DALIT CHRISTIANS AND CASTE CONSCIOUSNESS IN PAKISTAN

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This study explores caste discrimination in Pakistan against untouchable (Dalit) converts to Christianity. During the nineteenth century in India, many Dalits converted to Christianity to escape caste persecution. In the 1870s in Punjab, a mass movement to Protestant Christianity flourished among the Dalit Chuhra caste. The Chuhras were the largest menial caste in Punjab and engaged in degrading occupations including sweeping and sanitation work. By the 1930s, almost the entire Chuhra caste converted to Protestant Christianity. In 1947, during the partition of India, the majority of Chuhra converts in Punjab became part of the Protestant community in Pakistan. After Partition, many uneducated Chuhras were confined to menial jobs in the sanitation industry. Today, the stigma of Dalit ancestry is a distinct feature of social discrimination against Chuhra Christians in Pakistan.

‘Caste consciousness’ in Pakistan is connected to norms of purity and pollution. While not as pronounced as India, purity and pollution in Pakistan relates to the concept of pak (clean) and na-pak (unclean). Because of degrading occupations as sweepers and sanitation workers, many Chuhra Christians in Pakistan are associated with ‘pollution.’ This leads to multiple forms of social discrimination. Chuhra Christians respond to caste persecution through various modes. Through an analysis of church sermons, I argue that Chuhra Christians create ‘counter-
narratives’ as a form of protest against caste discrimination. These ‘counter-narratives’ focus on veiling caste identity and creating a new genealogical history for their community that is not connected to Dalit ancestry. These counter-narratives also affect the development of ‘folk theology’ which focuses on the concept of *izzat* or ‘respect.’ Church sermons reveal that *izzat* has a theological dimension and shapes Chuhra Christian self-understanding in Pakistan.
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1. **General Introduction**

In 1971, Pieter Streefland, a sociologist, conducted a study of ‘Chuhra Christians’ in an urban slum in Karachi.¹ In the nineteenth century in India, the ‘Chuhras’ were the largest untouchable caste (Dalits) in the Punjab. Chuhras were ‘outcastes’ in Indian society and engaged degrading occupations such as scavenging and sanitation work for survival. In 1870, the Chuhra caste initiated a mass conversion movement to Christianity. By the 1930s, almost the entire Chuhra caste converted to Protestant Christianity. During the partition of India, these Chuhra Christians became part of the Protestant community in Pakistan. But, Streefland found that despite conversion to Christianity, Chuhra Christians in Pakistan are still recipients of caste discrimination. In his study, Streefland notes that most Chuhra Christians still hold degrading occupations in the sanitation industry. Their work involves sweeping the streets, cleaning public latrines, and clearing blocked sewers in the city.² Streefland also describes de-facto discrimination against ‘Chuhra Christian sweepers’ based on Dalit ancestry.

When this study was published, middle class Christians heavily criticized Streefland for writing this book. First, they accused Streefland of insensitivity for highlighting that the majority of Christians in Pakistan work in the sanitation industry. Second, they criticized Streefland for conflating the word ‘Christian’ with ‘sweeper.’ Many middle class Christians argued that Streefland’s was promoting the view that all Christians in Pakistan are associated with the sanitation industry. In an issue of *Al-Mushir*, a theological journal published by the Christian

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²Ibid.
Study Centre in Rawalpindi, Georg Pfeffer defended Streefland’s work. Pfeffer argued that the root of the criticism against Streefland was that he illuminated the ‘caste issue’ in Pakistan. Pfeffer notes that by writing about the untouchable ancestry of Chuhra Christians, Streefland also underscores the Dalit origins of most Protestant Christians in Pakistan. According to Pfeffer, this makes many middle class Christians defensive because they want to deny the Dalit roots of the Protestant church. However, as Streefland depicts, caste is a pertinent part of Pakistani society.

This study is about Chuhra Christians and caste discrimination in Pakistan. While caste is the seminal feature of Indian life and influences every aspect of social and ritual behavior, it is actively denied in Pakistan. Discrimination of the basis of class, gender, poverty, race, tribalism, language, and ethnicity is part of Pakistani national dialogue and yet, there is a uniform silence on the issue of caste. Shahabano Aliani, a prominent social activist with the Thardeep Rural Development Programme argues, “When questioned, however, if caste is a problem, most Pakistanis will disagree. Many will argue quite heatedly that it’s only a problem for most Hindus across the border. Using circular reasoning, they will insist that the caste-system is not Islamic and since the majority of us are Muslims, therefore, there is no caste problem in Pakistan.” She further asserts, “public denial of caste is so ingrained and widespread that there is no official legislation that acknowledges and addresses caste-based discrimination.” As Aliani suggests,

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4 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
caste discrimination in Pakistan is either ignored or denied. Yet, caste persecution is rampant in many parts of Pakistan particularly against Chuhra Christians.

In this study, I examine caste discrimination against Chuhra Christians in Pakistan. I argue that caste persecution against Chuhra Christians connects to two things: Dalit ancestry and occupation. Many lower class Muslims refer to Christians as ‘Chuhras’ or ‘sweepers.’ There is an implicit inferiority in this language that translates into modes of ‘untouchability’ such as social discrimination, physical assault, and commensal segregation. Such experiences of caste persecution are part of Pakistani social dynamics particularly in urban slums and rural villages. Prejudicial stereotyping in Pakistani media exacerbates the conflation of ‘Christians’ with ‘sweepers’ and results in social exclusion and often violence. Discrimination is also a key feature of social interactions between middle class Christians and Chuhra Christians. As Pfeffer notes, many middle class Christians deny the Dalit ancestry of the Protestant church in Pakistan. Therefore, many middle class Christians also treat Chuhra Christians with contempt and shun their community. In this study, I examine the fissures of caste in Pakistan and the response of Chuhra Christians to caste persecution.

2. Methodology

Throughout this dissertation, I engage Dalit literature in India to provide context for Chuhra Christians in Pakistan. Three concepts in Indian Dalit discourse are particularly significant to Chuhra Christians: caste discrimination based on Brahmanical norms of purity and pollution, Dalit modes of assertion, and Dalit theology. Brahmanical ideology of purity and pollution is the basis for caste persecution of ‘untouchables’ in Indian society. Therefore, this

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Dalit literature is useful to analyze how ‘purity and pollution’ manifests in Pakistani society. Dalit modes of assertion in India include the prevalence of ‘genealogical narratives’ that are constructed to reject Brahmanical norms of purity and pollution. In India, these narratives function as ‘myths of origin’ for Dalits and enable a critique of Brahmanism. Further, these narratives re-imagine the position of Dalits in the caste system and in Indian society. I utilize these stories to compare similar modes of protest among Chuhra Christians in Pakistan. The third body of Indian Dalit literature I utilize is ‘Dalit theology.’ Dalit theology is a liberation theology that emerged in the 1980s to reflect the marginalization of Christian Dalits who comprise the majority of the Indian church. This theological reflection is a useful method to analyze how caste dynamics affect the marginalization of Chuhra Christians in Pakistan.

In my analysis of caste discrimination in Pakistan, I utilize the work of several Dalit scholars. In particular, B. R. Ambedkar, the ‘father of the Dalits’ in India and his analysis of caste and purity and pollution are significant to this study. Ambedkar’s re-imagination of Dalit origins informs my analysis of Chuhra Christian modes of assertion in Pakistan. I also engage John C. B. Webster, Gail Omvedt, Eleanor Zelliot, Christophe Jaffrelot, Sathianathan Clarke, C. Joe Arun, Peniel Rajkumar, Deenabandu Manchala, Philip Vinod Peacock, David Mosse, Rowena Robinson, Robert Deliege, Duncan Forrestor, and Mikael Aktor to examine Dalit protest and assertion in India. To analyze the form and function of Dalit theology in India, I engage Arvind P. Nirmal, James Massey, M.E. Prabhakar, Maria Arul Raja, P. Arokiadoss, Z. Devasagayaraj, R.S. Sugirtharajah, V. Devashayam, and Felix Wilfred. These scholars provide contextual information for an analysis of Chuhra Christians in Pakistan.
Few scholarly studies address caste discrimination or Chuhra Christians in Pakistan. To illustrate that caste is a feature of social dynamics in Pakistan, I utilize the work of Pieter Streefland, Patrick Sookhdeo, Linda Walbridge, John O’Brien, and Dominic Moghal. In recent years, social activists and journalists are more active in reporting Chuhra Christian caste persecution in Pakistan. The International Dalit Solidarity Network, the Dalit Solidarity Center, the Hindu Dalit Association of Pakistan, the Karachi Interfaith Society, Thardeep Rural Development Programme, Urban Slum Activists Association, National Center for Justice and Peace, and the Pakistan Religious Harmony Association have published numerous reports and case studies about caste dynamics in Pakistani urban slums and villages. This literature illustrates multiple forms of caste persecution in Pakistan. I engage these articles, reports, and case studies to delineate the negotiation of caste consciousness in Pakistan.

A significant practice in Chuhra Christian churches is recording church services and special events. Because they are so active in the ritual life of the church, Chuhra Christian pastors record services and special events that depict church practice. Many Chuhra churches in Karachi record weekly services, music, hymns, baptisms, weddings, and funerals. Chuhra pastors sell church recordings and music in the church compound for a nominal fee. The money that pastors earn from the sale of church recordings is redistributed in the church. I utilize several DVDs of church services, prayer circles, choir sessions, weddings, baptisms, and funerals that I purchased from three separate Chuhra churches in Karachi urban slums. These DVDs reveal many significant details about the rich and vibrant ritual practices of Chuhra Christians in Karachi. I also analyze church pamphlets and tracts sold in Chuhra churches to illustrate the issues of persecution and caste discrimination that are prevalent in the community.
3. Outline of Chapters

In Chapter 1, I provide the historical context for Chuhra Christians in Pakistan. In the nineteenth century, the Chuhra caste was one of the most despised menial castes in the Punjab and faced brutal caste discrimination from upper caste Hindus. I discuss the structure of the caste system and the theoretical foundation of caste in India. I then show how the term ‘Dalit’ developed as a self-conscious name for Hindu untouchables. Next, I describe the mass movement to Christianity in the nineteenth century which was initiated by Chuhras who were anxious to escape casteism in India. Chuhra evangelists enabled this movement to grow and expand all over Punjab until almost the entire Chuhra caste converted to Christianity. At the end of this chapter I show that during the partition of India, these Chuhra converts emerged as the nascent Protestant Christian community in Pakistan.

In Chapter 2, I argue that despite conversion to Christianity, caste discrimination against Chuhra Christians in Pakistan is rampant. I focus on social persecution and discrimination against Chuhra Christians in urban slums in Karachi. I argue that several modes of ‘caste consciousness’ including norms of purity and pollution guide social dynamics in Pakistani society. Purity and pollution, while not as pronounced as in India, manifest in Pakistan through the concept of pak (clean) and na-pak (unclean). Middle class Christians and lower class Muslims shun contact with Chuhra Christians based on their degrading and ‘polluting’ occupations. Because of their Dalit ancestry and their work in the sanitation industry, many Muslims and middle class Christians treat Chuhra Christians with contempt.

In Chapter 3, I describe Chuhra churches in urban slums in Karachi. I argue that Chuhra Christians have a vibrant religious life that revolves around the church. I illustrate how ritual and
practice in Chuhra churches is distinct from middle class churches. While middle class churches are largely ‘western’ in practice and culture, Chuhra churches are indigenized incorporating local music and religious practices into services. I show how funeral drumming is a distinct practice in this community that is connected to Dalit ancestry. Through an analysis of church service recordings, pamphlets, and tracts, I also argue that Chuhra Christians reject modes of middle class Christian practice as a form of protest against caste discrimination.

In Chapter 4, I engage the creation of ‘counter-narratives’ among Chuhra Christians. I first describe counter-narratives in India that are modes of Dalit protest against caste persecution. These narratives are powerful methods of ‘re-telling’ Dalit history and function as ‘myths of origin’ for Indian Dalits. The manner in which the narratives are structured influences the meanings associated with these genealogical accounts. Some stories focus on critiquing upper caste hegemony while others provide Dalits with a glorious past in which they were once high born. I then describe Chuhra Christian narratives in Pakistan. The narrative I examine is the story of St. Thomas and his arrival in Taxila, Pakistan in 52 CE. Through an analysis of Chuhra church sermons and pamphlets, I argue that this story enables Chuhra Christians to create a new genealogical history which is unrelated to Dalit ancestry. I argue that this is a form of ‘veiling identity’ and emerges as a ‘counter-narrative’ for Chuhra Christians in Pakistan.

In Chapter 5, I describe the emergence of Chuhra Christian folk theology. In India, Dalit Christians articulate a powerful liberation theology based on historical experiences of caste persecution. Dalit theology is a response to caste discrimination that re-imagines Jesus within the context of the Hindu caste system. Chuhra Christian folk theology emerges from the experience of social persecution and caste discrimination in Pakistan. Through an analysis of church
sermons and pamphlets, I argue that Chuhra folk theology focuses on the concept of ‘izzat’ or ‘respect’ as the focal point for self-understanding. Because of their association with ‘pollution’ and social discrimination, Chuhra Christians re-imagine the concept of izzat for their community as a form of empowerment.
Chapter 1: Chuhra Mass Movement

Introduction

On June 20, 2011, Younis Masih, a Christian man in a rural village near Lahore was walking home from work when three Muslim men attacked him. The local newspaper reporting the event wrote, “the victim of this attack was a Christian (sweeper).”¹ A second newspaper reporting the attack wrote, “the victim was a sweeper (Christian).”² What is significant about these news reports is the conflation of the term ‘Christian’ with ‘sweeper.’ In contemporary Pakistan, Christian sweepers form a cohesive community that can trace its roots to the menial untouchable Hindu caste, the ‘Chuhrs.’³ The Chuhrs were the largest untouchable caste in India associated with polluting work including sweeping, scavenging, and cleaning latrines.⁴ To escape caste oppression, Chuhrs converted to Christianity in the nineteenth century.⁵ Although caste does not operate in the same way in Pakistan as in Hindu society, many Chuhra Christians are still associated with ‘pollution.’

The association of Chuhra Christians in Pakistan with ‘pollution’ is a complex issue that connects to two things. First, the untouchable origins of Chuhra Christians and second, their continuing involvement with ‘polluting’ occupations including, sweeping, cleaning latrines, drains, and sewers.⁶ Bishop of Lahore, Alexander Malik from the Church of Pakistan (COP) argues, “Sweeping jobs back then [colonial era] were mostly allotted to lower Hindu castes, who were called the untouchables. This ostracized community converted to Christianity under British

⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid.
rule in hopes of improving their lives.”

But, in contemporary Pakistan, these occupations are still connected to ‘Christians.’ Social activist Ahmen Khawaja argues, “In mainstream discourse, disparaging terms like ‘Chuhra’ and ‘Bhangy’ [sweeper] are inextricably tied to hundreds of years of caste prejudices that have carried on from the Hindu caste system. More than a century later, “Chuhra” remains a term of contempt that signifies Christians as low-caste citizens.”

In everyday speech in Pakistan, many Christians are referred to as ‘sweepers’ and ‘Chuhras’ interchangeably. This conflation of the term ‘Chuhra’ with ‘Christian’ leads to multiple forms of social ostracism and exclusion for many Christians in Pakistan.

In this chapter, I describe the Chuhra mass movement to Protestant Christianity in nineteenth century Punjab. This movement flourished among the untouchable Chuhra caste in the 1870s. It increased in size and scope in the 1880s, continued through the mid-1900s and affected all major Protestant missions. Some missionaries were wary of the association of Christianity with untouchables while others utilized their success to spread the gospel throughout low caste communities. Because of the mass movements, the Christian community in North India increased from a mere 3912 in 1881 to 395,629 by 1931. In 1947, during the partition of India, the majority of Chuhra converts in Punjab became part of the Protestant community in

8 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
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Pakistan. While some Chuhra Christians secured jobs in the government or private sector, many illiterate Chuhra Christians were relegated to menial and degrading occupations after Partition.  

Chuhra conversion to Christianity during the mass movements is an essential component to understand the context of lower class Protestant Christians in contemporary Pakistan. The means and motivation for conversion to Christianity is a keen methodological lens to analyze the function of ‘caste consciousness’ in present-day Pakistan. First, I discuss theoretical interpretations of the Hindu caste system. These theories are crucial to a discussion of untouchability and the emergence of ‘Dalits’ (untouchables) as a social category in Indian society. Second, I discuss the mass movements to Christianity. I argue these mass movements were initiated by Dalits who were anxious to escape casteism; persecution, discrimination, and degradation that were a result of caste persecution. In conclusion, I discuss the effect of the mass movements on the religious demography of Pakistan.

1. Caste in Indian Society

Caste is the Indian hierarchical social classification of people into ranked groups called varnas. There are four varnas in the caste system organized by occupation and maintained through endogamy. Brahmins, the priests and scholars comprise the highest varna, followed by the Kshatriyas, the soldiers and political leaders. Vaishyas, the merchants occupy the third varna followed by the Shudras, the laborers, servants, and peasants. N. Jayapalan argues that the word ‘caste’ is the English translation of the Sanskrit word, jati. The word jati is derived from the root ‘jata’ that means, ‘to take birth’ or ‘to be born.’ In contrast, varna means ‘to select or

13 Ahmen Khawaja, “Pakistan’s Untouchables.”
14 N. Jayapalan, Indian Society and Social Institutions (Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2001), 31.
Jayapalan notes that while varna and jati are often conflated, they are distinct terms. While jati is acquired at birth, varna is “assigned according to one’s capabilities and mental tendencies.” Therefore, varna is a universal model of Indian social class while jati is defined by regional endogamous groups. Outside the varna system, are the avarnas, those outside caste, who are engaged in occupations that are considered unclean and ‘polluting.’ Included in these occupations are tanning, scavenging, and sanitation work. Within the construct of the varna system, the avarnas are ‘untouchables’ and their presence is a source of pollution and ritual impurity for the upper castes.

The caste system has many theoretical explanations. These theories reveal that caste is a negotiated term in India that is analyzed from various perspectives. A theological explication of caste and untouchability emerges from ‘mixed caste theory’ which finds its full expression in the Brahmamic text, the Laws of Manu. Composed between 200 B.C.E. and 200 C.E, the Laws of Manu, is one of the authoritative sources of caste in Indian society and contains several rules of purity and pollution. Manu utilizes the Purusha Shukta story from the Vedic text, the Rig Veda as the theological foundation for caste. In Purusha, the Primordial Man (Purusha) engenders the four varnas from his body. Manu states, “From his mouth he created the priest [Brahmin], from his arms the ruler [Kshatriya], from his thighs the commoner [Vaishya] and from his feet the servant [Shudra].” In this system, the Brahmins, the priests occupy the highest level followed by the Kshatriyas, the soldiers and the Vaishyas, the merchants. The lowest level in the varna system is for the Shudras or the servants.

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15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Rig Veda, 10:90.
In *Manu*, *varna* and *jati* are entwined in a system based on hierarchy that is punctuated by occupation and maintained through endogamy. Each *varna* follows prescribed rules and obligations in order to preserve the overall structure of the system. *Manu* states, “But in order to protect this universe He, the most resplendent one, assigned separate (duties and) occupations to those who sprang from his mouth, arms, thighs, and feet. To Brahmanas he assigned teaching and studying (the Veda), sacrificing for their own benefit and for others… One occupation only the lord prescribed to the Sudra, to serve meekly even these (other) three castes.”20 For *Manu*, caste hierarchy is theological and interdependent. The Shudras “serve meekly” so that the Brahmins can engage the sacred study of the Vedas. If the Shudras do not fulfill their duties; the Brahmins cannot accomplish their ritual obligations. Because caste duties are assigned at birth, *Manu* also asserts that hierarchy is divinely sanctioned. Therefore, in *Manu*, ‘mixing castes’ threatens the sanctity of the *varna* system.

In *Manu*, endogamy is necessary to ensure that *varnas* do not ‘mix’ which would result in polluting the system. *Manu* asserts the Chandala or ‘untouchable’ is the result of ‘caste mixing’ between a Brahmin woman and a Shudra man. As this is an abomination in the *varna* system, *Manu* states that the Chandala should be “excluded from all considerations of dharma.”21 In addition to the Chandala, *Manu* also attached ‘untouchability’ to others including people who worked with leather, or were associated with death, as these activities were ritually polluting for the upper castes.22 Because of the influence of *Manu* in Indian society, Chamars, a leather

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20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 3.
working caste are polluting to upper caste Hindus who revered the cow as sacred. Similarly, the Chuhra caste because of their occupation as sweepers and sanitation workers are also polluted. Based on these occupations, Chamars and Chuhras are outside the varna system and acquired ‘untouchable’ status in Indian society.

A second interpretation of caste and untouchability relates to racial purity. In his seminal work, *Caste in India* (1963), J.H. Hutton (1885-1968) argues that the origins of caste emerged out of the socio-religious taboos of Aryan tribes in India. Hutton claims that the Aryans had a complex set of rituals and practices that they brought with them when they migrated to India. When the Aryans encountered the indigenous races, they found their practices so distinct that they considered them ritually impure and racially unclean. In an effort at self-preservation, the Aryans initiated the practice of untouchability among the indigenous people. Similar to *Manu*, Hutton traces untouchability to pollution and the social stigma of racial impurity. Such racial impurity, argues, Hutton, threatened to corrupt the varna system which is persevered through acute attention to purity and pollution.

In contrast to the theological explanation of caste and untouchability, Louis Dumont (1911-1998), offered a sociological analysis of the varna system. In *Homo Hierarchicus* (1966), Dumont argued that the caste system is “the pan-Indian institution” and pervades every aspect of

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24 Ibid.
26 Ibid, 2.
27 Ibid, 68.
28 Ibid.
Chapter 1: Chuhra Mass Movement

Dumont asserted that caste is widely misunderstood in the west because of the western preference for individualism. In Dumont’s analysis, the caste system is a well-organized structure based on social interdependence that is rational in both ideology and practice. According to Dumont, the *varna* system is a rational ideology based on the opposition between purity and pollution and the “necessary and hierarchical co-existence of the two opposites.”

The hierarchical relationship between these two opposites informs all Indian social interactions. Therefore, while there is an inherent tension between purity and pollution, Dumont argues that it appears “consistent and rational” to those who live within the system.

For Dumont, the rational and consistent opposition between purity and pollution informs all aspects of Indian socio-religious practices. For example, purity and pollution is associated with food. Brahmins who are vegetarian have more ritual purity than castes that consume fish and eggs. Castes that consume mutton have less ritual purity than castes that consume only poultry. At the bottom of the ritual purity pyramid are castes that subsist on foods connected to impurity such as, carrion, beef, and ‘leftovers.’ In this system, purity and pollution has an element of contagion. Pollution has the potential to spread and ‘infect’ other people through physical contact. The pollution associated with death infects an entire family and not just the deceased. In addition, touching a polluting substance such as human excreta extends pollution

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30 Ibid.
31 Ibid, 65.
32 Ibid, 66. Dumont argues that the primary sources of pollution include contact with death and organic substances such as saliva, excreta, perspiration, menstrual blood, and hair.
33 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
from an individual to the entire caste.\textsuperscript{37} To avoid the contagion of pollution, castes are endogamous. These units are arranged hierarchically and rank higher and lower based on occupation and associations with purity and pollution.\textsuperscript{38}

Dumont’s explanation of caste is often critiqued. For Dumont, the hierarchy of the \textit{varna} system is ritual instead of socio-political. Because of this, Dumont analyzes the theological dimensions of purity and pollution but does not account for power dynamics in the system. Anupama Rao argues that Dumont ignores the concept of power in favor of an argument that is “structured in a sacral order that subsumed politics.”\textsuperscript{39} Gail Omvedt argues that Dumont glosses over the exploitation of the lower castes which is a centripetal feature of untouchability that goes beyond purity and pollution.\textsuperscript{40} Omvedt suggests that untouchables are in their socio-economic position \textit{because} they are impoverished.\textsuperscript{41} Therefore, economic injustice towards the lower castes manifests both purity and pollution \textit{and} upper caste hegemony. Nicholas Dirks confirms this observation.\textsuperscript{42} Dirks argues that Dumont’s concept of caste is ahistorical.\textsuperscript{43} Dirks asserts that kingship and colonialism created socio-economic deprivation for untouchables that was rooted in political power.\textsuperscript{44}

Other scholars critique Dumont’s sources. Patrick Olivelle argues that Dumont “cannot invoke the principle of hierarchy and its basis in purity totally \textit{a priori}; they must be derived in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{37} Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany, \textit{The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty, and the State in Modern India} (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 7.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Anupama Rao, \textit{The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India} (Oakland: University of California Press, 2009), 7.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Gail Omvedt, \textit{Understanding Caste: From Buddha to Ambedkar And Beyond} (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2011), 23-24.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
some way from the evidence of how the Indian society functions or from the native social ideology.” Olivelle claims that Dumont does not show sufficient evidence for his theory of caste. Instead, Dumont depends on classical Brahmanical texts that are based on varna and do not account for the diversity of jati. Because there is so much variance in jatis, an analysis of caste solely through Brahmanical texts is incomplete. As Olivelle argues, Brahmni priests with a theological and social agenda composed Brahmanical texts including the Laws of Manu. Therefore, it is insufficient to conclude that the caste system (varna and jati) is based on a single religious ideology of purity and pollution. Nevertheless, purity and pollution do inform the structure of the caste system.

In Indian society, the rules and regulations of purity and pollution are complex. Some forms of pollution are temporary. One can participate in a ritual bath to restore purity after touching a defiling object, such as human excreta. But some people such as the Chandala can never achieve ritual purity. Robert Deliege argues that the ideological and social function of untouchables is to “clean up society, to remove its organic wastes and to keep away all sorts of inauspicious influences” so the upper castes can remain ritually pure. Therefore, within the body politic, ritual purity has a theological dimension which is connected to the ‘touchability’ of certain castes. Correspondingly, ‘untouchability’ is also theological but instead, it relates to ritual impurity. Deliege argues, “At the summit of the hierarchy are the Brahmins, and at the base, the various Untouchable castes, who form a sort of antithesis to Brahmni purity, and who are in a permanent state of impurity because of their association with death and various forms of organic

46 Aktor and Deliege, From Stigma to Assertion, 17.
47 Ibid.
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waste.”

Purity and pollution then, while theological also has a political dimension. As Dirks argues, social discrimination and deprivation is always political.

2. The Dalits: The Downtrodden and the Crushed

The word ‘Dalit’ is a self-conscious name for untouchables in India that is rooted in marginalization and caste discrimination. ‘Dalit’ is from the Sanskrit root, *dal* that means to crack, split, be broken, torn asunder, downtrodden, scattered, crushed, and destroyed. This word originated in the nineteenth century with the Marathi reformer Jyotiba Phule (1827-1890). Phule was a Mali, an occupational caste of gardeners. Although not a Dalit, Phule was deeply affected by discrimination toward untouchables. Phule used the term *Atishudra* to describe untouchables. According to Phule, the Shudras are the ‘touchable backward class.’ This is because while Shudras are low caste, they are still part of the *varna* system. In contrast, the *Atishudras* are the ‘untouchable backward class’ because they are excluded from the *varna* system. Based on this distinction, Phule asserts that *Atishudras* are the *avaranas* or ‘those outside caste.’ To describe the social situation of untouchables, Phule used the Marathi word ‘Dalit’ which means ‘broken.’

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48 Ibid, 17.
49 Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 45.
A significant response to *avarna* discrimination emerged from Dalit reformer Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956). Ambedkar was a keen follower of Phule. In his analysis of caste, Ambedkar disagreed with the ‘racial purity’ theory. Ambedkar did not think the *avarnas* were the original inhabitants of India who were subjugated by the Aryans who later invaded the region. Instead, Ambedkar argued that primitive society comprised numerous nomadic tribes that engaged in inter-tribal warfare and separated from each other.\(^{53}\) Three distinct communities emerged because of the conflict: 1) the settled communities, 2) the nomadic communities, and 3) the Broken Men. The ‘Broken Men’ were defeated people who were ‘broken’ off from the settled communities and nomadic tribes and had nowhere to go.\(^{54}\) These ‘casteless’ men wandered the plains in search of food and sustenance and were never invited to join the settled communities or nomadic tribes.

Ambedkar suggests that in primitive societies, nomadic tribes were connected through blood membership. The ‘Broken Men’ were not permitted to settle inside the village because they were outside the blood group. While they were able to acquire necessities for survival; food, water, and shelter, they never became full members of another tribe. Instead, they provided mercenary services in order to survive. Christophe Jaffrelot argues, “When conquerors became sedentary, they turned to these ‘Broken Men’ to protect them from the attacks of nomadic tribes.”\(^{55}\) In contrast, Buddhist scholar Sangharakshita suggests that Ambedkar’s ‘Broken Men’ evolved into mercenaries because they were the “scattered remnants of defeated tribes who,

\(^{53}\) Ambedkar, *The Untouchables*, 42-43.
\(^{54}\) Ibid, 44.
\(^{55}\) Jaffrelot, *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability*, 40-41.
unable to join another tribe (for tribal organization was based on community of blood), lived in constant danger of attack."

This theory leads Ambedkar to conclude that the ‘Broken Men’ are the ancestors of the Dalits. “Are the Untouchables in their origin only Broken Men, my answer is in the affirmative […] Can there be any other reason than that they were Broken Men who were aliens and belonged to tribes different tribes from those who lived inside the village?” He further argues, “The Untouchable is outside the scheme of creation. The Shudra is Savarna [part of caste]. As against him the Untouchable is Avarna, i.e. outside the Varna system.” Ambedkar argues that these ‘Broken Men’ are the ancestors of the Dalits, who were broken, torn asunder, down trodden, scattered, and crushed by upper caste hegemony. Ambedkar popularized the term ‘Dalit’ which by his death in 1956 was widely used as the collective definition of untouchables who were connected through ‘brokenness.’

James Massey argues that long before Phule and Ambedkar introduced the word ‘Dalit’ to the Indian vernacular, the ideological concept of ‘untouchable’ was entrenched in Indian society through a variety of means and methods. Massey establishes this claim through an examination of Hindu sacred texts. He notes that a recurring theme in these texts is Dalit social exclusion and persecution. Massey suggests that the root of Dalit discrimination in the Hindu tradition were planted as early as the Rig Veda, particularly through the Purusha Shukta.

Echoing Phule, Massey argues that since the Purusha Shukta creates four castes, the Brahmins,

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57 Ambedkar, The Untouchables, 42-43.
58 Ibid.
59 Jaffrelot, Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability, 40-41. Sangharakshita, Ambedkar, 98.
60 Massey, Dalit Theology, 48.
61 Ibid.
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Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and the Shudras, it implies that Dalits are not part of creation. This sets the tone for Dalit discrimination as early as the Vedic period.\(^\text{62}\)

Massey next analyzes the Upanishads (c. 800 BCE and 300 BCE), and finds further references to the *avarnas* and their outcaste status in society. For example, in the *Chandogya Upanishad*, there is a sharp distinction between the upper castes compared to the Chandala. While the text uses pleasant language to address the *varnas*, it compares the Chandala, or *avarna* with a dog or swine:

> Accordingly those who are of pleasant conduct here…the present is, indeed, that they will enter a pleasant womb, either a womb of a Brahmin of the womb of a ksatriya, or the womb of a vaisya. But those who are of stinking conduct here… the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a stinking womb…either the womb of a dog, or the womb of a swine or the womb of an outcaste (Chandala).\(^\text{63}\)

As this Upanishad states, the womb of the upper caste is ‘pleasant’ while the womb of an outcaste is ‘stinking.’ Massey argues that such language is a testament to upper caste discrimination against Dalits.\(^\text{64}\)

In his analysis of the Hindu epics, the *Ramayana* (c.400 BCE) and the *Mahabharata* (c. 400 CE) Massey finds further proof of Dalit social persecution. He locates specific occasions where Dalits are severely punished for trying to improve their socio-economic condition. From the *Ramayana*, Massey recounts the story of a Shudra boy who undertook penance so that he could achieve divinity. As a direct result of this act, a Brahmin boy died. In his grief, the boy’s father complained to Lord Rama who went to search for the Shudra. Upon locating the boy, Lord

\(^\text{62}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{64}\) Ibid.
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Rama asked his caste and when he revealed that he was a Shudra; Rama severed his head.\(^{65}\)

Massey then describes a story from the *Mahabharata* of Ekalavya, an indigenous boy who was a skilled archer. When Arjuna, the protagonist of the *Mahabharata* and a ‘twice-born’ member of the Kshatriya caste discovered Ekalavya’s archery skills; Arjuna cut off his thumb.\(^{66}\)

Massey claims the distinction between the *varnas* and the *avarnas* is also apparent in the *Bhagavad-Gita* (c.100-200 CE). In the *Gita*, Lord Krishna, an *avatara* of Lord Vishnu reveals to Arjuna, that he created the four castes from his body.\(^{67}\) With this revelation, Krishna strengthens the upper caste claim that the *avarnas* have no place in Hindu society. Massey argues that these sacred texts bolster the ideology that the *avarnas* are outside a system that is created only for the upper castes. Instead of trying to integrate Dalits into Hindu society, these texts mark the boundaries between the *varnas* and the *avarnas* and perpetuate the notion that Dalits are polluting and worthy of contempt. As the story of the Shudra boy and Ekalavya reveal, any low caste or Dalit who tries to improve his position or participate in upper caste activities will face death, violence, and destruction. The priestly class in *Manu* further reified the ideology in Hindu society.

As Massey reveals, Dalit discrimination is partially theological. And, beliefs of purity and pollution that are reinforced through Hindu sacred texts have social ramifications. In the

\[^{65}\text{Massey, Dalit Theology, 49.}\]
\[^{66}\text{‘Twice born’ refers to a male member of the top three *varnas*, the Brahmans, Kshatriyas, and the Vaishyas. The first birth is physical and the second is spiritual and occurs when young men are initiated into Vedic study through the *Upanayanam samskara* (rite of passage). The *Upanayanam* ceremony is reserved for the top three *varnas*.}\]
\[^{67}\text{Ibid, 48. The quote that Massey is referencing is, “I created mankind in four classes, different in their qualities and actions; though unchanging, I am the agent of this, the actor who never acts.” *Gita*, 4:13. In addition, in the eighteenth teaching, Lord Krishna states, “The actions of priests, warriors, commoners, and servants are apportioned by qualities that are born of nature.” *Gita* 18:40. These verses when read together indicate that Lord Krishna not only created the *varna* system but that caste duties and obligations are inherent and divinely instituted. In other words, a commoner and a servant are created as commoners and servants through God’s will. The two selections are from Barbara Stoler Miller, (trans), *The Bhagavad-Gita: Krishna’s Counsel in a Time of War* (New York: Bantam Books, 2004), 53 and 141.}\]
nineteenth century, for example, Dalits were the recipients of brutal discrimination from upper caste Hindus. Most Dalits worked menial jobs as field laborers or manual workers and had very little social capital. Few Dalits were paid for services. Some received uncooked grain as compensation as part of the jajmani system, while others survived on the ‘leftovers’ of the high caste community.  

Himansu Sandangi argues that defiling occupations were assigned to Dalits because they were considered ‘polluted.’ “Within the caste system, Dalits have been assigned tasks and occupations that are deemed ritually polluting for other caste communities. Dalits are manual scavengers who clean public latrines and dispose of dead animals.” Further, Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany argue that these occupations led to permanent pollution for Dalits because they were in constant contact with “sources of impurity such as death and human excreta.”

In the nineteenth century, many Dalits worked in the municipal sanitation industry. Others removed night soil or the carcasses of cattle from upper caste land. Because of their impoverished state, Dalits also adopted practices that heightened pollution, for example, eating carrion, beef, and skinning animals in order to survive. Because of social degradation, religious conversion, though not occurring on a large scale, was something Dalits were contemplating. These deliberations took root in one form in the nineteenth century through conversion to Christianity. In the next section, I describe the mass movements to Christianity among

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70 Mendelsohn and Vicziany, *The Untouchable*, 7.
71 Ibid.
74 Massey, *Dalit Theology*, 52.
untouchables and argue that these conversions were rooted in caste discrimination and social persecution.

3. The Mass Movements

A significant part of Dalit history and mobilization begins with what Christian missionaries called the ‘mass movements.’ These movements are significant because they were localized conversions initiated by Dalits. John C. B. Webster asserts that most Indic scholars dismiss the mass movements in a few short paragraphs as a temporary anomaly. While some historians of Christianity attend to the mass movements, their work is restricted to ecumenical and evangelistic contexts. However, Webster argues that the mass movements are a prevalent part of Dalit mobilization and protest that requires analysis. In 1910, J. Waskom Pickett, a Methodist missionary in India wrote the following:

The distinguishing features of the Christian mass movements are a group decision favorable to Christianity and the consequent preservation of the converts’ social integration. Whenever a group, larger than the family, accustomed to exercise a measure of control over the social and religious life of the individuals that compose it, accepts the Christian religion (or a large portion accept it with the encouragement of the group), the essential principle of the mass movement is manifest.

As Pickett and Webster suggest, these mass movements altered the religious history of Dalits in India. And, as a result, these movements also shaped the future of Protestant Christianity in Pakistan.

Protestant missionary work began in South India with the Tranquebar Mission in 1706. The initial mission attracted few converts. In North India, Protestant missionary work began with

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75 Ibid. Webster, The Dalit Christians, 33.
76 Ibid, 33.
78 Ibid, 35.
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William Carey’s arrival in Bengal in 1793. During this time, missionaries in India had a small presence. Prior to 1833, the East India Company was generally suspicious of missionaries and thought proselytizing might create conflict with local trading partners. In 1833, when the East India Company renewed its charter, Evangelical Christians in England added a clause to evangelize in India without restriction. Within a year, in 1834, John Lowrie, of the Punjab Mission of the American Presbyterian Mission, arrived in Ludhiana. After the British annexation of Sindh and Punjab in 1849, new Protestant missionaries traveled to India. John Newton and Charles Forman of the Andhra Pradesh Mission settled in Lahore (now Pakistan) in 1849. American Presbyterians added Jullundur and Rawalpindi to the original mission site in Ludhiana in 1847 and 1856 respectively. The Church Missionary Society started work in Karachi in 1850, Amritsar in 1851, and Multan in 1856. The majority of these missionaries were from the United States and Britain.

The original wisdom among missionaries was to evangelize high caste Hindus instead of the lower castes. The missionaries thought that if the high castes converted to Christianity; the lower castes would soon follow. Therefore, the initial mission strategy was to “penetrate India

81 Ibid. 235.
83 Frederick and Margaret Stock, People Movements in the Punjab, with Special Reference to the United Presbyterian Church (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1975), 265.
84 Ibid.
from the top, rather than the bottom.” Massey argues that early missionaries perpetuated a ‘myth’ that high caste converts had more to lose compared to low caste converts. For example, a high caste convert had the potential to lose his/her caste status and corresponding importance in society. Missionaries thought if they were successful, high caste converts would become powerful messengers of the Christian gospel and encourage conversions among the low castes. Therefore, these early conversion strategies focused on the high castes and began with ‘bazaar preaching.’ In bazaars, missionaries distributed religious tracts written in Urdu, an upper class language, in urban settings.

Bazaar and city preaching had little effect on early missions. The use of Urdu was a significant factor in the limitations of this mission strategy. Because Urdu was an upper class language of the wealthy elite, religious tracts were only effective among the “one percent who were educated coming from respected Hindu, Sikh, or Muslim families.” Very few women frequented bazaars so tracts were distributed to men instead of entire families. Missionary J.C. Heinrich reports:

The bazaar preaching was not a particularly inviting prospect…Twice a week we went in front of the reading room, the evangelist and myself. As I had no knowledge of the vernacular, he preached while I sat on the bench for moral support. It was a deadly programme [sic] my own feeling was that we were wasting our time. Not a single enquirer came to our book room as the result of the whole winter’s preaching.

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87 Massey, *Dalit Theology*, 86-87.
89 Ibid.
Missionaries Frederick and Margaret Stock argue this evangelism strategy was based on a lack of information about caste.¹² Missionaries did not understand that the upper castes had little motivation to convert to Christianity or any desire to evangelize the lower castes. Further, high and low castes had limited social interaction. Overall, this strategy was a failure.¹³ Things changed when Protestant missionaries in the nineteenth century ignored former convention and began evangelizing people regardless of caste.¹⁴

Duncan Forrester argues that in the nineteenth century, Protestant missionaries had a different attitude towards caste compared to the Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics who preceded them.¹⁵ While the latter thought of caste as a ‘social custom,’ Protestant missionaries interpreted it as ‘religious institution’ based on social inequality.¹⁶ Geoffrey A. Oddie suggests that from their arrival in India, Protestant missionaries began condemning caste practices.¹⁷ Forrester traces this hostility to the fact that early Protestant missionaries were not elites. Many were from a working class background and sensitive to modes of social inequality.¹⁸ Forrester reports that by the 1850s, Protestant missionaries reached a consensus in condemning caste discrimination and actively tried to eliminate the practice.¹⁹ Mission reports support Forrester’s

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¹³ Ibid.
¹⁴ Ibid.
¹⁶ Ibid.
¹⁷ Ibid.
¹⁹ Forrester, *Caste and Christianity*, 35-42.
²⁰ Ibid.
theory and reveal that Protestant missionaries were evangelizing low caste groups. Further, they were baptizing people regardless of varna status.\(^\text{100}\)

Similar accounts of Protestant attitudes towards caste also emerge from South India. S. Manickman and Hugald Grafe argue that in late nineteenth century, liberalism among Protestant missionaries in India led to sympathetic attitudes towards caste discrimination. This encouraged missionaries to break the caste system rather than work within its boundaries.\(^\text{101}\) As a result, the diversity of conversion across caste categories is apparent in mission reports from Serampore in 1834 which included 20 Brahmins, 8 Kshatriyas, 28 Vaishayas, 64 Shudras, 25 Muslims, 7 Anglo-Indians, and 5 Cochin Jews.\(^\text{102}\) Webster reports between 1834 and 1886, converts to Christianity in Punjab and the North India Missions of the Presbyterian Church were 33 percent Muslim, 19 percent Brahmin, 24 percent Hindu (unspecified), 11 percent lower caste Hindu and 7 percent Sikh.\(^\text{103}\) Webster claims these figures indicate that Dalits were receptive to Christianity because Protestant missionaries condemned caste.\(^\text{104}\)

In addition to condemning caste, Protestant theology also affected evangelical strategy among Dalits. Protestant missionaries focused on individual sin and spent hours expounding the salvific work of the Holy Spirit before a baptism was permitted.\(^\text{105}\) They also framed the


\(^{103}\)Webster, *The Christian Community*, 49.

\(^{104}\)Ibid.

\(^{105}\)Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 37.
Christian message in juxtaposition to Hinduism and Islam. “One of the signs both of the truth of Christianity and of the falsity of Hinduism in particular was the concept of equality in the former and caste in the latter.”106 Because Protestant missionaries framed caste as a system of social inequality and injustice, this attracted many Dalits to Christianity.107 Once baptized, missionaries encouraged new converts to leave their caste and enter a new communal relationship with other Christians. Missionaries claimed this new Christian community was based on social equality.108

Early Protestant missionaries also had some success with high caste conversions among Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims. A few prominent converts were Thakur Das, a Hindu medical student; Didar Singh, a Sikh contractor; and Akbar Ali, a Muslim maulvi (prayer leader).109 While the missionaries hoped these new converts would evangelize others, their influence was limited. It is not clear whether these high caste converts tried to proselytize Dalits, but new converts to Christianity did not manifest. Meanwhile, Protestant missionaries were not overly successful with Dalits either. For example, missionaries were unsuccessful in evangelizing the Meg caste in Punjab.110 The Megs were a despised caste because their occupation, weaving, required using the handloom and the lower half of the body. Because of this, the high castes described the Megs as “half the body in the grave and other half in life.”111

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106 Ibid.
110 Stock, People Movements,33-44.
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The Megs were outcaste because of their occupation and other objectionable behaviour, such as eating carrion and ‘leftovers’ of high caste Hindus and Muslims.\textsuperscript{112} In 1879, the Megs in Sialkot, Gurdaspur, and Gujarat districts were persuaded by a guru to abstain from carrion. In 1900, the Megs made the decision to refuse high caste leftovers. But when the missionaries first encountered the Megs, these practices were still prevalent.\textsuperscript{113} The Megs were approached by G.W. Scott, an Indian evangelist who spent a few days in their village.\textsuperscript{114} The Megs were so interested in Christianity, particularly the emphasis on social equality that they pressed Scott for further teaching. Pipo, a moderately literate man was the first Meg to convert.\textsuperscript{115} Scott did not baptize Pipo because missionaries required potential converts to study Christian doctrine for several months before baptism.\textsuperscript{116} After Scott left the village, a few more Megs converted to Christianity. But, within ten days, these new converts faced severe opposition.\textsuperscript{117}

Several issues prevented the Megs from converting to Christianity. The first was the practice of arranged marriages. Some Megs feared that if they converted to Christianity, other Megs would reject their marriage proposals.\textsuperscript{118} Second, many Megs worked for Muslim landlords.\textsuperscript{119} When the landlords discovered their interest in Christianity, they actively prevented conversion.\textsuperscript{120} This was fuelled by a fear that if the Megs converted, they would refuse to work on the Sabbath which would create an economic loss for landlords. Third, the Protestant practice

\textsuperscript{112} Stock, People Movements, 33.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} Gordon, Our India, 199-200.
\textsuperscript{119} Stock, People Movements, 33.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
of delayed baptism created an additional issue. A largely illiterate community, the Megs could not commit to studying Christian doctrine for months with the future promise of baptism. While a few Megs did convert, their influence outside the caste was limited. This is because the Megs, while low caste, did not proselytize people they thought were lower than them. Therefore, the movement slowly dissipated.

In 1855, the first missionaries of the United Presbyterian (UP) Church of America, Andrew Gordon arrived in India. Conversions were painfully slow and missionaries were growing disheartened. “Of the multitudes who have heard the Gospel, only here and there an individual believes, and adheres to the good news of Salvation.” From the moment Gordon arrived, he took an interest in Dalits. As Forrester indicates, because of their working class background, Protestant missionaries, including Gordon were sympathetic to social inequality. Soon after Gordon’s arrival, missionaries directed their efforts towards resolving Dalit discrimination. They helped Dalits gain access to water wells and ensured they were equitably paid. These experiences prompted Gordon to write, “I may say briefly that I began with my eyes on upon the large towns and cities, but have been led from them to the country villages. I began with the educated classes and people from good social position, but ended among the poor and the lowly.” Missionaries were not always successful, but their concern secured Dalit interest in

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121 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
124 Forrester, Caste and Christianity, 35-42.
125 Gordon, Our India, 446. Many historians of Indian Christianity and Dalit scholars also report this shift in ideology from the Protestant missionaries towards the low castes. See for example, Massey, Dalit Theology, 86-87; Webster, The Christian Community, 33; C.D. Snell, “Christianity in India,” The Church Missionary Review, Vol. LXVI, No. 790, February, 1915, 85.
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Christianity. And, because the missionaries framed Christianity as antithetical to Hinduism; Dalits grew more attentive. However, as Webster claims, “it was the Dalits not the missionaries who took the initiative in launching the mass movements and in so doing, challenged some of the assumptions upon which missionaries had been laboring for decades.”

4. The Chuhra Caste

An analysis of the Chuhra caste depicts the depth of social degradation of Dalits in nineteenth century Punjab. The 1881 Census listed the Chuhra caste as the largest menial caste in Punjab. The Census reports that there were 1,078,739 Chuhras living in the central districts engaged in a variety of occupations including sweeping, sanitation work, and scavenging. Chuhras were responsible for sweeping public streets, cleaning private homes, making dung cakes for high caste landowners, and grazing cattle. Many Chuhras were agricultural laborers and removed night soil as part of their occupation. Because of these polluting occupations, the Chuhras were a despised caste in Indian society. Missionary W. P. Hares also reports that Chuhras he encountered had darker skin compared to most upper caste Hindus. Hares argues that Chuhras were likely the descendents of Dravidians which was another reason the high caste shunned their community.

Most Chuhras in Punjab were recipients of brutal caste persecution. They lived outside the village walls, were not permitted to drink water from high caste wells, and were often

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127 Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 38.
131 Ibid.
133 Ibid.
physically assaulted by the upper castes.\textsuperscript{134} Webster reports that high caste Hindus prohibited Chuhras from entering temples and participating in religious ritual.\textsuperscript{135} In many villages, Chuhras were required to bury their dead face down in order to limit pollution on the high castes.\textsuperscript{136} Because of their low caste status, Chuhras did not own land and had little job security.\textsuperscript{137} The result of these discriminatory practices was extreme poverty and social insecurity which was exacerbated by perpetual debt to high caste landowners.\textsuperscript{138} At the end of the nineteenth century, the Chuhras were at the bottom of the social hierarchy in Punjab.\textsuperscript{139}

Chuhras had a variety of distinct practices. Because of poverty, they lived in joint or extended family systems.\textsuperscript{140} Polygamy was common among Chuhras and if a man died, an official marriage between a widow and her brother-in-law was expected. A barren woman was inauspicious so if a woman could not have children, her husband was permitted to take a second wife.\textsuperscript{141} The birth of a son was auspicious and welcomed with revelry and celebration. But, when a girl was born, Chuhras offered consolation to the parents.\textsuperscript{142} Chuhras had a local panchayat system which comprised five men appointed by the caste to mediate disputes. Caste rules mandated that the decisions of the panchayat were binding.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{139} Sherring, \textit{Hindu Tribes}, 396-397.  
\textsuperscript{140} Stock, \textit{People Movements}, 59.  
\textsuperscript{141} \textit{The Presbyterian}, 264-265.  
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
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Hares reports that Chuhras held a wide range of religious beliefs that were different from caste Hindus.\textsuperscript{143} A common narrative among Chuhras was that the founder of their community was a man named Bal Mik, a hunter and famous dacoit.\textsuperscript{144} One day, Bal Mik attacked several \textit{faqirs} (religious ascetics) as they were passing his house. The \textit{faqirs}, because they were holy men, chided Bal Mik for his attack. Bal Mik stated that he vowed to kill everything that passed his dwelling including holy men. The \textit{faqirs} urged Bal Mik to change his ways and receive God’s forgiveness. According to Chuhras, Bal Mik promised the \textit{faqirs} his obedience. Twelve years later, the \textit{faqirs} passed Bal Mik’s house again and rested near a mound of earth. From the mound, they heard a constant buzzing sound and started digging to locate the source. They found Bal Mik, “still feebly repeating the words, Ram Ram.”\textsuperscript{145}

According to Hares, Bal Mik’s obedience to the \textit{faqirs} and his meditation on Ram, transformed his life. He soon acquired a reputation as a holy man and “gained many adherents from the outcaste community.”\textsuperscript{146} While this was a common narrative among Chuhras, Bal Mik also had other genealogies. He was referred to as Bala Shah or Lal Beg.\textsuperscript{147} Webster confirms the similarity of these narratives; Bala Shah and Lal Beg were also dacoits who became saints.\textsuperscript{148} Some Chuhras believed that Lal Beg was the youngest son of a sexual encounter between the Hindu God Brahma and Jastri, a low caste woman. Lal Beg was outcaste by his father, Brahma because he was the result of a ‘mixed caste’ sexual alliance and therefore, a source of

\textsuperscript{143} Hares, \textit{The Story of A Canal Colony}, 13-14.  
\textsuperscript{145} Hares, \textit{The Story of A Canal Colony}, 13-14.  
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{148} Webster, \textit{The Dalit Christians}, 11.
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pollution.\textsuperscript{149} In other narratives, Chuhras claimed that Lal Beg was the same person as Bal Mik and Valmiki, the low caste author of the Hindu sacred epic the \textit{Ramayana}.\textsuperscript{150}

The Chuhras also followed diverse religious rituals that further separated them from Hindu society. A common practice in the community was the worship of Bal Mik.\textsuperscript{151} Chuhras did not go to temple, as was the norm in the Hindu tradition. Instead, they erected a mound made of dirt or brick to honor the place where the \textit{faqirs} discovered Bal Mik in meditation.\textsuperscript{152} Most Chuhras worshipped this mound regularly and gathered for \textit{puja} (worship) on Thursday evenings.\textsuperscript{153} In addition to \textit{puja}, Hares reports that Chuhras, “wear charms and amulets to ward off evil and in times of sickness practice witchcraft; they believe in a life after death, when they will be punished or rewarded according to their evil or good deeds; and are strong believers in fate.”\textsuperscript{154} R.C. Temple argues that the Chuhras practiced, “a confused veneration for anything and everything its followers, or rather their teachers, may have found to be considered sacred by their neighbours, whatever be its origin.”\textsuperscript{155}

Webster asserts that Chuhras had many religious practices that were similar to Christianity, which might have enabled their receptiveness to missionaries.\textsuperscript{156} For example, Chuhras believed in a form of monotheism and worshiped Bala Shah as their “high priest, mediator, and teacher.”\textsuperscript{157} Youngson reported a common prayer among the Chuhras, in Punjabi:

\textsuperscript{151} Webster, \textit{The Dalit Christians}, 11; Temple, \textit{The Legends}, 529-530.
\textsuperscript{152} Hares, “The Mass Movements,” 31.
\textsuperscript{153} Hares, \textit{The Story of A Canal Colony}, 15.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{155} Temple, \textit{The Legends}, 531.
\textsuperscript{156} Webster, \textit{The Dalit Christians}, 12.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
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O Bala Shah Nuri
For the sake of thy son, Bal Bamrik
Have mercy on the dark race
Our cry is to thee,
Thy cry reaches the presence of God\textsuperscript{158}

Praying to Bala Shah occurred individually or communally. Chuhras made offerings of corn, raw sugar and \textit{ghi} (clarified butter) to Bala Shah during worship.\textsuperscript{159} Services included praising Bala Shah. A common chant also in Punjabi reported by Youngson was:

\begin{verbatim}
O God! O God!
God’s will be done
May the gift of thy hand avert evil!
May he have mercy on all!
We call on the One True Name
The Great Bala Shah\textsuperscript{160}
\end{verbatim}

The Stocks report that Chuhras believed in the resurrection of the body and in judgment after death.\textsuperscript{161}

In the nineteenth century, when the Protestant missionaries were active in Punjab, the Chuhras like other Dalits were utilizing religious conversion as a method to escape caste discrimination. Sathianathan Clarke and Rowena Robinson argue that historically, “entire villages, castes, \textit{biradaris}, lineages or clans were influenced by a new faith, and bore with them the bulk of the baggage of caste identities along with other customs associated with kinship or marriage.”\textsuperscript{162} Hares reports that thousands of Chuhras during this period adopted Sikhism to

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{159} Webster, \textit{The Dalit Christians}, 12; Hares, \textit{The Story of A Canal Colony}, 17.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{162} Rowena Robinson and Sathianathan Clarke, eds., \textit{Religious Conversions in India: Modes, Motivations, and Meanings} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 15.
\end{footnotes}
escape caste discrimination.\textsuperscript{163} Chuhras converts to Sikhism were “Mazhabis” or “Sikhs by practice” by non-Dalit Sikhs.\textsuperscript{164} These ‘Mazhabi Chuhras’ appropriated Sikh practices and started to wear long hair, an iron bracelet, and carried a short sword to fit with the larger Sikh community.\textsuperscript{165} However, Hares reports, conversion to Sikhism did not remove caste discrimination from Chuhras. “They copy the Sikhs in everything and employ a \textit{granathi} to read to them the \textit{Granath Sahib}, their sacred book […] They have adopted Sikhism, they have suffered in defence [sic] of their religion, and yet the Sikhs will have very little to do with them.”\textsuperscript{166}

Some Chuhras converted to Islam and were “Musallis” or “little Muslims.”\textsuperscript{167} Hares reports that “Musalli Chuhras” fared better than Mazhabis: “With them the true Muhammadan will eat and drink, and they are allowed to worship at the mosque. But the Musalli are very ignorant of the tenets of Islam, and the majority are satisfied with the mere recitation of the \textit{kalima}. That is all the Musalli knows about Islam.”\textsuperscript{168} In contrast to Sikhism or Islam, Clarke asserts that Christianity offered Chuhras “a vision of social living” and “a meaningful counter-worldview.”\textsuperscript{169} This worldview, based on social equality was radically different from caste hierarchy and bolstered an image of God rooted in justice and equality. Therefore, many Chuhras in Punjab were attracted to Christianity. The message of social equality in the Christian gospel

\textsuperscript{164} Hares, \textit{The Story of A Canal Colony}, 17; Webster and James Massey also report the trend among Chuhras to convert to Sikhism and Islam. See Webster, \textit{The Dalit Christians}, 12; Massey, \textit{Dalit Theology}, 62.
\textsuperscript{165} Hares, \textit{The Story of A Canal Colony}, 17.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{169} Robinson and Clarke, \textit{Religious Conversions}, 15.
Chapter 1: Chuhr Mass Movement

resonated with many Chuhras as a mobilization strategy to escape both caste discrimination and polluting occupations.

5. Chuhra Mass Movement

5.1. Ditt the Chuhra Evangelist

A significant part of the Chuhra mass movement to Christianity is that it was sustained by Chuhra evangelists. This evangelical process began with the conversion of a Chuhra named Ditt. In 1872, Reverend J. S. Barr of the Presbyterian Church converted an upper caste man named Natu. Gordon reports that Natu was the heir to his father’s land and had, “very fair worldly prospects.”

Because of his social standing and potential inheritance, missionaries were excited by Natu’s conversion. Some missionaries hoped that Natu would help new coverts by offering them steady work on his land and “provide a most valuable service to his native church.”

However, Natu squandered his inheritance and lost his money and title. Although the missionaries tried to support Natu, he was soon reduced to a pauper and “proved himself in every way to be a weak brother.” Despite Natu’s failure, “he did a work which many of the great and successful men in the churches fail to accomplish—like Andrew and Philip, he led one of his neighbours to the Saviour.”

Natu knew a man named Ditt from the “much despised Chuhra tribe.” One evening in 1873, Ditt, a small, lame, and illiterate man accompanied Natu to the Sialkot United Presbyterian Church.

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171 Ibid.
172 Ibid, 422.
173 Ibid, 421.
Mission to confess his faith in Christ. Since it was not the policy of missionaries to baptize new converts without several weeks of Christian study, Reverend Martin of the Sialkot Mission was hesitant to baptize Ditt. He also had reservations about Ditt’s sincerity particularly because his knowledge “was chiefly limited to what had been learned from his weak brother Natu.” Gordon reports that missionaries were also cautious because many people came to the mission under pretences of conversion for food and shelter. Doubting his sincerity, Reverend Martin asked Ditt to remain in Sialkot so he could instruct him in Christian doctrine and test his resolve. But, Ditt was so effusive in his desire to become a Christian that the reverend baptized him.

After the baptism, Reverend Martin requested that Ditt remain in Sialkot under his instruction. However, Ditt refused and asked permission to return to his village immediately. Reverend Martin was nervous that, “persecution and the lack of fellowship and teaching would quickly quench the spark of faith he had seen in this weak, illiterate child of God.” However, he relented and Ditt returned to his village. According to Gordon, Ditt’s own family opposed his conversion and abused him mercilessly for leaving his caste:

Oh ho! You have become a sahib (gentleman); others: ‘You have become a be-i-man (one without religion).’ His sister-in-law assailed him with: ‘Alas my brother! You have changed your religion without even asking our counsel; our relationship with you is at an end. Henceforth, you shall neither eat, drink, nor in

175 Ibid.
176 Ibid.
178 Ibid.
any way associate with us. One of your legs in broken already; so it may be with the other."\(^{180}\)

Despite these taunts, Gordon reports that Ditt remained steadfast in his faith.

In 1873, three months after his baptism, Ditt began evangelizing his family and neighbors. Ditt’s first success emerged from his immediate family; his wife and daughter converted to Christianity. Next, Ditt converted two neighbors. These new converts walked thirty miles with Ditt to the Presbyterian Mission in Sialkot back to Reverend Martin.\(^{181}\) The reverend was surprised to see Ditt and shocked that he brought new converts with him. After he was satisfied in their knowledge of Christianity, he baptized all the new converts.\(^{182}\) In February 1874, Ditt escorted four new converts to Sialkot for baptism.\(^{183}\) These men were also baptized. One of these converts, Kaka, joined Ditt in evangelism and they began to proselytize other Chuhras in their village.\(^{184}\) The 1876 mission report recorded 46 baptisms in the Zafarwal district in Ditt’s village and 25 baptisms the year before. All baptisms were among the Chuhras.\(^{185}\)

After success in his own village, Ditt embarked on a missionizing journey and traveled to neighboring towns evangelizing Chuhras. At the annual meeting in 1884, missionaries reported that Ditt converted almost five hundred Chuhras.\(^{186}\) The missionaries soon recognized Ditt’s gift for evangelism and offered him a small salary in return for his work.\(^{187}\) Ditt traveled by foot to other Chuhra villages preaching the Christian gospel. He suffered insults and was ousted from

\(^{181}\) Ibid.
\(^{182}\) Ibid.
\(^{183}\) Ibid.
\(^{184}\) Ibid; *The Seventeenth Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions of the United Presbyterian Church of North America (UPCNA) Presented to the General Assembly* (May 1876), 19.
\(^{185}\) Ibid.
many villages, however, he continued his work.\textsuperscript{188} Driven by his own conversion experience and the support of the Protestant missionaries in Sialkot, Ditt grew more aggressive in his efforts. By 1915 almost all the Chuhras of Sialkot converted to Christianity.\textsuperscript{189}

Massey reports that during Ditt’s mission, Chuhras in Gujranwala and a village near Gurdaspur heard of the ‘mass movement’ also began converting to Christianity.\textsuperscript{190} Eventually, the stronghold of Christianity in Punjab emerged from three areas, Sialkot, Gujranwala, and Gurdaspur, where the Chuhras were the majority caste.\textsuperscript{191} Massey argues that the root of these conversions was the doctrine of social equality.\textsuperscript{192} Long ostracized and socially excluded because of their occupation as scavengers and sanitation workers, Chuhras found social acceptance through Christianity. What began as a small, localized movement in one part of Punjab, soon expanded through the evangelism of other Chuhras in the region.

5.2. The Growth of the Chuhra Movement

Even during the height of the mass movements, ‘caste consciousness’ was still a feature of social dynamics between Chuhras and Protestant missionaries. There issues stemmed from the Chuhra association with ‘pollution.’ Massey argues that some missionaries described Chuhra conversions as “raking in rubbish in the church.”\textsuperscript{193} Mark Juergensmeyer asserts that many missionaries were also cautious about mentioning the Dalit background of Chuhra converts in

\textsuperscript{188} Massey, \textit{Panjab}, 11; Harding, \textit{Religious Transformations}, 106.
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid; Olson, \textit{What in the World in God Doing}, 163.
\textsuperscript{190} Webster, \textit{The Dalit Christians}, 47-48.
\textsuperscript{191} Harding, \textit{Religious Transformations}, 106.
\textsuperscript{192} Massey, \textit{Panjab}, 13.
\textsuperscript{193} Massey, \textit{Dalit Theology}, 101. This quote is from a letter by missionary J.C. R Ewing who wrote to the Board of Foreign Missions on March 9, 1884. Also reported by Webster, \textit{The Christian Community}, 60.
mission reports. Instead, they described Chuhra converts as “common villagers” or “illiterate menials.” This sentiment arose from the fact that while Christianity was flourishing among Chuhras, missionaries were not successful among high caste Hindus or Muslims. There was a fear that the association of Christianity with Chuhras would impede non-Chuhras from converting. The missionaries were partially correct. The Stocks indicate that the Chuhra mass movement impeded the Megs from joining Christianity. Because of the mass movement, the Megs though that Christianity was a ‘Chuhra religion.’ As weavers, they Megs were socially ‘higher’ than the Chuhras and withdrew support for the missionaries. Despite their failure with the Megs, by 1877 the United Presbyterian missionaries devoted attention to the Chuhra caste.

Between 1881 and 1891, Christians in Punjab increased from 660 to 10,165. The mass movement created many positive changes for Chuhras particularly in education. In nineteenth century Punjab, there were mission schools in urban centers that had both high caste and Muslim students. These schools included Christian doctrinal teachings along with secular subjects. To accommodate the Chuhras, missionaries opened new schools to educate Chuhra converts. Because of Ditt’s success, missionaries also wanted other Chuhras to

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195 Ibid.
196 Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 50-51.
They also hoped that as Chuhras gained education, the association of Christianity as a ‘Dalit’ religion would slowly subside. Because of the focus on training Chuhra evangelists, the missionaries made an effort to translate Christianity into the local language. While Urdu was the language of educated elites, it was also associated with Islam. In contrast, Punjabi was the local Chuhra language.

To help with the translation project, the missionaries enlisted Imam-ud-Din Shabaz, a local poet. Shabaz was born into a Muslim family but converted to Christianity in 1866. In 1880 the United Presbyterian Church announced a poetry competition in the magazine, Noor Afshan. A gifted writer, Shabaz won the competition and the missionaries invited him to translate the Psalms into Punjabi. In 1908, Shabaz set the Psalms to music. The Punjabi zabur or psalm emerged as distinct Chuhra practice and was integrated into Chuhra churches by the 1900s. The Chuhra movement changed in the mid-1880s when the British created a series of canals across Punjab to irrigate previously barren land. A. D. Asimi argues that this canal system changed the social demography of Chuhras in the region. Many Chuhras saw the canal

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206 Ibid.
208 Ibid.
209 Emma Dean Anderson and Mary Jane Campbell, In the Shadow of the Himalayas: A Historical Narrative of the Missions of the United Presbyterian Church of North America as Conducted in the Punjab, India, 1855-1940 (United Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, 1942), 113.
210 Ibid.
211 Stock. People Movements, 120.
settlements as an opportunity to leave behind polluting occupations and migrated to the area between the Chenab and Ravi rivers, known as Jhang Bar.\textsuperscript{213}

Protestant missionaries saw the Chuhra migration to the canal colonies as an opportunity for Christian expansion. Many missionaries followed the Chuhrs to the canal colonies to train new converts to evangelize.\textsuperscript{214} Canal colonies also had Hindu and Muslim residents who were impressed with the relationship between missionaries and the Chuhrs.\textsuperscript{215} Chuhra evangelists converted many Hindus and Muslims and the Protestant church continued to expand.\textsuperscript{216} The British government, impressed with the influx of people migrating to the canal colonies, allocated land to Protestant churches to resettle the Chuhrs.\textsuperscript{217} Within a few short years, the Chuhrs had the opportunity for economic independence through land ownership.\textsuperscript{218} Asimi argues that the Chuhrs were empowered by Christianity and their transition into non-polluted occupations that it increased missionary activity.\textsuperscript{219} Webster reports that prior to the canal colonies, the Church of Scotland had baptized only five Chuhrs by 1885. After the migration in 1886, the Church baptized 440 Chuhrs.\textsuperscript{220} In 1887, they baptized 666 more and by 1888, an additional 658 Chuhrs joined the church.\textsuperscript{221}

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\textsuperscript{213} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{216} Ibid; Walbridge, \textit{The Christians of Pakistan}, 58.
\textsuperscript{217} Webster, \textit{The Dalit Christians}, 61.
\textsuperscript{219} Asimi, \textit{The Christian Minority}, 33.
\textsuperscript{220} Webster, \textit{The Dalit Christians}, 51.
\textsuperscript{221} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
Chapter 1: Chuhr Mass Movement

Migrations to the canal colonies also increased the need to care for new Chuhra converts. The Scottish missionary John W. Youngson persuaded the British government to grant 3,556 acres of land which he parceled to Chuhra Christians. The Chuhra Christians converted by the Church of Scotland settled in Youngsonabad in the Sheikhupura district named after Youngson. In 1898, part of this initial land given to the Church Missionary Society was used to establish the Christian villages of Montgomerywala and Isa Nagri (Batemanabad) in Jhang Bar. The village of Martinpur was named after Revered Martin, the missionary who baptized Ditt. Perhaps because of the offer of land and new occupations in the canal colonies, or because they were drawn to the Christian message, more Chuhras migrated and converted to Christianity.

In 1884, Charles Forman of the Punjab Mission of the Presbyterian Church of the United States reported two new Chuhra movements in near Lahore, now in Pakistan. Charles Forman reports that by 1914, there were only 3457 communicant members but the church had baptized 22,339 Chuhras. Webster reports that in 1885, the Church Missionary Society baptized 14 Chuhras which led to a new conversion movement which spread into Amritsar and Gurdaspur. The Methodist and Salvation Army Church, though late in arrival also converted many

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222 Stock, People Movements, 258.
223 Ibid.
224 Asimi, The Christian Minority, 35.
226 Webster, The Christian Community, 49; Duncan B. Forrester, Forrester of Christian Ethics and Practical Theology: Collected Writings on Social Order (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 78.
227 Webster, The Dalit Christians, 51. These figures are also reported in Robert Clark, The Missions of the Church Missionary Society and the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society in the Punjab and Sindh (Edinburgh: R & R Clark Ltd, 1904), 122.
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Chuhras. These missionaries initially critiqued the Presbyterian Church for focusing on Dalits. However, they soon began evangelizing Chuhras. Because of the improvement in social status and education, some Chuhra Christians secured positions in the Indian civil service. A few became judges and foreign ambassadors. In 1915, because of the demands of World War I, many Chuhras joined the military. Prior to this, Dalits did not participate in military service but remained in traditional occupations. However, during World War I, almost six thousand Chuhra Christians enlisted in the Indian military as drivers, hospital assistants, and even chaplains. Psychologically, this empowered Chuhra Christians as it indicated acceptance into Hindu society.

It is likely the process of Chuhra assimilation into Indian society was easier because of conversion to Christianity. Nevertheless, for most Chuhra Christians, conversion did not eliminate caste discrimination. Hindus in particular were still ‘caste conscious’ with Chuhra Christians and observed rules of purity and pollution. But, the mass movements did change the religious demography of Punjab. Webster reports that of the 163,994 Indian Christians on the 1911 Census, 92,739 were Presbyterian, 29,051 were Anglican, and 18,007 were Salvation Army. The vast majority of each denomination was from the Chuhra caste. By 1951, the Chuhra Christian community had grown to 225 land owning families. Literacy rates among

\[228\] Ibid.
\[229\] Webster, *The Dalit Christians*, 52.
\[232\] Ibid.
\[234\] Ibid.
\[235\] Webster, *The Dalit Christian*, 53.
Chuhras increased to 36.6 percent which was twice as high as the general population in Punjab.\textsuperscript{236}

\textbf{6. Chuhra Christians in Modern Day Pakistan}

Conversion to Christianity did not remove the stigma of caste from Chuhra Christians. Today, in Pakistan, Chuhra Christians are still recipients of caste discrimination based on Dalit ancestry. In August 1947, Britain granted independence to Indian territories.\textsuperscript{237} Led by Mohammed Ali Jinnah, pro-Partition Muslims were designated territories determined by religious demography that emerged as Pakistan.\textsuperscript{238} After Partition, the Protestant church in West Pakistan was a minority in a majority Muslim nation. Chuhra Christians in Pakistan had to contend with relocation issues including the loss of employment in the canal colonies and Indian military.\textsuperscript{239} Many rural Chuhra Christians who worked for Hindu and Sikh landlords lost their primary source of income.\textsuperscript{240} Others were no longer required to work on the smaller plots of land that survived Partition.\textsuperscript{241} Rural Christians no longer had contact with village churches and had to find new congregations.\textsuperscript{242}

Today, the majority of Protestant Christians in Pakistan are descendants of the Chuhra mass movement.\textsuperscript{243} Some Christians in Pakistan are descendants of affluent families from South India or converts from Muslim or high caste-Hindu backgrounds.\textsuperscript{244} After Partition, while the wealthy Christians moved to the cities to work in the government or private sector, Chuhra

\textsuperscript{236} Massey, Dalit Theology, 102-103.
\textsuperscript{239} Asimi, The Christian Minority, 40; Stock, People Movements, 180-181.
\textsuperscript{240} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{241} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{242} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{244} Ibid. Streefland, Sweepers of Slaugtherhouse, 26.
Chapter 1: Chuhra Mass Movement

Christians were limited to menial occupations. Because the majority of Chuhra converts were uneducated and unskilled, the only occupations available were in mills and factories. A few Chuhras found work as rural laborers but were not equipped for employment in any sector that required education. Many Chuhras, desperate for work clustered in urban slums and found employment in the sanitation industry. Georg Pfeffer argues that Chuhra converts in rural areas and in urban slums met the same “disregard from others as had been their fate in earlier times.”

Social integration into Pakistan has proved difficult for Chuhra Christians. The Stocks argue that Chuhra occupations in the sanitation industry created a ghetto mentality that encouraged social discrimination from the larger Muslim society. Middle class Christians especially from a high caste Hindu background also shunned Chuhras as they had done prior to conversion. The Stocks report:

> Although the present Christian church in Pakistan has come almost entirely from the depressed classes, nearly a century of Christian teaching and influence has lifted the Christian community to a status considerably above the scheduled castes. Through mission institutions a good sized Christian middle class has developed, so that Christians are found in almost every profession and branch of government service in the country. For this reason the Christian church feels superior to the scheduled castes.

The Stocks claim that this superiority and corresponding discrimination among middle class Christians is clear from the behavior of pastors toward Chuhras and other low

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245 Ibid.
248 Stock, People Movements, 204.
249 Ibid.
castes. For example, soon after Partition, when one pastor was urged to evangelize Hindu Dalits in a Chuhra Christian village, he responded, “Are there no other lost sheep to be sought?”

According to the government of Pakistan, Christians comprise 2 percent of the total population. Christian leaders contest these figures and argue that the government purposely depreciates their numbers for political purposes. Today, the majority of Protestant Christians in Pakistan reside in Punjab. Lahore has the largest Christian presence. The majority of Punjabi Christians reside in Faisalabad, Sialkot, and Sheikhpora, which were all sites for Chuhra conversions during the mass movement. In Sindh, there is a large Protestant community with ancestral connections to both high and low caste Hindu backgrounds. Karachi also has a sizable Catholic Goanese population from Carmelite missions in India. In both Punjab and Sindh, there is a small Anglo-Indian Christian presence. These Christians are the result of intermarriage between British Christians and Indians during colonialism.

The majority of Protestant Christians in Sindh reside in Karachi or Hyderabad and almost 80 percent are urbanized. In Karachi, there are a few communities of Balmikis, a Scheduled Caste of sweepers similar to Chuhras in ritual and practice. Because of their close ritual connection to Chuhras, the Balmikis are comfortable in villages and urban slums with a large

250 Ibid.
251 Ibid.
255 Ibid.
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Chuhra Christian presence.\textsuperscript{257} The Stocks reports, “Whenever a congregation has Christian sweepers [Chuhras], Balmiki converts are integrated into it happily. In places where congregations consisted of middle class Christians, Balmikis did not feel at home and were not made welcome.”\textsuperscript{258} A similar sentiment is present among Mazhabi Sikhs particularly in Sindh. The Mazhabis also share an affinity with Chuhra Christians often opting to live near them in sweeper colonies and urban slums.\textsuperscript{259}

Baluchistan Province has a small Christian community. According to the 1981 census, there were only 20,000 Christians in Baluchistan.\textsuperscript{260} However, Chuhra Christians, Balmikis, Mazhabis, and Musallis in this region often fail to report their true religious identity on census records for fear of social discrimination.\textsuperscript{261} In Baluchistan, Christians reside primarily in Quetta and a few are converts from a Muslim background.\textsuperscript{262} In addition, there is a small Musalli presence as well. The Musallis are not socially integrated in Pakistani society and an awareness of Chuhra ancestry still erupts in forms of social discrimination against this community.\textsuperscript{263} In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province (KPK), Christians reside in Peshawar. National records indicate 50,000 members.\textsuperscript{264}

The largest Protestant denomination with 27 percent of the Christian population is the Church of Pakistan (COP), inaugurated in 1970 through a union of Anglicans, Methodists,
Chapter 1: Chuhra Mass Movement

Lutherans, and Scottish Presbyterians. The majority of Chuhras are communicant members of the COP. The next largest denomination is the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan. This church was formed in 1990 through a union between the United Presbyterian Church and the Lahore Church Council. Both the United Presbyterian Church and the Lahore Church Council had a schism in 1968. The break between these churches created the Presbyterian Church which has a sizable communicant membership. The Methodist Church also has a large presence in Pakistan. Other denominations include the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Baptists, Brethren, Charismatics, Church of Christ, Church of St. Thomas, Evangelicals, Eastern Orthodox, Salvation Army, and Seventh-day Adventists.

Conclusion

Caste is a seminal feature of Indian society. Social discrimination from upper caste Hindus led to the ostracism and degradation of Dalits who were anxious to escape religio-political persecution. For some Dalits, religious conversion was a viable method to escape Brahmanic oppression and casteism. In the nineteenth century, mass movements to Christianity emerged from Dalit communities and radically changed the religious demography of India. In the Punjab, the Chuhra caste was the largest such ‘people movement’ and resulted in mass conversions to Christianity. In 1947, the majority of Chuhra Christians in Punjab emerged as the nascent Protestant community in Pakistan. Conversion to Christianity enabled many Chuhras to escape caste occupations including sweeping and sanitation work. After Partition, many

266 These churches were originally founded by the United Presbyterian (UP) Mission and the Andhra Pradesh (AP) Mission during the nineteenth century in Punjab.
267 Barrett, World Christian Encyclopedia, 543.
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uneducated Chuhras were confined to menial jobs. Social discrimination against Chuhras based on occupation and Dalit ancestry is still a common occurrence in Pakistan.

In Karachi, Chuhra Christians reside almost entirely in urban slums and work in the sanitation industry. Some Chuhras work in domestic service as maids while others engage in sanitation work for private homes. However, the majority of Chuhra Christians in Karachi are engaged in municipal sweeping which includes cleaning the streets, public latrines, and collecting refuse. Chuhra Christians are still the recipients of caste discrimination in Pakistan because of their association with ‘polluting’ occupations. Although Pakistan does not recognize caste officially and does not categorize society into ‘high’ and ‘low’ castes many Chuhra Christians still face ostracism and exclusion. In the next chapter, I show how ‘caste consciousness’ manifests in social discrimination against Chuhra Christians in Pakistan.
Chapter 2: ‘Caste Consciousness’ in Pakistan

Introduction

In July 2013, Pervez Khattak, a member of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province (KPK) made a statement to the local newspaper that only “non-Muslims will be recruited as sweepers” in the province.¹ Khattak’s words created a firestorm across Pakistan. Media outlets in all four provinces reported this statement focusing on the inherent prejudice in these remarks. Khattak was the first provincial minister appointed by the PTI and as Christians are the largest minority in KPK, this statement was interpreted as a personal attack on the Christian community.² Albert David, the chairman of the United Christian Movement was incensed that Khattak suggested that only non-Muslims are eligible for sanitation jobs in Pakistan. “Whatever the context, it is very insensitive to say that the jobs of sweeping would only be given to minorities.”³ Napoleon Qayyum, a Christian leader and member of the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) filed a petition with the Lahore High Court requesting an official apology from Khattak and the PTI.⁴

Following the outrage by Christians all over Pakistan, Khattak gave a second interview to The News to clarify his earlier statements. In this interview, he exacerbated the situation further. “I made the comment in the provincial assembly in good sense. I stated the fact that non-Muslims normally do these kind of jobs in Pakistan and that they should have the first right to

² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
any openings in the government departments.”

This story illustrates that socially in Pakistan; there is a strong connection between ‘Christians’ and the sanitation industry. As I show in Chapter 1, in India, Chuhras engage in these occupations because of their outcaste status. Yet, in Pakistan, there is also a social expectation that non-Muslims, particularly Dalits, should work in the sanitation industry. In his second interview with The News, Khattak argued, “Muslims hired to do the cleaning jobs are reluctant to do the job. 40 to 45 vacancies of sweepers available in the Municipal Corporation in Peshawar should be filled by hiring non-Muslims as they do a better job than the Muslims. They [non-Muslims] should be given priority as they have traditionally held these jobs.”

The notion that non-Muslims have “traditionally held these jobs” suggests that such occupations are distinct to non-Muslims and Dalits in Pakistan.

This story illuminates two things. First, there is a social expectation for non-Muslims to work in the sanitation industry. Second, it highlights the anger and resentment that stems from this association. Pakistan does not have an official concept of ‘caste’ and does not categorize society into ‘low caste’ and ‘high caste.’ However, ‘caste consciousness’ is still part of Pakistani social dynamics. ‘Caste consciousness’ in Pakistan manifests through norms of purity and pollution through the concept of pak (clean) and na-pak (unclean). While not as pronounced as in India, purity and pollution affects social interactions for many Chuhra Christians. Despite conversion to Christianity, Chuhra Christians are recipients of caste discrimination in Pakistan. This discrimination stems from Dalit ancestry and their work in polluting occupations such as sweeping and sanitation work. In this chapter, I analyze norms of ‘caste consciousness’ in

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6 Ibid.
Pakistan and describe how this ideology affects social discrimination against Chuhra Christians. First, I describe caste denial in Pakistan. Second, I discuss Chuhra Christian occupations. Third, I examine the concept of pak and na-pak and its connection to caste persecution in Pakistan.

1. Dalits and ‘Caste Consciousness’ in Pakistan

The concept of caste and caste discrimination is largely overlooked in Pakistani society. Therefore, few academic books address caste dynamics and/or Dalits in Pakistan. Social activists in Pakistan publish the most studies, reports, pamphlets, and tracts on caste discrimination. A report published for the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) in 2007 reveals how ‘caste consciousness’ is actively denied in Pakistani society. In this report, Rochi Ram, a senior lawyer of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) states, “Caste is not an issue. Nobody wants to talk about caste in Pakistan.”\(^7\) In contrast, a 2013 report on Dalits for the U.N. Committee claims that Hindus Dalits and Christians from a Dalit background in Pakistan routinely experience discrimination for two reasons: 1) religious membership, and 2) caste identity.\(^8\) This report notes that Scheduled Caste Hindus in Pakistan face “double discrimination” and are often “victimized by the rest of the society.”\(^9\)

Shahbano Aliani argues, “the denial of the ‘caste problem’ starts with statistics.”\(^10\) The last official census conducted in Pakistan in 1998 reports that Scheduled Caste Hindus comprise 0.25 percent of Pakistan’s total population, approximately 330,000 people.\(^11\) Surinder S. Jodhka

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\(^8\) “Scheduled Caste Women in Pakistan,” Alternative Report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network, January 2013, 2.

\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^10\) Aliani, “Caste in Pakistan.”

\(^11\) Ibid.
Chapter 2: ‘Caste Consciousness’ in Pakistan

and Ghanshyam Shah note that according to the 1998 Census, the Scheduled Castes constitute 13.6 percent of the 2.44 million Hindus in Pakistan who reside mainly in Sindh Province.\textsuperscript{12} Scheduled Caste Hindus in Sindh reside in nine districts: Tharparkar, Umerkot, Mirpur Khas, Badin, Tando Allah Yar, Tando Muhammad Khan, Sanghar, Matiyari Hyderabad in Southern Sindh, and Ghotki, Sukkur, Khairpur districts of Northern Sindh.\textsuperscript{13} Jodhka and Shah argue that “though the mainstream Islamic ideology completely denies any place to caste in Pakistan, its presence, in the form of social intercourse, birth based occupation, segregation in residence and taboo in social relationship is very widely recognized.”\textsuperscript{14} Jodhka and Shah assert that ‘untouchability’ is prevalent in Pakistan.\textsuperscript{15} “[Hindu Dalits] live in separate colonies, are served food in separate crockery, and cannot sit inside” with either upper caste Hindus or Muslims.\textsuperscript{16} Hindu Dalits do not often report such forms of discrimination, as the Pakistan government does not officially recognize ‘caste.’

Jodhka and Shah also note that caste discrimination in Sindh often manifests through language. For example, Muslims uses many names and titles to indicate the Dalit ancestry for various people in Pakistan. “There are other titles, such as Musalman Sheikhs, Mussalis (both used for Muslim Dalits) and Masihi (used for Christians) universally refer to specific groups of people, also identified with specific occupations and used to segregate them from the rest as “untouchable” groups.”\textsuperscript{17} As I show in Chapter 1, Mussalis are Chuhra converts to Islam. These

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
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Chuhras converted to Islam in the nineteenth century during the mass movements to Christianity in Punjab to escape casteism. Jodhka and Shah suggest, language is a constant reminder to the larger Muslim community about the ‘caste’ background of Mussalis. Because Mussalis were part of the untouchable Chuhra caste, they are recipients of caste persecution even though they are Muslim.18

Although the Pakistani government denies the existence of caste, Jodhka and Shah argue, “Caste is so obvious and important in Pakistan that [if] you go on streets and talk to people, [the] first question you would be asked is about your caste.”19 In 2007, social activist Zulfiqar Shah published an in-depth report, “Long Behind Schedule: A Study on the Plight of the Scheduled Caste in Pakistan.”20 Shah notes Pakistani law lists 40 Scheduled Castes tribes including Bheel, Bagri, Balmike [Balmiki], Bhangi, Meghwar [Mega], Kholhi, and Oad.21 While these Scheduled Castes are registered with the government, Pakistani officials mostly ignore caste discrimination against these communities. Provincial governments do not offer these castes any ‘affirmative action’ or protection against caste persecution or social ostracism.22 Aliani argues that most Dalits in Pakistan “believe that both ‘upper caste Hindus’ and the Pakistani government do not want to recognize the actual numbers so no special legislation or programmes have to be designed to address the issue of Dalits and discrimination.”23

19 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Aliani, “Caste in Pakistan.”
Surrender Velasai, president of the Scheduled Castes Federation of Pakistan notes that ‘caste consciousness’ is a significant part of Pakistani society.\textsuperscript{24} “Discrimination on the basis of caste is very much there and we Dalits are its worst victims.” Aliani asserts that because of ‘caste consciousness’ in Pakistan, “Dalits are socially excluded and most of them forced to live on the outskirts of towns and villages or confined to their own paras [areas] or villages. Government and even NGOs working in their areas will often bypass Bheel and Kholki paras in Tharparkar altogether.”\textsuperscript{25} Such exclusion also manifests in social interactions. Shah notes that in interior Sindh, commensal segregation is common.\textsuperscript{26} “Restaurant owners also argued that since Hindus cannot eat along with Muslims that is why they have made separate crockery for Hindus but a little probing reveals that they do not treat upper caste and well off Hindus in a similar manner who are allowed use of the common utensils.”\textsuperscript{27} Such forms of discrimination are unchecked by the Pakistani government. Yoginder Sikand argues, “untouchability is not regarded as a punishable offence.”\textsuperscript{28} He also suggests, “[Hindu] Dalits are routinely denied entry to public places, and access to water sources or common utensils in eateries on account of their caste and religion, which remains a pervasive practice.”\textsuperscript{29}

Despite the existence of ‘caste consciousness’ in Pakistan, there are few scholarly studies on Hindu Dalits and/or caste discrimination. The most notable study, \textit{Hamey Bhi Jeenay Do: Pakistan Mai Achoot Logon Ki Suretahal} (2005) [Let Us Also Live: The Situation of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[24] Ibid.
\item[25] Ibid.
\item[27] Ibid.
\item[29] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
Untouchables in Pakistan] is written by Pirbhu Lal Satyani in Urdu. In this book, Satayni shows that caste persecution is rampant in Pakistan and Dalits are the recipients of brutal discrimination. In addition, two newspapers, *Pakistan Hindu Post* and *New Age Islam* publish articles about Hindu Dalit discrimination in Pakistan. Because there is no legal recourse for caste discrimination in Pakistan, many Hindu Dalits are contemplating migrating to India. A recent article in the *Pakistan Hindu Post* reports, “nearly 1,000 families in Sindh have been struggling to migrate to India.” A second article notes, “According to the Pakistan Hindu Seva, a community welfare organisation, at least 10 families have migrated from Sindh every month since 2008, mostly to India, but in the last 10 months, 400 families have left.”


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30 *Hamey Bhi Jeenay Do: Pakistan Mai Achoot Logon Ki Suretahal* (Urdu) [Let Us Also Live: The Situation of the Untouchables in Pakistan]. (ASR Resource Centre, Pakistan, 2005).
34 Ibid.
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sweepers [Chuhras] and refused to let them come to the church. Both groups were socially ingrown and uncomfortable.\textsuperscript{35} Brown, Streefland, and Stock all report that Muslims and middle class Christians shun Chuhra Christians based on their occupation in the sanitation industry and Dalit ancestry.\textsuperscript{36}

Jodhka and Shah argue that because the Pakistani state denies ‘caste consciousness,’ it creates a precarious environment for Dalits. “The Pakistani state uses Islamic identity and ideology to completely deny the presence of caste in the social and economic life of the country even when caste-based identities and caste related discrimination are quite rampant.”\textsuperscript{37} Further, this official denial of caste in Pakistan creates a “double disadvantage of the Hindu and Christian Dalits. While being members of a small religious minority, they confront a hostile majoritarian state and civil society; being Dalits they also remain marginalised within their own religious communities.”\textsuperscript{38} As such, Jodhka and Shah found that caste related persecution occurs between Muslims and Chuhra Christians even in urban centers and particularly in slums.\textsuperscript{39} Stock notes that Chuhra Christians are discriminated in Pakistani society in multiple ways, especially by working menial jobs that are only suitable for ‘untouchables.’\textsuperscript{40}

2. Chuhra Christian Occupations in Pakistan

As I show in Chapter 1, the traditional occupations for Chuhras in India are scavenging and sweeping. These occupations are hereditary—Chuhras, like other Dalits are born into a caste

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
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group and an occupation. Scavenging and sweeping are two occupations connected to Dalits because of the impurity associated with these professions. Takashi Shinoda argues that scavenging became increasingly popular among Dalits during the Mughal period (c. 1526–1707). During this time, “dry latrines” first became popular in India and then increased dramatically during the British Raj (c. 1765–1857). Shinoda suggests that as urban centers grew, so did the demand for scavenging which eventually developed into an additional source of income for Dalit sweepers including Chuhras. Scavenging is polluted work because it involves searching through refuse and surviving on ‘leftovers.’ Because of poverty, many scavengers are dependent on these upper caste ‘leftovers’ and are hence, ‘polluted.’

In Indian society, sweepers are also ‘polluting’ because they are traditionally responsible for removing night soil, cleaning cattle yards, and latrines. Because of inadequate sanitary structures and regulations, sweepers remove night soil with their hands and do not often wear gloves or protective clothing. Social activist Smita Narula argues that these occupations were always exploitive forms of labor. Narula asserts that Dalit discrimination, much like occupation is also hereditary. In India, because of a heightened awareness of purity and pollution, even if Dalits no longer participate in scavenging and sweeping, they are still associated with

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42 Ibid.
45 Scavenging, removing night soil and cleaning latrines are still common occupations for Dalits in India. See for example, R. Prasad, Status of Dalits in India (Delhi: D.P.S. Publishing House, 2011), 113-123.
46 Smita Narula, Broken People: Caste Violence Against India’s Untouchables (Human Rights Watch, 1999), 138-141.
pollution.\textsuperscript{47} Because of their historical connection to ‘unclean work,’ caste discrimination extends to all Dalits from a particular caste group.\textsuperscript{48} Such forms of persecution are ‘contagious’ and entire castes are associated with ‘pollution’ because of a connection to ‘unclean’ professions and practices.\textsuperscript{49}

Streefland argues that like most Dalits in India, the majority of Chuhra Christians in Pakistani \textit{bastis} work in the sanitation industry.\textsuperscript{50} Streefland claims that the first Chuhra Christians settled in Karachi \textit{bastis} in the 1930s when they left rural Punjab to search for equitable work.\textsuperscript{51} Hindu Dalits and some Mazhabi Sikhs originally inhabited these \textit{bastis} before Chuhra Christians migrated from Punjab.\textsuperscript{52} Streefland notes that most Chuhra Christians are municipal sweepers and clean city streets, public restrooms, sewage pipes, and collect refuse. Some are engaged in domestic sweeping.\textsuperscript{53} Streefland claims that many Muslims are hesitant to participate in sanitation work because of its ‘unclean’ nature. He does not suggest that sweeping is the only viable occupation for Chuhra Christians. However, he implies that there is less competition and more job security in sanitation work.\textsuperscript{54} Streefland also reports that Hindu Dalits in Pakistan work in the sanitation industry for similar reasons.\textsuperscript{55}

In Pakistan, sanitation work is connected to Chuhra Christians. Bishop Alexander Malik from the Church of Pakistan (Lahore) argues that sanitation work relates to discriminatory
government policies against Christians in general and Chuhra Christians in particular. In a recent interview, Bishop Malik argues, “I believe around 80 percent of sanitary workers in Punjab are Christians. The government only deems Christians suitable for this job.” One reason that Khattak’s statement elicited anger is precisely because a disproportional number of sanitation workers are Chuhra Christians. In a 2010 study conducted by the Interfaith Network of Pakistan (INSP), social activists report that in every province, most sweepers are Christian. The majority are Chuhra Christians. According to Lahore Waste Management Company (LWMC), there are 7894 sweepers and most are Christian. In Islamabad, the capital, there are 1500 sanitation workers registered with the city. The Union General Secretary of the Islamabad Capital Development Authority (CDA) Chaudhry Muhammad Yasin reports that, “all the sweepers are Christians.”

In all provinces in Pakistan, the majority of sweepers are Chuhra Christians. In Baluchistan, in the city of Quetta, which has a small Christian presence, out of 978 sweepers, only 111 are Muslim and the rest are Christian. In Karachi, the largest city in Pakistan, the overwhelming majority sweepers are Christian. Umar Baloch, a social activist for a Christian organization, Idara Aman-o-Insaaf reports that of the 19,000 sweepers in the Karachi Municipal Corporation and Karachi Water and Sewerage Board, 80 percent are Christian. Such jobs create an inextricable link between ‘Christians’ and ‘sweepers.’ Ahmen Khawaja argues that the media

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56 Khawaja, “Pakistan’s Untouchables.”
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
exacerbate such stereotypes. “Local media and International media usually show the only recognizable stereotype of the Christian minority, which is of the subjugated, poor sweeper. The news clips show barefooted, ragged-clothed men and women living in slums and pushing trash-filled wheelbarrows.”

Khawaja asserts that many Chuhra Christians often internalize these depictions. “Yesterday I was a sweeper, today my children are sweepers and tomorrow their children will be sweepers.”

Sanitation work in Pakistan is both exploitive and dangerous. The Minority Rights Commission (MRC) published a report, *Working Conditions of Sanitary Workers and Sewer Men* in Lahore in 2007. This report indicates that 75 percent of the Solid Waste Management (SWM) staff is Christian. From 1998 to 2007, at least 70 sanitation workers died because of a lack of protective gear for sewage workers. Sewage workers often descend underground into gutters and drains to clear clogged pipes without proper tools and sometimes drown in the process. Sweepers and municipal cleaners also work in extremely unhygienic conditions. Many remove waste and filth from city streets and public latrines with their hands without gloves. Because of these unsanitary conditions, many workers contract tuberculosis, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and skin diseases. This study indicates that most sweepers work for 10 to 12 hours a day.

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64 Khawaja, “Pakistan’s Untouchables.”
65 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
Most are temporary employees without job security of government benefits. Such conditions increase both poverty and exacerbate ‘pollution’ for Chuhra Christians.

In addition to sanitation work, Chuhra Christians work a variety of menial jobs. M. De Vries argues that the majority of Chuhra Christians are employed in low class positions as kammis (laborers); very few are landlords (zamindars). In urban centers, including Karachi, many Chuhra Christians work as day laborers without any job security. Fr. Inayat Bernard argues that Dalit ancestry is the main reason for the low paying occupations for most Chuhra Christians. Lack of education among Chuhra Christians exacerbates these caste fissures in Pakistan. Since so many Chuhra Christians are illiterate, they have limited job options. Philip Lall agrees with this assessment. Lall reports that in the public sector approximately 87 percent of Chuhra Christians are in the lowest three levels of the government pay scale. In federal or local government jobs, Chuhras occupy positions of low status with minimal educational requirements.

3. Bastis in Karachi

Because of poverty, the majority of Chuhra Christians in Karachi reside in urban slums (bastis). Slums in Karachi fall into two categories: 1) katchi abadis (makeshift settlements) which comprise squatters on private or government land; 2) bastis, which are permanent structures with some tenure security. The residents of bastis usually work in domestic service for

71 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
the city elite as maids, chauffeurs, and private security guards. Some own small businesses as fruit sellers or tailors. In contrast, most *katchi abadis* residents are unemployed or hold temporary positions as street hawkers. Many are professional beggars. There is no reliable census data on the religious demography of Karachi *bastis*. Most *basti* residents are Sunni Muslim. Christians, mostly Protestants, and Hindus (denominations unknown) comprise the remainder of the population. This follows the religious demography for Karachi, which is 96.45 percent Muslim; 2.42 percent Christian; 0.83 percent Hindu; and 0.03 percent Scheduled Caste.76

There are three large *bastis* in Karachi, Neelum colony, Akhtar Colony, and Asam Colony. Of these *bastis*, Asam Colony has the largest Christian presence. I focus on the Chuhra Christian community in this *basti*. A brief description of *bastis* in Karachi will illuminate the impoverished state of most Chuhra Christians. *Bastis* in Karachi are usually located near the city center and are vast in size. *Bastis* have a complex structure of winding dirt roads, open sewers, and mostly ‘*pukka*’ (solid) houses. Streets are unpaved and littered with piles of garbage. The alleys are teeming with people; fruit and vegetable sellers, hawkers, and beggars. Motorized rickshaws and municipal buses are the main forms of transport for *basti* residents. Because of extreme poverty, joint family systems are popular. One home often has eight or ten people from the same family crowded into a single-room. These ‘homes’ have very basic furnishings: one or two *charpais* (woven beds), a few mats on the floor for communal eating, and a small kerosene stove. Most homes in the *basti* share a common courtyard with two or three families for washing dishes and clothes.

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Karachi is an old city with a poor municipal infrastructure. During the summer, with the demand from air conditioners and fans, electrical grids are commonly overwhelmed. When electricity is scarce, bastis are the recipients of a biased government system called “load shedding” which means electricity is withheld from slums in favor of elite neighborhoods. Therefore, few homes in Asam Colony have regular electricity. Most people use kerosene lanterns for light and find no respite from the summer desert heat. There are few working sanitation structures. Human waste is visible in the streets in narrow open sewers called nalas. Residents pay for a weekly water delivery that they store in metal containers.\textsuperscript{77} Because of the high cost of water, two or three families usually share this water. Because of overcrowding and poor sanitation, infection and disease is rampant.\textsuperscript{78}

In Karachi, as in most of Pakistan, caste discrimination against Chuhra Christians is acute in bastis. In the next section, I show how ‘caste consciousness’ manifests in Pakistan. First, I describe how purity and pollution function in Pakistan through the concept of pak (clean) and na-pak (unclean). Second, I describe social discrimination against Chuhra Christians that relate to norms of purity and pollution. Such persecution manifests through physical assault and commensal segregation because of Dali ancestry and polluting occupations.

4. 

Caste Discrimination against Chuhra Christians

4.1. Purity and Pollution: Pak and Na-Pak

In Pakistan, unlike India, there is no public discourse on caste. However, ‘caste consciousness’ does manifest in social interactions between Muslims and Hindu Dalits or Dalit

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
converts to Christianity and Islam. Haris Gazdar argues, “the public silencing on caste [in Pakistan] contrasts with an obsession with it in private dealings and transactions.” Public discourse in Pakistan prefers to frame social discrimination against Chuhra Christians and Musalli Muslims as a “class-not-caste” issue. However, Ghazdar claims, that in ‘off the record’ conversations with public officials, “the village joke is always about caste, and at its receiving end usually stands a ‘chuhra’ or a ‘mussali.’” Similarly, John O’Brien notes that social dynamics in Pakistan are guided by norms of purity and pollution that manifest through different dress, the use of utensils, and social intercourse. This indicates an awareness of ‘caste consciousness’ in Pakistan which manifests in particular contexts.

Islam does not have a concept of caste and does not categorize society into ‘high’ and ‘low’ castes. Therefore, there are few published studies about caste among Muslims in India or Pakistan. Some scholars argue that caste practices do affect Muslims in the subcontinent, especially in India. Partap Aggarwal argues that while ‘purity and pollution’ in Islam is not as pronounced as Brahmanical Hinduism, there is a notion of ‘pak’ and ‘na-pak’ which means ‘clean/pure’ and ‘unclean/impure.’ Edward Simpson suggests that pak and na-pak relate to two kinds of purity. “One form of purity is derived from bodily processes (urination, menstruation,
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birth and death) and can be removed by acts of purification.”86 Bodily products that occur below the neck including urine and sexual fluids are ‘impure’ or *na-pak*.87 Simpson notes that these forms of purity are external as they relate to “hygiene and the tangible ritual and social purity of a body.”88 In contrast, “the second order of impurity in Islam is more fundamental and relates to blood, as substance, and the bio-moral combinations it sustains.”89 Simpson asserts that, “blood can, therefore, be pure and impure as well as the array of conditions in between the two extremes.”90

The concept of *pak/na-pak* connects to purity and pollution. The removal of waste, human excreta and sanitation work are all ‘polluting’ occupations despite the fact that these jobs actually purify a household and a society by the removal of defiling substances.91 People who engage in these professions, for example, municipal and domestic sweepers are often categorized as ‘promoters of pollution.’ Webster argues, “a number of recent sociological studies indicate that, despite all the changes that have occurred in the past sixty years, the idea of inherent pollution continues to be what sets Dalits apart.”92 Dalits inherit pollution through birth and occupation. V.R. Gomala argues, “Descent-based discrimination based on caste imposes social exclusion on persons belonging to Dalit castes. It is clearly seen in their physical separation from

86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
the dominant caste in housing patterns, strict enforcement of the prohibition of inter-dining at public places, and the degrading occupations like manual scavenging.\textsuperscript{93}

Indigenous religious practices in Islam are also associated with purity and impurity. For example, a menstruating woman is unclean or \textit{na-pak} and should abstain from saying prayers until the end of her period.\textsuperscript{94} It is a common practice in Pakistan that a Muslim should not say prayers while having impure or immoral thoughts. Pakistani Muslims also refrain from reading the Qur’an after touching a \textit{na-pak} or defiling object.\textsuperscript{95} Therefore, the words \textit{pak} and \textit{na-pak}, as described above, can relate to ritual. In other instances, they convey very general ideas of cleanliness and uncleanness. For example, one might refer to food from a street vendor as \textit{na-pak} to denote that it is unsanitary/unclean. In a similar way, sanitation work is \textit{na-pak} because it involves contact with defiling and polluting substances. However, in most \textit{bastis}, the concept of \textit{pak} and \textit{na-pak} resonate with Simpson and extend beyond hygiene to include “bio-moral” ramifications.\textsuperscript{96}

In many \textit{bastis}, Muslim perception of ‘Christian’ behavior further complicates the concept of \textit{pak} and \textit{na-pak}. These perceptions are exacerbated by media depictions of Christian

\textsuperscript{94} The general Qur’anic verse cited to support the notion that a woman is unclean when menstruating is, “They will ask you about menstruation. Say, ‘It is harmful, so keep away from women during it. Do not approach them until they are purified of it, when they are purified you may approach them as Allah has ordained.” (Qur’an 2:222).
\textsuperscript{95} The verse for ritual cleaning before prayer that is most often cited is, “Believers, when you prepare for prayer, wash your faces, and your hands to the elbows; wipe your heads and wash your feet to the ankles. If you are in a state of ceremonial impurity, then purify yourselves. But if you are ill, or on a journey, or one of you has relieved himself, or have been in contact with women, and find no water, then take for yourselves clean sand, and rub your faces and hands with it. Allah does not wish to place you in a difficulty, but to make you clean, and to complete his favour to you, that you may be grateful.”(Qur’an 5:6).
\textsuperscript{96}Simpson, \textit{Muslim Society}, 96.
participation in *na-pak* activities. Such activities include drinking alcohol.\(^97\) Pakistani laws that only legally permit the sale of alcohol to religious minorities further intensify this misconception. While Christians and Hindus do own the liquor stores in Karachi, they are not the largest consumers of alcohol especially considering the high expense. Whether the government publically denies it or not; many upper class Muslims drink alcohol. Social activists argue that many Muslim *basti* residents hold the perception that Christians regularly drink alcohol, which makes them *na-pak*.\(^98\) The ritual of Holy Communion which most *basti* Muslims know includes wine, further highlights this notion.\(^99\) All Chuhra churches in the *basti* use grape juice during Communion because wine is not easily available. But most *basti* Muslims believe that Christians consume alcohol regularly.

Hasan Ali argues that in India, when Muslims identify customs that are antithetical to their own, it amplifies notions of *pak* and *na-pak*.\(^100\) Ali notes that in Bihar, Muslims think Hindu women are *na-pak* because they do not observe *purdah* (covering in public). “The women of the Rais (green grocers) do not observe *purdah* and engage in fruit and vegetable selling in public. Dhobis and Bhangis [sweepers] also violate the norms of *purdah* and freely carry on their traditional occupations.”\(^101\) Therefore, as Ali suggest, social behavior, which is ‘distinct’ from Muslim culture, is *na-pak*. This creates many issues for sweeper women. Because of the physicality of their professions, many sweeper women in *bastis* do not observe *purdah*. Chuhra

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\(^98\) Shah, “Pakistan’s Sweepers,” 6.
\(^99\) Ibid.
\(^100\) Ibid.
women are recipients of caste discrimination in the basti based on a perception that they are na-pak and have ‘loose morals.’

One reason for this misconception relates to depictions of ‘Christians’ in cinema and television. Ameena Khan argues that prejudicial stereotyping of Christian women is common in local television shows in Pakistan. These television programs show ‘Christian’ women with loose morals and behavior that is antithetical to Islamic norms and culture. American and western television shows reinforce this ideology with depictions of scantily clad women who are ‘Christian’ because they are ‘western.’ Most basti residents have access of satellite television and watch American and British shows on a regular basis. Sometimes these shows are dubbed in Punjabi and/or Urdu. Pakistan censors sexual intimacy from most television shows but not clothing. Khan argues that such portrayals of ‘Christian’ women cultivate a perception of moral laxity among Chuhra bastis because they are ‘Christian.’

A prominent theme of pak and na-pak also relates to differences between Muslim and Christian ritual. Many basti Muslims hold the perception that Christians do not engage in ritual ablution before prayer, therefore, they are na-pak. This relates to other prejudicial stereotyping that serves to separate Chuhra Christians from Muslim residents in bastis. One Muslim said that

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102 Aliani, “Caste in Pakistan.”
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid, 5.
106 Aliani, “Caste in Pakistan.”
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Christians do not wash their hands after urination, which makes them na-pak.\textsuperscript{108} Local imams in \textit{bastis} report good relations with Chuhra Christians. However, there is a hesitancy to share food with Chuhra Christians because of their polluting work and a belief that they consume na-pak foods.\textsuperscript{109} Khan notes that many Muslims in \textit{bastis} believe that Chuhra Christians eat pork, which is haram (prohibited); subsequently, all Christians are na-pak.\textsuperscript{110} Even though pork is not available in Pakistan, there is a connection between Chuhra Christians and the consumption of na-pak food. Such beliefs of na-pak behavior of Chuhra Christians exacerbate social discrimination against the community. This discrimination manifests in two pertinent ways, through physical assault and violence, and commensal segregation.

4.2. Physical Assault and Violence

Patrick Sookhdeo argues that the single reason for social discrimination against Chuhra Christians is the Hindu caste system, which has “remained entrenched in the community consciousness of Pakistanis in Punjab and Sind.”\textsuperscript{111} Sookhdeo also argues that the link between ‘caste consciousness’ in Pakistan and the Hindu caste system is purity and pollution.\textsuperscript{112} Because of Chuhra Christian ancestry, many Muslims consider them polluted and worthy of contempt. This emerges through various forms of social degradation including physical assault. In 1997, Muslim prisoners forced a Chuhra Christian cellmate to clean latrines in the prison.\textsuperscript{113} Because so many Chuhra Christians are employed in polluting occupations, many Muslims believe that

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} Khan, “The Negative Stereotypes,” 8.
\textsuperscript{111} Patrick Sookhdeo, \textit{A People Betrayed: The Impact of Islamization on the Christian Community in Pakistan} (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications and Isaac Publishing, 2002), 180.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, 181.
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degrad ing work such as cleaning latrines is reserved for their community. Sookhdeo argues that this type of behavior is common in a society where there is an acute awareness of purity and pollution.¹¹⁴ In the prison, the Chuhra Christian man refused to clean the latrine.¹¹⁵ For his refusal, he was beaten and forced to lick excrement from the bottom of the prison latrine.¹¹⁶ Prison guards did nothing to stop his attackers from this assault partially because he was a Chuhra.

As I discuss earlier, many Chuhra Christians are uneducated and illiterate. This means they have few employment options. Many Chuhra Christians work as temporary laborers for landlords (zamindars) in Pakistan. These relationships are unequal and exploitive. The Human Rights Monitor reports, “Approximately half of the six million bonded labourers in the country belong to religious minorities, mainly Christians and Hindus.”¹¹⁷ The National Commission for Justice and Peace in Pakistan reports that the majority of bonded laborers in Pakistan are Chuhra Christians and Hindu Dalits.¹¹⁸ Asma Jahangir from the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan argues that almost 80 percent of bonded laborers especially in brick-kiln factories are Christian.¹¹⁹ These laborers are subjects of physical violence because of the perception that they are weak and have no political capital. Brick-kiln workers face severe discrimination and exploitation with very little legal recourse. Dalit ancestry often exacerbates such incidents of violence and assault.

¹¹⁴ Sookhdeo, A People Betrayed, 215.
¹¹⁵ Shirvanee, “Crisis of Identity.”
¹¹⁶ Ibid.
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The Human Rights Monitor reports that exploitive forms of labor often include violence and physical assault. In brick-kilns, many landlords withhold payment from employees and provide few benefits to Dalit workers. In 2000, a Christian man died while working under inhuman conditions. While administering pesticides without any protective gear, he suffocated from poisonous fumes. His family received no compensation for his death.\textsuperscript{120} Aamer Masih, a Chuhra Christian was tortured by his landlord for demanding wages which were withheld for six months for no apparent cause.\textsuperscript{121} He died because of his injuries.\textsuperscript{122} In August 2000, James Masih, a brick-kiln worker was severely beaten by his landlord with no legal recourse.\textsuperscript{123} The kiln owner beat Masih with a stick fracturing his arm and breaking his leg. The kiln owner left him unconscious and bleeding in front of his home. The root of the violence was an outstanding debt.\textsuperscript{124} Khalil Ramdey, Advocate General of the Punjab argues, “Most of the workers in the industry are Christians and even on this score being the minority they perhaps do not feel confident to enough to challenge the maltreatment that is meted out to them.”\textsuperscript{125}

In addition to bonded labor, norms of purity and pollution in Pakistani society affect other modes of violence against Chuhra Christians. Khawaja argues that Chuhra Christians in bastis routinely suffer violence and assault from the larger community based on Dalit ancestry.\textsuperscript{126} “As well as living in extreme poverty, Christians face religious and caste discrimination from people all around […] and are also called derogatory terms such as

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{120} Human Rights Monitor, 57.
  \item \textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{122} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{125} Khalil Ramdey, \textit{All Pakistan Legal Decisions Vol. XLII} (Lahore: Lahore Legal Press, 1995), SC 555.
  \item \textsuperscript{126} Khawaja, “Pakistan’s Untouchables.”
\end{itemize}
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‘Churas’ (low caste) and ‘Bhungys’ (sweepers) on an everyday basis.”

127 She also argues that violence against sweepers in bastis is common. “Christian sweepers take their place in the lower strata of society, their voices unheard and their stories unreported.”

128 In many bastis, verbal discrimination often translates into forms of physical assault and violence. In a report by the Karachi Interfaith Society, social activist, Ali Murtaza argues that most violence against Chuhra Christians stem from Dalit ancestry and sanitation work. 129 Chuhra men, particularly in the sanitation industry often wear municipal uniforms. This identifies them as ‘sanitation workers,’ an inherently ‘polluted’ occupation. Therefore, many sweeper men in bastis are recipients of violence sometimes because of a mistake, a misunderstanding, or an accident.

In 2009, a sweeper inadvertently bumped into other man who was waiting for the bus. Five men, who were present at the bus station, beat the ‘Chuhra’ sweeper for this accident. 130 In 2010, a Chuhra sweeper employed with the Karachi municipality was returning home from work. He was carrying two bundles of unstitched cloth he purchased for his wife and daughter. On his way home, three men attacked him. He was beaten and robbed. 131 In 2011, Elijah Masih, a resident of Asam Colony was walking home from work and accidentally knocked over a motorcycle that belonged to a Muslim resident. Angered that a ‘Chuhra’ had touched his property, this resident attacked Masih and beat him. 132 In 2010, Nizam Masih, a Chuhra Christian was buying fruit from the local fruit seller in Asam Colony. Offended that a Chuhra should purchase fruit from the same vendor as other basti residents, four men beat Nizam Masih...

127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
130 Ibid, 5.
131 Ibid.
132 Ibid.
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until he apologized for his intrusion.\textsuperscript{133} Such attacks are frequent in \textit{bastis} and are often unreported. While social activists try to raise awareness about violence against Chuhra Christians, local police ignore most reports of discrimination against the community.

The third form of violence that connects to Chuhra Christian identity and ‘pollution’ emerges against women. Sweeper women in particular are the recipients of caste based sexual assault in urban slums and rural villages in Pakistan. Aliani argues, “Dalit women are one of the poorest and most vulnerable group of individuals in the country. They are politically and socially excluded from the mainstream and vulnerable to discrimination and violence due to their gender as well as their caste.”\textsuperscript{134} Shah argues that Dalit women are victims of both verbal and physical assault in Pakistan. Because these women are economically powerless, men are more likely to attack and assault them.\textsuperscript{135} “Dalit women say when they go to towns and cities for work they are easily recognized from their dresses so people not only stare at them but also make derogatory remarks.”\textsuperscript{136} Similar issues relating to dress and clothing are present among Chuhra women in \textit{bastis}.

Multiple issues emerge from clothing that makes Chuhra sweeper women vulnerable to physical assault and violence. First, many Chuhra women work for the municipality as sweepers and therefore wear uniforms. These uniforms serve to identify these women as ‘sweepers.’ Because so many Christians work in the sanitation industry, these uniforms also identify these women as ‘Christians.’ Second, municipal sweeping jobs have a public dimension. Sweepers clean city streets, public latrines, and sewage pipes. This means that many people see sweeper

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{134} Aliani, “Caste in Pakistan.”
\textsuperscript{135} Shah, “Long Behind Schedule,” 73.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
women working throughout the city all day, which makes them easy to target. Third, sweeper women, in general, do not observe purdah because of the public and strenuous nature of their work. It is a difficult task for sweeper women to maintain wearing a headscarf, which is part of basti ‘culture’ because their jobs are so physically demanding. Therefore, most sweeper women do not cover their head while working. This practice is not common in bastis where all women cover their head in public. This serves to separate sweepers from other women in the basti and amplifies stereotypes of Chuhra women having ‘loose morals.’

The identification of sweeper women as na-pak, ‘polluted,’ and powerless make them the most vulnerable members of the Chuhra Christian community. Gazdar argues that he documented cases of rape against Mussali and Chuhra women all over the country in urban slums and rural villages.137 The common thread between these assaults is the assumption that ‘low caste’ women have no socio-political capital. “The perpetrators were all well-known and there was a feeling that they committed these crimes because they could get away with it, knowing full well that the victims were socially and political weak.”138 Shah argues that this is main reason why most attacks against Chuhra and Dalit women are unreported. “Due to the victim’s weaker position, police and other officials hardly take any action on the complaints of Dalits. In many cases they do not report such incidents expecting further victimization.”139 Gazdar also asserts that the powerlessness and vulnerability of these women stems from the notion that Chuhras have no ‘honor’ in Pakistani society. “In the language of the dominant

138 Ibid.
groups the “low castes” had no honour, and certainly no honour that could be defended.”

Hence, the physical assault and rape of Chuhra women is socially acceptable in many parts of the country.

The Human Rights Monitor in Pakistan actively records incidents of sexual assault against Chuhra women. The common thread between attacks is, as Gazdar suggests, the lack of honor and respect for Chuhra Christians. In May 2000, seven Chuhra Christian girls were gang raped at gunpoint on their way home from work. A Muslim woman was traveling with them but the perpetrators did not assault her. In 2000, a four-month pregnant Chuhra woman was raped and tortured by her landlord. She was accused of stealing a gold ring and although she denied any knowledge of its disappearance, her landlord and several other men in the household gang raped and tortured her to death. Through the intervention of Christian political leaders, the family filed a police report and the men were arrested. This is not the norm in most incidents of sexual assault in Chuhra and low caste communities. Most cases are unreported because of the inherent shame associated with sexual assault and rape in Pakistani culture. Nazir Bhatti, president of the Pakistan Christian Congress, states that because of the ‘shame’ associated with rape, 99 percent of assaults involving Christian women are unreported.

Sexual assault is rampant in bastis and in poor neighborhoods and sweeper women are the most common victims of these crimes. Because of their low social capital, many Chuhra women do not report these crimes for fear of further attack. This is a growing concern for social

140 Ibid.
141 Monitor, A Report on Religious Minorities, 86.
142 Ibid, 87.
143 Ibid.
144 Ibid.
activists and Christian leaders who want to raise awareness of such issues in Pakistan. In 2011, a
sweeper was traveling home on a rickshaw when the driver propositioned her for sex. When she
refused, he took her to a remote area and raped her. In 2011, two men raped a Christian
woman who has five children. Both the woman and her husband report that they were afraid to
report the incident to the police. The *Pakistani Christian Post* reports, “The couple said that
Muslims [in the neighborhood] told them they should not forget that they were chooras or
‘sweepers.’ These men also threatened to rape their daughters.” In 2012, three men raped a
sweeper who lives in their neighborhood. She did not report the incident to the police for fear of
an additional attack.

Female sweepers also face verbal assault and social humiliation in *bastis*. Social activist
Feroze Ansari notes that many *basti* Muslims call female sweepers *na-pak* and inappropriately
touch them in public spaces. Ansari argues that sweeper women in *bastis* generally accept
these insults because they fear further attacks against their families. Because many sweeper
women often travel alone on public transport, they are more susceptible to verbal and physical
assault. On buses and rickshaws, men routinely verbally assault sweeper women. In 2012, a
sweeper woman on a city bus was harassed on her way to work. Men on the bus pulled at her
clothing while calling her a ‘Chuhra’ and soliciting her for sex. In 2013, a bus driver forced a

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146 “Progress in Pakistani Rape Case,” *The Christian Post*, October 5, 2011. Accessible from:
147 Ibid.
149 Feroze Ansari, “Meet Your Sweeper,” Karachi Minority Rights Association, (Unpublished Report, Karachi,
Pakistan, 2012).
150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.
153 Ibid.
sweeper woman to ride in the front of the bus with the men because the women’s section was full. The men on the bus harassed her while she was on the bus and touched her inappropriately. Some sweeper women experience similar forms of harassment while at work. One sweeper claims that people on the street often call her a ‘Chuhra’ while she is collecting refuse. Such modes of discrimination have a psychological dimension and reinforce the outcaste status of Chuhra Christians in Pakistan.

An additional issue for Chuhra and Dalit women in Pakistan is kidnapping. In Sindh, many young Dalit and Chuhra girls are victims of kidnapping. The Catholic Church reports that at least 700 Christian girls from low caste families are kidnapped every year. Sometimes these women return to their families and at other times, they forcibly marry their kidnappers. The Asian Human Rights Commission reports between Hindu Dalits and Chuhras, there are almost 1800 reported cases a year of low caste kidnappings. In 2001, Nadia Bibi, a fifteen-year-old Christian girl was abducted from her home. She returned to her family after 10 years when she managed to escape her kidnapper. Shah argues that because Chuhra and Dalit women are marginalized in society, Muslim men and landlords consider them “sexually available.” Kidnapping is one way for landlords to control low caste women and also bring shame to their families. “As the men of scheduled caste families are also economically weaker with no social

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155 Ibid.
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid.
158 Ibid.
160 Ibid.
support or political leverage in the community, their younger women are lured into matrimony or abducted and wed through forced conversions.\(^\text{161}\)

Sookhdeo argues that abduction, kidnapping, and forced conversions are interrelated issues in Chuhra Christian communities.\(^\text{162}\) Many men kidnap Chuhra women and then force then to convert to Islam and enter into a marriage contract.\(^\text{163}\) Haroon Barkat Masih, director of the Masihi Foundation, a Pakistani legal aid organization argues, “Kidnapping Christian girls, conversion and forced marriages have become common practice.”\(^\text{164}\) Sookhdeo suggests that many women do not protest kidnappings because they are afraid of repercussions. In 2011, Rebecca Masih and Saima Masih, two sisters were kidnapped by a wealthy businessman. After he abducted them, he forced them to convert to Islam so he could marry both sisters.\(^\text{165}\) In 2010, two Christian girls in a basti were kidnapped on their way home from school.\(^\text{166}\) Although there were many witnesses, police claim they have no evidence to support the claim that the girls were abducted.\(^\text{167}\) Such forms of violence create an environment of fear for Chuhra Christians as they have little legal recourse or police protection against such crimes.

### 4.3. Commensal Segregation

‘Caste consciousness’ in Pakistan, though not openly acknowledged, is still prevalent particularly in bastis and rural areas. One pertinent practice through which people negotiate caste is apparent through commensal segregation. In bastis, many Muslims shun contact with Chuhra

\(^{161}\) Ibid, 71.  
\(^{162}\) Sookhdeo, A People Betrayed, 205.  
\(^{163}\) Ibid.  
\(^{166}\) Ibid.  
\(^{167}\) Ibid.
Christians because of Dalit ancestry and their occupation in the sanitation industry. In 2012, Asif Aqeel, the director of the Centre for Law and Justice in Lahore wrote, “Caste is still very much alive in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Muslims avoid proximity with the Christians due to the latter’s origins – unknown even to most Pakistani Christians—in low caste.”

He further notes that in some places, discrimination is so pronounced, “Muslim barbers refuse to give Christians haircuts, as it involves physical contact. In Sikandarabad village, Kot Radha Kishan, Kasur District, there are about 15 Christian families who cut each other’s hair.” These practices are common in lower-income areas, such as bastis and amplified by norms of pak and na-pak in Pakistan.

Haris Gazdar notes that in Pakistan, “everyday forms of exclusion revolve around taboos regulating eating and drinking together and sharing utensils. Bheels, Kolhis, Bagris, Lachhis and other Scheduled Castes that we met in Sindh and Balochistan are served in plates and bowls that are kept separate from the rest in local eateries. They have to wash these utensils themselves after use. The same is true of the Christian ‘chuhras.’” The social taboo against inter-dining is also a prominent feature of caste dynamics in India. Paramjit S. Judge argues that commensal segregation is one of the most pervasive forms of caste discrimination against Dalits. In an extensive ethnographic study, Judge questioned several upper caste respondents about their willingness to inter-dine with Dalits. Judge claims that the respondents were initially hesitant to

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169 Ibid.

170 Gazdar, “Class, Caste, or Race.”

answer truthfully because they were unaware of his caste background. Eventually, most admitted that inter-dining between high and low castes is both unlikely and infrequent.\textsuperscript{172}

In Judge’s study, ninety-seven percent of Dalit respondents experienced commensal discrimination in rural villages and urban centers.\textsuperscript{173} One hundred percent of Dalit respondents acknowledged that upper caste people are hesitant to share cooked food with Dalits.\textsuperscript{174} In a broad survey in India, the National Commission for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes reports, “In many tea-shops and dhabas (food stalls), separate crockery and cutlery are used to serve Dalits. The ‘two glass system,’ whereby Dalits use a separate set of glasses for tea-drinking which they are then required to wash, is practiced in nearly a third of villages surveyed in the report.”\textsuperscript{175}

Such practices are also prevalent among converted Dalits including Christians. Rowena Robinson notes that high caste Christians in Kerala, serve Dalit Christians food in different dishes.\textsuperscript{176} High caste Christians also maintain a physical distance from Dalit Christians and sit at separate tables even during Christian festivals.\textsuperscript{177}

The two-dish and two-glass system whereby high castes serve Dalits in separate dishes manifests social hierarchy in India in a physical manner. Separate tables further punctuate the distinction between the two groups. K.C. Alexander notes that until the mid-1960s, the Pulaya Christians (Dalits) received food in a broken dish from upper caste Christians which they were

\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid, 116.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid.
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responsible for washing. Such practices indicate an acute awareness of purity and pollution that determines social interaction between Dalits and the upper castes even in converted communities. Such norms while not as pronounced as in India, do manifest in Pakistan, especially in urban slums. Jodhka and Shah argue, “Almost the entire Christian population of Pakistan are converts from Dalit communities and many of them continue to be treated so even today by the dominant communities of the country.” This translates into commensal segregation for most Chuhra Christians especially in bastis.

For most Chuhra Christians, basti Muslims have an acute consciousness of pak and na-pak that they do not encounter with Muslim employers. Chuhra Christians report that Muslim restaurant owners routinely refuse them service because of their occupation in the sanitation industry. In some instances, Chuhras are required to bring their own utensils and water glasses to a restaurant. One sweeper reports that local restaurants charge her five rupees for water because they will not re-use the cup after she touches it. The five rupees is to replace the cup. Journalist Haroon Khalid argues that even in prominent cities, “Muslims refuse to eat with Christians and consider utensils touched by them to be impure” based on their Dalit ancestry. Khalid claims that because of these taboos, many Christians will ‘announce’ their ‘caste’ or their

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181 Gazdar, “Class, Caste, or Race,” 8.
182 Ibid.
Christian identity upon entering a restaurant “so that the owner takes the necessary precautions, to avoid embarrassment later.”

Sookhdeo argues that in parts of Pakistan, commensal segregation is so strong that many Muslims will not share utensils with Chuhra Christians. 

In some instances, Chuhra Christians are prohibited from sharing the communal water faucet and eating in the same room as Muslims. Municipal sweepers are often the worst recipients of commensal segregation. A municipal sweeper claims that Muslim vegetable vendors in bastis reserve bruised and spoiled fruit that they separate for na-pak people. This is the only fruit and vegetables that most vendors offer to the sweeper community. One basti resident asserts, “We are treated as a lower caste, as if we are dirty because our work is unclean.” This sweeper also notes, “What other choices do we have? This is the only option in the end, other than begging. We aren’t even allowed to eat from the same plates as Muslims and are told to buy the plates and glasses when we go somewhere to eat.” One municipal sweeper reports that at work, Muslim sweepers do not invite him to share food with them. His colleagues also do not permit him to use the same water canteen or drinking glasses that they use.

Sookhdeo argues that most Chuhra Christians, regardless of employment status, experience some form of commensal segregation in Pakistan. Many Chuhra women who work

184 Ibid, 81.
185 Sookhdeo, A People Betrayed, 231.
186 Ibid.
188 Ibid.
189 Khawaja, “Pakistan’s Untouchables.”
190 Ibid.
192 Ibid.
193 Sookhdeo, A People Betrayed, 231.
as domestic aides, report that their wealthy Muslim employers do not display any ‘caste consciousness’ toward their community. Instead, taboos on inter-dining and caste discrimination emerge from other lower class Muslims in the household staff. A Chuhra sweeper who cleans six houses in one neighborhood in Karachi brought a cake and other food for her employer to celebrate her daughter’s marriage. The employers ate the cake but the household staff, mostly Muslim did not eat the food she brought to work. Another Chuhra maid notes that she brings her own utensils to work. While her employers have no problems with her using their utensils and plates, other household aides are hesitant. A Chuhra nanny reports that Muslim staff members at work do not want to share the bathroom with her. Although her Muslim employer has no issue with the staff using the same bathroom, the other employees insist on the separation.

In some instances, norms of pak and na-pak in Pakistani also affect social interactions between Muslims and middle class Christians. It is significant to note that these occasions are rare. In 1997, Dawn, the largest English newspaper in Pakistan reported that during a Home Economics exam at St. Mary’s School in Gujarat, the Muslim examiner would not taste the food made by Christian students. While the examiner tested the food cooked by Muslim students, she threw away the food prepared by the Christian students. This story was widely reported by various media outlets in Pakistan. It created an outrage among Muslims and Christians and

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194 Ansari, “Meet Your Sweeper,” 5.
195 Ibid.
196 Ibid.
197 Ibid.
198 Sookhdeo, A People Betrayed, 232.
200 Ibid.
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sparked a national debate about Christian persecution in Pakistan. I utilize this story to illustrate the inequality in the treatment of middle class and Chuhra Christians in Pakistan. English newspapers do not often report similar incidents of discrimination against Chuhra Christians in bastis. In addition, such events do not spark the same level of outrage or self-reflection in Pakistan.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I argue that although there is no official concept of caste in Pakistan, ‘caste consciousness’ is a prevalent feature of social dynamics in the country. Chuhra Christians because of Dalit ancestry and occupation in the sanitation industry are recipients of caste persecution including physical violence, assault, and commensal segregation. Because of low social capital and poverty, Chuhra Christians rarely report incidents of violence. Chuhra women in particular do not report rape because of the shame associated with sexual assault. Because of Pakistani norms of *pak* and *na-pak*, many Muslims consider Chuhra Christians unclean and impure. In bastis and in rural areas, commensal segregation is rampant and emerges as an integral part of ‘caste consciousness’ in Pakistan. In general, middle class Christians are not recipients of caste based discrimination in Pakistani society. If such incidents do occur, media outlets in Pakistan report them with alacrity. In contrast, caste discrimination against Chuhra Christians is largely ignored.

In the next chapter, I describe Chuhra Christian ritual and practice in basti churches. Because of the concept of *pak* and *na-pak* in Pakistan, many Chuhra Christians are acutely aware of the pollution associated with their community. They are conscious that many Muslims regard them as ‘unclean’ and that many middle class Christians shun associations with their community.
because of Dalit ancestry. Through sermons and in church pamphlets, Chuhra pastors reject middle class Christian ritual and practice as a form of protest against caste persecution in Pakistan. Such modes of dissent also enable Chuhra Christians to find empowerment in their own ritual and practice.
Chapter 3: Chuhra Christian Ritual and Practice

**Introduction**

In a church pamphlet from November 2011, a Chuhra pastor notes, “the women in amir [wealthy] churches do not cover their head. This is na-pak.”¹ This statement indicates two issues that are prevalent for an analysis of Chuhra Christian ritual and practice. The first is a heightened awareness of ‘pollution’ and second, a rejection of middle class Christian religious practice. In India, many Christian Dalits face caste discrimination within the church. In Pakistan, there is no segregation within churches. However, there is separation between churches. In Karachi, there is limited social interaction between middle class Christians and basti Christians based on socio-economic, class, and caste distinctions. As I show in Chapter 2, Chuhra Christians are conscious that both basti Muslims and middle class Christians shun their community because of their Dalit ancestry. Distinctions in ritual and practice further separate Chuhra Christians from middle class Christians.

In this chapter, I describe Chuhra Christian ritual and practice in the basti. Chuhra Christians are very connected to the church and have a rich and vibrant ritual life. In the first section, I provide a description of basti churches in Asam Colony including church architecture, the structure of services, hymns, and prayer circles. I highlight that in contrast to middle class churches in Karachi, basti churches are indigenized. While middle class churches are ‘western’ and services are in English, Chuhra services are in Punjabi and churches have absorbed many basti social norms such as gender segregation. Chuhra pastors and congregants exhibit much pride in their rituals and practices particularly in church music. As the above cited church

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¹ Church pamphlet, Church of Pakistan (COP), Pastor Shaukat Masih, Asam Colony, November 23, 2012.
pamphlet reveals, pastors often utilize pride in their church rituals to critique middle class Christian practice. What emerges from this criticism is the claim that Chuhra Christian ritual and practice is ‘superior’ and more ‘authentic’ compared to middle class Christians.

In the second section of this chapter, I focus on the ritual of ‘funeral drumming’ in the Chuhra Christian community. This is a significant practice in the basti and has a historic connection to Dalits in India. Drumming, because of its association with death and pollution is a distinctly Dalit ritual. Hindu upper castes in India do not participate in funeral drumming. In Pakistan, there is no stigma associated with drumming. The drum is not a symbol of ‘pollution’ in Islamic society. However, this ritual is still esoteric in the basti and is connected to both Hindu Dalits and Chuhra Christians. Pastors in Chuhra churches are aware of the Dalit connection with funeral drumming. Therefore, in church sermons and pamphlets, pastors engage in ‘reclaiming’ this activity by translating it into a ‘Christian practice.’ This reclamation enables basti Christians to participate in funeral drumming, a prevalent practice in their community, while removing its ‘polluted’ connection to Dalits.

A significant practice among Chuhra Christians is that pastors record church services. Most churches in Karachi bastis record at least one church service a month as well as special events including prayer circles, choir practice, baptisms, weddings, and funerals. There are also extra recordings of Easter, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day liturgies. Chuhra churches sell these DVDs in the church compound for a nominal fee. In services, pastors encourage congregants to purchase these DVDs when traveling outside Karachi for the holidays.\(^2\)

\(^2\) DVDs, Multiple services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.
congregants travel to Punjab during the summer and take these DVDs with them to share with family and friends. Churches also sell DVDs of church music and hymns. Many people outside the Chuhra community purchase these recordings because this style of church music is renowned in Karachi. All Chuhra churches in the basti sing the Punjabi zabur or ‘Psalms’ in church. This practice is distinct to Chuhra churches. Middle class Christian churches in Karachi do not sing the zabur. The Punjabi zabur is a respected musical tradition that both Muslims and Christians in Karachi enjoy. Therefore, many middle class people in Karachi purchase these recordings.

I utilize 45 DVDs from three separate Chuhra churches in Asam Colony ranging from 2008 and 2011. These DVDs include recordings of Sunday services, Easter, Christmas as well as special events such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals. These DVDs provide many details of Chuhra Christian ritual and practice such as music, hymns, and sermons in basti churches. In addition to DVDs of church services, pastors also sell weekly pamphlets in the church compound for a nominal fee. In some pamphlets, pastors address issues that are prevalent in the community such as social discrimination. Others pamphlets are repetitions of church sermons. Utilizing 50 pamphlets and DVDs from three churches in the basti I describe church services and analyze sermons. In addition, I am a member of the Church of Pakistan (COP) in Karachi. I have attended countless services, baptisms, weddings, and funerals. I also integrate my personal knowledge of church services in this chapter.

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3 Ibid.
1. Ritual and Practice in Chuhra Churches

1.1. Chuhra Churches in Asam Colony

The largest Protestant denomination in Karachi is the Church of Pakistan (COP), which was established in 1970 through a merger of Anglicans, Methodists, and Lutherans. The majority of Chuhra Christians in Karachi bastis are members of the COP. There are three COP Chuhra churches in Asam Colony. Because this is a ‘mixed’ basti, these churches are centrally located near residential housing or local mosques. Churches are open to the public and anyone can attend these services. Each of the COP churches in the basti is very similar in architecture. The churches are small, concrete structures with a staircase on the side that leads into the building. All the churches are white and have no exterior embellishments, for example, no mosaic or tile, which are common for local mosques in the area. A wooden cross on the roof of every church is wrapped in purple cloth. A small sign of the side of the building says ‘Church of Pakistan’ in English. Under the English name, there is a second sign in Urdu that says “masihi” or “Messiah.” Before entering the church, congregants remove their shoes and place them on a wooden rack outside the building. This is standard practice for all mosques in Pakistan and is prevalent in basti churches.

Inside Chuhra churches, there is usually one large open room. The floor is constructed of marble which is relatively inexpensive in Karachi. Brightly colored dhurris (woven rugs) cover the floor. The dhurris are spread on each side of the room leaving a walkway in the middle that leads to the altar. The altar is a simple, raised platform made of wood with a podium, a

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4 Barrett, World Christian Encyclopedia, 543.
microphone, and a cross. The cross is generally constructed of wood with no carvings. There are no crucifixes in any Chuhra churches in the basti. The church interior in all three churches has simple decorations. There are no images inside churches for example, no paintings of Jesus, Mary, or the saints. There are also no statues or stained glass windows in any basti churches. There are usually three or four brightly colored wall decorations near the altar. These large pieces of embroidery or beading are made by female congregants for the church and hang near the altar. One side of the church is lined with windows that open into the basti streets. These windows remain open during Sunday services. There are no chairs or pews in any of the churches; all congregants sit on the floor.

COP Chuhra churches practice gender segregation. Inside the church, men sit on the left side and women and children sit on the right. This is standard socio-religious practice in the basti where men and women do not have physical contact in public. In Chuhra churches, even married couples do not sit together in church. Following basti norms, all Chuhra women cover their head once inside the church. Young girls over five, also cover their head. There are no hymnals or prayer books in churches. Chuhra pastors carry an Urdu Bible to place on the podium. The Bibles are always covered with an embroidered cloth which is also made by female congregants. In general, pastors do not read from the Bible during services. When the pastor and his wife enter the church, all congregants stand and remain silent. The pastor then raises the Bible and blesses

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5 DVDs, Multiple services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
it with the words, ‘“Raab Humara Badsha Hai’ or ‘God is our King.’ After the blessing, congregants sit on the floor for the service.10

Church services are usually two and half-hours long. Even though the national language in Pakistan is Urdu, these church services are in Punjabi. At times, pastors speak Urdu in church but the liturgy is always in Punjabi.11 There is a lot of singing, noise, and revelry during church services. The atmosphere in all basti churches is very lively. Men and women socialize before, after, and during the church service. While the pastor delivers the sermons, congregants talk amongst each other and discuss the details of the sermon during the service. If they have questions, they stand and raise any issues or complaints or ask for clarification during the service. Children generally remain in the church during services. Sunday school is part of most churches but in the basti, but it only occurs twice a month.

1.2. Social Structure of Chuhra Churches

The social structure within Chuhra churches in Karachi is distinct from churches in Dalit churches in India. Numerous Dalit scholars in India argue that Indian churches are replete with multiple forms of social inequality and caste discrimination.12 Rowena Robinson notes that caste hierarchy, although not officially sanctioned by the church, is common in India and often emerges as spatial segregation.13 “In some south Goan villages, the benches

10 Ibid.
11 DVDs, Multiple services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.
13 Robinson, Christians of India, 77; John C.B. Webster, “From Indian Church to Indian Theology, An Attempt at Theological Construction,” in A Reader in Dalit Theology, Arvind P. Nirmal, ed., (Madras: Gurukal Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1990), 96.
closest to the altar are often tacitly reserved for the high caste celebrants on the occasion of church feasts. Low caste Kerala Christians usually occupy the back benches in churches [...]“Commensal segregation is also present in many Indian churches. Michael Barnes argues that the Roman Catholic Church in Tamil Nadu is replete with such discriminatory practices against Dalit congregants.15 David Mosse reports that in many churches, high caste Christians will not share the Communion cup with Dalits in the same congregation.16 In other churches, there is “wide and constant discrimination” against low caste members in the church.17

In Chuhra churches in the basti, there are no ‘high caste’ members. The churches are attended entirely by Chuhra Christians and yet, there are some observable forms of social discrimination. This discrimination manifests through spatial segregation with Chuhra sweepers in the church. Sweepers are identifiable in these churches because they tend to be the most socio-economically disadvantaged members of the community. Therefore, their clothing is distinct from other members of the church. Most Chuhra women and men wear their best clothes to church. Women wear very brightly colored outfits with bangles and jewelry. But the sweepers usually wear uniforms to church.18 In general, these municipal sweepers occupy the

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14 Ibid.
16 Mosse, The Saint and the Banyan Tree, 210-214; Robinson, Christians of India, 71.
18 DVDs, Multiple services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.
back of the church. Other members of the community sit closer to the altar near the front of the church.\textsuperscript{19}

While commensal segregation is prevalent in the \textit{basti} between Muslims and Christians and in Indian churches, there is no such practice in \textit{basti} churches. All congregants use the same Communion cup.\textsuperscript{20} However, in most Chuhra churches, the Communion cup does not pass through the congregation.\textsuperscript{21} Instead of sipping from the cup, the congregants walk up to the altar and receive a piece of \textit{chapatti} (flat bread) which they dip directly into the cup.\textsuperscript{22} This practice does not relate to commensal segregation but instead to the size of congregations. On a normal Sunday, there are roughly two hundred congregants in a COP \textit{basti} church service.\textsuperscript{23} At least five hundred congregants attend services on special occasions including Christmas and Easter as well as during baptisms and weddings.\textsuperscript{24} Children under the age of fifteen do not participate in Communion and the ritual is also segregated.\textsuperscript{25} Men take Communion first followed by the women in the congregation.\textsuperscript{26}

Midway through a normal church service, there is a church collection.\textsuperscript{27} Pastors use the Islamic term, ‘\textit{zakat}’ which means, ‘charitable donation’ for this practice.\textsuperscript{28} In Chuhra churches, \textit{zakat} is a very public event. Instead of passing the collection plate through the congregation,

\begin{itemize}
  \item[Ibid.]
  \item[Ibid.]
  \item[Ibid.]
  \item[Ibid.]
  \item[Ibid.]
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  \item[Ibid.]
\end{itemize}
congregants walk to the altar and give their zakat directly to the pastor.\textsuperscript{29} This is an odd practice because in most churches, donations are anonymous and discreetly placed in a bag or an envelope in a collection tray. In contrast, in basti churches, the pastor announces the monetary amount of each donation by loudspeaker.\textsuperscript{30} This takes considerable time especially during special services such as Easter or Christmas. If the donation is generous, congregants clap their hands and the church musicians play the drums.\textsuperscript{31} If the donation is small, the congregants do not respond in any particular way.\textsuperscript{32} This practice has the potential to create discord in the community. Many municipal sweepers are unable to donate as much money as other members of the congregation. This means that they do not often receive applause in the church when they walk to the altar to make a donation.\textsuperscript{33} But this practice is part of all Chuhra churches in the basti and pastors stress the need for congregants to give as much money as they can to the church.\textsuperscript{34}

Most sermons in Chuhra churches are forty-five minutes and include audience participation.\textsuperscript{35} In general, the pastor selects one biblical pericope and focuses the sermon on an analysis of this verse.\textsuperscript{36} The congregants in churches are very vocal and engage the sermons and the pastors during church services.\textsuperscript{37} There is an aspect of ‘call and response’ in most church services. For example, when the pastor recounts the details of Jesus’ death, the entire church

\textsuperscript{29} DVDs, Multiple services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
falls silent. However, when the pastor recounts Jesus’ resurrection, the entire congregation claps their hands and the church musicians play drums for several minutes. In other services, when the pastor discusses Jesus’ ministry, the congregants clap and the musicians play the drums. The children in church services are also very engaged and participate in clapping when the pastor says something that appeals to them. When the service draws to an end, the congregants say the words, “Yesu Jive” or “Jesus lives” while the musicians play the drums.

1.3. Music in Chuhra Churches

Music is a defining part of Chuhra churches in Karachi. All Chuhra churches have a large musical band and singing occupies the most time in church services. Frederick Stock reports that music is a significant form of religious communication among Dalits because it does not require reading. During his missionary work with Dalits in Sindh, Stock found that the caste responded enthusiastically to music:

A drummer stands in the center of the circle to give the beat while a lead person will sing the first line of a song and start dancing. All who want to participate repeat his line and fall in after him. He sings the whole song, line by line with them repeating each line after him. The Christians have composed several hymns using tunes with the dance beat and they enjoy singing them while dancing. One contains the Ten Commandments; another is the 23rd Psalm.

Stock reports, “They [Dalits] dislike the necessity of a religious leader having to read his teachings or songs from a book. Their own experienced leaders know hundreds of songs by heart and are always ready to sing them.” Stock’s observation is valid in basti churches where

38 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, October 2010.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
43 Ibid, 95.
singing is the main attraction for most congregants.\textsuperscript{44} Music in church churches is vibrant, loud, and the entire congregation participates in this activity.

COP churches in the \textit{basti}, have large musical bands with six or eight members. The musicians are all male.\textsuperscript{45} Musicians often wear white clothing and a green scarf. The musicians sit near the front of the church and play two main instruments, the \textit{dholak} and \textit{tabla}, which are both drums. Church musicians have a ‘choir’ that accompanies them— the choir is also male.\textsuperscript{46} Most choirs in the \textit{basti} have six or eight members. The hymns in Chuhra churches are in Punjabi and congregants recite hymns from memory. The hymns are called \textit{zabur}, or Punjabi Psalms and are distinct to these churches. Missionary Pauline Brown reports, “The \textit{zabur} [Punjabi Psalms] are a vital feature of Punjabi Christian culture, and are sung all over Pakistan whenever Punjabi Christians gather to worship—in villages, in sweeper colonies, or city churches. Whether they know little or much of the Christian faith, every Punjabi Christian knows the Psalms.”\textsuperscript{47} In the \textit{basti}, all COP congregants including the children know the \textit{zaburs} by heart.

In most churches, there is no discernible order to the hymns sung during a service. In most services, the pastor usually asks the congregation which \textit{zabur} they want to sing.\textsuperscript{48} The

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{44} Ibid.
\bibitem{45} DVDs, Multiple services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.
\bibitem{46} Ibid.
\bibitem{48} DVDs, Multiple services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.
\end{thebibliography}
only zabur that is consistent in all services is ‘Rab Khudawand Badsha Hai’ or ‘God is our King’ that indicates the beginning of each service. The full text of this zabur is:

\begin{verbatim}
Rab Khuawand Badsha Hai
Oh jalal da badsha hai

Uchche karo sir darwaze
Uchche ho sab daro
Jan jalal da badshah awe
Tad sir uchche karo

Rab Khuawand Badsha Hai
Oh jalal da badsha hai
\end{verbatim}

The translation of the zabur is, ‘God is our king, he is the king of all things. Everything is given to us by God, and everything we give him also belongs to him. God is our king.’ This is a favorite song for the three COP churches in the basti.

Singing in basti churches follows a very specific pattern. The pastor leads by singing the opening line of the hymn but does not sing the rest of the zabur. The male choir sings the first verse of each zabur and the female congregants sing the refrain. The rest of the male congregants do not sing but instead provide the tempo for the congregation through rhythmic clapping. Children also participate in singing. If they do not know the words, they clap along with the male congregants. Singing the zabur occupies the most time in Chuhra services. Each zabur takes several minutes to complete and most services include at least ten zaburs. After many songs, congregants often request an encore and sing a hymn for a second and even a third

\footnotesize{49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.}
time.\textsuperscript{55} As the church windows are open, this music flows throughout the \textit{bastis} on Sunday mornings. Many people in the \textit{basti} also know the words to the \textit{zabur}. They participate in singing while outside the church. After the service when pastors sell recordings of church music, many \textit{basti} residents purchase these tapes.

Most Chuhra women in the \textit{basti} participate in singing the \textit{zabur} in church and are the most vocal participants in the service.\textsuperscript{56} The women in the congregation usually stand when they sing and sometimes they sway and dance.\textsuperscript{57} Children also dance during services and clap their hands during the \textit{zabur}.\textsuperscript{58} The other dancers in the church are the members of the male choir.\textsuperscript{59} When the musicians play the drums, the younger members of the choir dance throughout the \textit{zabur}. While the choir dances near the front of the church, the women in the congregation dance near the back of the church.\textsuperscript{60} The two groups of dancers do not join together but instead remain separate.\textsuperscript{61} This follows norms of gender segregation in the \textit{basti}. Even during the service, men and women do not physically interact. The drummers in the church also actively participate in the \textit{zabur}. They know the drum beat for each song by heart and do not refer to sheet music.\textsuperscript{62}

In church services, the majority of congregants connect deeply with the \textit{zabur}.\textsuperscript{63} As many are illiterate, singing enables many congregants to reflect on the Psalms without engaging written text. Stock also found that music had a profound effect on Chuhra singers. In his

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{63} DVDs, Multiple services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.
\end{itemize}
missionary work among Dalits in Sindh, Stock found that music was the easiest way to form a connection with the community. “One singer was so overcome as he presented the story of the crucifixion in song before a village group that he himself was moved to tears. The truth of what Christ had done came home to him in new force as he became wrapped up in the music he was presenting. Many of his listeners too, were soon in tears.”64 In the basti churches, the zabur has a similar effect on congregants.65 Women in the congregation often weep while singing the zabur during church.66

Before the first zabur is sing in church, pastors usually discuss their significance to church services. Pastors refer to the importance of the zabur in sermons. In a November 2012 service, a pastor said, “the zabur is our special tradition and makes our community distinct.”67 He then stressed the importance for all members of the congregation to participate in singing the zabur. After this statement, the musicians played the drums for a few minutes to mark the importance of the zabur in church. In another service, the pastor said, “The zabur belong to us. No one else sings them like we do.”68 The congregation agreed vehemently with this statement and again the church musicians played the drums for emphasis.69 Women in the congregation clap in approval when the pastor discusses the zabur in Chuhra churches. Then the entire congregation participates in singing.

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64 Stock, “Evangelizing Scheduled Castes,” 95.
65 DVDs, Multiple services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.
66 Ibid.
67 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, November 2012.
68 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, October 2012.
69 Ibid.
1.4. Chuhra Prayer Circles

A vibrant practice in Chuhra Christian churches are ‘prayer circles.’ Chuhra women participate in prayer circles every Sunday evening. During Christmas season, there are extra prayer circles organized by women to help with preparations for the Christmas celebration. The prayer circles are only for women but they are also open to the public. Anyone can participate in these sessions and do not have to be a member of the church. Chuhra women organize these sessions and encourage other women to participate. Prayer circles meet for two hours in the church compound and are also usually recorded. Recordings of prayer circles are sold in the church compound. These circles have forty or fifty women in attendance. Even though the prayer circles only comprise women, all participants still cover their head as soon as they enter church property. Each prayer circle has a ‘prayer leader.’ Prayer leaders are in charge of instructing other Chuhra women, a mix of domestic maids and sweepers, in basic biblical literacy.

The first hour of each prayer circle is spent memorizing biblical verses but because most women are illiterate, there are no books at these meetings. Brown reports that memorization of biblical texts is a common practice for Chuhra Christians in Sindh. Brown notes that because many Chuhras are illiterate, missionaries use a method called ‘lining’ while teaching the community biblical verses. During ‘lining,’ a missionary or prayer leader reads a biblical verse

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70 DVD, Prayer circle, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, November 2011.
71 Ibid.
72 Prayer circle, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, October 2011.
73 Brown, Jars of Clay, 227.
and then the congregants repeat the pericope and commit it to memory.\textsuperscript{74} ‘Lining’ is the same method Chuhra women still engage in prayer circles.\textsuperscript{75} Prayer leaders first learn biblical verses through ‘lining’ from the pastor’s wife. They then impart these verses to other women each Sunday.\textsuperscript{76} Children do not usually attend prayer circles. If they do attend, they do not participate in learning biblical verses. During each prayer circles, the prayer leaders select a biblical pericope from memory and then say it aloud in Urdu. But the command to repeat the verse is issued in Punjabi (\textit{dubaara sakdee}).\textsuperscript{77} All verses are from the New Testament and focus on Jesus’ life and ministry.

Prayer leaders in Chuhra churches gravitate towards biblical verses that are about ‘healing.’ In the majority of prayer circles, the most common verses that are selected for memorization focus on Jesus’ miracles and healing. During one prayer circle, the prayer leader selected a story about Jesus healing the Centurion’s servant for ‘study.’\textsuperscript{78} The prayer leader begins by repeating the verse, “A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death.\textsuperscript{3} When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave.”\textsuperscript{4,79} The prayer leader then instructs the women to repeat this verse ten times.\textsuperscript{80} After the first round of repetition, the prayer leader moves to the next verse in the story.\textsuperscript{81} In the course of a prayer session, the women learn one biblical story in its entirety. It is unclear how many of these verses the participants retain or whether they return to them at a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{73} DVDs, Multiple Prayer circles, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2011-2012.
\item\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{76} DVD, Prayer circle, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, November 2011.
\item\textsuperscript{77} Luke 7:1-10, NRSV
\item\textsuperscript{78} DVD, Prayer circle, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, October 2011.
\item\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
later time. In most prayer circles, prayer leaders select a new story to memorize.\(^{82}\) They do not refer to the verses from the previous session.\(^{83}\)

At the end of the first hour of these sessions, women repeat the verses they have memorized in entirety.\(^{84}\) The women do this five times. If the women in the prayer circle do not repeat the entire story correctly, the prayer leader chides them. After finishing the verses, the women say, “Mera Yesu” or “My Jesus” to indicate the end of the memorization session.\(^{85}\) After the memorization portion is over, women utilize the next forty-five minutes for discussion.\(^{86}\) The women discuss biblical verses with each other. Sometimes the prayer leader interjects but in most prayer circles, the conversations focus the biblical texts selected for memorization.\(^{87}\) At the end of the session, women repeat the biblical verses that they have memorized once more and the meeting comes to an end.\(^{88}\) During the prayer circles, the women also emphasize the importance of memorization and learning by rote.

As these descriptions reveal, Chuhra Christians in the basti have a vibrant ritual life. The church is significant part of Chuhra Christian practice that is filled with dancing, drums, and music. Some of the practices in these churches such as gender segregation are mediated through basti norms in Pakistan and are now part of the distinctness of Chuhra church traditions. Even though the community is largely illiterate, prayer circles enable women in the basti to connect with biblical text. They also provide opportunities for women to discuss biblical verses with each other.

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\(^{82}\) Ibid.
\(^{83}\) Ibid.
\(^{84}\) Ibid.
\(^{85}\) Ibid.
\(^{86}\) Ibid.
\(^{87}\) Ibid.
\(^{88}\) Ibid.
other. In the next section, I describe the Chuhra Christian rejection of middle class Christian practice which emerges in church sermons and in prayer circles. While few basti Christians frequent middle class churches, they do overtly reject middle class Christian practices. I argue this practice emerges as a form of protest because middle class Christians shun contact with the Chuhra community. Critiquing middle class Christian practice is a response to caste discrimination against Chuhra Christians. It also enables Chuhra Christians to find empowerment in their own ritual and practice.

2. Rejection on Middle Class Christian Practice

Middle class COP churches in Karachi are largely western in culture and practice. The largest COP church in the city is Holy Trinity Cathedral. This cathedral was built in 1855 and during the colonial period, its tower served as a lighthouse to guide ships into the Karachi port. As such, it has deep historical roots in the city. The cathedral is similar to any other church one might see in Europe or the United States. It is a stately building with a tall spire that stands high above the city and its church bells are heard for several miles on a quiet Sunday morning. Inside the church, there are beautiful stained glass windows depicting the crucifixion, rows of intricately carved wooden benches, and a marble altar. The church congregants are a mix of middle class Pakistanis and expatriates. Services and hymns are in English. There is nothing particularly ‘indigenous’ about this church or others like it in the city.

Very few basti Christians visit middle class churches. In a survey conducted by Holy Trinity Cathedral in 2012, pastors note that few Chuhra Christians attend services at the

89 Holy Trinity Cathedral, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), December 2011.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
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cathedral. There are several reasons for lack of interaction between the two communities.
First, Chuhra Christians are uncomfortable in middle class churches because of socio-economic and class disparities. As I describe in the previous section, Chuhra churches have no chairs or benches. Many Chuhra women are uncomfortable sitting in a chair or on a bench. Most basti residents do not have chairs in their homes and prefer to sit on the floor. Second, Chuhra churches practice gender segregation and middle class churches do not. For a basti woman, sitting next to a man in public who is not a relative causes discomfort and embarrassment.
Third, basti Christians do not speak English. This means they cannot understand the pastor or participate in services in middle class churches. While most middle class COP churches hold Urdu services in the evening, the same class issues are still present. The fourth reason is socio-economic. Middle class Christians own nice cars and wear expensive clothes while Chuhra Christians are very poor.

The most significant reason why basti Christians do not attend middle class churches is related to ‘caste consciousness.’ Patrick Sookhdeo argues that in Pakistan, ‘caste consciousness’ is the main reason for “division and mistrust between Christians.” Streefland reports that middle class Christians look down on basti Christians. There are many reasons for this behavior. Yunis Kushi argues that some middle class Christians are from a Chuhra background and if they have escaped caste related occupations, they are hyper-sensitive about Dalit ancestry. Because of this reason, many middle class Christians shun contact with Chuhra

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92 “Church Attendance Survey,” Church of Pakistan (COP), Karachi, Pakistan, May 2012, 3.
93 Sookhdeo, A People Betrayed, 307-308.
94 Streefland, The Sweepers of Slaughterhouse, 34.
Christians. Chuhra Christians are aware that middle class Christians avoid social interaction with their community. In response, they ‘reject’ middle class Christian religious practice. This rejection manifests in three ways. First, basti Christians reject middle class church social structure, particularly that these churches are not segregated. Second, they reject middle class church music. Third, they reject the emphasis on reading in middle class church services.

2.1. Social Structure of Middle Class Churches

Chuhra Christians are aware that middle class churches are not segregated. Pastors often discuss this practice in church sermons. According to basti pastors, the main issue that connects to this practice is that middle class churches do not follow Pakistani customs. This is a significant concern for Chuhra Christians who want to feel socially accepted in Pakistan and are often ostracized because of a perceived connection to pollution. In church sermons, Chuhra pastors affirm gender segregation in churches because of a consciousness that their traditions should ‘fit’ with the cultural practices of the country. Pastors suggest that middle class churches should also be conscious of their practices and should not appear to as ‘outsiders.’ In a Sunday sermon, one pastor states, “In our culture, men and women should be separate. These amir churches should know that.” Another pastor notes, “In these girjas [churches], men and women they sit next to each other during the service. This is not right.” One pastor said,

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96 Ibid.
97 DVDs, Multiple services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.
98 Ibid.
99 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, November 2012.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, March 2012.
“sitting together in church that is how they do it in America. But we are not in America. This is
Pakistan and in our church we follow the norms of the country.”  

A second issue related to ‘outsider’ status is the concept of being ‘na-pak.’ As I show in
Chapter 2, an association with ‘pollution’ is an integral concern for Chuhra Christians. There is
the additional issue that many Chuhras are associated with pollution because they are
‘Christian.’  

This is a common occurrence in many bastis in Karachi. This awareness of
‘pollution’ makes pastors very critical of middle class churches because they do not follow
social norms of gender segregation. In many sermons and pamphlets, pastors raise this concern.
In one church pamphlet, the pastor notes, “They [middle class Christians] do not think about us.
When Muslims come to their churches and see men and women together, they will think this is
na-pak. So, then they also think we are na-pak.”  

In the same pamphlet, this pastor asserts, “In
our churches, even the young girls do not sit with young boys. This is na-pak behavior. But in
these amir churches, they do all these things.”

The issue of na-pak behavior among middle class Christians and its relationship to
Chuhra Christians also emerges in observations about dress. In a pamphlet, one pastor notes that
middle class Christians do not cover their head in church which is na-pak. This pastor states,
“in these amir girjas, they do not cover their head. This is disrespectful. If Muslims see them,
they will think this is na-pak behavior. So, then they will think our churches are also na-pak.”

Another pastor said in sermon, “they [middle class Christians] also go to the altar for Communion uncovered. This is na-pak.” Many pastors suggest in sermons that these practices heightened ‘pollution’ with Chuhra Christians. There is no real evidence to support this claim. However, evidence is not required for pastors to make the claim that basti traditions are ‘superior’ to middle class churches because they are more respectful of Pakistani cultural norms.

Similar to pastors, many Chuhra women in prayer circles are also very conscious of social norms of decorum. As I show in Chapter 2, many basti Muslims associate Chuhra women, particularly sweepers with ‘loose morals.’ Because of this, there is a heightened sensitivity around issues of clothing and gender segregation. This makes many Chuhra women critical of middle class churches. In one prayer circle, women discussed the practices in middle class churches, particularly norms of dress. One woman said, “They [middle class Christians] should not meet together in churches. This is na-pak behavior.” Another woman said, “these women show their arms. They wear sleeveless shirts inside the church. This is na-pak. This is why Muslims think we are na-pak.” The concern over these clothes is that they are worn in church. In prayer circles, this emerges as a way for Chuhra women to criticize middle class Christian behavior and claim the ‘superiority’ of basti norms of dress and gender segregation.

109 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, November 2012.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
112 DVD, Prayer circle, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, October 2012.
113 Ibid.
2.2. Music in Middle Class Churches

Another distinct form of rejection of middle class Christian practice emerges through the zabur. Chuhra pastors and congregants express great pride in singing the zabur and keeping this tradition alive in their churches. This pride also translates into a rejection of middle class churches where hymns are sung in English. Most Chuhra pastors criticize middle class churches in sermons and pamphlets for singing English hymns in church. Similar to gender segregation, these pastors connect English hymns to the idea of being ‘outsiders.’ One pastor notes, “These songs [English hymns] are not authentic. These are western.” Another pastor notes that English hymns do not belong to Pakistani culture and are not part of Pakistani practice. Raising the notion of being ‘outsiders’ discussed earlier, both pastors indicate that singing in English implies that middle class Christians are not part of Pakistani culture.

Some pastors also make a connection between the zabur and the concept of pollution. In a church pamphlet, one pastor suggests that the zabur is the only music that is acceptable in a church. All other music is na-pak. This pastor said that the zabur is pak because it tells the story of Christians in Pakistan. This is an odd claim since the zabur are Psalms set to music and are not ‘Pakistani.’ In another pamphlet, a pastor states that the zabur is the only pak music because it has no ‘external influences.’ This pastor does not clarify whether these ‘external influences’ were ‘western’ or simply ‘non-Punjabi’ but does argue that the zabur is the only

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114 Church pamphlet, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, December 6, 2012.
115 Church pamphlet, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, December 4, 2012.
116 Ibid.
117 Church pamphlet, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, December 6, 2012.
118 Ibid.
119 Ibid.
120 Church pamphlet, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, December 14, 2012.
music that should be included in church services. They have no direct evidence about the content of English hymns in middle class churches. However, they still reject the practice of singing in English in middle class churches. These statements enable pastors to connect their tradition of singing the zabur as a ‘pak’ practice that is also distinct to their community.

Chuhra women in prayer circles also hold many opinions about music in middle class churches. In some prayer circles, women discuss the music in middle class churches. For these women, the notion that Punjabi is an authentically ‘Christian’ language and the zabur is part of their distinct tradition enables them to feel empowered. In one prayer circle, a woman said, “In the big girja [cathedral] they only sing in English. They do not sing the zabur like we do.” She also noted that this is because middle class Christians do not know how to sing in Punjabi. “They know English but this is not the Christian language. The Christian language in Punjabi and the big girjas do not know this [language].” The prayer leader in this session, agreed with this observation. During their discussion, women continued to comment on middle class Christian practice. One woman said, “English is the language of the amir but it is not Christian. The true Christian language is Punjabi and that is why the zabur is in Punjabi.” For these women, these critiques enable them to validate that middle class Christians are ‘outsiders’ while Chuhra Christians utilize an ‘authentic’ mode of worship.

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121 Ibid.
122 DVD, Prayer circle, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, December, 2012.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
2.3. **Re-interpreting Reading in Middle Class Churches**

The third critique of middle class Christian practice relates to reading. Rejecting reading as a method to assert superiority over middle class Christians is what Sathianathan Clarke identifies as a “counteractive discourse” among Dalits in India.\(^{126}\) This idea is prevalent among Chuhra women in prayer circles who believe that memorizing biblical texts is superior to reading. Webster suggests that in general, Dalits connect very deeply to biblical texts. This is because in Hinduism, Dalits were (and are) restricted from engaging sacred literature because of their *avarna* status.\(^{127}\) Further, because of the association of pollution with Dalit professions, they are restricted from entering temples.\(^{128}\) Webster argues that through conversion to Christianity, Dalits experienced a vital change in ritual practice.\(^{129}\) For the first time, they had access to “their own Sacred Scriptures.”\(^{130}\) This scripture enabled Dalits to participate in ritual in a manner previously inaccessible. This is an empowering concept for many Christian Dalits who

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\(^{127}\) For example, *Laws of Manu* 1:87-91: 87: “For the protection of this whole creation, the One of dazzling brilliance assigned separate activities for those born from the mouth, arms, thighs, and feet. 88. To Brahmins, he assigned reciting and teaching the Veda, offering and officiating at sacrifices, and receiving and giving gifts. 89. To the Ksatriya, he allotted protecting the subjects, giving gifts, offering sacrifices, reciting the Veda and avoiding attachment to sensory objects; 90. And to the Vaisya, looking after animals, giving gifts, offering sacrifices, reciting the Veda, trade, moneylending, and agriculture. 91. A single activity did the Lord allot to the Shudra, however: the ungrudging service of those very social classes.” Patrick Olivelle, *The Law Code of Manu*, trans., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 91.


\(^{129}\) Webster, *Religion and Dalit Liberation*, 93.

\(^{130}\) Ibid.
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strongly affiliate with the notion that, “Jesus is the one who gave them the ‘gift of the Bible.’”\textsuperscript{131} Validating Websters’ observations, Chuhra women in the basti are very conscious that they possess “their own Sacred Scriptures.”\textsuperscript{132} Therefore, memorizing biblical text emerges as a method to claim ‘ownership’ of these scriptures over middle class Christians.

The ‘ownership’ of biblical scripture is evident among women in Chuhra prayer circles through the practice of ‘lining.’ Chuhra women are very proud of this practice and insist that their children also engage biblical verses through ‘lining.’\textsuperscript{133} In prayer circles, some young women in the community who have basic reading skills reject this practice.\textsuperscript{134} Pastors are aware of this and utilize church sermons and pamphlets to reinforce the notion that it is preferable to memorize biblical texts.\textsuperscript{135} Although they express a desire to read the Bible, Chuhra women do not allow members of the community to read in prayer circles.\textsuperscript{136} Chuhra women substantiate the claim that memorizing is better than reading through a belief that words have ‘innate power.’\textsuperscript{137} While memorizing imparts power on the memorizer, reading is a passive activity and does not impart power upon the reader.\textsuperscript{138} In prayer circles, women validate this claim by the asserting that Chuhra pastors are superior to middle class pastors because they have memorized the Bible.\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{133} DVD, Prayer circle, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, November 2012.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{135} Church pamphlet, Church of Pakistan (COP), Pastor Ernest Masih. Asam Colony, December 01, 2012.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{137} DVD, Prayer circle, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, March 2012.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
The emphasis on text memorization in prayer circles arises from necessity because many Chuhra women are illiterate. However, utilizing ‘lining’ even for Chuhra women who can read emerges as an overt reject of middle class Christian practice.\(^{140}\) To substantiate beliefs that memorizing is superior to reading, Chuhra women in prayer circles make several claims about middle class Christians. Chuhras women claim that middle class Christians have to consult books when they have biblical questions.\(^{141}\) In contrast, Chuhra women (and pastors) never consult books because they memorize biblical verses through ‘lining.’\(^{142}\) In a discussion in one prayer circle, one woman notes, “They [middle class Christians] read the Bible all the time because they do not know it like we do.”\(^{143}\) Another woman at the prayer circle said, “We do not need to read because we have memorized everything. People only read the Bible if they do not know how to memorize.”\(^{144}\) Therefore, most Chuhra women who attend prayer circles and engage in memorizing texts assert that reading is only useful for newspapers and road signs. However, it is not necessary for understanding biblical text.\(^{145}\) Prayer leaders also suggest that memorizing is more ‘auspicious’ compared to reading.\(^{146}\)

What is evident in this rejection of reading is the negotiation of ideologies of value and importance. Through an emphasis on memorization, women in prayer circles refute the notion that education and reading are ‘valuable’ skills in Pakistani society. This relates to their involvement in menial and degrading occupations that do not require education. By devaluing

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\(^{140}\) Clarke, “Dalit Theology,” 27.
\(^{141}\) DVD, Prayer circle, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, October 2012.
\(^{142}\) Ibid.
\(^{143}\) Ibid.
\(^{144}\) DVD, Prayer circle, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, December 2012.
\(^{145}\) Ibid.
\(^{146}\) Ibid.
the importance of literacy and reading, these women create a new narrative where memorization emerges as the more valuable skill. This re-interpretation enables Chuhra women to find empowerment in a ritual that is distinct to their Christian community in Karachi. Instead of being ashamed by lack of education, these women dismiss middle class churches as ‘inferior’ and correspondingly elevate their own churches as both ‘superior’ and auspicious. Chuhra women also connect this theory to explain why middle class Christians limit social interaction with their community. In one prayer circle, the prayer leader said, “They [middle class Christians] are jealous because of our biblical knowledge. That is why they do not attend our churches.”

In the next section, I describe the practice of funeral drumming in the basti. The only communities in the basti and in Karachi that participate in this practice are Hindu Dalits and Chuhra Christians. Funeral drumming is a particularly significant to an analysis of Chuhra Christian practice because of its historic connection to Dalits in India. Because of the ritual association of drumming with pollution, upper caste Hindus do not participate in this practice. Although the drum is not associated with ‘pollution’ in Pakistan, it is still connected to ‘Dalit practice.’ Chuhra Christians are aware of the connection between drumming and ‘Dalits’ and hence, they ‘re-claim’ this tradition by translating it into a ‘Christian practice.’

First, I provide a brief description of funeral drumming in India and why this practice is associated with ‘pollution’ and Dalits. Second, I describe how Chuhra Christians continue this practice in Karachi. I argue that Chuhra Christians make a conscious effort to merge certain

147 Ibid.
148 Ibid.
aspects of Christianity into this tradition in order to ‘re-claim’ the practice for their community. I
argue that this ‘reclamation’ enables basti Christians to participate in funeral drumming while
rejecting the connection of this practice with their Dalit ancestry.

3. Ritual and Practice Outside the Church

3.1. Funeral Drumming

In Hindu society, the drum is a symbol of pollution associated with Dalits. Most Indian
drums are constructed by stretching calfskin tightly across a wooden or metal frame. The upper
castes avoid contact with drums because the cow is a sacred animal. Touching a cow carcass or
consuming the meat causes great ritual impurity for upper caste Hindus. Therefore, this
material is restricted for Dalits who often utilize calfskin to make shoes, tools, and
instruments. Some drums are made with goatskin but the most common drum is made from
calfskin. Drumming is also associated with death. First, because the physical material of the
drum is constructed using animal skin, it connects to death. In rural societies, Dalits are also
responsible for removing the carcass of deceased cows from upper caste property. Because of
poverty, many Dalits consume the flesh of deceased animals as a viable source of protein. The
practice of eating carrion and beef heightens Dalit association with death.

151 Ibid.
179-180.
153 H. Gould, “Castes, Dalits and the Sociology of Stratification,” International Journal of Comparative Sociology,
1, (1960), 220-238.
154 Ibid.
155 Arun, Constructing, 185-186.
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The drum is also associated with death because high caste Hindus employ Dalits to drum at funerals.\footnote{Manikumar, K.A, “Caste Clashes in South Tamil Nadu,” Economic and Political Weekly, September 6, 1997, 15.} This is particularly true in the event of an inauspicious death.\footnote{Isabella Nabokov, “A Funeral to Part with the Living: A Tamil Countersorcery Ritual” in The Living and the Dead: Social Dimensions of Death in South Asian Religions, Liz Wilson, ed., (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 159-161.} For example, if a person died from unnatural causes or as the result of a disease.\footnote{Isabelle Clark-Deces, No One Cries For the Dead: Tamil Dirges, Rowdy Songs, and Graveyard Petitions (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 126-127; Deliege, The Untouchables of India, 191; Clarke, Dalits and Christianity, 2.} The Hindu high castes believe that death in general invites evil spirits and demons to invade the household.\footnote{Arun, Constructing, 185.} In the event of an unnatural death or inauspicious death, evil spirits are even more aroused and accost the soul until it finds eventual rest.\footnote{Ibid.} Therefore, the high castes also require Dalits to participate in funeral drumming because of the belief that the sound of the drum frightens evil spirits. Once the spirits are gone, it ensures that the funeral is auspicious.\footnote{Ibid.} Because of these practices, even though Dalits are ritually ‘polluted’ they play a large role in fulfilling the ritual obligations of the upper castes, particularly through funeral drumming.

Although Dalits in India provide the high castes with the distinct service of funeral drumming, this activity does not earn respect or dignity.\footnote{D.P. Mines, “Hindu Periods of Death ‘Impurity’” in India Through Hindu Categories, McKim Marriot, ed., (New York: Sage Publications, 1990), 23.} Instead, it exacerbates ritual divisions between the two communities. As I show in Chapter 1, pollution is ‘contagious’ and spreads from individuals to entire occupational groups.\footnote{Ibid.} Therefore, drumming associates all Dalits with demons, evil spirits, and corpses.\footnote{Arun, Constructing, 185.} C. Joe Arun argues, “The very name ‘pariayar’ [Dalit], they
got from the Tamil word for a drum (parai). The material the drum was made of, cowhide that indicated death […] thus defining their persons as polluted.”

Dalits are also responsible for announcing death and often serve as cremation attendants and gravediggers. Such activities heighten pollution for the entire caste. In Tamil Nadu, because the Paraiyar commonly accepts clothes from the deceased as payment for cremation services, the high castes associate all Pariyars with pollution, death, evil spirits, and demons.

In India, Dalits are also required to sing at funerals with increases their association with death and pollution. Isabella Clark-Deces argues that the high castes request Dalits to sing at funerals to draw larger crowds to the cremation. Both Dalit men and women participate in upper caste funerals as singers and professional mourners and are paid in ‘leftover’ food. Isabelle Clark-Deces suggests that this remuneration is attractive to Dalits as they have limited sources of income. Without professional funeral mourning and singing, the Paraiyar rely heavily on other polluting activities including scavenging and sanitation work for survival.

“Dalits sing from a position of scarcity and deprivation. But they do not voice their wretchedness or evoke any of their personal difficulties.” Therefore, Dalit participation in funeral activities and drumming is both commercial and coercive. These are not activities that Dalits are eager to perform; however, their untouchable status makes funeral performances necessary for survival.

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166 Ibid, 187.
167 Ibid.
169 Clark-Deces, No One Cries For the Dead, 126-127.
170 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
172 Ibid.
173 Ibid.
Chapter 3: Chuhra Christian Ritual and Practice

The similarities between these traditionally Dalit practices in India and Chuhra Christians in Pakistan are striking. Funeral drumming is a prevalent Chuhra Christian practice in Karachi bastis. Funerals are public events and many people in the basti, drawn by the sound of the drum and singing that accompanies the funeral procession, attend these funerals. The drum, which Chuhra Christians use during funerals, is the dholak, a traditional instrument often present in Indian and Pakistani classical music. This is the same drum Chuhras use in church while singing the zabur. While the drum is not associated with pollution in Islam, it is connected to Hindu Dalit practice. In Karachi, Hindu Dalits are the only other religious community that engages in funeral drumming. As bastis in Karachi are ‘mixed’ there are many Hindus in Karachi bastis. Therefore, there is an association between drumming and Hindus. This practice is esoteric in Karachi and for Chuhra Christians, it raises issues of ‘pollution’ because of the similarity between Hindu drumming and Chuhra Christian practice.

Because bastis are located in the center of the city, these funerals are very loud, public events and attract much attention. In my association with the COP in Karachi, many people outside the Chuhra community attend these funerals. Middle class Muslims in Karachi attend funerals in bastis at times because they enjoy the ritual of funeral drumming. However, in general, middle class Christians do not frequent Chuhra funerals. When there is a death in a Christian family, the pastor sends word to the funeral drummers in the congregation. Usually three or four Chuhra men, each with a drum strapped around the neck lead the way from the church to the home of the deceased. The first function of the drummers is to ‘announce’ death in
the *basti* so that everyone is aware that a funeral procession is forthcoming. The drummers arrive at the house of the deceased and begin to drum. This entire funeral is recorded by church pastors.

For the first hour, drummers play in front of the house of the deceased and then accompany the family to homes of other relatives. The drumming creates noise and soon, the entire community is aware that there is a death in the *basti*. Funeral drummers accompany the body to the church and then to the Christian cemetery. They continue to drum until the body is lowered into the ground. During the procession, people offer condolences and bring gifts of food to the family of the deceased. After the funeral service, the family of the deceased pays the drummers in cash. They also receive gifts of food and sometimes cloth for their wives and daughters. For most drummers, this extra money and new clothes are part of the attraction of participating in this ritual.

Chuhra Christians hold very similar beliefs to upper caste Hindus in India about the significance of funeral drumming. Among Chuhra pastors and congregants, there is a notion that funeral drumming enables the spirit to find its resting place in *jannat* (paradise). Pastors often discuss this aspect of funeral drumming in church services. In sermons, pastors note that the departed soul is in a very risky position until the burial is complete. During the procession,

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174 DVD, Funeral service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, December 2011.
175 Ibid.
176 Ibid.
177 Ibid.
178 Ibid.
179 Ibid.
180 Ibid.
181 Ibid.
182 Ibid.
Chuhra men beat the drums loudly and rhythmically to frighten evil spirits.\textsuperscript{183} Pastors indicate that the body is not safe from evil spirits until it is blessed and is lowered into the ground.\textsuperscript{184} Until then, drumming is the only way to frighten evil spirits who are thirsty for blood and anxious to grab a soul before it is blessed.\textsuperscript{185} Pastors also preach that if evil spirits takes a soul before it is blessed and buried; it will remain in a state of unrest for eternity.\textsuperscript{186} Therefore, pastors tell funeral drummers that they provide a service to the community by enabling the spirit to find rest.\textsuperscript{187}

Because of a strong belief in evil spirits, pastors instruct funeral drummers to sing songs while they accompany the body to the cemetery. The ‘songs’ are biblical verses that are repeated to the rhythm of the drum. Almost all the biblical verses that are ‘sung’ at funerals relate to demonology and the removal of evil spirits.\textsuperscript{188} In one funeral service, the song that was ‘sung’ during the procession was a rendition of Luke 4:33-36:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{33} In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an impure spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, \textsuperscript{34} “Go away! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” \textsuperscript{35} “Be quiet!” Jesus said sternly. “Come out of him!” Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him. \textsuperscript{36} All the people were amazed and said to each other, “What words these are! With authority and power he gives orders to impure spirits and they come out!”
\end{quote}

A second song that is common during these funeral processions is Luke 11:24-26, “When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it wanders through waterless regions looking for a resting

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\textsuperscript{183} DVD, Funeral service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, April 2010.  
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{187} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{189} Luke 4:33-36, NRSV.
place.”¹⁹⁰ The pastors, drummers, and the funeral party throughout the procession chant these verses until they enter the church.¹⁹¹ Pastors preach that singing these songs during the funeral procession ensures the safe passage of the departed soul to jannat.¹⁹²

Pastors in most Chuhra churches preach about the importance of funeral drumming for the soul of the deceased. In a pamphlet prepared for a funeral in 2012, the pastor notes that the biblical passage, Luke 4:33-36 (quoted above) is a warning to evil spirits that if they try to enter the body of the deceased; they will be cast out.¹⁹³ In this pamphlet, the pastor explains that demons are strong and have to be cast out vigorously otherwise; they will torment the soul in the afterlife.¹⁹⁴ If that happens, the family members who are still living might experience bad luck. For example, a man might lose his job or a woman might become infertile.¹⁹⁵ The only way to safeguard the community is to drum during the funeral procession. In a second funeral pamphlet, another pastor claims that the sound of the drum frightens demons because loud noises make evil spirits inert.¹⁹⁶ This pamphlet also states that drumming alerts the guards of jannat that a member of the community is joining them.¹⁹⁷ This gives the guards time to prepare before the body is blessed in the church.¹⁹⁸

A second ritual that is part of Chuhra funerals and resembles Dalit practices in India is the participation of professional mourners in the funeral procession. These mourners are not part

¹⁹⁰ Luke 11:24-26, NRSV.
¹⁹¹ DVD, Funeral service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, December 2011.
¹⁹² Church pamphlet, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, December 12, 2012.
¹⁹³ Ibid.
¹⁹⁴ Ibid.
¹⁹⁵ Ibid.
¹⁹⁶ Church pamphlet, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, December 12, 2012.
¹⁹⁷ Ibid.
¹⁹⁸ Ibid.
of the family. They are usually Christian beggars who reside in the basti and do not have a regular source of income. Pastors invite these mourners, generally women, to participate in church processions. Sometimes mourners are unknown to the family. On some occasions, these female mourners attend the funeral in the hope of financial remuneration. During the procession, mourners wail loudly and produce a resume of the deceased person that they punctuate with several demands. For example, the mourners might say, ‘God why have you forsaken this family when this man worked so hard as a sweeper to support his wife and children?’ Then, they issue a list of demands such as, ‘God give this poor widow money; give her son a job; make her mother-in-law help her in this time of need.’ In response to these cries of injustice, the mourners receive resounding support from the other attendees in the funeral procession.

Because the mourners succeed in rousing the crowd, there is increased noise and revelry during the funeral. The mourners accompany the body to the church but they do not enter the church. They wait outside the church until the service concludes and then receive compensation from church pastors for their service. They also receive accolades from pastors, family members, and other funeral attendees for rousing the crowd. Mourners are not paid in cash but they receive food from the church after the burial. Usually, pastors will serve mourners food and offer a blessing. As most mourners have no formal or social relationship with

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199 DVD, Funeral service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, December 2011.
200 Ibid.
201 Ibid.
202 Ibid.
203 Ibid.
204 Ibid.
205 DVD, Funeral service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, October 2010.
the family of the deceased, after they receive compensation, they return to their neighborhood in the basti.

3.2. **Reclaiming the Drum as a ‘Christian Practice’**

In recent years, in India, drumming has emerged as a form of assertion and collective protest among Dalits.\(^{206}\) This is because while Dalits provide funeral services for the high castes these practices serve to elevate their pollution in Hindu society.\(^{207}\) In an effort to reject these polluting activities, Dalits participate in various forms of collective assertion. For example, the Paraiyar in Tamil Nadu refused to beat drums at funerals until it was “agreed that funeral drumming gave them a resource on which the upper castes were dependent.”\(^{208}\) Some Dalits continue participating in funeral drumming because they are dependent on the income. However, they engage in protest by negotiating higher compensation for these activities.\(^{209}\) In some communities in India, Dalits re-imagine drumming as an art form, and an expression of musical beauty and dignity, to reclaim the drum from upper caste notions of ‘pollution.’\(^{210}\)

In India, among the Paraiyar, drumming is re-conceptualized as a symbol of beauty and art. Arun argues that the Paraiyar have constructed a story that enables them to reclaim the drum as a non-polluting instrument.\(^{211}\) Through this story, the Paraiyar reclaim the drum as a non-polluting activity that is associated with life instead of death. In this story, Paraiyar drummers


\(^{207}\) Mosse, *The Saint and the Banyan Tree*, 222.

\(^{208}\) Arun, *Constructing*, 203.

\(^{209}\) Clark-Deces, *No One Cries For the Dead*, 126-127


\(^{211}\) Arun, *Constructing*, 203.
claim that a foreigner traveled the world researching music. He collected thirty women for his experiment and while they were working in the paddy fields, he asked musicians to play various instruments. When the organ was played; the women went to sleep. Then the vina [guitar like instrument] was played; the women when to sleep. However, when the drum was played, the women did their work well and began to sing folk songs.\textsuperscript{212} While every instrument lulls the women in the paddy fields to sleep; the sound of the drum awakens them. To express their joy, the women sing folk songs to celebrate life instead of death.

Like the Paraiyar in India, Chuhra Christians in the basti also re-imagine and re-claim funeral drumming in their community. In sermons and pamphlets, Chuhra pastors reject any association of funeral drumming with Hinduism and particularly Dalits.\textsuperscript{213} This is a key element of concern for Chuhra Christians because of their association with pollution in Pakistani society. Pastors assert that because Hindus in the basti also participate in funeral drumming, Muslims consider this practice \textit{na-pak}.\textsuperscript{214} In one pamphlet, a pastor argues that funeral drumming is considered \textit{na-pak} is because it is not part of mainstream Islamic practice.\textsuperscript{215} But, he also asserts that the main reason funeral drumming is considered \textit{na-pak} is because Muslims associate this practice with Hindus.\textsuperscript{216} In this pamphlet, this pastor asserts that this is a Christian ritual and it is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{212} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{213} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{214} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{215} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{216} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Chapter 3: Chuhra Christian Ritual and Practice

not associated with Hindus.\textsuperscript{217} He further argues that the Hindus in the \textit{basti} imitate the Christians by engaging in this ritual.\textsuperscript{218}

While Chuhra pastors do not have a ‘story’ that they recount to justify funeral drumming in the community, they do interpret biblical texts to lend support for drumming as a ‘Christian practice.’\textsuperscript{219} In a church pamphlet, a pastor quotes Psalm 98:4, “Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises” as justification for drumming as a ‘Christian’ practice.\textsuperscript{220} In light of this verse, this pastor asserts that funeral drumming is the “joyful noise” that accompanies the soul of the deceased to the church.\textsuperscript{221} In another church pamphlet, a pastor argues that funeral drumming is part of old Christian tradition.\textsuperscript{222} He states that middle class Christians in Pakistan ‘purposefully’ forgot this ritual because it is associated with Hindu practice.\textsuperscript{223} “They [middle class Christians] do not want to do it because people associate this ritual with Hindus. But the Hindus learned it from our community.”\textsuperscript{224} He also asserts, “these \textit{amir} Christians do not do these things in the big \textit{girja} [cathedral]. But this is an indigenous practice to our Punjabi church.”\textsuperscript{225}

In this pamphlet, the pastor argues that if middle class Christians were truthful to their ‘roots,’ they would recognize the importance of funeral drumming. He states, “I wonder how

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{219} Church pamphlet, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, December 12, 2012.  \\
\textsuperscript{220} Psalm 98:4, NRSV.  \\
\textsuperscript{221} Church pamphlet, December 12, 2012.  \\
\textsuperscript{222} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{223} Church pamphlet, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, December 10, 2012.  \\
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{225} Ibid. 
\end{flushleft}
their souls find *janaat* when no one plays the drum.⁽²²⁶⁾ In church services, pastors reinforce these beliefs in the congregation. Pastors claim that middle class Christians should follow this practice because it is ‘authentic.’⁽²²⁷⁾ In this sermon, the pastor also indicated that funeral drumming provides a very distinct service for the deceased.⁽²²⁸⁾ The drums symbolize the heartbeat and maintain a connection between the deceased and the world until the body is placed in the ground.⁽²²⁹⁾ Only a well-trained drummer can approximate the cadence of the heartbeat to maintain a connection with the soul.⁽²³⁰⁾ In this service, this pastor asserts that funeral drumming is distinct to the Chuhra church. He also notes that their community will not provide this service for other people. “This is *our* service to *our* people. We will not do it for others.”⁽²³¹⁾

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I describe Chuhra Christian ritual and practice in COP churches in the *basti*. I highlight that Chuhra churches are indigenized and many practices including the *zabur* and memorization of biblical texts are distinct to this community. In addition, Chuhra churches have amalgamated many cultural norms such as gender segregation into church practice. Chuhra Christians are aware that middle class Christians shun their community because of their perceived Dalit ancestry. As a response, *basti* Christians reject middle class Christian ritual and practice. Chuhra pastors and congregants criticize the social structure of middle class churches,

⁻²²⁶⁽Ibid.⁽²²⁷⁾ DVD, Funeral service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, October 2010.⁽²²⁸⁾ Ibid.⁽²²⁹⁾ Ibid.⁽²³⁰⁾ Ibid.⁽²³¹⁾ Ibid.
hymns, and the prevalence of reading in these churches. This rejection enables basti Christians to find empowerment in their own traditions and rituals.

In the second section of this chapter, I describe the ritual of funeral drumming among Chuhra Christians. I argue that this is a significant practice because of its historic connection to Dalits in India. As a community that is circumscribed by pollution, Chuhra Christians are hypersensitive about Dalit ancestry. Because Chuhra pastors are aware of the connection between funeral drumming and Hindu Dalits, they consciously ‘re-claim’ this practice as ‘Christian ritual.’ This enables Chuhra pastors to sever any connection between their community and Hindu Dalits. In the next chapter, I discuss how such norms of ‘caste consciousness’ among Chuhra Christians lead to the creation of ‘counter-narratives’ that function as ‘myths of origin’ in the basti.
Chapter 4: Analyzing Chuhra Mythos and Pathos

Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on Chuhra Christian narratives in COP churches in Karachi. The narrative I examine is the story of St. Thomas and his arrival in Taxila, Pakistan in 52 CE. This is a prominent story for Chuhra Christians. In Pakistan, the St. Thomas narrative is rooted in the Chuhra Christian experience of cleaning and sanitation work. Based on their association with polluting occupations, this narrative aims to re-claim ‘cleaning’ for Chuhra Christians and translate it into a pak activity. How this narrative functions for Chuhra Christians reveals the similarities and differences of this construct within the larger framework of Dalit narratives in India. Dalit stories in India focus on deconstructing the image of the avarnas that is constructed by the upper castes. Many of these stories function as forms of inversion and subversion. Dalits invert the ideology of ‘pollution’ and replace it with ‘purity’ and subvert upper caste ‘myths’ about avarna ancestry.

In India, these narratives occur in a context where caste is openly acknowledged. Therefore, inversion and subversion is part of the national dialogue about caste and caste identity. Each Dalit narrative in India has a plot that focuses on marginalization and being ‘cast(e) out’ of the varna system.¹ Such stories raise questions about Dalit identity, their nature and purpose in the world, and God’s plan for their community.² Re-creating the ‘polluted’ image that the upper castes hold about the avarnas enables Dalits to access a “purge of emotions.”³ This ‘purge’ relates to the pain that arises from marginalization and discrimination in a Brahmanical society.⁴ Some stories focus on critiquing upper caste hegemony while others

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¹ Arun, Constructing, 104.
² Ibid, 105.
³ Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958), 430.
provide Dalits with a glorious past in which they were once high born. These stories enable Dalits in India to re-interpret their relationship to the varna system, God, and community. In Pakistan, the St. Thomas story functions differently for Chuhra Christians. Instead of being ‘cast(e) out’ of Brahmanism, Chuhra Christians focus on being ‘cast(e) in’ to Christianity. This enables them to create a new genealogical history that is not connected to Dalit ancestry. This form of ‘veiling identity’ is a ‘counter-narrative’ among Chuhra Christians that is part of the larger tradition of Dalit dissent in India.

In the first section of the chapter, I begin with three Indian Dalit narratives of being ‘cast(e) out.’ First, I explore the story of Bala Shah which re-imagines how the Chuhras became untouchables. Second, I contrast this narrative with B.R. Ambedkar’s story of the ‘Broken Men.’ In this story, Ambedkar aims to explain how Dalits were ‘cast(e) out’ and how untouchability became associated with their community. The third narrative I present is from Chuhras in the nineteenth century who participated in the mass movement to Christianity. This story reveals how Chuhras incorporated conversion to Christianity into their genealogical re-imagination. In the second section of this chapter, I describe the historical evidence for St. Thomas in Taxila. Second, I analyze how this narrative functions for Chuhra Christians. I argue that this story is a form of assertion for Chuhra Christians in Karachi. It rejects the association of their community with pollution which is based on degrading occupations and re-imagines their Dalit ancestry.

1. Dalit Narratives: Re-imaging Dalit Origins

Arun argues that story-telling is the basic element of any society. Myths, epics, folklore, and satire are “communicative acts that create catharsis (a purge of emotions),” which help to
imagine a new way of being in the world. These narratives enable communities to assuage shared fears, to deal with tragedy and loss, and provide answers to difficult questions.

Genealogical re-imagination is a significant mode of Dalit dissent in India. Such narratives are common among Hindu and Dalit converts including Buddhists and Christians. A prevalent part of genealogical narratives is re-imaging the concept of being ‘cast(e) out.’ These stories assert that Dalits were once high born and were ‘cast(e) out’ of the varna system through upper caste deception and treachery. Such stories enable Dalits to claim a glorious past that was usurped through upper caste hegemony and oppression. Through this method, Dalits re-interpret the past in order to challenge persecution in the present.

Dalit scholars argue that in India, Dalit dissent against the high castes often emerges as a ‘counter-movement’ or a ‘counter-narrative.’ Some counter-movements are ritually structured. Ritual modes of dissent use overt methods of assertion to reject high caste practice in favor of Dalit customs. Robinson reports that in South India, the Syrian Orthodox Church traditionally used two biers for funerals, one for Dalits and one for Christians of ‘high caste’ origin. In the 1970s, Christian Pallars (Dalits), forcibly took the bier from inside the church and used it for a Dalit funeral thereby reclaiming the item for their community. The drum, which is ritually associated with Dalits and a sign of ‘pollution,’ is another symbol of dissent among Dalit Christians. “At one point of time, the breaking of the drum by the Dalit was considered a necessary preliminary to his entry into the Christian Church. However, the drum remains at the

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7 Ibid.
9 Robinson, Christians, 75.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
heart of the Dalit religious world and the beating of the drum a symbol of resistance to the social and ritual boundaries of caste.”

In a similar way to counter-movements, counter-narratives are forms of Dalit dissent that focus on deconstructing Dalit history. Clarke argues that among Dalits, “Rejection, refutation, and deconstruction are activities that are reacting to something that has been accepted as the substance and agenda of discourse.” Forrester agrees with Clarke and asserts that such are generally high caste accounts of Dalit origins. Stemming from the Purusha Shukta described in Manu, Dalit history is shaped by a high caste interpretation of avarna roots. Clarke notes that these upper caste narratives promote the view that Dalits are separate and distinct from the divine. Massey asserts that these narratives are rarified in Manu and reinforce the inhuman quality of Dalits both socially and theologically.

For Dalits, the reinterpretation of genealogical narratives is a conscious method through which to provide an alternative account of avarna ancestry. These narratives reject the theological claims of Manu as a mode of dissent and instead, create a new genealogy. Rajkumar argues that Dalits mythologize the past in order to create a “surrogate space for the articulation of self-understanding and wholeness” in the present. Rajkimar calls this movement a form of ‘Dalit mythos.’ Dalit mythos enables avarnas to create genealogical narratives as critiques of upper-caste hegemony and oppression. Maria Arulraja calls this a “re-creation” that aims to form

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13 Clarke, “Dalit Theology,” 27.
14 Ibid.
15 Forrester, Forrester on Christian Ethics, 92.
16 Clarke, Dalits and Christianity, 33.
17 James Massey, Dalits in India: Religion as a Source of Bondage or Liberation with Special Reference to Christians (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1995), 43.
19 Ibid.
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an alternative identity and reality in which Dalits are ‘re-cast.’ Clarke argues that all Dalits (Hindu or converts) share a communal bond that is circumscribed by marginalization. Therefore, the ‘re-casting’ that Arulraja indicates is a ‘re-creation’ in which Dalits are empowered and their agency is celebrated.

The Indian genealogical accounts in this chapter are pertinent examples of Dalit mythos. As Rajkumar argues, these stories indicate “‘disguised discourses’ of non-compliance by the discriminated against” that emerge as powerful counter-narratives. These counter-narratives focus on deconstructing Brahmanical notions of purity and pollution. Therefore, part of the contestation is based on the ritual and social impurity assigned to the avarnas by Brahmanism. These modes and methods express “an active, though disguised, rebuttal of the ideologies behind their discrimination.” Clarke agrees with Rajkumar and argues, “a theology of rejection incorporates the modality of refutation with the stratagem of deconstruction.” These genealogical narratives then are rejections and rebuttals of purity and pollution and the discrimination of Brahmanical ideology. Dalits assert is a new construction of identity that emerges from deconstructing the Brahmanical system.

Some Dalit narratives are powerful methods of reclamation. Rajkumar suggests that through the re-imagination of genealogical accounts, “old templates are overtly debunked and entirely new templates of identity and meaning are validated.” For example, Arun argues that

\[23\] Ibid.
\[24\] Ibid
\[25\] Clarke, “Dalit Theology,” 27.
\[26\] Ibid.
\[27\] Rajkumar, “The Diversity and Dialectics,” 56.
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the Paraiyar consciously reinterpret particular symbols of pollution as an act of reclamation.\(^{28}\) The drum is a specific symbol of Paraiyar “social exclusion and pollution.”\(^{29}\) Therefore, Paraiyar narratives emerge in a context where the drum has a historic connection to discrimination and pollution.\(^{30}\) Through Dalit narratives, the “old templates” of the drum and the Paraiyar as ‘polluting’ are reinterpreted. “The reversal arises out of a realization that there is nothing intrinsic in the objects such as the drums, or the use of it, that makes them polluted.”\(^{31}\) The “new template” deconstructs notions of purity and pollution. Therefore, Paraiyar counter-narratives enable them to realize that “they should be treated essentially as human persons, equal to other people.”\(^{32}\)

Such counter-narratives enable Dalits to engage ‘Dalit pathos.’ Rajkumar asserts that Dalit pathos enables *avarnas* to “purge whatever hinders their potential for human flourishing.”\(^{33}\) Dalit pathos has multiple modes and expressions. At times, Dalit pathos focuses on critiquing upper caste behavior.\(^{34}\) In some instances, Dalits demand a larger share of the harvest or a higher wage for removing dead cattle.\(^{35}\) In this way, Dalits ‘monetize’ certain polluted practices. For example, Dalits provide funeral services for the upper castes because of the ritual pollution associated with death.\(^{36}\) Clark-Deces notes that Dalits assert their identity by demanding more compensation for such work.\(^{37}\) Therefore, Dalit subversion has an economic dimension. Such

\(^{28}\) Arun, *Constructing*, 97.

\(^{29}\) Ibid, 97.

\(^{30}\) Ibid.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

\(^{32}\) Ibid.

\(^{33}\) Rajkumar, “The Diversity and Dialectics,” 56.


\(^{35}\) Ibid.

\(^{36}\) Clark-Deces, *No One Cries*, 126-127.

\(^{37}\) Ibid.
modes of Dalit pathos represent what Rajkumar calls, “sub-alterations.”

“Sub-alterations” are deliberate and conscious methods of subverting and re-imagining the past in order to re-conceptualize the present. In the next section, I analyze three such genealogical narratives. The connective thread between these stories is the ideology of being ‘cast (e) out’ of the varna system.

1.1. Bala Shah and the Brahmins

Bala Shah, the founder of the Chuhra community in Punjab, has many genealogical narratives. Missionary John W. Youngson recorded three separate genealogical accounts for Bala Shah including that he had ten incarnations. Webster reports that Youngson found a Punjabi manuscript in the Sialkot district with stories of ritual practice and Chuhra genealogy. H. A. Rose, a British administrator in the Indian Civil Service reported similar accounts to Youngson of Bala Shah that were common in the Punjab among Chuhras. According to Youngson, the most significant of Bala Shah’s reported incarnations, are Prashta or Jhaumpra which was the first, Bal Mik, the seventh, and Lal Beg, the ninth. Of these three incarnations, Jhaumpra, had the greatest effect on the genealogical re-imagination of Chuhras in Punjab. The significance of this narrative for Chuhras is connected to Jhaumpra’s genealogy.

In Youngson’s reports, Jhaumpra was one of four brothers who were all sons of the God Brahma. All four brothers were Brahmins. One day, God ordered the brothers to remove a dead cow from a pasture. When he instructed the removal of the carcass, God said, “‘Twas I that

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38 Rajkumar, “The Diversity and Dialectics,” 56.
39 Arun, Constructing, 37-38; Rajkumar, Dalit Theology, 122-23.
41 Webster, Religion and Dalit Liberation, 18-20.
43 Webster, Religion and Dalit Liberation, 18-20; Stock, People Movements, 60.
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killed the cow by lawful rite; it is not therefore now unclean.” Jhaumpra agreed to remove the cow on the promise that on the day of resurrection, “when my people cross the narrow bridge that spans the mouth of hell, thou wilt have mercy on them” With this decision, Jhaumpra emerged as Bala Shah and became a Chuhra. Upon his incarnation, Bala Shah immediately appealed to his brothers and asked when he could return to their company. His brothers promised to restore his purity four days after he removed the carcass. But, after Bala Shah completed his duty, his brothers ignored his plea for restoration. In the narrative, Bala Shah’s purity was never restored and spent his life as a Chuhra.

In Punjab, this narrative had a few iterations among different Dalit communities but the thematic message remained the same. Rose, reports that such accounts of Bala Shah were also common among Chamars (Dalit leather workers) in Punjab. John O’Brien argues that the similarity of these narratives could arise from the fact that Chuhras and Chamars are related in ritual and practice. “We meet the caste progenitor arriving late to a feast and being cursed either for inadvertently eating a piece of meat or for handling a dead cow […] The central figure of Balmik [Bala Shah] in the legends of these sub-groups indicates a common legendry and folklore inheritance, and argues for a generic relationship between these sub-castes.” O’Brien argues that these stories are “myths of the fall” and “may be characterized as ‘dead cow’

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44 Webster, Religion and Dalit Liberation, 18-20.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
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myths.” He asserts that these stories “represent an attempt on the part of the oppressed to proclaim their dignity.” This dignity is reclaimed by “borrowing from the symbols and worldview of that control system [Brahmanism] to reshape their identity, and in this way, to reconstruct it.”

As these narratives indicate, many Dalits including Chuhras and Chamars engage in similar forms of Dalit mythos to acquire Dalit pathos. These narratives focus on the deconstruction of Brahmanical norms of purity and pollution. However, contained within these narratives is an implicit recognition of the concept of Brahmanical purity. Caste ideology posits that caste is not a just a social construct but rather a description of one’s essential nature. As Deliege argues, the function of Dalits is to “clean up society, to remove its organic wastes and to keep away all sorts of inauspicious influences” from the upper castes because they are impure. Therefore, the Bala Shah narrative is also a “sub-alteration” of Chuhra history through the subversion of purity/pollution.

O’Brien suggests that the function of Dalit narratives is to challenge Brahmanical purity and pollution by “operating within the parameters of Brahmanism.” He claims this is one reason for the commonality of Dalit narratives. Brahmanic notions of purity and pollution are so totalizing in the socio-political hegemony that Dalits “experience oppression and Untouchability homologously.” O’Brien contends that “their [Dalit] common internalization of this oppression

55 Ibid, 58.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid, 56.
58 Deliege, From Stigma to Assertion, 17.
59 O’Brien, The Unconquered People, 58.
60 Ibid.
socializes them into thinking about their marginalization in a similar way.” The connective thread between Dalit narratives is the rejection of impurity attributed to them by the upper castes. This is evident in the narrative of Bala Shah which asserts that Chuhras were originally high born and even emerged from the God Brahma. Yet, despite, obedience to God, they were ‘cast(e) out.’ What is deconstructed is the notion that Dalits are intrinsically ‘impure.’ Instead, the re-construction asserts that “low caste rank is a terrible historical accident and an injustice.”

Through this rejection, the Bala Shah narrative is an example of how Dalit mythos affects Dalit pathos. This story is a “sub-alteration” that enables Dalits to re-imagine the past with pride. Deliege notes that this re-imagination is achieved through the rejection of the varna system that elevates the Brahmin and relegates the Dalit into avarna status. Pauline Kolenda argues that these narratives create a form of collective pathos for Dalits that remove “social anxiety.” As is evident in the story of Bala Shah, such narratives empower Dalits with the knowledge that they were once much higher than their current social position. However, as O’Brien notes, accepting the notion that they were once high born is also an implicit acknowledgement of the varna system. This indicates that for some Dalits, the “preferred social goal is to improve their lot within the system as distinct from seeking to change the system.”

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61 Ibid.
63 O’Brien, The Unconquered People, 58.
67 Ibid.
68 O’Brien, The Unconquered People, 58.
69 Ibid.
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Re-casting a narrative in which Dalits were once socially higher and not polluted also enables Dalits to engage in what Arulraja calls a “re-creation” of Dalit roots.\(^\text{70}\) In contrast to their present social and ritual pollution, Bala Shah’s narrative asserts that Dalits were once divine. The reason for their current polluted status is that Bala Shah chose, willingly, to participate in a meritorious act which God commanded.\(^\text{71}\) This is a source of empowerment for Dalits because Bala Shah *chooses* to follow God’s command. However, the story then reveals social and theological critique. Despite the fact that Bala Shah upheld his promise; his own brothers deceived him. Therefore, Brahmans are not trustworthy. It also claims that Chuhras first emerged as a polluted caste because of divine injustice and human treachery.\(^\text{72}\) In addition, because of Brahmin deception, the Chuhrs were pushed outside the *varna* system for eternity.\(^\text{73}\) Subversion, then, is a common theme of Dalit genealogical re-imagination.

Many Dalit narratives utilize subversion to challenge Brahmanical oppression. One such narrative is the story of Supaj, who sells winnows to Brahmins to earn a living.\(^\text{74}\) After the Brahmins buy the grain, Supaj reveals his Dalit identity and “exacts revenge” on Brahmanism by informing them that “they and all their grain have become polluted.”\(^\text{75}\) Other Dalit narratives overtly reject Brahmanical theology.\(^\text{76}\) In one account, the treacherous brothers who refused to restore Bala Shah’s purity are forced to seek penance.\(^\text{77}\) The God Brahma commands them into

\(^\text{71}\) Webster, *Religion and Dalit Liberation*, 18-20.
\(^\text{72}\) Rajkumar, *Dalit Theology*, 122-23.
\(^\text{73}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{75}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{76}\) O’Brien, *The Unconquered People*, 61.
\(^\text{77}\) Ibid.
the Himalayas to seek purification. But they freeze to death on their way to the mountains. In another account, Bala Shah incarnates as Balmik. In this narrative, Balmik, a dacoit, is told to acquire penance for his actions by repeating ‘Rama Rama’ in order to expiate his sins. But, in some versions, Balmik gains purification by crying ‘Mara Mara’ instead. In this way, subversion enables Dalits to re-conceptualize the present.

1.2. Ambedkar’s ‘Broken Men’

In contrast to Bala Shah, is the story of Ambedkar’s ‘Broken Men.’ Ambedkar wrote extensively about Dalits and untouchability. Two theories are significant to this analysis of Dalit narratives. First, is Ambedkar’s theory of the Shudras, and second, his theory of how the Dalits first emerged in Indo-Aryan society. To address Shudra ancestry, Ambedkar published a controversial book, Who Were the Shudras in 1946. In this book, Ambedkar explicated a complex theory of Shudra origins. The book was contentious because Ambedkar highlighted that the caste system originally had three varnas; the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and the Vaishyas. The Shudras were not part of the original varna system. Instead, the Shudras were part of the Kshatriya caste embroiled in conflict with the Brahmins. These disagreements eventually led to the Brahmins withholding the upanayana ceremony from these particular Kshatriyas.

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78 Ibid.
80 O’Brien, The Unconquered People, 58.
83 Ibid.
84 The upanayana ceremony is a Hindu ritual of initiation restricted to the three upper castes. The ceremony is performed on males between the ages of 5 and 24. After initiation, the boys wear a sacred thread to indicate that they are ‘twice-born’; once into the varna and once through the Vedas. This ceremony is not permitted for the Shudras and withheld from the avarnas. As such Dalits cannot engage in Vedic study as they are ritually impure and cannot participate in the upanayana ceremony. Most orthodox Hindus particularly from the Brahmin caste participate regularly in this ceremony.
Ambedkar suggests that the Shudras, emerged when a portion of the Kshatriyas were ‘cast(e) out’ after this conflict and formed the fourth varna.  

In 1948, Ambedkar analyzed the origins of the Dalits. In, *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables*, Ambedkar focuses on two aspects of Dalit history: untouchability and genealogy. Ambedkar believed that untouchability was linked to Dalit genealogy. He argued that there are only two possible explanations for this practice. Either untouchables originally lived with caste Hindus and were then ‘cast(e) out’ or they were never part of caste society from the beginning. “How did the Untouchables come to live outside the village? Were they declared to be Untouchables first and then deported outside the village and made to live outside? Or were they from the very beginning living outside the village and were subsequently declared to be Untouchables?” These questions lead Ambedkar to posit that perhaps, Dalits were always outcast(e), even in early Indo-Aryan society. Therefore, untouchability survived in the present because it was a significant feature of social dynamics in the past.

Ambedkar asserts that early Indo-Aryan society originally consisted of nomadic communities that were connected through blood membership. These societies were migratory and depended on cattle for wealth. When they discovered agriculture, they invested in land and settled down. However, they did not settle in one place or at one time. Some remained nomadic

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87 Ibid
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
while others migrated into villages. Ambedkar claims that these communities were in constant conflict because of differences in blood membership and wealth.

The second thing to remember is that the tribes were never at peace with one another. They were always at war. When all tribes were in a Nomadic state the chief causes of intra-tribal warfare were (1) stealing cattle, (2) stealing women, and (3) stealthily grazing of cattle in the pastures belonging to other tribes. When some tribes became settled, the tribes that remained nomadic found it more advantageous to concentrate their fight against the settled tribes.

These struggles were exacerbated by invaders who were often more powerful than the autochthonous people. Once the conquerors settled into newly acquisitioned land, peripheral groups, or ‘Broken Men’ split away from the defeated tribes because they were ‘cast(e) out’ of their land.

Because tribes were arranged through blood membership, the ‘Broken Men’ were unable to join another community. However, since the ‘Broken Men’ fought for the conquering tribes, they were allowed to settle on the outskirts of the village. Relegated to mercenary activity and without any tribal membership, the ‘Broken Men’ they soon devolved into cast(e)-less men. For Ambedkar, these ‘Broken Men’ were the ancestors of contemporary Dalits. But, this theory did not explain untouchability. To analyze the root of untouchability, Ambedkar analyzed census data in India. Census data arranged Indian society in three categories: 1) the Hindus, 2) Animists and Tribals, and 3) Depressed Classes and/or Dalits. This data revealed two curious details. First, Dalits did not receive ritual initiation from Brahmins, and second, they had no connection with Brahmin priests.
Ambedkar then consulted the work of Jean-Antoine Dubois (1765-1848) a French Catholic missionary. Dubois wrote a notable text, *Hindu Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies* in 1817. In this book, Dubois observed the Paraiyar caste. Ambedkar was struck by Dubois’ analysis of social interactions between the Paraiyar and Brahmins:

> Even to this day a Pariah is not allowed to pass a Brahmin Street in a village, though nobody can prevent, or prevents, his approaching or passing by a Brahmin’s house in towns. The Pariah’s [sic] on their part will under no circumstances, allow a Brahmin to pass through their *paracheries* (collection of Pariah huts) as they firmly believe it will lead to ruin.

Ambedkar observed similar norms between Dalits and Brahmins in his own context. This led him to conclude that the contempt between Dalits and Brahmins is mutual. This raised Ambedkar’s suspicions. “We must ask why the Brahmins refused to officiate at the religious ceremonies of the ‘Broken Men.’ Is it the case that Brahmins refused to officiate? Or is it that the ‘Broken Men’ refused to invite them? Why did the Brahmin regard the ‘Broken Men’ as impure?” From this Ambedkar concludes that the ‘Broken Men’ were originally Buddhists who were never part of the Brahmanic system.

Ambedkar acknowledges that there is no evidence for this theory yet, he asserts that, “If we accept that the Broken Men were the followers of Buddhism and did not care to return to Brahmanism when it became triumphant over Buddhism, we have an explanation for both the questions [untouchability and mutual contempt].” To validate this theory, Ambedkar merges the practice of beef-eating among Dalits in the present and ‘Broken Men’ in the past, as the root of untouchability. “Has beef-eating any relation to the origin of Untouchability? There need be

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100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
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no hesitation in returning an affirmative answer to this question." Ambedkar concludes that the ‘Broken Men’ were Buddhists who were in conflict with the Brahmins. Their contempt was mutual and dynamic. Because the Buddhists ate beef; the Brahmins sacralized the cow. Because the Buddhists rejected the varna system; the Brahmins created the avarna category. Therefore, Ambedkar’s ‘Broken Men’ are the Dalits who were socially and ritually cast(e) out of the varna system because they rejected Brahminism.

Various scholars critique Ambedkar’s narrative of the ‘Broken Men.’ Omvedt, Eleanor Zelliot, and Jaffrelot agree that Ambedkar had no historical proof that the ‘Broken Men’ were Buddhists. However, the lack of historical evidence is irrelevant for his theory. Omvedt argues that the first function of this theory is “the effort to construct an alternative identity of people, based on non-north Indian and low caste perspectives, critical not only of oppressiveness of the dominant Hindu caste society but also of its claims to antiquity and to being the major Indian tradition.” Zelliot suggests that Ambedkar was searching for an explanation of caste that was not connected to race. Jaffrelot argues that Ambedkar wanted to claim that Dalits are “descendants of the Buddhists who regarded themselves as endowed with a separate identity.” Further, Dalits are “external to the caste system and hostile to its logic because of the egalitarian nature of Buddhism.”

104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
109 Ibid, 40-41.
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This narrative, then, enables Ambedkar to provide Dalits with agency and a positive ideology. The ‘Broken Men’ have a separate identity and are ‘cast(e)’ out because they rejected Brahmanism. This is a prominent narrative for Dalits in India and one reason many seek conversion to Buddhism. Indeed, in 1956, Ambedkar converted to Buddhism in a public ceremony with approximately 300,000 to 600,000 Dalits (mostly Mahars) in Nagpur. This neo-Buddhist movement inspired by Ambedkar evolved from religious agitation among Dalits and is often dubbed “Ambedkarism.” Jaffrelot asserts that Ambedkar utilized this narrative to launch a “counter-offensive in which he sought to endow Untouchables with a glorious past.”

The “glorious past” is a “re-creation” and a “sub-alteration” that creates an alternative identity for Dalits. Through this narrative, Dalits are ‘re-cast’ with empowerment. Therefore, as Philip Vinod Peacock argues, through the ‘Broken Men,’ Ambedkar offers “a truly Dalit explanation for the origin of caste.” It does not follow a “defeated victim motif” but instead, gives the power of rejection directly to the Dalits.

1.3. The Chuhras of Nineteenth Century Punjab

In contrast to Bala Shah and Ambedkar’s ‘Broken Men,’ the Chuhras in nineteenth century Punjab constructed a different genealogical narrative. This story emerged during the

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110 See for example, Johannes Beltz, Mahar, Buddhist and Dalit: Religious Conversion and Socio-Political Emancipation (New Delhi: Manohar Press, 2005); R.P.N. Tiwari, Dalit and Neo-Buddhist Movements (Delhi: MD Publications), 2010.
112 Hebden, Dalit Theology, 88-89.
113 Jaffrelot, Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability, 40-41.
117 Ibid.
Chuhra mass movement to Christianity. This narrative is significant because it indicates the creative spirit of Dalits to “purge whatever hinders their potential for human flourishing.”118 For Chuhras participating in the mass movement, caste discrimination was the major impediment to human flourishing. And, caste persecution was the reality they wanted to ‘purge’ through conversion to Christianity. In this narrative, then, Dalit pathos emerges through a conscious ‘re-casting’ and a ‘re-creation’ of their historical context to empower their community and celebrate their agency.119

Like their ancestor Bala Shah, the Chuhras in Punjab had several genealogical myths that focused on upper caste deception and treachery. Hares reports that Chuhras had many “curious stories relating to their origin.”120 Hares recounts one narrative that is very similar to the Bala Shah’s story reported by Youngson:

They [Chuhras] claim to have been originally Brahmins, but were degraded to their present position in the following way. There were four brothers, Brahmins who lived together. One day one of their cows died, and, after some disputation as to who should remove the carcase [sic], the younger brother undertook to do it on the understanding that he should not be outcasted as a result. He removed the carcase [sic], but when he returned to the house, the three brothers refused to receive him, as through contact with the dead body he had become unclean.121

As with Bala Shah, the Brahmins promised to restore purity to the youngest brother who were polluted through contact with a dead cow. They promised to restore him on the fourth day; then the fourth week; then the fourth month; and then the fourth year.122

According to Hares, this narrative then took a surprising turn, with the acknowledgement of the mass movement to Christianity:

118 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
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[The brothers] finally promised to receive him back on the fourth Jug [era]. The present era according to Hindu reckoning, is the fourth Jug, and the Chuhras say that the time of their restoration has now come. Those who are acquainted with the story affirm that the present movement towards Christianity on the part of so many Chuhras is only the beginning of their restoration to their rightful place among men.123

What is creative about this “sub-alteration” is the acknowledgement that God has not willed Chuhra dehumanization.124 Instead, this narrative contests their low caste status in Hindu society. As part of ‘subversion’ this narrative also recognizes gullibility—evident from faith in their ‘Brahmin brothers’ who deceived them.125 O’Brien suggests that type of re-imagination is also an implicit rejection of Brahmanical purity and pollution.126 This ‘re-casting’ of Chuhra origins enables them to claim a “moral high-ground in relation to the officially pure and clean.”127

Another function of this story is Chuhra socio-political assertion. In the nineteenth century when Hares first encountered this narrative, the Chuhras in Punjab were converting to Christianity. As I show in Chapter 1, this movement was not without issues. Some missionaries were displeased with the ‘Chuhra’ association with Christianity.128 Because of Chuhra conversions to Christianity, many other Dalits including the Megs cut associations with missionaries.129 Therefore, in this narrative, conversion to Christianity also emerges as Dalit pathos. Unlike Bala Shah who remains a Chuhra for eternity, this narrative suggests that through conversion, Chuhras will find “restoration to their rightful place among men.”130 That “rightful place” is revealed through Christianity. Therefore, this narrative makes a bold claim: Chuhras are ‘cast(e) out’ of Hinduism in order to be ‘cast (e) in’ into Christianity.

124 O’Brien, The Unconquered People, 60.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
128 Juergensmeyer, Religion as Social Vision, 186.
130 Hares, The Story of A Canal Colony, 15.
2. ‘Cast(e) In’ to Christianity

The St. Thomas story is a significant genealogical narrative for Protestant Christians in Pakistan. This narrative functions differently for middle class Christians compared to Chuhra Christians. For middle class Christians, the notion that St. Thomas was in Taxila in 52 CE enables them to make certain political claims. First is the idea that Christianity did not emerge in Pakistan in the colonial period. Instead, it has deep roots in the region. Middle class Christians are anxious to claim this ancestry for political reasons. In an environment where many Christians feel politically ignored as non-Muslims, this narrative enables them to establish a genealogy as ‘indigenous people’ and equal citizens in Pakistan. Second, this narrative enables middle class Christians to lay roots in Pakistan, a Muslim nation as ‘Christians.’ Based on the belief that St. Thomas was in Taxila, Christians are able to assert that Pakistan is a shared sacred space for both Muslims and Christians.

In contrast to middle class Protestants, the St. Thomas story emerges as a counter-narrative for Chuhra Christians. The main concern for Chuhra Christians in Pakistani society is an association with pollution and discrimination. As such, incorporating this narrative into Chuhra churches enables the community to engage in two forms of protest. The first mode of protest is aimed at middle class Christians. This is because Chuhra Christians are aware that middle class Christians shun their community. The second mode of protest is directed toward many basti Muslims who treat them as ‘polluted.’ Similar to Dalit narratives in India that reject the dominant modes of Brahmanism, Chuhra pastors utilize the St. Thomas narrative to protest the dominant culture of ‘caste consciousness’ in Pakistan. What is rejected through this narrative is that Chuhra Christians are descendants of Dalit converts to Christianity in the nineteenth
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century. Therefore, this story becomes part of the counter-narrative of ‘caste denial’ for Chuhra Christians.

In the Indian genealogical narratives that I examine in section 1, ‘caste identity’ is not denied but instead it is re-imagined to ‘re-cast’ Brahmanical norms of purity and pollution. Because there is no national dialogue about ‘caste’ in Pakistan, the St. Thomas narrative functions as a ‘replacement myth’ for caste identity for Chuhra Christians. It ‘replaces’ the history of Dalit conversions to Christianity during the nineteenth century with a new genealogy. This ‘re-cast’ history enables Chuhra Christians to move fluidly from 52 CE to their current religious membership as ‘Christians.’ It also separates them, at least psychologically, from the social stigma associated with the Chuhra caste. This is because the pertinent issue for Chuhra Christians in Pakistani society is caste discrimination. Therefore, the St. Thomas narrative ‘replaces’ their Dalit ancestry with an ahistorical but less ‘polluted’ account. This enables Chuhra pastors to assert that they were ‘cast(e) in’ to Christianity without acknowledging that they were ‘cast(e) out’ of Hinduism first.

In the next section, I describe the St. Thomas narrative. I present the evidence for St. Thomas in Taxila. Second, I describe how the St. Thomas narrative functions for Chuhra churches and how pastors utilize this story to make genealogical claims for their community. Analyzing sermons and pamphlets in Chuhra churches, I show how this ‘counter-narrative’ is perpetuated. Chuhra pastors add many details to the scant information that is available on St. Thomas’ travels to Taxila. These additions enable pastors to make a stronger connection between Chuhra Christians to Christians in the first century. Through this re-imagination, Chuhra pastors reinforce the St. Thomas narrative to reject the dominant notions of ‘pollution’ that are operative
in Pakistan. What emerges is a ‘counter-narrative’ that aims to re-interpret caste discrimination and persecution that is connected to Dalit ancestry.

2.1. St. Thomas and Taxila

There is a long tradition in South India that St. Thomas the Apostle arrived on the Kerala coast in 52 CE and founded a Christian community. Indian Syrian Christians believe that St. Thomas came to Kerala to evangelize the small Jewish community there and instead found success among many low and high caste Hindus. By the end of his time in Kerala, tradition notes that St. Thomas converted many Hindus and established the Mar Thoma, or ‘Saint Thomas’ Church. St. Thomas established seven churches in South India, in Maliamkara, Palayur, Kottakavu, Quilon, Niranom, Nilakkal, and Chayal. Robinson argues that there is no literary evidence to support St. Thomas in India. But, as India and the Near East had strong commercial links during this time such a journey is not ahistorical. Despite the lack of reliable evidence, this narrative is a significant part of the Syrian Church in South India. Kerala Christians believe that St. Thomas was martyred by a Tamil king and is buried on the St. Thomas Mount in Chennai.

Robinson reports that Malayalam texts from the third century contain various legends of St. Thomas. These texts converge with an early west Asian hagiography, the Acts of Thomas

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132 Robinson, Christians of India, 39-41; Robinson and Clarke, Religious Conversions in India, 15.
135 Robinson, Christians of India, 39-41.
written in the third century in Syriac. Some texts also report that St. Thomas traveled to the India-Parthian Kingdom of Taxila, now in Pakistan. There is a corresponding tradition among Pakistani Protestants that St. Thomas traveled to Taxila in the first century. The historical evidence for St. Thomas in Taxila is as weak as his travels to Kerala. Theodore Gabriel notes there are accounts that St. Thomas was enslaved by an Indian called Habban and taken captive to Taxila. Habban then presented St. Thomas to the “legendary king Gondophares who ruled an Indo-Parthian kingdom from 21 AD for at least 26 years.” John Rooney argues that “Thomas was sold to Habban, the Merchant of the King” as a slave. Rooney also claims that because St. Thomas was likely a skilled slave, he enjoyed a “relationship and companionship with Habban.” Consequently, St. Thomas had freedom to travel and evangelize.

In 1935, a small cross was discovered near Sirkap during excavations. Salman Rashid argues that when the cross was found, Cuthbert King, the British Deputy Commissioner of Rawalpindi ‘grasped’ this as proof for St. Thomas in Taxila. King was familiar with the Acts of Thomas and his belief in St. Thomas’ sojourn to Taxila was strengthened when excavations of Sirkap dated ruins to the first century. This cross was adopted as the symbol of the Church of Pakistan on November 1, 1970. Sookhdeo argues that the Taxila Cross, however doubtful its historicity, is a powerful symbol for Christians in Pakistan. He notes that the cross “has

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137 Robinson, Christians of India, 39-41.
138 Ibid.
139 Ibid.
141 Ibid.
142 Ibid.
143 Ibid.
144 Ibid.
146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid.
become an object of great significance to Pakistani Christians, who see in it tangible proof that
Christianity is part of the heritage of Pakistan." In the inaugural speech of the COP in 1970,
the presiding bishop stated, “Adopting the Taxila Cross as our symbol, we want to establish the
fact that the Christian Church is not a recent addition in the country. Its heritage and past go back
to the early centuries of the Christian era.”

In 1988, Christian and Muslim scholars met at the Christian Study Centre in Rawalpindi
for a symposium to discuss the evidence for St. Thomas in Taxila. The symposium was
sponsored by the Protestant Diocese of Islamabad—Rawalpindi but was also attended by
Pakistani Catholics. During this conference, scholars debated the literary and archaeological
evidence for St. Thomas in Pakistan. At the conference, Christine Amjad-Ali argued there is
little literary evidence for St. Thomas in Taxila. She claimed that the authenticity of
hagiographical sources, the *Acts of Thomas* and *Hymns of St. Ephraem* (373 CE) written in
Syriac are suspect. These texts cannot “be taken as a serious historical narrative” as it is
impossible to “peel off the supposedly Gnostic layer and find the historical tradition
underneath.” Other scholars noted the absence of archeological evidence and of Christian
symbols on coins. This led conference participants to conclude, “no such Christian community
existed” in Taxila.

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149 Ibid.
150 Ibid.
151 Ibid, 1.
152 Ibid.
154 Ibid.
155 Ibid.
157 Ibid.

154
Chapter 4: Analyzing Chuhra Mythos and Pathos

Despite this lack of evidence, many Pakistani Christians believe that St. Thomas founded a Christian community in Taxila.\textsuperscript{158} Protestant Christians in Sindh assert that St. Thomas traveled to Karachi in 52 CE and established a Christian church.\textsuperscript{159} Protestants in Punjab claim that St. Thomas founded a community in Lahore.\textsuperscript{160} There is a village close to Sirkap called ‘Karamtoma’ which many claim is named after St. Thomas.\textsuperscript{161} A community of \textit{pirs} (holy ascetics) state they own a Bible that St. Thomas left behind.\textsuperscript{162} Sookhdeo reports that a secretive community called the Thatta Nagar Fakirs say they are descendants of Christians who were baptized by St. Thomas.\textsuperscript{163} Gabriel notes that some Thatta Nagar Fakirs call themselves “Barthamai” or ‘Sons of Thomas.’\textsuperscript{164} They also report to “possess books and relics” from the Apostle.\textsuperscript{165} Pakistani Protestants also believe that Melchior, one of magi who visited the infant Jesus was a scholar from the University of Taxila.\textsuperscript{166} Therefore, despite the lack of concrete sources, St. Thomas was in Taxila is part of the Pakistani Christian tradition.

Although the COP adopted the Taxila Cross, it does not function as a source of theological identity for most middle class COP Christians. Pastors in middle class churches do not eulogize this narrative or refer to it liturgically. In a lecture on St. Thomas, Pastor Riaz Daniel from the Karachi COP diocese, a middle class church noted, “We value the history of St. Thomas. It is a testament to our roots in this country but we don’t feel the need to preach this

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{158} Gabriel, \textit{Christian Citizens}, 18.
  \item \textsuperscript{159} Sookhdeo, \textit{A People Betrayed}, 34.
  \item \textsuperscript{160} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{162} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{163} Sookhdeo, \textit{A People Betrayed}, 34; See also John Rooney, \textit{Shadows in the Dark: A History of Christianity in Pakistan up to the 10th Century} (Rawalpindi: Christian Study Centre, 1984), 45.
  \item \textsuperscript{164} Gabriel, \textit{Christian Citizens}, 18.
  \item \textsuperscript{165} Sookhdeo, \textit{A People Betrayed}, 34.
  \item \textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
The function of the Taxila story for most middle class Christians is ideological and often political but does not connect to theological identity. This is because middle class Christians do not contend with caste issues in Pakistan that are related to Dalit ancestry and pollution. However, in Chuhra churches, pastors have amalgamated the St. Thomas narrative into services and preach this story often. The incorporation of the St. Thomas narrative into sermons is distinct to Chuhra Christians. Many pastors in Chuhra churches regard the St. Thomas narrative as living genealogical account for their community.

2.2. Perpetuating the Narrative

In Chuhra churches, pastors allude to the St. Thomas narrative frequently. In the church services I examine, the story of St. Thomas in Taxila is referenced in 70 percent of church sermons. Pastors refer to this story during most services and on special days such as Easter and Christmas. Chuhra pastors re-tell this narrative with absolute certainty as if there is no historical doubt that St. Thomas traveled to Sirkap and established a Christian community in 52 CE. Chuhra pastors utilize this story to reinforce to the community that their ancestry begins with St. Thomas in 52 CE and not with Dalit conversions in the nineteenth century. Pastors then claim that these early Christians are the ancestors of the Chuhras. During an Easter service in 2011, a pastor said, “People say we are Chuhras but we are not. We have never been Hindus. We have been Christians since St. Thomas converted us.” During a 2011 Christmas service, a pastor preached that Christians in Pakistan were the direct descendents of St. Thomas who lived

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168 Ibid.
169 DVDs, Multiple services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.
170 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
172 DVD, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, Easter Service, 2011.
in Taxila for many years. In a November 2011 service, a pastor asserted, “We are the original inhabitants of this country. We are the original Christians in this land. We have proof from St. Thomas.”

Pastors in these churches also claim that St. Thomas traveled to Karachi and established a Christian community in the first century. This claim enables pastors to connect St. Thomas to their congregations. During an October 2011 service, the pastor intimated that St. Thomas lived in Karachi for a long time and founded the Punjabi church. In a Sunday church service in May 2009, the pastor reported that St. Thomas had traveled from Taxila to Karachi where he founded a basti very similar to Asam Colony. According to this pastor, the basti was built for Christians but after Partition, they had to share this space with Muslims. In a July 2009 service, a pastor indicated that the first Christians lived in Taxila for many years and worshiped in a church that St. Thomas built. When the British ruled this region, they demanded that the Christians leave Taxila and so the community had to relocate to Karachi.

Such stories are prevalent in sermons and gain momentum in the community. In an Easter service in 2009, a pastor preached that St. Thomas is buried in Taxila. Many details are added in the course of these sermons that expand the narrative of St. Thomas. One pastor preached that ‘miracles’ could occur through faith in Christianity because St. Thomas had blessed this land and made it holy. During a Christmas service in 2009, a pastor incorporated a special sermon

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173 DVD, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, Christmas Service, 2011.
174 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, October 2011.
175 DVDs, Multiple services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.
176 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, May 2009.
177 Ibid.
178 Ibid.
179 Ibid.
180 Ibid.
181 Ibid.
182 Ibid.
about St. Thomas. He argued, “St. Thomas is the proof that Christianity is real. That God is real. If Jesus was not real, why would St. Thomas have come here? He came here to be with us.” After this sermon, the congregation gave the pastor resounding applause. In a July 2010 service, the pastor notes that many people say there is no proof for St. Thomas in Taxila. He claimed this was a method to ‘falsify’ Christianity. He further noted that this church [in the basti] was proof that St. Thomas was in Taxila because he founded this basti when he traveled through Karachi.

The localization of the St. Thomas narrative in the basti is what Rajkumar describes as a “sub-alteration.” These stories emerge as the deliberate and conscious methods of subverting, re-telling, and re-imagining the past in order for Chuhra Christians to conceptualize the present. As Arun suggests, historical evidence, is irrelevant for the function of Dalit narratives. To Chuhra pastors and congregants, the significance arises from the ‘re-casting’ and ‘re-creation’ of this genealogical account. The ‘re-creation’ is evident in the way Chuhras claim ‘ownership’ over St. Thomas and his travels into Sindh. These stories gain strength and vindication over time. For example, in a church pamphlet, one pastor notes, “The Punjabi church is the original church. It was the first church established in Pakistan.” He also claims, “The Taxila Cross is the symbol of the COP because it is the only authentic church in Pakistan.”

183 DVD, Christmas service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, December 2009.
184 Ibid.
185 Ibid.
186 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, July 2010.
187 Ibid.
188 Ibid.
189 Arun, Constructing Dalit, 37-38; Rajkumar, Dalit Theology and Dalit Liberation, 122-23.
191 Church pamphlet, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, December 12, 2012.
192 Ibid.
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What is significant about the additions to the St. Thomas story are the elements of ‘subversion’ in the details. There is an underlying tension between being ‘cast(e) in’ to Christianity through St. Thomas while also being ‘cast(e) out’ by other people. This is significant for Chuhra self-reflection because their daily experiences are marked by social exclusion in Pakistani society. This manifests in sermons. In the above cited examples, being ‘cast (e) in’ to Christianity is evident through certain claims including that St. Thomas established the first Punjabi church in Karachi.\(^{193}\) This is logical as Chuhra are ethnically Punjabi. There is also the claim that St. Thomas founded a *basti* similar to Asam Colony which was originally built for Christians.\(^{194}\) There are corresponding elements of being ‘cast(e) out’ contained in these stories as well. Pastors claim that after Partition, the Christians had to share ‘their’ *basti* with Muslims.\(^{195}\) There is also the sentiment that Christians, presumably the ancestors of the Chuhras, lived in Taxila until they were ‘cast(e) out’ by the British.\(^{196}\) These stories gain traction through sermons in the *basti* churches.

The St. Thomas story is also re-told in church during prayer circles.\(^{197}\) In prayer circles, women recount the St. Thomas story to remind the community that their ancestral roots in the region extend beyond the creation of Pakistan in 1947.\(^{198}\) During a prayer circle in 2011, women note that St. Thomas had blessed their community.\(^{199}\) For the women in the prayer circles, this is a source of empowerment. As many women work in menial occupations as maids and sweepers, the notion that St. Thomas has blessed their community is a source of comfort. It also serves to remove ‘pollution’ from women who work in degrading and ‘unclean’ occupations. Children

\(^{193}\) DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, November 2011.
\(^{194}\) DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, May 2009.
\(^{195}\) Ibid.
\(^{196}\) DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, July 2009.
\(^{197}\) DVD, Prayer circle, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, May 2009.
\(^{198}\) DVD, Prayer circle, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, December 2011.
\(^{199}\) Ibid.
learn these accounts at Sunday school every week.\textsuperscript{200} Localizing and indigenizing the narrative makes it more appealing to Chuhra youth. Many children in the church are familiar that St. Thomas traveled to Karachi.\textsuperscript{201} In Sunday school, pastors and teachers reinforce that St. Thomas established a \textit{basti} and a Punjabi church as early as 52 CE.\textsuperscript{202}

These details about St. Thomas and his travels to Karachi, provide Chuhra Christians in the \textit{basti} with the empowering knowledge that they were ‘cast(e) in’ to Christianity as early as the first century. In addition, Thomas established a church for their community. What is significant about this discourse is that it is in sharp contrast to actual Chuhra Christian history which begins in the Hindu Dalit community. Therefore, part of the function of the St. Thomas narrative is the active denial of caste identity. Such forms of caste denial are common in Dalits in India. When faced with social discrimination, many Dalits conceal their \textit{avarna} status. Shailaja Paik argues that many Dalit women engage in caste denial that includes “hiding” ritual practices so they can “pass” as low caste instead of untouchables.\textsuperscript{203} This also manifests as a concern for Chuhra Christians that is clarified through St. Thomas. Because Chuhra Christians face discrimination because of their association with pollution and degrading occupations, this story enables them to ‘re-cast’ a new image for their community that is not connected to Dalit ancestry.

2.3. \textbf{Re-casting the Narrative}

Chuhra Christians face two main issues in their community: pollution and social discrimination. As I show in Chapter 2, in colloquial Urdu in Karachi, ‘Chuhra’ is a pejorative term that is commonly used to denote a ‘low caste sweeper.’ In the \textit{basti}, it has the added

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{200} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{201} DVD, Prayer circle, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2011.
\item \textsuperscript{202} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{203} Shailja Paik, \textit{Dalit Women in Modern India: Double Discrimination} (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014), 254.
\end{itemize}
association with the word ‘Christian.’ Sookhdeo argues that discrimination in Pakistan specifically manifests against Chuhras because of Dalit ancestry. There is a belief that “the impurity of the Chuhras will be passed on by physical contact with them.” In many parts of Karachi, commensal segregation particularly affects Chuhra sanitation workers. Therefore, ‘pollution’ is still associated with Chuhra Christians. In this context, the St. Thomas story is ‘re-cast’ as a counter-narrative and a rejection of caste discrimination.

Among Chuhra women, particularly sweepers, the St. Thomas narrative is utilized in prayer circles as a method to break any Hindu associations with their community. During a prayer circle, one sweeper noted, “The fruit sellers [Muslim] in the basti call me a Chuhra. I do Chuhra work but I am not a Chuhra. I have always been Christian.” Another woman in the prayer circle argued that the term ‘Chuhra’ is for Hindus and not Christians. She claims that Hindus are doubly unclean. First, because they work in the sanitation industry and second, because they are part of an ‘unclean’ or na-pak religion. On the other hand, she claims that Christianity is a pak religion. She suggests this is evidenced by St. Thomas’ travels to Karachi, as he would not have spent extensive time in a place filled with ‘unclean’ people. A prayer leader in this prayer meeting confirmed this perception. This prayer leader argued that because St. Thomas established a church in Karachi, it is proof that her community is not associated with

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204 Streelfland, *The Sweepers of Slaughterhouse*, 22.
205 Sookhdeo, *A People Betrayed*, 231.
206 Ibid.
207 DVD, Prayer circle, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, May 2010.
208 Ibid.
209 Ibid.
210 Ibid.
211 DVD, Prayer circle, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, June 2010.
Hinduism. Further, because St. Thomas was an Apostle, it means he was pak. Therefore, her community is not and never has been na-pak.

Chuhra pastors exhibit similar modes of dissent in church when discussing social interactions with Muslims. In church, pastors note that when Muslims in the basti call them “Chuhra,” they cite the story of St. Thomas as a ‘corrective.’ One pastor reports that many Muslims assume that he was a Dalit. He argues, “I tell them that we have been Christians since St. Thomas. There are no Hindus in our community.” He encouraged the congregation to do the same. Another pastor related conversations that he has with local imams in church. This pastor claims that some imams are hesitant to accept dinner invitations to the church because of the perception that Christians are na-pak. On these occasions, this pastor cites the St. Thomas story as proof of his pak status. “The Hindus are na-pak. But we are not. We have never been Hindu. We have been Christians since St. Thomas came to Karachi.” In one sermon, a pastor said that many imams are familiar with St. Thomas but associates this story with middle class Christians. “He [imam] thinks only the rich Christians are from St. Thomas and we are the achut [outcastes] of the Hindus. That is why we should tell everyone we have been Christian since before this country was born.”

What these pastors reject through this counter-narrative is the perception of Chuhra Christians as na-pak people. Therefore, pastors make a point to connect their roots to St. Thomas

\[212\] Ibid.
\[213\] Ibid.
\[214\] Ibid.
\[215\] DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, April 2010.
\[216\] Ibid.
\[217\] Ibid.
\[218\] Ibid.
\[219\] DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, October 2010.
\[220\] Ibid.
\[221\] Ibid.
\[222\] Ibid.
Instead of Hinduism. During one church service in August 2010, a pastor said, “When they [Muslims] say that we are unclean, you should tell them that we are the cleanest people because we were chosen by God.”

In a June 2010 service, a pastor intimated that the congregation should remember their ancestral roots to St. Thomas. “WE are the indigenous religion in this land. The Muslims are our guests.” These comments confirm that this narrative functions to veil identity. Drawing a connection to St. Thomas in the first century is a way for Chuhra Christians to ‘re-cast’ their community and engage “new templates of identity and meaning.”

These new templates function to purge Chuhra Christians from Dalit roots and ‘re-claim’ an identity that begins in Taxila in 52 CE. The story of St. Thomas enables pastors to issue a ‘corrective’ and offer a ‘replacement myth’ for the Dalit ancestry of Chuhra Christians.

In addition to social interactions with Muslims, Chuhra pastors are very conscious of the middle class Christian disregard for their community. Streefland observed that middle class Christians “shirk contact with Christian Punjabi Sweepers and disassociate themselves unconditionally from them because of their origins.” Sookhdeo argues, “Christians from non-Chuhra origins look down on all the Chuhra Christians, some refusing to eat and drink with them, just as Muslims refuse to do so.” In a Christmas service, a pastor devoted part of his sermon to the St. Thomas story and used this to illuminate the issues within the Christian community. This pastor said, “our own people [middle class Christians] treat us like the basti

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223 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, August 2010.
224 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, June 2010.
225 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, June 2010.
228 Ibid.
229 Sookhdeo, A People Betrayed, 307; Dominic Moghal, Human Person in Punjabi Society: A Tension Between Religion and Culture (Rawalpindi: Christian Study Centre, 1997), 47; Streefland, The Sweepers of Slaughterhouse, 34.
Muslims do. They think we are *na-pak*. In this sermon, this pastor notes that middle class Christians do not help the Chuhra Christians and do not work for their empowerment. "They are only concerned with their own community. They do nothing to help us."  

In church pamphlets, pastors also claim that middle class Christians consider their community *na-pak*. "They will not hire us and we will not work for them. They think we are *na-pak*." In one pamphlet, a pastor notes that wealthy Muslims have better relations with Chuhra Christians compared to middle class Christians. “With the rich Muslims, we have no problems. But our own community [middle class Christians] thinks we are achut.” In other pamphlets, the St. Thomas story is utilized to reject middle class behavior towards Chuhra Christians. In an October 2010 pamphlet, a pastor comments that middle class Christians shun *basti* Christians in order to find social acceptance with middle class Muslims. “They [middle class Christians] will not associate with us because they think the Muslims will reject them. They will dine with them but they will not take Communion in our church.” In a September 2010 pamphlet, a pastor notes that middle class Christians do not help their community secure better jobs. He argues, “the amir Christians do nothing to help us. They only help their own people.”  

As these sermons and pamphlets reveal, there are multiple modes of dissent and assertion in Chuhra churches that aim to deconstruct the dominant modes of social discrimination in Pakistan. Because there is no national dialogue on ‘caste,’ these counter-narratives are often disguised and erupt as anger or betrayal. Sermons reveal that Chuhra pastors are angry about the

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230 DVD, Christmas service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, December 2010.
231 Ibid.
232 Ibid.
233 Ibid.
234 Church pamphlet, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, December 2012.
235 Ibid.
236 Church pamphlet, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, October 2010.
237 Ibid.
238 Church pamphlet, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, September 2010
association of pollution with their community and also feel betrayed by the disregard of middle class Christians. The St. Thomas narrative is utilized to dispel the association of pollution with Chuhra Christians and to deny the Dalit ancestry of this community. Through the localization of the St. Thomas narrative, pastors claim that their ancestry is not connected to conversions in the nineteenth century but instead begins in the first century. This mode of subversion enables Chuhra pastors to assert a new genealogy and a mechanism to veil caste identity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I engage Dalit genealogical narratives as a method to explore modes of Dalit dissent. In this first section, I describe how genealogical narratives function in Dalit communities in India. Through Bala Shah, Ambedkar’s ‘Broken Men’ and the Chuhras in the nineteenth century, I argue that these stories provide Dalits with a method to critique upper caste hegemony and re-imagine their social reality as avarnas. In the second section of this chapter, I connect these themes of Dalit subversion in India to Chuhra Christians in Pakistan. I argue that among Chuhra Christians, the St. Thomas narrative emerges as a significant mode of dissent. This narrative enables Chuhra Christians to connect their ancestry to Christianity as early as the first century while denying their Hindu Dalit past. This is a form of Chuhra Christian rejection of the perception of their community as na-pak. Further, it provides a form of pathos whereby they can “purge whatever hinders their potential for human flourishing.”239 In the context of Chuhra Christians, what needs to be purged is their ‘polluted’ connection to Hinduism and their Dalit ancestry.

239 Ibid.
Chapter 5: Emerging Chuhra ‘Folk Theology’

Introduction

In 2012, Paul Bhatti, a Christian and the Pakistan Minister for National Harmony, was questioned about Christian persecution in Pakistan. Bhatti made the following observation: “It is not just a religious problem. It’s a caste factor, because it is a certain group of people who belong to the poorest and most marginalized people. They are Christian but unfortunately, this caste system creates a lot of problems.”¹ Muslim writers and social activists also highlight this issue in the Pakistani media. K.M. Azam writes, “poor Christians, particularly in our rural areas, are not treated well. Of course, this is largely due to the Hindu caste system, which, unfortunately, still continues to have a hold on our rural society.”² In this chapter, I discuss the emerging Chuhra ‘folk theology’ in Pakistan. As I show in Chapter 2, conversion to Christianity did not remove the stigma of caste from Chuhra Christians.³ Therefore, Chuhra folk theology is a response to caste persecution in Pakistan.

For many Chuhra Christians in Pakistan, particularly in bastis, their occupation as sweepers and sanitation workers reinforces caste persecution.⁴ Therefore, the social reality for many Chuhras is rooted in servanthood. This is contained in the life experience of sweeping, cleaning, and serving others. Related to servanthood is the notion that these occupations are inherited from an outcast ancestry.⁵ Because of their connection to degrading occupations and pollution, many pastors in Chuhra churches emphasize biblical passages that reinterpret the concept of cleaning. Two biblical narratives have particular importance in Chuhra sermons. The first is the story of Jesus washing the Apostles’ feet and the second is the story of Mary

³ Streefland, The Sweepers of Slaughterhouse, 9.
⁵ DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, June 2010.
Magdalene washing Jesus’ feet.  

I discuss the relevance of both these stories in the development of a Chuhra folk theology. I argue that Chuhra pastors utilize these stories to ‘re-cast’ the image of servanthood in positive and uplifting terms. Through the re-imagination of these biblical stories, Chuhra pastors reject Pakistani norms of pollution and its association with their community.

In the first section of this chapter, I describe Dalit theology in India. The term ‘Dalit theology’ is specific to Christian Dalits. A contextual theology based on liberative themes, it arises from the experience of caste oppression and marginalization. I show what prompted this movement and what it articulates. This background is necessary for an analysis of Chuhra Christian folk theology in Pakistan for two reasons. First, Dalit theology is a distinct Christian response to caste discrimination. Second, it underscores the significance of ‘re-claiming’ particular modes of thinking and talking about God from the perspective of caste persecution. Dalit theology utilizes the self-conscious name ‘Dalit’ as the epistemological starting point for a relationship with God. For Christian Dalits in India, this relationship is based on brokenness. Through this theology, modes of brokenness are re-interpreted to assert two things. First, God is a co-sufferer with his broken people, and second, that God is Dalit.

In the second section, I engage emerging Chuhra theology in Pakistan. The context for this theology influences its form and content. In India, Dalit Christians are able to make certain claims about God, caste, and community because caste is part of public discourse. As I show throughout this dissertation, caste consciousness in Pakistan is either ignored or buried. Because of this factor, Chuhra pastors express their experiences of caste persecution through indirect

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6 John 13:1-17, NRSV.
7 John 13:1-17.
modes. For example, many church sermons focus on re-claiming servanthood for their community. Others sermons underscore the need for Chuhra Christians to acquire izzat (respect) in Pakistani society. I argue these ideas are theological ‘sub-text’ for contesting caste persecution in Pakistan. In contrast to ‘brokenness’ in Indian Dalit theology, the concept of izzat is the focal point for Chuhra folk theology. Church sermons reveal that for Chuhra Christians, izzat directly relates to inherent ‘self-worth’ and emerges as the inverse of ‘pollution.’ The goal of Chuhra folk theology aims to re-claim izzat for their community in a caste conscious society.

3. Dalit Theology: Voices of Liberation in India

In nineteenth century India, a movement to indigenize Christianity emerged from upper caste Hindu converts to Christianity. In 1879, a lecture by Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884), the leader of the Brahmo Samaj prompted this trend. In this lecture, Sen asked India to “see Christ in the plenitude of his glory and in the fullness and freshness of his divine life.” K.C. Abraham argues that this lecture marked a shift in Indian Christian theology. After Sen’s lecture, many Indian Christians sought to develop a distinctly ‘Indian’ theology that reflected indigenous thought and practice. What emerged was a diversity of ‘theologies.’ While these theologies focused on the indigenization project, the majority of these theologians were upper caste Hindu converts to Christianity. Because upper caste converts were familiar with the Brahmanic tradition, this indigenization movement utilized Brahmanic concepts to explain Christianity with a particular preference for Vedantic thought.

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
Chapter 5: Emerging Chuhrā ‘Folk Theology’

Upper caste Christian theologians utilized Hindu modes of expression to explain and reflect on Christian themes.\(^{13}\) Indian theologian Vengal Chakkarai (1880-1958) tried to explain the divinity of Jesus Christ using Hindu language.\(^{14}\) He describes Jesus as “sat purusa” or “truly human” and the Hindu term “shruti” (that which is heard), to describe the New Testament.\(^ {15}\) Similarly, Pandipeddi Chenchiah (1886-1959) based his understanding of Christian doctrine on the philosophy of Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950).\(^ {16}\) Bishop A.J. Appassamy (1891-1975) gained fame in western theological circles by reinterpreting Christianity though the lens of Hindu bhakti (devotional) traditions.\(^ {17}\) In his work, he employed Vedantic categories, pramanas or ‘evidences’ to present Christianity as a bhakti tradition that was consonant with Hinduism.\(^ {18}\) All three theologians engaged Brahmanical sacred literature to translate Christianity into the local Indian context.

The trend to localize Christianity through a Brahmanical lens continues with contemporary Indian Christian theologians. Raimon Pannikar (1918-2010) based his interreligious framework on the upper caste Hindu philosopher, Adi Shankara (700-750 CE).\(^ {19}\) Pannikar engaged Brahmanical texts including the Brahama Sutras to explore the universality of

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\(^{13}\) Ibid.


\(^{15}\) Jan Peter Schouten, *Jesus As Guru: The Image of Christ Among Hindus and Christians in India* (Amsterdam Rodopi, 2008), 120-121.


\(^{18}\) Ibid.

Christ.\textsuperscript{20} In his book, \textit{The Unknown Christ of Hinduism} (1981), Pannikar explores the Trinity through an Advaita (non-dualism) methodology.\textsuperscript{21} Similarly, Tamil theologian Thomas M. Thangaraj utilizes the Shaiva concept of ‘guru’ to explain the anthropology of a fully divine and immanent Christ.\textsuperscript{22} There were two issues with this indigenization process. First, these upper caste theologians ignored the “sociology of the Indian Church itself, which was and remains predominantly Dalit.”\textsuperscript{23} Second, these efforts to localize Christianity emerged from engaging Brahmanical texts.\textsuperscript{24}

The upper caste Christian indigenization project was a source of frustration and alienation for Dalit Christians. Not only did this Indian Christian theology ignore Dalit Christian social reality, it also venerated Brahmanical sources—the centripetal texts for caste purity and pollution.\textsuperscript{25} This led Christian Dalits to realize that Christian theology in India was amiss.\textsuperscript{26} In order to represent caste discrimination in the church; a new theology had to emerge from the experiences of the persecuted community.\textsuperscript{27} This void was filled by a ‘liberation theology’ that was distinct to marginalized Christian Dalits in the church.\textsuperscript{28} Liberation theology developed simultaneously in both Latin America and the United States in the 1970s. The seminal texts for this theological engagement are Gustavo Guiterrez’s \textit{A Theology of Liberation}, (1971) and James

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\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} Webster, \textit{Religion and Dalit Liberation}, 62.
\textsuperscript{24} Raja, \textit{Jesus the Dalit}, 7-9.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} Hans Schwarz, \textit{Theology in a Global Context: The Last Two Hundred Years} (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Press, 2005), 529.
\textsuperscript{28} Webster, \textit{Religion and Dalit Liberation}, 62.
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Cone’s *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970). Both authors argue that Christianity is in essence, a religion of liberation for the poor and oppressed.\(^{29}\)

For Guiterrez, liberation theology was constructed on the social reality of class divisions in Latin America.\(^{30}\) For Cone, liberation theology was founded on the oppression of black people in the United States because of race.\(^{31}\) In India, liberation theology emerged from the marginalization of Dalits based on caste discrimination. Almost 85 percent of the Indian church is Dalit.\(^{32}\) As Dalit Christians, they face persecution from both upper caste Hindus and upper caste Christian converts.\(^{33}\) Few upper caste Christian theologians addressed this dynamic partially because they were not the subjects of caste persecution. But, caste discrimination was, and is, a prevalent feature of the Indian church.\(^{34}\) Z. Devasagayaraj writes, “After the Dalit has entered the church, the high caste members will sprinkle ‘holy’ water to purify all that has been touched by them. They cannot even sit on the pews, for the high caste Christians will not sit beside them.”\(^{35}\) Mosse notes that Dalit Christians are underrepresented in the Indian church.\(^{36}\) Upper caste converts treat Dalits with contempt and few are on pastoral councils or in church leadership.\(^{37}\)

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\(^{30}\) Ibid.

\(^{31}\) Ibid. See also Rufus Burrow, *James H. Cone and Black Liberation Theology* (New York: McFarland and Company, 1994), 139-140.


\(^{33}\) Ibid.

\(^{34}\) Rowena Robinson, *Christians*, 80.


\(^{36}\) Mosse, *The Saint in the Banyan Tree*, 210-211.

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In some Christian churches in India, Dalits are prohibited from learning catechism, joining the choir, or participating in services.\(^{38}\) “[Dalit Christians] had separate cemeteries, (and paths to them) and funeral biers; where the bodies of the dead were not permitted into the church for funeral mass (or to pass through upper-caste streets en route to the cemetery).”\(^{39}\) In many churches, Dalit Christians have a separate seating area from high caste Christians and are not permitted to touch the Bible.\(^{40}\) Robinson claims it is rare to find a church that does not practice some form of segregation between upper caste and Dalit Christians.\(^{41}\) Dalits and upper caste converts rarely worship together.\(^{42}\) And some churches use different cups and utensils to serve Dalits during church gatherings and festivals.\(^{43}\) Webster argues that when Dalit Christians recognized that the basis of their marginalization was ‘caste,’ “a new Dalit theology was ready to born.”\(^{44}\) This theology was rooted in the Dalit Christian experience of caste persecution.\(^{45}\)

3.1. Dalit Theology: Reclaiming Brokenness

In the 1980s, a new theology emerged in the Indian Christian community. This was called ‘Dalit theology’ and was a response to two things: 1) the use of Brahmanic sources to indigenize Indian Christian theology, and 2) caste persecution. The central question of this theology is the nature of Jesus Christ and his role among Dalit Christians.\(^{46}\) The Bible is re-interpreted in light of liberation, equality, and justice through the painful experience of being ‘cast(e) out’ of the

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\(^{39}\) Ibid.

\(^{40}\) Arulraja, \textit{Jesus the Dalit}, 7-9.

\(^{41}\) Robinson, \textit{Christians}, 80.

\(^{42}\) Ibid.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 81.

\(^{44}\) Webster, \textit{Religion and Dalit Liberation}, 64.


\(^{46}\) Webster, \textit{Religion and Dalit Liberation}, 64.
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varna system.47 Of the external influences to this theology, the most significant is the work of Ambedkar. Webster argues that three Dalit theologians utilized Ambedkar in Dalit theology: M.E. Prabhakar, P. Arokiadoss, and Arvind P. Nirmal. A brief examination of Ambedkar’s influence on Dalit theology is significant to this discussion. As the ‘father’ of the modern Dalit movement, Ambedkar influenced Dalit theology in two important ways. First, he made Dalit theologians conscious of the need for Dalit unity across religious boundaries. Second, he affected the tone of Dalit theology as a reactive and conflictual response to caste oppression.

Prabhakar argued that Ambedkarism and Christian theology could work in synthesis to offer liberation to Dalit Christians.48 Prabhakar notes that Ambedkar was often critical of Christianity but he never resented a Dalit becoming Christian.49 Ambedkar’s critiques of Christianity were connected to the doctrine of sin.50 Ambedkar argued that the concept of original sin made Christian converts passive.51 Ambedkar feared that Christian Dalits were moving from one fatalistic religion (Hinduism) to another (Christianity).52 For Prabhakar, this critique was valid. But what appealed to him was Ambedkar’s desire for Dalit unity.53 Webster argues that in Ambedkar’s critiques, Prabhakar saw the need for internal reform in the church and for the “ideological unity between Christian Dalits and other faiths in a shared struggle.”54 Therefore, Prabhakar stresses that Dalit Christians should develop a theology that addresses the

47 Ibid.
48 M. E. Prabhakar, “Dr. Ambedkar and Indian Christianity,” in Frontiers of Dalit Theology, Arvind P Nirmal and V. Devashayam, eds., (Delhi: ISPCK, 1992), 75-78.
51 Ibid, 448.
52 Ibid.
53 Prabhakar, “Dr. Ambedkar,” 74-75.
54 Webster, Religion and Dalit Liberation, 70.
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persecution of all Dalits. “Christian Dalits are human beings and Christianity is basically humanist i.e., the restoration of broken relationships between man and man, woman and woman, high caste and low caste, master and servant.” The emphasis of this theology was creating a “unifying” strategy that engaged other Dalits in similar situations.

Similarly to Prabhakar, P. Arokiadoss, a Jesuit from Madras, employed Ambedkar’s writing to develop a distinct ‘Dalit theology.’ Arokiadoss presented ten propositions to delineate the significance of Ambedkar’s ideas for Indian Christians. Two of these propositions are particularly relevant to the development of Dalit theology. In proposition number 6, Arokiadoss argues that Ambedkar was familiar with the biblical story of liberation. He further asserts that Ambedkar teaches Indian Christians that Dalits are the ‘real’ subjects of theologizing in India. In proposition 7, Arokiadoss argues that in following Ambedkar, the language of Dalit theology will be angry and conflictual. This is a key point in Dalit theology which emerged as a counter-narrative to the dominant tradition. Dalit theology is a conscious reclamation of the theological space that was usurped by Brahmanism and assigned Dalits their polluted and avarna status.

Because of their historic marginalization, Arokiadoss argues that Ambedkar “helps us [Christian Dalits] realize” what is means to be messianic people.

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55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
58 P. Arokiadoss, “The Significance of Dr. Ambedkar for Theologizing in India,” in Frontiers of Dalit Theology, in V. Devashayam, eds., (Delhi: ISPCK, 1997), 290-313. The ten points are section headings in this essay by Arokiadoss.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 Arokiadoss, “The Significance of Dr. Ambedkar,” 298-299.
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The most significant theologian in the Dalit movement was Arvind P. Nirmal (1936-1995). Nirmal, considered the ‘father of Dalit theology,’ argued that Dalit Christians were the oppressed children of the church. And, they required a distinctly Indian ‘liberation theology’ to address their needs. In his search for authentically Indian liberation motifs, Nirmal also turned to Ambedkar. Nirmal argues that Ambedkar correctly assessed that the issue facing Dalits is misery (dukka). This misery has three components. First, there is the physical dukka caused by poverty. Second, the mental dukka caused by lack of human dignity and third, the spiritual dukka caused through guilt and sin. Nirmal argues that as a sociologist, Ambedkar was aware that human dignity was a requirement for Dalit empowerment. But, he overlooked the significance of spiritual empowerment. This was the lacuna that Dalit theology aimed to fill. Drawing on Ambedkar’s writings on the Buddhist dharma for inspiration, Nirmal presented the characteristics of ‘Dalit theology,’ which he thought, reflected the struggle of the Indian church.

In dialogue with Ambedkar, Nirmal proposed a methodology for Dalit theology that was both provocative and reactive. Nirmal argues that Dalit theology must be “a counter-theology.” It is a counter-theology because it is an overt rejection of Brahmanism and norms of purity and pollution. “It will present a radical discontinuity with the traditional Indian Christian theology

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65 Webster, *Religion and Dalit Liberation*, 67.
67 Clarke, “Dalit Theology,”19.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.

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because the dominant tradition is [...] essentially Brahmanic in character.”

According to Nirmal, the biblical story reveals that “the Triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is on the side of the Dalits and not the oppressors.” The oppressors in this context are those within the varna system who uphold and preserve caste oppression. Because of this, Nirmal asserts that Dalit theology must remain “methodologically exclusive.” It should be an honest reflection of Dalit experiences, suffering, and pain-pathos. After years of systematic oppression from Brahmanism, Nirmal considered “methodological exclusivism” a necessity for Dalit liberation. Therefore, Nirmal asserts that any influences from the dominant theological tradition are excluded from Dalit consciousness.

The methodological exclusivism is significant to Dalit consciousness because according to Nirmal, this counter-theology must be a distinct expression of Dalit pain-pathos. For Nirmal, like Ambedkar, Dalit pain-pathos is unparalleled and is intimately connected to social and theological identity. Pain is also the basis for the self-conscious name “Dalit” which means, ‘broken, crushed, and oppressed.’ Nirmal identifies that the root of Dalit pain-pathos is the varna system that is reified through Brahmanical texts. These texts are the source of purity and pollution that reject Dalits as the avarnas. Because of this emphasis on pain, Rajkumar argues

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76 Nirmal, “A Dialogue With Dalit Literature,” 76.
77 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid. See also, Andrew Wyatt, “Dalit Theology and the Politics of Untouchability,” in From Stigma to Assertion: Untouchability, Identity and Politics in Early and Modern India, Mikael Aktor and Robert Deliege, eds., (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 2010), 134.
83 Ibid. See also, Nirmal, “Towards a Christian Dalit Theology,” 141; Forrester, Forrester on Christian Ethics, 92.
86 Nirmal “Towards a Dalit Theology,” 32.
87 Ibid.
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that the primacy of pain emerges as the epistemological starting point for a Dalit relationship with God. Clarke notes that this pain-pathos relates to Nirmal’s insistence on the “methodological exclusivism.” While people who are sympathetic to avarna injustice are welcome to share that ‘pain-pathos’ with them; ultimately, only Dalits can fully express their own pathetic theology.

The key feature of Dalit theology that emerges from pain-pathos is brokenness. Like Ambedkar’s ‘Broken Men,’ Nirmal contends that Dalits are ‘broken’ from the varna system and engage their exodus from Hinduism through pain-pathos. “Our exodus from Hinduism, which was imposed upon us, to Christianity or rather to Jesus Christ is a valuable experience. It has enabled us to recognize our dalitness and also the dalitness of his Father and our Father, our God.” Similar language is present in James Cone’s theology. Cone argues, “in the [biblical] Exodus event, God is revealed by means of acts on behalf of the weak defenseless people.” He states that the “Exodus-Sinai tradition, Yaweh is disclosed to the God of history, whose revelation is identical with God’s power to liberate the oppressed.” In the Indian context, the Dalits are broken from the varna system and also oppressed by its ideology. Therefore, Nirmal demands that Dalit theology is about, for, and from Dalits. He indicates that Dalit theology is not passive but instead, as suggested by Arokiadoss, is angry and conflictual. Following Nirmal, Dalit theology rejects Brahmanical modes of thinking, speaking, and encountering God as a form of collective protest.

88 Rajkumar, Dalit Theology, 49.
89 Clarke, “Dalit Theology,” 21.
90 Ibid; Kim, “The Future Shape of Indian Christianity,” 61.
93 Cone, A Black Theology, 65.
3.2. Jesus the Dalit: Restoring the God-forsaken

Dalit theology is a mode of dissent and critique of Brahmanism and caste hierarchy in India. One way that Nirmal expresses dissent is through ‘re-casting’ the concept of servanthood.97 He argues, “The passages from Manu Dharmashastra say the Shudra was created by the self-existent to do servile work and that the servitude is innate in him. We are the avarnas. Below the servants, and yet our claim is this: The God of the Dalits, the self-existent, does not create others to do servile work but does servile work himself.”98 By making these claims in a caste conscious society, Dalit theology radicalizes the nature of humanity and God. Nirmal argues, “Servitude is innate in the Dalit God. Servitude is the sva-dharma [eternal nature] of God. As Dalits, service has been our lot and our privilege.”99 Therefore, Nirmal asserts that Dalits and God share the same nature based on brokenness.100 If Dalits were not ‘broken’ from the varna system, they would not have made the exodus to Christianity and discovered the true nature of God.101

Clarke argues that because of this emphasis on servitude and brokenness, Dalit theology is “unabashedly Jesus-centric.”102 As Rajkumar asserts, pain is the epistemological starting point for a Dalit relationship with God.103 And that relationship finds its full expression through the historical Jesus. Clarke notes, “the pathos of Jesus, the crushed/broken Son of God, and the pathos of Dalits, the oppressed/broken children of this same God, pave a pathway into the heart of the Divine.”104 Massey argues that for Dalits, God’s solidarity with the oppressed is manifest

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97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 Clarke, “Dalit Theology,” 32.
103 Rajkumar, Dalit Theology, 49.
104 Clarke, “Dalit Theology,” 32.
Therefore, through Dalit theology, the historical Jesus is ‘re-cast as the Dalit Purusha. This Dalit Purusha is a “co-sufferer” with his broken people. Nirmal argues that the historical Jesus is not just sympathetic to Dalits, but is a Dalit. “Jesus the Son of Man had to encounter rejection, mockery, contempt, suffering, and death; all these from the dominant religious tradition and established religion. He underwent these Dalit experiences as the prototype of all Dalits.”

It is this pain-pathos of the historical Jesus revealed in biblical texts that enable Dalit Christians to affirm, “brokenness belongs to the very being of God.” Reinterpreting the nature of Jesus into language of servitude enables Dalits to create a space within a new *varna* based on a Dalit Jesus/Dalit Purusha. Dalit brokenness and pain-pathos is then fully liberated through the death of Jesus on the Cross. For Dalit theologians, Jesus’ death, symbolizes the actualization of his Dalitness. “On the cross, he was broken, the crushed, the split, the torn, the driven-asunder man; the Dalit in the fullest possible meaning of the term.” Furthermore, Dalit theologians assert that when Jesus cries, “My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me” he is actualizing his “Dalit experience in its fullness.” As a ‘God-forsaken’ community who were ‘cast(e) out’ of Brahmanism, Dalit theology enables Christian Dalits to find restoration through the ‘God-forsaken’ Jesus on the Cross.

The notion of Jesus being “God-forsaken” is the foundation of Dalit theology. As Nirmal asserts, “The Son of God feels that he is God-forsaken. That feeling of being God-forsaken is at

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106 Clarke, “Dalit Theology,” 32.
108 Ibid.
110 Mathew 27:46.
the heart of our Dalit experiences. It is the Dalitness of the divinity and humanity that the Cross of Jesus symbolizes.”

This idea makes Dalit theology a ‘counter-theology’ that finds its richness through brokenness. The experiences that bind Dalit Christians together are oppression and marginalization which are then coupled with liberation. Therefore, Nirmal argues that the two identities, ‘Dalit’ and ‘Christian’ are in tension. “The primacy of the term ‘Dalit’ will have to be conceded against the primacy of the term ‘Christian.’” In order to manifest wholeness as ‘Dalit Christians,’ Nirmal demands that both identities occupy the same space in pain-pathos and find healing for brokenness through Jesus.

4. Chuhra Christian Theology

4.1. Caste Dynamics Among Christians in Pakistan

Like Christian Dalits in India, Chuhra Christians in Pakistan are the subjects of social persecution and caste discrimination. As I show in Chapter 2, many Chuhra Christians are shunned in Pakistani society and are a source of ‘pollution.’ Middle class Christian caste based persecution of Chuhras in Pakistan is not as pronounced as discrimination between upper caste and Dalit Christians in India. However, casetism does affect the social interaction between these two groups. Yunis Khushi asserts that many middle class Christians from a Chuhra background are very sensitive to untouchable ancestry. This creates an additional reason for middle class Christians to shun contact with basti Christians. “In a society where Hinduism has had a great influence with its caste system, manual labour in general and cleaning jobs in particular are looked down upon. […] Well-to-do Christians … try to convince themselves that they originally

112 Ibid.
113 Ibid.
114 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
Chuhra Christians are very conscious of the fissures in the Christian community. Mariam Francis notes that “In caste prejudice even ‘well-to-do’ Christians [in Pakistan] are very particular about eating and drinking from vessels touched by the lower castes.” Streefland confirms this behavior. He quotes Karl Heinz Pfeffer on the reaction to a sermon delivered by an American missionary in 1961, which called for improved relationships with Christian sweepers. Pfeffer writes, “But the well-to-do Pakistani Christians were angry to be reminded of the social composition of the community. It was of such consequence to them to bury in obscurity their origins in the Pariah-caste.” Such social divisions between Christians exacerbate the psychological suffering of the Chuhra community.

J.C. Heinrich (1884-1945) conducted a study in Punjab among Chuhra converts in 1933. Published in 1937, Heinrich examined the “deep seated unsocial behaviour patterns” among two groups of oppressed people: Indian untouchables and American blacks. Heinrich analyzed these patterns of behavior as social reactions to systematic oppression and humiliation. Heinrich notes, “[the suppressed] is more or less continuously subjected, to which he cannot always acquire actual unresponsiveness, and to which direct reactions involve severe disadvantages.” Heinrich argues that these disadvantages lead to a “craving for self-expression and superiority” which is necessary “in the struggle for self-preservation.” When these feelings of self-

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118 Ibid.
119 Streefland, The Sweepers of Slaughterhouse, 34.
120 Ibid.
121 Heinrich, The Psychology, 6.
122 Ibid.
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preservation are blocked by persecution, “its natural result is a manifestation of the emotion of rage and anger.”

Among Chuhra Christians, such feelings manifest as an inferiority complex. Massey argues that this complex connects to the mass movements. He argues that most missionaries were not pleased with Chuhra conversions, which psychologically affected the community. Massey notes, “Even today, Panjabi Christians ignore or are afraid to talk about the past, which would reveal their low social background.” Heinrich argues that suppressed people utilize various methods to respond to an inferiority complex. The most common mode is through “establishing a pseudo-superiority by lowering and disparaging rivals or apparent superiors.” Heinrich found that this is contagious and spreads from the individual to the group. Sookhdeo argues that Heinrich’s analysis is pertinent to social dynamics between middle class and Chuhra Christians in Pakistan. The divisions are replete with a “conflict attitude” that emerges from Chuhra Christians who are conscious that middle class Christians do not support them.

In the next section, I describe how anger and resentment towards casteism in Pakistani society manifest in Chuhra Christian folk theology. Through an analysis of sermons and church pamphlets, I argue that Chuhra folk theology is a distinct reflection of caste marginalization in Pakistan. Similar to Dalit theology in India, the emphasis of Chuhra theology is also rooted in ‘pain-pathos.’ The ‘pain-pathos’ of Chuhra Christians aims at liberation from norms of purity and pollution and social persecution. This theology has two distinct aspects. First, in church sermons, Chuhra pastors focus of re-claiming servanthood in liberative terms. Re-casting
servanthood enables Chuhra Christians to find empowerment in degrading occupations and removes the stigma of pollution, at least theologically, from their community. Second, pastors utilize the re-casting of servanthood as a method to restore izzat to their community.

4.2. Re-claiming Servanthood

One of the major themes in Chuhra church sermons is purity and pollution. In Chuhra church services, pastors reference pollution and its connection to their community in sermons. At times, these sermons are directed towards basti Muslims. In an August 2011 service, a pastor noted, “they [Muslims] will not share food with us in the basti because they call us na-pak. But, we are fully pak.” In an October 2012 service, another pastor argued, “they [Muslims] think we are all na-pak because it is our job to clean their waste (ghund).” In other services, pastors raise similar accusations against middle class Christians. In a September 2010 service, a pastor preached that the middle class Christians also persecute basti Christians. “They [middle class Christians] do not care for our empowerment because they think we are na-pak.” In an October 2010 service, a pastor notes, “these amir Christians will never come to our churches because they consider us na-pak. They do not want to be polluted by touching our church.” In a Christmas service in 2011, a pastor commented, “Today we are celebrating the birth of Jesus who never calls us na-pak. Unlike the amir Christians, he is present in our church.”

130 DVDs, Multiple services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.  
131 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, August 2011.  
132 Ibid.  
133 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, October 2012.  
134 DVDs, Multiple services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.  
135 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, September 2010.  
136 Ibid.  
137 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, October 2010.  
138 DVD, Christmas service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, December 2011.
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Because of anger and resentment towards many Muslims and middle class Christians for social discrimination, Chuhra pastors ‘re-cast’ servanthood for congregants in liberative terms. This ‘re-casting’ functions to re-claim ‘cleaning,’ a na-pak activity and translate it into a pak activity for congregants. This reclamation occurs primarily through the story of Jesus washing his Apostles’ feet.\textsuperscript{139} This story is frequently addressed in Chuhra services. In the recordings of church services that I consulted, this story is referenced in 80 percent of sermons and serves to reinterpret ‘pollution.’\textsuperscript{140} In a July 2009 service, a pastor said, “If Jesus was washing feet, a na-pak job, this means that ‘cleaning’ is not a na-pak activity but it is pak.”\textsuperscript{141} Another pastor during this service argues, “Because Jesus does cleaning it is now a pak occupation. Then we [Chuhra Christians] are also pak because of the work we do.”\textsuperscript{142} In a Christmas service in 2012, a pastor commented that Jesus shows the world the dignity that is contained in cleaning.\textsuperscript{143} This pastor comments, “Jesus tells us that cleaning is something full of pride and joy. That is why he washes his Apostles feet.”\textsuperscript{144}

This ‘re-casting’ is prevalent in the development of folk theology that focuses on re-claiming na-pak activities as a mode of dissent. Chuhra pastors are conscious of the connection between the historical Jesus and the contemporary Chuhra community.\textsuperscript{145} This is manifest through certain theological claims. In a September 2010 service, a pastor devoted his sermon to discuss the pollution related to sanitation work.\textsuperscript{146} In this sermon, the pastor notes that many basti Christians are socialized into thinking they are inherently na-pak because they work as

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\textsuperscript{139} DVDs, Multiple services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{141} DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, July 2009.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{143} DVD, Christmas service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, December 2012.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{145} DVDs, Multiple services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.
\textsuperscript{146} DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, September 2010.
\end{flushleft}
sweepers and maids. "They [bastī Muslims and middle class Christians] tell us we are na-pak because we clean their ghund [waste]. But Jesus does not agree." This is because na-pak activities are part of Jesus’ work in the Bible. This pastor then referenced the story of Jesus washing his Apostles’ feet and argued, “How can the work of God be na-pak? God is always fully pak.”

In other services, Chuhra pastors ‘re-cast’ the concept of ‘cleaning’ through making positive associations with this occupation. This is a pivotal aspect of Chuhra folk theology. It functions to restore pride and empowerment to a marginalized community in Pakistani society. In an April 2008 service, a pastor notes, “If Jesus washed his Apostles feet; it means that he provided a service to these men by cleaning them.” The pastor then said, “Then we [Chuhra Christians] also provide a great service to this country when we clean its streets.” In a May 2008 service, another pastor made a similar theological connection. “Jesus shows us that we should be proud of our jobs. He is the most pak. So, we are also pak regardless of our jobs.” This pastor also notes, “we should be proud of our jobs because we are following the footsteps of our God.” In this sermon, this pastor also asserted that the Bible says the best work for any community it to follow the footsteps of God. In this way, Chuhra pastors restore occupational pride to many Christians who work in degrading occupations and only associate pollution with their work.

147 Ibid.
148 Ibid.
149 Ibid.
150 Ibid.
151 DVDs, Multiple services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.
152 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, April 2008.
153 Ibid.
154 Ibid.
155 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, May 2008.
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid.
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This positive association of ‘cleaning’ resonates with theological assertions of Indian Dalit theology. Nirmal radicalizes the nature of both God and humanity (particularly Dalits) by connecting servanthood to Jesus.158 As Nirmal argues, “Servitude is innate in the Dalit God. As Dalits, service has been our lot and our privilege.”159 While Nirmal utilizes servanthood to make a claim about ‘brokenness,’ Chuhra pastors connect servanthood to the concept of being ‘pak.’ This is a significant form of theological re-imagination from a community that is shunned for physically ‘cleaning’ Pakistani society. Indeed as sanitation workers, Chuhra Christians do sweep and clean public streets, latrines, and sewage pipes. In a reactive response to this social reality, Chuhra pastors radicalize the concept of ‘cleaning’ and connect it to their communal ‘pak-ness.’ As these pastors claim, not only are the Chuhra Christians ‘cleaning’ the ghund of Pakistani society, but as a result of their labor, they are also closer to God.160

The narrative that emerges from the biblical account of Jesus washing his Apostles’ feet is the ‘re-casting’ of purity and pollution.161 This is because the Chuhra community is hyper-conscious of pollution. This makes them anxious of reject any modes of pollution, social or theological assigned to their community. This is the basis of theological ‘sub-text’ in many Chuhra churches. The congregants respond positively to such sermons and often applaud when pastors make associations of ‘purity’ for their community.162 And, pastors are eager to comply.163 In a November 2010 service, a pastor preached on ‘cleaning’ for 45 minutes. He argued, “there is nothing na-pak in cleaning. It is the most pak activity because it restores cleanliness (safai) where there was once ghund. What is na-pak are the people who claim this activity says

158 Ibid.
160 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, April 2008.
161 DVDs, Multiple services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.
162 Ibid.
163 Ibid.
something about us as a community. I say this activity tells us that we do the same work of Jesus."\textsuperscript{164}

This counter-narrative of ‘cleaning’ also resonates with Heinrich’s analysis that suppressed people often establish “a pseudo-superiority by lowering and disparaging rivals or apparent superiors” in their social context.\textsuperscript{165} Heinrich claims that this response is contagious and spreads from the individual to the group.\textsuperscript{166} Pastors in Chuhra churches have identified several “rivals” and “apparent superiors” in Pakistani society. In church sermons, both basti Muslims and middle class Christians are also “apparent superiors” and objects of social critique.\textsuperscript{167} The behavior of these two groups toward Chuhra Christians emerges in sermons as censure.\textsuperscript{168} This is clear through ‘re-claiming’ cleaning in church. The dichotomy between pak and na-pak that these pastors relate resonates with the congregants.\textsuperscript{169} In many services, when pastors critique these two groups, the congregants are visibly roused.

Connecting Jesus to polluting occupations has a liberative and empowering affect Chuhra Christians, at least theologically. Therefore, Jesus washing his Apostles’ feet is a counter-narrative in the community. Through this counter-narrative, purity and pollution in Pakistani society replaces other standards of pak and na-pak. In the re-telling of this story, there is a new method to measure ‘cleanliness’ and ‘uncleanliness’ that is not connected to occupation. Instead, it relates to social behavior. As the Chuhra pastors indicate, there is nothing na-pak about ‘cleaning.’ But, there is something na-pak about people who assign ‘pollution’ to a community based on occupation (s). This is significant because as pastors assert, Chuhra Christians are

\textsuperscript{164} DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, November 2010.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{167} DVDs, Multiple services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid.
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actually responsible for ‘cleaning’ Pakistani society by removing its waste.\textsuperscript{170} Hence, this ‘re-casting’ also critiques society for not valuing the services Chuhra Christians provide.\textsuperscript{171}

A second biblical story that informs Chuhra theological counter-narratives is Mary Magdalene washing Jesus’ feet.\textsuperscript{172} This story is referenced in many Chuhra prayer circles.\textsuperscript{173} For most Chuhra women in \textit{bastis}, cleaning is part of their lived experience as maids and sweepers.\textsuperscript{174} As I show in Chapter 2 many Chuhra women, particularly sweepers are the recipients of discrimination and physical assault because of their occupation. Sweeping is both a public and degrading occupation especially for lower class women in Pakistan. Because of the relationship it portrays between Jesus and Mary, this story is comforting for sweepers.\textsuperscript{175}

Because of this, the story of Mary Magdalene resonates with women in prayer circles for two reasons.\textsuperscript{176} First, it ‘re-casts’ the image of Chuhra women by rejecting practices, such as ‘cleaning’ and its association with ‘pollution’ and second, it provides the opportunity to ‘re-claim’ pride as maids and sweepers.\textsuperscript{177}

In some prayer circles, the details of this story are discussed between attendants and the prayer leader.\textsuperscript{178} Chuhra maids and sweepers discussed the intimacy between Jesus and Mary and note that it reveals Jesus’ fondness for a woman engaged in ‘cleaning.’\textsuperscript{179} The prayer leaders are very assertive in claiming that this story indicates that Jesus loves women who ‘clean.’ The fact that Mary uses her hair to dry Jesus’ feet is also discussed in prayer circles.\textsuperscript{180} One prayer leader

\textsuperscript{170} DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, May 2008.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{172} Luke 7:38.
\textsuperscript{173} DVD, Prayer circle, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, March 2010.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{180} DVD, Prayer circle, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, May 2011.
indicated that this reveals, “Jesus must have loved Mary because he let her touch him. He was not afraid he would become na-pak.” In another prayer circles, the prayer leader references this story and said, “This story tells us that Jesus loved Mary because she washed his feet. That means he also loves us because of the work we do.” In this way, women also ‘re-cast’ the story of Mary Magdalene as a narrative about ‘cleaning’ to find pride in their own occupations as maids and sweepers.

The image of Mary Magdalene as a woman who acquires Jesus’ affection is uplifting for Chuhra women. In contrast to the daily experience of ostracism, this narrative offers a different interpretation of their occupations. Through this narrative, Chuhra women in the church and in prayer circles find theological pride in their work and establish an intimacy with Jesus. Through re-interpreting this story, their relationship with Jesus is also ‘re-cast.’ This story indicates that Chuhra women can have a relationship with Jesus is based on occupation not in spite of it. And, it reveals that Jesus loves them because they engage in ‘unclean’ work. Therefore, it offers the ability for Chuhra women to be ‘re-cast’ in a way that is not connected to occupation. In one prayer circle, the prayer leader said, “Jesus allowed Mary to wash his feet which means that she was paks.” She also argued, “If people knew the kitab [Bible] like we do, they would see that our jobs are the most paks.”

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181 Ibid.
182 DVD, Prayer circle, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, April 2010.
183 DVD, Prayer circle, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, September 2011.
184 DVD, Prayer circle, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, May 2010.
185 Ibid.
187 DVD, Prayer circle, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, October 2010.
188 Ibid.
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In church services, when pastors reference the story of Mary Magdalene, the female congregants also respond enthusiastically.189 Women are active participants in church services and are often the most vocal congregants. In many church services, when the story of Mary Magdalene is discussed, Chuhra women applaud the pastor.190 In some services, the pastor comments that women are of special importance to Jesus.191 Pastors claim that through the story of Mary Magdalene, Jesus reveals how significant women are to a community and to a family. In a March 2010 service, after discussing this story, one pastor related the importance of women to the concept of ‘purity.’192 “Our women are responsible for our families and our children. Jesus shows that they are most pak because he let a woman touch him and clean his feet.193 The pastor also commented that this story shows how all women who seek a relationship a Jesus will be welcomed.194 The female congregants responded with applause during this sermon.195

This type of ‘re-casting’ of biblical stories in Chuhra sermons and prayer circles is a “sub-alteration” that resonates with Dalit theological assertions in India. In a similar way to Nirmal who re-images Jesus as the Dalit Purusha, Chuhra women in the congregation and in prayer circles ‘re-cast’ Jesus as a friend. Jesus is ‘re-cast’ in this manner partially because of his relationship with Mary Magdalene. Through an intimate relationship with Jesus, Chuhra women re-claim pride in polluted occupations at least psychologically. The story of Mary Magdalene reveals to these women that Jesus values them. He will not shun them for their occupation in the sanitation industry. Instead, for many Chuhra women this story indicates that Jesus cherishes

189 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, September 2010.
190 Ibid.
191 Ibid.
192 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, March 2010.
193 Ibid.
194 Ibid.
195 Ibid.
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their work. This is significant form of theological re-imagination for a marginalized community. It also decreases “social anxiety” that stems from degrading occupations.

What is clear from Chuhra sermons is that these two biblical stories function to re-interpret servanthood in positive and uplifting terms for the community. In contrast to Dalit theology in India, the emphasis for Chuhras is not on ‘brokenness’ but on Jesus’ social interactions with Apostles and Mary Magdalene. Two significant ideas emerge from these interactions for pastor, congregants, and women in prayer circles. First, these stories reveal that, like the Chuhra community, Jesus also engages in ‘polluting’ work. Second, Jesus does not shun people because they participate in ‘polluting’ occupations. The re-casting of these stories are the foundation of a folk theology that enables Chuhra Christians to encounter servanthood in a new way that is rooted in dignity and respect. In the next section, I describe how notions of ‘respect’ or izzat in Pakistani society are ‘re-cast’ theologically for basti Christians. Through the re-imagination of izzat, Chuhra pastors construct a mode of dissent to empower the community.

4.3. Restoring Izzat

O’Brien argues that in Pakistan, izzat is the fundamental concept that influences social dynamics. “Izzat may be described as honour, respect, standing, worth, face-saving; the correlative being be-izzati, or shame.” In Pakistani society, izzat is “concrete rather than abstract—a matter of what is external rather than interior.” Social norms dictate how izzat is attached either to a person, a community, or “to social status and caste.” izzat is not bestowed to everyone in Pakistani society. In contrast, there are many people from whom izzat is

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196 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, March 2010.
198 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, March 2010.
199 O’Brien, The Unconquered People, 129.
200 Ibid.
201 Ibid.
202 Ibid.

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Consciously disconnected such as, “people who have no social standing.” O’Brien notes that “within each sub-group, the level of izzat is dependent on the degree of publically acknowledged importance. Clearly discernible within this community is a social structure replicating the ancient caste divisions, and the grades of izzat attached to different degrees of standing within it.” This means that for most Chuhra Christians, izzat or rather, lack of izzat is a mark of socio-political marginalization.

Izzat is a significant concept for Chuhra self-reflection because discrimination against their community continually robs them of both dignity and respect. Bishop Munawar Rumalshah (COP) illustrates how lack of izzat is connected to Chuhra Christians because of their involvement in degrading work. “In my own diocese in north-west Pakistan, 85 percent of my people are severely deprived, working as ‘sweepers’ who remove human excrement from the streets. They are socially ostracized and economically paralyzed.” Such occupations and related discrimination create social degradation for Chuhra Christians. Because of this, Chuhra Christians are hyper-conscious that they have very little izzat in Pakistani society. O’Brien notes that Chuhra Christians are “extremely jealous of the deference they consider to be due to them.” This leads to the “conflict attitude” which occurs through “division and mistrust between Christians” and others in Pakistani society who persecute Chuhra Christians.

Based on marginalization, izzat emerges as a theological construct that informs Chuhra folk theology. This is because while izzat is a social category for honor and respect, for Chuhra Christians, lack of izzat relates to inherent ‘self-worth.’ As O’Brien notes, there are many

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203 Ibid.
204 Ibid.
206 O’Brien, The Unconquered People, 130.
207 Heinrich, The Psychology, 57; Sookhdeo, A People Betrayed, 307-308.
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people from whom *izzat* is consciously disconnected such as, “people who have no social standing.” Chuhra Christians are conscious that *izzat* is usurped from them because of Dalit ancestry. Therefore, for Chuhras, *izzat* emerges as the inverse of ‘pollution.’ While ‘pollution’ removes *izzat* from a social body; *izzat* restores purity to a *na-pak* community. Therefore, Chuhra pastors assert that *izzat* is integral to their essence as human beings. This indicates that *izzat* has a theological dimension, which shapes the self-understanding of many Christians. This ‘re-casting’ of *izzat* is a key element in the ‘re-imagination’ of Jesus among Chuhra Christians.

In India, Dalit theology ‘re-casts’ Jesus by reclaiming ‘pain-pathos’ and interpreting Christian Dalits as the broken children of a broken God. In contrast, Chuhra Christians in Pakistan ‘re-cast’ Jesus in a very different manner. In a society that is marked by gradations of *izzat*, Chuhra Christians walk a tight-rope between social acceptance and ostracism. They also experience multiple forms of persecution based on two things; religious identity as Christians and Dalit ancestry. This dual discrimination is the main source of ‘pain-pathos’ for Chuhra Christians that translates into the re-imagination of Jesus. But unlike Dalit theology, Chuhra folk theology does not focus on Jesus as “God-forsaken” but on their community as ‘God-cherished.’ This is done through ‘re-casting’ of Jesus as a member of the *Masihi biradari*.

The term *biradari* is significant to Chuhra theology in Pakistan. This word is from the Persian, ‘*baradar*’ or ‘brother’ and means “brotherhood or blood membership.” Yusuf argues

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209 DVDs, Multiple services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.
210 Ibid.
211 DVDs, Multiple services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.
that *biradari* “refers to a group of people, related by blood, living in a socio-economic unit.”

He asserts that the *biradari* system is adopted from the *varna* system and mimics certain aspects of caste. Hasan Ali argues that in Muslim society, *biradari* imitates caste relationships in three ways. First, a person is born into a *biradari* just as a person is born into a caste. Second, group interactions within the *biradari* are limited by endogamous relationships. Third, much like *jatis* in the *varna* system, *biradaris* are arranged around occupational specialization which are often graded higher and lower. According to Yusuf, in many *bastis* and in rural villages in Pakistan, the *biradari* system functions much like the *varna* system in India.

Missionary Ernest Campbell argues that from the beginning of the mass movement to Christianity, missionaries saw *biradari* as a competitor of the idea of church and Christian community. Sookhdeo asserts that the *biradari* system among Christians in Pakistan, like the *varna* system in India is replete with internal divisions. In Pakistan, the *biradari* system among Christians has its own hierarchy and is governed by the interests of the middle class instead of the Chuhras who comprise the majority of the Protestant church. “A few Christian *biradaris* control most of the Christian institutions and benefits tend to be channeled primarily to their own relatives.” This means that Chuhra Christians are further out ‘cast(e) out’ by middle class Christians socio-economically and politically through norms of inequality in the *biradari*

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214 Ibid
215 Ibid.
217 Ibid
218 Ibid
221 Sookhdeo, *A People Betrayed*, 308.
222 Ibid, 309.
223 Ibid.
system.\textsuperscript{224} This creates strife among Chuhras who are shunned by the few wealthy members who control the system.\textsuperscript{225}

An added dimension of the \textit{biradari} system connects to language. In \textit{bastis}, most Muslims refer to Chuhra Christians as \textit{Masihi biradari} or the ‘Messiah brotherhood.’ This name is rarely used for middle-class Christians even in Urdu. Chuhra Christians also use this name to refer to their community. Therefore, \textit{Masihi biradari} functions as an identity marker for the endogamous community of Chuhra Christians. Because many Chuhra Christians are aware that middle class Christians do not include them in the greater ‘Christian \textit{biradari},’ they have developed a counter-narrative to deconstruct this rejection. This emerges through the assertion that Jesus is part of the \textit{Masihi biradari}.\textsuperscript{226} Through this claim, Chuhra pastors link their community to Jesus through blood membership while rejecting middle class Christians.\textsuperscript{227} This also relates to ‘pollution’ in Pakistani society. By reclaiming Jesus as a member of the \textit{Masihi biradari} in a society that is sensitive to honor and respect, Chuhra Christians restore the \textit{izzat}, that is usurped from them. This ‘re-casting’ echoes O’Brien’s claims that lack of \textit{izzat} makes the marginalized “extremely jealous of the deference they consider to be due to them.”\textsuperscript{228}

Modes of anger and resentment based on the lack of \textit{izzat} in their community are prevalent in Chuhra church services. Pastors in these churches make a conscious reclamation of the term ‘\textit{izzat}’ which is withheld from them because of casteism.\textsuperscript{229} This is doubly damaging for Chuhra Christians because both \textit{basti} Muslims and middle class Christians perpetuate

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{225} Sookhdeo, \textit{A People Betrayed}, 309.
\item \textsuperscript{226} DVDs, Multiple Services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.
\item \textsuperscript{227} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{228} O’Brien, \textit{The Unconquered People}, 130.
\item \textsuperscript{229} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
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‘casetism.’ In a Sunday service sermon, one pastor said, “Even though I am a pastor, and you are all part of this church, people still call me a Chuhra. Isn’t a Chuhra a bhangi [scavenger]? How many bhangis have a church?”230 Another pastor said, “Izzat is taken from us from by everyone in this country. Because they think we are na-pak. They will not give us izzat anywhere.”231 These amir Christians will eat with Muslims but they will not take Communion in my church.”232 Another pastor said, “Jesus is part of our biradari which means izzat is ours by right.”233

‘Re-casting’ Jesus as a member of the Masihi biradari emerges as a “sub-alteration” in Chuhra churches.234 In sermons, pastors claim that biblical texts reveal that Jesus is part of the Masihi biradari and participates in na-pak activities like many members of the community.235 Unlike Chuhras who engage these occupations because of monetary needs, pastors claim that Jesus participates in these activities freely.236 Through this reclamation of Jesus, pastors are then able to make certain claims to izzat for their community. By becoming part of the Masihi biradari, Jesus is able to restore ‘cleanliness’ to a na-pak community. In a September 2011 service, a pastor said that Jesus washed his Apostles feet to show izzat for the Masihi biradari.237 Another pastor states that Jesus participated in these na-pak activities to give izzat to the people in his time who were treated like Chuhras in Pakistan.238 This pastor asserts, “We can be poor. That is fine. But, izzat is our essential need. Jesus shows us that izzat is our right

230 Ibid.
231 DVDs, Multiple Services, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, 2008-2011.
232 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, September 2010.
233 Ibid.
235 Ibid.
236 Ibid.
237 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, September 2011.
238 Ibid.
through blood.” This ‘re-casting’ of Jesus indicates how the social stigma of pollution is negotiated in the community.

The second aspect that emerges from the connection between the Masihi biradari and Jesus is that it reinforces the ‘re-casting’ of the St. Thomas narrative that I show in Chapter 4. The claim that Jesus and Chuhra Christians are part of the same biradari asserts that Chuhra ancestry emanates directly from Jesus and not from nineteenth century Dalits. This “sub-alteration” is a mode of dissent in Chuhra folk theology. This theology rejects the Dalit ancestry and corresponding pollution and social discrimination of Chuhra Christians. These theological claims subvert and re-imagine narratives of Jesus in the past to re-conceptualize the present. In addition, in the present, Chuhra Christians are an impoverished community circumscribed by social pollution without any izzat. Hence, through re-claiming Jesus as a member of their biradari, Chuhra Christians engage a form of ‘pain-pathos’ to find catharsis for suffering in their community. This catharsis is achievable through the restoration of izzat.

The catharsis that most Chuhra Christians need is the liberation from social persecution and pollution. The assertion that their community is connected to Jesus through blood enables Chuhra Christians to validate the claim that they have been Christian since St. Thomas came to Karachi in 52 CE. This trope is fully expressed during church sermons in the basti. “Is there any other reason that St. Thomas came here other than to be with us? To build a place for us to live?” In a March 2010 service, a pastor asserts, “Jesus is part of our biradari. This means that we have been Christian since St. Thomas.” In this service, the pastor makes an explicit

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239 Ibid.
240 Ibid.
242 Arun, Constructing, 37-38; Rajkumar, Dalit Theology, 122-23.
243 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, October 2012.
244 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, March 2010.
connection between Jesus and St. Thomas. “Why else would he [St. Thomas] come here to make a community?” He came because we are part of the same biradari. He came for our well-being.”

This particular narrative when combined with the ‘re-casting’ of Jesus has a liberative effect on Chuhra Christian folk theology. This “sub-alteration” enables basti Christians to feel part of a privileged community. It also reinforces that although basti Christians are ‘cast (e) out’ socially in Pakistani society, they are not ‘cast (e) out’ theologically. Instead, through Jesus and St. Thomas they are consciously ‘cast (e) in’ to Christianity as a God-cherished community. This God-cherished community will have izzat restored because it is theirs by ‘right’ and through blood relationship to Jesus. Further, Jesus reveals that as a part of the Masihi biradari, he is able to remove the stigma of pollution from a na-pak community and transform them into a pak people. Therefore, in contrast to Dalit Christians in India, Chuhra Christians do not find solace in the ‘God-forsaken’ Jesus. Instead, they emerge as a ‘God-cherished’ community with Jesus as a part of their biradari.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I engage the emerging Chuhra Christian theology in Pakistan. This theology is a mode of dissent among that is based on caste discrimination and persecution. I first begin with an analysis of Dalit theology in India. Dalit theology is a mode of protest against caste persecution that is distinct to Christian Dalits in India. It is a liberation theology that emerges from the experience of marginalization. This examination is significant to an analysis of Chuhra Christian theology in Pakistan. I argue that Chuhra folk theology in Pakistan is different from Dalit theology in India but it has a parallel structure. Based on shared experience of

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245 DVD, Sunday service, Church of Pakistan (COP), Asam Colony, March, 2010.
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casteism, both Christian Dalit communities engage in “sub-alterations” to find empowerment. Therefore, Chuhra folk theology in Pakistan is part of the larger framework of Dalit theology in India. It is a theological response to persecution and marginalization that enables Chuhra Christians to engage ‘catharsis’ and acquire theological liberation for their community.

The emphasis of Chuhra folk theology is the ‘re-casting’ of Jesus as a member of the *Masihi biradari*. This enables Chuhra Christians to assert a connection to Jesus through blood membership. Based on this blood relationship, Chuhra Christians make certain ‘truth claims’ about Jesus. Through the ‘re-casting’ of Jesus, Chuhra Christians re-claim servanthood as a source of empowerment for their community. In addition, because Jesus is connected to *basti* Christians through blood, it reinforces the narrative that St. Thomas came to Taxila in 52 CE and converted the Chuhrs to Christianity. Through these “sub-alterations,” a group that is conscious of *na-pak* status in Pakistani society is transformed into a *pak* community. This theological catharsis offers Chuhra Christians one method to cope with social persecution and emerges as a form of protest against marginalization.
CONCLUSION

1. Concluding Reflections

Caste is a prevalent issue in Pakistan and affects social dynamics in the country. As I show in this dissertation, Chuhra Christians are the descendants of Dalit converts to Christianity in nineteenth century Punjab. In Pakistan today, Chuhra Christians are recipients of caste discrimination and persecution based on Dalit ancestry and polluting occupations in the sanitation industry. In Pakistan, there is often a conflation between the words ‘Christian,’ ‘sweeper,’ and ‘Chuhra’ which exacerbates social discrimination against Chuhra Christians. Persecution against this community is not as pronounced as against Dalits in India but does manifest in various forms including physical assault, violence, and commensal segregation. Of these forms of discrimination, commensal segregation has the most psychologically damaging effect on Chuhra Christians as it reinforces their ‘outcaste’ status in Pakistani society.

In this dissertation, I also argue, that the negotiation of caste in Pakistan is very different compared to India partially because there is no public discourse on ‘caste.’ Because there is no acknowledgement of caste in Pakistan, the government offers no ‘affirmative action’ or legal recourse to Dalits for caste based discrimination. Therefore, Dalits in Pakistan have no incentive to assert Dalit identity. This creates many issues particularly in urban slums where many Chuhra Christians are recipients of caste discrimination. As a persecuted community, Chuhra Christians focus on veiling caste identity and denying Dalit ancestry in order to blend into Pakistani society. Because Pakistan does not recognize caste as a social issue, Chuhra Christian modes of protest against caste discrimination erupt as ‘sub-text’ through church sermons and in church pamphlets. Chuhra pastors reject their association with ‘pollution’ and the sanitation industry in Pakistan.
and instead, create counter-narratives to veil Dalit ancestry and re-claim ‘cleaning’ in liberative terms for their community.

2. Implications for Further Research

a. Caste in Muslim Context

The largest lacuna that has emerged through this study is the lack of scholarly work on caste practices outside India. The few scholars who highlight issues of ‘caste consciousness’ outside India, still examine it from a within a ‘Hindu’ socio-religious framework. Therefore, most caste scholars analyze caste dynamics in Pakistan through Indian modes of purity and pollution. However, what is missing from this literature is how caste functions outside India within the framework of a non-Hindu religious tradition. For example, how does Islam affect caste dynamics? Do Islamic beliefs change or alter caste practices or taboos in different communities? How does Islamic political ideology affect caste practices? A focused study on how caste is translated in a non-Indian and non-Hindu context would benefit caste scholars and increase knowledge about the function of caste in different socio-religious contexts.

b. Dalits in Muslim Societies

Several areas of Dalit studies require further investigation. In India, many noteworthy studies focus on caste among converted Dalit communities including Buddhists, Christians, and Sikhs. These scholars analyze how caste functions in India for Buddhist, Christian, and Sikh Dalits. How does religious conversion affect caste practices? How do certain religions such as Buddhism or Christianity alter or mediate caste dynamics in certain communities? What is missing from these studies is how the identity of Dalits changes according to their socio-political context. Are Dalits in different countries equally assertive? Do Dalits respond to marginalization in the same manner? Are there commonalities between Dalits in India and
Dalits in Pakistan based on common experiences of persecution and discrimination? Such comparative studies would increase current knowledge about Dalit discourse and self-reflection.

c. **Intra-Caste Dynamics in Pakistan**

While a few social activists and scholars do raise awareness of ‘caste consciousness’ in Pakistan, there is very little academic work on intra-caste dynamics in Pakistan. Some Pakistani scholars and Indian caste scholars agree that Pakistan has its own internal ‘caste system’ called the ‘biradari system.’ In Pakistan, the ‘biradari system’ functions in a similar way to the varna system in India. Biradaris are arranged around occupational specialization. Biradaris are endogamous and are connected by blood membership. While the biradari system is not prevalent throughout Pakistan, it is part of social dynamics in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In both provinces, the biradari system is particularly pronounced. In Punjab, this practice also merges with local caste practices of Chuhra Christians, Mussali Muslims, and Mazhabi Sikhs in the region. There is a lacuna in the literature about Pakistan that analyzes the dimensions of the biradari system and its connection to ‘caste’ and the varna system. There is currently very little theoretical analysis of how ‘biradari’ functions in South Asian Islam and its connection to Hindu conceptions of ‘caste.’

d. **Intra-Christian Dynamics in Pakistan**

In the western media, ‘Pakistan’ and ‘Christian persecution’ are often synonymous terms. However, as I show in this dissertation, Christians in Pakistan do not speak with a unified voice. There are many reasons for communal divisions between Christians in Pakistan including class, gender, ethnicity, language, socio-economics, and denominationalism. However, caste is the single most damaging feature of intra-Christian dynamics and creates ruptures throughout
Christian communities in Pakistan. Therefore, the most damaging forms of ‘Christian persecution’ such as caste discrimination often emerge in an intra-Christian context in Pakistan. It would serve academics interested in Pakistan studies to engage the many Christian denominations in Pakistan and the divisions among these communities. Further, an analysis of ‘caste’ and its function in Pakistani society is crucial to an examination religious discrimination in Pakistan.
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