

## Article

# Christianity and *Liberation*: A Study of the Canadian Baptist Mission among the Savaras in Ganjam (Orissa), c.1885–1970

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**Abstract:** Liberation is a psychological attribute that primarily aims towards peace of mind followed by emancipation from fetters. Every individual covets liberation through their actions and expects a conducive milieu to experience the same. However, for oppressed people, the journey to liberation is convoluted as it involves escape from many elements. In a hierarchical society like India, liberation means liberation from the whole structure in which religious affiliation plays an important role. The marginalized section of the population seldom has the liberty to choose for their lives and they continue to remain subordinated under age-old power relations, which are garbed in the names of destiny and ordinance. For them, liberation is a quest to make an identity and reinstate the value of self-worth. Christianity, with the Church as its mission partner, seeks to liberate these caged souls from their precarious standings. This study will try to show how the Canadian Baptist Mission, with a primary objective to evangelize, left a trail of aspiration among the tribal Savaras of Ganjam to undertake the pursuit of liberation and fight oppression on their own.

**Keywords:** Christianity; tribal; Orissa; culture; religion; liberation



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## 1. Introduction

Any comprehensive study on religion entails a detailed discussion of culture, traditions, and historical discourses. As each of these aspects are intertwined, a subtle understanding of these three terms is a prerequisite. Culture was defined by Sir Edward Taylor in 1871 as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society” (Krishnamurti 1993). Culture is an integral and inalienable part of our existence and identity. It may be understood as a consortium of communication that a section of the population have in common: their shared experiences, perceptions and values, consciousness, myths, rituals, customs, and manners (MacDonald 1991; Michael 2015). Because culture is concerned partly with symbols and meanings, the problem of how or whether to theorize culture is particularly a complex issue for historical analysis (Hall 2000). B. Malinowski (1945) clearly explained the impact of contact on culture. M.N. Srinivas ([1966] 1972) discussed the process of cultural change in India and introduced the concept of ‘Sankritization’ referring to the process of adapting cultural traits of higher castes by the lower ones. In this regard, Redfield (1955) used the concept of ‘Great and Little Traditions’ in the study of great traditional elements and the upward movement of little traditions due to the interaction of cultures. Robin Horton (1975), through his case study in Africa, conceptualized traditional and cultural interactions in a two-tiered structure whereby the ‘lesser spirits’ involved the microcosm of the local community (especially the isolated ones which lived by subsistence farming), with the ‘supreme being’ appropriating the macrocosm of the world. If tradition is people’s creation out of their own past, then its character is not moribund, and therefore, one tradition is replaced by another the moment a superior force superimposes itself over the inferior. Simultaneously, individuals and institutions constantly create and re-create culture. In this regard, tradition and culture share their properties, as both play determining roles in human affairs. Though they appear synonymous, they are distinct in that tradition is a temporal

concept, while culture comprises a synchronic state of affairs. Tradition seems to be ad hoc and fragmentary; culture is an index of identity and existence, and the interaction among traditions (Glassie 1995).

These concepts resurface individually and collectively when a community undergoes a social transformation that reconfigures the societal relationships and dismantles the prevailing equation hitherto being followed. A stark example of this change can be traced in the circumstances of religious conversion. Because conversion is a multifaceted process, it involves transformation of an individual's spiritual life, faith, philosophy, ideology, psychology, and a physical makeover (Jenifa 2013). It seeks liberation from the current state of existence and does not seem to be a temporary phase born out of provocation or frustration (Khan 1991). According to Lewis Rambo (1993):

Conversion is paradoxical. It is elusive. It is inclusive. It destroys and it saves. Conversion is sudden and it is gradual. It is created totally by the action of God, and it is created totally by the actions of humans. Conversion is personal and communal, private, and public. It is both passive and active. It is a retreat from the world. It is a resolution of conflict and an empowerment to go into the world and confront, if not create, conflict. Conversion is an event and a process. It is an ending and a beginning. It is final and open-ended. Conversion leaves us devastated and transformed.

The concept of liberative theology, which is inherent in Christian conversion, is a subjective experience which changes its definition with the alteration of space and time. It is, therefore, not a monolithic one, but encompasses myriad definitions within the framework of different contexts. Pinning down when the theology of liberation had its inception is difficult, as movements of thought and reflections are always difficult to date in terms of the exact moment of their birth. Enrique Dussel opined that its roots can be traced back to the early sixteenth century in the prophetic theology of the Latin American Church associated with names like Antonio de Montesinos and Bartolome de Las Casas. The non-academic prophetic–pastoral theology of these men that took up the sufferings of the exploited races and peoples of the colonies perhaps commenced the Theology of Liberation that found its expression in the subsequent period (Taylor and Taylor 1991). Something similar theologically, but different formally, was the widespread ministry carried out in the Central American countryside by unordained itinerant catechists called the “delegates of the Word”. The liberation theology movement arose as a response to an authentic disciplinary concern of academic theologians educated in the North. Many of them were priests in poor parishes who wrote books based on their heuristic experience for the intellectuals to build upon (Yoder 1990).

Juan Luis Segundo (1976) asserts his:

“... feeling that the most progressive theology in Latin American is more interested in being liberative than talking about liberation. In other words, Liberation theology deals not so much with content as with the method used to theologize in the face of our real-life situation”.

Also, Alistair Kee (1987) stated,

“Liberation theology is not the application of traditional theology to a different theological agenda including exotic phenomena such as revolution. It is a Theology done through a completely different method”.

However, in India, the liberative theology is viewed from a very complex pedestal whereby quantitative and qualitative aspects are enmeshed. On one hand, the number of churches, converts, and their employment opportunities are indexes of liberation; while on the other, the struggle against injustice is not merely to eradicate poverty, misery, and exploitation, but also to give birth to an altogether different person (Chethimattam 1972). As far as the Marxist analysis of liberation is concerned, the economic aspect is predominant in which the role of church and missionaries in bringing about economic reforms and assistance is an overarching one (Abeyasingha 1979). Research in this line of argument

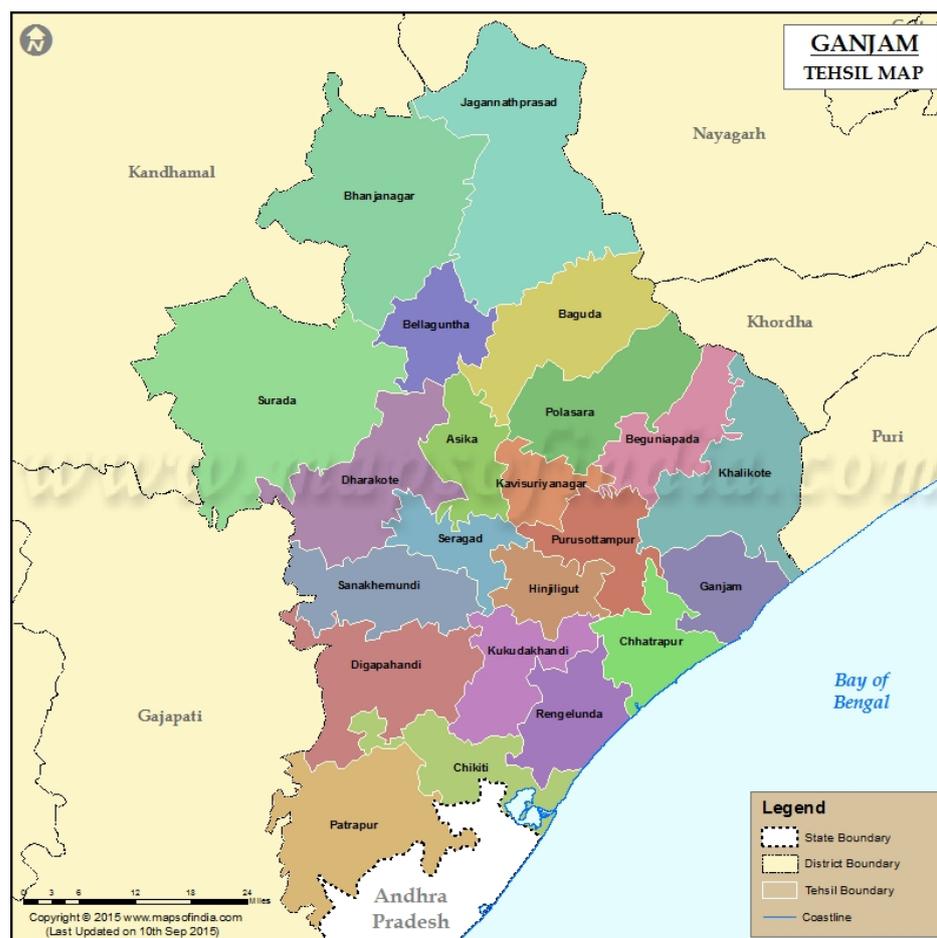
in India is still a grey area. Not much has been written juxtaposing the religious and cultural entitlement with the historical narratives through the prism of liberation as a mode of theological understanding. Existing research projects conversion from different vantage points of social change. Studying the Bhil tribe, for [David Hardiman \(1987\)](#) conversion meant accepting an 'alternative system of ethics.' [Gauri Viswanathan \(1998\)](#) viewed conversion as a 'subversion of secular power' that involved interweaving and disentangling of two religions and cultures. It also encompassed three interlocking and interdependent dominant symbols: God, world, and human beings, and their reconstitution in order to protest oppression ([Robinson and Clarke 2003](#)). Therefore, certainly, it attempted to gain social mobility, self-respect, and dignity ([Pickett 1933](#); [Oddie 1977](#); [Forrester 1980](#); [Kooiman 1989](#)). Although [Felix Padel \(2009\)](#) and [Barbara M. Boal \(1996\)](#), through their anthropological studies on the Khonds of Orissa, put forward the idea that Christianity liberated the tribe from traditional beliefs of superstition and elaborate rituals, the authors did not focus on the liberative aspect of spirituality. Historians like [Robert L. Hardgrave \(1969\)](#), [Henriette Bugge \(1994\)](#), [Gunnel Cederlof \(1997\)](#), and [P. Sanal Mohan \(2015\)](#) pointed out the reconfiguration of traditional social relations that underwent conversion, and by which the oppressed could protest tyranny and slavery. However, another group of scholars put forward a theory of 'aggressive cultural imperialism' that lay under the motive of converting people and argued that missionary activities disrupted the social equilibrium and fostered a communal divide and separatist movement between Hindus and Christians ([Panikkar 1953](#); [Goel 1986](#); [Susan Bayly 1989](#); [Devalle 1992](#); [Kim 2003](#)). Christian conversion led to a convert becoming a non-being who, at a psychological and cultural level, failed to associate himself in a new religious ethos, which made him feel alienated from the society ([Copley 1997](#)). It created a rupture in prior faith, heralded displacement within the family and society, both individually and collectively, and ended up in an intensification of experiencing 'otherness' with an added epithet of 'Rice Christians' ([Dube 2004](#); [Harding 2008](#)). It was [Sathianathan Clarke \(1998\)](#), [John C.B. Webster \(2007\)](#), and [James Massey \(2014\)](#) who delved into the liberative aspect of the conversion movements and opined that Christianity offered the disenfranchised and marginalized people an escape from social discrimination and despicable bearings.

Therefore, the question remains of how did the oppressed conceive of liberation in the process of embracing Christianity? Because conversion did not lead to complete emancipation from social ostracization, how far did liberative theology still have its pertinence for the converts? This research on the Christian conversion movement among the tribal Savaras of Ganjam will rely on three theories of culture, namely functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism, to understand how conversion shared its ontological derivations with culture. Historical discourse will be our prism to articulate the various aspects of changing cultural patterns. Moreover, the hypothesis that it was an urge towards proper existentialism that propelled the need for a counter theology will also be under our purview.<sup>1</sup> Through the configurational approach, this article will study the shift in religious practices, cultural patterns, and the problems that overshadowed the lives of Savaras, strengthening a cultural divide among themselves on the one hand, and bringing them into the mainstream civilization on the other. Utilising the theory of phenomenology, I shall take up a comprehensive history of Christianity in Ganjam and try to show that the decision to convert was a countenance of contextual and liberative theologies, and that liberation was more of a psychological comprehension based on individual piety. Since socio-historical phenomena are more than theoretical interpretation, archival sources and mission reports will be critically analyzed, blended with theoretical overtones, and corroborated by the secondary literature to present the arguments in a logical and unbiased manner.

## 2. The Rural World of Ganjam

The Ganjam district lies in the southern part of Orissa (see [Figure 1](#)), bordered by the districts of Nayagarh in the north, Gajapati and Srikakulam in the south, on the west by Kandhamal, and on the east by Khurdha and Puri and running along the coastline of the

Bay of Bengal (see map). During the early period of British administration, Ganjam was the northernmost district of the division of the erstwhile Madras Presidency called the Northern *Circars*. Prior to the creation of Orissa as a separate province, the whole of Ganjam Agency was divided into three taluks, namely, Ramagiri-Udayagiri, Ghumusar-Udayagiri, and Baligurha, and it was known as Baligurha division. Consequently, upon the creation of Orissa on 1 April 1936, Ganjam district was separated from the Madras Presidency and merged with Orissa. The district then comprised the divisions of Ghumusar, Chhatrapur, Baligurha, part of Brahmapur and Ichhapur Taluks in Brahmapur division, part of the Paralakhemundi plains, and the whole of Paralakhemundi Agency in Chicacole (Behuria 1992).



**Figure 1.** Ganjam *Tehsil* Map highlighting the names and locations of all the *tehsils* (administrative areas) in the district (<https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/orissa/tehsil/ganjam.html>, accessed on 12 October 2022).

The agency areas, or the hilly tracts with extensive thick forest growth, were mostly inhabited by the *adivasi* (first inhabitants) or ‘tribal’ Savaras and Kondhs, and the ‘untouchable’ Panos (*Small Farmers Development Agency: District Ganjam 1972*). The Savaras were one of the oldest tribal groups living in this district, especially in and around Parlakimedi. Along with them resided the Paiks and the Panos, who were a group of Oriya migrants from the plains. The Paiks were caste Hindus and formed a section of the ruling class, while the Panos were outcastes<sup>2</sup> and traders by profession. They lived apart in their own hamlets in parallel mud huts and had little in common with each other (McLaurin 195?). The Savaras themselves could be divided into two groups: *Kapu* and Hill Savaras. The *Kapu* Savaras inhabited the plains regions of the agency areas which provided them a scope to adapt the cultural traditions of the Oriyas and the Telugus. However, the Hill Savaras,

as the name suggested, lived in the more inaccessible regions and were staunch in their traditional faith and practices (Carder 1950; Thurston 1909; Singh 1984).

The mythologies of *Aitareya Brahmana* described the Savaras as descendants of the elder sons of *Viswamitra*, Valmiki's *Ramayana* traced them as inhabitants of the Dandaka forests, and legendary accounts like *Skanda Purana*, *Brahma Purana* documented that Lord Jagannath (the primary Hindu deity worshipped in Orissa) was venerated as *Neela Madhab* by the Savara chief Viswvasu (Elwin 1955; Mazumdar 1927; Joshi 2007; Konduru 2016). These accounts predominantly pointed towards a genuine possibility of the Savaras as followers of Hinduism. Unfortunately, the caste Hindus never considered them as their counterparts and treated them as 'antebasis' or indigenous people residing at the 'pratyanta desh' or frontier zones (Patnaik 1989). The Savaras believed in animism (spirit worship), and performed animal sacrifices to propitiate and appease their gods and goddesses through a *shaman* (male priest) or *shamanin* (female priest). Their religion was known as *Darangmaa* and elaborate observance of rituals was an integral part of it (Elwin 1954; Acharya n.d.). They believed that the incidence of natural calamities was triggered by the demons<sup>3</sup> and diseases spread due to the enragement of their village goddess, and they reared their children with certain misconceptions about life and death (Paik 1910; Elwin 1954; Pfeffer 2014).<sup>4</sup> However, the Savaras had greater admiration for the Hindu cultural traditions and even tried to imitate their ritualistic behaviors and lifestyle. They tried to interpret the Hindu concepts of 'paap-punya' (sin and religious merit) and 'kulamela' (a concept similar to that of caste groups) in their own ways and appreciated the Hindu way of life (Mahapatra n.d.). This quest for social acceptance and affiliation to mingle with the mainstream civilization continued until Christianity entered the region.

The Panos, on the other hand, were Oriya speakers who had mobility in both the Ganjam locality and the hilly areas. They were involved in fishing, trading, and even menial jobs. They formed the outcaste group but worshipped deities of the Hindu pantheon along with village ones. The upper caste people exploited the Panos without rendering any substantial return to them. A Brahman, who could serve as a priest in the house of the four varnas (Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra), did not extend his priestly functions to the *avarnas* or low castes. The Brahmans occupying the highest position in the caste hierarchy treated the lower caste people as beyond the Varna order, and this spiralled into a feeling of inferiority among the latter. The Panos were traditionally considered the lowest in the caste hierarchy and they served not only the *savarna* castes but also other castes as well. The classes like Washermen, Bauris, etc., who accepted services from the Panos, maintained a social distance from them on the ground of "purity and pollution".<sup>5</sup> They were debarred from entering the Hindu temples and participating in the Hindu festivals as well. Thus, the Panos were alienated socially from all sides (Behera 1991).

However, the economic framework of Ganjam after the arrival of colonial rule was such that, despite the outcastes being socially ostracized in a Hindu caste society, the Panos were in a better social position due to their dexterity and credibility compared to that of the tribal Savaras, which made the latter suffer from marginalization and subservience to both the Panos and others in the hierarchical society.

The British infiltration into Orissa that started in 1766 was completed after capturing the two districts in the South—Ganjam and Koraput; three districts in the North—Balasore, Cuttack, and Puri; and one district in the West—Sambalpur (Sengupta 2015). Apart from the changes in land settlements, the emergence of colonial rule in Ganjam led to the introduction of money economy, which undermined the self-sufficient livelihood practiced by the Savaras. With the opening of territory to the outside world, a large number of traders, liquor vendors, and communities like the Panos gained access to the agency areas (Henderson 1930). Perishable food stuffs, which were once used in gift exchanges, became a commodity in the wider market in lieu of cash. This led to an increasing exploitation and drain of natural resources which undermined the lives of the Savaras. As the local administrative officials were Oriya speakers, the Savaras developed a sense of inferiority, and this language barrier brought in opportunities for the Panos to exploit the tribals. The

tribals also resented the colonial rulers when they encroached upon their traditional socio-economic system, implementing policies of survey and taxation (Das 1983). The reformed land policies displaced the position of the Savaras from being original landowners to tenants-at-will. They were also denied occupancy rights over their ancestral lands. Because of their tribal status, the Savaras were humiliated and were subjected to *bethi* and *begari* (forms of unpaid labor) (Bag 2007). The isolated nature of the Savaras kept them non-literate and they were unfamiliar with commercial undertakings. This was another reason for deception by the Panos, most of whom were literate and well adapted to the changing economic circumstances. The Panos acted as middlemen in trade between the hill and the plains people on one hand, and moneylenders on the other, to whom the tribals always remained indebted (*Proceedings of the Judicial Department, Acc. No. 2275G: FL-1 1878; Thurston 1909*). In an interview with Sridhar Gomango, the tribal chief of Sogeda, when asked about his opinion regarding the Panos, he replied:

Panos are bad men. But they have a finger in every pie. I had to pay Rs.600 to save my land from ceiling laws through Barik Jogi Goenta (the biggest Pano fortune-maker). We always live on the brink of death and we have to tolerate them . . . in everything that we do, they outwit us. If we resort to violence, the police will not leave us. I suppose we chase away the Panos. (Singh 1984)

This led to the marginalization and stigmatization of the tribal Savaras from all walks of life. It was in this agonizing context that the Savaras were attracted towards the Christian missionaries, and embraced Christianity to witness a better standard of life, elevate their social positions, and be liberated from all sorts of oppression.

### 3. Arrival of the Canadian Baptist Mission and Their Contributions in Ganjam

The early years of British rule, imposed restrictions on the Christian missionary work in India as the East India Company was reluctant to allow any sort of interference in the religious and cultural practices of the people. It was only after the Charter Act of 1813 that the ban on missionaries was lifted (Frykenberg 2003). After the successful establishment of Serampore Mission in 1800 by William Carey, missionary activities began under the Company's jurisdiction. In 1822, a group of missionaries of the General Baptist Missionary Society arrived in Calcutta and then moved to Cuttack on 11 February 1822. Rev. J. Peggs and W. Bampton were the first to come in this journey. They were soon joined by Amos Sutton and his wife on 13 February 1824. In 1836, Rev. Samuel S. Day and Rev. E.L. Abbott of the American Baptist Mission came to Chicacole in Southern Orissa and, after a couple of years, they handed over the Chicacole station to the Canadian Baptist Mission (hereafter CBM), which, from 1885, made ventures in the frontier zones of Orissa and undertook evangelistic activities among the *adivasis* of the region. However, the great famine (1866–1868) of Orissa opened new avenues for the Christian missionaries to reach and preach to people and undertake social activities for them (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission, July 1914–July 1915 1916*). Rev. J.R. Hutchinson, along with a plains evangelist, Sora Venkiah, made a tour in the Parlakimedi hills among the Savaras in December 1886. In 1898, the CBM proposed the idea of a 'mission' for the Savaras, to be directed and supported through the seven Telugu churches of the Northern Association. The proposal was approved and, before the new year of 1900, a Savara evangelist, brother Goomana, was appointed under the new mission. In May 1901, Mr. B. Subraidu began his work as the first Telugu missionary for the Savaras. In December 1902, Rev. and Mrs. J.A. Glendinning arrived in Vizianagram (in present Andhra Pradesh) as new missionaries of the CBM, and the family moved to Parlakimedi in July 1904 to begin their work among the Savaras (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1905 1906*). Thus, the CBM activities commenced in Orissa in 1902 and they actively worked in the Northern Circars of the Madras Presidency. In 1910, the first Oriya *Mandali* (organisation) comprising local people was established in Burudingi. Subsequent *mandalis* were established in Ashrayagada (1910), Badapada (1913), Serango (1918), Rayagada (1922), Narayanpur (1923), Jhalarasruna (1930), Chelligoda (1931), R. Udayagiri (1932), Nuagada (1933), Gumma (1938), and Brahmarapur (1968) for preaching

Christianity (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Telugu Mission 1890–1949* 1950; *Centennial 'Great Things' 1968–1970* (CBOMB) 1971).

W.V. Higgins in 1876 started with street-preaching and visited houses in Parlakimedi to get in touch with the tribal Savaras. Unfortunately, due to severe malaria, the undertaking had to be abandoned in 1893 (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1893* 1894). Rev. Glendinning stayed with his missionary friends in Parlakimedi and learned the Savara language from Goomana, who assisted him in the missionary work (Nanda 2002). Glendinning, Freeman, and some Bible women also preached in the open air, which attracted a larger audience who out of curiosity stopped by and listened to the missionaries.<sup>6</sup> Preaching the Gospel in the vernacular language created an effective impact on people and Messrs. Lacey and Stubbins had been successful in this endeavor (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1908* 1909). Rev. Glendinning undertook the tedious work of converting the Savara language into writing for easy reading, prepared the Savara–English and vice-versa dictionaries, translated Jonah and Mark into the Savara language, and published a couple of hymns in the vernacular also (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1907* 1908). Mathew Lima, a Christian convert, reported that, apart from the pictures of Jesus, the missionaries narrated different stories related to the Gospel through a device called 'magic lantern' (modern day projector). Instruments like the gramophone were used to play traditional songs, which attracted a number of people (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1910* 1911; Daniel 1966). Finally, in March 1965, the New Testament for the Savaras was prepared, printed, bound, and delivered by the Bible Society of India (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1966* 1967).

The CBM also established a number of boarding schools in different places in Ganjam like Parlakimedi, Chicacole, Rayagada, and Jeypore with the purpose being to give a new life to the poor and to destitute children. In 1899, the first school was established in the hills for the Savaras at Lankapardu by Papiiah, a converted evangelist. Owing to its good academic performance, the school was later recognized by the government for the grants-in-aid (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Telugu Mission 1902–1903* 1904). Another important undertaking was the growth of female education. The annual CBM report of 1911 showed that within four months, the attendance of the Caste Girls' School at Rayagada increased from eleven to thirty-seven (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1911* 1912).

Creating medical facilities was a pathbreaking undertaking in the hills.<sup>7</sup> Rev. Glendinning was the pioneer in serving the Savaras. Though untrained in medicine, he sought advice from the CBM medical workers, and gave pills and a few bandages during an emergency. The patients responded to the medical treatments and this created a scope for improved longevity of life. In July 1920, a full-fledged doctor named J. Hinson West and his wife arrived in India and began daily medical treatment. The first hospital building of three rooms was opened in 1929 at Serango, and three additional wards were completed in 1933. In 1937, Miss Munro took charge of some Savara infants whose mothers had died, and started the Savara Baby Fold (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Overseas Mission Board, India, Bethel Hospital, Vuyyuru, 1939–1940* 1941; McLaurin 195?). Dr. West observed that unlike the Savaras, the Oriyas and Telugus visited the Parlakimedi clinic. Therefore, to reach the hill people, he opened a hospital and a bungalow in the Savara hills of Serango, and in July 1939 an out-clinic in Gumma (five miles from Serango) was started for the Savaras. Regarding treatment, the tribal Savaras used to apply leaves, take recourse to some esoteric practices followed by the elders of the family, and sacrifice animals to propitiate their village deities. Undergoing treatment in the hospital was a matter of fear and scepticism for them. To mention one instance, a Savara suffering from a bad ulcer on his foot, when it was suggested that he see Dr. West, replied, "If I give up the worship of spirits, how can I get better?" After four days of treatment, he healed up and this created confidence among the Savaras about the effectiveness of proper medication and medical missionaries (Christian Medical Service in Serango, Carder 1940). In 1940, a clinic was opened for the treatment of yaws, a peculiar tropical disease found mainly among the tribes (McLaurin 195?). In April 1946, Dr. John Coapullai, an eye specialist, arrived in Serango, and during the next

year the number of surgical operations and eye cases increased to three hundred and fifty in-patients, one hundred seventy-seven surgical operations, and nearly nine thousand total patients. Dr. Gill, in cooperation with the “Operation Eyesight” of Sompeta Hospital, pioneered a massive eye treatment program for Serango. In 1946, Dr. and Mrs. A.R. MacDonald arrived there, and they were in full charge of the hospital from 1950 (Medical Service in Serango, Carder 1951). By 1960, Mrs. MacDonald had put together an effective hospital nursing team. Three capable women also served with her. One Savara girl had completed her training in nursing and was appointed as the first registered nurse of the hospital. Moreover, there was installation of an electric plant and X-ray machine along with electric lights for the hospital and the Serango Mission Homes (Carder 1961). Therefore, hospital facilities and modern treatment infused a sense of hygiene, cleanliness, and the belief that proper medication was the sole way to get cured and lead a healthy life. As a result, most of the Savaras abandoned performing animal sacrifices and keeping spirit-pots in their homes.

Apart from these, the establishment of churches was perhaps the most vital task for the CBM. Interestingly, the first church was organized among the outcaste Panos on 10 January 1910 at Burudingi near Gumma. On February 1922, another church was organized in Ganjam-Rayagada, where one Savara man was baptized. The years 1924 and 1925 witnessed an unusual growth of churches (*Report of the Utkal Baptist Association 1930 (CBOMB-India) 1931*). Regarding worship, the Savaras carried on their Christian worship services in their own way and language at the mission house of Miss Munro and in their village homes. Later, they built a Savara prayer chapel in Serango. However, the baptized ones on the roll of the Serango church were all Oriyas. Therefore, the Savaras needed an independent church for themselves. With the strong cooperation of Mr. P. Allaby, the first Savara church was established in Serango on 16 February 1947 and came to be known as the Savara Baptist Churches Association.<sup>8</sup>

In the beginning, the Christian missionaries confined their work to purely evangelical and social upliftment activities. Later, they realized that undertaking defensive measures to secure tribal interests would make them trustworthy among the *adivasis*. Therefore, the missionaries were ready to offer assistance in temporal affairs also. They helped the helpless Savaras to redress their grievances, which made the latter come in large numbers for consultation and share their tales of misery. This helped them to fight social oppression and discrimination. During the British rule, the task of elevating the lives of these disenfranchised people in south Orissa was taken up only by the Christian missions. Missionary efforts in introducing mission protocols created a new skilled class which widened their economic, social, and political parameters. Education, healthcare, vocational training, and other welfare measures transformed their lifestyle, bringing new avenues of employment which enabled them to overcome the oppressive behavior of the influential communities. The missionaries assisted the marginalized ones to engage themselves in setting up self-supportive work, established Cooperative Credit Societies for providing loans, and rescued the non-literate Savaras from the clutches and exploitation of the fraudulent *Sahukars* (moneylenders) (Nayak 2016).

#### 4. Christian Conversion Movement among the Savaras and Its Consequences in Ganjam

H.V. Higgins visited many villages in and around Parlakimedi, and preached to people irrespective of caste, color, and religion. In 1894, two Bible women named Kanakamma and Lizzie were sent by the CBM to Parlakimedi and worked among women and children (Nanda 2002). By 1898, there were thirty Savara Christians on the plains. Instances of recovery after medical assistance made people believe in Jesus as a healer. In 1922, sixty-two Savaras converted to Christianity.<sup>9</sup> However, evangelism began among the Savaras with the baptism of Rudugu, the first Savara convert in the uplands, in 1928. Rudugu’s family then gave up performing sacrifices, spirit worship, and intaking liquor. After this, others also moved forward to embrace Christianity (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1930–1931*

1932). Moreover, the ceaseless work of Rev. Glendinning, his associate women missionaries, and two local preachers named Papaya and Goomana, spread the word of Jesus among the Savaras. In March 1940, eighty-six Savaras were baptized in and around Serango. In 1943, a medical woman,<sup>10</sup> from a village named Tumlo, converted after recovering from a serious disease, and in the same year five Savara families came within the Christian fold (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1943 1944*). Therefore, with the growing acceptance of Christianity among the Savaras, the new mission field was named the 'Savara and Oriya Mission' and later renamed as the 'Savara Mission' (Daniel, *Moving with the Times: The Story of Baptist Outreach from Canada into Asia, South America and Africa, During One Hundred Years, 1874–1974*, Since the Canadian Baptist Mission was founded in India, Daniel 1973). On 16 February 1947, when the new church building in Serango was set up, a number of Savaras walked many miles, far away from their hamlets, to attend the inauguration of the new congregation. The three deacons Rudugu, Malinga, and Kulped worked their best to evangelize the community at large (Serango-The Saoras: General Work, Carder 1950). In 1956, there were over twenty-four congregations; over two hundred Savaras could read the Scriptures, and the New Testament had been translated into a few copies. In August 1963, a group of Savaras joined hands with Punya and Mongolo, the two leaders of the Savara church, and conducted the baptismal services for them. By March 1965, the Savaras had the New Testament in their own language, and in 1966, a new area church was formed and two new Savara pastors were ordained. There were seven churches comprising about a hundred congregations, with each area having its own pastor (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Missionary (CBOMB 86–70 India) 1965 1966; Report of the Saora-Oriya Work Committee: Evangelistic Cooperation in Western Ganjam, Orissa 1969–1970 1970*).

The Christian conversion movement among the Savaras cannot be indexed only in terms of the number of converts, but also by the impact it created in their lifestyle. The converted Savaras abandoned some of their old religious practices and beliefs. Traditionally they had rigid rules of inter-dining, which were forsaken after conversion. The Savaras accepted food from people of other tribes and castes. The Savara women were respected more than before and they were considered as an integral part of the family. Instances of divorces and polygamy were put in check as the Savaras understood the importance of family ties. Pre-Christian habits like drinking, superstitious beliefs, and shamanism were given up, as they were considered non-biblical. Their food habits changed as well. The Savaras adapted the practice of drinking tea instead of liquor, and using salt in food. Moreover, they followed the Christian traditions of birth, marriage, and funeral rites. Due to the spread of literacy, the Savaras were instructed by the missionaries to read before signing any document, not to sign on any blank paper while taking loans, and they were taught the use of money which made them confident as individuals. The converts celebrated Christmas, Easter, New Year, and some even 'Christianized' their traditional festivals. They celebrated the first fruits day (harvest festival) and brought the first yields to the church so that the pastor could offer a word of prayer for them. In Sunday worship service, the Savara Christian men wore white *dhotis* and *kurtas*, while the women draped themselves in good clothes and adorned themselves with light ornaments. Christianity also taught them monotheism and clarified the concept of eternal life and heaven, which enabled the tribes to be released from the fear of malevolent spirits and relieved from the financial burden of offering sacrifices (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1930–1931 1932; Allaby 1932; Research Notes: Dr. West's Report (Serango Hospital) 1942, Allaby 1943a*).<sup>11</sup>

Following the positive aspects of the Christian conversion movement among the Savaras in Ganjam, there was a flipside consequence from it. Because of rapid conversion among the Savaras, it was inevitable that the repercussions from the upper caste Oriyas and other non-converts would be quite unfavorable for both the Christian missionaries and the Savara converts. This was evident after establishment of the first church when there arose some tensions within the old village structure. Glendinning observed that the sudden elevation of the hitherto disenfranchised people to a better social position fomented the upper class to vent their displeasure. The caste people befriended the missionaries but

abused the new Christian converts. The Christians sought help from the white ‘*padre*’ (a Christian priest), and his intervention brought redress to the sufferers. This filled with much confidence and courage to face their oppressors.<sup>12</sup> In 1926, tensions broke out again between the Savaras and the villagers of Burudingi. The church this time was weakened by an internal land suit filed by one party against another. The non-converts charged the Christians for neglecting their land rent. Some even encroached the village at night for vandalism and stealing (*Proceedings (Home Department) Judicial 1926 1927*). In December 1928, a mob of drunken Savaras raided the village and drove out many inhabitants who fled to Gumma and crossed the river to a place name Ashrayagada (*Proceedings (Home-Judicial) of 1928 1929*). The upper caste Oriyas and outcaste Panos also instigated the non-convert Savaras against the Christian converts and took advantage of the fiasco (Research Notes: Turnbull’s Report 1942, Allaby 1943b).

Rapid Christianization ‘from below’ perturbed the upper caste Hindu Oriyas, fearing that Christianity might spread its roots among these tribal people and gradually gain a ‘popular’<sup>13</sup> support, which was sure to pose a threat primarily to their supremacy and to the Hindu state as well.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, various allegations were hurled against the missionaries, who were blamed for converting these innocent people through force and coaxing.<sup>15</sup> As a result, anti-conversion laws were promulgated in Orissa which came to be known as the ‘Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967’ on the pretext of forced conversion and calling proselytization illegal (Venkatesan 2008). Moreover, conversion gave rise to jealousy among the non-converts and this led to intra-tribal conflict. In reality, religious conversion did not intend to destabilize the Hindu or other communities, as the content and program of the church-based education did not foster any communal hatred or discrimination. It was the disenfranchised group that sought Christianity as an alternative, to resist the oppression of the upper caste Hindus. It was alleged that the missionaries had caused destruction of the tribal culture due to their encroachment and illegal acquisitions of tribal lands. Although the delegitimization of the *adivasi* (tribal) rights was undeniable, the missionaries could not be blamed solely for this condition. The atrocious and coercive behavior of the upper caste Hindus also should not be overlooked in this regard (A. P. Chatterji 2009). Severe persecution against the Christians in rejection of Jesus Christ and His Gospel involved the indignant attitude of the offended majority who were determined to “preserve” their traditions and belief system. The Hindutva movement proclaimed that the tribals were Hindus and, therefore, legitimized the process of ‘Hinduisation’ or ‘*Suddhi*’. The practical purpose of this was to provide what Ian Douglas Richards argued was the “demographic advantage” over non-Hindus and treating conversion as “repugnant” (Suna 2017). It was these continuing oppressive attitudes and the extremely tense social outlook that made some Indian Christians reluctant to join Christianity and witness their faith in public (Daugherty and Athyal 2016).

### 5. Christianity as a Countenance of Liberative Theology

Bishop John Henry Okumu once stated, “The missionaries who brought Christianity, rid Africa of all its traditional values and religious concepts in order to have a clean plate on which to put the new faith”. It was the consequence of a threefold objective of the missionaries, namely to Christianize, to commercialize, and to civilize. It was further believed by some like Daniel Defoe that in order to enable the ‘primitive races’ of Africa to live like Christians, it was important that they were civilized according to the western parameters of culture and language, leaving aside whether they were spiritually converted at all (Katoke 1984). The Christian missionaries commonly subscribed to Rudyard Kipling’s view of the ‘white man’s burden’<sup>16</sup> which assumed that ‘Western civilization’ and Christianity were two aspects of the same gift which they were commissioned to offer to the rest of the world (Taylor 1965). This was not an event unique to Africa. It might apply to any part of the world that had been under the influence of the Western missionary enterprise of the colonial period. Conversion from one religion to another has always been a complex issue, especially in a pluralistic situation where change in religion affected one’s

religious affiliation, social status, and culture. As S. Michael remarked, "Conversion may bring the individual into conflict with his family, neighbour, society, and culture" (Thavare 2000). The new converts also suffered from 'post-conversion depression' (Rambo 1993).

Having said this, we cannot deny that the Christian missionaries all over the world tried to follow the command of Jesus Christ who said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Moreover, the saying, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19) is a clear message of pronouncing Christianity and the words of God among the people, which the missionaries tried to execute through their evangelical activities. However, what was unacceptable was the exceeding emphasis on the part of the missionaries towards the converts to 'imitate' the extraneous cultural and ritualistic patterns of Christianity. There is a fine line between religious propagation and reproducing western cultural superstructure, which at times made the Christian missionaries the victims of destroyers of the tribal societies who had the intention of spreading 'rapacious capitalism' in the name of development (Exley and Exley 1973). They were even labelled as 'soldiers of imperialism' and 'soldiers of Christ' who intervened and disrupted the traditional culture of the region (Osuri 2012).

In any religious conversion, the spirit of liberation reverberates after the ongoing conflict of whether to surrender to the new reality. W.H. Clark defined conversion as:

That type of spiritual growth or development which involves an appreciable change of direction concerning religious ideas and behaviour. Most clearly and typically, it denotes an emotional episode of illuminating suddenness, which may be deep or superficial, though it may also come about by the more gradual process. (Clark 1958)

So, this process undergoes three stages of experience: firstly, a period of conflict and push-pull forces of religious exit and entry that encompasses 'a conviction of sin'; secondly, the pinnacle involving surrender; finally, peace of mind when the convert feels in tune with God, redeemed of all sins and pains (Clark 1958). However, the theological understanding of the term 'liberation' is quite difficult to define in the Indian context, as the Protestant churches have undergone numerous divisions, and it is difficult to pin down any one theological direction of liberation because each denomination has their own theological positions. However, what was common in Protestantism in India was the dissemination of work among the marginalized and the dispossessed peoples. A significant area of work was translating the Bible portions into vernacular languages in the regions of operation to make the oppressed liberated from their *status quo*. These translation undertakings led to revival of the vernaculars which had a profound impact in bringing about a 'cultural and social renaissance' among the indigenous peoples, who were awakened to realizing their identity and self-dignity. Moreover, launching a counter-theology was to serve the yearnings of the oppressed people and their conceiving of Christianity in their own way, wedded with some traditional ideologies. This became the basis for total liberation as a theological *praxis* (Massey 2014). Christianity for the marginalized was not about evangelism and spreading the Gospel, but a commitment to discern the liberative wisdom of God through "imaginative dialogue with diverse cultural expressions of Christian and other religious traditions" (Daugherty and Athyal 2016).

Despite the absence of methodological consensus and practices of divergent theologies, it is only in the liberation theologies from the black, feminist, and the Third World that these perspectives stand out as the most discernible development in the Christian thought. Because implicit in these theologies is a distinctiveness concerning its nature and scope, they include a social critique regarding the destinies of the "oppressed". The inter-relationship between the "oppressed" and the "oppressor" is explicated in the theologies of Freire, Cone, Gutierrez, and Ruether. All of them addressed the dialectical themes of particularity and universality in the Christian tradition. In liberation theologies, socio-economic and political contexts are analyzed as the hermeneutics under which the human condition is understood and the Christian faith interpreted. In this regard, the essential interpretative category is

that of “oppression”. For the black theologians it is racism, for the feminists it is sexism, and for the Latin Americans, classism, that provide the context within which liberation takes place in the lives of the ‘oppressed’ (Bucher 1976).

The Brazilian humanist Paulo Freire, discussing the relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor, stated:

As the oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanised. As the oppressed, fighting to be human, take away the oppressors’ power to dominate and suppress, they restore to the oppressors the humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression. It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors. The latter, as an oppressive class, can free neither others nor themselves. (Freire 1973)

Gustavo Gutierrez insisted that liberation has to be undertaken by the oppressed themselves, which is the only context to bring about a true cultural revolution consistent with the Gospel. As he juxtaposed the oppressed’s human condition with the need for liberation, and the oppressor with the class struggle, he says, “One loves the oppressors by liberating them from their inhuman condition as oppressors, liberating them from themselves. But this cannot be achieved except by resolute opting for the oppressed, that is, by combatting the oppressive class” (Gutierrez 1973). Because the oppressed have internally accepted the dominant social images, they must experience a liberation of self, mobilizing themselves from self-hatred to self-esteem, via salvation as self-affirmation, which bolsters the renewal of humanity (Ruether 1972). Therefore, in this regard, the Theology of Liberation is self-consciously and deliberately contextual and follows the trails left by the historical discourses of life situation and realities. Liberation is pertinent in both the general and specific factors that result in dehumanization and marginalization of people within a given context. It is a *praxis* that commits to engage and identify God’s redemptive power, and leverage the struggles of the oppressed, which is why this is often referred to as “Bias to the Poor” or “preferential option for the poor”. One of the ways in which the political interest of the theology is displayed is in the process of education. This forms an integral part of the liberative ethos. Self-realization, coming to terms with their own potential, and the possibility of change through their own action, become part of the liberative process. Great emphasis is placed on similarities between the experience of the people of God in the Biblical stories and that of the poor and oppressed in their daily lives, which helps them find relevance in Christianity. This approach emphasizes the spirituality within the theology of liberation (Taylor and Taylor 1991). Jesus “believed that God would come to free man from every kind of bondage and usher in a new age of justice, freedom, love and universal brotherhood” (Kappen 1971). As Chethimattam stated, liberation in India referred primarily to the liberation of the whole man, and this tendency in the Indian tradition referred to moving away from all the rigid structures and systems of hierarchy (Chethimattam 1972). It seeks for those components that are meaningful for life. Perhaps the most appropriate expression of “Indianness” in the liberative theology is to make the notion of self-realization central and foundational, and the urge to overturn the traditional setup of oppressive relationships based on social grading (Abeyasingha 1979).

Liberative theology is not always about spiritual salvation, but is a sense of independence in practicing a religion.<sup>17</sup> This is why indigenization of Christian practices is pertinent to revitalize the religious and community life (Rao 2008). It brews a feeling of solidarity and contentment of being the children of God, a truth which for years had been denied to them. The age old marginalization and stigmatization of being tribal, the seething pain of being ‘other’, made them rejoice at becoming Christians. The vast majority of *adivasis*, who are non-Aryan by race and non-Brahmanical by religion, were never Hindus and survived with what Sathianathan Clark referred to as a “pseudo-Hindu identity” (Suna 2017; Raj 2004). This is not to overlook the fact that discrimination still prevailed between ‘born’ Christians and the converted ones, but the theological edifice of an all-embracing nature of Christianity made the hitherto undesired ones part of the mainstream civilization. It is convincing to believe that Jesus Christ had a ‘liberating-mission-agenda’ for his people who

have been identified in the Bible as the ‘marginalized community’, and this is revealed in Jesus’ Nazareth Manifesto. The church therefore became the ‘Mission-Partner-with-Christ’ as and when it addressed the sufferings of the tribal community. By doing so, the Church joined hands with Christ in redeeming the pain of suffering humanity. It was for this role of the Church as a ‘liberator’ that Christ ‘incarnated’ himself in the form of Church (Hemrom 2011; Cheria 2014).

In our study, we found that the temporal aim of the Canadian Baptists was to redress the economic and social sufferings of the Savaras, but their ultimate aim was to spread the Gospel and bring them within the Christian fold. Through the ministry of healing, education, and other evangelical works, the lives of the tribal group witnessed a change.<sup>18</sup> In the process, the Savaras acquired knowledge of the three R’s, i.e., reading, writing, and arithmetic, they gained the strength to establish an exclusive institution named the Savara Baptist Churches Association, and they became aware of their rights to relinquish all sort of bondage and servitude. Their access to education and medical facilities paved the way for them to lead a healthy life. It was the functionality of the hierarchical society and the conflicts pertaining to it that made the Savaras attracted towards Christianity. The Canadian Baptists broached the liberative *praxis* according to the regional context through their evangelical and upliftment contributions towards the marginalized Savaras. If we take the definition of liberation theology as the critical reflection of the great efforts and struggle undertaken by the poor and oppressed who share solidarity with them (Taylor and Taylor 1991), it can be argued that the missionaries could not bring total liberation in the region, as there developed a social breach among the Christian converts and the non-converts. However, as previously stated, liberation is a psychological experience, and leaving aside the strained relationship that followed after conversion, the hitherto caged souls were released from captivity through education and salvation with the help of the Canadian Baptists. For the tribal Savaras, their existence was intertwined with religious affiliation and practices. Judging by the Indian fervor for liberation, the fact that the Savaras had access to a materialistic and institutionalized form of religion in the form of practicing Christianity, performing church services, and its rituals, allowed them to experience a feeling of breaking the shackles of the prohibition to follow another world religion. Moreover, education and welfare activities undertaken among the disparaged community, and voicing their grievances and sufferings, which are perhaps the fulcrum of the liberation *praxis*, were carried out throughout by the missionaries in Ganjam. Through these symbolic and concrete interactions and constant supervision, the urge to exist as a community with a respectable identity was inspired, along with an assurance of salvation and liberation of the soul. The fact that the Savaras could claim themselves to be followers of Christianity was psychologically a liberative one, which is perhaps the most desirable outcome of the conversion movement in Ganjam. In this regard, the Canadian Baptists were absolutely instrumental in bringing about confidence and liberation among the Savaras to eke out a distinctive social standing for themselves, devoid of any pseudo self of Hindu identity.

## 6. Conclusions

Use of a theoretical metanarrative marks a passage from specific to configurational history, where the convergence of independent historical developments is theorized in a way which transcends meaningful connections among events. Here, socio-historical models are constructed in relation to epochal shifts, transitions, or transformation. In our study, we traced the gradual changes in the tribal society over time, especially after the arrival of colonial rule and the Canadian Baptist Mission, the effects of which are still a debatable issue. Until there were transportation facilities and roads, the traditional cultural and religious beliefs could remain unadulterated. It was only after the introduction of railways by the British in 1853, and the development of road transport, that the most inaccessible zones came under the purview of colonial rule and the ‘outsiders’. Later, due to various forest laws and the implementation of tribal development schemes, some plains people migrated to the

agency tracts for business, employment, and other purposes. This led to enculturation that invited some socio-cultural change among the Savaras. Initially, the economic culture of the tribes underwent a crisis, which took a turn towards socio-religious cultural change after the Canadian Baptists involved themselves with the inhabitants of Ganjam. Here, the term social refers to the network of social relations, roles, and interactions of people in a society, while culture applies to the artifacts, institutions, values, ideas, technology, and other symbolic systems that direct human behavior in a patterned society. The lives of the Savaras after Christian conversion, in a similar manner, could be seen from this changing cultural perspective. Embracing a new identity and comprehending themselves as liberated souls, the Savaras could mobilize themselves towards the ‘mainstream civilization’ and challenge the paralyzing nature of the hierarchical society. Moreover, the biggest liberative identity for them was the realization of being a part of the Indian subcontinent, a consciousness that developed after tedious efforts by the Canadian Baptist missionaries. By considering the Christian converts as nationals, India followed the *praxis* of syncretism as well as ‘living together separately’ (Konduru 2016; Robinson 2001).

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The tribal and Dalit (untouchable) Christians felt that the Indian Christian theology served the interests of the elite sections of the population. This initiated counter theology in the name of Indian Dalit theology that affirmed and confirmed the aspirations and needs of the marginalized people (Daugherty and Athyal 2016; Massey 2014).
- <sup>2</sup> The prevailing caste system in India is the system of four *varnas*, each comprising several endogamous castes and sub-castes (*jatis*) in the Hindu society. Each of these have their specified hereditary occupation. The four *varnas* are Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (soldiers), Vaishyas (traders), and Sudras (servants). People outside these *varnas* are called *avarnas*, *Ati-Sudras*, are arranged in their own hierarchies as the untouchables, the unseeable, and the unapproachable (Roy 2016).
- <sup>3</sup> The traditional beliefs about natural calamities like heavy rains, thunder and lightning, and earthquakes were that they were caused by demons. Therefore, during storms the locales would seek mercy from the Great God; when epidemics broke out, the Savaras believed that the evil spirits were pouring poisons from the top of trees or mountains, while the wind played carrier of those, thus ailing children (Paik 1910).
- <sup>4</sup> The Savara pantheon consisted of *Lobosonum* (female deity for good harvest), *Karnasonum* (male deity for good harvest of mango), *Jenaangloo* (village god or *Kittung*; a new harvest crop is first offered to the god before personal consumption), *Ratusonum* (male deity responsible for road safety), *Edaisonum* (ancestor god responsible for fever and *Khudan* sacrifices of a hen, goat, or beef before the house for propitiation), *Lodasonum* (forest deity), *Rogasonum* (both male and female in character worshipped to avoid breaking small pox), *Karnisonum* (malevolent devil both male and female in character, and the *Khudan* offered pigs as sacrifice), *Gangasonum* (malevolent deity, female in character, worshipped to prevent drought and endemic diseases), *Surendasonum* (male in character, worshipped to keep away pests from the crops), *Illasonum* (devil responsible for consecutive miscarriages of a woman), *Gagir-a-Bulu* (devil responsible for creating ailments at the time of delivery; the shamanin offered hen, goats, or clothes for propitiation), and *Sadru* or *Maandua* (benevolent male god). In some areas, illness and diseases were linked to the symbols of colonialism. The Savaras created a new god *Sahibosum*, the *Sahib* (white man) god. Most probably, *Sahibosum* was a torturing official, a forest guard, or policeman, who was looked upon as a cholera carrier. The Savara carved wooden images in his honor and placed them at the outskirts of their villages to keep him out or at least divert his attention. Sacrifices were even performed for *Sahibosum* as it was essential to keep him happy (Tribal Myths of Orissa, Elwin 1954; Pati 2001).
- <sup>5</sup> ‘Purity and pollution,’ a concept presented by Louis Dumont, weaved his theory around the four-fold Indian caste system. He tried to establish the fact that a person’s ritual purity depended on the caste he was born to. Thus, for him, it was the caste rank that decided the degree of purity and pollution. Therefore, the untouchables belonging outside the caste hierarchy are the most polluting group in the society (Dumont 1980).
- <sup>6</sup> On every Saturday and Sunday, the Savaras used to visit the weekly markets in Parlakimedi where the missionaries used to preach the Gospel to them. Freeman expressed that they used to sell books and distribute pamphlets during the Hindu festival of *Rathayatra* (the ‘Car Festival’ of Lord Jagannatha). The missionaries used to stand amidst people, sing in Oriya and Savara, and share the word of God, which attracted the local people towards them. Dr. West, who arrived in 1919, carried out special evangelistic campaigns in the church, streets, homes of the sick, and in weekly markets (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1910 1911*; *Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1923–1924*).

- 7 The Protestant missionaries believed that medical mission was the most important agency to reach the rural inhabitants. It functioned like a 'kindergarten system for preaching the message of the Gospel' (Basu 2013).
- 8 The Ganjam Mala Odiya Baptist Church Association was founded with the support of four main churches and some of the sub-churches in Serango. In the beginning, the Savaras worshipped with the Panos without any hesitation or conflict. However, during the 1940s, with the spread of Christianity among the Savaras, they felt a need for a separate church. Out of the seventy-six respondents among both the Savaras and the Panos, all of them preferred a separate church because of linguistic and socio-cultural dissimilarities (*Report of the Saora Church 1947, Field News-India; Set-1, Box 1 1948*).
- 9 A person near Rayagada took baptism in 1922 after recovering from a chronic fever (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1921–1922 1923*).
- 10 Medical women were pious females extensively associated with, and having more actively participated in, promoting evangelical activities (Brouwer 1990).
- 11 While Turnbull was discoursing about eternal life and heaven to a group of Savaras in the open air, he reported: Suddenly someone shouted 'airplane' or 'flying house' as they called it. All the audience was at once in the middle of the street gazing upward, "see, see there it is- up very high," and they watched it until it disappeared. Then as they settled down on the veranda again to hear the finish of the wonderful story, I was telling them, one man in all seriousness asked, "do your country people go to the eternal life heaven in airplanes?" (*Report of the Canadian Baptist Mission 1942 1943*).
- 12 One day, the Gumma zamindar (landlord), out of resentment, beat some Christians severely. These frightened the latter and they decided to complain to the missionary. Glendinning met them on his way, bound their wounds, and recorded their complaints. Then he called on the landlord. The Raja admitted his fault and sought for forgiveness, lest the missionary would have lodged a complaint with the police (*Proceedings Nos. 81–82, July 1925 1926*).
- 13 I borrow the concept of 'popular' from Sumit Sarkar who used 'popular' for the tribal people (along with the peasant and agrarian class) (Sarkar 1983).
- 14 Hindu cultural supremacy is the ascendance of dominant Brahminic forms of culture and, after India's independence in 1947, Hindutva has made the unification of Hindus as a central agenda of its political aspirations. V.D. Savarkar reaffirmed this belief by stating that the Hindus "constitute the foundation, the bedrock, the reserved forces of the Indian state". This synonymized India as Hindu *Rashtra* or State, and vice versa. So, to Hindutva, every conversion to Christianity indicated a loss in the battle for creating a Hindu majoritarian state (Chatterji 2009; Froerer 2012 (second impression); Chatterji et al. 2019).
- 15 The Christian missionaries were alleged to proselytize people with money power, allure the ignorant sections of the Hindu population, and displace Indian traditions by replicating western cultural patterns through the conduits of conversion. The attacks were generally hurled by the dominant sections of the society, and not the dominated ones. It was also pointed out that the missionaries took advantage of natural calamities like drought and famine when they posed themselves as saviors, which led people to convert (Lobo 1991).
- 16 This famous poem was written by Rudyard Kipling as a response to the American takeover of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War and projected the responsibility of white men in civilizing people of the culturally 'backward' country (Kipling n.d.).
- 17 A religious option can offer a wide range of emotional gratifications starting from developing a sense of solidarity, and relief from guilt, to building new relationships (Rambo 1993).
- 18 As a method of approach, the National Christian Council proposed that the only feasible practice was to select certain areas as demonstration centers and carry out evangelical works there. The main objectives were—firstly, development of Christian character, fellowship and service; secondly, enabling healthy living in a healthy environment; thirdly, improvement of family life through sanitation and child-care facilities; fourthly, enhance economic condition of people in villages; fifthly, maintain a cordial social attitude towards the neighbors and create an environment of social cooperation; sixthly, the constant re-creation of personality involving physical, mental, and spiritual attributes. Kenyon L. Butterfield proposed ten types of services in rural India—firstly, proclaiming Christianity through preaching and friendship; secondly, promoting religious education both to the Christians and non-Christians; thirdly, establishing village schools; fourthly, ministry of healing; fifthly, providing economic and social relief; sixthly, play and recreation; seventhly, helping the home-makers; eighthly, providing mass education; ninthly, establishing rural organisations; tenthly, training indigenous leaders (Manshardt 1933).

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