Caste-based Discrimination & Atrocities on Dalit Christians and the Need for Reservations

Prakash Louis

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The primary goals of the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies among its many tertiary objectives are:

A. Undertaking interdisciplinary research on (a) the forms, nature and dynamics of discrimination and exclusion of the marginalized social groups; (b) their consequences on the social, cultural, economic and political conditions; (c) on developing inclusive policies against discrimination and inequalities and for the economic, social and political empowerment of the marginalized social groups;

B. To provide knowledge support to the Government, the NGOs and other organizations working at local, regional, national and international levels;

C. To provide research inputs to policymaking and other related bodies; and

D. To serve as a Resource Center for researchers, students, activists and policymakers.

Cordaid (Netherlands) has provided support for the printing of this working paper and this is gratefully acknowledged.

The IIDS Working Paper Series disseminate the findings of the core research outputs of the Institute to facilitate informed discussions among the civil society, the academia, researchers and also strive to contribute towards policy infusions.
Caste-based Discrimination and Atrocities on Dalit Christians and the Need for Reservations

Prakash Louis

Working Paper Series
Indian Institute of Dalit Studies
New Delhi
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Foreword

This working paper “Caste-based Discrimination and Atrocities on Dalit Christians and the Need for Reservations” is the fourth in the Second Working Paper Series of the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies. The purpose of this Series is to disseminate and share the findings of the core research concerns of the Institute for a wider circulation, and to facilitate informed discussions on a variety of focal issues.

The Working Paper Series disseminate both, empirical and theoretical findings of the ongoing research on issues pertaining to the forms and nature of social exclusion and discrimination, caste and untouchability-based discrimination, and inclusive policies for the marginalized social groups in the Indian society and in other countries etc.

It is hoped that the Working Paper Series will be beneficial to researchers, students, academics, and activists alike, and will also benefit policymaking bodies and civil society organizations.

This Working paper “Caste-based Discrimination and Atrocities on Dalit Christians and the Need for Reservations” presents a unique perspective into the problems faced by Dalit Christians. It contextualizes the problem of the Dalit Christians to the Scheduled Caste origin of this social group and thereby, establishes that assertions for mobility are being circumvented due to their treatment as erstwhile untouchables at par with the Scheduled Caste community in the wider Indian society.

It documents the dilemma of the Dalit Christians, who on one side, are treated as Dalits by the caste Christians and on the other, are denied their legitimate rights due to their embracing another religion.

Further, this Working Paper attempts to understand the Dalit discourse in the contemporary times, the processes and outcomes of Christianization of Dalits, caste-based discrimination suffered by the Dalit Christians and the legitimacy of the demand for reservations for Dalit Christians, the opposition to such demands.

In the backdrop of paucity of data on Dalit Christians, this Working Paper collates information from a wide variety of primary and secondary sources, which highlight the marginality, alienation, continued subjugation and depressed location of the Dalit Christians.

It is relevant here to mention that the study is both, topical and interesting considering the nature of exclusion faced by the Dalit Christians on account of their caste backgrounds.

The Indian Institute of Dalit Studies gratefully acknowledges the support provided by Cordaid, Netherlands, for the publication of this Series.

Sukhadeo Thorat
Managing Trustee
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Caste-based Discrimination and Atrocities on Dalit Christians and the Need for Reservations

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**Statement of Objects and Reasons**

_of_ The Constitutional (Scheduled Castes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 1996

Converts to the Christian religion who are of the Scheduled Caste origin are precluded from the statutory benefits and safeguards accruing to the members of the Scheduled Castes. Demands have been made from time to time for extending these benefits and safeguards to the Christians of the Scheduled Caste origin by granting them recognition as the Scheduled Castes on the grounds that change of religion has not altered their social and economic conditions. Upon due consideration of these demands, it is proposed to amend the relevant Constitutional (Scheduled Castes) Orders to include the Christian converts from the Scheduled Castes as Scheduled Castes therein.

New Delhi                     Sitaram Kesri
The 11th of March 1996        Minister of Welfare

1. The Problematic

Dalits\(^1\) are the deprived, dispossessed and dehumanized segments of Indian society. They are, not only, deprived of the basic minimum facilities of life like education, housing and health, but are also dispossessed of access and control over resources. They are also outcasted to a dehumanized existence. Thus, culturally too, they are the most destitute section of Indian society. Further, in terms of culture, Dalits of India are deprived of their own way of thinking, behaving and living. The motivational aspects and the thought patterns about themselves, the society and their worldviews are imposed upon them by the dominant castes of the region. It is a historically proven fact that Dalits are the productive classes of the Indian society, but their very products have been alienated from them by the dominant castes and more often than not, Dalits are reduced to obliteration.
It needs to be reiterated that the genesis of Dalit discourse are the atrocities and brutalities that are heaped upon Dalits in everyday existence. Existentially speaking, Dalits are subjected to discrimination, deprivation and dehumanization. It is this individual and collective, social and historical experience of oppression and exploitation, which stimulates Dalit movements and also Dalit discourses. But this presents only one side of the story. It is understood that Dalit movements and Dalit discourses begin with the atrocities and the heinous inequalities that they are subjected from birth to death, in day to day operations and in the mindsets that control and colour their behaviour. Coupled with these is the innate power within the community to resist atrocities. While this is the case with Dalits in general, it is also the case with Dalit Christians.

Dalit Christians or Christians of Scheduled Caste origin (CSCO) or Dalits converted to Christianity have been asserting their rights for utilizing Constitutional provisions pertaining to Dalits in India. Such assertions have been denied to them historically and even in contemporary times. Similarly, Muslims of Scheduled Caste origin (MSCO) are also making similar demands and want the Government to bring them under the purview of reservations since they too are being treated as Scheduled Castes (SCs) even today. Thus, the demand for including Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims like Dalit Hindus, Dalit Sikhs and Dalit Buddhists into the ambit of reservations has been reverberating in the last two decades.

To contextualize and comprehensively understand the problematic of Dalit Christians, it is pertinent to understand the SC origin of this social group, the discrimination they suffer due to their caste backgrounds, both within wider society and the Christian world. Those who hail from caste Christian origin highlight the latent benefits received by Dalit Christians by being members of Christianity as an outcome of the manifest plan of action for emancipation and empowerment. But they continue to treat Dalit Christians as erstwhile untouchables and at par with the treatment to erstwhile untouchables in the wider Indian society. Thus, even after converting to Christianity, Dalit Christians are treated as Dalits by the caste Christians. The ruling class on the other hand, denies any benefit that is legitimate to the people of SC origin who got converted to Christianity on the grounds that they have embraced another religion, namely, Christianity.

The ruling elite of the country look at the issue of Dalit Christians only from the perspective of conversions. Interestingly, such a perspective was also
taken by social scientists and social activists. Even the ‘so called’ upper caste leadership within the church projected the issue of Dalit Christians from the point of view of them being discriminated by the Government since they got converted to Christianity. But all these points of view failed to see the Christians of SC Origin as Dalits or SCs first and foremost, and then secondarily, only as converts to Christianity. This myopic perspective according to me is the problematic.

In this working paper an attempt has been made to understand the Dalit discourse in contemporary times, the processes and the outcomes of Christianization of Dalits, caste based discrimination suffered by Dalit Christians, the legitimacy of the demand for reservation for Dalit Christians, the opposition to this demand from some quarters etc. and finally, this working paper will foreground the constitutional responsibilities of the National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities (NCRLM) with regards to suggesting conferment of SC status to erstwhile untouchables/Dalits converted to Christianity.

At the outset, it needs to be stated that one is confronted with lack of availability of data with regards to Dalit Christians. Though, some studies have been undertaken in south India and Punjab, but there is hardly any study available about other parts of India. This calls for an assimilation of issues of Dalit Christians with Dalits in general. Secondly, parallels could be made regarding the lives, nature of discrimination and exploitation suffered by Dalit Christians and Dalit in general. Though, they have got converted to another religion, they continue to be treated as Dalits. Hence, in this working paper constant references have been made to Dalits in general and Dalit Christians in particular.

2. Dalit Discourses

The emanating point of Dalit discourse is the caste discrimination that Dalits suffer on an everyday basis, the historical nature of their deprivation and the dehumanization that has reduced them to non-beings. But discrimination and dehumanization of Dalits presents only one side of the story. Central to the Dalit discourse is the ability of Dalits to carry on their lives against all odds and in unfavourable circumstances. Thus, the oppression of Dalits and their attempts for emancipation on one hand, and atrocities and assertions on the other, constitute the central and crucial axis of Dalit discourses.

Jyotirao Phule (1827-1890) in his reformatory attempts to work for dalituthan, that is, the upliftment of Dalits, or the downtrodden of Indian society is
supposed to have used the term Dalit for the first time. Dr. Ambedkar (1891-1956), though, did not popularize the word Dalit; his philosophy remained central to the emergence of the term Dalit. In a way, the term is of relatively recent origin (of the 1960s) in public discourses. Marathi literary figures and neo-Buddhists began to use the term in their writings and the contributions of the literary initiatives in replacing harijan and achut with the term maybe located as the first case of public use of the term. It is naturally assumed that they expressed their anger, protest and aspiration through the usage of this term.

The term Dalit is a past passive participle of the Sanskrit root dal implying to crack, split, and open etc. Dalna means tearing or causing to burst and Dalit as a corollary means split, broken, destroyed, scattered and torn as under etc. The noun dala, besides meaning the splitting, has also the positive connotation of something unfolding itself (dala-komala-a lotus, dala-kosal-a jasmine). Two inter-related processes can be identified with regards to the evolution of the term. Firstly, the term denotes an affirmative action, that is, ‘Yes we are Dalits; we are crushed and broken people’. Secondly, it also indicates assertion, that is, ‘No’ we will not allow ourselves to be crushed by you the dominant castes anymore’.4

The word gained currency in the public sphere during the SC - caste Hindu riots in Bombay in the early 1970s. Dalit Panthers used the term to assert their identity for rights and self-respect. Later, the term came to be used to include all the oppressed and exploited sections of the society. But predominantly, the word Dalit is used to refer to the erstwhile untouchables. While the location and role of Dalits in Indian society continues to be debated; the origin and evolution of Dalit Christians is all the more a complex issue, both in its reality and in the discourses. There are heated debates regarding Dalits being Hindus or having their own religious identity. But there is no disagreement on Dalits being the excluded and discriminated segment of Indian population. In a similar vein, there are debates regarding the nature, method, objectives of Dalits getting converted to Christianity. But there is a fair amount of agreement on the fact that Dalits who got converted to Christianity have continued to be subjected to discrimination and marginalization.

3. Dalitization and Subjugation
3.1 Marginality

It has been well established that marginalization of Dalits within the Indian society, both as a cause and a consequence of their exclusion. Even in
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democratic polity, their marginalization continues unabated. For instance, reservation is one of the ways of including the excluded. Dr. Ambedkar understood the debilitating consequences of exclusion on Dalits. Hence, he demanded for the right to representation in proportion to their population in educational institutions, legislative bodies and public services. One of the consequences of such a demand was the incorporation of the provision of reservation in educational institutions, jobs and legislatures as articulated in Article 330 of the Constitution. Reservation for Dalits has been in place for over five decades.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>60,067</td>
<td>6,135</td>
<td>10.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>94,111</td>
<td>11,649</td>
<td>12.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>19,59,477</td>
<td>3,14,995</td>
<td>16.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D (Excluding Sweepers)</td>
<td>8,18,748</td>
<td>1,76,368</td>
<td>21.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweepers</td>
<td>15,51,137</td>
<td>61,149</td>
<td>39.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (Excluding Sweepers)</td>
<td>29,32,403</td>
<td>5,09,149</td>
<td>17.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (Including Sweepers)</td>
<td>30,87,540</td>
<td>5,70,296</td>
<td>18.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


But contrary to common belief, the percentage of the marginalized sections employed in Government services is abysmally low (See Table 1 A). If one pays attention to the presence of Dalits in the public sector, one would be appalled by the fact that even the stipulated 15 per cent of the reservation quota fixed for them is not filled. Many of these prescribed posts are filled up by the dominant castes. It is this non-compliance with the constitutional measures, which has invigorated Dalits to raise the issue of filling of the quota of reservation at all levels. Dalit converts to Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism need not worry about sharing the cake with Dalit Christians because there are many posts, which are not filled up and those reserved posts can be filled by Dalit Christians. Secondly, if Dalit Christians are brought under the ambit of reservations, they will bring in an additional population, that is, approximately 1.4 crore to the already existing population of 16.58 crore (16.3 per cent) and thus, the total Dalit population would be 17.98 crores. If the same benefits are extended to Dalit Muslims, then the population of Dalits, as a whole increase and this will strengthen the demand for
reservations to the tune of 18 per cent, both in the public and the private sphere.

While the marginality of Dalits continues unabated, there are greater efforts for mobility among the community. According to the Government data, it is clear that nearly 2 lakh Dalit students at a given time have enrolled for academic and professional courses (See Table 1 B). If these figures are added up for the last fifty years, then the numbers of students educated, trained and skilled would run up to millions. Significantly, they accrue from different sectors and are thus, diversified. Though, marginalization of Dalits has been going, yet, they have been making consistent efforts to become educationally and economically mobile. The fact of the matter is that these candidates are denied equal opportunities to exhibit their capabilities, commitments and entrepreneurship skills since they belong to a discriminated social group. This is particularly the reason for them becoming unemployed and underemployed. The question that begs an answer is if this is the situation with the most educated segment among Dalit and tribal population, what consequences does it bear for the illiterate, under-employed and landless agricultural labourers as most of Dalit Christians belong to these categories.

3.2 Atrocities

With the legal provisions and special enactments like the Anti-untouchability Act and creation of the National Commission for the Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribe (NCSCST) etc, the dominant caste have been aggressively
pursuing the propaganda that the lot of Dalits are much better today than in the past. But crimes committed against Dalits as given in Table 1 reiterate the fact that their rights are more often than not, violated. Since the upper castes are the law makers, enforcers of law and the ones who occupy the seats of justice; rights are continuously denied to Dalits. Hence, any attempt to uphold Dalit human rights must first and foremost, unravel and explore the multiple nature of exploitation that Dalits are subjected to. All these establish the fact that caste system has developed to be the cauldron of intrinsic and instinct conflicts in the Indian social order.

When Dalits are subjected to atrocities, they can take recourse to Prevention of Atrocities Act. Though, due to the inherently oppressive and exploitative caste system, Dalits do not get justice, they can at the least take recourse to legal provisions. But the same is not the case for Dalit Christians since they are considered to be Christians and in some parts of India they are enumerated as Other Backward Castes (OBCs). This in my view is a gross violation of their rights.

4. Dalit Christians - Dalitization and Christianization

It is estimated that out of the 20 million Christians in India, comprising 2 per cent of the total population, nearly 70 per cent, that is, 14 million are

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crime Head</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>526</td>
<td>763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>923</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,083</td>
<td>1,136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidnapping &amp; Abduction</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dacoity</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arson</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurt</td>
<td>3,809</td>
<td>3,241</td>
<td>3,497</td>
<td>4,547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crimes Against Protection of Civil Rights</td>
<td>724</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>672</td>
<td>633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crimes under POA Act</td>
<td>7,443</td>
<td>7,301</td>
<td>7,386</td>
<td>13,113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>11,425</td>
<td>11,657</td>
<td>11,587</td>
<td>12,201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25,638</td>
<td>25,093</td>
<td>25,455</td>
<td>33,501</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dalits. They include the Pulayans in Kerala, Pariahs in Tamil Nadu, Tigalas in Karnataka, Malas and Madigas in Andhra Pradesh, Chamars (Ravidasis) in Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, Churhas from Punjab, Vankars from Gujarat and Mahars from Maharashtra. This goes to establish the historical fact that these groups got converted to Christianity from SC backgrounds. Though, they got converted to Christianity they are still referred to with their caste names.

In south India, conversions took place among some castes almost 400 years ago, in others, about 200 years ago and in a few cases, as early as 100 years ago. In other parts of India, these took place during the last 200 years. Lancy Lobo, Visions, Illusions and Dilemmas of Dalit Christians in India in Ghanshyam Shah (Eds.) Dalit Identity and Politics, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2001, p. 242.

Thus, Christianization of Dalits has been continuing for many centuries. But another fact is that the conversion to Christianity has come to a halt after Independence. Though, conversion has come to an end, yet most of the debate of conversion to Christianity is placed against Dalits and tribals. Moreover, it is the conversion of Dalits to Christianity, which leads to conflict and crisis within the church and wider society. Let us briefly examine the various processes and outcomes of Dalit conversions and the discrimination suffered by them.

4.1 Conversion and Cultural Alienation

Arguing about the need for conversions to attain equal status Ambedkar stated, ‘to get human treatment, convert yourselves, convert for getting organized, convert for becoming strong, convert for securing equality, convert for getting liberty, convert so that your domestic life may be happy’. From the historical experience of oppression and dehumanization and from years of reformatory work for emancipation of Dalits, he came to the fundamental conclusion that the road for social mobility was closed for Dalits within the Hindu fold and voiced the opinion that the path of political participation was sealed for the untouchables forever. He was convinced that economic opportunities had been snatched from Dalits from the very beginning of the establishment of caste system. He strongly believed that only the religious route is left open for the downtrodden of Indian society. Therefore, he advocated and urged Dalits to take the path of conversions.

Ambedkar also argued that the upper castes could never embrace Christianity. He stated that socialism does not appeal to the rich and the upper castes
since it propagates egalitarian relationships. In extension, Ambedkar asserted that Christianity could not appeal to the Brahmins and upper castes since it preaches brotherhood of people. He further presented this insight that the upper castes make use of the Christian schools, colleges and hospitals and go their ways without ever giving a thought about the religion, which does so much service to the humanity.\(^\text{10}\) While the SCs believing that Christianity would give them equal status and rights, and thus, got converted to it, but in reality they continued to be discriminated and subjugated due to their caste origins.

V.T. Rajshekar argues that Ambedkar’s conversion efforts had sent a shock wave throughout the country. Hindu revivalist organizations and other Hindu leaders were very much worried as they understood the deleterious consequences of untouchables fleeing the Hindu fold. The upper castes were well aware of the fact that the untouchables are the ones who carry the burden of this oppressive hierarchical caste order. Though, they have been cast out of the society, it is they who constitute the work force, the labouring classes and the backbone of the Brahmanical social order. If they move out of the structure, then the entire edifice will crumble. They were in fact, fundamentally frightened to forego such cheap, free, obedient and ever loyal work force.\(^\text{11}\) The situation has not changed even today. Rather, it has become more rigid and inflexible. A group of Dalits in Haryana protesting against upper caste discrimination were determined to convert to Christianity.\(^\text{12}\) Hearing this news, various leaders of the frontal organizations of the Sangh Parivar, which is the Hindutva force, rushed to the spot and tried to dissuade Dalits not to carry out their threat. They also implored the upper castes to behave ‘humanly’ with Dalits. Thus, Dalits do not have freedom within the existing social order and if they want to move out of it, they are dissuaded to embrace a foreign religion.

Cultural conflicts also arise when cultural norms, that is, the specified mannerisms of behavioural patterns are not conformed to or are violated. In extension it can be stated that conversion is an attempt to defy the dictate of the upper castes to continue to follow the caste order. By moving away from the Hindu social system to Christianity, Dalits assert their right to lead their socio-religious life as they deem legitimate. Given the socio-economic, political and cultural milieu Dalits cannot subsist in isolation. Hence, the sense of cultural alienation is reinforced in various ways. This situation, often, leads to conflict within themselves, with their own caste members, with the caste Hindus and with the church authorities.\(^\text{13}\)
4.2 Conversion and Continued Subjugation

As stated above, a myth is being perpetuated that those Dalits who convert to Christianity are better placed. But a cursory examination of Dalit Christian communities in different parts of India reveals the fact that even after conversion, Dalits are subjected to subjugation. John Webster is of the view that the Punjabi Dalit Christians provide an instructive case study of an oppressed group converting in order to gain an ‘emancipatory identity’, but ultimately, subjected to atrocities at all fronts. For most Punjabi Christians the context in which they converted did not change; they continued to be poor and landless rural labourers under the thumb of landlords and moneylenders. Conversion could not change this reality, at least for the majority. Change within that context could only be limited and its long-term consequences open-ended. While the missions provided some support in the early years of this struggle for an emancipatory identity, but the landlords on the other hand, have generally opposed it. Since Independence the Government has given Dalit Christians only token help at best and the same could be said for the churches as well. Thus, the odds against significant change have been historically and in contemporary times very high.141

Robinson, Rowena and S. Clarke, Religious Conversion in India - Modes, Motivations and Meanings, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2003, p. 373.

4.3 Christianization and Depressed Location

One of the primary reasons why reservation to Dalit Christians is being denied is for the fear of many Dalits converting to Christianity. This does not seem to be true on two accounts. Firstly, a careful reading of the demographic profile of various religious communities in India from 1961 to 2001 reveals that the population of various religious groups over time has, in fact, declined (See Table 1 D). Despite all the ‘pull factors’, which were supposed to have been offered to the weaker sections in India, Christianity remains a marginal religious community. Secondly, even the small groups of people who converted to Christianity from Dalit origin have been kept in a depressed and peripheral location.

Notwithstanding, the volume and spread of social work undertaken by the church personnel highlights the fact that a lot still needs to be done. Table 1 E underscores the manpower and infrastructure invested by the Catholic church alone in the educational, health and social work. The most significant point to be noted here is that though the Catholic population constitutes only 1.51 per cent of the Indian population, they in a given year educate nearly 50
lakh students. This is a major contribution by the Christian community towards nation building in India.

Table 1 D, Population by Religious Communities, 1961-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Religions</td>
<td>439,234,771</td>
<td>547,949,809</td>
<td>665,287,849</td>
<td>838,583,988</td>
<td>1,028,610,328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>83.45</td>
<td>82.72</td>
<td>82.63</td>
<td>82.00</td>
<td>80.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>10.69</td>
<td>11.20</td>
<td>11.35</td>
<td>12.11</td>
<td>13.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>2.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikhs</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhists</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jains</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.48</td>
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<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion not stated</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The main areas of social service undertaken by the Christian community are education, health, running orphanages, schools for the physically and mentally challenged, home for the widows and unwed mothers, working with children at risk and undertaking slum improvements etc. In times of natural calamities, churches in India have rendered yeomen service consistently. Most of these activities are undertaken by over 250 developmental societies in different
parts of India, under the aegis of the Roman Catholics, the Diocesan Social Service Society working under the apex body the Caritas India and the Christian Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) among the other churches. But none of these organizations are headed by Dalits, nor are they in managerial position in any of these. Further, if one examines the number of Dalit Christian students in these institutions their presence is abysmally low (See Table 1 F). Further, higher education shares an inversely proportional relationship with Dalit enrolment.

Table 1 F, Catholic Institutions and Presence of Dalit Christian students in Tamil Nadu

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Primary/Middle School</th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>College</th>
<th>Technical Institute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Institutions</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalit Christain Students (in Percentage Points)</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


5. Caste-based Discrimination of Dalit Christians

In this section of the working paper, an attempt has been made to highlight caste based discrimination of Dalits in general, and Dalit Christians in particular in its historical and contemporary reality.

5.1 Historical Roots of Caste-based Discrimination

Dr. Ambedkar in his celebrated work, “Who were the Shudras?” delineated the graded inequality and division of labourers on the basis of occupations. According to him, K.P. Kane presents the following privileges of the Brahmins claimed by them -

a. The Brahmin must be acknowledged to be guru to all Varnas by the mere fact of his birth;

b. The Brahmin has the sole right of deciding upon the duties of all other classes, what conduct was proper to them and what should be their means of livelihood and other classes were to abide by his directions and the king was to rule in accordance with the directions;

c. The Brahmin is not subject to authority of the king, the king was the ruler of all except the Brahmin;
d. The Brahmin is exempt from whipping, fetters being put on him. The imposition of fines, exile, censure and abandonment;

e. A Brahmin (learned in Vedas) is free from taxes;

f. A Brahmin is entitled to claim whole of the treasure trove it found by him. If found by the king, he must give half to the Brahmins;

g. The property of Brahmin dying without an heir shall not go to the King, but shall be distributed among Kshatriyas or Brahmins;

h. The king meeting a Brahmin on the road must give way to the Brahmin;

i. The Brahmin must be saluted first;

j. The person of a Brahmin is sacred. No death sentence could be passed against a Brahmin even if he is guilty of murder;

k. Threatening a Brahmin with assault, or striking him or drawing blood from his body is an offence;

l. For certain offences the Brahmin must receive a lesser punishment than members of other classes; and

m. Even when a woman has had the former husbands who are not Brahmins, if Brahmin marries such a woman, it is he alone who is her husband and not a Rajanya or Vaishya to whom she may have been married.16

In addition to these, Brahmins received many other privileges such as free access to the houses of other people for the purpose of begging alms; the right to collect fuel, flowers, water and the like without it being regarded as theft; and to converse with other men’s wives without being restrained (in such conversion) by others, etc.

In contrast to the privileges claimed by Brahmins, Ambedkar mentioned the Brahmanical views on the civil status of the Shudras, which included a long list of disabilities accompanied by a most dire system of pains and penalties. Given below is the list of disabilities:

a. The Shudras were denied initiation/Upananyana or the bearing of sacred thread, the study of the Vedas, and the kindling of sacred fire (that is, the right to perform sacrifice);

b. A Shudra was to take the last place in the social order;
c. The Shudra was impure and therefore, no sacred act should be done within his sight and within his hearing;

d. The Shudra is not to be respected in the same way as the other classes;

e. The life of Shudra has no value and anybody may kill him without having to pay compensation at all, if any compensation is paid, it should be of small value as compared with that of the Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya;

f. The Shudra must not acquire knowledge and it is a sin and a crime to give him education;

g. A Shudra must not acquire property. A Brahmin can take his property at his pleasure;

h. A Shudra cannot hold office under the State;

i. The duty and salvation of Shudra lies in his serving the higher classes;

j. The higher class should not inter-marry with the Shudra. They can, however, keep Shudra women as concubines. But if the Shudra touches the women of higher classes, he will be liable to dire punishment; and

k. The Shudra is born in servility and must be kept in servility for ever.”

Moreover, the erstwhile untouchables suffered heavily due to the philosophy of Brahmanism. According to Ambedkar, the untouchable was outside of the Varna system. The Shudra was savarna, that is, possessing only one Varna. As against him, the erstwhile untouchables were avarna, that is, outside the Varna system, Ambedkar called the philosophy of Brahminism as the technique of suppression. He mentioned six underlying principles of the philosophy of Brahmanism -

a. Graded inequality between the different classes;

b. Complete disarmament of the Shudras and the untouchables;

c. Complete bane on the education of the Shudras and the untouchables;

d. Total exclusion of the Shudras and the untouchables from places of power;

e. Prohibition on Shudras and the untouchables acquiring property; and

f. Total subjugation and suppression of women.
From the above, Ambedkar concluded that the caste system was not just a religious system, but also, an economic system much worse than slavery. He also stated that the Varna system was not just a ‘division of labour’, but also a ‘division of labourers’. He also argued that these implications were not spontaneous and manifest, but cleverly manipulated. Following this truth, Ambedkar raises a question, why were there no social revolutions against this cruel order? He answered saying, ‘the lower classes have been completely disabled for direct action on account of this wretched system of Chaturvarna.’

Hence, he suggested that, caste system should be abolished in totality. Since caste system was not abolished, even if the erstwhile untouchables moved to some other religion they were subjected to similar discriminatory practices.

### 5.2 Contemporary Caste-based Discriminatory Practices

It is significant to note that the caste privileges and discriminations are not a thing of the past. They continue unabated even today. The caste Hindus constitute only a small percentage of the population but they own and control most of the aspects of social, political economic and political mobility (See Table 1 G). They control 100 per cent of the priestly services, they are the most educated section of the society, and hence, they also have appropriated the highest proportion of employmen. Land is owned or controlled by these groups and businesses are in their hands. Contrast to this, Dalits neither own land or other resources nor are they educated enough to look for Government and non-government jobs. The only source that is left open for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Brahmins</th>
<th>Kshatriya</th>
<th>Vaishya</th>
<th>Shudra</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>Minorities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>55.79</td>
<td>16.73</td>
<td>11.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reservation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priesthood</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party leadership</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>7.08</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government jobs</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: These estimations have been collated from various reports.
them is social mobility through reservation. But since they are denied the opportunity to get educated or trained they loose out here too, to the upper castes. All these have cumulative effects on their lives and on their psyche. The case of Dalit Christians is all the more depressing since they are denied even the provision of reservation.

Caste supremacy and discrimination are expressed in these concrete social systems. If one takes the practice of untouchability, it is expressed both in material and in non-material factors. These include-

a. Economic and political relations between different social groups;
b. Competing cultural values;
c. Resistance to discrimination by Dalits;
d. Legal prohibition on untouchability and perceptions about whether the law will actually be enforced; and
e. The degree of social legitimacy that particular practices command. While many practices of untouchability still continue consciously or unconsciously as they have become a part of the ‘common sense’ of everyday life; over time there have certainly occurred many changes in the system as well. As the above factors change, they create a dynamic tension between Dalits and non-Dalits. In some areas, practices of untouchability are being erased, while in others, new forms of untouchability are being invented.20

Some of these forms of untouchability practiced even in contemporary times are -

1. Entry into savarna house;
2. Access to water facilities;
3. Entry into temples, churches, and gurudwaras etc.;
4. Entry into shops;
5. Service of the barber;
6. Dhobi washing clothes;
7. Service of the Brahmin;
8. Paying wages to Dalit worker;
9. Use of umbrellas, cycling, wearing chappals on public roads;
10. Marriage procession, funeral procession and celebration of festivals;
11. Compulsion to stand in the presence of caste Hindus;
12. Inter-dining arrangement;
13. Inter-caste marriage;
14. Sitting arrangement of students in schools;
15. Sitting arrangement of people during public meals;
16. Delivering letter by the postman;
17. Traveling in public transport;
18. Treatment in public distribution shop;
19. Cremation and burial places;
20. Polling booths and separate queue for Dalits;
21. Tea stalls and hotels;
22. Place in cinema theatres;
23. Treatment of Dalit women by caste Hindus;
24. Place and role in Panchayats;
25. Removing carcass;
26. Engaged as dai; and

Having identified the pervasive forms of untouchability still being practiced, a group of social scientists, stated that despite the abolition of untouchability by the Constitution of India, and despite the passage of numerous legislations classifying untouchability in any sphere as a cognizable criminal offence, and despite several ‘affirmative measures’ to improve the socio-economic conditions and opportunities available to the victims of untouchability; the heinous practice lives on and takes on new idioms. It is this conception, which seems to escape the understanding of the ruling elite, caste Hindus, social scientists and activists.

Caste based discrimination is a contemporary reality when it comes to Dalit Christians. For instance, in 1993, in a non-descript village, Chunduru of Andhra Pradesh, 12 Dalit Christians were massacred by the Reddys allegedly because a Dalit Christian youth sat with his feet up in the local cinema hall and accidentally touched an upper caste youth sitting in the seat in front of
This massacre took place just because the ‘offender’ was a Dalit Christian and not a Kamma Christian or Reddy Christian. If the youth belonged to a Kamma or Reddy Christian community the offended would not have dared to crate a ruckus since the Kamma or Reddy Christians would also retaliate. Thus, the prevalence of Brahmin Christian, Kamma or Reddy Christian, Syrian Christian and caste Christian in itself is an indication of the continuance of caste system even after a person has given up Hinduism and adapted another religion. With the continuation of caste, caste based discrimination is also a reality. Undoubtedly, the sufferers are Dalits including those who got converted to Christianity or Islam.

5.3 Historical Roots of Caste-based Discrimination of Dalit Christians within the Church

Historical data is abound with the fact that there have been caste segregation and discrimination within the church right from its inception. The Cathedral at Tiruchchirappalli, built between 1839 and 1841 was provided with the customary caste bar. In some places, Dalits had their own churches; in other places they at-tended service standing outside the church. In common churches, they were seated in the side naves or at the back and could take communion only after the caste Christians. It is not that the church authorities did not know about this or were unaware of the discriminatory practices. At the Synod of Pondicherry in 1844, the seating arrange-ment in church for different castes, inequality and injus-tice to Dalits were discussed and the Synod also issued a statement regarding this. But the caste Christians accused the missionaries that they were trying to abolish the caste system. Church attendance was boycotted till the old order was restored.

The Vellalars of Vadakkankulam refused to take commun-ion, that is, symbolic and sacred body of Christ, within sight of Nadars after the priest had knocked down the wall, which had kept the two groups from seeing each other in the church. If in the Hindu system, the shadow of an untouchable falls on the caste Hindu he is polluted. In Christianity, if two castes see each other even in the holiest of holies, it results in pollution. Thus, it is not religion, but social origin, which determines the interaction of persons who may practice two different religions.

From 1893 to 1900, high caste students refused to dine with the students from fisher community in St. Joseph’s College at Tiruchirappalli. It is this college, which boasts of being the alma mater of President Abdul Kalam. Sit in strikes and throwing of water snakes by caste Christians and acts of violence
against the Adi Dravidars had taken place to prevent them from entering the church of Tiruchirappalli.

The Bishop of Mylapore, T. M. Ribeiro Vieira de Castro pleaded in the conference of the Indian Hierarchy in 1921 to reiterate the non implemented instruction of the Propa-ganda Fide of 1783, which disapproved of separate seats in churches, and again the letter of the Propaganda 1865, which demanded that all castes be admitted into the Catholic schools. In 1933, South Indian Bishops wrote a common pastoral letter in favour of the abolition of caste distinction in the church.²¹

What emerges from all these historical notes is that the converts from Hinduism to Christianity brought with them their caste practices and symbols even after conversion. The Bull or letter of Pope Gregory XV, “Bulla Romanae Sedis Antistitis”, dated 31 January 1623, accedes to the requests of the missionaries to accommodate themselves to certain caste practices and usages of the new converts. The Pope was granting this permission only as a provisional and conditional measure. The Bull agreed to tolerate the continuance of certain traditional customs and usages. Taking into account the difficulties encountered by the Brahmin converts if they were obliged to abandon certain external signs (such as sacred thread, sandals, ablutions), and considering that these external rites could be interpreted as meaning signs of nobility and function and to show some empathy for human sensibilities, the Bull agreed to tolerate those usages, provided all danger of superstition was avoided and the convert showed charity and respect towards people of obscure condition, this presumably being a reference to Dalits. This document shows the prevalence of the caste mentality among the converted Christians.²²

Writing about conversion to Christianity in Tamil Nadu, S. Clarke demonstrated, on the one hand, conversion had to do with the deliberate movement of Dalit communities away from their traditional religions, which were in an intricate and ambivalent manner connected with local variants of popular Hinduism. This system of social and economic stratification left Dalit communities cumulatively and comprehensively marginalized and exploited and living in alienation beyond the borders of human society. On the other hand, conversion involved a conscious embrace by Dalit communities of a missionary-proclaimed Christianity. The minds of convert missionaries had the ability and the will to make economic and social capital available to such oppressed communities and could exploit their apparent positive
relationship with the colonial powers that ruled India to aid the liberative activities of Dalit communities.

Clark goes on to argue that the entry of Dalits into the new symbolic vision of Christianity did not eventuate into a real world of missionary-promised equality, freedom and dignity. Conversely, Dalits were still discriminated against by fellow caste Christians and English church members. Why then did Dalits continue to convert to Christianity? The Dalit Christians were able to construe a different world vision by utilizing many resources that were available. This may not yet have been concretely and definitively experienced, but it did nonetheless, have utopian consequences. The prospect of religious conversion, thus, does not lie only with the present but also in an anticipatory future. Conversion is a dynamic process; one in which the difference of the embraced world vision is assembled consciously and collectively in the spirit of a hope that lies in the future but which also impinges sporadically though concretely in the historical present.23

Interestingly, Pope John Paul II in his Ad Limina exhortation to the Bishops of Tamil Nadu stated, “I commend the many initiatives that have been implemented by the Bishops’ Conference and individual churches to fight this injustice. The brave steps you have taken to remedy this problem, such as those of the Tamil Nadu Bishop’s Council in 1992, stand out as examples for others to follow. At all times, you must continue to make certain that special attention is given to those belonging to the lowest castes, especially Dalits. They should be never segregated from other members of the society. Any semblance of a caste-based prejudice in relation between Christians is a countersign to authentic human solidarity, a threat to genuine spirituality and a serious hindrance to the church’s mission of evangelization. Therefore, customs or traditions that perpetuate or reinforce caste division should be sensitively reformed so that they may become an expression of solidarity of the whole Christian community”.24 Thus, caste is a reality within the Christianity and caste based discrimination has been fully ingrained in the practices of Christianity.

5.4 Contemporary Caste-based Discrimination of Dalit Christians within the Church

A careful observation of caste practices within the church in India today reveals that blatant discriminations like separate cemeteries and separate sitting arrangements in the place of worship for the upper castes and lower castes continues unabated even today. As in Hinduism, in Christianity too,
matrimonial alliances and food exchanges between the upper castes and lower castes are strictly prohibited. Similarly, even in the recruitment of young men and women to priestly and religious life unexpressed discriminations are practiced. All these practices reinforce caste identities and separation in a fundamental manner. This contributes to the frustration and anger of the lower caste Christians. Another significant social fact that needs to be explored is that the group that gets converted to another religion gets isolated from its parent body or from the other members of the caste group. This is all the more true of the lower caste segment. Though, conversion from Hinduism to Christianity provides an avenue to escape from caste oppression, it ultimately, leads to cultural alienation of Dalits and they are subjected to atrocities.

Dalit Christians are severely marginalized in the vocations of priests and nuns and in the appointments for any higher authority or positions. Even though Dalit Christians constitute about 75 per cent in the Catholic church in Tamil Nadu, only about 6 per cent among the priests and nuns are Dalits. Similar situation exists in the whole of India. Similarly, there are not even about 8 (just about 5 per cent) Dalit Bishops among the nearly 155 Catholic Bishops in India. This is again a serious exclusion of Dalit Christians from the mainstream of the church even though they form a big majority in the Catholic population. It is a clear that the caste domination is operating at all levels of making the choice, recommendations and decisions for the appointment of Bishops. Representations have been also sent to Rome to rectify such anomalies.

Even at the level of nomenclature, discrimination is practiced against Dalit Christians. The church personnel in their conversations when they want to say anything derogatory or negative about Dalit Christians, they instead of referring to their caste would use abbreviations. For instance, in Tamil Nadu they would say ‘pl’ to refer to Pallar and ‘pr’ to refer to Paraiyar. It is significant to note that such usage is not just limited to south India, but practiced in north India as well. In Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, when the church personnel want to refer to Dalit Christians they use the word ‘ch’ implying Chamars. These kinds of references are disapproved by Dalit Christians. But since they are dependent upon the caste Christians, they do not openly oppose such practices. But now they are resisting these kinds of practices.

Many of the church personnel keep claiming that they have contributed a lot towards the well being of Dalit Christians. There is not doubt that conversion
to Christianity from caste structure provided some relief to the discriminated Dalits such as enhanced access to education and health facilities. But Dalit Christians continue to be illtreated within the Christian fold. In many of the meetings and conferences, they have brought out the fact that the church at the most has made them A-B-C-D, that is, ayyas, butlers, cooks and darbans and drivers. This is corroborated by the fact that few Dalit Christians have secured any position in professional fields and in bureaucracy like caste Christians.

Table 1 H, Labour Patterns among Dalit Christians of north-west India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr.No.</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Seasonal farm labour</td>
<td>14.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Night-soil labour</td>
<td>11.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bonded labour</td>
<td>05.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Child labour</td>
<td>02.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Casual labour</td>
<td>47.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Migrant brick-kin labour</td>
<td>05.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Public road construction labour</td>
<td>00.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Grain market labour</td>
<td>04.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Rural handicraft labour</td>
<td>01.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Skilled labour</td>
<td>06.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Vidya Sagar Dogar, Rural Christian Community in north-west India, CISRS and ISPCK, New Delhi, 2000.

A careful analysis of occupational patterns among Dalit Christians highlights the fact that to a great extent the occupational patterns among them are similar to those of Dalits following Hinduism. According to a study undertaken by Vidya Sagar Dogar in north-west India, about 30.16 per cent of Christians of SC origins are reported to be main workers. The labour employment is classified into two sectors, the unorganized and the service sectors - over 72.41 per cent are employed in the unorganized sector labour and 27.59 per cent are engaged in the service sector. This goes to establish the fact that contrary to the myth propagated most of Dalit Christians are engaged in unorganized sector and are not in service sector. Further 11.48 per cent Dalit Christians are engaged in manual scavenging (See Table 1 H) like their caste persons following Hindu religion.

Another study about the occupational patterns among Dalit Christians of Tamil Nadu reveals the fact that their occupational patterns were almost similar. According to 1991 Census Report, 64.29 per cent of Dalits were enumerated as agricultural labourers. The percentage was almost similar to
Dalit Christians. Similarly about 14.62 per cent Dalits in general were returned as engaged in own cultivation while 7.29 Dalit Christians were identified as engaged in own cultivation (See Table 1 I). A small percentage of Dalit Christians have moved to lower administrative and teaching jobs. This may be due to the education they received from Christian institutions. But, the vast majority of them are still engaged like other Dalits in unorganized sector.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr.No.</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>High Administrative</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lower Administrative</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Clerical</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Trade and Commerce</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Transport and Public Utility</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Manufacturing, Processing and Service</td>
<td>2.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Own Cultivation</td>
<td>7.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Agricultural Labourers</td>
<td>54.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Livestock, forestry</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Menial</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>18.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Raj, Antony, Discrimination against Dalit Christians in Tamil Nadu, Ideas Centre, Madurai, 1992, p, 357. (This is an unpublished manuscript)

Many institutions and organizations have been built up and they have accumulated financial and material resources and continue to get financial aid from Christian donors and agencies all over the world, primarily with the appeal to help the underprivileged and the erstwhile untouchable Dalits and poor people. But, the benefits have not really percolated to them. They are not in leadership positions in any of these organizations. At the most, some Dalit Christians would be in maintenance jobs in these institutions. This surmounts to cheating and robbing of Dalit Christians of their right to social mobility within the fold of Christianity. This also goes to establish the fact that is discrimination even in NGO sector or civil society organizations.

Most of the well-established and premier institutions of the church and centers of higher learning are run under the tag of minority rights. But these institutions offer less opportunities and preferences to Dalit Christians in admissions and appointments. This amounts to an act of betrayal of the constitutional provisions provided to the minority communities. It can be
concluded that in this regard, caste Christians act against Dalit Christians very much like the caste Hindus against Dalits. Primarily so, due to these institutions being manned and managed by upper castes.

From the above facts and figures, it becomes apparent that conversion of Dalits to other religions, herein, Christianity does not result in them gaining socio-economic and cultural changes. Hence, Dalit Christians demand for reservation from the Government of India is their legitimate right.

6. Multiple Discrimination of Dalit Christians

It has been brought out by many conscious citizens of India, that Dalit Christians are “twice discriminated against” firstly, by the society and secondly, by the church. Though, this statement is true, but in reality Dalit Christians are subjected to multiple discriminations. They are—

6.1 Discriminated by Caste Christians

As has been indicated earlier, caste Christians ill-treat Dalit Christians due to their social origins. Being a part of the same religion does not reduce the antagonism and volume of atrocities. Dining and marriage among Christians of various castes is a far cry. Every opportunity is used to discriminate against Dalit Christians. Like the caste Hindus who consider the special provisions made to Dalits by the Government as a wastage or at the most part of vote bank politics, the caste Christians too, consider even minimum provisions being extended by the church to Dalit Christians as waste.

6.2 Discriminated by Caste Hindus

The caste Hindus also discriminate against Dalit Christians as they do against Dalits in general. Since Dalits in general, and Dalit Christians in particular, are forced to be dependent upon them for their livelihood, they have to suffer multiple discriminations without raising their voice against it. The Government argues that Dalit status is essentially part of the Hindu religion and that it plays no part in the non-Hindu religions. So a Dalit who adopts a non-Hindu religion like Christianity ceases to be a Dalit. In other words, it is not possible to be a Christian and simultaneously, an untouchable. But, the actuality is on the contrary same. Caste system in its principle and operation is fully alive and active even in Christianity and Dalits are thus, the victims of this.
6.3 Discriminated by the Church Authorities

The church authorities come from the upper castes and they are inherently discriminatory towards Dalit Christians. Moreover, they want to keep Dalit Christians confined as a segregated group and this inclusiveness works counter to the interest of Dalits. I have already stated many instances. Though, in principle, Christianity favors equality and equal opportunity; caste discrimination does not die out at the time of conversion from Hinduism, but still prevails in multiple forms in Christianity.

6.4 Discriminated by Dalits following Hindu Religion

Dalits who follow Hinduism also discriminate against the CSCO. This is done on many accounts. Firstly, Dalits who follow Hinduism believe or are made to believe that Dalit Christians are infidels since they rejected their ‘original’ religion and have embraced another religion. Secondly, they believe that Dalit Christians receive support from the church and hence, should not be entitled for any provisions made by the Government for Dalits. Thirdly, Dalits fear if reservation is extended to Dalit Christians, they will have to share the cake with them. These fears force Dalits to be discriminatory towards Dalit Christians.

6.5 Discriminated by the Government

Right from the time, when the Constitutional provisions were being implemented in this country, discrimination was practiced against all Dalits except those adhere to the beliefs of Hinduism. The Sikhs and the Buddhists were brought under the scheme of reservation in 1956 and 1990 due to political pressures. Also, these two religious groups are ‘considered’ to be offshoots of Hinduism, which is under the scanner today. Further, the Constitution speaks of SCs as a social category in Articles 330, 332, 334, 335, 338 and 341. In these Articles there is no mention of religious background of the SC communities. Thus, the denial of reservation to Dalit Christians since they adhere to Christianity is totally contrary to the rights provided in the Constitution.

Here it is expedient to include the process through, which Dalit discrimination got visibility in the international arena so as to draw parallels to the caste based discrimination suffered by Dalit Christians. The discrimination suffered by Dalits of south Asia was never brought to the international arena since those who represented India came from caste Hindu community. But, in the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) held in Durban, South Africa in
2001, Dalit and human rights activists took the issue to international fora for the first time. Justice K. Ramasamy, Member, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) who represented NHRC observed, “There has never been a United Nations Conference where there has been such a strong quest for the recognition of historical injustices. In different parts of the world, people are hurt because of problem of inequality or injustice and are pressing their case at this Conference. The NHRC, India, for which I have the honour of speaking at this Conference, has therefore, considered it its duty to listen attentively to those in our country who have been victims of historical injustices, who are hurt because of discrimination and inequality. I refer in particular to those who under our Constitution comprise the SCs and the STs.” The NHRC, not only, tried to listen to the cry of discrimination by Dalits, but has been taking stand in their favour from thence onwards.

Similar to the process of making Dalit discrimination visible in the international arena, after decades of struggle by Dalit Christians and friends of Dalit Christians, their struggle for equal status and rights has come to the fore of the government, social scientists, activists and others. This cry for justice cannot be denied any further.

7. The Demand of Dalit Christians for Equality and Human Rights

An obvious question that can be asked is that why even after many decades and consistent efforts the situation of Dalit Christians has not changed? Several causes or factors may be responsible for that -

1. The missionaries had brought in a predominantly ‘other worldly’ Christianity with an emphasis on spiritual salvation and personal holiness. They failed to translate the Gospel and Christian faith into the actual life of the people and thereby, failed to transform their lives and that of the society;

2. The missionaries colluded with the colonial powers and maintained status quo;

3. Educational policy of the colonial rulers was continued by the missionaries. The emphasis was not given to the education of the masses, but of the babus who in turn were status quoist;

4. From the very beginning, missionaries and their churches were divided regarding their approach to Dalits;

5. Missionaries and Christians had a superiority complex; and
6. At the time of the formation of the Constitution, there was an attempt to give special protection to Dalit Christians, but the upper caste Christians opposed it and thus, Dalit Christians lost some of these privileges. Constitution Assembly Debate documents bear ample testimony to this fact. Along with these factors, another crucial fact is that till now those who represented Dalit Christians were from the caste Christian community. Though, they spoke for Dalit Christians, they were not able to articulate their problems nor did they want to bring any change in their lives.

Irrespective of their rights being violated regularly and irrespective of being subjugated to injustice, Dalit Christians continued to carry forward their struggle. Dalit Christians as individuals and as groups have opposed the discrimination they are subjected to right from the beginning of caste based discrimination. In the beginning, their protests were directed against the church, since the church was the one, which promised them equal rights and dignified treatment if they get converted. Written records bear testimony to this fact that as early as 1869, Dalit Christians at Utthamanur in Tamil Nadu fought against untouchability. Dalit Christians under various forums have also represented their issues to various church authorities.

With the formation of Dalit Christian Liberation Movement (DCLM) their struggle for equality, justice and non-discrimination spread far and wide. Though, DCLM was limited to Tamil Nadu, it had a rippling effect in other southern states. In some of the northern states, too, some attempts to unify Dalit Christians have been witnessed. I now present the Manifesto of Dalit Christians that was presented to the Tamil Nadu Bishops’ Conference.

1. There is no room for the practice of untouchability within the church. Its practice in any form should be forbidden. The church authorities should enact necessary laws to declare such practices as a punishable offences;

2. The authority structure in the Catholic church should be decentralised and democratised so that there will be Dalit clergy and lay participation in the decision making bodies such as parish councils, boards of trustees for education, and multi- purpose societies, and other administrative bodies;

3. We demand social justice from the church. For us, justice necessarily means sharing of power. This should be based on the principle of proportionality. As a necessary prerequisites for adapting this
principle, the TNBC should order a caste-wise Census throughout Tamil Nadu, which will avoid all dubious claims by different castes;

4. We do understand that vocation is a call from God. But to have only 3.8 per cent of priests and the religious from Dalit Christians indicates certain covert and overt discrimination. Necessarily structural changes should be brought in, in order to recruit more boys and girls from Dalit community to rectify the glaring imbalances;

5. The Christian churches in India, which form just 2 per cent of the total population, are able to provide 20 per cent of the education services to this country. Such a mammoth organisation should adopt Dalit Christians as their target (priority) group and work for their educational development. Preferences should be given to Dalit Christians in student admissions and staff appointments. It should be recommended that these educational institutions are run in the name of minority rights, and among the minority, Dalit Christians are the majority;

6. The multipurpose society with its huge budget should channelize its resources to improve the quality of life (housing, health and food) of Dalit Christians in their dioceses. There should be Dalit representatives in the board of directors and in the administrative posts;

7. In our struggle to get out rights from the Central and state Governments, the church should adopt harder options in order to politicise such issues. The church should also call for an indefinite closure of our educational and medical institutions;

8. We call on the church to come out with imaginative economic programmes to alleviate the hunger and misery of these Dalits who live below poverty line, particularly the landless labourers; and

9. Those Dalit Christians who work in movements and organisations for the betterment of the cause of Dalits should not be penalised or victimised.

These demands clearly indicate the fact that the issues raised in the demands were based on caste consciousness and factors that were socio-economic-political and cultural in nature than religious.

But, when they realized that their struggle goes much beyond the precincts of the church, they under various forums have represented their issues to
various authorities and institutions. Starting from representing the matter to the various leaderships within the Christian community to representing the matter to the Government of India, Dalit Christians have been attempting to raise the issue of caste based discrimination.

Constant pressure from Dalit Christian community forced the TNBC to respond to the demands of Dalit Christians. The following are some of the proposals made by the TNBC:

1. To make known to non-Dalits the practice of discrimination within the church through the celebration of Justice Sunday at every parish;
2. To consciously avoid nominating members on caste basis to parish councils and other associations and sodalities in the parish;
3. In the appointment of officials in the church, as well as, in religious congregations nothing should be done on caste basis;
4. The recommendations, which the CBCI proposed in their annual meeting at Thiruchirappalli should be closely adhered to;
5. If there were any reserved places in the churches for the caste people and Dalits, it should be forthwith abolished and all should participate equally as one family;
6. To abolish casteism, inter-caste marriages should be encouraged; and
7. All should work together to obtain government benefits for the SCs.

The Bishops of Tamil Nadu who met with the major superiors of religious congregations in 1990 rightly analyzed and acknowledged caste discrimination within the church as violations of human rights. At the end of this meeting, they brought out a joint statement condemning the caste system in the church and announcing many concrete proposals. The ensuring ‘Pastoral Letter of the Tamil Nadu Bishops’ made recommendations:

1. That the Catholic SCs be treated equally, without being rejected in places of worship and in cemeteries;
2. That an increase in vocations to the priesthood and to the Religious Orders from the Catholic SCs in the diocese be promoted;
3. That responsibilities and rights of membership be offered to Catholic SCs in Catholic educational institutions, diocesan institutions,
pastoral centres and social service institutions, and that good leaders be created from among them;

4. That preference be given to catholic SCs in admissions to catholic schools, especially teacher training schools, professional centres and the like, and that special coaching classes for poor students who are backward in education, and especially the SCs, be conducted;

5. That scholarships be given to eligible SC students in professional and technical education, in institutions run by the dioceses and the Religious Congregations;

6. That the SC Catholics be given preference in selection for jobs in the schools run by the dioceses and the Religious Congregations;

7. The economic projects planned for the SCs be arranged and that greater opportunities be offered to SCs for participation in the training camps organised by these organisations;

8. That SC & ST Commissions be instituted in each diocese immediately;

9. That considerable funds be raised through the joint action of Tamil Nadu bishops and the religious congregations for the higher education of eligible SC Catholics; and

10. That continuous efforts be made to obtain rights for the Christian SCs form the Centre and the state Governments.

A careful reading of the above presented 10 recommendations by the church leadership unravels the fact that these responses of the church authorities are social in nature than religious. Hence, caste based discrimination is the central issue with regard to Dalit Christians and bringing them under the provision of reservation, would be one way of alleviating their discrimination.

8. Legal Processes and Outcomes

At this juncture, it is expedient to examine the various legal processes and outcomes with regards to providing reservation to Dalits in general and Dalit Christians in particular. Let us take note of the innumerable attempts made by Dalit Christians, friends of Dalit Christians, church leadership and others who were trying to impress upon the government that it has the Constitutional responsibility to bring Dalit Christians under the umbrella of reservation.

8.1 Constitution and Reservation

When the Indian Constitution was drafted some special rights and privileges were extended to the social category, which was then known as SCs in a bid
to ensure equality and dignity. It was a compensation for the historical injustices and discrimination that the SCs were subjected to for many centuries. Further, it was seen as a way of equalizing opportunities to those who were denied such opportunities. By making reservation available for them it was hoped by the framers of the Constitution that such provisions would improve their lives and that the SCs would gain both, social and economic status. Though, the entire Constitution addressed the issues of the weaker sections, some of the articles spelt out specific provisions. Article 46 gives the rights of educational and economical benefits. Article 17 provides protection from caste related violence and atrocities. Article 15(4) provides reservation for the SCs in educational institutions. Articles 330-334 provides reservations of seats in the state legislative assemblies and the Parliament. Articles 16(4), 335 and 320(4) recommend reservation in government services and posts. Social Safeguards and protections were earmarked under the Protection of Civil Rights (PCR) Act, 1976, the Untouchability (Offences) Act 1955, and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989. But, the SCs by virtue of following other religions than Hinduism were denied these privileges and rights. Hence, the demand that Dalit Christians and Muslims also should be brought under this purview has been foreground these days.

8.2 The Presidential Order (Constitutional Order), 1956

The Indian Constitution on the basis of its article 341(1) empowered the President of India to specify the castes and groups, which can be considered as the SCs to become the beneficiaries of the compensatory discrimination. The President promulgated an order known as the Constitutional (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950. The third paragraph of this order considers only the Hindu Dalits as SCs and provided them with the privileges and rights bestowed to the SCs by the Constitution. Dalits who converted to other faiths were denied the entitlement to these provisions. This Presidential Ordinance was subsequently, regularized as an act of Parliament. This ordinance paved way for the government to provide reservation for the SCs in education, employment and the political arena. Dalits who converted to other faiths such as Sikhism, Islam, Buddhism and Christianity were not entitled to these Constitutional benefits in the beginning. While social origin is the determining factor to put an end to discrimination, the attempt to bring in religion is gross violation of their rights.

8.3 Legality of the President Order, 1950

The exclusion of other SCs who adhere to other religions than Hinduism from their basic and fundamental rights has caused great concern and debate
from the very beginning of its promulgation. If providing reservation is a way of including the excluded; denying this opportunity merely on the basis of religion is not legal. It is quite contrary to the spirit of the Constitution that promotes secularism and freedom of religion. The third paragraph of the Order has violated the constitutional rights of Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims. On the basis of this argument, a petition was filed in the Supreme Court. The High Court of Madras had also admitted a plea filed by a Dalit who challenged the exclusion of Dalit Christians from the ambit of the PCR Act, 1976. Christians feel that this religion-based discrimination is a violation of Article 15(1) and contravenes the provisions of Article 15(4) of the Constitution of India. Constitutional principles prohibit discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.

This is not the end of the story. These rights and benefits that were supposed to be available for all the SCs were later extended to Dalit Sikhs. By amending the Constitutional Order 1950 in September 1956, Dalit Sikhs were included into this category of persons to benefit from reservation in the name of being SCs. Again in 1990, the Constitutional Order was amended and the Buddhists were included under the umbrella of reservation. This clearly shows the partiality exhibited by the ruling class with regard to SCs.

Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims should be given the SC status and privileges so that they can enjoy the same political rights and socio-economic benefits as all other SCs. Various state Governments and Commissions like the Mandal Commission and the Backward Class Commission of Andhra Pradesh, recommended to the Central and the state Governments to extend SC reservation privileges to Dalit Christians. This is what the Mandal Commission debate had to say about the continuation of caste based discrimination even after religious conversion, “the change of religion did not always succeed in eliminating castes. The converts who carried with them their castes and occupations to the new religions. The result has been that even among Sikhs, Muslims and Christians, casteism prevails in varying degrees in practice, their preaching not withstanding. Casteism has thus, been the bane of entire Indian society, the difference in its rigidity being of a degree varying from religion to religion”.31

Dr. Jose Kananaikal argues that the Presidential Order, as it was enacted in 1950 had two important limitations. One of these provisions restricted the SCs to certain areas and the other restricted the religion to which they can belong. The intentions of these two restrictions are not difficult to
understand. The President had been given power to choose the castes, tribes, races or parts thereof, as SCs. Accordingly, it was perfectly within his rights to include or exclude certain particular groups from the lists of the SCs.

The main criterion used in preparing the lists of the SCs seems to have been the consequences of the practice of untouchability from which the target groups suffered. This criterion and the list itself have been taken from the Government of India (SC) Order, 1936. Since this criterion was to be applied to groups and not to individuals, the President had to choose such castes, tribes and races and groups or parts thereof, which he ascertained to be the most downtrodden and had been suffering from the practices of untouchability in society. From this point of view, the President could have excluded a certain group of people who were suffering from the practices of untouchability, but had improved their position in society to such an extent that they had in the eyes of the State overcome the disabilities. He could have applied this criterion also to any particular group of SCs, who as a group were practicing any religion. But he could not exclude any single individual or family or automatically provide for their inclusion if certain criterions were violated or fulfilled. Nor could he exclude en masse whole sections of the SCs in every part of the country, for all times to come, only on the grounds that they practiced some particular religion.

The consequences of the two limitations were very different. They were interpreted to mean that an individual member of a SC will continue to be a SC only as long as he stayed in the restricted area or professed a particular religion. The area restriction within the States has since been removed in most cases. Thus, now a SC person is recognized as a SC in the whole state. Therefore, he can now move, more freely within the state, without the fear of the state debarring him or denying him the protection that he is eligible to. The second limitation, however, has been subjected to various misinterpretations. The President himself had made the criterion open to criticism as being discriminatory while stipulating that only those who profess Hinduism would be deemed to be members of SCs. Constitutional experts have pointed out that while making such a sweeping and far-reaching limitation for all times to come, the President has violated the fundamental right to freedom of the individual SCs to profess and practice any or no religion. The consequences of this rule were that a person who belonged to a community recognized as a SC would cease to be so if he changed his religion to any, other than Hinduism at any time. This seems to be a blatant discrimination based only on religious consideration. This led to a number of
protests from various groups. For some strategic and political considerations, Sikhs could prevail upon the Government, and this provision in favour of Hinduism was amended in 1956 to include Sikhism also. As a result, the Order now allows a SC to be recognized by the State as a SC if he professes either Hinduism or Sikhism or Buddhism. Thus, the religious criterion has stayed.

8.4 Constitutional (Scheduled Castes) Orders (Amendment) Bill, 1986

On 22\textsuperscript{nd} December 1986 an attempt was made to introduce the Constitutional (Scheduled Caste) Orders (Amendment) Bill once again drawing the attention of the Parliament and the ruling class to look into the demands of the SCs. One of the main arguments of Prof. P.J. Kurien who moved this Bill was that socially, economically and educationally, the SC converts to Christianity are at par with and in certain cases below that of their Hindu counterparts. Prof. Kurien further argued that a convert who has reconverted to Hinduism is eligible to be a member of the SCs and for all benefits. Here the freedom of religions does not have any meaning. Prof. Kurien went on to argue that the Bill be passed, which seeks to delete para 3, which will go a long way in rectifying the distortions of our reservation policy and in providing justice to a larger number of people who are deprived of these benefits due to change of religion.

8.5 Constitutional (Scheduled Castes) Orders (Amendment) Bill, 1994

Once again an attempt was made from 1991 to 1994 to introduce a Bill making provisions for reservation to Dalit Christians. Narayana Swamy introduced a Private Member Bill recommending the amendment of the Constitutional (Scheduled Caste) Orders so as to include Dalit Christians under this purview. This Bill made the point clear that the SCs and converted Christians from SCs are living in the same villages or towns in similar milieus. There is no reason to deny them the rights on the ground of conversion. But this Bill also could not see the light of the day.

8.6 Constitutional (Scheduled Castes) Orders (Amendment) Bill, 1996

In a Note for Cabinet dated 6.3.1996, The Ministry of Welfare had proposed to include SC converts to Christianity as SCs in the Constitutional (Scheduled Caste) Orders so as to make them eligible for all statutory safeguards and benefits accruing to the members of SCs. The Cabinet approved this proposal at its meeting held on 07.03.1996. In pursuance of this decision, the Constitutional (Scheduled Caste) Orders (Amendment) Bill 1996, (Bill No. 17 of 1996) was prepared. The Bill sought to amend the earlier Constitutional
(Scheduled Caste) Orders so as to remove the bar in Christians converted from the SCs being deemed to be members of the SCs. Although, the Bill was listed for introduction as a supplementary item in the Lok Sabha on 12.03.1996, it could not be introduced. Following the adjournment of Parliament, the Cabinet decided on 14.03.1996, that an Ordinance be issued for the purpose. An Ordinance was proposed to the President, but was not promulgated. Subsequent governments did not bother to pursue the matter irrespective of the pressure put forth by Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims. These two communities knocked at various doors for justice. The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government which came to power in 2004 has taken the step to examine the issue. By appointing the NCRLM, the UPA government has shown some political will power that it is open to examine the demand of Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims. Will it convert this political will into action or succumb to the pressures of vested interests is the question that will be closely watched by the academicians and activists from both these communities.

9. Opposition to Dalit Christians Demand for Reservations

As has been stated in the paper earlier, caste based discrimination suffered by Dalit Christians (it is also appropriate to append Dalit Muslims to the list) is a historical and contemporary reality. The demand to bring them under the ambit of the constitutional measures is therefore, necessitated. Further, Dalit Christians are not only deprived of reservation, they are also denied redressal when atrocities are committed against them since they do not fall under the category of SCs. This discrimination on the basis of conversion to another religion, deprives Christian Dalits the right to seek civil protection and safeguards provided to all Dalits under the PCR Act, 1976, the POA Act, 1989.

Taking into consideration these facts, Dalit Christians have been knocking at all doors demanding that justice be done to them. These also constitute some compelling reasons that forced Dalit Christians to approach the Supreme Court to fight for their equal rights. They have also presented their case forcefully and based on facts to the NCRLM asking them to recommend their case for reservation.

Like Dalit Christians, Dalit Muslims too, have been demanding for equal rights of being Dalits first and Muslims later. In 2000, the activists of the All India Backward Muslim Morcha demonstrated before the Parliament to press
their demand for an amendment of the Constitution and to provide reservation in the SC category for ‘Dalit Muslims’. The members of the Morcha claim that amendments made to the 1950 Presidential order initially ‘limiting SC status to only Hindus should be extended to Dalit Muslims. Members of the Morcha submitted memorandums to Rashtrapati Bhawan and the Prime Minster’s office.’. From the above facts it becomes apparent that the demand for reservation for Dalit Christians and Muslims is all but a demand.

Though, the demand of Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims to be brought under the safeguards of reservation is just and legitimate, it is not going to be easily granted. There are many vested interests who have been and are going to oppose this legitimate move. I now briefly deal with the nature of opposition to this demand.

Opposition to the demand of the Dalit Christians for reservation could come from the following quarters -

a. Sangh Parivar has been opposing reservations to Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims on the pretext that if Dalits from these religious backgrounds are given reservation, then they would en masse leave Hinduism and join other religions;

b. Dalits who are following Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism will oppose this move since they feel that they will have to share reservation with this additional group. Instead of exploring the possibility of how to bring in all Dalits into one banner and find greater solidarity to fight for their rights, these people are playing on the stipulated 15.5 per cent reservation. This stipulation of 15.5 per cent for the SCs or the 49 per cent reservation for all the weaker sections is not a holy cow that cannot be reexamined;

c. Caste Christians will oppose such a move fearing the equalization of Dalits with them. All along history, caste Christians have opposed any move to bring in change in the discriminated state of Dalit Christians. They opposed the church when it tried to introduce change in the lives of Dalit Christians and they will do the same when the Government is made to adhere to the principles of the Constitution;

d. The bureaucracy will also oppose this move fearing backlash from Dalits who are following Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism and caste Hindus and caste Christians. Especially, they will faint ignorance regarding this demand since they do not want to be on the wrong side of the Hindutva forces. Since most of the officials are known for maintaining status quo, it is less possible they will support this move; and
e. Finally, the politicians will remain uncommitted on this issue since Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims do not constitute a comprehensive vote bank. Conferring or denying reservation to Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims will be predominantly determined by the electoral prospects.

10. Constitutional Responsibility of the National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities

The UPA keeping its promise made under the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) has constituted a committee, namely, NCRLM to obtain facts about caste based discrimination of Dalit Christians and Muslims. This is a very progressive step. But the move in itself is full of criticism. Some see this as move to appease the Muslim and Christian vote bank. Others view it as a step to slower the processes or to curtail the processes of development.

While different groups perceive the issue in a different light, the task of the Commission is to listen, observe, and empathize with Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims. The Commission should also interact with various people who are proponents and opponents of this move. But ultimately adhering to its wisdom the Commission has to recommend the case of Dalit Christians and Muslims to the Government so that they can be brought under the purview of reservation since they like other Dalits – whichever religion they belong to – were and are being subjected to caste based discrimination. Change of religion has only resulted in cosmetic change in their social fabric, while socio-economic and political discrimination continues unabated. If the Commission musters enough political will to recommend the inclusion of Dalit Christians and Muslims for reservation it would have fulfilled its constitutional mandate.

Memorandum submitted by the Christian Depressed Classes of south India to the Indian Statutory Commission or what is popularly known Simon Commission included the following, “Inspite of our Christian religion, which teaches us fundamental truths, the equality of man and man before God, the necessity of charity and love for neighbours and mutual sympathy and forbearance, we, the large number of Depressed Classes converts remain in the same social condition as the Hindu Depressed Classes. Through the operation of several factors, the more important of them being the strong caste retaining Hindu mentality of the converts to Christianity, and the indifference, powerlessness and apathy of the Missionaries, we remain today what we were before we became Christians -untouchables- degraded by the laws of social position obtaining in the land, rejected by caste Christians, despised by caste Hindus and excluded by our own Hindu Depressed Class brethren”.

This Memorandum was submitted 1929
End Notes and Select Bibliography

1. The term ‘Dalit’ in the present times as in the past has been defined both, exclusively and inclusively. There are some Dalits and non-Dalits, which under the former definition refer only to the SCs or erstwhile untouchables. There is another group of Dalits and non-Dalits, which includes SCs and STs under the category Dalits. Thus, 160 million SCs and 80 million STs are at times clubbed together and called Dalits. The term Dalit at times in extension also includes all the exploited masses within the fold of Dalit. In this paper, the term Dalit has been used only in exclusive sense and thus, refers to the erstwhile untouchables and it refers to the CSCOs. The term is also used by some individuals and segments among the Dalit community while some others consider it to be derogative. Here, the term is used in the affirmative sense of assertion of Dalits for equal status, rights and dignity.

2. For a detailed discussion see Louis, Prakash, Casteism is more Horrendous than Racism - Durban and Dalit Discourse. Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, 2001.

3. The term ‘caste Christians’ is used here purely as a sociological category as used by social scientists to avoid the negative connotation – Dalits and non-Dalits. Instead of using the terms Dalits and non-Dalits, they use the terms Dalits and caste Hindus or general population.


17. Ibid.

18. Ambedkar, B.R., What Congress and Gandhi have done to Untouchables? Thacker and Company Limited, Bombay, 1943,


22. See www.dalitchristians.com

23. Robinson, Rowena and S. Clarke, Opposite Citation, 2003, p. 286.

24. Pope John Paul II’s Ad Limina exhortation to the Bishops of Tamil Nadu, 17th November 2003.


27. Stanislaus, L., Opposite Citation, 1999, p. 115.

28. Raj, Antony, Betraying the Hope of the Poor, DCLM Publication, Madurai, pp. 4-5.


30. Ibid, pp. 93-94.

31. Article 400, Mandal Case Judgment, Volume 6, Number 9, November 30, 1992, Judgment Today.

33. Ibid, pp. 15-16.

34. Lourduswamy, S., Towards of Empowerment of Dalit Christians - Equal Rights to all Dalits, Centre for Dalit Studies, New Delhi, 2005, p. 113.

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