

**AN OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIANS IN KARNATAKA WITH
A SPECIAL FOCUS ON THE PLIGHT OF DALIT
CHRISTIANS**

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Introduction:

According to 2001 Census there are 24,080,016 (over 24 million) Christians in India, who constitute 2.3 per cent of the population. The uneven geographical spread of Christians is brought out by the available statistical data – 25.15 per cent of the Christians belong to Kerala, 15.71 per cent to Tamil Nadu, 4.9 per cent to Andhra Pradesh and 4.19 per cent to Karnataka. Of the entire Christian population, thus, 90 per cent is found in three regional enclaves: south India, the north-east and the tribal belt in central India, consisting of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and the contiguous areas. The northern Hindi-speaking belt, which is home to 40 per cent of India's population, has only 10 per cent of India's Christians.¹

Christians in India are not a homogeneous community. They hail from diverse cultural, ethnic and caste backgrounds and belong to different denominations within the Christian church. They are thus divided by imported/imposed denominational divisions and home grown language and caste barriers.

I. The Christian Church and its denominations

Denominational divisions are rooted in historical developments of the Church in the West. The first major division happened in the 5th century with the churches in the eastern part of the Roman Empire separating themselves from the Church in Rome in the West. The eastern bishops known as patriarchs resisted the domination of Pope, the bishop in Rome. With the division of the Roman Empire, and under the influence of Sassanid emperor in the east, the bishops of the Sassanid Empire met in council in 424, and

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¹ Rowena Robinson, "Indian Christians: Trajectories of Development," in *Minority Studies in India*, edited by Rowena Robinson, (New Delhi: Oxford India Studies in Contemporary Society, Oxford University Press, 2012) 153,154

determined that they would not, henceforth, refer disciplinary or theological problems to any external power, and especially not to any bishop or Church Council in Rome. The relation between western and eastern churches in the Roman Empire was further vitiated in the sixth century, and a bitter brake came about in 1054, when the Pope excommunicated the Patriarch of Constantinople and the Patriarch returned the favour with anathemas on the Pope. Since then any semblance of Christian Catholicism was destroyed and the two branches of the Catholic Church went their separate ways. Thereafter, the patriarch of Constantinople provided leadership to all the Eastern Orthodox Churches up until 1453, when Constantinople fell to the Muslim Turks. The leadership of the Eastern Orthodox Churches then passed on to the Slavic Orthodox Churches, particularly the Russian Orthodox Church.

Another revolt in the Roman Church led to Reformation in the 16th century in the context of increased secularization of the church in the European continent and in the context of church and state conflict in England. Reformation had led to the birth of free churches like the baptists, methodists, presbyterians and several other denominations. These churches have freed themselves from established state churches and are therefore called free churches. And since they have broken out of the Roman Catholic Church in protest, they are grouped together as protestant churches. Although Reformation happened in the sixteenth century, it was brewing over for many years since the middle ages because of the perceived straying away from the Biblical teachings and indulgences that burdened the adherents. It also involved struggles for power between the religious leadership and the political leadership each supported by political theories and theologies. The Reformation gave significant push for the sect movement. The sects protested against the State Church system and fought for the principle of voluntary association.

While Reformation in the Continent was led by Martin Luther in Germany, Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin in Switzerland, in England rising nationalism was the underlying force that enabled Henry VIII (1509-47) to make his dramatic break with Rome. Motivated immediately by personal desire and ambition, he asserted royal supremacy over papal authority enabled by the context of mounting anticlericalism, anti-Romanism in the country. A series of laws were passed by the English Parliament to this effect. After Henry's death, his son Edward VI was guided by a Council, dominated by Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Edward Seymour, the duke of Somerset, earl of Hertford. They encouraged the spread of Protestantism and wrote evangelical tenets into the laws and customs of the land. Opposition to the Protestant innovations under Edward VI came from two sources: from Roman Catholics who wanted to return to the old order, and from evangelical dissenters, later called Puritans, who wanted to purify the Church along biblical lines. The Puritans since 1563 became differentiated according to the form of church government they advocated. Thus there emerged the free churches - Baptists, Presbyterians, and the Methodists. In America, these denominations took their independent form as American Methodists, American Baptists, and so on and so forth. The state churches were the Lutheran churches in Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and the Anglican Church or the Church of England.

The Spread of Christianity in India

In India, Christianity spread in three waves. First through eastern orthodox churches in the first few centuries with traders from Syria and Persia arriving in Malabar coast, second through catholic evangelization alongside Portuguese invasion and third with British colonialism through Protestant missionaries supported by Western Christian mission boards. While

Protestantism was taking shape in the 16th century in Europe and in England, Roman Catholicism was already engaged in mission work in India. Perhaps, it is because of their early arrival and intense mission work, Catholics form the largest group in India; nearly half of the total Christian population. Protestants constitute 40 per cent, 7 per cent are of Orthodox churches and 6 per cent belong to other sects.²

The first organized Protestant mission in the south was launched in 1706 by the Lutherans under the patronage of the King of Denmark at Tranquebar (now the Tanjore district of Tamil Nadu). The German Lutheran pastors, Ziegenbalg and Pluetschau were engaged in this mission. It was only at the end of the eighteenth century, during the period of the spread and consolidation of British rule, that the north of the country witnessed a significant growth in Christian mission activity. In the north-eastern region, where Protestantism dominates, Christianity is largely the product of nineteenth-and twentieth-century conversions.³

The Protestant churches owe an immeasurable debt to the Evangelical Revivals in the broad sense of the term. The Second Evangelical Awakening crossed the Atlantic from America to Britain in 1858. This produced the new phenomena of the nineteenth century, the interdenominational or nondenominational missionary society. By the end of the century every nominally Christian country and almost every denomination, had begun to take its share in the support of the missionary cause. While missionaries from England were permitted to work by the East India company, the 1833 charter opened up India to the missionary activity of other nations.⁴ In 1852, the

² *Ibid*, p.153

³ *Ibid*, p.154

⁴ J.Julian Richter, D.D. , A History of Missions in India, (New York Chicago Toronto: Fleming H. Revel Company, 1908), p.192

American Methodist Church felt the need for sending missionaries to other countries and formed the Methodist Missionary Society. Its mission in India began in 1856.

II. Christians in Karnataka: their spread and social background

As per 2001 census, the Christian population in Karnataka totals up to 1,009,164 constituting 1.9 % of the total population of 52,850,582. They are spread all across the state of Karnataka in different degrees of concentration. The big concentration of Christians is found in seven districts, namely, Bangalore Urban, South Kanara, Udupi, North Kanara, Bidar, Mysore and Kolar. Dharwad, Chikmagalur, Shimoga and Chamrajnagar also have substantial number of Christians. In other districts they are found in very small numbers. The growth rate of Christian population in the relatively backward districts has been significantly higher than that of the overall growth rate of Christian population in the state. As against a growth rate of Christian population of 2.6 per cent per annum in the state between 1961 and 1971, growth rate of Christian population in the relatively backward districts like Bidar is 10.6 per cent , Gulbarga 5.6 per cent and Bijapur 5 per cent. ⁵

Christians of Karnataka belong to different language groups - Tulu, Konkani, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam. Majority of them belong to the Roman Catholic Church. The others belong to the protestant denominations, and the eastern orthodox traditions, such as the Syrian Orthodox Church and its protestant offshoot, the Marathoma Church. The Catholic Church in its efforts to Latinise the St.Thomas Christians in the sixteenth century eventually created the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church with

⁵ Gladys Sumithra, *Christians in Karnataka: An Analysis of Demographic Features*, Bangalore Theological Forum, Vol.XII, No.2, 1980

the Syrian rite and liturgical tradition. The Syro-Malankara church established in 1930 is also found in Karnataka among the migrants from Kerala.

A. Christians and Caste

Apart from language, home grown divisive factor in the Indian church is caste. By precept, Christianity is an egalitarian religion. It proclaims equality of all people in the sight of God and expects its adherents to practice and promote equality, fraternity and social justice. But caste built on the principle of inequality was carried forward by converts into the Christian church.

From the very start, Indian Christians had grappled with the caste issue. Even the missionaries from the West who converted the locals to Christianity had ambiguous attitudes and approaches to the problem of caste. Some of them vehemently opposed condoning caste practises within the church, some others distinguished caste as a cultural practise better to be ignored than condemned. A few others embraced caste divisions with a view to win upper caste people to bring them into the fold of the Church.⁶ On the whole, dalits and tribals responded more positively to mission work and joined the Christian church in large numbers.

The reality of caste within the Christian community today is a stark reality even though most Christians do not wish to admit the same. More than half of total Christian population in India and in Karnataka today are dalits,

⁶ *This accommodating spirit that arose out of a desire to get as many converts as possible into their fold is seen to haunt the Roman church so much that some of its missionaries went to the extent of not merely tolerating caste but also accepting it without any reservations. To them caste had nothing to do with Hindu religion.*

Rev. H. Bower, writing in 1846 condemns Robert de nobili and his followers for professing themselves as Brahmans and thereby for despising the low-castes. He quotes one of their own authority which says, 'They at their first outset announced themselves as European Brahmans, come from a distance of five thousand leagues from the western parts of Jmbudwip, for the double purpose of imparting and receiving knowledge from their brother Brahmans in India'.

but they prefer to hide their low caste background. The others considered as higher than dalits in the caste ranking flaunt their caste tags, more so if they belong to the upper caste background. However, there is no caste enumeration in the church membership records. The only indication about caste background of Christians is found in historical accounts of conversions to Christianity during the missionary period. It is also possible to link one's caste identity with one's denomination since there was a tacit understanding and agreement among denominational mission boards for each to restrict their mission work in particular geographical areas and among particular caste groups.

B. Early history of the spread of Christianity in Karnataka

1. The Christians of Kanara

The Christians, more specifically the Catholics of South Kanara are both the native, but very few in number, and the immigrants from Goa and later we have the Protestants, converts made by the *Basel Mission*. The Catholics from Goa were all Konkani speaking while the local Catholics were Kanarese and Tulu speaking, the conversion being from among the villages of Ullal and Suratkal only who were Tulu speaking people.

Some local converts also included the Jain converts to Catholicism, while the Basel Mission converts were mainly from the *Billava and the Bunt* community (non-Brahmin class)⁷The Konkani Christians (Catholics) of Kanara are today found in Bangalore, Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, Kerala, Madras, North and South *Kanara* unlike the sixteenth century when they were confined to Goa only.

⁷ Kranti K. Farias, The Christian impact in South Kanara, (*Bangalore: Church History Association of India, 1999*), p.8

During their time of power and friendship with the Vijayanagar Kings (1510-1570) the Portuguese were probably allowed to make converts along the Kanara Coast. But it was during the early part of the eighteenth century after the Moghuls had withdrawn and when the Sonda chiefs in the south were their close allies that the Portuguese were most successful in spreading Christianity along the Kanara Coast.

The Protestant Christians of South Kanara are almost entirely the converts of the German Basel Evangelical Mission which established itself there in 1834. Conversion took place mostly from the *Billava* (toddy tappers) and other lower castes.

The languages spoken by the Basel Mission Christians are kannada (Kanarese) and Tulu. Caste barriers were the same for them as well as the restrictions to begin with. But the Basel Missionaries simply refused to bow down to the pressures of caste distinction and those who came into the Christian fold had to leave behind them all trammels to caste or class unlike the Roman Catholics who would not let go their grip of the caste system.⁸

2, The Christian communities of southern Karnataka

The history of Christianity in southern Karnataka is largely the history of the Mysore Mission. The work of evangelization in the territories of the raja of Mysore was started by Fr. Leonard Cinnami, an Italian Jesuit belonging to the province of Goa. He set up his residence Ramapura in Mysore in 1653 which became the first centre of the Kannada mission. Arrubale, Bassanpura, Kudulupalyam and Marathahalli were other little centres, where Christianity was established between the years 1650 and 1660.

⁸ *Ibid*, p.12-13

In spite of the ardour and devotedness of the missionaries, the number of Christians increased rather slowly in the state of Mysore. The mission has four residences administered by fathers who speak Kannada: Srirangapatnam, Cocanada, Bassnapura, and Capuganelli. Even in the Kannada residences many of the Christians were of Tamil origin. Around the year 1665, out of a total of 1,700 Christians belonging to the Mysore Mission, only 400 were Kannadigas.

Around 1672, there were about 2,500 Christians in the Mysore Mission as a whole. But only about 1,000 of them, belonging to the three stations of Srirangapatnam, Bassanpura and kankanahalli, lived within the boundaries of present day Karnataka. The other 1,500 Christians belonged to the stations of Kelamangalam, Dharmapuri and Sampalli. These places form part of Tamil Nadu today.

A new mission station was opened at Hassan in 1697, with Belur as its substation. There were about 300 catechumens and baptized Christians in the two places together. Arrubale had 400 Christians.

The Wesleyan Methodist Mission began its work in Mysore in 1836. They worked mostly among the depressed classes of Old Mysore districts. Their work in Kolar Gold Fields was started in 1897.

3. The Christians of Northern Karnataka

Some of the Christians who left Portuguese territory in Goa in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries settled in Bijapur. They were mostly petty traders or musicians or prisoners who had made their escape from Goa. In the seventeenth century (1622) two Jesuit fathers went to Bijapur and obtained permission from the sultan to build a house in his territory and to minister to the Christians.

Around 1640 the mission of Bijapur began to be administered by Bishop Mathew de Castro. He obtained from Sultan Muhammad Ali Shah of Bijapur freedom of religion for the Christians. He instructed and ordained a number of Indian young men as priests.

The incipient mission in Bijapur was destroyed during the wars between the Mughals, the Bijapuris, the Marathas and the Portuguese in the second half of the seventeenth century.

The London Missionary Society established the first Protestant Mission to work in Karnataka in 1810. This was started in Bellary. The districts of Bidar, Gulbarga and Raichur by default had fallen under the rule of Nizam-ul-Mulk for they had been under the control of Mughals from 1657. Aurangzeb invaded the kingdom of Bidar in 1657. Though peace was granted, sultan of Bijapur had to pay indemnity and surrender Bidar. In these districts canarese was spoken by most followed by Telugu and Urdu. Though nothing is clear of who introduced Christianity to the region, it is very clear that the American Methodists were the first and only missionary agency to evangelize the region with Wesleyan Methodists and American Baptists working in the neighbouring regions. The 1901 census counted 1024 Christians in the region.

In 1891, the Wesleyan Methodist Mission (English Methodists) invited the Methodist Missionary Society (American Methodists) to take up work in Bidar among the Madigas as they were working with malas in regions north of Bidar.

III. Socio-economic conditions of Dalit Christians

There are not many socio-economic studies on Christian minorities as such. However since the 80s many researchers and church related institutions

focused on studying the socio-economic conditions of Dalit Christians in several states of India including Karnataka.

Dalits are victims of caste system. They find themselves at the lowest rungs of Indian society. The same is the case with Christians of Dalit background. They face same atrocities and suffer same social boycott at the hands of the caste people in society although they seem to fair better in the areas of education. Furthermore, dalit Christians also find themselves discriminated by the Indian state which excludes them from constitutional benefits provided to Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist dalits. Within the Church, non-dalit Christians treat them with disdain and marginalise them in the affairs of the Church and its institutions. It is for the above reasons, researchers focused on studying the plight of Dalit Christians visavis church, state and society.

I present here a summary of the findings of a few research studies and conclude with the case study of Dalit Christians in Kolar Gold Fields, a mining town in Kolar district. Majority of the mining workers in KGF are dalits and among them dalit Christians constitute significant numbers. They together exhibit an attitude of hopelessness and resignation weighed over by caste discrimination and exploitation. I present a lengthier analysis of their condition using the structural analysis methodology. My interest in KGF is personal since I was raised there and have personal experience as a member of Dalit Christian community in Kolar Gold Fields.

But first, it is important to outline the history of dalitisation in India.

Dalits and Dalitisation – A Historical Overview

There are several theories regarding the beginning of dalitisation of a people. Most historians of ancient India consider the dalits to be the aboriginals of India who were invaded by the Aryan tribes from Central Asia

starting around 1500B.C. The invaders called these original dark skinned inhabitants *dasyus* or *dasas* and marauded their settlements.⁹ While some fled into deep forests away from the conquerors, the others were subjugated and enslaved and their enslavement was gradually rationalized with the institution of the caste system based on the theory of purity and pollution.¹⁰ In practical terms, this involved total denial of human rights of Dalits, their exclusion from social and political life and dehumanization. For instance, Dalits were forced to do the most menial jobs, never permitted to read and write or participate in the social and political life of the village. They were even barred from entering the village temples. It is said that by the Gupta Period, i.e. by the 3rd century B.C., the chandalas, as the Dalits were then called, had become so strictly untouchable that, like lepers in medieval Europe, were forced to strike a wooden clapper on that, like lepers in medieval Europe, were forced to strike a wooden clapper on entering a town, to warn the Aryans of their polluting approach.¹¹

Nevertheless, Dalits have also fought back and protested their subjugation from time to time. In the 19th century, a number of autonomous religious protest movements were formed from among the Dalits. They include the Messianic Movement among the Pankas of Raipur district, the Satnami uprising of the Chamars in the Chattisgarh district, Swami Narayana

⁹ *There is another view that inter-tribal conflicts eventually led to some being subordinated and subjugated. Those thus subjugated were treated as slaves. Still another view holds that the Dalits were the original inhabitants who were first conquered by the invading Dravidians and later by the Aryans.*

¹⁰ *While there is no clear cut evidence as to when the caste system began, it has its origins in the Vedic religion of the Aryans. A song of the Rg Veda refers to the myth of the primeval man from whose dismembered body arose the four classes; the priestly class of Brahmins, the ruling class of Kshatriyas, the trading class of Vysias and the servant class of shudras. The conquered original inhabitants were treated as inhuman and as untouchables. This division was further stratified and made rigid through codified law in the manusmriti supposedly written around 300 BCE and 200 A.D. during the period of classical Hinduism.*

¹¹ A.L. Basham, The Wonder that was India (London: Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd., 1967), p.146. *In this period Aryanisation of the South reached its culmination and the caste system came to be firmly established.*

Movement in Gujarat, Yogi Pothuluri Vir-brahmam Movement among the Madigas in Andhra, Ayya Vazhi in Tamilnadu, Narayana Guru's Movement, Pratyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha and Subhananda Movements in Kerala and the Adi Dharm Movement in Punjab Thus the predominant form of Dalit protest was religio-cultural and it included conversions to religions other than Hinduism. Islam and Christianity are missionary religions and have converts from both Dalit and non-Dalit communities.

A. Review of Selected Sociological Studies

The case/sociological studies for review were chosen to cover a spread of geographical regions and a variety of caste groups involved. The variety of Non-Dalit Christians/Caste Christians include those coming from the upper caste and backward caste backgrounds. The first case study highlights the discriminatory attitudes and practices of upper caste Christians towards Dalit Christians in Orissa. The second and third case studies highlight the dynamics that prevails between lower caste or backward Caste Christians and Dalit Christians. The third study furthermore points to the dynamics between conflicting sub-caste groups among Dalit Christians.

The three sociological studies are among the many that were undertaken during the late 80s and 90s. The studies reviewed here present us with enough clues to the continuing dynamics between Dalit Christians and Non-Dalit Christians. We will recognise that, the discriminatory practices may have changed since then, but the fundamental dynamics have not.

i. The dynamics between upper caste Christians and Dalit Christians - A case study from Orissa

This study was undertaken by Deepak Kumar Behra and his team in 1986 in Brajanagar and Sambalpur town in Orissa. He undertook a sociological investigation to study the engagement and dynamics between Christians of

three different social backgrounds; the upper caste converts to Christianity, the Christian converts from the Munda tribe and Christian converts from an outcaste community called the Gandas. The upper caste converts were a heterogeneous section of population from various caste backgrounds, so-called clean castes such as Brahmin, Karan, Chasa, Khandayatm, Gaudam, Teli, Tanti, Chasa and others. The number of converts from each of these caste groups was so low that they could not function as an independent caste within Christianity. As a result there was realignment among them resulting in the formation of a new endogamous group. This resultant upper caste convert groups with a strong sense of solidarity maintained social distance from both tribal and outcaste converts. They projected themselves as high grade Christians in relation to the Munda and the Ganda Christians. The study also examined the engagement of these groups across Christian denominations that they belong to and in relation with people of same social groups irrespective of religious affiliations.

The investigator observed the following:

Interdining was restricted to feasts in churches. The upper caste converts try to justify this commensal distance not on the basis of purity and pollution, but rationalize it on the basis of social hygiene and personal cleanliness.

This emphasis placed by the Upper caste converts on the lack of cleanliness and hygiene as factor for their refusal to interdine with the Ganda and the Mundas converts seems to be a cover to rationalize their social behavior pattern which is inconsistent with the egalitarian Christian doctrine.¹²

In the sphere of marriage the case of Upper caste converts is very significant from the sociological viewpoint. Though each upper caste convert

¹² Deepak Kumar Behera, "Ethnic Exclusiveness among Protestant Christians" in Religion and Society, Vol.XXXVIII, No.2, June 1986, p.78.

is initially very conscious of one's own caste, he/she gradually loses the caste identity due to the small size of one's own caste population within the local framework of Christianity. It becomes really difficult for upper caste converts to find a suitable match within one's own caste group. So, converts from various 'clean' castes like the Brahmin, the Karan, the Khandayat, the Chasa, the Teli and so on, unite together to form a single endogamous group consequent on their conversion to Christianity. This resultant endogamous group never established marital ties with lower caste converts like the Ganda and the Munda.

At the time of crisis, a convert invariably approaches members of his own caste/tribal group irrespective of religious affiliation for financial, other material and moral help.

Within the churches, each caste/tribal group behaves like pressure group and tries to exert its utmost influence on the church organization and its administration

ii. The discrimination of Dalit Christians by Backward caste Christians – the case of a Catholic Parish community in Karnataka

This study was undertaken by S.Japhet and his team in 1986 in a village called Harabole, which is in Kanakapura Taluk of Bangalore Rural district in Karnataka. The sociological investigation tried to find out the social conditions of Dalits after conversion to Christianity. The study also compared their status with that of Caste Christians in the village, namely the Reddys of the Sudra caste background. It was observed that Dalit Christians continued to suffer caste discrimination both in the village social life as well as in the religious life of the Catholic Church. The converts belonging to the Madiga and Holeyá sub-castes were given step-motherly treatment in the Church both by the clergy and laity belonging to the sudra caste.

Summarizing their overall situation, the investigator observed the following:

The territorial division of the Dalit Christian habitation, the practice of social segregation and the restrictions imposed on them in the matter of their entry into hotels, drawing of drinking water from the wells, interdining and admission into the houses of caste Christians are sufficient evidence that the Christian Dalits are not treated as social equals by the caste Christians. This vividly establishes that caste is the central factor which controls and governs the social life and relations of the Catholics in this village.¹³

He further observed that the principle of endogamy was rigidly practiced. Let alone inter caste marriage, even an affair between a Dalit girl and caste boy or vice versa was unpardonable.

As regards the educational status of Christians in the village, the investigator observed that while 79 percent of the Christian Dalit population was illiterates, 75 percent of the caste Catholics was literates. The better educational status had opened up new avenues of economic opportunities for the caste Christians, while low educational and occupational status of the Christian Dalits corresponded to their dependent economic and social condition.¹⁴

The organization and functioning of the institutionalized Catholic church has been serving more as a preserver of the existing caste relations and inequities than as a liberating force in relation to the aspirations and struggles of the Dalit Christians. The existence of segregation and prohibition in the place of worship, cemetery, participating in the altar service are only parallels

¹³ S.Japhet, "Christian Dalits: A Sociological Study on the Problem of Gaining a New Identity," in Religion and society, Vol.XXXIV, No.3 September, 1987, p.81.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.82

of the practice of social segregation, purity and pollution in the socio-economic sphere. The Christian religious structure seems to have accommodated the social inequalities and caste discriminations within the church structure.

The respondents complained to the investigator that the usual parish priest is no better than the caste Christian leaders. He treats them in almost the same way that Caste Christian feudal leaders do. Some respondents revealed that though theoretically the parish priest has ecclesiastical authority, in practice it is the caste leaders who control him and given him direction.

iii. Discrimination and rivalry between sub-caste groups within the churches - A Case Study from Andhra Pradesh

This study was undertaken by M.E.Prabhakar and his team in Guntur, covering Roman Catholic, and Lutheran Christians.

The major groups in conflict in Andhra Church belong to Sudra caste Reddys and Khammas, Dalit sub-castes Mala and Madigas.

Andhra Church manifests two particular dimensions of casteism: (i) the rivalry and hostility between the Scheduled Caste Mala and Madigas communities, who are equal in status and equally oppressed as ‘untouchables’ or ‘outcaste’ despite their conversion to Christianity, and (ii) the rivalry and hostility between Reddis and Khammas, the two dominant Sudra castes. In both features the Church replicates exactly the casteist situations of the wider secular community.

As regards caste composition in both the Catholic and Protestant churches, the investigator says,

The sudra Christians form a substantial proportion of the Catholic community, and as elsewhere in Andhra Pradesh, the Reddy and Khamma caste Christians dominate the priestly and secular hierarchy in Guntur district. Even so, the Christians of Scheduled Caste origin constitutes the majority of the Catholic Church membership in Guntur district.

And about those who monopolise church structure,¹⁵ the investigator says,

In the Protestant churches in Guntur district, the dalits monopolise the ecclesiastical structures and Christian institutions. In the Catholic church, the reverse is true. However, in the social and economic field the dalits are totally subjugated by the economically more affluent, socially higher and politically powerful Sudras. The Christian Reddis and Khammas, with the exception of individuals, lord it over the dalit labourers and workers.

With regard to the practice of untouchability by Andhra Christians, the writer says,

The fact is untouchability is practiced by Andhra Christians... it is not only the lay Christians who are guided by caste considerations. The clergy and religious men and women are no less tainted by it....catholics of Scheduled caste origin frequently allege that their higher caste priests are indifferent to ministering to them.. this indifference is shown, they maintain, in their lack of enthusiasm and interest in conducting services or in visiting them...there is evidence of heightened caste consciousness among a section of the clergy. A number of them have retained their caste surnames..."

¹⁵ *This has reference to the fact that the numbers of caste Christians in the given church organization is too small to manipulate themselves into power positions, but by virtue of their social dominance, they lord it over Dalit Christians ignoring the religious imperatives to treat one another as equals.*

Furthermore, Dalit marriage processions were earlier prohibited from streets on which caste Christians lived. The funeral-ceremonies of upper-caste Christians are also performed with much show, mostly at the church, while priests have been accused of refusing to even look at the face of dead Christian dalits or of sending only a trainee to perform the funeral ceremonies.

Caste identity discrimination is even carried into the cemetery. The tombs of dalit Christians are tucked away in a corner at the back.

The Mala-Madiga prejudices¹⁶ rule also many pastors' minds. There is also the phenomenon of many parishes/villages with separate church buildings for Mala and Madiga Lutherans.

To summarise, the dynamics of the engagement between the Dalit Christians and Non-Dalit Christians as shown in the above cited sociological studies underline following:

At the functional level, Christians do not follow the egalitarian principle. Caste Christians continued to carry their caste practices even after their conversion to Christianity. The same is the case with sub-caste groups among the Dalits, although given the right circumstances and awareness, Dalit sub-caste groups have the potential to join forces to fight caste discrimination practiced against them. There is no effort or willingness on the part of church

¹⁶ *Malas and Madigas have existed as rival communities from immemorial times. Prejudices are built over each other's claims to superiority, based on the menial occupations assigned to them by the Caste Order. Traditionally malas were associated with scavenging, digging graves and preparing briars. Because they were also agricultural labourers to higher castes, malas resided closer to the village than the madigas. Madigas were traditionally carrion-eaters and leather workers, and as a result were stigmatized. This condition of madigas became the basis for discrimination by the malas. Madigas on the other hand claim superiority by virtue of a tradition of their ancestor Jambhava marrying Arundathi, the daughter of a Brahmin sage. The traditional polemic between these two communities was further aggravated in the modern period by the uneven development favouring the malas.*

clergy and hierarchy to proactively counter caste prejudices. On the other hand, they and the lay leadership engage in caste politics to gain self-interest. It is now an acknowledged fact, that the Dalit Christians are very poorly represented in Church hierarchy, especially so in the Catholic Church. According to the latest report of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India,

There are about 24 millions of Christian population in India of which Dalits constitute circa 16 millions and Tribals form circa 2 millions and together 18 millions¹⁷. If you convert the figures in to ratio, 67 per cent are Dalit Christians and 8 per cent Tribal Christians and the remaining 25 per cent caste Christians. A look at the number of bishops and their percentage will tell us how deep caste minded is the church and its functioning. There are 164 catholic dioceses in India. There are 164 bishops, 13 auxiliary bishops, 2 apostolic visitors and 48 retired bishops. Both bishops and the auxiliary bishops who are holding offices number 177. Out of these 177 bishops there are 9 Dalits, 25 tribal and rest are caste bishops. This means, out of 67 per cent Dalit Christians, bishops are only 5 per cent; out of 8 per cent tribal Christians, bishops are 14 per cent and out of 25 per cent caste Christians, bishops are 81 per cent. We don't need any other information to describe caste discrimination in the church¹⁸.

A legitimate question may be raised about the validity of the studies done over a decade ago for relevance in the present. Do the relational issues identified between Dalit Christians and Non-Dalit Christians hold good even today? Indeed a few things may have changed, for instance, spacial segregation within the churches, inter-dining and restrictions related to drawing of water from common wells may no longer be matters of contention and conflict. Progressive legislation and increased awareness about human rights have brought about significant changes in group relations and functions in these areas. But caste prejudices and practices have a way of finding new forms of expression. Take the case of domination of one caste group over the

¹⁷ <http://www.dalitchristianscbci.org/content/dalit-christians>

¹⁸ Quoted after Selvaraj Arulnathan, *The number details were obtained from the SC/ST/BC Secretary of CBCI, New Delhi, Fr Cosmon Arockiaraj.*

other in running the church affairs; that still is an issue. Similarly, endogamy continues to prevail and inter caste marriages within the church are still a far cry from common. More importantly there is a widening gap with regard to educational and economic development between caste Christians and Dalit Christians.

B. Review of Socio-economic Studies

The Studies on Socio-economic status of Dalit Christians in India show that there is similarity between Dalit Christians and Dalit Hindus, that there is a wide gap between Caste Christians and Dalit Christians and that state reservations have brought about significant changes in the life condition of Dalit Hindus.

i. Socio-Economic Surveys in Kerala and Tamil Nadu

The survey in Kerala was published in 1993¹⁹ by Rajiv Balakrishnan of the Institute for Economic Growth, Delhi and the Tamilnadu survey was conducted between 1988 and 1989 by Dr. Jose Kananaikil under the aegis of the Indian Social Institute.

The study in Kerala showed that the relative standing of Dalit Christians vis-à-vis Dalit Hindus was one of overwhelming similarity. As far as occupations were concerned Dalit Christians were well represented in the inferior types of work and poorly represented in the relatively superior work categories, Non-Dalit Christians were well represented in the relatively superior work categories and poorly represented in the inferior types of work.

¹⁹ Rajiv Balakrishnan, "Religious Conversion and Socio-Economic Conditions among the Scheduled Castes: Evidence from South India," In Social Action (A Journal of Indian Social Institute, New Delhi) Vol43, No.4, ISI, Oct-December 1993

Similarly, landholdings were far higher among Other Hindus and Other Christians than Dalit Hindus and Dalit Christians. The data also showed that landlessness was slightly higher among Dalit Hindus than among Dalit Christians.

In the case of Tamilnadu, among male workers, Dalit Hindus were found to be better represented in the categories 'self-employed' cultivation, 'government service' and 'private services. By contrast, Dalit Christians were better represented in the daily agricultural wage category. The data thus indicated that Dalit Christians were relatively better represented in poorly remunerated employment. Also, unemployment tends to be higher among converts as compared to Dalit Hindus.

A Study in Gujarat 1993

This study was undertaken by Lancy Lobo in 1990²⁰ to study social mobility among Vankar converts of Central Gujarat. Vankars are a Dalit community who were traditionally engaged in weaving work. A few variables, including economic variables of landownership, employment, education, housing and economic assets were chosen for comparative analysis of the condition of Hindu and Christian Vankars in villages and in urban centres.

The data gathered showed that there was no social distance between Hindu and Christian Vankars in the rural areas. In the villages, there was greater interaction in food, visits, marital relations and exchanges. This was not the case between the urban Hindus and Christian Vankars. In the cities the Christians emphasized their religious identity over the caste identity. They positively desired to blank out their caste identity.

²⁰ Lancy Lobo, "Visions and Illusions of Dalit converts in Indi" In *Social Action* (A Journal of Indian Social Institute, New Delhi) Vol.43, No.4, Oct-December 1993.

The perception of non-Vankars regarding the Vankars on the social scale was examined. It was found that the rules of avoidance were strictly maintained.

Christian Vankars while claiming equality from those above them, do not concede the same to those below them, ²¹ such as Chamars and Bhangis

As far as political participation is concerned, Hindu Vankars are far ahead of Christians. The latter are rather insulated from mainstream politics as they have been enclosed within the Church. For what Hindu Vankars are constrained to get from the government, Christians tend to look from the Church.

iii. A Study of Dalit Christians in Bellary and Raichur Districts

This study was undertaken by Godwin Shiri in 2010 and published in 2012. It is a follow-up study of an earlier empirical study that he had undertaken in the early 1990s and published in 1997. The study was conducted in five villages, Hacholli and Beerahalli in Bellary and Talmari, Gangavar and Malkapur in Raichur districts.

Majority of Christians in these villages belong to the madiga subcaste among dalits. As high as 90 per cent of Christians live in huts, usually one-room structures with mud wall and roofing.

As high as 81 per cent of the people of age group above 18 years can neither read nor write. There is a large number of school drop-out children in the Christian community. Many government schools are like dilapidated or like cattle sheds with no benches, tables, blackboards, toilets, playgrounds and

²¹ *Ibid*, p.444.

so on. Untouchability was practised in schools. Christian/Dalit children were made to sit separately away from non-dalit children.

Majority of Christians earn their livelihood as agricultural coolies. There is little or no significant upward occupational mobility. The majority of Christians depend on daily wages for their livelihood. They suffer during spells of draught. In these times hundreds of families migrate from their villages seeking livelihood.

The Central Government's UDYOGA KHATRI scheme was ridden with corruption due to the nexus between village/panchayat chairmen, nodal officers and engineers. An alarming number of christian families have mortgaged their precious little landholdings due to debt trap. It was reported that three-fourths of Christian families are in debt.

The hard reality is Christians/Dalits are still not being allowed to live in freedom, justice and dignity, at par with others. Since the Dalits were being considered as 'polluted' people, they were not allowed to take out any procession in villages. This applied to Christians as well, as they were also from the untouchable Madiga origin. Dalits including Christians were not allowed to sit inside the tea shops with others. Barbers, washermen and tailors do not extend their services to Dalits/Christians. Christians are not welcome at common washing and bathing places. They were not allowed enter caste Hindu homes, and no inter-dining allowed. Menial caste occupations were forced on Christians such as beating drums, ritual slaughtering and bonded labour. It was found that many Christians were in the stranglehold of the obnoxious serfdom system, Madigathana-Okkaluthana.

Although OBC reservation is granted to dalit converts to Christianity in Karnataka, it is indeed not a viable alternative to Schedule Caste reservation

which they genuinely deserve. Besides, It was discovered that hardly anyone in the community were aware of OBC reservation or its benefits. The trend of dual identity is increasing. Christians declare themselves as Hindu SCs when census officials come to their door steps, while admitting their children to schools and many other occasions. With increasing number of Christians declaring themselves as Hindu SCs, the problem of undercounting of Christians has surfaced. Just as in the case of OBC reservation, not many in the Christian community, not even the pastors, seem to know about the vast opportunities/benefits available with the minority commission or with the minority development corporation. But about the functioning of the MDC, Dr.Shiri makes the following observation,

It may be mentioned that the functioning of the minority development corporation is very much under a cloud due to lack of transparency and financial accountability. One of the often made criticism is that the bulk of the funds is being used mostly in Bangalore and a few other district headquarters while hardly anything reached the real needy and rural areas. It is also alleged that deep rooted vested interest groups within are siphoning off vast sums of money. It is frequently being charged that almost all the funds earmarked for the welfare minority religious communities are used mostly for the benefit of Muslim community only...While the allegation that the Muslim community gets most of the funds has some truth in it, the lack of interest/awareness in the christian community is also equally to be blamed for the corporation's failure to fulfil its objective.²²

A Study of Dalits in Muslim and Christian Communities

This study²³ undertaken by Satish Deshpande and his team from the Delhi University was sponsored by the National Commission for Minorities, Government of India, in the context of the demand for equal treatment with

²² Godwin Shiri, Dalit Christians: A Saga of Faith and Pathos, (Delhi: jointly published by the Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPCK), Delhi and the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), Nagpur), 2012 p.67,68.

²³ Satish Deshpande and Geetika Bapna, Dalits in Muslim and Christian Communities (New Delhi: Report of National Commission for Minorities, 2010)

Hindu Dalits by Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims, in relation to the reservations granted to the former. It was also undertaken in the wake of the demand by the Supreme Court of India to produce hard facts concerning disability accrued to the Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims due to caste discrimination within their respective religious communities. Therefore the study had as its objectives, to find out the contemporary socio-economic status of Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims, to compare their status vis-a-vis non-Dalit segments of their respective religious communities and vis-a-vis Hindu and Sikh Dalits, and to ascertain if disabilities suffered by DMs and DCs (abbreviations used in the report) justify state intervention in the spirit of the Constitution as interpreted by the judiciary. The study used survey methods with structured questionnaires, community based investigations, and enquiries and long-duration field work using ethnographic techniques. Its report was made public in the year 2008.

Excerpts of the summarized Main findings are given below:

- With respect to proportions of populations in poverty or affluence, DMs are unquestionably the worst off among all Dalits, in both the rural and specially the urban sector. There is a significant gap between DMs and DCs and Dalit Sikhs, and small one between them and Hindu Dalits
- When it comes to intra-community comparisons, the gap between Dalits and non-Dalits is by far the smallest for Muslims. DCs are at the other end of the spectrum, with the highest inter-caste differentials.
- With respect to comparisons of occupational structure, there seem to be no dramatic contrasts in rural India. In urban India, however, DMs are in the bottom slot, with the highest proportion in ‘casual labor’ category. DCs have the highest proportion in the ‘regular wage category’ among all Dalits.
- With respect to comparisons of educational levels, DMs are the worst off in rural India in terms of illiteracy, but are closely matched by Hindu Dalits in both rural and urban India. DCs are slightly better off in rural,

and significantly better off in urban India. However, in both rural and urban India, and at both ends of the educational spectrum, all Dalits except Muslims do much worse than their non-Dalit co-religionists, specially the upper castes.

The case of Dalit /Christian Mining workers in Kolar Gold Fields

The town KGF²⁴ as I grew up since the 50s consisted of several communities with varying levels of interaction. Most of us however were

²⁴ *Kolar Gold Fields is situated 15 Km. to the south-east of Bangarapet town, the headquarters of the taluk with the same name and to the east of a low ridge of hills of which Betrayan hill, 975 meters of above sea level, is the most conspicuous point. Area wise it prominently occupies the central portion of the taluk and stretches towards south almost to the border of the taluk from Bangarapet-Bethamangala Road. Bangarapet, one of the eleven taluks in Kolar District, situated on the periphery, is bounded by Andhra Pradesh on the east and by Tamilnadu in the south.*

Gold mining in Kolar Gold Fields is the oldest metal mining industry in the country and is well over 100 years old. KGF urban area is unique in that it owes its origin, growth and to a great extent its existence to the mining industry. The settlement pattern, the occupational structure, migration and linguistic composition of the population etc., have all along been dictated by the mining activity.

All the six major religions are represented in varying proportions in the population of KGF. Hindus are the most numerous and account for more than 70 per cent of the population according to the 1981 Census. Christians (18.96 per cent) and Muslims (9.57 per cent) form the next numerically large communities after Hindus. Jains account for just over 1 per cent of the population. The proportion of Buddhists and Sikhs is insignificant in terms of percentages nevertheless there is a sprinkling of persons belonging to these communities also. There is considerable concentration of Scheduled Caste population in KGF. According to the 1981 Census more than 43 per cent of the total population of KGF belongs to this category. The 1971 Census revealed that Adi Dravida accounted for 39 per cent of the total population of the town which easily makes Adi Dravida the numerically strongest community among the Hindus. Adi Andhra and Adi Karnataka are the other two numerically important Scheduled Castes.

The Kolar district and KGF which is situated in it, present a distinct linguistic composition somewhat contrary to that of a typical area belonging to Karnataka state of which state the regional language is Kannada. It is observed that according to the 1971 Census more than half of the total population of Kolar district has returned Telugu as their mother tongue. In other words, Kolar is one of the few districts where the state language, Kannada is not the mother tongue of the majority of the population. Similarly, it was also observed that nearly one third of the population in KGF is made up of migrants mainly contributed by the neighbouring Tamil Nadu State. One may find migrants from Andhra Pradesh and Kerala as well. Therefore, though the State language, Kannada is used as an official language in these areas but the lingua franca in Kolar district is Telugu and that in KGF is Tamil (67 per cent) indicating the predominance of these linguistic groups in these respective places. (Taken from Town Survey Report Kolar Gold Fields Census of India 1981)

linked together with the Gold mining industry that generated a culture of its own. From the time we rose up in the morning till the time we retired to sleep in the night we were guided and governed by the rites and rules of the industry. On several nights we were woken up rudely in the wee hours by blasts and rock bursts that shook the earth below us. The industry rationed food grains, water and our education often with glaring inequalities. The privileged had the best of everything, the working class though suffered without proper housing, sanitation facilities and wages. Indeed, the workers of the Gold mining industry were such an exploited lot that they frequently resorted to strikes.

KGF had a strong Trade Union movement which had its own heroes and stories of betrayal. Besides the Congress party led movement, unions were organised under the auspices of the Republican Party of India and the Communist Party of India. The left-wing ideology with emphasis on justice and proletarian revolution was particularly appealing to young people like me who grew up experiencing the pangs of poverty and social discrimination. The RPI., though a dalit party failed to impress me much since I associated it with those who terrorised my people, a minority linguistic madiga community engaged in unclean occupations. Also at that time my own understanding of caste and its ramifications was rudimentary to say the least. It was only later and after much exposure to different situations and ideologies that I have come to recognise the need for a holistic framework to analyse complex social problems as those faced by the mining workers in KGF.

The mining township was as it is now home for several temples, churches and denominations. We have existed in total religious harmony for as long as I can remember. In fact, religiosity was an addiction here. While the Hindus conducted their pujas and festivals regularly, Christian churches and

evangelists held street meetings, conventions, and healing prayer meetings throughout the year. Much of the religious activity however remained unconnected with the management of the mining industry and the consequent suffering of the working class. I myself attended several of these meetings, considered different doctrinal approaches and was generally in search of God. Religion had no doubt influenced my life course. Another strong influence has been school education. At a time when most of my peers in the lines were school drop outs, and were addicted to alcoholism, I was attending the school regularly and competing with students from higher caste and class backgrounds. It is the combination of aspiration to do as well as others and a religious discipline built on evangelical faith that made a significant contribution to my self-development.

Unfortunately, the disassociation of the churches from the affairs of the world is a continuing reality. This is not to deny the variety of social services that the churches are rendering in the fields of education, health services, relief and rehabilitation. The point is that the churches have a lot more to contribute to the liberation struggles of the improvised and discriminated people. Worse still, established denominational churches have stagnated to become mere forums for preserving cultural traditions and class interests of particular social communities. And the leadership is all the time engaged in fierce power struggles within the given structures. On the other hand, the independent church movement is growing fast especially among the poor in the slums, but it is clueless and irrelevant in so far as the peoples' social needs are concerned. I see this happen even as I work with sanitation worker communities in and around Bangalore. The independent church pastors preach more to other worldly aspirations of their flock than finding solutions or providing guidance to deal with their down to earth social problems.

The Dalit/Christian Mining Workers attitude of resignation in the context of the development of Political Economy in India

A common feature among the people whether it is the mining workers community or the slum dwellers in Bangalore is the attitude of resignation. They are so accustomed to years of neglect, exploitation and oppression that they remain hopeless and helpless. While not belittling the role played by religious world views and perspectives I wish to highlight and identify here social factors that play an equally important role in developing such an attitude. A socio structural and historical analysis is important to understand the root cause(s) to develop a strategic and sustained effort to help the people regain their confidence to rebuild their lives. Such an approach involves social change programmes both at the micro and macro levels. What I intend to do in the next few paragraphs is to undertake a brief structural analysis to identify the root causes of the attitude of resignation among the worker population. It is my assumption that larger social factors such as colonialism, casteism and regional politics have played a detrimental effect on the psyche of the worker population and that therefore social change programmes should address these factors. The churches should also deal with these issues with social and spiritual resources it is amply equipped with. It cannot and should not shirk its social responsibility by remaining aloof.

There are two main features to the mining workers' cultural ethos. The first is of uniform experience. There is in KGF mass poverty, mass indebtedness, and mass alcoholism and so on. The workers and their dependents have so adjusted to this situation that they do not see these problems as abnormal conditions of life. The second feature is related. In spite of all these problems, the people have developed a peculiar sense of security, a comfort zone in KGF that most people refuse to move out of KGF to find alternate jobs and improve their standard of life. Theoretically

speaking, this cultural ethos may be common to all backward communities particularly to those that are at the stage of transition to industrialism. In all such communities; the individuals show little or no initiative. They are generally led by forces outside themselves. Again, even though an awareness of common experience may be present, there is little or no common effort to change their miserable conditions.²⁵

Certain socio-economic and political factors have contributed to the development of the attitude of resignation among the mining workers and their dependents. These factors are colonial exploitation, oppression, poverty and caste discrimination. It is also an effect that has developed over a period of time. In the past many decades, social circumstances and forces have so affected their lives that they have learned to stay resigned than to act on their own. In other words, in the course of their past history, they have lost their sense of participation.

I wish to identify and examine these factors through a structural analysis in two broad periods on the basis of significant developments. The first period begins with 1880 and ends with 1955 and the second period begins with 1956 and ends with 1988. 1880 marks the beginning of the Gold mining industry by the British company, 1956 marks the takeover of the Gold mining industry by the Indian government and 1988 marks the issuance of the Government Order to phase out the mining operation in KGF.

Structural analysis 1880-1955

The history of KGF begins in 1880 with the extraction of gold using modern machinery by the British company, the John Taylor & Company. With

²⁵ *The cultural ethos of mining workers has some similarities with amoral familism' of Montegrano community in southern Italy in the 50s. In both the communities, people show an attitude of pessimism and resignation.*

the introduction of modern machinery, gold mining became a profitable proposition. The profits gained in the early stages were enormous. In 1888 alone the shareholders in England received a profit of 7,00,000 pounds for their investment of 2,50,000 pounds.²⁶ With increased production there was increased profit and this exceeded 100% at times. Yet none of these profits were either invested in other prospective goldfields in the neighbourhood or in any other economic activity in KGF.²⁷

With the introduction of modern machinery, the John Taylor & Co., also gained ascendancy over 32 other European companies which were already engaged in the business of gold extraction in KGF. The British company operated the mines with the help of a few European skilled and semi-skilled workers and a large number of migrant Indian workers who provided the general labour. The bulk of migrant workers came from the neighbouring North Arcot district of Madras and a relatively smaller group from Andhra. Initially, these workers were reluctant to accept underground work because of the risks involved in such work. But they soon relented because the British overlords threatened to bring in indentured labour from China and Africa. The workers preferred to risk their lives than to return to agricultural occupations which had many uncertainties. There was no guarantee of year-round work and there was no guarantee of and enough crop yield to feed them all as there was very little cultivable land in their native places.²⁸ The European workers who numbered 90 in 1883 increased to 339 in 1935. In the same year, the migrant Indian workers numbered 29,592.²⁹

²⁶ K.S. Seetharaman The history of kolar gold fields, upto 1956, (Tamil), (Kolar Gold Fields: Elushan Electronics publication, KGF, 1989), p 65

²⁷ K.V. Subramanyam, "The future and development of kolar gold fields", Unpublished Article, 18 January 1979

²⁸ G.N. Ramu, Family and caste in urban India, (New Delhi: Vikas publishing house, Pvt. Ltd., 1977), p 17

²⁹ K.S. Seetharaman, op. cit, p65

Gold mining industry in KGF was started and run by the British company under the protection of the British colonial rule. The Indian workers were given step-motherly treatment. While the European workers and officials were paid well and provided with all luxuries of huge bungalows, automobiles, servants and recreation facilities, the Indian workers were oppressed and suppressed. The Indian workers' wages were so low that they had to fight for a minimum wage of Re.1 even as late as 1940.³⁰ Their civil rights were denied. It was only in 1940 that they were permitted to form the trade union. Even after that, the right to free speech and the right to gather for political purposes were suspended arbitrarily by the company under the declaration of KGF as a 'special area'. A remnant form of this arrangement still continues with the continuance of the appointment of a special superintendent of police to oversee policing in KGF.

The housing for the workers was provided by the employer, the company. But they can be best described as cattle-shed like shelters. Each hut consisted of a single room and kitchen with a plinth area of about 165 sq.ft. They were clustered together in such close proximity that these crowded residential areas were referred as 'lines', 'colonies', or 'camps'. This picture coupled with the cheap material used to build the huts and the fact that the workers had always the thought of returning to their native villages generated an ethos of temporariness. What made these shelters unfit for human dwelling was the scarcity of water and sanitation facilities. Because of the lack of basic amenities and because of overcrowding, plagues and epidemics broke out in these areas very frequently. The company was not bothered about providing these basic needs. It was only when this inhuman treatment of workers was

³⁰ *Ibid*, p 121

exposed to the outside world that they began to grudgingly provide such things as more water taps.³¹

Thus, during the period 1880-1955, the dominant factor that affected the lives of the mining workers in KGF was imperial colonialism. It is probable that before the mighty power of the British company, the workers felt so helpless that they learned to yield and resign to their fate.

Structural analysis, 1956 – 1988:

This period is marked by the change of ownership of the industry. The government of Mysore first bought the industry from the British company in 1956. It could not however run the industry for too long, because it realized that gold mining was no longer profitable. All the gold ore in the lateral extent which makes gold mining profitable were exhausted as early as 1939. The left over gold was embedded at deeper levels and the cost of depth level mining increases with the increase of the depth level. Therefore, the management of the industry was handed over to the union government which ran the industry with much subsidy. The losses, i.e. the expenditure over income for two years, between 1986 – 87 and 1987 – 88 alone were Rs.18.21 crores and Rs.16.89 crores respectively. According to the managing director, these losses were partly due to the adverse pricing policy of linking KGF gold to the international market (London Metal Exchange).³²

With the departure of the British, social classes in KGF were primarily drawn along caste lines. The contention was between the Brahmins and non-Brahmins, more particularly the Panchamas or the so-called untouchables. The Brahmins were holding most managerial and supervisory positions, while

³¹ Radhakamal Mukherjee, *The Indian working class*, (Bombay: Hind Kitabs Ltd., Third Edition, 1951), p 307

³² *Indian Express*, November 30, 1988

the Panchamas were mostly general labourers. The Brahmins were quick to seize the opportunities to occupy managerial and white collar positions after the departure of the British company. The lower-caste groups could not compete because they lacked the required skills.³³ Once in positions of power, the Brahmins tended to favour members of their caste group both in new appointments and promotions. A study conducted in 1971 has shown that there has been a correlation between 'ritual dominance' and 'economic dominance' in KGF. The sample survey was conducted on respondents belonging to various varnas. Of them 18.5% were Brahmins, 20.6% were shudras, and 47.7% were panchamas. Among the Brahmin respondents, 7.7% belonged to the lower class, 53.8% belonged to the middle class and 38.5% belonged to the upper class. Among the shudras 53.5% belonged to the lower class, 37.9% belonged to the middle class and 8.6% belonged to the upper class. Among the panchama respondents 85.8% belonged to the lower class, 13.4% belonged to the middle class and 0.8% belonged to the upper class.³⁴ India had gained its independence in the year 1947. But the British company in KGF was forced to leave only in 1956. The union government of India acted upon the takeover only after much pressure was placed on it, particularly by the Mysore state politicians. The states in India were also re-organised in 1956 on the basis of language spoken by the majority population in each state. This had its own effect on the prospects of the mining population. To give an example, the Bharath Earth Movers Limited, a public undertaking was started in KGF in 1962 with the primary intention of employing surplus labourers or their children from the mining industry which was by then reducing its workforce progressively. But the primary intention was not fulfilled due to various reasons including the political compulsions of appeasing the majority linguistic community in the state. Thus, of the 6,300 workers employed by the

³³ G.N.Ramu, op.cit, p 32

³⁴ Ibid, p 31

BEML in 1962, only 2,000 were from KGF.³⁵ Also the differential wage system favouring the BEML workers whose salaries were almost double the salary of the mining workers created a serious problem for the latter in the common market. The prices of commodities shot up artificially in accordance with the purchasing capacity of the BEML workers. This worsened the economic condition of the mining workers who were already victims of chronic indebtedness.³⁶

In summary, during the second period, 1956 – '88, the poor mining workers had to face a different kind of discrimination and domination. This time their oppressors were their own nationals and the dominant factors that determined their discrimination and marginalisation were caste and language. It is probable that the attitude of resignation further developed among the workers because of their awareness that they were up against systemic powers, the age old caste system and the state power of a brute majority.

It has been made clear from the above analysis that colonialism, casteism, regionalism and poverty have affected the lives of the mining workers' in KGF. I now wish to bring to focus the way in which the underlying principles or patterns of these factors have influenced the development of the attitude of resignation among the workers.

Colonialism: Colonialism was the inevitable form of the expanding capitalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Capitalism runs on the two principles of profit and competition. These principles also form its inner contradictions. It is these principles or contradictions that drove the European capitalists to distant lands to plunder the latter's wealth and exploit their

³⁵ J.A. Victor Joshua, "*Socio-economic survey of kolar Gold fields*", 1977

³⁶ Ibid

labour.³⁷ The colonial exploiter's sole aim is profit. Towards this, he adopts any method, however inhuman and unethical it may be. Thus, the British gold mining company did not hesitate to manipulate unfortunate circumstances as when they coerced the migrant workers to unconditionally accept their terms and work, to unleash terror by expelling rebel workers from the mining area and by rewarding very docile workers. The poor housing without the basic amenities provided by the company was a deliberate plan. They stand to gain in their workers' ethos of temporariness.³⁸

All of these methods had no doubt the intended effect on the poor workers – the effect of generating a sense of helplessness and resignation.

Casteism: Caste is the basic criterion of social organization and structure of traditional Indian society. This is recognized by all. But it was assumed by some including a section of the Marxists who base their assumption on early Marx's views on the effects of industrialism on the Asiatic societies, that caste would lose its importance in the process of industrialism. This assumption has been proved false by the re-emergence of caste as the dominant factor after the departure of the British in KGF. The mining workers, majority of who belong to the lowest caste group have through repeated experiences realised that they are up against a deep rooted system that has great survival value. It is probable that this painful awareness is one of the causal factors in the development of the attitude of resignation.

Factors of recent origin: Regionalism is one such factor. The operative pattern has been explained in the analysis itself. One thing more needs to be said here. That is, that regionalism sustains a negative effect that is common

³⁷ Eric Fromm, The Sane Society, (New York: Fawcett Premier, 1955), pp 84,85,94

³⁸ Clark Kerr, John T Dunlop, Fredrick H Harbinson, Charles A Meyers, Industrialism and Industrial Man, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1960), pp 170-171, 188-189

to all migrants in any part of the world. It is the minority complex or the displaced mentality – a loss of sense of belonging that is akin to the sense of resignation. Another important factor of recent origin is the development of impersonal bureaucratisation and high centralisation. These forms of administration alienate both the administrator and the administered - the bureaucrat and the worker.³⁹ The mining workers have reasons to believe that the crisis facing them is not being considered seriously, leave alone being managed well by those higher-ups who are both far away in New Delhi and unaffected by their experiences. At the same time the workers believe that only those higher-ups have the political power to change their circumstances. It is probable that this reality and realisation is another causal factor for their attitude of resignation.

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³⁹ Eric Fromm, *op. cit.*, p 116

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