The ‘Untouchable School’: American Missionaries, Hindu Social Reformers and Educational Dreams of Labouring Dalits in Colonial North India

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This article explores the history of Dalit education beyond the usual analytical frames of access and exclusion. It suggests that the mere inclusion of marginalised groups in educational institutions does not guarantee equality. Rather, inclusion can set the process for generating newer forms of exclusion and suppression. It investigates Dalits’ dreams of education in Uttar Pradesh by examining hitherto unexplored records of the American Methodist Church missionaries and the Arya Samaj from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. I argue that education provided to Dalits was limited, hierarchical, and practical, and was subordinated to the missionaries’ and Arya Samajis’ visions of maintaining Dalits as productive, disciplined, loyal bodies—wage workers, housewives, farmers. Dalit dreams had to create a space for themselves within a hierarchical, limited world of education and opportunities.

Keywords: Dalit education; Dalit labour; wage-worker; American missionaries; rural schooling; Dalit dreams; North India schools; ‘untouchable’ education; Arya Samaj schools; industrial education

This article discusses how Dalits of Uttar Pradesh (henceforth UP) negotiated their dreams of education and non-labouring positions through schools established by the American Methodist Episcopal Church (henceforth MEC) missionaries (1850–1930) and later by the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reform organisation (1920–30).¹ It will show that Dalits' desire for schooling got intimately tied to their aspirations of escaping manual labouring jobs and claiming 'respectable' non-labouring jobs (teaching, preaching, clerkship)—a preserve of 'literate' elite castes. Missionaries and missionary education cultivated these desires and dreams, but they also contained them by offering limited and differentiated education to Dalits. So much power ascribed to schools by labouring castes worried missionaries and Arya Samajis who saw Dalits primarily as labouring bodies and offered an education that educated Dalits but as docile, industrious, clean, morally-sound, loyal religious bodies—male Dalits as industrial and farm workers and female Dalits as productive housewives. These educational visions and Dalits' aspirations evolved over the years as the mission spread and constituted each other mutually through dialogues. Dalits' demand for education was shaped by their experience of subordinate socio-economic status and religious bodies' educational policy. Similarly, visions of missionary education were shaped by religious bodies' needs (conversion, need for labour, teachers, and pastors) and students' aspirations. I show that both missionaries and Arya Samajis focussed on the issue of access—opening schools for Dalits and making them literate—and, prepared them to accept their roles as manual workers by denying them higher literary and scientific education or by offering industrial education. Through this article, I want to stress

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that the processes of educational inclusion are often accompanied with conflicts, exclusion, and suppression of dreams that we need to accept and examine critically. Access to educational institutions alone does not guarantee the equal participation.

The question of Dalit education has been framed through the lens of access and exclusion, the role of elite actors in establishing schools for Dalits, caste discrimination inside educational institutions, Dalits' struggles and initiatives for establishing schools and using education for generating socio-economic equality.² Scholars have debated the role of Christian missionaries and the Arya Samaj—the two most important private actors of education in modern India—in opening schools for Dalits. Hayden J. Bellenoit in his work on missionary education in UP stressed that missionary schools were primarily meant for the literate elite—castes, while 'nearly all converts in north India' remained illiterate.³ While such conclusions are overdrawn, missionary education that emerged in UP was deeply hierarchal and castiest. Missionary education, in general, had been seen as providing education to Dalits and challenging caste inequalities (G.A. Oddie) and generating socio-political consciousness and socio-economic mobility (Duncan Forrester, D. Kooiman), spiritual emancipation (J.W. Gladstone).⁴ Scholars

² Shailaja Paik, *Dalit Women's Education in Modern India: Double Discrimination* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Eleanor Zelliot, 'Dalit Initiatives in Education, 1880–1992' in Parimala V. Rao (ed.), *New Perspectives in the History of Indian Education* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2014), pp. 45–67; Philip Constable, 'Sitting on the School Verandah: The Ideology and Practice of "untouchable" Educational Protest in Late Nineteenth–Century Western India', in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 37, no. 4 (2000), pp. 383–422.

³ Hayden J.A. Bellenoit, *Missionary Education and Empire in Late Colonial India, 1860–1920* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 76.

⁴ G.A. Oddie, *Social Protest in India: British Protestant Missionaries and Social Reforms, 1850–1900* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1979); Duncan B. Forrester, *Caste and Christianity: Attitudes and Policies on Caste of Anglo-Saxon Protestant Missions in India* (London: Curzon Press, 1980); Chinna Rao Yagati, 'Education and Identity Formation among Dalits in Colonial Andhra' in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Education and the Disprivileged: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century India*. (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2002), pp. 84–120; R.E. Frykenberg, 'Modern Education in South India, 1784–1854: Its Roots and Its Role as a Vehicle of Integration under Company Raj', in *The American Historical Review*, vol. 91, no. 1 (1986), pp. 37–65; Dick Kooiman, *Conversion and Social Equality in India: The London Missionary Society in South Travancore in the 19th Century* (Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1989); J.W. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity and People's Movements in Kerala: A Study of Christian Mass Movements in Relation to Neo-Hindu Socio-Religious Movements in Kerala, 1850–1936* (Trivandrum: Seminary Publications, 1984); Joseph Bara, 'Tribal Education, the Colonial State and Christian Missionaries: Chhotanagpur', 1839–1870 in Bhattacharya, *Education and the Disprivileged*.

have problematised the radical image of missionary education through different regional case studies, but they continue to see missionary education unproblematically. Koji Kawashima in the context of Hindu ruled Travancore princely state argued that missionary education got subjected to the social conservatism and pressures of the local state by the 1890s.⁵ Philip Constable in the context of the Bombay Presidency reemphasised that missionary education operated in constraints set by the colonial state and Indian society, and the demand for education was led by ‘untouchables’.⁶ Within this historiography, there is a consensus that missionary education was crucial for waging anti-caste struggles. The nature of missionary education vis-à-vis Dalits’ desires is not given importance. Otherwise, missionary education has been seen as a tool for facilitating imperial ideology, nationalist ideas⁷, proselytization and conversion⁸, producing religion-based community identities⁹. Same is true in the context of studies on the Arya Samaj and Dalit education in UP. The uplift agenda of the Arya Samaj—opening schools, public wells, temples and educating values of cleanliness—is seen as educating Dalits who later in their career became Dalit leaders and led anti-caste organisations.¹⁰ Ramnarayan Rawat’s study shows that Arya Samaj’s programmes appealed to Chamar leaders who were claiming a superior caste status (Kshatriya) in the 1920s.¹¹ However,

⁵ Koji Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State: Travancore, 1858–1936* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁶ Constable, ‘Sitting on the School Verandah’, pp. 383–422.

⁷ Bellenoit, *Missionary Education and Empire*.

⁸ Jonathan C. Ingleby, *Missionaries, Education and India: Issues in Protestant Missionary Education in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000).

⁹ Parna Sengupta, *Pedagogy for Religion Missionary Education and the Fashioning of Hindus and Muslims in Bengal* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2012).

¹⁰ Badri Narayan, ‘A Book Also Travels: Circulating Small Booklets in Dalit Poorva’, in *South Asian History and Culture*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2010), pp. 1–15. Sudha Pai, *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution: The Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh* (New Delhi: Sage, 2002), chap. 1; Ramnarayan Rawat, *Reconsidering Untouchability: Chamars and Dalit History in North India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), pp. 140–41; Nandini Gooptu, *The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early Twentieth-Century India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 155–57.

¹¹ Rawat, *Reconsidering Untouchability*, pp. 136–41.

he does not point out that Arya Samajis formed alliances with landlords to keep Dalits in labouring positions and made schooling subordinate to these goals.

Rupa Viswanath in her recent work on Pariahs in Tamil Nadu provides a radically different view where she shows that missionaries believed in and practised social hierarchy and difference—a point also made by Jana Tschurenv with regard to gender, race, and education in the early nineteenth century India.¹² Viswanath argues that missionaries did not ‘uphold an egalitarian ideology, except insofar as that meant equality before God alone’ and were interested in replacing the harsh and cruel ‘oriental slavery’ with gentler ‘free servitude’. According to her, missionaries’ critique of caste was directed against the ‘religious’ aspects of castes (rituals, superstitions) and not against the labour, political, and economic aspects (labour extraction and occupational hierarchies).¹³ Within this overall argument, schools for American missionaries, according to Viswanath, were a means to produce self-disciplined, thrifty ‘free servants’ content with their rural labouring positions, and for Pariahs to alter their conditions of subordination in their ghettoised neighbourhoods lacking school buildings.¹⁴ While I agree with her reading, I also show that education, both to missionaries and Dalits, meant more than what she suggests, and its meanings were shaped by constant dialogues and negotiations.

This article provides a history of Dalit education from the perspective of elites’ visions as well as of subalterns’ desires, highlights the role of transnational actors (the global) in producing a discourse and practice of Dalit education in the Hindi and Urdu speaking area of north India to which regional actors responded, and shifts the scholarly attention to UP where there has been hardly any work on missionaries and Dalit education. The first section of the

¹² Jana Tschurenv, ‘Incorporation and Differentiation: Popular Education and the Imperial Civilizing Mission in Early Nineteenth Century India’ in Michael Mann and Carey Watt, (eds), *Civilizing Missions in Colonial and Postcolonial South Asia: From Improvement to Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 93–124.

¹³ Rupa Viswanath, *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion, and the Social in Modern India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), pp. 88–89, 15–19, 40–99.

¹⁴ Viswanath, *The Pariah Problem*, p. 66, 75.

article, by doing a close reading of the MEC records kept in digital forms at the Yale University Library, explores American missionaries' engagement with the education of high-castes, Dalit desires and demand for education, and Dalits' conversion. It shows how Dalit conversion to Christianity and mission's need for a trained workforce led missionaries to open their schools for Dalits and offer respectable non-labouring positions to them. However, missionaries' prejudiced views about Dalits made them see Dalits as mere labouring entities. Mass conversion of Dalits from the 1890s, an expanding mission with first-generation Christian leaders, and a highly differentiated system of education meant that quality education could only be given to limited converts which produced a deeply hierarchical Christian community divided on the lines of education, region, and occupation. The second section analyses the entry of the Arya Samaj in the region in the 1920s and how they expanded educational opportunities for Dalits by establishing exclusive Dalit schools. Arya Samajis' alliances with local landlords and businessmen to crush Christian and Islamic influence among Dalits led them to establish basic literacy schools that perpetuated Dalit subordination. I will stress that there was a continuity between missionaries and Arya Samajis in terms of imagining Dalit lives as labourers and offering only limited, practical education to Dalits.

Dalit Dreams, Education, and the American Methodist Missionaries

When MEC missionaries established their first mission (Bareilly, 1857) in Oudh and Rohilkhand, a region situated between the Ganges and Himalayas (Image 1) in north India, they followed the advice of Alexander Duff, a famous Scottish Church missionary, of inducing high-castes to Christianity by establishing English schools for them.¹⁵ They combined it with bazaar preaching.

¹⁵ J.L. Humphrey, *Twenty-One Years in India* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1905), p. 34.

Image 1, MEC mission stations, 1895. Source: Wade Crawford Barclay, *The Methodist Episcopal Church, 1845–1939: Volume 3: Widening Horizons, 1845–95* (New York: The Board of Missions of the Methodist Church, 1957), p. 638.

Over the years, missionaries established primary, secondary, and high schools in the region and learned Hindustani for street preaching. However, both methods largely failed in bringing

converts. James Thoburn, one of the earliest missionaries and first Bishop of the MEC, remembered, ‘the whole work seemed so utterly unpromising that at times the thought could not but present itself that it might as well be given up’.¹⁶ The congregation was formed of native assistants provided by the American Presbyterians and domestic servants of missionaries.¹⁷ Successful conversions only happened when Dalits themselves came to them or missionaries visited their neighbourhoods. William Butler, the founder of the MEC, wrote,

A group of two or three dozen houses will be found on the outskirt of the town, inhabited by Chumars [Chamars], or leather-dressers; another by Chuhars, a very low caste of labourers, and so on. Going into one of these quarters [a mohalla] the workers began to hold meetings in a more formal way than possible in the bazaars.¹⁸

In 1859, a mass of ‘untouchable’ Mazhabi Sikhs from villages surrounding Moradabad city reached out to missionaries asking for education and employment. Fifteen or twenty of them were baptised.¹⁹ A Church Missionary converted Chamar came to MEC missionaries asking for their help in establishing a school for the Chamar community. The school he established began with fifty Chamar students.²⁰ In the following year, Chamars in Budaun asked for schools.²¹ Subsequently, Bhangis (sweeper caste) from Budaun who were mainly agrarian labourers and brick-makers by profession reached out to missionaries.²² Schooling, sometimes coupled with employment, was a primary demand of Dalits. It had emerged as an important outpost for conversion among Dalits. In 1872, Zahur-ul-Haqq, a preacher and later the first native presiding elder of Amroha station, noted that Chamar weavers at Hasanpura village

¹⁶ J.M. Thoburn, *India and Malaysia* (Cincinnati: Cranston & Curtis, 1892), p. 264.

¹⁷ Thoburn, *India and Malaysia*, p. 264.

¹⁸ W.C. Barclay, *The Methodist Episcopal Church* (henceforth MEC), 1845–1939, Volume 3 (New York: The Board of Missions of the Methodist Church, 1957), p. 464.

¹⁹ Humphrey, *Twenty-One Years*, pp. 115–16.

²⁰ *Report of the Third Decennial Missionary Conference Held at Bombay, 1892–1893* (henceforth TDMC), Vol. 1 (Bombay: Education Society’s Steam Press, 1893), p. 29.

²¹ TDMC, Vol. 1, p. 32.

²² *Ninth Annual Report of the Mission Stations* (henceforth ARMS), 1873 (Lucknow: American Methodist Mission Press, 1874), p. 10.

(Amroha circuit) were enthusiastically educating themselves and sending their children to the missionary village school. He alerted that a mass conversion among Chamars would break out soon in the neighbouring Moradabad district.²³

Dalits demand for schools needs to be looked in the context of their subordinated position in the society and their exclusion from indigenous and government schools. To be a Dalit was to perform unpaid or little-paid forced labour (*begar*) for the elites—landed and rich upper-castes (Hindu and Muslims) and local officials. Rawat shows that landlords since the late nineteenth century became more brutal and harsher in extracting *begar* from Chamars to cultivate their own lands.²⁴ Dalits had to offer their grass, hens, eggs, milk, and grains whenever elites demanded. Economic oppression was coupled with social oppression that had a gendered element. Dalits were denied entry into schools, motels (*sarais*), temples, drinking place, and trams; forbidden to celebrate their marriages and carry water while going to the latrine; their women were denied to wear ornaments. Any form of insubordination was met with shoe-beating, burning of fields and houses, harassing and raping of their women, and a public spectacle of lynching to death.²⁵ White missionaries opening schools for Dalits and visiting their ghettoised neighbourhoods, situated at the outskirts of villages and towns, altered the social fabric and power relations of villages and towns. MEC Missionaries wrote that elite Hindus and Muslims often became hostile to converts as they feared that Dalits would no longer be submissive to them, their children would be educated. ‘In the elevation of the Chumars’, elites saw ‘their own degradation’, wrote Thoburn.²⁶ Aspiring Dalits moved to Christianity with huge risks. Dalits who used missionaries to get education took years to converts as they

²³ *Eighth ARMS*, 1872, p. 5.

²⁴ Rawat, *Reconsidering Untouchability*, pp. 72–73.

²⁵ *Annual Report of the All India Shradhanand Dalitodhar Sabha* (henceforth AISDS), Mar. 1927 to Mar. 1928, (Delhi, 1928), pp. 9–21. See also the oral evidence of Mr Baldeo Prasad Jaiswara and Mr Hari Tampta of the Adi Hindu Depressed Classes Association, and the Note of Dissent by Babu Ram Sahai, *Indian Franchise Committee Report*, IOR/Q/IFC/73, India Office Records, British Library.

²⁶ J.M. Thoburn, *My Missionary Apprenticeship* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1884), p. 129.

feared persecution by caste elites and ostracization by their own community members.²⁷ Dalits feared that once missionaries were gone from their villages, there would be no one to protect them.²⁸

Dalits did not join schools just to be literate, but they wanted to attend schools, be eligible for jobs that were usually usurped by educated elite castes who attended schools. Upper-castes, from the beginning of the century, had used missionary schools to learn vernacular and English education and apply for jobs as scribes, teachers, interpreters, clerks, postmen, advocates—positions on which the everyday functioning of the local colonial state rested.²⁹ Once educated, Dalits asked missionaries to employ them as teachers, interpreters, preachers, and assistants. J.L. Humphrey, the missionary who converted Mazhabi Sikhs, gave details of the two converts, Main Phul and Gurdial Singh. Phul attended a missionary school, became a teacher, and returned to his village to teach and preach. Gurdial became an assistant of E.W. Parker, the presiding elder missionary and later the Bishop of the mission. Gurdial requested Parker if he could bring his wife from the village which Parker agreed. She got educated and became a village teacher. Missionaries' need for a local Hindustani speaking workforce and their inability to convert high-castes provided opportunities for 'outcaste' labouring bodies to emancipate themselves from the bondage of forced manual labour and caste exploitation. There were just 209 converts in 1864. Missionaries educated them and hired them as servants and assistants, preachers, exhorters, Christian community leaders, and most importantly as teachers.³⁰ By 1884, the MEC in North India employed 166 native preachers, 425 teachers, 646 Sunday school (religious singing schools) teachers.³¹ We do not what proportions of them were Dalits, but Thoburn in the 1890s commented that there were more than a hundred 'depressed

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 129–30.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 135–36.

²⁹ Robert Eric Frykenberg, *History of Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 307–22.

³⁰ Thoburn, *India and Malaysia*, p. 267, 269.

³¹ William Butler, *From Boston to Bareilly and Back* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1885), p. 475.

class' teachers.³² The alleviation of Dalit converts to such salaried positions had symbolic meanings for Dalits. Such employment, education, and the company of a White person had given them a sense of sudden importance. A Dalit Kabirpanthi Guru converted to Christianity, adopted a Christianised name (Andrias), and became a salaried preacher.³³

But missionaries did not convert all Dalits that came to them. Later, in their reflections, missionaries regretted their prejudiced actions.³⁴ At that moment, missionaries were not too happy about Dalit conversion as it degraded the status of mission and Christianity. In 1859, Butler wrote to the Missionary Society at home that a large amount of money had been locked in the fine school and church buildings for 'perishing multitudes for whose souls no man cares'.³⁵ Taylor, the successor of Butler, had gone to the extent of saying that Dalits could not be raised above their 'servile' state and funds spend on them were 'a great hindrance to the spread of the Gospel among the better classes'.³⁶

Converting upper-castes was a fetish among missionaries. Missionaries strongly believed that upper-castes, especially Brahmans, were superior, cultured, dominant, and intelligent beings in comparison to 'outcastes' who lived in their enslaved state and showed apathy to everything that was progressive and modern including education.³⁷ Missionary records celebrated the conversion of high-castes in their reports by giving names and photographs of the convert, circumstances of the conversion, and truthfulness of the convert's religious beliefs.³⁸ Such an honour was rarely reserved for Dalit converts. Missionaries constantly reinforced the view that high-castes formed the best, true, and intelligent converts by picturing them against Dalits who, according to missionaries, were poor, hungry, 'unclean', immoral and

³² Thoburn, *India and Malaysia*, p. 406.

³³ Thoburn, *My Missionary Apprenticeship*, pp. 126–27; Thoburn, *India and Malaysia*, p. 266.

³⁴ Thoburn, *India and Malaysia*, pp. 266–67.

³⁵ Barclay, *MEC*, p. 467.

³⁶ Barclay, *MEC*, p. 649, see the footnote.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 646.

³⁸ *Eighth ARMS*, 1872, pp. 16–17.

joined Christianity for socio-economic reasons. Thoburn in his writings on Dalits wrote that the 'depressed classes' were not only superstitious, timid, destitute, uncivilised but also repulsive (carrion-eaters) and of low character.³⁹ Missionaries' love for high-castes shaped their hierarchical educational programme. The majority of their educational resources, especially the higher education, continued to be devoted to the educational desires of elite Hindus and Muslims, even though the majority of converts were Dalits. They were not ashamed of maintaining exclusive Dalit schools, called Chamar and Bhangi/Mehtar schools, exclusive Christian schools for converts who were mainly ex-Dalits, and general schools primarily catering to caste Hindus and Muslims. Justifying the hierarchised education system to American readers, Thoburn wrote, 'we have long since learned that it is useless to fight against either wind or tide. The people of India, like the people of America, will send their children to schools which are near to their own social level'.⁴⁰ Hierarchies of caste, class, and colour became sharper after the primary education level. Missionaries maintained Anglo-vernacular boarding schools and high schools for elite castes and English boarding schools for Eurasians and Europeans. Poor Dalit converts were kept out of these institutions. Fees in these schools ranged from US\$1 to 2.50 per month.⁴¹ High-caste students were taught geometry, science, English literature, high math. In contrast, converts were just taught reading and writing. Only best converts were given scholarships to attend free Christian boarding schools and the Bareilly Theological Seminary. At the bottom were the free orphanage-cum-boarding schools for waifs and the poorest. Thoburn stressed, '... even the poorest of our Christians do not care to send their children to be associated with them [orphanage school students]'.⁴² Take a closer look at the hierarchised educational structure of Chandausi, a sub-circuit of Moradabad station, in

³⁹ Thoburn, *India and Malaysia*, pp. 400–03.

⁴⁰ Thoburn, *India and Malaysia*, p. 335.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 334–35, 342.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 335.

1881. The MEC maintained a general Anglo–vernacular boys’ school, two separate schools for Chamars, and one school each for Hindu and Muslim girls.⁴³

Serving elite castes gave missionaries an acceptance and legitimacy within the local society in the post-revolt period.⁴⁴ Educational institutions, supported by the Grant-in-aid scheme of the colonial government, provided symbolic power to the mission and identity to missionaries. Even though MEC missionaries had realised that their schools did not return any high–caste converts,⁴⁵ they continued to maintain schools for elites. The major beneficiaries of missionary education were non–converted elite castes. In 1873, the MEC mission ran 64 vernacular schools with 2253 students, 78 girls’ schools with 1560 students, 33 Anglo–vernacular boys’ schools with 2650 students, and 4 Anglo–vernacular girls’ schools with 444 students in the 19 stations of north India in 1873. Altogether, there were 190 schools with 6836 students. At that time, the mission only had 876 full baptised members and 691 probationers.⁴⁶ Despite producing a hierarchised and differentiated education system, missionaries maintained their self–image as the only agent of caste liberation, ‘human equality and progress’ in the region.⁴⁷ They placed themselves against high–castes who did not allow Dalits into schools and the colonial government who never implemented its open–to–all educational policy.

The mobility provided by missionaries was limited and forced by circumstances. Had high–castes converted, missionaries’ reaction towards Dalits would have been different. Dalit converts were rarely educated and trained to become teachers in caste high–schools where only caste Hindus and Muslims studied and taught under the headship of White Christians.⁴⁸

⁴³ Barclay, *MEC*, p. 615.

⁴⁴ MEC missionaries understanding of the local society was profoundly shaped by the ‘horrors’ of the 1857 revolt when the very first mission of the MEC in Bareilly was burnt down, members beheaded, and a bounty of Rs. 500 was placed on the head of Butler. Barclay, *MEC*, p. 452.

⁴⁵ Thoburn, *My Missionary Apprenticeship*, pp. 198–99.

⁴⁶ Barclay, *MEC*, p. 487.

⁴⁷ Humphrey, *Twenty-One Years in India*, p. 58.

⁴⁸ Thoburn, *My Missionary Apprenticeship*, p. 202.

Missionaries took the credit for any aberration.⁴⁹ Dalits had to create a space for themselves within this limited and differentiated education that was opened to them for the first time by missionaries. Otherwise, their lives were fixed as labouring bodies, often as wage workers.⁵⁰ Missionaries' early attempts to settle Dalits as manual labourers failed and they blamed Dalit's uncivilised, uneconomic, and corrupt character for failures.

In the 1860s, missionaries secured huge wasteland grants in Lucknow and Shahjahanpur from the government and began settling Dalit converts as tenants who would make the land fertile, cultivate it, and pay the land rent to missionaries. They also established a carpentry industrial school in Bareilly to teach converts carpentry. Such acts of landlordism and producing wage-workers failed severely.⁵¹ In his diary, Thoburn noted various incidences of missionaries' benevolence and converts' unwillingness to work hard and honestly, temptations to use credit money for immediate comfort and show uneconomic behaviour and insubordination.⁵² An industrial association was formed to give credits to farmers for seeds, day labourers for carts, and weavers for yarn, but it also failed. Missionaries blamed the failure on the childlike impatient behaviour of converts. Thoburn writes that once he had arranged apprenticeship contracts for a dozen of converted children to work as bricklayers under an English engineer, but converts threw their tools as they wanted adult wages, not the apprentice wages. A second attempt to provide work to forty converts as bricklayers also failed. He noted, 'All went well for two or three days; but as soon as their stomachs were well filled, and they had a little surplus money in hand, they became insubordinate, made unreasonable demands, and finally left in a body and went back to their village homes'.⁵³ Various other efforts to establish factories and farm colonies failed.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Barclay, *MEC*, p. 649.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 479, footnote,

⁵¹ Thoburn, *India and Malaysia*, pp. 270–71.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 272–74.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 274.

⁵⁴ Barclay, *MEC*, p. 479, footnote; Butler, *From Boston to Bareilly*, p. 369.

Converts' unease to work as labouring entities, in contrast to their success as teachers, preachers, exhorters, assistants that missionaries commended, brought the conflict between missionary and Dalit desires at the forefront. Missionaries' failure to settle converts as agrarian wage labourers, coolie labour, and craft workers was reflected in their U-turn on the position of employing converts. Thoburn wrote, 'It does not seem to be God's plan to gather out the converts from among their countrymen, but rather to encourage each man to remain in the place where the providence of God has placed him...'⁵⁵ He quoted Ellice Hopkins, the author of *Work Among Working-Men*, to argue that it was 'sin', not poverty, that kept lowest classes in their position.⁵⁶ Such a position framed Dalits' oppressed conditions as a product of Dalits' own attitude, behaviour, and action. Wesleyan Methodist missionaries in Tamil Nadu believed that Pariahs were their 'own worst enemies'.⁵⁷ Missionaries' new conviction that Dalits should remain in their existing vocations freed them for finding alternative employment for Dalit Christians.

Missionaries' framing of the poor male Christian converts as wage workers and female converts as productive housewives was more apparent in the two orphanage-cum-industrial schools established in 1860. Orphaned boys and girls, collected during various famines, along with the children of the poorest converts were taught and trained at the Bareilly female orphanage and the Shahjahanpore boys' orphanage. Because of their orphaned status, missionaries had greater control over the lives of these children. Other than giving a basic literary education, missionaries trained girls in sewing, knitting, cloth-making, domestic-work and boys in farming, carpentry, metalwork, shoemaking, rope-making, and tailoring.⁵⁸ And, whenever needed, especially in the initial decades, they picked up smart boys and girls to

⁵⁵ Thoburn, *India and Malaysia*, p. 270. See also, William Taylor, *Four Years' Campaign in India* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1876), pp. 158–59.

⁵⁶ Thoburn, *India and Malaysia*, p. 274.

⁵⁷ Viswanath, *The Pariah Problem*, p. 66.

⁵⁸ Butler, *From Boston to Bareilly*, pp. 316–337, 363.

further train them for jobs (teaching, medical, preaching) that the mission required. Out of 182 boys of the Shahjahanpore Orphanage that Butler traced in the late 1880s, 107 reported to be working as mission workers (41 as preachers, 27 as teachers, 19 as missionaries, 8 as exhorters, 4 as doctors and apothecaries), 36 as skilled artisans, servants, farmers, clerks, and 39 as miscellaneous (failures, dead, removals). And out of 124 girls passed in the same period, 8 became doctors, 5 dispensary and hospital assistants, 28 school teachers and zenana visitors, 84 wives of mission workers and converted Christians.⁵⁹ Over the years, more and more students had to settle in labouring positions. However, the framing of children's lives as labouring entities was challenged from the below. J. Blackstock, the in-charge of the Shahjahnepore Orphanage, remarked in 1892,

There seems to be very strong amount of opposition on the part of natives Christians to have their youth learn any trade or engage in any kind of manual labour. Frequently impertinent letters come to us, telling us that they did not send their brothers or cousins, as the case may be, to work, but to be taught, and if we do not do that to send them home. This prejudice is due, in part, to the low estimation in which any kind of physical labour is held by the people of India.⁶⁰

By the late 1880s, the MEC mission began mass conversion of Dalits in UP. Missionaries found that in contrast to individual conversion when a large neighbourhood/clan accepted Christianity together, the fear of persecution and reverse conversion was significantly reduced.⁶¹ Caste/clan was recognised as a powerful tool of solidarity.⁶² Chamars, Lal Begis, and Bhangis converted in hundreds. These conversions happened in the background of recurring famines, growing poverty, and a slight alleviation in the status of a few converted Dalits. The MEC Christian community in north India increased from 9226 in 1887 to 32992 in

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 367–68.

⁶⁰ *TDMC*, Vol. 2, p. 507.

⁶¹ Raj Bahadur Sharma, *History of Christian Missions: North India Perspective* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1988), pp. 129–31.

⁶² Frank W. Warne, 'India's Mass Movements in the Methodist Episcopal Church', in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 6, no. 2 (1917), pp. 193–208.

1891.⁶³ In Agra, 2000 Dalits working as leather workers (*rehgers*), street and road builders, agrarian labourers, sweepers, and scavengers converted in 1892. In Aligarh, 5751 Chamars, Muslims, and Kachis converted. In Allahabad, Dalits and low-castes who worked as servants in hotels and private homes converted. In Cawnpore, Dhanuks, Chamars, Lal Begis, Mallahs, and Kachis converted.⁶⁴ By 1895, a total of 252 stations were established in five conference zones: North India (the region between the Upper Ganges and Nepal and Tibet) with 99 stations, North-West India (the region south and west of the Ganges) with 76, South India with 27, Bengal-Burma with 25, and Bombay with 25 (Image 1). The Christian community grew from 26611 full members and 43899 probationers in 1895 to 71000 and 181000 in 1920, and 103000 and 220000 in 1939.⁶⁵

Mass conversions had posed several serious questions in front of the mission. What should be the missionary responsibility towards educating the mass of Dalit illiterates? What should be the aim of education and who should finance it?

MEC missionaries accepted that Dalits sought baptism for varied reasons. The official history books of the MEC presented that while a few groups joined to save themselves from starvation during the famine, others, the ‘less desperate’, joined because of the better economic prospects and greater comfort for themselves and their children—education, food, property, better-furnished living quarters.⁶⁶ Missionaries wrote, ‘it [Christianity] opened to them doors of opportunity that for a hundred generations had been closed. It alone offered them education, a self-respecting status, and improved condition’.⁶⁷ Yet missionaries insisted that these conversions were religiously motivated.

⁶³ J. Tremayne Copplestone, *History of Methodist Missions. Twentieth-Century Perspectives: The Methodist Episcopal Church, 1896–1939, Vol. 4* (New York: The United Methodist Church, 1973), p. 789.

⁶⁴ Warne, ‘India’s Mass Movements’, p. 195.

⁶⁵ Copplestone, *History of Methodist Missions*. pp. 788–811, 1155; Barclay, *MEC*, pp. 638–39.

⁶⁶ Barclay, *MEC*, pp. 646–48.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 646; See also, David Mosse, *The Saint in the Banyan Tree: Christianity and Caste Society in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), pp. 53–55.

For many baptism meant ostracism from those nearest and dearest, in some cases even from wife and parents. While the convert stood to gain economically, at the same time he was paying a price. Again, what might be interpreted as an economic motive may have been, and often was, accompanied by a realization of the powerlessness of his former religious faith, of the helplessness of the idols to which he paid obedience, and a disgust for practices associated with their worship.⁶⁸

MEC missionaries' simultaneous acceptance and denial of the socio-economic motives of Dalit converts and the ultimate framing of mass conversion as a religious phenomenon was also a way to limit missionary actions in the realm of social. E.W. Parker, the head missionary in Moradabad, wrote to the All-India Missionary Conference (1892-93),

Many of them [Dalits] have an idea of "moving on". Many places they have broken away from their old traditions to some extent, and are doing work their fathers did not think of ever attaining. Being thus willing to rise, they will take hold of those who may seem able to aid them; hence the way is open to teach and lead them. *While there is encouragement in this point, there is also danger to be guarded against, lest the benefits of being raised socially become the motive that draws them to Christianity.*⁶⁹

Missionaries, including Parker, agreed that converts should at least be literate to read Christian literature.⁷⁰ The reality was that many converts did not receive any education⁷¹ and there were not enough schools for new converts. Questions were raised in 1889 as to why the mission was spending large sums of money in educating non-Christians when the mission itself needed a large trained and educated workforce. For the purpose, US\$70000 were appropriated from the home office in 1891. In 1892, Bishop Thoburn started training 500 children as teachers.⁷² Fundamental changes were made in the organisation of the mission with greater powers and responsibilities being shifted to Indians. The elevation of the best Indian converts to the position of missionaries, first in 1864 as exception and then in 1882 as a policy, was a

⁶⁸ Barclay, *MEC*, p. 648.

⁶⁹ *TDMC*, Vol. 1, pp. 27-28.

⁷⁰ Barclay, *MEC*, pp. 188-89.

⁷¹ *Tenth ARMS*, 1874, p. 20, 24.

⁷² Barclay, *MEC*, p. 610, 644.

radical step in the history of foreign missions⁷³, but it was a move to make the mission a self-supporting Church. Indian missionaries got similar privileges and rights as an American missionary—the privilege of heading a mission station, voting over financial and ecclesiastical matters, and sitting in the Bishop’s councils and cabinet.⁷⁴ By 1895, the number of native Christians who were members of the central committee (the North India Conference) increased from 8 in 1877 to 62 in 1895 and of American missionaries from 24 to 25. The number of ‘native local preachers’, mainly coming from Dalit background, increased from 51 in 1877 to 231 in 1895.⁷⁵

By the late 1890s, missionaries lacked fund to finance village schools, train teachers, and provide quality education.⁷⁶ Congregations suffered from what missionaries called ‘spiritual illiteracy’.⁷⁷ Missionaries insisted that stations and circuits became self-supporting, converts paid for their education, and education get limited to providing mere religious education (skills of reading and writing).⁷⁸ Converts in powerful positions collected funds from the new poor converts and established evangelical schools. A preacher-cum-teacher alone looked after 14 *evangelistic* schools in 1888 with students distributed in 100 villages.⁷⁹ In Kasganj, about 1400 persons converted to the MEC in 1893 and gave Rs. 540 for schools to Hasan Raza Khan, the presiding elder (*chaudhari*), who could only run 15 schools with that money. He wrote,

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 611; James P. Alter, ‘American Presbyterians in North India: Missionary Motives and Social Attitudes under British Colonialism’, in *Journal of Presbyterian History*, Vol. 53, no. 4 (1975), pp. 291–312, pp. 303–4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 611.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 611.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 644–45.

⁷⁷ Copplestone, *History of Methodist Missions*, pp. 826–28.

⁷⁸ *Reports and Minutes of the North India Conference, MEC*, (henceforth RNIC), 1903, pp. 52–53. Barclay, *MEC*, pp. 644–45.

⁷⁹ *TDMC*, Vol. 1, p. 32.

These newly baptized people entreated us very much to open small schools amongst them for the education of their children, so I opened fifteen small schools, but I could not do anything for other stations where similar help was needed.⁸⁰

The proportions of uneducated Dalit Christians increased. In 1892–93, only forty percent (3142) of 7884 children attended schools.⁸¹ Converts were asked to pay one-tenth of their earnings to the Church. Often not able to pay in cash, the poor converts paid in grain. *Kauria Paltans* (Cowrie Army) were created in Sunday schools who brought cowries, grains, and lentils to the mission.⁸² However, the crisis deepened when a series of famine, plague and cholera epidemic hit the region in the late 1890s and early 1900s. Not only was the ability of the convert to contribute financially got reduced but the mission also received a large number of converts. Concerned with limited American financial support and the prospect of baptising 10 to 15000 people at once, Hasan Raza Khan wrote to American missionaries, ‘About 40 or 50 congregations have no teachers at present and members come to us and ask for teachers. Others send similar requests, telling us that the mission has forgotten them. They cry out that they with their children are left in ignorance’.⁸³ ‘Send us teachers! Give us instruction!’ was what converted Mehtars, Chamars, and Dhanuks asked repeatedly.⁸⁴

Until the 1910s, missionaries did not establish a plan to handle the mass conversion. In 1915, a plan was drafted to secure US\$27900 from India and America, but it was only enough to educate 16000 children. The mission had 60000 children who had no access to schooling.⁸⁵ The plan was not realised. However, US\$40000 came in from America in 1916–17. In 1918, India’s Mass Movement Commission established to support mass

⁸⁰ *Annual Report and Minutes of the North-West India Conference: Methodist Episcopal Church* (henceforth RNWIC), 1894, p. 2, 25.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁸² *RNWIC*, 1898, p. 31.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *RNWIC*, 1894, p. 13.

⁸⁵ Copplestone, *History of Methodist Missions*, p. 827.

conversion decided to spend US\$137,000 for ‘30 training school teacher, 11 training school buildings, 509 training school scholarships, 70 primary school scholarships, 15 new missionaries, 188 preachers, 208 village schools, and 11 mission plants’.⁸⁶ But only US\$47000 of the promised money reached to the mission. MEC missionaries repeatedly reported that there were considerable problems in educating Christian communities located in distant rural locations.⁸⁷ Bijnor in the 1920s had 45 village schools with 408 Christian children but hardly any student could read beyond the first page of the primer. ‘Most seemed to be learning the alphabet “forever”’, reported an inspecting missionary.⁸⁸ Naturally, very few rural Christian students made to the MEC middle Anglo-vernacular schools, high schools, and colleges located in towns and cities. As early as 1903, it was reported that the MEC community was going through a process of socio-economic inequality. Two classes among the Christian community were visible—one literate, intelligent, rich class that resided in small towns and cities and had access to service class jobs and the other uneducated poor class that resided in villages and hamlets.⁸⁹ While the rural Christian community suffered from the lack of education or standard education, the urban Christian community, mainly comprising of second and third generation Christians, did not only benefit from the advance educational institutes but also usurped 95 percent of the total educational fund.⁹⁰ This was the emerging dominant picture even though a few stations like Hardoi and Bareilly–Kumaon defied these trends.⁹¹ Missionaries reported that while rural Christian continued to be engaged in caste–stigmatised ‘ancestral callings’ (as agrarian labourers, leather–workers, farmers, scavengers), the urban Christian community entered

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 831–32.

⁸⁷ *RNIC*, 1921, pp. 100–3.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁸⁹ *RNIC*, 1903, p. 53.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

into ‘respectable’ professions.⁹² They got government and non–government jobs as skilled workers in the railways and printing presses, shoemakers, tailors, doctors, clerks, domestic servants of the White master. It was from the decently educated urban Christian community that the majority of teachers, pastors, preachers of the MEC were recruited.⁹³ This continued to be the case after the 1920s, and MEC authorities accepted that they did little to resolve the tension.⁹⁴

Along with reducing the extent of education for rural converts and making education limited to basic literacy, MEC missionaries embarked upon making the higher education for converts, if any, more practical and vocational that suited to their visions of keeping Dalits as wage workers. Progression of Dalits was framed within the labouring world. Thus, missionaries claimed that Christianity was pulling out Dalits from their slavery like status to better–paid manual work.⁹⁵ Mass conversion of Dalits and the custody of thousands of famine children throughout the subcontinent forced all major missionary societies to embark upon industrial missions and industrial education. Industrial missions were a strategy to make missions self–supporting and train converts in useful crafts and industries.⁹⁶ At the 1902 Madras Decennial Conference, missionary bodies unanimously agreed that industrial work should form ‘an essential element in mission enterprise’ and be considered as ‘spiritual work’.⁹⁷ The formal recognition of industrial work as a ‘spiritual work’ was a big step as it legitimised economic and industrial enterprises of missionaries, which until then were seen

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 52–53.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *RNIC*, 1921, pp. 57, 61, 104.

⁹⁵ *RNIC*, 1908, p. 45.

⁹⁶ I discuss industrial missions in one of my forthcoming articles. See also, Arun Kumar, *Learning to Dream: Education, Aspirations and Working Lives in Colonial India (1880s–1940s)*, PhD thesis (Germany: University of Göttingen, 2017), chap. 2.

⁹⁷ ‘Industrial Education’ in *Harvest Field*, Mar., 1903, pp. 137–144; *Report of the Fourth Decennial Indian Missionary Conference Held in Madras, Dec. 11th–18th, 1902* (London : Christian Literature Society, 1903).

with contempt and as profit-driven efforts or landlordism.⁹⁸ Three elements came to define the industrial work/mission prominently. First, to impart practical, industrial, vocational education to converts which either suited to their existing occupations or skilled them for a trade. Second, to establish industrial and agricultural establishments to provide employment to converts in a Christian environment. Third, to discourage lofty ambitions among converts and teach them the dignity of manual labour and value of a disciplined, industrious life.

The effect of these broader shifts in the missionary world was that MEC missionaries not only strengthened their existing industrial works (six orphanages with 300 boys and 350 girls in 1898),⁹⁹ but it also introduced new industrial establishments and made the curriculum of educational institutes more practical and tuned towards the occupations of converts. On the one hand, it opened new industrial and orphanage schools (Cawnpore, Aligarh, Phalera, Tilaunia) which taught trades such as carpet- and cloth-weaving, basket- and rope-making, printing-press work, carpentry, smithery, farming, housekeeping. The two orphanages in Ajmer (Phalera and Tilaunia) produced 170 farmers, 19 weavers, 54 carpet-makers, 40 lace-makers, 80 embroiders, 6 carpenters, 12 teachers, 12 servants, 10 tailors, 17 gardeners, 4 blacksmiths, 4 printers, and 2 electroplaters in 1905. The Central Day School (Holman Institute) in the Agra city trained as many as 600 children of the poor converts in industrial trades such as rug-making and soap-making by the early 1920s. A Ford bus carried girls and boys living in various working-class neighbourhoods to the mission compound where they learned new trades.¹⁰⁰ A new industrial school (Ingraham Institute) was also started in Ghaziabad in the 1930s to train Dalit Christians as peasants and tinsmiths.¹⁰¹ The timings of village schools were adjusted to the occupational needs of students. In Meerut, a school was run in the morning and the evening

⁹⁸ *TDMC*, Vol. 2, pp. 479–80.

⁹⁹ *RNWIC*, 1898, p. 29.

¹⁰⁰ *Yearbook and Official Minutes of the North-West India Conference* (henceforth *YOM-NWIC*) 1925, p. 50.

¹⁰¹ *YOM-NWIC*, 1938, p. 231

when boys got free after tending pigs.¹⁰² On the other hand, the mission retained the high caste and class character of its higher educational institutes. Out of 268 male students in the Lucknow Christian College in 1919, only 27 were Christians. The case was different with the Isabella College that had 28 Christian girls out of an attendance of 32 girls.¹⁰³ The college began as a boarding school and was established by the first radical female missionary of the MEC, Isabella Thoburn, who considered that the standards of female education should be equal to that of male education—a history to be told another time.¹⁰⁴ However, like the male college, it only catered to the educational aspirations of elite natives (Christians and non-Christians), Eurasians and Europeans who could pay a fee. The mass of poor Christian girls received an education that prepared them for housework, and if required by the mission, they were sent to the free boarding schools to be trained as teachers, preachers, medical women.¹⁰⁵

Dalit Lives and the Arya Samaj

The Arya Samaj saw the success of American missionaries in converting Dalits as a threat to the Hindu society. Led by Swami Shradhanand, an Arya Samaji from Punjab and member of the nationalist party Congress, a radical group of Arya Samajis initiated the grand project of ‘reconversion’ and ‘purification’ (shuddhi) of ‘untouchables’ who had converted to Christianity, Sikhism, and Islam.¹⁰⁶ Thousands of Rahtia Sikhs, Ods, and Meghs in Punjab

¹⁰² *RNWIC*, 1898, p. 21.

¹⁰³ Copplestone, *History of Methodist Missions*, p. 858.

¹⁰⁴ Barclay, *MEC*, p. 504–05.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*; Thoburn, *India and Malaysia*, pp. 369–70.

¹⁰⁶ See Harald Fischer-Tiné, ‘Kindly Elders of the Hindu Biradari: The Arya Samaj’s Struggle for Influence and its Effects on Hindu-Muslim Relations, 1885–1925’ in Antony Copley, (ed.), *Gurus and Their Followers: New Religious Reform Movements in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000); Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); C.S. Adcock, *The Limits of Tolerance Indian Secularism and the Politics of Religious Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Satish Kumar Sharma, *Social Movements and Social Change: A Study of Arya Samaj and Untouchables in Punjab* (New Delhi: BR Pub., 1981); Kenneth W. Jones, ‘Communalism in the Punjab: The Arya Samaj Contribution’, in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 28, no. 1 (1968), pp. 39–54.

were reconverted to Hinduism by the Arya Samaj at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁷ Shradhanand denounced Hinduism for the ill-treatment of Dalits. His radical ideas of incorporating ‘untouchables’ into the fold of Hinduism (wearing the sacred thread, access to schools, wells, temples) were vehemently opposed in the initial years by conservative Arya Samajis and Hindus who did not consider ‘untouchables’ as a part of Hindu religion. Joel Lee argues that it was only during the 1910s and 1920s that the idea that Dalits were part of Hinduism gained larger acceptance in the light of Shradhanand’s invocation of enumerative identity politics (Hindu as a dying race) and Dalits becoming an autonomous group and posing a threat to the nation and nationalism by supporting Muslims and the British.¹⁰⁸

By the 1920s, the influence of the Arya Samaj was very much present in Delhi, UP, Punjab. Arya Samajis became active in Meerut, Bulandshahar, Aligarh, and Saharanpur, Bareilly, Oudh, Ballia—regions where MEC missionaries carried out their mass conversion. What started as counter proselytization (*prachar*) by the Arya Samaj soon turned into violent conflicts between Dalit converts and Arya Samajis, persecution of converted Christians, and systematic organisation of education and welfare work for Dalits. Arya Samajis, often upper- and middle-caste Hindus, formed alliances with landlords, businessmen, Dalit caste-leaders who wielded power over the impoverished Dalit lives. Such alliances were predicated on the fact that conversions unsettled the ‘reservoir of subservient labour’ that Dalits formed for landed elites.¹⁰⁹ Missionaries noted that landed elites in Ballia invited Arya Samajis from Benares and Mathura to mobilise Chamars and Chamar *chaudharis* (caste-leaders). Hindu cotton mill and press owners, merchants, businessmen at Hathras supported Arya Samaj financially.¹¹⁰ A ‘reign of terror’ was launched against converted Christians, noted

¹⁰⁷ Joel Lee, *Recognition and its Shadows: Dalits and the Politics of Religion in India*, PhD Thesis, (New York: Columbia University, 2015), pp. 133–34.

¹⁰⁸ Lee, *Recognition and its Shadows*, chap. 4.

¹⁰⁹ Copplestone, *History of Methodist Missions*, p. 808.

¹¹⁰ *YOM-NWIC*, 1925, pp. 38–39.

missionaries. Dalits were threatened with losing caste—leadership, lands, houses, social life and cajoled with ‘offers of schools and of social recognition’.¹¹¹ MEC preachers, colporteurs, and school teachers often gave reports of Dalit converts’ persecution and harassment by the trio of Arya Samajis—landlords—*chaudharis*.¹¹² Before the 1921 census, converts in Ballia region were so threatened that they publicly refused their Christian status.¹¹³ In Mathura where 18000 Christians lived in various villages and towns, and many more Kolis (weavers) and Chamars were about to be converted, missionaries reported that Samajis came and disrupted the ceremony. Those who converted were later persecuted, and existing converts lived ‘amid threats and abuses’.¹¹⁴ Christian colporteurs shared their stories of not being allowed to distribute and sell Christian literature in fares and market. They told that material distributed to readers was seized and burnt in front of them.¹¹⁵ Lee’s research shows that elements of coercion and force were seen as part of the emerging militant Hindu nationalism and the Shuddhi movement.¹¹⁶ By the late 1930s, local heads of the MEC circuit stations reported that teachers’ houses were being burnt down in the night.¹¹⁷ Missionaries noted the period as a phase of defeat. They saw many of their converts returning to the fold of Hinduism.¹¹⁸ To express their strength, local Christian preachers organised *jalasas* (marches) in villages and paraded from village to village shouting ‘*yisu masih ki jai*’ (Victory to Jesus!).¹¹⁹

At the same time, Arya Samajis complained that missionaries, Christian school teachers and students harassed Dalits students of the Arya Samaji schools, spat in their mouths, and beat them. They alleged that far from converts being persecuted by landlords, Dalit Christians,

¹¹¹ Copplestone, *History of Methodist Missions*, pp. 808–09.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 809; *YOM–NWIC*, 1933, p. 27.

¹¹³ Copplestone, *History of Methodist Missions*, p. 810.

¹¹⁴ *YOM–NWIC*, 1932, p. 44.

¹¹⁵ *YOM–NWIC*, 1925, p. 50; *YOM–NWIC*, 1933, p. 36.

¹¹⁶ Lee, *Recognition and its Shadows*, 143–44.

¹¹⁷ *YOM–NWIC*, 1938, p. 221.

¹¹⁸ *YOM–NWIC*, 1925, p. 51.

¹¹⁹ *YOM–NWIC*, 1929, p. 151.

unlike non-Christian Dalits, were seen as free labourers.¹²⁰ Rawat argues that Arya Samajis' competition with Islamic and Christian organisations for Dalits gave Chamars bargaining powers to demand equal participation in the public life.¹²¹ Dalits used the power of Sabha officials to claim wages for their unpaid forced work, settle disputes with landlords, attend government schools, complain to the police about landlords' tortures, beating, and forced labour.¹²² A missionary report (1921) remarked,

Where there were almost no orphanages a generation ago, except those fostered by Christians, now there are Hindu, Mussalman, and Arya Samaj orphanages, each jealously vying with us for patronage...Where there were almost no aided schools but ours, now aided schools exist in many communities of other religions.¹²³

While the Arya Samaj had been maintaining high schools, middle schools, general primary schools for Hindu girls and boys, it also began to focus on Dalits. Like Christian missionaries, it established exclusive schools for Dalits in north India. In 1925, when the first All-India statistical report on the Arya Samaj's educational work came out, it was stressed that the Arya Samaj was one of the pioneering non-state actors after Christian missionaries in running schools.¹²⁴ It maintained 505 schools with 54886 students in 1925. Out of these 55 were depressed class schools with 1444 students. In UP, the number of all Arya Samaji schools was 121 with the highest number of schools in Bareilly (32) followed by Meerut (9) and Badaun (6).¹²⁵ However, many of these schools, as I will show later, existed only for few months or had no teachers or textbooks. Educational work of Dalits in UP was looked after by the branches of the All India Shraddhanand Dalitodhar Sabha Delhi, established in 1921. It aimed

¹²⁰ *Annual Report on the Educational Work of the All India Shradhanand Dalitodhar Sabha for the Ending Mar. 1928* (henceforth EWSDS), (Delhi: Hindustan Times Press, 1928), p. 2.

¹²¹ Rawat, *Reconsidering Untouchability*, pp. 142–43.

¹²² *AISDS*, pp. 9–22.

¹²³ *RNIC, 1921*, p. 53.

¹²⁴ *Report of the Educational Work by the Arya Samaj in India* (Amritsar: The George Press, 1925), forward.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

to educate Dalits, form high morals among them, and keep them clean.¹²⁶ Sabha's vision of Dalit uplift was based on the understanding that landlords should learn to respect Dalits, consider them as brothers, pay them wages for their work. Samajis held conferences in Bulandshahar requesting Rajput zamindars to not ill-treat their Dalit servants and show 'leniency'.¹²⁷ In practice, the Sabha treated Dalits as unequals. It maintained that Dalits were servants of landed elites, and education given to Dalits should not disrupt the rhythms of the local political economy. In its reports, the Sabha did not refer to Dalits as Hindus. For example, it wrote, 'On 31st March last [1927] the enrolment of 821 students included 190 Hindus of higher castes and 9 Mohamadans, while on the same date of the previous year the enrolment of 959 included 73 Hindus and 7 Mohamadans'.¹²⁸ It maintained exclusive Dalit schools—where Dalits, and sometimes poor upper- and middle-castes, were educated in reading, writing, arithmetic. They taught Dalits values of cleanliness, vegetarianism, morality, nationalism, religion.

Throughout UP and Delhi, the Sabha ran 27 schools with 655 students in 1927. In 1928, 32 Arya Samaji schools in Bareilly came under its organisation. Since these schools often depended on the grant-in-aid scheme of the government, their existence was ephemeral. Once the government grant ceased, these schools also stopped.¹²⁹ Like in missionary schools, Dalits attended these schools in large number. The average daily attendance was about 73 percent. However, when schools failed to attract students, Sabha officials blamed it on Bhangis' apathy towards education.¹³⁰ Factors such as poverty (lack of proper clothing, food, and study material), the absence of leisure time, resistance by elite and landowning castes were never considered as reasons for failures. However, these issues popped up in school inspectors'

¹²⁶ *AISDS*, p. 1.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹²⁹ *EWSDS*, pp. 3–4.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

reports. The District Board inspecting member wrote the following report on the Jahangirpur school (Bulandshahar, UP),

I inspected the Achhut School [the ‘untouchable school’], Jahangirpur on 6th April, 1928. Enrolment was 31 and attendance 21. Detail according to caste is 17 Chamars, 1 Koli, 5 Thakurs, 3 Vaishes and 5 Jats. Examined copy books and Takhties [slates]. Writing is generally good and reading ordinary. Writing to dictation is good...The Chamars are interested in reading. Owing to harvest attendance is poor....¹³¹

Sabha schools operated in a constrained environment both from the side of students and teachers. Teachers were hired on low salaries. Educated youth often used these teaching posts to prepare themselves for the teacher training course and matriculation examination.¹³² It was often found that teachers only taught reading, writing, and arithmetic. They neglected other subjects such as cleanliness.¹³³ School inspectors constantly reported about the lack of furniture, textbooks, good teachers, classes on arithmetic. In some schools, teachers did not even use textbooks.¹³⁴

The Sabha did help exceptional students in getting admitted to government middle schools. Six Sabha school students got access to vernacular middle schools and one each to an Anglo-vernacular school (IX class) and intermediate college (XII class).¹³⁵ Fighting for the oppressed against an oppressive system exhibited their progressive thinking. But, it did not establish any middle and high schools for Dalits. The only advanced institution that the Sabah established was an industrial school in Khurja, very similar to missionary industrial schools. It offered classes in smithery, carpentry, weaving, tailoring with an aim to train Dalits as efficient wage workers for local mills and industries.¹³⁶ Given that Dalits aspired for higher education and

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 21–39.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

institutions that admitted them easily were limited, the industrial school co-opted educated Dalits within the labouring frame.

Conclusion

Let me conclude this article by discussing an event that shows how converted Dalits had to operate within the limited vision of the MEC. In 1935, Dalit leader B.R. Ambedkar called for Dalits to embrace non-Hindu religions. MEC missionaries got excited at the prospect of receiving millions of 'Harijans'. William W. Reid of the Mission Board in America visited Ambedkar to know his expectations. Ambedkar told the American missionary to send 'India a commission of agricultural experts and educational experts' that would map industries and educational institutions where Dalits could enter and figure out laws that would protect Dalits from the intimidation of high-castes when they would leave the oppressive agrarian world. He also asked for high scientific, technical, and management education for intelligent Dalits, a body like the American Civil Liberties Union that would protect Dalits from false court charges, and a greater politicisation of Christian community in India.¹³⁷ Accepting Ambedkar's demands was to bring a complete socio-economic revolution against what missionaries themselves stood for—a socio-economic status quo and keeping the mission limited to the realm of religion. Missionaries were willing to offer only a basic literacy programme, the abolition of untouchability, and a self-promise to study how Dalit's economic, sanitary, housing, and family conditions could be improved. Ultimately, they rejected Ambedkar's call citing that his demands were too revolutionary for the mission.¹³⁸

Through this article, I have tried to show that a focus on access and exclusion cannot alone explain the history of Dalit education. When we move beyond this frame, we find that

¹³⁷ Coplestone, *History of Methodist Missions*, pp. 1153–55.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 1154–55.

schooling and its content and objectives shape the lives of students and their educational trajectory. MEC missionaries and Arya Samajis who opened schooling for Dalits had their own agendas of educating Dalits that were conservative in their outlook. Missionary education, which remained hierarchical and casteist in nature, educated Dalits so that they could read Biblical literature, become true Christian, and learn trades and farming. The limited socio-economic mobility for educated Dalits within the mission life was structured by missionaries' need of teachers, preachers, exhorters, medical staff and their prejudiced caste views, inability to convert high-castes. Arya Samaj schools for Dalits again were interested in making Dalits literate, not enabling them to become doctors, advocates, teachers, clerks, accountants. In the case of female Dalits, we do not know what Arya Samajis envisioned, but missionaries prepared them as good, productive Christian wives. While these visions, itself got shaped by missionaries' experience as landlords, labour employers (printing press, carpentry workshops) and Arya Samajis as landed elites and as collaborators of landed elites.

Dalits, who often approached the limited education provided to them with a hope to transcend their fixed labouring and caste identities, got subjected to the elite politics that maintained them as manual workers, either in their existing stations or as wage workers. They had to create a space for themselves in an educational structure that was overtly hierarchical and unfair to them. We see that higher institutions, teachers, and resources got devoted to non-Christians, high-caste Hindus, and elite Christians, while the more impoverished Dalits received no education or a basic literacy education. To move up in the socio-economic hierarchy and create a space in the hostile world, they had to prove their loyalty and intelligence to religious organisations, local teachers and get their support. H.J. Sheets, the Superintendent of the Bijnor mission station, reported in 1920 that Hindus and Muslims in government schools did not admit his bright boys. Instead, he had to send them to the MEC high schools in

Lucknow, Moradabad, and to the Girls' School in Bijnor.¹³⁹ The result was that intense competition happened among converts for the limited schools and jobs that the mission provided. Second generations Christians and converts residing in the city, close to the central mission stations, usurped the majority of resources, funds, infrastructure that was meant for the Christian community. For the remaining, labouring was the only frame in which their lives were envisioned. With financial pressures and an increasing number of converts, missionary education got subordinated to the goal of providing only religious education. At the same time, only higher educational institutes that were intended for Dalits were free boarding schools that prepared them for mission work or industrial and practical schools where they were trained as industrial wage workers and craftsmen. Opportunities for education came with exclusion, suppression of dreams, and newer forms of control.

¹³⁹ *RNIC, 1921*, p. 57.