symbiotic socio-cultural context where Christians had Hindu names, built temple-like churches, and practiced Hindu rituals to a larger extent.[28]

Similarly**,** caste rigidities, notions of purity-pollution, and social ranking on the basis of economic status were very common in most of the Indian states. Even after their conversion, the converts continued to follow the caste rigidity and untouchability. They continued to sit separately on the basis of caste differentiations. This rigid practice inside the church was described by converts themselves in Madras Presidency. For example, Vedanayagam Sastriar, one of the most influential Pietist and evangelical poets of the nineteenth century, described how within St Peter's Church in Thanjavur in Madras Presidency, European Christians sat on benches, Vellalar Christians sat on fine grass mats, and Paraiyar Christians, the so-called low-caste people, sat on the stone floors or on earthen floors.[29] At the same time, their women and children also sat apart - each group according to the ascribed social status. Indeed, in St Peter's

[27]George Mark Moraes, *A History of Christianity in India: From Early Times to St. Francis Xavier, AD 52-1542*, Bombay: Manaktalas, 1964, 56.

[28]Mundadan Mathias, 'Indigenisation of the Church,' in D. P. Chattopadhyaya, ed., *History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilisation*, Volume VII, Part 6, New Delhi: Center for Studies in Civilizations, 2009, 249.

[29]Quoted in Frykenberg, *Christians and Missionaries in India*, 297; Also see Vedanayagam Sastri, 'Jati-tiruttalin Payittiyam,' (The Foolishness of Amending Caste) Tanjore, 1829.

Church, built by a German Lutheran missionary Christian Friedrich Schwartz with funds provided by the Hindu king Serfoji, different castes sat in quadrants of nave and transept and had done so for generations.[30]

It was during this time, some of the Protestant missionaries in India sought to emphasize equality upon everyone, especially every Christian convert. For example, Bishop Daniel Wilson of Calcutta declared that the distinctions of caste must be severely dealt with and asked the chaplain of a Protestant church at Tiruchirapalli to read out his letter, on 17 January 1834, which said, among others, that the converts should sit together in church. They should come to the Lord's Table without any caste distinction.[31] Similarly, Henry Whitehead, Bishop of Madras asserted that Christianity with caste would be no Christianity at all. He argued that Christianity with caste would be Christianity without the body of Christ, and Christianity without the body of Christ would be Christianity without union with Christ.[32]

Nonetheless, a large number of Catholic missionaries including De Nobili felt the increasing necessity of deconstructing missionary selves by Indianising Christianity in India. Attempts were made to incorporate Christianity into Indian reality, by establishing a theological and vital connection with Hinduism. The name adaptation to Indian culture, emphasis on inculturation, and closing the widening gap between Portuguese missionaries and Indian converts, allowing Hindu converts to practice Hindu customs, and his principles of consolidation and Indianisation continued to attract the attention of a considerable number of Indians towards missionary faith.[33]

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[30]Duncan B. Forrester, *Caste and Christianity: Attitudes and Policies on Caste of Anglo-Saxon Protestant Missions in India*, London: Curzon Press, 1979, 37.

[31]Joseph Roberts, *Caste, in its Religious and Civil Character, Opposed to Christianity,* London: Longman, 1847, 3-5.

[32]Robert Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamil Nadu: The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, California: California University Press, 1969, 94.

[33]Suman Willeke and Engelbert Ritschl, "Rites Controversy," Karl Muller, in Theo Sundermeier, Steven B. Bevans, Richard H. Bliese,

During the colonial period, missionaries strongly believed that God permitted them to become the potential reformers of India for the exclusive benefits of Indians. They considered that it was their responsibility to impart the benefit of their just laws, rational liberty, and the knowledge of their faith. They believed that they had tremendous potentials to make India good, happy and permanently great.[34]One of the earliest, most exhaustive and focused works on a disadvantageous community in India was successfully undertaken by Robert Caldwell as he turned out to be one of the most admirable fishers of men. In his work, he describes the socio-economic and politico-cultural condition of the Shanar community, the present-day Nadars. In his view, they converted to Christian faith on account of social pressure, rather than individual enlightenment. His genuine sympathy for the community's cultural status, religious modality, and unlettered nature remains unparalleled among missionary scholarships.[35]

Relying on Caldwell's work to a larger extent, Robert Hardgrave evaluates the condition of the community with a history from below perspective. Favouring missionary notion of empowering the 'other' and the material development of Nadars in India he argues that the advantages of missionary Christianity became clearly visible among the community as their material conditions improved considerably.[36] As Daniel O'Connor sums up, the Nadars were successful in negotiating with missionaries, but refused to accept missionary move to completely eradicate caste system.[37]

This new direction by missionaries with the teaching of egalitarian ethics opened up vistas to create new consciousness

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eds., *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History and Perspectives*, Wipf & Stock, Oregon, 1999, 399-401.

[34]Caldwell, *Edeyengoody Mission,* 2.

[35]Robert Caldwell, *The Tinnevelly Shanars: A Sketch of Their Religion, and Their Moral Condition and Characteristics as a Caste,* Christian Knowledge Society Press, Madras, 1849, 15-18.

[36]Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamil Nadu*, 49.

[37]Daniel O'Connor, *Mediated Associations: Cinematic Dimensions of Social History*, London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002, 73.

among the people which made them to question the social rigidity of caste system. This, directly or indirectly resulted in the emergence of caste eradication and egalitarian movements such as Justice Party, self-respect movement and so on in the first half of the twentieth century.[38]

3. Empowering the 'Other' through Education

The notion of empowering the other, propounded by missionaries and the progress of Indian people in the field of education, need to be studied critically. In South India, for example, a large number of missionaries, both Catholics and Protestants, who established schools for both boys and girls, were from Jesuit Mission, Church Missionary Society, London Missionary Society, and Society for the Propagation of Gospel. Nevertheless, the idea of women education was not welcomed by non-Christians who explicitly expressed their discontent against missionary endeavour stating that women were like cattle and there was no use of giving education to them as they were not getting employment opportunities outside their houses. The colonial missionaries, on the other hand, viewed that the disadvantageous Indian women should be taught technical education to get involved themselves in embroidery, spinning and lace work so that they can earn livelihood.[39]

In North India, education was patterned after the English tradition to train students for services in the British official establishments and in other professions. Some of the leading women religious congregations including the Religious of Jesus and Mary, established in Agra in 1842, Institute of Blessed Virgin, also known as Loretto Sisters, in Patna, 1853, Mission Sisters of

[38]Christhu Doss, *Protestant Missionaries and Depressed Classes in Southern Tamil Nadu, 1813-1947*, PhD Thesis, Center for Historical Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 2009, 148.

[39]Eliza F. Kent, *Converting Women: Gender and Protestant Christianity in Colonial South India*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 141.

Ajmer of 1911 played crucial roles in the field of education, particularly women's education.[40]

Visionaries from France, for instance, contributed tremendously in the field of women education in North India. Drawing a tremendous amount of enthusiastic inspiration from the foundress of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary [CJM] Claudine Thevenet, the Sisters started serving the cause of education. The CJM educational institutions such as Hampton Court School, Mussoorie, CJM, and Jesus and Mary College, New Delhi, St Bede's College in Himachal Pradesh, St Margaret's Training College, Bombay, and St Joseph Girls Degree College, Sardhana, to name a few, continued to impart transformative education in India. In fact, the motto of St Bede's College, *Non Nobis Solum* (Not for Ourselves Alone), itself asserts how missionaries attempted to empower the other by imparting transformative education in the fields of art, science, administration, business, and social work.[41]

Inaugurating the Golden Jubilee celebrations of Jesus and Mary College, New Delhi on 17th October 2017, and the 200th anniversary of the CJM, Ram Nath Kovind, the President of India, highly appreciated the total commitment of the college towards transformative education. He said: "I must note that the Christian community—whose history in India goes back 2,000 years and which has contributed so much to our shared culture - has carved a special role for itself in education. Missionary institutions such as this one have become symbols of scholarship, dedicated teaching and academic excellence."[42] Truly, the President of India has valued the contributions made by Christian missionaries in India in general and the CJM in particular for a variety of reasons,

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[40]Augustine Kanjamala, *The Future of Christian Missions in India: Towards a New Paradigm for the Third Millennium*, Bombay: St Paul's Publications, 2008, 57.

[41]*Gazetteer of the Simla District, 1904, Punjab District Gazetteers*, Vol. VIII A, New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1904, 116-117.

[42]Express News Service, "Special Role of Christians in Academic Excellence, says President Kovind," *The Indian Express*, 21 September 2017.

most importantly for the ways in which these institutions stood for the very idea of transformative education.

It should be noted that the CJM missionaries considered that education had a tremendous potential to liberate people from all forms of darkness and ignorance. Many schools, colleges, and other formal and non-formal educational institutions run by the CJM Sisters, and their devoted service to the poor and the needy has received a wide range of respect, recognition and appreciation. The CJM institutions continued to train the young minds and inculcated in them a deep sense of responsibility, morality and spiritual ideals together with a solid training in academic, intellectual and character formation. In fact, by emphasising on the humanistic aspect of education, and the harmonious development of all human faculties, the body, mind and spirit, the CJM institutions, had made and still have been making a very valuable contribution to the nation building.[43]

The CJM Institutions have been rated very high for the qualitative impact that they have had on people, society, polity, and governance. Thousands of alumni spread all over the country and abroad have repeatedly testified that a high academic standard has been maintained, spiritual and moral values stressed and a secular outlook fostered. Education, as an instrument of social change was centred on the idea of inclusive education. To improve the overall development of children, cutting across stereotyped boundaries, the CJM Sisters made it clear that admission in their institutions is open to everyone irrespective of caste, creed and language. The members of the economically and socially disadvantaged sections of society were given adequate attention. The CJM believed that a quality education imparted in time would obviously make women empowered. Empowerment, the CJM missionaries convinced, is an active process with which women realize their full capability and power, and they viewed that the empowering process as the surest way of realization of their potentials.[44]

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[43]Kanjamala, *The Future of Christian Missions in India*, 268.

[44]Kanjamala, *The Future of Christian Missions in India*, 268-269.

Once the poor and marginalized got education, there was a paradigm shift in social loyalties. This is to suggest that the underprivileged sections who were loyal and dependent on landlords for their day-to-day livelihood for generations, began to change their loyalties and began to rely largely on missionaries. Similarly, missionaries also felt the need of protecting these marginalized sections of the society in order to redeem them from the clutches of influential sections of the society. Secondly, missionary education also created job opportunities. It should also be noted that there are scholars who claim that the vast majority of the beneficiaries of the Christian educational institutions are the upper class and upper caste, ignoring the ways in which these educational institutions lifted the underprivileged masses from the mire of social degradation, the manner in which missionary education liberated from slavery, ignorance, illiteracy, inequality, superstitions.[45]

4. Empowering the 'Other': Social Affirmative Actions

Missionary historian Ryland demonstrates how the missionaries interrogated and deconstructed multiple representations of women in Hindu shastras, which degraded women and made the temporal and spiritual destinies of women lie not in their hands, but of men. Their husband is their god. From birth till death woman is under man's authority, her own virtue ought to be obedience. It has never been considered necessary to educate women, because "to educate woman is like putting a torch in the hands of a monkey."[46]

For many people, Christianity and missionaries appeared to be a sort of spiritual opium (consolation and anaesthetic) to the people who were in poverty-stricken and debt-ridden condition. Grave economic threats were pressing in various parts of South India during the nineteenth century. Missionaries in addition to

[45]Kanjamala, *The Future of Christian Missions in India*, 270-271.

[46]J. C. Ryland, *The Socio Economic Development of London Missionary Society Church and its Contributions to the Inter-Church Co-operation in Tamil Nadu Area*, Calcutta: London Missionary Society Press, 1909, 4; Also see Doss, *Protestant Missionaries and Depressed Classes*, 197-212.

remedial efforts in time of famine, pestilence, or sudden disaster, engaged themselves in preventive work among those who ordinarily lacked means of livelihood.[47]

In 1818, Charles Mead was appointed by the London Missionary Society to empower the people through religious work in Travancore. He arrived at Mylaady and then went to reside at Nagercoil, in a house given for the use of mission by the Queen of Travancore. Colonel Munro, the British Resident, rendered valuable support to the extension of missionary activities. A missionary report claims that the Queen of Travancore offered material support to the cause of the expansion of missionary programmes particularly educational activities in Travancore region. The report also noted that the Queen had donated rupees 5000 to purchase paddy fields, the produce of which was utilized for a religious training centre at Nagercoil, established in 1819.[48] It was about this time a large number of the people renounced Hinduism, and submitted themselves to Christian instruction. According to a missionary report there appeared to have been about 3000, chiefly of the Nadar caste. Christians were inducted into the service of the government through the influence of Colonel Munro, a pro-missionary British Resident.[49]

The evolution of Christianity in the nineteenth century was characterized predominantly by the economically motivated affirmative programmes. Many of the converts to Christianity were attracted and actuated primarily towards the material and other physical motives. A missionary observed that the converts thought that a connection with Europeans, who were friends of

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[47]Eugene Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society, Its Environment, Its Men and Its Work*, Vol. III, London: Church Missionary Society, 1899, 76.

[48]Isaac Henry Hacker, *A Hundred Years in Travancore, 1806-1906: The Socio-Economic Development of the London Missionary Society*, London: London Missionary Press, 1908, 34-35.

[49]Charles Allen Lawson, *Narrative of the Celebration of Jubilee of Her Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria, Empress of India, in the Presidency of Madras*, London: Macmillan and Co., 1887, 334.

the powerful British Resident, would help them to get rid of their social rigidity. For instance, Charles Mead, a missionary of London Missionary Society and whose position as a judge in the District Court in Nagercoil was often sought by converts for social and economic remission. A new era of rapid progress and extension of Christianity commenced when Charles Mead paid a visit to England and pleaded the cause of Travancore mission which resulted in the increase of medical and evangelizing missionaries in 1838.[50]

Very often missionaries felt that those who are converted to their religion have suffered from certain civil disabilities. They noted that the disadvantageous sections, who were aspirants of Christian teaching, were not allowed to keep milk cows and use oil mills. Trade was out of bounds for them and they were even debarred from using caste titles. In 1847, missionaries gave a memorandum to the Travancore King to abolish the practice of slavery by a law, similar to that passed by the Government of Bengal, which was then in operation with regard to slaves in the Company's territories.[51]

The situation worsened with the issue of the Edict of 1851 by Diwan Krishna Rao of Travancore, which prohibited the slaves from using the public roads used by the advantageous sections and forced them to use the roads and ways assigned to the disadvantageous groups. The Diwan directed that the Christian converts should not pass through the public roads, but must go through the field road, that was the path the jackals go.[52] Besides, a violent assault on William Lee, a missionary of Lutheran Missionary Society, in Travancore on August 19, 1868 made the missionaries to take up the issue of disadvantageous sections very seriously more than ever before. In order to end the unrelenting oppression by the advantageous and influential Hindus,

[50]Lawson, *Narrative of the Celebration of Jubilee*, 334.

[51]Lawson, *Narrative of the Celebration of Jubilee*, 334.

[52]Samuel Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore*, London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1883, 338.

missionaries appealed to the Governor of Madras to intercede on their behalf.[53]

The Madras government after reviewing the case drew the attention of the Raja of Travancore to the principles laid down. Accordingly, the public streets of all towns were declared to be the property of not any particular caste, but of the whole communities. It was also confirmed that "Every man, be his caste or religion what it may, has the right to the full use of them."[54] An inquiry was soon instituted to investigate the nature of injustices suffered by the disadvantageous sections in Travancore. The Madras Government had requested the Raja to remove all impediments including the stigma of untouchability, the root cause of all caste based discrimination in Travancore.[55] Charles Mead in a letter to the London Missionary Society dated 8 October 1851 stated that the missionaries in Travancore raised the status of Nadars from a civil point of view, freeing the community from unjust taxes, oppressive customs, and a grievous poll tribute.[56]

With the aid of the missionaries, many social groups improved their socio-economic position. The Nadars, the numerically predominant converts, made a significant progress. The missionary intervention also facilitated the community to get rid of many burdensome taxes and the corvee[57] labour demanded by

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[53]Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore*, 316.

[54]C. Boulnois, and H. C. Wedderburn, *The Indian Laws Report, Madras Series*, Vol VI, January-December 1883, Calcutta: Spink and Co., 1883, 218-219.

[55]Lloyd I. Rudolph, "The Modernity of Tradition. The Democratic Incarnation of Caste in India," *The American Political Social Review*, vol. 59, no. 4 (December 1965), 34.

[56]Dick Kooiman, *Conversion and Social Equality in India,* New Delhi: Manohar, 1989, 73.

[57]Forced labour or bonded labour, which was practiced in South Travancore. Missionaries like Ringletaube influenced the government to put a pull stop to this inhuman practice. For details, see, James S. Dennis, *Christian Missions and Social Progress*, vol. 2, New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1893, 89-90.

the Travancore Government. As a result, some of the Nadars opted for trade and secured sufficient wealth to purchase their own lands. Others purchased land with financial assistance from the mission. Robert Hardgrave argues that Nadars' release from the obligation of servility and their concomitant rise in economic status aroused antagonism among the higher castes.[58] By and large, the education and Christianity worked as torchbearers in opening up new avenues to Nadars so as to escape from their socio-economic difficulties. This, over a period of time, attracted the attention of the community towards Christianity. The Nadars, influenced by the idea of missionary egalitarianism, began to conceive that conversion to Christianity, as a safety valve mechanism to escape from social hierarchies.

The constant clash between the ideas of tradition which was deeply rooted in the rigid social order and modernity, propagated by missionaries played a crucial role in the social history of South India. As Robert Caldwell has shown, conversion that had taken place had been the result, not of spiritual motives alone but of a combination of motives partly spiritual and partly material.[59] J. E. Kearns of Society for the Propagation of Gospel concludes that the vast improvement among those who converted to Christianity is that Christianity taught them to feel they are superior to what they originally considered to be.[60]

Education and Christianity went hand in hand. The essential components of a missionary compound normally included a school, a church, a hospital, and a discussion centre, all of which managed to get the attention of the villagers. According to the missionaries, the Nadars were waiting to be converted along with their kith and kin. The missionaries, though confronted with a varieties of social, cultural, political and religious contentions, were able to deconstruct their 'selves' culturally, ideologically,

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[58]Hardgrave, *The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, 69-70.

[59]Reverend C. Dunkley, ed., *The Official Report of the Church Congress Held at Carlisle*, September 30, October 1,2,3, 1884, London: Bemrose and Sons, 1884, 613-614.

[60]James Hough, *The History of Christianity in India*, vol. III, London: Christian Mission House, 1845, 582-583.

and structurally and empower the other through social, material and spiritual means. Despite the fact that they had to undergo through a series challenges, difficulties and obstacles, they were able to empower the underprivileged masses by undermining the spirit of caste rigidity and abolishing the deeply embedded slavery system in the nineteenth century with a view to establish an egalitarian and inclusive society.[61]

The missionaries, endowed with an idea of equality, attempted to break the fetters of differences at social, economic, and cultural levels. Their policy of material assistance, cleanliness-cum healthcare system and conversion, commonly known as 'soup-soap-salvation', introduced in 1800s in London, which attempted to merge evangelism with social action, aimed at bringing social transformation in the lives of the converts, created sufficient knowledge infrastructure, educating the hitherto unlettered masses. Education as an instrument of social action was put to good use in creating level playing fields across the spectrum of society. Given the social predicament and cultural taboos, the missionaries had to deconstruct their 'selves' by adopting the most appropriate social and cultural methods to empower the 'other' by disseminating knowledge.

4. Conclusion

The binary of the missionary 'self' and the Indian 'other' in this study through the prism of theoretical and empirical analysis, enumerates how missionaries, in a stereotypically constructed cultural climate of colonialism, attempted to empower the 'other' by transcending the boundaries of race, language, culture, religion and nationality, by deconstructing their Eurocentric 'selves'. Missionaries, to a larger extent, considered that their shared experiences with Indian counterparts were more significant than their actual cultural roots. These aspects were explicitly expressed in their Indianisation of church, Hinduisation of names, and inculturation. Missionaries who lived in villages among their converts expressed that Indianisation of Church was the most

[61]Doss, "Contextualising Missionary Engagement," 212.

significant tool to achieve more converts for they felt that if India was to be won for Christ, it must be by her own people in their own setting through the process of Indianisation, not through Westernisation. Interestingly, as part of its Indianisation policy, a considerable number of missionaries decentralised financial responsibility transferred it to the local congregations by deconstructing the centralised and missionary-centred financial regulations with special reference to school education. The study concludes that missionaries, despite their different cultural landscapes, succeeded in deconstructing the deeply embedded images as strangers, firangis and foreigners through their social affirmative actions including anti-slavery programmes, women empowerment strategies, and inclusive education. Nevertheless, Western missionaries, particularly some of the Protestant missionaries, had to face objections not only from the people belonging to other faiths but from the so-called national Christians at large. This was partly due to Western missions' suspected relationship towards Indian converts, and local Indian missionaries, their lack of openness, absence of devolution of responsibility and above all their spiritual and cultural hegemony. Yet, missionaries' indigenous methods of offering to God, inculturation of harvest festivals in church, organising melas, offerings in kind, first fruits and so on attracted a great deal of attention of a considerable number of people, who slowly and steadily embraced missionary faith. By and large, deconstruction of missionary self and empowerment of the other, proved to be a crucial phenomenon in colonial South India.