

## Article

# General Baptist Women in Orissa, India: Initiatives in Female Education, 1860s–1880s

Ian Randall

Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide, Cambridge CB3 0AA, UK; ian.m.randall@gmail.com

**Abstract:** This article looks at the General Baptist mission in Orissa, India, from the 1860s to the 1880s, with particular reference to the way women who served within the mission fulfilled a role in teaching and encouraging girls and women, especially by setting up schooling. The challenges of a time of desperate famine, with many orphans being cared for, are examined. The General Baptist mission worked with other bodies, notably and crucially with the interdenominational Female Education Society. A major aim was that, through the work of the female teachers, local teachers would be equipped. The argument here is that there was integrity in what was performed, and thus, this article offers an alternative to interpretations that dismiss the validity of the mission endeavours. The Orissa mission continued on beyond the 1880s, with wider fellowship eventually happening through the Church of North India. This study does not go beyond the 1880s as that would introduce a new phase with the amalgamation in 1891 of the General and Particular Baptists and their overseas missionary societies.

**Keywords:** Baptist; Orissa; female education; orphans; famine

## 1. 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 significantly larger Particular or Calvinistic Baptist denomination. The description ‘General’ signifies ‘general atonement’, an aspect of Arminian theology. In the eighteenth century, when a number of General Baptist congregations were embracing Unitarianism, the New Connexion of General Baptists was formed under the influence of the Evangelical Revival. This took place in 1770. The dynamic leader was Dan Taylor (1738–1816), who had been a Methodist local preacher (See [Copson 2017](#); [Briggs 2017](#); [Pollard 2018](#)). In the year of Taylor’s death the General Baptist Missionary Society (GBMS) was formed. The prime mover was John Gregory Pike, pastor of the General Baptist Church in Derby, in the English Midlands. He was Secretary of the GBMS from its formation until his death in 1854 ([Shepherd 2009](#)). This study examines GBMS initiatives in India in female education and care, especially those carried out in partnership with the Society for Promoting Female Education in the East (often known as the Female Education Society: FES), from the 1860s to the 1880s. The FES, which began to send women to establish schools in the East in 1836, was, by the 1860s, supporting educational work in China, Malaya, Burma, India and Ceylon, and the Middle East. This article makes use especially of the GBMS *Missionary Observer* (hereafter, *Observer*) and the FES *Female Intelligencer* (hereafter, *Intelligencer*).<sup>1</sup>

The methodology used in this article is a close reading of the primary sources, seeking to listen to the voices of the Baptist women—the theme of this issue of *Religions*. Over three decades, from the 1860s to the 1880s, there has been an opportunity to investigate changes and continuity. This article does engage with secondary writers, although other writers have not focussed on the situation among Baptist women in Orissa. The wider context in which the missionaries worked was the imperial rule of India by Britain. There has been a tendency to see overseas missions as working in tandem with the imperialist



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enterprise, but in England, Baptists were not part of the ‘establishment’, and neither were they in India. Another aspect often misunderstood is the nature of mission journals. It is not the case, as can be wrongly assumed, that what was written was presented only to encourage people to give money. It is fair to say that missionaries shaped their content for intended audiences in missionary journals: the public nature of their writing meant they did not necessarily include a full account of their experiences. At times, certainly, there were appeals for financial help, but more significant was an awareness of spiritual bonds and a desire to share at that level. This article suggests that there was a deep desire among the Baptist women to see Indian women being educated, so having their own faith, not an imported version (For more, see my article ([Randall 2022](#))). In this context, this article seeks to show the importance of the local Oriya language that was being used. This did mean that all that was local was accepted, as seen in the issue of jewellery. The fact that visiting European women (not missionaries) were wearing jewellery was not something that the Baptist women could influence. This article is not comprehensive in portraying all the complex missionary issues but seeks to give Baptist women a voice.

## 2. Developing Female Education

The early formation and development of the GBMS were narrated by those who were involved ([Sutton 1833](#); [Peggs 1846](#)). The Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), formed in 1792 by the Particular Baptists, a much larger body than the General Baptists, felt unable to accept a General Baptist as a missionary when a request was made. However, in India, William Carey and his colleagues in Serampore were happy to advise the GBMS in its formative period. The advice was to work in Orissa (now Odisha), eastern India, which, at that time, was part of Bengal. Outreach began in 1822. The years up to 1858 in Orissa have been characterised by Kanchanmoy Mojumdar as a period of ‘preparation’ for wider Baptist activity ([Mojumdar 1976](#), p. 327). Church life was centred in Cuttack, the main commercial centre of Orissa, and the 1860s saw the growth of ‘a large school of local girls’. This was a description by Sarah Buckley, one of 20 GBMS missionaries, who served with her husband, John.<sup>2</sup> There was one FES-supported teacher in Orissa, Mary Guignard, who had arrived in 1860. She had trained at Homerton College, London, and had been teaching in Sheffield.<sup>3</sup> She welcomed into the school significant numbers of children in Orissa who were orphaned, and she trained local teachers, an early example being Komali Shahad, who had been a student in the school. Komali’s husband had become unwell and was unable to work. He was at home with the children while she took up a teaching role alongside Mary Guignard.<sup>4</sup> This relationship, between the GBMS, the FES, and locally trained female teachers, would develop further as increasing attention was paid to education (For more see ([Ingleby 1998](#))).

In the first months of 1863, the *Intelligencer* carried two reports from Guignard. She was ‘happy in her work’, which involved responsibility for 60 girls. The main subjects covered were reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, scripture, sewing, and history, especially the history of India. The school had set up a library.<sup>5</sup> Whereas in the Cuttack schools—there was one for boys and one for girls—some teaching was in English as well as in the local language, Oriya, Guignard reported on a ‘Vernacular School’ being started for girls in Chaga. The mothers of the girls were keen to find out about Guignard when she visited the Chaga school in its early stages. They asked Guignard if she had a living mother or father, or brothers and sisters. She answered that she had no close family—her parents had died when she was young—and ‘it seemed to the mothers that she had done something wrong to be so bereft of relations’. However, she explained the importance of friendships. She found that the mothers needed persuading that girls should be given an education from quite an early age. Guignard found the amount of ‘astonishment and pleasantries’ to which this idea gave rise ‘rather amusing’. One child of two or three was held up by its mother, with the question of whether she should be at school. Guignard was not dismayed and was determined to ‘preach’, as she put it, the education of girls.<sup>6</sup>

At this stage, Guignard was joined by Agnes Packer, who had been teaching with the FES in Calcutta, and who arrived in Orissa to augment the teaching team with its increasing challenges. Her arrival meant that more individual attention could be given to the faith development of the girls. The *Observer* noted, in February 1863, that in a baptismal service at the Baptist church in Cuttack at which ten candidates were baptised, six of them were teenage girls who had been in the school. Guignard was trying to help girls whose parents had died, something with which Guignard could herself identify. All ten of those baptised were received into the church fellowship. An Indian church member made a joyful response: 'This is something like the day of Pentecost.'<sup>7</sup> The July 1863 *Observer* carried reports from both Packer and Guignard on a range of issues. Two of the older girls who had finished at the school were now married, one to the headmaster of the boys' school. Several girls were reading scripture aloud outside the school setting, during church services. They were also making good progress in writing. Guignard introduced the innovation of writing on slates.<sup>8</sup> The *Intelligencer*, in June 1863, was adamant that the FES was continuing its work in India, against the background of rumours that this might not be the case. It had 49 schools and 128 trained local teachers which it was supporting in India. In the whole of the East, the Society supported 254 schools.<sup>9</sup>

Further advance in Orissa took place from the mid-1860s. A Vernacular Education Society had been formed in 1858, in which Baptists, Anglicans, Congregationalists, and Methodists in India cooperated (Hewitt 1949). Discussions in Baptist conferences in Cuttack focussed on new places for schools. Obvious locations were Christian villages being set up by the GBMS. 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.' (Stanley 1992, p. 163). Sarah Buckley, a regular GBMS correspondent, wrote in 1864 about how 'her heart sank' when visiting a village and discovering that none of the women could read. She asked the mothers if the children could be taught; the reply was that there was 'no one of our caste to teach them'.<sup>10</sup> Supporters of the FES were committed to increasing funding for such needs, with a meeting in Dublin being told that reaching Indian women meant influencing a nation, as was the case in Ireland. Soon a grant was made to provide for an extra local teacher to work with Guignard. A library lending books overseas was in operation.<sup>11</sup> The extent of the challenge was indicated by a further letter from Buckley in the *Observer* in May 1865. She had 400 children under her overall care and was feeling 'somewhat bewildered'. However, she had very good assistant teachers. She was delighted that R.L. Martin, Government Inspector of Schools, who worked under T.E. Ravenshaw, the Commissioner, and also an educationist, said that in Bengal, no Indian female teachers operated with such high standards as those at the Baptist Cuttack school.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. Care and Education in a Time of Famine

A devastating famine hit Orissa in 1866. It is reckoned that one million people in Orissa died, representing about a quarter of the population. The most vulnerable sections of society were worst hit (Mohanty 2022). Already in May 1865, before the famine reached its deadliest, one of the GBMS centres in Piplee (Pipli), a town 27 miles south of Cuttack where an orphanage had been established, was talking about taking in 'little skeletons', but seeing them become 'bright and lively'.<sup>13</sup> When the worst of the famine struck, the FES made a special grant to Cuttack. An article in the *Intelligencer* in September 1866 described how cholera and smallpox were 'raging all around'. The Maharajah of Dhenkanal, Bhagiratha Mahendra Bahadur, visited and gave a gift. A visitor who was subsequently removed from office for his lack of action to address the dire situation during the famine was Sir Cecil Beadon, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal.<sup>14</sup> During 1867 and 1868, Agnes Packer reported from Cuttack on the growth in the number of girls in the school and orphanage. The increase was considerable, and government help was being given. Orphaned girls in the school numbered 195 girls. This was a larger number than the orphaned boys. Older girls were helping younger ones. There were new additions each month, but also deaths by

famine. The average number of deaths each month was a heart-breaking 25, with some having no family left. In the midst of this tragedy, Packer was praying for God's Spirit 'to be poured out' on the girls and on the teachers.<sup>15</sup>

Orphan outreach has been criticised by some writers. Jeffrey Cox asserted that the cooperation between the government of India and the Christian missions to put Hindu or Muslim children into Christian care was one of 'the corruptions of imperial power'. He states that he found no evidence of any missionary who comprehended 'the moral implications of using famine as an opportunity for making Christians' (Cox 2002, p. 163). A comment like this is easily made from a distance, but for the GBMS at the time, there was a calling to respond to an enormous need. Another critic, Clare Midgely, argued that orphan outreach utilised ideas of 'Christian female privilege and providential imperialism' to enact a 'maternalist Christian-imperial mission' which was 'powerfully articulated around the surrogate mothering of the "heathen" girl.' (Midgely 2007, p. 111). However, it was not that the missionaries wished to replace Indian mothers but, in the case of orphans, there was no option other than 'surrogate' (a word never used at the time) care in a community. The outreach in this time of enormous distress was in fact to mothers, where they survived, as well as their children. At the annual meeting of the Auxiliary of the FES in 1868 in Cork, Ireland, there was the affirmation of women in Cork who looked 'with sisterly feeling upon the women of India'.<sup>16</sup> The *Intelligencer* of June 1869 had a report from Guignard, who was moved to tears by the prayers and readings she heard from girls. Packer added a description of weddings in the Christian community, with 600 present and singing going on for three hours.<sup>17</sup> These are hardly 'Christian-imperialist' perspectives.

Caroline Lewis criticised, in her PhD in 2014, on a mission to women and girls in India, what she called 'sanitised and sentimental accounts of orphans aimed at procuring sponsorship from women'. Alongside these, she suggested, were 'problematic examples of orphan work that derived, largely, from accounts of men's missionary work' and included 'intimations of relationships with the colonial state' (Lewis 2014, p. 78). It is strange to describe accounts of the suffering that was actually happening as 'sanitised and sentimental', and in any case, many of the reports were written by women. It is debatable, certainly in the case of Orissa, whether men's missionary work predominated in reports. Also, reports were read by men as well as women, so they can hardly be said to be 'aimed' only at women. However, there was a desire to include outside approval of what was being undertaken. In 1878, the *Observer* looked back on the late 1860s and printed an article, 'The Orissa Mission and its Famine Orphanages'. John Henry Pratt, Anglican Archdeacon of Calcutta, wrote in 1868 about a visit to the Orissa Baptist mission and how he saw 500 girls 'rescued chiefly from the Famine'. He was pleased to hear them sing hymns with Oriya words and tunes. David Smith, Sanitary Commissioner for Bengal, visiting in the same year, said that in his mind, the work of the women of the Baptist Mission reminded him of Florence Nightingale.<sup>18</sup>

By the early 1870s, although fewer new girls were being taken into the Orissa orphanages, many who had been taken in earlier were still in the GBMS community and receiving education. In December 1870, the *Observer* reported that local Indian pastors had preached at a baptismal service in Cuttack and baptised 16 candidates, 13 of whom were from the orphanage overseen by Sarah Buckley. There was 'much joy'.<sup>19</sup> Caroline Lewis noted that baptismal records in orphanages had 'unknown' written where the parents and birth circumstances of orphans were not known. She saw this as an 'effacement' of the biological claims on the child.<sup>20</sup> The Baptist practice of the baptism of believers, who then enter a Christian community that is, in itself, a family, does not appear in what Lewis writes. Sarah Buckley, energised by the baptisms taking place, hoped that the 20,000 General Baptist members at home would enlarge their vision for India. In April 1871, she expressed in the *Observer* her disappointment that the GBMS home committee did not 'seek to exert itself more energetically to send us more help'. Buckley insisted that there was 'a large field of labour for devoted Christian women whether married or single'. She prayed that more women would 'come over and help us'.<sup>21</sup>



In the spring of 1871, Packer and Guignard were able to take groups of girls on holiday. They walked six miles to the holiday location, something they could not have performed previously because of the debilitating effects of the famine. Now, they walked that distance, singing as they went. In the accommodation provided for the holiday, they enjoyed each other's company and spoke about their lives. In the group led by Packer, one girl said she was the only survivor of an extended family of 35.<sup>22</sup> The group led by Guignard met some girls whom they had not met before and, in two cases, relations who had lost contact were re-united.<sup>23</sup> In June, leading this group, Mary Guignard was feeling quite well, but her health suddenly deteriorated, and on 14 August 1871, she died. The *Observer* reported on this loss, of someone aged 45 and known for the 'very high order' of her 'capabilities for teaching', as 'a very heavy one'. She had 'courageously struggled with the disadvantages of an early lot', which should 'encourage those who have still to maintain the struggle'.<sup>24</sup> The *Intelligencer*, in an extended tribute, considered that the FES had lost someone who was 'a burning and a shining light'. The Baptist community at Cuttack was 'distraught, adults and children'. Agnes Packer spoke of Mary as 'a faithful, true, generous friend'.<sup>25</sup> A way forward was sought in light of such a severe loss.

#### 4. Priorities and Personnel

A pressing issue in 1872 was to what extent government aid for education for orphans would continue. The number of children in the schools receiving accommodation and food as well as education meant that the resources of the mission could not cope. 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' (Sarma 1996, p. 71). Aid for this work had been forthcoming during and after the famine, but in 1872, there was a substantial government report which covered all schools in Orissa and there was a recognition that, in some cases, government aid could be withdrawn. A Church of England school was warned that this might be the case if there was no improvement in standards. Roman Catholic schools received a favourable report. The Baptist community was happy to read the section of the report on their schools, which had 929 pupils, and which were described as 'admirably conducted'. The girls were said to have made 'remarkable progress'.<sup>26</sup> The *Intelligencer* also reported on this and added that part of what had been undertaken was the rescue of children who would have been victims of child sacrifice. Among the Khonds, who lived in a mountainous region and had little contact with the outside world, there had been human sacrifices of local Meriah children, and over time, about 250 Meriah children were taken into Baptist orphanages.<sup>27</sup>

Throughout 1872, some girls taught by Mary Guignard were baptised. One, from a Muslim background, was blind, and those who interviewed her for baptism spoke of how 'though blind with the bodily eye she could see very clearly with the eye of the mind'. She had 'extensive acquaintance' of scriptures and 'clear views of the plan of salvation'. The report on the baptisms considered that if opponents of immersion had witnessed the event, they would have 'been convicted to give up some of their strong arguments against it'. Those baptised were welcomed into church membership.<sup>28</sup> Soon after these baptisms, Harriet Leigh arrived to take the place of Mary Guignard. Her home church was a Baptist congregation in Caversham, on the outskirts of Reading, Berkshire. Part of her support came from young people in Caversham and part from the FES. Leigh, after arriving in Orissa in November 1872, quickly took up a role alongside Agnes Packer. The two women were, as the *Observer* said in autumn 1873, 'in charge of two orphanages and a large Christian community'. In addition, extension work was taking place in villages, including possibilities for buildings for worship. There were also 'innumerable calls for medical help'. It was noted that Packer 'badly requires a furlough'.<sup>29</sup> This was possible, as Lydia Hague, who married Thomas Bailey, arrived in 1873, with Leigh taking charge of the educational department, contributing 'ability, energy and practical knowledge'.<sup>30</sup>

An important issue which had come to the fore in Orissa by the mid-1870s was teaching in the local language, Oriya, rather than in English. The GBMS had always favoured Oriya

as part of a policy of seeking to build up a strong indigenous church. This is not to say that all local customs were affirmed. The Calcutta correspondent of *The Times* noted in 1873 that women in Orissa who became Christians were asked to stop wearing Hindu-related bracelets. These women then looked ‘in astonishment’ at the jewellery worn by visiting European ladies.<sup>31</sup> However, in the minds of GBMS personnel, using Oriya in preaching, teaching, and singing was quite different from questions of Hindu customs. The 1875 Orissa Baptist Assembly suggested that the first English students of Oriya were not government officers but missionaries. They were in tune with and contributed to developments in promoting the printing of literature in Oriya (For background, see (Choudhury 2015, pp. 44–46)). The Baptist mission statement to the government was unequivocal: ‘We have always earnestly contended that the Oriya Language should always be taught in all vernacular schools in Orissa and have sometimes marvelled at the lack of common sense which has rendered the discussion of the question necessary.’ British policy was being influenced, and the mission was told that it was hoped the ‘the introduction of a number of well educated and trained girls into the villages and rural districts of Orissa will have a great effect on the future of female education’.<sup>32</sup> The impact was to be wider, as Pritipuspa Mishra showed: Orissa was to become the first linguistically organised province in India (Mishra 2020).

Agnes Packer returned from furlough in 1875. Her farewell service was held in the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London, and C.H. Spurgeon, the Tabernacle’s famous minister, gave ‘words of good cheer’ to Packer which would ‘long be remembered’.<sup>33</sup> She was urged by the home committee of the FES to start zenana work in Orissa.<sup>34</sup> To reach women in zenanas, where women were cut off from male contact outside the family, was seen as a possible way to influence families (Smith 2007). However, the view in Orissa itself was that priority should still be given to schools. It was reckoned in 1876 that there were 184 villages in Orissa and that the Baptist school in Chaga was the only village school offering female education. Mookta-Ma, a teacher there for several years, had as a child been rescued from being a Khond sacrifice. In the female orphanage in Cuttack, she became ‘a sincere disciple of Christ’. She was guided by Harriet Leigh, and her abilities as a teacher were notable. An inspector said the Chaga school was ‘doing a very useful work in a quiet and unostentatious way’. As in all the mission schools, subjects covered a wide range, with an emphasis on what was appropriate to the context.<sup>35</sup> Lewis suggested that there was a process in which the children’s Indian roots were destroyed (Lewis 2014, p. 81). But those with the welfare of the children at heart took a different view. Deputy Surgeon General C.R. Francis, who was deeply involved in Indian affairs, said Baptist schooling impressed him most favourably.<sup>36</sup>

The GBMS cooperated not only with the FES but also with other bodies. The American Free Will Baptists, with whom the GBMS shared an Arminian theological outlook, initiated a mission in the northern part of Orissa in the 1830s (Hills 1886). There was a long-term GBMS relationship with American medical and educational workers in Balasore, for example, with Lavinia Crawford.<sup>37</sup> In 1877, Mary Bachelier, at age 17, became a Free Will Baptist teacher in the Balasore area, and after studying for a medical degree at the Women’s Medical College in New York, she became the first medical missionary of the Free Baptist Woman’s Society. Another missionary of the Society was Harriet Phillips, who began her work in Orissa in 1878 and later supervised the teaching in several girls’ schools (*The Free Baptist Woman’s Missionary Society* 1922). The needs of the FES in India were publicised through newspapers such as the *Friend of India*, which was started in the early nineteenth century and published by the Serampore Press. In 1875m it incorporated *The Statesman* and was published weekly in Calcutta. The FES also had individual backers who took a particular interest in Baptist witnesses, such as Lady Peto, a member of Bloomsbury Baptist Chapel and the wife of the industrialist Sir Morton Peto (Bowers and Bowers 1984). As a small mission, the GBMS needed to seek ongoing support, not least support for its work in female education.

## 5. Societal and Missional Issues

Further famine affected Orissa in 1877–78. Reports on events were given by Lydia Bailey, who had come to Orissa in 1873 after living in Switzerland and Germany.<sup>38</sup> She referred in the *Observer* in 1878 to the ‘Madras Famine’, part of a much wider famine, with Orissa among the regions that were suffering. The price of grain had risen markedly. One area in Orissa, on the borders of the Chilka Lake, which is the second largest coastal lagoon in the world, was suffering very severely. The *Observer* report was critical of the government: those who lived in the region manufactured salt, ‘and on the abolition of this manufacture by Government the distress was very severe’. The harvest had always been very precarious, ‘and when it fails they have no resource’.<sup>39</sup> This was one of the recurring periods of famine, and estimates of those who died in the ‘Madras Famine’ reach eight million (For the wider picture, see (Bhatia 1991)). This seems to have galvanised writers in the *Observer* to take a more critical stance towards the British government. A column in 1880 spoke about the government forcing Afghans into ‘a cruel and wicked war, their villages burnt, and their property confiscated’. They had been ‘ruthlessly hunted down and hanged by dozens for defending their country and homes against their Christian (?) invaders’ and taxes ‘wrung out of the poor’ in India, which were supposed to provide famine relief, were ‘expended upon this miserable and murderous war in Afghanistan’.<sup>40</sup>

While fostering awareness of the enormous issues in Indian society, the main focus of the Baptist mission in Orissa was local. In 1877, D.F. Carmichael, government Chief Secretary based in Madras, received a glowing official report on the Baptist orphanage in Berhampur.<sup>41</sup> In Piplee, Lydia Bailey described in May 1878 an ‘immense gathering’ at a special event. The use of a magic lantern was central (Smith 2022). At sunset, a ‘magic lantern’, which had been sent to Agnes Packer by friends in England, was used. The slides were coloured and represented scenes in Palestine—the Mount of Olives, Gethsemane, Bethlehem and Bethany—and three sets represented the Prodigal Son, Joseph, and Daniel. The news about the lantern presentation to be held in the Piplee chapel spread, and people ‘flocked in such numbers that our new chapel was full to overflowing’. Along with Bible passages being illustrated, an Indian preacher spoke, and there was singing.<sup>42</sup> Gifts such as a lantern were received occasionally. More commonly, the articles needed, especially for schools, were slates, copybooks, pens and pen-holders, picture books, and fine crochet cotton. A request was also made for a sewing machine. Agnes Packer and Harriet Leigh expressed delight that the importance of female education was now being widely accepted in India: ‘Prejudices and false notions have been removed. The possibility and advantage of female education have been demonstrated.’<sup>43</sup>

The loss experienced in 1871 through the death of Mary Guignard was experienced again in 1879 when Lydia Bailey died after childbirth. On 6 April 1879, she gave birth to a son, Thomas, named after his father, but four days later, her health suddenly deteriorated and she died. The tribute in the *Observer* gave some details, including Lydia’s last words, which were, ‘Simply to Thy cross I cling’, repeated several times. She had come to faith and been baptised early in the ministry at Union Chapel, Manchester, of the outstanding Baptist minister, Alexander MacLaren (Sellers 1987). When she arrived in Orissa, she invested in language learning. Her colleagues became aware of her ‘cultivated mind’. Although she enjoyed European company, she settled in Piplee, working alongside her husband to assist the local Christian community, and, in particular, she gave herself to the orphans she was teaching.<sup>44</sup> At the next Orissa Baptist Conference, at which Thomas Bailey was present, further tributes were paid. Some notes had been found that Lydia had made of sermons by Alexander MacLaren, one of the sermons having been preached at her baptism. It was on living according to the pattern shown by God. This was what she had undertaken.<sup>45</sup>

One of those within the government’s education inspectorate who especially appreciated Lydia Bailey’s contribution was Radhanath Ray, who, as well as being Joint Inspector of Schools for Orissa, was a poet and a promoter of the Oriya language (Mahanty 1978). The *Intelligencer* of August 1879 reported that Radhanath Ray had described the GBMS girls’ school in Cuttack as ‘the most numerous attended girls’ school in Orissa’ and one

that was doing ‘earnest and efficient work’. He was pleased that all the girls were taught to read and write Oriya, with some of the older ones learning ‘a little English and Bengali’. The *Intelligencer* added that Bloomsbury Baptist Chapel had sent a gift which enabled a new classroom to be built. Psalm 72:4 was quoted: ‘He shall save the children of the needy’, with salvation being in Christ and to be worked out in practice.<sup>46</sup> Radhanath Ray added his own tribute to Lydia Bailey, and this was quoted in the *Observer*. He wrote that the education being delivered by Mrs Bailey ‘was beyond all praise’. Her death was a great loss. She was someone who ‘animated’ the girls and who was ‘eminently fitted, by her experience and knowledge of the Oriya language and manners’, to form their thinking.<sup>47</sup>

There was awareness in Orissa of the work of Baptist missionaries from America, John and Harriet Clough, who were serving in the Telugu-speaking Andhra region, which bordered Orissa. It was the pioneering GBMS missionaries, Amos and Charlotte Sutton, who had urged Baptists in Virginia to begin work among the Telugus. In the early years after 1865, when they went to the region, the Cloughs saw limited response to the Christian message. This changed markedly in the 1870s. In 1877–1878, the Cloughs were deeply involved in famine relief work. During a six-week period in the summer of 1878, John Clough and his assistants baptized nearly 9000 members of the Madiga community living in and around Ongole. Baptisms took place in the Gundlakamma River (Harris 2007). The *Observer* referred in 1879 to ‘startling reports’ of the Telugu work, with ‘ten thousand believers being baptized last year by one American Baptist missionary and his twenty-two native assistants’. ‘Bible women’ were part of the outreach to other women. The Orissa mission had not seen anything on this scale but there had been ‘patient, persevering, prayerful toil; which, sooner or later, will be crowned with the Divine blessing’. The motto was written in capitals: ORISSA FOR CHRIST.<sup>48</sup>

## 6. Exemplifying and Teaching the Way of Jesus

There was a continuing commitment among GBMS leaders who knew Orissa to the vision for local outreach, not least in the area of female education, with the teachers seeking to give an example to girls and young women as well as teaching classes. In August 1881, Sarah Goadby, who had first gone to Orissa in 1855, wrote a substantial article in the *Observer* on the FES. She suggested that few members of General Baptist churches were aware of how valuable that help had been. ‘To our Mission’, she said, the Society had ‘ever been ready with a helping hand’. Mary Guignard, Agnes Packer, and Harriet Leigh had their salaries paid by the FES. In addition, for 18 years, the FES had supported the girls’ school at Chaga. However, the financial situation for the FES was currently demanding, and Buckley was asking for extra giving from General Baptists. She hoped that ‘a hearty response may be made, both by private individuals and churches’. Buckley prayed that God’s work in Orissa would ‘go on increasing and extending’, and that those involved in any way would ‘never grow weary till Orissa is Christ’s’. She wished to touch the ‘heart and conscience of every mother and daughter’ so that support for spreading the message of Jesus would be forthcoming. She raised the possibility of the formation of a General Baptist Ladies’ Missionary Society.<sup>49</sup> That did not happen, but FES involvement in Orissa continued into the 1890s.

On 12 November 1881, the *Peterborough Standard* reported on the departure of Elizabeth Mary Barrass (usually known as Mary), the eldest daughter of the well-known Peterborough Baptist minister, Thomas Barrass, to Cuttack, India.<sup>50</sup> A fuller report appeared in the December 1881 *Observer*. About 250 people were present for tea, and a larger crowd gathered for the farewell service in Queen Street Baptist Chapel, Peterborough. Thomas Barras had come to Peterborough in 1853, to a small General Baptist congregation. Over subsequent years, growth was such that a new building seating 800 was erected. Thomas Barrass, in what the *Observer* described as a ‘feeling speech’ on behalf of himself and his wife, observed that ‘he had often prayed for labourers to be sent into the mission field, and that his prayer had been answered in a way he did not anticipate’. The way had now opened for Mary to go to India, and he ‘could not act the hypocrite, or stultify his



own prayers, by placing any obstacle in her way'. The *Observer* added that Mary Barrass was going out to Orissa 'as an agent, and at the cost of the Society for Promoting Female Education in the East'. A further farewell meeting was held in London with J. P. Chown, the minister of Bloomsbury Baptist Chapel, giving an address and with FES home committee representatives present.<sup>51</sup>

The interdenominational nature of the FES meant that there were opportunities to commend the work being done through General Baptist channels in Orissa to a wider constituency. In the early 1880s, there were 16 GBMS missionaries from Britain, 23 trained local ministers, and six students. The Cuttack Mission Academy meant that, as Brian Stanley notes, the mission 'had the advantage of having a training institution located at the heart of a geographically concentrated Christian constituency' (Stanley 1992, p. 163). Indians were taking the lead in much mission work, but there was some excitement in 1882 when it was reported that Thomas Mulholland and his wife were coming from Britain (from Scotland) to superintend the work of the Mission Press at Cuttack.<sup>52</sup> However, they stayed for under three years. In January 1883, the leading article in the *Observer* was entitled 'Half as much again', echoing an appeal by E.H. Bickersteth, the evangelical Anglican, for extra funds to support the ministry of the very large Church Missionary Society (CMS) work. The GBMS asked if 'half as much again' could be raised for Orissa.<sup>53</sup> At the annual Orissa Conference in 1883, the *Observer* reported that attendance was the largest in the history of the mission. The place of European missionaries, including the newest arrival, Mary Barrass, was recognised but reports especially covered gifted younger Indians, including local teachers trained with the help of the FES. There was no sense of superiority of English over Indian; indeed, it was suggested that over the previous 10 years, the increase in Baptist membership in England had proportionally been much less than in India.<sup>54</sup>

Long-serving FES teachers such as Agnes Packer were given public thanks in 1886, 50 years after the first women went to the East with the Society. At a large meeting in London, with Packer present and Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton in the chair, wide support was expressed for the FES. The society which had the most extensive partnership with the FES was the CMS, and its Editorial Secretary, Eugene Stock, was a strong advocate of the role of women.<sup>55</sup> He was behind the appointment four years later of Georgina Gollock as the first woman to join the CMS' home staff (Randall 2023). While Packer was in England, Mary Barrass was a mentor to younger women taking up teaching in Orissa. As well as working in schools, she was visiting some women in villages, accompanied by those she was mentoring. One report spoke of two of Mary Barrass' European team making visits to a group of women and being asked, as 'fresh-comers', a series of 'amusing questions' about why they were not married, how old they were, and how they cared for their hair. When this had all been dealt with, some Oriya hymns were sung, and the women 'listened very attentively' as Mary Barrass explained the Christian message in Oriya. Some homes they visited were almost devoid of furniture, and the new trainees accompanying Barrass were introduced to one young mother with a new baby 'lying on a rush mat spread upon the stone floor'.<sup>56</sup>

As with all the Orissa missionaries, Mary Barrass wished to develop local leadership. She reported in the *Observer* in October 1886 that seven Bible women were employed in Cuttack, of whom five were supported by private contributions and two by the British and Foreign Bible Society. Katie, an experienced woman, visited from house to house. The other six went out in twos into the bazaars and outlying villages. Barrass gave an account of one of the women who went to a village some distance away to visit her daughter. In the village, the people received her—to use her own words—'almost as an angel from heaven'. She was seen as someone bringing an important new message and her personal presence had an impact. The women said: 'We have never heard these things before; do stay with us and teach us.' She visited the family of the brother of the prince (the Rajah) of that district, and this family 'listened with delight, and again and again begged her to come back to them'.<sup>57</sup> With some Bible women, there was the possibility of their training as teachers. Harriet Leigh promoted what was seen as 'the great task of raising the

position of Christian womanhood in India'.<sup>58</sup> A Bible and Prayer Union began in Cuttack, under Indian leadership, with young women who had been in schools where they had FES teachers, and were now married, drawing their husbands into the Union. Leigh was encouraged in 1889 that a new generation of girls was meeting every day, working through material from the Children's Special Service Mission, which had been translated into Oriya. Several girls had asked for baptism, and Leigh believed they had real faith and 'are seeking to follow Jesus'.<sup>59</sup>

## 7. Conclusions

This article has looked at the General Baptist mission in Orissa, India, with particular reference to the way women who served within the mission fulfilled a role in teaching and encouraging girls and women, especially by setting up schooling. The challenges of a time of desperate famine, with many orphans being cared for, have been examined. The General Baptist mission worked with other bodies, notably and crucially with the interdenominational Female Education Society. A major aim was that through the work of the female teachers, local teachers would be equipped. They were to be women who were well-trained and also who were seeking to follow Jesus. The argument has been that there was integrity in what was undertaken, and thus, this article offers an alternative to interpretations that dismiss the validity of the mission endeavours. Caroline Lewis suggested that missionaries associated with the FES used its magazine as a channel for 'encouraging women readers to imagine that, in return for sponsoring an Indian female, they were helping to create a Christian subject in their own image' (Lewis 2014, p. 81). This might have been the case with some within the FES, but for the mission in Orissa, the desire was always to have Indian Christian women whose faith as Christians was worked out in their context, not in the image of the sending mission. The Orissa mission continued on beyond the 1880s, with wider fellowship eventually happening through the Church of North India. This study does not go beyond the 1880s as that would introduce a new phase with the amalgamation in 1891 of the General and Particular Baptists and their overseas missionary societies (Briggs 1991a, 1991b). It was recognised that the work of the FES could be carried out under the auspices of established missionary societies—mostly denominational agencies—which, by the 1890s, had learned about giving a proper place to female education and educators.<sup>60</sup>

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The *Missionary Observer* was published monthly. The SPFEE published the *Female Missionary Intelligencer*. See (Donaldson 1990).
- <sup>2</sup> 'Letter from Mrs Buckley', *Observer*, April 1861, 154. Sarah Buckley had originally been supported by the FES.
- <sup>3</sup> In 1894, Homerton College, which was a Congregational College, moved to Cambridge.
- <sup>4</sup> 'Report', *Intelligencer*, 1 September 1862, 160–61.
- <sup>5</sup> 'Orissa', *Intelligencer*, 1 January 1863, 8–11.
- <sup>6</sup> 'Vernacular School', *Intelligencer*, 1 April 1863, 78–81.
- <sup>7</sup> 'Cuttack', *Observer*, February 1863, 79.
- <sup>8</sup> 'Reports', *Observer*, July 1863, 274, 279–80.
- <sup>9</sup> 'Work in India', *Intelligencer*, 1 June 1863, 126.
- <sup>10</sup> 'Letter from Mrs Buckley', *Observer*, May 1864, 195–98.
- <sup>11</sup> A.M. Pollock, 'The Work of the Society', *Intelligencer*, 1 July 1864, 153–55; 'Home Committee', *Intelligencer*, 1 December 1864, 17.
- <sup>12</sup> 'Letter from Mrs Buckley', *Observer*, May 1865, 156–59. For background, see Dinabandhu Dehury, 'Promotion of Education in Orissa by Ravenshaw', *Orissa Review*, April–May 2009, 15–21.
- <sup>13</sup> 'The Orphanage at Piplee', *Observer*, May 1865, 222.

- 14 'Famine in Orissa', *Intelligencer*, 1 September 1866, 134–39. For more, see (Samal 1999, pp. 6–31).
- 15 'Report', *Intelligencer*, 1 October 1867, 164–66; 'Report', *Intelligencer*, 2 March 1868, 34–36.
- 16 'Cork Auxiliary', *Intelligencer*, 1 August 1868, 125–27.
- 17 'Reports from Orissa', *Intelligencer*, 1 June 1869, 126–28.
- 18 'The Orissa Mission and its Famine Orphanages', *Observer*, August 1878, 5, 10.
- 19 'Baptisms in Cuttack', *Observer*, December 1870, 378.
- 20 Lewis, 'Establishing India', 90–91.
- 21 'Letter from Mrs Buckley', *Observer*, April 1871, 123–24.
- 22 'A Holiday in Orissa', *Intelligencer*, April 1871, 53–55.
- 23 'Orissa', *Intelligencer*, July 1871, 101–3.
- 24 'Death of Miss Guignard', *Observer*, October 1871, 317. Mary Guignard was buried in Bengal.
- 25 'Tribute', *Intelligencer*, December 1871, 178–86.
- 26 'Education in Orissa', *Observer*, March 1872, 98–99.
- 27 'Tidings from Orissa', *Intelligencer*, February 1873, 21–23. See (Stanley 1992, pp. 166–67), also (Gangte 2017).
- 28 'Baptisms in Orissa', *Observer*, October 1872, 324.
- 29 'Reports', *Observer*, October 1873, 399; 'Reports', *Observer*, December 1873, 494.
- 30 'Orissa', *Intelligencer*, January 1875, 11–13.
- 31 'Orissa', *Intelligencer*, November 1873, 171.
- 32 'Language Policy', *Intelligencer*, January 1875, 11–13. See (Mohanty 2002).
- 33 'Metropolitan Tabernacle', *Observer*, November 1875, 440.
- 34 'Zenana work', *Intelligencer*, January 1876, 17.
- 35 'Orissa', *Intelligencer*, January 1876, 17.
- 36 'School Inspections', *Intelligencer*, February 1876, 7. For Francis, see *Indian Medical Gazette*, 2 July 1877, 192.
- 37 'The Beginning of the Work in Balasore: American Baptist Historical Society', *Tidings*, December 1924, 7.
- 38 She married Thomas Bailey, whose first wife had died.
- 39 'Madras Famine', *Observer*, March 1878, 115.
- 40 'Afghan War', *Observer*, January 1880, 39. For background, see (Barthorp 2002).
- 41 'Berhampur', *Observer*, August 1878, 11.
- 42 'Piplee', *Observer*, May 1878, 201.
- 43 'Female Education', *Observer*, August 1878, 322.
- 44 'Tribute', *Observer*, July 1879, 301–2.
- 45 'Orissa Conference', *Observer*, February 1880, 76, 80.
- 46 'School in Cuttack', *Intelligencer*, August 1879, 142–43.
- 47 'Tribute', *Observer*, March 1880, 118.
- 48 'Telugu work', *Observer*, July 1879, 293. See (Sekhar 2021).
- 49 'Female Education Society', *Observer*, August 1881, 318–19.
- 50 'Queen Street Baptist Chapel', *Peterborough Standard*, 12 November 1881, 5. I am grateful to Michael Kennelly, who has written on Thomas Barrass, for his help.
- 51 'Farewell Service', *Observer*, December 1881, 469–70.
- 52 'A New Missionary for Orissa', *Observer*, June 1882, 237.
- 53 'Half as much again', *Observer*, January 1883, 33–34.
- 54 'Orissa Conference', *Observer*, March 1883, 113, 'Notes', *Observer*, May 1883, 157.
- 55 'London Meeting', *Intelligencer*, July 1886, 105–11.
- 56 'Visiting villages', *Observer*, September 1886, 359.
- 57 'Bible Woman', *Observer*, October 1886, 397–98.
- 58 Harriet Leigh, 'Female Education in Orissa', *Observer*, May 1888, 198–99.
- 59 'Bible and Prayer Union', *Observer*, August 1889, 333.
- 60 FES files are held in the University of Birmingham, Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections.

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