Seeking an Indian Identity: Baptist Witness in Orissa, India, from the 1860s to the 1880s

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Abstract:
The English General Baptists represented a strand of Baptist life which took shape in the seventeenth century and became a denominational body alongside the larger Particular or Calvinistic Baptist denomination. In 1816 the General Baptist Missionary Society (GBMS) was formed, a product of the New Connexion of General Baptists that resulted from the Evangelical Revival. This article examines the way GBMS sought to develop an authentic Indian witness in Orissa, from the 1860s to the end of the 1880s. It examines several themes: developing local churches and leaders; concern and care for all human needs; wider connections with other bodies; Baptist convictions; and an enlarged Baptist identity created in 1891 when the GBMS amalgamated with the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS). The article makes especial use of the GBMS monthly magazine, the *Missionary Observer*. Brian Stanley, in his history of the BMS, suggests that the Orissa mission was one of the most fruitful fields for Baptist work in India. The features of this have not previously been analysed.

Keywords:
General Baptist; missionary; identity; convictions

Introduction

The English General Baptists represented a strand of Baptist life which took shape in the seventeenth century and became a denominational body alongside the larger Particular or Calvinistic Baptist denomination.[1] The description 'General' signifies 'general atonement', an aspect of Arminian theology, and a perspective sometimes seen as tracing back to John Smyth and his congregation in Amsterdam, although that identification has been challenged.[2] By the eighteenth

[1] Stephen Wright, in *The Early English Baptists, 1603–1649* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2006), shows the demarcation was not straightforward in the early period.
[2] Stephen Holmes, 'When Did John Smyth Embrace "Arminianism" – And was the First Baptist Congregation "Particular"?', *Baptist Quarterly* [hereafter, *BQ*], 52, no. 4 (2021), 146–57.

century, a number of General Baptist congregations were embracing Unitarianism. This period saw the formation in 1770, under the influence of the Evangelical Revival, of what became the New Connexion of General Baptists.[3] The dynamic leader of the New Connexion was Dan Taylor (1738–1816), who had been a Methodist local preacher. He took some Methodist features into Baptist life, for example the term 'Connexion'.[4] It was in the year of Taylor's death that the General Baptist Missionary Society (GBMS) was formed. The GBMS was formed by the New Connexion and was not related to churches in the Old General Baptist movement, who had largely slipped into Unitarianism.[5] The prime mover was John Gregory Pike, the pastor of Derby's General Baptist Church for forty-four years. He was secretary of the GBMS from its formation in 1816 until his death in 1854.[6] This article examines the way GBMS sought to develop an authentic Indian witness in Orissa, from the 1860s to the end of the 1880s. In 1891 the GBMS amalgamated with the Baptist Missionary Society. The article makes especial use of the GBMS monthly magazine, the *Missionary Observer*.[7]

Developing Local Churches and Leaders

Considerable attention has been paid to the early formation and development of the GBMS.[8] The Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), which had been formed in 1792 and was a Particular Baptist body, felt unable to accept a General Baptist as a missionary when a request was

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[3] See Stephen L. Copson, 'General Baptists in the Eighteenth Century' and J.H.Y. Briggs, 'New Connexion of General Baptists, 1770–1813', both essays in *Challenge and Change: English Baptist Life in the Eighteenth Century,* ed. by Stephen Copson and Peter J. Morden (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 2017), pp. 29–55, and pp. 57–75 respectively.

[4] Richard Pollard, *Dan Taylor (1738–1816): Baptist Leader and Pioneering Evangelical* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2018).

[5] For the New Connexion, Dan Taylor and the Old General Baptists, see Stephen Copson, 'Dan Taylor and the Old General Baptists', *BQ*, 49, no. 2 (2018), 75–81.

[6] Peter Shepherd, 'J. G. Pike of Derby: Pastor, Evangelist and Founder of the General Baptist Missionary Society', *BQ*, 43, no. 3 (2009): 132–53.

[7] Published monthly in the *General Baptist Repository* (later *Magazine*) and *Missionary Observer*.

[8] See James Peggs, *A History of the General Baptist Mission* (London: John Snow, 1846); G. P. R. Prosser, 'The Formation of the General Baptist Missionary Society', *BQ*, 22 (1967), 23–29; Amos Sutton, *A Narrative of the Mission to Orissa* (Boston: David Marks, 1833).

made for this. However, there was considerable goodwill.[9] In India, William Carey and his colleague William Ward were happy to advise the GBMS in its formative period. The advice was to begin work in Orissa (now Odisha), eastern India, at that time part of Bengal. William Bampton and James Peggs, together with their wives, began work in Cuttack, the capital of Orissa, in 1822. Carey had already been translating the Bible into the local language, Oriya, and the area, with its influential Hindu temple, was seen as strategic for Christian witness. By 1830, twelve GBMS missionaries had arrived in Orissa. At that point the New Connexion had 11 000 members, in 109 churches. The years up to 1858, when over thirty GBMS missionaries had served, have been characterised by Kanchanmoy Mojumdar as a period of 'preparation' for Baptist activity due to generally limited impact.[10] Nonetheless, there was a growing church in Cuttack. This had 137 members in 1845, with a further fifty-two members in six outstations.[11] The decades that followed were a time when an identity was more fully worked out.

A Cuttack Mission Academy (subsequently, Theology College) operated from the later 1840s and thus, as Brian Stanley notes, the Orissa mission 'had the advantage of having a training institution located at the heart of a geographically concentrated Christian constituency, an advantage that Serampore in the BMS mission lacked'.[12] There was a strong emphasis on the role of Indian pastors and evangelists. At a Thanksgiving Day at Cuttack in October 1859, there were reports of the impact of local Indian evangelists reaching out in the markets. The preachers gained hearers, while occasionally being stoned.[13] Two factors appear to have been at work in this period. Following the Indian Rebellion of 1857–1858, which signalled the alienation of many Indians from the rule of the British East India Company, there was increased emphasis in Orissa on local Baptist

[9] For the friendship between Dan Taylor and the Particular Baptist, John Fawcett, see Pollard, *Dan Taylor*, pp. 127–28.

[10] Kanchanmoy Mojumdar, 'Baptist Missionaries in Orissa, 1822–58: A Study in Western Impact on 19th Century Society', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 37 (1976), 327–35. See p. 327.

[11] Peggs, *History of the General Baptist Mission*, p. 257.

[12] Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792–1992* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), p. 163.

[13] 'Thanksgiving Day at Cuttack', *Missionary Observer*, October 1859, p. 394. Authors of reports were not named.

leadership. The *Missionary Observer* (hereafter, the *Observer*) covered in detail local Indian preachers, such as Tama and Makunda, and their leading of meetings. The other factor was the '1859' evangelical revival, an international movement with a focus on prayer and witness, and in May 1859 a GBMS article was published on 'Religious Revival'.[14] On the theme of effective witness, the January 1862 *Observer* had a letter about Gunga Dhor, an extraordinary preacher in Orissa described as the 'Charles Spurgeon of India'. A high caste Brahmin, he had been baptised in 1828 and later ordained. He had a deep interest in John Bunyan and prayer and had recently preached a sermon on 'The character of Holy War by Bunyan Sahib'.[15] The identity was connected with England while finding fresh forms in India.

An annual conference of the churches was held in Orissa, at which reports were given and messages preached in English and Oriya. At the 1865 Conference, it was noted that Indian preachers occupied 'a large share of Conference'. By this time, some had more than thirty years of service, and pensions were provided for retirement.[16] In 1867, there was deep concern at Conference for the effect of the devastating famine of the previous year in which it was estimated that one quarter of the population of Orissa had died.[17] The question of ensuring a missionary presence was raised: during the 1860s only two new missionaries had arrived in Orissa. However, discussions led to a more positive outlook. Instead of 'excessive modesty', which could lead the General Baptists 'to depreciate our own work', there was a call to affirm the church planting and training of local leaders that had taken place.[18] A year later, John Clifford, then in his early thirties, who was to become a towering figure among General Baptists, gave an impassioned address at the autumn meetings of the Baptist Union in which he referred to the caste system in India as a 'gigantic edifice', not a 'structure built of sand but an adamantine barrier'; and he went on to pronounce that it had been 'shaken to its base by the thunderbolt of human brotherhood shot from

[14] 'Religious Revival', *General Baptist Herald*, May 1859, pp. 161–66.
[15] 'Letter from Rev. W. Hill', *Observer*, January 1862, pp. 33–34.
[16] 'The Orissa Missionary Conference', *Observer*, February 1865, p. 77.
[17] Bidyut Mohanty, 'Orissa Famine of 1866: Demographic and Economic Consequences', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28 (1993), 55–66.
[18] 'Annual Conference', *Observer*, August 1867, p. 253.

the heavens'. He argued for the equality of all people.[19] Although Clifford's picture of the victory of equality was over-drawn, at a New Year conference in Cuttack in 1869, one missionary, John Buckley, who had served in Orissa since 1844 and would continue until his death in 1886, spoke of meetings at which missionaries were 'spectators'. He observed 'with great joy' the faith in Christ and the ability of local pastors.[20]

In 1869–1870, as the New Connexion celebrated one hundred years as a General Baptist denomination, there were reports of considerable numbers in Orissa 'who had put on Christ by public baptism', often following the work of local evangelists and of Bible Women — who were female evangelists focusing on reaching other women. At one baptismal service, five hundred Hindus and Muslims were reckoned to have been present. It was noted that Orissa had only five European missionaries, half the number of a quarter of a century previously. Yet the churches were 'growing faster than ever before'. Among themes often taken up in the preaching of local pastors were witness, holiness, prayer, and the Holy Spirit. The preaching was motivating members to witness and in the case of some to train as pastors. Mention was made of those studying in the College. Following the centenary celebrations, an appeal was made for money for a larger Baptist building in Cuttack: it emphasised that the Baptist Chapel was the oldest Protestant building in Orissa and that in other places besides Cuttack, steadily increasing congregations produced a need for more buildings for worship.[21] The GBMS Annual Report for 1878 recorded 452 members in the Cuttack churches, 209 at Pipli, and 152 at Berhampur.[22]

Although Indians were taking the lead in much of the mission work, there was some excitement in 1882 when it was reported that Thomas Mulholland, a native of Glasgow, was coming to Orissa to superintend the Mission Press at Cuttack. He had a background in

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[19] 'The Christian Conscience', *Observer*, November 1868, pp. 347–50.
[20] 'The New Year at Cuttack', *Observer*, March 1869, pp. 95–96.
[21] 'Reports from Orissa', *Observer*, May 1869, pp. 159–62; 'Orissa Chapel', *Observer*, August 1871, p. 253.
[22] 'GBMS Annual Report, 1878–79', pp. 11, 24, 38.

printing and had for eight years been a home missionary with the Free Church of Scotland. He began to train for Free Church ministry but was 'led to consider the subject of believers' baptism, and after prayerful consideration of the Scriptures he came to the conclusion that this was the only baptism enjoined in the word of God'. [23]The General Baptists knew of Andrew Bonar, described as Mulholland's 'revered pastor'. In several interviews with Bonar and others, attempts were made to counter Mulholland's new convictions. Mulholland, in a decision that caused him 'considerable pain', was baptised and joined Adelaide Place Baptist Church, Glasgow, and later made his way to Orissa with the GBMS.[24] At the Orissa Conference in 1883, the *Observer* reported that the attendance was the largest in the history of the mission. Conference recognised the place of European missionaries, but especially gifted younger Indian preachers, such as Gideon Mahanty: there was no sense of superiority of English Baptists over Indian. Indeed, it was suggested that over the previous ten years the increase in Baptist membership in England had proportionally been much less than in India.[25]

It was difficult for the New Connexion to appeal for new missionaries from England when the overseas mission fund was struggling to meet its financial outgoings. Mulholland returned to Britain after just under three years. By 1888, the denomination was being called to special prayer as the 'missionary debt' had grown to £1200. Giving did not increase significantly, and it was only a legacy that paid off the debt.[26] For those in the churches in Orissa, however, the focus was on local mission rather than legacy money. Growth in the churches was continuing, all under Indian leadership, with those being baptised coming partly from Indian Christian families and partly from those who had no Christian background. One of those baptised in 1888 was a grandson of Ghanu Shyam, a long-standing, 'very able' minister and tutor in the College. Another was someone in his late twenties, Kina Ram Bose, a Hindu 'from a high class family and in Government

[23] 'A New Missionary for Orissa', *Observer*, June 1882, p. 237.
[24] 'A New Missionary for Orissa', *Observer*, June 1882, p. 237.
[25] 'Orissa Conference', *Observer*, March 1883, p. 113; 'Notes', *Observer*, May 1883, p. 157.
[26] 'An Important Proposal', *Observer*, January 1888, p. 38.

employment'.[27] A report in the *Observer* in 1889, looking back over sixty years, made this significant pronouncement: 'Never in the history of the Mission were the Society's operations in Orissa so extensive or so encouraging as they are now.'[28] A Baptist witness with its own identity had been established.

Concern and Care

Alongside the Mission's desire to see people come to faith in Christ, there was concern to care for the whole person. In recognition of the needs of orphans in Orissa, the Mission had opened orphanages at Cuttack and Berhampur in 1836, and at Ganjam in 1841. With the terrible famine of 1866, the needs multiplied and new orphanages were opened at Cuttack, Pipli, and Berhampur to accommodate 1300 children. Care was given and training in skills was offered. Over time, the skills gained by those in orphanages, in conjunction with what was offered in GBMS schooling, included weaving, carpentry, farming, printing, and blacksmith's work. The government praised what was done and helped in certain cases with costs.[29] The locations for a number of the orphanages were Christian villages set up by the Mission. Brian Stanley notes, 'Christian villages tended to act as a magnet for the outcaste and fellow traveller, and thus helped to inflate the total Christian community to about five times the size of the baptized membership.'[30] It was reported in the *Observer* that at the international Conference on Missions held in Liverpool in 1860, the setting up of separate Christian villages was questioned, with concern expressed that Christians were separated from the wider population. In Orissa, however, the villages became places of witness.[31]

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[27] 'Current Events at Cuttack', *Observer*, April 1888, p. 156; 'An Interesting Baptism', *Observer*, October 1888, pp. 397–99.

[28] 'Missionary Operations in Cuttack', *Observer*, January 1889, p. 33.

[29] Bina Sarma, *Development of Modern Education in India: An Empirical Study of Orissa* (New Delhi: M. D. Publications, 1996), p. 30.

[30] Stanley, *Baptist Missionary Society*, p. 163.

[31] 'Proposed new Christian Village', *Observer*, October 1861, p. 393–94; See, The Secretaries of the Conference, eds., *Conference on Missions held in 1860 at Liverpool* (London: J. Nesbit, 1860).

A new aspect of orphanage work had to do with the Khonds, who lived in a mountainous region and had little contact with the outside world. A British official, Major S. C. Macpherson, produced in 1846 a 'Report upon the Khonds of the Districts of Ganjam and Cuttack', which was published in the *Calcutta Review*. This highlighted the way *Meriah* human sacrifices, often of children, were taking place as part of the worship of the Khonds. British officials tried to substitute animal sacrifices. Amos Sutton, a leading GBMS missionary, proposed to the Mission that at-risk children could be taken to the Baptist orphanages, but despite the need being made known in different parts of India to garner support, nothing transpired.[32] In 1861, it was reported that after fifteen years of hopes being disappointed, a further appeal had been successful.[33] John Orissa Goadby, from a missionary family, and his wife, began to visit the Khond lands and made reports on the people, their Kui language (which he learned) and their faith. The Goadbys served the Khonds till 1867, when they were transferred to Pipli because of the pressing needs of famine orphans. About 250 *Meriah* children were taken into Baptist orphanages. A number of these orphans became committed Christians, including Paul Singh, who trained as a GBMS evangelist.[34]

Another area of concern for the GBMS was education.[35] The annual mission conference in Cuttack regularly discussed possibilities for schools. Its concern for the education of girls meant that several female missionaries who came to Orissa with the Mission did so in conjunction with The Society for Promoting Female Education in the East, formed in 1834 to promote education through schools and also in zenanas, where women were cut off from any male contact outside the family.[36] Among the countries in which the Society supported

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[32] Lalrameng K. Gangte, 'Human Sacrifice among the Khonds of Orissa c.1836–1861: A Study', *Mizoram University Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, 3 (June 2017), 114–125.

[33] 'Letter from Rev. W. Miller', *Observer*, May 1861, pp. 193–95 (p. 195).

[34] *Indian Report of the Orissa Baptist Mission*, *1871–2*, pp. 5–6, cited by Stanley, *Baptist Missionary Society*, p. 163; S. P. Carey, *Dawn on the Khond Hills* (London: The Carey Press, 1936), pp. 28–29.

[35] For more on this, Jonathan C. Ingleby, 'Education as a Missionary Tool: A Study in Christian Missionary Education by English Protestant Missionaries in India with Special Reference to Cultural Change' (doctoral thesis, Open University, 1998).

[36] See Karen E. Smith, 'Women in Cultural Captivity: British Women and the Zenana Mission', *BQ*, 42, no. 7 (2007), 103–113.

educational work were China, Malaya, Burma, India and Ceylon.[37] In 1888 Harriet Leigh, who had been a GBMS missionary in Orissa since 1872, surveyed the progress in education for girls. She was particularly interested in the openings for young women as school teachers. A theme that emerged was 'the great task of raising the position of Christian womanhood in India'.[38] Bina Sarma, in a study of education in Orissa, argues that female education developed in Orissa in the nineteenth century 'only because of the exertion of the missionaries'.[39] For boys, one initiative was a Protestant Boys' School, established in 1882 by William Day Stewart, a Civil Surgeon (head of the health services of the district) based at Cuttack who had been born in Chennai. In the context of an emphasis on high quality education, satisfaction was expressed in 1889 in the *Observer* that rising educational standards were evident in the GBMS High School. One hope was that new ministers for the Orissa churches might come through this educational route.[40]

Health was also a part of the Mission's concern, although the New Connexion was not involved in recruiting doctors for Orissa. The GBMS was glad, however, that a medical school was set up in 1875 by William Stewart. One former Lutheran who became a GBMS evangelist, Prabhu Sahai, exercised a ministry of prayer for healing among a hill tribe, the Mundas, in the 1880s, and although there were set-backs after his death in 1890, the work subsequently resumed.[41] The GBMS co-operated with the American Free Will Baptists — the link had been made by Amos Sutton — and some in America occasionally queried whether health care and hospitals were a good use of missionary energy. But the overall thrust of the Free Will Baptist missionary work showed a natural partnership between medical and spiritual care.[42] The GBMS view was that there was 'a need to follow Jesus' in providing for the

[37] The Society published a Journal from 1854, the *Female Missionary Intelligencer*. See Margaret Donaldson, '"The Cultivation of the Heart and the Moulding of the Will": The Missionary Contribution of the Society for Promoting Female Education in China, India, and the East', in *Women in the Church* ed. by W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 429–42.
[38] Harriet Leigh, 'Female Education in Orissa', *Observer*, May 1888, pp. 198–99.
[39] Sarma, *Development of Modern Education in India*, p. 71.
[40] 'Mission High School and College', *Observer*, August 1889, p. 331.
[41] Stanley, *Baptist Missionary Society*, pp. 164–65.
[42] See Mrs M. M. Hutchins Hills, *'Reminiscences: A Brief History of the Free Baptist India Mission* (Boston: Free Baptist Woman's Missionary Society, 1886); David Bebbington, *Baptists through the Centuries* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), pp. 79–81, 98–100.

needs of the body as well as the spirit.[43] There was, too, an awareness of a wider understanding of health. The *Observer* in 1889 expressed a great sense of responsibility for widows, 'the wronged and suffering sisterhood in the land of the Ganges'.[44] Care should be comprehensive if Baptist witness was to be authentic.

Wider Connections

The fact that the GBMS was a small Mission contributed to an openness to cover news of missionary endeavours by other denominations. As Terry Barringer shows, although many missionary periodicals in the nineteenth century served one denomination only (others were non-denominational), they were ready to note or re-use material from other denominations. She uses the General Baptists as an example.[45] The tendency is pronounced in the *Observer*. The GBMS's closest relationships were with the BMS and the Free Will Baptists, but the *Observer* also carried extensive reports from other Nonconformist bodies. In March 1858, three pages were devoted to the work of the London Missionary Society (the LMS represented Congregationalists) and the Methodists. This echoed the call from the LMS for 'a great increase of zeal and liberality in extending the blessings of the gospel throughout India', and the urging of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society that 'greater effort by Christian people' was needed to sustain witness worldwide.[46] The coverage of the LMS and Wesleyan Methodist mission continued through the decades of the production of the *Observer*. When the *Observer* wanted to emphasise the sacrifice involved in Christian mission, it could turn to the experience of others, reproducing, for example, an address at the Annual Meetings of the LMS on the ministry of John Williams and his martyrdom in the South Sea Islands in 1839.[47]

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43 'Annual Mission Meetings', *Observer*, August 1889, pp. 325–26.

44 'The Widows of India', *Observer*, March 1889, p. 123.

45 Terry Barringer, 'What Mrs Jellyby might have read: Missionary Periodicals: A neglected source', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 37, No. 4 (2004), 46–74. In Dickens's *Bleak House*, chapter 4, when Esther Summerson first visited the Jellyby household she was unfavourably struck by a room strewn with papers — perhaps missionary publications.

46 'Missionary Societies', *Observer*, March 1858, pp. 124–27.

47 'Annual Meeting of the London Missionary Society', *Observer*, February 1863, pp. 314–17.

It was natural that the GBMS should make wider connections in India. In 1860, the *Observer* reported on a forthcoming 'Concert of Prayer'. The missionaries in Orissa responded to an invitation by the Calcutta Missionary Conference to 'set apart a week for special prayer'. The invitation was signed by the Chairman Alexander Duff, and the Secretary David Ewart (both Presbyterians from Scotland) of the Calcutta Conference.[48] This initiative became part of the Evangelical Alliance week of prayer.[49] Calcutta was a centre of Protestant missionary co-operation, with transdenominational conferences held from time to time. At these, Baptists were usually the largest group, followed by missionaries of the evangelical Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS), the Free Church of Scotland, the Church of Scotland and Methodism. In March 1865, an *Observer* report on meetings at Cuttack expressed gratitude for local and visiting speakers, noting the role of K. S. Macdonald, described as an 'eminent minister of the Free Church of Scotland', editor of the *Indian Evangelical Review*, and a leading Christian figure in the region. In the same issue the GBMS associated itself with Free Will Baptists and a call for a 'larger spirituality'. The *Indian Evangelical Review* was a quarterly 'journal of missionary thought and effort, published in India and read by those across the Protestant denominations'.[50]

The *Observer* carried items about various ways in which India was being influenced, spiritually and also politically. Great changes were going on in India and although in parts of South India there was a historic Syrian Orthodox Christian presence, which was covered in the *Observer*, on the whole what would be termed 'mass movements' to Christianity had not yet taken place.[51] Politically, John Buckley stated in 1859 that he had 'no confidence whatsoever' in Sir George Clarke, who had been appointed the first Permanent Under-Secretary of State for India, a position created after the British government took over governance in India from the previous rule of the East India Company. Clarke's principles were seen by Buckley as 'abhorrent', when compared

[48] 'Concert of Prayer', *Observer*, July 1860, pp. 465–66.
[49] 'The Week of Prayer', *Observer*, May 1861, pp. 195–96.
[50] 'Conference at Cuttack', *Observer*, March 1865, pp. 115–17, 135.
[51] For these see also J. Waskom Pickett, *Christian Mass Movements in India* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1933).

with Christian beliefs.[52] Although Buckley did not elaborate on this, it may be significant that Clarke was at the forefront of a policy that the religious beliefs of the people of India should not be subject to 'interference'. The meaning of 'interference' was discussed in the *Observer*. The GBMS was strongly opposed to any coercion, but asked whether its Mission schools, with children from varied religious backgrounds, could be accused of interference. If so, it seemed that freedom was being seriously curtailed.[53]

An important area for the mission in Orissa, as across India, was Bible translation. William Carey's translation into Oriya required revision, and this was undertaken first by Amos Sutton and then by John Buckley and Jagoo Roul in the 1860s. The latter work was a revision of the Old Testament, and the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) made grants towards it. In 1869, various parts of the Old Testament were produced and soon the whole Old Testament.[54] With the translation of the New Testament, Baptist relationships with the BFBS in India had been fraught. In the 1830s, there was a serious dispute over the translation of baptise, *baptizo*. The Baptists in India wanted this translated as 'immerse', but the BFBS would not agree and left it as an untranslated word. The outcome was that in 1840 the BMS established the Bible Translation Society (BTS).[55] It was the BTS that assisted the Orissa Baptist churches with the production of a revised New Testament in Oriya in 1862. In reporting on this great event, Buckley added that 'the Spirit of the Lord is working among us'.[56] It was only in 1883 that a solution to the issue of *baptizo* was agreed. The *Observer* spoke of the fact that the New Testament had 'not been allowed to speak intelligibly on the subject of baptism' because of BFBS policy, but now 'nearly fifty years of blockage' had ended. Baptist thinking was given space. The 'Minutes of the British and Foreign Bible Society of

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52 'Notes: Letter from Rev. J. Buckley', *Observer*, January 1859, pp. 34–35.

53 'The Queen's Proclamation at Cuttack', *Observer*, February 1859, pp. 49–52. Queen Victoria's authority was invoked.

54 William Canton, *A History of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, vol. 3 (London: John Murray, 1910), p. 387.

55 Roger H. Martin, 'Anglicans and Baptists in Conflict: The Bible Society, Bengal and the *Baptizo* Controversy', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 49, no. 2 (1998), 293–316.

56 'Completion of the Oriya New Testament', *Observer*, December 1862, p. 469.

November 29, 1882; confirmed at General Committee of January 22, 1883', signed by William Wright, BFBS editorial superintendent in London, stated that the BFBS Committee had agreed that along with the untranslated *baptizo* there could — in the margin — be a note such as 'Some translate immerse'.[57]

A notable feature of the *Observer* was the way it covered mission happening across the world. The identity of the GBMS was not parochial. On a number of occasions, the work of Moravian mission was reported. The Moravians had inspired much subsequent Protestant mission. In February 1864, the *Observer* had a piece on Moravian mission to Greenland, begun in 1733. At four mission points in Greenland there were male and female Moravian teachers, described as 'exemplary and attractive'.[58] Persecution of those in Chinese Christian villages was reported later in 1864, perhaps with Orissa Christian villages in mind.[59] In 1865, the reports included information on a Lutheran Deaconess House at Kaiserswerth, Düsseldorf, in Germany; on a Nestorian mission school in Oroomiah, Persia; and on an Institute near Rattingen, in Germany, seeking to help addicts to recover.[60] When it mentioned, as it often did, the considerable help of the Religious Tract Society, 'an old and long tried friend' of the GBMS, the *Observer* referred to the Society's endeavours in France, Spain, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Saxony, Prussia, Switzerland, Italy, Greece and elsewhere.[61] Other reports in the *Observer* covered the Russian Orthodox Church. The fact that many Orthodox priests had little opportunity to study was noted, and the suggestion was made that Orthodox leaders were complicit in oppressing evangelicals in Russia.[62] The GBMS saw itself as part of a world-wide evangelical movement.

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[57] 'The British and Foreign Bible Society and the Baptists', *Observer*, June 1883, pp. 233–35.
[58] 'Moravian Missions in Greenland', February 1864, *Observer*, p. 57.
[59] 'Chinese Christian Villages', December 1864, *Observer*, p. 457.
[60] 'The Deaconess House at Kaiserswerth', *Observer*, January 1865, pp. 19–20; 'Mission Schools in Nestoria', *Observer*, February 1865, pp. 76–77; 'A Home near Rattingen', *Observer*, February 1865, pp. 101–02.
[61] For example, 'Orissa Conference', *Observer*, March 1867, p. 221.
[62] 'Notes', April 1865, *Observer*, p. 143.

Baptist Convictions

What might be termed an ecumenical vision of world mission was articulated in the *Observer*, but there was also robust advocacy of Baptist identity and convictions. In May 1858, the *Observer* carried a piece from John Buckley: 'As to the question of more [Anglican] bishops for India, let those who conscientiously believe in diocesan episcopacy have as many as they like provided only that they pay for them!' He was adamantly opposed to taking money for church expenses from the Indian population as a whole. Imposition, he argued, did not commend the Christian gospel. Churches, as in Baptist ecclesiology, should be supported by the voluntary giving of members.[63] This did not mean that all those who spoke from a Church of England standpoint were deemed unsuitable speakers at GBMS events. In 1861, at the annual meeting of the Society, the speaker was G. F. Cockburn, Her Majesty's Commissioner of Cuttack. Cockburn said, 'I do indeed rejoice when denominational differences are merged in one common movement for the salvation of souls.' He quoted 'the late excellent Bishop of Calcutta', Daniel Wilson, on 'the gift of unity and co-operation'. Cockburn had asked Wilson about the Baptist missionaries in Orissa, and Wilson, an evangelical, had urged that they be helped in any way possible.[64]

Although Buckley was wary of giving support to the Church of England Chaplain of Cuttack Hastings Harington in his final illness, Harington asked for Buckley to visit him regularly, which he did, and both expressed the wish that they had 'walked together' more fully than had been the case.[65] But a year later, Buckley wrote that a new chaplain had been appointed and that in a recent sermon by this chaplain a damning verdict on Baptists had been pronounced. For this new appointee, who presumably had little experience of Baptist identity in India, Baptists were 'a canting, ranting set'. Their meetings included 'religious exercises and tea' and degenerated into 'scandal and backbiting'. The view expressed was that Baptists 'rant and rave about hell as if they had been there themselves'. It was actually the chaplain who seemed to be the one ranting. Buckley contented himself with the

[63] 'Letter from Rev. J. Buckley', *Observer*, May 1858, pp. 205–07 (p. 205).
[64] 'The Annual Meeting', *Observer*, August 1861, pp. 313–15.
[65] 'Death of the Chaplain of Cuttack', *Observer*, February 1862, pp. 195–98.

comment, 'We are disciples of Him who when reviled, reviled not again.'[66] For the Baptists, the connection between the state and the Church of England, in England but also in India, was a hindrance to the gospel. In 1884, in an article 'The State Church in India', the *Observer* again raised the question of Church of England ministers in India being supported from taxes. Other denominations had to support their own ministers. What was evident to the Baptists was that the Church of England had people with 'political power'.[67]

The advocacy of Baptist convictions in the *Observer* included accounts of Baptist advance in different parts of the world. The work of the American Baptist Missionary Society as well as that of the Free Will Baptists was covered regularly. Of particular interest was the growth of Baptist life among the oppressed Karen people on the frontier of China in what was then the Burmese empire.[68] It was noted that as well as Baptists, the Swedish Missionary Association, American Episcopal Methodists, and Canadian Presbyterians had entered these areas. Coverage of China in the *Observer* was also extensive. Here, too, Baptists from America were prominent, among many missionary agencies.[69] The work of Johann Gerhard Oncken and Baptist mission emanating from Germany was often reported in the *Observer*. Baptist sentiments were also understood to be spreading in other parts of Europe, such as Sweden and France.[70] At a time when the *Observer* could state that Baptists 'arose amidst persecution as a voluntary congregation of believers', and now numbered more than five million Christians in countries across the world, the *Observer* took strong objection to a widely read article (later a booklet) in the *Fortnightly Review* entitled, 'The Great Missionary Failure'. Isaac Taylor, the author, a Church of England canon of York, was directing his comments mainly to the CMS.[71] W. R. Stevenson, in the *Observer*, argued that Taylor had himself failed, since

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[66] 'The Chaplain of Cuttack v. the missionaries', *Observer*, November 1863, pp. 468–69.
[67] 'The State Church in India', *Observer*, June 1884, pp. 235–36.
[68] Hitomi Fujimura, 'A View of the Karen Baptists in Burma of the Mid-Nineteenth Century, from the Standpoint of the American Baptist Mission', *The Journal of Sophia Asian Studies*, 32 (2014), 129–45.
[69] For an example of reports, 'A Visit to Peking', *Observer*, November 1863, pp. 435–39.
[70] For Baptists in Europe, Ian Randall, *Communities of Conviction* (Prague: European Baptist Federation, 2009).
[71] Isaac Taylor, 'The Great Missionary Failure', *Fortnightly Review*, 50 (1888), 488–500.

he had not taken into account the range of Nonconformist overseas missions.[72]

The only location outside India where the GBMS had direct involvement was in Rome. The BMS began mission in Italy in 1870–1871, supporting James Wall, an English Baptist minister. In 1872–1873, Thomas Cook, a General Baptist and the founder of the well-known travel firm, advocated GBMS work in Rome, and in November 1873 the *Observer* carried a long article on 'Our new evangelical in Rome'. The description 'evangelical' was favoured by the GBMS. The article explained that Paulo Cavaliere Grassi, a former Roman Catholic priest, had embraced evangelical and Baptist convictions through reading Scripture and had been baptised by James Wall. Grassi had been connected with the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome and was described as a dedicated pastor and scholar. His resignation letter to Cardinal Patrizi Naro, Dean of the College of Cardinals, was both firm and respectful — signed 'Your Eminence's most humble servant'. About three hundred people were present at Grassi's baptism.[73] The General Baptists adopted Grassi as a worker/evangelist in Rome and he was involved in study, preaching, and visiting. In 1874, he married an Italian Protestant woman, with Wall conducting the ceremony. It was reckoned to be the first marriage in Rome of a former Roman Catholic priest.[74] Reports from Rome continued to feature in the *Observer*. A chapel was built, and in 1878 the GBMS sent N. H. Shaw from England as a missionary. Thomas Cook largely financed the cost of the chapel.[75] John Rylands of Manchester, a Nonconformist entrepreneur, was one of those supportive and he sent £100 for work in Rome.[76]

The focus of GBMS mission remained Orissa, but the financial struggle to maintain a foreign missionary presence there became more acute. In January 1883, the leading article in the *Observer* was entitled 'Half as much again', echoing an appeal by E. H. Bickersteth for funds

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72 'The Great Missionary Failure', *Observer*, November 1888, p. 458.

73 'Our new evangelical in Rome', *Observer*, November 1873, pp. 445–51. Stanley, *Baptist Missionary Society*, pp. 220–21.

74 'Rome', *Observer*, February 1874, pp. 45, 78; and March 1874, p. 120.

75 For example, 'The Rome Chapel', *Observer*, August 1877, p. 319; cf. *Missionary Herald*, July 1878, pp. 153–5; and *Missionary Herald*, May 1879, p. 128.

76 'Notes and Gleanings', *Observer*, March 1883, pp. 119–20.

to support the ministry of CMS. The GBMS asked if 'half as much again' could be asked for Orissa.[77] Five years later, more money was still needed for Orissa, 'a field which', the *Observer* commented, 'by a common understanding on the part of other denominations, has been left to us to cultivate'.[78] Witness to the British in India as well as to Indians was advocated. In 1882, the *Observer* acclaimed a speech supporting Christian endeavour by Sir Richard Temple, who had been Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal.[79] But a provocative piece appeared in the *Observer* in 1888 with the title, 'The Government versus the Gospel, in India'. It was a comment on the British Establishment, and in particular those 'whose love of money seems to be of more interest than all else'.[80] At the same time, there were Hindus who appreciated the work of the mission. The *Observer* noted in 1889 that the influential Hindu reformer Keshub Chunder Sen had made it clear in his essays that he did not credit the British Army with helping India, while the devotion to God and the service of the missionaries evoked deep gratitude in his heart.[81] In response to this being quoted, the Orissa missionaries stated that they were seeking 'a more unreserved self-consecration, more fervent prayer, a more living faith, a larger measure of spiritual power, and a more abundant outpouring of the blessings of the Holy Spirit'.[82] This was the identity they valued.

An Enlarged Baptist Identity

Throughout the period studied here, a recurring theme was whether the GBMS and the BMS should amalgamate. There had long been the possibility that the two Societies might at least be united in India.[83] In 1861, the GBMS followed the BMS in establishing that a New Year 'sacramental offering' (i.e. an offering taken at a communion service) be taken in the churches to support 'a fund for widows and orphans of

[77] 'Half as much again', *Observer*, January 1883, pp. 33–34.
[78] 'The Financial Position of the Mission', *Observer*, September 1888, pp. 357–58.
[79] 'Objections to Christian Mission Answered', January 1882, *Observer*, p. 38–39.
[80] 'The Government versus the Gospel, in India', *Observer*, March 1888, pp. 113–115 (p.113).
[81] 'Annual Report', *Observer*, September 1889, pp. 369–72 (p. 371).
[82] 'Missions and Missionary Methods', *Observer*, September 1889, p. 372.
[83] J. H. Y. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 1994), p. 147.

missionaries'.[84] The Orissa missionaries celebrated all that had been done by William Carey and his colleagues in Serampore, and to a large extent the issues of theology that had been dividing lines were seen as less important than a shared evangelical faith. In October 1870, a united meeting of the two Baptist missionary societies was held in the Guildhall, Cambridge, prior to the autumn Baptist Union meetings. Two thousand people were present at this missionary meeting. Joseph Tritton, treasurer of the BMS, gave the opening address and spoke about the two missionary bodies: 'Our object is one, our gospel is one, the Master whom we serve is one, the Spirit which moves us is one.' J. C. Pike, secretary of the GBMS and son of the founder, also spoke. He was cautiously in favour of union, while making the unusual statement, given the Arminian roots of the General Baptists, that General Baptists were 'predestined to be such'.[85]

The road towards union between the two Baptist bodies and the two missionary societies was fully explored by John Briggs in two articles in the *Baptist Quarterly* in 1991, one hundred years after the amalgamation took place.[86] It was a process which occupied both bodies to the full in the later 1880s. Indeed in 1889, when an appeal was passed on by the GBMS from a Hindu sub-magistrate in Udayagiri for a Baptist mission, and two Baptist students at the Methodist Cliff College in Derbyshire, Abiathar Wilkinson and Arthur Long, responded, the GBMS committee was 'preoccupied by the current negotiations with the BMS for the merger of the two societies, and turned down their application'. An interdenominational committee supported the mission.[87] Debates were featured in the *General Baptist Magazine* in 1888 about the advantages and disadvantages of amalgamation from the point of view of those concerned about the overseas missionary dimension. The question posed was, 'Is it desirable that the two Baptist Foreign Missionary Societies should become one?' C. W. Vick answered in the

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[84] 'New Year's Sacramental Offering', *Observer*, January 1861, p. 34.

[85] J. C. Pike, 'Our Future, The Association Letter for 1870', p. 6; 'Notes', *Observer*, October 1870, p. 315.

[86] J. H. Y. Briggs, 'Evangelical Ecumenism: The Amalgamation of General and Particular Baptists in 1891', Part I, 'A Process of Courtship', *BQ*, 34, no. 3 (1991), 99–115; Part 2, 'From Courtship to Marriage', *BQ*, 34, no. 4 (1991), 160–79.

[87] Stanley, *Baptist Missionary Society*, p. 167. Carey, *Dawn on the Khond Hills*, pp. 42–43.

affirmative, pleading for union 'for the sake of the missionaries themselves'. They needed to be part of an 'enlarged brotherhood'. J. R. Godfrey, from the Barton church, was opposed, fearing 'denominational extinction'.[88]

Despite the divergent views, joint meetings of the BMS and the GBMS met in September 1888 to seek to find a way forward. Further meetings and discussions followed. In parallel, as Briggs writes,

> the Baptist Union Assembly, meeting in Birmingham in October 1889, received from the Council a resolution in favour of amalgamation, proposed by John Clifford, and unanimously agreed. For this to have meaning would require the integration of the various societies and institutions of both bodies.[89]

At a special meeting of the BMS on 29 April 1890, a form of words was devised which officially adopted the name Baptist Missionary Society, explaining that the Society embraced the 'Particular Baptist Missionary Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Heathen' founded in 1792, and the 'General Baptist Missionary Society' formed in 1816. The proposal was warmly adopted, and the General Baptist Association and the Subscribers' Meeting of the GBMS ratified this action. There was never any question of the BMS simply absorbing the much smaller GBMS. William Hill, the secretary of the GBMS, became secretary of the Bible Translation Society, dividing his time between that role and work for the joint society.[90]

The final step in the decision-making which brought about the amalgamation came during the General Baptist Association Meeting at Burnley in June 1891, under the presidency of John Clifford. There was mention during these final discussions of ways in which Orissa missionaries had received significant support from the BMS missionaries in India. The 1891 Burnley meeting lasted four hours, and the resolution in favour of amalgamation was carried by 155 votes to 39. Thus, it was not unanimous, and for some the distinction between Calvinists and Arminians remained important. However, there was an

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[88] 'The Baptist Foreign Missionary Societies', *General Baptist Magazine*, December 1888, pp. 449–55.

[89] Briggs, 'From Courtship to Marriage', p. 170.

[90] 'Amalgamation Accomplished', *Observer*, June 1891, pp. 237–40.

explicit desire to co-operate in preaching the gospel across the world. Clifford spoke of the unity of Christians as an aid to that task. When many knew nothing of the atonement of Christ, the question was raised whether differences between 'general' and 'particular' were important enough to be debated.[91] Rather, what was hoped for was a great missionary endeavour. Ernest Payne, in his history of the Baptist Union, was to comment, perhaps with undue optimism, 'With remarkable ease and amity, the older distinctions passed from the mind of the denomination as a whole.'[92]

Conclusion

The story of the General Baptist Missionary Society has been somewhat overshadowed by the fame of William Carey and the Serampore mission. However, Brian Stanley suggests that the Orissa mission was 'one of the most fruitful fields in India'.[93] The number of missionaries was never large, which meant that from the beginning, and most especially in the period examined here, Indian leadership was crucial to the development of the churches and their identity. Dhirendra Kumar Sahu, tracing the formation of the ecumenical Church of North India, suggests that the pioneer generation of the Baptists 'came nearer than any other body to the ideal of a truly independent Indian church'. Mission and church were 'an integrated whole'.[94] Those leading the mission and church in Orissa saw their work as holistic. It was necessary, and in line with the teaching of Jesus, to address the needs of the whole person. A further aspect of the GBMS, as it sought an authentic identity, was that through the *Observer* a range of mission and ministry across the world was covered. At the same time, Baptist convictions were affirmed. Finally, the wider identity of the GBMS was created through amalgamation with the much larger BMS. There was a desire to see this in a positive way, as 'Amalgamation Accomplished'. The *Observer* ceased to be published, with the *Missionary Herald* now the organ for the

[91] 'Report', *Observer* 1891, p. 505.
[92] Ernest Payne, *The Baptist Union: A Short History* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1858), p. 147.
[93] Stanley, *Baptist Missionary Society*, p. 56.
[94] Dhirendra Kumar Sahu, *The Church of North India* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994), pp. 35–36.

combined Baptist missionary work. By 1970, when the Church of North India was formed, it was a Baptist minister from Cuttack, Benjamin Pradham, who was one of those playing a central role. The Baptists of Orissa/Odisha had continued to be open to a larger identity.[95]

[95] Stanley, *Baptist Missionary Society*, p. 414; Sahu, *North India*, pp. 136–37.