Section - IV

Chapter - 1

Encounter between Madigas and Catholicism: Narrative Genealogy of Catalysts, Continuities and Discontinuities

Introduction

In the foregoing section, we have traced out a dynamic inventory of the subaltern religious-consciousness of the Madigas of Konaseema. The struggle for survival of the Madigas is manifest/latent in their religiosity, which appropriates and re-positions, the symbols of dominant religiosity, in contestation of their strategy of exploitation, ultimately inverting these very symbols into survival symbols of political economy. Madiga religiosity is a ritual continuum between the ritual of daily survival and the ritual immersion in/of village solidarity. As we have noted, there is solidarity of ritual, without the consensus of ideology, with the dominant.

Madiga religiosity, which has its matrix in the matter-spirit, divine-human continuum is indicative of the fact that Madiga locates the sacred, wholeness and salvation in this world. Political economy and religiosity, in the context of the Madiga religious consciousness, is embedded in each other, mirror each other, flowing into their daily ritual of the struggle for survival and identity. The ancestral symbol of Jāmbavuḍu, celebrated in the kulapurapā, in performative protest, is a pre-eminent symbol, challenging the amnesia of the Madiga, in the realm of political economy. I have also indicated the persistent and overriding presence of the feminine in Madiga religiosity and symbolic universe during the course of the preceding section. The symbols of Mātangi and Āranjōthi, as well as the near total goddess orientation of the Madiga religiosity are proof of this.

In the present section, we analyze the encounter of the Homo Economicus-Homo Ritualis, that is the Konaseema Madiga, with colonial Catholicism, around 1942, towards the end of the Vasco da Gama era of Asian history, and just before
the dawn of India’s Independence. Attempt is made to trace the trajectory of this ambivalent encounter between Catholicism and the subaltern Madiga agency-consciousness, informed by the ritual continuum, traced out in the foregoing section, with its multi-layered embeddedness in the political economy of Konaseema.

The first chapter of the section phenomenologically narrates the continuities and the discontinuities with the past, latent in this encounter. The second chapter looks at these phenomena hermeneutically, and especially brings into relief the attendant contradictions, being revealed in the encounter, against the background of socio-cultural and politico-economic vicissitudes of Konaseema. The final chapter of the section takes note of and highlights the subaltern signposts for the onward journey, in view of a greater subaltern-oriented praxis for Catholicism in Konaseema. The thrust of this whole section is to dwell on the dynamics of the encounter between the subaltern agency-consciousness of the Madigas and Catholicism, and capture its different layers, at the level of religion-in-society, culture and political economy.

In this context, the works of two authors, which have been inspirational in this phenomenological and hermeneutical endeavour, are acknowledged at the outset. They are of Richard Eaton and Saurab Dubey, who deal with the encounter between cultures and religions, in two different varied contexts, the former with Islam and Hinduism in pre-modern East Bengal, and the latter with the Satnamis of Chhattisgarh and Colonial Christianity.¹

Eaton’s thesis is that as agriculture moved into the vast uninhabited tracts of Eastern Bengal, Islam, with its pirs, mosques, shrines and the Book moved inward, from the already civilized Western Gangetic plane of Bengal. In the context of the

political economy of advancing agriculture and clearing of jungle hinterland, there was a fruitful encounter between Islam and the indigenous peoples, who were not yet fully Hinduized.\textsuperscript{2} This encounter, according to Eaton, had taken place in three moments and movements of Inclusion, Identification and Displacement.\textsuperscript{3} Eaton explains these heuristic categories thus:

By inclusion is meant the process by which Islamic superhuman agencies became accepted in local Bengali cosmologies alongside local divinities already embedded therein. By identification is meant the process by which Islamic superhuman agencies ceased merely to coexist alongside Bengali agencies, but actually merged with them, as when Arabic name Allah was used interchangeably with the Sanskrit Niranjan. And finally by displacement is meant the process by which the names of Islamic superhuman agencies replaced those of other divinities in local cosmologies.\textsuperscript{4}

These heuristic notions of inclusion, identification and displacement will throw light on the encounter between the subaltern Madigas of Konaseema and Catholicism. Similarly Saurab Dube's insightful contributions on the encounter between the Satnamis of Chhattisgarh and colonial Christianity can be of help to us in delving into the dynamics of the encounter between the Catholic missionaries, European, as well as Indian, and the Madigas in Konaseema.

It is Dubey's discovery that conversion and building up of Christian communities in colonial Chhattisgarh implied paternalism on the one hand, from the part of the missionaries, and the assertion of the equality of the converted natives in the Kingdom of God, on the other. Mission was structured against the background of a political economy, wherein the missionary was a malguzar, a landlord invested with power, embedded in the ritual and symbolic hierarchy of rural Chhattisgarh. Missionary enterprise also implied creation of colonial cultures of rule, 'unique cultural configurations', homespun and localized creations, in which European food, dress, housing, orderings of space and time and morality were given new political meanings in the indigenous social order of colonial rule.\textsuperscript{5}


\textsuperscript{5} Cf. Saurab Dube, “Issues of Colonial Christianity”, p. 100.
Though in our investigations into the encounter between Catholicism and the Madigas, we come across only very few colonial missionaries, the pattern of the dynamics of the encounter in Chhattisgarh, as laid out by Dubey holds good for Konaseema too, as there is a pattern of internal colonization endemic to the missionary enterprise, as engaged in by even the local missionaries. The truth of this heuristic assertion would be borne out in the following pages.

Catalysts and Triggers in the Process of Conversion: A Historiography of the Fragments, and History outside the Archive

Catholicism did not enter Konaseema on virgin soil, as regards the process of Christianization is concerned. It is a late arrival. The different Protestant denominations, evangelical Churches and numerous Pentecostal groups were already at work in Konaseema, before Catholicism entered there. Some of these Evangelical groups are Godavari Delta Mission (GDM), The Church of God and Bible Mission. Though there were conversions from the non-Brahmin backward castes, most of the conversions were from among the Malas and the Madigs, the untouchable Dalit castes, along denominational lines. In the stories of conversions, often characterized as Christian mass movements, the dynamics of power equations and subaltern agency are very visible:


7 Godavari Delta Mission is probably associated with the Plymouth Brethren, who were working in Narasapur. This information is given to me by Dr Roger Hedlund, the Editor of *Dharma Deenika: A South Asian journal of Missiological Research* – 10-03-2002. See also Matthew Kumapuram, *Christianity Among Telugu People*, pp. 261; also Dolbeer, *A History of Lutheranism*, pp. 38-40.


In East Godavari, the Malas outnumber the Madigas, whereas in West Godavari both are equal. In the uplands of the both the districts, the Madigas dominate. But in the delta area of both the districts, Malas dominate. In East Godavari, the Baptists and Pentecostals have larger following than the Lutherans. Protestants are present in the Godavari delta from 1850s. Roman Catholics were present in the Samalkot area only. In the south of East Godavari, there are Baptists. In the West Godavari delta, there are Lutherans and the Pentecostal Movements. The Pentecostals are highly uncultured. As you see, both in religion as well as socio-economic arena, we are playing a game of numbers. The first-generation of Pentecostal leaders were all Madigas. But the second-generation leaders are all from Malas. The Malas consider Mr. Paramjyoti (a Mala Pentecostal leader) to be an Apostle. There are also many Kapus and Kammias in this Pentecostal fold. They consider theirs to be the real Church. 11

As far as the subalterns, in search of socio-economic identity were concerned, the borders of different denominations seemed rather porous, if we are to take the following testimony as an indication. “We were the members of the Bible Mission in the year 1966. Ten of us were baptized and the Church was built. Afterwards, the Protestant Pastor who was in charge of us, handed over the Sangham to Fr. Joseph at Amalapuram.” 12

Whether the borders were porous or not, the subaltern Madigas did make their options, and gave expression to their religious subjectivity, before joining a particular Christian mission or the other:

We are proud to say that ours is the very first Madiga enclave in Konaseema to have received Catholicism. When we went over in Bhimavaram as migrant harvesters, we met Fr. Pagano and invited him to our village. Mr. Jonnada Paul was our leader. He was the most educated among us. Later, he along with Mr. Marri Ganapathi, a military man, who was a Mala, went over to Gundalal during the Gundalal Matha Feast. Mr John had contact with Christianity in the military. At Gundalal, they impressed upon Fr. Pagano once more on the need of coming to Konaseema and almost fixed a date on which he could come over to our village. Protestants were here but we did not join them because their doctrine and approach to life seemed to uproot us from our tradition. They used to frighten us by saying “No bangles, no bindbüotta and no ornaments.” But Fr. Pagano’s words were “You can have and wear everything. Aime alankaram. God looks at the heart. Adore God with happiness and joy.” 13

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12 In personal communication with Sarojini of Enugapalli – 11-10-1998.

13 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Pulletikuru - 22/05/1998.
The above passage gives us an inkling into the circumstances of the option by the subaltern Madigas for Catholicism and its entry into Konaseema, at their express invitation around 1942. It also reflects the subaltern intuition into the potential of the religion of the Catholic Fathers, to provide cultural continuity, in contrast to the puritanical worldview of the many mushrooming Pentecostal groups. The same subaltern agency is echoed by the Madigas of Enugapally in 1970s. "We joined the Catholic Church because it allowed us to keep our culture-gajulu (bangles), bottu (forehead mark) etc. The Protestants used to tell us ‘Puttina Puttina Lekka (As you are born, you should live.). No decoration. No ornaments’."\(^{15}\)

The dominant historiography at play in the *Directory of the Diocese of Eluru - the great Jubilee edition* - 1999 has eclipsed this very express subaltern agency of the Madigas of Konaseema, which is instrumental in bringing Fr Vincent Pagano PIME, and Catholicism to Konaseema. This historiographical amnesia of the subaltern religious subjectivity and their mode of history as memory is inscribed in the pages of the directory, which highlight the agency of Pagano, the veteran missionary and role of the then reigning Prelate of erstwhile Vijayawada diocese, Mgr Ambrose de Battista PIME. Though certain Gotru Sudarsanam of Mukkamala village finds mention there as the first contact person of Fr Pagano, neither Jonnada Paul nor Marri Ganapathi (alias John) appear therein.\(^{16}\)

If the Madiga memory lingering in Pulletikurru celebrates the subaltern agency and instrumentality in giving entry for Catholicism in Konaseema, the

\(^{14}\) The Protestant groups have scant regard for the Catholic Church and its Hindu. Brahminical ways, by which, in their view, the Catholics adapt themselves to the culture and evil customs in it, like caste system and the ‘Pagan’ ways of worship, what may be termed sociologically as Sanskrification. In personal conversation with Prof. George Victor - 06/11/1998. See in this context also Rowena Robinson, " Some Neglected Aspects of the Conversion of Goa: A Socio-historic Perspective", *Sociological Bulletin*, March-September 1993/42 (1&2), pp. 72 - 80, wherein the author concludes that the caste conversions in Goa were motivated, apart from the other pragmatic reasons, also by the fact that Catholicism, with its pantheon-like array of saints and its loose structure, was the only means the caste Hindus had of recreating their socio-symbolic life.

\(^{15}\) In personal communication with Apparao of Enugapalli - 11-10-1998.

\(^{16}\) Cf. *Diocese of Eluru – Directory 1999: Great Jubilee 2000 Edition*, pp. 13 - 14, wherein the historical details regarding the parish of Amalapuram, founded by Fr Vincent Pagano PIME appear. The historical details regarding the visits made by Jonnada Paul and Marri Ganapathi (John) were first gathered by me from Peddasamadhanam, a veteran Catholic catechist of Konaseema. Mr Peddasamadhanam himself is a Mala by caste and is a resident of Kolluvaripeta, a Mala hamlet near Pulletikurru - 22/05/1998.
fragments of subaltern reminiscences gathered from the Madiga stronghold of Kommuragiri give the sociological key to the events that triggered the second wave of Madiga conversions to Catholicism in the mid-1970s:

We have our relatives across the Gautami Godavari, in the area, which comes under the parish of French Yanam. We used to hear from them that the Fathers there, Fr Mathew Mappilakunnel, the old priest and the young priest Fr Paul Maipan (presently the Bishop of Khammam) used to conduct food for work programmes. Fr Paul also used to distribute medicines. These were the days of hunger. We also heard from our relatives, that the good Fathers used to distribute clothes like blankets coming from abroad. We used to visit the Church for the festival of Mother Mary. Once when we heard that there was the distribution of clothes there, a group of elders from eight leading families, from among us went over there and requested for clothes and asked the Fathers to come over to our place. But the Fathers told us that the area of Kommuragiri came under the parish of Amalapuram and they directed us there. We went as a group and requested Fr Joseph Oliapuram for help. Later he came here and established this sangham (community) here. There were already some Protestant groups conducting prayer meetings at Pasuvala Lampa, in the Malapalli. My mother, along with other women from the peja used to go there. She used to take me also. At Muramalla, near the river, an ex-military man used to conduct prayer meetings, which we used to attend. 17

This oral tradition concerning the circumstances leading to the first contact between Catholicism and the Madiga stronghold of Kommuragiri has gone into the texture of the subaltern memory of the other Madiga villages, which came over to Catholicism from the Island Polavaram Mandal. In fact they have appropriated it, as I realized during my field work in Kesinakurupalem, another Madiga stronghold, from where Mr Ebenezer, the author of many a Madiga identity aphorism hailed.18 They have appropriated it as their own story of initial contact with Catholicism, crossing the Godavari.

It could be also true that, following the example of Kommuragiri village, many other Madiga villages would have crossed the Godavari at Yanam to visit the priests at Yanam, to be sent back to Amalapuram, respecting ecclesiastical jurisdictions. They were in search of Christians, who not only prayed and asked the Prabhu (The Lord) for power and strength, but also showed the power of the Prabhu, in giving food, clothes and medicine. 19

17 In personal communication with Bhaskara Rao, Ex-Panchayath Member, Kommuragiri - 10/05/2001.

18 In personal communication with Mr Ebenezer of Kesinakurupalem - 19/05/1998.

19 For the historical details regarding the negotiations between the dioceses of Vijayawada and the diocese of Visakhapatnam and the eventual absorption of the mission territory of Konaseema in the erstwhile diocese of Vijayawada, and the founding of the parish of Amalapuram in 1953, as a
What I have attempted in the preceding subsection is to knit together from the subaltern memory and its oral tradition, a history of the subaltern agency and the latent political economy behind the conversions of the Madigas to Catholicism, thus overcoming the amnesia of the dominant historiography, which tends to eclipse the agency behind subaltern movements and everyday struggles for identity and autonomy. It is a historiographical exercise, from the periphery and the fragments, making of a history outside the archive.

What Kooiman noted about the nineteenth century Christian converts from among the Shanars and Pariahs of South Travancore can be extended to the situation of the Madigas of Konaseema of mid-twentieth century. "One of the main characteristics of the nineteenth century mass movements was precisely that material, political and spiritual motives were blended together in one complex whole, making it next to impossible to isolate one single factor." 23

In Konaseema, around the second half of the twentieth century, there was no major social or economic dislocation like famines, which would, sociologically warrant, a criss-crossing of religions by those at the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder. 24 But the situation of endemic hunger and perennial low level of bifurcation of Bhimavaram, Cfr. Directory of the Diocese of Eluru - 1999, pp. 13-14. It also gives details regarding the initial attempts, which had been made by the priests from French Yanam, to Christianize Konaseema.

20 Cf. Carl Plasa and Betty J. Ring (eds), The Discourse of Slavery: Apha Ren to Tony Morrison (London: Routledge, 1994) for memory as a subaltern mode of history and historiography.

21 Cf. Felix Wilfred, "Whose Nation? Whose History?" in Felix Wilfred and Jose D. Maliekal (eds), The Struggle for the Past: Historiography Today (Chennai: Department of Christian Studies: University of Madras, 2002), pp. 88-90, for a treatment of history and historiography as an empowering narration of the everyday struggles of the subalterns, as opposed to the grand narratives of the dominant.

22 Cf. Felix Wilfred, "Christianity in Hindu Polytheistic Structural mould: Converts in Southern Tamilnadu Respond to an Alien Religion During the Vasco da Gama Epoch", Arch. de Sr. soc. des Rel., juillet - septembre 1998/103, pp. 81-82, where the author calls for a new approach to the historiography of mission, from the viewpoint of the converts in search of identity and cultural continuity.


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real wages presented a condition of ongoing crisis in political economy. This situation was also inscribed by the ritualized stigma of pollution and untouchability, as far as the Dalits like Malas and the Madigas were concerned. This ongoing crisis in political economy and social disability were catalysts enough to trigger a chain of conversions, starting from the late 1940s, to Catholicism, which presented itself as an eminently ameliorating religion.

Up to now, we have had a glimpse into the ‘history from the periphery’, of the catalysts and triggers, which led to the Madiga’s opting for Catholicism, as a way of identity assertion and survival. In the following sections, we enter into an analysis of the continuities and discontinuities manifest/latent in this encounter, in the interrelated layers of culture, religion and political economy.

Continuities/Discontinuities in the Spheres of Political Economy, Culture and Religion

As we have seen already in the third section on the religious consciousness of the Madiga, and reiterated in the introduction to this section, Madiga religiosity can be characterized, as one inscribed by primordial subaltern posture for survival and search for identity and well-being, rooted in the political economy. This primordial posture of survival and search for well-being and identity is manifested in the encounter between Catholicism and the Madigas of Konaseema, as evidenced by the following layers of economic, cultural and religious continuities / discontinuities, as surfacing through my fieldwork.

Father/Prabhu/Catholicism as a Source of Socio-economic Identity: Subaltern Political Economy of Conversion

The Madigas of Pulletikurru, whom we have seen celebrating in memory, their hunger and their eating carrion, as a matter of survival and subaltern protest,

28 Cf. Section II, Chapter – 1, Subsection entitled “Further on the Economics of Starvation, Class Conflict and Ideological Alienation”; also see Chapter – 2, subsection entitled “Famine, Endemic Hunger and Elusive Well-being ”.
26 Cf. Section II, Chapter-3, entitled “Minimum Wages: Launching Pad and Touchstone of Mobility in Konaseema’s Subaltern Universe”.
found in Fr Pagano, a symbol of Catholicism, as a religion which could effectively address the material issues of life, their primordial subaltern concern. "In the beginning he gave us milk powder, rice, wheat and cloth. We felt needed. He met our needs. Whatever he had, he used to share with us. He used to give us three kilograms of rice and facilitate our education. Except two families, which did not embrace Catholicism for the professional reason of being the drum-beaters, all of us received baptism. These two families still remain Hindu."

This willingness of the Catholic Fathers to provide material help for survival, and shelter during natural calamities have been attested to by the people of Linepeta, where Catholicism was brought by Fr Joseph Oliapuram, a missionary from Kerala, who is known as the "Father of Konaseema". Fr Joseph Oliapuram has been instrumental in the conversion of many Madiga strongholds in the Island Polavaram Mandal. The people of Uppalaguptam recall the material help extended to them by Fr Angelo Beehi, a PIME missionary.

The same is the case with the people of Vadapalem and Devarapalli Chivvaripuntha, who have enjoyed the paternal protection of Fr Chacko Thattil SDB, who was instrumental in their conversion to Catholicism. The people of Vadapalem also recalled the fact that they have been the beneficiaries of PARA (People's Action for Rural Awakening), a voluntary organization, based at Ravulapalem, run by the Salesians of Don Bosco, networking with many other similar organizations in Konaseema and Andhra Pradesh, for the conscientization and emancipation of the rural poor.

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29 Cf. Section III, subsection entitled "Survival: The Primordial Subaltern Posture and Strategy".
30 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Pullettkurra - 22/05/1998.
31 In personal communication with Satyanadam, the catechist of Lineptra - 16/05/1998.
32 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Uppalaguptam - 21/10/1998.
33 In personal communication with the Madigas of Vadapalem - 22/05/1998.
34 In personal communication with Pedda Veeriah, the Madiga elder of Devarapalli Chivvaripuntha - 19/05/2001.
35 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Vadapalem - 22/05/1998.
In the lives of the Konaseema Madigas, after the encounter with Catholicism, there was an evident shift from the idioms of necessity and survival, to idioms of identity assertion. "We ourselves built a small community hall, after having bought the land on our own." This building of a small church was symbolic of the assertion of the Madiga community vis-à-vis the higher castes of the Kapus and the Komattis, who had deprived them of their land, and left them starving, except for the carrion and nature's bounty of ripe palmyra fruits, as a means of sustenance.

The mood of this nascent first ever-Catholic community of Konaseema was buoyant for sure, basking in the newfound identity and autonomy. "Christianity gave us power and identity. When our Bishop was brought from Eluru and received in the village in all regalia, the higher caste people sat back in surprise and started looking up to us. Then they started becoming more respectful towards us and started joining hands with us. Now we have greater self-respect. Now we need to perform our traditional duties (carrying the carcass and beating the drum) only if we wish."37

That building of a Church, however small, built with their own contribution and in a piece of land, bought again with their own contribution, was a matter of pride and identity assertion, and an inversion of the exclusionary ritual spatialities of the dominant hierarchical Hinduism38 is once more brought home to us by the people of Peddamadi, Madigas, who were converted much later than the community of Pullekkurru. "Fr. Joseph brought Roman Catholic Mission sangham here. There were no Protestants earlier. We are very proud that the land for the gudi as well as the gudi itself was built with our contribution, as well as Father's contribution".36

"After the Prabhu set foot in our colony, we have gained a new identity - power and strength, to stand up to the higher castes. Father was with us. We learned to live as human beings after the arrival of Jesus - after Father came. Father

36 Cf. Section III, Chapter - I, subsection entitled “Idioms of Necessity”.

37 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Pullekkurru – 22/05/1998.

38 Cf. Section – III, Chapter 4, subsection entitled “Madiga as Insider- Outsider: Towards a Subaltern Genealogy of a Solidarity Without Consensus”.

39 In conversation with the people of Peddamadi – 17/03/1999.
gave us the light of jñānam. These words of the Madigas of Linepetta echo the situation of the newly converted ex-untouchables in the Anglican Mission diocese of Dornakal. The new-found cleanliness, decorum, knowledge and thriftiness of the ex-untouchables and the giving up of the polluting habit of eating of carrion by them, so impressed the caste Hindus of the lower rungs of the hierarchy that it triggered off conversions among them.

In Konaseema Catholic Madiga context, jñānam (knowledge) is a short-cut icon, a cohort concept, standing for cleanliness, hygiene, giving up of the polluting kulavrutti and eating of carrion, and dissociating themselves from the ritualized burden of having to carry the carcass of the animals for burying or skinning. It also stands for mobility in literacy and education, and growth in spiritual knowledge. As we can note, this cohort concept of jñānam is highly loaded with connotations of political economy, protest, power and alternative option to the burden of ritualized hierarchy, under which they were labouring. Jñānam is given by the Church, because it is the repository of truth, in the language of Abraham, the catechist from Kesinakurupalem and his wife Marthamma, the daughter of a Pastor of Godavari Delta Mission (GDM). "We both were baptized as Catholics in 1976. We have received the Truth. There is Truth in Catholicism."

Jñānam leads also identity as the Madiga ideologue Ebenezer affirmed. "The Church has given us gurthimpu (identity) and power." Catholicism was indeed a source of power and identity for the Konaseema Madiga.

Marthamma recalls the celebration of the Jubilee of Amalapuram Church with a glow in her eyes and evident nostalgia, as a memorable event of her life, where she celebrated the togetherness of the Fathers and Sisters, with the new converts. "We went to Amalapuram, for the Jubilee, with the intention of receiving

40 In conversation with the Madigas of Linepetta – 16/05/1998.
41 Cf G.A. Oddie, Christian Conversion among Non-Brahmins in Andhra Pradesh, p. 112.
42 In conversation with Abraham and Marthamma – Kesinakurupalem – 19/05/1998.
43 In personal communication with Ebenezer, Kesinakurupalem – 19/05/1998.
help, in kind and cash, mortgaging our belongings. We spent three days there together with the Fathers and Sisters. Fathers and Sisters sat together with us for meals. There was the distribution of food and distribution of blankets."  

The event was once again an overcoming of the boundaries of ritual spatialities of the internal hierarchy in the Church, especially given the fact that most of the priests and nuns, hailing from Kerala, considered themselves to be of higher caste and gave out the message of being so, in many subtle ways, as we shall see in the following section on the discontinuities latent in the encounter.

**Continuities in the Dominant Order: Father-Prabhu as Arbiter and Leader in a Community given to Fragmentation**

Apart from the newfound socio-economic identity by way of the fulfillment of physical and survival needs like food and shelter, the Catholic Madigas looked to the priests for leadership. The priests became their protector, vis-à-vis the higher caste landlords, who were harassing them, and their arbiter in the disputes among themselves, and between them and the higher castes.

The colonial missionary also wielded clout, which he put to good use in defence of his downtrodden Madiga community, who apart from suffering from the ritualized stigma of pollution, was also at the receiving end of the high handedness of the higher castes. "Catholicism has given us identity, power and strength. Especially, Fr. Beefie stood with us. In 1953, there was tension between SC Madigas and Kapus, following an incident, in which a Madiga poked a Kapu with an umbrella. They were planning to retaliate and harm all of us. At that time Fr. Angelo Beefie went riding on his motorbike, carrying two pistols, through the streets of upper caste areas, challenging them to dare lay hands on his people. At this, the caste people were frightened. After that we were left free."  

The first ever police case filed by the Dalits against the higher castes, from Island Polavaram, was filed by the Madigas of Kommaragiri, the newly baptized

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44 In conversation with Marthamma of Kesinakurupalem - 19/05/1998.

flock of Fr Joseph Oliapuram. The case was eventually withdrawn by the Madigas, after reaching a compromise, and a formal apology by the higher caste members, that too a first time event in the history of the island. The incident was symbolic, in an as much as it was an act of identity assertion by the untouchable converts to the new religion, and their increasing autonomy.  

In the parish house of Kommaragiri, during my second stint of fieldwork, I myself was a witness to the arbitration between the Madiga parents of a boy who had stolen a foot of plantains from his landlord’s grove, and the landlord himself. The landlord had threatened to take the boy to the police station. At the Father’s intervention, the landlord relented and the boy was let off with a stern warning. "RCM has given us identity, has helped us to assert ourselves against the higher castes (the Kapus and Rajulu). Whenever our boys have been attacked by them or when they tend towards atrocities, Father appears. He protects us. He settles the cases. Whenever we are at fault, he beats us."  

"We used to have our cases settled by the Peddaraju or the Peddakāpu – the feuds among ourselves and feuds with the other castes. His writ ran large in the village. Now when we cannot settle the cases by ourselves we go to the Father. But we have our traditional set-up of Panchaiduguru (the traditional five-member caste panchayath). It still works".  

The leadership provided by the Fathers to the Madigas becomes significant given the high degrees of fragmentation and the fragility of unity among them. "After we met the Prabhu, there is unity among us. But of late, there are some divisions, on account of government loans. There is division in our community and in this colony itself. There are two Catholic Churches, as you can see. Some of us

46 This incident, along with his helping the Madigas to assert their right over the use of riverbed, against the higher castes was narrated to me by Fr Joseph Oliapuram on 15/03/1998. The incident related to the police case occurred in 1974.

47 The scene took place on 08/03/1999 in the presbytery of the Kommaragiri church.

48 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Pathamadigapēta of Kommaragiri – 15/03/1999.

49 In personal communication with the Madigas of T. Kothapalli – 13/03/1999.
do not go to Church. Never mind. We are still Catholics. That is why, we have not allowed any other denomination, to set foot in this peeta.”

The Madigas of the other villages also attest to the fact that the membership in the Church and the leadership of the Father have been instrumental in their newfound unity. "One of the most beneficial things which happened to us is that we have become one – after the coming of the sangham (the Church). Earlier there used to be divisions and quarrels among us. Now we are able to stand together". This observation was borne out by the testimony of the parish priest, who stated, “Though the community had many problems earlier, now it is more or less settled. They are able to stand united”. Then he described the incident in which the Madigas had turned aggressive, after a Madiga household servant had been beaten up by a Raju youth. He had to calm the people, and request a public apology from the Raju youth, to which he yielded with some insistence on the part of the people and the Father. As it happens often, some members of the Madiga caste Panchayat had been bought up by the higher castes.

In the main parish, as well as the sub-stations, there are the Church councils, which are at times co-terminous with the caste panchayath itself, or constituted with at least some members of it present in the council. There are also occasions on which the parish priest had dismissed the entire council of the Church elders, due to internal politics and disunity. There are also cases where, the villages could not avail of the housing scheme, associated with the cyclone relief, as the leaders could not come to a united decision, to meet the minimum conditions to be met, before applying for the scheme.

50 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Ambajipeta - 23/05/1998.
51 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of T. Kothapalli - 13/03/1999.
52 In personal communication with Fr Babu George, the parish priest of Kommaragiri parish 14/03/1999.
53 Ibid.
54 In personal communication with Mahalakshmi, the Madiga elder of Bhavanipeta - 18/03-1999.
55 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of the Peddamadi village - 17/03/1999.
“Nine āru peddalu are chosen from among us. The democratic set-up of Panchaidaguru-salahādri still is in vogue. The five church elders are chosen from among the nine āru peddalu. They can also be selected from members other than the āru peddalu. The nine peddalu carry on as long as their behaviour is good. ⁵⁶ This is an instance where the inner structure of democracy in vogue in the caste, is carried over into the Church.

The nascent Catholic communities of Konaseema feel that the leadership provided by the Fathers has resulted in the augmentation of identity assertion, as well as economic upliftment. “There has been change. Earlier, the Rajus used to make use of us for their purposes. Now we are more aware. They always taunt us now. ‘You have your Father now. Go to him.’ Whenever we approach them for financial help, they say this to us. Now, after the entry of the Prabhu and Father, we feel the Strength.”⁵⁷ In Adavipēta village the Mahila Mandalı members mentioned that Father(Priest) was like a Thalli (mother) for them.⁵⁸

I was counterchecking the truth of my findings at the end of the field work with Fr Babu George, the parish priest of Kommaragiri, “I feel in Catholic Konaseema, the operative equation is Prabhu = Father = Church”. He responded “May be a little correction ‘Father = Prabhu = Church’.” ⁵⁹

Domination With Paternalistic Hegemony: Amnesia of Subaltern Economic Agency in Conversion and the Story of a Truncated Autonomy

This leadership and help provided by the Fathers were not without their share of ambiguities, as the history of Catholicism in Konaseema, which is little over six decades old, amply testify:

Catholicism here is not planted on virgin soil. Father Joseph came to us with housing material (beams, pillars, two hundred palm leaves and thirteen bamboo poles) in

⁵⁶ In personal communication with the Madiga elders of T. Kothapalli - 13/03/1999.
⁵⁷ Cf. In personal communication with Mahalakshmi, the Madiga elder of Bhavanipēta, a community of recent converts to Catholicism – 18-03-1999.
⁵⁸ In personal communication with the Mahila Mandalı members of Adavipēta – 15/03/1999.
⁵⁹ In personal communication with Fr Babu George, parish priest of Kommaragiri – 19-03-1999.
1974. Following these 85 families joined the Church. I myself, who was trained to be a pastor in the Church of God, wrote up the list of those families, who wished to become Catholics. Father facilitated government loans for us. Earlier we had gone to Yanam (Vizag Diocese), to receive help from there but the father there had directed us to Amalapuram, where there was a Catholic Church, belonging to Eluru Diocese. This side of Godavari belonged to Eluru Diocese. During the second phase, Father and Sisters came to us with a new scheme, the buffalo-scheme. But this time over, only five families were found worthy by the Father and Sisters to avail of the scheme. This caused divisions in the Church - among the families. The Sisters were heard to say “This Petta won’t become good. If anything is given, they will fight.”

My fieldwork has revealed that whenever a welfare scheme of an economic nature has been introduced by the Fathers and Sisters in the Madiga villages, it has been a source of division in the communities. I have already quoted above the testimony of the Madiga elders of Ambajipeṭa, how because of the government schemes, there were divisions in the community. Though Fr Joseph Oliapuram might disagree that it was not exactly the buffalo scheme, which paved the way to the disintegration of the once flourishing Kesinakurupalem community, in people’s memory, it has been the beginning of the decline. As can be noted from Ebenezer’s observation, the root cause seems to be the cleavage in the hermeneutical perceptions between the Madigas and the missionaries of the economic help extended.

The missionary views the help extended in its instrumental nature, by way of either a reward for the progress shown in faith, or as an entry point for speaking about the spiritual matters like the gospel message, Jesus Christ and salvation. The help extended seemed benevolent bait, in the art of fishing for souls. “But this time over, only five families were found worthy by the Father and Sisters to avail of the scheme. This caused divisions in the Church - among the families. The Sisters were heard to say “This Petta won’t become good. If anything is given, they will fight”.”

The Madiga, who sees the help as a matter of survival and well-being, and not in an instrumental perspective, rejects the derogatory and demeaning paternalism of the missionary.61 He leaves the Church. In fact, Ebenezer, who wrote up the list of

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60 In personal communication with Mr. Ebenezer of Kesinakurupalem – 19/05/1998.

61 In this context see Saurab Dube, *Paternalism and Freedom*, pp.179-183, where the author analyzes the dynamics of the encounter between the colonial missionaries and the Satnamis. The missionary was the madiguar, the traditional landlord of Chhattisgarh, and the pastor combined into one. Also pp. 187-198, for a description of the rebellion of the converts against the missionaries, who were
the potential Catholics, felt insulted by the Fathers and Sisters and left the Church, never to return. "I do not belong to any Church now. I pray to God straight."62 "There was no community like that of Kesinakurru, not even Kommaragiri, the main parish. Now everything is gone to the dogs."63 In fact, though there are many families on the register of the Church, very few families are active churchgoers. The others are dormant Catholics.

"In the earlier years, we used to feel the pangs of hunger. We had nothing to eat except the carcasses. So we used to have a good helping from the meat of dead animals."64 For the subaltern Madiga, "Belly comes before the soul."65 The economic agency, expressed in his quest for survival often has not been respected, rather decried and the religiosity at play there not revered by many a missionary.66 It has been dubbed as a mere mercenary motive, viewed with suspicion, and has been viewed only with an instrumentalist and teleological perspective by the missionaries.67

In spite of the theological and doctrinal advancements made by the Catholic Church, in overcoming the matter/spirit dichotomy, in its pastoral approach, and in

dominating over them. Eventually in revolt against the missionaries, the converts started their own independent Church. The situation is very similar to that of Konaweema Catholicism, where the Father, at least for the converts, was playing the role of and fulfilling the functions of their earlier masters, the high caste landlords.

62 In personal communication with Ebenezer – Kesinakurrapalem – 19/05/1998.

63 Ibid.

64 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Pullettikurru - 22/05/1998.


67 Cf. Felix Wilfred, Ibid., p. 77, where he quotes Robert Caldwell, the well-known Protestant missionary, who worked among the Shanars in Tiruchchirappalli, Southern Tamil Nadu. Caldwell was bemoaning the ignorance and the proper lack of motivation among the Shanars, who were apparently embracing Christianity for very inferior motives of food and daily sustenance, and not evidently for the higher motives of the nobility, superiority and the soteriological value of Christianity. See also G.A. Oddie, Christian Conversion among Non-Brahmins in Andhra Pradesh. p. 103; Dick Koonman, Conversion and Social Equality in India, p. 199.
overcoming the cleavage between the social dimension of evangelization and the aspect of direct proclamation, at the grassroots, to this day, this cleavage informs the pastoral practice of the Church. In the case of Konaseema Catholicism, with the exceptions of few experiments in pastoral practice, these cleavages in pastoral practice are still in operation.

The pattern of paternalistically instrumentalizing the subaltern economic agency of the Madiga is repeated in the mother parish of Kommaragiri, the flagship of Konaseema Catholicism, and the place of toils of Fr Joseph Oliapuram, the ‘Father of Konaseema’. He had extended help to the parishioners in large scale, but as in Kesinakumpalem, some families were excluded from becoming the beneficiaries of the schemes, on account of having been not regular to the Church or not being judged spiritually and morally worthy to be deserving of help. They were excluded from availing of the schemes. This angered the concerned families and they turned against the Father, and they were apparently scheming against the Father and the sisters. Father filed a police case against these people, which he eventually

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69 Cf. Ibid. p. 259, for the mood of caution still lingering in the Church’s pastoral practice, following Evangelii Nuntiandi arising from the fear of reducing the gospel to social and human promotion, and the preoccupation with the possibility that the cause of evangelization being jeopardized by the horizontalization of liberation

70 People’s Action for Rural Awakening (PARA), an N.G.O., launched by the Salesians of Don Bosco, which has as its operational thrust, the social dimension of the gospel as affirmed by Roman Synod of Bishops in 1971, could be cited as an example for an exception to the dichotomous pastoral thrust in vogue in Konaseema. The Women’s Self Help Movements of Maha Mandalis, launched recently under the auspices of A.P.S.S. (Andhra Pradesh Social Service Society – the Social Action Organ of the Catholic Bishops of Andhra Pradesh), could also be cited as an exception to the beaten track in pastoral practice, especially the instrumental approach to material help extended to the people.
withdrew, after having reached a compromise with the people. The irony is that the ‘Father of Konaseema’, who was instrumental in filing the first ever police case against the higher castes, on behalf of his children and flock, now found himself all set to file a case against these very same children, from which he withdrew, on apology from the flock!

The Madiga does protest against the hegemonic paternalism of the Fathers, in the eruption of the autonomous layer of his subaltern contradictory consciousness, when faced with indignity to his caste identity:

One day one of our men, who was not accustomed to frequenting the Church, came to the parish church along with us. He was not used to the proprieties of behaving in the Catholic church, although he was a baptized Catholic. As per custom, when three of us bowed in front of the tabernacle, he made the semblance of a bow to the wall. The parish priest, who saw his unbecoming behavior, caught hold of him by the neck and violently pushed him out of the Church. Seeing this, our blood curdled and our soul melted. We felt so belittled at the priest’s treatment of our fellow-caste members - his demignation of our entire caste. The incident is symbolic of the paternalism of the Catholic missionary-Father, who has replaced the Madiga, the landlord of Konaseema, and also who embodies in himself/herself, pretensions to be of Brahminical lineage. A missionary, himself a Syrian Christian stated that the Syrain Christian Fathers and Sisters from Kerala, when they gather together refer to the lethargy, obstinacy and especially the ingratitude of the Madigas and other Dalits, using the following short cut icon of disparagement. “Nammude Pelayanmaralle” (After all, the Madigas and Malas are like our Pulayas, back home).

71 In personal communication with Fr Joseph Arjun, the parish priest of Kommaragiri – 16/12/2001. Cf. Saurab Dube, “Paternalism and Freedom”, p. 187, for the attempt by the missionaries to prosecute the people for having encroached into the forestland of the mission.

72 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Pulletikura – 22/05/1998.

73 Many of the missionaries of Konaseema hail from Kerala, in the South of India. They form part of the Syrian Christian Church, which according to sociologists and anthropologists kept themselves as a separate caste, in the society of Kerala, which was until very recently, highly caste-ridden. The Syrian Christians, many of whom are landed farmers and businessmen, claim a caste status equivalent to that of the Nayars, who consider themselves to be only next to the Brahmins in caste hierarchy. Some Syrian Christians claim that their ancestors were in fact, Namblothiris, the Kerala Brahmins. Cf. Duncan B. Forrester, Case and Christianity, pp. 97-117. Also Susan Visvanathan, The Christians of Kerala: History, Belief and Ritual among the Yakoba (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 1-68.

74 In personal communication with social activist and lawyer, Fr Thomas Pallithanam, the Director of PARA, Ravulapalem – 15/12/2001.
This is a window to the inner world of the benevolent missionary men and women, who have been working in Konaseema, with the Dalits for their upliftment, working for them, perhaps not with them. They perhaps do have the psychological satisfaction of having left their homes to work for the Lord and his people, in far away mission lands, like the apostles and martyrs, but perhaps transplanting the values of Kerala’s caste hierarchy in toto to Konaseema. The following examples gleaned from my fieldwork give corroborative evidence to my seemingly vague, but an assertion, very much grounded-in-reality, indicative of the internal colonization of Konaseema, consciously or sub-consciously engaged in by the missionaries.

Brothers, yes but not Brothers-in-Law: Brahminical Self-Constructs and Mission as Internal Colonization

A missionary, whose zeal for souls, is unquestionable, and his benevolence for the Madigas is especially celebrated in memory by the Madigas, once retorted to the higher caste converts of his mission, who resented his commensality with the Madigas. “Who do you think you are? You are at the most a Raju or a Kapu, a Kshatriya or a tiller of the land, a farmer. But mind you, I am a Namboothiri (Kerala Brahmin). If I deign to eat with the untouchables, why can’t you?”

But this benevolent monarch of a missionary used to literally abuse, thrash and kick the Madigas in his mission, all to teach them good lessons, all for their good. And the Madigas used to never resent it, because the “Father used to see to all our needs. He used to give us money in our need, whenever there was cyclone.

77 Cf. Jose D. Maliekal, “Identity- Consciousness of the Christian Madigas: Story of a People in Emergence”, Jeevadhara, January 2001/181, p. 29-30. See in this context, the enlightening contribution by Marion O’ Callaghan, entitled “Continuities in Imagination” in Jan Nederveen Pieterse and Bhikhu Parekh (eds), Culture, Knowledge and Power: Decolonization and Imagination, Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1977, pp.22-44, where the author treats colonial mentality as a continuum, where historical colonization is only the chronologically first moment, after which it continues also within the context of the Third world countries, in different fabrications and constructions, by the bourgeoisie.
whenever fire devastated our homes. He was really like a father to us.”  

The reminiscence of the Madigas of the benevolence of the Father mirrored their contradictory consciousness, in which they enjoyed the protection, as well as the exploitation of their higher caste landlords. But this hamlet of the Madigas, which enjoyed the neo-colonial, protectionist paternalism of the “Father”, still remains very backward, in comparison with the other Madiga colonies of the same parish.

" Madigas can improve, and can be improved, provided there is somebody with a big rod, to guide them.”  

Fr Joseph Oliapuram was meaning what he said, literally, and not figuratively, speaking out of his experience, with them for years. But as his words reflect, he has been the master, and Madiga, always a slave, always in need of the stick, never reaching the degree of autonomy, when he could assert his subjectivity, because the Father has always, in his paternalistic construct forced him to remain one.

“There is a cultural distance between the non-Dalit clergy and Dalit Christians. The non-Dalit clergy coming from the other regions have not socialized with the Dalit Christians.”  

Nothing brings into better relief, the truth of this statement than the following narration, gleaned from my fieldwork, which reveals the subtle paternalism and hidden casteism of some of the Konaseema missionaries:

A few years ago, a priest and a group of religious Sisters, belonging to a Congregation, founded in the South of India were travelling together, from Amalapuram, towards Ravulapalem. As their car reached the middle of the small town of Kothapeta, near to where they were working, the Sisters sighted the plot of land, which had been bought by one of the Protestant denominations, for their church. On sighting the plot of land, their spontaneous reaction found expression in the following words “Father, if only we had our own Church here, in the middle of the town”. What they had left unsaid was “Where we are now, are at the outskirts of the town, the peta, where the Mahas and the Madigas, the Dalits live. They are dirty and the area is dirty. Though we are working for them, we are not at home, in their midst. We would be more at home, here in the middle of the town, where the Brahmin quarters are.” To the priest’s query, as to why they were not at home, in the place,

78 In personal communication with Pedda Veeriah, the Madiga elder of Devarapalli Chivarripuntha. Cf. Saurab Dube, “Issues of Colonial Christianity”, p. 104, where Dube describes the instincts of self-preservation, self-defence and acquiring things from the colonial missionary, which made the Satnamis of Chhattisgarh to construct the identity of the colonial missionaries as that of ma-bap (mother and father).

79 In personal communication with Fr Joseph Oliapuram – 11/12/2001.

where, they had been working for so long, their reply was "Oh! Father, whatever it be, we must have some dignity." And this Congregation had been working in Andhra already for quite many years, calling themselves missionaries. 81

Apart from the cultural distance and the paternalism practised by the missionaries from outside, they also tend to be feudalistic and authoritarian in approach, having scant regard for the Dalits. 82 The Madigas have been the sufferers of the subtle and gross indignities meted out to them by the landlord cum master missionaries:

In 1983 our Church, built on our own land was removed. The parish priest dismantled the Church and took away the material for the construction of the one and only church, which was being built by him. His idea was that "all should come to the main Church for mass and no sub-station masses." He not only destroyed our Church but also sold the land on which the Church stood, to one of his favourites in this village, under the argument that the church land belongs to the Church. We did not oppose him. Because we didn’t want to go against his word. It is God’s word. We never dared to open our mouth against the Father, because Father’s words were God’s own words. 83

This is the situation of the Pullettkurru village, which boasts that they gave entry to Catholicism in Konaseema. The church, which they had built with their own hands and on their own land, had been physically dismantled and made part of the Church of the parish priest, known otherwise as the "builder of the Konaseema Church". He moves on building churches, in the plots of land bought with his own money, consolidates the communities around the area concerned, and later on makes them into parishes. 84


82 Lancy Lobo, Visions, Illusions and Dilemmas, Ibid.

83 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Pullettkurru – 22/05/1998.

84 Cf. Directory of the Diocese of Eluru – 1999, p. 37-38, where the instrumentality of Fr Mathew Kunnumpura in establishing the parish, and building a church, remodelling a theatre is mentioned. Apparently, as mentioned by the people, all the sub-station churches were demolished, or left non-functional, with the Father’s insistence that all had to come to the main church at Irusumanda. In Andhra, each village is a self-enclosed unit, and worship in the local area would be preferred, to one in a centralized church. On the contrary, the Syriac Churches in Kerala have centralized worship, where the village is a topographically continuous unit, with undefined boundaries, unlike in Andhra Pradesh, where the village is a well-defined and de-limited topographical unit. There is at play in this liturgical centralization, a dominant ordering of space, which I hope to dwell on, in the next chapter. After building the Church and forming the parish at Irusumanda, following his missionary
Though his missionary zeal is not to be questioned, and his architectural abilities to be admired, his rough-riding ways, smacks of a colonial mentality and feudal outlook. His intention to bring together the flock from different villages, though good in itself, and in tune with the liturgical norm of having a centrally conducted Eucharist on Sundays, as far as possible, it did violence to the subaltern sense of identity, and sense of sacred geography, which could invoke gods/goddesses in the peripheries, and not only in the centre. The people had great admiration for this ageing missionary, who was also a Siddhanthi, who could fix the muhurtams (auspicious time) for their marriages, but had the weakness of listening to the opinion of the party, which pleased him.

Notwithstanding the admiration they felt for him, they could not stand his paternalistic highbandedness. As their subaltern pride, sense of religiosity and identity were hurt, they expressed their resistance by filing a case against him, for having encroached into their land, and illegally sold it. Though the Father claimed that the land and the church belonged to the Holy Catholic Church, and he was in authority to dispose off both, the court gave verdict, to the contrary, in favour of the people.

Though in their subaltern contradictory consciousness, they respect the divine power of the Father, who has God’s words, which cannot be opposed, the incident of their church being demolished did leave a deep scar on their subaltern memory. “Of late, it looks as if Catholicism has become a burden for the Madigas and the Madigas, in turn, a burden for Catholicism. Our leaders (priests) are not caring for us. If Catholicism did not enter here (Pullettikurru), there would not be Catholicism in Konaseema. Our community hall, Church was destroyed. We had baked with our own hands 8000 bricks and bought with our own hard-earned

strategy, Father Mathew had moved on to Ambajipeta, and later on to Mummidivaram, another Mandal headquarters.


86 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Pullettikurru – 22/05/1998.

87 In personal communication with Fr Mathew Kunnumpuram – 13/12/2001.
money, two cents of land. But everything has become a prey to the whimsicality of leadership.\textsuperscript{88}

The echoes of the feudal highhandedness of the missionaries from outside is heard in other parts of Konaseema also, again with regard to subaltern identity expressed in the building of the community church. "After Fr. Chacko left, another Father came. He wanted to take away the bricks, which we had gathered to build our church, to Bobbarlanka, to build a church there. He wanted to take away the bricks by force, which we prevented. Father threatened to take us to the police and to the court. Then I said 'either you take all of us or take none'. Father gave up the idea of taking away the bricks, which we had bought to build our church."\textsuperscript{89} The hermeneutical cleavage between the missionaries and the subalterns expressed in the lack of respect for their labour and their quest for identity is a running theme in Konaseema.

If the missionaries from the outside, who preached that all Christians were equal, but wanted the Dalits to remain their brothers, and not their "brothers-in-law",\textsuperscript{90} the Mala priests, who are their fellow-Dalits, were not treating them any better.

\textbf{Stigmatizing Spatialities: Dalit Brahmins and Replication of Hierarchy}

"There are Fathers, who treat us as human beings, but others, including Mala priests, have no regard for us. Even they frequent only the families of socio-economically-developed castes. They avoid eating and drinking from/with us, unlike the missionaries of the past. They prefer to drink and dine with the other castes."\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{88} In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Pallethikkuru - 22/05/1998.

\textsuperscript{89} In personal communication with Appano, Eaugapalli – 11-10-1998.


\textsuperscript{91} In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Pallethikkuru - 22/05/1998.
The import of the above statement comes home deeper, when we listen to the Madigas of Uppalaguptam, even if we give allowance for the heightened mood of mutual antipathy Malas and the Madigas were harbouring for one another, in the wake of the Danḍōrā movement in 1998. "The Mala Priest, who is our parish priest, allots all the houses of the Cyclone Relief Housing Scheme, to his own kinsfolk. We don’t mind. We don’t mind even that he brings his own drinking water, when he comes to celebrate the Mass here. But we cannot bear the fact that he brings his own chair to sit down." 92

The Madigas of Uppalaguptam did feel thrice alienated, first at the level of the level of political economy, as they were being deprived of the housing allotments due to them, as the Mala priest was manipulating the scheme to the advantage of his own caste. Next at the symbolic level of sociological replication of hierarchy, 93 at two layers, of commensality and spatiality. 94 The Mala priest was driving home to the Catholic Madigas, the superiority of his caste, and the inferiority of the Madigas and their polluted state of untouchability, whether Christians or not. 95 The message of alienation was carried across to the Madigas, painfully.

The story of mistrust and alienation between the Father and his flock continued in Enugapalli:

Fr. Xavier allowed nobody to talk. The present Father is keeping the cheque, which came from one of our members, working in the Gulf, as a gift for the Church to buy a microphone. But Father is not parting with the money. Father is not giving us anything. There are ill feelings between the Father and us. Some of us have joined Prajapthu Suvarthā Mandali. Father always scolds us. But Fathers must not swear and abuse. We prepare food for him but he does not eat here. 96

92 In personal communication with Mr Ambrose, Uppalaguptam – 21/10/1998.

93 Cf. Section III – Chapter – 1, the subsection entitled "Madiga Standstill and Mala Mobility: Replication of Hierarchies".

94 Cf. D. Dennis Hudson, The First Protestant Mission in India: Its Social and Religious Developments", Sociological Bulletin, March- September, 1993/42(1&2), pp. 54 – 57 for a description of the seating arrangements in the New Jerusalem Church, which Ziegenhulb founded on the outskirts of Trangēbar, and the spatialities practised and the struggle of the missionaries to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, the symbol of unity, in the context of the caste dharma, among the converts who ranged from Velalans to Partiyans.

95 Cf. Wilson, Twice Alienated, p.23, where he refers to the continued fragmentation of the Dalit Christians along denominational lines.

96 In personal communication with Madiga elders of Enugapalli – 11-10-1998.
The denial of commensality with the Madigas, is taken as indication of the display of caste superiority of the Father, and the denial of what he stands for, the symbol of equality of all members, preached by the Church. This particular priest was not from Kerala, but from the South of Tamilnadu. He also treated the Madigas, as not trustworthy, as regards money, or not grown up enough, to handle the funds from abroad, both traits smacking of social Darwinism, evolutionism and colonial paternalism.

These traits of sociological and anthropological evolutionism and social Darwinism of the dominant Church leadership, is often expressed in the following oft-heard aphorism. "The Madigas have a low level of morality. They are unsteady in religion and politics. They will not stand by us. They will let us down at a crucial moment. They will not stand together."

It is a well acknowledged historical fact that Catholic Christianity in the sub-continent, especially Catholic missionaries and leadership, have not been emphatic in interrogating the sociological reality of caste in society and the community, unlike their Protestant counterparts. The Madigas do feel deep within them that the

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77 See in this context, Dubey, "Paternalism and Freedom", p.187, for a similar accusation made by the Satnami converts against the foreign colonial missionaries about the missionaries withholding the foreign gifts coming for the natives.

78 See in this context, Felix Wilfred, "Postmodernism and critical theory: Their Implications for Third world societies" - A Paper Presented at the National Seminar on Postmodernism and Critical theory held at the Radhakrishnan Institute of Advanced Study in Philosophy, University of Madras, August 18-20, 1997, p. 14, where the author quotes Hegel's description of Africa as a land of childhood, whose consciousness and spirit is yet underdeveloped and unhistorical and still immersed in the conditions of mere nature. Hegel's attitude to Africa as continent is indicative of Social Darwinism, evolutionism and ethnocentrism. The missionaries in Konaseema seem to display the same traits, in dealing with the Madigas.

79 Social activists and missionaries often bring an array of arguments to prove their point regarding the unsteadiness of the Madiga mind and mood in politics and in life, and their unreliability, as a target group for social action. In my field research, a Catholic Priest and a social activist have complained of the Madigas, not having turned up for Dhamas, which were previously arranged, after much political build-up. This, they experienced as a letdown. Another interlocutor has described to me in detail, how the Madigas, though, a sizeable majority in a particular constituency, in Konaseema, could not see to the victory of their own chosen candidate, a Protestant, son of a Pastor. In all these incidents, they had been bought up by the other castes, the Rajus, as well as the Malas. Perhaps we could explain this phenomenon, from the Gramscian perspective, as an expression of their Contradictory consciousness and their primordial need for survival. Cf. Section III, Chapter-1, subsection entitled “Stories of Resistance and Betrayal: Agency and its Ambivalence”.

Catholic Church was not with them, taking an unambiguous stance, in their journey from coconut shells to coffee cups.\textsuperscript{101}

Catholicism, as stated, has been tolerant of casteism. Though welcoming depressed groups, it has presented itself, by and large, less attractive for the depressed classes, unlike the Protestant mission groups.\textsuperscript{102} The following testimony of a trained catechist in Konaseema, at the early stages of his career in 1970s, brings depth and gives a human geographical contour to this missiological and sociological broad stroke by Forrester. "I was working as a catechist in the Mala villages on other side of Konaseema. When my friend came to stay with me, they recognized my identity and told me off from the village. This happened twice. So I left that area."

In Konaseema, as we have already seen, the Kerala missionaries played the Brahmin/Namboothiri card, whereas the Mala priests, especially in the wake of the Dandora movement, played the Dalit Brahmin, if Uppalaguptam story is any indication. This has hampered the mobility of the Madigas.

The Subversion of the Subaltern Quest for Identity: Symbols of Connivance and Conspiracy of Silence

The Madigas feel let down by the condescending missionary Brahmins, as well as the neo-Brahmins among the Dalit Mala Fathers, who seemingly or for real, connive with the higher castes. "The land given by me for building the chapel in our _petta_ is taken over by the B.C.s. The church- building is occupied by the B.Cs. We tried to protest and reported the matter to the Parish Priest, who is a Mala. We said, 'you are the head - leader of our community. Why not act? We will be behind you'. But no action came."\textsuperscript{103}

Some of the missionaries do feel that unless they themselves, and the Church itself are keeping good relationship with the higher castes, they would not be able to

\textsuperscript{101} Cf. Section II, Chapter-1, the subsection entitled "Untouchable Pastas".

\textsuperscript{102} Cf. Duncan B. Forrester, "The Depressed Classes and Conversion to Christianity", 1860-1960" in Religion in South Asia, p. 69.

\textsuperscript{103} In personal communication with the Madiga elder of Uppidi village, near Uppalaguptam - 21/10/1998.
act for the Dalits. They have to be friendly with the Rajus and the Kapus for sake for the Dalits, for their good. They do not approve of the one-sided approach of certain missionaries, who work for the Dalits, in opposition with the higher castes. But other missionaries, who are social activists, and who are inclined to have a radical option for the empowerment and conscientization of the Dalits, see the approach of seeking favors from the higher castes, as detrimental to the cause of the Dalits on the long run.

The Madigas themselves resent the Catholic missionaries either seemingly or really conniving with the Rajus or the Kapus, or getting closer to them. They are very possessive of their Fathers. Apart from the economic schemes, which led to the fragmentation of the Kesinakurupalem community, and the eventual lapse from faith, of many families, there was another incident, which triggered off the alienation of the Madigas.

One of the Franciscan missionaries was allowing a Raju boy to pillon ride on his motorcycle. This was an outrage on the sensibilities of the Madigas, who interpreted the gesture of the Father, symbolically to mean that the new Father was a ‘man’ of the high castes, and not for them, the Madigas. For the Madigas, who demanded the undivided attention of the missionaries to themselves, the Father’s act of allowing the higher caste boy to ride his motorbike, meant his showering attention more on the higher castes, to the neglect and marginalization of the Madigas.

But there were similar accusations against Fr Joseph Oliapuram himself, of ‘hearing the word of the Rajus of Kommaragiri and taking police action against his own flock, the Madigas.’

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104 In personal communication with Fr Babu George, the parish priest of Kommaragiri – 15/03/1999. He had achieved much for the Madigas of Konneneema by way providing cyclone relief, and building houses for them, using his influence with G.M.C. Balyogi, the erstwhile Speaker of Lok Sabha, the M.P. from the area. But it is heard that Mr Balayogi, though a Malu, was actually being controlled by the higher castes, especially the Kammans and the Kapus.

105 In personal communication with Fr Thomas Pallithanam, social activist and lawyer, Director of PARA – Ravulapalem – 16/12/2001.

106 In personal communication with Fr Joseph Oliapuram – 11/12/2001.

107 In personal communication with Fr Joseph Arjun and the parishioners of Kommaragiri – 16/05/2002.
There is discrimination against the Dalits within the Church’s organizational structures, in recruitment to the clergy and the distribution of positions of power, and in Konaseema, this discrimination is keenly felt by the Madigas. "After nearly fifty years of Catholicism in Konaseema, there is not yet a Madiga priest. There is only one priest candidate, a sister candidate and two trained catechists so far; " this in spite of the fact that Mgr. John Mulagada, the bishop of the diocese of Eluru, wherein Konaseema falls, is himself a Madiga. He is one of the first Dalit Bishops of India, and the very first Dalit bishop of the Catholic Church in Andhra Pradesh.

Discontinuities in the Subaltern Quest for Mobility, Identity and Autonomy

Subaltern Madigas of Konaseema, in their subaltern religious subjectivity and economic agency, opted for Catholicism, as an alternative mode of religiosity. They had hoped that it would be a means of identity assertion and autonomy. Their aspirations for identity and autonomy have only been partially fulfilled. They did find in Catholicism, a religion, which had the willingness and the potential to respond to their subaltern quest for survival. They found in its religious leadership, a source of protection. But this has not taken them far in their search for socio-economic identity, and autonomy. Reasons for this state of affairs, is not far to seek, if the foregoing analysis of the dynamics of the missionary approach could be any proof.

The paternalism, the Brahminical leanings, and the replication of the hierarchical order have led the Catholic religious leadership to mis-read the

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109 In Conversation with the Madiga elders of Kesinakurupalem - 19/05/1998.

110 Cf. Directory of the Diocese of Eluru - 1999, pp. vi - vii. Along with many other aspects of their mobility, like assignment of lands and liberation from discrimination, they recall Indira Gandhi with gratitude, the Dalits in general, and the Madigas of the Catholic Church of Andhra Pradesh, in particular, must be grateful to Indira Gandhi, in also being instrumental in the nomination of Mgr. John Mulagada as the bishop of Eluru. As per the information shared with me by a prelate of the Andhra Church, during Emergency, Indira Gandhi withheld the list of candidates nominated as Bishops, until a Dalit candidate was included in the list. Though the Holy See had cleared the other names, as Indira Gandhi was adamantly holding on to her condition of adding a Dalit to the list, there was delay in the announcement of the list, until bishop John’s name was included. Only then did Indira Gandhi allow the announcement of the list in 1976. Until that time, the other bishops were in pectore, not only of the supreme Pontiff, but also of Indira Gandhi.
subaltern quest and religious subjectivity rooted in the subaltern concerns of political economy and well-being. These had to be met, not by meeting the needs of the subalterns, in times of the natural calamities, which are frequent visitors to Konaseema. Beyond that, the root of the state of endemic hunger, in which the subalterns find themselves had to be addressed, in terms of Sen’s elaboration of the themes of well-being and capability, relating the same to the religious subjectivity of the subalterns, tapping at the matrix of the matter-spirit continuum of subaltern religiosity.

Instead, paternalism of the religious leadership has resulted in the continuity in the earlier dominant order of leadership, the Fathers substituting the landlords and Zamindars, but resulting in discontinuities/dissatisfactions in the order of subaltern quest for socio-economic mobility, in the realm of political economy, as the following gleanings from my fieldwork, indicate. The negation of autonomy, caused by the paternalism of the religious leadership makes the identity achieved by the Madigas, a truncated identity. Until the emergence of the Dandora movement, the journey of the Madigas from contradictory consciousness to critical consciousness had been tardy, as the religious leadership, which was to act as Organic intellectuals, was plying the role of the Traditional intellectuals, preserving the status quo.

**A Standstill Experience in Socio-economic Mobility: Negations in the Order of Political Economy**

The Catholic missionaries in Konaseema, in their Brahminical leanings and dominant constructs of cleanliness, encouraged the Madigas to give up their *kutuvruti*. This was also in view of making their flock, Christianity and more especially Catholicism more acceptable to the higher and cleaner castes.¹¹¹ There is the interplay of Christianization and Sanskritization at work here.¹¹² Of course, many Madigas would have to eventually to give up the *kutuvruti*, in the context of the commercialization of agriculture in Konaseema, with the arrival of the factory-

¹¹¹ In personal communication with Fr Joseph Oliapuram – 11/12/2001. He shared with me with extreme self-gratification that he had been instrumental in the near total eradication of *kutuvruti* in the Madigapeta of Kommaragiri. See in this context Dube, *Paternalism and Freedom*, p. 194, for a very similar attempt by the missionaries in Chhattisgarh.

made chappals, and the phenomenon of globalization. But what the Madigas of Konaseema took pains to convey to me was that if kulavruti meant an identity-marker, as well as a source of livelihood, the Church also had a role in its gradual disappearance.\textsuperscript{113}

How this discussion on the disappearance of kulavruti, and the Church’s instrumentality in it touches off the political economy of subaltern survival in Konaseema is that, of late, even agricultural labour is scarce. That means greater indebtedness, and the Madigas turn to their old Masters, who turn them back to the Fathers, their new Masters. “Now the Rajus taunt us, when we ask for monetary help from them. ‘You have your sangham and your Father. Go to him’. Father tells us “I can give some help but not everything.’ “So we are turned off and abandoned by the higher caste, the state and the Church. We have to fend for ourselves.” Once more, like the Madiga Catholics of Uppalaguptam, at the hands of the Dalit-Brahmin parish priest, the Madigas are feeling alienated by the high caste landlords, the old Masters, the Church and the Fathers, the New Masters, and the State, the Master who cared only on occasions of ‘Emergency’.

**Protective Discrimination and Dual Identity:**
**The Burden of Christianity / Prabhu**

After the Dandhra Movement and the successful accomplishment of the main agenda of the further categorization of the Reservation Pool, into ABCD, the conditions to obtain the justly deserving reservations for the jobs should have become easy for the Madigas. But at the grassroots, obtaining of a caste certificate is almost an ordeal by fire, entailing a loss of work of three to four days, going from the parish priest, and the village inspector, up till the Revenue Divisional Officer, if not the Collector himself.\textsuperscript{114}

My interviews in Peddamadi, Enugapalli, Mummudiavrapadu and other villages have revealed this. “We are Arundhatulu and Jambavulu. For us, to obtain

\textsuperscript{113} In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Kommaragiri Pathapeta – 11/03/1999.

\textsuperscript{114} In personal communication with Apparao, the Madiga elder of Enugapalli – 11/10/1998.
a caste-certificate, it takes the travail of four days, losing our work. To get any benefits from the government, we need the certificate. But the government will not issue it, even if one of our families has become Christian. We have to revert to our Hindu names. But even the Christians are making us go around. "Not only the government but Christianity and the Church are also making us go around. There is nobody to talk on behalf of us against sidelining S.C. Christians. In the Protestant sanghams there is personal contact. Not so in Roman Catholic Mission (RCM)."  

The protective discrimination extended by the State, which they cannot avail of, because their Christian identity puts the Madigas in the dilemma of a dual identity. To add to this, there is also the humiliating experience of internal discrimination meted out to them within the Church. On account of these, they begin to feel the burden of Christianity:

We do not have anybody to lead us forward – to care for us. The Government and its agents make it so difficult for us to obtain a caste certificate. Starting from the V.R.O. to the M.R.O. and beyond to the Minister, everybody is a Mala, who is bent on suppressing us. The Church supports us. The Father helps us. But the entry into Christianity has become a great hindrance – if not a hindrance, but at least not help to us. We do love him (Prabhu) much. But my very name Krupavaram (compassionate grace) has been a hindrance in securing a career. Such is the case with many others. For example, this young boy, standing here has entered into Vettilakari, because he could not secure a caste certificate, to carry on with his education. Getting a caste certificate, for us Madigas, is an ordeal by fire.”

The Church in India has of late recognized its failure to better the economic status of the Dalits, and this has resulted in the campaign for securing reservations for the Christian Dalits, helping them to tide over the dilemma of the dual identity. The plea of the Dalits in Konaseema is an added call to recognize the existence of discrimination on the grounds of caste also within Christianity, which

115 In personal communication with Madiga elders of Munmedivarapaddu – 10/10/1998.
116 In personal communication with Apparao, the Madiga elder of Enugupalli – 11/10/1998.
117 In this context, see Santisree D.N.B. Pandit, “Dilemmas of Identity of Dalit Christians in India: A Case Study from Andhra Pradesh”, Dharma Deepika, December 1997/2, pp. 39 - 48, where the author discusses the circumstances of reconversion from the Dalit groups back to Hinduism.
118 In personal communication with Mr Krubavaram, Adavipet – 05-03-1999.
the dominant Christian discourse, from the security of its Brahminical constructs, tries to explain away. "Christianity has no caste but Christians do have caste."120

Seeing like the Subaltern: Addressing the Issues of the Political Economy of Survival, as Religious Praxis

The Rajus and Kapus of Konaseema taunt the Madigas "Now you have your Father and your sangham. Why come to us?" They do know well that the Madigas will have to return to them, as they are very much in control of the political economy of Konaseema. "The fact that prawn cultivation is fast spreading, does affect our wages and our opportunities for work. Of late, nobody calls us for work. Only 3 - 4 of us are called for farm work. Others have to go as migrant labour as far as West Godavari and beyond to Ongole (Prakasam Dt.), in search of work".121 This information was statistically corroborated by the parish priest. "There are 120 families from here, Kommaragiri, which have migrated to Ongole, in search of work in brick kilns. So too from the sub-stations, like Peddamadi. May be totalling to 400 families – 1200 people. The Reddys pay them well and ask them not to be spendthrifts and to save some money to take with them when they go back home".122

"There is vettičakkiri (bonded labour) in the village. Four or five families are involved in this, not only children but also adults. I do it for 30-40 bags, a year, because I am yet to pay back some loan, which I took years ago."123

"From that village, I have not succeeded in bringing anybody to this boarding. Even when I have given them everything, they all run away."124 These are the words of Fr Thomas Pallithanam in despair over his inability to give the Madiga children of Chivarripuntha, a good English education. But the Madiga elder of the village, Peddaveeraiah had a different way of looking at things. " If my son, our

120 Ibid.

121 In personal communication with the Madigas of Pedamadi – 17/03/1999.

122 In personal communication with Fr Babu George, the parish priest of Kommaragiri – 14/03/1999.

123 In conversation with a Madiga elder of T. Kohipalli – 13/03/1999.

124 In personal communication with Fr Thomas Pallithanam - 15/12/2001.
children are to study, they will study. There is no need of any special effort. And if they won’t study, are not to study, they will not study, however hard you try.  

There seems to be a ‘lack of fit’ between the hermeneutical visions of the Church represented by Fr Thomas and Veeraiah, speaking for the Madigas. Perhaps, Veeraiah’s logic could be that when the political economy of survival is the predominant concern, education is still a distant dream, beyond the Madigas’ reach and the ensuing mobility through it, illusive and remote.  

These snapshots into the very live issues of survival only bring into relief Sen’s insight that endemic hunger, famine, well-being and capability are interrelated issues. Without economic ability, social aspirations cannot be realized. Without human development, autonomy and freedom, economic development cannot take place. In the context of subalterm Konaseema, this theme of the synergy of freedoms and capabilities is not a matter of textual discourse, but of survival, human dignity and mobility. As we have noted, the negative symbolic surplus of caste and the Brahminical constructions of the religious leadership in collusion with the higher castes, seem to negate, rather than enhance the subaltern search for identity, autonomy and critical consciousness.

“Nothing is moving forward or backward. The Church – Prabhu – Father has given us identity. But our prospects remain the same”. This is the assessment of a Madiga elder from T. Kotahpalli, whose testimony on veṭṭiḥākiri, I have just quoted. “We don’t come up because we are not able to. We are looked down upon. We are not monied. We are not landed people. We cannot avail of the loans. We were poor and we are poor. The Fathers looked after us with dignity.” These words are a plea to the Church leadership, to extend dignity to the Madiga once

125 In personal communication with Pedda Veeraiah of Devarapalli Chivarripuntha – 19/10/2000.
126 Jose D. Maliekal, Identity-Consciousness of the Christian Madigas, p. 31.
127 Cf. Section II, Chapter – I entitled “Development as Synergy of Freedoms: A theoretical Prelude to a Subalterm Enquiry into the Political Economy of Konaseema”.
128 In conversation with a Madiga elder of T. Kothapalli – 13/03/1999.
129 In personal communication with Ethakotta Mariamma, Potahvaram – 14/10/1998.
more and to make his/her life-issues its own, for “Life has become too cheap” because wages have become low, prices high, and work scarce. The life of the Madiga and the Dalit has been commodified.

“Now we are still in struggle. At times all alone. Now too, we are being hunted down. I have a piece of land near the Royyala Cheruvu (Prawn farm), owned by a big Raju. He has grabbed all adjoining small plots of land, owned by some people. He is threatening to take over mine also, if I am not going to sell it. He says ‘I will use my influence with G.M.C. Balayogi, to take over your land’. I said ‘that piece of land, given to me by my forefathers is my pride. Come what may, I am not going to part with it. If need be 1972 will be repeated. “We have to fight for our identity”. Though I have quoted the words of Sahibu earlier, in this context, it may be worth repeating, as it includes a plea “Now also we are alone”, as in 1972, when the Madiga rebellion occurred in Adavipeṭa and his father had to go to the jail, following the murder of one the Rajus.

“We are landless. Neither the Church nor the government is coming forward to help us. We are saving the village. The village does not save us. Yet, the sad fact remains that we have no leaders. We have nobody to put us down or to lift us up.” “We are yet to meet some Christians, who are able to lead us, whether they are Pentecostals, Lutherans, Baptists or even Catholic Fathers. The Catholics do not want to build the Church in the pēṭa (Dalit quarters). But they have built a Church in the āru (Caste segment). There is no trek between them and us. So no one goes to the Church.”

Again the pleas and grievances of the Madigas are an indictment of the religious leadership of the Church, which has been very selectively political and

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130 In personal communication with an elderly member of the MahilaMaṇḍalī of Kummaragiri 11/03/1999.
131 In personal communication with Sahibu – Adavīpeṭa - 15/03/1999.
132 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Ambajīpeṭa - 23 – 05 - 1998.
133 In personal communication with Ramudu, the Madiga elder of Mumudivaraṇapu – 10/10/1998.
collectively incompetent, avoiding a radical stance on structural issues related to subaltern survival like minimum wages, human rights, land reforms and unbridled growth of aquaculture. They are calling out to their leaders to become their Organic leaders.

“We have not received any help from the Church as part of the cyclone-relief. Father does not see to our material needs. He is not interested in us. Our Christianity comes on the way to our progress. Now the Kapus are also joining the Church.”

Be it the Protestant missionaries, who opposed caste as an institution within the Church, or the Catholic missionaries, who always tolerated it, in theory and practice, both considered the high caste convert always as a prize-catch, and a precious creature. Here Christianaization, negating hierarchy, and Sanskritization upholding it are made to collapse their borders in the coveted site of the caste conversion. Even in Konaseema, where the Church was a church of the Dalit among the Dalits, the recent entry of the Kapus and a few Rajus is considered as something to be encouraged and valued, to the great chagrin and resentment of the Madigas. The Madigas, as we have seen earlier, are very sensitive to lose their Fathers and their Church to the higher castes, who, they know, though few in number will dominate, once they are given entry.

Apparao’s statement is also a pointer to the practice of the Church, whose help has been often selectively individual oriented or to a group to the exclusion of others. It is also to be noted that the Dalits do not consider help given to individuals and different members of the group, as given to the caste. Other way around, any act of the missionary or the social activist, however small, done to the individual or the group, which enhances or degrades the dignity of the caste, is

Lobo, Visions, Illusions and Dilemmas, p. 254.


Cf. Lobo, Visions, Illusions and Dilemmas, p. 255.
deemed done to the entire caste. In their paternalistic and hegemonic approach, the missionaries have missed out on this dimension of subaltern psyche and approach to identity autonomy.139

Madiga sees the world of Konaseema from the point of view of survival, and political economy, and looks to religious leadership, for providing space for his/her religious subjectivity in his/her quest for autonomy, identity and critical consciousness. The missionaries on the other hand, have presumed the lack of subjecthood in the subalterns, as if they are to be saved, by and through the help and protection extended to them. The preceding analysis of the encounter of the subaltern Madigas and Catholicism has revealed this cleavage between the lived hermeneutics of the subaltern and the missionary.

The contradictory consciousness or the multiple consciousness of the subaltern sees the continuity of the dominant order in the transition from the landlord to the Prabhu-Father-Leader-Protector continuum. But he/she also in his political consciousness is able to gather the discontinuities and the dissatisfactions in the order of survival/political economy. The Madigas are also able to penetrate through the cleavages between the potential of Catholicism for being the catalyst in their struggle for well-being and dignity, and the conscious or sub-conscious Brahminical constructions of the Catholic leadership, which on the ground level, deny them their due share and space in political economy. Continuities in the dominant order are contiguous with the discontinuities in the subaltern political economy of survival, and this takes us to the analysis of the religio-cultural layers of the encounter.

Religio-Cultural Continuities and Discontinuities: Hermeneutical Cleavages of Dominant Religiosity and Religion-in-Society

After having analyzed the continuities/discontinuities/dissatisfactions related to the quest rooted in political economy, we move on to the investigation into the layers of religio-cultural continuities/discontinuities, as manifested in the encounter.

139 In personal communication with Fr Thomas Pallithanum – 15-12-2001.
Given the subaltern logic of the matter-spirit continuum and the divine-human continuum, the power of the Father/Catholicism was felt by the Madigas, not only in the sphere of the material necessities of life, but also in the realm of sickness, health, life and death. These spheres were attributed by them to be under the control of the spirits and goddesses, whose nature and role were ambiguous, with regard to good and evil.

After going over to Catholicism, the Christian god, the Prabhu, brought by the Father is felt to be a source of power, bereft of the ambiguities of the goddesses, who acted benevolent, as well as malevolent. Prabhu was powerful and only benevolent, like the Fathers, who are benevolent. "After the arrival of the Prabhu in the village, we have received freedom from demons and evil spirits and from possession, and from the fear of Erra Nālika (Red Flame). Earlier we used to worship Būrulkulamma and sacrifice chicken to her. Now we don't engage in those practices."

"After Jesus Christ, our Prabhu set foot in our village, there is no more harm from gālibhutalu (malevolent spirits). We used to believe in Dayyalu (devils) and Dēvalalu (goddesses). We used to have the practice of black magic. Now we have abandoned all that. We are RCM. But the Kapus go to the Pentecostals."

"We used to work in the tobacco field for ten annas. We used to worship Durgē mmathalli and kill the sheep for her. We used to buy a new saree and adorn her statue and afterwards wear the saree. My children died after my offer to

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141 Ibid., also the subsection entitled “Hot Coals and Cool Waters: Subaltern Potential of the Hermeneutic Ambivalence of the Goddess”.


143 In personal communication with Apparao of Erugapalli village – 10 - 10 -1998.
Vanapalli. After my husband’s death devil alone was my refuge. Then the Prabhu (Lord Jesus) came. I was baptized in 1979.”

The testimony of the people of Kandalapalem is even more poignant and reflective of the Konaseema situation, where the phenomenon of infant mortality was rampant, the goddess of cholera and the goddess of smallpox, being rather constant visitors:

We were baptized by Fr. Job from Palivela. Eighteen families were baptized. Now there are 60 families. Except four, all are Catholics. Four other families frequent our church, but they are not Catholics. Before Fr. Job baptized us, Fr. Paganus, the Italian missionary used to visit us. He used to give us material help. After him, Fr. Job, Fr. Chucko and Fr. Joseph used to do the same. Especially, when Godavari goes in flood, they come to our help. But we don’t address Godavari as goddess Ganga. We used to have other gods like Sathyamma, Sallalamma, Nakalamma and Kandallamma. But under these goddesses, our children used to fall dead. We used to go for work leaving our children behind, their hair plaits and bedecked with flowers, to see them dead on our return. Not one child but many children. Not once but very often and we used to wonder what to do. We felt helpless. But after the Prabhu set foot in our village, the infant mortality abruptly ended. We don’t know why and how. We believe it is Prabhu’s power and Fathers help. All these young people, now married and with children were born and brought up after the Prabhu entered our village. Prabhu entered means – the Fathers and Sisters used to take care of us, take our children to the hospital, and give us medicine when we were sick. But it is all Prabhu’s power. With Jesus, we have no more fear of children falling dead, as if by magic. Not only that, after Prabhu entered our village, we have gained more courage to demand our rights. We have a new will. Father is God’s man. We will obey whatever he says. His word is God’s word. He is our ‘Thallanthana’ (father and mother).

The constant refrain, which I have heard in all the villages, during the fieldwork, is “We believe in the Prabhu and we have left our old customs. Earlier we believed in other gods.” This is almost an echo of their pre-Catholic refrain “We have no gods.” “We have no gods, except the Prabhu.” It is as if after meeting the Prabhu, he had displaced all other gods and goddesses, and removed the ambiguity, characteristic of subaltern religiosity as well as the ambiguity surrounding the subaltern gods and goddesses. Displacement, and a total discontinuity with the

144 In personal communication with Pothamma of Enugapalli village – 10-10-1998.

145 Cf. Section – II, Chapter 1, the subsection entitled “The Land and its Eco-determinants: Konaseema (Godavari) in Subaltern Memory”.

146 In personal conversation with the elderly Madiga womenfolk of Kandalapalem – 12-10-1998.

147 In personal communication with Mahalakshmi, the village elder, Bhavnipeja – 18/03/1999.


149 Cf. Eaton, Islam and the Bengal Frontier, pp. 281- 290. “A third dimension of the Islamization process – the displacement of Bengali superhuman agencies from the local cosmology and their replacement by Islamic ones - is clearly visible in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries.
past, seem to be the only key to understand the post-conversion existence of the Catholic Madigas of Konaseema.

**Prabhu – Goddesses in Continuum: The Idiom of Inclusion**

To state that displacement is the only key, to understand Madiga Catholicism is only part of the truth. This became evident to me, from other layers of the Madiga Catholic religiosity in vogue in Konaseema. There is an element of continuity also to the Madiga Catholicism in Konaseema. It is indeed true that the people felt the power of the Prabhu, through the Fathers and the Sisters, who used to bring them his powerful healing touch, through the modern ‘English’ medicine, offsetting the anger of the goddess smallpox and goddess cholera. But these gods and goddesses were not totally erased from the texture of the lives of the Madigas, if the following scene which took place during my field interviews, is any indication.

I was asking the Madiga elders about their gods and goddesses. After enumerating their pre-conversion gods and goddesses, they were vouching to me that those customs and goddesses were a thing of the past. Towards the end of the conversation, the old beggar lady, Chettubalji by caste, who was avidly listening to the conversation, came out with her very pragmatic, but perhaps more true to life picture of the role of the Prabhu and the other gods and goddesses.

She started by narrating the story of Arundhati, who is shining in the sky as a star and whom everybody, high or low has to salute on the day of the marriage. She also narrated the story of Ėranamma (decorated dog), which used to be brought on the day of the naming ceremony of the child and kept under the cot. This veneration of Ėranamma was in view of invoking the protection of the goddess, so that the dogs would not attack the children. For a male child, a bitch used to be brought to the room and for a female child a dog. Ėranamma used to be given rice before everybody else. Pōlamma used to be worshiped as the polameru (village border) when waves of Islamic reform movements such as Farā’izi and the Tariquah-i Muhammadiyah swept over Bengali countryside. These movements aimed to strip from Bengali Islam all the indigenous beliefs and practices to which folk communities had been accommodated, and to instill among them an exclusive commitment to Allah and the Prophet Muhammad.” – pp. 281–82.
goddess during the months when chicken pox used to strike the village. She
concluded the narration with this observation, “Yesuprabhu is god. He has to be
there to lead others, including Mariammatalli (Mother Mary). But all the rest are
also required”. The Catholic Madigas did not disagree with her scheme of
inclusive sacred pantheon.

This scene, which occurred in Kommaragiri, the main parish of Island
Polavaram, and in fact, the flagship of Konaseema Madiga Catholicism, is a
window to the religio-cultural continuity existentially lived out by the Catholic
Madigas of Konaseema.

Satayanadam, the catechist of Linepeta, whose firmness in faith is
acknowledged by all, recalls their pre-Catholic past, in disparaging and self-
condemning words; “Edhō cheppakō putpakō mrokkēvaramu mēnu” (We used to bow
to/ worship all and sundry tree and anthill). 151

The self-deprecatory tone in which the Madigas of Konaseema recall their
‘pagan’ past is symptomatic of the repression of the Madiga religiosity and
symbolism, which the missionaries have tried to achieve through the
superimposition of a dominant mode of religiosity, in the name of Catholicism, the
true religion. It is symbolic of the idiom of discontinuity with the former
religiosity, 152 which the Catholic missionaries, as well as the Protestants and the
Pentecostals, before them, tried to evoke in the lives of the people. 153

150 In conversation with Madiga elders of Kommaragiri and Krishnamma, the Chettubalji beggar –
11/03/1999.

151 In personal communication with Satayanadam, the catechist of Linepeta – 17/05/1998.

152 Cf. Felix Wilfred, Christianity in Polytheistic Mould, p. 78.

153 In Konaseema, where Catholicism is not on virgin soil but has only reared what Protestantism has
planted, Jesus as the Prabhu is the focal point of faith. The usual Catholic trappings of sacramentals
and the saints are not much on the horizon and in the texture of faith-life. For example, the
confessions made by the faithful, though made to the priest, looked as if they were made to the
Prabhu straight. There was no inventory of sins but just a confession of sorrow and asking for
forgiveness. It looked to me that the confessions were more Protestant in style than Catholic. I also
noticed the custom of collection after the Mass or prayer service. It was over and above the small
offerings made at the Mass. Another interesting phenomenon was the popularity of prayer meetings
over the Mass. The Catholic grafting seems to be the equation of Prabhu with the Father (Priest), and
subsequently with the Church. God, the Father is hardly heard of. So too Mary, except for her annual
In spite of the repression of the pre-Catholic religiosity and the symbolism and the assertion of Prabhu (Lord Jesus) as the true God, in actual practice, the Prabhu stands in a continuum, along with the other gods and especially goddesses. True to the subaltern logic of matter-spirit continuum, and the appropriation and deployment of the dominant goddesses at the workplace, the Prabhu, Mary and the other gods and goddesses are in a hierarchized continuum, as envisaged by the Chettubalji beggar woman and given the nod of approval by Yesudas and his fellow-Madiga elders.

The nod of approval of Yesudas had his own experience to support it. "When I was suffering from chicken pox, my mother used to bring bundles of grass offered to the Amma, along with flowers and saffron. When I took my child to the Muslim bhūtavaidyuṭu (spirit healer), he told me to crush lemons on the way and gave me a string, which was blessed by him. It had healing power. All this goes together with Yēsuprabhu."\(^{155}\)

Approaching Bhūtavaidyuṭu (spirit healer) is rather common practice, whether it is tolerated as medicinal practice, or condemned as magic.\(^{156}\) Many of the Madigas, though covertly have recourse to the spirit healers, as an alternative medicinal practice, overtly they deny it, for fear of condemnation by the religious leadership or the fellow-Catholic Madigas.

festival at Yanam. The Holy spirit is mentioned as the god projected by the Pentecostals and as the healer helper of Prabhu.

\(^{154}\) Cf. Section III – Chapter – 4, subsection entitled "Transitory Fraternity and Solidarity of Incommensurable Identities: The Operative Praxis of Ritualized and Hegemonic Communitas".

\(^{155}\) In personal communication with Yesudas, the Madiga elder of Kommaragiri – 11-03-1999.

Apart from approaching the spirit healers for medicinal purposes, it is rumored that some Madigas had recourse to what they believed to be black magic itself, to settle scores with a former parish priest, whom they believed, had been acting in a partisan way. The concerned parish priest himself believed as much, that he had become sick, on account of the black magic performed on him.  

Satyanadadam, who recalled to me the past of the Madigas under the spell of evil spirits and false worship of stocks and stones, himself admitted that, "There is definitely the phenomenon of the criss-crossing of religions. In my view, 60% of our Catholic families engage themselves in these practices. It is quiet natural to them, though the Parish Priest insists from time to time that the Catholics give up all the old ways. Those who engage themselves in these practices, interpret the biblical quotation 'What is due to God to God and what is due to Caesar to Caesar' (Lk.20:24). They make use of this interpretation to say that both the Prabhu as well as the other gods and spirits must be attended to."  

The fieldwork and interviews in the villages of Kesinakurupalem, Peddamadi, Adivipeta, T. Kothapalli and Bhavanipeta did reveal the import and the truth of Satyandaam’s statement. Sizeable number of families do engage themselves in ‘old practices’, an indication of the strong religio-cultural continuity among the Madigas between their pre-encounter and post-encounter days.

Satyanadadam further corroborated his assertion regarding the lapse of his fellow- Madigas into the ‘old practices’ by stating that, "Sixty percent of our

157 In personal communication with Fr Joseph Arjun, the parish priest of Kommuragiri - 16/05/2002.

158 In personal communication with Satyanadadam - catechist of Linepet - 17-03-1999. Some of the ‘old practices’ as engaged in by the Madigas and as described to me by Satyanadam are: 1) Draiti – hair as well time or similar objects, on which spells have been uttered are thrown in the fire or on the road. This is to avert the evil eye. There are many other similar practices, which are geared towards propitiating the spirits. 2) Annam-muggu: Mixture of cooked rice and saffron powder offered as Naivedyam (offering), together with the flowers to propitiate the goddesses, to be healed of small pox and other maladies. 3) Kinginillu - the votive offering made to the goddess under the same name. 4) Talisman, over which spells have been uttered, fastened to the wrist or worn as amulets. The practice of fixing the mukhurtam for the marriage, as per their former custom is widespread, as indicated by the following testimony by the elders of Pulletikurru. "There is no custom of menarikam (maternal uncle marrying the niece) among us. We have the custom of looking for mukhurtam for our functions. For this we go to a Siddhanty (Hindu cultural designation for the astrologer, who fixes the auspicious and inauspicious dates and times). Our former Parish priest also used to know the art of fixing the mukhurtam." - In conversation with the Madiga elders of Pulletikurru - 22/05/1998.
Catholics continue with the old practices. After the *tūphan* (cyclone), the *gūṭh* (church) is *khali* (empty). Satyanadam was referring to the fact that many people had congregated in the Church, immediately following the devastating cyclone of 1996, when, the young and dynamic parish priest Fr Babu George had been building houses for the people. Fr Babu George had some clout with the late Lok Sabha speaker, Mr. G.M.C. Balayogi, who was the M.P. from the area. The attendance had become thinner, as the frenzy of house building was over. It was the time, that I had just started my fieldwork in the area. Fr Babu George took me to Linepēta, the hamlet of Mr Satyanadam, and it was the first village, where I started my live-in experience.

From the viewpoint of dominant religiosity, this phenomenon of the cultural continuity may be termed as syncretism. Very often subaltern spirituality has been accused of being syncretic. This is often an outsider’s view, especially, from the point of view of those of the dominant sections, who wield doctrinal and liturgical authority. But this accusation seems to be the result of the hidden, but ever-operative dominant logic, which runs like this: “When we are in control, it is inculturation. When they do it, it is syncretism.” From the point of view of a subaltern hermeneutic of religiosity, we have to go beyond even Schreiter’s rather evolutionistic and accommodating view of syncretism, as cited in the note above. In the subaltern context of continuity in religiosity, and the subaltern’s option for an

159 In personal communication with Satyanadam, the catechist from Linepēta – 22/03/1999.

160 Cf. Dick Koonman, “Change of Religion as a Way to Survival”, pp. 167 - 80, for a description of similar situation in South Travancore, where the *Shanaars* and *Pulevas* were shifting their allegiance between the L.M.S. missions and their former religion, during the famines and the epidemic, and following them.

161 In this context see Carl F. Starkloft, “The Problem of Syncretism in the Search for Inculturation” in *Mission*, 1994/1, pp. 75 – 94, for the theoretical nuances of the problematic and an autobiographical narration by the author of his journey with the Amerindian communities of the Northern Arapahos and the Wind River Shoshones, in their own journey towards inculturation of worship, under what the author names as the positive aspects of syncretism. The author is attempting to offset the pejorative connotation, the term syncretism, has come to acquire in Christian theology. For an analysis of the symbolic mechanics of syncretism, see Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local theologies* (New York: Orbis, 1985), pp. 144 – 159. According to Schreiter, syncretism is a temporary phenomenon in a gradual process, and thus should not be seen as a lapidary condition in a culture, in the meeting of the symbolic systems that religions are. As I shall state below, I am at variance with this accommodating view of syncretism, presented by Schreiter.

alternative religiosity, syncretism is a mode of expressing his/her quest for survival.\footnote{In this context see Note 169 of chapter 3 of this section, where I quote Christian Parker on syncretism, in relation to his hermeneutical understanding of popular religiosity of Latin America.}

Standing in the shoes of the subalterns, the key to understand this phenomenon is to be sought in political economy, especially given the concrete situation of the socio-economic standstill of the Madigas. They are in search for power, whichever be its source. The capacity of Catholicism, to lend itself to integrate different cultural elements, had been intuited by the Madigas, as we have already noted in the case of the Madigas of Pullettkurru.\footnote{Cf. Leonardo Boff, \textit{Church, Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church} (New York: Crossroad, 1985), pp. 89 – 107.}

Here the heuristic key of \textit{inclusion}, as provided by Richard Eaton, in the context of the political economy of the simultaneous advance of Islam and the frontiers of agriculture into East Bengal, throw light on the situation of the religio-cultural continuity of the Madigas. The co-existence and acceptance of the Islamic superhuman agencies, alongside the already existing local divinities, was at the service of the political economy of clearing the forest, braving the Bengal tiger and the vagaries of nature. In the process of the advance of civilization, and agriculture, power was welcome, from Islam’s holy men or from the indigenous divinities.\footnote{Cf. Richard Eaton, \textit{Islam and the Bengal Frontier}, pp. 270 – 75.} That cultural continuity and inclusion as idioms of approach to religion is there to stay, and can at best be tolerated, and not erased out, was driven home by the insightful observation of the Madiga elders of Vadapalem. "We don’t worship other gods. Neither do we go to their temples. Even if some go, that practice will be changed by time, not by religion."\footnote{In conversation with the Madiga elders of Vadapalem - 22/05/1998.}

Standing within the subaltern religious matrix of the matter-spirit continuum, the relationship of the Madigas to religion and deities, concern itself, not with a life after death and the heavenly abode, but rather life before death.\footnote{Cf. Felix Wilfred, "Christianity in Polytheistic Mould", p. 75.}
Yet, the Madiga Catholicism in Konaseema, which shows signs of cultural continuity with the pre-conversion Madiga subaltern religiosity, is not very vibrant in reworking and reinterpreting its new religiosity, in the mould of earlier religiosity, as we see has happened with Catholicism in other parts of South India, like for example in Southern Tamilnadu. In Konaseema, the hermeneutical key of inclusion and continuity is in admixture with the key of displacement, and discontinuity. The Madiga Catholicism of Konaseema is woven with the twin-strands of the idioms of political economy and the economy (parsimony) of sacred hierarchy, in the texture of inclusion and displacement.

By economy or parsimony of sacred hierarchy, I mean the sparseness of the sacred hierarchy in Konaseema Catholicism. They have on the one hand, repressed the Madiga symbolic heritage and the appropriation of Hindu pantheon, at the behest of the missionaries. This repression of their symbolic heritage by religious leadership has been interiorized by the Madigas, as a sign of their break with the past, and as a mark of difference with the 'pagan' Madigas, as an identity marker. On the other hand, in the post-conversion religious praxis, they have limited the appropriation of the Catholic pantheon to Prabhu, and very thinly to Mother Mary. The predominant idiom at work in Konaseema Madiga Catholicism, in relation to sacred hierarchy seems to be displacement and discontinuity. But it stands to gain in vibrancy and rootedness, by tilting the balance towards inclusion and continuity, by means of a recovery and integration of the Madiga symbolic heritage, and a greater appropriation of the Christian symbolic universe.

Conclusion

In the encounter of the Konaseema Madigas with Catholicism, we observe the idioms of continuity and discontinuity. At the level of political economy, there has been continuity at the level of the dominant order, but discontinuity, as regards the primordial subaltern aspirations for survival, and the quest for identity, autonomy and critical consciousness. These discontinuities are expressed in the form of dissatisfactions or frustrations of subaltern economic agency, entwined with

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168 Ibid., pp. 68 – 71.

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religious subjectivity, which opted for, and invited its entry in Konaseema. The Madigas feel converted and protected, but not uplifted. Their situation is akin to those of the Paravas of the Pearl Fishery Coast, who opted for the Portuguese protection, became Catholics but not given identity, and much less autonomy.\textsuperscript{169} The Kartha Bhajas of Krishnagar in Bengal, who are called ‘Rice Christians’, found pity as also money and rice, with the missionaries, but not the enhancement of their autonomy.\textsuperscript{170} The situation of the Madigas of Konaseema after their encounter with Catholicism is not much different from the “Rice Christians” of Bengal. After their encounter with Catholicism, find themselves in an economic standstill, with a truncated identity, and a fractious autonomy.\textsuperscript{171}

The reason for this state of dissatisfaction is that the missionaries, who took on the role of their new masters, in the place of their former landlords lacked respect for the subaltern economic agency of the Madigas expressed in their conversion. Dignity, which is the key to autonomy, identity, freedom and development, has not been meted out to them. The paternalistic protectionism of the Catholic Fathers, which the Madigas do/did enjoy in their contradictory consciousness, was in fact a cover-up for the lack of empathic and grounded insight of the Church into the political economy, inscribing their struggle for survival, and a praxis, which should have flowed from that insight.

At the religio-cultural layer of the encounter between Catholicism and the Madigas, as we have seen, the binaries of continuity/inclusion and discontinuity/displacement are at work. There has been a tendency to repress the religio-cultural resources of the Pre-Catholic days, and a tendency on the part of the Madigas, to interiorized that symbolic repression, as a tool of identity assertion. But the idiom of inclusion/continuity is also at play, giving rise to the celebration of many a symbolic residue. A creative tapping of the Catholic potential to engage itself in creative

\textsuperscript{169} Cf. Forrester, The Depressed Classes and the Conversion to Christianity, pp. 80-81.

\textsuperscript{170} Cf. Ibid., pp. 88-89.

adaptation with different cultures, in our case with the Madiga religio-cultural resources will go a long way in invigorating Konaseema Madiga Catholicism. This will help towards the integration of the symbolic residues, like Jambavudu and Matangi in the texture of Madiga subaltern religious subjectivity, so as to transform these religio-cultural resources into tools of empowerment and emancipation.

As I stated, at the root of the lack of convergence between the missionary intentions and the aspirations of the subaltern flock, is the hermeneutical cleavage between the worldviews and praxis of the Fathers and the people. In the opting for Catholicism by Madigas and the missionary’s attempt to impart the good news of Catholicism to the Madigas, they seemed to be making a tunnel, digging from both ends of the mountain, without meeting one another. What resulted were two separate tunnels. This parallel-tunnel syndrome, occurs due to the dominant logic of religiosity, marked by the polarities of temporality and spirituality, sacred and the secular, operative in the missionary praxis of the Christianization of the Madigas. The alternative could be in the immersion of the religious leadership into the subaltern praxis of everydayness and the transcendence at play in the subaltern struggle for survival.

As stated earlier, the signposts for the onward journey of Konaseema Catholicism, emerging from an alternative hermeneutic of subaltern religiosity will be delineated in the final and third chapter of this section. Prior to that, in the next section, we shall engage ourselves in a hermeneutic of the encounter between the Madigas and Catholicism, in terms of the layers of continuities and discontinuities unearthed in this section, especially with a view to unearthing the contradictions that are at play in the encounter.

172 Cf. Eaton, Islam and the Bengal Frontier, p. 267. Eaton uses the term ‘Creative Adaptation’ to connote the creative and dynamic ways in which the Islamic and Bengali worldviews and cosmologies were fused, where amidst the socio-economic changes taking place in the pre-modern Bengal, Islam creatively evolved itself into an ideology of world construction. What is still important is that for Eaton, Creative Adaptation implies the creative role played by those undergoing it, as opposed to the role of the “missionaries” or their agencies.

173 Cf. Felix Wilfred, Christianity in Polytheistic mould, p. 78.

Chapter 2

Towards a Hermeneutic of the Encounter:
Emerging Contradictions, Fractious Identity, and Truncated Autonomy of the Madigas

Introduction

In the preceding chapter of this section, we have made the transition from the investigation into the inventory of the religious consciousness of the Madigas to their encounter with Catholicism. In this process, we have traced out the itinerary of the continuities and discontinuities between the pre-encounter and the post-encounter phases, in the spheres of political economy, religion and culture. At the level of political economy, there has been continuity at the level of the dominant order, but discontinuity, as regards the primordial subaltern aspirations for survival, and the quest for identity, autonomy and critical consciousness.

These discontinuities in the sphere of political economy find expression in the form of dissatisfactions or frustrations in the areas of economic agency and religious subjectivity. At the religio-cultural layer of the encounter too, the binaries of continuity/inclusion and discontinuity/displacement are at work. As we have noted in the preceding chapter, the encounter manifests a hermeneutical cleavage between the worldviews and praxis of the missionaries and the Madigas. This cleavage, through the continuities and discontinuities, gives rise to certain contradictions in the praxis of Catholicism and religiosity in the context of the vicissitudes of the political economy of Konaseema.

This chapter intends to bring out these contradictions, thrown up in the encounter, under the thematic of dominant superimpositions of the orderings of time and space, amnesia on the part of the Church leadership of the subaltern political economy of survival, and the inability of the Church to be an effective catalyst in the strivings of the Madigas towards identity, autonomy and critical consciousness.
Methodological Inspirations

As in the earlier sections, this section on the hermeneutics of the encounter too has its specific methodological inspirations and heuristic thrusts, which can be delineated under the following headings.

Representation of Religious Insurgency: Mutual Embeddedness of Resistance and Transcendence

Rustom Bharucha in his work, The Question of Faith\(^1\) has decried the low priority given to representations of faith in theories of oppression and resistance, as well as the inadequacy of the language of the social sciences in dealing with the contradictions of faith. He extends this critique also to Subaltern Studies, which is considered, by and large, as one of the most radical and significant historiographical interventions in the recent years. His contention is that the subaltern historians, in their writings, have polarized the worldly and otherworldly consciousness as descriptive of the divide between secularism and religion. In other words, as Ranajit Guha admitted, it looks as if the historian is unable to "conceptualize insurgent mentality" outside of "an unadulterated secularism."\(^2\)

Barucha is also apprehensive about the emerging shifts in the attitude of the younger historians to religious consciousness. His fear is that these new formulations would lead to an instrumentalist reading of religion, which is described as a mere adjunct to political activity. On the contrary, his hope is that the attempts at a new formulation of religious consciousness by younger historians would enable recognition of experiential contexts of religion providing new possibilities of representing 'resistance' and 'transcendence'.\(^3\)

As the foregoing sections of this thesis would have revealed, our enquiry has been precisely about bringing into relief, the mutual embeddedness of resistance and transcendence, in the subaltern context of the Madiga religious subjectivity.

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1 Rustom Bharucha, The Question of Faith, Tract for the Times, no.3 (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993).
3 Cf. Ibid.
Especially in this chapter on the hermeneutics of the encounter of the Madigas with Catholicism, the programmatic agenda proposed by Barucha, of analyzing religious consciousness without polarizing resistance and transcendence, can be of immense methodological inspiration and of far-reaching heuristic import.

Barucha’s call for a non-disjuncted approach to resistance and transcendence in the social sciences has special relevance as regards Christian mission, in the subaltern context.

**Social Engagement and Locatedness of Christian Mission**

Another methodological key in the hermeneutic of the encounter of Catholicism and the Madigas is the social engagement of Christian mission. Mission is conditioned by the societal changes taking place around it, and in turn, mission does trigger socio-economic and cultural changes, in its field of influence. This follows the sociological principle that any innovation in the religious field of a given society, perceptible or otherwise, leads to changes, which overflow into other fields as well. This is necessarily so for at least two reasons.⁴

The first reason has to do with the carriers of the mission or the gospel. The mission or the gospel, which is proclaimed, contrary to the dominant construction of mission, is already part of a history, and are embodied in the concrete social forces and historical circumstances. It always carries the ideological overtones of the carriers of the message or mission. Political and economic interests, cultural prejudices and the way the society is conceived by the carriers of the gospel are all part of the social engagement or embodiment of the gospel. The mission has often been carried out according to the moulds and models, imported from another culture and reality, causing great damage to the local people and the reality of the mission itself.⁵

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⁵ Cf. Ibid., pp. 136-38.
The second reason is that the mission always affects the lifestyle of those to whom it is directed. It always brings about new identities and distinctions in the society. The emergence of new identities in the social environment produces reaction from the other members of the society, who have not taken on the new identity. Any new thought is critical of the existing tradition, and challenges the images and forms of the distribution of power. It gives rise to new questions and questions old answers. The way these questions created by the mission are responded to, in theory and practice by the society at large, are decisive for understanding and interpreting the concrete and real social “engagement” that the gospel has evoked in a particular society.⁶

This is precisely because “Societies are not a coherent unity that function in this way or that way, but complex realities of confronting powers, dynamic living spaces where people share, struggle, submit or dominate, according to particular circumstances, traditions, symbols and culture, physical and natural environments, creating different social configurations, as they solve or not, their living conditions.”⁷

Christians believe that the incarnate Word of God transcends any human condition. But paradoxically, this incarnate word of God can be known and expressed only in a particular human setting, and particular human context. The communication of the transcending presence of God/Word can only take place in a narrowly located human experience, coloured as it is with all its bias and limitations. This is even truer of the gospel in a transcultural setting. The coincidence of the liberating proclamation of the gospel and the conquest of the peoples and the harm done to the various dimensions of their cultures in most of the former colonies is a dramatic example of this.⁸

If the Christian gospel becomes incarnate, in its locatedness, in the subaltern context, this locatedness has much to do with the labouring bodies of the subalterns.

⁶ Cf. Ibid., 136 – 37.
⁷ Ibid., p. 139.
⁸ Cf. Ibid., p. 139.
As we have noted in the core section of the thesis on religious consciousness of the Madiga, the first moment of the ritual continuum is the ritual of his/her daily labour. This brings us once more to the Foucauldian themes of the embodiment and the related theme of desire.

**Genealogy of Power as Embodied Agency and Counter-memory as a Resource of Resistance**

In Foucault's thought, genealogy as a tool of historiography is concerned primarily with power and bodies. The emphasis on the body as the object of discipline and control gives Foucault's genealogical studies of punishment their distinctive character. In fact for Foucault, the Cartesian disjunction between souls and bodies, and philosophical absolutism, characteristic of Classical period divides it from the Modern period. As per Foucault's reading, the point of entry to the Modern period was provided by the French Revolution. The Modern period has witnessed the cementing of souls back to our bodies. It also saw the breaking of discourse with representation to enter bodies themselves, leading to the constitution, individuation, and normalization of bodies, and the valorization of the action of the incarnate souls, in the interests of society.

Here the body is seen as passive, as an object and space of punishment, as physical engraving of memory. But Foucault also conceives body to be capable of a counter memory, as a resource of resistance to the institutional subjugation brought about in the spaces and situations like the Panopticon. The embodied subjects of Foucault are individuated, and Foucault's genealogy of power exercised by and upon embodied beings has the potential of contributing towards sociology of action. Yet Foucault's embodied and individuated beings, capable of counter memory and critical weapons of resistance, is devoid of a positive libidinal driving

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force, as admitted by Foucault himself. This lack, as Foucault himself suggests can be supplemented by the positive force of 'desire', as developed by Deleuze. For Deleuze, body is the surface of intersection between libidinal forces, on the one hand, and external social forces on the other. It is the interplay of these forces, which bestows on the body, its shape and its specific qualities.\textsuperscript{13}

These Foucauldian themes of the body and counter-memory have their relevance, in our forthcoming hermeneutical probe into the themes of the superimposition of the dominant orderings of space and time, amnesia of political economy of subaltern survival and the identity assertion of the Madigas.

Gramsci and Foucault in Creative Engagement: A Hermeneutical Key to the Coherence and Contradictions in the Praxis of New Social Movements

In the context of our probe into the contradictions latent in the encounter of Madigas and Catholicism, a creative dialogue between the Gramscian thematic of hegemony, interpreted as articulation and the Foucauldian notion of the 'social', as the field of discusivity, in which all social practices articulate with one another, can be hermeneutically enriching.\textsuperscript{14} Articulation as a social scientific construct refers to any practice that establishes relations among elements such that their identities are modified in the articulatory practice.\textsuperscript{15}

Foucault's proposition that in the modern context, power is not merely repressive, but also productive, has potential in analyzing and critiquing the dynamics of the development apparatus and movements, especially new social movements. The notion of productive power allows us to view power as practices that constitute subjectivities, rather than simply as practices of denial and suppression. Power is the cluster of practices that cultivate desires and motivations

\textsuperscript{13} Cf. \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 76-77.

\textsuperscript{14} Cf. Sangeeta Kamat, \textit{Development Hegemony: NGOs and the State in India} (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 35. For the insights in the following section on the creative engagement of Foucault and Gramsci in the study of development agencies and new social movements. I am indebted to Sangeeta Kamat, \textit{Ibid.}, especially pp. 30 - 45.

\textsuperscript{15} Cf.\textit{Ibid.}, p. 44. For a treatment of hegemony from the neo-Gramscian and post-modern perspective, see Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, \textit{Hegemony and Social Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics} (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 1-5.
that both empower, as well as discipline individuals and groups. This perspective gives power a new positivity, previously lacking in the discourse of power. Such an approach to power emphasizes the contradictory character of power in modern society, and provides insights into the processes by which hegemony is established over diverse social classes and articulations.\textsuperscript{16}

As Kamat states, the deployment of Foucault, in creative engagement with Gramsci is towards an interpretative cultural critique of the actors in the social movements. Following the anthropological tradition of cultural critique, the intention is to interpretatively foreground the complex roles of ideological or cultural systems of belief, in relation to a system of political economy. The strategy is to trace the often hidden links between local routine relations among actors to larger political-economic processes. The intention is to interpret the local relations of power at the micro-level, in relation to the dominant political economy, and the ways in which they mutually constitute one another.\textsuperscript{17}

These methodological nuances do find echo in the thrust of our own thesis, and more concretely, in the concerns of this specific chapter, which deals with the hermeneutic of the encounter between the Madigas and Catholicism, with its developmental concerns. They have special significance also to our attempt to interpret Catholicism in Konaseema, as an agency, which strives for the empowerment of the subalterns, through the mediation of social movements, which we intend doing in the next chapter of this section.

Of special significance is the last of the methodological pointers given by Foucault for the study of power,\textsuperscript{18} and quoted by Kamat, "A final methodological suggestion is to study the local mechanisms of power for the ways in which they are 'invested, colonized, utilized, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended etc., by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination'."\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{16} Cf. Sangeeta Kamat, \textit{Development Hegemony}, p. 36.

\textsuperscript{17} Cf. \textit{Ibid.}, p. 42.


\textsuperscript{19} Cf. Sangeeta Kamat, \textit{Development Hegemony}, p. 43.
The methodological lead given by Kamat revolves around the coherence and contradiction between the discourses of the organization under study by her and the larger discourses operative in the region, such as the subaltern historiography, and the development discourse. The effort is directed towards an analysis of the dominant discursive and material practices which impinge upon and operate within the grassroots organizations. It also takes into account of the strategies and tactics employed by the grassroots activists and intellectuals of the organizations, and historically locates them in the context of the traditions of resistance and struggle in the region. The methodology involves the critique of the dialectic between the two levels, the dominant and the grassroots, the micro and the macro. It is directed towards finding out the ways in which the subaltern resistance is suppressed or even domesticated by the dominant, as well as subverted from within by the intellectuals and activists, by their practices and orientations, which supports the status quo. In Gramscian perspective, it is about their failure to play the organic intellectuals, instead of the traditional intellectuals.\(^{20}\)

This methodological lead given by Kamat has direct relevance for us, as we hermeneutically look into the possible contradictions, which are latent in the encounter between Catholicism and the Konaseema Madigas. More concretely, it is the encounter between the missionaries and the Madigas, who are subalterns, in search of identity, autonomy and well-being. In the next sub-section, in three different layers, we undertake this task of critically interpreting the encounter between the missionaries and the Konaseema Madigas, with an eye to the latent contradictions in the encounter.

Towards a Hermeneutics of the Encounter

In the intertwining of the layers of the continuities and discontinuities that go to make up the texture of the encounter between the Madigas and Catholicism in Konaseema, there is the hermeneutical cleavage between the worldviews and praxis of the missionaries and the Madigas. This gives rise to certain contradictions, arising from the absence of the immersion of the Catholic religious leadership into the

\(^{20}\) Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 43-44.
hermeneutics and the praxis of the Madigas, in the areas of identity politics, religious subjectivity, well-being, and idea of sacredness as located in the political economy of survival.

Dominant Superimpositions of Orderings of Time and Space

"Earlier we used to carry our dead to the burial place on a frame, made of wooden pieces tied together. Now after the advent of Roman Catholic Mission (RCM), we bury our dead in coffins."\(^{21}\) These were the words of Apparaao of Yenugupalle uttered with pride to me, indicating the new identity and status gained by them after their entry into Catholicism. That coffin was indeed a symbol of burial with dignity and more than that, of newfound identity assertive, was brought home to me when he communicated to me his next utterance, which resonated with a deeper autobiographical echo. "When my mother was buried, she was taken to the banks of Godavari, without a coffin because Kapus threatened us."\(^{22}\)

For the Kapus, allowing the Madigas to have any other form of burial, than the usual one, was an infringement on the ritualized order of caste hierarchy and order prevalent in the village, symbolically expressed through the spatialization of death and burial. The Madigas had no place of burial. They had to bury their dead on the Godavari, and the Godavari used to carry them off when she was in spate.\(^{23}\) Coffin was indeed a new spatiality, indicating a new order of freedom and dignity, which interrogated the existing order of hierarchy, wherein the landlords had ritualized control over the time and space of the untouchable Madigas.\(^{24}\)

\(^{21}\) In personal communication with Apparaao, the Madiga elder of Enugapalli – 11/10/1998.

\(^{22}\) Ibid.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.

\(^{24}\) Cf. Section III – note 15 of Chapter 3, subsection entitled "Mātangi: A Symbol of Subaltern Resistance and Assertion in the Socio-economic Space", where I quote Gopal Guru, who communicates the point that the Dalits in India are not in control of their time and space. Their definitions of time and space are still dictated by the idioms of necessity imposed upon them by the higher castes, and not defined by their own choice.
In life and death, their untouchability had to be driven home to them, through the spatialities associated with death and burial. For the Madigas of Konaseema, coffin and the new mode of burial in Catholicism, had become a new inscription in the texture of their Thirdspace. Now Catholicism was indeed offering them a new symbolic order, through which they could assert their dignity and identity.

If coffin in Enugapalli was a spatial window to the newfound identity and dignity of the Catholic Madigas of Yenugaplle, the Madigas of the Chivarripuntha of Devarapalli had a different story to narrate about the spatialities of death and burial after their entry into Catholicism:

When we call the parish priest to officiate at our burial, he sends us the catechist. What is the priest for, if not to assist us at our rituals of birth, marriage, death and burial? If somebody dies, and we send word, the Father will curtly send the messenger away. “Go and pray and bury the body yourself.” And he sends the catechist. Even if Father appears on the scene, he will hold the ceremonies only in the church, not where the body is laid out, in our home, where the food is offered to the dead. Recently two deaths occurred, both of them tragic, and he never turned up. When any one among the Protestants dies, the Protestant pastor comes and holds the ceremonies. They prepare a plain and proper coffin, with paper decorations and the cross. We Catholics have nothing. What are we Catholics for, if the sangham cannot bury us in a coffin, with a proper cross? And in case of emergency, it should meet at least half our expenses, which we can pay back afterwards. We have one God, one worship and one sangham. So far, we have not allowed any Protestant pastor to set foot in our colony, though they serve their flock much better. But we are deeply aggrieved over the fact that our Fathers do not treat us kindly. They do not care for our needs, especially during our moments of sorrow. It was better to have remained Hindus. At least, we would have our kadayaru and Karagam (ritual ceremony for the souls of the dead), after our death.

At face value, the complaints of the Madigas of Chivarripuntha looks very normal, trivial almost like that of any of the parishioners, in a rural parish. But deeper analysis, with the help of the Foucauldian understanding of the dynamics of power reveals a clash of different sets of paradigms at work in the worldviews of the Madigas and the parish priests. As we have already seen in our analysis of the Madiga religious consciousness, the dominant approach to religion and ritual is

25 Cf. note 2 of section 11, Chapter 2, where I introduce the notion of Thirdspace and the trialectics of space as developed by Henri Lefebvre, the French Marxist Philosopher. Thirdspace is the attempt by Lefebvre to attract our attention to the dimension of space as an ontological and epistemological reality along with the dimensions of historicality and sociality, which he terms as Firstspace and Thirdspace respectively.

26 In conversation with Peddaveeriah, the Madiga elder of Chivarripuntha and the womenfolk of Chivarripuntha - 19/10/2000.
through distanced gaze of the deity, and it is individualistic in orientation. On the other hand, the subaltern key to ritual and religion is intimate proximity, touch and feeling, in the context of mutual solidarity. Touch, feeling and solidarity are subaltern idioms and the hermeneutical key to understand those idioms is space.

The rituals of the rites of passage, symbolized by the coffin and the cross were sources of power, identity and solidarity. If those were denied in Catholicism, they had to fall back upon their kadayaram and karagam, leaving the Church and the Fathers, who were gazing at them from far, standing at a distance in time.

Fathers also have complaints about the faith-life of the Madigas of Chivarripuntha, that they are lethargic and lazy, and their attendance in church is thin. But the Madigas of Chivarripuntha had a different story to narrate:

We request the Fathers to come and celebrate the Eucharist for us in the morning of Sunday, whereas they insist on coming in the evenings, when we return from work. By that time, we are fully exhausted, and we have to do our cooking and then turn up in the chapel for Mass. If we are to come for Mass, without getting tired, and in time for cooking, then we will have to stop our work earlier. This would mean we have to lose our pay.

As the spatialities of death and burial, and the rituals marking their life cycle were important for the Madigas of Chivarripuntha, from the point of view of tapping power, the ritual of their daily labour was a question of their survival and sustenance.

However limited be the context, Chivarripuntha is a window to the tension between the orderings of time by the dominant and the subaltern, verifying the assertion of Gopal Guru that the Dalits are being dictated to by the dominant order, in their definitions of time and space. The Madigas of Chivarripuntha were

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27 Cf. notes 118 and 119 in Section - III, Chapter 4, the subsection entitled Madiga as Insider - Outsider: Towards a Subaltern Genealogy of a Solidarity without Consensus, where I quote Sunder Kaali, where he describes the subaltern spatializations during the festival Thiruppuvanam, Tamilnadu. Cfr. also Saurab Dube, “Myths, Symbols and Community: Samampanth of Chhatusgarh” in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (eds), Subaltern Studies: Writings in South Asian History and Society-VII (Delhi: Oxford university Press, 1997). p.149, especially notes 68 and 69.

28 Ibid.

29 In conversation with Peddaveeriah, the Madiga elder of Chivarripuntha and the womenfolk of Chivarripuntha – 19/10/2000.
concerned with the spatialities of their daily ritual of survival, and the ritual spatialities of tapping power. But the Fathers, who were concerned with the social and political conscientization of the people, were working under the hermeneutical key of time, the symbol and measure of modernity and progress.\textsuperscript{30}

This cleavage of paradigms is very visible in the attempt at mobilization of the Dalits, which is a matter of some pride for PARA (People’s Action for Rural Awakening). If the other Madigas under the networking area of PARA were feeling that its efforts at the mobilization of the Dalit wage earners, were beneficial to them, the Madigas of Chivarripuntha had been disenchanted by the attempts of the Don Bosco Fathers, to conscientize them and uplift them socially, through the activities of PARA:

\textbf{Fathers are always calling for meetings and dharnas.} All discussions are about subscriptions endlessly. We have lost so many days of work, due to dharnas. Fathers are urging us to boycott work, as part of the struggle for higher wages. But if we go for revolution, the landlords might permanently boycott us. Then who will give us work? We have to survive.\textsuperscript{31}

The subaltern concerns for survival do take the upper hand over the designs and plans of the well-meaning social activists and priests. The teleology and the long wait implied in the struggle for wages go against the earthiness of the concerns of subaltern survival, embedded often not in the macro-economy, with which the dominant deal with, but the micro political economy of the everydayness – endemic hunger and minimum subsistence.\textsuperscript{32}

The cleavage between the paradigms of time and space, social action and daily survival is best reflected in the matter of education, which has been a matter of frustration for the Fathers. The Don Bosco Fathers run an English medium

\textsuperscript{30} Cf. Ananata Giri, “Contemporary Challenges to the Idea of History” in Felix Wilfred and Jose D. Maliekal (eds), \textit{The Struggle for the Past: Historiography Today} (Chennai: Department of Christian Studies: University of Madras, 2002), pp. 28–30, where he discusses modernity’s obsession with privileging of time and history over space and geography, quoting Foucault and David Harvey.

\textsuperscript{31} In personal communication with Pedda Veeriah, the Madiga elder of Chivarripuntha – 19/10/2002.

\textsuperscript{32} Cf. Section III – Chapter 1, subsection entitled “Stories of Resistance and Betrayal: Agency and its Ambivalence.”
residential school, where the majority of the inmates are the Dalits of Konaseema. The frustration of the Fathers is that none of the children from Chivvaripuntha has completed their schooling in the Boarding. This, in spite of the fact that Chivvaripuntha is one of the earliest villages to be converted by Fr Chacko, the Salesian (Don Bosco) pioneer in Konaseema. The counter answer of the people for their children not sticking on to education is a stock reply. “If our children are to study, they will study. Otherwise nobody can force them to study.”\(^3\)

The paradigms of space, wherein the Madigas operate and the paradigm of time, history and progress, wherein the Fathers are moving, do not converge. The lurking contradiction is that religious leadership, whom they expect to speak their language of quest for identity and well-being, seems to speak to them in a different language, not couched in the earthiness of the subaltern concerns of Chivvaripuntha.

From Chivvaripuntha, if we move upward on the road to Amalapuram, we reach Pullettikurru. It is the village, which gave entry to Catholicism in Konaseema. But as we have already seen, it is also a witness to the superimposition of the dominant ordering of space by the Catholic religious leadership. As we have noted, the Father forbade the use of the sub station churches. The church built by the people, with their own hands and in the land bought by them, was demolished by him and physically integrated into the Church built by the Father. It was a symbolic deconstruction of their subaltern spatial ordering, a symbol of their identity assertion, which left a scar on their memory.\(^3\)

The argument of the Father, while demolishing the church at Pullettikurru, and selling the small piece of land on which it stood was that both belonged to the

\(^{1}\) Cf. note 125 of the present section, Chapter 1.

\(^{3}\) In this context, see Sathish Deshpande, “Hegemonic Spatial Strategies: The Nation-Space and Hindu Communalism in Twentieth-Century India” in Partha Chatterjee and Pradeep Jeganathan (eds) in Subaltern Studies XI - Community, Gender and Violence (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002), pp. 167 - 211, for an insightful analysis of the spatial strategies of Hindu communalism in India. Though the essay is dealing with the spatialities employed by the Singh Parivar, to redefine the nation-space, the parallels between the strategies of the Catholic missionaries and those of the fundamentalist Hindu outfit, in the spatialization of dominant ideologies cannot be missed. See especially pp. 173-176, where the author deploys the Foucauldian spatial thematic of heterotopia, interrogatively, to trace a genealogy of the nation as a heterotopian space and as an imagined community, constructed by monolithic and homogenizing dominant religious nationalism.
Catholic Church. In turn, what was assumed was that he, being the parish priest could dispose of the Church property at will. It was a symbolic assertion of his ecclesiastical authority, as well as an assertion of his monolithic ordering of space and architecture, acknowledged 'builder of Konaseema Church', as he was.\(^{35}\)

This superimposition of the dominant ordering of space, negating the subaltern ordering of space and identity assertion is the mirroring of a tangled web of missiology, ecclesiastical discipline of Catholicism, obscuring of temporal and spiritual power and subaltern contradictory consciousness.\(^{36}\) This physical destruction of the churches, to make place for one Church and one community, doing violence to the sense of solidarity and identity of the communities, is symbolic of the fact that missionary was a victim of a false sense of universalism.\(^{37}\)

The hermeneutical foray into Chivarripuntha and re-entry into Pulletikuru have given us a window into the superimposition of the dominant conception of time/space orderings by the missionaries on the Madigas. The Madigas, in their autonomous/super-imposed consciousness has resisted this dominant orderings of time/space imposed upon them. The contradiction at play in this hermeneutical

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\(^{35}\) In the context, K.M. George, "Beyond the Frontier Complex: The Reordering of Christian Mission in Asia" in The people of God among All God's People, pp. 204-214, where the author calls for a reordering of time and reconception of space as a mode of de-secularizing and reordering the Christian mission in Asia. The past of Christian mission has been one of imposing the dominant colonial modes and conceptions of time and space over the peoples of the world.


\(^{37}\) Some observations on Religion under Globalization made by Beyer are poignant in this context. “In general, the Christian churches latched onto to European imperial expansion, styling religion as the necessary holistic essence of the ‘civilizing’ project: along with the merchant and the soldier came the missionary.” He adds “A related critical aspect of religion’s systemic fate centres on the historical results of Globalization itself. As long as Westerners could conceive the process as more or less the expansion of their particular culture, the carriers of the Christian religious system were able to respect the religious function as an indispensable part of the project. Hence the tremendous worldwide missionary effort... the holistic perspective of any religious tradition made it difficult if not impossible to separate the universal and inclusive aspect of Christianity from the many ways it is bound into that particularism.” Cf. Peter Beyer, Religion and Globalization (New Delhi: Sage publications, 1997), p. 103. See also Felix Wilfred, "A Vision for the New Century: Role of Religions and Approaches to Christian Mission" in Thomas Malipurathu and L. Stanislaus (eds). A Vision of Mission in the New Millennium: Proceedings of the research Seminar (Mumbai: St. Paul’s, 2000), pp. 98 - 104.
cleavage can be re-formulated as a question, "Whose Side the Missionary was on?" 38

If Chivarripuntha and Pullemtikurru give us any inkling, the missionary had not been on the side of the subalterns in their journey towards identity, autonomy, critical consciousness and well-being. In this foregoing subsection, we delved into the hermeneutical cleavages centering on the differential in the orderings of time/space. In the next sub-section, we will deal with the political economy of subaltern survival, and the missionary response to it.

Amnesia of the Subaltern Political Economy of Survival: Madigamantra

While calling for an Anatomy of Mass Movements, in the context of a research into the spread of Christianity among the Malas and Madigas of Andhra Pradesh, an anthropologist by name, Dr. K. Job Sudarshan, proposed three variables. One among them was the carrying capacity of the land:

The ratio between the natural resources, fertility and other parameters on one side, and the size of the population presently being supported by the land. The carrying capacity has a considerable influence over the collective psychology of the people inhabiting that region. The general pattern observed in the historical mass conversions suggest a correlation between the carrying capacity and vulnerability of the people group as a whole to new influences. 39

According to Sudarshan, the carrying capacity of the Godavari delta had increased due to the network of canal systems, in the post-Cotton period, and the ensuing prosperity had reduced the possibility of the mass conversions. My fieldwork among the Madigas has revealed that though the carrying capacity of the land in the Godavari delta increased, the Madigas have not been able to be sharers in this newfound prosperity. This is characterized by the short-cut icon of the standstill experience. They have been neither going forward, nor backward. Though they have experienced social upliftment, through the intervention of Indira Gandhi and NTR 40, economic mobility and capability still eludes them.

40 NTR (Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao), the founder of Telugu Desam Party, and the first non-Congress Chief minister of A.P. He asserted the proverbial Telugu pride, by founding this regional party, and promoting Telugu culture and language.
They also have been very conscious of the fact that the equations in the number game are against them. It is to be recalled that at one point in the itinerary of the Dandora movement, they had requested the leadership of the movement, that they be listed, as a different group, in the new categorization for reservation, demanded of the government. Added to this, there is the phenomenon of the ‘brain drain’ or the drain of the potential organic leadership from among the Dalits. This is a direct result of the growing underemployment, as well as the unemployment among the Madigas, in the wake of globalization, and the search for easy socio-economic mobility.  

If the standstill experience of the Madigas has been the result of the vicissitudes of the political economy of Konaseema, the Madigamantra “It is difficult to change the Madigas, and equally difficult for them to change” has been a dominant construct foisted upon them. The Madigas have been labouring under this construct. Though they stand under the general experience of “standstillness”, as regards economic mobility is concerned, their potential for change and the actual mobility they have attained, at least in certain areas of their life, have been attested to by the Madigas themselves and some missionaries.  

The missionaries have also been to a great extent in collusion with the dominant castes, in giving this mantra, the character of a self-fulfilling prophecy, in the context of the wider society, as well as in the interiorization of the mantra by the Madigas themselves. The missionary, like the dominant castes, which stand under the ritualized caste hierarchy, has failed in extending the basic human dignity to the Madiga. This has hampered his journey into autonomy and identity.  

41 Cf. Section – 11, Chapter 3, subsection entitled “Globalization, Dalit Landlessness and Brain Drain in Konaseema”.  
42 In personal communication with the Madigas of Peddamadi, T. Kothapalli and Bhavanipeta.  
43 In interview with Mathew Kunnapuram, the parish priest of Ambajipeta, and Fr Raayappa, the parish priest of Palivela – 13/12/2001.  
44 In this context see Amita Baviskaar, In the Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts over Development in the Narmada Valley (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002) for a de-romanticized view of the indigenous resistance by tribals, as constructed by the international environmental movement and scholarship. The thrust of her well researched work, against the background of a rich ethnography is that tribal culture is embedded within a complex and contradictory relations at the local level that do
missionaries themselves have become conscious of the lack of dignity extended to the Madigas, by the colonial missionaries, as well as the Indian missionaries, who followed them in Konaseema:

Not only that we did not show them dignity, but also we told them in so many actions and words that they were our servants. We treat the caste people with honour, But the Dalits, we treat with indignity. And all these people, they have eyes. The Europeans were no worse than us, in meting out indignity on them. As soon as I went to Telebrou, I made two benches and requested the teachers to sit down, whenever they came to see me. But nobody sat. They used to sit when I was not there. The Europeans also never felt the need of making them sit. We too were in the same mould.\(^6\)

This is the self-confession of a veteran missionary, who has spent long years in Konaseema, and a keen observer of the contradictions in the missiological praxis of the Catholic Church.\(^6\) It is as if he is coming to terms with the colonial and neo-colonial vestiges in his own missionary praxis, together with the traces of feudal leanings in his pastoral methodology, as we have witnessed in Pulletikurru.\(^7\)

Again the Supportive Survey bears out the fact that the Church leadership, either consciously or sub-consciously failed to enhance the identity and autonomy of the Madigas. The response of the Madigas regarding the attitude of the Church leadership regarding the identity, autonomy and critical consciousness of the Madigas is either indifferent or ambiguous.

The following excerpt from an interview I had with Fr Rayappa, another of the parish priests of Konaseema is revelatory of the ongoing contradiction between the high ideals of equality, preached by Catholic Christianity and the pastoral praxis:

The people will come to see the priests. They will be standing only or sitting near to his feet. I am sure that Chucko also would have been doing that only. He will be giving all the possible help. But he will be making sure that the Madiga feels that he/she is a Madiga. Then I thought to myself. If I do that, God will punish me. Whether other people recognize me or not, I must not let somebody sit at my feet.

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\(^{46}\) In interview with Mathew Kunnumpuram, the parish priest of Ambajipeta – 13/12/2001.

\(^{47}\) For the description and analysis of the gap, lack of fit between the professed ideals of a voluntary movement and its own praxis, or what can be sociologically termed as the "play of counter-points", see Ananta Kumar Giri. *Building in the Margins of Shacks: The Visions and Projects of Habitat for Humanity* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2002), pp. 244 – 67.

\(^{47}\) Cf. Section IV. chapter 1, the subsection entitled “Brothers, yes but not Brothers-in-Law: Brahminical Self-Constructs and Mission as Internal Colonization”.

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I am sure that Chacko will not do it with a Raju.

No. He will not do it with a Raju. Even the other priest, who says this and that about Konaseema (perhaps a veiled reference to Fr. Olhapuram, the Father of Konaseema), does the same. Even today it continues Father. Seeing that I told the people, "Please sit in these chairs. The chairs are for you to sit. They are meant for you. Don't you see the other people sitting?"

Now you understood the gap. There is all care and protection showered on people, provided people are dependent upon me. In your action, the message is strongly conveyed. "You are not equal to me."

I understood the gap. Even now it is continuing.48

As noted earlier, the missionaries are becoming conscious of this contradiction in pastoral practice, where the situation is akin to that of Colonial Chhattisgarh. There the missionaries preached equality of all Christians in the Kingdom of God. But in strong colonial Western idioms of domination and emotive images of redemption, the native Satnamis were described as those who were to be shown the light of Christianity, to be civilized by the missionaries. The missionaries evoked the precept of self-determination to argue for the religious freedom of the converts. But these converts were at the same time childlike, and to be controlled, and to be nurtured with paternalist authority. It was within the matrix of these contradictory strategies that the missionary reinforced the familiar symbols and signs of colonial rule, racial supremacy and paternalist authority.49 As Dubey insightfully notes:

All this came about without their formal entry into the manifest processes of institutionalized power relations centring on colonial state. It is indeed the realms of the cultural, the ideological and the discursive, which reveal the political implications, and colonial connections of the mission project.50

The situation is similar in post-independence Konaseema, where intellectual and internal colonization is operative, with its attendant Social Darwinism, conveyed through the short-cut icon of "Nammude Pelayanmaralle"51 This mentality and

48 In interview with Fr Rayappa, the Parish priest of Palivela - 13/12/2001. Fr Rayappa is also the co-ordinator in Konaseema area, of the A.P.S.S.S. (Andhra Pradesh Social Service Society), the Social Service Organ of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Andhra Pradesh.


51 Cf. The present section - Chapter 1, subsection entitled “Domination With Paternalistic Hegemony: Amnesia of Subaltern Economic Agency in Conversion and the Story of a Truncated

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mode of internal colonization and paternalism built into the structure of missionary strategy has resulted in an amnesia of the material conditions of the Madiga existence, a by-passing of the life-concerns of the flesh and blood Madiga, and his quest for identity and autonomy.

The situation is akin to the development discourse, constructed by the First World, for the Third world, by which the former has, and is continuing to colonize the latter. Around the experience of hunger of the Third World, a new reality of Development discourse has been superimposed. It expresses itself in Green Revolution, agrarian reform, integrated rural development, comprehensive food and nutritional planning. In spite of in and through the proliferation of disciplines and departments, which has occurred around the development discourse, the materiality of the fundamental experience of hunger has been invested by Western forms of power. 52

This parallel between the internal colonialism of the Catholic religious leadership of Konaseema and the recolonization of the Third World throw light on our present problematic, because of the similarity of hermeneutical structures of developmentalism latent in both situations. This vein of developmentalism, in the missionary strategy, which extended help to the Madigas, but went at a tangent to their real quest for socio-economic identity, mobility, autonomy and well-being, can be captured in the following, minuscule and compressed reconstruction of my fieldwork findings. Let the snapshots into Madiga memory, of their expectations from the Church, as an alternative religiosity and a vehicle of identity assertion, and the subsequent dissatisfactions speak for itself:

Autonomy”. In this context, a very valid insight from psychology on disguised prejudice may throw further light on both the Madigamamtra and the disparaging verbal icon “Nammatte Pelayannamalale”. According to Crocker and Major, disguised or hidden prejudice behind a cloak of fairness is more damaging to the self-esteem of the socially stigmatized individuals and groups like the Madigas. The authors find that overt prejudices in societies are on the decline, whereas disguised prejudices, termed as “modern racism” are on the increase. Cf. Jennifer Crocker and Brenda Major, “Social Stigma and Self-Esteem: The Self-Protective properties of Stigma”, Psychological Review, 1889/96(4), p. 621. I am indebted to Dr Sophy Philippine for indicating this relevant insight, and sharing other pertinent material from the field of psychology, under the theme of autonomy.

They met the Father for the first time in West Godavari, when they had gone there as migrant harvesters. They invited him into Konaseema, along with his new religion. The Prabhu – Church – Father gave them a new identity – this, they do not doubt. But they are still where they were – socially, and economically. They are still migrant laborers into West Godavari and far away Ongole, as brick-kiln workers. The Father – Church and the Prabhu are still with them.

This is another way of recounting the standstill mood of the Madiga, the lack of real, socio-economic and cultural mobility. They are still awaiting, hopeful of the golden age. The Church came to their succour; gave them also a certain identity. But this identity is not without its contradictions, as it is becoming evident now, especially in the wake of new economic policy in India and overall context of Globalization. Added to this, religion, in this case, post colonial Catholicism, which is/was a source of identity for them, itself seems to have lost its strength and power. It makes them doubt, whether the Church was a temporary substitution for their caste or a temporary catalyst in their longing for upward mobility or even whether the Church and its concerns, after everything said and done, are at a tangent to their caste and its concerns.

Whereas the Madigas were seeing Catholicism, as a vehicle for his mobility and identity, the missionary’s perspective was to save the souls of the Madigas for heaven, by making them members of the holy Catholic Church. The concerns of the Madigas were earthbound, but of the missionaries turned heavenward.

After their encounter with Catholicism, given the developmentalist and neocolonialist perspective, the missionaries had been trying to teach them jīnānām or cleanliness and encourage them to take up to education. Though the missionaries were interested in the areas of cleanliness and education, both tools of progress, in the perception of colonial modernity, they were not attentive to the earlier and basic concerns for survival, in the celebration of their daily ritual, their embodied struggle for survival.

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54 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Puletikuturu – 22/05/1998.
55 In personal communication with a Madiga elder of T. Kothapalli – 13/03/1999.
56 In personal communication with Fr Babu George - parish priest of Kommuragiri – 14/03/1999.
As I have gathered from the field interviews, the Madigas, immersed as they were in the political economy of survival, found education to be a remote possibility, and a very distant means of mobility, beyond their reach.

In the context of the earthiness of the concerns of the Madigas, and the continuities and discontinuities in their encounter, which are embedded in political economy, we are able to better understand the ambiguities of the agency of the Madigas, their shifting loyalties to different religions and denominations, and their continued allegiance to the landlords, in spite of the attempts of the social activists and priests to uplift them. This applies to the internal border crossing, which they engage between Catholic practices and the sources of power, earlier available to them in their pre-Catholic days.

As in the case of the Madigas of Chivarripuntha, they looked to Catholicism and its priests for accompanying them in the rituals of their life cycles, and make them into moments and movements of their identity assertion and means of tapping power. If the priests were not seen to be with them, naturally they would have to cross over to their earlier sources of power. This passage does not evoke the syncetic tensions, which is the usual concern of the dominant religiosity; rather this crisscrossing is a process of synergetic energy harvesting. Kooiman observing the religious mass movements of the Chanars of South Travancore, insightfully observes:

Hence our main conclusion must be, first of all, that change of religion as a strategy for survival goes both ways. People may turn to the Christian religion, but there is also the return option: when people try to ward off the dangers threatening their existence they give priority to ancestral beliefs and practices. Secondly, a closer reading of the missionary sources reveals that famines and other cases of emergency merely create a kind of 'rush hour' in already existing religious border traffic. Whether the main flow is away from or back to the religion of origin is to a large extent determined by an assessment of the alternative options available to the people concerned.\(^5\)

This border crossing and migration into different symbolic and religious universes, is understood in the context of the structure and the hermeneutical texture of the ritual continuum of the Konaseema Madigas, we have traced out in the previous section of the thesis. More precisely, it is to be placed in the matrix of the

daily ritual of the Madiga, enacted in the daily and embodied struggle for survival. It is in continuum with and in mirroring of their constant physical migration to West Godavari and Krishna, in search of grain and harvest, and to Ongole’s brick kilns in search of labour, under the forced rubrics of globalization, and its attendant displacement and commodification of human labour. As Gramsci emphasized, capitalism is precisely about the production of a new kind of labouring body. 57

Against the backdrop of the hermeneutical interrogation of the amnesia of the Subaltern Political Economy of Survival, and the self-fulfilling prophecy of the Madiga mantra, in the next section, we undertake a hermeneutical overview of the attempts of the Madigas towards the formation of a Madiga identity politics, in the wake of the Danjorâ movement.

Identity Politics and Danjorâ: The Task of Recovering Madiga Symbolic Heritage

When Ebenezer, the village elder and the Madiga ideologue, of Kesinakurru in Konaseema, Andhra Pradesh boasted that St. Thomas, the Apostle was a Madiga, because he had dared to place his fingers into the wounded flesh of Jesus, he was presenting the software-chip of a potential Madiga identity theology. He was trying to assert his pride in his traditional trade, the identity-marker of his caste, by tracing aetiology for it and taking off the stigma attached to it. This particular aphorism traces itself back to the gospel (Jn. 20: 24-29), where Jesus, after his resurrection for m the dead, asks Thomas to put his finger in the wound at the side of Jesus.

When Ebenezer asserted that St. Thomas the Apostle was the first Madiga, he was deploying the information he had gathered from the St Thomas Christian missionaries, to construct an identity for his caste, no less ancient and no less revered. He had heard his Bible teachers from Kerala, boasting in and out of season, of the ancientness of their Christian heritage. At one stroke, he was constructing an aetiology of his caste and sanitizing the stigma of pollution attached to it, by

57 Cl. David Harvey, Spaces of Hope (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 104. See ibid., pp. 97- 130, for an insightful treatment of the embodied condition of the human labourer and body as a space of struggle for living wages, and body’s relation to political economy, from the Marxist perspective.
revalorizing the act of skinning the carcass and touching the flesh into a sacred and ennobling task. We see at work here the attempt at a diachronic ‘fusion of horizons’ by the subaltern Madiga hermeneutic, to bridge the gap between the pure and ancient world of tradition of the faith-giving missionaries and the impure and the new world of the faith-receiving Madigas.

It stands within the texture of the continuity/discontinuity, which marks the encounter between the Madigas of Konaseema and colonial/neo-colonial Christianity/Catholicism. It is in the line of religio-cultural continuity, in as much as it is an act of refraction of the message of the missionaries, thorough the indigenous categories by the natives.

It is also synchronic appropriation of the Barahminical leanings of the missionaries, their ‘word’, the book and their saints to be deployed against them, and against the larger section of the dominant castes, with whom they are in collusion, inscribed by the hierarchical binary of the purity/pollution. It is also a contestation of both the disparaging vernacular short-cut icon “After all Nammude pulayammaralle”, and the dominant construct of the Madiganama, which had attained the force of a self-fulfilling prophecy, holding its sway over the dominant as well as the subaltern Madigas.

This contestation, which is in line with the continuities in the encounter, also fits into the pattern of discontinuities in the encounter. “St Thomas, the Apostle is a Madiga” is a symbolic reminder to the missionaries and the Church at large to involve themselves in the debate on the kulavruiti, the identity-marker of the Madiga. “St Thomas, the Apostle was a Madiga” is also a short-icon for the issues of political economy, which have been eclipsed by the dominant discourse, including the universalizing and the homogenizing discourse of globalization. It is a re-assertion of the issues of political economy, of the alienation of the Madiga from

land and labour, raised by Jāmbavuḍu, the primordial Madiga, and by Mātangi, the feminine symbol of the reassertion of Madiga re-assertion in the socio-economic and political space.  

61 St Thomas, the Madiga is yet another symbol or subaltern Madiga appropriation of the dominant symbols, to contest and invert the dominant constructions, which were deployed to keep the Madigas in socio-economic and political alienation, through hierarchic ritual spatialities.  

The interviews during the fieldwork have revealed that the Catholic Church, though has been extending material help to the Madigas, has not been instrumental in enhancing the caste identity and autonomy of the Madigas. "The Church has not helped us as a kulam (caste). Only the emergence of the Danḍörā has helped us in this. But she has been giving us knowledge about God, but not about the dignity of the kulam and the unity of the kulam. Only the Danḍörā, and the awareness brought through the Danḍörā leaders helped us in that aspect."  

Here what I intend highlighting is not that the Church has to attend only to the enhancement of the Madiga caste, rather what is implied in the context of our discussion on the emerging Madiga identity politics is that the Church will help in the enhancement of Madiga autonomy, if it displays greater sensitivity to the dynamics of the Madiga sensibility for the identity of the caste as a whole. As I have noted earlier, it is my submission that the sociological key to interpret the subaltern journey of the Madigas of Konaseema, is political economy and not Sanskritization. 

In this context, the leadership of the Church stands to be greatly enriched in its approach to Madiga identity politics, by being attentive to the dynamics of the Danḍörā movement, both in its mobilization of the Madigas, and the achievement of its agenda of gaining for the Madigas, their due share in socio-economic and the political space. 

62 Cf. Section – III, Chapter 4, subsection entitled "Transitory Fraternity and Solidarity of Incommensurable identities: The Operative Praxis of Ritualized and Hegemonic Communitas". 

My fieldwork, by way of interviews and the live-in experiences, during the peak of the *Dandhōra* movement, had given me the feel that the Madigas were not very enthusiastic about the reception given by the Church leadership to *Dandhōra*. The emphatic affirmation by Krishna Madiga, of the total lack of collaboration of the Churches, Catholic or otherwise, in the movement corroborates my view. The Madigas were conveying to me the message that the Church was not with them, in this momentous experience of the first ever mobilization of their caste, in history. The Church’s pastoral praxis, vis-à-vis the strivings of the Madigas towards their identity assertion, can be enhanced, by absorbing the lessons from the *Dandhōra* *Dandhōra*, into its texture.

The *Dandhōra* movement, which is an ‘Exodus’ experience of the Madigas, was a rite of passage for them, in many areas, but chiefly in the area of identity politics. This first time assertion of the Madiga identity politics, had as its main agenda, the re-categorization of the reservation quota allotted to the Dalits.

*Dandhōra* was also an existential break of the binding spell of the *Mādīgamaṇtra* over the dominant sections, the Church, as well as the Madigas themselves. The Madigas of Konaseema were skeptical of the mobilization of the caste, by the movement, given the fact that in Konaseema, unlike in Telengana and Rayalaseema, the number game was not in their favour. But the strategy of Krishna Madiga, to successfully launched the movement, from the very area of Konaseema, where it was feared not to take off, paid off. The successful launching of *Dandhōra* from Amalapuram, the heart of Konaseema, was an eye-opener and a morale booster, for the Konaseema Madigas.

The movement also brought into relief the performative potential of the Madigas, and led to the recovery of the evocative richness of the Madiga symbolic heritage, as we have seen exemplified in *Jāmbavuṭu* and *Māṭangi*. As part of the programmatic agenda of a renewed subaltern thrust of the Konaseema Catholicism.

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64 In interview with Krishna Madiga, the leader of the *Dandhōra* Movement – 07/06/2001.
65 Cf. Section – III, Chapter 1, subsection entitled, “*Dandhōra* : A Retrospect and a Prospect”
the Church stands to gain much by reading in the Danfôrâ movement and its socio-cultural and economic fallouts, a sign of the times, of the place and the people.⁶⁶

This reading into the signs of the times, place and the people, has added relevance in the context also of the salutary tilt towards the idioms of continuity and inclusion. I have called for towards the end of the preceding section on the itinerary of the encounter. The recovery of the Madiga symbolic heritage, achieved during the Danfôrâ movement can act as a pointer to the Church, in integrating the symbols of Madiga heritage, like Jâmbavudu and Mâtangi in the inculturated and contextually re-interpreted Madiga Catholicism of Konaseema, looking forward toward a renewed subaltern thrust.

This also will help the Church, in giving the strong feminine and goddess orientation in the Madiga heritage, a creative space in the symbolic and genuinely Catholic matrix of the Church. This recovery of the Madiga symbolic heritage, aimed at the contextual re-interpretation of the Konaseema Madiga Catholicism is intertwined with the growing self-realization of Catholicism that it is/has to be inscribed by the vissicitudes of the political economy of Konaseema. As we noted at the beginning of this sub-section, Jâmbavudu, Mâtangi and St Thomas, the Apostle is standing in a symbolic continuum, mirroring the contingencies of the daily ritual of the struggle of the Madigas for survival. They are symbolic residues, inhabiting the space of their counter-memory, impelling them in their journey, their quest for survival and well-being, identity and autonomy, political space and critical consciousness.

This baptism of Konaseema Madiga Catholicism and its religious leadership in the vicissitudes of the political economy of Konaseema, and the contingencies of the struggle of the Madigas for well-being and identity, will enable it to overcome the dualism of the matter-spirit dichotomy, which is still operative in its praxis. Though it is true that the missiological and social teachings of Catholicism have notionally overcome the pre-Vatican dichotomies between faith and social action.

matter and spirit, contemplation and action, at the level of praxis, as our fieldwork indicates, these dichotomies are still in operation.

The task of Christianity, and in our concrete context, of Konaseema Catholicism is in pushing the cause of the oppressed and the subalterns, as the common agenda of the civil society, and the most important priority of the nation. This task entails that Christianity associates with the subalterns not only in terms of their religious identity, but also in all that concerns them in their quest for survival and identity, and project this cause of the subalterns as the cause of the moral challenge of the entire society. This implies also that Christianity play its role in challenging the reigning dominant model of development, standing in substantial and effective solidarity with the unorganized labourers, beyond the strategy of riskless textual critique of economy, in its documents.

The celebration of differences and the strengthening of identities, have an added significance, in the context of political economy, especially at this juncture, when the Dalits are concretely staking a greater share, their just due in the fast globalizing economy of the country, as evidenced by the recent Bhopal Declaration.

The explicit thrust towards political economy endorsed by the Bhopal Declaration, in the march of the Dalits towards the realization of socio-economic identity and autonomy, calls for prolonged struggles. The struggle has to be based on broader alliances with other sectors of the population and movements. It calls for greater solidarity among the ranks of the Dalit subalterns themselves.

See notes 68 and 69 of the previous chapter, where drawing on Felix Wilfred, I allude to the cleavages, which are still operative in the pastoral praxis of the Church, in the social context, with their deeper roots in the matter-spirit dichotomy. I deem the applied relevance of my own present contribution to the area of contextual re-interpretation of Christianity, to be in showing the presence of these cleavages in pastoral practice at the grassroots, in our case, in the context of Konaseema Madiga Catholicism. The wider implication is that the Church’s doctrinal advancements, in spite of the good will and eagerness to be in touch with reality, still work at a tangent to the everyday concerns of the subalterns and their quest for survival and well-being.


Cf. Section – III, Chapter 1, note 123, where I allude to the programmatic reflections by Kancha Ilaiyah and Gail Omvedt in response to the Dalit oriented agenda of the recent Bhopal Declaration.

In this context, see also Aditya Nigam, “In Search of a Bourgeoisie: Dalit Politics Enters a New Phase”, Economic and Political Weekly, 30 March, 2002/37(13), pp. 1990 -3, where the author
In the context of Andhra Pradesh, and more concretely of Konaseema, the realization of the still to be achieved issues like land reforms, securing of minimum wages, will become possible, only in the context of a greater solidarity between the Malas and the Madigas. They form the bulk of the landless agricultural labouring class. After the micro-Mandalization of the political scenario of Andhra Pradesh, following the emergence of Danṭôrā movement, there has been a growing rupture in the Mala- Madiga Dalit solidarity. After the realization of the aim of the re-categorization of the reservation quota, there has been a rethinking in their strategy among the leadership of the Danṭôrā leadership. They have become more accommodative, and are not averse to issue based solidarity with the Malas, for the achievement of the issues like land reforms, minimum wages and atrocities. 71

There is a growing feeling among the Dalits themselves about the need of stressing on their common Christian identity, as a plank for strengthening the Dalit solidarity. "When there was a meeting with the Bishop, to study about the atrocities on the Malas and the Madigas, my observation was that though Danṭôrā has helped us to attain the ABCD reservation, the unity between the Malas and the Madigas has been lost. Actually Danṭôrā itself was the result of the manipulation of Chanadrababu Naidu to divide the Dalits of the State and wean them away from the Congress. I had requested the Bishop during the meeting that the Church play its role in bridging the gap between the Malas and the Madigas."72

Conclusion

In this chapter, we attempted at a hermeneutics of the encounter between the subaltern Madigas and Catholicism in Konaseema. Our critical hermeneutics also had an eye towards the emergent contradictions in the encounter. The analytical hermeneutic, which has revealed the contradictions of the encounter also have critically analyzes the different dimensions of the Bhopal Declaration, and the ambiguities it entails, especially in the context of the broader alliances in society called for, for the success of the Dalit struggle in the sphere political economy. It also critiques the negative stance taken by the Declaration vis-à-vis the social movements, on the assumption that all social movements are anti-dalit in orientation.

71 Cf. Section III – Chapter 1, subsection entitled Danṭôrā : A Retrospect and a Prospect.

72 In interview with Mr. Babuji, the Madiga catechist of Don Bosco Mission, Ravulapalem – 10/12/2001.
provided us with some signposts for the onward journey. They are non-instrumental approach to the quest for survival needs, inscription of texture of salvation or well-being with political economy, and the overcoming of matter-spirit dichotomy.

The Catholic religious leadership has to translate into creative praxis, the dissatisfaction, they are already feeling over the deep-rooted contradictions, in their praxis. This calls for a border crossing\(^3\) at two levels. The first is an internal border crossing towards the flesh and blood Madigas, and Dalits in general. Catholicism, and its leadership have to enter into the logic of the subaltern mode of religiosity and praxis. It is an earthy node of religiosity, inscribed by the political economy of survival and everydayness. Subalterns and the very first moment of their ritual continuum, their daily struggle for survival, have to be accorded dignity, and respect. This will break the spell of the *Mādigamantra*, over themselves, as well as the leadership.

The second level of the border crossing demanded of Catholicism is towards the forces of transformation, at work outside the Church. We have already noted the need of the need for Christianity to enter the civil space, as a part of deconstructing its mission, without domesticating the radicality of the gospel message.\(^4\) This entry into the civil space, in solidarity, with the agents of transformation entails entering into new hermeneutical moorings, and skills in networking. It entails a process of learning, of conversion, of internal transformation. In the context of globalization, it calls a shift from looking at religion as function in the private sphere, to religion as performance in the public sphere, or a healthy dialectics of both aspects.\(^5\)

\(^3\) Cf. Felix Wilfred, "A Vision for the New Century", pp. 95 – 97, where the author re-interprets the mission, as the art of negotiating boundaries.


\(^5\) Cf. Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization*, pp. 86 – 96; also Ananta Kumar Giri, "Globalization and Religion: Beyond the Primacy of the Political", *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, September, 2001/62(3), pp. 344 –346, where Giri makes a sympathetic critique of Beyer, in the context of the need to evolve a practical spirituality, as an aid in socio-economic transformation. I myself am not going along with Giri, in the neat division, he seems to place between political movements and practical spirituality, especially from the point of view of the subaltern thrust of the thesis.
At the dawn of the millennium, in the wake of globalization and the onslaught of the forces of the market, the Madigas are looking forward to a transformative and liberative second intersection with the Church, as they had towards the end of the Vasco da Gama epoch. But the Madigas of Konaseema, and Andhra Pradesh in general, especially in the wake of the Dandorla have come out in the open about betrayal of their hopes by Christianity, and Catholicism in particular. I summarize the feelings and arguments, as conveyed to me by Krishna Madiga, during the interview:

During the days of the Dandorla struggle, no Church, including the Catholics came forward to help us. It was the biggest movement ever, by the Madigas, to achieve their identity and rights. Christianity has failed us. The missionaries get much money in our name. But it does not reach us. With the exception of the Baptist Church, which we feel identify with us, other Churches have failed us. And the Baptist church is economically the poorest Church. Jesus has been domesticated and tamed by the Churches and their leadership. The Jesus, preached by the missionaries, only dilutes the Madiga consciousness, and their cause. The missionaries have thrown some help at the Madigas, but betrayed their cause. They do not preach the real flesh and blood Jesus, who fought and died for the poor. This Jesus has not entered the texture of the Madiga life and struggle. Religion, and Christianity, should help all, irrespective of caste and creed, for the liberation of all. Religion is a vehicle of emancipation. It is nothing more, and nothing less. We have gone beyond this domesticated symbol of Jesus. If today, I go into a Madigapeta, and tell them not to be part of the Christian Church any more, they will leave the Church. Now Ambedkar is a useful symbol for us. May be beyond Ambedkar, Babu Jagajeevanram. Like earlier, Jambuvu, and Maitangi were potent cultural symbols for us. They are not so much our religious symbols. We are not ashamed to say, may bold to say that our symbols keep on sliding, as we move on, in our quest for survival and identity. We are very pragmatic that way. And I can tell you point blank, that if you missionaries do not change your strategy, and start making your religion, something for the people, that is the end of Christianity. Let Jesus take on flesh and blood, and become one with our cause. 76

As Krishna Madiga, reminded the Christians, they have to present a flesh and blood Christ, who is involved in the flesh and blood concerns of the poor. 77 Christianity cannot any more present itself to be an agency of supernatural salvation, away from this world, 78 because the salvation that the Madigas have been in quest is their well-being, in this world. It is yearned for, and inscribed in the living and lived

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76 In personal communication with Krishna Madiga – 07/06/2001.

77 In the context of the challenge thrown by Krishna Madiga, see Felix Wilfred, Drawing a Deep Breath, pp. 269–270, where he presents two models of Christocentrism, in terms of their concerns they represent and the methodology that they follow. The first is centered on the mystery of Jesus Christ, and the second on the historical praxis of Jesus, to understand his mystery. Wilfred is of the opinion that for the Asian continent, the second model of Christocentrism is must suited for the context. It is by following Jesus, in his praxis, that we share and communicate that he is in the divine plan of God’s salvation for the world.

78 Cf. Ibid., p. 82.
language of their daily ritual of the struggle for survival. Catholicism will fulfill its authentic prophetic role of being an active agent in the socio-political dynamics of Konaseema, when the intertwining of political economy and religion, a subaltern reality, gets written into its religious hermeneutical texture.

In the next and final chapter of this section, taking into account of the contradictions in the encounter between the Madigas and Catholicism, we will be engaging in the elaboration of an alternative hermeneutic of salvation. This alternative soteriological hermeneutic will help towards the renewed subaltern thrust of Konaseema Catholicism. The chapter will also bring into greater relief, the subaltern signposts, which were already in emergence in the course of our hermeneutical journey, especially in the area of subaltern religiosity, inscribed by and embedded in political economy.
Chapter 3

Nurturing Spaces of Hope: Alternative Subaltern Signposts for Well-being as Salvation

Introduction

The hermeneutic of the encounter in the previous chapter has brought out the three-fold contradictions emerging in the itinerary of the encounter. In this final chapter of the section, in the light of the foregoing hermeneutic of contradictions, we intend to elaborate an alternative hermeneutic of the thematic of salvation. In the light of this alternative soteriological hermeneutic, the subaltern signposts, which were already in emergence, especially in the area of subaltern religiosity, will be gathered together and brought into greater relief. It is hoped that this alternative hermeneutical elaboration will be of help of to Konaseema Catholicism in its onward journey, with a renewed subaltern thrust.

As we noted, the threefold contradictions, which have been thrown up are the imposition of the dominant orderings of time and space by the missionaries over the subaltern Madigas, in the context of evangelization, amnesia of the rootedness of subaltern quest for well-being and salvation in the concrete vicissitudes of everyday political economy of Konaseema, and the lack of immersion on the part of the missionaries in the strivings for autonomy by the Madigas, and their solidarity movement for identity. Their agency expressed in the appropriation of Catholicism, guided by the dynamic intuition that Catholicism held within itself the potential to address their material and earthy subaltern striving for salvation as well-being, stands unfulfilled, if not frustrated.

From our hermeneutical point of view, we have traced this mutual dissatisfaction to the hermeneutical cleavage between the worldview and praxis of the subaltern Madigas and the missionaries, as indicated by the contradictions ongoingly lurking in the encounter. These contradictions have remained latent and

1 In the context of our discussion on the growing dissatisfaction between the missionaries and the Madigas, and the emerging contradictions in the encounter, Cf. Ananta Kumar Giri and Philip Quarles van Ufford, "Reconstituting Development as a Shared Responsibility: Ethics, Aesthetics and
at times become manifest, given the shifting landscape of the contradictory consciousness of the Madigas, or their political consciousness and the political unconscious.

In this chapter, we hope to follow the lead given by the hermeneutic of the encounter, which has brought into relief the signposts for the onward journey. As we have already noted in the conclusion of the foregoing chapter, these signposts which were already emerging are along the lines of non-instrumental approach to the subaltern economic agency, recognition of the inscription of the texture of salvation and transcendence with political economy, and the overcoming of matter-spirit dichotomy in discourse and praxis. These subaltern signposts call for certain hermeneutical shifts, which would enhance the renewed subaltern thrust of Konaseema Catholicism. These interrelated hermeneutical shifts have to be centred on the new non-dichotomous and integral soteriological thrust, which we intend elaborating as the core of this chapter.

In the light of the proposed hermeneutic of salvation and transcendence, subaltern-oriented Catholicism will be interpreted as a religion, with orientation towards performance. This new orientation is to be actualized through the mediation of social movements, equipping it better for the new transformative immersion in the lives of the subalterns, as demanded by the Madigas.

This process, in turn is linked to an alternative hermeneutic of subaltern religiosity and the recovery of subaltern Madga symbolic heritage, especially under the key symbols of Jāmbavudu and Mātangi. Jāmbavudu in the context of Madiga performative protest is the symbol of contestation in the site of political economy, to

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2. Cf. Peter Beyer, Religion and Globalization (New Delhi: Sage, 1997), pp. 86-96, for the distinction he makes between the dimensions of function and performance, while dealing with the relevance and continuity of religion in the context of globalization.
which the Madigas have been contributing, but from which, they have been alienated by the dominant forces. Mātangi is the symbol of liberative solidarity and the space of subversion of the dominant ritual spatialities and hierarchical constructions.

After having captured the proposed alternative hermeneutical thrust in its broad sketches, we move on to the elaboration of the new hermeneutic of salvation.

Well-being as Salvation: Towards an Alternative Soteriological Hermeneutic in a Subaltern Key

As indicated earlier, this alternative hermeneutic of the traditional Catholic thematic of salvation is an attempt at a resolution of the of the matter/spirit dichotomy, operative in the praxis of Konaseema Catholicism. As has been indicated, the amnesia of the subaltern economic agency in the encounter of the Madigas and Catholicism, and the ensuing truncated identity/autonomy of the Catholic Madigas, have to be traced to this dichotomy. The Madigas, in Konaseema and elsewhere in Andhra Pradesh, have been protesting in their own earthy and symbolic language against this matter/spirit dichotomy, and the amnesia on the part of the religious leadership, of the embeddedness of the Madiga religiosity in the concerns of political economy. On the other hand, at the turn of the century, after nearly six decades of their first encounter, they have been demanding from Christianity, and Catholic leadership in particular, a more organic and incarnational involvement in their subaltern life-texture and concerns. In corroboration, I narrate an excerpt from my interview with Krishna Madiga, the leader of the Madiga Dandorā movement:

If you Fathers are working so much for us, and want to be one with us, why can't some of the Fathers marry Madiga girls? When told that the Catholic priests do not marry, he continued. "Don't you Fathers bring many of your kith and kin from the South and secure employment for them? Why can't the missionaries see to it that at least some of their relatives marry our Madiga girls."

In his own symbolic and very earthy subaltern way, Krishna Madiga, was pointing to the fact that the missionaries have to be not only their brothers, but also

1 In personal communication with Krishna Madiga – 07/06/2001.
become their brothers-in-law, enter into blood ties with them, one in flesh with the people, with whom they work. He was, in his own homely idiom, touching upon one of the deepest truth of the Christian mystery — the mystique of the incarnation. If incarnation is becoming, one in flesh, what other telling example could be there, than that of the reality of marriage? As we see in the life of Jesus, the foundational event of Jesus’ offering of his life is solidarity, with the people. His life abounds with the symbols of his communication in solidarity with the people, stating with the sharing of the festive meal with the marginalized, breaking himself on the cross, as the bread of salvation. His offer of salvation, grace and freedom begins with his identification with his people. The beginning, the middle and the end of the path of salvation is solidarity, becoming one with the other, through deep act of identification.

Mutual self-giving is the grammar through which we learn of the self-gift of the Incarnate Word, for the well-being of the world, especially of the subalterns, the poor and the marginalized. The actions of Jesus, concerned with the welfare of the poor, like feeding the hungry, and healing the sick, become the symbolic affirmations of God’s identification with us, for our well-being.

The absence of the incarnational solidarity and identification, flowing from the matter-spirit dichotomy is the hermeneutical key and the operative logic behind the disparaging verbal icon, “Nammude pelayanmaralle, the Mādigamantra, and the dominant orderings of space/time imposed on the Madigas, even by well-meaning missionaries. The disparaging discursive icon and the dominant construct of the Mādigamantra are substitutes for the usual derogatory label “Rice Christians”, attached to the subaltern and the marginalized Christians, in several parts of India. They have been almost often Dalits, who have embraced Christianity, as an

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5 Cf. Ibid.

expression of their subaltern economic agency, and their concerns for survival and the quest for socio-economic identity, all concerns rooted in political economy, and the quest for well-being.

Salvation as Spiritual-Material Continuum: Inscribed by the Idioms of Necessity

The so-called "Rice-Christians" have been despised by the fellow-Christians, as well as the followers of the other religions, belonging to the dominant sections, because they have been in search of their basic necessities of life, like food, clothing and shelter, in the process of their transition to Christianity. But as (Mt: 25: 31 – 46), indicates, ultimate bliss is about these very material realities, which are often being despised as not valuable or worthy enough for the ultimate salvation. Jesus links the ultimate bliss of his disciples, with the care and succour, they provide for other fellow human beings, as regards these basic necessities. Salvation is about the other-oriented use of these basic necessities, without being consumerist. Sharing the very basic necessities of life, listening to the call of the idioms of necessity of the subalterns is the locus of salvation, and the encounter with God. Those who are feeding, clothing and caring, and as well as those who are being fed, clothed, and cared for are both experiencing salvation. "God is Rice."}

7 See Gustavo Gutierrez, Matthew J. O'Connell (trans.), We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People (London: SCM Press, 1984), pp. 102 – 104, for an interpretation of this passage from the flesh and blood, social perspective of the theology of liberation. The author drives home the point that the implication of the passage is not of dealing with the 'abstract poor', but the flesh and blood poor.

8 Cf. Richard A. Horsley, Sociology and the Jesus Movement (New York: Continuum, 1994), pp. 124-125, where the author, relying on pre-Marcan "Q" sources assert that the idioms of reciprocity, sharing and caring as the governing idioms which characterized the dynamics of the local communities, in the earliest phase of Jesus movement. The movement was concerned with the alleviation of hunger, debt and other symptoms of poverty.

9 For a consideration on the same thematic of the social, collective and the human dimensions of the locus and praxis of salvation in Buddhism, see Raimundo Panikkar, Robert R. Barr (trans.), The Silence of God: The Answer of the Buddha (New York: Orbis, 1990), where Panikkar compares the gospel thematic of the service of the neighbour with the Buddhist themes of mahakaruna and the Mahayana concept of the bodhisattva.

10 Cf. Takenaka Masuo, God is Rice (Geneva: World Council Of Churches), as quoted in Felix Wilfred, What is Wrong With Rice Christians, p. 8.
At the heart of the social, political and economic alternatives to the dominant order initiated by Jesus is a radical new symbolic system, founded on the primacy of human need.11

Encounter with God, does not take place in the abstract,12 but in encounter with the poor. In caring for the poor, in that act of striving for the well-being of the other, one encounters God, who became one with the suffering humanity. The contrast is not between the renunciation of the material, in favour of the spiritual, but between selfish seeking of either material or spiritual goods, all for oneself, and the sharing of goods with others. The poor experience their salvation in a hope of a future,13 of a better-transformed condition, in which the material necessities will not be denied to them.

It is a hope inscribed by the idioms of necessity, related to the earthy, physical necessities of life. Thus salvation is not a struggle against matter, but a struggle with the spirit, against the negation of matter. Matter is the essential matrix of life and growth. In the struggle, the contrast is not between the material and the spiritual. Rather, the contrast is between the forces of life and death, between the life-giving willingness to share, and the deathbringing selfish consumerism. The spiritual is not the preserve of the dominant, the Brahminical. On the other hand, the struggle of the subaltern for well-being, against the negations of matter, as well as the struggles of all those who journey with them, in their quest for well-being, are


12 Cf. D. Dennis Hudson, " The First Protestant Mission to India: Its Social and Religious Developments", Sociological Bulletin, March - September, 1993/42 (1&2), pp. 58-59. The author is of the opinion that admirable missionary intervention of Ziegenbalg and Pluetschau would have been even more impact-filled if not for the fact that the entire mission to the Tamilnadu coast had been the result of a last minute decision by Frederick IV of Denmark. They had been originally destined for India, but then the king seriously considered sending them to the West Indies or the African Coast. For him, mission was like a commercial venture, like switching instruments according to the fluctuations in the market. This impersonal, highly abstract commercialized universalism drained the mission of its civilizational locus and particularity. The logic in operation was that of the impersonality of saving souls, wherever they were, like exchangeable merchandise. Ziegenbalg too was under a similar influence of thought, where he argued that, the rational exposition of the gospel would produce results anywhere, as the divine wisdom was operative everywhere.

spiritual, salvific and transformative. The spirit accompanying their subaltern and earthly immersion into material realities, transform everything into life and salvation.  

Salvation in Fragments and Transitoriness: Plurality in Transcendence

The experience of salvation implies a discourse on transcendence. This transcendence has been constructed by the dominant religiosity as a totality, a meta-narrative. But for the subalterns, transcendence is something, which irrupts into their lives, often on the margins. Their experience, again takes the mode of hope, hope through which they expect a transformation of their own lives and the orderings of reality, space and time, in which they live and suffer. It is a hope that transcends, inverts and subverts the negations, and the dominant constructs, to which they are subjected to. It is a transcendence, which defies the present order as definitive.  

The experience of transcendence is as varied as there are human beings, as infinite as human persons are. The relationship of the intermediary to the ultimate is constructed by the individual persons differently; likewise in the collective experience of the community. Different idioms are at work, in conveying the experience of transcendence, both in the dominant Sanskritic traditions, and in the subaltern traditions. For the Sanskritic tradition, renunciation is a valued ideal. But the subalterns immerse themselves in the wonder and sensuality of life. Their approach is symbolized in dance. They know everything passes away, there is dukha

14 Cf. Saurab Dubey, “Issues of Christianity in Colonial Chhattisgarh”. Sociological Bulletin, March-September, 1992/41(1&2), p. 112, where in the context of the concluding remarks of the article, the author draws our attention to the hermeneutical shift needed from the paradigm of the Brahminical householder, to that of the ascetical and the non-twice born castes, in the anthropological attempts at interpreting the nexus of power and religion in South Asia.

15 Cf. Felix Wilfred, “What is Wrong with “Rice Christians”?” p. 10. See Raimundo Punikkar, Silence of God, p. 174, for the Buddhist approach to transcendence as being on the path, in orthopraxis, beyond orthodoxy and orthopoeisis. What matters is to follow the path of dharma, relying on the Buddha, and in solidarity with the sangha.

16 See Roy Bhaskar, Reflections on Meta-Reality: Transcendence, Emancipation and Everyday Life (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002), pp. 80–97, where the author, in the context of his philosophy of critical realism, expounds the view that in any transcendentally real self, there is the dialectics of uniqueness and universality at play. Each self has its own geo-history. This echoes with our assertion that transcendence is a plurality.
in life, but that does not prevent them from enjoying the moment.\textsuperscript{17} “I dance, therefore I live”, says the African thinker, Ehoussi Boulaga, countering the Cartesian dictum of rational clarity, “I think, therefore I am.” The African thinker places an alternative to the one-sided dominant, and modernist meta-narrative of reason and its exultation with the affirming of the material, and the earthy and the ecstatic dimension of life.\textsuperscript{18}

The earthy experience of the struggle of the subalterns gives them a different hermeneutical key to transcendence and salvation. They discover and experience transcendence in the aesthetics of the infinite fragments of transitory moments. In this transcendence of their everydayness, defying the totalizing and the homogenizing logic of the market, institutions, and patriarchal culture.\textsuperscript{19} Transcendence cannot be straitjacketed in the mode of a disincarnate and historical truth, as often is the case with the constructs of dominant religiosity. Especially in the context of subaltern religiosity, truth stands in harmony, with beauty and goodness, in the context of their lives of struggle and solidarity. Reality deifies being construed as one-dimensional.\textsuperscript{20}

**Anthropology in the Subaltern Key: Non-instrumental Approach to the Materiality of Life**

The dominant discourse of transcendence, solidarity and multidimensionality of reality have been standing under the burden of the problematic of

\textsuperscript{17} See Raimundo Panikkar, *Silence of God*, pp. 19-30, for the Buddhist thematic on momentariness, contingency and the cessation of suffering.


\textsuperscript{20} Cf. Felix Wilfred, ibid., pp. 11-12. See in this context Panikkar’s model of radical relativity, wherein reality is characterized by radical pluralism, as its co-constitutive aspect. God himself is this radical relativity. The entire reality, for Panikkar, a-la Gregory of Nyssa, is in *epexestasis*, in striving towards God, the fullness, which always eludes our grasp. Cf. Raimundo Panikkar, *Silence of god*, pp. 134-144.
the relationship of matter and spirit. A closer understanding and appreciation of matter will alter our perspective of the relationship between matter and spirit. Our universe, if contemplated in the light of modern physics and astronomy, reveals its own mysterious grandeur and indicates that matter is no less a mystery than the spirit. A dichotomized understanding and polarization of the two have led to undermining the material basis of our lives in the past. As we have already noted, a re-conception of the relationship between matter and the spirit will enable us to understand and interpret the thematic of salvation in a new perspective, and also to take a different perspective on the quest of the subalterns for survival, material needs and their well-being.21

As we have already hermeneutically traced out in the third section of the thesis, the subaltern life and religiosity are embedded in the matrix of matter-spirit continuum, and intertwined with the concerns of the political economy of everyday, dull economic compulsions, to re-deploy an expression of Marx.22

To reiterate our position, real opposition is not between matter and the spirit, but between spirit and selfishness. Salvation is from selfishness and egoism, through the power of the spirit, leading us to the freedom of solidarity. This has far reaching implications, for understanding the position of the woman, as well as Dalits.23 As we have seen, both have been ritually marginalized from the societal space, in the context of the order of patriarchy.24

The research findings from Konaseema, and the missionary history of South Tamilnadu, both Protestant and Catholic, have revealed the instrumental perspective, the missionaries had towards the subaltern economic agency and the quest for material well-being. This negation of the subaltern agency of the subalterns have led

22 Cf. section III – chapter 4, subsection entitled “Madiga as Insider-Outsider: Towards a Subaltern Genealogy of a Solidarity without Consensus”.
24 Cf. section – III, chapter 2, subsection entitled, “Underexposed and Conflicctual Political Economy of the Ritualized Hierarchy of Caste".
the missionaries, as well as their detractors, to view the phenomenon of the transition of the Dalits, to another religion, disparagingly. The activities of the missionaries are also viewed with suspicion, as it is suspected that they follow a teleological trajectory, of extending help to the Dalits, so that they could be converted to Christianity.

As we have already noted, in the logic of the incarnation, the material conditions of life are real and they are inextricably bound with our salvation. *Caro cardo salutis*. The flesh is the hinge of salvation. This patristic aphorism is a shortcut icon for the mystery of incarnation and human salvation. And as corollary, it is a symbolic assertion of the fact that physical conditions and material basis of life, like food, water, clothing, education and health are integral to human wholeness, well-being and salvation. It challenges the instrumental attitude on the part of the missionaries and Christians, towards the quest of the subalterns for survival, expressed in their conversions. Salvation as the identification of God with man is at play in the "materialistic" attitude and quest of the subaltern Christians.

The daily ritual of their struggle for survival, the first moment of the ritual continuum of the religion-identity consciousness is salvific. Their mode of relating to reality, and their gods/goddesses, who emerge from the matrix of the matter-spirit continuum are part of this materialistic economy of salvation.

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26 Cf. Felix Wilfred, "What is the Wrong with "Rice – Christians"?", p. 13.

27 Cf. Ibid., pp. 13-14.

28 In this context, see Raimon Panikkar, Scott Eastham (ed.), *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998), pp. 93-99, the chapter entitled "Nonhistorical Consciousness", where he describes the shared world of gods and men. Though I am at variance with Panikkar, in his specific terminology of "pre-historical Man" in the chapter, I share the thrust of the argument of the chapter, which has much in common with our own hermeneutical description of the subaltern religiosity, as embedded in the matter-spirit continuum. Panikkar’s non-historical consciousness is a challenge to the present day tendency to economic globalism and upholds the worldview of the subalterns, which struggle against economic homogenization. It also challenges the discourse of absolututization of the future, along the logic of the market forces.
The dominant religiosity, by and large, has been operating under the logic of the matter-spirit dichotomy. It has been blissfully ignorant of the miseries of this life, and projected a salvation beyond this world. It has scant regard for the materialistic dimension of life. On the other hand, the subaltern religiosity, has its matrix in the daily struggles of the subalterns for their survival, and so is centred on the material conditions of life, their presence or absence. The religiosity of the subalterns has been concerned with the tapping of power, for their survival and well-being. The festivals, rituals and the general symbolic universe of the subalterns are concerned with their daily life, and their emancipation from the subjugation by the dominant, from the alienation from their identity, autonomy and rights.

The major religions should realize that if they are to be credible to the marginalized, their discourse of salvation should have a concrete historical content. If this happens, the religious traditions, more than being in competition, in providing trans-historical salvation, will turn their attention to the cause of the emancipation of the marginalized, in promoting life in all its richness and dimensions. In spite of their differences in belief and traditions, the religions should not allow their differences to overshadow what the poor consider to be most important in the perspective of their salvation, primarily, their physical well-being.

Especially in the context, where the forces of globalization and the forces of the market try to eliminate the poor and the marginalized, religions should undertake the common task of providing socio-economic, cultural and political conditions, in which a secure and dignified existence would be assured for the poor. If the phenomenon of globalization covers up a cluster of blatant lies, this lie, which holds sway over the poor, needs to be unmasked. The devil who is the Father of lies (Jn. 8: 44), present in the amorphous form, in the forces of the market and globalization,

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29 Cf. Christian Parker, Robert R. Barr (trans.), *Popular Religion and Modernization in Latin America* (New York, Orbis, 1996), 234 – 235, where the author quoting sociologist Brian Turner asserts that unlike in Western Christianity, which has been given to spiritualistic abstraction, in the popular religiosity of Latin America, “religious salvation has been historically joined to physical well-being”.


41 Cf. Ibid., p.16.

42 Cf. Ibid.
should be named and exorcized by the religions, standing under the power of truth, freedom and well-being.

The subalterns, including the Dalit Madigas of Konaseema, were seeking life and salvation, in their quest for the material necessities of life. The life they seek, they continue to affirm, against the forces of selfishness and those who suppress and marginalize their identity. Their quest for well-being and the subaltern economic agency at play in their struggle, must be respected. The political economy underlying their transition, conversion to Catholicism, must be considered as constitutive of their salvation. This quest, constitutive of their salvation is linked to their quest for identity-consciousness, and their approach to life. In the subaltern Dalit context, any serious discourse, which respects the dignity of the subalterns, must start with well-being, their everyday life concerns. This flows from the fact that there are no two parallel histories, one salvation history, and the other, secular history. There is only one vocation for humanity, and history is a continuous creative engagement of God, with human beings and creation. It is a continuous process of liberation, wherein men and women are engaged in the same salvific framework.

Today any serious discourse on the thematic of salvation has to start at the level of well-being, the everydayness of the subaltern life, their daily ritual of the struggle for existence. The plurality of transcendence at play, in this quest and in the context of subaltern solidarity must be taken seriously, and not be explained away as materialistic immanence. In subaltern solidarity, which fights the forces of selfishness, there is the power of the spirit, the encounter of the transcendence and immanence, the divine and the human, and the collapse of borders between self-transformation, as well as societal transformation. Solidarity becomes the key to transcendence, especially in the context of global individualism. Solidarity is the door to the experience of salvation as well-being.


Cf. Ibid., p. 17.


As indicated already in the introduction, the hermeneutical shifts we have achieved in our attempt to evolve a new subaltern hermeneutic of salvation are the non-instrumental approach to the quest for survival needs, inscription of the texture of salvation with political economy, and overcoming the matter-spirit dichotomy. This three-layered hermeneutical shifts had already emerged as signposts, towards the end of our hermeneutic of encounter in the foregoing chapter. Our attempt at elaborating a new soteriological hermeneutic has reaffirmed the validity of these subaltern signposts. In view of our onward journey, these hermeneutical shifts have eliminated the hierarchizing of Christians, and the deriding of the Dalit quest for well-being and identity. The search for an alternative hermeneutic of salvation from the subaltern point of view has also brought into relief, the constructed nature of religion, and the intertwining of religion and political economy, whether it is the dominant or the subaltern religion.

Whereas the subalterns construct their religion, in view of their well-being and mobility, the dominant, unethically manipulate religion, to construct a ritual hierarchy, as a tool of exploitation. This had been asserted by Krishna Madiga and his fellow-ideologue, Suresh. During the interview, they had drawn my attention to this ambiguity of religiosity, though the dominant would pretend that theirs is a pure and rational religion.³⁸ Religion must not be made into a tool of oppression, in the hands of the dominant, rather must be made to serve the cause of the downtrodden. Religions must endeavour to create a single new humanity, (Eph.2: 15), challenging the divisions, which deprive the poor of their right to life and well-being.³⁹

This very elaboration of a new hermeneutic of salvation itself is a moment of and a movement in the incarnational economy of solidarity and identification with the poor, in their quest for well-being. By evolving a new hermeneutic of the salvation thematic, which takes into account of the “dull economic compulsions” and the “everydayness” of the subaltern religion, we are engaged in a journey with the subaltern Madigas, in their quest for identity, autonomy and critical consciousness.

³⁸ In interview with Krishna Madiga and Suresh Madiga – 7/06/2001
This new hermeneutic of salvation demands of the leadership, the two-fold border crossing, of which we mentioned in the conclusion of the foregoing chapter on the hermeneutic of encounter. To re-iterate, the first moment of this process is the internal border crossing, to be achieved by the leadership, towards the subaltern Madigas, the Dalits in general, and their everyday life concerns. The second moment of the border-crossing is to be achieved by the Church in general by entering into the civil space, joining hands with the agents and forces of transformation.

This entry into the civil space by the Church will entail engagement with the social movements and networking with the socio-cultural agencies. This networking will help the Church to become more easily part of the movement of the peoples, in struggle, to redeem the non-objectifiable in the local cultures, in our case, the Madiga heritage, and galvanizing the local resistances in quest for the resurrection of subjugated knowledges.

This process of entry into civil space and networking with the social movements and other agents of civil society call for, from the Church, a process of learning and unlearning, of conversion and of internal transformation. This demands of Catholicism entry into a new logic of kenotic universality, of emptiness.


44 Cf. Ibid, pp. 108-10, where Wilfred places the antinomy between Accumulation Vs emptiness, as first of the alternative hermeneutical component of a reinterpretation of Christian mission as praxis of
The two-level border crossing, implying the logic of emptiness and interactive solidarity also demands of the Church, that it relativize itself of its monolithic and institutional character. It also calls upon the Church leadership to become organic intellectuals, in organic participation with the people. In pastoral strategy, the leadership, following the logic of the border-crossing towards the subalterns and their life-concerns, has to make the options, not for the poor, but of the poor.

This pastoral shift and the relativization of its institutional character will help the Church to engage itself better with the contingencies, which form the inevitable texture of the journey of the subaltern peoples towards transformation. The rationale behind Krishna Madiga’s call for a flesh and blood Christ and Christianity is no different from this process of going along with the contingencies of the lives of the subalterns, inscribed by everyday political economy.

hope in Asia; also Felix Wilfred. “The Art of Negotiating Boundaries”, in Felix Wilfred and Oscar Beozza (eds), Concilium, 1999/2, pp. xii – xiii; also Ananta Giri, “Contemporary Challenges to the Idea of History” in Felix Wilfred and Jose D. Malekam (eds), The Struggle for the Past: Historiography Today (Chennai: Department of Christian Studies: University of Madras, 2002) Contemporary Challenges, pp. 37 – 38. Where the author calls for an openness to emptiness, as an integral dimension of space, time, being and society, in the context of the much-needed re-interpretation of historical enterprise, deconstructing the modernist formulations of space and time.


47 Cf. Philip Quarles van Ufford and Ananta Kumar Giri, “Interventions in Development: Towards a New Moral Understanding of our Experiences and Agenda for the Future” in Philip Quarles van Ufford and Ananta Kumar Giri (eds), A Moral Critique of Development: In Search of Global Responsibilities (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 19-20. See also Nancy Weiss Hanahan, Difference in Time: A Critical Theory of Culture (London: Praeger, 2000), pp. 35-58, where the author, quoting Kant, attempts to establish the point that in politics and culture, what is at stake is not so much as immutable truth, as judgement and decision, marked by contingency. This insight of Hanahan could be applied also to the subaltern journey of transformation, or in Gramscian perspective, a philosophy of praxis.
Towards a sociological Audit of Konaseema Catholicism: Cleavages in Religious Praxis as Privatized Function and Public Performance

At this juncture, when we seek a relativization of the institutional character of the Church, and its entry into the civil space, in view of a renewed subaltern thrust of Konaseema Catholicism, an overview of the itinerary of the encounter will help us better appreciate the subaltern rationale behind the call for an immersion of Christianity and Konaseema Catholicism, in particular in the contingencies of the lives of the subalterns.

The intervention of Catholicism in Konaseema towards the end of what has been called as the Vasco da Gama epoch has been in the mould of colonization, either in its external or internal variations. In this mode of intervention, which left the subaltern agency of the Madigas expressed in their conversion in amnesia, they were considered to be the recipients of services of the functionally specialized institution, that is the Church, especially its agents, the Fathers. Faith was an area of privatized function, going along with the role of religion, understood to be a holistic mode of communication in the lives of individuals and groups, encompassing the entirety of their lives.

Religion as a privatized function under the governing dynamics of the quest for salvation, in the idiom of the immanent/transcendent dichotomy was a


49 In the Luhmannian perspective, as employed by Beyer, function refers to the pure religious communication, the various aspects of devotion and worship, care of souls, the search for enlightenment and salvation. It is the pure and “sacred” communication involving the transcendent. It is that aspect, which the religions claim as their space, the basis of their autonomy in the modern society. Cf. Beyer, Religion and Globalization, p.88. Privatized function refers to that option, often had recourse to by the conservative elements of the society, by which they ghettoize religion. Cf. Ibid., pp. 89-93.

50 In this mode of communication, peculiar to religion, it subsumes under itself, the whole of reality, under the aspect of the immanent. But as the whole cannot be the subject of communication, as it cannot distinguish itself from itself, the transcendent is posited as a function to give it (immanent) its definition. Religious discourse is in terms of the dichotomous binary of the transcendent/immanent. Religious commitment involves the whole person, and is directed to the entire reality as immanent. Unlike the other functional domains, like economics, politics, culture, science etc., religion as a functional domain, claims to be holistic in approach. Religion is about salvation, which is conceived as a totality. Cf. Ibid., pp. 81-83.
superimposition on the Madigas by the missionaries from their colonial dominant perspective. From the point of view of the missionaries, the transaction involved in the extension of the material help by the Fathers or its reception by the Madigas, was instrumental in its nature, extraneous to the privatized function of religion. As we noted earlier, it was developmentalist in its intention and execution. In the idioms of function and performance, applied to religion, it was an instrumental appendage to function.

Contrary to this idiom of function, operative in the approach of the missionaries to religion, and the material help extended by them, the subaltern Madigas were operating under the idiom of performance, in as much as they looked for a non-instrumentalist approach to religion and the material help extended by the missionaries. Though going through the rubrics of the institutionalized colonial Catholicism, the Madigas have been exercising their religious subjectivity, under an alternative idiom of religious dynamics, namely, performance, in contrast to function.

The trajectory of the continuity/inclusion and discontinuity in the religio-cultural layer, and the continuities/discontinuities-dissatisfactions in the layer of political economy, as traced out in the itinerary of the encounter mirror this tension between the idioms of function and performance in the dynamics of the subaltern appropriation of Catholicism. This tension is brought into relief, through the cluster of contradictions, as revealed by our critical hermeneutic in the foregoing chapter. The contradictions are centred on the amnesia of the subaltern economic agency as expressed in the Madiga conversions, the insufficient attention to the subaltern striving of the Madigas for identity and autonomy, and the impositions of the dominant orderings of time/space over the subaltern worldviews and praxis.

51 Sociologically, from the Luhmannian perspective, performance, as contrasted to function of religion, occurs when religion is 'applied' to problems generated in other systems or areas, but not solved there, or simply not addressed elsewhere. Examples of such problems would be economic poverty, political oppression, environmental degradation, familial estrangement or personal identity. Through the relations of performance, religion establishes its relevance for the 'profane' aspects of life. In the process, non-religious concerns impinge upon pure religiousness, indicating the fact that other societal concerns condition the autonomy of religious action. Cf. Ibid., p. 80.
In the sociological idioms of function and performance, applied to the
dynamics of religion, the missionaries and the Madigas were constructing parallel
tunnels, in spite of the apparent convergence expressed in the institutional
membership of the Madigas in the Church, which seemed to be on the rise, through
intermittent mass movements of the Madigas to the religion of the Fathers. Madigas
enjoyed the paternalistic protection of the Fathers, especially in the early stages of
the encounter. Fathers were mistaking the Madiga submission for loyalty and faith,
especially in the institutionalized context of the Church.

The missionaries were expecting an evolutionary continuity in faith, in the
line of the functional dimension or religion. Material benefits, extended by the
missionaries to chosen individuals and families were a reward for their growth in
faith, which the Madigas were resenting, as we have seen already. The Madigas
were outwardly acquisitive to the function-oriented approach of the missionaries to
religion, but in the autonomous agency of their religious subjectivity, they desired
for a more impact-filled performative intervention on their behalf. This observation
is grounded in the caste dynamics observed by social activists and some
missionaries working among the Madigas that the Madigas, as a caste, lay great
stress on the collective mobility, and identity of the caste. It is their experience of
"standstillness" as a caste, vis-à-vis the Malas, and the critical realization of this
lack in the autonomy of the caste, that triggered off the Danḍōrā movement. As the
post-Danḍōrā developments in Konaseema, and elsewhere in Andhra Pradesh
indicate, Madigas have gained critical consciousness of their lacks, and the resolve
to redress those lacks, suffered by the caste as a collective entity, in and through the
Danḍōrā movement. As indicated earlier, Danḍōrā has sanitized the stigma attached
to the name Madiga, and has enabled the Madiga to own his Madarikkam
(Madighahood).

They looked to Catholicism for a more positive intervention, which would
help them attain autonomy and socio-economic mobility as a caste. This striving for
well-being as salvation was manifest in their subaltern agency at play in their
transition to Catholicism in large numbers, starting from 1940s. But the Church's
approach to the material aspirations of the Madigas basically had turned out to be
the practice of helping individuals or groups of selected families. Instead of evolving a caste-oriented dynamics, tapping the already existing structures of solidarity among the Madigas, the Church, in its function oriented approach, left itself, and the Madigas under the spell of Mādigamantra. This does not mean, as I noted already earlier, the Catholic must turn casteist in its approach. What is meant by the call for caste-oriented dynamics is that, the Church would immerse itself deeper in the Madiga subaltern reality, if it develops greater sensibility and sensitivity towards the dynamics of the caste solidarity oriented identity striving of the Madigas.

With the onset of the commercialization of agriculture, and the growth of capitalism in agrarian Konaseema, there was the growing awareness of the crisis in Madiga identity/autonomy, which I have expressed through the short cut icon of 'standstillness'. This experience of standstillness, in the space of political economy and socio-cultural space, was further accentuated, as globalization became a telling and visible reality in Konaseema, bringing with it the displacement of land and labour. The dissatisfaction in the sphere of political economy brought into even greater relief, the crisis of the institutionalized and function oriented role of religion. This crisis was given the voice of protest at the wake of the Dandārā movement, the first ever socio-political and cultural awakening among the Madigas.

As expressed by Krishna Madiga, Dandārā opened the eyes of the Madigas to new avenues of socio-cultural and economic mobility and autonomy, as an alternative to Christianity. Dandārā posed a challenge to Christianity, in as much as it brought to their existential awareness the dwindling relevance of Christianity, as a vehicle of socio-economic autonomy and mobility of caste. As Krishna Madiga and his fellow- Madiga ideologue threw the challenge, if Christianity, and especially Catholicism had to survive as a religion, the missionaries had to change their strategy, by making religion a flesh and blood affair, involved in the concrete lives of the people. The Madigas, through this challenge were calling for a Catholicism, which not only functioned, but also performed. They are calling for praxis oriented Catholicism, wherein the Church would be in organic participation with them and act as a catalyst in their journey together towards well-being and autonomy.
Religion at the Service of Residual Wo/men and Matters: Potential of Social Movements

According to Beyer, the social movements of today, characterized by greater flexibility, and lesser demands of functional specialization can be more effective in being bridges of communication between the religions and the other subsystems of society. This is all the more so, wherein the religions, under globalization are called to play their role as antisystemic systems catering to the residual matters, like the identities of individuals and communities, and the interpretation of the meaning of the social whole. 52

Social movements are antisystemic in orientation and characterized by mobility. The ‘grievances’ and ‘strains’ of the society become the motivational base of the social movements. They are best suited to mediate the intervention of religion in residual matters. As we have already noted, the conservative option in religion gives rise to fundamentalist religio-political movements that seek to reverse the relativization of cultural particularisms attendant upon globalization. Liberal religious option on the other hand, give rise to movements like new social movements that focus on local and global peace, environmental and justice issues. 53

The religiously-based social movements mediate the modality of religion to the otherwise non-religious problems, through means other than straightforward reproduction and expansion of religious communication. Thus they carry within themselves the possibilities of bridging the gap between privatized religious function and publicly influential religious performance. 54

This antisystemic intervention of religion in residual matters has specific relevance in the sphere of personal and collective identity. This antisystemic role of religion, as a subsystem that intervenes in the area of personal and collective identities, which are relativized and on the margins, 55 has operative significance in the context of Konaseema Catholicism as a religion.

53 Cf. Ibid., p. 107.
54 Cf. Ibid.
55 Cf. Ibid., p. 105.
In subaltern Konaseema, the Madigas look towards Catholicism, and its leadership to play the role of catalysts in their struggle for collective autonomy and identity. They look to the Church to exercise its ethical and global responsibilities, on behalf, and with them, when the forces of globalization are alienating them from their identity and autonomy, and depriving them of their land and labour. The Madigas are looking up to the Church, for a flesh and blood intervention on their behalf, calling for a renewed subaltern thrust in its praxis, informed by a new thrust of development as an undertaking in hope, leaving behind earlier pastoral mode of colonial developmentalism. They are calling on the Church for a shift in its pastoral methodology, informed by an alternative subaltern hermeneutic, in the idiom of performance, beyond that of function.

In its striving for renewed subaltern thrust, at the level of hermeneutics and praxis, two insights of Beyer have strategic potential. The first is that the social movements in their antisystemic orientation and their capacity for mobilization of peoples can mediate the performative function for religion in the area of residual matters. Secondly, they carry within themselves the possibilities of bridging the gap between privatized religious function and publicly influential religious performance.

Relational Identity and Transcendence in Contingency: Towards a New Hermeneutic of Subaltern Praxis

The movement of Konaseema Catholicism from Function to Performance, through the mediation of social movements calls for a new hermeneutic of participation and empowerment, in line with the alternative soteriological hermeneutic traced out above.

Networking with the social movements will help the church in relativizing itself of its institutional character. The relational identity acquired through


57 Cf. Ibid.

58 Cf. The subsection entitled “Amnesia of the Subaltern Political Economy of Survival: Madiga mantra” of the foregoing chapter.
networking can be of help in developing a self-critique of power, and cultivate a more participatory mode of intervention in the lives of the subalterns. The alternative mode of intervention is rooted in the hermeneutic of fragments and contingencies of the everyday lives of the people in their times and places.\textsuperscript{59}

In the context of contingency, which is acknowledged as inscribing the societal transforamtive process, we are able to reiterate our notion of transcendence, as evolved in the new soteriological hermeneutic. Transcendence is plural and fragmentary. It is beyond the Enlightenment universality and rationality, which follows the dichotomous logic of the either/or, placing matter and spirit in dichotomous opposition. Transcendence is experienced within immanence.

This awareness of transcendence in contingency, accepted as part of our embodied experience helps us to understand the limitation of any particular location, position or worldview, without absolutizing one’s own worldview and mode of praxis.\textsuperscript{60}

Being existentially attentive to contingencies in our interventions towards empowerment is to listen to the stories of struggles of the subalterns for survival, their religious appropriations and inversions, embedded in the vicissitudes of micro-political economy.

**Intertexture of Political Economy and Religion: Towards an Alternative Hermeneutic of Subaltern Madiga Religiosity**

Subaltern Madiga religiosity emerges from the matrix of the material-spiritual and divine-human continuum. The subaltern gods and goddesses ascend from the feet of the society, from its underside. They are often historical persons, who were in conflict with the unjust systems of the casteist and feudal society, and its laws. These goddesses are very close to the subalterns in the daily ritual of their struggle for survival.\textsuperscript{61}


\textsuperscript{60} Ananta Kumar Giri and Philip Quarles van Ufford, “Reconstituting Development”, pp. 54 – 7.

\textsuperscript{61} Cf. Section III, Chapter 4, subsection entitled “The Material Texture of the Divine-Human Continuum: Fear, Power, and Subaltern Strategy”.
At another layer, we have also noted the superimposed character of subaltern religiosity, in as much as subaltern religiosity, apart from the twin strands of the primeval elements and the subaltern rubric of survival also contains elements appropriated from the dominant religious groups. This bipolar nature of subaltern religiosity gives it its contradictory character from the Gramscian perspective. This polarity gives subaltern religiosity its specific character, with its ambiguity. But it is precisely this ambiguity, which gives it its creativity, a creative ambiguity and also its emancipatory potential.62

In the concrete context of the subaltern religiosity of the Konaseema Madigas, we have seen this creative ambiguity and creative potential exemplified in their appropriating the dominant goddesses to make them into tools of their workplace, at the service of their everyday micro-political economy.63 As we have already discerned, the ritual continuum of the Madiga religious consciousness, which seems a seamless web from the ritual of daily struggle of the Madiga to his immersion into the ritual of rural solidarity, is not without its traces of dissonance at various layers.64 There is solidarity of ritual without the consensus of ideology.65

Here we see the subaltern agency of the Madiga at work, wherein, the twin strands of religious subjectivity, and political economy are intertwined. Madiga religiosity has its matrix in the matter-spirit, divine-human continuum. The Madigas give expression to this religiosity, in their struggle for survival, well-being and autonomy. In the process, they locate the sacred, wholeness and salvation in this world. Marx’s remarks that religion is a general theory of the world, logic in its popular form, universal source of consolation, as well as protest is verified in the context of the religiosity of the subaltern Madigas of Konaseema.66

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63 Cf. Section III, Chapter 4, subsection entitled “Transitory Fraternity and Solidarity of Incommensurable Identities: The Operative Praxis of Ritualized and hegemonic Communitas”.

64 Cf. Ibid.

65 Cf. Section III, Chapter 4, subsection entitled “Madiga as Insider- Outsider: Towards a Subaltern Genealogy of a Solidarity without Consensus”.

66 Cf. Section III, Chapter 4, “Conclusion”.

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Texture of Continuity/Discontinuity: An Inscription of Contradictory Consciousness

From the point of view of sociology, there is a pattern of continuity/discontinuity in this appropriation of the dominant religiosity by the Madiga. The same pattern of continuity/discontinuity is evidenced also in the appropriation of Catholicism as an alternative religiosity.

This pattern of continuity/discontinuity, flowing from the emancipatory potential of the contradictory character of the Madiga subaltern religiosity, holds the key to an alternative hermeneutic of subaltern religiosity, at variance with the dominant hermeneutic of subaltern Madiga religiosity.

This contradictory consciousness with its emancipatory/protest potential is rooted in the everyday quest of the Madiga for survival and well-being, where the struggle for survival is the daily ritual. As we noted in the narration of protest of the Madigas of Chivarripuntha, where the opposition between the subaltern and dominant orderings of time/space are at play, coffin as a symbolic discontinuity is projected as the spatiality of protest and identity assertion.67 Ebenezer’s construct of St Thomas the Apostle as the first Madiga, with its potential for a Madiga identity-theo-logy is an example of symbolic continuity. At one layer, it is an attempt at an appropriation of the symbol of the ancientness of dominant religiosity, as a subaltern tool of identity assertion and the sanitization of the stigma of untouchability and pollution. At another level, it is also a representation of the dissatisfactions at the level of political economy.

The Process of Symbol Sliding: Subaltern Agency Inscribed by Contingencies

This interplay of continuity/discontinuity-dissatisfaction in the intertwined matrix of the religious subjectivity and political economy brings into relief the agency of the Madiga, expressed in the art of creating, appropriating and sliding past

67 Cf. Section IV – Chapter 2, subsection entitled “Dominant Superimposition of Orderings of Time and Space”.
the symbols of identity, protest and autonomy. The subaltern hermeneutic that Madiga is, he/she is engaged in the bricolage of appropriating and fabricating anew symbols, which become tools in their journey towards identity, autonomy and critical political consciousness. "Our gods are made just for the occasion – temporary gods and seasonal gods."68

In the art of shaping new symbols, the bricoleur that Madiga is, leaves behind, slides past the symbols that do not any more serve his/her quest for and journey towards identity and well-being. Like in the case of Jesus, who, as a symbol was not flesh and blood enough to help them address the issues of their struggle for survival, or like Ambedkar, whom they felt were being increasingly being appropriated by the Malas, the Madigas move past the symbols, which are no longer fitting aids and tools in their quest for survival and well-being.69 "We are not ashamed to say, nay bold to say that our symbols keep on sliding, as we move on, in our quest for survival and identity. We are pragmatic that way."70

This process of symbol-sliding, which the Madiga the bricoleur engages in, is at once an act of protest and of identity-assertion. It is simultaneously an act of critique and a protest. It is the Madiga’s way of creating spaces of hope in his/her struggle for survival.71

This weaving of the chāpa in the texture of the subaltern quest and the intertwined matrix of political economy and religious subjectivity, falls within the logic of the alternative soteriological hermeneutic developed by us. Many contingencies of everydayness inscribe subaltern Madiga’s experience of

68 In personal communication with the Madiga elder of Razole – 01/05/1998. See also section III - chapter 4, subsection entitled “The Material Texture of the Divine-Human Continuum: Fear, Power, and Subaltern Strategy”.

69 In interview with Krishna Madiga, the leader of Dandjūrī movement – 07/06/2001. See also Section III – Chapter 2. “Conclusion”.

70 In interview with Krishna Madiga, the leader of the Dandjūrī movement – 07/06/2001.

71 Cf. David Harvey, Spaces of Hope (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 53 – 72, where the author stresses the importance of building up small spaces of hope, in the form of particular and localized struggles, which have to be networked into a great movement of struggle, especially against the forces of globalization, which cause uneven development in geographical spaces.
transcendence in fragments and the pluralism of his/her everyday struggle for survival.\textsuperscript{72}

**Centrality of Need-based Symbolism: Political Economy as the Hermeneutical Key to Subaltern Religiosity**

The process of symbol sliding, wherein Madiga agency, inscribed by everyday contingencies is expressed, is an affirmation of the centrality of the need-based symbolism in the life of the subalterns. In the context of mainline sociology of religion, the need-based symbols are considered to be contingent, in as much as they are not as stable as the symbols of transcendence and salvation, which do not usually change, and the socio-structural symbols are very hard to change.\textsuperscript{73} Going along with Kooiman,\textsuperscript{74} it is my submission that especially in the subaltern context, the neat distinctions between transcendence/salvation, need/economy and *Communitas*/Structure, do not hold. Rather what is actually in practice of their everyday agency expressed in the intertexture of political economy and religious subjectivity is the collapse of borders or the violation of frontiers between the above binaries and the wider spheres of religion, economy and politics.\textsuperscript{75}

Unlike what Amaladoss, in his sympathy for popular religiosity puts forth, Sanskritization as a process, may not be the ideal hermeneutical key to understand the subaltern struggle for mobility and identity, especially if the process of Sanskritization is understood only from the point of view of rituals. The reason for my submission is that subaltern religiosity is deeply embedded in and intertextured with political economy. The religiosity of the subalterns is a religion-in-society,

\textsuperscript{72} Cf. The subsection entitled "Salvation in Fragments and Transitoriness: Plurality in Transcendence" above.


\textsuperscript{75} In this context see Christian Parker. *Popular Religion and Modernization in Latin America: A Different Logic* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), pp. 51- 3, where the author brings into relief the fact that the real-life situations of the subalterns are beyond the 'radar' of the modern means of statistics and systems of information, though their survival strategies and social forms of collective actions must be acknowledged and appreciated as modes, in which they construct their way of life, and constitutive of their worldviews.
constructed by them, within the matrix of the socio-political and economic forces in flux. 

Instead of legitimizing a hierarchization of symbols, according to the degree of real or imagined stability, what is salutary in the subaltern context is to respect the logic and the process of the collapse of borders between the spiritual, material and the political in the everydayness of subaltern struggles, inscribed by contingencies. This is to affirm the subaltern agency at play there, and stand in reverence before the transcendence at play in the experiential and the lived plural contexts of the subalterns.

The recognition of the primordial embeddedness of the subaltern religious subjectivity in political economy is the key to an alternative hermeneutical understanding of subaltern Madiga religiosity. This is an alternative to the dominant reductive hermeneutical key, which was centered on the evolutionistic understanding of growth in faith-as-function, over against performance. The alternative non-dualistic understanding of subaltern religiosity also overcomes the instrumentatalization of the Madiga economic agency, expressed in their transition to alternative religiousities like Catholicism.

This is also the logic behind my call for a recovery of the Madiga symbolic heritage. As over against the hermeneutical keys of Displacement, the key of

76 Cf. G. Aloysius, Religion as Emancipatory Identity: A Buddhist Movement among the Tamils under Colonialism (New Delhi: New Age International, 1998), pp. 1-12, for a genealogy and the characteristics of religion-in-society. See also Christian Parker, Popular Religion and Modernization, pp. 234 - 9, where the author affirms the capacity of the people as social actors, who produce and reproduce the codified meanings. People collectively produce their representations and practices of religious symbolism, which contains layers of the dominant, as well as the relatively autonomous.

77 Cf. Christian Parker, Popular Religion and Modernization, pp. 93-94, where the author presents the potential of popular piety to bestow a sense of meaning in life, by resematicizing the common sense, which confronts adversity everyday.

78 In the context of the present discussion, where we are contrasting the centrality of the need-based symbolism, as a hermeneutical key to understand subaltern religiosity, over against the dominant reductive hermeneutical key of faith-function, see Felix Wilfred, "Towards a Subaltern Hermeneutics: Beyond the Contemporary Polarities in the Interpretation of Religious Traditions" in Asian Dreams and Christian Hope, pp. 247-68, especially pp. 259 - 64, where the author highlights the subaltern hermeneutics as a hermeneutics of earthliness, beyond the polarities of dominant discourse.
Continuity/Inclusion has to be employed for the recovery of Madiga symbolism and its integration into the Catholic Madiga religiosity/sacred hierarchy.\textsuperscript{79}

Recovery of Madiga Symbolic Heritage: Jāmbavuḍu and Mātangi

We have noted in the preceding section that need-based symbols are central to the subaltern culture and political economy is the key to understand subaltern religiosity. Against this background, the recovery of the two focal symbols, of Jāmbavuḍu and Mātangi has timely relevance, especially given the context of the renewed subaltern thrust of Konaseema Catholicism. It has added significance in the context of the process of symbol-sliding, characteristic of Madiga subaltern religiosity. Though Krishna Madiga admitted to me that Jāmbavuḍu and Mātangi as identity symbols were relevant to the Madigas, and that they had gone beyond them to Ambedkar and Babu Jagajeevan Ram, these two ancient symbols fired the imagination and the quest for identity of the Madigas, as the Danḍhūrā movement. These symbols, once slid by, were once again resurrected, especially given the fact that apart from being symbols of protest and penetration, they were also symbols of quest for survival. As Veeraraju from Madikki exhorted the fellow-Madigas, during the group interview, I had with them, the Madigas had to take up the sword of revolution, thrown in challenge at them by the Mātangi. She has been in Madiga memory, a symbol of subaltern resistance and assertion in socio-economic space.\textsuperscript{80} The revolution, understood in context was that of the struggle for streamlining of reservations, and the identity assertion of the Madigas, vis-à-vis the Malas, the traditional enemies of the Madigas.

Jāmbavuḍu, ever celebrated in Madiga memory and kulapurana, as the ancestral symbol, is also a pre-eminent symbol of protest, over the alienation of the Madigas from the space of political economy, through ritualized hierarchy, as we have noted. "You have left me in a polluted place. I will not remain here....". He

\textsuperscript{79} Cf. Section – III, chapter 1, the subsection entitled "Prabhu – Goddesses in Continuum: The Idiom of Inclusion".

\textsuperscript{80} Cf. section – III, chapter 3, “Mātangi as Symbol which plays the Goddess”, subsection entitled “Mātangi: Symbol of Subaltern Resistance and Assertion in Socio-economic Space?".
interrogates the dominant benevolence, which masks the alienation of subaltern labour.\textsuperscript{81} Revalorization of \textit{kulavruti} (traditional trade of skinning and tanning leather) and leather itself, as symbols of the caste identity and not of stigmatization, was triggered by the recovery of the symbol of Jambavudu, a share in the political economy of the village, for him and his posterity.\textsuperscript{82}

At this juncture, when Konaseema Catholicism is looking towards a renewed subaltern thrust, a recovery and re-interpretation of the symbols of Jambavudu would be a symbolic act in itself, symbolizing Catholicism’s readiness to make its own, the very earthy and primordial concerns of the Madigas for survival. Though my proposal augurs well with the call of contemporary anthropology for building up alternative traditions of spiritual humanization through the recovery in memory of the symbolic heritage of the subaltern peoples, their sedimented moorings and situated vernacular beliefs.\textsuperscript{83} I am, at least for the present, unable to present a concrete programmatic for the integration of these symbols into the texture of Catholicism. But the heuristic validity of these and other symbols of Madiga heritage, as a part of the process of the subaltern thrust of Catholicism is to be affirmed.

These symbols are part of the texture of the economic thelogy, which Madigas build up as they experience transcendence, in the fragments of their everydayness. They are symbols, which they recover and slide by, and trigger their subaltern imagination of protest, in the contingencies of the quest for survival and identity.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{81} Cf. section III, Chapter 2, where I elaborate a hermeneutic of the \textit{kulapurāṇa} called \textit{Jambapurāṇa}.

\textsuperscript{82} Cf. \textit{Ibid}.


\textsuperscript{84} In this context of the discussion of the embeddedness of subaltern religiosity/ spirituality in political economy, see Ranajit Guha, "The Career of an Anti-God in Heaven and Earth" in Ashok Mitra (ed.), \textit{The Truth Unites: Essays in Tribute to Sanar Sen} (Calcutta: Sahamarekha, 1985), pp. 1-25, where the author tracing the trajectory of the cluster of myths around the lower caste god "Rāhu" brings out the fact that the subalterns construct their gods, often appropriating the myths constructed by the dominant to denigrate them. By a process of inversion, they turn these very myths into weapons of contestation against the dominant, who exploit and oppress them. For example in many myths, eclipse is depicted as Rāhu swallowing up the sun and moon, the two celestial god-brothers, who were indebted to Rāhu, but never managed to pay back the debt. Here the Baniya moneylender, to whom they are in perpetual indebtedness and who is constantly exploiting them, is turned into
Given the fact that political economy can be an alternative key to understand the religio-cultural continuities/discontinuities of subaltern religiosity, and their device of symbol-sliding, in the art of negotiating boundaries, the attempt to integrate these hermeneutically pregnant symbols in the texture of Konaseema Catholicism, must evoke less the memory of syncretism, pejoratively understood, and more the idiom of inculturation, understood as emancipatory praxis on behalf of the poor. Better still, it is understood as an option of the poor, in their quest for survival and well-being.

Recovery of Madiga symbolic heritage, especially the focal symbols of Jambuvudu and Maliangi is also an exercise in helping the subalterns build an ideology of identity politics, assert their due in political economy. It is also an exercise in constructing a subaltern emancipative historiography from subaltern memory, and fragments.

Conclusion

As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, in this concluding chapter of the section on the encounter between Catholicism and the subaltern Madigas of Konaseema, we have attempted at bringing into relief, the subaltern signposts for the

Rāhu: The economic theology of compensation behind the construction of this god, and its moorings in political economy cannot be missed. See especially ibid., pp. 16–9. I am indebted to Sanal Mohan of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata, for drawing attention to this essay, as well as the aspect of the economic theology of the subalterns.


88 Cf. Sanal Mohan, "Theorizing History in the Context of Social Movement: Challenges to the Reigning Paradigms of History" in The Struggle for the Past, pp. 99–110, where the author tries to capture for us the struggle of a subaltern community, namely Pratiksha Raksha Dava Sabha, in the south of the South-Western state of Kerala, India, to construct a history from their memory of slavery, and the stories of their existence in the periphery, and their attempt to constitute themselves into a community, through history.
onward journey of Catholicism, with a renewed subaltern thrust. These signposts were already emerging towards the end of our hermeneutic of the encounter, which we undertook in the last chapter. The broad frameworks of the signposts, which we have brought into relief, were already in the horizon, during our hermeneutical probing in the foregoing section, as the thematic for an alternative hermeneutic. They were, as we already noted, the non-instrumental approach to the subaltern economic agency, recognition of the inscription of the texture of salvation and transcendence with political economy, and the overcoming of matter-spirit dichotomy in discourse and praxis.

The new hermeneutic of salvation, which we undertook at the beginning of this section, provided the launching pad for the erection of and bringing into relief, the subaltern signposts, for the onward journey of Konaseema Catholicism, answering the call of the Madigas, for a second intersection with the Church. The sociological shift called for by Beyer from religion as function, to religion as performance was made a tool in reaching a new understanding of the praxis of the Church, through the mediation of social movements. The signposts, which we have brought into relief, at the end of our hermeneutical journey, are, relational identity of the Church, experience of subaltern transcendence in contingency, texture of continuity/discontinuity- dissatisfaction in religion and political economy, process of symbol sliding, and the centrality of centrality of need-based symbolism.

These subaltern signposts are expressions of subaltern contradictory consciousness, and expression of subaltern agency inscribed by contingencies. It also highlights the subaltern facticity that survival is the primordial subaltern posture, and that in the subaltern ethos and praxis, religious subjectivity and political economy are ever intertwined. Our call for the recovery of Madiga symbolic heritage, especially the focal symbols of Jambavudu and Matangi is an expression of our taking note of the subaltern signpost of process of symbol sliding, as an expression of quest for identity and autonomy.

This section too has been hermeneutical in its thrust, and comes as a moment in our hermeneutical journey with the subaltern Madigas of Konaseema. Even here, given the nature of our enquiry, which is open-ended, our hermeneutical
elaborations have let the signposts emerge from the horizon of Madiga subaltern agency and everyday praxis. It is hoped that these subaltern signposts will assist Konaseema Catholicism in a deeper immersion into the subaltern life world of the Madigas.

In the next section, which is the concluding section of the thesis, we will be gathering together the main findings of the research and highlighting the salient contribution of the thesis.