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Orphans of the Orissa Famine: Capital, Charity, and Coercion in the Missionary System

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ABSTRACT

Some of the most profound effects Britain imposed on society in Orissa, India came as a result of the missions that formed the majority of the protective infrastructure during the Orissa famine. Shortly after the British began their occupation of Orissa, a network of Protestant Christian missions based in England began to move into the region. Leadership came from the Christian Missionary Society, an Evangelical Anglican group, as well as Baptist figures such as Rev. J. Buckley. Their move was difficult, and for many years unsuccessful. However, the British East India Company and the Raj that followed it would pave the way for an increase in mission power through their laissez-faire policies of ignoring preexisting infrastructure and discontinuing preexisting social support systems. The missions, through their network of periodical publications, were then able to position themselves as a charitable counterpoint to the mainstream ideology of free markets at the time. In 1865, when a harvest failed as a result of British lack of infrastructure maintenance, the Protestant mission network's opportunity arrived. The famine left many children without caretakers, and the missions, having begun a precedent of taking in orphans, became one of the only options for these children. The missions completed their takeover after the British first refused to acknowledge the famine, and then offered an ineffective response. The mission takeover quickly became so complete that secular authorities turned those seeking to give charity to the missions, since missions were some of the only organizations with a history of working directly with people in the region. The lives and identities of these famine orphans formed a microcosm of the changes to Orissa over the course of the Orissa famine.

1. INTRODUCTION

Some of the most profound effects Britain imposed on society in Orissa, India came as a result of the missions that formed the majority of the protective infrastructure during the Orissa famine. Shortly after the British began their occupation of Orissa, a network of Protestant Christian missions based in England began to move into the region. Leadership came from the Christian Missionary Society, an Evangelical Anglican group, as well as Baptist figures such as Rev. J. Buckley. Their move was difficult, and for many years unsuccessful. However, the British East India Company and the Raj that followed it would pave the way for an increase in mission power through their laissez-faire policies of ignoring preexisting infrastructure and discontinuing preexisting social support systems.

The missions, through their network of periodical publications, were then able to position themselves as a charitable counterpoint to the mainstream ideology of free markets at the time. In 1865, when a harvest failed as a result of British lack of infrastructure maintenance, the Protestant mission network's opportunity arrived. The famine left many children without caretakers, and the missions, having begun a precedent of taking in orphans, became one of the only options for these children. The missions completed their takeover after the British first refused to acknowledge

the famine, and then offered an ineffective response. The mission takeover quickly became so complete that secular authorities turned those seeking to give charity to the missions, since missions were some of the only organizations with a history of working directly with people in the region. The lives and identities of these famine orphans formed a microcosm of the changes to Orissa over the course of the Orissa famine. This paper argues first, that the missionary network achieved a foothold in the Orissa region because of the gaps in the British takeover of the network of assistance and unwillingness to take action against the famine, and second, that this foothold resulted in a coercive system in which children with few other options for survival exchanged cultural identity for food and care.

The Orissa Famine plays a central role in this paper. After a poor harvest in 1865, hunger began to affect the people living in the Orissa region and the surrounding areas. The monsoon season which followed was exacerbated by the British government's mismanagement of flood-mitigating infrastructure, leaving the affected region cut off from imports of food aid.² British economic policy only worsened the material effects of the famine when the commissioner of Orissa banned the distribution of rice in order to protect market prices.³ It was not until May of 1867

¹ Department of History, Southern Methodist University

² W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1872), 181

³ Bidyut Mohanty. *A Haunting Tragedy: Gender, Caste, and Class in the 1866 Orissa Famine* (New York: Routledge, 2022)

that the government formed a Famine Relief Committee.⁴ By then, the famine had ravaged the region and left not only death and destruction, but also major social and religious upheaval in its wake.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The role British Christian missions played in recovery during the Orissa famine appeared occasionally in academic writing, but was often not centered to the extent the issue demands. Instead, many discussions of the Orissa famine analyzed the event from the perspective of caste or policy, or discussed missions as they first arrived in the region in the early 19th century and within the post-colonial context, glossing over the power and influence these missions and missionaries wielded through resources during the famine and subsequent cholera epidemic of 1865-1868. The work of such scholars as Bidyut Mohanty and Bismawoy Pati offered amazing analyses of the famine, its causes, and its effects. Mohanty's book *A Haunting Tragedy* explored how the famine transformed the caste and class system and had differential effects by gender. The work also included a discussion of the famine orphans' role in the situation as a whole. Pati wrote many insightful papers discussing religion and culture in Orissa. However, they do not, nor do any other previously published works, center the experiences of the famine orphans and the effects on their lifeways.

These analyses of famine and caste often deemphasized or lacked mention of the so-called famine orphans, children raised in missionaries because of the circumstances of the famine that left many without parents or without parents able to care for them.

While works on Orissa did not delve solely into the missions and mission orphans with the focus the topic merits, works on missions on British India relegate Orissa to the fringes. Ian Copeland added nuance to the Stanley-Porter revisionist thesis of original competition between missionary and capitalist goals and an eventual coming together interrupted by the Great Rebellion of 1857.⁵ His work categorized the whole of British missions in India as an arm of empire despite competition between the East India Company and the later Raj and offered important clarity on how missions functioned as a whole in relation to the entirety of the subcontinent. This article and many of its contemporaries, however, make little mention of the unique nature of the situation of Orissa with its non-Hindu tribal groups mixing with caste structures. The Indian History Congress, though they delved into the story of missions in Northeast India, did not give the Orissa famine its due diligence as a turning point in the power of British Protestant Christian missions in the region.⁶ The strength of the role of missions created lasting impacts that reverberated through the future of Orissa.

By the time the famine began, missionaries had consolidated a near-monopoly on structures of charity and

care in Orissa. W. W. Hunter's account of his experiences in Orissa included a condemnation of the British lack of maintenance of previous systems.⁷ The British government had abandoned previous Mughal storehouses and worked to shut down the Jagannath temple kitchens, all without a permanent British settlement, leaving the missionaries some of the only people in the area with access to resources and wealth during the famine.

As a result, missionaries would often utilize this monopoly to increase conversion rates to Christianity, which had been historically very low in the region. Mission-run periodicals lamented this low conversion rate but soon began to offer updates for their readers on the children they had taken in. Missions tended to feed only those who showed willingness to convert, especially those who left their children at missions or children who made their own way to missions for food. The missionaries fed these children, set them up with British financial sponsors, changed their names, and arranged their marriages in the years following the famine. This drastic difference in the lifeways of these children and those of their parents often resulted in schisms of identity, especially for future generations in their family, who would now be raised Christian in Orissa. These children and their descendants' complex relationship to religious and cultural identity were therefore a testament to the power and goals of the missions.

3. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MISSIONS AND THE BRITISH GOVERNMENTS IN INDIA

Victims of the Orissa famine often received more aid from Christian missions than from their government. This missionary monopoly was a direct result of the British government's weak response to the famine. The British adopted a set of laissez-faire economic ideals that left the historic Indian infrastructure that prevented flood and famine in shambles. As this infrastructure crumbled, missionaries set up a network of missions throughout Orissa and the surrounding regions that began to develop systems to care for orphans. Because of this precedent in policy and the missions that seemed to fill the gaps, the British government originally offered no response to the famine, and then offered very little. The British governmental response to the Orissa famine, however, is what truly set in motion the chain of events that allowed missions the ability to control systems that supported the starving. The government did not offer sufficient funding, food, or infrastructure to combat the famine meaningfully, which led to increased missionary control over famine relief, especially for children.

Laissez-faire government policy marked the early part of the 19th century, paving the way for missions to gain control of charity complexes and infrastructure. In his book, *Orissa: or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*, Scottish member of the Indian Civil

⁴ Bidyut Mohanty, *A Haunting Tragedy: Gender, Caste, and Class in the 1866 Orissa Famine*

⁵ Ian Copeland, "Christianity as an Arm of Empire," *Historical Journal* 49, no. 4 (2006): 1025-1054

⁶ David R. Syiemlieh, "Sectional President's Address: Colonial Encounter and Christian Missions in North East

India," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 73, (2012): 509-527

⁷ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*

Service William Wilson Hunter wrote, “any rural disaster tells immediately upon the Land Tax and the floods which every few years desolate Orissa involve large remissions of rent. During our first twenty-seven years the Province (1803-1830) £65,094 were written off from this cause alone. But such remissions proved wholly inadequate meet evil.”⁸ Hunter criticized the Land Tax system the British had implemented after acquiring Orissa and blamed it and, by extension, the officials who created it for the region’s poverty and poor response to floods. According to Hunter, the region flooded regularly, and the British system of land management proved ineffective to handle these floods. Of the embankment system, Hunter wrote, “The Native system had never been a complete one. We organised no machinery for enforcing it, and under British rule it completely broke down.”⁹ This system had protected farmland from floods under the Mughal empire.¹⁰ Hunter observed that under the British, these embankments fell into disrepair. The British increased pressure on farmers to devote more time to producing rice crops for export rather than the communal maintenance required to keep the embankments functional. British policy of valuing financial gain over all else formed a major factor in the severity of the flood that directly caused the famine.

The British government’s laissez-faire response allowed missionaries to present themselves as charitable counterpoints. The British East India Company disallowed missionary practice completely from their lands until 1813, when, after years of lobbying from Protestant groups, the government offered entrance to missionaries with approved licenses.¹¹ It was not due to some concept of religious toleration that the company regulated proselytization so heavily, but out of a fear that religious tensions would harm their business interests. However, as the Company’s control grew more complete over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century, their restrictions lessened on missionary activity. In 1833, the Company lifted their requirement for licenses, essentially allowing unlimited missionary activity.¹² However, this change in regulation did not result in an influx of missions and converts because Christian missions in India – especially Orissa – had long been unsuccessful, and many groups focused the majority of their resources elsewhere.¹³ The lifting of restrictions in 1833 did not make the Company friendly to the missions’ goals by any means. If missionary ideology conflicted with their profit margins, the Company chose profit.

The early days of British conquest of India saw the East India Company show a willingness to avoid religion to make a profit, whereas the missionaries clashed with this idea and sought to evangelize in the area. In the 1840s, the British East India Company received criticism from missions in Orissa in response to its yearly donations to the Jagannath temple, an important site of religious pilgrimage in Puri as well as a pillar of community charity through its kitchens.¹⁴ The company’s donations may have kept a tenuous peace as it took over the region and slowly abandoned social programs and public works, but many missionaries saw it as a continuation of company policy to maximize profit through avoidance of religious conflict. When the Christian Missionary Society, publisher of many mission periodical articles upon which this work is built, asked permission to set up a mission, Colonel Mackelson, Commissioner of Peshawar replied, “no missionary shall cross the Indus while I am Commissioner ... do you want us all to be killed?”¹⁵ Responses such as this characterized official attitudes under Company rule. They granted few permissions for missionaries, and when missions began to enter, Mackelson’s successor, the Evangelical Commissioner Edwardes stated that “it is not the duty of the Government, as a Government, to proselytise India.... The duty of evangelising India lies at the door of private Christians.”¹⁶ When compared to his predecessor, his stance on missionaries was supportive. However, missionaries argued that the Company prioritized the interests of Hindus in Orissa, where the Company collected taxes on pilgrims to the lucrative Jagannath temple.¹⁷ The *Church Missionary Society Intelligencer* criticized the temple heavily in its “Description of a Native Eyewitness of Acts Perpetrated Within Jaggernath’s Temple at Pooree.”¹⁸ The article described the ritual of self-immolation. Being a Christian missionary publication, the *Intelligencer* presented the incidents as signs of the evils of Hinduism, from which only missionaries could save the people. From the missionary perspective, by profiting from the temple, the company was prioritizing money over souls, and preventing them from doing what they believed was an inherent good in working towards conversion.

The situation did not undergo much change when the Company dissolved into the British Empire following the Great Rebellion of 1857. Because of this continuity, missionaries’ narratives of themselves as standing against capital to do good persisted. Many officials blamed the rebellion on earlier attempts to Christianize India. Charles

⁸ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*, 181

⁹ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*, 183

¹⁰ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*, 183

¹¹ David R. Syiemlich, “Sectional President’s Address: Colonial Encounter and Christian Missions in North East India,” 510-511

¹² Penelope Carson, “Between Scylla and Charybdis: 1836-1858,” in *The East India Company and Religion* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2012), 206-236

¹³ “The North-India Mission,” *Church Missionary Paper*, 1842

¹⁴ Penelope Carson, “Between Scylla and Charybdis: 1836-1858,” 206-236

¹⁵ J. Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India, 1818-1940* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 33

¹⁶ S. Neill, *The History of Christianity in India, 1707-1858* (Cambridge MA: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 184

¹⁷ Penelope Carson, “Between Scylla and Charybdis: 1836-1858,” 212

¹⁸ “Description of a Native Eyewitness of Acts Perpetrated Within Jaggernath’s Temple at Pooree,” *Church Missionary Society Intelligencer*, 1873, 53-54

Wood, Secretary of State under the post-rebellion Palmerston government, called any earlier attempts at Christianization “a mistake.”¹⁹ Wood, and many others like him, regarded the possible mix-up in giving Hindu and Muslim soldiers pig fat to grease their muskets as the straw that broke the camel’s back and began the rebellion.²⁰ To keep their colonies, and their profits, they did not want to inspire such religious and cultural strife again. Therefore, the missions operated mostly separate from the government after 1857, and received funding nearly exclusively from private donors. Missions gained much of this funding through their periodical newsletters. These newsletters offered subscribers updates on mission efforts all around the world. Many included specific updates on orphanages, which would grow greatly during the Orissa famine.

It was in this environment in which the British East India Company and the Raj that replaced it emphasized draining Indian resources and avoided maintaining or fomenting systems to support people during hard times that the network of English Protestant missions arrived in Orissa. The Church Missionary Society’s *Church Missionary Paper* released an 1842 overview of their work in North India, reading, “Of their principal Missionary centres in North India, twenty-three in number, eleven will be found on the great arterial line of communication, some sixteen hundred miles long, which connects the great metropolis with Calcutta with Peshawar.”²¹ Peshawar is located in modern Pakistan, far away from Orissa, which is close to the Bay of Bengal on the eastern coast of the subcontinent. Therefore, the Christian Missionary society’s missions formed an infrastructure of sorts that spanned the subcontinent.

While the British governmental structure neglected structures of aid in India, missionaries offered aid in the hopes of saving souls. *The Children’s Missionary Magazine* published a letter they claimed was written by an orphan they had taken in named Maria. The letter said, “For several years in sinful pleasure and sorrow my time passed away; through the favour of God I was brought to this place, and entered this school and was taught in the way of truth, but continued to love sin till the Lord Jesus gave me his Holy Spirit, and true light beamed on my mind.”²² The periodical that published this letter was a Christian publication written to report on the outcomes of and encourage missions, so it is possible that this child did not exist, but it is equally likely that she did, as there are sources to corroborate the presence of these missions as aid for children in Orissa. This letter, if real, would have been likely heavily edited in order to support the causes of the *Children’s Missionary Magazine*. As published, the letter thanks the missionaries for teaching its apparent writer about Christianity and expresses a hope to teach other Indian children as well. This letter, real or fake, expresses the agenda and desires of the missions in Orissa that existed before the famine, setting up a narrative about how they took over networks of community care in

Orissa during the famine because of British governmental neglect. *The Children’s Missionary Magazine* published Maria’s alleged conversion narrative in 1845. Therefore, by the onset of the Orissa famine twenty years later, missions had accumulated experience raising orphans. Missionaries in Orissa at the time of the famine were working from an established network of missions that dated to before the end of the East India Company’s rule and had, since then, began to fill the gaps the British left behind in infrastructure and social services. The precedent the missions had set would continue in their responses to the British policy surrounding the Orissa famine.

4. ORIGINS OF THE FAMINE

The missionary presence in Orissa was able to serve as a substitute of sorts for governmental assistance because the British government continued in their policies of inaction when the famine began. The Orissa famine started to set in after the bad harvest of 1865. A lack of proper flood-mitigating infrastructure compounded the effect of the bad harvest when the monsoon season came, cutting Orissa off from imports.²³ Despite the suffering that had begun, in February of 1866, the Orissa Division Commissioner banned the distribution of rice for fear of the effects on markets.²⁴ *The Hull Packet*, a British newspaper, published an exposé in October of that year that read, “In India, in the province of Orissa, it turns out that the famine has been far more terrible than the reports of the local Governor or the Governor-General had led us to expect, and it seems to have resulted in a frightful mortality.”²⁵ Being a British newspaper for British readers, the *Hull Packet* had no vested interest in furthering Indian causes or anticolonial narratives. The article, therefore, was less likely to have a skewed anti-British perspective, though it did criticize the British government. *The Hull Packet* claimed that the Governor General of India had lied about the seriousness of the Orissa famine.

Aid was similarly slow to arrive due to a Victorian cultural emphasis on the sovereignty of the market. *The Friend of India*, a British newspaper whose title indicates a greater likelihood of siding with Indian interests, furthered the *Hull Packet*’s claim, writing, “The complaint is that, when the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal would not only not ask assistance as Sir George Edmonstone did in 1860-61, but prevented the public from giving it, the Supreme Government would not ignore or supersede him in a crisis.”²⁶ The article argued that the colonial government had not only hidden information on the famine, but had also suppressed aid for famine victims. Despite its name, *The Friend of India* did not exaggerate its claim, because The Famine Relief Committee did not arrive in Orissa until May

¹⁹ Penelope Carson, “Conclusion and Epilogue: Strangers in the Land,” in *The East India Company and Religion*, 239

²⁰ Jill C. Bender, *The 1857 Indian Uprising and the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016)

²¹ “The North-India Mission”

²² “Maria,” *Children’s Missionary Magazine*, November 1, 1845

²³ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*, 181

²⁴ Bidyut Mohanty, *A Haunting Tragedy: Gender, Caste, and Class in the 1866 Orissa Famine*

²⁵ “At Home and Abroad,” *Hull Packet*, Oct. 26, 1866

²⁶ “The Government of India on the Famine,” *Friend of India*, Dec. 13, 1866

of 1867.²⁷ The article came out in late 1866.²⁸ In the first year of the Orissa famine, British officials worked to cover up stories of the famine's effects and refused aid rather than attempting to solve the people's problems.

Though the government eventually allowed aid for the Orissa famine victims, the support they provided proved insufficient, leaving the missions as one of the only viable backstops for people to access relief and care. *The British Daily News*' explanation of the happenings of parliament included the anecdote: "For the future he was afraid it would be impossible to admit that the government could do very much to prevent the recurrence of visitations which depended mainly on the seasons, but the prosecution of the irrigation works on which the government were at present engaged seemed to be the only means at their disposal for that purpose."²⁹ The word 'he' referred to Lord Cranbourne, a man who three months later sent out orders to "give largely and freely out of the public purse in relief of the prevailing distress,"³⁰ according to the *Hull Packet*. Cranbourne therefore expanded his view of the means at the government's disposal as working on irrigation after the flood did little to alleviate the resulting hunger. Cranbourne's later order, however, was similarly ineffective, as W. W. Hunter's narrative of his experiences with government relief kitchens in Orissa described crowded, unsanitary conditions in which government stinginess left famine victims eating on re-used plates and sleeping and re-used beds left by cholera victims without being cleaned.³¹ The public purse did open according to Cranbourne's directions, and the government did not give freely nor largely. When the British government responded to the famine, they did so with half-measures that did not provide much substantial relief.

5. MISSION PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE FAMINE

The lackluster government response to the Orissa famine created an opening that missions moved to fill, as they had been operating in the region on a smaller scale for years by the time of the famine. *The Wesleyan Juvenile Offering*, a magazine from the Methodist branch of the network of missions in India published that "a great deal of money has been given by good, kind people to relieve the sufferers; and it is said that one hundred and fifty thousand people are being thus fed by charity. Let us hope, and let us pray, that the good deeds of Christian kindness may lead many of these poor natives to admire and seek after the enjoyment of the Christian religion."³² Methodist missions were a robust enough presence on their own to feed 150,000 people, according to this article. As it was a Methodist missionary periodical, the *Wesleyan Juvenile Offering* may have exaggerated their numbers, but with all the donors they

thanked, they evidently received enough to be a pillar of their community's support system during the famine.

The Methodist missions were not the only missions working, either. They belonged to a network of Protestant missions linked loosely by communication, transportation of orphans, participation in the Paris Mission showcase, and an 1868 Pan-Missionary meeting that made these connections official.³³ *The Wesleyan Juvenile Offering* then offered a prayer that their work would result in more conversions. The Methodist missions were not the only ones who emphasized conversion in their narrative of their famine relief work. Many fed famine victims with the expectation they would convert. *The Wesleyan Juvenile Offering* expressed that same expectation in its article on its famine response. The government's inaction and subsequent insufficient action in response to the Orissa famine resulted in a religiously-controlled system of famine relief that would offer support often to serve their own interests of conversion.

Secular authorities looking to help children during the famine had no choice but to turn to the missions without any other option. *The Friend of India* published an article that began by criticizing the government's apathy to famine victims: "Orissa seems now to be abandoned by public benevolence. India, which subscribed for a time with its wonted liberality, is ceasing to give. England... sought to be allowed to help, but the Secretary of State for India and the Lord Mayor rejected the offer."³⁴ Though the *Friend of India* was not a Christian publication, it called for a system of Christian charity in response to the failings of the government relief efforts when it followed its criticisms with, "England was compelled by those who should have known better to act like the Levite and the Priest of the parable, while the heavy task of the good Samaritan devolved on the small community of Englishmen and a still smaller number of Natives in India... But surely it is the part, nay more, the privilege, of the Christian to care for the orphan."³⁵ The secular *Friend of India* newspaper invoked Biblical stories to call for aid, likely because the only institutions that would support famine victims were Christian ones. The article also emphasized care for orphans as it sought donations. *The Friend of India* did not itself provide care for orphans; it was a British publication that collected donations and sent them on to other groups that actually operated on the subcontinent.³⁶ Its willingness to use religious reasoning to ask for financial support for the orphans implied that the funds it sought would go on to support the children living at various missions as a result of the Orissa famine. This private charity likely forwarded its money to religious groups since they were some of the only groups working towards a modicum of famine relief.

This transfer of responsibility for children from secular authorities to religious ones occurred on the ground as well, with the *Children's Missionary Magazine* outlining

²⁷ Bidyut Mohanty. *A Haunting Tragedy: Gender, Caste, and Class in the 1866 Orissa Famine*

²⁸ "The Government of India on the Famine"

²⁹ "Imperial Parliament," *Daily News*, July 27, 1866

³⁰ "At Home and Abroad"

³¹ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*

³² "The Famine in India," *Wesleyan Juvenile Offering: A Miscellany of Missionary Info*, October 10, 1866

³³ "The Pan-Missionary Meeting," *Friend of India*, Jan. 30, 1868

³⁴ "The Famine and Its Orphans," *Friend of India*, June 13, 1867

³⁵ "The Famine and Its Orphans"

³⁶ "Orissa Famine Fund," *Friend of India*, May 17, 1866

how when the Magistrate of Police found the orphaned Naslican, he delivered her to the Benares Girls' Orphan School.³⁷ The Magistrate did not explain how he had found her, but she arrived at the Benares Girls' Orphan School after the poor harvest 1865, meaning her parents were likely victims of the first wave of famine. The near-monopoly on famine relief systems the missions had was so great that secular groups and authorities sought their help to aid orphans.

In the aftermath of the negligent government response and mission takeover, mission and non-mission news sources looked to the Rev. J. Buckley, a missionary in Cuttack, as an authoritative source of information and a figure worthy of praise. The mission periodicals and secular news sources that quoted and discussed him made little mention of his origins. They all agreed, however, that he was responsible for the care of an influx of orphans in Cuttack, where he ran a Baptist mission during the Orissa famine. *The Pictorial Missionary Society* published an article highlighting the Orissa Mission House in which Buckley stayed and from which he ran the mission that included the famine orphans:

"In this house it was the privilege of Dr. Buckley to complete the new edition of the Old Testament in the Oriya tongue. Mrs. Buckley's orphanage now contains about 321 orphans; of these 231 are famine orphans supported by Government, and the remaining 90 are dependent on the kind support of friends in this country. Nearly all of them can read the Word of God in their own tongue. It is believed that the Holy Spirit is inciting earnest desires after God in the hearts of many of these orphans."³⁸

Published a couple years after the famine, this article discussed the Rev. J. Buckley and his mission in Cuttack. This article was part of the missionary periodical network that gave Buckley the status of a minor celebrity in the international Christian community over the course of the famine. Like many other periodical mentions of Buckley, the article promoted his work in converting orphans.

Buckley was the member of the network of missionaries in Orissa and the surrounding area the media – secular and religious – chose as a spokesperson. He featured in the *New York Times* as well through an article that informed on the famine: "There are, says a correspondent, 1,700 orphans by this time in Orissa and Midnapore alone. I find that the total number from the first, in the hands of the missionaries, has been 2,673 in these districts, besides the many in Ganiem and Chota Nagpore. Most pathetic are the descriptions of the missions, both Protestant and Roman Catholic. Nothing in the blue-books gives such a horrible idea of what that great famine was. Parents lost all natural affection for their children."³⁹ The article associated the missionaries and the orphans as well as credited the

missionaries. Missions were the only relief effort the article mentioned, illustrating the extent of the mission takeover. *The New York Times* also echoed the parenting rhetoric from the mission periodicals. The Times did not follow this claim with any source but Buckley. After introducing the missions alongside the orphans, the article quoted Buckley, introducing him as "Mr. Buckley, Baptist missionary of Cuttack: 'it has been more affecting than we know how to express to hear one after another say, 'mother dead; father dead; brother dead; sister dead; all dead. I have not a friend or relative anywhere.'"⁴⁰ It was through Buckley that the *Times* explained the situation in Orissa to their readership. The article did not address any biases Buckley may have held or factors that may have influenced his explanation of the situation. To the author of this article, Buckley was the only necessary reliable source on the subject. The *Times'* usage of Buckley as a voice of authority exemplified the importance of Buckley's testimony in framing the story of the famine to the world.

As secular papers such as the *Times* considered Buckley a reputable source and cited him in articles that raised the profile of the famine, mission periodicals invoked Buckley and the other orphanages in their bids for funds that they raised successfully. *The Pictorial Missionary News* began an update on Orissa with: "'The state of things,' says the Rev. J. Buckley, 'is truly awful.'"⁴¹ Buckley continued to describe cases of cannibalism, starvation among converts, and the high price of rice.⁴² Like the *New York Times*, the *Pictorial Missionary News* found Buckley a suitable source. However, the religious nature of the *Pictorial Missionary News* meant this appeal to the authority of a reverend was simply in the periodicals' long tradition. Unlike the *Times*, the *Pictorial Missionary News* attached this account to a fundraising effort: "Such is the trying position in which the General Baptist Missionaries are placed. Donations in aid of the sufferers will be thankfully received by Thomas Hill, Esq., Arboretum Street, Notting- ham, Treasurer of the General Baptist Mission; or by the Rev. H. Wilkinson or Rev. J. C. Pike, Secretaries, Leicester."⁴³ The article followed Buckley's words with a plea for donations. Therefore, the author found Buckley not only impactful but capable of spurring the readership to financial action. Buckley's ascent to minor public figure beyond religious circles allowed him to become more influential and fundraise more effectively.

Communications through missionary periodicals illustrated the usefulness of invoking children for fundraising in the tradition Buckley had begun. Missionary E. Droese worked at the orphanage at Bhogulpore alongside her husband Rev. Droese. Because of overcrowding in the orphanages in Puri and Cuttack, members of the network of Protestant missions sent many Orissa famine orphans to Bhogulpore as well as nearby Benares. E. Droese began a conversation with the subscribers to the *Children's Missionary Magazine*. She wrote: "it would be a very nice

³⁷ "The Coral Missionary Fund," *Children's Missionary Magazine*, Aug. 1, 1865

³⁸ "The Orissa Mission House," *Pictorial Missionary News*, Nov. 1, 1873

³⁹ "Orphans of the Orissa Famine," *New York Times*, Oct. 28, 1867

⁴⁰ "Orphans of the Orissa Famine"

⁴¹ "Orissa," *Pictorial Missionary News*, July 14, 1866

⁴² "Orissa"

⁴³ "Orissa"

thing indeed if we could manage to get a magic lantern for our orphans! What a treat, what a pleasure would that be for them! A pleasure which could at once convey useful instruction to the mind. But how to get it? This has always been the question, and not finding a way, we had always to relinquish our wish with a sigh. I want now to ask you, my dear friend, whether you think you could assist us. Do you think you could interest some mission friends to contribute to such a thing; at least to some extent?"⁴⁴ This letter read as though it was addressed to an individual at the magazine, but as it appeared in the magazine's pages, Droese likely wrote it both to the recipient and to her readers. The missions required funding to function, and therefore their periodicals were geared towards reaching new subscribers and keeping existing ones. These updates on the children, then, worked alongside the rest of the publications' content to seek payment.

Droese's letters not only asked for money, but explained the role donations played when they arrived. She wrote in her Christmas letter, "You may then fancy how glad we were when almost every week in the month of December brought us quite unexpectedly a box from England, and in each presents for the school children. We all then set about preparing for Christmas, and you should have seen how diligently, and with what happy faces, the girls plied their needles from morning to evening, in order to get all things ready... Each child received one or more presents: the girls, petticoats, jackets, needle-books, bags, boxes, etc.; the boys, jackets, books, pens, pencils, toys, caps, etc., not to forget a large plate full of sweetmeats."⁴⁵ *The Children's Missionary Magazine* published this letter in 1867, though it described the Christmas of 1866. Christmas in 1866 took place after the failed harvest of 1865, during the height of the food shortage at the beginning of the famine. It was not until September of 1866 that rice aid arrived, just two months before Christmas. These children had been living in scarcity for over a year before the Christmas Droese described arrived. *The Children's Missionary Magazine's* most loyal readers would have been following the stories of the children in the mission network, and therefore would have had some idea of the time these children had gone without or close to it, as donations kept the missions better fed than any other parts of Orissa. Either way, the readers and donors among them would have had access to a personal story about the impacts their gifts made. This would have inspired positive feelings and made them more likely to donate. The missions needed material goods such as these if they were going to continue in their success converting orphaned children. Without a materially better option, children were much more likely to end up at the missions and therefore convert. The missionaries relied on these statements of the value of donation that invoked the children to continue to raise adequate funds.

Missionary periodicals also explained to their more religious readers that famine provided an opportunity for increased conversion, as hardship had sometimes weakened existing religious ties. Though W. W. Hunter –

among many other scholars – traced the lack of options for children orphaned over the course of the famine to the actions of the British Empire, the missionary network utilized these issues to declare to one another and to the British public the need for their work. Mission periodicals described Hinduism as ineffective and framed problems with Hindu structures as reasons their work was necessary. "A silver idol in the Mysore was supposed to have power to cure diseases. When the cholera raged, the goddess was brought to the city [Cuttack], but its presence had no effect, although the people presented to it numerous offerings. They learnt its powerlessness," concluded an article in the *Pictorial Missionary News*.⁴⁶ The periodical celebrated the fact that the suffering of the cholera epidemic had led in some cases to losses of religious belief. The statement came with the implied conclusion that the famine was the perfect time for widespread conversion.

Mission periodicals accused Indian parents of poor parenting, connecting it to their religion and culture, therefore conveying to their readers the need for mission work and, thus, the need for donations. Rev. J. Buckley, as part of his interview with the *New York Times*, described a situation where "fathers unable to provide for their families had left wife and children to their fate, and fled to some distant place in the hope of securing some remunerative employment; and mothers, forgetting the compassionate tenderness which the Creator has implanted in woman's heart, left their offspring to languish and die. One little child that we recovered had been partly buried in the sand by her who should have watched over and protected her."⁴⁷ Buckley criticized first the many men who traveled to other regions to find work, often leaving their families behind.

Anant Das, a man who wrote an account of his childhood in Orissa during the famine, faced this experience when his father abandoned his family during the famine because he was unable to feed them.⁴⁸ Buckley moved on to women and offered them a much harsher criticism in which he juxtaposed the actions of women who could not feed their children with an ideal of Christian motherhood. Buckley did not include any details of the mother's situation with starvation and poverty. Instead, he pitted her against a straw-woman ideal. Then, Buckley invoked the missionaries at the same time as he discussed her child, describing how the Cuttack mission "recovered" her. Buckley's story used the mentions of famine's effect on parenting to set up a gallant tale of rescue. This language came as part of Buckley's 1867 *New York Times* interview that solidified him as an authority on the subject of the famine and famine orphans. *The New York Times*, though quoting a religious figure, was a secular publication. It left this quote with no critical analysis, and therefore tacitly endorsed Buckley's story. Parenting criticisms that ignored the context of famine fueled missionaries' and missionary supporters' beliefs that missionary monopolies on charitable structures were necessary.

⁴⁴ E. Droese, "A Magic Lantern for Bhogulpore," *Children's Missionary Magazine*, Nov. 1, 1867

⁴⁵ E. Droese, "Christmas Time at Bhogulpore," *Children's Missionary Magazine*, April 1, 1867

⁴⁶ "Cuttack, Orissa," *Pictorial Missionary News*, Dec. 12, 1867

⁴⁷ Orphans of the Orissa Famine"

⁴⁸ Mayadhar Mansingh, *Durbhikshya*, 1962

6. W.W. HUNTER: AN EYEWITNESS PERSPECTIVE

Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule is the product of Scottish scholar W. W. Hunter's years in the area.⁴⁹ Hunter came from a manufacturing family in Glasgow.⁵⁰ He found social mobility through education and the Indian Civil Service, which he entered in 1862.⁵¹ His first post was as a record keeper in Birbhum, from where he began to work on surveys and histories of the local area in North East India.⁵² His work received notice when Governor General Lord Mayo sought his expertise in planning a nationwide survey.⁵³ It was during his work on these surveys that Hunter spent time traveling Orissa while the Orissa famine happened to rage around him. Hunter compiled his experiences into the book *Orissa*, which became one of the few eyewitness narratives of the Orissa famine. In two volumes, the book summarized the history of the region, discussed existing religious and class divisions among Indians, surveyed the landscape, explained his experiences with famine, and leveraged criticism against both the British government and many Indian traditions. Hunter's position as an outsider to the British aristocracy and a simultaneous colonial ruler over Indians gave him a unique perspective, not wholly separate from the British power base or the missionary organization's salvation goals, but not fully in line with either.

Hunter wrote openly about the failures of the missionary system and leveraged knowledge of Indian culture the missionaries often lacked or refused to acknowledge. He prefaced his discussion of the orphans by writing, "If the famine orphans be excepted, missionary efforts have made but little progress in actually converting the people."⁵⁴ Hunter separated the famine orphans' conversion with those of other Indians, demonstrating an understanding of the uniqueness of their situations.

Missions had been fairly unsuccessful in converting groups that still had support systems during the famine. When discussing the non-orphaned converts, Hunter noted that higher caste Hindus had nothing material to gain in conversion, whereas the lower castes that were more likely to convert often did so for material reasons.⁵⁵ This willingness to employ a material analysis of mission work denoted a difference in Hunter's perspective and the piety of mission publications. Missionary writings often excluded discussions of caste inequity when relaying stories of conversion. While missionary periodicals tended to celebrate conversions and leave out any possible secular

motivations, *Orissa* accepted the realities of a place where during a famine, missionaries were some of the only guarantors of resources. Hunter acknowledged the unequal balance of power among the missionaries, the average Indians, and the orphans, telling the story of the mission takeover through the differences in conversion rates in groups with more or less material resources.

Hunter described his visits to the Rev. J. Buckley's Cuttack mission in *Orissa*, where he offered a retrospective analysis comparing the children at the height of the famine and after it. He described the "famine orphans"⁵⁶ as "these miserable creatures, the children of parents who had died of starvation or who in the last extremity of hunger had deserted their offspring, formed six years ago a collection scarcely animate puny skeletons."⁵⁷ Then, as he revisited these orphans in the Reverend J. Buckley's Cuttack mission, he relayed that

"six years of good food and good training have made these strays and waifs of the famine one of the most interesting sights I have seen in India. Two large Orphanages- one for boys, the other for girls- in Cattack city are thronged with clean and bright-looking young people, who have been educated on the ennobling Christian system and trained in some bread winning occupation, to enable them play their parts reputably in life."⁵⁸

Hunter followed these children from parentless starvation to working trades, marriage, and settlements in Christian villages, and discussed the missions as the arbiters of these transformations. Though willing to criticize the government and its ideologies, Hunter offered nothing but glowing reports on the missionaries' work with the famine orphans. He did not mention their work of exclusively offering food to those willing to convert.⁵⁹ However, he did supplement his praises of the orphanages with an explanation that the children often had no choice but to settle in Christian villages upon reaching adulthood, as Hindu purity customs disallowed them from working in many fields due to their status as converts.⁶⁰ These were some of the only options available to children left orphaned during the Orissa famine, and many survived at the cost of losing their Hindu communities. Hunter witnessed the children as famine victims and as Christianized members of the orphanages. Hunter noticed these two options of conversion or starvation, and in his support of these orphanages, elected the best of the two, though this decision was likely influenced by

⁴⁹ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*

⁵⁰ Francis Henry Bennett Skrine, *Life of Sir William Wilson Hunter, K. C. S. I., M. A., L. L. D., a Vice-President of the Royal Asiatic Society, Etc.* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901)

⁵¹ Skrine, *Life of Sir William Wilson Hunter* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901)

⁵² W. W. Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1868)

⁵³ Skrine, *Life of Sir William Wilson Hunter*

⁵⁴ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*, 142

⁵⁵ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*, 142

⁵⁶ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*, 142

⁵⁷ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*, 143

⁵⁸ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*, 143

⁵⁹ J. Buckley, "The Indian Famine," *Morning Post* (London), Oct. 26, 1866.

⁶⁰ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*, 142

Hunter's religion as well as a material analysis of the circumstances.

From a 19th-century British Christian perspective, Hunter approached Hinduism with more empathy than his peers. He offered criticism of the poor sanitary practices of pilgrims to the Jagannath temple, but he also discussed their beliefs separately from the area's issues with cholera that compounded following the famine. Hunter's religious analysis of Hindus came in his discussion of the Jagannath Temple in Puri.

"Scholars tell us that in pre-historic times the Hindu race fell into polytheism by recognizing God too vividly in His mani-festations, and worshipping the work rather than the worker. Jagannath represents the final result of the converse process. It exhibits the goal to which a highly intellectual race painfully arrives after ages of poly-theism, during which the masses were sunk in darkness, while the higher spirits of each generation have been groping after the One Eternal Deity."⁶¹

While not positive, this analysis represented Hunter's willingness to understand the Hindu perspective. Hunter described Hindus as "highly intellectual" even as he referred to their beliefs as "darkness." With this "darkness," Hunter represented Hindus as capable of spiritual growth on their own terms in his discussion of "groping after the One Eternal Deity." Rather than representing Hindus as satanic, as Rev. J. Buckley does in his response letter to Hunter's book, W. W. Hunter saw their religious and cultural practices as an imperfect piety.

The British Protestant missionary found themselves facing what had come closer to a criticism of their taking advantage of people's desperate situations for conversions than anything else at the time in *Orissa*. Their publications responded negatively to Hunter's work. While modern readers may not read Hunter as progressive or subversive, his book inspired responses by the missionaries that ran the orphanages he praised. The Rev. J. Buckley wrote a letter responding to the book, in which he said, "It will, I suppose, be admitted by candid and reasonable men that the missionaries in Orissa are far better acquainted with Poree than their fellow country-men."⁶² Buckley began his letter by seeking to discredit Hunter. Though Hunter spent years traveling and working in Orissa, Buckley asserted that his knowledge from working in the Cuttack orphanage was superior. Buckley would continue the letter with a series of disagreements. He proceeded to argue that Hunter had been too willing to accept views his contemporary Rev. C. Lacey categorized as "one of the most horrid spectacles I ever beheld."⁶³ "Dr. Hunter, in correcting prevalent misapprehension in one direction, has, as it appears to me, gone to the other extreme," Buckley wrote in a discussion of

Hunter's account of the Temple of Jagannath.⁶⁴ While Hunter did not present a positive view of Jagannath, Buckley considered this "extreme" and worthy of rebuttal. Their argument about the ritual of Jagannath was also one about how the British public and missionaries should view Hindusim, and therefore about how they should respond.

Buckley was in a position of power over missionary response as a respected part of a network of missionaries running orphanages in Orissa, whereas Hunter, being a member of the Indian Civil Service, had the ear of the government.⁶⁵ They were well-matched, and other parts of Buckley's missionary network decided therefore to step in. In an article that published parts of Buckley's response letter, the *Christian Missionary Society Intelligencer* periodical offered a response to Hunter's criticisms of the low conversion rate. "If the antagonists of Indian Missions really did care to know why Missions have not been more successful, they might find at least one reason in the perusal of such dispatches and minutes," the periodical rebutted.⁶⁶ It sought to explain to the British public — especially those who had subscribed to mission funds — why they were seemingly unsuccessful, and therefore justify their existence in order to continue to control the British discourse around the best practices for India. While Hunter represented the orphanages generally positively compared to the few or no alternatives that existed for the famine orphans, his discussion of the missions as a whole was not wholly complimentary, and he included a similar mix of compliments and critiques in his analysis of the Hindu Temple of Jagannath. These religious unorthodoxies, however slight, created in the mission authorities a desire to push back, leading to works by missionaries justifying their work where previously this had gone unspoken.

7. COERCION IN THE MISSION SYSTEM

The other options available for children left without caretakers during the Orissa famine proved Hunter's insinuations regarding missionary success coming from a lack of support during the famine years. Notoriously unsanitary government relief centers spread disease and disregarded cultural norms of the time, making them much less effective than they could have been had they improved sanitation or consulted Hindu practices. A tribal group purchased children for practices of human sacrifice.⁶⁷ Girls beyond the mission walls often entered into lives of prostitution.⁶⁸ Therefore, the alternate lifeways of children outside the missions contrasted to show the coercive nature of the mission system when there were no other options available to children.

Without systems in place that had evolved alongside Oriya culture, lackluster British government support clashed with Hindu tradition, leading to material decreases in famine relief. In his work *A Statistical Account*

⁶¹ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*, 88

⁶² J. Buckley, "On Dr. Hunter's Orissa," Adam Matthew Digital, *Christian Missionary Intelligencer*, January 1873.

⁶³ J. Buckley, "On Dr. Hunter's Orissa"

⁶⁴ J. Buckley, "On Dr. Hunter's Orissa"

⁶⁵ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*, 13

⁶⁶ "The Question of "Cruelty"- Dr. Hunter versus the Rev. J. Buckley of Cuttack," 61

⁶⁷ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*

⁶⁸ Bidyut Mohanty. *A Haunting Tragedy: Gender, Caste, and Class in the 1866 Orissa Famine*, 120

of Bengal, Puri and the Feudatory States, W. W. Hunter relayed his experiences at government feeding centers.⁶⁹ Hunter wrote that many Brahmins and other higher-caste people chose to starve rather than eat in the relief centers because the government-run centers did not follow caste purity rules when preparing and dividing food donations. The government ignored issues of caste prejudice, which greatly lessened the effectiveness of their efforts. Whether caste purity beliefs were moral or immoral, the government lack of cultural competency led to starvation deaths among people of higher castes.

Those famine victims who did relinquish caste prejudice to feed themselves and their families found themselves members of a new caste—the Chhatrahkias, or those who eat in relief kitchens.⁷⁰ The Oriya newspaper *Utkal Dipika* described the origin of the caste in an article claiming they had already paid their penance to the Brahminical system and needed to be allowed to return to their former castes.⁷¹ This petition seemed to have been culturally denied, as the Chhatrahkia still exist in areas of Orissa today.⁷² The Chhatrahkia distinction evolved from a combination of existing caste prejudice and government ignorance. Since the government relief centers did not follow caste purity restrictions when preparing and distributing food, those who ate the food in desperation had broken caste restrictions. Therefore, according to hard-line Hinduism, these desperate famine victims needed to be punished through a revocation of their status. British governmental relief centers' lack of care to Hindu customs conflicted with the conservatism of many higher-caste Oriyas, creating a situation in which starving people needed to choose between caste status and life.

The missions existed in a climate with few other options for children without parental care during the famine. These options were often much less desirable than mission life, and contributed to an atmosphere of coercion for children with little other choice than to enter the missions. One such option was life with the Khands, a tribal group that lived in forested hills around Orissa. The *Pictorial Missionary News* published a sensational article that told their British audience that

“The buying and selling of little boys and girls in India is carried on by the Banjaris and Gonds. The former are the gipsies and carriers of India. They travel with bullocks laden with salt or grain, and are ever on the alert to steal or buy dog, bullock or child. During the famine many parents sold their children, and some of those who fell into the hands of Gonds, it is feared, were slain as a sacrifice to the goddess of the earth. The Orissa Missionaries have rescued a great many children

who were about to be killed by those wicked Gonds, and have placed them in schools.”⁷³

The British transliterated the name of the Khands to Gonds, Khonds, Kondas, and many similar phonetic transfigurations. *The Pictorial Missionary News* referred to the group as Gonds, arguing that because they bought famine orphans for sacrifice, the Khands' practices illuminated the necessity for missions. Without the missions, the option of life and sacrifice with the Khands would have a larger 'market share' of sorts of children with few options during the famine. W. W. Hunter's *Orissa* corroborated much of the mission claims about the Khands' practices of sacrifice, but added much context in his ethnographic approach. The sacrifice victims, according to Hunter, were known as Meriahs and occupied a respected place in Khand society.⁷⁴ Hunter wrote that Meriahs would often live for many years with the Khands before sacrifice. The Khands, according to Hunter, would only practice sacrifice when they felt the Earth goddess needed it, which was typically when misfortune befell the community. Hunter wrote that these sacrifices were few and far between, and Meriahs often integrated into Khand communities and lived there for years after purchase.

Though human sacrifice is a less-than-satisfactory option for a person's child, Oriya parents would have known about these time differences between purchase and sacrifice. In the case of the 1866 famine, it is possible that many Meriahs would have starved before they would have been sacrificed, and parents likely extended their lives by selling them to the Khands, who fed them for many years in most cases before death. Missionary periodicals often excluded this information, as the more dire the situation appeared to their British readers, the more money they would be likely to donate. Though often misrepresented in missionary periodicals, the fate of a Meriah was eventual human sacrifice. As an alternative to immediate starvation, eventual human sacrifice did not seem too bad. However, these two options did not materialize out of thin air. W. W. Hunter attributes the severity of the famine to the British government's allowance of preexisting support systems such as embankments and grain storages to degrade and go without maintenance over time.⁷⁵ The mission periodicals, though critical of the government's lack of charity when it hindered their efforts, did not discuss these root causes of the famine orphans' lack of options. Instead, they invoked the scary image of the violent Khands in order to gather more funding to continue their monopoly as the safest option for children.

Many female children, if not living as Meriahs, could only find support and food outside the missions through entering prostitution. Bidyut Mohanty noted this

⁶⁹ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*

⁷⁰ Bidyut Mohanty, "Relief and Caste," in *A Haunting Tragedy: Gender, Caste, and Class in the 1866 Orissa Famine*

⁷¹ *Utkal Dipika*, April 11, 1868

⁷² Bidyut Mohanty, "Relief and Caste," in *A Haunting Tragedy: Gender, Caste, and Class in the 1866 Orissa Famine*

⁷³ "The Buying And Selling of Little Boys and Girls in India is Carried on by the Banjaris and Gonds," *Pictorial Missionary News*, April 1, 1869

⁷⁴ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*, 95-97

⁷⁵ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*, 180-187

fact in her valuable book *A Haunting Tragedy*.⁷⁶ Older prostitutes, she wrote, would house and feed famine orphans while training them in their line of work. These girls who began to work as prostitutes had few other options. These options were death by starvation, life as a Chhatrahkhia outcaste, eventual human sacrifice by the Khands, prostitution, or life in the missions. Secular periodical *The Friend of India* noted this coercion into prostitution when telling the story of “girl named Trilochun under sixteen years of age.”⁷⁷ The paper relayed that “her mother had gone out to beg when a woman induced her to leave home on the pretence of going to the house of a relative. In a strange house she was sold and sent out to pursue an infamous calling.”⁷⁸ The periodical told of her “being discovered by the chowckedars, (which) led to her rescue.”⁷⁹ However, this human interest story ended its mention of Trilochun there, moving on to discuss the arrest and prosecution of her traffickers. *The Friend of India* made no mention of a reunion between Trilochun and her mother. This omission, when combined with the mission periodicals’ many tales of officials dropping famine orphans off with them, implies the possibility that Trilochun ended up in a mission. The story of Trilochun, therefore, illustrated how missions had framed themselves as the only acceptable alternative in a world where all safe alternatives had been lost to British governmental negligence.

8. EFFECT ON CHILDREN’S LIFEWAYS

When the network of Protestant Christian missions in Orissa became the main source of care for a multitude of children left without families during the famine, they shaped the future of those children’s lives and even the lives of their descendants. Orphans in the mission would be quickly baptized with new European names following their entrance into the mission orphanages and schools. The missionaries would run many aspects of these children’s lives even after their graduations, setting up careers and choosing marriages. Decades later, the Orissa famine orphans’ descendants may still feel the moment their ancestral chain broke from older practices when the famine came. From the moment they set foot in one of the many Christian missions throughout Orissa and the surrounding area, these children experienced life-altering consequences of their time in the missions, from cultural disconnection to loss of control over their lifeways. However, missions in the region affected by the famine did save the lives of many of these children. Cultural sensitivity was not an aspect of the moral landscape of these missionaries. Instead, their emphasis lay on saving both lives and souls according to their religious paradigms. This section of the paper is not a moral condemnation of the work of these missionaries, but instead simply explores its impacts on cultural reproduction in these children’s lives.

One of the first major life changes the missions imparted upon these children was the changing of their name, whether simply by a missionary’s decision, or by the request of a donor. Mrs. E. Droese explained one version of this practice in a letter published in the *Children’s Missionary Magazine*, “‘Mulwa,’ which is the heathen name of this little boy, was baptized at the end of last year, but hoping that we would find some supporter for him, his name was not changed at the time of his baptism; but he shall now be called Lewis Holland.”⁸⁰ Mulwa was one of the many children orphaned as a result of the Orissa famine attending one of the orphan schools associated with the Bhogulpore mission, run by the Rev. and Mrs. Droese. Name changes such as these were commonplace in the missions and appear often in the *Children’s Missionary Magazine*, discussed as everyday anecdotes, no more exciting or life-changing than a story about feeding the dog. The magazine took it as a matter of course that these children would receive European names upon their baptisms, treating a coerced change in religious affiliation as a complete change in cultural practice as well. Often, after the magazine mentioned a name change, it would no longer refer to the aforementioned child by the name their parents had given them. Instead, in all future issues, the magazine would only mention the child by their European name. The same is true for Mulwa/Lewis Holland. Mrs. Droese also mentioned that she did not change his name immediately upon baptism because he did not have “some supporter.” The supporters she referenced here were individual donors who could, for a sum of money, decide the name of a given child. Nearby missionary Rev. J. Fuchs discussed it in an earlier article: “We have chosen a girl for Miss H-, who will, as desired, -be called Maria Helen Hibbert. Her name is Nasilean. She was sent here by the superintendent of police in August, and may be about five years of age.”⁸¹ In this case, Droese did not have to wait for a supporter for a decision on the name, as one had already arrived before Nasilean. The article informed Miss H- and their other readers that the name Miss H- had preselected had been matched with a child. Miss H- was likely a Miss Hibbert, since she decided to pay to name a child Maria Helen Hibbert. Miss H- continued to donate to Nasilean/Maria Helen Hibbert over the next few years, as was documented in the *Children’s Missionary Magazine*. Many other children besides Nasilean had their names selected by donors. A Miss Hinton paid to change Gangia to Ann Hinton.⁸² Another donor paid to turn Parvatia to Florence Bickersteth.⁸³ Missions baptized the orphans as soon as they could, giving them European names and permanently altered their identities in the beginning of a string of methods they would use to shape their lifeways.

After growing up in the mission, many of the orphans of the Orissa famine came of age in a world that did not offer a mechanism of self-support for Christians, leaving

⁷⁶ Bidyut Mohanty. *A Haunting Tragedy: Gender, Caste, and Class in the 1866 Orissa Famine*, 120

⁷⁷ “The Government of India on the Famine”

⁷⁸ “The Government of India on the Famine”

⁷⁹ “The Government of India on the Famine”

⁸⁰ E. Droese, “Have I No One to Care for Me? or, The Bhogulpore Orphans,” *Children’s Missionary Magazine*, Jan. 1, 1868

⁸¹ J. Fuchs, “School Report,” *Children’s Missionary Magazine*, March 1, 1865

⁸² “Annual Report of the Coral Mission Fund, June 1866,” *Children’s Missionary Magazine*, June 1, 1866

⁸³ Letter of the Rev. J. Fuchs to the Co-Helper,” *Children’s Missionary Magazine*, April 2, 1866

them continually dependent on the mission network as they entered their working lives. In a separate published letter from the *Children's Missionary Magazine*, E. Droese noted, "seeing such a number of big boys who ought to be doing something, besides sitting in school, and learning little or nothing, my dear husband insisted that they should learn a trade, or do something to ensure their future livelihood; plus every one of the bigger boys had to begin something. Some are now learning the carpenter's trade, some are tailors, again others want to become servants, and others agriculturists, and they have been put to it."⁸⁴ As the immediate wave of children left without families during the famine began to grow older, the missionaries needed a way to transition the children into adult life. However, as W. W. Hunter noted in his account of visiting the missions, the Hindu framework of hiring power was not built for an influx of young converts.⁸⁵ This left the famine orphans without opportunities as they aged out of the missions. Therefore, in Bhogulpore, Rev. Droese filled this gap by setting up a program to train many of the young boys under his care to work various jobs. Mrs. Droese wrote that the boys had "been put to it," which was likely a reference to the Christian settlements Hunter discussed in his book. These settlements developed as the famine orphans aged out of life in the mission and were not accepted in wider Hindu society.⁸⁶ Though the settlements were the only option for adult life for these orphans, continuing to live and work under the purview of the missions left them dependent on the mission network into their adult life, leaving them no recourse if they were to question the mission's beliefs or methods. The girls in the missions experienced a similar situation, as Mrs. Droese wrote, "only the other day I learned with much pleasure that the teacher we got from the Benares Normal School was formerly a girl of the Coral Fund, Caroline Cobb. You will be glad to hear this, and more, that she is a very good teacher, and a good Christian. Her cheerfulness and good temper, and the nice way she has in teaching, has quite touched our girls' hearts, that they begin to wish to become teachers too; and I think we shall soon be able to send from our school one or two girls to the Benares Normal School, to be educated for teachers."⁸⁷ Droese's letter here illustrated the later part of the path onto which the missions set the children in taking over their careers. Caroline Cobb, as stated in the letter, was an orphan who grew up in one of the Orissa missions just before the onset of the famine. The Coral Fund, a group of donors affiliated with the *Children's Missionary Magazine*, supported her throughout her childhood, and a member likely picked the name Caroline Cobb for her. As she grew older, she experienced the same lack of work opportunities as the other mission children, and studied at Normal School — a 19th century term for a teaching academy — affiliated with the nearby Benares mission. She then taught at one of the very group of missions that had raised her. Therefore, like the boys mentioned in Droese's other letter, Caroline Cobb's career fell within the jurisdiction of the mission

network. The missions wrested control of the Orissa famine orphans' careers as they came of age.

Just as they exerted influence over the children's working lives, the missions continued their input on the orphan's lifeways through setting up marriages. In W. W. Hunter's account of his visit to the Cuttack Mission after the height of the famine, he wrote of the children, "many of them are now entering manhood and womanhood, and a number of couples have been married off."⁸⁸ Hunter's use of "have been" implied an actor separate from the couples themselves in these marriages. While arranged marriages were common in the Hindu world, the actors in those cases were parents, whom these children lacked. Instead, the missionaries arranged marriages among the famine orphans. "A good number of the girls are grown up now, of whom it were better if they could get out of their Orphanage, but they must wait until husbands can be found for them; young men are scarce in our congregation since the regiment of hill-rangers has been disbanded, to which most of our Christians belonged,"⁸⁹ relayed Mrs. Droese to the *Children's Missionary Magazine*. Droese explained that the girls would not be allowed to leave the orphanage unless they were married. Their marriages were under the purview of the missionaries, meaning only the missionaries could decide when a young girl could leave the mission. The missionaries set the girls up with boys from either the same or nearby missions, most of whom had received job training and jobs from mission network and would settle in one of the affiliated mission villages. Therefore, arranging marriages allowed the missionaries totality in the control they could exert over the Orissa famine orphans.

The missions' impacts lasted far beyond the children's names, jobs, and marriages, affecting not just their identities, but the identities of their descendants. Jayanta Mahapatra was a successful poet from the Orissa region, and much of his work draws on the impacts of the Orissa famine he faces, even though he was born many years after the next good harvest and the end of the cholera epidemic. Mahapatra's account was one of few first-person stories of the effects of conversions of Orissa famine orphans or their later family lines. The second most significant account is the *Diary of Anant Das*, a firsthand account from a famine orphan whose original work was lost. The only access currently available to Das' work is through its use as a source in Oriya writer Mayadhar Mansingh's discussion of his own town's experiences with famine.⁹⁰ Mahapatra was one of the only first-person voices left when he asked in his poem: "You left your family behind, the buried things, the precious clod that praised the quality of a god. ... The imperishable that swung your broken body, turned it inside out? What did faith matter? What Hindu world so ancient and true for you

⁸⁴ E. Droese, "A Picture of the Bhogulpore Orphanage," *Children's Missionary Magazine*, May 1, 1866

⁸⁵ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*, 143

⁸⁶ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*, 143

⁸⁷ E. Droese, "Have I No One to Care for Me? or, The Bhogulpore Orphans"

⁸⁸ W. W. Hunter, *Orissa, or the Vicissitudes of an Indian Province Under Native and British Rule*, 143

⁸⁹ E. Droese, "A Picture of the Bhogulpore Orphanage"

⁹⁰ Mayadhar Mansingh, *Durbhikshya*

to hold?”⁹¹ The poem, “Grandfather,” is addressed to the title figure, Mahapatra’s grandfather, who converted to Christianity to access the food at the Cuttack mission during the Orissa famine. He asked his grandfather these rhetorical questions about the importance of faith and culture to express an understanding that such things became a faraway second priority during the years of the famine, when people focused first on feeding themselves and their families. Mahapatra grew up as a Christian because of his grandfather’s desperation two generations ago. He lamented the discontinuity in his family’s culture when he stated, “you left your family behind.”⁹² The mission monopoly on charity left Mahapatra a member of a minority religion a hundred years later. However, he did not blame his grandfather in the poem, referring to the “imperishable” hunger that led him to his decision as well as questioning the importance of faith in a world where missions guaranteed access to food only to those who would convert. The poem, therefore, expressed a tragic understanding for the suffering the author’s grandfather had undergone.

The poem also displayed the long-term repercussions of the missions’ control of the lifeways of those they fed. Mahapatra then explained the effects the famine would continue to have into the future with the lines, “Now in a night of sleep and taunting rain / My son and I speak of that famine nameless as snow... Does he think of the past as a loss we have lived, our own?”⁹³ Mahapatra linked his son to his grandfather in the poem, relaying that his family line would bear the mark of the famine long into the future. He was not the last generation to experience disconnection from his ancestral culture and the dominant culture around him as a result of missionary practices during the famine. His son, too, he wrote, would feel these effects and could claim the loss as his own. Mahapatra’s poetry declared the long-term effects of life at the missions for the Orissa famine orphans and, as Mahapatra demonstrated, their families.

The orphans of the Orissa famine would have their life paths altered forever upon entrance to the missions. Inside the network of Protestant Christian missions, missionaries changed the children’s names simply to European ones or to European ones selected by a financial benefactor. The children would then come of age to a working environment without precedent for Indian people with their names or religion, leaving them more dependent on the missions as the missions scrambled to offer jobs and job training. Around the same time, the missionaries selected partners for the children as they reached adulthood. These matches finalized the control missions had over the children’s lives. The mission network enjoyed near-total control of the paths the lives of the children within would take, reaching even a hundred years into the future and beyond.

Beyond Mahapatra’s and others’ individual family histories, the history of social and religious movements in

Orissa since the famine conveyed a desire from many other famine converts to reintegrate into Hindu or tribal society. In her article outlining the history of religious conversion in Orissa, Bismawoy Pati explained that following the famine, “converts to Christianity observed certain customs and beliefs that were antithetical to the basic tenets of Christianity. They participated in tribal festivals and when asked about their identity, mentioned their tribe, suppressing the Christian connection.”⁹⁴ People who had converted from their tribes during the famine abandoned Christian principles as soon as food was more readily available. They avoided displaying their conversions, and instead worked to rejoin their original cultural networks. This trend reflected the coercion the missionaries employed in order to increase their numbers of converts over the course of the famine. The tribal members had not truly left their former affiliations for Christianity, but instead needed to eat. As the missionaries were the only groups with steadier access to food during the time, the people came. The *Utkal Dipika Oriya* newspaper reported that in 1868, the efforts of activist Sri Bichitrinand Das paid off when zamindars agreed to return a number of Chhatrahkhas to their former villages to readmit them to their former castes, and expressed regret that villages refused to readmit orphans who had been fed in the missions.⁹⁵ The famine orphans remained outcasts. Das and many Chhatrahkhas worked for two years to achieve this shift in status for themselves and the orphans. Their work indicated a desire to return to Hindu lifeways, even if just to access the resources they had before the Orissa famine and resulting caste changes. Later, in the 1930s and 40s, when many famine orphans were outcaste adults with outcaste families of their own, Gandhian nationalist principles advocated for a change in status from outcaste to “Harijans.”⁹⁶ Elevating their social status would integrate famine orphans and their families into the nationalist movement and incentivize an alliance between outcastes and high-caste nationalists. Many people took the opportunity, especially as it came with material benefits of an increase in caste status. However, Hinduisation also offered the famine orphans the ability to close the gaps in their family lines and have their descendants avoid such feelings of disconnection as Mahapatra’s. In the closed practice of Hinduism, these waves of reconversion indicated a dissatisfaction with coercive missionary practice and a desire to reconnect culturally in the famine orphans.

The story of mission takeover and the Orissa famine is a long one, and it extends far before and far beyond the years during which the famine actually struck. It may have begun with the Biblical command to make disciples of all nations, the colonial fervor sweeping Europe beginning in the sixteenth century, Adam Smith’s theories of laissez-faire capitalism, or the arrival of the British East India Company. It could have begun anywhere in that long, long range of time. However, action started to pick up in 1813, when the British East India Company allowed the

⁹¹ Jayanta Mahapatra, “Grandfather” in *The Table is Laid: The Oxford Anthology of South Asian Food Writing* (Oxford University Press: New Delhi, 2007)

⁹² Jayanta Mahapatra, “Grandfather”

⁹³ Jayanta Mahapatra, “Grandfather”

⁹⁴ Bismawoy Pati, “Identity, Hegemony, Resistance: Conversions in Orissa, 1800-2000,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2001, 4208

⁹⁵ *Utkal Dipika*

⁹⁶ Bismawoy Pati, “Identity, Hegemony, Resistance: Conversions in Orissa, 1800-2000,” 4208

missionaries entrance to India. Since the British were working steadily to erode the embankment systems that had protected Orissa from floods and drain the Mughal grain storehouses, the charity work the missions did became, by the time of the Orissa famine, one of the only systems that functioned to help people experiencing hardship left in the region. This situation turned the missionary relationship with the people of Orissa – especially orphaned children – into a coercive one. Coercion is evident in the lack of safe alternatives to mission life available for children left without care during the famine. As the mission network managed to keep food on the table through their donors and advertising campaigns, the children needed to show a willingness to convert in order to eat. For their troubles, the children ended up away from home in Benares and Bhogulpore, and, whether they could stay in Cuttack and Puri or not, answering to new names bought by mission periodical subscribers, and awaiting arranged marriages and arranged employment in arranged Christian villages. The documentation of these events is scarce, which likely explains the lack of previous research on the topic. The story lived in Protestant missionary periodicals such as the *Children's Missionary Magazine*, the *Pictorial Missionary News*, the *Church Missionary Society Intelligencer*, and the *Wesleyan Juvenile Offering*. It appeared almost exclusively in connection with missions in secular news sources like the *New York Times* and the *Friend of India*. It haunted the outskirts of the W. W. Hunter's account of his time studying the history and present life in Orissa. It resided in every word of the *Diary of Anant Das* and the intergenerational pain of the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra. No matter where it appeared, the story of the Orissa famine orphans was one that outlined the ethical issues with missionaries serving as the only source of community support, displayed the lasting effect of laissez-faire policy, and continues to leave its mark on Orissa to this day through family and cultural lineages.

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