

RELIGION, CHARISMA AND NEOLIBERALISM: A STUDY ON KING'S TEMPLE CHURCH IN HYDERABAD

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By

Vennela Mocherla

(20SSHL03)



Department of Sociology

School of Social Sciences

University of Hyderabad

(P.O.) Central University, Gachibowli

Hyderabad – 500046

Telangana, India

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "**Religion, Charisma and Neoliberalism: A Study on King's Temple Church in Hyderabad**" submitted by **Vennela Mocherla** bearing Reg. No. **20SSHL03** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Master of Philosophy in Sociology is a bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

This thesis is free from plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

Prof. Tanweer Fazal

Research Supervisor

Head,
Department of Sociology,
University of Hyderabad

Dean,
School of Social Sciences,
University of Hyderabad

DECLARATION

I, **Vennela Mocherla**, hereby declare that this Dissertation entitled, "**Religion, Charisma and Neoliberalism: A Study on King's Temple Church in Hyderabad**", submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of **Prof. Tanweer Fazal** is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

Date: 31/01/2023

Name: Vennela Mocherla

Signature of the Student

Reg. No.: 20SSHL03

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Increase in the number of independent churches is a recent phenomenon in Christianity. In recent years, there has been a notable rise in independent churches in India. These churches do not have any affiliation with any specific denominations or any church organizations, and are often led by local pastors. The 20th century witnessed a great change and dynamism in the religious landscape. This period has witnessed the emergence of modern forms of religion and religious expressions. This includes the rise of fundamentalist and evangelical movements within established religions, as well as the rise of new spiritualities and alternative religions. Emergence of these movements have often been a response to the technological shifts and lifestyle changes in modern societies. Modern technologies like the internet have highly impacted religious practices and how it is experienced.

Pentecostalism is a renewal movement within protestant Christianity (Kalu, 2003; Togarasei, 2011). This form of Christianity began in the 20th century in the United States of America, but has significantly transformed the face of the Christian tradition globally (Kalu, 2003; Togarasei, 2011). Theological foundations for the Pentecostal movement were laid by the Methodists. Pentecostalism is not a church in itself, however, it has given rise to more independent and Charismatic churches world-wide. Pentecostals placed a strong emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, and this led them to reject the more formal and liturgical worship styles of many traditional denominations. This emphasis on Spirit-led worship and the belief in spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues¹ led many Pentecostals to feel that they were better able to express their faith and experience God's presence in independent congregations, rather than in more established denominations. Pentecostals felt that the denominational structures hindered the spread of their message and the growth of their movements, and chose to start independent churches, to be able to reach more people and more easily adapt to different cultures and regions. Togarasei (2011) opined that the Pentecostal

¹ The phrase “speaking in tongues” refers to a practice when an individual (especially, a pastor) makes speech-like sounds. This is taken to be a blessing by the Holy Spirit upon the individual. This is also referred to as “glossolalia”. It has been mentioned in the Bible in Corinthians (see *Speaking in Tongues*).

churches addressed “the spiritual and the socio-economic needs of people through the 'gospel of prosperity’”.

The prosperity gospel or the prosperity theology can be understood as a theological movement within Christianity that teaches that faith in God and donations to religious organizations will result in material prosperity and improved physical health. This belief holds that believers will be blessed with financial success and prosperity as a sign of God's favor, and that giving money to the church or to certain religious leaders can increase one's blessings. This belief is often associated with televangelists and other religious leaders who promote the idea that God enables people to be wealthy and successful and having faith in God and following certain religious practices like making donations will lead to prosperity.

Prosperity Theology also called the Word-faith is a belief system that originated from the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. It does not have clear historical theological roots unlike the liberation theology which has clear historical roots in the Bible. The word-faith or Prosperity Gospel is preached and popularized through radio, and televangelism started in the 20th century. The pioneering efforts of Rex Humbard and Kenneth Hagin later followed by Oral Roberts in the field of televangelism popularized this trend and the Word-faith and Prosperity Gospel is now a fast-expanding theological movement associated frequently with Pentecostalism, Evangelicalism, and Charismatic Christianity and it is important to note that it is practiced in the independent churches.

Prosperity theology caught on more significantly in the developing world during the economic instability in the end of the 20th century. During the same period prosperity gospel started to replace the traditional focus of Pentecostalism on spiritual matters in Latin America. This is likely due to the economic dislocations during that period, which may have led people to seek out religious teachings that promised material benefits displacing the other-worldly focus of early Pentecostalism. The rise of internet culture and social media made it easier for people to access and share religious information and ideas, and facilitated the emergence of virtual communities and online religious practices.

Wrenn (2019) links Prosperity Gospel to Pentecostalism and argues that the former is merely a “modern, neoliberal variation” of the latter (Wrenn, 2019: 425). Prosperity Gospel, according to Wrenn, assures the believer that the stronger their faith, the more they are entitled to the “blessings of health and wealth” (2019: 425). She also states that the Prosperity Gospel "serves as an institution that provides a refuge for individuals from the uncertainties of the market" (2019: 425). Additionally, the Prosperity Gospel reinforces individual responsibility and fault in case of difficulties, by teaching that if a person experiences financial difficulties or illnesses, it is a sign of a lack of faith in God.

According to Haynes (2013), the Prosperity Gospel, which is an important component of Pentecostalism, espouses the belief that a person's faith and generosity towards God will result in blessings from Him in the form of financial prosperity, success, and good health. This gospel asserts that these blessings are indicative of God's divine will for the believer and that they are granted in return for the person's faith and donations. In other words, the Prosperity Gospel teaches that a strong faith and acts of generosity towards God will result in tangible blessings in this life. This prosperity gospel emphasizes on ‘*sowing seeds in the name of God*’. The followers are preached to be faithful to God and donate to the ministry with an expectation of receiving material benefit in return. They extensively stress on the biblical verse “*whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully*”(2 Corinthians 9:6, *New International Version*). This type of Christianity has challenged the traditional main-line churches which are characterized by bureaucratic and hierarchical organisation structure, following a ritualistic pattern of worship and the principles that are often rigid.

History of Pentecostalism in India

Christianity in India has a long and rich history, dating back to the 1st century CE. It has been shaped by the efforts of various missionary groups, including the Syrian Church, the Portuguese Jesuits, and the British Anglicans. Christianity in India has also undergone a unique process of cultural synthesis, blending elements of Indian culture with traditional Christian theology and practices. Christianity in India has gone through a transition from a foreign import to a distinct Indian faith. Christianity in India is a minority religion, with Christians making up

only around 2.3% of the population. Despite this, Christianity continues to have a significant impact on Indian society, particularly through the church planters who propagate the prosperity gospel. This gospel as already mentioned has its roots in Pentecostal revival movements within Christianity.

The origins of Pentecostalism are not only complex and varied, there are multiple sources for its origin and are widespread. The rapid growth of Pentecostalism in the 20th century was not just due to the efforts of evangelical leaders from the western countries, but also the result of local preachers adapting the Pentecostal message to their own context. In the case of India the first revivals of Pentecostalism occurred under indigenous leadership. The role of local preachers plays a key role in popularizing the faith.

The earliest Pentecostal revivals in India were recorded in the 1860s, occurring in the southern part of India where Christianity had already been familiarised by St. Thomas. He is said to have arrived in Kerala around 52 AD introducing Christianity in India. In the later centuries the works of Portuguese followed by other missionaries popularized Christianity in India and could attract more low-castes and tribes into Christianity. Early Pentecostal revivals in India occurred under the leadership of native individuals (rather than pastors or missionaries from abroad) in the regions of Tirunelveli in present-day Tamil Nadu and Travancore in present-day Kerala (Burgess, 2001: 95). These revivals took place among Anglican and Syrian Orthodox congregations. Some of the phenomena observed during these revivals included "flinging the arms in the air, shaking, falling on the ground and rolling about". These physical expressions were seen as a sign of the Holy Spirit's presence and manifestation among the believers. These revivals were marked by a strong sense of spiritual fervor and religious enthusiasm among the participants, and were instrumental in the spread of Pentecostalism in India (see Anderson, 2005).

In the twentieth century, the first revivals in India occurred in March of 1905 among the Khasi people in the northeast hills of the country during prayers conducted by the Welsh Presbyterians. (Frykenberg 2008: 446). In June of 1905, a Pentecostal revival began among women and girls at Pandita Ramabai's Mukti Mission in Kedgaon, located near Pune in the

present-day state of Maharashtra in India. This revival was characterized by strong emotional and spiritual experiences, and it quickly spread throughout the region. In 1907, a similar revival broke out in Calcutta under the influence of the Garrs, who had recently returned from the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, California. The Garrs, who were American Pentecostal missionaries, brought with them the preachings of the Pentecostal movement, which had a significant impact on the direction of the Pentecostal movement in India. They played a crucial role in spreading the Pentecostal message and teachings across India, and in shaping the Indian Pentecostal movement as it is known today.

The neo-charismatic² movement is a branch of Pentecostalism that emerged in India during the late 1960s and early 1970s. This movement emphasizes the power of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and often includes practices such as speaking in tongues, faith healing, and prophetic revelation. The movement is considered "neo-charismatic" because it is a more recent development within the broader Pentecostal tradition. Many of these groups have connections with American Pentecostal groups, but are considered indigenous, they have their own distinct characteristics that reflect the Indian context. These characteristics include worshipping with local musical instruments, singing in their native languages, performing local rituals while conducting marriage ceremonies, maintenance of caste system, etc. These groups have grown rapidly and now have a significant presence in India, with hundreds of smaller fellowships thriving throughout the country. The charismatic renewal movement, which emphasizes the power of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit, was also introduced to the Roman Catholic Church in India during the 1970's by the natives, laypeople, and Jesuits. This movement has since become a significant force in Indian Catholicism. Around the same time, many groups associated with the "third wave" or "Neo-Charismatic" movement of Pentecostalism began to establish themselves in India. These groups, although many of them have connections with American Pentecostal evangelicals, are considered indigenous, they have their own distinct characteristics that reflect the Indian context.

² Neo-charismatics have been defined as the following, "[Neocharismatics] are Christian bodies with Pentecostal-like experiences and a common emphasis on the Holy Spirit that have no traditional Pentecostal or Charismatic denominational connections. This is a catch-all category of dozens of independent, indigenous, postdenominational denominations and groups" (Burgess, 2001: 95).

In addition to these groups, there are numerous other Christian denominations and fellowships present in India, including thousands of small Pentecostal fellowships that are thriving throughout the country. This has greatly contributed to the reshaping of Christianity in India and has made it a globalized religion with enormous ecumenical implications. Adherents of these movements are often at the forefront of interfaith encounters, and the movement has had a significant impact on Christianity in the 20th century.

While there is a longstanding antagonism between the Catholic and Protestant groups and antagonisms within different denominations of Protestantism, Pentecostalism which is a revival movement started within Protestant groups and has challenged both Catholicism and Protestantism. Mainline Protestantism, whose rhetoric and theology tend towards liberalism, is currently experienced sociologically and ideologically as a somewhat closed and calcifying Christian tradition, with little room for new people and fresh religious perspectives. Pentecostalism on the other hand, whose rhetoric tends towards the conservative and dogmatic, is in reality a highly adaptable social and religious movement, twisting and turning and transforming itself to adjust to the realities of a civilization whose ancient roots continue to sprout new branches and leaves. They do not involve themselves in activist work such as protecting the rights of tribals, minorities like traditional Christian missionaries do. Pentecostals are against idol worship, they profess their faith publicly and perform miracle healings in open spaces, they involve followers in congregational worship, fasting prayers and an ecstatic atmosphere. Pentecostal stress on change of heart instead of active conversions from the followers and do not maintain official record unlike mainline traditional churches. In other words, they concentrate on followership rather than active conversions.

Pastors of the neo-charismatic movement do not identify with any particular church unlike mainline churches and are free to conduct prayers in the open and at homes of the believers. This flexibility in these churches help the pastors in understanding the localities and its people better and tweak their style of preaching. This generally involves upper caste pastors and his followers from different castes. For example, the pastor of Calvary Temple (which is a renowned church in Hyderabad with branches in Andhra Pradesh) belongs to the Kamma caste which is a dominant caste in the Telugu states. Another example is that of Brother Anil – an

influential pastor in the Telugu states, who is the son-in-law of the former Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Y.S. Rajshekhar Reddy belongs to the Brahmin community. K.A. Paul is another influential pastor who belongs to the Kapu caste. He founded Praja Shanti Party in 2008 and also contested in the 2019 general elections in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

Prayers focus on day-to-day problems such as job, health, family problems and offer prayer in the name of solving that problem. They downplay any external agency as a reason for individual sufferings and problems and they stress upon belief in God to solve their problems and erase their sufferings. Some receive funding from overseas churches. The mainline churches who often confine their worshiping practices inside their churches often feel frustrated about Pentecostals professing their religion more publicly. This exhibitionist nature of Pentecostalism not only makes the renewal site a magnet for popular religiosity and devotion, in a way that a traditional Christian liturgy does not (Schmalz, 1998: 22–72) but as well can be understood as serving to attract more people into their fold alongside gaining animosity among people from different faiths and some times, from mainline churches. This invariably contributes to the contempt against Christians locally and polarizes the cultural and political atmosphere.

Interesting dimension to the Pentecostal neo-charismatic movement is that it grows indigenously and yet has global interconnectedness and appeal. With neoliberal globalization, this movement of Christianity has spread across continents such as Africa, Asia, Europe and has significantly transformed the face of Christianity. India is also witnessing a significant rise of independent Pentecostal neo-charismatic churches post 1990s.

Significance of the study

The subject of the proposed study has been of sociological significance and intellectual curiosity for the following reasons. Firstly, what constitutes a ‘desire’ has been the subject of debate across the theological schools in Christianity. For instance, if Catholicism viewed the *desire of earning money* as a sin and the root of all evil, money as the manifestation of God’s grace has been central to the reformist Christianity.

Secondly, the growing global appeal for the prosperity theology has not just challenged traditional Christian denominations by invoking the debate around material desire, it has also been noticed to have been growing influence in attracting followers from different faiths in India. This movement gave rise to the emergence of several independent churches across India. Some of them grew up to be megachurches, such as New life fellowship association (Mumbai), Calvary Temple (Hyderabad). These churches emphasize repentance, speaking and praying in tongues, individual experience of God's grace, spiritual new birth, miracles, intense prayer, spiritual revivals, public witnessing, evangelism, fasting, enthusiastic worship, faith healing. Based on the preliminary data from the field site, it is observed that these followers include a significant number of Hindus as well as Christians across denominations. Also, this trend is not restricted to urban areas alone. This trend is also seen in villages as well, Gurala village in Punjab is in news recently because a borewell operator who was a Sikh by religion turned into a charismatic pastor and started a church attracting hate of the Hindutva nationalists and mainline church leaders as well.

Thirdly, the prosperity theology is believed to contrast with that of Liberation Theology. Liberation theology focuses on the social oppression of the church followers induced by different politico-economic regimes and challenges and questions them. Conversely, the prosperity theology shifts the underlying reasons for the believer's fate from the State to the individual's faith, by arguing that true believers will prosper under whatever political or economic regimes which are in place. So, despite Prosperity theology having its Biblical roots and their presence in some parts of the world during the 19th and 20th century, its global appeal during the neo-liberal era seems not a coincidence. As we know by now, the neoliberal market economy has had the state withdrawing and reducing its responsibilities from providing a range of services like education, health, and employment. And the prosperity theology promises material gains which the state and the market fail to provide. Prosperity theology, also known as the Prosperity Gospel, is a religious belief that promises success and material gain. Both its critics and fans agree that this is its most obvious appeal. The theology holds that faith is immediately rewarded with gain, with pastors saying that "God will meet you at the point of your knees"(Gifford, 2007). This point of need was traditionally focused on health, but in recent years has shifted to financial prosperity (Chesnut, 2003). Prosperity Gospel, according to Wrenn (2019), offers

something for everyone across class lines. If it offers hope for the poor, for the rich, it accounts for their higher position in the social order. Additionally, it affirms the aspirations of the middle class and shows them prospects to become richer. (see Wrenn, 2019: 427)

If we turn back to Weber's Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism (1904), he spoke about how change in religious ethic, particularly Christian ethic- from Catholicism to Protestantism- is one of the important contributors in understanding the rise of capitalism. Weber notes that the protestant ethic of calling, predestination and worldly asceticism (which expressed in Calvinism and others) have emerged as a consequence of reformation in Christianity, independent of economic changes of the times. However, they have had a considerable influence in developing capitalist spirit (Weber, 2005). This ethic has considerably changed the Christian world-view and giving importance to worldly affairs has become a significant part of their lives, by renouncing the theory of sin, repentance and salvation. Now the rising global popularity of charismatic churches which advocate the prosperity gospel or "*name it-claim it gospel*" have found its resonance with the neoliberal state. Following Weber, it is significant to study the underlying changes in Christian ethics and its contribution to the capitalist spirit of the times. But, I believe it is premature for me to say that neo-liberal capitalist spirit can be solely understood by studying the rise of charismatic churches and its ethic. Rather I believe at this point that the rise of independent charismatic churches and neoliberalism are contingent upon each other.

If one were to see the following verses

*"The Lord makes poor and rich;
He brings low, He also exalts" (1 Samuel 2:7)*

*"But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day"
(Deuteronomy 8:18)*

*"He who tills his land will have plenty of food,
But he who follows empty pursuits will have poverty in plenty" (Proverbs 28:19)*

These are biblical references which have mention of material wealth. Interestingly, the individual believer is said to have been given the power to choose what one needs. When we observe closely this kind of preaching is done by a charismatic preacher who proclaims that he is blessed by the Holy Spirit.

Research questions

In order to understand the phenomenon of the rising independent charismatic churches I have the following research questions;

1. How can we contextualize the rise of non-denominational independent churches as part of new religious movements?
2. How can we apply the concept of charisma to understand the appeal of non-denominational independent churches?
3. What are the socio-economic underpinnings that contextualize the shifting narratives in Christianity, say, from liberation theology to prosperity theology; from other-worldly focus to this-worldly focus; from sin to prosperity as a central tenet?
4. How do institutions like prosperity churches mediate neoliberalism?

Objectives of the study

1. The larger objective in conducting the study is to map out the aspirational anxieties of independent charismatic church followers and correlate with the socio-economic realities and unfulfilled needs by the neo-liberal State.
2. My second objective of the study is to analyse the testimonies of the followers and look for patterns and strategies of the independent charismatic churches in attracting followers from different faiths which gives an insight in understanding the rising independent charismatic churches.

3. To apply the concept of charisma in understanding the appeal of the charismatic independent churches.
4. To meticulously see and analyse the style of preaching and prayers in independent-charismatic churches.

Field Site

For the purpose of carrying out the proposed study, KINGS TEMPLE church of Hyderabad was chosen. It is an independent church started by a pastor, Samuel Patta who claims to have experienced the holy spirit.

The pastor speaks in tongues which is an indication of possessing the holy spirit which is an essential component in Pentecostals worship. This church labels itself as a word-based church which basically means that everything happens from and according to God's Word. The pastor clearly propagates the message of prosperity gospel in his prayer services. This church is modeled around the Texas based church started by an American televangelist, Kenneth Copeland who is associated with the charismatic movement. An interesting feature of tithing is a key characteristic of these churches.

In the King's temple church the pastor preaches the followers not to depend on any human being, but to believe and depend only on God, even in the most uncertain circumstances. They also run Foundation Courses to teach Christian basics for interested people. They also conduct Life Transformation Camps every month, for people to understand about Salvation, to be delivered from their curses and bondages and to be filled with the Holy Spirit. This church also provides water-baptism for the interested followers. The pastor even conducts marriage ceremonies like in the case of other churches.

The King's Temple Church is a fast growing church that was started independently by the pastor Samuel Patta. The pastor of this church shows the tremendous growth of this church as an example of the Gift of God for believing in him. This church, unlike other traditional churches,

doesn't have an established church. Rather it is a congregation of people assembling in an auditorium to worship God. Like most other independent churches this church also is started by an individual who could attract more followers and such pastors are often termed as Charismatic pastors. The prayer services of this church are held in function halls of different parts of Hyderabad and other cities such as Visakhapatnam on different days of the week enabling easy access to its followers. Hundreds of followers from different faiths and different walks of life attend these prayer services. This church also enables the followers to join their online prayers and spread the word of God through television and social media as well. The church strategically attracts followers and new-visitors to the church belonging to other faiths. An interactive session is held welcoming them.

The style of worship and culture in this church is different from that of traditional churches. This type of worship is modelled around American charismatic churches which are characterised by their ecstatic worshipping experience which includes motivational speeches emphasising on the bible, personal-testimonies, and intense prayers praising God and singing in a luxurious environment. The rhetoric *sowing a seed* is emphasised in this Ministry and the followers are encouraged to give God to receive plenty in return.

This church, like other new-churches, makes use of modern musical instruments and audiovisual technology in creating an ecstatic spiritual experience. This church also has a good rapport with similar churches across the world, especially American and African churches which are known for preaching prosperity theology. This church has a sophisticated managerial set up under one leader and a network of volunteers that cater to the local population and form local groups called life groups. These groups keep in touch and conduct prayer meetings in their homes and share their testimonies. This church, like other new independent churches, is also known for its televangelism with telecasts all over the country.

So the king's temple church which has the essential characteristics of a church professing prosperity theology and attracting followers from different walks of life has been chosen. This site is interesting to understand the functioning and the appeal of the independent churches thoroughly. Catholic-churches and Protestant churches belonging to different other

denominations are also present near the field site which enabled in drawing a comparative understanding as well.

Methodology

The chosen field site was studied through frequent visits to the church and by participating in the church services. Key informants were identified after joining prayer meetings of the church with friends and family members who are regular members of the church. An understanding was developed after interactions with church goers. The data about the preaching style of the pastor and strategies to attract followers were collected through observations, supplemented by interviews and informal ways of knowing. Data about the key respondents was recorded. Extensive literature was reviewed to understand the historical trajectory of different Christian theological schools and the debates thereof. Preacher's biblical references are carefully noted to analyze thoroughly the Biblical understanding of the material desire, especially prosperity theology. Online preaching was reviewed by attending their live preaching sessions streaming on YouTube and television. Other information was collected through the king's temple church's website, their YouTube channel and Instagram handles. This study also consulted a range of literature with regard to charismatic Christianity, neoliberal tendencies of charismatic Christianity, Christian theological debates related to prosperity theology and material desire and new religious movements.

Chapterisation

The introductory chapter tries to foreground the historical trajectories of the rise of independent charismatic churches with regard to the prosperity theology of Christianity and indicates the significance of the phenomenon of Charismatic Christianity. With this historical background, this chapter also outlines the significance of the present research as part of my M.Phil. dissertation. The broad research questions that guide the present work, research objectives and methodology is also included in this chapter.

The second chapter titled Charisma and new religious movements broadly deals with literature of sociology of religion with regard to the present work in contextualizing the rise of the phenomenon of charismatic Christianity. This phenomenon will be analyzed at two levels. Firstly, this phenomenon will be seen and analyzed with the growing influx of “cult” based religious preaching across religions (scholars have termed this as a new religious movement). Secondly, the Charisma of the pastors will be understood. Charismatic Christianity is propagated by the charismatic pastors and these pastors enjoy enormous reverence, popularity, trust and a certain amount of divinity among Church followers. The popularity of the Charismatic pastor and the nature of organization of the church are crucial in the Church’s growth and popularity. Max Weber’s charismatic authority, Edward Shil’s expanded work of Charismatic authority, T.K Oommen’s application of Charismatic authority and the literature on new religious movements will be employed as a theoretical framework to explain the “cult” popularity (or, Charisma) that the pastors of these churches enjoy.

The third chapter studies and describes the church in greater detail based on the empirical evidence from the field visits to the King’s temple church. This chapter tries to present an understanding of the working of the church for further discussion.

The fourth chapter is titled as *Prosperity gospel and neo-liberal morality* discusses the dialectical relationship between them. Christian ethic is the core of Christian theological debates and essential in understanding the changes that are happening within Christianity. Dealing with Christian ethic is of sociological significance as it involves a dialectical relationship with the socio-economic changes. Weber traced the roots of modern capitalism to the protestant ethic. Following Weber’s work, this chapter deals with the prosperity gospel which is a major phenomenon globally (with the rise of Charismatic Christianity) and narrates how prosperity gospel fundamentally challenged the mainline churches on one hand and propagates the neoliberal morality on the other. In other words, the significance of the prosperity gospel may be informed by social change as induced and shaped by modern capitalist tendencies (neo-liberal political economy). This further complicates the position of mainline traditional churches and their response to this change. For the purpose of this chapter, a lot of empirical data from my field visits such as preaching about prosperity gospel and asking donations in the King’s temple church, Secunderabad are taken.

The fifth chapter titled as *Neoliberalism through charismatic churches* begins with a discussion of various scholarly attempts at understanding the concept of neoliberalism. The concept has been explicated by different scholars using different underlying assumptions and methodologies. Consensus which was adopted by American policymakers to push neoliberal policies internationally. Moreover, the chapter discusses different scholarly writings on Pentecostalism and prosperity theology. As the neo-liberal economic reforms of the 1990's in Latin America are responsible for reshaping the economic policies impacting the people, it is argued that prosperity theology emerged as a reaction to these changes in market, it further tries to analyze the individual's neoliberal anxieties and how the church as an institution tries to address and ameliorate their anxieties and offer a refuge while preparing them to face the changing social reality.

The conclusion chapter discusses the main arguments of the chapters. It attempts to demonstrate that it is important to consider the cultural-moral implications of economic systems, such as neoliberal capitalism, in order to fully understand their impact on society. This chapter also argues that religious ideologies can be used by economic systems in order to propagate themselves. This chapter also discusses the limitations of the work and further explains the scope for future research in this area of study.

Chapter 2

Charisma and New Religious Movements

New Religious Movements (NRMs)

The phenomenon of new religious movements, which includes a wide range of faith-based groups such as religious forms, spiritual groups, cults, and sects, has been receiving increasing attention. These scholars have sought to understand the nature and rapidity of social change in order to make sense of the upsurge of new religious movements. However, it is important to note that the goal of this research is not to establish causation, but rather to examine the ways in which social change and religious change are interconnected.

Different scholars have approached the study of new religious movements with different themes, but their overarching question is to understand the sociocultural sources that explain the upsurge of heterodox religiosity. In order to fully understand this phenomenon, it is crucial to have a detailed understanding of the terms "cults" and "sects" and to analyze whether these groups can be classified as new religious movements.

New religious movements are often characterized by their departure from traditional religious beliefs and practices and their emphasis on individual spiritual experience. They may also be characterized by their ability to adapt and take advantage of technological advancements and social changes. However, it is important to understand that not all the new religious movements can be classified as cults or sects and these groups should not be judged or stigmatized based solely on their status as a new religious movement. Overall, the upsurge in the new religious movements is a complex phenomenon that requires a nuanced understanding of social and cultural change, as well as a critical examination of the terms and labels used to describe these groups

Cult and institutionalization of cult:

Many scholars of religion have posed the question of whether all 'cults' and 'sects' fall under new religious movements. Defining cults is very important because the conventional definitions for cults do not apply to them naturally because cults are novel with exotic culture. Scholars like Robbins (1969) and Wallis (1978) have used the word 'cult' to "refer to putatively ephemeral groups that lack clear group boundaries, centralized leadership, and standardized dogma, and that make minimal demands on devotees, whose degree of commitment may be highly variable" (Robbins and Anthony, 1979: 81). Scholars say cults are different from sects. Because "when a sect breaks away from a church, it takes with it the label 'religious', but cults are not born with the religious label" (Stark and Bainbridge, 1979). Sects, being schismatic, embody certain religious principles and operate as religious organizations. Whereas, cults may not fully develop themselves into "full-blown religious movements". The question then to ask is when do cults qualify to be a new religious movement. Stark categorized cults into three types: Audience as a cult, Client cults and cult movements. For him the first form of the cult could be the audience as a cult. An "audience cult" refers to a cult-like following that does not involve physical gatherings of members (Stark and Bainbridge, 1979), but instead relies on the consumption of cult teachings through various forms of media such as magazines, books, newspapers, radio, and television. This type of cult does not have a formal organization, as its members primarily engage with the cult's doctrine through the consumption of media rather than through in-person meetings. Another important form that scholars identified is client cults in which the relationship between a cult leader and the follower is established. Cult leaders have some form of the organization but the clients (or followers of cult leaders) are largely under-organized. Cult leaders may try to lead clients into a religious movement, successfully or unsuccessfully. Lastly, there are cult movements with a full organizational structure. These cult movements with an established organisational system with a popular leader qualify to be a religious movement.

Coming to the tension that the cults experience with traditional religion. Most cults face relatively less tension unless they organize themselves as a religious movement and appear as a threat to the traditional religions. For this reason, audience cults and client cults face no tension

whereas cult movements face tension to the degree to which they appear as a “danger” to others. “Furthermore, among cult movements, the more a cult mobilizes its membership, the greater the opposition it engenders. Cults whose members remain in the society to pursue normal lives and occupations engender much less opposition than do cults whose members drop everything and become full-time converts. In part, this is probably because cults that function as total institutions rupture converts' ties to conventional institutions. This generates personal grievances against the movement” (Stark and Bainbridge, 1979). Speaking on organizational structure and cult leadership, Roy Wallis argues that “cults, characterized by weak leadership and "epistemological individualism," will tend either to disappear or to evolve into authoritarian sects, characterized by centralized charismatic leadership and "epistemological authoritarianism”” (Wallis, 1974 cited in Robbins and Anthony, 1979: 82). But, the larger question that remains is what socio-cultural conditions produce a cult and of what nature whether secular or religious?

Sociology of new religious movements:

The answer to the above question may lie in another basic question: why does an individual need religion? What role does religion play for individuals? Why are individuals motivated to participate in religion? Though these are basic questions posed to know the process of religious formations, they equally apply to new religious movements as well. Westley (1978) has argued that “people's participation is motivated by a preoccupation with the development of personal identity and correspondingly the locus of the sacred is often seen to be within the individual and not without” (Westley, 1978: 137 cited in Dawson, 1998: 138). Stone argues that the commonality among the participants is “intense experiences of themselves and the sacred” (Stone, 1978: 124 cited in Dawson, 1998: 138). Clearly, experience and faith take precedence over dogma and belief. Dawson (1998) says that “the new religious consciousness found in these groups displays a more pragmatic attitude to questions of religious authority and practice” (Dawson, 1998: 138). He further says “the new religious consciousness embodied in so many new groups is markedly more compatible with science and the social sciences than conventional religions; likewise it is more compatible with the new social order emerging around us, whether it is called advanced capitalism, late or high modernism, post-industrialism, or postmodernism” (1998: 141).

Returning to the broader question posed at the start of the chapter: what are the sociocultural sources that explain the upsurge of new religions or heterodox religiosity? And, why have the traditional religious values lost their pre-eminence that is resulting in 'new religiosity'? Robbins and Anthony (1975, 1978) argue that the current spiritual resurgence is caused by a predicament of declining values and a growing sense of normative ambiguity in society. They attribute this to the breakdown of a cultural tradition of moral absolutism in a society that is becoming increasingly diverse and pluralistic. This means that people are facing a lack of clear moral guidelines and are seeking alternative ways of finding meaning and purpose in their lives. This ambiguity is causing people to turn towards spiritual practices and beliefs to find a sense of certainty and direction. Robbins (1975, 1978) and McGuire (1975, 1978) argue that the current surge in evangelical Pentecostal movements is characterized by a strong ethical dualism, which involves a perfect separation of good and evil. They also suggest that these movements hold apocalyptic visions of the world's impending destruction and redemption. However, according to Robbins (1975), another interpretation suggests that this surge in spiritual groups is an aspect of ongoing secularization. The underlying issue is to identify the source of normative ambiguity and moral indeterminacy which is driving these spiritual movements. These scholars point out that the present spiritual movements and the underlying reasons for them are complex and multifaceted, and require further examination to understand their origins and implications.

Different scholars have put the individual at the center of analysis and thereby, tried to offer an explanation by placing the individual's psyche in the context of larger socio-cultural change. As Marx and Ellison (1975) have argued that the intimate and the traditional mediating structures such as joint families and homogeneous neighborhoods for an individual have seemingly been weakened by the social change post-industrial revolution has brought. Furthermore, the role of such traditional mediating structures in an individual's life has declined. Also, industrial and post-industrial capitalism has been fragmenting the workforce and worker unions. Scholars such as Marx and Ellison (1975) posit that industrial and post-industrial capitalism has fragmented the workforce and worker unions, giving rise to different associations at various levels such as "communes" and "quasi-communities" like spiritual groups. These

groups, according to Marx and Ellison, help to wean individuals away from dependence upon their primary groups such as family. This creates the possibilities of relations between individuals and groups of people other than their kin. Such groups come to provide the individual with a community which proves to be therapeutic. Furthermore, these groups help individuals integrate into society and negotiate tension within society (see Robbins and Anthony, 1975: 79).

Overall, these theories suggest that the new religious and spiritual movements that have emerged post-industrial revolution have played a crucial role in providing a sense of community and belonging for individuals who may have been displaced by societal changes.

Linking the relationship between religious ideologies and their appeal in answering the individual concerns, scholars like Bird (1978) argue that monistic and dualistic ideologies, such as religious or political ideologies, provide a sense of normative structure and clarity for their followers. By adhering to a set of beliefs or principles, individuals are able to resolve the moral ambiguity that exists in the world and validate their own moral "innocence." In other words, by subscribing to a particular ideology, individuals are able to justify their actions and beliefs.

While this is the case with the above-mentioned scholars, Berger and Wilson tried to explain the context of the new religious movements through secularisation theory. Berger (1967) says that the "modern world" confronts religions in two ways. One, they can accommodate themselves to the "modern" situation and realign themselves to the modern social challenges and needs of their followers. Second, they can maintain and entrench the old objectives irrespective of socio-cultural and economic changes and thereby refuse to "accommodate" themselves. In this context, if one were to see New Religious Movements in any religion or tradition be it Christianity or Buddhism or Hinduism, or any other, they are not actually the revivals of traditional religion. Instead, they are adaptations of respective religions to new social circumstances. They have "realigned" themselves to appeal to new conditions created by the increasingly rationalized and secularized societies. "Thus it is that many new movements are themselves testimonies to secularization and they often utilize highly secular methods of Evangelista, financing, publicity, and mobilization of adherents" (Wilson, 1988: 965 quoted in Dawson, 1998: 135). Whereas Wilson (1988) argues that "...the traditional symbolism, liturgy

and aesthetics concern of traditional religion are abandoned for much more pragmatic attitudes and for systems of control, accountancy, propaganda, and even doctrinal content which are closer to the styles of secular enterprise than to traditional religious concerns” (Wilson, 1988: 965 quoted in Dawson, 1998: 135). He further locates the new religious movements in the need for “spiritual solace and reassurance” for modern individuals and argues that “they are also very much the creations of a secularized society” (Wilson, 1988: 965 quoted in Dawson, 1998: 135). Both Berger (1967) and Wilson (1988) think that this secularization of [western] societies has resulted in the creation of new religious movements. So these movements, by nature, cannot be called revivals as most of the new religious movements as most of them are “largely the products of the modern societal system, rather than its opponents” (1998: 135). Hunter (1981) suggests that the emergence of New religious movements can be understood as a response to the alienation and anomie that are characteristic of advanced capitalist societies. He argues that these movements, similar to the perspectives of Berger and Wilson, represent an attempt to impose a sense of meaning and structure on existence by socially reconstructing the world. Hunter describes this as a “demodernizing impulse” in the society, where people seek to return to traditional or religious values and institutions as a way of coping with the rapid changes and uncertainties of modern life. He also suggests that these movements are a way to reimpose institutionally reliable meanings upon existence, which are seen as a solution to the problems caused by the anomie and alienation of advanced capitalist societies.

The cultural significance of NRMs is that it is a response to modernism, whether it is premised on modernist principles or anti-modernist principles. While some NRMs are products of modernity, some are born out of anti-modern tendencies. They are contrary yet they have some convergence. But an interesting aspect to note is that they both sprung out from similar societies and around the same time. Lucas argues that the understanding of the convergence of different religious movements provides us with more cultural clues than their differences as they originate in the same cultural logic though their modalities and trajectories are different. Pentecostal-charismatic revival and New Age movement, he argued, are anti-modern and modernist NRMs respectively and yet they share some commonalities regarding the experience of sacred power in the daily lives of ordinary people, in envisioning their sacred communities, and in offering solace and belief with spiritual healing. He further highlights that the

“[Pentecostal-charismatic revival and the New Age] movements represent attempts to fashion new structures of social cohesion, under the guise of "sacred communities” (Bibby, 1993: 200-2001 quoted in Dawson, 1998: 146). In doing so, however, both are distinguished by their worldwide vision. In a true globalistic manner, they have consciously sought to transcend "conventional denominational, national, and ethnic boundaries." As internationalist movements, they have adapted to "current geopolitical realities and trends" and taken full advantage of the new means of mass communication and travel, as well as mechanisms and forums for cultural exchange” (1998: 146). These new religious movements, as seen, may emanate from the same cultural logic and yet may give rise to different trajectories of movement in the manner they appear, practice religion, and their world-views. It has as well spread to political views of believers as the movements not only cater to spiritual needs but also nurture the political world views of the believers. The Weberian theory that mysticism and spiritual beliefs are incompatible with political and social activism has been challenged by scholars such as Wuthnow (1978) who argue that individuals involved in Eastern mystical practices and human potential groups often have liberal and reformist political views. However, other scholars such as Marin (1975), Schur (1976), and Robbins (1973) have found that certain religious groups, such as the "Jesus Movement" and the "Moon Church," have conservative political beliefs and attitudes. Based on these findings, Robbins & Anthony (1978) proposed that the current rise in deviant religious movements may have long-term negative effects on society and culture.

Charismatic authority in New Religious Movements:

The Greek term *Charismata* appeared in St. Paul’s epistles to the early Christian groups (these epistles are the earliest writings in the New Testament). *Charismata* means spiritual gifts which are bestowed upon individual believers. Possession of Charismata by an individual is an indication of the presence of God. For Paul, these spiritual gifts, though are different in nature, originate from the same Spirit i.e. the spirit of God or the Holy Spirit. Paul had written these epistles at a time when there was a rapid expansion of the early Christian movement and there were schisms among early Church believers. Concerned with these developments, Paul appealed to the early Church believers to maintain unity by invoking the spirit of God and making them aware of the presence of *Charismata* in every believer. He was very desperate to “unify religious

variations” among early Christians and form a universal Christian fellowship basing on the spirit of God (Joose, 2014).

During the 19th century when European society was witnessing rapid social transformation Rudolph Sohm ambitiously looked to Paulian *charisma*, a Christian concept to preserve, sustain and maintain the power of pneumatocracy of early Christianity against the secularizing and democratic reforms and dominating tendencies of the Roman Catholic church. There were many Christian religious debates between different denominations regarding the nature and formation of the early church. Rudolph Sohm intervened in the debate as he wanted to preserve the power of the early Christian church.

“According to [protestant] consensus, the early Church was a voluntary association in which preaching and teaching were performed by the charismatic action of apostles, prophets, and teachers, and matters of administration and worship were conducted by the humanly instituted presbyters/bishops. In this vein, the early local churches were autonomous and democratic, since they were voluntary associations resulting from the believers' decision” (Nardoni, 1982).

Speaking against this,

“He [Sohm] argued that the Church possesses from the beginning the self-awareness of being assembled, not by the free will of the individual believers, but by the word of God and organized by the charisms of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:4-6, 11). Being charismatic by origin and nature, the Church is a spiritual and supernatural entity, independent of any human, ecclesiastical organization and, therefore, free from any human law” (Nardoni, 1982).

Sohm while trying to sanctify the early Church formation wrote that “the Church is a God-given organization” and “Christendom is organized through the distribution of spiritual gifts (*charismata*)” (Sohm, [1892] 1970: 147, 26 quoted in Smith, 1998:43). The individual Christians though are called to the Christ, not all individuals are alike and not all enjoy the same rights, in Sohm’s terms, “there is no abstract equality” and there is only “God-willed superiority and subordination” (Smith, 1998).

According to Sohm, charisma is bestowed upon individuals by God. This power (of charisma) becomes apparent to the individual through divine revelation. The function of this charisma is to lead people. The point that Sohn emphasises is that the charismatic leader of the church is not elected, but is chosen through divine revelation. This can be read as Sohm's justification for the hierarchy in the Catholic Church. Through this justification, Sohm manages to reject the notion that charisma can be conferred upon by humans.

For the same reason, Sohm was disappointed with the routinization of Charisma (transforming charismatic authority into traditional and legal-rational authority) in the Christian movement through elections to the different office-bearers of the Church. To him, this social construction of authority- where bishops, cardinals, and the Pope are bureaucratically elected and receive authority from human hands, is "not a sociological principle but a sin" (Smith, 1998: 45). From Sohm's perspective, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church is analogous to an idol or fetish because it was created by human beings but is venerated as if it were bestowed by God. This routinization of charisma veers away the power of God's will and subjects this authority to the worldly affairs of society. Though these are theological mandates to protect, preserve and sustain the power of Christianity, this cannot be visualized independently of the domain of social processes and worldly affairs.

Though some scholars gave psychological explanations for charismatic people and their authority, focusing both on a charismatic leader's unique abilities to sway over his followers and followers' weak egos which result in looking for charismatic leaders, Sociologists opined that they are "stereotypical or idealized relationships". The proper delineation of charisma as a sociological concept began with the work of Weber on charismatic authority. Weber expanded the meaning of charisma from being just a Christian concept to a more sociological and analytical category which then is helpful in the understanding of any religious group or any authority (political, military, and other cultural contexts). Weber defines charisma as follows – "a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (Weber, 1968: 241). Weber also writes, "These are as such not accessible to the

ordinary person but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them, the individual concerned is treated as a leader” (Weber, 1947: 358-359). In other words, Weber visualized and expanded the meaning of Charisma from the earlier theological notions by bringing the discussion on the location of the Charisma. The “gift” of charisma and its location is seen not only as heaven-sent, but also something that followers impute special powers to the leaders, making them charismatic. This spin is very interesting as it brings charisma into the domain of sociology. Because, knowing the locus of charisma and attribution of charisma to the leader by followers is one thing and for Weber, the locus of the Charisma lies in the followers who impute Charisma to certain individuals, by implication social authority. However, he also says that charismatic people time and again need social validation. Because the attribution of special or extraordinary powers to certain individuals by the followers “regardless of whether this quality is actual, alleged, or presumed” (Weber, 1922) is not an eternal affair and is based on, in Weber terms, a social contract where the charismatic leader needs to prove himself/herself time and again. Thus, “the actual personal qualities that trigger these imputations were clearly of secondary importance to Weber who maintained that “[w]hat alone is important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority, by his ‘followers’ or ‘disciples” (Weber, 1922 [1978]: 242). By making this the locus of Charisma as to how it originates and sustains itself, Weber had displaced two interpretations of the Charisma. One is the earlier theological meaning of Charisma where it is Godly bestowed. Second, charisma is fully bound up by an individual’s unique qualities. However, what is even more interesting is: why or under what conditions do the followers attribute charisma to certain individuals in the first place?

Oommen (1967) contends that charisma is “ultimately a product of social structure and hence its nature and content will undergo a transformation as the society itself changes” (Oommen, 1967: 85). He further maintains that “the changes in the features of the social structure are capable of changing the character of charismatics” (1967: 88). So he proposes “in order to understand genuine charisma the analysis must be directed to the social situations from which the charismatic figure originates and within which he operates and also to the character of the message he gives. In other words, it is when the content of the message given by the

charismatic is appropriate to the social climate that he is likely to be accepted as a leader” (1967: 85).

Scholars like Friedland (1964) and Bourdieu (1987) accuse Weber’s charisma as not being clear and say he occasionally was tempted to locate the charisma in an individual’s mysterious and unique quality. But Shills, while clarifying the concept, says, Charisma in the narrower and original sense is the state or quality of being produced by receipt of the gifts of grace. In Weber’s usage, charisma is, in the first instance, a property of conduct and personality regarded by those who respond to it as a manifestation of endowment with, or possession by, some divine power. Weber did not insist that the person really be “possessed” or “endowed”; only that he be thought to be possessed by or endowed with these qualities. (Shills, 1965: 200). Following the work of Weber, many scholars who worked on the relationship between charismatic leaders and their followers potently identified the role of followers in the formation or creation of a charismatic leader. While Weber agrees with the exceptional qualities of a charismatic individual, he also says that charisma doesn’t last forever unless it is not worked upon by the charismatic individual in meeting the spiritual demand and social needs of followers.

The recent literature, on the relationship between charismatic leaders and their followers, also indicated that this authority the followers grant the leader is neither absolute nor irreversible. “The charismatic bond must be periodically refreshed and may deteriorate or disappear altogether” (E Prophet, 2016). Precisely for these reasons, Charismatic leaders tend to institutionalize their charisma. Even the followers incline toward the routinization of charisma because it assures them of a more orderly life (Bromley, 2014). Bromley (2014) says it “may inaugurate the process of creating traditional authority early in their careers, establishing churches and organizations to systematize their work, and transferring authority to scriptures or procedures”. Speaking on the strategies of Charismatic leaders in retaining and maintaining their charisma and their bond with their followers, Baker (1993) identifies an internal process that the followers are made to undergo, which she/he calls “charismatization” where the followers learn about the true greatness from each other and appreciate it and valorize it. This process is similar to Weber’s institutionalization of charisma or routinization of charisma. Both Weber (1922) and Baker (1993) agree on the importance of this process, for charismatic leaders, to retain their

charisma. However, Baker (1993) has also alerted that the relationship between the charismatic leader and the followers is dynamic and unidentical. In other words, though the locus of charisma lies in the followers (also, by implication, charismatic individuals' efforts to retain that charisma), the individual followers are not passive. Their meaning of charisma and why they attribute charisma to the leaders is an interesting insight that gives layers to the understanding of the role of followers in the information of charismatic leaders. While some followers see them as Divine humans, others perceive them as insightful people and various others merely see them as preachers and some may have a mixed view. These varied perceptions may find an explanation in the nature of individual personalities and their experiences. But their connection with the leader is certain and as Baker (1993) and Lewis (2003) have argued, they experience an emotional connection with the charismatic leader at one point or the other.

Positing the concept of charisma as a sociological category by premising on different scholars is one aspect. Equally important is to see the charisma and charismatic people and their dynamic relationship with larger socio-cultural dynamics. While Sohm visualized them as preservers of the Christian order, Weber accorded general characterization to them as being disruptors, innovators, and creators and those who spur change and are different from maintainers in the society and argued they arise in crisis times. According to Bromely (2014), a crisis moment occurs when preexisting cultural narratives no longer offer plausible interpretations of lived realities and/or when social arrangements do not allow for the attainment of culturally defined values and goals. This was explained further in the previous paragraph. Wallis (1982) and Joose (2014) have argued that the cultural upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s was responsible for the emergence of many new religious movements in western societies and their subsequent rise to prominence. The leaders of these movements provided answers to the psychological and emotional challenges that came along with prosperity, as well as ways to address the impression that traditional values were hollow. Therefore, charismatic leadership is understood to be situational as well as interactive, requiring participation from followers and a message that is resonant with issues that are relevant in today's world.

Weber believed that charisma usually originates in times of crisis. While agreeing with this, Oommen (1967), following Edward Shills (1965), says that charismatics originate in a

certain “social climate” and that they are system stabilizers and conserves as well. So, whether the charismatics are conservers, disruptors, innovators, and stabilizers, their genesis is social, economic, and cultural. Personal traits may qualify certain people as candidates for charismatic faith, but charisma is a social status, not a personal attribute. The crucial question, then, is why does the public often invest in groups and individuals with charismatic status. Studying the leader is easy, but the more difficult task, the more vital one, is to understand the followers (Smith, 1998: 53). To ascertain this, we may have to understand the “purpose” of charismatic people, the socio-cultural location of this “purpose” and followers’ faith in the church, the pastor, and the message.

For instance, the charismatic Christian pastors claim that they are blessed with holy-spirit (their repeated enunciations and speaking in tongues testify this), preach the prosperity gospel, amass followers, and seek donations from the followers. If one were to theoretically imply the concept of charisma to understand the charismatic Christian pastors (more precisely, King’s temple church pastor), the locus of their charisma seems to be flowing from different locations. Because they exhibit uniquely different managerial and public speaking skills with seemingly good command over the Bible (charisma based on unique qualities), they claim that they are Holy-spirited (Sohm’s notion of charisma); they have numerous followers who attribute charisma to the pastor by way of allegiance and donating to the church and they are being validated by the kind of message, in this case, prosperity gospel, they deliver. (Weber and Oommen’s notion of Charisma). In other words, the connection, if one were to make, between the charismatic pastor and followers is established through the kind of message the pastors preach (prosperity gospel) and its validation by way of allegiance and donations to the church. It is established that the locus of the charisma of the pastors lies at the heart of followers’ attribution of the charisma and social validation of the message. The following chapters tries to explore reasons as to why these followers attribute charisma to the pastor and validate him and his message? The answer potentially lies in the sociological relevance of the message itself and because that is where the faith in the charismatic church and adulation for the charismatic pastor is built around. Also, that is where religious change contingent upon social change lies.

Chapter 3

An observation of The King's Temple Church

The King's Temple Church, founded and led by Pastor Samuel Patta, is one of the fastest growing churches in India. It began with a small gathering of 10 people in 1986, but has since grown to a congregation of more than 10,000. The King's Temple Church is known as a "Word-based Church" with a focus on teaching that everything happens according to God's Word. The followers of the church are taught not to depend on any human being, but to believe and depend only on God as their source. This church can be classified under the Neo-Pentecostal movement which gave rise to new independent churches led by a preacher who is said to be charismatic by appealing to a large crowd. This church does not have affiliations with classical Pentecostal churches or other traditional churches. This church is known for preaching the prosperity gospel.

This independent church is observed to be employing effective strategies in appealing to the followers. The King's Temple Church meets its attendants in multiple locations across the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad, making it easy for people to find a campus that is convenient for them. The Central Campus is located in Secunderabad and holds services on Friday evenings. The Sunday services are held at the SVIT Auditorium, Patny Centre, Secunderabad. The West Campus is located in Kukatpally, Hyderabad, and holds services on Sunday mornings. By having multiple campuses, this church makes it easy for people to attend the services regardless of their location. Different sessions focusing on different themes will be conducted at different parts of Hyderabad. Apart from these locations their prayer services are held in other neighboring states occasionally. The King's Temple Church has an international presence also, with connections to churches and religious communities around the world. This is evident in the frequent visits of pastors from foreign countries, who are invited to deliver sermons and share their message. Additionally, Pastor Samuel Patta also regularly visits foreign churches, fostering exchange of ideas and strengthening transnational ties.

Calvary temple is the biggest independent church that is well known and is situated in Hyderabad. Apart from this church there are a lot of local independent churches that preach a similar gospel are located in Hyderabad and each church strives to increase their attendance of church followers. These independent pastors are often criticized by the people of other faiths as well as the traditional Christians that they are taking advantage by misleading people by brainwashing them.

The Pastor who is perceived as Charismatic says that the vision of the King's Temple Church is to build every member of the congregation into a strong and committed Christian. This he says, is accomplished through a combination of worship, teaching, and personal development opportunities. The pastor prays in tongues as he enters the stage during the prayers. Speaking in tongues is an indication of the gift of the Holy Spirit according to the Pentecostal tradition. A background music is played while he speaks in tongues. This creates a holy ambiance and some followers from the gathering are observed to be crying and confessing emotionally during the session.

Merlyn Patta, the wife of Pastor Samuel Patta, is known to be a powerful influencer in spreading the message of the church. The couple is often seen together, they showcase themselves as an ideal couple, with a strong bond built on love and happiness. They are known to be very presentable, always wearing modern and branded clothes, which gives them an attractive appearance. Together, they have been able to attract many followers and help spread the message of the church to a wider audience. Pastor Merlyn connects with people and her strong faith filled messages has helped her to become an influential figure in the church. The couple's devotion to their faith and the way they live their life serves as an inspiration to many. They flaunt their riches and own luxury cars and showcase them as God's manifestation for their faith and encourage the followers to be prosperous. The pastors use powerful and convincing language to connect with their congregation on a deep emotional level, and their words are often filled with passion and conviction. The children of the senior pastors, a son and a daughter who are called as junior pastors, take part in preaching and other church activities. They are an attraction and inspiration to the youth followers, as they are seen as role models and examples of how to live a life of faith. They are well-dressed and presentable, they wear modern and stylish

clothes, which makes them relatable to the youth in the church. They are actively involved in the church activities and try to connect with the youth and help them understand the message of the church in a way that is relevant to their lives. They serve as a testament to the importance of passing on the faith to the next generation. One cannot see such a practice in traditional churches, traditional churches do not involve family members. One can observe that this church like other independent churches is itself operating like a corporate entity running a family enterprise. People of other faiths see this flaunting of wealth in a scornful way while the followers see it as an inspiration.

The King's Temple Church recognizes the importance of addressing the spiritual needs of its followers who are in business. To that end, the church has designed a separate session specifically for this group of followers. This is an interesting feature of the king's temple church which is generally not observed among other traditional and denominational churches. During these sessions, business owners and entrepreneurs are motivated and encouraged by the pastor through his teachings and preachings about entrepreneurship from the Bible. These sessions are designed to provide guidance and inspiration for those who are striving to build and grow their businesses, while also staying true to their faith. The session not only addresses the followers in terms of their business but also in terms of their spiritual growth and development.

An exclusive session is conducted on Friday's for youth. The junior pastors conduct this session and the message is tailored for youth and also engage them with worship by music and dance. This session is an important aspect of the King's Temple Church's outreach to young people, as it provides them with a supportive and welcoming environment where they can explore and deepen their faith. The junior pastors are relatable and understand the unique challenges that young people face, and their message resonates with the youth. The session is also an opportunity for the youth to connect with their peers and build a sense of community within the church. The youth session helps the youth to grow spiritually, morally and socially.

The church's management has set up a separate session for the children also, known as the bible class. The bible class is filled with playful activities, games, drawing, singing, along with teaching them morals and bible stories. This allows the children to have fun while learning

about their faith. The parents attend the main sermon during this time, which allows them to focus on the teachings and messages of the church without any distractions. This also allows for the children to make new friends and enjoy the fun. Overall, the king's temple church has created a welcoming and inclusive environment for families and youth to come together and learn about their faith.

Although it is said that people from different socioeconomic backgrounds and different age groups attend the king's temple church it appears that the followers to be primarily middle-aged individuals, many of whom attend services with their spouses and children. According to my observation there are very few elderly people attending the church. Additionally, a significant number of youth who come alone can also be seen in attendance at the church. Many of them I have interacted with claimed that they were Hindus before they got baptized. They claimed that their family members are not happy with them coming to the church, however they wished that God would change their heart for good.

The ambiance of the King's Temple Church is noteworthy. The moment you enter the church, you are greeted by the volunteers who are polite. A dedicated church management sees to it that the church is kept clean and there is order. The church management is very alert and they give special attention to the newcomers and make sure they are comfortable. They are readily available and clear doubts and provide guidance to the newcomers. It is observed that while the pastor delivers his message in English, a translator immediately translates the message into Telugu with the same effect. This can greatly increase the accessibility of the message to those who may not understand English fluently or at all. This practice allows for both educated and uneducated members of the congregation to fully understand and engage with the message being shared. It also promotes inclusivity and helps to break down language barriers within the community. This trend of translating the message is observed in preachings of most of the Pastors who address a larger congregation.

The infrastructure of the king's temple church is high-end and modern, with state-of-the-art instruments that add to the overall experience. The use of video presentations during sermons adds a dynamic and engaging element to the service. The presentations are

visually appealing and catch the attention easily, and they are tailored to complement the message being delivered. The background music is also carefully played and is in sync with the context of the sermon. The combination of the powerful message, the visual appeal, and the background music creates an immersive and uplifting experience. The seating arrangement is also well thought out, providing ample space for the congregation to sit comfortably and take in the service. The lighting is also perfect, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere. Overall, the King's Temple Church's ambience is set in such a way it exudes positivity, and a sense of community. It is evident in every aspect of the church that they have a strong organizational set up that makes it an inviting place. The charismatic leader is often characterized by their ability to create a powerful and engaging atmosphere. This can be seen in the ambience of their church or place of worship, which is often designed to be welcoming and uplifting. Additionally, the attire of the pastors, often dressed in formal and well-groomed clothing, adds to this atmosphere of professionalism and authority. The way they conduct themselves, with confidence and assurance, further adds to their charm and attractiveness.

Pastor Samuel Patta is also a well-known televangelist, and his sermons are widely broadcasted on various television channels. He preaches in Telugu on channels such as Aradhana, Shubavatha, in Hindi on channels such as Subhsandesh, and in English on channels such as God. This allows him to reach a diverse audience and share his message of faith with people who speak different languages. The reach of televangelism is vast and Pastor Samuel Patta's sermons being aired on different language channels is an example of how technology and media can be utilized to spread the message. The King's Temple Church recognizes the importance of utilizing social media and technology in order to reach a wider audience and propagate its message of faith. The church maintains an active presence on various social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, where they share updates, sermons, and other content related to the church's activities and teachings. Additionally, the church has its own website where visitors can learn more about the church's history, mission, and upcoming events. They also stream their services live on their website and social media platforms for those who are unable to attend in person.

The church also uses technology to facilitate online giving and donations, making it easy for members and supporters to contribute financially to the church's mission. At the end of their YouTube session they provide a QR Code for seamless payment. The envelope they provide in the church for tithing also has a QR code for enabling the followers to pay. An interesting feature of the King's Temple Church is the way in which the pastor subtly encourages followers to donate to the church. The pastor often emphasizes that the church is investing a lot of resources into providing an ecstatic experience for the followers, from providing the state-of-the-art infrastructure to the visually appealing video presentations and background music. In his prayer meetings the pastor often points out that people often spend money on things like movies and food, but hesitate to give to God. He makes it clear that the church needs support to continue providing high-quality experience, and it's important for followers to give back to the church, as it is a way of giving back to God. It's important to note that the pastor's appeal is not aggressive or forceful, but rather a subtle reminder that the church needs support to continue its mission. It is also important to mention that, the pastor also claims that the church provides a lot of community services, and the money collected is used to help the less fortunate in the society.

From my observations from the church visits it is observed that the prayer meeting starts with the junior pastors (the son and daughter of the senior Pastors) addressing the gathering followed by a short prayer thanking the lord and sets the stage. Senior Pastor Merlyn Patta also delivers a short prayer asking the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of those present. The pastor preaches that God promises and makes miracles in the lives of his believers and that people should ask and depend on God.

This is followed by personal testimonies of the followers which help to strengthen the faith of those in attendance. While some claim to have cured from prolonged illness and other ailments, others claim to have gotten a decent job, built a home, and other material gains after seeking God. The service includes a message from Samuel Patta, based entirely on the Word of God, and an altar call for those who wish to make a commitment to the Lord. The prayer session is almost spontaneous with worshiping songs and music. The followers are encouraged to dance, clap and sing aloud.

The pastor emphasizes the importance of God in human lives. He stresses there should be *“hunger for God and God will not disappoint hungry hearts”*. While he emphasizes the importance of God, he juxtaposes that with the stressing on the Devil. In other words, God doesn't exist in his own right but to protect the people from the Devil. The pastor understates the Christianity as a religion and quite actively defines it in relational terms. He says Christianity is an experiential relationship between the person who died and rose again i.e. God/Christ and humans. It is not a religious relationship but a genuine relationship. Christ is not a religious God but a covenant keeping God. God fulfills his covenant with the one who keeps the commandments. He further says that the so-called religious Christians (implying the Christians of other denominations) only pray as a ceremony but a true Christian must invite God into his life. Addressing the congregation the pastor stresses that God comes to you if you have belief in God and pray.

An important feature of the king's temple church, like many other independent churches, is their dedicated session for the testimonies of the followers. This session provides an opportunity for the members of the congregation to share their personal experiences of how God has worked in their lives, and how their faith has helped them overcome struggles and challenges. This session is not only a way for the followers to express their gratitude to God but also an opportunity for the audience to be inspired and encouraged by the stories of others. The testimonies as far as I have observed are very powerful, emotional and moving. This session is also an important aspect of building a sense of community within the church, as it allows people to connect with one another and share their common experiences.

The concert of seeking donations from the Church followers is a unique feature of the prosperity gospel churches that I have also observed in the king's temple church during my visits. Donating is attached with an element of empowerment in giving money to the church, a manifestation of faith in God, and also the testimony of personal prosperity. The way charismatic pastors seek donations is a very interesting dimension to look for. The preaching of the message by the Pastor is succeeded by the donation process. While prosperity gospel stresses on the essentiality of belief in God for both material and mental prosperity, seeking donations stresses on the evidence and demonstration of the belief. For instance, questions such as what is the

evidence/proof that one loves and believes in God? How does one demonstrate the belief in God?- are central in seeking donations to the Church in the name of God. But this throws up another provoking question: Doesn't mere prayers/belief without donations suffice to demonstrate one's faith in God?

The pastor says that Covid has devastated so many livelihoods and so have the many pastors suffered financial problems across the world. He continues to preach that blessed people like business people, influential people and people who have the ability to serve the people should come forward and serve the pandemic sufferers. He said that many influential people and well-to-do pastors have already come forward to support the needy. Addressing the gathering and viewers across platforms the pastor called out that people should as well come forward to support. While Pastor Samuel Patta evokes- *God loved us and he sacrificed*, he underlines the 'message' that love demands sacrifice. Then he goes on to ask *if you love God, what have you sacrificed for him? If not, it's fake love. What is the evidence?*

The process of seeking donations to Church in the name of God moves further when the Pastor invokes the quality of a donation and drafts this logic to measure the faith. For instance, the pastor narrates the story of a person who offers his loving wife an expensive diamond ring instead of a brass ring. And, stresses that there is nothing called expensive when we offer it to the loved ones. He further emphasizes that *"God is not very cheap"; "God loves a cheerful giver"; "whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows generously will reap generously"; "It is not a bribe to God, it is a seed of investment for God to reward you back"; "God is a rewarder..God doesn't see what you give but sees what percentage you give"*. And he challenges *"If you love him, show it with quality donations"* (meaning, material expression). The preaching provokes the followers to show the 'proof'. Also, interestingly and paradoxically the lyrics of one song goes like this: *"Devudu bangaram adagatledhu vendi adagatledhu... nee hridayam koruthunnadu"* (*God does not seek Gold neither does silver... he just seeks pure heart*). The whole preaching in my observation is designed to motivate individuals to donate to the church. To affirm this message, the charismatic pastor gives equal footing to the Church along with God. He criticises any act of separation of the God from the Church. *"Love God but not the Church"* is unacceptable to the Charismatic pastor. It doesn't suffice to motivate the people to

donate, it is equally important, for Charismatic Pastor, to show the place where followers are required to donate. This, he does- by actively placing God in the vicinity of the Church, the sacred place and by affirming the Church's importance for the interaction with God. But, quite evidently, that gathering place is not an actual church in the traditional sense. It is an auditorium with good infrastructure. While tithing and donations are common in any religious community. These independent churches are often criticized by others as these churches do not have transparency and are often accused of using the money for personal accumulation. In some cases independent pastors are accused of directing the money into political campaigns like in the case of the Pastor K.A.Paul.

This church clearly falls into the category of independent churches of neo-charismatic movement preaching the prosperity gospel. A deeper analysis of the pastor's prosperity message and the individual's responses in the neoliberal context are discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 4

Roots of Prosperity Gospel/Theology

Broadly, prosperity Theology is a North American phenomenon and it has spread to different parts of the western world and other countries. It emerged from the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. Speaking on the origins of Pentecostalism and its spread, Anderson (2005) argues that it has truly become a global phenomenon, challenging different faiths and even Christian denominations. Though it is a North American phenomenon and has spread to different countries, these movements have also been home-grown and indigenous. The idea that God rewards those who are faithful with money and material wealth, known as Prosperity theology, is a relatively recent concept that gained popularity in the 20th century with the rise of religious media such as radio and television. Early pioneer of religious media, Copeland popularized the word-faith prosperity gospel during the mid-1960 and began to gain significant popularity in the developing world during the later decades of the century, eventually Rex Humbard and Kenneth Hagin, used these platforms to exhort their audiences to send in money to support their technologically expensive ministries. This eventually evolved into a theology that saw money as a proof of faith and that God would return it to the giver tenfold or more. Prosperity theology caught on more significantly in the developing world during the economic dislocations of the last decades of the century. In Latin America, it began to displace the more other-worldly focus of conventional Pentecostalism in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Similarly, in Africa and Asia, where economic transition and corruption in the former and unprecedented economic advances in the latter forced people into new methods of coping with global realities, prosperity theology has been one of the methods that people have turned to. It is important to consider the rise of internet access and social media that made it easier for people to access and share religious information and ideas, which also facilitated the emergence of virtual communities and online religious practices. NRMs are often able to take advantage of these technological developments in order to reach new members and spread their message.

Anderson (2005) says “pentecostalism’s rapid expansion in the twentieth century was not only due to the labours of missionaries from North America and Western Europe to Africa, Asia and Latin America, but was especially the result of the spontaneous contextualization of the Pentecostal message by thousands of local preachers” Speaking on the Indian case, Anderson (2005) narrates that during the early 1900s, a revival occurred at Pandita Ramabai's Mukti Mission in Pune, India. Young women who had been baptized by the Spirit reported experiencing visions, falling into trances, and speaking in tongues. This revival predates the Azusa Street revival in the United States. Ramabai believed that the Holy Spirit was using this revival to create an independent Indian Christianity. These Pentecostal revivals were not just movements from the western world to other countries, but also significant movements within these continents themselves. Overall, this revival at Mukti Mission was a significant event in the history of Christianity, as it helped to shape the development of an independent, Indian version of the faith. This might have also worked for the rapid spread of prosperity theology.

The underlying feature of prosperity theology is that it evokes the belief that prosperity is God’s will for every Christian. It claims that prosperity (wealth and health) is God’s manifestation for every Christian and there are certain divine principles, if followed, that will guarantee prosperity. In other words, it holds “that God wants the faithful to be prosperous, in terms of finances, good health, good marriages, and relationships. Its practitioners [charismatic pastors] promise physical, emotional, financial, relational, and spiritual healing or prosperity for anyone who has the right belief-filled confession, in which believers have the power to speak things into being. (Ericksen, 2019). The faith of an individual Christian in God is a testament to his/her prosperity. Scholars point out that prosperity is an important biblical theme, though not as pervasive as liberation is. But, this theme-prosperity and the prosperity gospel have acquired enormous significance in Christianity in different countries. Their global appeal and the wider social-economic and geographical contexts cannot be separated.

It is important to understand the characteristics of the different phases of Pentecostalism to ascertain and contextualize the present churn of prosperity gospel churches. Scholars of religion have identified three important waves of Pentecostalism which are classified as the

“renewal” movement. They are namely classical pentecostalism, charismatic Pentecostalism, and neo-Pentecostalism.

Classical Pentecostalism traces its roots back to the Azusa Street Revival of 1906 and includes denominations such as the Assemblies of God and Church of God in Christ. These denominations are characterized by their emphasis on speaking in tongues, faith healing, and other supernatural practices.

The charismatic movement, which emerged in the 1960s, also shares many of these Pentecostal distinctions, but it occurs within mainline Protestant denominations, as well as Roman Catholic and Orthodox congregations. Charismatic believers usually remain part of non-Pentecostal denominations and might even describe themselves as Pentecostal Christians, but they are not affiliated with the classical Pentecostal denominations. Examples include the El Shaddai movement in the Philippines.

Neo-Pentecostals are part of newer independent churches that are more frequently associated with prosperity messages, such as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Brazil. These churches are not affiliated with classical Pentecostalism or the charismatic movement and are considered as a separate group (K Attanasi, 2012).

The term “renewal” is a broader term to include Pentecostals, charismatics, and neo-Pentecostals despite there being considerable overlaps. Neo-Pentecostalism emphasizes prosperity theology which advocates material prosperity i.e. wealth and health. This has gained momentum and acceptance within charismatic Christianity from the late 1990s. During the 2000s and later, global south and post-colonial societies have witnessed a significant rise of evangelical-pentecostal churches teaching prosperity theology. The interesting question to pose is why there is a lot of appeal to prosperity theology in general and in the Global South and post-colonial societies in particular. Many scholars have attempted to study this phenomenon and scholars like Jenkins (2006) have pointed out that the poor citizens of developing and underdeveloped countries often find the prosperity theology appealing because of their economic subjugation and the prosperity theology’s emphasis on miracles.

The discussion on prosperity theology will be fruitful if one brings ideological separations between liberation theology with that of prosperity theology. As both these theologies stemmed from the same socio-economic contexts, how each theology from the same religion responded to the pervasive and rapid socio-economic change that undergird the capitalist transformation and addressed pressing social problems that inflict upon individuals is very crucial.

Weber has illustrated that socio-economic class is an important factor with regards to the practice of religion. In his estimation, for the working class, religion can be salvationist as well as utilitarian (Weber, 1993 [1922] cited in Chesnut, 2003: 220). Andrew Chesnut (2003) builds on this Weberian point to draw a distinction between liberation theology and prosperity theology. The former is critical of capitalism for its exaltation of profit over everything else. Liberation theology goes even further to argue for “overthrowing an economic system that was viewed as inherently exploitative” (Chesnut, 2003: 216). On the other hand, Chesnut characterises prosperity theology as pragmatic for its concern with “immediate crises and afflictions that plague the disprivileged classes more often and more acutely than the affluent” (2003: 220). It stresses on that God intends the individual to be prosperous and also propounds that individual actions have to be taken in order to attain prosperity.

The prosperity gospel and neoliberal morality

While how the market dynamics and economies are structured is important in understanding the neoliberal capitalist order, it is equally important to understand what kind of cultural- moral fabric this capitalist order intends to create and induce the same in the society. With respect to state, individual, and their relationship, there are two important aspects relating to neoliberal capitalism. One, as Harvey (2005) argues, neoliberalism marks the ideological shift vis-a-vis “the purpose of the state from one that has responsibility” (Harvey, 2005 cited in Wrenn, 2019: 425) for the overall wellbeing of its citizens and protection of their livelihoods against the market exploitation and exigencies to one that has the responsibility to promote and protect the market itself. Second, as Wrenn (2015) illustrates how neoliberalism creates

individuals who perceive that they cannot be dependent upon anyone. Individuals are socialised to believe that they are responsible for their own needs. In this way, neoliberalism produces individuals who are exclusively attentive to their own needs. Moreover, the dominance of these ideas leads to the undermining of the collective ethos (see Wrenn, 2019: 425-426). The preachers of the prosperity gospel believe and preach that the individuals whose faith in God is not so strong cannot have God's manifestation. Samuel Patta's preaching mirrors this prosperity and neoliberal alliance very evidently. He clearly calls out to his followers to stop expecting from the government. The following are his words from his online preaching videos from youtube.

God is a rewarder. Amen! Your reward doesn't come, necessarily from an earthly institution. It doesn't necessarily come from the men or the Church but it comes from the God, the God Almighty. You will be rewarded by Him for your service. God will make sure that you will live long. No medicine can guarantee that. God will make sure that the days that you live, will be in peace. Nothing in this world can give you that.

God's plans are for your welfare, not for your disaster. Even what seems like a disaster now, is going to turn into good for you.! Don't try to wriggle out of it in your own strength. Let Him handle the situation and turn everything around, while you stay strong in the Lord. Be faithful to Him. Be faithful in your prayer life. Be faithful in what God has entrusted you with and wait for Him to promote you and wait for Him to elevate you, wait for Him to deliver you. Wait. Because there is a purpose. Because in that situation, in that heat, in that fire, he is moulding you.

From the above lines one can understand how the onus of the state in providing welfare to its citizens is shifted to God and how the individual is supposed to pray and wait patiently through hardships. Prosperity gospel preachers emphasize that God is the only provider and he alone can uplift and elevate an individual and bless him abundantly if one has enough faith in the lord. In the wake of neoliberalism where the government is unable to provide employment and calling out for privatisation and encouraging entrepreneurship this prosperity gospel may provide hope to the believers. The anti-welfare rhetoric of Prosperity Gospel preachers also castigates those whose beliefs are not strong enough to make God's promises manifest.

By analysing the churches that are preaching prosperity gospel one would also understand the capitalist workings of the church and how it promotes neoliberal capitalist morality alongside harnessing the socio-economic issues that this capitalist order has been creating. For example the king's temple church provides direct guidance for businessmen, the members of the church help each other by providing micro-credits, and support each other in businesses. As Chesnut (2003) argues, prosperity theology "reinforces and... promotes the existing global capitalist order" (Chesnut, 2003: 215). The very birth of the prosperity gospel is the result of neoliberal capitalist market exigencies. It is a perfect fusion of the biblical theme of prosperity and the neoliberal market aspirational anxieties at various levels. Gospel preachers across different countries such as "China, the Philippines, Nigeria, and many other nations encourage their followers to realize potential through hard work, entrepreneurship, sobriety, and wise investments" (2003: 215). And, most of these churches have a similar pattern of preaching, conducting prayer meetings, emphasis on gospel message through personal testimonies, and seeking donations from the followers to manifest their faith in God. Even their organizational setup and functioning not only look similar but is also a feature of capitalism. Speaking on this, Wrenn (2019) writes:

Prosperity Gospel churches have embraced the aesthetics of corporate America in their large, non-descript worship headquarters equipped with stages instead of altars, typically with a globe as a backdrop instead of a cross. Services function more like conventions or TED Talks and the preachers look more like bankers than clergy. As well, these churches have adopted the standard capitalist operating and management practices: large payrolls; retail stores offering everything from books to clothing to home décor; production studios to polish the weekly services to a high shine for the millions in the global audience watching online (Ehrenreich, 2009; Walton, 2009).

Also, the charismatic pastors narrate their own success stories as to how they became rich and powerful as an example of prosperity because of God's miracles. They stress that "through their unwavering faith they were able to overcome poverty and self-doubt and become the champions that their flock strive to be" (Chesnut, 2015: 216). The following message is derived

from the preachings of the Pastor Samuel Patta to his followers. The message is *we have carved a successful and prosperous path with our deep faith and positive confession to God and you will also become prosperous if you have faith in God and sow seeds (donations) in the name of God*. As Chesnut (2003) argues that the prosperous preachers and “their cohorts have charted prosperous paths through the familiar waters of the capitalist marketplace” (Chesnut, 2003: 216). Furthermore, “they preach to their followers that their own paths to prosperity are to be navigated in the same seas of capitalism” (2003: 216). Samuel Patta asks the followers What do you want to do in life? And then asks them to look at signs that God is showing them. What is the call of God in my life? Am I called to preach? Am I called into the ministry? Am I called into business? Am I called into a profession? What am I called to do? Enquire! Your degree should not determine your profession. How many doctors do we have that are preachers today? In the world there are many people like that. Doctors or engineers, they have studied to acquire a degree and they ended up becoming pastors. Paise God! Hallelujah! That doesn't mean you stop studying. You keep doing what you know is right. But while you are doing that, ask the lord, what is the direction of my life? Samuel Patta in one of his preaching collected from YouTube video, shares his personal experience of turning towards God, he explained that he was a Chartered Accountant before he was called to minister the God's message.

Scholars like Ehrenreich (2009), Walton (2009) and Bowler (2015) argue that the prosperity gospel is a micro-model of capitalism. Bowler writes:

The preachers hold the “means of production”—they are the gatekeepers, the owners of sacred space, and the liaison to God; the congregation are “the workers”—apart from church service, they volunteer their time to keep the church running and are charged to recruit other workers/ worshippers into the fold. The call to tithe is outright extraction, and the support from church volunteers is exploitation (Bowler, 2015).

As I have described in the earlier chapter, the king's temple church is run by the pastor and his family and they are the owners of the sacred space, they employ people in helping them maintain the church. Dedicated volunteers also provide services to the church and help in running the church.

Regarding profits Samuel patta preaches that I don't think anybody out there does not want profit. Everyone wants and desires profit, blessing and grace, everyone of us...God puts that desire in our heart. The only thing is don't go after it in deceptive ways and through compromise and through illegal illicit ways. But desiring profit is not wrong at all. Desiring prosperity and success is not wrong at all but let God do that..... God will teach you.....Amen!

If one were to observe carefully, the charismatic pastor teaches prosperity gospel with the support of Biblical verses whose core theme is material and mental well being which is bestowed to the individual's with high degree of faith. Then he moves on to narrate the Biblical stories to assert the importance of sacrifice that one requires to do to God. Then he characterizes the sacrifice in material expression and leads the followers to donate to the Church. The volunteers of the church also provide an envelope cover to the church goers at the entrance itself and would come and personally collect them at the end of the service.

It is one thing to say that it is an offshoot of neoliberal capitalist morality and sustains and promotes the neoliberal capitalist order, it is quite another to know why this message seduces and see its connections with the economic precarity of neoliberalism. It is important to understand not only the relationship between the Prosperity Gospel and neoliberal capitalist morality, but also the reasons why its message seduces individuals in the context of the economic precarity of neoliberalism. Berger (2010) argues that contemporary Pentecostalism has a strong connection to modern capitalism, describing it as a "carrier of modern capitalist culture". On the other hand, Ruccio (2015) posits that the Prosperity Gospel supports neoliberalism through its emphasis on individual responsibility and self-governance. According to Ruccio, the Prosperity Gospel serves as a spiritual version of neoliberalism, offering refuge to the individuals from the harsh realities of the market (see Wrenn, 2019: 431). He asserts that it is a theology that reinforces the idea of personal responsibility and fault, and provides a set of social practices that align with these ideals. The Prosperity Gospel has turned the traditional message of Christianity on its head, by fusing the biblical theme of prosperity with the aspirational anxieties of neoliberal capitalism. Therefore, one can argue that the Prosperity Gospel is a fusion of the biblical theme of prosperity and neoliberal capitalist aspirational anxieties. The next chapter aims to understand

how the individual's anxieties are addressed by charismatic pastors with their seductive message of the Prosperity Gospel.

Examining the reasons for its wider popularity and the religious economy, Chesnut (2003) says that “...believers who follow the prosperity gospel do so because they have consciously chosen to practice this particular brand of Christianity” (Chesnut, 2003: 216). He further says that as the ‘religious consumers’ have the freedom to choose from different spiritual “firms” belonging to different faiths, “[t]hose firms that offer the most appealing religious products in the free marketplace of faith are the ones that prosper the most and failure to cater to the tastes and preferences of consumers in a competitive religious economy almost always means stagnation and demise” (2003: 216-217). The decline of mainline Protestantism in Western Europe and the United States, he argues, is an example of how these churches failed to adapt to change according to the spiritual needs of the believers in the ever-growing precarity of the neoliberal capitalist order. It is at this level that the preachers of the gospel aim at their followers. In other words, the preaching should resonate with the followers in one or other aspect of their ‘neoliberal capitalist life’ and their aspirations. In a world compounded by multiple forms of exploitative structures, the concept of a miracle that the gospel preachers propagate appeals to the followers by providing spiritual healing, temporary relief and hope for the future. Therefore, “there is near perfect convergence between preaching intended for individuals and Christians desirous of their own personal “breakthroughs” or miracles of health and wealth” (2003: 218). So, it is interesting to further probe the demography of the believers/followers to dwell on this point.

Chapter 5

Neoliberalism through Charismatic Churches

How do we understand the emergence and the popularity of prosperity churches? This chapter uses the concepts of neoliberalism and charisma in order to suggest some answers for this question. The chapter begins with a discussion of various scholarly attempts at understanding the concept of neoliberalism. The concept has been explicated by different scholars using different underlying assumptions and methodologies. There has also been literature that illustrates how neoliberalism has emerged differently in different countries. Furthermore, this chapter also undertakes a brief discussion on the Washington Consensus which was adopted by American policymakers to push neoliberal policies internationally. Moreover, the chapter discusses different scholarly writings on Pentecostalism and prosperity theology. This leads into a description of the field. In this section, along with a description of the field, various quotes by a pastor of a prosperity church have been quoted. Lastly, the chapter goes into the analysis section. In this section, an attempt has been made to draw links between neoliberalism, charisma, and the prosperity church. Using interviews with church goers, it has been argued that the certain individuals in a neoliberal society find solace for the anxieties and pressures that neoliberalism causes in prosperity churches. It has also been argued that one of the reasons that such churches attract people is due to the operation of charisma within the church. In this way, the concept of charisma has been used to explain what attracts church goers to prosperity gospel churches and why they keep going back.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism has been an elusive concept for scholars to define. There have been various major works by scholars that have tried to define it as a concept. Campbell and Pedersen's (2001) edited volume titled *The Rise of Neoliberalism and Institutional Analysis* categorizes the literature on neoliberalism based on "schools of institutional analysis". The period that they are writing about is marked by the rise of conservative governments in

developed countries, widespread austere stabilization policies in the Third World, and the fall of communist regimes. They argue that the rise of neoliberalism has also led to noteworthy changes within institutions. According to a variety of researchers, these institutions have evolved into being "important drivers of political and economic performance as well as topics of inquiry in their own right" (Campbell & Pedersen, 2001). This has brought about various schools of institutional analysis which provide different frameworks to analyze the rise of neoliberalism. The writings included in the volume have been categorized into four schools -

1. Rational choice institutionalism
2. Organizational institutionalism
3. Historical institutionalism
4. Discursive institutionalism

The editors have further summarized the literature on the rise of neoliberalism by highlighting four aspects of each of the schools -

1. Problematic
2. Conditions of change
3. Mechanisms of change
4. Epistemology and methodology

How institutions "address difficulties of exchange and public goods production" is a topic of discussion within the rational choice institutionalism school. This school considers the fact that with the rise of neoliberalism, there have been shifts in costs and benefits. They contend that "interest-based struggle, conflict, bargaining, and strategic gaming" lead to these alterations or changes. The larger aim of this school is to look for a general theory using positivist deduction (2001: 10). On the other hand, the school of historical institutionalism is interested in how "institutions shape capacity for action and institution formation." According to this school, neoliberalism is characterised by "crisis and exogenous shock" along with "contradictory institutional logics." The "interest, concept, and ideologically driven struggle, conflict, negotiation" as well as "learning, feedback, and experimentation" are the means by which neoliberalism's reforms are brought about. Their inquiry is inductive in nature and they seek a "historically specific theory" to explain the rise of neoliberalism (2001: 10). The school of

organizational institutionalism asks “how are institutions culturally constituted, rationalized , and legitimized ?”. The changes that they see as being brought on by neoliberalism include “increased environmental uncertainty” and “political-cultural shifts”. These changes come about through “imitation, diffusion, and translation”. This school is interested in arriving at a general theory of the rise of neoliberalism through positivist deduction. However, it is also involved in an “interpretive inductive search for historically specific explanation” for the rise of neoliberalism (2001: 10). Lastly, the discursive institutionalism school emphasises on the relationship between discourse and institutions. What role does speech play in the formation, framing, and transformation of institutions? According to this school, the "existence of alternative discourses" and a "perceived political-economic crisis" are indicators of neoliberalism. This is brought about through “translation, displacement, bricolage”. The methodology that is used by this school is interpretive inductive and also archaeology of texts (2001: 10).

In a rather extensive paper, Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb (2002) chart the ways in which neoliberalism has emerged in four countries - Chile, Britain, Mexico, and France. They take each of these countries as a case study and perform a comparative analysis in order to illustrate the arrival of neoliberalism in different contexts. The central argument of their paper has to do with the processes of economic and financial globalisation. They contend that these processes were crucial in bringing about the neoliberal era. More specifically, they also focus on the institutional changes at the local level. They illustrate how these institutional changes shaped the nature and meaning of the transition from the liberal economy to the neoliberal economy. Furthermore, their comparative study comments on the ways in which neoliberalism emerged in developed and developing countries. They affirm that external pressures towards structural changes affected developing countries more than they affected developed countries. However, they also find that state-society relations constituted institutionalised patterns which affected the nature of the shift towards neoliberalism. This happened regardless of whether the country under analysis was developed or developing.

Massey, Sanchez, and Behrman (2006), in their paper titled *Of Myths and Markets*, describe the thesis of “Washington Consensus” and how Latin America became the “proving ground” for this thesis (Massey et al, 2006: 9). The Washington Consensus's central tenet first

surfaced in the 1990s. This was a period that saw a few monumental changes in the landscape of world politics. The Soviet Union had collapsed, China moved towards global trade and investment, and the engagement of East and Southeast Asian countries in international markets led to unprecedented growth and poverty reduction. The United States of America, on the other hand, during this period witnessed an economic boom. The size and unprecedentedness of this surge encouraged Washington, D.C.'s decision-makers to adopt a new set of policies. "Sustained economic growth and seamless national development" were the goals of the policy makers. They concluded that "a comprehensive programme of balanced budgets, decreased taxes, decontrolled interest rates, floating exchange rates, liberalised trade ties, open foreign investment, deregulation, and privatisation" was the best method to do this (Williamson 1990 cited in Massey et al, 2006). The Washington Consensus, according to the authors, was marked by "a dramatic shift from governmental operations and rules to markets"(Massey et al, 2006: 8). In other words, the government was supposed to move out of the way and let the markets take the reign of the global economy.

In a nutshell, late 20th-century political and economic doctrine known as neoliberalism. It advocates for the promotion of free market policies and the liberalization of trade, capital, and other markets. Neoliberalism is based on the belief that the free market is the most efficient and fair system for organizing economic activity, and that the role of government should be minimized as much as possible. The rise of neoliberalism can be traced to the 1970s and 1980s, when many countries around the world were experiencing economic crises, high inflation, and stagnant growth. In response, governments began implementing policies that liberalized their economies, such as deregulation, privatization, and reduced government spending.

Correlating neoliberal anxieties and prosperity gospel

The religious landscape has seen significant transformation and dynamism throughout the 20th century. The rise of modernity gave rise to new religious manifestations. This includes the rise of fundamentalist and evangelical movements within established religions, as well as the emergence of new spiritualities and alternative religions. These movements have frequently been a reaction to modern societies' alleged loss of purpose and ties to the local community. The

method in which religion is performed and experienced has been significantly impacted by contemporary technology like the internet. As it is argued in the earlier chapter, the origins of the prosperity gospel lie in neoliberal capitalist market exigencies. It is a perfect fusion of the biblical theme of prosperity and the neoliberal market aspirational anxieties at various levels.

In the latter decades of the 20th century, prosperity theology exploded not only in Latin America but also in Africa and Asia. By the second decade of the twenty-first century, it had surpassed the traditional themes of Protestant and even Pentecostal theology to become the primary focus of many of the fastest growing Evangelical "non-denominational" congregations in the global South. Neo-liberal economic reforms altered people's access to the system and economic policies in Latin America in the 1990s. This phenomena was not limited to Latin America; similar changes also took place in other emerging regions like Africa and Asia. In addition, these areas were dealing with issues including economic change, corruption, and unparalleled economic growth, respectively, in Asia and Africa. This led to the adoption of new methods of coping with these changes, one of which was prosperity theology (Garrard-Burnett, 2012).

In the 1990s and 2000s, neoliberalism became the dominant economic ideology, with many countries around the world adopting free market policies believing that it is the best way to promote economic growth and prosperity. If we look into the origins of prosperity theology, we can see a correlation here, which is discussed in detail in the next section. In the earlier chapter we have seen how the Prosperity gospel preachers invoke a neoliberal morality in their followers. In the present chapter the anxieties of the followers brought out by the neoliberal social climate are discussed.

Neoliberalism and the individual

One of the ways in which neoliberalism perpetuates individualism is through its emphasis on individual responsibility and self-reliance. Neoliberal policies often place the burden of responsibility for one's own well-being and success on the individual, rather than on the state or

on broader social structures. This can lead to a focus on individual achievement and success, and can discourage people from looking to the state for support or assistance.

Bowler (2013) asserts that the Prosperity Gospel (PG) and the institutions of neoliberalism are intertwined and mutually supportive. It upholds and defends the fundamental principles of neoliberalism, which maintains that a person's financial situation is a direct result of their own decisions and activities. If one carefully observes the words of the king's temple Pastor in his preaching collected from a YouTube video where he says *God has never yet designed a failure. So if you are failing in life, don't blame God. If you are not happy and frustrated in life, you are not fulfilled, it is no time to blame God. It is time to go before him on your knees and begin to pray. Amen!*. This statement raises many questions. Whom should be blamed for your failures. The pastor often asks the followers not to depend on the Government or any other humans, here he is asking the followers not to blame God for one's failure. It can be argued that in a situation where nobody is to be blamed the individual himself is responsible for his/her own failure. In order to overcome failures, the pastor also readily shows a path which is to pray to God. PG provides a moral and spiritual explanation for this notion by asserting that although prosperity and success are the results of moral fortitude and faith, poverty is the consequence of sin and an absence of faith. In this regard, the PG supports the neoliberal notion that poverty is a personal shortcoming and that those who are poor are poor because they lack ambition and character. The PG likewise espouses the notion that excess and luxury are not only morally admirable but also desirable from a spiritual perspective. According to this theology, a person's moral integrity and aptitude to prosper in the marketplace are gauged. Both, neoliberalism and the doctrines of the PG focus the responsibility for poverty on the individual and disavow societal and structural problems as the root of poverty.

The PG, as outlined by Barker (2007), emphasizes the importance of individualism in its belief that salvation is achieved through a personal contract with God, in which devotion and belief are exchanged for blessings and eternal salvation. This individualistic perspective aligns with the core principles of neoliberalism, which also places responsibility on the individual to work harder to improve their material well-being, as noted by Walton (2012). Both systems

assign blame for failure on the individual, viewing it as a result of insufficient dedication to the respective belief system.

"Bernice Martin contends that Pentecostalism enables its followers to have a global and radical personalised self-consciousness at the personal level; at a structural level, Pentecostalism functions as a cultural and institutional prophylactic," writes Nolivos in his work from 2012. This religious organisation prepares its followers for the turbulent aspects of neoliberal economics on both the macro and micro levels (Nolivos, 2012). David Martin and Bernice Martin have a cautious, moderate perspective that affirms the interdependence between Pentecostalism and economic progress: the latter is latent and may take decades to manifest, whereas the former acts as a coping mechanism for the outcast.

The Prosperity Gospel movement and neoliberalism are ideologies that share similarities in their emphasis on individual agency and the role of faith. A religious movement called the Success Gospel espouses the notion that having trust in God can bring about material prosperity (Wrenn, 2020). Neoliberalism, on the other hand, is a political and economic philosophy that supports the notion that the free market has the ability to create wealth. According to both beliefs, a person's success or failure is mostly the result of their own decisions and deeds. The Prosperity Gospel and neoliberalism are compatible with one another because of their emphasis on individual agency and belief in a single concept or system. It allows individuals to interpret and adapt these ideologies to their own beliefs and circumstances. Furthermore, the simplicity and straightforwardness of these ideologies provide a clear framework for individuals to make sense of their own experiences and understand their place in the world. According to Mary Wrenn (2020), the compatibility of the Prosperity Gospel and neoliberalism enables people to customise and interpret that framework according to their own preferences.

Another way in which neoliberalism perpetuates individualism is through its emphasis on competition and the idea of the survival of the fittest. Neoliberal policies often encourage competition between individuals and businesses, leading to a focus on individual self-interest and a winner-takes-all mentality. This can create a culture of individualism and self-promotion. Considering the above anxieties that are caused by a neoliberal regimes an attempt is made to

understand the appeal of the charismatic pastors preaching the prosperity gospel. "Pentecostalism is a branch of Christianity that is quickly expanding, especially among groups of people who find in this faith both a vision for themselves and a way to support their family" (Davie, 2007). Theologically, Pentecostals offer a vision of redemption, blessings from the Holy Spirit, and new opportunities for the individual Christian. Through a conservative reading of the Bible and defence against life's challenges, Pentecostalism's teachings and actions offer its adherents a haven. This is especially enticing in poorer countries since there are frequently few other welfare options available. As a result, this combination of theology and practical support has proven to be a successful draw for many people. According to Grace Davie (2007) the fragility of economies in the developing world is one of the reasons that Pentecostalism has been so successful in those regions.

Analysing individual anxieties

One of the criticisms of neoliberalism is that it can have a negative impact on employment. Some of the key features of neoliberalism that we discussed earlier include deregulation, privatization, and cuts to social welfare programs. Removing regulations on business and privatisation can make it easier for companies to operate, but it can also lead to job losses as the private owners may seek to cut costs by laying off workers and overburdening the employees. Individuals face immense stress in coping up and being competitive. Additionally, the decreased government spending on welfare programmes, particularly on social security and unemployment benefits, can result in greater poverty and inequality, which can then raise unemployment rates and expand the gap between the rich and the poor. People are left without a safety net to face any financial challenge which can create anxieties about the inability to afford basic necessities such as food, housing, and healthcare.

The project of neoliberalism has emerged in different contexts in different ways, as the comparative study by Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb (2002) indicates. Their observations are useful for my analysis here. They argue that the nature of neoliberalism will be determined by the institutions that exist in the society. These institutions such as family, educational institutions, churches, etc. will draw a link between the state and society. In other words, institutions instruct

the members of a society regarding their relationship with the state. These institutions inform individuals regarding how they should relate to the state, how they should see the state, etc. According to Massey et al. (2006), "sustained economic growth and seamless national development" are the goals of neoliberalism. These aims shape the institutions in society. These aims are also reproduced by the institutions in society. They are accompanied by the processes of the state withdrawing and allowing the markets to take charge of the economy. Therefore, the state withdraws from spending on public healthcare, public education, and providing employment. These responsibilities are taken over by the market. This is how neoliberalism legitimizes privatization. Thus, healthcare, education, and employment are now taken over by private players. Under neoliberalism, they are no more the responsibility of the state. In such a scenario, where the state does not aid or guarantee the citizens much in terms of living a stable life, individuals tend to become anxious.

A fifty year old woman who attended the King's Temple Church shared with me that she chose this church because of the positive impact it had on her life. She and her husband struggled to save money due to the high cost of living in Hyderabad and the expenses of raising and educating their children. She was worried about their future and the ability to build a home. However, her neighbor invited her to the King's Temple Church and she was impressed by the teachings of Pastor Samuel and his wife. She began regularly attending the church and seeking blessings from God. According to her, she experienced many miracles in her life as a result of her faith and the guidance of the church. She had two specific prayers: for her son to get a seat at IIT and for her family to be able to construct a home. Despite having no savings, she had faith in God and never gave up on her prayers through fasting and praying. She says that with the help of the pastor's guidance, everything fell in place and they were able to build a beautiful house by God's grace. Her son also got an IIT seat as she prayed.

A middle-aged man who is a software employee coming from a Hindu family, moved to Hyderabad after completing his graduation to find a job. He told me that despite his efforts, he struggled to find a well-paying job and had to change jobs frequently. He was unhappy with the low pay and high rent in the city, and also had to send money to his parents and was very upset with his life. His cousin introduced him to the King's Temple Church in 2014. Since then, he

said, that he has found stability and developed a positive attitude and continues to attend the church.

In one of the visits to the church a woman along with her husband came up on the stage and gave a testimony about how they and their children were saved from Covid and she stated that they were miraculously cured and the woman was able to give a normal birth to the baby when the doctors gave up on them. They thanked the pastors for praying for them and guiding them through the word of God and asking them to not lose hope.

If we analyse the above testimonies of the followers of the church, we can understand their material aspirations and the reasons for their frustrations. The followers whom I have interacted with seem to be sharing their experiences of how God helped them after going to the king's temple church and overcame various struggles in their lives, such as financial difficulties or illnesses. They attribute these positive outcomes to their faith in God and the guidance and support they received from their pastors. It is also worth noting that many of these testimonies focus on material aspects of life, such as building homes or finding employment. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this, it is important to consider the broader context in which these testimonies are shared. It may be that many people in the church community are facing these particular challenges and that these types of testimonies are particularly resonant for them.

Weber believed charisma originates in times of crisis, Oommen argues it arises from a specific social climate and serves as a stabilizer. Having charisma is more of a social status than a personal quality. To understand why the public often follows charismatic leaders, we must study not only the leader but also the followers and their reasons for investing faith in the leader, their message, and their socio-cultural context. As is evident from the above responses, it is noteworthy that the individuals who were interviewed were stressed regarding the material aspects of a stable life such as healthcare, education, employment, and housing, which are no longer under the purview of the state. People are forced to rely on the marketplace in order to access these components of a secure living. These conditions that have been brought on by neoliberalism have made it more difficult for individuals to access the aspects of a stable life. Therefore, individuals experience anxieties regarding them. And the next question arises; What

do individuals in society do with these anxieties? Where do they go to ameliorate them? Ideally they should counter the neoliberal agenda that is causing distress to them, but in this case it is observed that the people are finding solace in these prosperity churches. According to Barker (2007), the Prosperity Gospel theology provides a way to understand and cope with economic challenges such as poverty and insecurity. It promotes the idea that individuals have the power to change their circumstances through their belief and faith, and provides hope that things can improve.

We have already established in the above section that the nature of neoliberalism is determined by the institutions that link state and society. Although the market is the paramount institution under neoliberalism, the ways in which individuals become a part of this market is mediated through other institutions like family, schools, churches, etc. Put differently, the ways in which neoliberalism is experienced by the individuals in society, the ways in which neoliberalism is understood by the individuals, and the ways in which neoliberalism is dealt with by them will be determined by the institutions in society. A further significant concern that falls outside the purview of the current investigation is how neoliberalism affects these institutions. So restricting to the mediating nature of these institutions in linking the society with the agenda of the state, in this case neoliberalism, an attempt is made to explain how these institutions try to shape a neoliberal morality. One such institution is the Church. And more specifically the churches preaching the prosperity gospel. As this study concerns itself with independent churches professing the prosperity gospel. It's crucial to provide answers to the following questions regarding the anxiety that people experience and how these churches support people in relation to their anxieties. What is the nature of the messages that are delivered in these churches? By examining the above testimonies of the respondents it can be argued that the prosperity churches have given churchgoers comfort from neoliberalism anxieties. However, the question remains: what exactly is it about these churches and their messages that brings people back to them? How is it that people find solace in these prosperity churches? This can be answered using the concept of charisma.

The concept of "charisma," according to Oommen (1967: 85), is ultimately a product of social structure, and that its nature and content undergoes transformation as society changes.

According to him, social structure has the power to change the characteristics of charismatics. As a result, in order to comprehend true charisma, analysis must be focused on the social contexts in which the charismatic figure emerges and operates as well as the nature of the message he conveys. According to Oommen, a charismatic person is more likely to be regarded as a leader when the message he conveys is acceptable for the social environment. Oommen (1967), argues that a leader and his charisma is accepted by the people when he delivers a message that is relevant to the social climate. We have already established that the social climate within which the individuals and the prosperity churches operate is that of neoliberalism. This social climate of neoliberalism brings on certain anxieties among the individuals in society. In order to find redressal for these anxieties, some individuals have found the charismatic churches professing the message of prosperity gospel useful. Put differently, the messages that are preached in these charismatic churches by the pastor are relevant in the climate of neoliberalism. These messages help individuals deal with the challenges brought on by neoliberalism. It could be further argued that it is the charisma that operates within the setting of the church that helps the church-goers to deal with their challenges. Applying Oommen's concept of Charisma it can be argued that the message of the prosperity churches is tailored to the social climate of neoliberalism. It is supposed to aid individuals in dealing with the pressures and challenges of neoliberalism. In short these charismatic churches through their message of prosperity gospel provide a refuge to individuals in dealing with the neoliberal anxieties. This can be the most convincing reason for the appeal of the charismatic churches that the individuals are motivated to keep going back to the church. Precisely, The charisma that is generated because of the message being appropriate to the social climate keeps bringing back the people to the church.

Here, one can take a look at the message of the pastor (which is legitimized through his charisma) which says that the church-goers should not depend on the state. The church-goers are, on the other hand, asked to have faith in God. "You will not require aid from the government. You will not require aid from your relatives or the banks, No, you won't need any of that.. I will not go looking for it, He (God) will cause it to me in abundance, always under all circumstances. Even though there is a pandemic, even though there is famine, even though people are losing jobs, even though I have lost my job, it doesn't matter. Because, my supply is not based on the economy of this nation. It is based on His(God's) economy, the kingdom of God and his grace.

My god is a god of abundance. He said I have come to give you life and in abundance!” This is a message of the pastor Samuel patta taken from his preaching that is posted on the church’s Instagram account.

We can see that it is not only the state that is withdrawing in the neoliberal context. The neoliberal institutions in society, in this case the prosperity churches, are also mediating this withdrawal process by encouraging individuals in the society to withdraw themselves from the state. In addition these institutions are tuning the followers to the societal realities and validating it with a religious theology (Prosperity gospel). These institutions are as well providing motivation to the individuals and preparing them to deal with the anxieties caused by the neoliberal changes. In addition, these institutions are providing a temporary refuge to the individuals and buffering them from their neoliberal anxieties. Thus, The answer for the question posed in the previous chapter as to why the charismatic church followers attribute charisma to the pastor and validate him and his message potentially lies in the sociological relevance of the message itself which is relevant to the social climate. Because that is where the faith in the charismatic church and adulation for the charismatic pastor is built around. Also, that is where religious change contingent upon social change lies.

Conclusion

New Religious Movements (NRMs) can be understood as a movement that arose in response to modernism and can be premised on modernist or anti-modernist principles. They are often born out of similar societies and around the same time, and share commonalities in terms of the experience of sacred power and envisioning sacred communities. However, they may give rise to different trajectories in terms of how they appear, practice religion, and their worldviews. NRMs also have political implications as they nurture the political views of believers. Weberians have argued that mysticism is contrary to social and political activism. This position has been challenged by scholars studying NRMs which have both liberal and conservative political tendencies. The long-term socio-cultural consequences of these movements are yet to be determined.

Berger (1967) and Wilson (1988) argue that new religious movements are not revivals of traditional religion, but rather adaptations of respective religions to new social circumstances in response to the increasing secularization of society. They see these movements as the result of the need for spiritual solace and reassurance in a secularized society, with a focus on pragmatic attitudes and methods of control, accountancy, propaganda, and even doctrinal content. Hunter (1981) similarly locates the phenomenon of new religious movements in forms of alienation and anomie in advanced capitalist societies, as an attempt to socially reconstruct the world by reimposing institutionally reliable meanings upon existence, representing a "demodernizing impulse". Overall, these scholars see new religious movements as products of modern societal systems, rather than its opponents.

Many studies link the current spiritual upsurge in the new religious movements to a crisis of values or a climate of deepening normative ambiguity, caused by the erosion of cultural tradition of moral absolutism in a highly differentiated and pluralistic society. Different scholars place the individual at the center of their analysis, and attribute the rise of new religious movements to various factors such as social change, fragmentation of the workforce and weakening of traditional mediating structures such as joint families and homogeneous

neighborhoods. These new religious movements help to create new intermediate relations between individuals and different other groups. While different scholars have different perspectives on the rise of new religious movements, they all agree that the individual plays a central role in the formation of new religious movements.

The concept of charisma as a sociological phenomenon has been primarily developed by Weber's work on charismatic authority. Weber expanded the meaning of charisma from being solely a Christian concept to a more analytical and sociological category, which helps in understanding the nature of religious groups and other forms of authority. According to Weber, charisma is a certain quality of an individual's personality that is considered extraordinary and treated as being endowed with supernatural or exceptional powers or qualities. The locus of charisma is not only seen as something that is heaven-sent, but also something that followers attribute special powers to leaders, making them charismatic. Weber also maintained that charismatic people need social validation and that the actual personal qualities that trigger these imputations were of secondary importance. Scholars like Oommen, Friedland, and Bourdieu have established the link between social structure and charisma. Oommen (1967), particularly, illustrates how charisma emerges when the charismatic individual makes use of the social situations. This is specifically embodied in the message that he delivers to his followers. The correspondence of the message with the social climate makes it possible for charisma to emerge, according to Oommen. Overall, charisma is a complex and multi-faceted concept that requires a sociological lens to fully understand its origins and sustenance.

The prosperity gospel, an offshoot of neoliberal capitalist morality, promotes material and mental well-being and sacrifice in material form by encouraging donations to the church. It is a fusion of biblical themes of prosperity and the aspirations of neoliberal capitalism, and its popularity can be attributed to its ability to cater to the spiritual needs of individuals in an ever-growing precarity of the neoliberal capitalist order. The prosperity gospel tries to offer a spiritual version of self-governance and appeals to followers by providing spiritual healing, temporary relief, and hope for the future. Neoliberal capitalism aims to create a cultural-moral fabric in society, it's important to understand not just the market dynamics but also how it shapes the relationship between the state and individuals. Harvey argues that neoliberalism shifts the

state's responsibility from protecting citizens from market exploitation to protecting the market itself. Wrenn points out that it teaches individuals to be responsible and accountable for themselves, eroding collective responsibility and the state's role in protecting individuals. The PG and neoliberalism share similar ideologies. Preachers of prosperity gospel believe that only those with strong faith in God can attain prosperity, this is evident in Samuel Patta's preaching. Through his preaching of the prosperity gospel, it is shown how religious ideologies can be used to align with the idea of shifting the responsibility of providing welfare from the state to God, and how this aligns with neoliberalism.

This study has examined the relationship between neoliberal capitalism and the cultural-moral fabric it creates in society. This relationship is crucial in understanding the broader implications of political and economic systems. Additionally, it is important to understand how neoliberalism erodes the sense of collective responsibility and the state's responsibility towards its citizens through the process of socialization that emphasizes individual responsibility. Independent churches often have a theology that emphasizes self-sufficiency and the power of individual faith, leading them to reject any external assistance, including from the government. These churches argue that dependence on government aid undermines the power of faith and discourage individuals from fully relying on God. This approach can have significant consequences, particularly when it comes to political participation and government accountability because by urging its members to rely solely on God and not the government, independent churches may discourage their members from becoming politically active or engaging with government institutions. Without the input and pressure from active citizens, the government is less likely to be held accountable for its actions and may become less responsive to the needs of the people. Some scholars argue that this phenomenon can lead to the upswing of right-wing politics as the people who may have been the most vocal critics of government policies and practices may become less engaged and less likely to challenge the status quo. Without the counterbalance of critical voices, governments may become more authoritarian, less democratic and less responsive to the needs of citizens.

Limitations of the study

In my dissertation, I aimed to study the experiences of church goers and the role that religion plays in their lives. However, a limitation of my research was the constraint of time. Due to time constraints, I was not able to collect and analyze the socio-economic backgrounds of the participants. This may have impacted the generalizability of my arguments and led to an incomplete understanding of the relationship between socio-economic status and religious involvement.

Socio-economic status is an important variable in my particular study, as it can have a significant impact on individuals' experiences and outcomes. However, collecting and analyzing this information can be time-consuming and require additional resources. In my case, I was unable to include questions on socio-economic status in my survey or conduct interviews that focused specifically on this topic. Additionally, lack of time also prevented me from doing more follow-up studies, which would have been beneficial in understanding how the participants' religious involvement and experiences change over time.

As the area of my study concerns the recent phenomenon of the rising independent churches, there was not much existing literature in the Indian context. Literature regarding the religious changes within Christianity is very limited. This proved to be a major limitation in my project as it is difficult to back my arguments with the existing literature. Despite these limitations, my study provides valuable insight into the experiences of church goers and how the prosperity theology preached by the charismatic pastors is helping them ameliorate their anxieties caused by the neoliberal changes.

Way forward

There is a significant amount of scope for further understanding the rise of new independent churches, preaching the prosperity theology, particularly in relation to the political economy of churches and new religious movements, as well as the religious antagonism surrounding conversions in India and in understanding the relationship between caste and religion. Prosperity gospel through its teaching that faith, positivity, and donations to religious or spiritual causes will result in wealth, success, and improve quality of life is attracting people who

are seeking for personal growth, material wealth, Additionally, the increasing influence of the independent churches who profess the prosperity gospel is challenging and changing the mainstream churches which makes it an interesting area for exploration.

One important aspect to consider when examining the rise of new independent churches is the political economy of these organizations. These churches often have a significant impact in terms of the resources they require and the economic opportunities they provide for their members. Understanding the ways in which these churches operate within the broader political and economic systems is crucial for understanding their growth and influence.

Another key area of examination is the religious antagonism surrounding conversions in India. The rise of independent churches in India has been accompanied by increased instances of religious conflict, particularly between Hindu nationalist groups and Christian converts. Understanding the ways in which these conflicts are arising and the dynamics driving them is important for addressing and resolving these issues.

The relationship between caste and religion is also undergoing significant changes in the context of the rise of new independent churches. Historically, caste has been closely linked with Hinduism, but the growth of independent churches in India is challenging this association and providing alternative avenues for individuals from lower castes to access power and resources. Exploring these changing dynamics is essential for understanding the ways in which religion and caste are interacting in our society.

Overall, there is a wealth of potential research to be conducted in the area of understanding the rise of new independent churches, with implications for both academic and practical applications. Examining the political economy of these independent churches, the religious antagonism surrounding conversions in India, the changing relationship between caste and religion, provides valuable insights for understanding the ways in which religion is evolving in the 21st century.



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SEMESTER GRADE TRANSCRIPT**REGULAR EXAMINATION**

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COURSE M.Phil. SOCIOLOGY
PARENT'S NAME M SRINIVASA RAO / P VIJAYA SUSEELA

**SEMESTER 1**

COURSE NO	TITLE OF THE COURSE	GRADE	CREDITS	RESULTS
SL701	ADVANCED SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY	B+	4	PASS
SL702	ADVANCED RESEARCH METHODS	B+	4	PASS
SL703	ACADEMIC WRITING COURSE	C	2	PASS

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LETTER GRADE	A+	A	B+	B	C	F
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SEMESTER GRADE TRANSCRIPT**REGULAR EXAMINATION**

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MONTH AND YEAR OF EXAM JUL 2021
COURSE M.Phil. SOCIOLOGY
PARENT'S NAME M SRINIVASA RAO / P VIJAYA SUSEELA

**SEMESTER 2**

COURSE NO	TITLE OF THE COURSE	GRADE	CREDITS	RESULTS
SL721	RESEARCH THEME BASED COURSE	C	4	PASS

SEMESTER GRADE POINT AVERAGE (SGPA) : **6.00**(In words) : **SIX POINT ZERO ZERO**Date Of Result Notification : **Jun 29, 2022**

Pattern of Evaluation is based on 6 letter grades on a 10 point scale.

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CREDITS	10	9	8	7	6	0

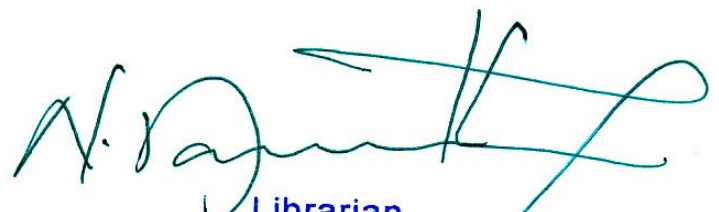
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by Vennela Mocherla



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