Section – V

Conclusion

In this concluding section, I gather together the main research findings and
the salient contribution of the thesis.

A. MAIN FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

The main conclusions of the research, in relation to the hypotheses of the
research, can be grouped under the following thematic headings.

1. Interrelationship between Political Economy and Religion

An analytical overview of the vicissitudes of the political economy of
colonial Konaseema reveals that the Madigas have been in struggle for survival and
subsistence. They have been in a state of endemic hunger. The negative influence of
caste and the stigma of untouchability were instrumental in preventing their socio-
economic and political mobility. The nexus between power and ritualized hierarchy,
written in the codes of dominant religion, has alienated them from the space of
political economy.

2. Intertwining of Political Economy and Religious Subjectivity

A hermeneutical analysis of the inventory of the subaltern religious
consciousness of the Konaseema Madigas reveals that they have been constructing a
religiosity of their own, by appropriating, as well as contesting the religious universe
of the dominant castes. The subaltern religiosity of the Madigas is characterized by
the texture of matter-spirit continuum, and by an eminent sense of pragmatism.
Their ritual world cannot be separated from their everyday struggle for survival and
well-being. Given this context, religiosity was a space of tapping power, through
appropriation, inversion and contestation of the dominant religious space. A
subaltern hermeneutic of the symbols of Jambavudu and Mātangi indicates the
presence of these modes of appropriation and contestation, especially in view of
asserting the share denied to them in the political economy and socio-cultural space.
Their participation in the customary rural rituals around the goddess, by which the
village gave expression to the prevalent hierarchy and hegemony has been, one of solidarity, without the consensus of ideology.

3. Conversion as an Expression of the Subaltern Economic Agency and the Quest for Well-being and the Attendant Contradictions

The conversion of the Madigas to Catholicism is an expression of their subaltern economic agency for survival and their quest for well-being. In the initial stages, this need for socio-economic identity and well-being was met through the power of the Prabhu (the Lord Jesus), which was manifested in the material and medical help extended to them by the missionaries. The political and financial clout of the missionaries also gave the Madigas an added and vicarious sense of identity and protection. But this realization of identity had been fractious, in as much as it had not been accompanied by a growth in autonomy and critical consciousness. The protectionism of the Catholic missionaries, coupled with their imposition of the dominant cultural and religious modes on Madiga life and religiosity have suppressed the potential for the enhancement of identity, leading to a state of truncated autonomy and contradictory consciousness.

4. Continuities, Discontinuities and the Burden of Christianity

In the sphere of religiosity, religious subjectivity has been replaced by conformity to the Catholic faith, given by the missionaries, expressed in the willful suppression of their religious symbolism, which earlier served as a tool of subaltern assertion. This is a discontinuity with the past. In continuity with the past, in the realm of autonomy, the religio-economic power of the Fathers has replaced the hegemony of the earlier masters, the landlords. In the wake of the Mandalization of politics, and under the growing impact of globalization, the Madigas feel abandoned by their former higher caste landlord masters, by the Catholic Fathers and by the government.

Faced with the bureaucratic hurdles in procuring the caste certificates, in view of availing of reservation due to them, many of the Madigas have started feeling that their belonging to the Church is a burden, and a hindrance to their social and economic mobility. The intervention of the Church, in the spheres of welfare
and education has often been benefiting only clusters of families, and not enhancing the collective dignity, identity, autonomy and critical consciousness of the Madigas. So, the Church’s intervention has not been able to take the Madigas as a caste, economically forward, and has failed to help them to assert their collective identity. The paternalistic protectionism of the Catholic leadership, expressed in subtle ways of hegemony, is one of the factors that had atrophied their capacity for autonomy. As some of the missionaries themselves have acknowledged, the Church leadership could have been more vigilant in fostering a sense of human dignity in the Madigas.

5. An Alternative Programmatic for Catholic Christianity in Konaseema

There is a growing awareness among the Church leadership, of its lack of critical involvement in the lives of the Madigas, especially in their concerns for well-being and survival. Madigas themselves have been giving expression to their disenchantment with the Church and its leadership. The need of the hour is a renewed subaltern thrust for Catholicism in Konaseema. This alternative programmatic calls for paradigm shift in pastoral praxis from function to performance.

As fulfilling a function, religion is in the private sphere, mediated by religious functionaries and limited to ritual and doctrines. On the other hand, under the paradigm of performance, religion involves itself, in the residual spheres of life, not being attended to by the dominant subsystems like economy and polity. Religion can exert this influence in the spheres like strengthening the identities of marginalized people through the mediation of social movements and by networking with the other agencies involved in the empowerment of people. It is also an attempt in the paradigm shift from function to performance.

In the paradigm shift from function to performance, Christianity can draw inspiration also from the Danḍārā movement. It is a phenomenon in which, the Church can read the signs of the times, of the place and of the people. The entire Madiga population, until then considered to be proverbially lethargic, was mobilized by the caste leadership, with the explicit agenda of achieving the streamlining of quota of reservations for jobs, so as to help the Madigas towards greater socio-
economic mobility. In this process of the political mobilization of the Madigas, the potential of the Madiga performative, as well as cultural-symbolic resources were tapped with telling impact.

6. A New Look at Salvation and a New Approach to Culture and Contingency

The turn of the Church to a subaltern ethos and hermeneutic of praxis will help it to re-deem and respect the political economy underlying their subaltern quest for survival and well-being, as constitutive of their salvation. This challenges the Church to overcome the matter-spirit dichotomy, operative in its praxis, against its own professed faith in the mystique of incarnation. The onward journey of Catholic Christianity with the subalterns becomes more incarnate through its entry into a new hermeneutic mode of relating to the reality of culture and material dimension of life.

Culture has its own autonomous value, more than being a mere conduit for the universal and eternal faith of the Church. So too, matter, if approached, through non-dichotomous soteriological hermeneutic, will be valued in itself, rather than being considered a mere means of salvation. The praxis of the Church becomes more immersed in the subaltern context, when it is informed by contingency as a mode of existence and transformation of society. The anthropological, as a constitutive dimension of reality and everyday praxis, calls for a non-reductive approach that does not subsume it under the divine and the spiritual.

7. The Idiom of Political Economy as an Alternative to the Binary of Syncretism/Inculturation

The Church has been addressing the issue of the cultural continuity between the pre-conversion religiosity and the post-conversion religiosity of the subalterns, only under the binary framework of syncretism/inculturation. When the continuity has been worked out by the subalterns, it is labeled as syncretism or superstition; on the other hand, when continuity has been encouraged by the authorities of the Church, it is called inculturation.
The present inquiry, which has delved into the interrelationship between religion and political economy, in the context of the life of the subaltern Madigas of Konaseema, may help the Church to go beyond the polarities of syncretism and inculturation. New light can be thrown on the problematic of the cultural continuity and the attendant ambiguity in the religious praxis of the subalterns, if the subaltern religious practice can be studied under the alternative idiom of political economy. If the Church gets into the operative logic of subaltern religiosity, many of the symbols employed by the subalterns, considered syncretic, will be seen to be potent expressions of their subaltern economic agency for survival and well-being.

Praxis oriented hermeneutic of the symbols of Jāmbavudu, Mātangi and the Madiga immersion into ritual solidarity, have testified to the relevance of this heuristic assertion. The symbolic potential of the subaltern religiosity has to be recovered and hermeneutically integrated into the texture of subaltern religious subjectivity and faith-life, so as to be of assistance to the subalterns in their journey and struggle for well-being, wholeness and mobility.

This alternative hermeneutical model for understanding Madiga religious subjectivity will help the leadership to delve deeper into the subaltern religiosity of the Madigas, deeply embedded in the everyday political economy of their lives. This in turn, will enable them to become organic and participatory intellectual at the service of the subalterns, in their quest for survival and well-being.

B. THE SALIENT CONTRIBUTION OF THE THESIS

In one sense, this thesis can be brought under the broad academic discipline of “Fundamental Theology”. It was commenced under the working title of “An Enquiry into the Religious Consciousness of the Dalit Madigas of Konaseema (E.G. Dist., A.P.) in Encounter With Catholicism”. At the end of the hermeneutical journey, it has taken on the title of “Political Economy and Religion in the Encounter of the Dalit Madigas of Konaseema (E.G. Dist., A.P.) with Catholicism”. The final shape of the title and the itinerary of the entire phenomenologico-hermeneutical pilgrimage, have given me clues as to what fundamental theology,
nay what theology could be in the subaltern context, and in even in a broader framework.

In the following paragraphs, I delineate this salient contribution of the thesis, around the thematic of fundamental theology as an engagement with the primordialities of subaltern existence.

1. Fundamental Theology as Engagement with Primordialities of Subaltern Everydayness

The thesis, as a hermeneutical journey with the subaltern Madigas of Konaseema has brought to light that fundamental theology, especially from a subaltern perspective has to be understood as an engagement with the primordialities of life. It is *fundamental* theology, in as much as it is called to address the fundamental/primordial concerns of human life, like survival and human dignity. Fundamental theology, and theology in general are called to be a praxis, action-reflection-action, towards addressing the day-to-day challenges of life.¹

2. Fundamental Theology as a Catalyst in the Strivings for Identity and Autonomy

Traditionally the role of fundamental theology was to establish the preambles of faith, from the perspective of reason. It concerned itself with a set of questions related to the potentiality of the human being to receive faith and revelation. From the perspective of dominant religiosity, these questions are valid enough and would merit great attention. But in the subaltern context, there has to be a paradigm shift regarding the very set of questions raised by fundamental theology, and the way they are raised. The focus has to shift from the possibility and foundations of faith and revelation, to how faith and revelation would address their concerns for survival and quest for identity and autonomy.

Our empirical and hermenutical investigation has brought to light that subalterns expect religion and religious praxis, to be an immersion in their everyday

concerns of survival and identity. In this context, the contribution of fundamental theology consists in being a catalyst in the struggle of the subalterns for identity and autonomy. From the Gramscian perspective, it becomes a participatory activity, where people who are suppressed, forgotten and alienated are enabled to articulate their concerns of identity and autonomy.

It becomes a space for the articulation of subaltern struggle and protest, with its embodied and performative character. It is also open to the contradictory nature of subaltern consciousness, operative in subaltern religiosity. In their contradictory consciousness, the subalterns appropriate the symbols of dominant religiosity as a means of identity assertion and their striving for autonomy. Thus Fundamental theology becomes an anthropology of embodied knowledge and a philosophy of praxis, a resource in their striving for identity and autonomy.

3. Fundamental Theology as Sensitivity to the Economic Sacred

Fundamental theology is about listening to/contemplating the subalterns in their primordial posture of survival and protest. It is in being with them, not in the condescending mode, where their subaltern agency and concerns for survival are instrumentalized, but in a mode of engagement in/with their primordialities and subaltern aspirations. In this way, fundamental theology becomes a primordial theology, with well-being and the subaltern quest for survival as its proper theological locus. In this way, primordial theology is linked to political economy. Political economy becomes a tool of mediation for primordial theology, in its engagement with the primordialities of subaltern life and struggles.

A primordial theology is also about giving due reverence to the economic sacred in the life of the subalterns. Sociologists speak of three levels of symbols, which are operative in human cultures. They are the symbols of transcendence,


symbols of social interaction and the need-based symbols. Accordingly, they speak of the transcendental sacred, as well as a social sacred.⁵ They consider the need-based symbols to be of shifting or non-stable character, and do not associate the need-based symbols with the sacred. But in the subaltern context, there is need to accord hermeneutical privilege to the need-based symbols, as they are expressive of the primordial concerns of the subalterns for survival and identity.

Along with the transcendental sacred and the social sacred, which occupy the privileged space of sociological and theological discourse from the dominant perspective, there is need to affirm the space of the economic sacred, as symbolic of the subaltern primordial concerns. This space of the economic sacred is the proper and privileged locus of primordial theology, and is constitutive of their salvation.

Thus primordial theology is about recognizing the signals of transcendence, in the everyday experience of the struggle of the subalterns for survival. Subalterns experience transcendence in the plural sites of contestation and subaltern submission, in the fragments of their daily life experiences. Margins become the site of God’s visitation.⁶ It is in this context that the first moment of the ritual continuum – their daily struggle was accorded hermeneutical privilege. This primordial theology has its locus, the politics and history of the everyday. It becomes also the matrix of the subaltern soteriological hermeneutic operative in the renewed subaltern thrust of Catholicism.

This primordial theology with its non-dichotomous approach to matter and spirit valorizes the subaltern economic agency at play in the continuities and discontinuities, of their religio-cultural options. Subaltern political economy of survival becomes the key of this theology, as an alternative to the theological discourse, informed by polarities of matter/spirit and transcendence/immanence.


4. Primordial Theology as Crossing of Boundaries in Sensitivity to Contingencies

Primordial theology is a trigger for the Church, in becoming a space, a nodal point, which articulates the everyday concerns of the subalterns. The Church becomes a nodal point for the articulation of subaltern concerns, by reactivizing itself of its institutional identity, and learning to network with the agents of socio-cultural and economic transformation. Hope as an ability to immerse oneself into the contingencies informing societal processes is an essential condition for this process of dialectical interaction.7

5. Primordial theology in the Matrix of Transdisciplinarity: Humanizing Knowledge for Emancipation

The praxis of networking and dialectical interaction with other agencies does impinge upon theology's hitherto held self-understanding as a rigorous and self-enclosed science.8 The praxis of joining hands with the agencies transforms theology into a participative partner.

Sharing the Postmodern condition, with its dynamics of collapse of borders, theology realizes its contingent location, in the republic of disciplines and perspectives. The emphasis in this emerging matrix of transdisciplinarity is on interpenetration of disciplines. Knowledge is viewed as relational. The universality, which can be claimed by any science, is that of perspective universality, at the service of articulating the human concerns. Essential virtue for growing in transdisciplinarity is the courage to abandon one’s self-assured positions, and be on constant move, at the service of human emancipation.9

Thus fundamental theology, in the matrix of transdisciplinarity, attains a processual and dialectical identity. It is transformed into a moment, a nodal point in


the hegemonic articulation of human knowledge, at the service of engagement with the primordialities of the alienated, oppressed and forgotten of history.

In this context of knowledge as the articulation of human concerns, primordial theology is also historiography. It is a partner and collaborator with other disciplines, in giving voice to his/her story, of those absent from the stories of the dominant. Primordial theology is also attentiveness and sensitivity to the subaltern people's memory of resistance and struggle.10

6. Primordial Theology as Operative in the Present Work: A Methodological Afterword

The present work stands at the intersection of several disciplines like political economy, economic history, anthropology, sociology, and philosophical and theological hermeneutics. It is transdisciplinary in character and is intended to be an exercise in primordial theology, anthropology of embodied knowledge or the philosophy of praxis. It has been an attempt to give voice to the agency of the Madigas of Konaseema, by collapsing the borders of many disciplines, under the one-integrating subaltern perspective. Under this subaltern rubric, it also has tried to meet the Postmodern concern for humanization of knowledge.11

Basically, it is a modest contribution towards subaltern hermeneutic, as a tool of contextual theology. It is my hope and desire that this work will be a contribution towards the contextual and praxis-oriented re-interpretation of Christianity, and Catholicism, in Andhra Pradesh. It is also hoped that my attempt at explicitating the hermeneutical centrality of political economy, in interpreting the subaltern appropriation of Christianity, will be a contribution towards a much-needed sociology/anthropology of Indian Christianity.12

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