
Mass Conversion To Christianity: A Case Study Of Chuhra Community In Sialkot Distric (1880-1930)

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Abstract

This article analyses the phenomenon of mass-conversion with reference to the Chuhra community of Sialkot district from 1880 to 1930. The focus is on two important aspects of mass-conversion movement in Sialkot District: first, the missionaries changed their pattern of interaction with the local community and focused on the lower segments of the society, second, the socio-economic marginality of Chuhra community pushed them towards mass conversion, and a new religious identity. It highlights the circumstances in which Chuhra mass-conversion movement materialised. Due to their marginalized status Chuhras always remained in search of a new identity. This pursuit for a new identity was based on their aspirations for socio-economic uplift. Consequently, most of the Chuhras came under the sway of Ad-Dharm movement of the 1920s.

Introduction

Rural *Chuhra*¹ community embraced Christianity in large groups in the Sialkot District². Their large scale conversion to Christianity, also known as mass-conversion in missionary literature³, started in the 1880s, and multitudes of *Chuhras* embraced Christianity. They nurtured aspiration to change their lowly socio-economic status. Moreover, they wanted to join Christian religion due to the presence of upper caste converts and European Christians, and wished to become the part of ruling community by changing their religion. This aspiration for change can be noted in a conversation between a *Chuhra* and a British police officer; ‘now tell me’ the chief (British Chief of Police) said ‘what good it has been for you

[convert] to become a Christian? ‘Well I cannot tell you’ said the man. For one thing, I am not afraid of you now, and I can go around among these villages with freedom, and people do not take me for a thief and rascal, as they used to do when we were heathen *Chuhras*. They take me for a man now.⁴

The existing literature on Christian community is mainly provincial and regional. The information on the mass-conversion in Sialkot district is patchy and based on survey research. Most of this literature was produced by the missionaries. Hardly any historical study has been undertaken to empirically study the *Chuhra* mass-conversion movement in the Sialkot district. This article aims to address this gap in the existing literature. This is the first micro-level study which looks at the *Chuhra*-conversion movement at grassroots level in the light of revealing new sources found in the missionary archives.

For socially suppressed segments of the society, the message of the gospel was a God sent boon. They considered the missions as God’s agent of change. The lower castes started to convert with the spread of missionary activities not only in the Punjab but also throughout India during the twentieth century. The other lower-caste converts were Bhangi from U.P., Methars from Western India, Chamar from North India, and Madigas from central India.⁵ The *Chuhras* not only of Sialkot embraced Christianity, but their brethren elsewhere in Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Rawalpindi, Sheikhpura, and Gujranwala converted to the Christian religion. However, conversion in other areas of Punjab was not on a large scale as compared to Sialkot.

Various Christian missions such as United Presbyterian (UP) mission, Church of Scotland, Church Missionary Society (CMS) and Roman Catholic mission played their role to convert the lower segments of society towards Christianity in Sialkot district.⁶ The process of mass-conversion was very rapid in this district.⁷ After only one decade (1881-1891) Christian population increased over 3,000.⁸ Among the overall converts, ninety-five percent came from *Chuhra* caste.⁹ Due to this reason, the primary focus of this study is to analyze two different aspects of *Chuhra* mass-movement in district Sialkot. First it will shed light on the phenomenon of mass-conversion in the light fo missionary activities and second, it will analyse the process of conversion in the light of social, religious and economic factors.

Meaning Of Mass-Movement

The term ‘mass-movement’ is frequently employed by scholars to define group conversion of *Chuhras* towards Christianity in Sialkot district. However, some authors termed it differently. For example, Thakur Das used ‘history of Christian movement’ (1880-1930)¹⁰, Margret Stock, Fredrick, John C.B. Webster, and John Rooney used the term ‘*Chuhra* Movement’¹¹ and James Messy used the words ‘Holy Spirit Movement’ for Christian mass-movement among the lower castes of Punjab.¹²

Regardless of the differences in terminology, all the scholars unanimously agree that mass conversion in Punjab, especially in Sialkot, took place from 1880s to 1930s.¹³

Church Missionary Society (CMS) defined the meaning of mass-movement in its study of 'Mass-Movement Survey of India' among lower castes which was conducted in 1927. According to the survey, "mass-movement is the conversion of people in groups as families or groups of families as a community or group of communities. They may number thousands, or only hundreds, or possibly even less. However, if the movement is one of the people in groups, as distinguished from the conversion of isolated individuals, it is a mass-movement."¹⁴

The *Chuhra* mass-movement to Christianity was not a new phenomenon. Before this, there had been different mass-movements among different lower castes in various parts of India. The oldest among them was the conversion of *Paravars* (fisherman by caste) in 1573 in the Southern tip of Peninsula under the influence of Roman Catholics.¹⁵ After the first mass conversion movement, many other mass conversion movements were witnessed in India. For example, a few of the prominent mass conversions are noted below;

- ❖ *Nadras* of Tamil Nadu under Protestant Church during 1840.
- ❖ Krishngar (Bengal) in 1832 and Sikhs in Moradabad village (Utter Pradesh 1859) under Methodist mission.
- ❖ Mass conversion movement from 1889 to 1905 in Gujrat.
- ❖ Bhangis and Chamars in Western parts of India during the 1880s and 1890s.¹⁶
- ❖ Paraiyar and Madharis of Trichinopoly-Tanjore (Andhara Pradesh) from 1931 to 1947.¹⁷

During the colonial era, especially in Punjab, different Christian missions (United Presbyterian Mission, Church of Scotland and Church Missionary Society) promoted mass conversion. Nonetheless, in Sialkot, United Presbyterian and Church of Scotland baptized mass-movement converts.¹⁸ Moreover, under their influence, the movement also spread to other areas e.g. Gujranwala, Gujrat, and Waziarabad. Initially, missionaries were only interested in the conversion of wealthy individuals of Punjabi society. The purpose behind this inclination towards them was to promote the right image of the Christian community. In the words of Stephen Neill 'It is part of mythology of missions that missionaries turned naturally to the poor and degraded, among whom they would find less resistance to their message, and neglected the higher castes.' But history shows that the exact opposite was the case. Almost every mission started with the attempt to reach higher castes. The poor were viewed with anxiety and a measure of embarrassment by the missionaries who believed that their all efforts of conversion might be prejudiced by the influx of mass of ignorant and despised people.¹⁹ Regardless of this policy of missionaries, when

individuals from the lower caste started converting to the Christianity, missionaries did not have any other option but to accept them in Christianity.

Formation Of Chuhra Identity In Sialkot District

Social conditions of Chuhras

In Sialkot district, *Chuhras* houses were separated from other communities.²⁰ Moreover, most of their population was residing in rural areas where they worked for Muslims and Hindus. They had their houses but were isolated from the other dwelt areas. They were allowed to construct and own houses by the landlords, and were provided with the material for the building. They can also collect fire wood with the permission of landlords. Their social contact with other communities was based on working ties. They were considered polluted and were not allowed to use wells of upper-castes and have their separate *kachha* (not constructed with backed bricks) wells. There was no notion of respect for them, and they were not even authorized to have decent names.²¹ Deep poverty and gross-ignorance ruled all the aspect of their social and cultural life. One of the missionary described their social status in theser words, 'In the social scale they are as low and degraded as they can be, they are not only slave of the village in which they live but temporary slaves of the natives and European officers who may encamp in the village...People too depraved, too vicious, too immoral, and too ignorant'.²²

The other village communities like *Nai* (barber), *Mochi* (cobblers), and *Dhobi* (washer man) used to serve Muslims and Hindus and remained away from *Chuhras* because of the fear of a boycott by the upper castes on the charge of having relation with untouchables. The only caste who served the *Chuhras* was barbers and they were considered *Chuhras* as well. In social life *Chuhras* had joint or extended family structure with patriarchal patterns. They used to live in *Baradari* (brother-hood) system²³ on which their social status was based. Their *Baradri* system was further sub-divided in different *gotras* (clans) i.e. Gill, Bhatti, Mattu, Ladhar, Sahotra, Sindhu, Untawal, Boral, and Bahairwal.²⁴ They used to settle their problems through the *panchayat* (council) that consisted of elders of their *gotras*. The situation of *Chuhra* woman was even worse than their counterpart men. Women were ignorant and believed in charms.²⁵ However, their role in economic life was imperative. The *Chuhra* women helped men to support their families. Along with their husbands, they used to work at the house of landlords. For their services they received 1/3rd portion of the major crops.²⁶

The seclusion of *Chuhras* from the society and the subsequent concept of pollution had many reasons. Most scholars believe that it was their eating habits that influenced other communities to consider them polluted. They lived the life of

scavengers and used to eat dead animals. However, their eating habit was different in different areas.²⁷ In Sialkot, *Chuhras* under the influence of Muhammadans avoided pork. However, they eat *haram* (unlawful in Islam) flesh as well as *halal* without any distinction.²⁸ Along with eating habits, another reason because of which they were considered pollutants was betrothal ceremony. During the ceremony, father of bride used to ask for money in exchange of his daughter. Such selling of daughter was seen as a lowly deed by the general public.²⁹ Moreover, in order to incur expenses on marriage and related ceremonies, *Chuhras* used to borrow plenty of money from the landlords. Since most of the time they were unable to pay back the borrowed money, they remained under the subjugation of their landlords for generations. According to a *Chuhra*, "Though we are poor thus we marry our sons and daughters in a manner that would bring credit to us.....after all *izzat* of *biradari* has some meaning... even if we cannot afford we must spend."³⁰

Economic Conditions of Chuhras

The *Chuhras*' most common work was sweeping and removing the night soil. They also used to remove the carcass. The sweeping became a more permanent profession of those *Chuhras* who migrated to cities. However, the rural *Chuhras* were actively engaged in agricultural labour which provided them social and economic survival in the agricultural economy. The *Chuhras* population mostly resided in villages, and rural society was predominately agricultural. Under the agricultural settings, *Chuhras* were known as *Athri* or *Sepi*. *Arthi Chuhras* were those who were employed only for agriculture labour. In return, they would get daily food. On the other hand, *sepi Chuhra* was scavenger of the landlord's house. He can serve more than one landlord family. He could also be employed for agricultural work.³¹ The system is known as *Jagmani* system in which lower castes were tied in a hereditary relation with the landlord and provided services to them in return for livelihood.³² The relation of *Chuhras* and landlords was hereditary. This hereditary relation of *Chuhras* with the master was not very simple in nature. Landlords, very often, engaged them in forced labour. To protect them from this coercion, missionaries even supported the *Chuhras* against the oppression of landlords.³³

Religious Conditions of Chuhras

The common perception regarding *Chuhras* was that they were followers of the religion of dominant classes in their respective villages. In Muslim dominated areas they became Muslims and in the Hindu dominated areas they remained Hindus. In Hindu villages, they used to cremate their dead, but those living in the Muhammedan villages they followed burial practice.³⁴ However, regardless of this

apparent following the practices of dominant religions, they always retained their distinct religious life. The *Chuhras* had their peculiar legends about their religious origin. Muslim Churahs used to call themselves as Bala Shahi or the followers of Lal Beg tradition and the Hindu Chuhras called themselves Balmiki. Although they claimed to be either Muslims and Hindus but they retained their peculiar religious practices. They had their separate shrines. Muslim *Chuhras* used to worship in the shrines of Bale-Shah, which usually stood in the center of *Chuhra* quarters.³⁵ In Sialkot, where Muslim culture and religion was dominant, *Chuhras* claimed to be Bale-Shahis.³⁶

In one of the traditions of the Chuhras the creation of the Lal Beg and their distinction from the Balmikis is described in the following manner, “when the Satan tempted Adam and Eve he was thrust down from heaven. Blood gushed from his nose and each drop became a pig. Allah-Talah brushed the sweat from his forehead and each drop became a dog. Then the Lord created sons of *Balmik* to be scavengers on earth and created Lal Beg to clean the steps of the throne of heaven”.³⁷ H. A. Rose described different traditions which distinct Balmiki from Lal begs. About the origin of the Lal Beg he wrote that once Lord Shiva (Hindu God) rubbed his hand on the red stone and Lal Beg came out. Lal Beg was regarded as the Prophet of the sweepers.³⁸

Chuhras, through these peculiar notions of origin and legend tried to create their own social space in the society. With the arrival of Islam, the *Chuhra* converted to Islam, linked their old traditions and legends with Islam in the form of Bala-e-Shah. Then under Sikhism, they started to propagate their relationship with the Sikhs Gurus especially with Guru Tegh Bahadar (1621-1675), who was the Ninth Sikh Guru and in this vein began to call themselves Rangetra (son of Guru).³⁹ This certainly suggests that they struggled to find space not only in socio-economic terms but also in religious terms. In this way, their traditions and legends became a permanent source of their identity which defined their religious practices. Being despised by the upper caste followers of other major religions, they started to develop their own way of worship.

Conversion In Sialkot: Some Discernible Trends

The Christian missions of Sialkot, United Presbyterians and Church of Scotland, were not in favour of converting individuals from lower castes. These missions only focused on the upper castes of Sialkot and could only manage to get a few converts. However, they largely remained unsuccessful to convert affluent people in significant numbers. Andrew Gordon, a missionary from United Presbyterian mission who spent many years to convert people from a high caste, remarked that they listened to him with considerable attention but did not denounce their faith

publicly. Even a very few of them who were baptized later on reconverted to their former religion.⁴⁰ This detachment of upper class forced missionaries to look towards depressed segments of the society. On another occasion, Andrew Gordon remarked that 'I may say that I began my eyes upon the large towns and cities. However, have been led from them to the country villages. I began with educated classes and people of good social position and ended among the poor and lowly.'⁴¹

Gordon's opinion regarding *Chuhra* conversion changed the mission's strategy and mission started working on the lower castes of Sialkot district. According to him, 'If the honourable, the wise, and the great should be deterred from coming to Christ, the sin would lie in their pride, and not in our receiving the lowly.'⁴² His opinion reverberated in the Mission which now clearly understood that only individual converts could not provide the podium for the formation of an all-inclusive Christian community.

Like United Presbyterian mission most of the eminent missionaries of Scottish mission were also not favourably disposed towards lower caste conversion. William Harper (1874-1885)⁴³ was the first Scottish missionary who showed dissatisfaction in lower caste conversion. Nevertheless, his successor Rev. John Taylor and Rev. Robert Paterson showed interest in the lower caste and established *Barah Pather* (an area close to the western side of Sialkot cantonment) as a headquarters of the mission and started converting individuals both from upper and lower tier of society.⁴⁴

During Reverend Youngson's time, things changed dramatically. With the mass conversion of *Chuhra* community, especially in Sialkot, Gujrat, and Wazirabad,⁴⁵ missions had to change their policies. After these mass conversions, missionaries started focusing on the convert from the lower segments of the society and tried to make them real Christians as well as economically independent citizens. Reverend Youngson opened a school for sweepers in 1885 at Daska with the aim to educate them for better economic life.

Origin Of Mass Movement

The conversion of MEGS Tribe in Sialkot District

The origin of the mass movement in Sialkot district can be traced to an event of conversion when a person from Meg⁴⁶ community was baptized in 1866.⁴⁷ He belonged to the village of Jhandran, a mile from Zafarwal in Sialkot district. Megs were Hindus by religion and were a depressed caste of Sialkot. In appearance, Megs used to have *bodi*, a tuft of hair on the head, cremate their dead and treated cow as a sacred animal.⁴⁸

The people of the village came under the influence of Jahawar Mashi (who was a newly employed catechist) and started to lose interest in idol worship. Mr. G. W. Scott also accompanied Jawahar Mashi, a missionary of United Presbyterian Mission, and began to preach Megs in Jahandarn village. After their preaching of Christianity, Megs converted in groups. This happened during a marriage ceremony, a Meg chief (Pipo) showed his inclination towards Christianity, and all of his tribesmen followed suit. Moreover, Pipo's influence also forced his younger brother Bhajan and his friend Kanaya to convert to Christianity.⁴⁹ Similarly, after the wedding incident, other followed their examples, and 25 more families were converted in 1859. By the end of 1884, the total converts coming from Meg community was 59.

After 1884, Megs' mass conversion movement lost its momentum. The reason behind the slow growth of the Megs' conversion was the Arya Samaj's (Hindu reformist movement, 1875) movement of purification. This movement provided the Megs a second chance to embrace their old religion that too without falling back to their old caste system. Before the conversion, Megs were facing discrimination. They were not allowed to draw water from the wells of Hindus and were even not allowed to share the carpets with Hindus. The massive conversion of Megs to Christianity alerted Hindu reformist organization i.e. Arya Samaj. They not only declared the Megs cleaned but also started to establish some schools and Arya Nagra colony to uplift the socioeconomic position of the Megs in Sialkot.⁵⁰ The Arya Samaj was so effective that in 1908, 22,115 out of 40,000 Megs joined Arya Samaj.⁵¹

The Chuhra Mass Movement

The *Chuhra* mass movement started with the conversion of a thirty-year-old *Chuhra*, named Ditt, in 1873. He lived in Shahbdike, a village three miles South of Mirali in Sialkot district.⁵² At that time no Christian mission was working in his village. He met a Hindu Jat (Nathu Lal) of neighboring village who had converted to Christianity in 1872. During his interaction with Nathu Lal, he came to know about Christianity. After the meeting with Nathu, Ditt decided to embrace Christianity. In June 1873, Nathu accompanied him to Sialkot, where Rev. Samuel Martin baptized him under the United Presbyterian mission.

Ditt's request for conversion was sudden while missionaries used to check faith of converts by keeping them in mission compound for a few days before baptism. However, Rev. Samuel Martin found him sincere towards Christianity and baptized him. After baptism, Ditts got permission to go back to his village to preach his villagers and companions about the message of Christianity. Rev. Martin, although, reluctant to allow a *Chuhra* to preach Christianity, allowed him to do so. When he went back to his village, he had to face sharp reaction from his family. He was no more allowed to eat or drink with them. On his conversion, his sister in law

expressed his feelings; "Alas my brother, you have changed your religion without asking our counsel: our relationship with you is over."⁵³ However, regardless of this bitter reaction he went from village to village and preached the message of Christianity to the *Chuhra* communities in Sialkot District.

After three months, he came back to Sialkot with his wife, daughter and two neighbors to Rev. Martin for baptism. Six months later Ditt came again with four other men one of them was his relative named Kaka, who joined him voluntarily for evangelical work.⁵⁴ Consequently, after eleven years of Ditt's conversation, more than five hundred *Chuhras* approached church and half of them converted to Christianity.⁵⁵ Similarly, Webster mentioned in his book that in 1886 there were 2,000 baptisms out of which 1,041 were reported in Zafarwal's area where the village of Ditt was located.⁵⁶ After the start of the mass movement, by 1900 half of people accepted Christianity and by 1915 all *Chuhras* in Sialkot district became Christian.⁵⁷

Ditt's contribution changed the mindset of missionaries towards the use of native catechists. After his useful contributions, Missionaries used native converts to address other *Chuhras* to give them a message of Christ in an eloquent way. Christopher Harding used the expression of 'Native Agency' for this.⁵⁸ After changing the policy, rural catechist, teachers, and medical staff played a major role in evangelicalism and worked as mediators between missionaries and rural community. Subsequently, United Presbyterian missionaries and Scottish missionaries also adopted the same technique. Rev. Youngsons, especially in Gujrat, visited 100 villages in which he was assisted by one of his convert Didar Singh. Similarly, Rev. William Harper used the services of his native converts (Kishan Chand and Nath Mall) to work in the villages of Daska and Sammbrial in 1874.⁵⁹

Before the conversion of *Chuhra* class, as we have seen most of the missionaries were not set for converting lower classes. However, things changed after the mass conversion. Missionaries felt the need to educate converted persons to make them true Christians. Consequently, to impart religious education United Presbyterian mission started a Theological Seminary in 1877 at Sialkot. The seminary was an orphan education institution under the patronage of Sialkot United Presbyterian with Dr. J. S. Barr as principal. He was assisted by Andrew Gordon and G. L. Thakur Das. Under this initiative, one thousand two hundred and fifty-one children from lower class were admitted to the Church.

During the *Chuhra* mass-movement, converted community had to face two kinds of persecution. First, they had to face the persecution of the local landlords, who considered conversion to Christianity as heresy since most of the converts were not available for the minial work. This narrative was deliberately constructed to bring back the converts to their previous social and economic activities. Due to this persecution, some of *Chuhra* converts migrated to other parts of Punjab such as Julunder, Amritsar and Delhi. In these cities, especially in Delhi, *Chuhras* converts

engaged themselves in sanitation department to fulfil their economic needs. They were regarded sweepers by the British, Hindus and Muslims. In 1921 almost eighty two percent of sweepers were from *Chuhra* community.⁶⁰ However, the second kind of persecution was more severe. After conversion to Christianity family members and locals excommunicated them. This excommunication was backed by the activities of Arya Samaj in Sialkot district, especially in the areas of Megs. Arya Samaj unleashed a severe campaign against the conversion of first Megs and than *Chuhras* and increased the frequency of the ceremony of purification. However, to win back the converts, the Aryas worked for the socio-economic wellbeing of the Megs and *Chuhras*. For example, Lala Ganga Ram Vakil started a high school and ten vernacular education and carpentry schools in which children of Megs were admitted. Through this welfare work the Samajists succeeded in claiming back hundereds of Christian converts. As a result the depressed and marginalised communities became more resilient towards missionary activities.

Culmination Of Mass Movement

The *Chuhra* mass conversion to Christianity started to slow down during the 1920s. The primary reason for the decline in the mass conversion was the emergence of another socio-religious movement among lower castes in Punjab. This movement was called as Ad-Dharm movement and was founded by Mango Ram. The Ad-Dharm movement brought about a significant awareness among the lower castes and raised their consciousness about forming a new identity. The movement was against labeling lower castes as Hindu, Muslim or Sikh and promoted the idea of a separatre identity for the lower castes of all religions.⁶¹ The founder of Ad-Dharm movement believed that the fundamental reason behind the division in the society was the faith and to change the social order and to free the lower castes from the shackles of religious oppressions, a new religious alignment for lower caste is essential.⁶² This movement was not only for the converted Christians; many other castes such as sweepers, Chamar and *Chuhra* who were looking for some religious identity for their survival became Ad-Dharm.

Before the census of 1931, instructions were issued that all *Chuhras* who were not Muslims or Christians and did not have any desire to associate with any other religion should mention themselves as Hindus in the census. However, Ad-Dharm leader responded to this new policy and demanded that 'they are not Hindu and should not be included in the Hindu category. They wanted the British government to accept them as a distinct identity. Consequently, their organization The 'Punjab Ad-Dharm Mandal' petitioned to the government that depressed castes should be returned as Ad-Dharm and eventually their request was accepted. In response to this policy change, a significant number of *Chuhras* and Chamars claimed to be Ad-

Dharm in the census of 1931⁶³ i.e. the 418,789 untouchables in Punjab recorded Ad-Dharm as their religion.⁶⁴

Along with the Ad-Dharm movement, political activism of untouchables also impaired the growth of Christian community. Ad-Dharm was not only a movement championing for social-mobility its leaders in Punjab also tried to create a separate political consciousness. This political movement provided the untouchables and converted Christians a political platform to change their social and economic status. In the changed circumstances, the lower segments of the Punjabi society opted for political activism⁶⁵ and begin to resent conversion. Moreover, from the 1920s onward the process of conversion to Christianity had come to an halt, and those who had a desire for change joined the Ad-Dharm movement.

Besides the reformist movements, many prominent political figures also supported the lower castes of India. A leader like Karam Chand Gandhi (1869-1949), used the term *Harijan* (1933), which mean children of God for the depressed castes.⁶⁶ Moreover, Mr. Gandhi went to live in sweeper colony in Delhi in March 1946 and he prayed for the day when he will live in the house of a *Harijan*.⁶⁷ Similarly, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956) a Dalit leader, demanded the right of separate electorates for untouchables in 1932. However, on the issues of untouchables, Dr. Ambedkar and Mr. Gandhi showed diverse opinions. Dr. Ambedkar was for providing legal status to the untouchables in the form of separate identities like Muslims and Hindus. Moreover, he believed that this goal could only be achieved by imparting education to the untouchables.⁶⁸

On the other hand, Mr. Gandhi being a Veishia of Bania caste expressed his feelings for untouchables in these words "I want to attain moksha. I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should be born an untouchable so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings and the affronts leveled at them, so that I may endeavor to free myself and them from that miserable condition."⁶⁹ He always maintained his support for the Dalit community, but he was strictly against providing them separate electorate. Consequently, during the communal awards of 1932, untouchables were being considered to be recognized as a distinct identity but because of the protest of Gandhi the untouchables had to withdraw from their demands.⁷⁰

Conclusion

Due to their marginalised status the *Chuhra* community of Sialkot district looked for a new identity in order to improve its social status. After the arrival of Christian missionaries in Sialkot, *Chuhras* with a little persuasion embraced the new faith. Initially, Christian missionaries were not inclined for the conversion of lower castes. However, with the multitudes of *Chuhras* converting to Christianity, missionaries

were left with no other option but to accept them. The missionaries trained the native converts and used them as mediators between them and other *Chuhras* for further evangelization. The mass-conversion among *Chuhras* resulted in massive growth of native Christians in Sialkot district. However, they still remained marginalized and were unable to intermingle with the highcast educated native and European Christians. They achieved economic opportunities to some extent but their identity became more stigmatized. Due to the rapid growth of Christianity among the depressed classes, the image of Christian community in Punjab became stigmatized i.e. all the Christian came to be known as *Chuhra*, and all the *Chuhras* came to be known as Christians. Under these circumstances, when they remained unable to change their stigmatized social status, they started looking for another identity. Consequently, of the Arya Samaj and the Ad-Dharm movement ebbed the tide of mass conversion to Christianity. A number of converted Christian were calimed back and still many more joined the Ad-Dharam.

Notes and References

¹*Chuhras* is the sweeper and scavenger caste of Punjab. In Lahore and Sialkot they also functioned as agricultural labourers, village messengers and in some areas of the province they collected the cow dung. Denzil Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes* (Lahore, Government Printing Press, 1986), p. 209. Different censuses enumerated their population in the Sialkot District as follows.

Year	Population
1881	78980
1891	18419
1901	63811
1911	23895
1921	1231
1931	1688

See for detail, Punjab District Gazetteer, volume XV part B, Sialkot District Statistical Tables (Lahore: Printing press Punjab, 1936), Table. 15, p. iii.

²Sialkot came into the fold of Imperial rule after the second battle of Anglo-Sikh war in 1849. During the colonial era, Sialkot district had four tehsils i.e. Sialkot, Zafarwal, Pasrur, and Daska. Captain J.R Dunlip Smith, *Gazetteer of the Sialkot 1894-95*, revised edition (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1895), p. 35.

³There are three important enquiries on rural Christian community especially on *Chuhra* Christians. These studies were related to the socio-economic conditions and results of mass conversion among lower-caste converts in Sialkot District. First survey was conducted by Church Missionary Society named 'Mass-Movement Survey of India' which was conducted in 1927 in seven region of India including Punjab. See for detail, 'Report on The Mass Movement in Western India, A Survey and Statement of Need' (London: Church Missionary Society, 1926). Second study was conducted by Dr. J. Waskom Pickett 'Director Mass Movement Study National Christian Council of India' (1929-1933). He conducted his research in ten different areas of India. In Punjab he focused on Christian Community of Pasrus, District Sialkot. See for detail J. Waskom Pickett, *Christians Mass Movement in India: A study with Recommendation* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1933). Third a survey was done among *Chuhra* Christian community by E.D Lucas and F. Thakur Das between 1936-1938 in eighteen villages in Sialkot and Narowal. See for detail E.D Lucas and F. Thakur Das, *The Rural Church in Punjab: A study of social, economic, educational and religious conditions prevailing amongst certain village Christian communities in Sialkot district* (Lahore: Forman Christian College, 1938).

⁴ Reverend G.E Philips, *The Outcaste' Hope or Work among the Depressed Classes in India* (London: 1912), p. 83. Also see, Rowena Robinson and Sathianathan Clarke,

Religious Conversion in India: Modes, Motivation, and Meanings (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 363.

⁵Chuhra was not the only community that accepted Christianity through mass-conversion. Along with them many lower segments of the Punjabi society also witnessed mass-conversion i.e. *Chamars* an another scavenger caste, converted to Christianity in large number in Delhi, Amritsar and Gurdaspur. See Saurabh Mishra, "Of Poisoners: Tanners and British Raj: Redefining Chamar Identity in Colonial North India 1850-90", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, July-September 2011, Vol XLVIII, No.3. pp. 318-19. See also John C.B. Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2009), p. 35.

⁶ *Gazetteer of the Sialkot 1894-95*), p. 65. see also Fr. Leo, *The Capuchin Mission in the Punjab: With Notes on the History, Geography, Ethnology and Religion of the Country* (Punjab: Catholic Mission Press, 1910), p. 131.

⁷ *Gazetteer of the Sialkot 1894-95*), p. 65

⁸ Kenneth W. Jones, *Arya- Dharam; Hindu consciousness in 19th century Punjab* (London: University of California, 1997), p. 12.

⁹ *Punjab District Gazetteer, Sialkot District 1920, Volume XXIII* (Lahore: Punjab Printing Press, 1921), p. 58.

¹⁰ E.D Lucas and F. Thakur Das, *The Rural Church in Punjab: A study of social, economic, educational and religious conditions prevailing amongst certain village Christian communities in Sialkot district* (Lahore: Forman Christian College, 1938), p. 10.

¹¹ Frederick and Margaret Stock, *People Movement in Punjab: With Special Reference to United Presbyterian Church* (United States: William Carry Library, 1975), p. 66. Also see John Rooney, *Into Desert (Rawalpindi: Christian Study Centre, 1986)*, p. 21., John C. B. Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History*, p.71.

¹² James Massey, *The Movement of Spirit* (Switzerland: SCC Publication, 1996), p. 9.

¹³ Christopher Harding, *Religious Transformation in South Asia: The meaning of Conversion in Colonial Punjab* (London Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 5. William B Anderson and Charles R. Watson, *Far North in India: A Survey of the Mission Field and Work of the United Presbyterian Church in the Punjab* (Philadelphia, United Presbyterian Church of North America, 1909), p. 227. E. D. Lucas and F. Thakur Das, *The Rural Church in Punjab: A Study of Social, Economic, Educational and Religious Conditions prevailing amongst certain village Christian communities in Sialkot district*. p.11. Frederick and Margaret Stock, *People Movement in the Punjab: With special reference to the United Presbyterian Church* (United States: William Carey Library, 1929), p. 68. *The Call from the Land of Five Rivers: A survey of Work of Church Missionary Society in Central Punjab, on The Mass Movement in Western India, A survey and statement of Need*, Church Missionary Society, 1926, p. 7. Kenneth W.

Jones, *Arya- Dharam; Hindu consciousness in 19th century Punjab* (London: University of California, 1997) p. 12.

¹⁴ The first survey was published in 1917 then second in 1921, and the third survey was conducted in 1927. According to the first study of CMS, the term 'Mass Movement' seems to be applicable only when there is a definite forward movement towards Christianity.' The Mass Movement Survey was conducted in seven regions i.e. Aurangabad, United Provinces, Central Punjab Punjab (Jogra), Travancore, Western India, Telugu country and in Santalia. Report on The Mass Movement in Western India, A survey and statement of Need, Church Missionary Society, 1926, p. 1. W. C. Pickett also defined the group conversion movement towards Christianity as a reception of the outcastes or untouchables into Church. It can be defined as the transformation of the small groups or conversion of the whole populace. In simple word, the mass movement conversion is either a small or large group movement towards Christianity. See. J. Waskom Pickett, *Christian Mass Movement in India* (New York: Ablungdon Press, 1933), p. 22. W. C. Pickett also defined the group conversion movement towards Christianity as a reception of the outcastes or untouchables into Church. It can be defined as the transformation of the small groups or conversion of the whole populace. In simple word, the mass movement conversion is either a small or large group movement towards Christianity.

¹⁵Parvaras were the depressed castes and being exploited by the Arab pirates and Hindu upper castes. They requested from the Portuguese for protection and conversion. Then in 1537, the whole caste was converted to Christianity. Duncan. Forrester, "The Depressed Classes and Conversion to Christianity"1860-1960 cited in *Religion in South Asia: Religious Conversion and Revival Movements in South Asia in Medieval and Modern times* by G. A. Oddie (London: Cruzan, 1977).

¹⁶. Eleanor, Zelliot, 'The Psychological Dimensions of the Buddhist Movement in India', p.123

¹⁷ John C.B. Webster, *A History of Dalit Christians in India* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), pp. 38-39.

¹⁸The United Presbyterian (UP) was a first mission that started its activities in Sialkot district in 1855 under the guidance of Reverend Andrew Gordan, and missions focused only in the areas of Pasrur, Zafarwal, and Raya. After United Presbyterian mission, Sialkot district came under the control of Church of Scotland and chose Adah in Sialkot district as their headquarter in 1856. Moreover, Church of Scotland selected Gujrat, Wazirabad, and Daska as their main mission stations. Along with Church of Scotland and United Presbyterian missions, Roman Catholics also started their mission activities in Sialkot under the guidance of Reverend Dr. Mourad, Bishop of Lahore, in 1893. *Gazetteer of the Sialkot 1894-95*, p. p. 65.

¹⁹ R. K. Wilson, *The Twice Alienated: Culture of Dalit Christians* (Hyderabad: Bobolinks Publishers, 1982), p. 15.

²⁰ *Gazetteer of the Sialkot 1894-95*), p. 48.

²¹ Restrictions were more rigid in other parts of India, especially in Kangra District (South India), where the majority of the population was Hindus. In some other areas in India, especially in U.P, some lower castes like Chamars and Dhobi (washer man) were treated better and were allowed to use the water of wells of upper castes. However, *Chuhras* were not allowed. See for detail Dr. Soran Singh, *Scheduled Castes of India, dimensions of Social change* (New Delhi: Gian Publishers, 1987), p. 10.

²² Allaud, Dean Asini, 'Christian Minority in West Punjab', PhD Dissertation, School of Education, New York University, 1964, p. 83.

²³ Clement Ashley Waidyasekara, *Brotherhood in Punjabi Culture and Gospel Message* (Colombo: Rufiana Graphics, 2007), p. 54.

²⁴ Linda S Walbridge, *The Christians of Pakistan: The Passion of Bishop John Joseph* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 15.

²⁵ William Croke, *Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (Oxford University Press, 1926), P. 326.

²⁶ E. D. Lucas and F. Thakur Das, *The Rural Church in Punjab: A study of social, economic, educational and religious conditions prevailing amongst certain village Christian communities in Sialkot district* (Lahore: Forman Christian College, 1938), p. 15.

²⁷ In Gujrat *Chuhra* used to eat dead animals especially those which had died a natural death. These included lizard and wild cat but did not eat jackal, fox and tortoise. In Montgomery all *Chuhras* ate flesh of dead animals. H. A. Rose, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*, volume II (Lahore: Aziz Publishers, 1978), p. 190.

²⁸ Ibid. 190.

²⁹ D. J. Boyd, *Customary Laws in Sialkot District* (Lahore: Government Printing Press, 1917), p. 5.

³⁰ E. D. Lucas and F. Thakur Das, *The Rural Church in Punjab: A study of social, economic, educational and religious conditions prevailing amongst certain village Christian communities in Sialkot district* (Lahore: Forman Christian College, 1938), p. 36.

³¹ John C.B. Webster, *A History of Dalit Christians in India* (San Franco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), P.14. See also Punjab District Gazetteers of Sialkot 1912, Religion Part A, statistical table (Lahore: Mufid-i-Am Press, 1913), p. 110.

³² Louis E. Fenech, "Conversion and Sikh tradition" cited in *Religious conversion in India, Modes, Motivations, and Meaning* by Rowena Robinson and Sathianathan Clarke (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.296.

³³ Jeffrey Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India (1818-1940)* (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 126.

³⁴ Census of India 1911, volume XIV, Punjab, Part I, Report by Pandit Harikishan Kaul (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette, 1921), p. 111.

³⁶ Jon. C.B. Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2009), p. 64.

³⁷ John O'Brien, *The Unconquered People: The Liberation Journey of Oppressed Caste* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 47.

³⁸ H. A. Rose, *A Glossary of Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*. p. 20

³⁹ The Chuhras founded more acceptance in Sikhism because it was believed that executed body of Guru Tegh Bahadur was carried out from Delhi and handed over to his son Guru Gobind Singh by Chuhras. Than the Chuhras were accepted in Sikhism as a reward of their service. See for detail B.W Srivastava, *Manual Scavenging in India: A Disgrace to the Country* (New Delhi: Concept Publishers, 1997), p. 27.

⁴⁰ Frederick and Margaret, Frederick and Margaret Stock, *People Movement in Punjab: With Special Reference to United Presbyterian Church* (United States: William Carry Library, 1975), pp. 21-23.

⁴¹ James Massy, *The Movement of Spirit* (Switzerland: SCC Publication, 1996), p. 7.

⁴² Frederick and Margaret, Frederick and Margaret Stock, *People Movement in Punjab: With Special Reference to United Presbyterian Church* (United States: William Carry Library, 1975), p.20.

⁴³ He was born 1845, at Monquhitter in Buchan. He sailed for India with his wife Isabella. After William Hunter, he was given charge of Sialkot Mission. They had three children one of his daughter was buried in Sialkot. His area of influence was Sialkot, Sammbral, and Daska.

⁴⁴ There were some important converts from Islam and Hinduism such as Karm Chand (1876), Imam-ud-din (1877), Gopal Chand (1878), Muhammad Hanif(1878), YisuRakh(1879), IllahiBaksh(1880), HidayatUllah(1882). Karam Chand baptized but remained under pressure from his family that forced him to come back to their religion. One day he was preaching in Sialkot and did not return to the mission again. Later on, it was discovered that he had become a Sikh. Similarly, Yasu Rakha father was Qanungo of Sialkot Tehsil, and one of his uncles was Diwan of Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir. After getting his education in a city school, he went to Kashmir. He became annoyed with the idol worship and under the influence of Maulivi he became Muslim. However, he was not satisfied. He appeared in Hunter Memorial Church and declared his faith in Christ and changed

his name from Ram Rakha to Yisu Rakha. In the same way, Hidayat Ullah, adopted son of wealthy man in Jammu, was a student of mission high school Sialkot. He expressed his desire to become a Christine. However, he left for Peshawar and then for Jullundur because he had to face persecution. Later on, he was baptized in Jullundur. William G. Young, *Days of Small Things* (Rawalpindi: Christian Study Center, 1991), pp. 23-24.

⁴⁵Native converts from Gujrat and Wazirabad under Rev. Youngson included Karam Bibi, Sadiq Masih, and Akbar Ali. Some other converts were Burhi (1881 Dec 18) a son of teachers, Samanda son of Murad Bakshzamindar, Jaimal son of domesticservant, CharanMashi son of the coolie, Channu, son of a domestic servant and Rani a domestic servant. William G. Young, *Days of Small things* (Rawalpindi: Christian Study Center, 1991), pp. 116,-127.

⁴⁶Megs was known as 'Meg,' and 'Meng' and majority of them were weavers, though some were field labourers, and grass cutters. They used to live in Sialkot, Gurdaspur and Gujrat district. Their social and economic position was not good, and they used to eat the leavings of Muslims and high caste Hindus. In 1879, the Megs under the influence of one of their guru or religious leaders decided to change their eating habits in the 1900s. In their meeting, they finally decided not to eat leaving of others. They had already started to lose interest in idol worship. The Megs were considered superior to *Chuhras* in the whole of the district. Frederick and Margaret Stock, *People Movement in Punjab: With Special Reference to United Presbyterian Church* (United States: William Carry Library, 1975), p. 33.

⁴⁷William B. Anderson and Charles R. Watson, *For North in India: A Survey of the Mission field and Work of the United Presbyterian Church in Punjab* (USA: Board of Foreign Mission of Presbyterian Church of North America, 1909), p. 218.

⁴⁸Lala Ganga Ram, *The Uplift Movement at Sialkot Punjab, The Brief report of the Arya MeghUddhar Sabha, Aryan Mission for the uplift of the Megs Untouchables* (Sialkot: Punjab Press, 1925), p. 2.

⁴⁹Bhagan and Kanaya and their families were 13 members. They with other two families those of Fakira and Jesus made total 30 members. Thus 50 percent of communicant members were from those four families and located in four villages Jhandran, NayaPind, Scottgarh, SukhoChekh (10 miles away from the Zafarwal). William B. Anderson and Charles R. Watson, *For North in India: A Survey of the Mission field and Work of the United Presbyterian Church in Punjab* (USA: Board of Foreign Mission of Presbyterian Church of North America, 1909), pp. 219-221.

⁵⁰Ganga Ram, *The Uplift Movement at Sialkot Punjab, The Brief report of the Arya MeghUddhar Sabha, Aryan Mission for the uplift of the Megs Untouchables* (Sialkot: Punjab Press, 1925. p.13.

⁵¹Frederick and Margaret Stock, *People Movement in Punjab: With Special Reference to United Presbyterian Church* (United States: William Carry Library, 1975), p. 40.

⁵² John C. B. Webster, 'Christian Conversion in Punjab: What has Change' cited in *Religious Conversion in India, Modes, Motivations, and Meanings* edited by Rowena Robinson and Sathiana Clarke, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 355-56.

⁵³ James Massy, *The Movement of Spirit* (Switzerland: SCC Publication, 1996), p. 11.

⁵⁴ John C. B. Webster, *The History of Dalit Christians in India* (USA, Mellen Research University Press, 1992), p. 45.

⁵⁵ J. Waskom Pickett, *Christian Mass Movement in India A Study with Recommendation* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1933), p.45.

⁵⁶ John C. B. Webster, *The Dalit Christian: A History*, p. 59-60.

⁵⁷ James Massy, *The Movement of Spirit* (Switzerland: SCC Publication, 1996), P. 1. On other hand due to conversion of *Chuhra*s Christians population increased in Sialkot district. See for detail

The Christian Population In The Sialkot District	
Year	Population
1881	1535
1891	11668
1901	11930
1911	48620
1921	62266
1931	66266

Census of India, 1931 volume XVII part I Subsidiary Table III, p. 321.

⁵⁸ Christopher Harding, *Religious Transformation in South Asia: The Meanings of Conversion in Colonial Punjab* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 16.

⁵⁹ William G. Young, *Days of Small Things* (Rawalpindi: Christian Study Center, 1991), p.100.

⁶⁰ Vijay Prasad, *Untouchables Freedom: A Social History of Dalit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 43-44.

⁶¹ Ronki Ram, 'Untouchability in India with a difference Ad Dharm, Dalit Assertion, and Caste conflicts in Punjab' University of California Press, volume 44, No,6, 2004 retrieved Http: www.jstore.org/stable. p. 7.

⁶² Mark Juergensmeyer, *Religion as a Social Vision: A Movement against untouchability 20th Century Punjab* (California, University of California Press, 1982), p. 269.

⁶³ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Religion as a Social Vision: A Movement against untouchability 20th Century Punjab* (California, University of California Press, 1982), pp.74-75

⁶⁴ Ronki Ram, "Untouchability in India with a difference Ad Dharm, Dalit Assertion, and Caste conflicts in Punjab" University of California Press, volume 44, No,6, 2004 retrieved Http: www.jstore.org/stable. p.8

⁶⁵Under the influence of new political agility, the Dalit agitation was started in India in which the Dalit Christians also participated actively. In 1925, converted Christians conducted a conference, Anti-Untouchability Conference, in Madras to condemn the discrimination in *Chuhras* against Dalit Christians. See John C. Webster, John C Webster, *A Social History of Christianity: North-West India since 1800* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 107.

⁶⁶ Vijay Prasad, *Untouchables Freedom: A Social History of Dalit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 112.

⁶⁷ John O' Brien, *The Unconquered People The Liberation Journey of an Oppressed Castes* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 199.

⁶⁸Dr.Soran Singh, *Scheduled Castes of India: Dimensions of Social Change* (New Delhi: Gian Publishers, 1987) p.4.

⁶⁹ John O'Brien, *The Unconquered People: The Liberation Journey of an Oppressed Cate* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 198.

⁷⁰JoshuFazal-ud-Din, *Tragedy of Untouchables* (Lahore: Punjabi Darbar, 1934), pp. 20-21.