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Christian Mass Movements in South India and Some of The Critical Factors that Changed the Face of Christianity in India

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Theology

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Abstract

The main reason for Christian growth in India was not individual conversions but rather Christian mass movements (CMMs). Since the late 1700s, a series of independent CMMs among non-Christians and a mass reformation movement within the *Suriani* community have occurred in the southern end of India. These MMs culminated in a mass emancipation movement against caste-imposed segregation of *Dalits* in the late 1800s, an event of national significance. In the early 1900s, Pentecostalism evolved from these CMMs and transformed the religious landscape of Christianity in South India and later in India as a whole. The Thoma Christians were the early catalysts for the expansion of new-generation Christianity in India. The Christian population in India, researched and compiled by non-governmental expertise, tallied its growth from a mere 1.15% (of 238.3 million) in 1901 to over 5.8% (of 1.38 billion) in 2020.

Lay Summary

Christian mass movements (CMMs) in modern times, characterized by large numbers of conversions or reformations, are central to understanding the growth of Christianity in India. This research focuses on CMMs in deep south of India, including regions of Cochin/ Travancore Kingdom and Tinnevely dating back to 1700s and onwards, following the inquisition and subsequent schism in Suriani Church. The thesis elaborates on three kinds of mass moments (MMs): mass movements from other faiths to Christianity; mass reformation and revival movements within Christianity; and mass liberation movement. Several mass movements have occurred since the advent of the British Raj. The thesis explains the mass reformation and revival movements among Suriani Christians; the works of evangelical itinerant preachers, independent missionaries, and mission societies in South India; and how they helped to facilitate mass conversions among non-Christians. To get a better understanding of these conversions, I have detailed four CMMs of significance among the non-Christian communities. Influenced by CMMs, a parallel MM of emancipation of national magnitude emerged among the distressed population and slave castes. The movement became an effective tool to voice opposition to the socially imposed caste system and to fight for their emancipation. Ultimately, it succeeded in compelling the government to enact legislation against segregation and abolish slavery in India under the provisions of the Indian Penal Code (Sec. 359–374) of 1862. Following a series of revival movements, CMMs culminated into Pentecostalism. The research explicates how Pentecostal like moment, influenced by the pietism and holiness movement, emerged in South India decades before the global expansion of modern Pentecostalism. The thesis is an attempt to answer the impact and the outcome of CMMs in the deep south of India, and how they re-shaped Christian communities and churches in India as a whole.

Abbreviations

AGs:	Assemblies of God
AP:	Andhra Pradesh
CMMs	Christian Mass Movements
CMS:	Church Missionary Society
COG (FG):	Church of God (Full Gospel)
CPM or TPM:	Ceylon Pentecostal Mission or The Pentecostal Mission
CNI and CSI:	Church of North India and Church of South India
EIC:	East India Company
GFA:	Gospel for Asia
IPC:	Indian Pentecostal Church
KC:	Keswick Convention
LMS:	London Missionary Society
MMs	Mass Movements
MMTSC:	Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church
MTEA:	Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association
NIBCOG:	New India Bible Church of God
RMMs	Religious Mass Movements
SPCK:	Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge
SPGT:	Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Tirunelveli
TN:	Tamil Nadu
WME:	World Missionary Evangelism

Glossary

<i>Avarnas</i>	Untouchables (also called Dalits) outside the four castes of Aryan ideal
<i>Avatar</i>	Incarnate
<i>bhakti Marga</i>	Way of devotion
<i>Brahman</i>	Supreme Principle or reality (God)
British Resident	A Senior British official posted to maintain alliance and indirect rule of the princely states during British rule in India.
<i>Dalit</i>	Untouchables and all out-caste groups of Hindu caste system
<i>Dharma</i>	Religious rules and duties
<i>Diktat</i>	A harsh order or decree unilaterally imposed that must be obeyed
<i>Guru</i>	Teacher, advisor
<i>Glossolalia</i>	The phenomenon in Pentecostalism of speaking in tongues
<i>Kattinar</i>	Church priest
<i>Malankara</i>	Coastal west side of Malabar's Western Ghat
<i>Malpan</i>	Guru; Teacher.
<i>Mar Thoma</i>	St. Thomas
<i>Mar Thomite</i>	Breakaway Syrian Christians are called <i>Mar Thomites</i> because they reinstate the original Church belief and customs
<i>Mantras</i>	Sacred or magical chants
<i>Mantravadi</i>	One who performs black magic
<i>Mooppan</i>	Elder, headman
<i>Padre</i>	Christian pastor, church priest
<i>Padroado Real</i>	Royal patronage granted by Rome (the Pope and his curia to the Portuguese king)

<i>Pfarangi</i>	European
<i>Prasthanam</i>	Organization or Group
Renewalist	It includes all the groups adhering to the concept of Pentecostalism in Christianity, including Classical, Charismatics, neo-Pentecostals, etc.
<i>Shanars:</i>	Untouchable sect of Nadars of South India
<i>Suriani</i>	Syrian Christians, St. Thomas Christians, <i>Thoma</i> Christians, <i>Thoma Nasranis</i> , <i>Mapilla</i> , <i>Malankara Christians</i> or <i>Malabar Christians</i> are some of the names given to Kerala's ancient Christian community.
<i>Sadhana</i>	Spiritual practices
<i>Suriani</i> Church	Established by St. Thomas, the undivided ancient Church used Syriac text, followed Nestorian practices, and had allegiance to the Patriarch of Mesopotamia.
<i>Swadeshi</i>	Indigenous (the word is well known for its association with Indian independence movement for boycotting non-domestic product).
<i>Thalakaram</i>	Tax imposed based on number of people (head tax)
<i>Mulakaram</i>	Tax imposed based on based on the size of breast (breast tax)
<i>Tantric</i>	Black magician
<i>Tinnevelly</i>	Region of Tirunelveli in today's State of Tamil Nadu
<i>Verna</i>	Four castes of Aryan ideal (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras)
<i>Verpadu</i>	Brethren-like separatist group
<i>Viyojithar</i>	Those who disagree with the doctrines of the parent Church
Zamindar	Landlord

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Lay Summary.....	iii
Abbreviations	iv
Glossary	v
Introduction.....	1
Methodology	5
Chapter 1: Background to the Modern CMMs in India.....	6
1.1: The Outlook of Christianity in India Today.....	6
1.2 Introduction to the CMMs and the National Debate Over Conversion	9
1.3: The Beginning of Mass Movements Among Mar Thoma Christians.....	15
1.3.1: Abraham Malpan and the Major Reform in Mar Thoma Church	15
1.4: The Beginning of the Early Evangelical Mission in Southwest India	19
1.5: Introduction to the LMS and CMS and their Social Involvement in Kerala	22
Chapter 2: Major CMMs of the 1800s and 1900s and Controversy	25
2.1: The CMMs of the 1800s in the Deep South of India	25
2.2: The CMM in South Travancore	27
2.3: CMMs among Shanars of the East and West of the Western Ghat	32

2.3.1: CMMs Among Tamil-Speaking Shanars in the East of the Western Ghat.....	32
2.3.2: CMMs Among Shanars of the West (in the South Travancore)	35
2.3.3: The likely Reasons for the CMMs Among Shanars.....	36
2.4: CMMs Among Malayarayan (Hill Arrians).....	37
2.4.1: The Likely Reasons for Malayarayans to Embrace Christianity	41
2.5: CMMs Among Pulaiyars	42
2.6: Conclusion: A Parallel MM of Emancipation, Its Emergence and Expansion	46
Chapter 3: The Revivals, Renewals, and Mass Separatist Movement.....	49
3.1: The Renewal that Led to the First Pentecostal MMs in India in 1860.....	49
3.2: Aroolappen and His Approach to the Mission.....	55
3.3: Keswick’s Teaching of Higher Life and its Mission	56
3.3.1: The Missionary Sense of the Convention: “Missioners” and “Missionaries”	59
3.3.2: The Impact of the Keswick Mission on Syrian Christians.....	60
3.3.3: The Holiness Movement, Keswick Revival, and Global Pentecostal Awakening ...	62
3.4: The Decline of Christendom and the Rise of Evangelism	64
3.5: The Rise of Pentecostalism Among Malabarians: Its Latter Impact on Evangelism.....	66
3.6: The Third Wave of Pentecostalism in Malabar	74
3.7: The Diversity of Pentecostalism	75
3.8: Pentecostalism, its Theological Relevance and Practices in Indian Context	77

4. Conclusion: Statistics and Underlying Reasons for CMMs in India	82
4.1: Statistics on the Growth of Christianity in India.....	82
4.2: The Underlying Reason for Mass Conversions in India	87
4.3: An Ethnographic Insight of Mass Conversion Movements in India.....	92
The CMMs and Two Major Revolutionary Mega Movements	93
Bibliography	94

Table of Figures

Figure 1.1: Map of South India taken from “India in the 19 th CE.”	26
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

List of Tables

Table 4. 1: Distribution of major religions in South Asia.....	84
-----------------------------------------------------------------------	----

Introduction

“Mass movements” (MMs) can be defined in a variety of ways, “but broadly put, they refer to movements in which large numbers of people connected by bonds constructed on the basis of caste and family transfer their loyalties from one set of religious texts, institutions and leaders to another.”¹ “Christian mass movements” (CMMs) in modern times, characterized by large numbers of conversions or reformations,² are central to understanding the growth of Christianity in India from the earliest inception of the *Suriani* Church through to the modern Pentecostal movement. This study is focused on CMMs in South India (also known as *Malabar* or *Malankara* and adjacent regions of Western Ghat in Kerala of ancient Malabar coast), their influence on various communities, their emancipation and reformation, and the important events associated with them. This thesis situates the growth of Christianity from the 1700s, tracing common themes into the more recent missionary successes and mass conversions of the 19th and 20th CE, leading to today’s Pentecostal movements.

The thesis expounds on three kinds of mass moments: mass movements from other faiths to Christianity, mass reformation and revival movements within Christianity, and mass liberation movements. The following are the key elements that the thesis tends to explain: 1) What were the existing and changing condition for the CMMs; 2) How the CMMs subsequently led to larger MMs of emancipation of greater national significance. 3) How the emergence of CMMs in

1. Eliza F. Kent, “‘Mass Movements’ in South India, 1877–1936,” in *Converting Cultures* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 367, https://brill.com/view/book/edcoll/9789047420330/Bej.9789004158221.i-507_016.xml.

2. J. W. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity and People’s Movements in Kerala: A Study of Christian Mass Movements in Relation to Neo-Hindu Socio-Religious Movements in Kerala, 1850-1936* (Trivandrum, India: Seminary Publications, 1984), 1, 7.

Malabar (west and east of Western Ghat in South India) during the mid-1700s and 1800s prepared the ground for Pentecostalism to take root and spread to other regions of India; 4) the key dynamics that kindled these movements, as well as the circumstances and aspects that powered them; 5) the external influence as well as internal background of the communities and sects that participated in these movements; 6) and the contextual pattern of events that paved the ground for the later MMs.

Thus, the thesis attempts to answer the following issues: the effect of reformation and revival on the Suriani Christians of South India; the catalysts and the causative elements responsible for initiating CMMs; what were the existing and compelling environment and circumstances that created the motivation among the non-Christians to convert en masse despite extreme opposition and persecution; and what does the evidence suggest about the claims of intimidation, fraud, and coercion by the critics of mass conversions? The conclusion of this thesis is drawn by analyzing various statistical data and surveys to explain how these regional phenomena developed into larger movements of national significance.

Mar Thoma community of the Malankara region played an important role in the expansion of Christianity in India following mass reformation and a Pentecostal like revival movement among them in the mid-1800s and latter Pentecostalism. After the Nestorian mission between 500s–600s, there is no record of the Thoma community engaging in any missionary activities until the 1800s.

A new chapter in the growth of Christianity began in India after the arrival of the Portuguese on the Malabar coast. In the 1700s, the rise of Pietism in Germany attracted many to commit to the mission. Two pietists, Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg along with Heinrich Plutschau from Halle, were the first Evangelical missionaries to arrive in India. What followed from the

late 1700s until the early 1900s was a series of mass movements mainly led by native itinerant preachers in South India, especially among the low castes and *Avernas*.

Around the same period, the revolutionary Reformation movement took root amidst the Thoma Christians. In the late 1800s, Keswick's "Higher Life" message of holiness instilled a passion for cross-cultural mission and prepared the stage for the Thoma Christians to embrace Pentecostalism, which took the Christian world by storm. Beginning in the second half of the 1800s in Tinnevely and Travancore, Pentecostalism in India has expanded manifold from the South to the North of India. In their early stages, they were led mostly by Syrian Christians. After a series of revivals, it culminated in the Pentecostal and neo-charismatic movements, which transformed the landscape of Christianity in India. According to non-governmental data sources, the Christian population in India has grown from 1.41% in 1911 to over 6% (of 1380 million) in 2021.³

Malabar's historical border (unlike today) is in Kerala and adjoining regions of Western Ghat in South India. It covered regions of Travancore-Cochin state and part of the western border of Madras state of India. Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, the first Evangelical missionary, and others from Europe, called the people of the west (Kerala) and east of the Western Ghat (Tamil-speaking South) Malabarians,⁴ thus, I will be addressing the people of these regions as Malabarians.

3. Douglas Jacobsen, *The World's Christians: Who They Are, Where They Are, and How They Got There* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 115; Brian Grim et al., *Yearbook of International Religious Demography 2018* (Boston: Brill, 2018), 116.

4. Johannes Ferdinand Fenger, *History of the Tranquebar Mission Worked Out from the Original Papers*, trans. Emil Francke (Tranquebar: Evangelical Lutheran mission Press, 1863), 25; Eugène Tisserant, *Eastern Christianity in India: A History of the Syro-Malabar Church from the Earliest Time to the Present Day*, 1st ed. (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1957), 1.

Since Indian culture and religious practices are complex in their diversity of sects, creeds, and languages, the paper will navigate through these diverse groups of caste ridden Malabarians of South India to understand the impact of MMs on them. To better understand the complexity of these diversities, a brief explanation of the caste system in India can be helpful. In Hinduism, caste is a complicated and tortuous religious system, with both social and economic implications. It segregated a section of society in “severe bondage and in a state of stagnation.”⁵ *Dalit* is a Sanskrit term that means “broken, scattered, or oppressed.” The nature of the Hindu caste system can best be understood within the two-term classification of *Varna* and *Jati*. Dalits are *Avarnas*, which refers to the people within the Hindu tradition who are excluded from the fourfold hierarchical structure of Varnas of the Aryan ideal. They were regarded as “untouchable” and outcasts and touching them pollutes the higher caste members. There are thousands of Jatis, and they are endogamous groups that are practical units outside the four Varnas. The Jati-caste model is regional in variance, while the Varna-caste model is practiced all over India among Hindus. The Dalits were confined to performing impure tasks such as clearing garbage, sweeping, sanitation, and scavenging. Of the 3,000 castes in India, 578 are in Travancore alone (based on an 1891 Census Report).⁶

For a clear understanding, the following facts should be kept in mind. First, historian Stephen Neill acknowledges that there is no single “coherent and truly comprehensive account”

5. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 16, 20.

6. Gladstone, 17–18; Alex Thomas, “A Historical Study of the North Kanara Mission of the Mar Thoma Church, 1910–2000” (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2003), 9–10, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/305232879?pq-origsite=primo>.

of the growth of Christianity in India.⁷ However, this thesis makes a comprehensive study of the CMMs and the growth of the four largest Christian communities in South India following the schism of the *Suriani* Church, i.e., Thoma Christians, Catholics, Evangelical communities, and the hugely successful Pentecostalism in India. Second, Christianity in India is an indigenous phenomenon and can be properly understood only on this term. Hereby, I must also note that my Initial thesis proposal was to do an ethnographical study of the emerging yet the fastest growing section of Christian house churches and cell groups but had to be shelved due to Pandemic and the aftermath.

Methodology

The research will be exploratory, descriptive, and analytical in process. It will expound on the social background of the local population, the theological basis for the mass movement, inland and foreign missional initiatives, and relevant statistics. The study will analyze both, primary sources and secondary sources. The primary sources include homilies, translated materials, published materials, and church documents. Secondary sources will include scholarly literature, documentary analysis of existing documents, books, journals, dissertations, essays, and reviews of statistical data and other relevant documents.

Statistical data includes demographic and religious population growth since 1881, and between 1951 and 2011. It will explore the quantitative elements of the growth of Christianity in India by analyzing both primary and secondary sources. It will also help to synthesize and

7. Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present*, ed. Henry Chadwick and Owen Chadwick, Oxford History of the Christian Church Series (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 17.

understand the trend and the effect of underlying phenomena of experiences and changes for the individual's radical decision to convert to the Christian faith. The compiled information, thus collected, along with the secondary data, and church documents are put together to explicate the theme and identify the pattern for the rise and growth of the Christian faith in India.

Chapter 1: Background to the Modern CMMs in India

1.1: The Outlook of Christianity in India Today

With the arrival of the Portuguese and colonial rule from the 16th to the mid-20th century, the Indian reaction to the Western form of institutional Christianity was negative. Although Jesus was born, lived, preached, and died in Asia, many in India consider Christianity as a foreign religion and Jesus as a Westerner.⁸ Despite this misconception, many Hindus today accept Jesus as their *guru* (master or teacher), characterize him as an incarnate of the divine along with other deities, and devote worship and *Sadhanas* (spiritual practices) to him. However, they would distance themselves from all forms of institutional and authoritarian church structure. Following the Hindu cultural renaissance of the 1800s, there has been renewed interest and effort to embrace the ethical concepts of Christianity and the moral teachings of Jesus to reform Hinduism. Moreover, Indian reformers, like Ram Mohan Roy, Keshub Chunder Sen, Krishna Mohan Banerjee, Protap Chunder Mozoomdar were some who innovated interactive debate with indigenous Indian perspective about Christian faith and encouraged the idea of further indigenizing Christianity from Western influence. They were all Hindus and were the first to

8. M. Amaladoss, *The Asian Jesus* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2006), 1.

raise the question of Indianness of Christ and an Indian understanding of Christ.⁹ According to R. S. Sugirtharajah, there is no other religion or religious discourse than Hinduism that has deliberated in depth on the personality and representation of Jesus based on its varied philosophies and traditions.¹⁰ They found Jesus and his teachings unique and admirable, to the extent that they attempted to define Jesus within the Hindu standpoint and syncretize him into the conglomeration of Hindu philosophy.¹¹

The great Indian reformers like Raja Ram Mohun Roy saw Jesus as *Uchchatam Maargadarshan* (Supreme Guide), Keshub Chunder Sen found in Jesus a true *Yogi* who is divine as well as human, Vivekananda called Jesus *Jivanmukta* (liberated but alive), Rabindranath Tagore addressed Jesus as the Son of Man who came seeking the lost and the least, and Mahatma Gandhi adored Jesus as *Param Satyagrahi* (Supreme Truth). Mohun Roy used Christian teachings to reform Hinduism and to fight against the malevolent practice of *Sati*, child marriage, the caste-system, idol worship, and rituals. Chunder Sen interpreted the Christian Trinity in terms of the Hindu *Vedantic* concept of *Brahman* (God) as *sat-chit-ananda* (truth-consciousness-bliss), with Jesus Christ being the incarnation of *chit*. Banerjee, a social reformer and scholar, coined

9. R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Faces of Jesus*, Faith and Cultures Series (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1993), 3; Helen Ralston, *Christian Ashrams: A New Religious Movement in Contemporary India*, vol. 20, Studies in Religion and Society (Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Press, 1987), 17.

10. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Faces of Jesus*, 3.

11. John Parratt, *An Introduction to Third World Theologies* (Cambridge: University Press, 2004), 48; Sugirtharajah, *Asian Faces of Jesus*, 3.

the term “Hindu-Christian.” He argued that indigenous Christianity is the fulfillment of Hinduism.¹²

This kind of interactive dialogue about Christianity and its teaching among the scholars and reformers in India brought a great deal of awareness among the general Hindu population—a platform conducive to engage meaningfully between Hinduism and Christianity. On the other hand, it was a period when the nationalist movement was on the rise in India and some Hindu fundamentalist groups began to exert their displeasure toward everything that was foreign including Christianity and mission activities. Despite all these oppositions, majority of Christians supported the idea of *swadeshi* (indigenization) to make themselves self-reliant and independent from colonial influence and control. It led the Indian Christian community to claim and engage in the indigenization of church, mission, leadership, liturgy, worship, and prayer—an attempt to bring them more in line with traditional practices. Christian thinkers and theologians were unyielding in their effort to reconstruct and present their own understanding of Christian faith especially in context to the values and tradition of pre-Christian heritage that were acceptable and aligned to the Christian Scripture.¹³

We observe the tendency to Indianize in the works of such distinguished figures like “K. M. Bannerjea, Nehemiah Goreh (1825-1895), Sadhu Sunder Singh (1889-1929), Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya (1916-19-07), A. S. Appasamy (1848-1926) . . . and others.”¹⁴ Upadhyaya asserted that it is possible for a Christian to remain culturally Hindu and still practice

12. Parratt, *An Introduction*, 48, 49.

13. Geoffrey A. Oddie, “Indigenization and Nationalism,” *Archives de Sciences Sociales Des Religions* 43, no. 103 (1998): 143–49.

14. Oddie, 148.

Christianity. The Christian *ashram* movement is one such successful example of the indigenisation of Christianity. All mainline denominations in India were inspired to replicate ancient Indian practice of community living in ashram for the purpose of learning the path of salvation from a *Guru* (teacher) through strict discipline, meditation, and other spiritual exercises.¹⁵ Upadhyaya acknowledges that despite the tendency of Hindus to oppose the Western way of spirituality, they tend to adapt faith practices that are acceptable and reasonable to their understanding of spirituality. Furthermore, it was this tendency that has influenced many in India in modern times, to embrace Christianity. On the other hand, it also helped Christianity to be indigenized without compromising their Christian identity.

1.2 Introduction to the CMMs and the National Debate Over Conversion

Mass movements have a long history in India. They became a controversy in modern Indian society following the mass conversions of non-Christian low castes and Avarnas since 1700s.¹⁶ The Evangelical CMMs began in South India in the 1700s, and by 1830, they spread to every corner of the country. As modern information tools (print media), governance, and censuses became accessible, people became aware of societies' shifting trends. However, with the growth of nationalism, Hindu fundamentalism also began to exert its opposition to mass conversions. The debate over mass conversions became more evident and intense following a series of famine and epidemic outbreaks since the 1800s. It is important to note that since mid-1800s until the 1900s, 28 million Indians lost their lives to famines and epidemics. After these

15. Ralston, *Christian Ashrams*, 20:25–26.

16. Kent, "Mass Movements," 367.

difficult times of scarcity and death, large numbers of marginalized castes joined the Christian communities where relief had been distributed by the missionary societies and churches.¹⁷

There were a variety of voices that spoke against these conversions—both religious and secular writers, wrote in the editorial of local newspapers like the South Indian Post, Indian Mirror, and Madras Mail, owned by Hindu leaders of influence, T. Madhva Rao, Devan Bahadur, R. Raghunatha Rao, and P. Ranganatha Mudaliar. The advocates of anti-conversion claimed that people embraced Christianity to receive material support and were not sincere and honest in their conversions. Newsprints became an arena of bitter exchanges between intellectuals, clergymen, politicians, and others over the question of what constituted a genuine conversion.¹⁸ Mohandas K Gandhi believed that religious conversion is *disruptive* and does not carry any benefit to the converts. As such, he vehemently opposed any kind of religious conversion as well as the various modes of services offered by the missionaries, like education, medical, orphan home, etc., which he deemed as an *illegitimate mingling* of evangelism and services. There were occasions when he envisaged to prohibit religious conversion.¹⁹

On the other hand, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, the architect of India's Constitution and champion of the cause of Dalits and women in India, openly rejected Gandhi's idea of reformation within Hinduism to accommodate Dalits and keep them within its fold. Moreover,

17. George Oommen, "Christianity Among the Malayarians of Kerala: 1848-1900" in F. Hrangkhuma, ed., *Christianity in India: Search for Liberation and Identity*, Contextual Theological Education Series 16 (Delhi: ISPCKCM, Union Biblical Seminary, 1998), 148; Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 98–99; *India Awakening* (New York: Missionary Education Movement, 1911), 22; Kent, "Mass Movements," 371.

18. Kent, "Mass Movements," 370, 375–77.

19. Chad M. Bauman, *Pentecostals, Proselytization, and Anti-Christian Violence in Contemporary India* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 57–58.

the Mahar (Dalit caste) conference held on 31 May 1936 collectively reaffirmed the need to break free from the hegemony and strangle hold of Hinduism and thus, proclaimed it as “the only remedy for the Mahar (Dalits) community to attain equality and freedom.”²⁰ Ambedkar, voiced the need for the emphasise of both spiritual and material aspects to better understand sincere conversion. He rejected the idea of equality without freedom for the depressed class within caste-ridden Hinduism. Ambedkar declared in 1935 that he will not die a Hindu, and that to chose religion is the power that all Dalits can exercise at will. His speech at the Dalit conference resonated in the hearts of seventy million depressed Indians— a freedom in their disposal to exercise.²¹

For radical Hindus, leaving their family *dharma* (religious duty) is an irreligious act, and so, it is just wrong. Hence, conversion through false promises of material gain, physical healing, and spiritual hope is deeply offensive. According to them, the right to not convert by any means is the true freedom of religion.²² Hindu religious establishments like Arya Samaj (founded by Dayananda Saraswati), Rama Krishna Mission, Hindu Mahasabha (leaders like V. D. Sarvar who coined the term Hindutva), etc., sustained their voice against the humanitarian work of Christian institutions and the conversion of distressed community. They proposed various measures in the Parliament as early as 1946–50 to ban Christian Charities and conversions. Subsequently,

20. Kent, “Mass Movements,” 392.

21. J. Waskom Pickett, *Christ’s Way to India’s Heart: Present Day Mass Movements to Christianity* (London: The United society for Christian literature, 1938), 109–10; Laura Dudley Jenkins, *Religious Freedom and Mass Conversion in India*, Pennsylvania Studies in Human Rights (Philadelphia, USA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 55, 65, 68, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv16t6h4s>.

22. Jacobsen, *The World’s Christians*, 119.

various state level committees were formed, and the most well known was the Niyogi Committee, whose report was an inflated version of Gandhi's suspicion on illicit nexus between Christian Charity (Humanitarian work) and conversion.²³ Comparatively, Gandhi was moderate, and his rational critique of religious conversion became an invective weapon for many anti-conversion crusaders in the following decades. The Niyogi report described Christian charity work as "forced," "fraudulent," "inducement," and "allurement" and advocated a restriction on conversion in 1956.²⁴

With the rise of nationalist fervor in the early 1900s, it became a challenge for missionaries to prove it otherwise. There was a concerted effort by the churches and missionary organizations to set the controversy to rest by showing a variety of resources to establish the sincerity and agency of mass converts to several audiences, including Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi, international funders of missionaries, and potential future converts. They collected data and amassed "evidence such as conversion narratives or images documenting the converts' transformations."²⁵

It is imperative to note that both critics and, to some extent, missionaries were cynical about the true motives behind the conversion of depressed castes. Some questioned the agency of the underprivileged, their autonomy and capability to independently choose to convert.²⁶

Following Gandhi's disapproval of the conversion of depressed castes to Christianity and

23. Bauman, *Pentecostals, Proselytization*, 48–51, 58.

24. Bauman, 51, 58.

25. Jenkins, *Religious Freedom*, 33.

26. Jenkins, 38.

Ambedkar's resolute for religious freedom and anti-casteism, the 1930s were an important time for deliberation and examination by experts on the much-publicized issue of mass conversions.²⁷

In the early 1930s, J. Waskom Pickett initiated a survey of ten different localities in India that included four thousand converts.²⁸ The depressed class became a crucial audience for mass movement studies, and Pickett's survey attained greater importance and scrutiny.

Historians have addressed several impacts of Pickett's 1933 study, which responded to Gandhi's critiques as well as to Christian concerns 'about the legitimacy of group conversions from depressed classes.' Eliza F. Kent observed that Pickett granted the mass movements 'a certain validity' through the 'cool language of sociology.' [Historian Chandra] Mallampalli credits Pickett for attracting 'international attention' to mass converts in India and documenting the challenges they posed for Indian churches.²⁹

Pickett continued his survey on conversions among the Verna middle class and added another two books to his credit. His mass movement studies were multid denominational, focusing on both the spiritual aspects and scientific reasons for mass conversion. It addressed the facts and motives behind mass conversions.³⁰ Pickett's survey positioned mass movement converts into four groups depending on their professed motives, i.e., 1) spiritual (34.1%), such as individual agency towards spiritual sincerity; 2) secular (8.1%), such as education, help, and improving social status; 3) social (22.4%), such as "family was being baptized" or "my relatives are Christians"; and 4) natal influences (34.7%), such as being a "child of Christian parents."³¹ As we study this research data, the individuals spiritual motive of free choice and natal influence of

27. Jenkins, 33–35.

28. Jenkins, 33, 52.

29. Jenkins, 39–40.

30. Jenkins, 42–43.

31. Jenkins, 44.

being born into the same family predominate other aspects for their radical decision to convert. However, Pickett did recognize the high percentage of mixed motives among the groups and individuals who were converted. Furthermore, he finds the motives and mixed motives of the Indian depressed class to be similar and not much different than any other group or individual conversions anywhere.³²

Some scholars, like K. C. Alexander believe that many slave caste converted to Christianity to get new identity by the change of their name without any conviction of sin or change in character and beliefs.³³ Vinil Baby Paul points to some recent arguments that asserted material benefits and opportunity to disassociate from their past tradition as a reason for their conversion. These claims are important to understand the overarching concept behind CMMs. Conversely, Henry Baker Jn., who started a mission among run-away slave caste (more about MMs among Pulaiyars in section 2:5), instructed many families for four years until he recognized seventeen families who were ready to be baptized in 1852.³⁴ The description of rituals and methods for adding new converts by the missionaries during mass conversion in South India were rare. One record by Rev. John Clough about mass conversion narrates methods employed to baptize 9,000 members in Ongole (Andra Pradesh, South India). The missionaries setup three stations and in each station the new converts were inquired about evidence of the

32. Jenkins, 45, 47.

33. K. C. Alexander, "Caste and Christianity in Kerala," *Social Compass* 18, no. 4 (1971): 556, <https://doi.org/10.1177/003776867101800402>.

34. Vinil Baby Paul, "'Onesimus to Philemon': Runaway Slaves and Religious Conversion in Colonial 'Kerala', India, 1816-1855," *International Journal of Asian Christianity* 4, 2021, no. 1 (2021): 51, 62, <https://doi.org/10.1163/25424246-04010004>.

conversion experience and transformation (like keeping sabbath, abstinence from alcohol, commitment to church doctrine etc.) before being baptized.³⁵

However, Eliza F. Kent's analysis adds another important element of political motive to the whole argument on mass conversions. She suggests that "mass conversions in India have always involved the formation of collective identities that have something to do with the state, and in that sense, always been political . . . since we are dealing with conversion movements that involved large numbers of people acting in concert. What is significant to note, however, are the divergences and continuities in this process."³⁶

Several mass movements have occurred among non-Christians since the advent of the British Raj. The next segments deal with: 1) mass reformation movement among Thoma Christians; and 2) the works of Evangelical missionaries and mission societies in South India and how they helped to facilitate mass conversions among the non-Christians.

1.3: The Beginning of Mass Movements Among Mar Thoma Christians

1.3.1: Abraham Malpan and the Major Reform in Mar Thoma Church

Following the inquisition and consequent schism of the undivided Suriani churches (1653 CE), the reformation began in the Suriani churches that opposed the supremacy of Rome. It was with the objective of maintaining independence and restoring their ancient identity. This section studies mass reformation and revival movements within the ancient Suriani communities. It explains how they opened the stage for evangelism and how the impact of the Keswick higher life movement on their spirituality eventually paved the way for Pentecostalism.

35. Kent, "Mass Movements," 377.

36. Kent, 369–70.

It was a period of turmoil following Roman's inquisitorial zeal to establish Catholicism among the Suriani church, schism, and the political uncertainty due to the rise of Hyder Ali in the mid-1700s and later his son Tippu Sultan in Mysore. In 1815, Palakunnathu Abraham Malpan (1796-1845) was ordained as *Kattanar* by *Metran* Dionysius III. In 1816, he became the professor of Syriac and Malayalam at the St. Thomas Seminary in Kottayam, and the Vicar of a large congregation at Maramon, which became a center for the future reform movement. He was part of the committee for reform appointed by *Metran* Dionysius IV. Later, following dissociation with the Anglican Church, Malpan resigned from the Seminary to continue with the reformation within the Church.³⁷ Malpan recognized the need to reverse the changes made by Rome, many of which were imposed following the Synod of Diamper. Thus, he revised the church liturgy and removed all non-scriptural sections from it, including prayers to Mary, to restore the beliefs and liturgy of the Mar Thoma Church. They were no longer celebrating masses for the dead. Malpan next destroyed the statue of St. Muthapan kept in the church at Maramon, declared its annual veneration idolatrous, and abolished the festival itself. This act was the turning point for the beginning of the mass reformation movement within the Syrian Church, which is often called the reform of 1837.³⁸

Malpan maintained a good relationship with CMS and LMS missionaries and helped them in their efforts in field education and medical service. To continue with the wide-ranging reformation, he arranged to consecrate his reform-minded nephew, Palakunnathu Mathen

37. Leslie Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas: An Account of the Ancient Syrian Church of Malabar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 140; Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 248.

38. Brown, *The Indian Christians*, 141.

(Mathew), as the next Metran but it was opposed by Dionysius IV. What followed was a long history of litigation and in-fight.³⁹ Mathen was consecrated as Metran Mathew Athanasios in 1852, and he continued with the reformation initiated by Abraham Malpan. He welcomed CMS, LMS, and Tamil preachers to conduct meetings among his people. The missionaries from Tirunelveli, mentored and trained by John Christian Aroolappen (detailed in sections 3.1 and 3.2, he was first to spearhead a Pentecostal-like independent movement in India), were actively engaged in Kerala. They were at the forefront during the Pentecostal-like revival movement of 1873–75 in Kerala.⁴⁰ It was a period when changes through reformation soared in Malabar; new educational institutions rapidly multiplied, and several mission stations were established both in the Travancore and Cochin areas. After the consecration of Thomas (Mar Thomas Athanasios) as the coadjutor, a revival began in 1873.⁴¹ This early revival manifested all the elements typical of latter Pentecostalism.

The missions have been powerfully affected by a remarkable revival and dangerous schism . . . [The revival was] associated with great mental and physical excitement, [and] was marked by such genuine features as intense sorrow for sins, transformation of lives, zeal for religion, and Bible reading.⁴²

39. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 248; Brown, *The Indian Christians*, 141–45.

40. Gary B. McGee, “Pentecostal Phenomena and Revivals in India: Implications for Indigenous Church Leadership,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 20, no. 3 (1996): 114, <https://doi.org/10.1177/239693939602000305>.

41. Brown, *The Indian Christians*, 145; Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 249; M. A. Sherring and Edward Storrow, *The History of Protestant Missions in India: From Their Commencement in 1706 to 1881* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1884), 293, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100336092>.

42. Sherring and Storrow, *The History*, 292–93.

The revival continued, but the uneasy peace was shattered. Many in the Northern parishes were not happy with the pace of reform, especially those who were at the leadership level. The whole church was deeply divided between the Northern parishes and the reformed parishes of the South, and subsequently, the Patriarch (Ignatius Peter IV, Antioch) on his visit to Kerala anathematized Metran Athanasios publicly in 1876.⁴³ However, the reform movement initiated by Abraham Malpan sustained with renewed vigor in the New See of the South. When we observe the growth of the breakaway group of Syrian church, the schism and legal setback for the reformed *Mar Thomite* turned out to be the greatest possible blessing. Since then, this large, reformed group has been named the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church (MMTSC). The combined effect of reformation, revival, and legal setbacks led to a mass movement—thousands had to leave their mother churches and build new churches and educational institutions.⁴⁴

In addition, the movement greatly increased the demand for the Bible; revival prayer meetings were held throughout the Malabar region; and the *Kattanars* (Priests) were motivated to instruct, conduct prayer meetings, and conventions to revive the people's faith.⁴⁵ They were revitalized to evangelize. It led to the formation of the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association (MTEA) in 1881. Many who committed themselves to the mission were ordained and sent to work in the mission. There was exponential growth, and the great annual weeklong Maramon convention was instituted in 1895, where tens of thousands gathered each day.⁴⁶ Keswick

43. Brown, *The Indian Christians*, 146–47.

44. Brown, 147–49; Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 248–49.

45. Sherring and Storrow, *The History*, 294.

46. Brown, *The Indian Christians*, 149.

preachers, like the Rev. Thomas Walker and others, were regular speakers at this convention in its early stages. It became a site for the next wave of the mass holiness movement. The Keswick's *higher life* message instilled in St. Thomas Christians a renewed sense of spirituality and commitment to cross-cultural mission. By 1950, the membership increased to 200,000 under the leadership of five bishops.⁴⁷ As of 2011, the MMTSC had over a million members.⁴⁸

1.4: The Beginning of the Early Evangelical Mission in Southwest India

It is important to note that, contrary to what is widely believed, “even before the full dawn of the missionary movements of the early 1800s led by various missionary societies out of Europe and America had broken, the first Evangelical [like] mass movement of conversion occurred in the deep South.”⁴⁹ Evangelical movements,⁵⁰ during this period of increasing imperial influence, remained independent and developed their own institutions. They interpreted the Gospel to include the lower caste underprivileged of society who were oppressed and deprived of their basic rights. These changes began before the arrival of European missionaries in and around Tinnevely (Tirunelveli) and then in Kerala.⁵¹ During the reformation movement in

47. Brown, 149; Johan Kommers, “Focus on the World: The Keswick Convention and Mission,” *In Die Skriflig: Tydskrif van Die Gereformeerde Teologiese Vereniging* 49, no. 1 (2015): 8, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v49i1.1931>.

48. Jacobsen, *The World's Christians*, 122.

49. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 207–8.

50. Evangelical movements from the 1700s to the mid-1800s are largely known to have been associated with the independent works of pietist like Ziegenbalg, Plutschau, Schultze, Schwartz, Hough, Rhenius, and Ringeltaube. They facilitated, endorsed, and supported the indigenous missions led by native leaders and preachers.

51. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 214.

the early 1800s and the latter revival among Thomas Christians, many adherents committed themselves to the work of evangelism as itinerant preachers. They were probably the earliest Syrian Christians in modern times to engage in missions in and outside regions of Kerala.

The Evangelical mission in South India had its roots in pietism. The first Protestant missionaries: Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plutschau of the Danish-Halle Mission, were the products of A. H. Francke's school at Halle during the "second wave" of the pietism movement. In India, by this time, the esteem and respect for the colonial ruler and missionaries had declined considerably among both Christians and Hindus because of the imposed schism of the *Suriani* church, their gross promiscuous lifestyle, brutality, and irreligious habits that were not in conformity to local culture and their expectations. The two Danish missionaries were also the first Evangelicals (young in their twenties) to arrive in India on 6 July 1706. In many ways, they spearheaded the future of Christian missions and CMMs in South India, preparing the base for Pentecostalism to thrive later. Their arrival was a new beginning for the Christian mission in India. They realized early the importance of education and devoted their effort to translate the Bible and writing about Hinduism, its religious practices, and beliefs. They instituted a new educational system, merging the local teaching practice of *guru-shishya-parampara* (teacher and disciple relationship) involving native teachers and pastors. Within five years, in 1711, Ziegenbalg had managed to translate the New Testament into Tamil. He published Tamil grammar for Germans and a comprehensive genealogy of the Malabarian gods.⁵²

52. Zdeněk Štípl, *The Christian Ashram Movement in India* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), 18; Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett, *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution 1660-1815*, vol. VII (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 444, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521816052>.

Within a short time, he had 160 converts, and their numbers grew to more than 600. His converts were mainly from the lower-caste Shudras and Dalits of South India. He made sure to conduct church services in the Tamil language and use traditional music.⁵³ Ziegenbalg understood the importance of indigenization of Christianity for deeper integration of mission and education into the native population. Moreover, he and other pietist missionaries after him were influenced by the Indian practice of *guru-shishya parampara* (teacher-disciple tradition). They embraced it and integrated it into their modern educational system of teaching. Unlike other Protestant foreign missions, what was noteworthy about Pietist missionaries like Ziegenbalg, Schultze, Friedrich Schwartz, William Tobias Ringeltaube, and others is that they promoted indigenization of their mission by encouraging overall lay participation and management by local Indians themselves. The combined effect of these strategies resulted in successful implementation of various mission activities in the field of education and evangelization within a short time. It became an efficacious tool to directly communicate with the local communities by their people in their own language without provoking any suspicion or wrong perception of their work. Later, the application of this influential model to integrate Christianity into the Indian environment turned the Christian communities of South India (Tamil Nadu and Kerala) most active across all of India.⁵⁴

Friedrich Schwartz arrived in Tranquebar (South India) on July 30, 1750. He was a proficient preacher, teacher, diplomat, and statesman who knew many languages. He trained

53. Brown and Tackett, *The Cambridge*, VII:444–45; James. M. Thoburn, *The Christian Conquest of India*, Forward Mission Study Courses; Ed. under the Auspices of the Young People’s Missionary Movement (New York, NY: Young People’s Missionary Movement, 1906), 136.

54. Štipl, *The Christian Ashram*, 19.

locals for evangelism and for leadership roles, thus helping to initiate several Christian mass movements in South India. Thus, they were successful to establish large congregations of Christians in Madras, Tranquebar, Tiruchirapalli, Thanjavur, and Palayamkottai in South India.⁵⁵ Moreover, with the rise of Evangelicalism and the arrival of the printing machine, India experienced a surge in the translation and printing of the Bible in local languages. The CMMs under the watch of Schwartz converted thousands to Christianity. By the end of the 1700s, the Danish mission in the South had 50,000 members.⁵⁶ Most of the Christian works of evangelizing and preaching in these mass Christian movements were led by native itinerants and local leaders. The tactical success of their mission was due to the simple basic model that involved 1) the basic education and training provided to the new evangelist recruits; 2) the evangelist and lay leaders were not subject to hierarchy of power, and they worked independently in coordination with other co-workers and leaders; and 3) most of these wandering preachers were independent, depended on their own means and were not salaried.

1.5: Introduction to the LMS and CMS and their Social Involvement in Kerala

The missionaries of the LMS and CMS contributed to church administration and the building of all infrastructure, such as schools, seminaries, and churches.⁵⁷ The first Evangelical Missionary Society in Kerala was led by William Tobias Ringeltaube of the LMS in 1806. It was the beginning of English missionaries' involvement in Kerala. Ringeltaube was a product of the

55. Brown and Tackett, *The Cambridge*, VII:445.

56. Thoburn, *The Christian Conquest*, 138.

57. Sherring and Storrow, *The History*, 295; Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 229.

University of Halle and was associated with the Moravian Pietist movement in England.⁵⁸ He came to Travancore at the behest of Maharasan Vedamanickam, a native evangelist.⁵⁹ The very presence of Ringeltaube was a great relief for the new converts of Travancore from persecution, as well as it gave them the boldness to profess and preach the new *Veda* (Christian Scripture).

Col. John Munro, who was the Resident and Diwan of Travancore and Cochin between 1810 and 1819, invited the CMS to start educational work in Kerala. The first CMS missionary, Thomas Norton, started a school in 1817. By 1827, there were seven CMS schools, and the LMS by 1930, had 97 schools with 3,100 pupils. In the late 1830s, the LMS invested resources into the field of medical care. The medical mission produced two-fold benefits for the mission objective: 1) The gratuitous assistance provided to all applicants without distinction of caste or creed created a sense of trust and gratitude toward missionaries 2) It gave missionaries wider scope and brought them into close contact with all classes in the community. The most significant aspect of the medical mission was that it was appreciated and endorsed by all sections of society and brought people of all castes and creeds together. The church mission schools opened the opportunity for the education of underprivileged children. Their education shattered the myth that only the higher castes were destined to learn.⁶⁰ In the latter years, mission school education was considered a highly esteemed achievement throughout India.

58. Samuel Mateer, *The Land of Charity: A Descriptive Account of Travancore and Its People, with Especial Reference to Missionary Labour* (London: J. Snow and Co., 1871), 155, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001869549>.

59. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 56, 59–60.

60. Gladstone, 70–73.

The low caste and the *Averna* outcaste were not permitted any direct access to the courts and administration. They understood that missionaries were the best and most reliable means to present their petition of grievances to the authorities. Therefore, people presented their appeals to the missionaries for various benefits and favors from the government. The missionaries exerted their influence by approaching the British Resident to resolve many genuine grievances of the suppressed people.⁶¹ Thus, the LMS and then the CMS missionaries were effective in establishing a reliable relationship with these depressed sections of society. The efforts of the missionaries in the fields of medicine, education, and social reform also became one of the major reasons for creating a sense of value and awareness among the distressed population to unite and struggle for their liberty and rights. It endowed in them a sense of emancipation and boldness to question the established caste-driven oppressive customs. I believe their work in the fields of education, medical, and other charitable services were important factors in attracting many, particularly the low-caste and *avernas*, to the Christian faith.

He next chapter introduces 1) the CMMs of significance among the non-Christian communities; 2) how these CMMs ignited a parallel mega movement of emancipation within the sectarian low castes and the *Averna* population; 3) and an insight into the reasons for mass conversions towards Christianity in India. Thus, it addresses the questions of who were the catalysts responsible for these CMMs; what were the circumstances that motivated these non-Christians to convert in masses despite intense opposition and persecution; and do these mass conversions to Christianity suggest any intimidation, fraud, and coercion?

61. Gladstone, 68, 73.

Chapter 2: Major CMMs of the 1800s and 1900s and Controversy

2.1: The CMMs of the 1800s in the Deep South of India

In this section, I will discuss CMMs of significance between the late 1700s and late 1800s in South India that have had spearheaded the latter liberation movement. These include the regions of Malabarians in Travancore, Kanyakumari, and Tinnevely. As I have noted in the previous chapter, the increase in educational infrastructure, printing press, and the level of literacy in these regions facilitated the increase of Christian mass movements manifold in South India, and it paralleled any Christian movement occurring elsewhere in the world.⁶² To get a meaningful understanding of these mass movements, we need to consider the social framework of caste, religion, and politics of the time in South India. From the mid-1700s to mid-1800s was a period of sweeping shifts in the political, social, and religious spheres for Malabarians. By the second half of the 1700s, with the rise of the Sultans of Mysore in South India, many kingdoms were occupied by Hyder Ali Khan and later by his son, Tipu Sultan. They seized Calicut, made Cochin a vassal state, and pushed southwards, threatening the powerful kingdom of Travancore. His army vandalized Hindu worship places and laid waste the ancient Christian centers like Palur, Cranganoor, Angamali and other areas before he had to retreat to defend his own capital in Mysore from the British.⁶³ Sensing real danger from the North, Raja (Rama Varma I) of Travancore in 1789 sought the assistance of the rising British power in Madras, with whom he

62. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 230.

63. Paul Thomas, *Christians and Christianity in India and Pakistan: A General Survey of the Progress of Christianity in India from Apostolic Times to the Present Day*. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1954), 227.

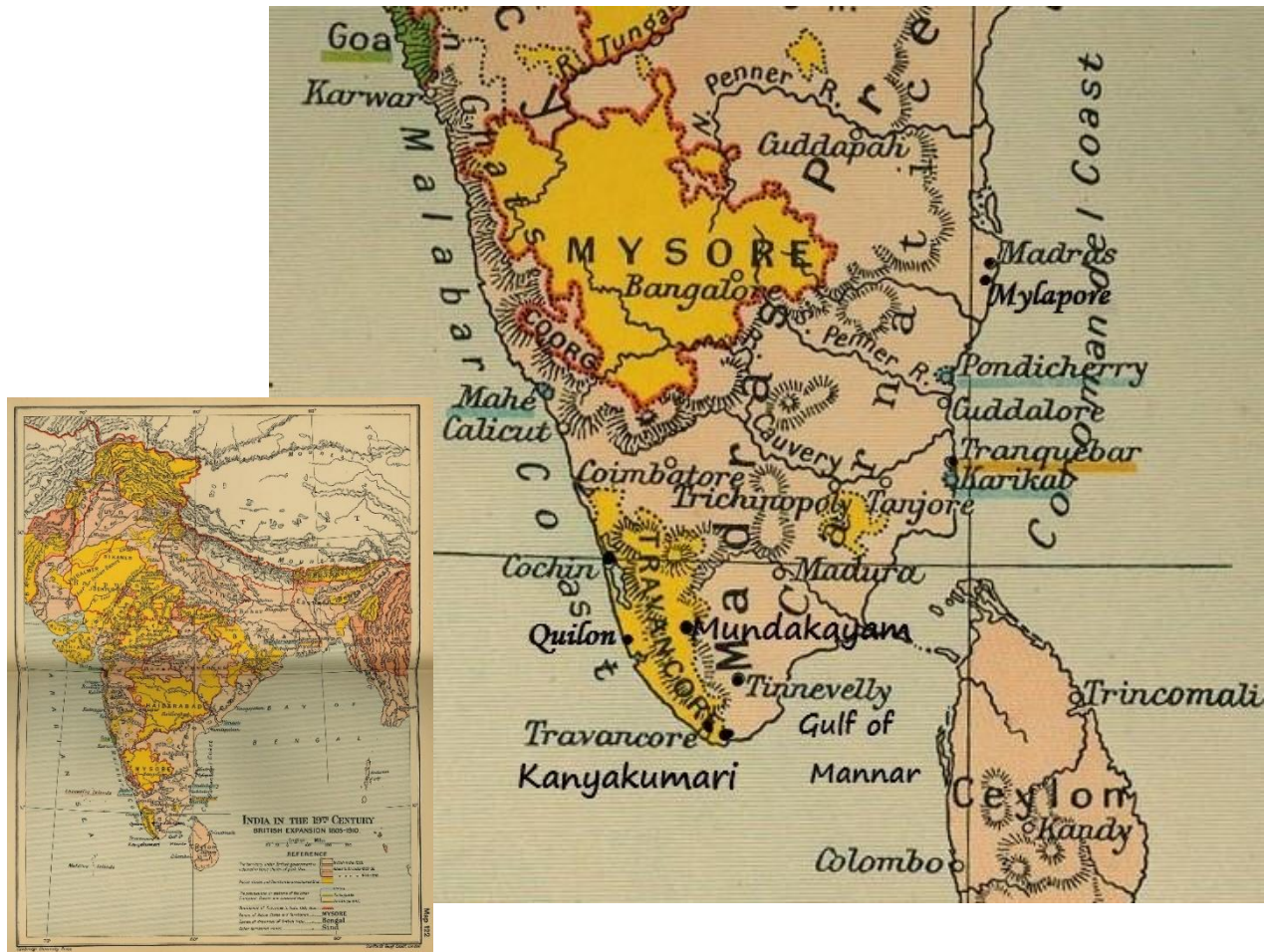


Figure 1.1: Map of South India taken from “India in the 19th CE.”⁶⁴

maintained a cordial relationship. He entered into an agreement with the East India Company (EIC) for the deputation of “two battalions” to the border of his kingdom.⁶⁵ Based on the treaties of alliance signed with the EIC in 1789, 1790, and 1795, the Raja promised to pay an annual

64. “India 19th Century,” History Map Archive: British Expansion 1805-1910, 2016, http://www.emersonkent.com/map_archive/india_19th.htm.

65. Samuel Mateer, *The Gospel in South India* (London, UK: Religious Tract Society, 1889), 21; Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 51.

subsidy and received the first British resident, Col. Colin Macaulay, at his court in 1800. In the ensuing forced treaty of 1805, Kerala became a vassal kingdom of the British Raj.⁶⁶

2.2: The CMM in South Travancore

Under the prevailing conditions, in 1799, a fresh mass movement in Travancore began with the conversion of Maharasan. He was from a respectable *Verna Vellalar* (Sudra caste) family in Mayiladi (south of the Kingdom of Travancore). On his pilgrimage trip to Chidambaram, he was disenchanted by the unfaithful practices, corruption, and irreligious activities of the temple *Devadasis* (women engaged in temple service).⁶⁷ Disappointed, on his return journey, he visited his sister and her in-law's family who were recent converts to Christianity. While watching their worship, he was deeply moved by their lively singing, praying and heart-rending message. After his conversion, adorned with a new name of Vedamanickam and a Tamil Bible, he introduced the Gospel of the *New Veda* (Gospel) first to his relatives and neighbors. Soon, thirty people openly professed their newfound faith. Within a few years, the movement had grown to add several hundreds, most of them from the low caste.⁶⁸

This unprecedented mass movement in the predominantly Hindu area prompted the landlords to protect themselves from losing the agrarian slaves who were confined under the caste system of Travancore. When he realized there was a plot to kill him, Vedamanickam fled for his life to the hills. The rise of persecution and crisis led him to recognize the need for missionary help, without which, he understood his efforts would not subsist. Moreover, with the

66. Mateer, *The Gospel in South India*, 21–22; Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 52–53.

67. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 58; Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 226.

68. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 58–59; Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 226–27.

growth in the number of congregations and congregants, he realized the need for trained pastors and teachers.⁶⁹ The missionaries at Thanjavur suggested relocating the new community of Christians of Travancore to a new settlement, as they had done in Tinnevely. But on hearing about W. T. Ringeltaube who was then associated with the LMS, Vedamanickam went right away to meet him in *Tharangambadi* (Tranquebar) and invited him to help with his mission in Travancore.

In 1806, Ringeltaube, with the help of Colin Macaulay (British Resident), received permission from the Kingdom to reside in Travancore.⁷⁰ Besides, it is important to note that the 1800s witnessed an exponential growth in literacy within the kingdoms of Cochin and Travancore.⁷¹ On his return, Vedamanickam was disheartened to see many people not willing to listen or accept his invitation due to fear and restrictions imposed on them by the ruling caste authorities. Over time, with the arrival of Ringeltaube, new native evangelists were trained, and they toiled under the leadership of Vedamanickam. Finding support from the missionaries and the British Residents, and their rising in numbers, the new Averno Christians began to openly profess their newfound faith. It brought in them a sense of inspiration and a new awareness about liberty among their own people who were Hindus. They found in Evangelical Christianity a scope for their social liberation and release from caste-imposed *diktat*. The Brahmans were offended by the very presence of converts among them. The Varnas were not willing to allow Avernas any freedom or liberty. The adoration of the new faith by the dalits and the optimistic

69. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 227.

70. Mateer, *The Gospel in South India*, 23.

71. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 230.

attitude expressed by the converts unsettled the ruling elites. Thus, they conspired to suppress their newfound boldness in whatever way possible.⁷² Moreover, the willingness on the part of British political authorities to help the missionaries fight for the rights of their converts might have emboldened others to come out and claim their social freedom.⁷³

Following the victory over the rebellion (Travancore War) in 1809, the British consolidated considerable power over the Travancore government. By this time, with the changes in the political situation, there had also been a complete change in the religious policy of the Travancore government.⁷⁴ It was not long before the Travancore Kingdom granted permission to build a church at Mayilaudy and ordered the local government officials to oversee the execution of the order.

During the war of rebellion in 1808, Ringeltaube had to maintain his residence at Tinnevely where he continued to provide religious instruction until the end of the war and represented for the cause of the new converts of Travancore. Before he moved into Travancore as a full-time missionary in 1810, Ringeltaube maintained a small makeshift hut, where he trained committed men for the ministry.⁷⁵ Following his return from hiding during revolt, Vedamanickam and his associates toiled in Travancore and expanded their ministry rapidly. By the end of 1810, they managed to establish six active stations to train new evangelists, and plant new churches with schools attached to them. Due to the changes in political stance, the Christian

72. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 76; Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 227.

73. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 69.

74. Gladstone, 61.

75. Sherring and Storrow, *The History*, 300; Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 61; Mateer, *The Land of Charity*, 264.

movement gained pace, so that by 1812 there were 677 communicants and many unaccounted numbers of believers under the supervision of Ringeltaube alone.⁷⁶

Protestant Christianity in its early phase was identified to a considerable degree with the British political power. Col. Macaulay, the first British Resident to Travancore, showed great interest in starting the work of Ringeltaube. . . The connection between the Resident and CMS missionaries continued for many decades. In 1814, when Col. Munro obtained a grant of two fields for the mission, Ringeltaube wrote, ‘this grant firmly establishes the Protestant religion in Travancore . . . The missionaries also received many other privileges as British subjects.’⁷⁷

As noted earlier, it is significant to note that Vedamanickam, who spearheaded this mass movement from its inception, continued as an itinerant preacher along with his associates for many years. On the other hand, missionaries like Ringeltaube and others after him devoted their efforts to printing, teaching, training, and establishing schools in every station. These became the groundwork for changes in society.⁷⁸ As education was an integral part of his mission, Ringeltaube had schools attached to all the churches under his administration. Before he departed for Ceylon (Sri Lanka), he resigned from the mission in 1816, and by this time he had baptized about 900 persons.⁷⁹ By 1819, the LMS had 10 churches, and 12 schools, and a plan for another thirty schools was on the table.⁸⁰

When Averno Christian converts started to openly assert their faith, persecution from the ruling Brahmins and Nairs intensified. As a symbol of pollution and subordination, the lower

76. Sherring and Storrow, *The History*, 300.

77. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 68–69.

78. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 228; Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 69.

79. Mateer, *The Land of Charity*, 264.

80. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 70.

caste and Avernas were not permitted to adorn themselves with dresses, ornaments, and footwear like the higher caste. Caste-imposed restrictions did not permit the women of the depressed section to wear anything above their waists.⁸¹

When women became Christians and then, for the sake of self-respect, dared to cover their bosoms with clothing, in violation of strictures that forbade them from trying to show such symbols of respectability, they were severely beaten. Pukka houses made of [baked] brick and tile, instead of mud and thatch, had never been allowed to such people, were torn down or burned. Worse still, newly built school chapels, made of pukka materials, were also burned down and their pastors-teachers imprisoned. Attempts to be allowed to celebrate Sabbath days off from work for the sake of worship were also denied.⁸²

Despite such adversity and the sudden departure of Ringeltaube in 1816 from India, Christian conversions continued to grow under the sole leadership of Maharasan Vedamanickam. More than 700 communicants were added, and “untold unbaptized Christians” were with him. His two nephews, Gnanamuthu and Gnanapragasam, were serving as church ministers and evangelists. A new wave of mass movements flared between 1819 and 1820 among the *Shanars*, *Arrians*, *Izhavas*, *Kuravars*, and some slave castes. Thousands were added to the Church. “Undaunted by persecution and violence, new converts came in large numbers to the new faith, “voluntarily demolishing with their own hands their shrines and idols . . .”⁸³

The next sections will explore four CMMs of significance among non-Christian Avernas communities in South India, i.e., CMMs among the Shanars of the east and west of the Western Ghats, the Pulaiyars, and the Malayarayangans. Each of these sections will explain the possible reasons for their conversions. The conclusion elucidates how the CMMs among Avernas

81. Gladstone, 81–82.

82. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 228.

83. Frykenberg, 228.

developed to facilitate and converge into the mass emancipation and liberation movements that spread from the south to the rest of the Indian subcontinent.

2.3: CMMs among Shanars of the East and West of the Western Ghat

Mass movements among Shanars occurred in two adjacent regions of South India. The first of these CMMs began in Tinnevelly (*Tirunelveli*), east of the Western Ghats. Later, under the leadership of Vedamanickam and his associates, CMM began among the Shanars of the west, in south Travancore. The Shanars were viewed as polluting and were excluded from living among the Varna high caste.⁸⁴ They were not allowed to enter Hindu temples and courts of justice; their women, unlike the higher caste Brahmins and Nairs, had to keep their bodies uncovered from the waist upwards.⁸⁵

2.3.1: CMMs Among Tamil-Speaking Shanars in the East of the Western Ghat

Between 1797 and 1799, a fresh wave of extraordinary movement occurred among the Shanars within the villages of Tinnevelly (*Tirunelveli*) led by Chinnamuttu Sundaranandam David and other leaders. Young David was the first *Shanar* Catechist deputed to Tinnevelly by Schwartz in 1796. The initial breakthrough came in early 1797 at David's own birthplace at Kalangudi. Here, his articulate and captivating message convinced his entire extended family to embrace the new faith. Four families related to David and twenty other people were baptized in Vijayaramapuram in October 1797.⁸⁶ The overall response to the preaching and teaching of

84. D. Arthur Jeyakumar, "Christianity Among the Nadars of Tirunelvely," in Hrangkhuma, *Christianity in India*, 126, 128; Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 208.

85. Jeyakumar, in Hrangkhuma, *Christianity in India*, 126.

86. Jeyakumar, in Hrangkhuma, 128.

“New Veda” (The New Testament) was so immense that the team of missionaries were overwhelmed by a “flood of new converts.” They had to work non-stop day and night, and there were occasions when the whole village embraced Christianity. The Hindu temples were turned into “chapel schools” and many were added to the Church.⁸⁷

The *zamindars* (landlords), perceiving the loss of free labor over their workforce, hired warlords and goons to attack and vandalize. “Many were beaten, stripped, and sent into jungle.”⁸⁸ Despite all the mayhem experienced, conversion numbers increased many-fold and advanced to newer and wider areas. As per the records of the Tirunelveli Mission Register, 5286 *Shanars* and 384 others were baptized and added to the church in the second wave of mass movement between May 1800 and December 1803, bringing the total to 5670.⁸⁹ In due course, to avoid persecution, the communities of Christian converts opted to migrate and build new localities in Tirunelveli with the help of missionaries.⁹⁰

A new chapter of the mass movements began with the coming of James Hough in 1816 and Charles Theophilus Ewart Rhenius in 1820. To keep the Christian community independent and committed, Rhenius introduced various new measures. He organized the villages to form a local society (*Dharma Sangam*) to purchase land for the purpose of settling down the persecuted new Christians. He purchased barren land, added new villages, built schools, refurbished the

87. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 209.

88. Frykenberg, 210.

89. Jeyakumar, in Hrangkhuma, *Christianity in India*, 129–30.

90. David W. Kling, *A History of Christian Conversion* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 555, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195320923.001.0001>; Hrangkhuma, *Christianity in India*, 130.

struggling seminaries, and “reignited the mass movement” in the Southeast of Malabar.⁹¹ Rhenius personally trained prominent leaders of the time, like David Pillai Asirvatham, John Devasagayam, Daniel Mukander, and Savarirayan Pillai. They had a deep impact, bringing a fresh outbreak of mass movements in 1820.⁹² By 1835, the number of *Shanar* converts in the East had reached 11,186 covering 261 villages. There were one hundred primary and two secondary mission schools, providing 2,882 children with access to education.⁹³ Between 1841 and 1845, the entire population of Chanpattu and another village a few miles away were converted.⁹⁴ By 1849 and the 1890s, there were about 40,000 and 90,000 *Shanars* associated with CMS and SPGT respectively in the East. “Over time, Tirunelveli became the largest, most thriving, and most progressive Christian community in India. The *Shanars* ‘turned radical conversion into social revolution.’”⁹⁵

The outbreak of mass conversion and group movements continued across the length and breadth of Tinnevely, flooding into Kerala, where, according to Hough (London, 1824), reformations were already happening in the neighborhood among the Suriani Christians of Travancore.⁹⁶ It was only in 1921 that the *Shanars* were officially renamed as Nadars (lords). By 2000, Tirunelveli counted 1.26 million Christians, which is the largest Christian community

91. Kling, *A History*, 555.

92. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 220.

93. Kling, *A History*, 555–56.

94. Jeyakumar, in Hrangkhuma, *Christianity in India*, 130.

95. Kling, *A History*, 555.

96. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 217, 220.

associated with the Church of South India (CSI), and it continues to grow at an average rate of seventeen new churches each year.⁹⁷

2.3.2: *CMMs Among Shanars of the West (in the South Travancore)*

In 1818, the first mass movement occurred among the *Shanars* of South Travancore (in the west of the Western Ghats) under the leadership of Vedamanickam. In the same year, around 2,000 committed to Christianity, and another 3,000 were added in 1820.⁹⁸ Again, in 1822, 5,000 people were added to the church membership, with twenty-two assemblies, twenty schools, seventeen native teachers, and five catechist evangelists laboring in the neighborhood.⁹⁹ Rhenius, who was involved in mission activities in the neighboring Tinnevely area, prepared a new version of the Tamil Scripture in 1820. Subsequently, a large number of Tamil Bibles were printed and circulated in South India. By 1824, the number of assemblies had doubled to 48, with 47 schools and 1,300 pupils. By 1849, 20,000 had embraced Christianity and were connected with the LMS in South Travancore.¹⁰⁰

A “great mass movement” among the *Shanars* recurred in Travancore around the time of the *Upper Cloth Revolts* in the late 1850s (detailed in section 2.7). There were numerous occurrences where the whole village collectively embraced Christianity. Right after the famine and cholera outbreak of 1860, following the triumph of the Upper Cloth Revolt, the CMM

97. Jeyakumar, in Hrangkhuma, *Christianity in India*, 137.

98. Sherring and Storrow, *The History*, 304; Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 93; Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 228.

99. Mateer, *The Land of Charity*, 271.

100. Mateer, 273–75; Kling, *A History*, 555.

resumed among the depressed sections, including Shanars, with new vigor. The revolt's outcome heightened their respect and trust for the Christians and missionaries who helped them and emboldened them to strive for their liberty. By 1866, the number of Shanar converts in South Travancore reached 32,363 with 240 assemblies.¹⁰¹

2.3.3: The likely Reasons for the CMMs Among Shanars

Admittedly, a variety of factors determined the cause of these MMs. The motives for the Shanars to respond and embrace the Gospel en masse were mixed, complex and equally intriguing. The following are some of the predominant reasons for CMMs among Shanars.

First, in the inception itself, as observed by Samuel Jayakumar, it was an “independent and indigenous” movement “that brought them social awareness as well as social transformation.”¹⁰²

Second, they were earnestly seeking to free themselves from the stranglehold of the Hindu caste system that subjected them to forced labor and deprived them of any right or status in society.

Third, like their Pietist predecessors, both Rhenius and Vedamanickam replicated the Helle model and relied on native “pilgrims” (Indian Pastors and Catechists) for outreach and preaching. They went out into the countryside and were the catalysts for these mass movements. They were the wandering preachers who travelled from village to village, exhorting older believers and edifying those who were new in the faith. They took note that prospective converts

101. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 98–99.

102. Kling, *A History*, 557.

understood basic doctrines and exhibited Christian behavior.¹⁰³ Everyone associated with the Gospel ministry understood the mission and its fundamentals. They made sure that each person they reached out to was given the chance to freely accept or reject the new faith.¹⁰⁴

Lastly, with the help of missionaries, the Shanar converts migrated and formed their own settlement away from the caste-ridden Hindu communities. These new Christian villages provided the new converts with safety, security, and shelter and made them self-reliant. “To enhance the spread and continued support for the Gospel . . . [Shanar] Christians formed voluntary cooperative societies for evangelism, philanthropy, conflict resolution, and the support of widows for the poor.”¹⁰⁵ According to Frykenberg, the real distinction between the revolutionary movement in Tinnevelly “lay in the strength of the internal and institutionalized support structures generated by the Tinnevelly congregation themselves.”¹⁰⁶

2.4: CMMs Among Malayarayan (Hill Arrians)

The *Malayarayans* were a class of respectable hill tribes of the Western Ghats. Though isolated, they were more civilized than most other tribes. Their primary economic source depended on farming with rice paddies and fruit trees, and trading honey, wax, and dried meat to outside traders. As such, they were self-sufficient and sustained an independent economy. Still, Malayarayans were subject to extreme socio-economic exploitation and a heavy head tax

103. Kling, 551; Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 223.

104. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 219–20.

105. Kling, *A History*, 555.

106. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 221.

(*Thalakaram*) and breast tax (*Mulakaram*).¹⁰⁷ A mass conversion movement broke out among Malayarayangans during c. 1819–1820.¹⁰⁸ Nothing much is written about this initial breakthrough. Gladstone describes how Malayarayangans met a European for the first time. An instance in 1848, when five members of Malayarayangans from “as many different hills” approached CMS missionary Henry Baker (Jr.) requesting him to open schools in their communities. Initially, Baker was skeptical and hesitant about their idea, as he assumed that they were looking for protection rather than Christianity. Another factor was the geographical difficulty of reaching them—a forty-mile path through the jungle, roughly eight of which were through dense forest.¹⁰⁹

However, Malayarayangans persisted with their request and informed Baker that there were about 800 to 900 people already prepared to commit their lives to the Christian faith.¹¹⁰ Finally, Baker was moved by the appeal made by their *Muppanars* (headmen) when they said:

‘Five times have we been to call you. You must know we know nothing right; will you teach us or not, we die like beasts, and are buried like dogs; ought you to neglect us?’ . . . they stated that they wanted no pecuniary help, as they had plenty of rice. They wish to serve God, and not to be oppressed by anyone. They offered to make over their lands as proof of the sincerity and waited about, determined to have me in their hills.¹¹¹

This was the beginning of a much larger phase of mass movement among the Malayarayangans. In his first meeting with the Malayarayangans communities, Baker addressed about 200 people who gathered at dusk around a fireplace under the moonlight. They were zealous to

107. George Oommen, *Christianity Among the Malayarayangans of Kerala: 1848-1900*, in Hrangkhuma, *Christianity in India*, 140–42.

108. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 228.

109. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 101–2.

110. Gladstone, 102.

111. Oommen, in Hrangkhuma, *Christianity in India*, 148.

know about sin, its origin and problem and asked questions about suffering and ultimate punishment.¹¹² Baker observed that Malayarayans were mainly concerned about spiritual matters, access to education, and diseases and epidemics. They saw the Bible, baptism, and prayer as powerful tools against evil spirits and diseases, particularly epidemics.¹¹³

Baker promised to start schools and recruit teachers. 1850 saw the beginning of a new mission in a few villages in the mountains of the Western Ghats in the north of Travancore. Understanding the need and the situation of the people, missionaries focused their preaching on the love of God, the importance of the Bible, the way to heaven, and the urgency of removing and freeing themselves from all the articles of spirit (demon) worship.¹¹⁴ “In many cases, Malayarayans were ready for baptism as soon as the missionaries preached. This indicated that they were either already prepared for a radical move, or they were in contact with Christian relatives in other villages.”¹¹⁵

Baker was cautious and advised the villagers to exercise patience and to wait until they were prepared. The native evangelist stayed among the settlers to instruct and teach them further. Subsequently, many Malayarayans were resolute in their decision to embrace the new faith. They submitted themselves to the authority of the Scripture in obedience and prayer, which was for them a new source of power against malevolent demonic spirits, who they believed was the reason for their many problems. Christianity began to spread after the 1850s among

112. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 102–3.

113. Oommen, in Hrangkhuma, *Christianity in India*, 148.

114. Oommen, in Hrangkhuma, 148.

115. Oommen, in Hrangkhuma, 149.

Malayarayans from hill to hill concurrent with de cease and death.¹¹⁶ In many villages, they built worship centers and schoolrooms for themselves. They were conscientious to obey all instructions they learned from evangelists and missionaries.¹¹⁷

However, opposition and persecution followed from Brahmin Zamindars, traders, Nair supervisors, and the local King (Poonjatu Raja) who had previously benefited from exploiting the Malayarayans. Gladstone narrates the persecution thus, “Some were beaten, made to stand in water up to their necks, they were kept in confinement for days, chillies were rubbed in their eyes, their heads were tied up in bags and loosened head cloths filled with large ground ants, and yet when loose, they learned again with their teacher.”¹¹⁸ In some villages, families of converts had to flee to escape persecution. All these hostilities did not stop them from professing the Christian faith. For many years since 1860, there had been no missionaries to assist with the mission activities, and the local work was carried out by native leaders. By the late 1870s, their number exceeded two thousand. After 1882, in the absence of any external assistance, a fresh wave of mass movement began because of their effort.¹¹⁹ By 1896, a significant majority of Malayarayans, numbering about five thousand in the Mundakayam District (Map: Figure 2.1) of Western Ghat, had embraced Christianity.¹²⁰

116. Oommen, in Hrangkhuma, 148–49, 151; Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 104.

117. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 104.

118. Gladstone, 105.

119. Gladstone, 105, 108–9.

120. Gladstone, 109–10.

2.4.1: *The Likely Reasons for Malayarayans to Embrace Christianity*

First, when we look at the overall situation, the scope of spiritual liberation in Christianity was one of the main attractions for their conversion. The Malayarayans, who were animists, believed that every act of “benevolence” and “malevolence” in the world are dependent on the spirits, that permeate everything, including life and lifeless substances. Ravines, rocks, groves, and hills held spirits and demons that wielded sway and awe over families or villages.¹²¹ The spirits were responsible for all disasters, calamities, diseases, and epidemics.¹²² It is interesting to note that the rituals and ceremonies rendered to these demonic spirits were not to seek benefits but rather were intended to appease them. They believe that under no circumstances should one attempt to please these gods by engaging in an act that gratifies lust or evil practice. Several Malayarayan headmen, as mentioned earlier, took a long, tedious journey five times to convince Baker of their needs. They were seeking help for their predicament due to demonic oppression and the devastation they had experienced due to the cholera epidemic and other diseases that had killed many of their dear ones.¹²³ According to George Oommen, some of the vital issues of concern for them were the influence of spirits, demonic oppression, death, old deities, and calamities. They were convinced of the superior power of the Christian God over death, demonic spirits, and their influence.¹²⁴

121. Oommen, in Hrangkhuma, *Christianity in India*, 143.

122. Oommen, in Hrangkhuma, 143–45.

123. Oommen, in Hrangkhuma, 148.

124. Oommen, in Hrangkhuma, 150; Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 106.

Second, Malayarayangans were deeply troubled by the exploitation and exertion of control by the Raja (local king) and the Brahmin landlords. They were determined to seek help that could provide them with protection, security, and status.

Finally, they might have heard from their relatives and other converts about Christianity, education, and missionaries who were actively engaged in charity work. They wanted something similar for the prosperity of their community and children.¹²⁵

2.5: CMMs Among Pulaiyars

“Could we depict in true and vivid colours of the miseries and woes of the Pulaiyars and other slave population of Travancore, the hearts of our readers would melt with pity and compassion for their temporal sufferings and spiritual danger,” writes Samuel Mateer, who earned the title “*Pulaiyar Padre*” (Father of *Pulaiyar*) for his dedicated work among them.¹²⁶ The earliest instance of conversion of slave caste took place at Latin Church at Pallurthy (Kochi) in 1571, and they were baptized. However, Pulaiyar converts had their mass on Saturdays and even observed Christmas on the 26th of December because the Syro-Catholic community refused to accommodate them.¹²⁷ With the arrival of CMS missionaries (1816) like Benjamin Baily, Henry Baker Sr. and Joseph Fenn, new village schools were started around Kottayam where only upper caste children were instructed. During this time, some from the slave caste approached the missionaries and showed interest in the Christian faith and education.¹²⁸

125. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 106–7.

126. Mateer, *The Land of Charity*, 44.

127. Paul, “Onesimus to Philemon,” 52–53.

128. Paul, 55–56.

It was only in 1850 when systematic work among the slave castes (Pulaiyars and Paraiyars) of Malabar was initiated. This was the effort of a native, Rev. George Mathan (1819–1870), son of a Suriani priest, who erected a shed in the jungle close to Mallappally to instruct the Pulaiyars. It was T. G. Ragland, who witnessed a slave pulling a plough along with an ox, donated some money to Mathan and asked him to start a school for the slave castes. Mathan (with the help of missionaries) began to publish articles in missionary journals narrating the unparalleled suffering and miseries meted on these slave castes. It helped to inform the world about the despicable state of the slave castes of Kerala. In 1854, two other schools were opened at Tiruvella. After their learning, the Pulaiyars taught others in their own community about Christianity. In the same year, 38 slaves professed their faith.¹²⁹

Later, a large number of Pulaiyar joined the mission. These gospel workers were passionate and meticulously spread the message among their own people. By the end of the 1850s, many Pulaiyars were converted by the efforts of these itinerant workers. These itinerant preachers who afforded by their own means had no definite pay. They taught the people by working during the day and teaching at night. The pastoral needs of these people were, in most cases, met by the baptized slaves who had been placed there as readers. Later, these readers were replaced by catechists.”¹³⁰

Henry Baker Jr. while working among Malayarayans at the high ranges of Mundakayam (the early 1850s), came across run-away slaves living in the deep forest. Mathan wrote about how Baker Jr. after much effort, got Varkey Moopen, an elderly native mission worker, to do the

129. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 110–12; Paul, “Onesimus to Philemon,” 64.

130. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 116–17.

work of searching for the run-away slaves in the jungles. The thing Varkey did was to track down four of them and began to give them instructions. Within four years, five hundred run-away Pulaiyars and Paraiyars were baptized and the mission land at Mundakayam became a very popular settlement for “fugitive” slaves.¹³¹

In 1864, a concerted effort was made to reach the eastern Pulaiyars by Xavier, who himself was a Pulaiyar convert from the west. He was a runaway slave who risked his life to visit them by night. His persistence paid off, and many new converts from the east were instructed by the missionaries. Their association with the missionaries gave them nerve, strength, and a new lease on life to fight for their progress. In 1867, a mass movement took off among the southern Pulaiyars of Travancore. People turned up in thousands and were added to the Church. It was a movement of the people. F. Bayil, a CMS missionary who had witnessed these mass movements, notes that these Pulaiyars were brought over by ordinary members of the congregation.¹³² The mass movement among Pulaiyars and Paraiyars continued to grow until the mid-1900s.

Most of the CMS adherents were from the slave caste, and by the beginning of the 1900s, their number had reached 25,000; in 1908, they were 30,000, and in 1911, their number crossed 38,000.¹³³ After the 1920s, many thousands of CMS Pulaiyar, influenced by the holiness and Pentecostal movements, broke away to form independent groups. It was a period when

131. Paul, “Onesimus to Philemon,” 62.

132. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 118–19.

133. Gladstone, 128, 131, 134.

Pentecostalism was expanding across the globe. The Christian mass movements were instrumental in their social progress and collective emancipation.¹³⁴

The converted slave Christians were assisted by the missionaries in legal arbitration, and they built better houses, cleaned up large stretches of marshland for paddy cultivation, and erected sheds for worship and schools. CMS missionaries helped them run these schools. Thus, Christianity was an innovative experience and a means for the social and religious progress of these slave castes. Another factor that brought slave castes close to Christianity was the assistance provided by the missionaries to educate them despite stern opposition from the upper castes. Their teachings emphasized on personal hygiene, morality, Christian religious studies, etc., which helped them build their character and impress others. The spiritual experience of the slave castes, according to Gladstone concerned “Repentance and remission of sins” and they took these principles to their heart.¹³⁵ The transformed new lifestyle and hope of prosperity in the early converts attracted people from other communities to Christianity. They found the caring and considerate approach of the missionaries for their cause compelling and was in contradistinction to their experience of humiliation and oppression under Hindu and Syrian Christian landlords. It is important to note that the predicament of the slave castes of Kerala and their mass conversion attracted global attention. The conversion of the slave castes and the effect of the publication of articles in newspapers and Christian journals for their cause were the essential factors for the effective abolition of slavery in India under the provision of the Indian Penal Code (Sec. 359–374) of 1862.

134. Gladstone, 118–19, 121.

135. Gladstone, 114.

2.6: Conclusion: A Parallel MM of Emancipation, Its Emergence and Expansion

The CMMs among distressed communities opened avenues for the slave castes and Avernas to assert and resist forced labor. It led to conflicts and persecution of low caste and Averno Christians. As a matter of prestige and authority, the high caste Brahmins and Nairs were determined to impose caste duties on these lower castes and Averno Christians.¹³⁶ The persecution and incidents of torture continued without any redressal or justice from the government. Seeing their boldness and determination, the Hindu counterparts of the converts, the Izhavas, Shanars, and other outcast sections of Kerala society, were emboldened to unite with the Christian brothers in their opposition to such social *diktat*.¹³⁷ The CMMs, along with the rise in education and self-awareness about imposed segregation and injustice, prepared the underprivileged section to muster together and fight. Also, they found in evangelical Christianity a willingness and prospect to “struggle for their social and religious emancipation.”¹³⁸

Every attempt and event that implied freedom by the Avernas was viewed as a violation of Hindu custom and societal traditions. This led to a larger series of conflicts against the new converts and depressed section. Eventually, in the early 1850s, a collective mass movement for emancipation began brewing in Kerala. It gradually moved toward the north of the Indian subcontinent. The protests against suppression and segregation became the main focus of the news media. With mounting pressure on the government of India, slavery was formally

136. Gladstone, 77.

137. Gladstone, 81.

138. Gladstone, 75.

abolished first in the Kingdoms of Cochin and Travancore, on June 23rd and June 27th of 1855, respectively. Moreover, some civil disabilities were relaxed.¹³⁹

As noted earlier, lower caste women were not permitted to wear anything above the waist, nor could they cover their bosoms. Covering the upper waist area for women was a symbol of caste status. The women of Izhavas, Shanars, and other low-caste and Christian converts who opposed the caste dictates were attacked, stripped of their jackets, their houses looted, and many schools and chapels were burnt down.¹⁴⁰ By the late 1858, in Kerala, the movement against women's clothing "burst" into an open insurgency called the "Upper Cloth Revolt."¹⁴¹ Throughout this period of struggle, the missionaries continued to represent the cause of the depressed section of society.

In 1859, Charles Trevelyan, son-in-law of Macauley, the first British Resident of Travancore, was appointed governor. By this time, the disturbance in Travancore had attracted attention from all over India and England. He ordered the Resident to force the Travancore government to change the existing rules with regard to the dress of women.¹⁴² Consequently, following the mass protests and with rising pressure from government agencies, a proclamation was made in Travancore on July 26, 1859, ending the age-old caste-imposed dress code.¹⁴³ The CMMs among the Avernas became the milestone for these great MMs. The ongoing struggle for

139. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 229.

140. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 82–84.

141. Gladstone, 80–81; Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, 229.

142. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 90–91.

143. Gladstone, 91.

collective freedom from the stranglehold of subjugation and suppression continued. Finally, on January 1, 1862, it led to the abolition of slavery, forceful confinement, and labor of the distressed communities in all of India under Section 359–374 of Indian Penal Code.

As we have noted in this chapter, it is a fact that the distressed communities were attracted by the support and charity work provided by the Christian communities and missions. But the available records do not substantiate the allegation of intimidation, fraud, and coercion in the conversions of non-Christians (detail in section 1:2 about the allegations). In his research, Pickett found that for the low castes and Avernas, the Christian message was a plausible alternative to their predicament in the caste-ridden Hindu society. He did not find any reports of conversions that suggested intimidation or coercion. While the missionaries continued to preach and engage in charity during the famine, epidemic and depression, most churches and missions involved in relief activities did not receive new converts during these periods into the church.¹⁴⁴

144. Kent, “Mass Movements,” 371–72.

Chapter 3: The Revivals, Renewals, and Mass Separatist Movement

This chapter explains how the CMMs among Suriani Christians and non-Christians, and the latter Keswick's Holiness movement converged into Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism in the 1900s. It attempts to show how a Pentecostal-like mass movement surfaced in South India decades before the Azusa renewal (flag bearer of modern Pentecostalism) in Los Angeles; explicates the development of indigenous Pentecostalism, the Separatist movement, and subsequent Pentecostal renewal in Kerala; and how the Pentecostal awakening is indebted to Keswick's holiness movement and later influenced hugely successful charismatic, neo-charismatic, and neo-Pentecostal movements.

3.1: The Renewal that Led to the First Pentecostal MMs in India in 1860

Two early Pentecostal-like movements of the modern era in India took place in 1860–81 and in 1905–7. The earliest Pentecostal-like movement recorded in Asia was led by John Christian Aroolappen of Tinnevely (Southeast of Western Ghat) in 1860. This indigenous renewal movement was independent without any Western mission influence.¹⁴⁵ The latter revivals and renewal-like mass conversions of 1905-06 took place mainly in three regions of India: Khasi Hills (Eastern region), Pune (Western region), and Travancore (Kerala). All these mass movements were marked by the empowerment and the manifestation of gifts of the Spirit like prophecy, vision, and speaking in tongues, along with a quest for evangelism.¹⁴⁶ The indigenous movement led by Aroolappen had no influence of western missionaries or their

145. George Henry Lang, *The History and Diaries of an Indian Christian*, First Edition (Dorset, UK: Thynne & amp Co., 1939), 32.

146. McGee, "Pentecostal Phenomena and Revivals in India," 112.

money. In fact, he declined any form of salary from the foreign missions because the people, he said, would call him a hireling.¹⁴⁷ As I have noted earlier, it was a period when nationalism and anti-colonialism were on rise and there was a deep distrust among Indians about anything that represented foreign.

Aroolappen advocated faith-living by waiting on God for providence and stressed that a believer should depend on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit regardless of his status, caste, or race. Henry Groves, the grandson of Antony Norris Groves (Antony was the first brethren missionary to South India), characterised him as independent and disciplined in his approach to the Gospel message and preaching. For him, faith is in trusting and depending on God for his providence, and for the wants and needs of his co-worker.¹⁴⁸ The movement led by Aroolappen advanced to other areas of South India and into Kerala. Many of the members of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and those of the Syrian Church of Malabar were moved by the infilling experience of the Spirit.¹⁴⁹ It spread among the British soldiers stationed in and around these areas. After receiving Spirit baptism, believers shared their faith with non-Christians. The outpouring of the Spirit with the evidence of gifts for them was a sign of the Pentecostal awakening (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:1-13).¹⁵⁰ Aroolappen notes the early events in his diary (May to August 1860) and describes it as an outpouring of the “Holy Ghost” with the manifestation of

147. Lang, *The History and Diaries*, 32.

148. Lang, 147.

149. Stanley M. Burgess, *Christian Peoples of the Spirit: A Documentary History of Pentecostal Spirituality from the Early Church to the Present* (New York, NY: University Press, 2011), 211.

150. Burgess, 211.

gifts of prophecies, seeing signs, speaking in unknown tongues, repenting, confessing their sins and praising God. He notes that “. . . about twenty souls were baptized after they received the Holy Ghost.”¹⁵¹

They conducted three meetings every day. Those who were dedicated to the work of evangelism travelled without salary or pledged support and set their own itineraries.¹⁵² They followed the pattern of New Testament apostles and evangelists as modelled by Aroolappen. “Faith” was the benchmark for these missionaries who set their own mission goal to travel and preach without salary or pledged support. In his church, as noted by a CMS missionary and observer, Aston Dibb, the experience of the Holy Spirit baptism induced a new zeal among the members to preach the Gospel with the evidence of gifts, like infilling experience of the Holy Spirit, prophecy, speaking in tongue, etc.¹⁵³ There were instances when several believers saw visions and prophesied calling the believers by name for preaching as apostles, prophets, and evangelists. However, such expressions were not in conformity with foreign missions, and their clergy left little room for such a demonstration of the distribution of the Spirit’s gifts.¹⁵⁴

Many of the CMS missionaries saw such expression as excessive and unhealthy, and found it necessary to keep such manifestations in check. They undermined its success as extreme and unacceptable. A CMS missionary writes: “The newly awakened have fancied that they could speak in tongues, have visions, to which they have attached great importance, have given

151. Lang, *The History and Diaries*, 142–43.

152. McGee, “Pentecostal Phenomena and Revivals in India,” 113.

153. McGee, 113.

154. McGee, 113.

utterance to prophecies, etc.”¹⁵⁵ Further, he asserts that all such expressions and tendencies were suppressed in the missionary churches in the first instance itself.¹⁵⁶ “From the ethnocentric perspective of missionaries, Indian Christians required extended tutelage; [Anglican] missionaries contended that a sound English-language education in Western culture and theology must precede any attempt to evangelize in the vernacular. Only then could the door be opened to mass conversions and a Christian civilization in India.”¹⁵⁷ It was also preconceived by the English mission that they were the undisputed custodians of the church, and God had propitiously consigned colonial rule to civilize and evangelize India. However, the mass movement led by Aroolappen and the subsequent revival in Travancore (Kerala) proved them outright wrong.

In one of his letters, Aroolappen gives a brief description of the initial stage of the ministry among predominantly Hindus. “I have had a good opportunity to proclaim *the* gospel to several thousand people at the bottom of the Sudaraghere Hills [present day Sathuragiri in Western Ghat], where a great many thousands go to worship idols from all directions, even from far countries, in the middle of July.”¹⁵⁸ Similarly, Aroolappen and his associates travelled around Tamil Nadu and Kerala preaching. Many received their message and were filled with the Holy Spirit with the manifestation of gifts, and the subsequent mass conversions amazed the Western missionaries. McGee notes Dibb’s assertion:

155. Lang, *The History and Diaries*, 158–60.

156. Lang, 159.

157. McGee, “Pentecostal Phenomena and Revivals in India,” 114.

158. Burgess, *Christian Peoples of the Spirit*, 212.

‘There is little doubt,’ writes one of our friends from Madras, ‘but that the Spirit of the Lord is in an extraordinary manner at work in portions of our South Indian Missions. The Church of England clergy are backward in accepting such movement as these; but the unanimous testimony is now pretty decided . . . It is indeed a new era in Indian missions, that of Christ to their fellow-countrymen, and that with a zeal and life we had hardly thought them capable of.’¹⁵⁹

This Renewal MM, though different, closely coincides with the holiness revivals in the United States, England, and Ulster in 1858–1860. The basic characteristics of this movement have vivid similarities with the latter Pentecostal renewal movement of the late 1800s and the early 1900s. Both these movements emphasized repentance, the confession of sins, baptism in the Spirit, holiness, and evangelism. It is necessary to give a brief history of Aroolappen in order to understand his significant role in CMMs. Aroolappen was born in Tirunelveli (Tamil Nadu, South India) to a Christian family. He studied at a CMS seminary under C. T. E. Rhenius, an eminent missionary from Prussia who came to India in 1814. Rhenius was dismissed from CMS for his teachings on the principles of independence for Indian churches to make them self-sustaining and self-propagating congregations. He promoted the concept of ordaining local catechists not subject to the Church of England.¹⁶⁰

In 1833, Aroolappen got associated with a notable Brethren missionary, Anthony Norris Groves, from England. He travelled with Groves preaching in the Nilgiri Hills area, marking the beginning of his extensive missionary trips. After four years, he returned to Tirunelveli and continued his ministry after resigning from the CMS. He refused to accept any salary and depended on the agriculture self-support scheme that he promoted among Christian villagers.

159. Ashton Dibb, “The Revival in North Tinnevelly”: 178, quoted in McGee, “Pentecostal Phenomena and Revivals in India,” 114.

160. G. H. Lang, Anthony Norris Groves, quoted in McGee, 113.

The village settlement he developed was named Christian-Pettah (village) and it had its own boarding school, a printing press, facilities for itinerant preachers and their training, and a church. Here, they maintained regular Bible training sessions and conventions. They shared and distributed its benefits to non-Christians as well.¹⁶¹ He accepted gifts from the local church community of Tirunelveli for the mission purpose.¹⁶²

In Madurai (165 km north of Tinnevely), he planted a network of many indigenous churches and trained self-supporting native evangelists. He promoted local leadership, and many from these congregations committed to the evangelistic initiative to travel widely and preach the Gospel.¹⁶³ By 1859, there were 33 participating villages, with around 800 communicants attending the local churches. This typical model matched well with indigenous wishes to stay independent from foreign influence and foreign mission authorities.¹⁶⁴ Aroolappen's associate were active in Kerala even after his death in 1867, during the 1873–75 revival among St. Thomas Christians in the Travancore area. This became a precursor to the formation of the *Verpadu* (brethren-like separatist) movement and the later Kerala Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal movements. During this period, the revolutionary mass movement initiated by Abram Malpan of Mar Thoma Church was in full swing, and many were committed as itinerant evangelists.¹⁶⁵

161. Lang, *The History and Diaries*, 116.

162. Lang, 28, 30.

163. Robert Bernard Dann, "The Legacy of Anthony Norris Groves," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 29, no. 4 (2005): 201, <https://doi.org/10.1177/239693930502900410>.

164. Lang, *The History and Diaries*, 91–92.

165. Stanley John, The Rise of 'New Generation Churches in Kerala Christianity quoted in Martha Frederiks and Dorottya Nagy, *World Christianity: Methodological Considerations*,

3.2: Aroolappen and His Approach to the Mission

Other than the works Aroolappen left behind and the principles he enforced in his mission and the churches, nothing much is known about the theology that he professed. However, his diary and other communication records reflect a simpler and more radical approach to his teaching and church practices—very much like the early apostolic propositions and mode of mission.¹⁶⁶ He relied on the Bible to frame his theological guidelines and church practices. He did not hesitate to reject church doctrines and liturgy that were not in conformity with his biblical understanding of passages. He opposed the traditional control of the native churches and their clergy by the mission societies. He repudiated the prevalent exclusivity of ordained clergy to minister the sacraments.¹⁶⁷

The appearance of gifts in the ministry of Aroolappen and his openness to miracles clearly indicated the expectation of prophecy fulfilment of Prophet Joel. According to McGee, Aroolappen believed in the premillennial eschatology, which included the second coming of Christ, and the end-time outpouring of the Spirit and its gifts on all believers, irrespective of their age, sex, caste, or race, as quoted by prophet in Joel 2:28-29. The teachings of Rhenius, Aroolappen's early mentor, and his association with Antony Norris Groves, an independent missionary from England with whom he began his preaching ministry, may have influenced the

vol. 19, *Theology and Mission in World Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 276, <https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.1163/9789004444867>; McGee, "Pentecostal Phenomena and Revivals in India," 114.

166. Lang, *The History and Diaries*, 33, 116.

167. Lang, 33.

latter outlook of his Christian practice.¹⁶⁸ The great missionaries, like Bakht Singh in North India (Aroolappen's great-grandsons were his closest associates) and Watchman Nee in China (who make mentions Groves and the Brethren as his early influence), acknowledged the primitivist and biblist model of the Evangelical predecessors as truly inspiring and effective.¹⁶⁹ Following the death of Aroolappen, most of his churches joined the CMS, and the use of Pentecostal expressions and gifts was restrained. Gradually, the expression of spiritual gifts dissipated in Tinnevely but continued to spread in Kerala. The flare of renewal that awakened the St. Thomas community of Kerala preceded the American Pentecostal movement by several decades and is still going strong into the 21st century.¹⁷⁰ As noted earlier, indigenous Tirunelveli revival, though different, closely coincides with the Holiness revivals in the United States, England, and Ulster in 1858-1860.

The next section deals with the impact of the Keswick mission in Kerala and how Keswick's message and its teachings became a catalyst for the latter-wave Pentecostal awakening.

3.3: Keswick's Teaching of Higher Life and its Mission

The motto of the Keswick Convention (KC), "All One in Christ Jesus," and the Keswick message of "Holiness" swept over Britain and then the whole world, including India.¹⁷¹ Canon

168. McGee, "Pentecostal Phenomena and Revivals in India," 113; Lang, *The History and Diaries*, 151, 186.

169. Dann, "The Legacy of Anthony," 201.

170. McGee, "Pentecostal Phenomena and Revivals in India," 114.

171. Kommers, "Focus on the World," 1.

Harford Battersby (3 October 1822 – 27 July 1883), the founder of the KC, attests repentance and faith as the two indispensable fundamentals of true conversion towards Christ. In turn, repentance requires conviction of sin, which leads to the confession of sin and complete submission to God.¹⁷² These are made possible through prayer and by the working of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is “the Divine Teacher and Administrator in all assemblies.”¹⁷³ Keswick’s teaching emphasizes the Baptism of the Spirit, or infilling of the Spirit, as among the most precious of all Christian experiences; it is only through the Holy Spirit that one can bear fruit and lead a holy life; and these divine blessings are promises and must be claimed rather than sought.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, Keswick teaches that, “The surrender of the will to God in habitual obedience is, however, the radical law of all holy living.”¹⁷⁵

Holiness, according to Keswick, is achieved by complete submission and commitment of the self to God. Thus, in Christ, though we are perfect, we are also “being perfected.”¹⁷⁶

172. Thomas Dundas Harford Battersby, *Christ the First and the Last* (London, UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 1884), 69–73.

173. Arthur T. Pierson, *The Keswick Movement in Precept and Practise [Microform]* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls company, 1903), 49, http://archive.org/details/MN41537ucmf_0.

174. Charles Wesley Price and Ian M. Randall, *Transforming Keswick* (Cumbria, UK: OM Publishing, 2000), 26, 53; Pierson, *The Keswick*, 82–84.

175. Pierson, *The Keswick*, 75.

176. David D Bundy, *Keswick: A Bibliographic Introduction to the Higher Life Movement*, 3 (Wilmore, KY: B. L. Fisher Library, 1975), 56, <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=firstfruitspapers>.

Christians need continuous cleansing from sin through the blood of Christ to keep them acceptable in the sight of the holy God.¹⁷⁷

The purpose and message of the Keswick Convention were to promote “Scriptural Holiness” and spiritual growth. It was primarily designed for believing Christian men and women in crisis, who are 1) lost, desperate, selfish, helpless, and hopeless about their own faith which they once professed and received, and 2) others, like the Galatian Christians, having begun in the Spirit they are seeking to be made perfect by their own effort.¹⁷⁸ One of the notable characteristics of the KC is that the speakers are invited from all professing Christian denominations,¹⁷⁹ and differences are kept out of sight. Regarding evidence of the infilling of the Spirit, unlike classical Pentecostals, Keswick disagrees with the strong manifestation of certain gifts, like speaking in tongues. Rather, they emphasize faith as the evidence of the filling of the Spirit.¹⁸⁰ For Keswick, the infilling experience of the Spirit leads to bearing the fruits of the Spirit and the formation of a holy character. However, many at Keswick professed manifestation of spiritual power and gifts that was literally Pentecostal. The infilling of the Spirit at the beginning was both subsequent to and different from conversion.

177. Johan Kommers, “The Beauty of His Holiness,” *In Die Skriflig: Tydskrif van Die Gereformeerde Teologiese Vereniging* 48, no. 1 (2014): 5, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v48i1.1812>.

178. Price and Randall, *Transforming Keswick*, 32; Charles F. Harford, ed., *The Keswick Convention: Its Message, Its Method and Its Men* (London: Marshall Brothers Keswick House, 1907), 4–5.

179. Harford, *The Keswick Convention*, 21.

180. Kommers, “The Beauty,” 4.

3.3.1: *The Missionary Sense of the Convention: “Missioners” and “Missionaries”*

The overall message of divine transformation and practical holiness of the KC prompted many to enter the foreign mission field in England. In 1885, the KC mission became an integral and inseparable catalyst for unifying the churches for evangelism. Only since 1888, the KC started to emphasize concurrently the missionary call to the churches.¹⁸¹ A part of the monetary contribution at the KC was assigned for the mission to the unreached world. Miss Amy Wilson-Carmichael, who was working in South India, along with Rev. Thomas Walker of the CMS, were sponsored as the first Keswick missionaries. The Keswick missionary movement produced great results in South India, China, and many other countries.¹⁸² It is believed that the KC did more to prepare “men and women” for the mission than any other organization in the late 1800s.¹⁸³ The Rev. C. H. Gill, one of the three who first committed to the foreign mission at Keswick, went to India, and after twenty years of service, he became the Anglican Bishop of Travancore and Cochin in 1905.¹⁸⁴

In 1889, Rev. George Grubb and Mr. Millard were assigned as the first Keswick representatives to spread the message of the KC to Asia.¹⁸⁵ Grubb, along with three other missioners conducted a series of meetings in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and South India. They were helped by Tamil David, an effective interpreter, who was originally from Tinnevely.

181. Kommers, “Focus on the World,” 1, 4.

182. Harford, *The Keswick Convention*, 138–39.

183. Kommers, “Focus on the World,” 1.

184. Harford, *The Keswick Convention*, 134–35.

185. Price and Randall, *Transforming Keswick*, 110; Kommers, “Focus on the World,” 3.

Grubb's highly successful trip prompted many at Keswick to come forward for missionary service.¹⁸⁶ Revivals and renewal movements were already taking place at various locations in Kerala. In 1894, Tamil David conducted gospel meetings at various centers in Kerala, attracting a huge crowd. He preached on the sufficiency of the Bible, salvation by faith, and Keswick's holiness teachings, and many who heard him were converted.

3.3.2: *The Impact of the Keswick Mission on Syrian Christians*

Keswick's concomitant relationship with various mission societies and increased mission involvement in many former British colonies became the driving force for preparing the ground for the late 1800s and later revivals that spread all over India. Through these mission societies, many Keswick-inspired recruits ended up in India and China. The impact of Keswick's *higher life* message aroused a need for a Spirit-filled surrender to Christ. It created a passion for evangelism and *holy living* among Thoma Christians. The reformation among Thoma Christians, the early revival movements, and most importantly, the availability of the Bible in vernacular language helped evangelical missions to infuse awareness of higher spiritual life and evangelistic responsibility.¹⁸⁷ The Rev. Walker of Keswick was engaged in mission activity in Tinnevely and some parts of North India. He held a convention meeting in Travancore (South India) among the Syrian Christians that attracted many to hear him.¹⁸⁸

Mar Thoma Christians believed in the return of Christ and grasped the occasion for personal renewal. Many of them made a personal commitment to the ministry and began

186. Price and Randall, *Transforming Keswick*, 110–11.

187. Kommers, "Focus on the World," 8.

188. Harford, *The Keswick Convention*, 154.

evangelizing on their own charge. This resulted in “pre-millennium” movements in Travancore (Kerala). In 1895, the first indigenous *Maramon* Convention of *Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church* was convened. It became a venue for the next wave of holiness revivals. Tamil David from Tinnevely was a lead speaker at the first Maramon Convention. Rev. Walker, in the initial stages of the convention instilled in Thoma Christians the message of Keswick’s higher life spirituality and endeavor for cross-cultural mission.¹⁸⁹ It turned out to be one of the largest conventions in the world and it is estimated to attract more than a hundred fifty thousand attendees.¹⁹⁰ In 1896, the famed KC speaker, J. Gelson Gregson was invited by the Mar Thoma Church. Gelson and Volbrecht Nagel were instrumental in setting up the first Brethren fellowship in Kerala in 1897.¹⁹¹ Several leaders of the Suriani Church and the reformed Mar Thoma Church moved towards the *Verpadu*, *Viyojithar* (those who disagree) and Brethren groups. They were expecting the return of New Testament ecclesiology and more reform in the Church. K. V. Simon, the renowned *Mahakavi* (poet laureate) who came to faith by hearing Tamil David, became one of the leaders of the Verpadu movement (*Viyojitha Prasthanam*). Later, the Verpadu movement merged with the Brethren groups as they shared similar

189. Kommers, “Focus on the World,” 8.

190. Dyron B. Daugherty and Jesudas Athyal, *Understanding World Christianity: India* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 93.

191. Ian Welch, “Tamil David, The Tamil Evangelist. ‘Vathakunu Deresegayam David,’” *Australian National University, Canberra*, n.d., 4–6, https://core.ac.uk/display/156623283?utm_source=pdf&utm_medium=banner&utm_campaign=pdf-decoration-v1; Frederiks and Nagy, *World Christianity*, 19:277; K. V. Simon, *The History of Kerala Brethren (Verpadu) Assemblies*, trans. Bethany Aroma (Edayaramula, Kerala, 1938), 56–60.

doctrine.¹⁹² We observe that many from the Brethren group subsequently embraced Pentecostalism.

3.3.3: The Holiness Movement, Keswick Revival, and Global Pentecostal Awakening

In 1880, Keswick's parallel movements began in North America.¹⁹³ From its inception in the United States, the Convention has had a stupendous impact on the foreign mission, a precursor to the outbreak of Pentecostalism in the United States and around the world. As we have noted earlier, several Pentecostal-like revivals in South India predated the Keswick revival. However, the latter Azusa Street renewal became the center of modern Pentecostalism and its global expansion.¹⁹⁴ Despite their theological distinction, both the Keswick Convention and the Pentecostal movement shared much in common with their emphasis on the transforming work of the Spirit, total yielding of one's will to God, obedience to Christ's commandment, personal piety, and commitment to evangelism. Moreover, the teachings that stemmed from the meetings at Keswick were spread through Bible schools, Christian conferences, and revivals in North America, influencing the latter Pentecostal movement and its teachings.¹⁹⁵ This is especially true in the context of the Pentecostalism in India. The Keswick network, by their association with

192. Frederiks and Nagy, *World Christianity*, 19:277; Stanley John, "The Indian Root to Kerala Pentecostalism" (2017 Northeast Regional Conference, Evangelical Missiological Society, 2017), 8, <http://www.nyack.edu/files/pubs/John-Stanley-Indian-Roots-of-Kerala-Pentecostalism-031817.pdf>; Simon, *The History of Kerala Brethren (Verpadu) Assemblies*, 2–3, 44–50, 131–38.

193. Kommers, "Focus on the World," 7.

194. Daugherty and Athyal, *Understanding World Christianity*, 43–44.

195. Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think About and Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2007), 175.

missionary societies throughout the vast British Empire, including India, became a fertile ground for the Pentecostal missionaries who went out after their infilling spiritual experience at Azusa in Los Angeles.¹⁹⁶

The awakenings, those that had eventuated in India (1860, 1873 and 1905), Welsh (1904), and Korea (1906), were to have special significance for international Pentecostalism. These revivals influenced to set a chain of events, and as described by Frank Bartleman (who was a participant in the Azusa revival), became full-grown at Azusa Street (Los Angeles). People from all over the world thronged to Azusa to taste this unique experience of Spirit's manifestation and renewal.¹⁹⁷ Many at Azusa renewal committed their life to global mission. It is noteworthy to observe that it was the Azusa Street movement that initiated a new thrust in world mission as missionaries began to travel around the world, including India. According to Michael Bergunder, "Azusa Street renewal went global from the very start and began to channel its message through the vast international evangelical and missionary network that was receptive to revivals."¹⁹⁸

Although the Keswick movement and the Pentecostal renewal had their basis in the Holiness Movement, the immense influence of Pietism, the Keswick movement, and the Welch

196. Daugherty and Athyal, *Understanding World Christianity*, 45.

197. Frank Battleman, *Azusa Street* (S. Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing, 1980), 19, quoted in Allan Anderson, "Pandita Ramabai, the Mukti Revival and Global Pentecostalism," *Transformation (Exeter)* 23, no. 1 (2006): 37, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026537880602300106>.

198. Michael Bergunder, *The South Indian Pentecostal Movement in the Twentieth Century*, Studies in the History of Christian Missions (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2008), 7.

Revival on the Global Pentecostal mission is undeniable.¹⁹⁹ In short, like in the rest of the world, Pentecostalism in India was a continuation of early modern movements. Thus, it is significant to note that beginning with Pietism in the late 1600s, the holiness movement with a renewed interest in devotional literature and spiritual tradition, culminated in the Pentecostal renewal in the early 1900s around the globe, including South India. According to Tennent, the most important of the Christian movements of the 1800s that had a direct influence on Pentecostalism was the Keswick Holiness movement.²⁰⁰

The impact of Keswick mission on Syrian Christians of South India is summarized thus by Johan Kommers:

Keswick's growing involvement with missions and its concomitant presence in many former British colonies enabled it to cross many paths with various evangelical mission agencies . . . Especially in India the influence of the KC could be seen. The remarkable growth and fascinating development of the church there is an integral strand of the remarkable shift in Christianity worldwide. In India, it eventually gained distinction during the great Indian revival of 1905-1907 [beginning of second wave of Pentecostalism in South India], this was not only indicative of the form of revivalism . . . but indicates that the influence of the Holiness movement, broadly gained in India.²⁰¹

3.4: The Decline of Christendom and the Rise of Evangelism

With the decline of “mainline” denominations, a new wave of ecstatic and vibrant movements appeared, re-aligning the very demography of Christendom globally once again. The mass reformation movement among Mar Thoma Christians and the new wave of global Pentecostalism of the 1900s proved it right in many ways and has been highly successful. As

199. Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 83.

200. Tennent, *Theology in the Context*, 175.

201. Kommers, “Focus on the World,” 8.

we'll observe, the main driving force for this transformation is Pentecostalism, "an expression of Christianity that dates back to the first century, when the Holy Spirit is reported to have visited a small band of Jesus' followers [Acts 2]. . ."202

Beginning in 1900, the statistical center of gravity of Christianity started to shift steadily towards the Global South (broadly refers to non-Western regions of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and parts of Oceania). As of today, statistics published by the *International Bulletin of Mission Research* estimate that 67% (two-thirds) of Christians are located outside the Western world, even though this number was just 18% in 1900.²⁰³ Moreover, whichever way we evaluate this new phenomenon, whether inside the mainline churches or outside them, with the kind of growth it has experienced, Pentecostalism is becoming the hub of Christianity in the Global South.

With the inception of Pentecostalism in India, the evangelistic fervor reached an exponential level, reaching both the Christian denominations and the non-Christian population. One main characteristic of Pentecostalism was evangelism, and they executed this task better.²⁰⁴ Pentecostalism and its message are rooted in intelligible scriptural authority, mysticism, and Puritanism, with a strong supernatural orientation and stress on personal experience. To a normal person their messages are charismatic, visionary, and apocalyptic; spiritual gifts are a component

202. Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement*, Acls Humanities E-Book (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 17, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.30680>.

203. Gina A. Zurlo, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing, "World Christianity and Mission 2020: Ongoing Shift to the Global South," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 44, no. 1 (2020): 10, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2396939319880074>; Tennent, *Theology in the Context*, 8.

204. Daugherty and Athyal, *Understanding World Christianity*, 46.

of religious sensibility, including faith-healing, exorcism, and dream-visions.²⁰⁵ Despite the poor image of such activities in Western popular thought, Christian missions in the Global South, including India, continue to expand. Consequent to the exponential growth in the last hundred and fifteen years, Pentecostalism and its traditional, orthodox, and spiritual outlook have completely transformed the face of Christianity in India and the Global South. From being few thousand in early 1900s, the Renewalists movement has grown to 670 million (2022) and at the present rate it is projected to cross a billion mark by 2050 globally.²⁰⁶

3.5: The Rise of Pentecostalism Among Malabarians: Its Latter Impact on Evangelism

As noted earlier, an indigenous Pentecostal-like movement was led by Aroolappan in Tirunelveli (Tamil Nadu) in 1860. Subsequently, it spread to Travancore among the Syrian Christians.²⁰⁷ In Kerala, beginning in the second half of the 1800s through the early 1900s, mass conversions and revival movements in the Mar Thoma and Brethren churches were characterized by the manifestation of spiritual gifts, speaking in tongues, the conviction of sins, repentance, and commitment to ministry. All these developments prepared the ground for the Pentecostal movement that swept across the world in the decades that followed. Later, the Brethren church embraced the doctrine of cessation (of miraculous gifts), and the leadership within Suriani

205. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002), 8.

206. Gina A. Zurlo, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing, “World Christianity and Religions 2022: A Complicated Relationship,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 46, no. 1 (2022): 77, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23969393211046993>.

207. Daughrity and Athyal, *Understanding World Christianity*, 43–44; Allan Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity*, Oxford Studies in World Christianity (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 25.

churches objected to the manifestation of spiritual phenomena. It led many who believed and experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit to leave these churches and join the Pentecostal movement.²⁰⁸

As we have observed, by the early 1900s, Pentecostalism had already taken root and was progressing independently with little expatriate supervision in India. Following the Azusa revival, Pentecostal missionaries began to arrive in India. The unfamiliar Indian socio-cultural system and diversity posed a great challenge to visiting Western missionaries. However, they played an important role in consolidating and uniting the early Pentecostal movement.²⁰⁹ In 1909, George E. Berg was the first Pentecostal missionary to be invited to speak at a Brethren convention in Kottarakara (Kerala). Though he did not find much success in his early ministry in Kerala, he was able to convince some in the Brethren groups to establish the first Pentecostal Brethren Assemblies in Kottarakara and Adoor in 1910. Later, in 1911, the first Pentecostal congregation in South India was established under the leadership of Paruthupara Ummachan at Thuvayur (Kerala).²¹⁰

Robert F. Cook, an American Pentecostal missionary who arrived in 1913, was instrumental in his work among Kerala Dalits. In the early stages, the Pentecostals were mostly from lower castes and Avernas. Cook was received well by the independent Dalit groups and their leaders, who were previously associated with the CMS and LMS churches. Chodie, an

208. Stanley John, The Rise of 'New Generation' Churches in Kerala Christianity quoted in Frederiks and Nagy, *World Christianity*, 19:278.

209. Joy T. Samuel, "The Pneumatic Experiences of the Indian Neocharismatics" (Birmingham, UK, University of Birmingham, 2018), 11, 28, <https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/8838/>.

210. Bergunder, *The South Indian*, 26.

important early *Dalit* religious leader of a large *Dalit* group, invited Cook to address one thousand people who gathered at Kumbanad. Another more influential *Dalit* leader, Poykayil Yohanan of Eraviperoor, invited Cook to address a larger gathering in his community. His community of converts, who had been with the CMS, then in the Mar Thoma Church, and lastly with the Brethren, launched their own independent Church.²¹¹

These groups embraced Pentecostalism but remained non-denominational because the leadership of the Pentecostal movement in Kerala was dominated by Syrian Christians who discriminated against *Dalit* converts in leadership. The work of the Pentecostal missionaries had a positive effect in helping the Dalits to be resilient despite the ever-existing social segregation. Under the leadership of Cook, the lower caste missionaries were trained and given their own leadership positions. He allowed poor *Dalits* the opportunity to become leaders and gave them relief from the oppression and deprivation they suffered from high caste society.²¹² By the mid-1930s, the four established Pentecostal denominations were: The Assemblies of God (AGs), Ceylon Pentecostal Mission (CPM), Indian Pentecostal Church (IPC), and Church of God full Gospel (COG).²¹³

In the first half of the 1920s, several Brethren members joined the Pentecostal movement, and many evangelists and leaders of the holiness movement in Kerala became Pentecostal. Between 1928 and 1929, a series of Pentecostal awakenings occurred, leading to another mass movement. Many from the Brethren congregations went over en masse to the Pentecostal group.

211. Bergunder, 30.

212. Samuel, "The Pneumatic Experiences," 35, 45.

213. Bergunder, *The South Indian*, 30–31.

Moreover, most of the early Pentecostal evangelists and leaders in India were Suriani Christians.²¹⁴ South India (especially the Malabar region) is not only the center of Indian Christianity but also the center of Indian Pentecostalism and its expansion to the rest of India. However, as Bergunder states, “Despite the numerical strength and its hundred years of history, Indian Pentecostalism has remained rather invisible in the academic writing on Christianity in India.”²¹⁵

Initially, one of the key reasons for the success of the Pentecostal movement was that, while the work of evangelizing and church planting was carried out by the Indians, the missionaries assisted by Syrian Christian leaders concentrated primarily on building Bible schools and training new leaders. Except for the CPM, most of the Pentecostal leaders were highly educated. Established in 1927, Bethel Bible School under the leadership of John H. Burgess was the first Pentecostal training center at Punalur in Kerala. In the same year, Cook opened Mount Zion Bible School at Mulakuzha; K. E. Abraham and P. M. Samuel of the indigenous IPC, instituted the Hebron Bible School at Kumbanad in 1930; and within a decade, many more Pentecostal training institutions cropped up all over Kerala.²¹⁶

It was only in the 1940s that the Dalits and Nadars (Shanars) had their own Pentecostal groups. The first prominent Dalit group was led by C. S. Mathew, who founded the Independent Church of God in India. The movement received a big influx, especially from the Dalits of the Brethren congregation. Later, this group merged with World Missionary Evangelism. The COG

214. Bergunder, 28–29.

215. Bergunder, 14.

216. Bauman, *Pentecostals, Proselytization*, 27; Bergunder, *The South Indian*, 31.

(Full Gospel) in Kerala historically had a high proportion of Dalits, and in 1972 they amicably parted to form a separate administrative division for their churches, known as the COG – Kerala Division. Since its inception, the movement has shown considerable growth and established several Bible schools. In the south of Kerala, the Nadars initiated their own Pentecostal movement, and many of them who had previously been associated with the LMS joined the new church. The International Zion Assembly is a prominent Pentecostal group of the Nadar community with more than seventy churches (as of 2008) in the south of Kerala.²¹⁷ Although Pentecostalism in practice is much more inclusive than other mainline denominations, the lower castes were marginalized by the high caste converts and the Suriani believers in matters of leadership and decision-making. Inter-caste marriage is still a taboo and almost non-existent. Later, the low caste Dalits and Nadars formed their own congregation independent of others.

By 1994, in South India (including Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka), the Pentecostal churches (combined) had a million adult adherents. In Kerala alone, there were 16,000 adult members in AGs; 30,000 in the IPC; 20,000 in the COG; 9,000 in the CPM; 13,000 in the Sharon Fellowship; 7,000 in WME; and another 30,700 members in splintered groups (combined).²¹⁸ These churches were initially independent groups that developed their own distinct identities. Despite some internal differences, they all maintained consistent growth.

As per the official count, the Malayalam District Council of AGs, the largest of these churches in the South, claims to have 3,500 churches with half a million members in 2021.²¹⁹

217. Bergunder, *The South Indian*, 54–57.

218. Bergunder, 307–9.

219. “Assemblies of God Malayalam District Council,” Official, Malayalam District Council, 2017, <https://agmdc.org/>.

AGs (World Mission) states that in India, overall, they have 5,200 recognized churches and 6,000 house congregations, having over 600 missionaries, 8,000 trained leaders, and 2,500 ministers. The IPC is the largest indigenous Pentecostal church with 7,000 churches all over the world. In Kerala, the COG (Full Gospel) has three Bible schools with more than 1,200 churches and 1,500 ordained pastors.²²⁰

As we have observed, Pentecostalism grew remarkably in the early 1900s in Kerala, but in India as a whole, the growth was steady and was not so remarkable until after 1947. By the 1950s, there was a concerted effort by the Pentecostal denominations to spread beyond Kerala and South India to the other states in the North. Later, more missionaries and church leaders from Kerala were sent to North India and abroad, including middle eastern countries and the West.²²¹ Moreover, Pentecostalism had begun to take root in established denominations like the Catholic Church and other Protestant churches.²²² In the 1960s, the number of trained Pentecostal evangelists sent from Kerala for ministry to the rest of India increased many-fold, and most of them were Syrian Christians. Like their predecessors, Pentecostal leaders opened Bible schools in different parts of India and trained the native Christians in evangelizing and leading their own congregations. Furthermore,

220. Kritin Wileman Sheldon, "Assemblies of God in India Celebrates Centennial," PENews, June 22, 2016, <https://news.ag.org:443/en/news/assemblies-of-god-in-india-celebrates-centennial/>; "Indian Pentecostal Church of God," Official, 2022, <https://ipc.international/about-us/>; "Church of God (Full Gospel) in India, Kerala State," Official, State Overseer, 2020, <https://cogkerala.org/state-overseer/>.

221 Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. van der Maas, *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2002), 123.

222. Daugherty and Athyal, *Understanding World Christianity*, 51–52; Bergunder, *The South Indian*, 44.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, Pentecostalized faith and worship began to make inroad into the Catholic Church and . . . Protestant denominations in the form of charismatic movement, while over the next few decades independent “neo-Pentecostal” or “neo-charismatic” denominations and churches from (or besides) the older, more established Pentecostal denominations proliferated rapidly. The growth of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity accelerated dramatically after this period . . .²²³

The inception of the charismatic movement triggered the second wave of the Pentecostal movement in India. Since the late 1960s, the effect of Pentecostalism among other mainstream denominations has been overwhelming, and it has become difficult to differentiate Indian Pentecostals from Indian Evangelicals. Chad M. Bauman describes this as a two-way trend—

. . . the Pentecostalization of Evangelicalism, and Evangelicalization of Pentecostalism . . . Most Indian Christians in India are related to Pentecostalism, and many have been influenced in significant ways by Pentecostalism without having any conscious or demonstrable connections to it. These forces have produced millions of self-identifying Evangelicals who display marks generally considered uniquely Pentecostal [e.g., practice of glossolalia, dream and visions, prophecy, healing, etc.].²²⁴

From 1977, a new wave of Charismatic movement at Potta Ashram in Kerala attracted hundreds of thousands every year to its Divine Retreat Centre (at Muringoor, Kerala) from all walk of life. Up to 200,000 gathers at the occasional conferences. It is now the largest retreat center of its kind in the world. The group organizes retreat meetings all over the world. They operate an international network of similar institutions and TV channels. The Charismatic renewal has incorporated explicit Pentecostal practices that are distinct to all such movements.²²⁵ Like the Pentecostals, the Charismatic Catholics in Kerala openly practiced the manifestations of

223. Bauman, *Pentecostals, Proselytization*, 27.

224. Bauman, 37.

225. Burgess and van der Maas, *The New International Dictionary*, 512; Eva Jansen and Claudia Lang, “Transforming the Self and Healing the Body Through the Use of Testimonies in a Divine Retreat Center, Kerala,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 51, no. 2 (2012): 543–44, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-011-9564-7>.

the Holy Spirit, and the majority did not find it necessary to leave their historic church. Since its inception, there have been millions of charismatic adherents in Kerala. It has become the location of one of the largest Catholic Charismatic movements.²²⁶

With the second wave, a fresh evangelistic fervor to expand to the rest of India prepared many to commit to the ministry on their own charge. Bible colleges and training centers were instituted all over India. New Pentecostal groups emerged in Kerala. Some of the prominent ones are the Sharon Fellowship Church (1976) with more than 2000 congregations in India and branches around the world and two Bible colleges; New India Church of God; New India Bible Church; and The Believers Church (1978) of Gospel for Asia (GFA). The GFA Ministry established in Kerala in 1981 claims 20,000 churches, 16,500 missionaries, and 67 Bible colleges with an enrollment of 9,000 students. Although, their ministries have spread to 20 Countries, more than 70% of the GFA's work is established in India.²²⁷ Except for Nadars and Dalits, most of the Pentecostal missions and churches were founded and led by Syrian Christians of Kerala. Besides, the Pentecostal movement in South India consists of many independent groups²²⁸ and one should be mindful of the fact that there are currently tens of thousands of unregistered congregations and house fellowships all over India. These are emerging house churches that chose to remain independent and of which little is written. (Note: My original proposal to do an ethnographic study about the emerging house churches got disrupted due to the pandemic).

226. Samuel, "The Pneumatic Experiences," 9.

227. Daugherty and Athyal, *Understanding World Christianity*, 52.

228. Bergunder, *The South Indian*, 209.

3.6: The Third Wave of Pentecostalism in Malabar

The third wave of indigenous Pentecostalism was kindled by the neo-Charismatic or neo-Pentecostal movements in the 1980s. Some Charismatic Catholics in India who were not happy with the traditional church practices formed their own new independent churches with typical Pentecostal characteristics. In Kerala, besides many new converts from other faiths, the neo-Pentecostals belonged to historic mainline churches like the Orthodox Church, Jacobite Church, and Malankara Mar Thoma Church.²²⁹

Each of the neo-Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal groups differ in their theology, but they share a common emphasis on the gifts and empowerment of the Spirit. It has become normal to refer to them interchangeably, and they are the largest CMMs that India has ever seen. The success story of the neo-Pentecostal movements is mostly related to various mega conventions, mega churches, and prosperity teachings, stressing on the belief and promises of prospering in every area of life—health, wealth, and success in life. Mega crusade conventions were often conducted at various locations since the 1980s. Thousands from all religious backgrounds thronged to these meetings for the healing, peace, and prosperity promised by these preachers.²³⁰

By the late 1980s, several neo-Charismatic independent churches had proliferated all over India. The Heavenly Feast (Kottayam), Joshua Generation (Kochi), El-Shaddai Ministry (Kottarakara), Blessing Today (Ernakulam), and Pilgrims Highland Church (Trivandrum) are some of the groups in Kerala that attract thousands daily from all walks of life through their television broadcasts, radio transmissions, and other channels. Some of these organizations have

229. Stanley John, The Rise of ‘New Generation’ Churches in Kerala Christianity quoted in Frederiks and Nagy, *World Christianity*, 19:284.

230. Samuel, “The Pneumatic Experiences,” 52.

branches in the Middle East and other countries, where a sizable number of expatriates from Kerala and Southeast Asia work. Many of the leaders as well as the early members of these churches are Syrian Christians, though occasionally they come from a Pentecostal background.

A much larger neo-Pentecostal like mass movement cropped up in other parts of India, many of them led by non-Christian converts. Examples of some of the fastest growing independent mega churches are—Calvary Chapel in Hyderabad, which began in 2005 with 25 people, in 2018 its membership has grown to more than 195,000;²³¹ Ankur Narula Ministries in Jalandhar (Punjab), which began in 2008 with 3 people, currently (2022) claims to have 150,000 attendees for weekly services;²³² Prophet Bajinder Singh Ministries and many more. They are “held together through the personal social networks of the founder.”²³³

As we have observed in the previous chapter, the mass reformation within the breakaway Suriani Church and the CMMs among non-Christians between the 1700s and 1800s laid the ground and created an environment conducive for the holiness and renewal movements like Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism to take a foothold in India.

3.7: The Diversity of Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism includes Classical Pentecostal, Charismatic, neo-Pentecostal, and the Pentecostal/ Charismatic type Independent, and are collectively called Renewalists. Despite the *diversity* within these movements, they demonstrate several common features, especially in the

231. Stephen Hunt, *Handbook of Megachurches*, Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion; Volume 19 (Leiden Boston: Brill, 2020), 305.

232. “Ankur Narula Ministries,” *Ankur Narula Ministries* (blog), November 12, 2016, <https://www.ankurnarula.org/about-us/>.

233. John, quoted in Frederiks and Nagy, *World Christianity*, 19:284.

demonstration of spiritual gifts. The distinctiveness within each group is its primary characteristic and thus, makes their categorization and generalization difficult.²³⁴

The most remarkable and the greatest surprise in the whole Pentecostal tradition was the sudden appearance of Catholic Pentecostalism in 1960 in St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Van Nuys, California, where there was a spontaneous outbreak of speaking in Tongues.²³⁵ They are basically rooted in early Pentecostalism but have expanded rapidly since 1960. Similarly, Pentecostalism made inroad in other mainline denominations like Orthodox and Protestant and instead of leaving, they remain within their historical non-Pentecostal denominations. By 1970, the Catholic Pentecostal movement was spreading fast around the world, and today it is the largest Charismatic movement, found in significant numbers in India and across Latin America. It was only in 1974, that they abandoned the term Pentecostal in favour of charismatic renewal.²³⁶

The Pentecostal/ Charismatic type Independent do not self-identify with the other major traditions: Orthodox, Protestant, or Catholic. Also referred to as “post-denominationalists” and “neo-apostolic” they are independent of historic, institutionalized and denominationalist Christianity and often predate both the classical Pentecostals and Charismatics. The combined growth of Pentecostalism worldwide has reached 656 million in 2021 from just 58 million in

234. Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 10.

235. Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, 27.

236. Gina A. Zurlo, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing, “World Christianity and Mission 2021: Questions about the Future,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 45, no. 1 (2021): 18, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2396939320966220>.

1970. They all share a common emphasis on the power and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.²³⁷ As indicated in the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, there are nearly 391 million Independent Pentecostals worldwide, largely as a result of indigenous initiatives, for example, the house church in China (55 million), neo-Pentecostal/charismatic of India, Kimbanguist in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (12 million) and the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Brazil (7.5 million).²³⁸

3.8: Pentecostalism, its Theological Relevance and Practices in Indian Context

To understand the effect of Pentecostalism, we need to consider the impact of Pentecostal theology, and bibliology. It was Charles Parham who first formulated classical Pentecostal theology in 1901.²³⁹ For the Renewalists, the Bible in its original is inerrant and authoritative for their faith and practice and thus, theology is inseparable from the Bible. Unlike mainline denominations, Pentecostals are not interested in polemical discourse. They look for something that they can relate to and experience. Like the Holiness and Higher Life movements, for Pentecostals, the Bible is the inspired Word of God, reliable and applicable for life-sustaining needs and experiences. Thus, they read the Bible with “a thoroughly popularistic, pre-critical, text-centred approach” and believe that “it must simply be read, believed, and obeyed,” by relying on the Holy Spirit to teach and direct.²⁴⁰

237. Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing, 18–19.

238. Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing, “World Christianity 2020”; Todd M. Johnson, “Independent Christianity,” *Gordon Conwell* (blog), May 13, 2020, <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/blog/independent-christianity/>.

239 Burgess, *Christian Peoples of the Spirit*, 233.

240. Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 225.

The most defining common feature shared within these denominations is the renewing experience of the Holy Spirit and the impartation of its gifts like healing, exorcism, speaking in tongues, prophesy, etc. For them, the Spirit experience and its manifestation validate the Gospel. Hence, the contribution of Pentecostalism to the study of pneumatology in Christian theology has widened the view of the work of the Holy Spirit, and at the same time, it has proven effective for evangelism in India.

Pentecostalism has deeply influenced both Protestant and Roman Catholic churches, as reflected in the Charismatic and neo-Charismatic movements. According to Tennent, “the overwhelming majority of Pentecostal groups are solidly within the boundaries of historic Christian orthodoxy.”²⁴¹ Although typically non-creedal, most Pentecostals have many shared theological foundations with the early church: they affirm every phrase of the Apostles’ Creed; affirm the biblical authority and apostolic faith; confess the centrality of Christ’s work in His death and resurrection for salvation; profess the need for repentance and conversion, and the importance of living a holy life.²⁴² The faith world of Pentecostal spirituality in India is not limited to believing in God, angels, and heaven but is animated with spirits, demons, and a realm of hell and eternity. The traditional Western theologies influenced by the Enlightenment, rationalism, and modernism outright refute such an assertion. Many mainline churches and critics find such blatant faith practice in Pentecostalism senseless, and unrealistic. However, the same mystical and spiritual beliefs that others find problematic are the very practices that make Pentecostalism thrive and succeed in its endeavors.

253. Tennent, *Theology in the Context*, 165.

242. Tennent, 167.

Pentecostalism in the Indian context is more dramatic in its expression of spiritual gifts and worship. Their ecstatic loud singing and clapping are sometimes unsettling, especially to those from mainline churches and outside. The services and worship of Renewal churches in India are not based on any written set of rules but rely on traditional oral practices. They do not believe in old church liturgy but rather devote time for reading psalms, preaching sermons solely from the Scripture and spending considerable time in singing, thanksgiving, testifying, and worshipping. A normal Sunday service can take 3 to 5 hours. Holy Communion is administered once a month (some groups conduct it every week) to those who have taken faith baptism. Those with infant baptism must be rebaptized again to participate in the Lord's Table.²⁴³

It is very common for Pentecostal churches to have cell groups, cottage meetings, and fasting prayer several times in a year. It is an occasion for them to invite their friends, associates, and neighbors to these meetings to pray for personal problems, family issues and any other matter for which a request is made. Most of the outreach happens in these house meetings.²⁴⁴ On occasions, it is common for the churches to invite guest preachers and prophets to lead 3-days or longer fasting and prayer sessions. It is normal during prayer for the prophets and pastors to lay hands for healing, and manifestation of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and gifts of the Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit, the expression of gifts (healing, prophecy, speaking in tongues, its interpretation, etc.) and power are central to their worship. Many of the new generation Renewalists (neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic) stresses on prosperity teaching and conduct separate

243. Bergunder, *The South Indian*, 221–23.

244. Bergunder, 227–28.

sessions praying for the success of the congregant in their life pursuit, finance, and sound health, with the assurance that God will grant all these favors to the faithful.

In the South Indian Pentecostal churches, men and women exercise different roles in both leadership and service. Normally, elders and pastors are always men. However, women play a key role in maintaining, preparing, and connecting with others in the neighborhood for cell group and house meetings, thus contributing to the growth of the church. Women conduct their own ladies' meetings. They also have the liberty to exercise the gifts, especially of tongues and prophecy. There is an overwhelming agreement among the leadership and believers of Kerala Pentecostals that women's ordination to a leadership position in the church is not Scriptural, thus theologically unacceptable.²⁴⁵ These practices correlate well with the social context and religious tradition of South India as a whole.

Although most of those in the leadership positions of Renewalist churches in Kerala are well educated and qualified, in practice, they follow the Biblicist method of interpretation found in the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*. They believe that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word of God. Biblicism has the tendency to undermine secular and historical theology and criticism. Critics like Larry Hart find this problematic and susceptible to literalism as well as misleading and deviant. Another problem pointed out is the lack of a unified voice, doctrine, and representation. The absence of authority and hierarchical power distribution in these churches makes them loosely connected and inherently unstable.²⁴⁶ However, the Primitivist and Biblicist modes of interpretation and teaching of Indian Pentecostalism bring

245. Bergunder, *The South Indian*, 204.

246. Larry Hart, "Problems of Authority in Pentecostalism," *Review and Expositor* (Berne) 75, no. 2 (1978): 252–53, 257, <https://doi.org/10.1177/003463737807500207>.

them closer in practice to ancient and Apostolic Christianity. It is characterized by an experience of the Holy Spirit that most mainline churches and Christians consider to be highly unusual. As I have mentioned earlier, these very practices that many today find problematic and unsustainable are the very practices that make Pentecostalism thrive and succeed in India and in the Global South as a whole.

4. Conclusion: Statistics and Underlying Reasons for CMMs in India

4.1: Statistics on the Growth of Christianity in India

The advancement of Christianity among the low castes and Dalits, and the planting of house churches (and cell groups) in towns and villages are the areas in which Christianity is growing at a faster pace than all others. However, the growth of Christianity in India is conspicuously underestimated. Frykenberg confirms that the census of India is heavily politicized.²⁴⁷ Daughrity stresses that Christianity in India is “not fringe faith with a questionable future. Rather, they are growing, vibrant, and see no sign of decline.”²⁴⁸ Moreover, the report of the *Christian Missionary Activities Inquiry Committee* formed in 1956 by the State Government of Madhya Pradesh (India), re-affirmed that, “the Christian population was growing by leaps and bounds, that Hindu population was declining rapidly . . .”²⁴⁹

Of India’s total 1.38 billion population in 2020, 20% (276 million) are from low castes or *Dalits*, and 8.61% (119 million) are from Schedule Tribes.²⁵⁰ 70–85% of the 68.189 million Christians in India are primarily from low castes or Dalits (considering that Christians comprise

247. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, vii.

248. Dyron B. Daughrity, *The Changing World of Christianity: The Global History of a Borderless Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 185.

249. Bauman, *Pentecostals, Proselytization*, 51.

250. Daughrity, *The Changing World*, 165; “Statewise Total & Tribal Population,” Tribal Research & Training Institute, January 29, 2022, <https://trti.maharashtra.gov.in/index.php/en/statewise-total-tribal-population>; “World Population Prospects 2019 - Population Division - United Nations,” Total Population - Both Sexes, 2019, 1. 137, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/>.

4.9% of the total 1.39 billion).²⁵¹ As mentioned earlier, the 1800s was a period of numerous CMMs, mostly led by evangelical missions in India. The religious demographic trend of the Indian Union, according to the *Census* report of 1881 to 1931, shows the growth of Christianity at 338% and during the same period the Hindu population growth rate was 27%.²⁵² The census records from 1901 to 2011 show the Christian population at 1.15% (of 238.3 million) in 1901; the rate doubled to 2.33% (of 361 million) in 1951; in 1971, the figure is stated as 2.60% (of 568 million) ; and in 2011, it was 2.30% (of 1.25 billion), a decrease of 0.03% and 0.30% over 1951 and 1971 respectively.²⁵³ In comparison, Pew research, which uses the same *National Census*, records share of Hindus' decline by 4.3 percentage points, a decrease from 84.1% in 1951 to 79.8% in 2011. Meanwhile, Muslims' share has steadily grown from 9.8% to 14.2%, an increase of 4.4 percentage points from 1951 to 2011, mainly due to higher fertility rate than all other religious groups.²⁵⁴

As noted at the beginning of this section, the national census reports (especially of 2001 and 2011) are being disputed and challenged by many experts who argue that Christian

251. Tim Stafford, "India's Grassroots Revival," *Christianity Today* (Washington) 55, no. 7 (2011): 32.

252. "Pew Research Center," Stats, *Historical Overview of Pentecostalism in India* (blog), October 5, 2006, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2006/10/05/historical-overview-of-pentecostalism-in-india/>.

253. Grim et al., *Yearbook of International*, 116; "Census Tables: Government of India," Census Tables: religion, Office of Registrar General & Census commissioner, 2021, <https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/data/census-tables>; "World Population Prospects 2019 - United Nations," l. 137.

254. Stephanie Kramer, "Pew: Religious Composition of India," *Pew Research Center*, September 21, 2021, 6–7.

population growth was evidently underreported. Statisticians working with alternate sources estimate a much higher percentage of Christians than that of official data.

Table 4. 1: Distribution of major religions in South Asia (2001)²⁵⁵

Country	% Christian	% Muslim	% Hindu	% Buddhist
Bangladesh	1	86	12	1
Bhutan	0	1	18	80
India	6*	12	75	1
Nepal	2	4	72	9
Pakistan	3	96	1	0
Sri Lanka	9	9	11	65
	*The official Indian census of 2001 claims that Christians constitute only 2.34% of the country's population, but this is clearly an underreporting.			

The *Pew Research Center* relies on the same national decennial *Census of India* (Govt. of India) resources for its study on population growth and religious composition. Considering the data limitations of the official census, the Pew Research Center study acknowledges: “There are known issues with census data on religion in India. Christians (in particular) appears to be undercounted: some Christians who belong to Schedule Castes [Avarnas] may choose to identify as Hindu when completing official forms such as the census. . .”²⁵⁶ Pew’s internal research reports estimated that 10% of Christians in India state their religion as Hindu in Government-issued documents and census, and this disparity is not applied in Pew’s final report. Moreover, conversion in India is a contentious issue and government restrictions on religious freedom may have influenced census takers to state a religious affiliation other than the one they practice or

255. *The World’s Christians*, 115.

256. Kramer, “Religious Composition,” 45.

believe in. There are reports of the enumerators not adhering to the census protocols and Pew research noted various discrepancies in the collection process of the census, leading to a biased record, especially against the minority religions like Christianity.²⁵⁷

Another reason for this disparity as pointed out by Bauman is that many of the converts, especially from the backward caste, do not officially declare themselves as Christians; they prefer to remain secretive, to protect themselves, and to preserve their access to the low caste reservations and privileges since 1950.²⁵⁸ This is because the *Constitution (Schedule Caste) Order* of 1950 stripped the Christian Dalits or Dalit converts of all the benefits, reservations, and constitutional privileges by depriving them of their legal schedule caste status.²⁵⁹

All the alternate research statistics show higher percentage growth during the 2001 and 2011 periods. *The Operation World* puts the latest figure at 5.8 % (2021) and Jacobsen in his *World's Christians* rates the Christian population close to 6% (2001), while some recent Christian researchers in India indicate much higher results, even up to 9% (2011).²⁶⁰ Todd Johnson of *Atlas of Global Christianity* opted for a more conservative estimate of 4.8% (58 million), stating that, “it’s a very volatile situation. Exciting things are happening. That’s real.

257. Kramer, 45.

258. Bauman, *Pentecostals, Proselytization*, 28.

259. Satri Veera Kesalu and Vukkala Srinivasulu, “Dalits and Their Religious Identity in India: A Critical Look at Existing Practices,” *Contemporary Voice of Dalit* 11, no. 2 (2019): 98, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2455328X18822909>.

260. “Operation World: India,” World Christian Stats, Operation World, 2022, <https://operationworld.org/locations/india/>; Jacobsen, *The World's Christians*, 115, 122; Tim Stafford, “India’s Grassroots,” 31.

Our methodology is to wait and see and do our best to track it. But it is remarkable.”²⁶¹ The *World Christian Database*, a reliable source (The Center for the Study of Global Christianity), estimated the Christian population at 5.8% (68.189 million approx.) out of 1.15 billion population in 2005.²⁶²

The Renewalists, according to Jacobsen, comprised nearly 40% (2011) of the total Christians in India.²⁶³ They are growing at a rate of 5% a year,²⁶⁴ a rate 4.2 times higher than the 1.18% global growth trend of Christianity as projected by the *International Bulletin of Mission Research*.²⁶⁵ As we have observed, the first Renewalist congregation in India was classical Pentecostal which began in the early 1900s. Today, Renewalists constitute close to 40% of the total Christian population in India,²⁶⁶ which shows that the movement became the main engine that powered the surge of Christianity from 1.15% (2.74 million) of the total 238.3 million in 1901 to a conservative estimate of 4.9% (67.62 million) of the 1.38 billion population in 2020.

Very little is written about the micro-level growth of house churches and cell groups, where Christianity is expanding at a faster pace. As noted earlier, though the dynamic of

261. Tim Stafford, “India’s Grassroots,” 31; Bauman, *Pentecostals, Proselytization*, 28.

262. According to Frykenberg of Oxford History, the data acquired from the World Christian Database, comes from a reliable source: The Center for the Study of Global Christianity. They publish yearly statistics updates in the Yearbook of International Religious Demography. Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, vii; Grim et al., *Yearbook of International*, 205; “World Population Prospects 2019 - United Nations,” 1. 137.

263 Jacobsen, *The World’s Christians*, 124.

264. Bauman, *Pentecostals, Proselytization*, 28.

265. Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing, “World Christianity 2021.”

266. Jacobsen, *The World’s Christians*, 124.

Christian advancement is incredible and real, it's a very fluid situation. It has become more and more difficult to assess the pace and expansion of Christian growth because of persecution and the strict imposition of anti-conversion legislation in various States in India. Under such situations, most of these fast-growing Christian groups and house churches prefer to remain independent and have gone underground. We must wait until a clearer picture appears. A recent article published by the New York Times describes the situation thus:

The pressure is greatest in central and northern India, where the governing party [Hindu Fundamentalist] . . . is firmly in control, and where evangelical Christian groups are making inroads among lower-caste Hindus, albeit quietly. Pastors hold clandestine ceremonies at night. They conduct secret baptisms. They pass out audio Bibles that look like little transistor radios so that illiterate farmers can surreptitiously listen to the Scripture as they plow their fields.²⁶⁷

4.2: The Underlying Reason for Mass Conversions in India

The underlying reasons for mass conversions to Christianity are intriguing and, at the same time, intelligible and well-founded. Here are some of the critical reasons why more Indians (including Dalits) are open to conversion.

First, in India, the social caste-jati system remains in various regions and communities.²⁶⁸ The rigidity of caste and exclusion from the Varna caste system prompted members of the lower caste and outcastes to seek other forms of faith for their release from social and religious bondage.²⁶⁹

267. Jeffrey Gettleman and Suhasini Raj, "Arrests, Beatings and Secret Prayers: Inside the Persecution of India's Christians," *The New York Times*, December 22, 2021, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/22/world/asia/india-christians-attacked.html>.

268. Tim Stafford, "India's Grassroots," 32.

269. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity*, 420.

Second, J. Waskom Pickett's *Christian Mass Movements in India: A Study with Recommendations* is the earliest (1933) research and is the most detailed study on conversion in South India. It reveals some important underlying reasons for mass conversions. For the oppressed and marginalized people in India, Christianity is a useful and respectable alternative to the existing Hindu caste system.²⁷⁰ Pickett, while explaining this in his *Christ's Way to India's Heart*, states that, "The depressed classes of India are desperately poor. But their chief economic need is not financial; it is an antidote to the poisonous ideas that have made them incapable of struggling successfully with their environment . . ." ²⁷¹ In many ways, the situation described remains the same for Dalits even today.

The pernicious effects of systematic indoctrination have crippled their very ability to think and act for themselves. The teachings of Karma and rebirth taught the Dalits that they were tainted and worthless, "suffering just retribution" for the wrongs of earlier life, and thus, they have inflicted a devastating effect on their spirit and self-esteem.²⁷² Under such a depriving environment, it is natural for the depressed classes to greet the Christian message of inclusion, acceptance, and intrinsic value with an open heart. The Christian message was more attractive and meaningful than any direct ministry to their social improvement.²⁷³ This is especially true in

270. Daugherty, *The Changing World*, 184.

271. Pickett, *Christ's Way*, 47–48.

272. Pickett, 48.

273. Pickett, 48.

context to the success of the Pentecostal movement which stressed much more on spiritual aspects and self-esteem than social and humanitarian service.²⁷⁴

Third, rural villages are home to more than two-thirds of India's population. Due to industrialization, many new townships have cropped up. Today, there are 43 cities with over one million people. This has given villagers from all walks of life the opportunity to migrate to greener pastures. In these new settings of "social fluidity" and urban life, although a subtler form of prejudice remains, caste identity is no longer a divisive and decisive factor for growth and success. In the township, people from all walks of life live and interact under a new setting of freedom and make choices that best suit their needs.²⁷⁵

Fourth, there has been a rampant rise in religious persecution against religious minorities in India. The Hindu fundamentalist governments in various states have enacted and passed anti-conversion laws. It has become a tool and pretext against religious rights and constitutional freedom to propagate one's faith. This has prompted Christian organizations to reconfigure their activities that emphasize social welfare such as opening schools and vocational training centers, establishing self-employment projects for women, and planting house churches and cell groups. Missionary schools and institutions are at the forefront of providing Dalits and other marginalized groups with education and training opportunities.²⁷⁶ These settings provide a better opportunity to engage and propagate the Gospel message.

274 Bergunder, *The South Indian*, 212.

275. Tim Stafford, "India's Grassroots," 32.

276. Tim Stafford, 32–33.

Fifth, since the late 1900s, the number of Indian mission agencies has grown from just 20 to 200. According to the data listed by *Operation World*, today there are more than 80,000 Indian missionaries alone, and many of them are serving in cross-cultural settings.²⁷⁷

Sixth, as observed earlier, the Hindus and Animists of South India worship many deities—Vishnu and Shiva, and their subordinate gods and goddesses. Demons and spirits are believed to haunt houses, burial grounds, and gigantic trees. They are seen as the source of diseases, plagues, accidents, and misfortunes. It is usual for Hindus and tribes to engage mediums or *Matravadi* (witchcraft specialists) in *Chatan Seva* (exorcizing rites to pacify the spirits) and other activities for relief from these evil spirits. Unlike Christian practices, it is normal for the *Matravadi* to engage in black magic against anyone for a payment. Pentecostals in India acknowledge the evil effects of demonic spirits. The practice of healing and exorcism are essential elements of Pentecostalism in South India and elsewhere in India. Moreover, the Pentecostal movements have successfully competed with the demonology of Hindu spirituality in a wholesome and non-intrusive mode of intercessory prayer. It has demonstrated an effective contextual link that has helped the acceptance of Christian healing and the practice of exorcism among tribal groups and Hindus.²⁷⁸

Seventh, there are significant numbers of Hindus who consider Jesus as an *avatar* of the divine and worship Him in Bhakti fashion.²⁷⁹ When presented in context, the inner essence of the Christian Gospel, i.e., the idea of an incarnate savior in Christ and its spirituality of eternal hope

277. Tim Stafford, 33.

278. Bergunder, *The South Indian*, 124–25, 147.

279. Jacobsen, *The World's Christians*, 126.

of life, are attractive and understandable to most Indian minds, resulting in a noticeable surge of Christianity in India.

Eight, as noted in chapter one, there is an inherent tendency among the Hindus to adapt faith practices that are acceptable and reasonable to their understanding of spirituality.

Ninth, in Pentecostalism, the Bible has a more authoritarian role, and people in these churches, although not interested in polemic, are actively involved in sound biblical debate and interactive dialogue within small groups and outside. This practice opens new venues to reach out and help growth. Although women do not participate in leadership role, they play a major role in connecting people to these cell groups where they participate in prayer and fellowship. These practices align well with the social norm of Kerala and Indian society collectively. Conspicuously, as these groups grow, they divide and spread as well. As I have noted earlier, one of the fastest growing Christian communities is among the small cell groups and house churches. These small units are more energetic and active in conducting house meetings more often than larger groups, bringing new adherents to their fold much faster.

Lastly, despite all kinds of adversaries and persecution, what attracts non-Christians to Christianity is the literal message of the Scripture. It addresses to them, their life, and their experience of hopelessness, failure, and need; they found in it the best means of explaining the turmoil and suffering of the world around them because they can relate in it their own personal context of the truth, purpose and meaning that provoked them to respond.²⁸⁰

280. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 44.

4.3: An Ethnographic Insight of Mass Conversion Movements in India

As we have observed earlier, in Pickett's survey, although individual agency and spiritual motives predominated in conversion, he recognized "the highly mixed motives of groups and even individual respondents."²⁸¹ Pickett's survey divides the motives of the converts into four groups: spiritual, secular, social, and natal influences.²⁸² In his final analysis, he discovers that the motives and mixed motives of the Indian depressed class were similar and "not all that different from the motives of converts anywhere."²⁸³

Karin Kapadia, in her ethnographic research in the slums of Madras (the largest metropolitan area in South India), notes that Dalit women converts find Pentecostal views more positive and accommodating. The network of prayer support groups has created close "kinship-like relations" among them and has thus manifested in a large conversion movement. The initial motivation was more personal than upward class mobility.²⁸⁴ Further, the shepherd's role of the pastors in these house churches cannot be ignored as they are encircled by inexorable responsibilities—they devote most of their days counseling, fasting, conducting meetings, and

281. Jenkins, *Religious Freedom*, 45.

282. Jenkins, 44.

283. Jenkins, 47.

284. Karin Kapadia, "Caste and Class in Gendered Religion: Dalit Women in Chennai's Slums," in Kenneth Bo Nielsen and Anne Waldrop, *Women, Gender and Everyday Social Transformation in India*, Anthem South Asian Studies (London: Anthem Press, 2014), 236–47.

solving problems. Thus, according to Nathaniel, house churches in the slum, “integrated the slum as a whole. . .”²⁸⁵

The CMMs and Two Major Revolutionary Mega Movements

In the 1800s, CMMs emboldened the non-Christian Dalits and untouchables to muster together with their Christian brothers to fight for liberation and emancipation from age-old caste-imposed oppression and slavery. The movement expanded from Malabar (Kerala) to the rest of India, compelling the states and kingdoms to enact and enforce provisions to liberate the oppressed and underprivileged sections of the population. Further, the CMMs, i.e., mass reformation within the Suriani Christian community, mass conversions of non-Christians, and the subsequent holiness revival movements, became a catalyst for the latter spread of Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism has completely transformed the face of Christianity in India as well as in the Global South, and it is still growing.

285. Nathaniel Roberts, *To Be Cared For: The Power of Conversion and Foreignness of Belonging in an Indian Slum*, 1st ed., vol. 20, *The Anthropology of Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 245–46.

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