



ARTICLE

# Rediscovering *Hitavadi*: A Forgotten Pioneer of Telugu Vernacular Print and Missionary Journalism

Chandra Sekhar Chakali 

SRR And CVR Government Degree College (A), Vijayawada, AP, India

Email: [chandueflu@gmail.com](mailto:chandueflu@gmail.com)

(Received 28 April 2024; revised 14 January 2025; accepted 15 January 2025)

## Abstract

This article examines the pioneering yet largely forgotten magazine *Hitavadi*, the first Telugu Christian monthly magazine and the earliest Telugu monthly journal. Founded in 1862 by Rev. John Edmund Sharkey, *Hitavadi* played a crucial role in shaping the intellectual, religious and social discourse in the Telugu-speaking regions of colonial India. Despite its significance, the history of the magazine has remained elusive due to the disappearance of most issues from public libraries and archives. The scarcity of issues reflects the fragility of nineteenth-century print preservation, making this article the first detailed attempt to reconstruct the legacy of *Hitavadi*. Through its vernacular focus, *Hitavadi* blended Christian teachings with secular knowledge, addressing gender reform, education and social transformation. It was not merely a missionary tool but a platform for intellectual engagement, connecting local concerns with global ideas. This study explores the role of the magazine in constructing a Telugu public sphere and contributing to the broader Protestant mission of literacy and moral reform. In doing so, it sheds light on the dynamics of colonial print culture, vernacular journalism, and the challenges of recovering lost archival material.

**Keywords:** Telugu Christianity; women's education; colonial print; Telugu journalism; missionary press

This article explores the pioneering role of *Hitavadi: An Illustrated Telugu Magazine*, the first Telugu Christian monthly magazine and the earliest known periodical in the Telugu language. Although the first Telugu-language newspapers started to appear from the 1830s onwards, *Hitavadi* (which can be translated as 'kind adviser' or 'good adviser') was the first literary magazine.

Founded in 1862 by Rev. John Edmund Sharkey of the Church Missionary Society (hereafter CMS), *Hitavadi* had a mission that extended well beyond religious evangelisation. Emerging as part of a wave of Christian missionary publications in various South Asian languages following the 1857 Sepoy uprising, *Hitavadi* marked a significant milestone in Telugu print culture. Its role was transformative in shaping public discourse

© The Author(s), 2025. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Royal Historical Society. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

in the Telugu-speaking regions of the Madras Presidency, an area that roughly corresponds to the modern Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.<sup>1</sup> *Hitavadi* blended Protestant Christian values with social and educational goals, aligning its religious ethos with broader aspirations for public knowledge and reform. Published in the vernacular Telugu language, *Hitavadi* bypassed the oral and manuscript traditions that had long restricted sacred knowledge to Brahmin elites.<sup>2</sup> By covering topics such as gender, science and literature, it aimed to foster an informed and morally conscious civil society. However, studying *Hitavadi* presents unique challenges, as most of its issues have perished, making this an effort not only of historical analysis but also of archival recovery. This article argues that *Hitavadi* not only propagated Christianity but also served as a critical platform for social reform, gender advocacy and public debate in colonial Telugu society.

The wider study of Christian vernacular periodicals in South Asia highlights their crucial role in fostering intellectual discourse and societal reform. In Tamil-speaking regions, Hephzibah Israel's analysis of *Morning Star* demonstrates its impact in creating a 'Protestant public' by merging sacred and secular themes. Dennis Hudson's exploration of *Morning Star* has similarly emphasised its role in engaging with Tamil Hindu intellectuals, prompting reinterpretations of religious identity and fostering dialogue between Protestant and Hindu traditions. Klaus Koschorke has shown that the Madras-based English language *Christian Patriot* was a key voice advocating for indigenous Christian agency while criticising colonial policies.<sup>3</sup> These journals exemplify the negotiation of local and European intellectual traditions, serving as platforms for reform and moral transformation.

Scholars have also thrown light on the importance of such journals for the Telugu-speaking parts of India. For instance, *Vivekavathi*, established in 1909, became a pivotal medium for shaping modern Telugu Christian womanhood. Elsewhere, I have highlighted its focus on women's education and agency in religious practices, while Mahaboob Basha has situated it within broader Hindu social reforms. Tarangini Sriraman has studied the journal's use of medical temperance narratives to challenge caste and alcoholism, aligning local issues with global missionary discourses.<sup>4</sup> However, the Telugu journal *Hitavadi* remains underexplored,

<sup>1</sup>The Telugu-speaking areas of India primarily encompass the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, with significant populations in neighbouring states such as Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha, as well as in Union Territories such as Puducherry and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Globally, Telugu is spoken by diaspora members in countries such as the United States, Australia, Malaysia, Mauritius, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and others. It is the fastest-growing language in the United States. It enjoys protected status in South Africa, where it is offered as an optional third language in schools in the KwaZulu-Natal province. According to the 2011 Census, Telugu is spoken by over 81 million people in India, making it the fourth most spoken language in the country.

<sup>2</sup>Cezary Galewicz, *Kingdoms of Memory, Empires of Ink: The Veda and Regional Print Cultures of Colonial India* (Krakow, 2020), 188.

<sup>3</sup>Hephzibah Israel, 'Improving the Public: Translating Protestant Values through Nineteenth-Century Bilingual Print Journalism in South Asia', in *Translating Values*, ed. Piotr Blumczynski and John Gillespie (2016), 191–211; D. Dennis Hudson, 'Tamil Hindu Responses to Protestant: Nineteenth-Century Literati in Jaffna and Tinnevely', in *Indigenous Responses to Western Christianity*, ed. Steven Kaplan (New York, 1995), 95–123; Klaus Koschorke et al., *Discourses of Indigenous-Christian Elites in Colonial Societies in Asia and Africa around 1900: A Documentary Sourcebook from Selected Journals* (Wiesbaden, 2016), 37–138.

<sup>4</sup>Chakali Chandra Sekhar, 'Christian Women's Journals and Vernacular Christianity: A Case Study of *Vivekavathi* in Telugu Speaking Regions', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 46 (2023), 956–73; Shaik

representing a missed yet vital opportunity to examine the intersections of print, religion and social reform in one of India's most populous regions. *Hitavadi* offers us more than just articles; it provides a window into the intersecting worlds of missionary media, colonial print and the construction of the vernacular public sphere. The term 'public sphere' here is inevitably inspired by Habermas's concept, which describes a space where individuals engage in open discourse to shape public opinion.<sup>5</sup> In this context, *Hitavadi* functioned as a 'vernacular public sphere' within colonial Telugu society, allowing its readership to explore and participate in social reform and moral discourse informed by both local Telugu culture and Protestant Christian values. By bringing these perspectives into dialogue, the magazine articulated a view on societal improvement that resonated with a surprisingly large readership.

The scarcity of *Hitavadi* issues speaks to the fragility of archival preservation, even for printed materials from the nineteenth century. For decades, historians could only mention the name of the magazine without any detailed exploration of its content or contributions. Often, its contents were assumed lost. As a scholar, I found the process of recovering rare surviving issues both challenging and rewarding, requiring months of painstaking effort across libraries in India and the West. After extensive research, I managed to uncover twelve issues from 1862 at the British Library and three issues from 1864 at the University of Chicago Library. Those moments when I finally located the long-lost issues of the magazine felt like real breakthroughs. While combing through the archives at Telangana State Archives, I came across an additional archival find of absolutely pivotal significance – a 1904 issue of *Hitavadi*. This fortuitous discovery introduced a new dimension, offering fresh insights into the magazine's later phase. During my search at the Telangana State Archives, a librarian shared stories of researchers facing similar challenges, which added a deeper appreciation for the fragility of historical records. Uncovering these fragmented issues felt like assembling a jigsaw puzzle, where each piece offered a glimpse into the larger narrative of colonial print culture. This article offers a first attempt to reconstruct the legacy and significance of *Hitavadi*. Key to understanding *Hitavadi*'s importance is that it was not just a magazine; it was a bridge. It connected local readers to new ideas, fostering a vibrant public sphere within colonial India. The magazine served not only as a tool for missionary outreach but also as a platform for intellectual exchange, encouraging its readers to participate in moral and social debates. *Hitavadi* did not just discuss women's education; it challenged norms. In doing so, it aligned with national reform movements and pushed forward the modernisation of Telugu society.

The challenges involved in reassembling this lost journal highlight the complexities of studying colonial print culture. Reconstructing the history of *Hitavadi* is only part of this study, which also enables the study of its influence on Telugu public discourse and missionary activity. This reconstruction highlights the dynamics of Telugu print culture, the influence of missionary media on modern discourse, and how vernacular

---

Mahaboob Basha, 'Christian Press and Hindu Social Reform: The Story of *Vivekavathi*', *Kakatiya Journal of Historical Studies*, 16 (2021), 114–35; Tarangini Sriraman, 'The Power of the "Universal": Caste and Missionary Medical Discourses of Alcoholism in the Telugu Print Sphere, 1900–1940', *Medical History*, 67 (2023), 324–46.

<sup>5</sup>Jürgen Habermas, Sara Lennox and Frank Lennox, 'The Public Sphere: An Encyclopaedia Article (1964)', *New German Critique*, 3 (1974), 49.

journalism engaged with colonial power to shape a new public sphere in India. The article draws on a range of primary sources, including the available issues of *Hitavadi*, Church Missionary Society records, mission conference proceedings, and biographies of key figures involved in the publication. These materials form the foundation for understanding the evolution of *Hitavadi*, its influence and its significance within the broader context of Telugu print culture, missionary efforts and the colonial public sphere.

### Christian missionaries: pioneers of printing and literacy in Andhra

Christian missionaries introduced the printing press to Andhra and changed the landscape of literacy and education in the region. The development of print culture in colonial India was closely linked to missionary efforts. These efforts focused on disseminating religious texts to the local population, fostering literacy and spreading Christian teachings. Protestant missionary organisations from various denominations played a pivotal role in this shift, bringing with them expertise from early European printing ventures. As Cezary Galewicz has shown, Protestant missionaries on the Coromandel Coast, particularly those inspired by Pietist ideology, were among the first to adopt printing technology in India.<sup>6</sup> Hephzibah Israel has similarly demonstrated that Protestant missionaries in Tamil-speaking regions utilised bilingual print journalism, such as the *Morning Star*, to create a 'Protestant public'. This journal integrated Tamil and English translations to promote rational inquiry, secular education and public discourse while advancing Protestant values.<sup>7</sup> Recognising the transformative power of the printed word, these missionaries used it not only to disseminate their religious message but also to educate the masses and engage with local cultures. These initiatives exemplify how missionaries intertwined literacy, cultural transformation and religious dissemination, laying the foundation for the region's intellectual development.

Protestant Christianity, with its emphasis on the written word of Scripture, has had a close relationship with print. Indeed, it famously goes back to Martin Luther and the early Reformation.<sup>8</sup> This innovative use of print technology not only catalysed the Reformation but also laid a foundation for later efforts by missionaries to utilise print as a tool for education, literacy and religious outreach. Missionaries adopted a strategy focused on long-term community engagement rather than immediate conversion, using print to promote intellectual dialogue. As director of the East India Company, Robert Boyle (1627–91) envisioned printing as part of a broader civilisational project that could counterbalance the Company's commercial interests with religious outreach.<sup>9</sup> This vision set the stage for future missionary efforts, reinforcing the belief that literacy, religion and education could work together to shape society. As Viera Pawliková-Vilhanová notes, the work of the missionaries in producing some of the first documents in the written form of the language was instrumental in establishing

<sup>6</sup>Galewicz, *Kingdoms of Memory*, 110, 113.

<sup>7</sup>Israel, 'Improving the Public'.

<sup>8</sup>Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther: 1517, Printing, and the Making of the Reformation* (New York, 2015).

<sup>9</sup>Galewicz, *Kingdoms of Memory*, 24.

both a literary tradition and a written language.<sup>10</sup> Building on these ideals, missionaries such as the German Lutheran Benjamin Schultze expanded print culture in Andhra through key individuals. Extensive research by Schultze on the Telugu language during the mid-eighteenth century led to the publication of several works, laying the foundations for future missionary activity.<sup>11</sup> Nearly a century later, the London Missionary Society (hereafter LMS) built on these foundations by introducing printing technology to the region. They established presses in Bellary in 1825 and Vizagapatam (currently Visakhapatnam) in 1840, which played a crucial role in publishing religious texts in Telugu.<sup>12</sup> By making religious publications available in the local language, the LMS extended the reach of missionary teachings beyond religious spaces, engaging broader audiences and catalysing regional literacy efforts.

However, missionary presses did not limit themselves to religious texts. They expanded their efforts to secular education, publishing schoolbooks, government-commissioned materials and other educational content.<sup>13</sup> With their use of vernacular language and locally relevant illustrations, periodicals like *Hitavadi* became accessible and relatable to Telugu communities. This integration of secular education broadened the scope of literacy, equipping readers with practical knowledge alongside religious teachings. Emma Hunter and Leslie James have highlighted how the materiality of print, including its physical production, format and circulation, shaped the public sphere in colonial contexts.<sup>14</sup> These efforts laid the foundations for a print-based public discourse that encouraged participation in moral, intellectual and civic engagement.

This dual focus on evangelisation and education was part of a larger trend among missionary societies across the British Empire.<sup>15</sup> Several institutions such as the Madras Tract and Book Society, S.P.C.K Press in Madras, the Christian Vernacular Education Society, the Arcot Mission of the Reformed Church in America, the American Baptist Mission in Nellore, and the Narsapur Mission, contributed significantly to the development of Telugu literature.<sup>16</sup> These presses collectively advanced the spread of both religious and secular knowledge, expanding access to printed materials and fostering intellectual exchange. In sum, through their early engagement with print, missionaries created a public sphere that nurtured not only religious discourse but also literary and cultural development. This early involvement with printing technology

<sup>10</sup>Viera Pawlikova-Vilhanova, 'Christian Missions in Africa and their Role in the Transformation of African Societies', *Asian and African Studies*, 16 (2007), 256.

<sup>11</sup>Jolepalem Mangamma, *Book Printing in India: With Special Reference to the Contribution of European Scholars to Telugu (1746–1857)* (Nellore, 1975), 31–42; K. W. Christopher, 'Negotiating the Spiritual: Purushottama Choudhari and Early 19th Century Christian Literature in Telugu', *Indian Literature*, 59 (2015), 152.

<sup>12</sup>Mangamma, *Book Printing in India*, 68. John Murdoch, *Catalogue of the Christian Literature of India: With Hints on the Management of Indian Tract Societies* (Madras, 1870), 238.

<sup>13</sup>Galewicz, *Kingdoms of Memory*, 144.

<sup>14</sup>Emma Hunter and Leslie James, 'Introduction: Colonial Public Spheres and the Worlds of Print', *Itinerario*, 44. 2 (2020), 3–4.

<sup>15</sup>Galewicz, *Kingdoms of Memory*, 133–4; Hunter and James, 'Introduction', 10.

<sup>16</sup>Murdoch, *Catalogue*, 233–45; *The Missionary Conference: South India and Ceylon, 1879*, II (Madras, 1880), 391, 406.

paved the way for the growth of the Telugu publishing industry. Missionary presses not only spread Christianity but also reshaped the intellectual and social landscape of Andhra. By integrating print with both religious and secular education, they laid the foundations for a robust public sphere that continued to thrive.

### The emergence of Telugu Christian journals: in search of early periodicals

The origins of what is often (but wrongly) regarded as the first Telugu journal, *Satyadoota*, have been the subject of considerable debate, with scholars traditionally attributing its publication to missionaries in Bellary in 1835. This claim has overshadowed the significance of other early Telugu periodicals, such as *Hitavadi*, and has persisted despite the lack of concrete evidence supporting the existence of *Satyadoota* in the 1830s. As Bandi Gopal Reddy, better known as Bangore, notes, the existence of this journal was first reported by Nidadavolu Venkata Rao in 1951, who described it as a trilingual journal.<sup>17</sup> Rao's claims have been repeated by authors such as Yandamuri Satyanarayana Rao and others; they, too, failed to provide references.<sup>18</sup> Exhaustive examination of missionary reports, including the South India Missionary Conference (1879) and records from the Bellary Press and various tract societies, reveals no mention of *Satyadoota*. Understandably, other scholars have therefore questioned the journal's existence in 1835.<sup>19</sup>

Further evidence challenging this claim comes from key documents such as LMS annual reports from the Bellary station, the *Manual of the Bellary District* (1872), and the *Bellary District Gazetteer* (1904), all of which meticulously document missionary activities but make no mention of *Satyadoota*. Similarly, J. C. Knight Anstey's *Report on Protestant Telugu Christian Literature* and John Murdoch's contemporary catalogue of Telugu Christian publications from 1824 to 1870 – detailing titles, publication years, and page counts – also omit any reference to *Satyadoota*, despite their thorough coverage of missionary press outputs.<sup>20</sup> The omission of *Satyadoota* from these detailed records further undermines claims of the journal's early existence. My research established that *Satyadoota* was not published in the 1830s as previously believed. Instead, historical records show that a journal by this name was launched much later, in Tamil, in 1886, by the Religious Tract Society in Madras. A Telugu edition followed in 1888,

<sup>17</sup>Bangore, *Brown Jabalu: Telugu Journalism Charitra, 1832 nunchi 1857 Daaka* (Brown Letters: History of Telugu Journalism, 1832–1857) (Madras, 1973), 2; *Bharathi* (Madras, July 1951), 691.

<sup>18</sup>Yandamuri Satyanarayana Rao, *Usha Kiranalu: Panthomidava Satabdi Thenugu Sahitya Charitra* (Morning Rays: Nineteenth Century Telugu Literature History) (Vijayawada, 1960), 320.

<sup>19</sup>Arudra's original name is Bhagavatula Sadasiva Sankara Sastry. Arudra, 'Beginnings of Telugu Journalism', in *Studies in the History of Telugu Journalism*, ed. K. R. Sheshagiri Rao (Delhi, 1968), 17, 21; V. Lakshmana Reddy, *The Origin, Growth and Development of Telugu Journalism (Pre-Independence)*, PhD Thesis (Guntur: Nagarjuna University, 1980), 51–2; S. H. Saubhagyamma, *Telugulo Sahitya Patrikalu* (Literary Journals in Telugu) (Tirupati, 1992), 15; J. Chennaiah, *Telugu Dina Patrikalu: Basha, Sahitya Swarupam* (Telugu Dailies: A Study of Language and Literature) (Hyderabad, 1998), 24.

<sup>20</sup>J. C. Knight Anstey, *Report on Protestant Telugu Christian Literature* (Madras, 1917), 2–91. John Murdoch was a Scottish Christian missionary and Secretary of the Christian Vernacular Education Society in India. Knight Anstey was a Methodist missionary who worked in Hyderabad District of Nizam domain, South India.

edited by Dhannavada Anantam. This evidence provides a more accurate timeline for the origins of *Satyadoota*, reshaping our understanding of early Telugu journalism.<sup>21</sup>

While the claims about the origins of *Satyadoota* in the 1830s have therefore been definitively disproven, other periodicals provide clearer insights into the rise of Telugu Christian journalism. The 1830s saw the first halting efforts toward Telugu print media with the tentative emergence of daily newspapers such as *Madras Chronicle* and *Virittanthi*. Despite their short-lived nature, these publications set the stage for more sustained efforts like *Varthamana Tharangini*.<sup>22</sup> With the 1858 South India Missionary Conference underscoring the need for vernacular Christian literature, missionary societies became more invested in periodicals. The conference not only affirmed the importance of religious publications but also paved the way for specialised magazines aimed at children and lay readers.<sup>23</sup>

The South India Missionary Conference of 1858 resulted in the establishment of periodicals in the Telugu region. John Murdoch's *Catalogue of the Christian Vernacular Literature of India* mentioned two periodicals in chronological order: *Hitavadi* and *Monthly Magazine*.<sup>24</sup> Research into *Hitavadi*'s origins is hampered by uncertainty and fragmented documentation. Earlier scholars such as Natarajan and Nadig Krishna Murthy posited that *Hitavadi* was a short-lived weekly periodical. Even renowned scholars Bangore and Lakshmana Reddy appear unsure as to whether the journal was a weekly or monthly publication.<sup>25</sup> One source of misinformation goes back to John Edmund Sharkey's biography, which maintained that the Sharkey founded the magazine in 1848, when he was only 27 years old. These assertions, which also claim that the journal folded in 1862, draw on a biography of Sharkey penned by Frederik Gledstone and edited by E. Prakasam.<sup>26</sup> This unverified claim has found its way into subsequent Telugu journals. However, missionary records definitively confirm that *Hitavadi* was a monthly magazine, with its publication commencing rather than halting in 1862.<sup>27</sup> This conclusion directly clarifies long-standing uncertainties regarding its origins and periodicity, distinguishing my findings from earlier speculative claims and unverified

<sup>21</sup>The journal *Satyadoota* is also referred to as 'Satya Duta'. This usage can be found in multiple sources. See *Harvest Field* (Mysore, August 1903), 299; P. Rajaraman, *The Justice Party: A Historical Perspective, 1916-37* (Madras, 1988), 57. However, it is worth noting that the *Report on Native Papers in the Madras Presidency* referred to the journal as 'The Messenger of Truth' in its reports (see 15 July 1889).

<sup>22</sup>Arudra, 'Telugu Journalism', 301; Bangore, *Brown Jabulu*, 9-14; V. Ramakrishna, 'Women's Journals in Andhra during the Nineteenth Century', *Social Scientist*, 19 (1991), 80-1.

<sup>23</sup>*South India Missionary Conference, 1858* (Madras, 1858), 265-82.

<sup>24</sup>The *Monthly Magazine* appears to have been published for a period of time in Vizagapatam by the Vizagapatam Tract Society. However, the surviving information does not provide specific details regarding the exact years of publication, content, and editorship. See Murdoch, *Catalogue*, x, 240, 241, 245; *The Missionary Conference: South India and Ceylon, 1879*, II (Madras, 1880), 391.

<sup>25</sup>J. Natarajan, *History of Indian Journalism: Part II of the Report of the Press Commission* (New Delhi, 1955), 201; Nadig Krishna Murthy, *Indian Journalism: Origin, Growth and Development of Indian Journalism from Asoka to Nehru* (Mysore, 1966), 316; Bangore, *Brown Jabulu*, 111-12; Lakshmana Reddy, *Development of Telugu Journalism*, 73.

<sup>26</sup>Frederik Gledstone was a missionary associated with the CMS in Andhra. Gledstone, along with Rev. E. Prakasam, compiled biographies of notable Telugu converts and European missionaries, including *Jeevitha Charitra* (Life History) of Sharkey, as well as accounts of Robert T. Noble, Thomas Young Darling, and William Howell, among others, for the Christian Literature Society.

<sup>27</sup>Murdoch, *Catalogue*, 241.

narratives. The unavailability of *Hitavadi* in Indian libraries posed a substantial obstacle to scholarship. With the exception of Lakshmana Reddy, who was able to reproduce three pages from the British Library thanks to a London contact, no effort had been made to search libraries in the West comprehensively.<sup>28</sup>

### **Hitavadi: pioneer of Telugu Christian and secular magazines**

*Hitavadi* first saw the light of day in January 1862, published by the Christian Vernacular Education Society, Madras. Because *Vrittanthi* and *Varthamana Tharanagini* were newspapers, we can safely identify *Hitavadi* not only as the first Christian Telugu magazine, but also the first journal printed in the Telugu language. It inspired many to recognise the potential of monthly journals as effective tools for propagating Christianity and engaging with the local community through print media. For instance, the Godavari Delta Mission launched a monthly journal titled *Sakshi* in 1870. This was followed by the American Baptist Mission, which introduced *Telugu Baptist* in 1876, and the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Mission began publishing *Lutheran* in 1891. These publications not only mirrored the innovative approach pioneered by *Hitavadi* but also highlighted the broader impact of Christian missions in fostering a vibrant and dynamic publishing culture in the Telugu language.<sup>29</sup>

*Hitavadi* was established and edited by John Edmund Sharkey (1821–67), a missionary in CMS. He was born to an Anglo-Indian family in Masulipatnam (currently Machilipatnam), Andhra Pradesh. His educational journey began at Daniel Corrie's School and later continued at the Church Missionary Institution in Madras. Upon completing his education, he became a catechist, a position that involved religious instruction. In addition to his educational endeavours, Sharkey was ordained as an Anglican deacon. This role marked his transition from teaching to pastoral work.<sup>30</sup> According to Gledstone, whose biography of Sharkey, as we noted, should not necessarily be taken as gospel, Rev. Sharkey exhibited exceptional linguistic prowess in Telugu. Gledstone notes that during a Telugu examination, the jury reportedly praised Sharkey's language skills as unparalleled, asserting that he could effectively carry out his evangelistic work without difficulty.<sup>31</sup> While Gledstone's inability to identify the examiners raises questions about the basis and rigour of his claims, Sharkey's translation work provides indisputable evidence of his linguistic competence. A *Catalogue of the Telugu Books in the Library of the British Museum* provides insights into Sharkey's translation work, highlighting four notable books he translated from English to Telugu. These include *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments ... together with the Psalter or Psalms of David, History of Phulmani and Karuna, God's Choice the Best for His People*, and *New Testament Stories*.<sup>32</sup> Even before he launched *Hitavadi*, Rev. Sharkey also actively engaged with Telugu literature by commissioning work from Telugu

<sup>28</sup>Lakshmana Reddy, *Development of Telugu Journalism*, 74, 425–7.

<sup>29</sup>For an in-depth discussion on the contributions of Telugu Christian periodicals and their lasting influence on India's cultural and literary heritage, see Chakali Chandra Sekhar, 'Cultural 'Chronicles: Exploring Telugu Christian Periodicals in Colonial India'', *Mission Studies*, 42 (2025).

<sup>30</sup>Gerald H. Anderson, *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1999), 614; D.S. Ramachandra Rao, *Dhannavada Anantam* (Bangalore, 1956), 21.

<sup>31</sup>Frederik Gledstone, *Sharkey Jeevitha Charitra* (Madras, 1941), 3.

<sup>32</sup>L. D. Barnett, *A Catalogue of the Telugu Books in the Library of the British Museum* (London, 1912), 209–10.



**Table 1.** Timeline of Key Events in the History of *Hitavadi*

Year	Event
1862	Launch of <i>Hitavadi</i> by John Edmund Sharkey.
1867	Suspected cessation due to financial challenges.
1873	Revival of <i>Hitavadi</i> under the leadership of Rev. D. Anantam.
1897	Likely ceased publication.
1904	Relaunch with D. Anantam as editor.
1916	Circulation reached 550 copies.

scholars, as the prominent Telugu author and expert on Telugu literature Arudra (1925–98) already noted. These were independent book-length projects and were not intended as articles for *Hitavadi*.<sup>33</sup> Burra Sheshachalam Sastri, a renowned Telugu scholar, mentioned that he had the privilege of working under Sharkey. According to Sastri, his work involved preparing descriptive catalogues of Telugu and Sanskrit texts.<sup>34</sup> This collaboration underscores Sharkey's wider efforts to enrich Telugu literature and contribute to its development.

The surviving issues of *Hitavadi* encompass all of 1862 and those from January, March and June of 1864 and January of 1904.<sup>35</sup> Table 1 sets out the journal's print history as far as it can be constructed from these surviving copies and archival records. The inaugural issue points to the 1857 Sepoy uprising in Bengal as the impetus for the establishment of the magazine. According to Sharkey's inaugural editorial, Christian missionaries believed that Hindus and Muslims were prone to revolt due to their lack of education, moral corruption, engagement in malicious practices and adherence to superstitious beliefs. They were of the belief that enlightened education could forestall such disturbances. In their mission to eradicate what they perceived as 'Agnanam' [ignorance], they turned to religious publications but soon identified a gap for a broader, all-encompassing monthly magazine catering to diverse age groups. This insight led to the birth of a magazine in the Dravida (Tamil) language. Sharkey represented *Hitavadi* as a Telugu counterpart. Despite its eclectic and, as we shall see, often surprising content, the magazine's core was therefore firmly rooted in Christian teachings from the outset: 'The lasting happiness in this country can only be achieved when people read the Bible, which has the power to transform lives – turning the wicked into virtuous, the angry into calm, robbers into honest individuals, the adulterous into pure-hearted, enemies into friends, and conflicts into harmony.'<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Arudra, *Samagra Andhra Sahityam* (An Encyclopaedia of Telugu Literature), III (Hyderabad, 2012), 308.

<sup>34</sup> Bangore, *Brown Jabulu*, 111.

<sup>35</sup> The 1862 issues are collected from the British library, London, the 1864 issues are collected from the library of University of Chicago and the 1904 issue is collected from Telangana state archives, India.

<sup>36</sup> 'Durmargulanu sanmargulanu chesetatuvantinni, kopisthulanu santhulanugaanunnu, dongalanu sanmargasthulanugaanunnu, jaarulanu kacha shuddulanugaanunnu, vairulanu mitrulanugaanunnu, porunu sandhigaanunnu chese Bible ane veda granthamunu chaduvukune paryanthamunnu, ee desamunaku saswatha saukhyamu kaluganeradu' *Hitavadi*, Jan. 1862, 3.

The magazine, consisting of sixteen pages, features an ornate title page with the title *Hitavadi* prominently displayed in both Telugu and English script (see Figures 1 and 2). Further down, the cover page provides pertinent details, including volume number, issue number, month (in English) and year. It also encompasses a summary of contents in both Telugu and English and publication information, including the place of publication and the publisher's name. The magazine used the old Telugu script and incorporated ancient Telugu numerals. Titles of articles and sections were provided in both Telugu and English. In the 1864 issues, two unnumbered additional pages stand apart from the main body of the magazine. The first page, titled 'Notice', is in English, while the last page, titled 'Prakatana Patrika', is in Telugu and mirrors the same content as the English page. These pages outline the magazine's contents, provide guidelines for contributors and provide subscription information. In both languages, the notice ends with an earnest appeal to fellow missionaries: 'Missionaries may greatly promote the circulation of the Magazine by bringing it before the notice of their assistants, by encouraging men to act as agents for its sale in their districts.'<sup>37</sup> This highlights the editor's call for active missionary involvement in expanding the magazine's reach.

These additional pages reflect the magazine's broader mission of outreach and engagement, a theme further elaborated in the January 1864 issue's column addressed 'To the Readers of the *Hitavadi*'. This reflective column offers insights into the magazine's development. Acknowledging potential errors, the editor appeals to readers' understanding: 'We do not claim that this magazine is free of mistakes; there may be grammatical errors. However, as intelligent readers, you will understand that the essence of these discussions is meaningful.'<sup>38</sup> Sharkey, as editor, acknowledges the magazine's contributions to topics such as women's education, child-rearing, cleanliness and religious understanding, expressing gratitude if readers have benefited from them. Assuring his own continued dedication, he emphasised his active responsibility in guiding and contributing to the readers' improvement while acknowledging the readers' role in engaging with this guidance. 'Encouraged by this,' Sharkey promised, 'we have thought to work diligently this year as well, by the grace of God, for your development.' Such claims underscore Sharkey's self-perceived virtue as a provider of knowledge and direction, framing the reader as a beneficiary expected to absorb, copy and imitate these efforts. The column also encourages readers to share their copies of the magazine with others, emphasising its value for all, regardless of their knowledge level. The editor concludes with a spiritual reflection on accountability to God, warning that 'we are accountable to the God who created us, and we live forever either in heaven or hell.'<sup>39</sup> Stressing the futility of worldly achievements without addressing spiritual concerns, the editor urges readers to reflect on salvation and overcoming sin,

<sup>37</sup>*Hitavadi*, Jan. 1864, 1.

<sup>38</sup>'Ee granthamu lopamulenidani cheppamu kaani, memu vrasina amsamulalo vyakarana doshamulunnappatikinni, aa amshamulayokka mukhya thathparyamu saadhuvani, buddhimanthulaina mere grahimchavachunu.' *Hitavadi*, Jan. 1864, 18.

<sup>39</sup>'Manalanu kalagachesina devunaku vutharavaadulamaniyu, narakamulonaina, mokshamulonaina nirantharamu vundavalasina vaaramaniyu.' *Hitavadi*, Jan. 1864, 18.



Figure 1. *Hitavadi*'s cover page of the January–December 1862 issue.

emphasising that 'everything is waste if you do not keep this effort'.<sup>40</sup> Reading *Hitavadi* was therefore meant to be a religious call to action, not a passive act.

While evangelisation thus clearly constituted a significant portion of the magazine's content, the publication also boasted an eclectic collection of articles spanning a myriad of subjects. Other topics, such as natural history, botany, mineralogy, manufacturing, science, geography and history, occupied a substantial portion of its pages. This global coverage mirrored editorial strategies common among Protestant mission periodicals. *Hitavadi* reported on developments across countries such as America, Austria, Greece, Japan and Mexico, covering topics ranging from conflicts to political and social developments. This global outlook was complemented by domestic news from India, helping readers stay connected with both local and international events. While readers from Telugu towns such as Anantapur, Bezawada or Visakhapatnam were informed about local news, *Hitavadi* also positioned them as part of a broader world community shaped by Protestant ideals. This cultivated a dual sense of belonging, connecting

<sup>40</sup>*Hitavadi*, Jan. 1864.

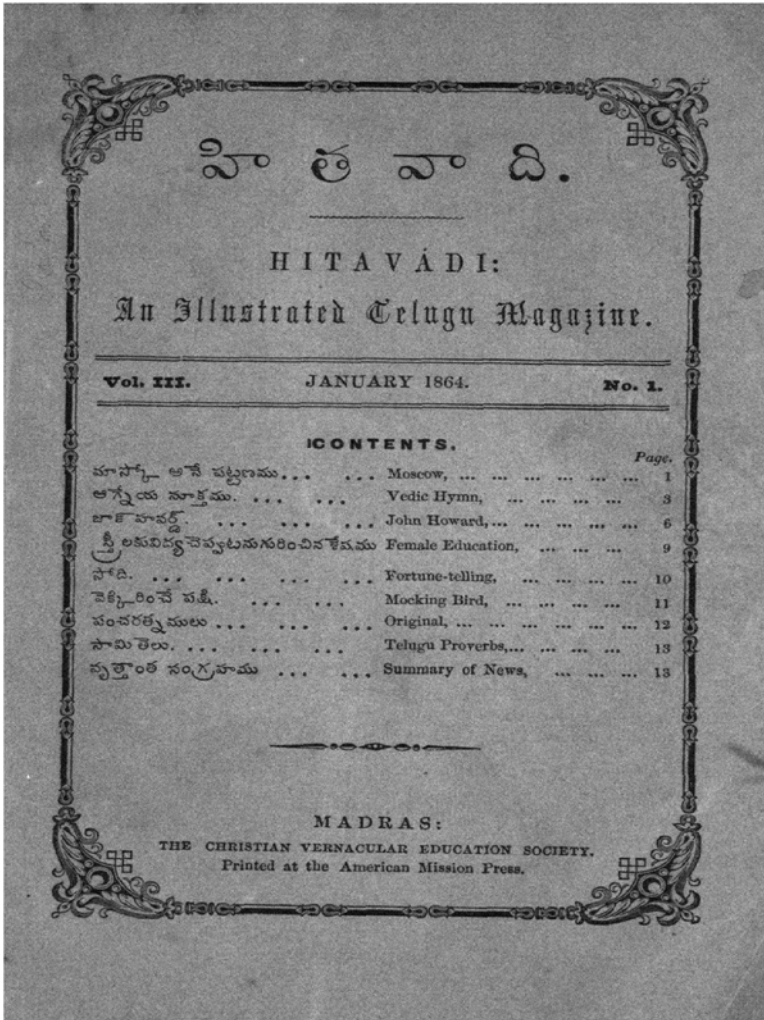


Figure 2. *Hitavadi*'s cover page of the January 1864 issue.

readers through shared values that emphasised certain moral principles and civic engagement, reflecting both local and global narratives. The news in *Hitavadi* was not merely informational; it integrated Telugu readers into a 'civilised' Protestant worldview and a 'civilised' Protestant world, where local events were framed within global narratives. This editorial strategy helped bridge geographical divides, fostering a sense of interconnectedness among scattered communities and making the Telugu readership part of a global Protestant public.<sup>41</sup> In doing so, it portrayed Christianity as an

<sup>41</sup>Israel, 'Improving the Public', 206.

international movement that transcended boundaries and therefore culturally and even scientifically superior to local religions.

*Hitavadi* also engaged readers through intellectual challenges, including arithmetic problems and riddles drawn from Scripture. On a much more practical level than Sharkey's original call for religious reflection and spiritual reform, these activities turned readers into active participants rather than passive consumers. Israel notes that, in the Tamil journal *Morning Star*, puzzles encouraged 'public one-upmanship', where readers demonstrated their problem-solving skills.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, *Hitavadi* used these challenges not just as tests of knowledge but as platforms for communal dialogue. Readers were invited to reflect on both practical and spiritual matters, fostering intellectual engagement and critical thought. By encouraging readers to submit solutions, the magazine promoted a sense of competition and community. This approach aligned with Protestant ideals of self-improvement and active learning. Through these efforts, *Hitavadi* aimed to build a readership connected by shared values and intellectual curiosity, promoting both personal and societal growth. The magazine is also visually captivating, as each issue contains three vintage engraved illustrations, enriching the reading experience. It was made accessible to a wide audience at an affordable subscription rate. Single copies were priced at nine pies each (about 4.6 paise), and an annual subscription was available for eight annas (about 50 paise).<sup>43</sup>

In a similar vein, authorship in *Hitavadi* presents compelling insights into the dynamics of collaboration and editorial control during the early years of the magazine. The extent of local Telugu contributors' involvement in the initial issues remains unclear. Many articles in the 1862 and 1864 issues were signed with initials or short names, leaving the identity and background of the writers ambiguous. For example, arithmetic solutions were submitted by T.C.; 'Female Education' was attributed to V.S.; 'Fortune Telling' was signed by Kaa. Raa.; 'Pancha Ratnamulu' poems were credited to C.P.<sup>44</sup> Occasionally, a full name was provided, such as in 'The Early State of Britain' by Rev. J. Sharp, B.A., a CMS missionary at Masulipatnam. His identification probably reflected his prominent status within the missionary community.<sup>45</sup> Despite the inevitable ambiguity, the evidence on balance suggests the participation of native Telugu scholars. The presence of articles with a non-Christian orientation, such as a 'Vedic Hymn', 'Purusha Sukta' featuring the Sanskrit text and grammatical analysis, and a reflection on the renowned sixteenth-century poet Bhattu Murti from the court of Sri Krishnadevaraya, suggests that *Hitavadi* was not exclusively missionary-authored.<sup>46</sup> These inclusions point to a more diverse content strategy, incorporating contributions from local Telugu voices, possibly converts. Such varied material indicates that even in its early years, *Hitavadi* was gradually becoming a collaborative platform, accommodating multiple perspectives.

By 1873, Rev. Dhannavada Anantam (1850–1949), a Telugu Brahmin convert to Christianity, took over as editor. Unfortunately, no issues of *Hitavadi* from this period

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup>*Hitavadi*, Jan. 1862, 1–3. The daily wage of a male labourer in Ceded Districts during 1876–7 was 3 annas.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, May 1862, 71; June 1862, 88; Jan. 1864, 10, 13.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, Sept. 1864, 135.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, Jan. 1864, 3–5; Mar. 1864, 40–1; June 1864, 88–9; Mar. 1864, 44–5.

have survived, making it difficult to ascertain directly the contributors or the magazine's content during this time. However, secondary sources such as the biography of Purushottam Chowdhary, a prominent Telugu Christian poet, preacher and evangelist, provide indirect evidence of contributions during this period. According to his biography, his article and hymns were published in the July 1883 and August and September 1884 issues of *Hitavadi*. The biography also includes a complete hymn from the 1884 issue. These hymns explored themes of mortality and spiritual transcendence, reflecting the inclusion of Telugu Christian voices and adding depth to the magazine's spiritual discourse.<sup>47</sup> By 1904, this inclusivity had become a hallmark of the magazine. The only surviving copy of the January 1904 issue exemplifies the fruition of collaborative editorial model that to some extent had been present from *Hitavadi*'s founding. Edited by Rev. Anantam, it features contributions from a diverse group, including Rev. J. B. Panes, a missionary, as well as local converts such as B. Seenaiiah and Rev. M. Devanandam.<sup>48</sup> The increased inclusion of local voices illustrates the broader democratisation of Telugu print culture.

The early ambiguity in authorship shows that *Hitavadi*'s evolution was not straightforward. Initially shaped by missionary leadership, the magazine's gradual integration of Telugu Christian voices reflects a transition toward shared authorship. This transformation made *Hitavadi* not just a tool for missionary engagement but a dynamic platform that engaged diverse contributors, bridging colonial and local perspectives. Through accessible print media, *Hitavadi* democratised knowledge, enabling a wider audience, including non-elite readers, to engage with religious, intellectual and social debates.

### Shaping religious discourse and evangelising through print

*Hitavadi* became a significant medium for Christian evangelism in late nineteenth-century India. It utilised print to disseminate religious teachings, promote intellectual discourse and challenge deeply rooted Hindu practices such as idol worship, ritual purification and beliefs about divine complicity in human suffering. By positioning Christianity as a rational and transformative alternative, *Hitavadi* sought to reshape moral and societal norms. This aligns it with journals in other South Asian languages, such as *Morning Star* in Tamil, which, as Dennis Hudson has shown, severely criticised Saivism for its supposed inability to foster personal character or societal welfare.<sup>49</sup>

Predictably, *Hitavadi*, a journal founded by a missionary, took part in this broader evangelical strategy with similar publications across South Asia, challenging traditional Hindu practices and promoting Christianity as a vehicle for personal and social reform. An article entitled 'Idolatry' condemned idol worship and portrayed devotion to physical representations of gods as both spiritually misguided and irrational. It encouraged readers to reject idolatry in favour of the Christian belief in a single, omnipotent God.<sup>50</sup> 'Bathing at Sacred Places' questioned the Hindu ritual of bathing in

<sup>47</sup>Babu John Chowdhary, *Monarch of Telugu Christian Literature: Purushottam Chowdhary* (Vijayawada, 2017), 123, 127, 135–6, 138–9, 149, 150.

<sup>48</sup>*Hitavadi*, Jan. 1904, 2, 4, 8, 12.

<sup>49</sup>Hudson, 'Tamil Hindu Responses', 98.

<sup>50</sup>*Hitavadi*, Feb. 1862, 27–8.

the Ganga river to cleanse sins. The article argued that such rituals failed to prevent immoral behaviour, suggesting that their spiritual efficacy was limited. In contrast, the article emphasised that true forgiveness could only be achieved through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>51</sup> These criticisms reflected the magazine's broader strategy of challenging Hindu practices by presenting Christianity as spiritually fulfilling and morally superior.

Alongside its criticisms of Hinduism, *Hitavadi* actively promoted Christian teachings on salvation, forgiveness, and spiritual renewal. 'The Prodigal' retold the biblical parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32), emphasising God's unconditional love and forgiveness. Readers were encouraged to seek the forgiveness of Christ, with the assurance that God's kindness would embrace them.<sup>52</sup> This narrative reinforced the focus of Christianity on personal redemption, setting it apart from the complex rituals associated with Hindu traditions. Similarly, the article 'The Intercession of Christ' used the story of a man on trial to illustrate its message. The man seeks help from three friends when accused before the King: the first two, representing wealth and worldly ties, refuse to assist, while the third, symbolising Jesus Christ, pleads on his behalf and secures his forgiveness. The article emphasises that neither wealth nor status provides spiritual security, but faith in Christ offers salvation and intercession for humanity's sins.<sup>53</sup> Through such teachings, *Hitavadi* sought to convey that Christianity was a path to both personal transformation and spiritual assurance.

While such biblical exegesis was the bread and butter of a missionary journal, *Hitavadi* also employed unexpected historical comparisons between English and Indian civilisations to promote Christianity as a transformative force for personal and social growth. Two notable articles illustrate the dramatic transformation of Britain from a barbaric past to a modern, prosperous state, attributing this change to the adoption of Christianity. In 'The Progress of the English', the author uses a striking engraved illustration of a bare-bodied man sitting in a coracle, symbolising ancient Britain (see Figure 3).

The man, described as 'lacking the means and facilities of a civilised person', represents the primitive state of the British people.<sup>54</sup> Expanding on this imagery, the article recounts how ancient Britons lived without moral or social order. A second contribution, 'The Early State of Britain', paints a similarly depraved picture of ancient British society 'living with wickedness'. The author claimed that in pre-Christian Britain, ten to twelve men lived communally with their wives in the absence of rules. This chaotic existence included practices such as husbands permitting other men to sleep with their wives and fathers taking their sons' wives and brothers sharing each other's spouses.<sup>55</sup>

These accounts of a morally corrupt and disordered ancient Britain serve as a stark contrast to the country's present state, which authors portrayed as the epitome of civilisation, prosperity and technological advancement. With wealth and power, the

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, May 1862, 76–7.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, June 1862, 81–3.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, April 1862, 58–9.

<sup>54</sup>'Naagarikulakunnattu vaaniki saadhanamulunu, sadupayamulunu leni vaadai yunnadu', *ibid.*, June 1862, 91–3.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, Dec. 1862, 182–3.



**Figure 3.** An early inhabitant of Britain (*Hitavadi*, June 1862, 91).

British now possess innovations such as ships, trains and telegrams that facilitate rapid communication and national integration. According to the author, this remarkable transformation is directly attributable to the English embracing Christianity. By abandoning idol worship and adopting Christianity, the English renounced their old, detrimental practices and aspired to excel in all aspects of life, ultimately achieving a superior state of development. Conversely, the author criticised Hindus for their resistance to change, attributing their societal stagnation to adherence to outdated ancestral practices. The author observes that Hindus often say, 'we do as our ancestors did'.<sup>56</sup> This resistance, the author argues, has resulted in degradation rather than advancement, as encapsulated in the claim, 'Hindus, due to their religion, have been experiencing degradation instead of achieving the best'.<sup>57</sup> Developing the parallel between ancient Britain and contemporary India, the author concluded that for Hindus to achieve progress and development, they must relinquish their adherence to outdated practices.<sup>58</sup>

To promote Christianity further, *Hitavadi* also shared stories of personal transformation through faith. One such story was about Sasko, a native American shaman. People sought his help for relief from suffering, deliverance from evil spirits, prayers for rain and healing. Sasko, however, began to consume alcohol and fell into immoral behaviour. His life changed profoundly after encountering the teachings of Christian missionaries. Sasko embraced Christianity, foreswore alcohol and committed himself to a virtuous life, regularly praying to the Christian God and attending church. He

<sup>56</sup>'Maa peddalu chesinate, memunu chethumu'.

<sup>57</sup>'Hinduvalu vaari mathamuvalla, anthakanthaku sresthathanu pondaka adhogathini ponduthunu vasthunaru'.

<sup>58</sup>*Hitavadi*, June 1862, 91–3; Dec. 1862, 182–3.



remained steadfast in his new faith, despite temptations from his wife and relatives.<sup>59</sup> Sasko's conversion narrative illustrated how conversion to Christianity could lead to personal transformation and moral regeneration, echoing themes and tropes found in biblical stories of redemption and renewal. The magazine also featured biographies of notable Christians to inspire readers. One example was John Howard (1726–90), an English prison reformer who championed humane treatment, sanitation and better conditions in prisons. The author concluded the article with reflective questions: 'Is there a philanthropist like him among Hindus? Should we not consider someone like him a true scholar, rather than those who merely study grammar and philosophy without understanding the importance of helping others?'<sup>60</sup> These stories and biographies highlighted Christian figures as role models. They showcased Christian teachings as a foundation for personal growth and moral inspiration, encouraging readers to adopt Christianity as a way of life.

In addition to evangelising, *Hitavadi* aimed to build a strong Christian community through religious education and spiritual formation. It provided practical advice on how believers could live according to Christian teachings. Articles such as 'Meditating on the Word of God' and 'The Lord's Supper' offered guidance on engaging with scripture and participating in Christian rituals.<sup>61</sup> The magazine also emphasised the importance of religious education within the family. In the article 'How to Train Children', parents were urged to teach their children to pray, read the Bible and sing hymns from a young age.<sup>62</sup> This focus on family-based education aligned with Protestant ideals, which viewed the home as the foundation of faith and moral development.

*Hitavadi* played a crucial role in using print to evangelise, challenge traditional Hindu beliefs and promote Christian teachings in colonial India. The magazine went beyond criticism. It told stories of personal reform and compared Indian and Western ways of life. It positioned Christianity as both a spiritual refuge and a means of change, appealing to the aspirations of readers for personal improvement. By making religious teachings accessible in vernacular languages and promoting family-based education, *Hitavadi* worked to build a devout Christian community. Its use of print technology ensured that Christian teachings reached broader audiences, creating lasting social and religious change.

### Colonial narratives: justifying British rule

British colonial discourse frequently depicted pre-British India as a land plagued by disorder and moral decay. C. A. Bayly has shown how British officials often invoked a Hobbesian idea of a 'state of nature', a situation of constant conflict and anarchy, to justify their presence in India. By painting a picture of the subcontinent as rife with internal conflicts, misrule and insecurity before British intervention, the colonial narrative made British governance appear necessary to restore order.<sup>63</sup> As some of the articles discussed above already make clear, *Hitavadi* magazine played a crucial role in

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, June 1864, 86–8.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan. 1864, 6–8.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan. 1904, 2–8.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, June 1864, 90–2.

<sup>63</sup> C. A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (New York, 2012), 10.

reinforcing this framework by promoting the narrative of British moral superiority over Indian rulers. Through its selective criticism of pre-colonial rulers of India, particularly the Muslim, Jat and Maratha regimes, it positioned British governance as a source of peace, stability and welfare for India. By highlighting the chaos and corruption of past Indian rulers, *Hitavadi* aligned its message with broader colonial objectives, effectively legitimising British control as necessary and benign while downplaying the exploitative nature of British policies.

*Hitavadi* played an important role in echoing these colonial arguments, particularly by emphasising the failures of pre-colonial rulers. The magazine's portrayal of the successors of Aurangzeb, the last major Mughal emperor, was particularly harsh. In an article titled 'India under the Successors of Aurangzeb', the magazine painted a vivid picture of the Mughal Empire's decline. The successors were portrayed as indulging in vice, neglecting their duties as rulers, and focusing more on personal pleasures, such as smoking and enjoying entertainment like comedy performances, rather than attending to the needs of their people. This negligence, *Hitavadi* argued, left India vulnerable to repeated invasions by rapacious figures such as Nadir Shah, Ahmad Shah Abdali and Jats, which further destabilised an already chaotic situation. The Marathas were singled out as particularly aggressive, portrayed as a marauding force that demanded submission from every kingdom and spread fear and disorder.<sup>64</sup> This portrayal of Indian rulers as fundamentally self-serving created a strong contrast with the image of British governance, which was presented as a stabilising force.

The magazine also used symbolic language to reinforce this narrative. A recurring metaphor in *Hitavadi*, such as the image of 'Under British rule, a tiger and an ox quenching their thirst from the same waterhole',<sup>65</sup> conveyed the sense of harmony and peace that British rule supposedly brought to India. This metaphor symbolised the British-imposed stability, where former enemies could now coexist peacefully under the umbrella of British governance. This stark contrast between the perceived anarchy of previous regimes and the peaceful coexistence brought by the British formed a central element of colonial propaganda, and *Hitavadi* was instrumental in propagating this idea.

The magazine not only highlighted the failures of Indian rulers but also glorified the achievements of British governance, particularly in the realm of administrative reforms. In an article titled 'Lord Dalhousie's Administration in India', *Hitavadi* praised the reforms carried out by Governor-General Lord Dalhousie, particularly in areas such as infrastructure development, including railways, postal services and telegraphs. These projects were portrayed as benevolent acts meant to improve the welfare of the Indian people.<sup>66</sup> By glorifying British achievements and downplaying their imperial motives, *Hitavadi* helped legitimise the colonial project.

This objective was rooted in *Hitavadi*'s missionary origins, which influenced the magazine's perspective on Indian and British rulers. The publication often focused its criticism on Muslim rulers while consistently presenting British moral superiority. As Thomas Metcalf observes, the British used despotism as a central representational

<sup>64</sup>*Hitavadi*, May 1862, 67–8.

<sup>65</sup>Britishuvvari paalanamu kindu puliyunu yedduu oka guntalone dappini theerchukonuchunnavi.' *Ibid.*, Mar. 1864, 42–3.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, Mar. 1862, 35–7.

mode to depict Muslims as fierce invaders who alternated between arbitrary violence and indolent self-indulgence during their rule. Metcalf further highlights that Muslim rulers, particularly those opposing the British Raj, were often portrayed as being driven by zealous religious fanaticism. At the same time, their regimes were described as emblematic of the broader misrule and decadence of the eighteenth century.<sup>67</sup> This narrative aligned with the broader colonial agenda of portraying British intervention as a necessary civilising mission. The article 'The Past and Present Government of India' therefore juxtaposed the cruelty of Muslim rulers with the perceived justice and humanity of British governance. The article cited an incident in which a Muslim ruler, in the presence of Portuguese and Dutch dignitaries, ordered the execution of musicians for failing to appear at a court event.<sup>68</sup> Such narratives reinforced the depiction of pre-colonial Muslim rulers as despotic and arbitrary. By contrast, British rule was positioned as a stabilising force that brought fairness, protection and relief to a previously oppressed populace.

*Hitavadi* magazine was an important tool in the strategy to justify British colonial rule in India. Through its selective criticism of Muslim, Jat and Maratha rulers and its glorification of British governance, the magazine helped shape public perception in favour of the British Empire. By promoting the narrative of British rule as a civilising force and depicting Indian rulers as incapable of governing, *Hitavadi* reinforced the colonial narrative of British moral and administrative superiority.

### Breaking gender norms: call for women's education

During the colonial period, Telugu society, much like other parts of India, was deeply patriarchal, confining women to domestic roles and denying them access to education.<sup>69</sup> *Hitavadi* emerged as a pioneering force that challenged these entrenched gender norms, advocating for women's education as a means to transform society. Kenneth W. Jones discusses the struggles of the Nadar women in southern India, who turned to Christianity as a means to escape caste oppression and assert their dignity and rights, including the right to cover their bodies.<sup>70</sup> This struggle for dignity among the Nadar women resonates with *Hitavadi's* own calls for women to be respected as intellectual and moral equals to men. By advocating for women's education, *Hitavadi* was, in essence, advocating for a broader rethinking of gender roles, challenging the deeply ingrained belief that women were inherently inferior.

Much like the Nadar women, widows in Telugu society faced severe marginalisation, which *Hitavadi* sought to address through education. During this period, widows were subject to severe social restrictions and stigmatisation, but *Hitavadi* urged society to reconsider these rigid constraints and advocated for widows' access to education. The magazine focused on the education of widows, presenting them as potential agents of literacy who could contribute to spreading knowledge and advancing reform. This

<sup>67</sup>Thomas R. Metcalf, *The New Cambridge History of India*, III.4: *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge, 2008), 139.

<sup>68</sup>*Hitvaadi*, Mar. 1864, 42–3.

<sup>69</sup>Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley, 1998); Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* (2001); Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens* (Calcutta, 2003).

<sup>70</sup>Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* (Cambridge, 1989), 158–9.

emphasis on educating widows suggested that widows, long marginalised, could play a crucial role in instructing others and thereby contribute to the intellectual and moral uplift of society.<sup>71</sup> The magazine's (from our perspective perhaps rather simplistic)–call for educating widows demonstrates its belief in the edifying power of education for both personal and societal transformation.

Through numerous articles entitled 'Female Education', *Hitavadi* argued that educating women was essential not just for their intellectual growth but for the moral and spiritual advancement of society as a whole.<sup>72</sup> Different authors questioned the justification for women's supposed inferiority or for treating them as mere servants. The article emphasised the inherent equality of men and women, noting that both genders are created to be partners in life, contributing uniquely yet equally. While acknowledging the different strengths and capabilities of each sex – women excelling in nurturing and men often more suited to physical conflict – the article underscored that these differences did not justify inequality. Instead, it highlighted the complementary nature of these roles while emphasising the spiritual equality of men and women, both of whom are accountable for their actions and equally deserving of a heavenly abode.<sup>73</sup>

While *Hitavadi* championed the transformative power of education, it also recognised and addressed widespread apprehension about the potential disruption to traditional norms.<sup>74</sup> In Telugu society, as in other parts of India, the notion of female empowerment threatened patriarchal structures. *Hitavadi* addressed the widespread fear surrounding women's education through an imaginary conversation between an English visitor and an Indian that represented the tension between colonial modernity and indigenous conservatism. In one such dialogue, the English visitor challenged the sceptical Indian interlocutor by reframing education as essential for both individual and societal growth rooted in religion: 'Education is a means to gain knowledge about God. If women are educated, they too can read religious texts and gain spiritual insight. Education also provides wisdom and offers numerous benefits for women.'<sup>75</sup> This argument situates education beyond mere employment, emphasising its role in spiritual and moral development.

The Indian replied with deep-seated concern: 'However, women will be spoiled if they get an education by making friends with wicked men and writing letters to them. I am afraid that in this way, they may misuse their education.'<sup>76</sup> However, the English visitor counters this argument with a rational perspective: 'Only some women get spoiled, as you said, but not all women. Instead of thinking that way, why don't you think that

<sup>71</sup>*Hitavadi*, Jan. 1864, 9–10.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, June 1862, 85–6.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, Jan. 1864, 9.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, June 1862, 87–8.

<sup>75</sup>Chaduvukonuta eswara jnanamunaku saadhanamavunu. Streeelaku kuda vidya vachina pakshamunaku varunnu bhagavatsambhandamaina sadgranthamulu modalainavi chaduvukonavachunu. Chaduvulana yukthayuktha vivechanayunnu kalugunu. Buddhi vikasinchi anduvalana aneka labhamulu kalugunu.' *Ibid.*, June 1862, 86.

<sup>76</sup>'Kaani streeelaku chaduvu cheppina pakshamunaku pokirithanamu athisayinchi, pokiri purushulatho sahasasamu chesi, attivarki durmargapu sangathulanu gurinchi vuthara prathyutharamulu vrayanu arambhinchi, ee vidhamuga thamaku vachina vidyanu durviniyogamu chethuremoyani bhayamuga nunnadi.' *Ibid.*

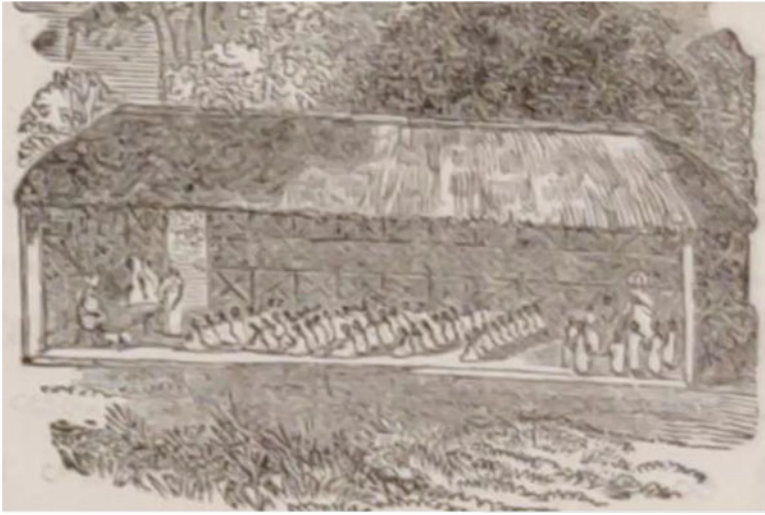


Figure 4. Girls' school (*Hitavadi*, June 1862, 85).

they read God-related books and behave in the right ways?<sup>77</sup> By presenting education as a means of empowering women to engage with Scripture and acquire religious wisdom, the dialogue reorients the discussion from fear to possibility. The English visitor also addresses the stigma associated with social change, suggesting that 'to those who laugh, you can tell all these reasons which I have told you. After telling good reasons also, if people laugh, are they wise people or fools?'<sup>78</sup> The dialogue thus imagined the – by now persuaded – Indian interlocutor becoming an agent of change himself. By framing resistance to women's education as foolishness, the dialogue presented education as a moral and social imperative and challenged conservative norms.<sup>79</sup>

Crucially, the discussion of women's education was more than theoretical. The magazine featured an evocative illustration of a girls' school setting, which complements the article. The school is depicted as a hut, characterised by its absence of walls, providing an open and accessible ambience (see Figure 4). Within this open-air structure, female students are seated in six distinct rows, their attention directed towards women teachers. These serve as the focal point, imparting knowledge and guidance. Intriguingly, towards the back, another woman teacher is illustrated with a different dynamic. She stands and is encircled by a group of standing students. Their posture and arrangement suggest a playful or interactive moment, hinting at a more casual, perhaps recreational activity in the formal learning environment.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>77</sup>'Kondaru durmargapu streele meeru cheppinattu chedipoduru kaanee, andarunnu chediporu. Streeleu thamaku vachina vidyanu itla durviniyogamu chethuranukokunte, bhagavatsambandhamaina sadgranthamulu chadivi sanmargamunande pravarthinthurani yela anukonagudadu?' *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup>'Atula navvedivaariki neenippudu cheppina hethuvulanniyunnu meeru cheppavachunu. Manchi hethuvulu cheppina tharuvatha kuuda navvedu vaaru vivekulaa, avivekulaa?' *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, 85–8.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 85.

This depiction of a vibrant educational atmosphere served to underscore both the possibility and the reality of female instruction. However, it is important to note that this dynamic is still limited to a female-only space. While it challenged certain societal barriers, it also reflected contemporary mores, where broader co-educational opportunities remained out of reach. This blend of formal instruction and casual interaction paints a rich yet nuanced picture of the school's evolving role in advancing women's intellectual and moral development.

By drawing on these themes, *Hitavadi* made a compelling case for women's education as a means to challenge gender norms, empower women and, in the process, fuel social and religious change. By linking education with broader social reforms, the journal became a pioneering publication in the fight for gender equality in Telugu society. Its efforts contributed to a larger trend in colonial India, where education was seen as a powerful catalyst for social change and a justification. By challenging traditional gender roles and promoting women's empowerment, *Hitavadi* significantly shaped the discourse on gender and education in the Telugu regions.

### Expanding horizons through global education

A final and related aspect of *Hitavadi* that is worth exploring in this article is its role as a virtual travel guide, taking readers to unexpected places, many of them outside of the British Empire. These articles explored a rich tapestry of cities and locations such as Rome, Athens, St Petersburg (see [Figure 5](#)), Paris, Windsor Castle, Moscow (see [Figure 6](#)) and Tiberias, which is located in modern-day Israel. As Emma Hunter and Leslie James note, the infrastructure and global networks that facilitated the circulation of colonial print media played a significant role in enabling periodicals like *Hitavadi* to connect local readers to broader global ideas, demonstrating the intellectual and cultural reach of missionary print media.<sup>81</sup> Additionally, the articles provided insights into the historical context, foundation, daily life of its citizens and the legacy of past rulers. These narratives were always accompanied by engraved illustrations, showcasing castles, cityscapes with buildings and bridges over water adorned with boats, mountains, people travelling by horses, and pedestrians. This choice of content positioned *Hitavadi* as more than a local magazine; it became a conduit to the world, embodying an interconnected vision where the outside space was depicted as civilised and Christian.

The geographic diversity and symbolic significance of the cities portrayed in these articles were striking. For instance, the article on Rome dwells at great length on the city's role in Christian history, referencing Augustus's reign as the time of Jesus Christ's birth and describing the Roman Emperor Constantine as the first ruler to embrace Christianity. The article on Paris portrays it as a vibrant centre of commerce and industry, renowned for its architectural grandeur and cultural heritage. While its streets were noted as less clean than those of London, its grand royal palaces and thriving urban activity made it a symbol of progress and elegance.<sup>82</sup> Other cities, such as Moscow, with its eclectic architecture and rich history of conflict and trade,

<sup>81</sup>Hunter and James, 'Introduction', 4.

<sup>82</sup>*Hitavadi*, Jul. 1892, 102–5; Oct. 1892, 145–6.



Figure 5. St Petersburg (*Hitavadi*, Sept. 1862, 129).

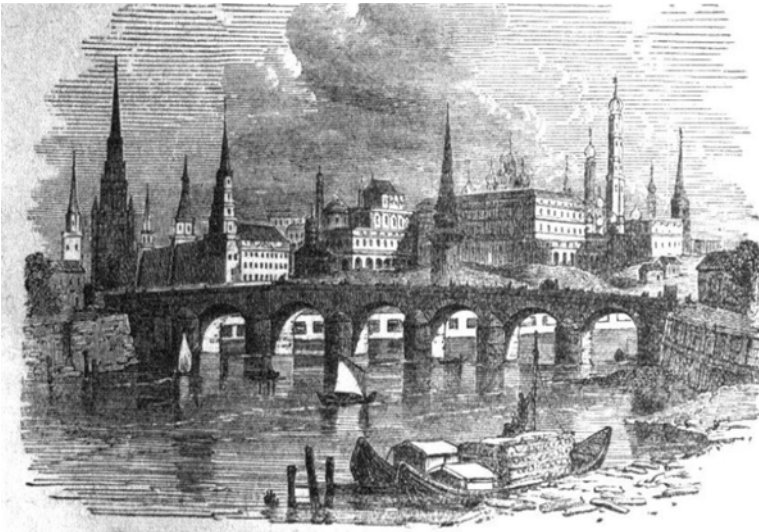


Figure 6. Moscow (*Hitavadi*, Jan. 1864, 1).

and Tiberias, shaped by Herod Antipas and (much) later the European Christian presence, offered a compelling mix of historical significance and contemporary relevance. Windsor Castle, on the other hand, symbolised not only the British monarchy but (perhaps surprisingly) also the transient nature of human effort. The article blended

historical narrative with spiritual reflection, reminding readers that while castles and forts are built for worldly happiness, only labour directed towards heavenly joy can yield eternal results.<sup>83</sup> Through such detailed geographic portrayals, *Hitavadi* fostered its readers' cultural awareness by exposing them to a mosaic of cultures and historical narratives. These articles enriched readers' understanding of human societies and encouraged them to engage with a global perspective that was multifaceted and dynamic but fundamentally Christian.

*Hitavadi's* selection of cities such as Rome, Athens and St Petersburg, despite their non-Protestant affiliations, reflects the magazine's commitment to fostering a nuanced appreciation of global achievements. The article on Athens highlights its profound historical and cultural significance, recounting foundational myths, intellectual contributions and political innovations. It portrays Athens as the cradle of governance and legal reform, referencing pivotal moments such as Cecrops's establishment of the Areopagus, the Trojan War and Solon's drafting of the Athenian constitution. Additionally, Athens is celebrated for its thirst for learning and excellence in sculpture, and is presented as a beacon of intellectual and artistic brilliance. Similarly, the depiction of St Petersburg reflects Peter the Great's vision of a modern, European-inspired capital, emphasising his ambition to uplift and modernise his nation through knowledge gained from his travels across Europe. The article highlights the city's urban sophistication, with planned streets, grand houses, and institutions such as temples, hospitals and schools, while also acknowledging the human cost of its construction. Furthermore, St Petersburg is depicted as a hub of trade and commerce, importing goods such as jute, iron and finger millet, emphasising its pivotal role in global commerce and cultural exchange.<sup>84</sup> Russia's transformation, then, is held up as a mirror of what India might become if it followed its lead in imitating the West.

Such portrayals of Athens and St Petersburg enriched *Hitavadi's* global perspective and demonstrated an inclusive approach to celebrating human achievement, regardless of religious or cultural affiliations. By choosing cities that symbolised enlightenment, progress and innovation, *Hitavadi* encouraged its readership to draw inspiration from these global milestones, suggesting that similar virtues and aspirations could guide their own society towards comparable advancements. The focus on these cities went beyond a simple Christian message – or rather, it equated Christianity with civilisation.

What is particularly intriguing is that this portrayal could act as a mirror, suggesting that Telugu readers might envision themselves as part of this world. The narrative subtly implied that by adopting similar virtues and aspirations, they could achieve comparable progress and civilisation. Yet by enlarging the readers' world, *Hitavadi* also decentred Andhra and its traditions and customs, encouraging readers to see themselves not just as Telugu speakers but as participants in a larger interconnected cultural and intellectual sphere. The articles were thus intended to spark curiosity and inspiration among readers, evoking a sense of awe and prompting them to expand their knowledge or dream of visiting these far-flung places. In an era when global communication was not as seamless as it is today, these articles bridged significant gaps, acting

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, Jan. 1864, 1–2; Mar. 1864, 33–4; Nov. 1862, 161–2.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, Aug. 1862, 113–15; Sept. 1862, 129–31.



as connective threads that linked readers to the wider world. They fostered a sense of belonging to a global community by transcending geographical boundaries, allowing readers to experience interconnectedness with diverse cultures and histories. This sense of connection not only enhanced the knowledge of the readers but reinforced an aspirational identity; Telugu readers could see themselves as potential participants in a broader, 'civilised' world aligned with Christian frameworks.

Despite infrastructural constraints, *Hitavadi* engaged with global Christian intellectual networks, thus contributing to the circulation of ideas on education, science and social reform between the local Telugu population and the global context. Beyond content, the infrastructure enabling the circulation of the magazine was also crucial in linking the content of *Hitavadi* to a global exchange of knowledge. This circulation further reinforced the role of the magazine as a medium that expanded intellectual horizons while connecting local audiences to global currents of thought and development. The depiction of places such as Paris and St Petersburg was not merely informative; it was symbolic of a possible future, a call to readers that their own society could transform and mirror the values and advancements of these distant, 'civilised' realms.

### The resurgence of *Hitavadi* magazine

The magazine *Hitavadi* experienced interruptions and multiple revivals during its history. According to CMS records, Sharkey initially edited *Hitavadi* from 1862 to 1866. However, it ceased publication around 1867 due to financial constraints, as proceeds from sales were insufficient to cover expenses. In 1873, the magazine was revived by 'upper-class converts' affiliated with the CMS in Masulipatnam and Ellore.<sup>85</sup> Rev. Dhannavada Anantam became its editor and played a pivotal role in reshaping its content to include topics such as religion, literature, science and biographies.<sup>86</sup> Despite clear archival evidence for this revival, no surviving issues of *Hitavadi* from this period have so far been located.

Financial challenges persisted despite the magazine's growing influence. The Telugu Christian Association of the CMS sought support from the Religious Tract Society of London, which provided monthly donations of printing paper.<sup>87</sup> This assistance was crucial in making the magazine affordable for its primarily Christian readership. CMS records confirm that *Hitavadi* was still in circulation in 1884, but details about its activity afterwards remain scarce. A biography of Anantam, written by his son, notes that he revived *Hitavadi* and managed it for over forty years.<sup>88</sup> The Missionary and Bible Society reports clarify this gap, indicating that Anantam was engaged in biblical scholarship from 1897 to 1901.<sup>89</sup> This suggests that *Hitavadi* ceased or suspended publication for the second time around those dates.

<sup>85</sup> *Church Missionary Record* (June 1874), p. 148; *Evangelical Christendom: Christian Work and the News of the Churches*, xxviii (1874), 341.

<sup>86</sup> Ramachandra Rao, *Dhannavada Anantam*, 1–19; *The Missionary Conference: South India and Ceylon, 1879*, II (Madras, 1880), 391.

<sup>87</sup> *Annual Report of the Religious Tract Society* (1880), 152; (1882), 157; (1884), 149.

<sup>88</sup> Ramachandra Rao, *Dhannavada Anantam*, 116–17.

<sup>89</sup> *Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East, 1896–97* (1897), 272; *The Report of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, 97 (1901), 374.

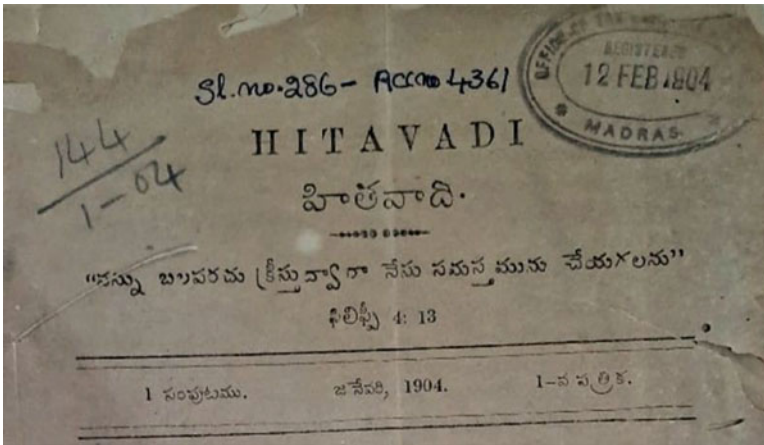


Figure 7. *Hitavadi*'s cover page of the January 1904 issue.

A third revival of the magazine occurred in January 1904 (see Figure 7). The cover page of this issue features the title printed in both English and Telugu, along with a verse from the New Testament – Philippians 4:13 ('I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me'). This addition of a Bible verse was not present in the surviving 1862 and 1864 issues. Below the verse, within two borders, the details 'Volume 1' and 'Issue 1' are printed in Telugu on the left and right sides, respectively, with 'January 1904' written in the centre, indicating that the new editor considered this effort to be a fresh relaunch. Although no other issues from this revival period have survived, some content from *Hitavadi* was republished in other Telugu Christian journals such as *Kraisthava Samyukta Sangha Varthamani* and *Streelakoraku Varthamanamulu* (*News for Women*). Anantam claimed that, due to increasing responsibilities in education, he had handed over *Hitavadi* to Vedanayagam Samuel Azariah, the Bishop of the Dornakal (1874–1945). Under Azariah's direction, it became a diocesan publication aimed at serving mission agents.<sup>90</sup> The magazine was still confirmed to be in existence in 1920.<sup>91</sup> However, no further information is available regarding how long it continued to operate. It is unclear when the magazine ultimately ceased publication. *Hitavadi*'s history over the decades shows just how ephemeral print could be even in the early twentieth century.

## Conclusion

This article has recovered the forgotten legacy of *Hitavadi*, the first Telugu monthly. It played a crucial role in creating an incipient public sphere and redefining missionary journalism in nineteenth-century Andhra. More than a missionary periodical, *Hitavadi* represents a profound intervention into Telugu print culture, using vernacular language to engage with complex intersections of education, religion, colonialism and

<sup>90</sup>Ramachandra Rao, *Dhannavada Anantam*, 116–17.

<sup>91</sup>Report on Native Papers in the Madras Presidency (Madras, July 1920), 838.

social reform. From this perspective, the magazine appears not only as a cultural artefact but also as an active agent of societal change. It served as a platform where local and global Protestant ideals were negotiated, translated and adapted to the Telugu socio-cultural landscape. By recovering the elusive history of *Hitavadi* from fragmented archival records and the challenges of print preservation, this article highlights the importance of restoring the narratives of marginalised yet vital periodicals, which have often been overlooked in accounts of Indian print culture.

The article has offered a new take on *Hitavadi*, revealing its multifaceted legacy, which extends beyond straightforward evangelism. While *Hitavadi* has been acknowledged as the first journal of its kind, its broader significance has often been overlooked, partly because scholars lost access to the text over time. This study shed light on how *Hitavadi* served as a platform for social discourse, ethical debates and the expansion of literacy, facilitating the democratisation of knowledge beyond its Christian orientation. In doing so, *Hitavadi* subverted elite monopolies on religious and literary authority, giving a space to diverse voices and enabling reformist ideas to gain visibility in the public sphere. Moreover, the study highlights the growing role of Telugu voices in *Hitavadi*, which were probably present from the outset. The magazine's editorship shifted to a Telugu convert in 1873, although missing issues obscure contributor details from this period. By 1904, as evidenced by the surviving issue, *Hitavadi* predominantly featured Telugu contributors and a local editor, reflecting its transformation into a platform shaped by local voices.

In addition to its immediate impact, *Hitavadi* laid a foundational model for subsequent Telugu Christian journals by shaping their content and editorial style. Later periodicals, such as *Telugu Baptist*, *Telugu Lutheran* and *Vivekavathi*, followed its approach by incorporating a similar blend of religious outreach, nurturing converts, presenting riddles and news columns, and advocating for women's education. This legacy demonstrates how *Hitavadi* not only shaped contemporary discourse but also provided a template that sustained and expanded Christian journalism in the Telugu-speaking regions. Ultimately, *Hitavadi* exemplifies the transformative potential of vernacular print media during colonial India. Its ability to address both secular and religious concerns reflects the strategic adaptability of *Hitavadi*. The magazine also responded to the intellectual and social needs of the time, demonstrating how missionary journals engaged with the complexities of colonial modernity. This study's recovery of *Hitavadi* serves as a critical intervention in the broader discourse on the role of print in fostering public spheres and negotiating cultural change in colonial India. It underscores the need for further scholarship on lesser-known vernacular journals, which have played vital roles in shaping regional modernities but remain hidden in fragmented archives.

**Acknowledgements.** I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Jan Machielsen, co-editor of the journal, and the anonymous peer reviewers for their insightful comments and constructive suggestions. I am also deeply thankful to Tarangini Sriraman (London) and Aaron Kaiser (US) for their time and effort in visiting the libraries and providing me with the issues of *Hitavadi*.

---

**Cite this article:** Chandra Sekhar Chakali, 'Rediscovering *Hitavadi*: A Forgotten Pioneer of Telugu Vernacular Print and Missionary Journalism,' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (2025), 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0080440125000039>